A STUDY OF ROMANTICISM IN THE LYRIC POETRY OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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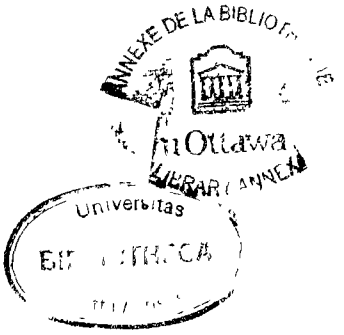
Thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa through the medium of the Department of English in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Ottawa, Canada, 1951

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Very sincere thanks are tendered to Reverend Father R. H. Shevenell and to Dr. George Buxton for their direction of this thesis, to Reverend Father R. Lavigne for his practical encouragement, to Dr. Emmett O'Grady for his loan of documents, and to Sister Regina Clare, librarian of Saint Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, for her loan of books not otherwise available.

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INTRODUCTION

> Yeats's greatness is secure.[1]
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> . . . the nervous romantic sighing through the reeds of the 'eighties and 'nineties and the worldly realist plain-speaking in the twenties.[2]
>
> . . . he exulted in his incorrigible romanticism.[3]

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was the last of the great Romantics. He is today considered by most critics to be the dominant poet, as well as one of the most interesting and significant men, of his time. Interest in his poetry, his plays, his essays, was strong -- if controversial -- in his own day, and has deepened since his death, an interest free now from the glow of praise or the shadow of reproach cast on his literary reputation in his own day. He is credited with the founding and organizing of the Irish Literary Revival and the Irish National Theatre as well as the inspiring of the whole Celtic Renaissance, yet the excellence of his own poetic and dramatic work probably surpasses in importance the influence he exerted on contemporary and later writers.

It is with only one aspect of Yeats's work that this record of research is concerned. That aspect is his Romanticism.

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1 A. Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats, Man and Poet, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, p. vii

2 Richard Ellman, Yeats the Man and the Masks, N. Y. Macmillan, 1948, p. 1

3 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, N. Y., Macmillan, 1943, p. 498

Critics are unanimous in admitting that Yeats was, at least in his earlier poetry, a Romantic. But it is seldom that any critic will admit that the poet was a Romantic in his later poetry. None admit any traces of Romanticism in the poems of the middle period. Joseph Hone [4] admits the poet's persistent Romanticism in his life, but does not commit himself to a similar statement about the poetry. Yet it seems obvious, as a result of the studies that preceded and accompanied this research, that Yeats was a Romantic in his poetry as in his life from first to last. The type of Romanticism changed from the languorous to the despairing to the passionate, but it was Romanticism throughout. That contention, aggressive enough to be Yeatsian, has dominated the pages that follow.

From the admitted starting point of Yeats's early Romanticism, an analysis of the nature, quantity, and intensity of his Romanticism has naturally followed. Much care has been taken to set the subject in its proper perspective. Norman Jeffares [5] writes that Yeats

> . . . devoted his life to literature, and in a peculiarly personal way. He drew much of his material from his life; his emotions coloured all that he read; and almost all that he wrote was subjective. The man and the artist cannot be separated; his life and his writings are complementary and interwoven to an unusual degree. His life throws light on his works and his works reflect

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4 See preceding page, quotation 3

5 Jeffares, op. cit., p. vii

> that life. Therefore some knowledge of his life and background is necessary for the better understanding of his poetry.[6]

In order that the quality of Romanticism may not be conceived as existing in a vacuum, not only Yeats's life and the definition of Romanticism itself must be considered, but his personal, national, and literary background as well. From this necessary foundation there will rise the body of the essay, a detailed study of the nature and occurrence of specific Romantic qualities in his lyric and personal poetry. Such a study has not previously been undertaken in any of the numerous interesting and valuable critical works on Yeats published up until this time. It will stress the Romantic idea of escape, and will show that such qualities as revolt, solitude, melancholy, egotism, the creating of an ideal love and an ideal world, and interest in the supernatural in all its forms -- dream, vision, the spirit, fairy belief, mysticism, symbolism --, are all types of this escape and are all found in Yeats's poetry.

One of the most continuously productive of writers, Yeats has published approximately fifteen volumes of poetry, eighteen volumes of plays, and nineteen volumes of miscellaneous prose works. In addition he has edited and written

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6 Jeffares, loc. cit.,

introductions for several other volumes of prose and poetry. Any attempt at classification of his work is, however, complicated by many factors. Much of his work (at least 50,000 pages) has not yet been published, and innumerable poems, essays, and tales, published over a lifetime in newspapers and magazines, have not since been collected. Then, too, his repeated and frequently drastic revisions of his own poetry have so altered many earlier poems as to render them in their final draft not wholly characteristic of the period in which they were originally written.

The basis of this study has been as much as was available of Yeats's lyric poetry. This has been considered side by side with his dramatic output in poetry and prose, and in the light of his autobiographical and critical works. Volumes of biography and criticism by Joseph Hone, Horatio Krans, Richard Ellman, Norman Jeffares, T. R. Henn, and others, have been valuable. Meanwhile more remote and scattered comment on the poet by friends and associates has proved helpful as well.

It has proved at once easy and difficult to write about Yeats's life: easy, because he himself wrote so much of an autobiographical nature, and because in contemporary literature there are so many references to him; difficult, because of his tendency to pose, to exaggerate, to select, to create myths about himself, sometimes either consciously or

unconsciously to suppress opinions on occultism and magic which played such an important part in his life, and also because he was so many-sided, so multifarious of mood and action, that he revealed himself differently to each man and woman he met.

Richard Ellman quotes Maud Gonne as writing,

> . . . his Autobiographies gave little indication of the intensity and enthusiasm which raged in his youth; the self-possessed old man had buried the extravagant boy.[7]

Many acquaintances based their judgement of Yeats almost wholly on externals, and each of these saw a different man: a few looked deeper, but even of these each perceived a different soul and a different mind, for the vision of each was altered or coloured by his own prejudices and passions as each reacted in his own way to a man so strongly individual, silhouetted against the turbulent and passionate background of the age and the country. Only by careful pruning and constant checking has it been possible to approximate a true picture of Yeats through the various stages of his development. Set free from the clouds of the controversial and non-essential, the poet, the dramatist, the nationalist, the politician, Yeats emerges all the clearer, the man himself, shorn of pose and affectation, neither god nor hero.

& Maud Gonne, Yeats and Ireland, in Scattering Branches, Tributes to the Memory of W. B. Yeats, N. Y., Macmillan, 1940, p. 21, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 3

CHAPTER I

YEATS THE MAN

> . . . it is necessary that the lyric poet's life should be known, that we should understand that his poetry is no rootless flower but the speech of a man.[1]
>
> I was a stranger there.[2]

No study of the poetry of W. B. Yeats could be undertaken without a preliminary study of the life and character from which the poetry grew. In such a study the influence of heredity is extremely significant, and is therefore discussed in some detail. The account of Yeats's life falls naturally into three divisions; his childhood and early youth, his young and later manhood, and his middle and old age. The first period, one of extreme melancholy and frustration, lasted up to about the age of twenty; the second period, that marked by his hopeless love for Maud Gonne, ended with his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees at the age of fifty-two; the third period, one of greater peace and happiness, ended with his death at the age of seventy-four.

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1 W. B. Yeats, unpublished notes for London lecture on Contemporary Poetry dictated in Dublin in 1910, quoted by Richard Ellman in Yeats, the Man and the Masks, N. Y., Macmillan, 1948, p. 5.

2 W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, N. Y., Macmillan, 1938, p. 60

1. Heredity.

By marriage with the Pollexfens I have given a tongue to the sea-cliffs.[3]

William Butler Yeats was born at Sandymount near Dublin on June 13, 1865, of that Anglo-Irish stock which so often is more strongly nationalistic than the native Irish. He was the eldest son of John Butler Yeats, well-known Irish artist, and Susan Pollexfen Yeats.

The Yeats family belonged originally to the English merchant class, but was linked by marriage to the Butlers, Anglo-Irish gentry who claimed some French blood. It was to this French ancestry, J. B. Yeats said, that the family owed their charm and good manners.[4] The poet's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather were clergymen of the Church of Ireland, both apparently very remarkable men and as strongly individual in their sphere as artist and poet were in theirs. Indeed the whole family appear to have been unusually talented. J. B. Yeats quoted Sir William Wilde, father of Oscar Wilde and himself a well-known Dublin

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3 J. B. Yeats in Letters to his Son W. B. Yeats and Others, London, Faber, 1944, p. 29, quoted by Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, N. Y., Macmillan, 1943, p. 18.

4. J. B. Yeats, Letters to his Son W. B. Yeats and Others, London, Faber, 1944, p. 93

physician, as saying, "The Yeats's were the cleverest and most spirited people I ever met." [5] This statement is proved by many anecdotes written by W. B. Yeats in his Autobiography.[6]

Of his own father J. B. Yeats wrote:

> My father was sweet-tempered and affectionate, also he constantly read Shelley, and, no less, Shelley's antidote, Charles Lamb. To be with him was to be caught up into a web of delicious visionary hopefulness. . . And he would talk of his youth and boyhood in the West of Ireland where he had fished and shot and hunted, and had not a care.[7]

J. B. Yeats was himself a worthy father of a poet son. In a lecture delivered in Ottawa on May 29, 1950, Padraic Colum, friend and protégé of Yeats and himself an Irish poet and dramatist of note, commented that W. B. Yeats

> . . . had a very remarkable father . . . the finest in all literary history, [8]

and explained further how effective the elder Yeats's precepts and criticism had been in molding the poetic and dramatic art of his famous son.

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5 J. B. Yeats, op. cit., p. 144.

6 W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, N.Y., Macmillan, 1938.

7 J. B. Yeats, quoted by Hone, op. cit., p. 7.

8 Padraic Colum, lecture on The Irish National Theatre, Technical School Auditorium, Ottawa, May 29, 1950.

As a child, much older than his brothers, J. B. Yeats led a lonely and solitary life, -- not too great a pity, for it sent him headlong into the world of fancy and imagination. He wrote many years later:

> Whether inside the house or out in the grounds I was always by myself, therefore I early learned to sustain myself by revery and dream. Years afterwards I suffered a good deal from the reproofs of my elders, for my habit of absentmindedness. Of course I was absentminded and am so still. In those childhood days I discovered the world of fantasy, and I still spend all my spare moments in that land of endearing enchantment. I think as a child I was perfectly happy; my father my friend and counsellor, my mother my conscience.[9]

As a boy, J. B. Yeats went to Liverpool and then to the Isle of Man to receive his education, an education marred by too-rigid discipline and severe home-sickness. He later attended Trinity College, Dublin, where -- after reading Butler's Analogy -- he became a sceptic. Then, too, under the influence of John Stuart Mill, he became vigorously controversial. He wrote, "I wanted to quarrel with everyone."[10]

Physically and mentally vigorous until his death in 1922 at the age of 82, he remained possessed of much charm and wide personal and intellectual influence. W. B. Yeats

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9 J. B. Yeats, Early Memories: Some Chapters of Autobiography, Dublin, Cuala, 1923, p. 2, quoted by A. Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats, Man and Poet, London, Paul, 1949, p. 5.

10 J. B. Yeats, Letters, p. 28.

has acknowledged that he acquired his whole philosophy of life from his father. He certainly inherited, -- most noticeable in manhood, -- his father's mental vigour and delighted skill in argument. But more fundamental legacies were the artistic temper of mind, the love of dream and solitude, blended in son as in father to encourage a talent that was near genius. So too, as will be seen later, environment played a vital role in the development of the poet, and here also the father's contribution was deep and significant.

Through his mother W. B. Yeats derived from the Pollexfens and Middletons, sea-farers, millers, and shipbuilders. Daring, courageous, brilliant, they were also eccentric and accentuated in character. There was among them, also, a tendency to melancholy: one of Yeats's uncles, a brilliant architect, went insane. William Pollexfen, the poet's grandfather, was the genius who dominated the poet's childhood; he was a strong and passionate old man like Lear. George Pollexfen, W. B.'s uncle, was an eccentric and hypochondriac who shared the poet's later interest in astrology and the supernatural. Henry Middleton, another uncle, shut himself off from the world, spent his life within his little estate, and refused to see visitors.

Yeats's mother, a quiet and lovely woman, cared only for her husband and children, for the beautiful scenes of her native Sligo, and for the fairy tales and ghost

stories of the peasants of the Irish country-side. Oliver Elton has described her:

> Mrs. Yeats, as I knew her, was a silent, flitting figure. She came from the fairy shores of Sligo, and Yeats would speak of her as the right sort of mother for a poet and a dreamer.[11]

She was an excellent story-teller, and yet none of her children knew her well, for she could not express her emotions although they were strong and deep. She talked of Sligo to her children with love and longing, and yet discouraged them from displaying their emotions. Her husband once wrote, "Inarticulate as the sea-cliffs were the Pollexfens, lying buried under mountains of silence,"[12] and added that by marriage with the Pollexfens he had, in his poet son, given a tongue to the sea-cliffs.[12]

The influence of heredity is obvious and very striking in William Butler Yeats both as man and poet. He was, more noticeably than the ordinary man, what his ancestors had made him. From his father he had inherited an artistic, beauty-loving, and sensitive soul, as well as much charm, a keen intellect, strong individuality, love of argument, and a strong nationalism. From his mother there had come to him a heritage of dreamy mysticism, love of

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11 Oliver Elton, in Preface of J. B. Yeats, Letters, p. 5.

12. J. B. Yeats, op. cit., p. 29.

folk-lore, and love of nature.

Environment played no less important a part in the development of his character and his genius. He was very greatly influenced by the strong personalities of the relations whom he knew in his childhood. Even when, in manhood, he left home and tried consciously to break away from his father's and the Pollexfen's sphere of influence, he never succeeded in freeing himself either from spiritual affinity to his mother and long-dead ancestors or from the far stronger physical affinity to his father, to his brothers and sisters, and to the doughty Pollexfens. As he grew older he developed and fostered exaggerated pride of race, and identified himself with all those gallant "old fathers,"[13] seeing life as a continuation and a repetition.

> I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
> This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair
> is my ancestral stair; [14]

> Old Dublin merchant 'free of the ten and four'
> Or trading out of Galway into Spain;
> Old country scholar, Robert Emmet's friend,
> A hundred-year-old memory to the poor;
> Merchant and scholar who have left me blood
> That has not passed through any huckster's loin,
> Soldiers that gave, whatever die was cast;[15]

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13 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, N. Y., Macmillan, 1950, p. 113.

14 W. B. Yeats, op. cit., p. 268.

15 W. B. Yeats, op. cit., p. 113.

2. Childhood and Youth.

. . . I remember little of childhood but its pain.[16]
And therefore I am proud and sad forever.[17]

From his autobiography and from letters written by his father, young Willie Yeats emerges as a shy, sensitive, and nervous child, so timid and so enfolded in his own thoughts that some of his Pollexfen relations considered him backward mentally. Like his mother, he was fascinated by fairy stories and at all times he delighted in the lovely Sligo countryside. While he was young his mother's delicate health and his father's financial difficulties caused frequent and lengthy visits to the Pollexfen home in Sligo. Even after the family had moved to London, he and all the other members of the family except his father longed for their summer vacations in Ireland. During these holidays in Sligo the young Yeats began to develop a passionate love of the mountains and he listened avidly to the tales of the peasants and of the old fishermen. He was perpetually restless, his thoughts a continual excitement; he had too many interests, all pursued furiously.

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16 W. B. Yeats, Reveries Over Childhood and Youth, N. Y., Macmillan, 1916, p. 9.

17 W. B. Yeats, Unpublished Verse, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 30.

The boy's education was irregular and capriciously pursued. Taught at first (rather violently and not very successfully) by his father, he then attended a Dame School for a short time. He attended the Godolphin School at Hammersmith in London from about 1875 to 1880. When the family returned to Ireland to live, he was a pupil at the Erasmus Smith High School in Dublin from 1881 to 1883. In general, he lacked application and learned little unless he was bullied by his father into studying. He had some skill in Geometry and Latin, but was poor in all other subjects on the school curricula. Yet his mind was active and acquisitive, and his intellect was keen. His opinions, often acquired from his father, tended to be radical. He never won an essay prize because of poor writing and spelling.

Socially, he was never a success among his schoolfellows. At all times sallow and delicate, he was bullied by his London classmates both because of his physical weakness and his nationality, but he had a few loyal friends who saved him some persecution. In Dublin most of his classmates considered him a snob. In England he forced himself to excel in running and diving. Both in England and in Ireland he revealed a strong interest in natural science, a subject which probably contributed to the effective description of nature in his earlier poetry.

Throughout Willie's childhood his father had very frequently read poetry to him, always choosing that which was stirring and dramatic. At about the age of fifteen or sixteen he began to acquire a conscious interest in literature, and began to write verse as well. J. B. Yeats encouraged him in both interests, reading aloud passages from Shakespeare, Shelley, Rossetti, Blake, and always selecting the most passionate moment of play or poem. His judgements on poetry--merits, methods, themes, and style--were sound, and he urged his son to attempt dramatic poems, crammed with life and passion. He gave sound and constructive criticisms of his son's verse, coupled with real encouragement, and the poet's skill and techniques owed much to his trenchant advice.

At about the age of seventeen the complexity of the young Yeats's character began to be revealed more fully. Stimulated by his new interest in literature, he began to brood anew on his early enthusiasms, old legends and the loveliness of natural scenery. At the same time his mind turned in upon itself, and he made himself the hero of the books he read. In true Romantic fashion he dominated his whole universe, now Hamlet, now Manfred, now Prometheus, now Prince Athanase, always solitary, aloof, splendid. He played with the magician image; in magic he could find the

power over men that was denied to him in life. And so he dramatised himself in his day-dreams, as sage, magician, and poet. This attitude is essentially romantic.

A thicket at the junction of three roads, he wrote later, gave him his first idea of what a long poem should be, "a region into which one might wander from the cares of life",[18] with characters "no more real than the shadows that people the thicket".[18] This, as will be shown more clearly in Chapter II, is a typically romantic attitude to life and literature. Poems and plays written at about this time, and largely unpublished, show the influence of Spenser and Shelley and the Pre-Raphaelites; they are unusually luxurious in description, with heroes who are all aspects of himself, proud, sad, utterly despising the crowd.

Yeats was, therefore, a typical romantic at this time, lost in dreams and fantasy, centred upon his own moods and emotions, seeking escape from reality in legend and in nature, preferring reverie and solitude to company, preferring the simple folk to the well-to-do. He sought escape from his physical limitations, his delicate health, his awkwardness and weakness, from the disapproval of his courageous and cheerful father and the hearty, athletic Pollexfens. Timid and restless, he was constantly tormented by an acute

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18 Joseph Hone, op. cit., p. 38.

religious consciousness, in itself largely a revolt against his father's scepticism.

When he was eighteen he left high school, but refused to go to Trinity College both because he feared he could not pass the entrance examinations and because he had not money for fees. His lack of higher education was always a severe mortification to him, for it added to his sense of inferiority. In 1884 and 1885 he attended the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, and later attended the Royal Hibernian Academy School. Never proficient at art, and always too timid to paint as he wished, he was confused by the conflict between his own romantic tendencies and the anti-romantic tendencies of the art school. One interesting and far-reaching effect of his attendance at Art School was the beginning of a long and intimate friendship with George Russell, the mystic and poet who wrote later under the pen-name of AE. Yeats and Russell shared a deep and abiding interest in mysticism and spiritualism.

Yeats developed from a melancholy child to an unhappy young man, from a solemn and dreamy small boy to a solitary and artistic young man -- an introvert whose poetry clearly reflected his romantic attitude to life and his absorption in himself. His interest in magic, in the supernatural, in the occult, was already deeply rooted.

3. Yeats in Manhood.

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their antique joy;
Of old the world on dreaming fed;
Grey Truth is now her painted toy.[19]

I would, before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways.[20]

. . . one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face. [21]

The second period of Yeats's life, that from 1885 to 1917, was eventful and fruitful. It was marked by a change in the philosophy of life he had built up before he was twenty: instead of escaping from life he thrust himself into its midst and deliberately sought incident and experience. He forced himself into contact with men and succeeded in making himself into a many-sided public man. He became an ardent, vocal, and effective nationalist -- one who is largely responsible for the whole Irish literary, dramatic, and political revival. He found in Maud Gonne a very beautiful inspiration for his love and his poetry, and although his love was in vain his poetry was all the richer for the continuous emotional tension that varied between ecstasy and despair.

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19 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 7.

20. Op. cit., p. 35.

21 Op. cit., p. 46.

When Katharine Tynan, the Irish poetess, met Yeats in 1885 he seemed "all dreams and all gentleness",[22] but ideas had taken hold of his soul; philosophy and nationalism were at the same time inspiring him and competing with his literary activities.

With George Russell, Charles Johnston, and a few other young men -- all alike unsatisfied by the doctrines of the Church of Ireland and of Presbyterianism and attracted by the ideas set forth in A. P. Sinnett's The Occult World and Esoteric Buddhism -- Yeats had begun the studies of pseudo-mystical philosophy and psychical research. In the Dublin Hermetic Society which they formed, and in similar societies later, they studied European magic and mysticism, Eastern religions, spiritualism, esoteric buddhism, and finally Theosophy under a Bengal Brahmin, Babu Mohini Chatterjee, and the notorious Russian, Madame Blavatsky. This study will not follow Yeats far into the labyrinthine morass of these studies: the subject is at once too involved and too dangerous. They are, however, evidence of his romantic temper of mind, the restless and unhealthy search for excitement in secret and unorthodox doctrines, a "secret

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22 Katharine Tynan Hinkson, Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences, London, Smith Elder, 1913, p. 145, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 32.

fanaticism"[23] which cannot be condoned. They will be referred to again in the discussion of his symbolism and 'mysticism' and his use of the supernatural.

Yeats's interest in occultism continued throughout the rest of his life. He was curious but not over-credulous, passionate and energetic but lacking assurance. His insistence on the need for experiment brought an indirect request for his resignation from the London Theosophists in 1890, a request originating from Madame Blavatsky. In the same year he joined the Hermetical Students of the Golden Dawn, an order of 'Christian Kabbalists' under the influence of the 'magician' MacGregor Mathers. In 1891 he planned a mystical order, a secret spiritual propaganda for all Ireland, with headquarters in a castle built on the romantically lovely island in Lough Key. Eventually he travelled very deeply indeed into magical practise and theory, and read widely in Boehme and Swedenborg.

Nationalism had never been dormant in subjugated Ireland, but in 1885 patriotic enthusiasm was at white heat. The Irish Republican Brotherhood was active. Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Irish parliamentary party,

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23 W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, p. 97, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 44.

was bringing pressure to bear on Gladstone to introduce an Irish Home Rule Bill in the British parliament. J. B. Yeats was an enthusiastic Home Ruler, as was his son. Together they attended meetings at the nationalistic Contemporary Club in Dublin in 1885. W. B. Yeats began to practise public speaking at these meetings. Here he met the outstanding Irish patriot, John O'Leary, whose dignity, self-restraint, culture, and interest in achieving and maintaining a high standard in Irish literature, greatly appealed to him. O'Leary influenced Yeats to join a Young Ireland Society, introduced him to Thomas Davis' nationalist poems, encouraged a literary interest in Irish folk lore: soon Yeats found a patriotic ardour inspiring his verse.

> Know, that I would accounted be
> True brother of a company
> That sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong.[24]

In 1882 Standish O'Grady had published prose versions of some of the old Irish legends; in 1886 Yeats, although conscious of the uncertainty of general public approval, determined to follow his example. He wrote of Ireland and of all things Irish, with a strong personal emotion. In 1886, too, he had given up the study of painting for a literary career -- a reckless move in some ways because the family's financial difficulties remained very real. He

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24 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 56.

published several original poems during the years from 1885 to 1890, the most important being The Wanderings of Oisin, and several anthologies of Irish poetry and stories.[25] None, however, brought him more than a pittance.

The Wanderings of Oisin was published in 1889. It was legendary in theme, heavily symbolic, pervaded by a dreamy sadness. It was the retelling of an old Irish tale, and it caught something of the cold beauty of the older Gaelic literature, but transformed and blurred in true romantic fashion.

Yeats made many literary contacts during these years as well. In London in 1887 he came under the influence of William Morris and -- although he disapproved of the doctrines of Socialism -- he attended the meetings for working men and the debates which Morris sponsored. There he met George Bernard Shaw, whom he disliked at once as a "notorious hater of romance".[26] At about the same time he met W. E. Henley (whose coterie of poets he joined), York Powell, Oscar Wilde, and Edwin Ellis. With Wilde he had little association, but with Ellis, a mystic, he undertook an analysis of the symbolism of William Blake which

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25 See the chronological table in Appendix A for the names and dates of publication of individual works.

26 Katharine Hinkson, The Middle Years, London, Constable, 1916, p. 47, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 46.

culminated in a joint edition of Blake, published in 1893. In 1891 a meeting with Ernest Rhys led to the founding of the Rhymers' Club, a group of young poets organized by Rhys, Yeats, and T. W. Rolleston. Included in the group were Lionel Johnson, Edward Dowson, Arthur Symons, Richard LeGallienne, -- members of the 'Tragic Generation'.

The most significant event in W. B. Yeats's life, both as a personal and as a literary influence, was his meeting with Maud Gonne. In 1889, shortly after the publication of The Wanderings of Oisin, she came to the Yeats home with a letter of introduction from John O'Leary. She was six feet tall, so lovely that she was generally admitted to be the most beautiful woman in Ireland, the daughter of an English officer who had died in Dublin of cholera. After an adventurous life in Ireland and on the continent she had decided to devote herself to the cause of Irish independence and the betterment of the Irish poor. Aside from her very remarkable beauty, she had a dramatic personality. Willie immediately fell under her spell, a spell that held him almost all his life.

Throughout the years of their acquaintance she moved back and forth between Ireland and France, involved always in political activity and intrigue. He usually admired her ideals but frequently deprecated the means

which she used to achieve them. He was always conscious of her need for peace and rest, a need she refused either to acknowledge or to gratify. He wrote The Countess Cathleen for her, and she was also his inspiration for The Land of Heart's Desire and for Cathleen ni Houlihan.

He had dreamed for years of the perfect love and of an ideal woman. Both had come to him -- but only as dreams -- for Maud Gonne directly and repeatedly refused his proposals of marriage while refusing to surrender his friendship and his assistance in her political activities. He suffered from all the pain of disappointed love without the solace of separation, but he found in this situation a constant and keen poetic stimulus. No other theme could have held him for so long a time with so much intensity.

To Maud Gonne Yeats owes, too, a strengthening and enriching of national themes and national ideals. With her he planned a great Irish literature, a blend of ancient Celtic mythology and popular legend, with the purpose of stirring Irishmen to the cause of Irish freedom through Irish culture. Under her inspiration he helped found the Irish Literary Society in London in 1891 and the National Literary Society in Dublin in 1892. To please her, and to bring himself closer to the man of action she admired, he began to take a more active part in politics and thereby, incidentally, not only brought himself but also his poetry closer to

reality and closer to the people. Despite misunderstandings and disappointments, his faith in her was always strong, surviving by ignoring calumny and detraction.

It seemed to Yeats, then, like the end of his world when in 1903 he received a letter from her announcing her marriage to John MacBride, an Irish patriot. Hero as he later proved himself to be, MacBride was surely no mate for a delicately bred lady, not only in Yeats's opinion but in that of many of MacBride's own relations and friends. The effect on Yeats's life and poetry of this disappointment is considered in a later chapter which treats of Romantic love. It surprised few when Madame MacBride sought a legal separation in 1905. In this latter crisis Yeats showed himself a true and unselfish friend: she had become a Catholic, and there was no thought of remarriage.

MacBride was executed after the Easter Rising in 1916, in which he played a hero's part, and Yeats paid him poetic tribute. Yeats again proposed to Madame MacBride, and was again refused. He accepted this rejection as final, wisely -- for she was still more interested in politics than in marriage. Partly from a sense of duty, partly from a love that was almost paternal, Yeats then proposed to Iseult Gonne, Madame MacBride's adopted daughter, who also refused his offer. It was perhaps with a sense of relief that the long struggle was over that he proposed to Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees. They married in October, 1917, and with the

marriage a new life began, -- new but memory-haunted, for the past could never be completely forgotten.

Meanwhile Yeats had found much hope and some consolation in his secret orders (a schism in the Golden Dawn led to its dissolution and to the organizing of the Stella Matutina) and in occult researches that were deeper and more secret than ever. These orders seemed to him to open a door that led beyond the teachings of Theosophy into regions more and more shadowy and mysterious. Intrigued by rituals and teachings rich in the symbolism of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, he learned to use these symbols to drift back, as he believed, to a source beyond conscious or unconscious memory, and to evoke images which he used in turn to effect greater vividness and sensuousness, greater power of evocation, in his poetry. He never fully received the greater understanding of soul that he longed for, although he did receive further stimulation towards public affairs. His occult activities were frowned upon by his father and by AE who disapproved of his wish to replace mysticism by magic, but he succeeded in interesting Maud Gonne and some other friends in the orders -- at least for a time. He dabbled in black magic and in spiritualism during these years as well.

His social activities and the number of his friends were both increasing. His acquaintance among Irish nationa-

lists was extensive, as was that among literary men. Dr. Sigerson, Dr. Douglas Hyde, and John MacGrath were among his associates. An intimate friendship with Lionel Johnson had come to an end and was replaced by an enduring and rewarding companionship with Arthur Symons, well-known writer and critic. Through Symons Yeats gained some knowledge of the French Symbolists, although their influence on his own work came late and was slight. In February, 1894, Yeats and Symons visited Paris, where Yeats met Henri Bergson and the poet Verlaine. Then, too, he attended and was deeply impressed by a performance of Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam's Axel, a play which influenced his way of thought and his work in the years that followed. In the same year he met George Moore, with whom he was later to be associated in the Irish Literary Theatre. At about the same time he met Mrs. Olivia Shakespeare, a beautiful and intelligent woman, who was his life-long friend, and probably the 'Diana Vernon' of the 1894-1895 liaison.

Two visits to Ireland, in 1894 and 1895, were very important. The first he paid to his uncle, George Pollexfen, in Sligo. Yeats interested his uncle in astrology and psychical research, and the preoccupation of both with the supernatural was confirmed. Then, too, he met Eva and Constance Gore-Booth, the former a visionary poetess and the latter a rebel who was imprisoned after the 1916 Easter Rising. On his second visit he met Edward Martyn and Lady Gregory, with whom he

was later to be associated (along with George Moore) in the Irish Literary Dramatic movement, which will be described in some detail shortly.

Still later Yeats became associated with Symons, the unfortunate Aubrey Beardsley, and others, in the publication of the Savoy, a magazine designed to shock Victorian public opinion. All enjoyed the opposition they met, the criticism they received, and the controversy stirred up by the magazine. This, like his numerous nationalist controversies, showed his romantic -- and Irish -- tendency to seek conflict. He commented, "Being all young we delighted in enemies and in everything that had an heroic air."[27]

Robert Bridges had long been Yeats's friend, and now he could count among his intimates celebrities such as John Masefield, Ezra Pound, and Lennox Robinson. Both in Britain and in Ireland he was welcomed among intellectuals and the aristocracy. Even the social poise he had so deliberately acquired could not prevent him from preening himself a little, and he began to pride himself often on his own family connections. In this mood he was undoubtedly encouraged by Lady Gregory's interest and admiration.

He had frequently visited Paris, and also Normandy, to meet Maud Gonne. He made lecture tours to the United

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27 W. B. Yeats, quoted by Hone, op. cit., p. 130.

States and Canada in 1903 and 1914, and accompanied the Abbey Players for part of a tour in 1911. With Lady Gregory and her son, Robert Gregory, he toured Italy in 1907, and came to understanding and appreciation of the Renaissance culture.

Honours began to come to him, too. In 1910 he was, at Lady Gregory's suggestion, given an annual grant of £150 on the British Civil List. He accepted a seat on the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature in the same year. He declined a Knighthood early in 1916. His poetry, prose, and plays were almost universally praised, even the opposition of the public to certain events and comments in such a play as The Countess Cathleen being in itself an evidence of a very wide public.

Brief reference has been made to Yeats's meeting with Lady Gregory,[28] but it will be described now in more detail in connection with the Irish Dramatic movement in which both played so prominent a part. While Arthur Symons and Yeats were visitors at Tulira, Edward Martyn's estate, they were invited to visit Lady Gregory at her neighbouring estate of Coole. Already impressed by the work of Yeats and his fellow-writers of the Irish Literary Revival, and wishing herself to achieve some creative literary work, she asked his advice on how to begin. Yeats advised her to watch

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28 See pp. 22-23.

what they were doing and both inspiration and technique would follow. She began to collect Irish folk-lore from the peasants on her lands, writing down faithfully the Anglo-Irish idiom which gave a strong local flavour to the legends as they were printed and which later enriched her own comedies as well as bringing a salutary note of earthiness and realism to Yeats's plays and poetry. Yeats gained immeasurably in this and in other ways from contact with Lady Gregory: he spent his summers and other holidays at Coole for many years, finding rich inspiration in the lovely house and surroundings and gaining comfort from Lady Gregory in the emotional and physical distress of those years. Her attitude to him was partly maternal, partly hero-worshipping, and through her he met cultured friends among whom he was encouraged to do much of his best work.

Yeats was full of the idea of an Irish theatre when he came to Coole. Lady Gregory wrote that he was

> . . . full of playwriting and very keen with the aid of Florence Farr about taking or building a theatre somewhere in the suburbs to produce romantic plays, his own plays, Edward Martyn's, one of Bridges, and he is trying to stir up Standish O'Grady and Fiona Macleod to write some. He believes there will be a reaction from the realism of Ibsen and romance will have its turn.[29]

Lady Gregory was sympathetic and it was her organizing

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29 Lady Gregory, Journals, 1916-1930, Putnam, London, 1946, pp. 2-3.

ability that made possible the raising of funds and the securing of the necessary permission to open the theatre.

Yeats had dreamed of an Irish National Theatre for years. Actual plans were drawn up in 1897, and the theatre was actually founded in 1898. Lady Gregory, Yeats, George Moore and Edward Martyn were joint founders, but Yeats was the heart of the movement. He turned out play after play for presentation, ranging from fairy plays and national plays to mystical plays. The public was enthusiastic both in its likes and dislikes. Cathleen ni Houlihan was acclaimed, while The Countess Cathleen caused mild riots. J. M. Synge's The Playboy of the Western World caused a week of rioting in Ireland, and similar disturbances in several cities of the United States when the Abbey players went on tour in 1911. There were production difficulties, difficulties with the actors, difficulties between the playwrights. First Moore and then Martyn left the movement, but their places were gradually filled by new dramatists, Synge, Padraic Colum, Lennox Robinson, Sean O'Casey, Lord Dunsany, and others. But Yeats dominated the scene and was largely responsible for holding the Abbey Theatre together until it could carry on under its own momentum. Altogether, although his dramatic activities tore Yeats from his lyric poetry, he gained more than he lost -- a greater knowledge of man and men, an ever-growing mastery of stage-craft, a tautening of

language and rhythm, activity that served as an outlet for his tormented emotions.

The plays which Yeats wrote alone or in collaboration with others may be found in the Chronological Table.[30] An account of the various volumes of poetry he published will be found at the end of this chapter. They will be considered all together for greater ease in tracing tendencies and making comparisons.

During the thirty-two years between 1885 and 1917, as has been shown, Yeats changed from a young man tormented by self-consciousness to an older man full of self-assurance, from a romantic and idealistic nationalist to a practical nationalist, from a dreamer with no fixed purpose in life to a lover who has sublimated his love and captured its every move in his poetry. Yet, despite many successes, he still lacked fulfilment. He could write with some bitterness in the Prologue to Responsibilities,

> Pardon, old fathers, if you still remain
> Somewhere in ear-shot for the story's end,
> . . .
> Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,
> Although I have come close on forty-nine,
> I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
> Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.[31]

For the sequel that carries the 'happy ending' another section will serve.

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30 See Appendix A

31 Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 113

4. Middle and Old Age .

. . . many that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.[32]

I declare this tower is my symbol; . . . [33]

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.[34]

O who could have foretold
That the heart grows old?[35]

The story of Yeats's youth and manhood has been told, and the remark was there made that with his marriage in 1917 a new life began. The account of that new life is now to be told. Its high-lights are few: the happiness that marriage and fatherhood brought him; the rebuilding of the ruined tower, Thoor Ballylee, which symbolized himself and his life; the complete development of his theories of the Self and Anti-Self; the development of a whole 'philosophy' in A Vision; the coming of old age and his rage against it --

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32 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 212-213.

33 Ibid., id., p. 268.

34 Ibid., id., p. 182.

35 Ibid., id., p. 156.

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.[37]

Yeats had met Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees, a charming young lady of good family and some private means, in 1912. She shared his interest in psychic matters, and impressed him as well by her pleasant manner. It is possible that only a sense of loyalty to the then aging Maud Gonne prevented him from proposing marriage to this young lady -- so eminently suitable for a poet's life -- earlier. They had, indeed, spoken of marriage. When John MacBride's death in 1916 set Maud Gonne MacBride free and she still refused his offer, as did her adopted daughter, it was to Miss Lees he turned. His good fortune was notable. Witty, intelligent, understanding, kind, she filled his heart and life as no other could do. He never quite forgot his first love, who haunted his poetry until the end, but marriage was satisfying in many ways. The birth of a daughter in 1919 and a son in 1921 made him once again a family man, for the first time a complete man.

For wife and family he must provide a home, one that would be suitable and enduring: Thoor Ballylee was the solution. It was an abandoned tower near Lady Gregory's

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37 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 218.

estate of Coole. He restored it with much labour and expense, and with the help and advice of Lady Gregory and her son, now Major Robert Gregory of the Royal Air Force. A lecture tour in America in 1919 helped to pay for it, and meanwhile the family moved between Dublin and Oxford. For Yeats the tower was a symbol, a very complex one. It meant to him the pride of family he had long nourished, the solitariness and splendour of his own life, the aspirations -- magical and social -- that he still held, the strength and solidity his uneasy heart craved, all these and many other things. For personal reasons the family did not live there for all of each year, and after some years the tower was deserted and is now falling into ruin. But while it was inhabited, and even afterwards, it surely enriched his life as it did his poetry.

Yeats's theory of the Mask, of the Self and Anti-Self, will be studied in more detail in a later chapter, but must be mentioned here. It was not a new theory, for shadows of it had appeared in his earliest poetry and it had been developed in some detail out of his distress following Maud Gonne's marriage. But during these later years it appeared more plainly and defiantly in his poetry. He had posed from early youth, and during his life had worn many masks -- notably that of man of action. The simplest mask is the social self, that which divides personality from character.

Then, too, the mask is defensive -- the front with which one faces the world. Having adopted a mask, man has set for himself a standard from which he must not vary. Yeats pushed this theory still further to the belief that the mask is in fact man's opposite, his Anti-Self. And then, having created for himself two Selves, he is faced with the problem of reconciling them. A great deal of Yeats's later poetry is concerned, implicitly or explicitly, with this doctrine. Its connection with romanticism offers an interesting study.

A few days after their marriage Mrs. Yeats noticed that her husband was unhappy and brooding. To distract him, she decided that she would attempt to fake automatic writing. To her surprise what she wrote obviously came from elsewhere than her mind, for the disjointed sentences were on a subject of which she was ignorant. Yeats induced her to give a few day-time hours to this occupation, and later developed the scribblings into the obscure book called A Vision. The so-called system is in fact not a system at all, and consists of a strange medley of Theosophy, astrology, geometry, spiritism, and scraps from Yeats's confusion of reading over the years. Yet to any student of Yeats's later poetry, complete understanding of the volume, A Vision, is necessary for an understanding of the poetry. Both topics lie beyond the field of this study.

Since his marriage Yeats had gradually withdrawn both from politics and from the direct management of the Abbey Theatre. He felt that it was time the young were taking up the torch. He had been powerfully affected by the World War, and felt that anarchy was being set loose upon the world. He had remained aloof -- unwittingly, for he had not been consulted -- from the Easter Rising in 1916, and he took no part in the Irish civil war. Yet his real services to the cause of Ireland had not been forgotten, and he was appointed a Senator in the Irish Free State. This appointment he took most seriously, and worked conscientiously for his country's social and cultural betterment.

Other honours came to him as well. In 1922 he was granted honourary degrees both by Belfast (Queens University) and by Dublin (Trinity College). In 1924 he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature. In 1931 Oxford University gave him an honourary Doctor of Laws. He was by this time widely sought after and generally admired. The greatness of his contribution to literature was being more fairly estimated, although -- as it is usual -- full appreciation came only after his death.

His health had not been good for years, however. He had been greatly depressed by his father's death in 1922, and by 1927 he was suffering from severe lung haemorrhages and high fever. The years from 1927 to 1939 showed a

gradual and steady decline in health, interrupted in 1934 for a year or two when Yeats underwent the Steinach operation. The poet and his wife spent much time on the continent, in the milder climate of Italy, Sicily, and France. Despite the physical weaknesses that came upon him, there was no mental slackening. His best poetry was written in middle and old age, for through the years he had acquired greater clarity and economy of language, along with more effective imagery, greater poetic inspiration and insight.

Death came to Yeats on Saurday, January 28, 1939, at Cap Martin on the Riviera. Buried first At Roquebrune, his body was reinterred after the close of the Second World War in Drumcliffe Churchyard in Sligo. He wrote his own epitaph.

> Under bare Ben Bulben's head
> In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
> An ancestor was rector there
> Long years ago, a church stands near,
> By the road an ancient cross.
> No marble, no conventional phrase;
> On limestone quarried near the spot
> By his command these words are cut:
>
> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by! [38]

Such, then, was the life of one whom T. S. Eliot has called "the greatest poet of our time---certainly the greatest in his language, and so far as I can judge, in any language".[39]

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38 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, pp. 400-401.

39 Hone, op. cit., p. 513.

5. Yeats's Works.

His chosen comrades thought at school
He must grow a famous man;
He thought the same and lived by rule,
All his twenties crammed with toil;
'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'

Everything he wrote was read,
After certain years he won
Sufficient money for his need,
Friends that have been friends indeed;
'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'

All his happier dreams came true---
A small old house, wife, daughter, son,
Grounds where plum and cabbage grew;
Poets and Wits about him drew;
'What then?' sang Plato's ghost. 'What then?'

'The work is done,' grown old he thought,
'According to my boyish plan;
Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
Something to perfection brought';
But louder sang that ghost, 'What then?'[40]

Although occasional passing reference has been made to certain of Yeats's works, the continuity of the account of his life has not been interrupted to give an adequate comment on all or any of the books (approximately forty) that he has published. Indeed even brief accounts of all the works would be too lengthy and unnecessarily full a survey for the purposes of this thesis. Reference should properly be made, however, to the books of verse that are the immediate concern of this study, and to other works, prose, drama, or poetry, that explain or supplement its findings.

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40 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, pp. 347-348.

The lyric poetry, since it is the foundation for this analysis, may well be considered first.

In the 1950 edition of Yeats's Collected Poems the lyrics have been arranged in fourteen sections. These are in chronological order of publication and are, of course, listed here in the same order. They are, respectively: Crossways (1889); The Rose (1893); The Wind among the Reeds (1899); In the Seven Woods (1904); The Green Helmet and Other Poems (1910); Responsibilities (1914); The Wild Swans at Coole (1919); Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1929); The Tower (1928); The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1933); Words for Music Perhaps (1932); A Woman Young and Old; A Full Moon in March (1935); Last Poems (1936-1939).

The poems in Crossways were in the beginning published in the volume, The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems (1899), and in various magazines. Yeats's best fairy poetry appeared in this volume, as well as several folk songs and ballads that caught the melodies of the Irish countryside. Every poem is suffused with the deep melancholy that was the essence of the Yeats of that time. The poet's three exotic early poems which came from his association with Mohini Chatterjee are found in this volume also: "Anashuya and Vijaya", "The Indian upon God", "The Indian to his Love". The melody of the verse is rich and subtle, but the young poet tended to lose himself in words.

The poems of The Rose appeared first in the Collected Poems of 1895, in which the Crossways poems also appeared after some revisions. The rose is the key symbol for these poems, a symbol that means sometimes the spirit of beauty, sometimes Maud Gonne as beauty personified, sometimes Ireland, sometimes other and more complex images. Mythology and fairy lore contribute to the themes of this volume, but more important as a subject for his verse is his love for Maud Gonne -- a love not clearly expressed, but veiled in symbolism, and associated with the more explicit love of country that he here made articulate.

The Wind among the Reeds is more mystical, more vaguely symbolical, than the earlier volumes. Its poems are more esoteric but less blurred by unnecessary beauty. In them there is a wistfulness and very real unhappiness, almost a certainty of life-long sadness now no longer purposeless but centred around the elusive Maud Gonne. Several poems are addressed to 'Diana Vernon', a mysterious and lovely lady who -- he hoped -- might drive Maud Gonne from his heart.

The poems of In the Seven Woods are few in number, a fact easily explained by his dramatic activities and by the shock of Maud Gonne's marriage. They are full of pain, and occasional bitterness is apparent. The language has acquired greater clarity, greater economy of phrase, and consequently greater poetic effectiveness.

Almost as few in number, and for the same reasons, are the poems of The Green Helmet and Other Poems. They have gained in clarity, and have a trend towards realism in theme and language. The poet's bitterness is less, and memory brings back the old enchantment of love. There is much use of topical matters as themes. The shadows of the earlier poems are clearing, to reveal the poetic vigour that increases with the years.

Responsibilities marks a complete transition from Romanticism to realism in style, although not in poetic temper. Now the author, no longer an escapist, lives with a will the life of his own time. He has at once a clearer vision and a clearer expression. Poems of this volume show the rage that characterizes so many of the later poems. Mythological themes are still used, but the real hero is the naked beggar who symbolises Yeats in particular, and mankind in general. The poet has no illusions. Still memory-haunted, he has no comfort in the present, no hope for the future.

In The Wild Swans at Coole, Yeats's poetic flower begins to reblossom. There is still a tone of dejection over the past, but its glories are recalled and consolation of a kind is found in the present. Hope of future reunion with his love is there, and the philosophy of vision that became richer year by year. A greater tautness of expression does not preclude a strong lyricism.

In Michael Robartes and the Dancer Yeats has a more pungent defiance of the world, but there is evidence of some comfort and happiness in wife and family and home. There is, too, more poetry of dream prophecy, probably inspired by the 1916 Easter Rising.

The Tower was long hailed as the best volume of poetry published by Yeats. The language is particularly eloquent and forceful, the perfect expression of much original and powerful thought. Yeats was by this time a celebrated public figure, definitely writing for an audience out of his own self-centred and richly-stored mind. It is strengthened by its bitterness and rage.

The Winding Stair is marked by still greater skill in the use of astringent and epigrammatic language. Side by side with the poetry of mystic vision there is the raw brutality of the Crazy Jane poems. Yeats evidences greater insight into character, especially his own. There is in this volume a soaring and exultant passion that is fully Romantic.

The poems of A Full Moon in March continue the trend of the previous volume, a trend that reaches its climax in Last Poems -- surely the most remarkable body of poems ever written by a poet who was seventy and more years old. They are richest of all Yeats's poems in soaring and exultant Romanticism, and at the same time the simplest and most sincere.

Among narrative poetry that is of interest because of themes taken from Celtic mythology, although outside the scope of this essay, may be listed "The Wanderings of Oisin" (1889), "The Old Age of Queen Maeve" (1903), "Baile and Ailinn" (1903), and "The Two Kings" (1914). "The Shadowy Waters" (1906) is a dramatic poem based on the legendary tale of Forgael and Dectora, who sought an immortal love. "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" (1923) is an elaborate poetic introduction to the would-be philosophical system Yeats believed to have been given him through his wife's automatic writing by the mysterious 'communicators'.

Yeats wrote approximately fifteen plays, and collaborated with George Moore and Lady Gregory in writing several others. Most of the plays were poetic dramas in the heroic style, although here again he came closer to reality in style, language, and theme as he gained experience. Most of the plays were based on Irish myth and legend, always treated with sympathy.

The Countess Cathleen was Yeats's first play, written for Maud Gonne soon after they met. It was based on Irish legend, a tale of a lovely lady whose heart was sore for her famine-stricken peasants. When demons came to buy souls for gold, she sacrificed her own pure soul to save her people. This play offended many Irish, and caused much controversy.

The Land of Heart's Desire, also written with Maud Gonne in mind, is a one act poetic fairy play. Maire Bruin, a fair young bride, is lured away by the fairy enchantment just as Maud Gonne in fact is being won away from Yeats by her longing for some vague impossible life. Written in 1892 or 1893, it was produced in London in 1894.

Cathleen ni Houlihan is Yeats's triumph of nationalism. Cathleen ni Houlihan is an old woman who represents Ireland. She wins a young man away from his intended bride, and he sets off to join the French who have landed to head an Irish rebellion. Maud Gonne played Cathleen, and helped make the play Yeats's most popular. Years later he was to write, very seriously and with some reason, of the 1916 rising,

> Did that play of mine send out
> Certain men the English shot?[41]

These three are not the best plays that Yeats has written, but they are those most often mentioned in the pages that precede and follow, because most closely related to his Romanticism in general.

Of Yeats's prose works the most interesting and rewarding is certainly his autobiographical work. It was written at various times, and under various titles: Reveries

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41 Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 393.

over Childhood and Youth, The Trembling of the Veil, Dramatis Personae, The Bounty of Sweden have all been collected in Autobiography (1938). Although Yeats has somewhat coloured and glamourized his life as he wrote about it in retrospect, it is certain that he meant it to be completely accurate and in that purpose he has succeeded fairly well.

Next in importance and interest for a student of Yeats's Romanticism is The Celtic Twilight. It gives the background of his early beliefs about folk lore, fairy lore, and the supernatural in all its aspects.

An account of Yeats's life and work has been given in order to lay the foundation for the study of the nature and extent of Romanticism in his work. A second, and equally necessary, part of this foundation is a discussion and definition of romanticism in general and as seen in Yeats's earlier poetry in particular. Such a discussion and definition will be commenced in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

ROMANTICISM

Teach us, here, the way to find you.[1]

There are certain words frequently found on the pages of literary history which are so vaguely used, so difficult to define or explain that, while the average reader glides effortlessly, uncomprehendingly, and unquestioningly over them, even the literary critic frequently ignores them. He prefers either to assume his readers' comprehension rather than attempt an explanation which may reveal the cloudiness of his own thought or to formulate an explanation which depends rather on novelty than on conformity with usage for its effectiveness and which, Procrustes-like, forces authors and qualities to conform with a set of rules instead of deriving rules from authors and qualities. One of these difficult and dangerous words is Romanticism, a word particularly difficult of definition or explanation because it has has come to mean so many different things during different ages and among different races.

Any analysis of the nature and extent of Romanticism in the poetry of Yeats must begin with a clear understanding, and an equally clear expression, of terms. Both understanding

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1 John Keats, "Ode on the Poets".

and expression must be adequate, yet objective and conservative. In Chapter I the account of Yeats's life referred frequently to romantic features, events, or enthusiasms. To avoid confusion, explanation was not attempted there, but it cannot be longer delayed. Yet how numerous are the difficulties which render explanation difficult.

F. L. Lucas wrote in 1936 that 11,496 books on Romanticism had been published up to that year,[2] and since that time hundreds more have undoubtedly been printed. Years of study could not cover the field thoroughly, yet the fact remains that the wider the survey the more clear and comprehensible the resulting perspective and attempted explanation will be.

For the purposes of this research, then, there have been chosen a limited number of authorities whose standards and quality of scholarship are high, whose knowledge includes the literature and other arts of many countries besides their own, and whose judgements are quite impartial, neither praising nor blaming exclusively. The opinions of these authorities have been gathered and analysed. Where agreement on certain qualities of Romanticism was found, these have been recorded with assurance. Where opinions varied, a

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2 F. L. Lucas, The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal, Cambridge, University Press, 1936, p. 3.

synthesis of the opinion of the majority has been made. The result, it is hoped, is a reasonably complete and unbiassed description of the qualities of Romanticism, from which a definition has been drawn, and from which a set of characteristics revealed in Yeats's poetry have been chosen as focal points for the detailed analysis of Yeats's Romanticism found in the following chapters.

The pages that follow include not only a discussion of Romanticism and its qualities, but also an historical survey of English Romanticism which points parallels with Yeats, who was influenced by many of the English Romantics and found himself in fundamental sympathy with many more.

1. What is Romanticism?

Dreaming through the Twilight
That does not rise nor set . . . [3]

Despite the danger of over-simplifying a subject that is not at all simple, it is perhaps advisable to begin answering this question as to the nature of Romanticism by offering suggested definitions that will at once reveal both qualities and difficulties. With the warning that no one definition is complete, no one is even adequate, and many are only partly true, the following suggestions are offered.

Many French writers have attempted definitions of the movement. The French Academy declared in 1835 that Romanticism was a matter of technique alone, a mere reaction against the pricks and restrictions of the rules of Classicism,[4] and while this decree has been approved by many critics it has been rejected by others as being too negative. Victor Hugo's association of Romanticism with "the grotesque"[5] or with the sense of the grotesque which developed side by side with melancholy, and which is essentially truthfulness,[6] is no more universally true, for much that is romantic is not

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3 Christina Rossetti, quoted by Lucas, op. cit., p. 40.

4 Lucas, op. cit., p. 9.

5 Id., ibid., p. 10

grotesque, and there is no identity bwtween either truth or melancholy and the grotesque. Brunetière's assumption that Romanticism was merely "a blind wave of literary egotism" [6] can perhaps be admitted to contain more truth, and yet many works that are truly romantic actually contain no egotism at all. "Emotion against Reason"[7] is another French formula which has had wide acceptance, and yet emotion is not the exclusive possession of the romantics.

German writers, scholarly and imaginative alike, have indulged freely in critical analysis of Romanticism and the romantic period. Goethe has written, "Romanticism is disease; Classicism is health," [8] but here again an inaccurate generalization has detracted from a worth-while suggestion; disease may sometimes accompany Romanticism, but the two are far from synonymous. Heine's suggestion that "Romanticism is the awakening of the Middle Ages"[9] is another statement which is rather a subdivision of one aspect of the movement than a mark either of the aim or scope of the movement.

English writers such as Pater, who believed that Romanticism was "the addition of strangeness to beauty",[10]

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6 Lucas, op. cit., p. 11

7 Id., ibid., p. 11

8 Id., ibid., p. 9

9 Id., ibid., p. 10

10 Id., ibid., p. 12

and Watts-Dunton, to whom it was "the Renascence of Wonder",[11] can be said to have useful, although still incomplete, definitions. (It is interesting to note that Yeats was powerfully influenced by the work of Pater, and that the definition given above is particularly suitable as a description of much of Yeats's work). Lascelles Abercrombie's theory that Romanticism is actually the opposite of realism, "a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate on inner experience",[12] has in it much truth, as well as some exaggeration and omission.

Despite the few valuable suggestions, so much of inadequacy and disagreement has been found in the preceding definitions that it is well to turn to the description of the mood and movement as found in an authoritative and scholarly literary history, that of Legouis and Cazamian, and to quote at some length. After pointing out that English Romanticism, properly so called, followed the social upheaval of the Industrial Revolution, the religious awakening of Methodism and Evangelicalism, and the shock to thought caused by the French revolution, the authors continue:

> Romanticism can be defined only in terms of pure psychology. Any other formula alters or limits arbitrarily its very essence. . .

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11 Lucas, op. cit., p. 12.

12 Id., ibid., p. 13.

> English Romanticism does not consist in the triumph of 'self'. The personality of the writer has a characteristic place in it, because sensibility and imagination are of the very essence of individuality, while intelligence tends to the general. . .
>
> Nor does English Romanticism primarily consist in a return to national tradition, although in a real and deep sense it is that very thing. The ideal of restoring the broken continuity of a formerly normal inspiration, which by the attraction of a different art---an attraction enhanced by the spontaneous transformation in taste---had dried up at its source, is only partially and at intervals present in the conscious thought of those poets who realize it. And when they do dream of reanimating the past, it is not altogether for its national and familiar quality, but on account of its intrinsic virtues, and of the moral attributes they see in it. . .
>
> . . . The Romantic spirit can be defined as an accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked or directed by the exercise of imaginative vision, and in its turn stimulating and directing such exercise. Intense emotion, coupled with an intense display of imagery, such is the frame of mind which supports and feeds the new literature. . .
>
> And it is much rather through a probing deeper into the self, than through the exercise of pure imagination, that the heart's desire is attained. A feeling of nostalgic strangeness is essential to this literature, because consciousness is in quest of a certain mood which is a thing of the past, and because in an obscure way it grasps the reality of the mood, and not a mere image. . .
>
> Thus the 'wonder' of the Romanticists is the enthralling discovery, the progressive lighting-up of an inner horizon, which extends beyond the limits of clear consciousness; it is the perception of objects in the magic garb with which our fresher vision invested them of yore, and which our tired eyes had forgotten. . .[13]

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13 Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, London, Dent, 1948, pp. 995-999.

A glance at the philology of the word may shed additional light on a topic of which the history is obscured by many shadows of misunderstanding. It had its philological origin in the old lingua Romana, the colloquial Latin spoken in France after the influx of the Barbarians into the Roman Empire. It was a 'barbarized vernacular', the first Romance language. The word Romance then came to mean the literature composed in the vernacular, fictitious stories of love and adventure which soon lent their own enchantment to the philological term. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Romance had come to mean any fantastic statement, while Romantic had come to mean either 'false as a fairy-tale' or 'strange and dreamlike as a fairy-tale'. At about the beginning of the nineteenth century the word Romantic reached England where it replaced the old term, Gothic, and there it began to suggest and to be attached to ruins, wild landscapes, any object or scene that held mingled terror and sublimity. Ther Germans began about the same time to use the word to denote anything that was medieval in origin rather than classical. (It is, incidentally, interesting to note that both terms, classical and Romantic, had their roots in Rome.)

Lucas thus summarizes the development in usage of the term:

> Such, then, is the word's pedigree. "Romance" means first a certain language; then a certain type of literature composed in that language; then the

> epithet "romantic" is applied to the unreality associated with that type of literature; or to the temperament associated with that type of unreality; or to the literary forms associated with that type of temperament. 14

The word as it is used today has two main usages: it is applied to the movement which calls itself Romantic, and it also describes other things which give the reader the same sort of feeling as do typical works of the Romantic Revival.

In general, Mr. Lucas says, the romantic qualities are

> Remoteness, the sad light of desolation, silence and the supernatural, winter and dreariness; vampirine love and stolen trysts, the flowering of passion and the death of beauty; Radcliffe horrors and sadistic cruelty, disillusion, death, and madness; the Holy Grail and battles on the Border; the love of the impossible. . . 15

In contrast to some of these qualities are several of the characteristics of classicism,

> grace, self-knowledge, self-control; the sense of form, the easy wearing of the chains of art hidden under flowers, as with some sculptured group that fills with life and litheness its straitened triangle in the prison of a pediment; idealism steadied by an unfaltering sense of reality; lamp and midnight oil, rather than wine-cup. . . 16

There are some contrasts here, but the reader must be warned

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14 Lucas, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

15 Id., ibid., pp. 24-25

16 Id. ibid., p. 28.

not to assume too lightly a perfect antithesis between classicism and Romanticism, between reason and emotion, for life as well as literature, the mind as well as the soul, are far too subtle and far too complex to be imprisoned in antonyms. Rather might it be said that Romanticism is an element of classicism; only when it is exaggerated and distorted so that it cannot be limited within classicism may it be considered as a movement in itself.

A tentative definition, useful for the purpose of this research because it utilizes characteristics of Yeats's poetry which can be treated in more detail in subsequent chapters, perhaps approaches the problem from a different viewpoint. Romanticism is a mood, implicit or explicit, of e s c a p e -- escape from the present, from actuality, from all restrictions on life or intellect or imagination -- in either of two ways: first by active and impassioned r e v o l t against reality, tradition, and authority; second by f l i g h t from present reality into one or more of the following -- solitude, egotism, melancholy, sensation, the past, dreams, an ideal life, an ideal world, an ideal love, past all barriers between the physical world and that of the spirit and the imagination.

Escape, then, epitomizes and gives the essence of Romanticism. This chapter will attempt to prove that every

single romantic mood and quality is, in a greater or lesser degree, a manner of escape from the here and the now and from all restrictions.

Romantic rebellion or revolt is perhaps more difficult to link with the sense of escape and evasion than are the other characteristics, yet what is rebellion but an attempt, active and passionate, at escape from an unbearable situation by defiance of drab reality and by valiant action to alter it. The fact that the rebellion is forceful makes it no less an escape, although the word in this sense has rather the connotation of a breaking away than a flight. This holds as true when the revolt is not so much against reality as against tradition and authority.

The notion of flight more commonly associated with the word escape includes every other aspect of Romanticism. The escape from actuality that is "the shrinking from the tumult of the world", [17] the escape from real life into dreams, from the present into the past, from the company of men into solitude, from human beauty to an idealized beauty, from human love into an ideal love, from the disillusion of the earthly world into an ideal lovely world, from happiness unachieved into melancholy, from contact with other men into egotism,

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17 Horatio Sheafe Krans, William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival, N. Y., Heinemann, 1905, p.189.

from reason into imagination, from plain fact and simple expression into mysticism and symbolism, from calmness and candour into passionate intensity and exaggeration, from placidity to the pursuit of sensation through all its extremes of excitement, magic, spiritualism, the occult, strange false religions, Satanism, -- all these are attempts at flight.

No less an escape, although of a different order, is the romantic tendency to surround what is absolute with all the dreamy, misty, cloudy glamour that distance, imagination, and enchantment can lend. The romantic deliberately creates an impression of remoteness in time, space, thought, and expression. Overtones of melody and subtle nuances of thought, delicate and suggestive, pervade the poetry of the romantic, so that the reader receives not only what is explicit in mood and thought but much that is implicit as well, brought by recollection from his storehouse of memory. Lilting and graceful rhythms lull the mind of the listener and make it more sympathetic to thought, mood, impression.

From this discussion of the elements and characteristics of Romanticism it is a natural step to a discussion of the history of the mood and movement, with particular reference to Yeats.

2. The History of Romanticism.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.[18]

Now that the subject of Romanticism has been considered, its historical development may next properly be traced. A general survey of the history of this movement carries the student back to a time when the quality existed, nameless, and through the years up to the present time when it has borne some very strange fruit indeed.

Romanticism is found first, perhaps, in the mythology of Greece, highly imaginative dream-tales of the childhood of a race. Indeed the mythology of any land is richly romantic, for it has been produced by the attempt of imagination to answer the eternal questioning of early men. (It is very significant that Yeats deliberately went back to Irish mythology to find themes for poetry: it was one of the ways in which he sought escape from the drabness of reality.)

The mood is found again frequently in Greek literature, notably in the writings of Empedocles, as Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie has pointed out,[19] but often also in the thought of Plato and the poetry of Homer, both transcendent and sublime. There, however, it is better kept under control than

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18 Proverbial expression.

19 Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism.

in the exuberant mythology. There are fewer traces of Romanticism in the literature of the more practical Romans, and what was there was in the decadence, with the exception of occasional Romantic moods and moments in Virgil and in Catullus.

The Middle Ages were rich in Romantic qualities, the healthy day-dreams of youthful imagination which tended rather to enhance life than to flee it. Moments of romantic loveliness in Tasso and Ariosto flowered into the rich romanticism of Spenser, Ronsard, Shakespeare. It is notable that Yeats kept himself closely attuned to the Middle Ages, partly through his reading and partly through his magical experiments which he believed to have their roots in the Middle Ages. Spenser's influence upon him was particularly strong, and may be noted in the Arcadian setting of much of his early poetry, and in the occasional archaisms consciously used.

The first stirrings of the Romantic Revival began in Europe towards the middle of the eighteenth century: from those small beginnings there came to life a romantic age far more self-conscious than any previous period. There arose the note of melancholy and preoccupation with darkness and death of the Graveyard School, Blair and Young, a note clearly caught a century and a half later in Yeats. A strain of Celtic strangeness and melancholy was introduced in MacPherson's Ossian (Scottish counterpart of Yeats's Oisin) and in Percy's

Reliques -- a strain not so clearly heard again until Yeats's time.

Far apart from and far above the early poets of the Romantic movement in England was William Blake (1757-1827), dreamer and visionary, mystic and symbolist. Too original to be part of any group of poets, his poetry is in many senses more purely romantic and mystical than that of those six -- Wordsworth and Coleridge, Scott and Byron, Keats and Shelley -- who are commonly considered England's real romantics. Yeats found himself in almost complete harmony with Blake, and believed his knowledge of magical principle and practise gave him special insight into Blake's poetry. As has been already mentioned[20], Yeats and Edwin Ellis published an edition of Blake and an accompanying explanation of Blake's symbolism. Yeats also wrote several essays on Blake, and is responsible for the claim that Blake was actually Irish.

It was with Wordsworth (1770-1850) that English Romanticism became reasoned and deliberate. His Preface to the Lyrical Ballads stated his doctrine of verbal simplicity, avoidance of poetic diction, interest in nature, and concern with the ordinary man, and became the charter of the movement. Not at all the greatest romantic, Wordsworth was yet the greatest figure in the romantic age. And despite the

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20 See Chapter I, p. 17.

difference between Wordsworth and Yeats caused by the gulf of national difference, there are remarkable likenesses. Both were superb egotists, and each was the standard-bearer and apologist of a literary movement.

Coleridge (1772-1834), like Yeats, often chose the supernatural for theme, by careful simplicity investing it with the cloak of truth. Yeats felt a close kinship with Coleridge. Both were mystics, both sought escape from the frustration of life, and Yeats found his interest in Coleridge strengthened because "from 1807 onward Coleridge seems to have had some kind of illumination which was only in part communicable."[21]

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) brought to the Romantic movement the revitalizing of chivalry and of the past, the renewed emphasis on emotion and imagination. J. B. Yeats read Scott to his son at an early age, with telling effect. This effect was obvious in the early poetry, and perhaps even more in the day-dreams of the young Yeats. But Scott's style was too rhetorical to impress Yeats for long, and the influence was short-lived.

Byron (1788-1824) was classical in instinct, yet the force and intensity of his passion, the depth of his emotion, the tragedy implied in his melancholy, have caused him to be

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21 Hone, op. cit., p. 67.

considered among the Romantics. His rebellion was violent and disorderly, but he has been for years the model of the tragic hero. Yeats as a young man adopted the Byronic tie and, with it, much of the Byronic pose. Although he outgrew this phase, he retained strong admiration for Byron. Jeffares quoted him as saying that Byron was the last man who wrote poetry.[22]

In Shelley (1792-1822) the fires of idealism and revolt burnt fiercely. His poetry was visionary and mystical, expressed in language that was richly sensuous and full of symbol. Shelley's influence, like that of Byron, was most noticeable in Yeats's youth in his heroes, his lovely ladies, his languishing and diffuse language. As Yeats grew older he became more preoccupied with Shelley's symbolism, and planned an exhaustive analysis of it.

The poetry of Keats (1795-1821) was marked by the imagination, the melancholy, and the nostalgia later to be found in Yeats's poetry. Yet it is difficult to trace the influence of Keats on the later poet, and, although their themes were often the same, Yeats seems scarcely to have appreciated Keats as he did Shelley. It may be suspected that Keats's humbler birth might have been the reason.[23]

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22 Jeffares, op. cit., p. 143.

23 See Collected Poems, p. 182.

The spirit of Romanticism did not die out with the great Romantics. Charles Lamb, DeQuincey, Landor, Tennyson, Morris, the Pre-Raphaelites, all had romantic elements in their works. Even among the moderns Romance still appears, notably in the members of the Celtic Renascence and in the poet-dramatist who was their literary inspiration, William Butler Yeats. The Pre-Raphaelite influence was strong in Yeats, whose father was close in time and spirit to their artistic and poetic productions. Particularly is this influence obvious in The Wanderings of Oisin. Note has been made of this both by D. A. Stauffer and by Joseph Hone.

> Yeats was born a pre-Raphaelite, with the smell of paint in his nostrils and the sound of poetry in his ears.[24]

> One critic saw in the poem the English romantic movement in process of decomposition, and certainly the influence of Coleridge, Keats and Shelley is apparent in some of the loveliest lines.[25]

The purpose of the survey which has been given was not only to trace briefly the history of Romanticism, but also to show Yeats's relationship to the romantic movement in general, to the romantic poets in particular.

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24 D. A. Stauffer, The Golden Nightingale, Macmillan, N. Y., pp 1-2.

25 Hone, op. cit., p. 65.

3. Romantic Revolt.

To wage by force or guile eternal war. . .[26]

From the historical survey of the Romanticism which has already been defined and discussed, this essay now turns to a particular analysis of the main romantic moods with particular reference to Yeats.

Relying on inner experience a Romantic poet may wish to withdraw from the actualities of life, but equally well he may wish to improve these actualities. He does this by a rebellion or a revolt, imaginative or passionately active or both, against authority, against society, against materialism, against reality, against tradition in form or style. This regolt has been observed in the English writers of the romantic period, and it is implicit or expressed in the writings of many since their time.

If the rebellion proves eventually successful, the romantic frequently tends to become classical. If it happens to be unsuccessful, the writer has at least recorded his protests and his plans for reform, proof of the sincerity and worth of his ideals. Even if that ideal has not been achieved he has given hope and inspiration to others who

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28 John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I, line 121.

may seek the same or higher ends.

Yeats's protests against reality were numerous, but rather than essay an active rebellion which would attempt to change reality, he often preferred escape into a dream world, or into various forms of supernaturalism. His ideal life was the life of the spirit, and only rarely did he dream of imposing it on others. Only in one sphere was his revolt active, in that of nationalism. Yet here he was undoubtedly vigorous enough, not only planning for Ireland's freedom, but attempting to force on the whole Irish people his ideals of culture and sublimated nationalism.

His revolt against tradition in matter and form, however, was as effective as Wordsworth's had been a hundred years before. In pursuit of his ideal of Irish unity, liberty, and perfection, he urged new themes for Irish literature. Disdaining the traditions of weak imitation of English themes, he passionately urged young writers to return to folk-tradition, to the peasants who were close to the heart of the land, to the land itself, so that every hill and glen and lake and river should have its own excitement and imaginative association. In drama, he repudiated plays of incident and spectacle, of popular sentiment and commonplace thought, and substituted for them a drama of ideas and sincere emotion, a drama that has not yet -- despite the years that lie between -- again become imitative.

In form, again like Wordsworth, he urged the use of simple and effective language as opposed to the rhetorical language of the oratory-loving Irish and the affected and artificial language which many of his English friends spoke. He spent days among the Irish peasants, capturing the simplicity, dignity, and charm of the Irish idiom turned into English. He sent J. M. Synge to the Aran Islands so that he might there capture the earthy and twisting idiom of those farthest from the contamination of English speech. Had the younger Irish poets learned no other lesson from him, both precept and example would still have been invaluable.

> John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
> All that we did, all that we said or sang
> Must come from contact with the soil. [29]

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29 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 369.

4. Solitude, Egotism, and Melancholy.

> I could lie down like a tired child,
> And weep away the life of care
> Which I have borne, and yet must bear. [30]

It has been shown that escape from actuality may take two forms, the first being the defiance which substitutes a challenge for withdrawal, and the second being the actual withdrawal or retreat from actuality itself. The first has been discussed in Section 3: the second will be described in this section and in the two that follow.

All men are greatly concerned with the problem of achieving happiness, earthly or heavenly. They vary, however, in their definition of happiness and in their method of attaining it. The romantics, no less than other men, have greatly concerned themselves with this pursuits of happiness.

Certain types of Romanticist, lost in a steadily increasing self-absorption as essential and important to them as it is absurd to others, seek pleasure in the gratification of the emotions or of the passions. In pursuit of this satisfaction they may travel many paths, from the simple quest for an ideal life or love, a longing that may exist exclusively in the imagination, to the insatiable quest for

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30 Percy Bysshe Shelley, Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples, l. 30-32.

for heightened physical sensation or intellectual or spiritual exaltation. The general tendency of the Romantic temperament is to lose action among ideas, and so such quests deteriorate into nostalgia, an infinite, indeterminate, hopeless longing for the unattainable. The result of what might have become, in a man of different temperament, a constructive search for true happiness, too often becomes in the Romantic a state of hopeless or all but hopeless melancholy, with a consequent withdrawal into solitude. As Joubert has written, "We spend on the passions the stuff that has been given to us for happiness."[31]

As a whole, no group of men have been so steeped in melancholy as have the Romantics. The contrast between the desired and the real has been too great, too heart-breaking. Perhaps they have sought the moment of happiness too passively, or in the wrong source, and they have achieved only the sense of having lived in vain. Or perhaps the dream itself was too perfect, too ethereal, ever to be attained. At any rate the Romantic considers himself the victim of fate or of society. His sensibility battens upon itself in an egocentric heart, and the victim, mad with frustration, sinks at last into despair.

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31 Joubert, quoted by Irving Babbitt, in Rousseau and Romanticism, N. Y., Houghton Mifflin, 1919, p. 314.

Such melancholy would be impossible in any but complete egotists, far too fully conscious of real or supposed uniqueness, for melancholy and egotism are two sides of the same thing and each grows by feeding upon itself. The loss of love, the lack of or loss of friends, hatred of mankind, -- all these loom large as partial causes of such depression, while deeper and far more fundamental is the inability or refusal to realize God and to unite with Him.

The sincerely unhappy Romantic may come to wear his garb of sorrow as a cloak with which to protect himself from further pain, and then he enfolds his purely personal sorrow in a guise of anonymity, in metaphor and symbol. His poetry is to him a shield behind which he may hide from curious stares and which will shelter him from further assaults of the world. And at the same time the actual expression of his lamentation brings him a measure of beautiful relief.

Another type of melancholy Romantic flaunts his unhappiness as a badge certifying to the depth of his desolation. His pathos is more superficial, no more than a dramatic pose which demands attention and sympathy. He comforts himself with the consciousness of his uniqueness. He feels himself to be exceptional, apart from and superior

to, the mass of mankind. Like the other, he, too, finds consolation in the written expression of his woes.

In Yeats egotism, melancholy, and love of solitude were blended. In youth he wished to withdraw from the world to some safe and remote retreat. In later life he was content to remain near the world, brooding above the mass of men like some solitary eagle, conscious that most others were unworthy of him. Always he was most conscious of his own importance, and earlier unhappiness arose largely from the knowledge that he fell short not only of the ideal his father and the Pollexfens had set for him but also of the still higher ideal he had set for himself. His moods of discouragement and black unhappiness devastated his life. Only his nationalistic, political, and dramatic enthusiasms and activities -- into which he was almost forced -- kept him from the final collapse into catastrophe and despair.

5. Reality Transformed.

Beyond the light of far Cathay,
  Beyond all mortal dreams,
Beyond the reach of night and day
  Our El Dorado gleams. [32]

The preceding section has shown that the Romantic, an egotist with a desire for happiness that is greater than his active will to achieve it, retreats into melancholy and seeks a solitude where he may mourn his deficiencies or his losses and where he may brood upon his conviction of his difference from other men. In such a solitude he may, as well, find freedom to dream and to indulge his passion for nature and for the past.

Finding the unhappiness, inanity, and lack of romance of the present a wearisome burden, the sentimental Romantic may turn back to the past, mystical, mysterious, and remote, -- back to the Middle Ages or earlier, to a day when chivalry, love, and adventure lent fascination, gaiety, and meaning to life. He invests bygone years with the romantic blur of that distance which lends enchantment in the mind: in time he comes to love the blur for its own sake. In the past he can find in imagination all the the present denies him, for in a special sense he makes his own past just as he makes his own

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32 Alfred Noyes, in "The Moon is Up".

future, both being simply an idealized present. Shelley, in "To a Skylark", aptly expresses this phase of the Romantic mind:

> We look before and after,
> And pine for what is not. . .[33]

All things that are old and half-forgotten are sought, both for their own sake and for the sake of the mood they help to create.

Yeats was just such a Romantic, for he went back to pre-historic, partly mythological times, the age of mighty heroes and stirring deeds. Too conscious that he was severely handicapped by his physical deficiencies and frustrations, he found in the tales of Oisin and the warriors of the Fianna, Cuchulain, Fergus, Conchobar, Deirdre and the sons of Usnach, all the heroism, all the mingled greatness and simplicity, all the active and stirring excitement that seemed so lacking in his own life and in his own day. He found in these old tales the thread of story and wove it, transformed by his imagination, into a web of enchantment. Always he was the hero of the story, with the courage of Cuchulain, the strength of Oisin, the subtlety of Conchobar, the renunciation of Fergus, the successful -- even though it ended in death -- love of Naisi for Deirdre.

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33 Percy Bysshe Shelley, in "To a Skylark".

In Nature, imagined as he thinks it ought to be and almost always invested with the haze that distance lends, the Romantic finds another refuge. Perhaps at first the distance intrigues because it offers a hope of hidden and lovelier views behind those immediately visible -- something of a mystical viewpoint. Gradually, however, the blur becomes its own satisfaction, for it permits the imagination to brood so as to create and people the hidden view. Rousseau, typical Romantic, wrote, "I peopled Nature with beings according to my own heart . . . I created for myself a golden age to suit my fancy."[34] This is one Romantic ideal, and many of the great Romantics (including Yeats) had a very similar attitude to Nature. It is, however, a dangerous ideal, for it leads too frequently to an inability to distinguish between the dream and the reality.

Of those Romantics who fly to Nature for refuge, there are two types. One group finds the real or imagined loveliness of Nature a consolation for and a shelter from the ugliness of life. Another group, fewer in number, the real mystics and the pseudo- mystics, look through natural objects and scenes as though they were a barrier between man and God, or between man and spiritual forces. They see,

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34 Jean Jacques Rousseau, quoted by Babbitt, op. cit., p. 84.

with varying clarity and force, glimpses of the Supreme Being, -- or, in the case of the pseudo-mystics, other beings which they believe to exist. Pseudo-mysticism will be more fully discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Yeats found both these views of Nature. In earlier years he found its loveliness a retreat. Later, forced by circumstances to live far from natural scenic beauty, he found it possible by recollection and imagination tc recreate a new and cloudier conception of Nature. Finally, as will be shown in the following section in some detail, he tried to achieve a neo-mystic vision which inspired a great deal of his poetry.

The building up of an ideal or Romantic love, found in reverie, dream, and illusion, is another form of the transformation of reality now being discussed. It may have as its foundation either the idealizing of a person, or the idealizing of the emotion of love itself. Romantic love is remote, aloof, unattainable, and almost always unhappy, -- partly because the ideal is so lofty that the real can never correspond with it and possession of the ideal is therefore impossible, partly because the achievement of the ideal necessitates the loss of an ideal, the loss of a raison d'être.

What has been said in Chapter I of Yeats's early dreams of Romantic love and of his all but life-long hopeless passion for Maud Gonne, a woman so lovely that she was the very symbol of beauty, has been sufficient to show that this mood was dominant in both life and poetry. A subsequent chapter will discuss this in greater detail.

With the desire for an ideal love there goes hand in hand the yearning for an ideal world, a dream-world that one may call Utopia, Arcadia, or -- as Yeats does -- the Land of Heart's Desire. Here the Romantic can find the retreat from reality which he constantly seeks, escape from the drudgery and ugliness of day to day existence. He wants a life both pastoral and idyllic, simple and enchanted. He may try to create such a world out of the world he knows by the urging of political and social reform, as did Rousseau and Shelley, or by stating and inspiring a cultural ideal, as did Yeats. Or again, having imagined such a visionary world, he may be content to inhabit it in imagination, and never attempt to translate the ideal into action. The latter attitude is probably more typical of the thorough Romantic temper

Yeats pictured for himself just such a world, to be created partly out of the past and partly out of the future. In it he envisioned an ivory tower in which he might isolate himself in loneliness and dreams, for day-dream and reverie

were an essential part of the life he longed for. As the years went by, in order to achieve his ideal of national cultural greatness, he summoned both physical and intellectual activity to his assistance. The result, strikingly successful, will be discussed within the next few paragraphs.

Another type of ideal world, the fairy world that to Yeats was the Land of Heart's Desire, offers another means of escape. Such a land Yeats actually sought by exploration and experiment, and there is strong evidence that at least until his thirtieth year his writings about fairyland were much more than a poetic pose. This will be further discussed in Section 6 of this chapter.

Nationalism may, perhaps, be rather an aspect of the Romantic's desire for an ideal world, but its importance as a motive in Yeats's life and in his writings merits special discussion in a special section. Patriotism, which has its roots deep in the past but which is nourished by present dreams, culminates in a passionate nationalism. All strife, all danger, all heroic deeds justify a purpose so lofty. A country must be served as faithfully as an ideal love. And if the country falls short of the ideal, then it must be imaginatively recreated and glorified.

Yeats had a deep understanding of and sympathy for the Celtic spirit and his love for the actual and legendary

past of Ireland inspired much of his poetry, much of his prose and all but all of his plays. His imagination stirred to the music of his country's past sorrows and achievements, and he hoped to have a part in unifying and freeing an Ireland divided by religious strife and enslaved by political strife. His ideals of a literary and dramatic renascence were at first simply a means to an end. The possibility that they might in practice become ends in themselves must in the beginning have been far from his mind.

From the preceding paragraphs it has been seen that the Romantic mind tends to transform reality, either by recreating nature or enveloping it in a cloudiness which increases its charm, by dreaming of an ideal love or an ideal world, or by the glorifying of a nation. How far is such a tendency from Matthew Arnold's classical ideal of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole! [35]

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35 Matthew Arnold, in "Essay on Criticism."

6. The Supernatural.

Darkness surrounds us; seeking, we are lost . . .[36]

The preceding section has discussed the Romantic's transformation of the past, of nature, of love, of life, of country, by dreams and imagination. Imagination inspired each of these, but it was imagination which burned with a steady flame. But imagination can soar, too, and can transcend time and space and every natural barrier. In this section some of the fruits of this towering frenzy will be considered.

It seems probable that the beginning of the quest of the supernatural is found in the desire for heightened physical and intellectual sensation which comes when ideals have either sated or failed the Romantic. The gentle dreaminess of the earlier mood has proved insufficient, and the pursuit of sensation becomes a fascinating avenue which leads to another type of escape that is almost exaltation. Often the sensation sought is pain, either in sadism or in masochism. There is a strange fascination in suffering, the continually unsatisfied search for horrors that echoes the Gothic novel formula of experience.

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36 William Wordsworth, in "Uncertainty".

Yeats's bent seems to have been largely toward self-inflicted suffering. In the strange fascination which Maud Gonne exerted over him for so many years, the "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" or vampirine type of fascination, this tendency is very obvious. He should have broken away from her spell, and probably could have done so. It seemed as though he relished his pain, for friendly advice and other opportunities for love offered a sounder life, but both were continually rejected. He squeezed each sensation dry as subject for poetry, but in addition he seems to have had practically a lust for destruction.

From such a passion it is an easy step to an obsession with the supernatural in the less elevated sense of the term, and many of the Romantics were obsessed with the occult and with Satanism. Pride and Romantic rebellion supported such debased preoccupations, and the odour of brimstone must often have been pervasive.

Yeats had read, and had been permeated with the influence of, Blake, who -- especially in his later poems -- had been unrestrained in the recording of evil. He was also in personal or literary contact with Swinburne, Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, and others whose interests were spiritually and morally unhealthy in varying degrees.

It is possible that Yeats would have delved into occultism even without such contact, but his interest in spiritualism, in white and black magic, in esoteric religions must have seemed more natural and less proscriptive in such an atmosphere.

To draw away somewhat from the incubus of these unsavoury and unhealthy preoccupations, there may be mentioned a milder and more playful aspect of the supernatural, the interest in fairies often shared by Romantics. There are fairies and fairies, but the fairies of the romantic writer, especially if he be a Celt, are bewitching and completely fascinating.

Yeats, like many another Celtic and Romantic, has been interested in the fairy folk and has written of them freely in his poetry, prose, and plays. The fact that his belief in fairies seems more real than that of the average writer adds a note of enchantment to what is no new literary theme.

In the previous section reference was made to the mystical or neo-mystical view of nature which many of the greater Romantics possessed. Such poets strive deliberately for the mystic vision. If they are true mystics, they seek God. Most poet-mystics, however, concern themselves rather with a search for the forces or spirits of nature, a pan-

theistic quest insofar as it is a quest for a supreme being at all. Some are sentimental in approach, others philosophical, and far too few religious. In each case, however, ecstasy is sought, a union with the Infinite or some lesser aspect of the Infinite.

Symbolism is little more than a device, at first, for communicating the mystical visions, although it may later become an object in itself. The Romantic clings to symbolism partly because by no other device can he convey the aura of the mystic vision so well and partly because he loves for its own sake the remote, half-dreamy, and secretive mode of expression. He wishes half to convey, half to hide, his vision, and symbolism does both for him.

Blake was the most mystical and most symbolic of poets. He was at times very close to the Divine Vision, and at times very far from It. Yeats, with Edwin Ellis, edited Blake's works; a great part of his mysticism and much of his symbolism can be traced to Blake's influence. Later chapters will analyse this particular phase of Yeats's poetry in more detail.

From a discussion of Romanticism and an historical outline of the Romantic spirit and movement, this chapter has proceeded to a description of Romantic qualities, grouped under the four headings; Romantic Revolt; Solitude, Egotism

and Melancholy; Reality Transformed; and the Supernatural. These topics have been related briefly to Yeats's life and to his poetry. In the chapters that follow they will provide chapter headings for a complete analysis of the nature and extent of Romanticism as revealed in Yeats's lyric poetry.

CHAPTER III

ROMANTIC REVOLT

I carry from my mother's womb
A fanatic heart. [1]

This chapter will describe fully Yeats's tendencies towards Romantic revolt. His autobiographical works, along with biographical and critical work, have been used quite freely as sources of explanation for trends that are highlighted in the poetry. Most remarkable it is to note that from earlier to later poetry there is a steady increase both in quantity and quality of this Romantic rebellion. This greater preoccupation with revolt and greater intensity of defiance as the years went on seems conclusive disproof of the statements of most critics, who claim that Yeats was at first a complete Romantic who later became a complete realist. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It would be more accurate to say that he was a Romantic who after some years of writing began to seek a note of realism in his poetry -- either as a conscious pose or, more probably, as an attempted reaction against a Romanticism that seemed unsatisfactory,-- who gained from it a more earthy language, greater clarity of style, greater concreteness of image, and somewhat

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1 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 288.

greater preoccupation with the world around him, but who -- by virtue both of this perpetual feeling of revolt and by of his attempts to pierce the veil of reality -- was from first to last a Romantic poet. A realist accepts reality: Yeats never accepted it.

As has been mentioned already,[2] Yeats rebelled against tradition and authority in theme and style. But in his poetry there appears as well a strong defiance of reality and actuality, against the ugliness of life, against its commonness, against its frustrations, against the thoughts of old age and death which more and more tormented him as the years put their weight upon him. These two main types of revolt will be discussed in that order in the pages which follow.

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2 See Chapter II, pp. 60-61.

1. Revolt Against Tradition and Authority.

> At seventeen years old I was already an old-fashioned brass cannon full of shot, and nothing had kept me from going off but a doubt as to my capacity to shoot straight.[3]

Despite the gentleness and melancholy of the youthful Yeats, passionate and rebellious blood ran in his veins. Spiritually and emotionally he was not so far removed from his grandfather, that "silent and fierce old man"[4], as he believed, sunk in boyhood's timidity and ineptitude. The old man, a retired sea-captain, "who was always irritated with the past and the future"[5], kept a hatchet beside his bed in case of burglars, would rather knock a man down than go to law, and even hunted a group of men with a horsewhip.[6] In later life he felt this kinship more strongly, and claimed it with delight. His mind went back often to those "old fathers".[7]

> . . . Although my wits have gone
> On a fantastic ride, my horse's flanks are spurred
> By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen.[8]

It was his boast that he had "inherited a vigorous mind".[9]

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3 Autobiography, p. 102.

4 Collected Poems, p. 113.

5 Jeffares, op. cit., p. 10.

6 Autobiography, p. 4.

7 Collected Poems, p. 113.

8 Op. cit., p. 202.

9 Op. cit., p. 228.

There is no doubt this mental vigour came to him partly from his father, whose own turn of mind was forceful and aggressive. He had domineered over his son, largely in intellectual matters, and W. B.'s reaction came with manhood. His revulsion against his father's scepticism and the emptiness of Protestant doctrines caused his interest in Buddhism and in Theosophy. There was revolt, as well, in his insistence on personal poetry when his father declared the superiority of dramatic poetry. It was in opposition to his father's wishes that he had become interested in mysticism and psychical research. Sometimes their differences of opinion became physical.

> The poet had first broken away from his father by taking up occult science, and now their conflicts of opinion were frequent. One night at Bedford Park W. B. expressed an appreciation of Ruskin's Unto this Last. He was put out of the room so violently that he broke the glass of a picture with the back of his head. Another night when they had been in some similar argument, J. B. Y. squared up and wanted to box, and, when Willie said that he could not fight his own father, replied, "I don't see why you should not."[10]

Just as deep and as vigorous was Yeats's reaction against pacifism. On her first visit to the Yeats home Maud Gonne had defended war as a means of securing Irish liberty, and W. B. had offended his father by supporting her views.[11] If he had not thought much about revolution

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10 Hone, op. cit., p. 68. 11 Loc. cit., pp. 70-71.

before that eventful meeting, it was inevitable that he should find it often in his thoughts thereafter. The theme began to appear in his poetry. "The Rose of Battle", written before 1893, finds beauty in warfare, even in war's defeats.

> Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
> . . .
> Turn if you may from battles never done,
> . . .
> Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,
> For him who hears love sing and never cease
> Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade:
> But gather all for whom no love hath made
> A woven silence . . .
> And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.
> . . .
> And when at last, defeated in His wars,
> They have gone down under the same white stars,
> We shall no longer hear the little cry
> Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.[12]

Through Maud Gonne, John O'Leary, and other patriots of the Young Ireland groups and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and from his readings of Irish history and contemporary Irish literature, Yeats got at once a picture of the Ireland of the past and her possible future freedom became more desirable. The Ireland of his time,

> That country where a man can be so crossed;
> Can be so battered, badgered and destroyed,[13]

calls aloud for freedom: "we and our bitterness"[13] recalls the sorrowful past.

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12 Collected Poems, pp. 42-43.

13 Op. cit., p. 51.

Yeats gradually became bitter and full of hatred, not repelled only by Britain where Edward VII had ascended the throne --

> . . . new commonness
> Upon the throne and crying about the streets
> And hanging its paper flowers from post to post,[14]

-- but also by many of the Irish people whose jealousy and quarrels weakened their own cause. Ireland was "this blind bitter land";[15] the Irish people were "dolt and knave",[16] "ignorant men"[15] who lacked "courage equal to desire";[15] Dublin's reaction to Synge's and Yeats's own plays was "The daily spite of this unmannerly town".[17] Such instances might be multiplied, and they date from approximately 1902 to 1930. These and similar references are realistic in tone, but Yeats has not resigned himself to the gulf between his ideal Ireland and his ideal Irish and the reality. His passionate revulsion evidences so much. Therefore they are to be accepted as further evidence of Romantic revolt.

When the Easter Rising of 1916 took place, Yeats was appalled and yet encouraged. No longer could it be said that the "little streets"[15] lacked courage equal to desire. Now came a sense of exaltation, the sort that the

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14 Collected Poems, p. 85.
15 Op. cit., p. 101.
16 Op. cit., p. 104.
17 Op. cit., p. 169.

Irish airman, Major Robert Gregory, felt while fighting for England--a country he considered not his own.

> A lonely impulse of delight
> Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
> 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.[18]

The Irish had always known that freedom could come at last only through bloodshed, and repeatedly they had shown their willingness to shed their blood. Yeats showed that in his play, Cathleen ni Houlihan, and in such a poem as "The Rose Tree".

> There's nothing but our own red blood
> Can make a right Rose Tree.[19]

Now the blood had been shed, in vain and yet not in vain, for courage is a conflagration. Many were killed in the fighting, fighting as hopeless as Cuchulain's warfare with the waves. Many were imprisoned, including Countess Markiewicz. Sixteen of the rebels were shot. The peasant-poet, Padraic Pearse, Connolly, and John MacBride who had won Maud Gonne from Yeats,--all were dead. "A terrible beauty is born," [20] Yeats wrote.

> I have met them at close of day
> Coming with vivid faces

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18 Collected Poems, p. 152.

19 Op. cit., p. 206.

20 Op. cit., p. 203.

From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth century houses,
I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words.
. . .
Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn:
All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born. [21]

Of John MacBride he wrote,

This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vainglorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly;
A terrible beauty is born. [21]

Yeats did not fight himself. He did not know of the projected rising; probably he had been purposely kept ignorant, for he was notoriously unable to keep a secret. But his sympathy was with them, and -- proof that he understood, and therefore possessed, the heart of a rebel -- he felt and knew what had led them to such action.

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?
... .
Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.
We know their dream; enough
To know they dreamed and are dead;
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died? [21]

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21 Collected Poems, pp. 202-205.

Before turning from Yeats's revolt against tradition and authority to his revulsion from the realities of life, a few paragraphs will serve to describe his reaction against authority in his themes and style.

Like Wordsworth, he praised the common man, living close to nature, idealized. Ellman quotes Yeats as writing,

> In Ireland alone among the nations that I know you will find, away on the western seaboard, under broken roofs, a race of gentlemen, keeping alive the ideals of a great time when men sang the heroic life with drawn swords in their hands.[22]

And the same thought appears in his poetry. He had visited the Aran Islands in 1896 and had been stirred by the simplicity and dignity of the people, and of their un-English idiom. He had some years later urged J. M. Synge to go to these islands so that he might capture that idiom, just as he had encouraged Lady Gregory to collect the expressions of her peasantry.

> And that enquiring man John Synge comes next,
> That dying chose the living world for text
> And never could have rested in the tomb
> But that, long travelling, he had come
> Towards nightfall upon certain set apart
> In a most desolate stony place,
> Towards nightfall upon a race
> Passionate and simple like his heart.[23]

From sources such as these a new and different literature would come, one that would unite the religious groups and the different classes in Ireland, one that would not be

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22 Ellman, op. cit., p. 113.

23 Collected Poems, p. 149

merely and weakly imitative but that would live by virtue of its own excellence. Such a literature could not, however, be easily achieved: the roots of sentiment and verbiage and ornament had gone too deep. Yeats wrote before 1925,

> . . . The Irish form of Victorian rhetoric . . . had declined into a patriotic extravagance that offended all educated minds. . . Victor Hugo and Swinburne had so delighted our school days that we distrusted our habitual thoughts. I tried after the publication of The Wanderings of Oisin to write of nothing but emotion, and in the simplest language, and now I have had to go through it all, cutting out or altering passages that are sentimental from lack of thought.[24]

Yeats's Romanticism is excellently revealed in his constant dissatisfaction with his own poems, and his innumerable revisions which attempt to make each poem say exactly what he meant in words that he considered most apt at the time of the revision. An unpublished poem, quoted by Henn, well expresses the reason for the revisions.

> The friends that have it I do wrong
> Whenever I remake a song,
> Should know what issue is at stake:
> It is myself that I remake.[25]

In style, then, just as in theme, Yeats was a rebel. Such early poems as Mosada and The Wanderings of Oisin were strongly reminiscent of Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite poetry,

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24 W. B. Yeats, in Dedication to Early Poems and Stories, quoted by Henn, op. cit., p. 100.

25 W. B. Yeats, unpublished verse, quoted by Henn, op. cit., p. 101.

by these frequent revisions he strove for a style that would be simpler, more expressive, more Irish. Although his style became eventually more Yeatsian than Irish, his precepts were more effective in such associates as Lady Gregory and in such literary disciples as Padraic Colum who followed rather his ideal than his example.

> Is there, then, no hope for the de-Anglicising of our people? Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language? Can we not keep the continuity of the nation's life by translating or retelling in English which shall have an indefinable Irish quality of rhythm and style, all that is best of the ancient literature?[26]

It was such an inspiration that lit and kept alight the twin torches of the Irish Literary Revival and the Irish Dramatic Movement.

Yeats's Romantic revolt against tradition and authority has been seen to be fundamental in and characteristic of the man, its seeds sown in soil made fertile by the influences of heredity and nourished both by the needs of his age and the contacts he made. It was strong and efficacious in the fields of subject-matter and style, less tangible but quite as effective in the struggle for Irish freedom.

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26 W. B. Yeats in the December, 1892, issue of United Ireland, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 92.

Yeats's trend towards the changes he advocated in subject and style may be observed in "The Ballad of Father O'Hart"[27], "The Ballad of the Foxhunter"[28], and "The Ballad of Moll Magee"[29]. A few verses from the latter poem will illustrate the changes clearly.

> Come round me, little childer;
> There, don't fling stones at me
> Because I mutter as I go;
> But pity Moll Magee.
>
> My man was a poor fisher
> With shore lines in the say;
> My work was saltin' herrings
> The whole of the long day.[30]

The same extreme simplicity is shown in the un-English

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree . . .[31]

In later poetry equal simplicity and avoidance of poeticism is found, but it is intrinsic and not a pose.

> Better go down upon your marrow-bones
> And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
> Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather.[32]
>
> They had hands like claws, and their knees
> Were twisted like the old thorn-trees
> By the waters.[33]
>
> But was there ever dog that praised his fleas?[34]

Sometimes, still later, a deliberate coarseness is sought, as in "The Three Beggars"[35] and "The Three Hermits"[36]. Finally Yeats achieved a spontaneous harmony of word and thought, natural and effective.

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27 Collected Poems, p. 23.
28 Op. cit., p. 27
29 Op. cit., p. 25
30 Loc. cit.,
31 Op. cit., p. 44.
32 Op. cit., p. 89
33 Op. cit., p. 91
34 Op. cit., p. 105
35 Op. cit., p. 124
36 Op. cit., p. 127.

2. Revolt against Actuality.

I cry continually against my life.[27]

The reader of Yeats's poetry finds in it many a protest against life in general and against his own life in particular, the sort of protest that is typical of the Romantic mind and that runs the gamut of emotions from the early petulant fretfulness to the later raging hatred.

The autobiographical poem, "The Man who Dreamed of Fairyland", explains much of the background of this type of revolt. The man whose "heart hung all upon a silken dress",[28] whose "mind ran all on money cares and fears",[28] learned of a land where the troubles of this world are unknown.

> He mused upon his mockers: without fail
> His sudden vengeance were a country tale,
> When earthy night had drunk his body in;
> But one small knot-grass growing by the pool
> Sang where--unnecessary cruel voice--
> Old silence bids its chosen race rejoice,
> Whatever ravelled waters rise and fall
> Or stormy silver fret the gold of day,
> And midnight there enfold them like a fleece
> And lover there by lover be at peace.
> The tale drove his fine angry mood away.
>
> . . .
> The man has found no comfort in the grave.[28]

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27 W. B. Yeats, Dramatis Personae, 1896-1902, Estrangement, The Bounty of Sweden, London, Macmillan, 1936, p. 150.

28 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, pp. 49-50.

Yeats was troubled almost all his life by his unhappy love affair yet, for reasons which will be more fully discussed in a later chapter, he never attempted a permanent -- and scarcely ever a temporary -- revolt against this thralldom. Yet much of this revolt against actuality was closely associated with his love for Maud Gonne. His Romantic revulsion against ugliness, for example, is so strong because it is an offence against her beauty. He is stirred by the Romantic and unavailing desire to remake the world to harmony with her image. In "The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart" he writes:

> 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.
>
> 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, re-made, like a casket of gold
> For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.[29]

He raged much, too, against people[30] -- especially those who have harmed Maud Gonne. The "dolt and knave" [31]

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29 Collected Poems, p. 62.

30 See Ch. III, p. 83.

31 Collected Poems, p.104.

who misunderstood and maligned her, the "drunken, vainglorious lout"[42] who married her, -- all are condemned. But he raged, as well, against those Irish who showed lack of foresight and lack of desire for culture by their indifference to the offer of Sir Hugh Lane to give his famous collection of paintings to Ireland if by municipal and public subscription a new National Gallery were built on a site he had suggested.[43] He again criticized the mob when they took part in the Playboy controversy[44], and condemned the government's land policy which was designed to reduce such estates as that of Coole.[45]

He fretted at the restrictions of his life caused by his busy and constraining theatrical activities. The note of rebellion is strongly sounded here.

> . . . My curse on plays
> That have to be set up in fifty ways,
> On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
> Theatre business, management of men.
> I swear before the dawn comes round again
> I'll find the stable and pull out the bolt.[46]

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42 Collected Poems, p. 203.

43 See "To a Wealthy Man who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were Proved the People Wanted Pictures", Collected Poems, p. 119; also "To a Shade", op. cit., p. 123.

44 See "On those that Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World', 1907", op. cit., p. 124.

45 See pp. 106, 107, op. cit.

46 Op. cit., p. 104. See also pp. 107, 135.

Since Fate has denied him fulfilment of his love, the occupation of his life should be his poetry, but both politics and the theatre compete with verse.[47] Now, "out of heart with government"[48] and plagued by imitators, he rebels against his rebellion. Life must replace mythology as theme.

> 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.[49]

So he wrote near the end of Responsibilities, published in 1914, and thereafter the personal note is louder and less disguised in symbol.

Occasionally the misery of his long courtship and its disappointing close creeps into a poem written after Maud Gonne's marriage in 1903. There appears clearly his bitterness and disillusion over this "barren passion"[50].

> Never give all the heart, for love
> Will hardly seem worth thinking of
> To passionate women if it seem
> Certain . . .
> He that made this knows all the cost,
> For he gave his heart and lost.[51]

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47 Collected Poems, p. 109.

48 Op. cit., p. 141

49 Op. cit., p. 142

50 Op. cit., p. 113

51 Op. cit., p. 87

Sweetheart, do not love too long:
I loved long and long,
And grew to be out of fashion
Like an old song.[51]

One of the most insistent aspects of Yeats's Romantic revolt is that against the passing of time, against old age in general, and against his own increasing age in particular. It is a passionate revolt, and one which appears even in his earliest. Its urgency is in direct proportion to its uselessness. The inevitability and urgency of the passage of the years oppresses him, and no matter who is the subject of the poem, the theme most closely touches the poet himself.

Yeats was not twenty-five years old when he wrote "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman"[52] and not twenty-eight when "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner"[53] was published, yet both breathe the dependence upon memory that so poignantly accompanies old age with a sympathy and understanding that the young seldom possess.

In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves
were more gay,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;
My sorrow! For many a creak gave the creel in the cart
That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.[52]

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51 Op. cit., p. 93

52 Op. cit., p. 23

53 Op. cit., p. 52

The second of these two poems reveals as well the earliest example in Yeats's lyric verse of the rage against age that appears so often in later poems.

> I spit into the face of Time
> That has transfigured me.[54]

The poems of The Tower repeat this rage, but by 1928 it was an openly personal rage.

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress.
>
> . . .
> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is. . .[55]

Age does not weaken imagination, nor does it bring an end to dream or hope or longing.

> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible --[56]

But Yeats found a solution to his problem of leaden age. Rather than defy it, he will ignore it and will refuse to acknowledge the handicaps that came in its wake.

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

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54 Op. cit., p. 52

55 Op. cit., pp. 217-218

56 Op. cit., p. 218

Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come---
The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath---
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.[57]

And even when death comes it will be met with defiance and be mastered by courage.

A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone--
Man has created death.[58]

Yeats, as this chapter has shown, has throughout his poetry a strong and stirring note of revolt against tradition, authority, reality; a note that echoes the song of the rebellious heart beating in his breast. Like Fergus, he would throw away the troubles and responsibilities of his life, but too many cords tie him to life's treadmill.[59] Unable to flee life's burden, he carries it with a defiant air; like the heroic Cuchulain he will die if he must in unceasing, if vain, conflict.[60]

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57 Op. cit., p. 224

58 Op. cit., p. 264

59 Op. cit., pp. 36-37.

60 Op. cit., pp 37-40.

His fight may bring him the wisdom that now seems the best of living, an "old man's eagle mind".[61] Out of that passionate defiance something of worth must surely come.

> Grant me an old man's frenzy
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till Truth obeyed his call. [62]

At the least, perhaps defiance will be its own reward.

> . . . I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man.[63]

And how little it seems to matter, after all, whether he has some reward other than defiance at all. In at least one poem he shows that revolt never really succeeds, a poem that serves as fitting epilogue for his life and his poetry of fruitless rebellion.

"The Four Ages of Man"

> He with body waged a fight,
> But body won; it walks upright.
>
> Then he struggled with the heart;
> Innocence and peace depart.
>
> Then he struggled with the mind;
> His proud heart he left behind.
>
> Now his wars on God begin;
> At stroke of midnight God shall win.[64]

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61 Op. cit., p. 347

62 Loc. cit.

63 Op. cit., p. 326

64 Op. cit., p. 332

CHAPTER IV

SOLITUDE, EGOTISM, AND MELANCHOLY

I came on a great house in the middle of the night,
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,
And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through.[1]

Following the discussion in Chapter III of Romantic revolt as a factor in Yeats's poetry, it is necessary to turn to those other Romantic aspects which colour so much of his lyric output. All these aspects, it has been pointed out[2], go to make up the flight from reality that is the essence of Romanticism. They have been grouped into three divisions: the first included the three moods -- solitude, egotism, and melancholy, -- which are to be discussed in this chapter; the second included all the means of transformation of reality; the third detailed all the aspects of the supernatural.

There is much overlapping of the moods of solitude and egotism and melancholy, an overlapping almost inevitable because of their close relationship, but for the purpose of analysis in this chapter the three will be considered separately even at the risk of doing violence to some of the poetry by a scrutiny that seizes one feature and ignores others.

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1 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 351.

2 See Chapter II, pp. 51-52.

1. Solitude.

. . . the proud and apart . . .[3]

Yeats had from early boyhood a nature that was essentially solitary, although in later life he was often forced into human contact. His dreams of leadership made it necessary for him to come into contact with those whom he wished to inspire. His froward heart made him seek the companionship of women, while his love for one woman drove him headlong into into national and political contacts. His growing fame made it necessary for him to live in contact with his public and with admirers whose intellectual stimulus he found helpful. His marriage made him a family man with a family man's obligations to society. Throughout his life it must have seemed to him often that he had been trapped in a world he had wished to escape. But, like the prisoner of Chillon, he found the prison at last a home.

In a sense, Yeats was able to carry his solitude with him even among a throng of people. Biographers have recorded his tendency to abstraction and reverie at times when he was surrounded by company. His mind made of his dreams and preoccupations an intellectual solitude. His rebuilding of the Tower for a home was most significant; it was to be a

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3 Collected Poems, p. 23.

solitary's refuge as well as a home, the same sort of escape he had found years before in the thicket or on the island.

Yeats's Reveries over Childhood and Youth gives the story for his early longing for solitude. Of his grandfather's house he wrote, "The house was so big that there was always a room to hide in, and I had . . . a garden where I could wander."[4] When visitors arrived, he hid in the hayloft and lay listening to a servant calling him.[5] At other times he often sought refuge in the library.[6]

Much more significant was his account of the thickets in which he loved to hide. He discovered one of them while visiting his father's aunt, Miss Mary Yeats. "Under one gable a dark thicket of small trees made a shut-in mysterious place, where one played and believed that something was going to happen."[7] Hone describes another thicket near Howth, one between three roads, " a region into which one might wander from the cares of life", and peopled by shadows.[8]

Important, too, is his account of the refuge he hoped to find on the Isle of Innisfree, an island later celebrated

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4 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, N. Y., Macmillan, 1916, p. 2

5 Op. cit., p. 17

6 Op. cit., p. 26

7 Op. cit., p. 18

8 Hone, op. cit., p. 38

in the well-known and well-liked poem, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree". Stirred by his father's reading aloud of Thoreau's Walden, he determined to live in a little cottage on the island and, having set aside love, to seek wisdom alone.[9] Frequently he slept out of doors at night, in Slish Wood or some other hoary grove, or in a cave which he had been told was haunted.[10] He coaxed his cousin to take him out in his boat at night so that he might learn the cries of the birds at dawning.[11]

Among his schoolmates he found himself a stranger, set apart in London by his nationality and in Dublin by his own aloof manner. This sense of isolation remained with him well into manhood, and perhaps all his life. Painfully self-conscious in society, he exaggerated his social blunders. He wrote about this time, "I was like a man in nightmare who longs to move and cannot,"[12] and again, "Sometimes the barrier between myself and other people filled me with terror."[13] It was only by determined self-schooling that he achieved social poise.

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9 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, pp. 83-84.

10 Op. cit., pp. 29, 72-73, 84.

11 Op. cit., pp. 85-86.

12 W. B. Yeats, unpublished First Draft of Autobiography, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 76

13 W. B. Yeats, Letters to the New Island, Cambridge, University Press, 1934, p. 12 xii, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 78.

Even in his love for Maud Gonne, Yeats was lonely. Despite the depth of his love for her, she never completely understood him. But she spoiled any hope of his finding true understanding and companionship in any other woman, at least until his marriage. There is a curious and interesting sidelight on his sense of isolation after his meeting with Maud Gonne in the plot of Dhoya, published in 1892. Yeats put much of himself into the novel, subtly identifying himself with the chief character. Dhoya had been a slave from childhood, subject to violent fits of passion. His masters set him free, and he made his home in a cave. He grew more mad, raging against his own shadow.[14] His furies stop when he falls in love with a woman from the fairy world. But she wishes not to love, only to be loved. She is taken from him, and in despair he mounts a black steed and dashes over the cliff to his death. It is unnecessary to explain the parallel.

During the course of his love for Maud Gonne, Yeats dreamed that he might share a solitude with her, a solitude that was in vivid contrast to her busy public life and his. That dream was unfulfilled, but after his marriage to Miss Lees in 1917 a somewhat similar hope came true. He and his wife shared an intellectual seclusion built partly on mutual understanding but largely upon the 'system' of philosophy

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14 It should be noted here that the shadow is an important feature of Yeats's theory of the Mask, to be discussed later.

developed through her automatic writing and his patient exposition. Their rebuilding of the Tower as a home was especially significant, its strength, its isolation, its symbolism as the study of the sage, all adding importance to its choice.

From a survey of the mood of solitude in the poet's life, a foundation has been laid which explains and makes more meaningful the same mood in the poetry.

The earlier poetry stresses, as might be expected, the notion of an active escape or a flight into solitude. The Yeats who wrote the early poems was, perforce, part of the busy world that he scarcely understood or liked. The young man in "The Indian to his Love" promises his beloved that they will find a lonely home for their love and murmur

> How we alone of mortals are
> Hid under quiet boughs apart.[15]

It is perhaps Yeats himself, a Yeats who dreams of a love that has not yet come to him, who sees his beloved, shy and apart, and promises himself in "To an Isle in the Water" --

> To an isle in the water
> With her would I fly.[16]

It was quite possibly Innisfree that his mind had recalled:

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15 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 15.

16 Op. cit., p. 22.

it was obviously so in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree". It was written in London soon after a faint trickling of water in a shop window in the Strand recalled the boyish dream. He had written of the moment in John Sherman, a novel published with Dhoya in 1892.

> . . . Often when life and its difficulties had seemed to him like the lessons of some elder boy given to a younger by mistake, it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out.[17]

Now the longing sang plaintively in poetic rhythm.

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
> Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
> And live alone in the bee-loud glade.[18]

When his heart had been stirred by his dream love become real, his dreams of escape became more shadowy. She was beautiful as he believed the women of fairyland to be, and an escape to the Celtic Isles of the Young or to fairyland itself seemed more fitting than the very real Innisfree.

> I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore,
> Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us no more;
> Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of the flames would we be,
> Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea![19]

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17 Hone, op. cit., p. 82, quoting W. B. Yeats, Dhoyé.

18 Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 44.

19 Op. cit., p. 47. An ancient Irish name for the fairies was the Tuatha de Danaan.

Maud Gonne rejected the poet's love, and he finds himself alone in a heart-sore isolation that brings more of despair than hope. In his obsession with her he finds no consolation in woman or man or nature. Wandering

> . . . by the edge
> Of this desolate lake
> Where wind cries in the sedge,[20]

he feels a certainty that she will never be his. He bids his "trembling heart" [21] to have courage, although it

> . . . has no part
> With the lonely, majestical multitude,[21]

When any sign of hope was crushed by her marriage to John MacBride, Yeats was thrown into an exile of utter desolation. There was nothing left for him but a despair that forbade expression. The personal utterance was all but silenced: no volume of poetry appeared between 1904 and 1910.

> . . . since you were gone,
> My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.[22]

The years of lonely and bitter aloofness ended with his marriage. Wisdom and love came together, and brought new warmth and comfort in their wake.

> Said Solomon to Sheba,
> And kissed her Arab eyes,
> 'There's not a man or woman
> Born under the skies

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20 Collected Poems, p. 75

21 Op. cit., p. 71

22 Op. cit., p. 102

Dare match in learning with us two,
And all day long we have found
There's not a thing but love can make
The world a narrow pound.[22]

Now, sometimes together, sometimes alone, their minds soar and weave in a strange solitude into which none can follow. Mrs. Yeats, half unwilling, let herself be swept along, but Yeats's flight was deliberate and hopeful to the point of madness or ecstasy.

Malachi Stilt-Jack am I, whatever I learned has run wild,
From collar to collar, from stilt to stilt, from father to child.
All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all. A barnacle goose
Far up in the stretches of night; night splits and the dawn breaks loose;
I, through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk on;
Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn.[23]

And on a more earthy and human note the search ends.

I have found nothing half so good
As my long-planned half solitude,
Where I can sit up half the night
With some friend that has the wit
Not to allow his looks to tell
When I am unintelligible.[24]

So the quest for Romantic solitude has been traced, both in life and in poetry, with one explaining and enlarging the other. Personal, sincere, meaningful beyond the surface gloss, the quest itself is thoroughly Romantic as well.

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22 Collected Poems, p. 155

23 Op. cit., p. 386.

24 Op. cit., p. 387

2. Egotism.

I will my heavy story tell.[25]

Most of the poems discussed in the previous section have revealed personal emotions or opinions. That is not strange, indeed, for approximately four-fifths of Yeats's lyric poetry is directly personal, while the remaining fifth is largely made personal as its themes are transformed by the poet's mind. Personal emotions, moods, and thoughts are not always egotistical in the sense in which the word is used in this chapter -- that of self-conceit, self-preoccupation, the tendency to talk over-much of self. In that sense Yeats Yeats had a little more than his share of egotism. Not selfish, he was still strongly and perhaps engagingly self-centred. Having made his imaginary world, he most naturally caused it to revolve around him: he was the most important figure in it.

In childhood he had more than a touch of ostentation. This was accentuated in the posing of young manhood, and exaggerated still further as fame gradually came to him. The stages in its development, first in life and then in poetry, will be studied here. In the following section it will then be shown how melancholy was a natural result of egotism.

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25 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 9.

Even as a very young child, Yeats appears to have a tendency to show off. In Reveries over Childhood and Youth he describes several events, some of them amusing, which bear out this statement. An aunt accused him of reining in his pony and striking it at the same time as he rode through the town so that he might show it off.[26] Given a little whiskey to avoid a chill caused by a wetting when a wave broke over the boat in which he was sailing, a very young Willie reacted characteristically.

> . . . I drove home with the uncle on an outside car and was so pleased with the strange state in which I found myself that for all my uncle could do, I cried to every passer-by that I was drunk, and went on crying it through the town and everywhere until I was put to bed by my grandmother . . . and so fell asleep.[27]

As a school-boy, young Yeats offset his physical weakness by determined attempts at excellence in the few things he found he could do. Having fallen from a spring-board that was five or six feet above the surface of a swimming pool, he lost his early fear of diving.

> . . . After that I would dive from a greater height than the others and I practised swimming under water and pretending not to be out of breath when I came up. And then if I ran a race, I took care not to pant or show any sign of strain.[28]

He understood his own reasons for the growing interest he

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26 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 9.

27 Op. cit., pp. 17-18 28 Op. cit., pp. 42-43.

took in athletics and in champion athletes:

> . . . I was nursing my own dream, my form of the common school-boy dream, . . . Often, instead of learning my lesson, I covered the white squares of the chessboard on my little table with pen and ink pictures of myself, doing all kinds of courageous things.[29]

Dream and ideal came to be more important than act. When he listened eagerly to the legends -- "grotesque or tragic or romantic"[30] -- of the well-known families in Sligo, he thought to himself,

> . . . how terrible it would be to go away and die where nobody would know my story.[30]

It is interesting to speculate how much of Yeats's written work, poetry and prose, is no more than effort to insure that his story would indeed be known.

With this longing for his own achievement and remembrance came pride in his own relatives and ancestors. He dwelt with increasing pleasure on the exploits and adventures of Middletons, Pollexfens, Yeatses and Butlers, and wrote, "I am delighted with all that joins my life to those who had power in Ireland or with those anywhere that were good servants and poor bargainers." [31] A story is told that during his early association with Lady Gregory he was heard mutter-

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29 Op. cit., p. 43.

30 Op. cit., p. 17

31 Op. cit., pp. 21-22

ing that if he had his rights he would be Duke of Ormonde, and that AE said, "In any case, Willie, you are overlooking your father".[32]

From early youth Yeats found his thoughts more fascinating than real things, and all but uncontrollable. "My thoughts were a great excitement, but when I tried to do anything with them, it was like trying to pack a balloon into a shed in a high wind."[33] "I . . had found it hard to attend to anything less interesting than my thoughts."[34] These thoughts were usually about himself and his future, and were rather lofty than commonplace. The following may serve as a sample.

> I have climbed to the top of a tree by the edge of the playing field, and am looking at my schoolfellows and am as proud of myself as a March cock when it crows to its first sunrise. I am saying to myself, "if when I grow up I am as clever among grown-up men as I am among these boys, I shall be a famous man." I remind myself how they think all the same things and cover the school walls at election times with the opinions their fathers find in the newspapers. I remind myself that I am an artist's son and must take some work as the whole end of life and not think as the others do of becoming well off and living pleasantly.[35]

He long remembered his father's definition of a gentleman

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32 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 293, quoting George Moore in Hail and Farewell.

33 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 46.

34 Op. cit., p. 23

35 Op. cit., pp. 46-47

as a man who was not wholly occupied in getting on.[36]

In early manhood Yeats continued to dramatise himself and to pose as he had done in childhood.[37] "Sometimes I told myself very adventurous love-stories with myself for hero, and at other times I planned out a life of lonely austerity." [38] He was the hero of all that he read and all that he wrote: he always read aloud and dramatised his poetry, arousing the laughter of some neighbours who could observe him. His pose became Byronic.

> . . . sometimes walking with an artificial stride in memory of Hamlet and stopping at shop windows to look at my tie gathered into a loose sailor-know and to regret that it could not always be blown out by the wind like Byron's tie in the picture.[39]

In later life the tendency to dramatise himself never left him, although he kept it under better control and was less likely, because of his growing fame, to be mocked by any except perhaps the irreverent George Moore. He was in general taken at his own valuation, which was high, and was surrounded by admirers who were content to listen or to be ignored just as the mood seized the poet. His poetry was personal: so was his conversation.

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36 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 106.

37 See Chapter I, pp. 10-11.

38 W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, p. 134

39 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 97

It may well be affirmed that Yeats's egotism was most clearly evidenced in his love for Maud Gonne and in his nationalistic aims. Only a man with great pride would have dared to love a woman whose beauty was so astounding: only one with still more pride and innate self-confidence would have proposed marriage again and again despite her repeated refusals. Maud Gonne was so outstanding in beauty and breeding, in wealth and character, that only a supreme egotist could have thought himself capable of sharing her life and winning her heart. Yeats was that egotist. Similarly his confidence in his ability to shape a nation, a nation's culture and a nation's destiny, is shown in his plans for Ireland. His dreams were lofty and sublime, and perhaps in that sense every man may resemble him, but it took arrogance and almost super-human purposefulness to attempt to put them into action. His success proves, it must be admitted, that his self-confidence was justified.

In his poetry Yeats shows the expression of the egotism that was fundamental in his life. At first it was somewhat disguised, a little timid. Yeats was sensitive to criticism in his early years of poetizing, and not even an egotist (perhaps especially not an egotist) relishes mockery.

Yeats himself was both happy shepherd and sad shepherd. The former declared with authority that

. . . there is no truth
Save in thine own heart,[40]

and followed this ridiculously assured statement by a warning to seek no learning from scholars. His "glad singing"[40] had in it more of mirth than wisdom. The sad shepherd, like Yeats, sang his song over and over, but found none to listen to his story.[41] Yeats himself is the Indian youth, beloved of a priestess, in "Anashuya and Vijaya", the Indian who meditates upon God, the Indian who sings his song of love's solitude.[42] He is King Goll, driven mad by "a whirling and a wandering fire";[43] King Fergus, who wishes to learn the "dreaming wisdom"[44] of the Druid; Cuchulain, who dies gloriously fighing insuperable odds in battling with "the invulnerable tide."[45] It would be fruitless to quote further instances, but it may be pointed out that Yeats identified himself always with someone who, by virtue of rank or race, was different from the generality of men, -- significant of his own sense of difference.

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40 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 8.

41 Op. cit., p. 9

42 "Anashuya and Vijaya", "The Indian upon God", "The Indian to his Love", Op. cit., pp. 10-16.

43 OOp. cit., pp. 17-20

44 Op. cit., pp. 36-37

45 Op. cit., pp. 37-40

In the poems of The Rose (1893) there is found a freer acknowledgement of personality, side by side with a growing use of symbolism.

> I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam of the sea![46]

> I dreamed that one had died in a strange place.[47]

> While still I may, I write for you
> The love I lived, the dream I knew.[48]

> . . . Love fled
> And paced upon the mountains overhead
> And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.[49]

But in the final quotation, as in the first three, it is Yeats himself who speaks.

The Wind among the Reeds (1899) combines all three elements--the sense of difference, personal expression, and symbolism. In "The Song of Wandering Aengus", for example, Yeats symbolizes himself as the god of love and Maud as the little silver trout which turned into a lovely girl who still eluded him. And

> Though I am old with wandering
> Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
> I will find out where she has gone . . .[50]

His disappointment at his rejections seems to him keener than it would to another man, his bitterness correspondingly

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46 Op. cit., p. 46

47 Op. cit., p. 47

48 Op. cit., p. 57

49 Op. cit., p. 46

50 Op. cit., pp. 66-67

greater, his heart-break at her marriage to another beyond all tragedy.

At the same time, too, he shows a confidence in the power of the well-chosen and well-written poetic word both to fill the mind and to achieve immortality. His poems will displace thoughts of prayer and will make Maud Gonne's beauty eternal. The thought is not new, but there is no doubt that Yeats meant what he said exactly and in a completely personal way.

> O women, kneeling by your altar-rails long hence,
> When songs I wove for my beloved hide the prayer,
> And smoke from this dead heart drifts through the
> violet air
> And covers away the smoke of myrrh and frankincense;
> Bend down and pray for all that sin I wove in song;[51]

> . . . dream about the great and their pride;
> They have spoken against you everywhere,
> But weigh this song with the great and their pride;
> I made it out of a mouthful of air,
> Their children's children shall say they have lied.[52]

In The Green Helmet and Other Poems (1910) there appears a flaunting of personality, a grating repetition of 'I', 'my', 'me'. Defiance has been added to egotism; this new Yeats cares naught for mockery, but savagely returns it. His dreams are filled, like his poetry, with tragedy and passion. There is no further veiling of emotion in symbolism or in circumlocution. Such a poem as "His Dream", for

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51 Collected Poems, p. 79.

52 Op. cit., p. 75.

example, shows his consciousness of being once again the master of his own destiny.

> I swayed upon the gaudy stern
> The butt-end of a steering oar,
> And saw wherever I could turn
> A crowd upon a shore.[53]

And his lost love appears now as a woman rather than as a dream-like fairy queen.

> 'I had this thought a while ago,
> 'My darling cannot understand
> What I have done, or what would do
> In this blind bitter land.'[54]

> Why should I blame her that she filled my days
> with misery? [55]

There is a blunt admission of the change that has been forced upon him.

> Though leaves are many, the root is one;
> Through all the lying days of my youth
> I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
> Now I may wither into the truth.[56]

He is undergoing the change symbolized by the image of the naked beggar in various poems of Responsibilities (1914),[57] a beggar who flaunts his nakedness and glories in it.

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53 Collected Poems, p. 99

54 Op. cit., p. 100-101

55 Op. cit., p. 101

56 Op. cit., p. 105

57 Op. cit., "The Three Beggars", pp. 124-126; "Beggar to Beggar Cried", p. 128; "Running to Paradise", p. 129; "The Hour Before Dawn", pp. 130-134.

Marriage somewhat softened Yeats's strong egotism, as it has a way of doing. He became more aware of the personalities of others, living and dead. It is significant that the second poem in The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) calls to mind such deceased friends as Major Robert Gregory, Lionel Johnson, John Synge, and George Pollexfen are recalled.[58] In The Tower (1922) Yeats in "All Soul's Night" recalls W. T. Horton, visionary artist, Florence Emery, actress, and the 'Magician' MacGregor Mathers.[59] Long dead Pollexfens are recollected in "In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen"[60] Dead and living are linked in the poems "Upon a Dying Lady" written about Mabel Beardsley, sister of Aubrey Beardsley.[61] More and more, too, does he write of people other than himself. Maud Gonne MacBride still holds a prominent part in the poetry, but now his wife appears almost as often, and Iseult Gonne and Lady Gregory as well. His son and daughter are commemorated in "A Prayer for my Daughter"[62] and "A Prayer for my Son".[63] But in these poems one wonders whether to Yeats the children are important in themselves or whether he sees them only as projections of himself.[64]

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58 Op. cit., p. 148

59 Op. cit., pp. 256-259

60 Op. cit., pp. 175-177

61 Op. cit., pp. 177-180

62 Op. cit., pp. 211-214

63 Op. cit., pp. 238-239

64 Op. cit., pp. 228-229

There appears in the poetry written after 1917 an increasing tendency to hide egotism and purely personal expression behind a mask and behind the doctrine of the Self and anti-Self. Yeats had already used the mask of the beggar, and this is continued in "Under the Round Tower".[65] Later Yeats assumes the mask of the Fool.[66] There is a series of different aspects of the Self and Anti-Self. He had already used Michael Robartes and Owen Ahearne to represent the man of action and the dreamer, and they appear particularly in the later poetry surrounding the philosophical (?) system of A Vision.[67] The Shepherd and the Goatherd represent the younger and the older Yeats.[68] The spiritual and the physical Yeats are represented by the Saint and the Hunchback.[69] Yeats's anti-Self is -- in one phase -- the Fisherman.[70] He and his wife appear as Solomon and Sheba.[71] The dialogue between body and soul appears as between Hic and Ille,[72] and later as between Man and Echo.[73] Under these guises Yeats speaks out as freely as ever, but the thin disguise tends to deceive

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65 Op. cit., pp. 154-155

66 Op. cit., pp. 190-191

67 Op. cit., pp. 192-194, 197-198, 183-188

68 Op. cit., pp. 159-163

69 Op. cit., pp. 188-190

70 Op. cit., pp. 166-167

71 Op. cit., pp. 155, 164, 199

72 Op. cit., pp. 180-182

73 Op. cit., pp. 393-395

the casual reader.

There may still be found many personal utterances that are not veiled: in them the old Yeats speaks out, and it is obvious that personality has not changed greatly through the years. He is still conscious of his uniqueness, still greatly absorbed in himself, but more than ever anxious to achieve immortality in some way.

> I am worn out with dreams;
> A weather-worn, marble triton
> Among the streams.[74]

With a soul as cold and durable as marble, he finds it appropriate to build in Thoor Ballylee something that will be almost as durable.

> I, the poet William Yeats,
> With old mill boards and sea-green slates,
> And smithy work from the Gort forge,
> Restored this tower for my wife George;
> And may these characters remain
> When all is ruin once again.[75]

Pride of race is still strong as old age comes on. In a poetic will he leaves his pride to "upstanding men"[76] who resemble him.

> . . . I declare
> They shall inherit my pride,
> The pride of people that were
> Bound neither to Cause nor to state,
> Neither to slaves that were spat on,
> Nor to the tyrants that spat,

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74 Collected Poems, p. 152

75 Op. cit., p. 214

76 Op. cit., p. 222

The people of Burke and of Grattan
That gave, though free to refuse---[77]

He joys in the "vigorous mind" [78] which he has inherited from his ancestors, and hopes that it has been passed on to his descendants. Yet there is disquiet in his mind lest in some way he has failed the family tradition and achieved less than he planned in his boyish dreams. Perhaps those dreams had been too lofty ever to be captured in action.

Have I, that put it into words,
Spoilt what old loins have sent?
Eyes spiritualised by death can judge,
I cannot, but I am not content.[79]

Even this self-doubt is proof of egotism, for the egotist dare not face a gap between the ideal and the real, between self-set standard and accomplishment. Yeats in his later poetry rather frequently gives expression to such a mood.

Things said or done long years ago,
Or things I did not do or say
But thought that I might say or do,
Weigh me down, and not a day
But something is recalled,
My conscience or my vanity appalled.[80]

But pride rises strong even out of frustration.

Some stupid thing that I had done
Made my attention stray.

Repentance keeps my heart impure;
But what am I that dare

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77 Op. cit., pp. 222-223

78 Op. cit., p. 228

78 Op. cit., p. 284

80 Op. cit., p. 284

Fancy that I can
Better conduct myself or have more
Sense than a common man?[81]

Even in self-distrust (or is it not rather mock humility?) the poet feels that he is not a common man. Much the same feeling is underlined in the 'song's sake' of the next lines.

O what am I that I should not seem
For the song's sake a fool?[82]

Up until the last poems Yeats knows that his song is the echo of his own heart, and that his heart is no common heart, no base-born heart.

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so,
Maybe at last, being but a broken man,
I must be satisfied with my heart.[83]

Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.[84]

In this section there has been described the egotism which was so characteristic of Yeats both as man and as poet. It was self-pride, self-love, and self-preoccupation beyond the ordinary, its intensity pointed by his distress and pain at defections from his self-set standard.

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81 Op. cit., pp. 288-289

82 Op. cit., p. 326

83 Op. cit., p. 391

84 Op. cit., p. 400

3. Melancholy.

The soul cannot,live without sorrow.[85]

Romantic melancholy is closely connected with solitude and egotism, and in fact rises from them. It is only possible to feel pure melancholy in solitude, and then only for an egotist who cannot remake himself or the world to correspond with his personal blue-print. It is fitting, then, that the topic of melancholy should be considered side by side with two moods so closely related.

Melancholy is an essential and almost all-pervading mood, and often a theme, of Yeats's poetry, both early and late. The only real difference between early and later verse is not that of mood but rather of treatment. The young Yeats slightly disguised himself, either behind another face or in symbolism, and then was not ashamed to weep in public. The elder Yeats had more restraint and somewhat less camouflage, and his verse had in it more passionate resistance to fate than the earlier doleful acceptance.

The very real melancholy that was so much a part of Yeats's life is the melancholy that glowed so coldly through the poetry. The melancholy of the verse is by no means merely

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85 The Celtic Twilight, London, Lawrence and Bullen, 1893, p. iii.

a mere literary affectation: it breathes through the pages of the Autobiography. A servant's statement that a uniformed telegraph boy was going to blow up the town caused Yeats as a child to have a night of sleepless terror. A mastless and scratched toy boat filled him with melancholy. Vague alarms and miseries haunted the child. An early memory confirmed this.

> Then one day at dinner my great-uncle William Middleton says, "we should not make light of the troubles of children. They are worse than ours, because we can see the end of our trouble and they can never see any end," and I feel grateful for I know that I am very unhappy and have often said to myself, "when you grow up, never talk as grown-up people do of the happiness of childhood." I may already have had the night of misery when, having prayed for several days that I might die, I had begun to be afraid that I was dying and prayed that I might live. There was no reason for my unhappiness. Nobody was unkind. . . [86]

Yeats later felt that much of his unhappiness was associated with his grandfather.

> Some of my misery was loneliness and some of it fear of old William Pollexfen, my grandfather. He was never unkind, and I cannot remember that he ever spoke harshly to me, but it was the custom to fear and admire him. . .
>
> I think I confused my grandfather with God, for I remember in one of my attacks of melancholy praying that he might punish me for my sins.[87]

Other relatives had some slight share in the child's unhap-

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86 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 2.

87 Op. cit., pp. 2-3.

piness -- the aunt who accused him of reining and striking his pony at the same time to show off and caused him to spend a night of misery, or even his gentle grandmother who insisted that he attend church even against his inclination.

> I was often devout, my eyes filling with tears at the thought of God and of my own sins, but I hated church.[88]

> Indeed I remember little of childhood but its pain. I have grown happier with every year of life as thought gradually conquering something in myself, for certainly my miseries were not made by others but were a part of my own mind.[89]

As he grew older he found no escape from his misery, for it came to him again from the studies that inflicted themselves on him and from which he was constantly being distracted by his wandering thoughts. As a schoolboy in London he suffered from lonesomeness for Sligo as well as from his lessons. "I had always a lesson to learn before night and that was a continual misery, for I could very rarely, with so much to remember, set my thoughts upon it and then only in fear."[90]

When he began to write he must have found some relief in recording his unhappiness, although when he was writing his Reveries over Childhood and Youth he could still be upset by his memories. "I am sorrowful and disturbed."[91] It is, however, significant that in youth and early manhood he tended

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88 Op. cit., p. 24

89 Op. cit., p. 9

90 Op. cit., p. 30

91 Op. cit., p. 130

in his numerous day-dreams to identify himself with some Romantic tragic hero--Hamlet, Manfred, Athanase, Alastor, -- longing to share their melancholy. This tendency indicates a natural inclination towards melancholy that was stronger than the accustomed buoyancy of youth.

Later life did little to relieve Yeats's unhappiness. His unfortunate love affair rather intensified his dejection, which was associated with other failures as well. His ideals, as was stated in the previous section, were so lofty that they could scarcely be humanly possible. When plan after plan failed, or only partly succeeded, Yeats came close to despair. Even marriage did not bring him the consolation that it might, for it had to combat his own nature -- at all times a formidable foe. Poem after poem in later years reveals a melancholy as strong as that of childhood, only more bitter.

Just such a brooding melancholy and disillusion as has been described is diffused through the early poems. In Crossways there is not a poem which sounds a cheerful note. All are damp with Ireland's tears and with Yeats's own. Both "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" and "The Song of the Sad Shepherd" are instinct with sadness. In the former the poet regrets the joy that has passed from the world, the dreary changes that have been wrought by the coming of "grey truth".

Only words and dreams are worth the having.[92] As the sad shepherd, however, Yeats best describes himself.

> There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,
> And he, of his high Comrade Sorrow dreaming,
> Went walking with slow steps . . . [93]

and called in vain to stars and sea and dewdrops and shell to hear his story. But at last the shell,

> . . . sad dweller by the sea-ways lone
> Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
> Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.[93]

Sorrow is a recurring theme in these poems. The poet creates for sorrow "The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes".

> 'I make the cloak of Sorrow:
> O lovely to see in all men's sight
> Shall be the cloak of Sorrow . . .
>
> 'I build a boat for Sorrow:
> O swift on the seas all day and night
> Saileth the rover Sorrow . . .
>
> 'I weave the shoes of Sorrow:
> Soundless shall be the footfall light
> In all men's ears of Sorrow. . .[94]

The tears for the sadness of things are universal. "Anashuya and Vijaya" has its setting in India. Its heroine, a priestess, sings "A sad, sad thought went by me slowly."[95] The flamingoes in the temple wander deviously, compelled "To wander by their melancholy minds."[96] The stars "drop many

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92 Collected Poems, p. 7

93 Op. cit., p. 9

94 Op. cit., p. 10

95 Op. cit., p. 11

96 Op. cit., p. 12

an azure tear",[97] and the pilots of the stars --

> Their faces are all worn, and in their eyes
> Flashes the fire of sadness,[98] --

see, all the while, "The phantom, Beauty, in a mist of tears."[99]

The world itself is always seen by the poet as full of trouble and sorrows. The poem called "The Stolen Child" is a fairy song which will lure mankind from earthly unhappiness to the everlasting gladness of fairyland.

> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.[100]

> . . . the world is full of troubles and is anxious in its sleep.[100]

In "The Host of the Air" a bride is stolen from the world's troubles by the fairy horde. The fairy piper's music is heard,

> And never was piping so sad,
> And never was piping so gay.[101]

Love always is associated in Yeats's mind with sadness, even before his meeting with the woman who brought so deep an unhappiness into his own life. "Down by the Salley Gardens" is based on an old folk song, but it, too, has Yeats's characteristic note of melancholy. His love tells the youth that he must take love easy. He is heedless of her warning

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97 Op. cit., p. 13

98 Op. cit., p. 12

99 Op. cit., p. 13

100 Op. cit., pp. 20-21

101 Op. cit., p. 63

and the sadness is inevitable.

> She bid me take love easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
> But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.[102]

"The Falling of the Leaves" [103] and "Ephemera" [104] also breathe the sorrow of love that is dying or dead.

The sadness of old age is described in "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner"[105] and in "The Meditation of the Old Fisherman"[106] Death has spread its veil of sorrow in "The Ballad of Father O'Hart"[107], "The Ballad of Moll Magee"[108], and "The Ballad of the Foxhunter"[109].

The poems of The Rose volume are scarcely less concerned with melancholy, but it is better hidden than before for symbolism clouds its pages. Yeats is no less unhappy, but slightly more reticent. The Rose, among other things, is the symbol of beauty, but it is not quite the Platonic idea of beauty. Rather is it pictured as suffering with, and sharing the sorrows of, mankind. Hence it is addressed as "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days."[110] It is "The Rose of the World" [111], and full of essential tragedy.

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102 Op. cit., p. 23
103 Op. cit., p. 16
104 Op. cit., p. 16
105 Op. cit., p. 52
106 Op. cit., p. 23
107 Op. cit., p. 23
108 Op. cit., p. 25
109 Op. cit., p. 27
110 Op. cit., p. 35
111 Op. cit., p. 41

For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.[112]

A girl arose that had red mournful lips
And seemed the greatness of the world in tears.[113]

Not only does Yeats find sorrow in abstract beauty, but also in individual beauty -- particularly that of Maud Gonne. He tells that he "loved the sorrows"[114] of her "changing face"[114]. In his heart and hers there is "a sadness that may not die"[115]. The Countess Cathleen, identified with Maud Gonne, has a "mournful beauty"[116]. Yeats, himself, is identified with Fergus who attempts to cast away his sorrow with his crown and, hoping to lose melancholy forever in dreams, finds his soul still caught in "great webs of sorrow"[117]. So, too, is the poet represented by Cuchulain who, even among his glorious feasting, is noted for "the mournful wonder of his eyes"[118]. Both Yeats and Maud are among "the sad, the lonely, the insatiable"[119] who are lured by the Rose of Battle.

The sadness of Ireland and the Irish is closely linked with the Rose of Battle. The Irish people who are perennially hopeful and perennially as close to tears as they

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112 Op. cit., p. 41
113 Op. cit., p. 46
114 Op. cit., p. 46
115 Op. cit., p. 47
116 Op. cit., p. 48
117 Op. cit., p. 37
118 Op. cit., p. 39
119 Op. cit., p. 43

are in spirit to their native land, are

> . . . planning, plotting always that some morrow
> May set a stone upon ancestral Sorrow.[120]

Yet there is attraction even in this sorrow for the Irishman still best enjoys the saddest thought and saddest tales:

> And yet the saddest chimes are best enjoyed.[120]

In the volumes that follow The Rose Yeats becomes less articulate about sadness and melancholy. The poems retain melancholy as a theme or as a method of treatment, but the words themselves appear less often, and quotation is thereby rendered more difficult.

The world is still seen as pierced by unhappiness, and still the fairy host would woo man from care. Through the "desolate winds"[65] of the world the fairy throng still sing.

> And if any gaze on our rushing band,
> We come between him and the hope of his heart,
> We come between him and the deed of his hand.[122]

Some enchantment, he feels, has come between him and the hope of his heart, for love escapes him as he reaches to catch it -- first the love of Maud Gonne and then that of Diana Vernon. He has endured the "Travail of Passion".

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120 Op. cit., p. 51

121 Op. cit., p. 65

122 Op. cit., p. 61

When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay:
Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the way
Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side,
The vinegar-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kedron stream.[123]

When he seeks an antidote to love in his poetry of fairy-lore and mythology, he finds no less unhappiness. But action may, he hopes, bring a dulling of the pain eventually.

I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:
It worked at them, day out, day in,
Building a sorrowful loveliness
Out of the battles of old times.[124]

I have drunk ale from the Country of the Young
And weep because I know all things now.[125]

The volume In the Seven Woods was published in the year following Maud Gonne's marriage. The increasing note of bitterness as his frequent rejections had taken their toll was intensified in this book: he had been shocked into a colder reticence. The vocal melancholy of the previous poetry is chastened in this and in immediately following volumes.

In love of nature's beauty he has attempted to

. . . put away
The unavailing outcries and the old bitterness
That empty the heart.[126]

But still memories crowd back, accompanied by a wide range of emotions. Time makes it no easier to forget her, for

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123 Op. cit., p. 79

124 Op. cit., p. 71

125 Op. cit., p. 81

126 Op. cit., p. 85

Time can but make her beauty over again:
. . .
O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,
You'd know the folly of being comforted.[127]

There is bitterness in "Never Give all the Heart"[128] and "O Do not Love Too Long"[129], regretful remembrance in "The Ragged Wood"[130], agony in "Under the Moon"[131], a calmer despair in "The Withering of the Boughs"[132], and forgiveness at last in "Old Memory"[133]. But the pain never dies.

To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.[134]

In The Green Helmet (1910) there is no less pain. Now a Catholic, Maud Gonne can look forward to happiness in a world that will right the wrongs of this. Yeats has no such anchor.

And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?[135]

His only refuge is the theatre with its activities at which he chafes, but which fill his days. His pain is as deliberately crushed in his poetry lest he rage like a madman.

. . . imagination and heart were driven

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127 Op. cit., p. 86
128 Op. cit., p. 87
129 Op. cit., p. 93
130 Op. cit., p. 92
131 Op. cit., p. 91
132 Op. cit., p. 87
133 Op. cit., p. 86
134 Op. cit., p. 92
135 Op. cit., p. 102

So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out
of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. [136]

As old age comes upon him Yeats in his sadder moods broods upon four themes. His thoughts wander back, as the thoughtsof the old always do, to the past. He compares his ideals with his achievements, and finds that the latter fall far short. He is distressed, as the old almost always are, by the state of the world. Finally with a fury that is surely not characteristic of the old he rages against old age itself. These will be discussed in that order.

His memories centre around lost friends, Lady Gregory, J. M. Synge, Pollexfens and Middletons, those long dead -- the famous or the eccentric. He feels for the "loneliness and pain"[137] of the Irish patriots of old, for Parnell who "had enough of sorrow before death"[138], for "that most lonely thing" -- the beauty of Maud Gonne.[139] The swans at Coole seem to possess the immortality he has longed for; "Their hearts have not grown old"[140] while he grows old among dreams.[141] His heart holds "vague memories, nothing but

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136 Op. cit., p. 140

137 Op. cit., p. 121

138 Op. cit., p. 123

139 Op. cit., p. 172

140 Op. cit., p. 147

141 Op. cit., p. 153

memories"[142]: his life seems empty.

In youth he had dreams, but they were dreams of the future, lofty dreams which he had attempted to translate into achievement. In retrospect, it often seems to him that he has failed.

> I was one of those doomed to imperfect achievement, under a curse as it were.[143]

> I have attempted many things
> And not a thing is done,
> For every hand is lunatic
> That travels on the moon.[144]

> . . . I am not content.[145]

He is tormented at the thought of his possible responsibility for such events as the 1916 Easter Rising by the presentation of Cathleen ni Houlihan and other lesser personal and social tragedies.

> All that I have said or done,
> Now that I am old and ill,
> Turns into a question till
> I lie awake night after night
> And never get the answers right.
> . . .
> And all seems evil until I
> Sleepless would lie down and die.[146]

The first World War caused extreme distress to Yeats, not merely because of specific incidents during its four years

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142 Op. cit., p. 174

143 Autobiography, p. 145

144 Collected Poems, p. 249

145 Op. cit., p. 371

146 Op. cit., p. 393

but because it seems to him the beginning of an age of world destruction and disintegration. The poet's sick dismay appears in several poems, and in the exposition of his cyclic theory of history in A Vision.

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.[147]

Greater distress came to him with the 1919 Troubles in Ireland and with the Civil War. These events were nearer to him, and a personal and dismayed revulsion appeared in his verse. The Black and Tan atrocities destroyed any objectivity he had laboriously achieved.

> Now days are dragon-ridden; the nightmare rides upon sleep.[148]

Yet Irish retaliation was never condoned, and many a blunt word in speech or poem made his attitude clear.

But Yeats's greatest enemy, his most deadly opponent, was old age. AAgainst it he raged with furious words. In a letter written to Mrs. Shakespeare in 1922 he expressed his feelings freely.

> I am tired & in a rage at being old, I am all I ever was & much more but an enemy has bound me & twisted me so I can plan & think as I never could but no longer achieve all I plan and think.[149]

The greatest loss he has suffered is his impaired power of

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147 Op. cit., p. 211

148 Op. cit., p. 233

149 W. B. Yeats, in letter to Mrs. Shakespeare, June, 1922, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 241

producing poetry (so he feels, at least, although critics do not agree). But there were other losses as well, for instance the progressive decline of his sense of harmony with beauty. Feeling himself now "a comfortable kind of old scarecrow", [150] he acknowledges the real tragedy, the ageing of the heart.

> . . . O heart, we are old;
> The living beauty is for younger men:
> We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.[151]

Yet the tears are there just the same, despite his courage.

> Pray I will and sing I must,
> And yet I weep.[152]

On such a note of pain and acceptance of fate does the discussion of Yeats's love of solitude, his egotism, and his melancholy, close. As lonely in old age as is boyhood, his was the solitariness of the soul. From such a spiritual and intellectual solitude, his egotism sprang naturally. And because his dreams so far exceeded possibility, the extremes of melancholy resulted. Yet, in spite of all, he has produced much that the world will not willingly let die.

> . . . his life shows remarkable consistency and tenacity. From the boy who dreamed of controlling the world by a magician's wand to the old man who cried out, 'I make the truth,' he laboured to state with growing maturity themes which he developed in adolescence.
>
> His physical and temperamental weaknesses as a child, his timidity as a young man, encouraged him to nourish

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150 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 243

151 Op. cit., p. 156

152 Op. cit., p. 315

> his imagination on heroic self-projections until his dreams far exceeded reality. Then, with great courage and will, he tried to become the hero of whom he had dreamed and to instill into Ireland a heroic atmosphere. His amazing achievement was to succeed partially in both ambitions.[153]

The poet himself, in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", surveys his life, its pain and its shame, and with vision made clear by the years he sees it all at last in its true perspective.

> What matter if I live it all once more?
> Endure that toil of growing up;
> The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
> Of boyhood changing into man;
> The unfinished man and his pain
> Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;
>
> The finished man among his enemies?
> . . .
> The folly man does
> Or must suffer, if he woos
> A proud woman not kindred of his soul.
>
> . . .
> I am content to live it all again
> And yet again.[154]

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153 Ellman, op. cit., p. 282

154 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, pp. 266-267

CHAPTER V

REALITY TRANSFORMED

I've built a dreaming palace
  With stone from out the old
And singing days, within their graves
  Now lying calm and cold.

There among the pillars
  Are many statues fair
Made of the dreamland marble,
  Cut by the dreamer's care.[1]

The preceding chapter has described three closely related elements of Yeats's life and poetry, -- solitude, egotism, and melancholy, -- all of which are evidences of the poet's flight from reality. As has been shown in the discussion of Romantic qualities in Chapter II[2], another way of escaping reality is possible -- by transforming it. When actuality does not appeal, it may be rebuilt to correspond with an ideal. So it was that Yeats created for himself a dream- beauty and a dream love, a dream world, an idealized past, an idealized nature. Thoroughly Romantic, made solitary and melancholy by the troubles of life, conscious of his ability to re-create and glamourize by poetic imagination, he built his dreaming palace and peopled it with dream figures.

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1 W. B. Yeats, unpublished verse, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

2 See Chapter II, pp. 66-72.

He had long been fascinated by his childish image of the magician who could transform and create at will. He wrote in early manhood,

> . . . I have quaffed full deep
> The glorious cup of magic, till in drinking
> That dred [sic] wine that once I dreamed
> And read of only my soul gros [sic]
> The image of the mighty viewless ones.[3]

Like the magician, he could transmute the real by using a wand of his own.

And so it was that he sought in the past the perfection that was lacking in the present, selecting and altering as he wished. So he cast over nature a cloudy charm and enchantment it did not possess. So he fashioned for himself an ideal world and a visionary beloved, so lovely that his heart went mad when the vision was found incarnate in a living woman.

Because Yeats was not equally preoccupied with all these features, this chapter will unavoidably tend to be one-sided, for it must emphasize the one that the poet himself emphasized -- the ideal beauty and ideal love. This will be considered first, the others in their turn.

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3 W. B. Yeats, from an unpublished play, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 34.

1. Ideal Beauty and Love.

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.[4]

. . . what cared I that set him on to ride,
I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride? [5]

Yeats's attitude to love already has been discussed, although briefly, in Chapter I[6]. Reference was made, also, in the following chapter, to the importance of the part love played in both early and later poetry.[7] In the present chapter the subject will be fully analysed and discussed.

It may be stated as a general introduction that his early ideas of love were completely Romantic and that the later attitude to love, although more realistic in treatment, was no less essentially Romantic in inspiration and concept. His ideal of beauty was always Romantic, in old age as in youth.

This section will pass from a discussion of Yeats's boyishly Romantic notions of beauty and love, through the period of crystallization of his youthful theories when he met Maud Gonne, through the years of his abiding love for her, to his later obsession with her or with his idea of her while he attempted to forget her in marriage with Miss

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4 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 15
5 Op. cit., p. 391
6 See Chapter I, p. 19
7 See Chapter II, pp. 69-70

Georgie Hyde-Lees. It may be possible at the end of such a survey to attempt to answer a question which arises in the mind of one who reads his poetry and his biography side by side, namely whether his happiness in marriage has been over-rated by his biographers or whether -- as his poetry seems to indicate -- not even marriage made him forget his love for Maud Gonne. If the former is true, then it must be assumed that his poetry in later years was little more than a pose, the reworking of a theme formerly fruitful in poetic inspiration. If the latter is true, then his life was indeed a mask, and his poetry the true expression of heart-felt emotion.

> Does the imagination dwell the most
> Upon a woman won or woman lost?[8]

In quantity of lines at least the love motif is the most important single theme in Yeats's poetry. Approximately half of his lyric poetry directly concerns itself with love in one or other of its aspects. Most of his narrative poetry and many of his plays are also based upon love. Almost always, especially in the earlier poetry, is the love of the kind that is called Romantic, ideal, remote, aloof, unattainable. Later disappointment and disillusion brought more of passion and hatred into the love poetry, a

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8 Op. cit., p. 222.

mood less attractive but closer to reality. It is the contention of this thesis, although not commented upon by critics, that this passion by its fury and intensity soon tended away from cold reality towards another emotion as Romantic in its vigour as the earlier mood had been Romantic in its gentleness.

Yeats's early ideas of love are most interesting and they lay the foundation for an understanding of the love poetry both early and late. It must be remembered that the youthful Yeats had been strongly influenced by the poets of the Romantic movement and of the pre-Raphaelite group. These could not, of course, have influenced him so strongly had not his own nature been itself strongly Romantic and impressionable. His own writings make his early ideas of beauty and love explicit.

> I was a Romantic, my head full of the mysterious women of Rossetti, and those hesitating faces in the art of Burne-Jones seemed always awaiting for some Alastor at the end of a long journey.[9]

> When I thought of women they were modelled on those in my favourite poets and loved in brief tragedy, or like the girl in the Revolt of Islam, accompanied their lovers through all manner of wild places, lawless women without homes and without children.[10]

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8 W. B. Yeats, unpublished material, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 57

9. W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, p. 79, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 57

Yeats passed his whole life in a state of acute awareness of women. It was the idea of women that first intrigued him. His love for Maud Gonne, who long seemed an ideal woman, set the tone of interest in supremely lovely women that lasted for many years. When he at last ceased to be preoccupied with her personally and exclusively, he still retained the idea of perfection in woman that he had associated with her. T. R. Henn describes the progress of his ideas.

> His experience and knowledge followed the pattern of development that appears normal in the life of a Romantic poet; adoration, the taking fire of the mind at women's beauty; the recoil from disappointment and frustration into affairs that were unsatisfactory in varying degrees; a return to his idealized portrait, and a desperate attempt to rediscover it in the next generation; his marriage, and its overwhelming consequences in his philosophy; parenthood, and a certain stability; then (after the pattern of the lives of the poets), a growing excitement and intensity as the imagination seized new significance in the elements which it could now combine. For as the physical realities receded, the images took on a continually sharpening edge: the gap between the extremes of sensuality and the spiritual, 'the intercourse of angels', widened as both became emphasized in the 'passionate coldness' that marks the later thought.[10]

The early Yeats has what amounts almost to a mistrust of human love. Some of the early lyrics portray love's gentle and simple tenderness. More often there is a tone of lament for the sadness and the swift passing of love. This

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10 T. R. Henn, The Lonely Tower, p. 51.

develops slightly later into a note of ecstasy and spiritual longing that human love cannot satisfy, a desire for a divine beauty that is unstained by the world and never to be possessed in the world. Woman is then but the symbol of a perfect beauty, an intermediary between man and the spiritual. Love in reality is love of loveliness and eternal beauty. Pursuing such a love, the lover is ever restless and unsatisfied; he grows old and weary in his quest. His search by its intensity and singleness of purpose sets him off from other men and from all that most men consider worth possessing in the world. The quest is the Platonic quest for beauty, of course, with the single exception that the ideal beauty is frequently considered as suffering with man.

There are two basic reasons underlying Yeats's ideas of love: his Celtic temperament and his own Romantic nature. Of these, the former is perhaps the stronger. Horatio Krans writes:

> The quest of the ideal in all its forms, faith in the unseen life, the passion for romance and mystery, the pursuit of the intangible and evanescent, a vague melancholy and a vague unrest, the shrinking from the tumult of the world, characteristic of a race that has not greatly succeeded in dealing with the actualities of life -- these are Celtic traits, and all of them are vital in the creation of Mr. Yeats's art.[11]

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11 Horatio Krans, William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival, p. 189.

The second reason is his own innate Romanticism, evidenced in his early dreams of love, in his hopeless love for Maud Gonne despite her refusal either to marry him or to break completely with him, in his own refusal to accept his rejections as final, and in his holding fast to her image year after year until death.

Yeats's early women are dream women, fragile and delicate, gentle, nostalgic, altogether unreal, doomed to tragedy. Niamh, for instance, in the narrative poem entitled The Wanderings of Oisin, may be considered as typical. She was the fairy daughter of Aengus, King of the Young, and his wife, Edain. She had come from the far-off Kingdom of the Young, Tir-na-n'Og, to Ireland to enchant the Red Branch hero, Oisin.

> A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
> On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
> And like a sunset were her lips,
> A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
> A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
> But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
> And with the glimmering crimson glowed
> Of many a figured embroidery;
> And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
> That wavered like the summer streams,
> As her soft bosom rose and fell.[12]

Oisin fell under her spell just as Yeats fell under Maud Gonne's spell, both enslaved by unearthly beauty.

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12 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 410.

The description of Niamh is in itself Romantic, redolent of the poetry of Keats and Shelley and Rossetti. Part La Belle Dame sans Merci, part the enchantress Lamia, part the Blessed Damozel, Niamh is as beautiful, as ethereal, as unearthly as they. She is the type of Romantic beauty and Romantic woman, a tapestry rather than flesh and blood, vague, fanciful, remote and melancholy. She was the type, then and always, of Yeats's ideal woman; in her service men would die, but her spell they could never escape. Such an enchantment seemed the ideal love to young Yeats: it seems likely that his ideas changed little as age came to him.

The Indian poems of Crossways also describe a love that was remote and inaccessible, this time because of time and distance. Anashuya, the heroine of "Anashuya and Vijaya", was a priestess. The lovers in "The Indian to his Love" will withdraw far from men to enjoy their lonely love.

Yeats broods often on the sorrow of dying love and of a love that has died, the poetically languishing lament of one who -- without ever having known love -- bids it farewell. Love fades as the leaves fall, and almost as impersonally. The dead leaves symbolize a love that is dead.

> The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
> And weary and worn are our sad souls now.[13]

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13 Op. cit., p. 16

'Ah, do not mourn,' he said,
That we are tired, for other loves await us;
Hate on and love on through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity; our souls
Are love, and a continual farewell.[13]

Yeats's meeting with Maud Gonne took place in 1889. He wrote many years later, "I was twenty-three years old when the trouble of my life began."[14] The extremely beautiful young woman had come to his father's house, ostensibly to visit the artist but in reality to meet the young poet whose Wanderings of Oisin had recently been published.

It is not too difficult to estimate the impact she made on the impressionable Yeats. Jeffares quotes Yeats as writing, "I had gathered from Shelley and the Romantic poets an idea of perfect love. Perhaps I should never marry in church but I would love one woman all my life."[15] Jeffares continues:

> . . . his thoughts turned to beautiful women; and they were modelled on the wild Shelleyan heroines. His was an unusual character, and his ideal love was shaped by two of the dominant traits . . . his sense of difference and his ability to suppress or accentuate aspects of his personality; he idealised his love, yet it is easy to see some of the reasons which induced him to do so.
>
> In love with love, he had a desire for an exciting and unusual woman to love. Because he was different

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13 Op. cit., p. 17

14 W. B. Yeats, Unpublished autobiography, quoted by Jeffares, P. 29.

15 Jeffares, op. cit., p. 58

> himself, his love should add to his distinction. She was to have some of the qualities of those wild women, heroic and lawless. And because he was still a boy there was an air of unreality about his ideas, for he would sing his imagined mistress's charms with all the tragedy and hopelessness of one of Morris's heroes, and all would be for her approval, all in her service. She must have beauty fit for a poet to sing. It was to be a great love.[17]

With Yeats's mind so prepared for love, it was inevitable that Maud Gonne's loveliness and her fiery nationalism should lay powerful hold on him. It was her beauty that first captured him, making him more susceptible to any of her enthusiasms. His first necessity was to ensure her understanding of those things which he considered so important.

> I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the bloom of apples and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and stature so great she seemed of a divine race. Her movements were works of grace and I understood at last why the poets of antiquity, where we would but speak of face and form, sing, loving some lady, that she seems like a goddess. . . . she too was full of the Romantic movement.[18]

> I spoke much of my spiritual philosophy. How important it all seems to me. How much would I have given so that she might think exactly right on all these great questions. And today all is faint to me beside a moment when she passed before a window dressed in

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17 Op. cit., p. 59

18 Yeats, unpublished autobiography, quoted by Jeffares, p. 59

white and rearranged a spray of flowers in a vase.[19] Years later he wrote a poem which tried to express the excitement and enchantment of that moment. It seems, though, that he had as well a sense of impending disaster. He was, he later wrote,

> . . . incurably Romantic. I was in love but had not spoken of love and never meant to speak of love and as the months passed I gained a mastery of myself again. What wife would she make, I thought, what share could she have in the life of a student?[19]

Yet she was in his dreams, day and night. Her influence shaped his whole life. He became more actively nationalistic because of her influence and example, knowing that the man of action would appeal to her more than would the dreamer. He wrote plays for her; his poetry was full of her. At last, feeling that her need for protection and peace was greater than the awe in which he stood of her, he asked her to marry him. She refused, but asked for his friendship. And so the long years of frustration and attempted renunciation began. Yeats alternated between hope and despair, and seemed both unwilling and unable to throw off her spell.

Her beauty was all he had ever dreamed of, and more. It shared of the perfection of the Rose, of Helen of Troy, of Deirdre. She is described by these three symbols, and is later used as the symbol of beauty herself. Over and over

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19 W. B. Yeats, unpublished autobiography, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 60

again that beauty is recorded in poetry. She is the "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!"[20] There is always sadness associated with the thought of such loveliness, the sadness of impending doom.

> Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
> For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
> Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
> Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
> And Usna's children died.
>
> We and the labouring world are passing by:
> Amid men's souls, that waver and give place
> Like the pale waters in their wintry race,
> Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
> Lives on this lonely face.[21]
>
> And then you came with those red mournful lips,
> And with you came the whole of the world's tears,
> And all the trouble of her labouring ships,
> And all the trouble of her myriad years.[22]

Since love had become personal, less vague and shadowy, it brought with it worries about its object. Maud Gonne lived an active life, a woman who defended violence and movedby among violent men. Nature and man alike seem to menace her.

> A pity beyond all telling
> Is hid in the heart 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.[23]

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20 Collected Poems, p. 35

21 Op. cit., p. 40

22 Op. cit., p. 46

23 Op. cit., p. 45

The thought of death in connection with her brought its own pain, and his imagination frequently became morbid. When she was threatened by consumption as a result of her relief work among the starving Donegal peasants, she spent some time on the continent. He sent her this poem, which explains itself.

> I dreamed that one had died in a strange place
> Near no accustomed hand;
> And they had nailed the boards above her face,
> The peasants of that land,
> Wondering to lay her in that solitude.[24]

Still greater use of symbolism is made in the poems of The Wind Among the Reeds (1899). Yeats's love is no less strong, but the waiting has been long. Disappointment and a note of bitterness appear here and there. He has worked for her and with her most faithfully, but has received no reward for his faithful service. He is willing to remake the world for her if she will let him.

> All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,
> ... .
> Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.
>
> The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told;
> I hunger to build them anew . . .[25]

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24 Op. cit., p. 47

25 Op. cit., p. 62

But Maud Gonne was, in many ways, better able to face the realities of life than was Yeats himself. Her nationalistic activities filled her life, and took her from the poet as surely as the fairy host stole Bridget from her young husband in "The Hosting of the Sidhe".[26] The one-act play, The Land of Heart's Desire, which tells how Maire Bruin was stolen from the real world by her longing for the vague and impossible fairy world, was written with Maud Gonne's nature in mind. All Yeats could do under such circumstances was wait and hope, like

> . . . him who sold tillage, and house, and goods,
> And sought through lands and islands numberless years,
> Until he found, with laughter and with tears,
> A woman of so shining loveliness
> That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,
> A little stolen tress. I, too, await
> The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.[27]

His duty was that of willing and faithful service.

But meanwhile, his love must be hidden alike from the pity or the laughter of man. And since its intensity required expression in poetry at least, it must be expressed in symbol and metaphor. Frequently he used the beautiful yet elusive trout as a symbol of the beautiful but evasive woman. In "The Fish" and in "The Song of Wandering Aengus" the symbolism was effective.

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26 Op. cit., p. 63

27 Op. cit., p. 78

Although you hide in the ebb and flow
Of the pale tide when the moon has set,
The people of coming days will know
About the casting out of my net,
And how you have leaped times out of mind
Over the little silver cords,
And think that you were hard and unkind,
And blame you with many bitter words . . . [28]

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout. . .

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands
I will find out where she has gone . . .[29]

An ancient Irish symbol is used in "He Mourns for the Change that has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World". The pursuit of the white, hornless deer by the hound symbolizes the chase of the elusive woman by the hunter, man. Lust, carefully disguised, has begun to replace the former Romantic wooing. This poem, incidentally,

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28 Op. cit., pp. 64-65

29 Op. cit., pp. 66-67

belongs to the period of the unfortunate liaison with the lady whom Yeats called Diana Vernon.

> Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns?
> I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;
> I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of Thorns,
> For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and fear
> Under my feet that they follow you night and day.
> A man with a hazel wand came without sound;
> He changed me suddenly: I was looking another way.[30]

The poems of the Diana Vernon period (it lasted less than a year) have a stronger tendency towards the physical, but even they are still full of the Romantic languour and shadowiness of Keats, Shelley, or Rossetti at their worst. Such expressions as "pale dew", "roses of crimson fire", "lonely hour", "deep twilight",[31] "wandering tress", "pearl-pale hand", "shadowy loveliness" [32] exemplify the vapoury Romantic tendency. It is significant that the earthy love could never, at this time or later, replace the spiritual love for Maud Gonne.

> Pale brows, still hands, and dim hair,
> I had a beautiful friend
> And dreamed that the old despair
> Would end in love in the end:
> She looked in my heart one day
> And saw your image was there;
> She has gone weeping away.[32]

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30 Op. cit., p. 68

31 Op. cit., p. 69

32 Op. cit., p. 68

Meantime he offers to his beloved his dreams and the promise of his lasting and faithful remembrance.

I bring you with reverent hands
The books of my numberless dreams.[33]

I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.[34]

Though you are in your shining days,
Voices among the crowd
And new friends busy with your praise,
Be not unkind or proud,
But think about old friends the most;
Time's bitter flood will rise,
Your beauty perish and be lost
For all eyes but these eyes.[35]

Even when he feels the conviction, recorded in such poems as "He Hears the Cry of the Sedge" and "He Thinks of his Past Greatness When a Part of the Constellations of Heaven"[36], that Maud Gonne will never be his except in death, his devotion never falters. One wonders whether, by this time, he is in love with a woman or with an idea.

I became a rush that horses tread:
I became a man, a hater of the wind,
Knowing one, out of all things, alone, that his head
May not lie on the breast nor his lips on the hair
Of the woman that he loves, until he dies.[37]

Were you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;

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33 Op. cit., p.70

34 Op. cit., p. 81

35 Op. cit., p. 79

36 Op. cit., pp. 75, 81.

37 Op. cit., pp. 81-82

And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead;
Nor would you rise and hasten away,[38]

The poems of three volumes published between Maud Gonne's marriage and his own marriage (In the Seven Woods in 1904, The Green Helmet and Other Poems in 1910, and Responsibilities in 1914) reveal three trends in the love poetry: bitterness, agony, and consolation.

The extent of his disappointment and humiliation can scarcely be over-estimated. While he had been pained by Maud's frequent rejections of his offers of marriage, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his rival was a country, an idea of a country. Since he largely shared his beloved's nationalistic ideals, he could sympathize fairly well with the devotion to a cause that disregarded an individual. If she did not spare him, neither did she spare herself. And he still had the solace of hope: when she no longer had a country to serve, she might turn to him if Ireland's freedom were won. Now, unexpectedly, he had been replaced by a flesh and blood rival, one considered by almost everyone to be no fit match for a delicately nurtured lady. Patriot and hero John MacBride was, but even his own relatives considered the match an unsuitable one. Arthur Griffith, friend to both

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38 Op. cit., pp. 80-81

Maud and MacBride, wrote to dissuade them from the marriage. All was, of course, in vain.

When Yeats had recovered from the shock that rendered him almost inarticulate, the bitterness began to appear. It ranged between the irony of

> Sweetheart, do not love too long:
> I loved long and long,
> And grew to be out of fashion
> Like an old song,[39]

the intenser bitterness of

> Never give all the heart, for love
> Will hardly seem worth thinking of
> To passionate women if it seem
> Certain . . .
> He that made this knows all the cost,
> For he gave all his heart and lost,[40]

and the coarse hatred of an unpublished poem found in his diary,

> My dear is angry, that of late
> I cry all base blood down,
> As if she had not taught me hate
> By kisses to a clown.[41]

The agony of soul was largely inward, but occasionally it appears in burning words. The leaves -- old symbols of dead love or dying love-- have withered because he has told them his dreams.[42] Even the thoughtof other lovely women

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39 Op. cit., p. 93

40 Op. cit., p. 87

41 W. B. Yeats, Unpublished material, quoted by Jeffares, p. 142

42 Collected Poems, P. 87

brings pain too great to bear, for all -- like his own love -- have suffered tragedy. Yet her beauty still holds sway over him, regardless of the passing of time. Her hair is greying, but the thought of her growing old brings him no comfort.

> . . . Heart cries, 'No,
> I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain.
> Time can but make her beauty over again:
> Because of that great nobleness of hers
> The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,
> Burns but more clearly. . .
>
> O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,
> You'd know the folly of being comforted.[43]

> I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,
> Made out of a wild thought, is in my marrow.
> There's no man may look upon her, no man,
> As when newly grown to be a woman,
> Tall and noble but with face and bosom
> Delicate in colour as apple blossom.
> This beauty's kinder, yet for a reason
> I could weep that the old is out of season.[44]

Even when Maud Gonne MacBride, for reasons considered valid by her confessor, secured a legal separation from her husband, Yeats had no hope of marriage. She had become a Catholic, and in her faith she saw future happiness in Heaven at least. Yeats had no such comfort. The poem "King and No King" describes the No King, Sean MacBride, as having become King by refusal to understand his unsuitability. He prevailed by cannon which overcame words. And now he cannot be

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43 Op. cit., p. 86 44 Op.cit., p. 85

completely dethroned.

> . . . we that had thought
> To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale
> Have been defeated by that pledge you gave
> In momentary anger long ago;
> And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
> That in the blinding light beyond the grave
> We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?[45]

Out of all this pain and agony there came at last consolation of a kind. He never resigned himself to his loss, but there were some satisfactions just the same. He remembered how much of his best work there had been done in that long period of apprenticeship.

> I had this thought a while ago,
> 'My darling cannot understand
> What I have done, or what would do
> In this blind bitter land.'
>
> And I grew weary of the sun
> Until my thoughts cleared up again,
> Remembering that the best I have done
> Was done to make it plain.
> . . .
> That had she done so who can say
> What would have shaken from the seive?
> I might have thrown poor words away
> And been content to live. [46]

One achievement above all others does he take pride in: he has painted her in his poetry as no artist could Men in the future can say of him

> 'He shadowed in a glass
> What thing her body was.'[47]

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45 Op. cit., p. 102

46 Op. cit., p. 100

47 Op. cit., p. 100

What he had achieved, he had achieved for her. Now time had brought her peace, and the memory of their mutual sympathy should bring him peace as well.

> Enough if the work has seemed
> So did she your strength renew,
> A dream that a lion had dreamed
> Till the wilderness cried aloud,
> A secret between you two,
> Between the proud and the proud.[48]

Her beauty and simplicity would always be her justification, although they carried with them as well their own doom, their own fatality. It was unnecessary to admire her; it would be fruitless to blame her.

> For she had fiery blood
> When I was young,
> And trod so sweetly proud
> As 'twere upon a cloud,
> A woman Homer sung.[49]

> Why should I blame her that she filled my days
> With misery? . . .
> What could have made her peaceful with a mind
> That nobleness made simple as a fire,
> With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
> That is not natural in an age like this,
> Being high and solitary and most stern?
> Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
> Was there another Troy for her to burn?[50]

He sought comfort in still another way, in the theory of the Mask. He had believed her beauty of form to be the image of a soul as beautiful, one that was the mate of his

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48 Op. cit., p. 104

49 Op. cit., p. 100

50 Op. cit., p. 101

own soul. But was the beauty that had attracted him rather a disguise? And if it was indeed a disguise, what then did it conceal? Perhaps the woman he had so long sought to win had not, after all, been worth the winning.

'Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.'
'O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold.'

'I would but find what's there to find,
Love or deceit.'
'It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind.'

'But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquie.'
'O no, my dear, let all that be;
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me.'[51]

The question was never answered directly in words. The answer may, however, be assumed from the later verse. He, too, by this time had assumed a mask, worn for protection, to hide whatever in his feelings might arouse the pity or the ridicule of the crowd. But lyric poetry cannot wear a mask for long, or it ceases to be lyric; Yeats's lyric note remained as strong and true as ever.

There opened to him in 1916, after Maud Gonne's final rejection of his offer of marriage, still another avenue of consolation. It seems at least probably that this

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51 Op. cit., p. 106

last proposal of Yeats's was made primarily out of a sense of duty, and that his interest was even then strongly centred upon Iseult Gonne, Maud's lovely adopted daughter, who seemed to him the recreation of her foster-mother's loveliness without the "Opinionated mind"[52] and the idealism so extreme that it amounted to fanaticism -- both of which had repelled him for many years. Iseult had been largely responsible, herself, for that momentary transferring of affection. She had herself proposed marriage to Yeats when she was fifteen, and had been repulsed. But Yeats was beauty's fool, and she was extremely beautiful. She was also extremely clever, well-educated, and intellectually sympathetic. She was flattered by the attention of such a famous man, one whose life had for years closely paralleled her mother's life. When Yeats proposed to her in 1917, she rejected the marriage after much heart-searching, thus giving pain both to the poet and to herself. Yeats had been touched more deeply than he at first realised, and although his marriage to Miss Hyde-Lees followed soon, the early weeks of that marriage were far from serenely happy.

> . . .O heart, we are old;
> The living beauty is for younger men:
> We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.[53]

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52 Op. cit., p. 213 53 Op. cit., p. 156

A strange thing surely that my Heart, when love had come
unsought
Upon the Norman upland or in that poplar shade
Should find no burden but itself and yet should be worn
out.
It could not bear that burden and therefore it went mad.

The south wind brought it longing, and the east wind
despair,
The west wind made it pitiful, and the north wind afraid.
It feared to give its love a hurt with all the tempest
there;
It feared the hurt that she could give and therefore it
went mad.

. . .

The Heart behind its rib laughed out. 'You have called
me mad,' it said,
'Because I made you turn away and run from that young
child;
How could she mate with fifty years that was so wildly
bred?
Let the cage bird and the cage bird mate and the wild
bird mate in the wild.'

'You but imagine lies all day, O murderer,' I replied.
'And all those lies have but one end, poor wretches to
betray;
I did not find in any cage the woman at my side.
O but her heart would break to learn my thoughts are far
away.'[54]

Yeats's marriage made no complete break with his past life and his past love, although he obviously intended that it should. His choice was wise, and there is no doubt that marriage brought him much comfort and some consolation. But Yeats's hunger was rather of the soul than of the body, and it was the spiritual hunger that Mrs. Yeats, despite her sym-

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54 Op. cit., pp. 247-248

pathy and understanding, despite the automatic writing with which she occupied the would-be philosopher's mind, could not completely satisfy. Yeats had fallen in love with love, then with an ideally beautiful woman who, as he thought, was also his ideal. He had found the reality lovely enough, but had transformed even that reality. He had built up a legend, and was in love with that legend. What chance did a woman of flesh and blood have to win him completely.

It was not ignorance of his debt to Mrs. Yeats that kept him enslaved. Rather he paid conscious tribute to her.

> . . . all day long I look
> Upon this lady's beauty
> As though I had found in a book
> A pictured beauty.[55]

> Do not because this day I have grown saturnine
> Imagine that lost love, inseparable from my thought
> Because I have no other youth, can make me pine;
> For how should I forget the wisdom that you brought,
> The comfort that you made?[56]

She was the Sheba to his Solomon: he saw in her a beauty that equalled her wisdom. Yet there was an agony of regret in many of his poems, even those written soon after the marriage. In "The Collar-Bone of a Hare" there is a sneer at "the old bitter world where they marry in churches".[57] In "Solomon and

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55 Op. cit., pp. 152-153

56 Op. cit., p. 202

57 Op. cit., p. 153

the Witch" there are found some significant lines.

> Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,
> For each an imagined image brings
> And finds a real image there.[58]

His dreams are still filled with her image, the real image of old.

> . . . always when I look death in the face,
> When I clamber to the heights of sleep,
> Or when I grow excited with wine,
> Suddenly I meet your face.[59]

It seems painfully likely that Mrs. Yeats knew of the power Madame MacBride still exercised over the poet's mind. "An Image from a Past Life" recounts such an experience. Among the natural beauties of night, starlight on a dark stream, a vision appears.

> He. Why have you laid your hands upon my eyes?
> What can have suddenly alarmed you
> Whereon 'twere best
> My eyes should never rest?
> . . .
>
> She. A sweetheart from another life floats there
> As though she had been forced to linger
> From vague distress
> Or arrogant loveliness,
> Merely to loosen out a tress
> Among the starry eddies of her hair
> Upon the paleness of a finger.[60]

The poet never denied the presence of this image. Even when he and Maud had been separated by quarrels and mutual misunderstandings, her idealized form floated nearby

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58 Op. cit., p. 199

59 Op. cit., p. 174

60 Op. cit., p. 201

and his memories of the ideal brought him all the old-time Romantic agonies. She was his phoenix[61]; old age brought only renewal of beauty. Still she had

> . . . the simplicity of a child,
> And that proud look as though she had gazed into the burning sun,
> And all the shapely body no tittle gone astray.
> I mourn for that most lonely thing.[62]

> Like the moon her kindness is,
> If kindness I may call
> What has no comprehension in't,
> But is the same for all
> As though my sorrow were a scene
> Upon a painted wall.
>
> So like a bit of stone I lie
> Under a broken tree.
> I could recover if I shrieked
> My heart's agony
> To passing bird, but I am dumb
> From human dignity.[63]
>
> 'She will change,' I cried,
> 'Into a withered crone.'
> The heart in my side,
> That so still had lain,
> In noble rage replied
> And beat upon the bone:
>
> 'Uplift those eyes and throw
> Those glances unafraid:
> She would as bravely show
> Did all the fabric fade;
> No withered crone I saw
> Before the world was made.[64]

When he thought of death, his terror and dismay were lessened

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61 Op. cit., pp. 170-172

62 Op. cit., p. 172

63 Op. cit., p. 250

64 Op. cit., pp. 296-297

by the certainty that it would bring him again the joy of first love, then complete union and understanding denied in life.

> But in the grave all, all shall be renewed.
> The certainty that I shall see that lady
> Leaning or standing or walking
> In the first loveliness of womanhood,
> And with the fervour of my youthful eyes,
> Has set me muttering like a fool.[65]

In summary, it may be stated with assurance that Yeats, both in his concept of beauty and his concept of love, remained from first to last a Romantic poet. There has been found disillusion here and there in the poetry, but it would have been impossible for any but a Romantic made wretched by disappointment. Notes of realism merely strengthen the contrast with the fundamental Romanticism. The Romanticism itself changed from the dim and shadowy type found in the earlier poems to the vigorous and passionate intensity of the later poetry. His eyes stayed always fixed on the stars, and his aspiring song rang deep and true.

His ideas of beauty underwent few changes throughout the years. It began with the Platonic ideal -- an intangible and dreamy concept of the perfect beauty of the Rose, a beauty that man recollects and sees but seldom, a beauty that suffers with man. Then the dream became centred upon a living woman

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65 Op. cit., p. 173

who was, in her loveliness, herself close to the ideal. But it was still true that

It was the dream itself enchanted me.[66]

Till the end of his life he held to the dream, and longed to recapture it again after death.

His ideas of love were alike fundamentally unchanged throughout his life. From youth he craved the unusual and the distinctive. He found it easier to love the evanescent than the tangible, the soul than the body.

Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
What more is there to say?[67]

He was ready to remind himself of

The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul,[68]

but he could not alter the nature that drove him to such a folly. This love he hoped to find recreated beyond the grave. Regardless of the opposite views of most critics, it is the contention of this thesis that his idea of love as well as that of beauty are thoroughly Romantic.

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66 Op. cit., p. 392

67 Op. cit., p. 234

68 Op. cit., p. 267

2. An Ideal World.

I sing the ancient ways.[69]

I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland.[70]

The preceding pages of this chapter have shown that W. B. Yeats in true Romantic fashion first created for himself concepts of an ideal beauty and an ideal love and then, partly by chance but largely by his own imaginative power and force, compelled his actual life experiences to correspond very closely to that ideal. In Maud Gonne he found both an ideal beauty and an ideal love, but he transformed even these to correspond with his first dream. When the reality failed to correspond with the ideal, he largely ignored the reality and glorified the dream still more. Such Romantic idealism and intensity continued throughout his life, actually increasing with the years. In just such a way he created an ideal world, building it largely upon the past, and compelling the actual pattern of events to correspond with his ideal. When the reality fell short of the ideal, he had moments of disillusion, but the dream intensified also as the years went on, up until the end of life. Even confronted with death, he still sang his songs of the ideal which might yet become the real. His

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69 Collected Poems, p. 35 70 Op. cit., p. 303

dreams were largely achieved, indeed a proof of the driving force that lay behind them.

This section will pass from a survey of what he had planned to do to a discussion of his interest in and transformation of the past and to an account of the nationalism which planned the dreams and helped make them come true.

Yeats went to Ireland's past to find an ideal which would underlie his plans for present and future. Both mythology and history contributed to the blueprint for a new Ireland. He was inspired by his love of the country's beauty and by John O'Leary's precepts and example. The resulting idea of Ireland was patriotic and mystical, but also practical. It bore fruit in the Irish Literary Renascence and the Irish Dramatic Revival, and almost certainly also in the founding of the Irish Free State itself. Yeats's three interests were poetry, magical philosophy, and Ireland: all three were inseparably interwoven. The following pages will trace the steps from love of country through pride in country, hunger for liberty, to ardent and idealistic nationalism.

Mention has already been made in Chapter I to the remarkably strong love Yeats had for his native Sligo.[71] His earliest memories were of Sligo's old homes, her lakes

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71 See Chapter I, p. 8

and groves and hills. Even after he had moved to London with his family he remembered his former home with longing and affection, emotions kept alive by his mother's stories and by her own love for the home of her youth. In Reveries over Childhood and Youth he described, many years later, this passionate hunger of his childhood for Sligo.

> A poignant memory came upon me the other day while I was passing the drinking-fountain near Holland Park, for there I and my sister had spoken together of our longing for Sligo and our hatred of London. I know we were both very close to tears and remember with wonder, for I had never known anyone that cared for such momentoes [sic] that I longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand. It was some old race instinct like that of a savage.[72]

> Years afterwards, when I was ten or twelve years old and in London, I would remember Sligo with tears, and when I began to write, it was there I hoped to find my audience.[73]

His holiday trips to Ireland became more significant as he grew up. He listened eagerly to legends about this place or that, legends full of folk-lore and the supernatural. Every spot began to have its associations and its memories. He began to develop the Romantic love for mountains, their magnificence, their solitude. He loved the old homes and ruined castles, any spot enriched by story and legend.

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72 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 33

73 Op. cit., p. 17

The little towns and villages, the lakes and hills and mountains of Sligo appear often in his earlier poetry. Sleuth Wood, Rosses, "the hills above Glen-Car"[74], are all mentioned in "The Stolen Child".[75] "The Ballad of Father O'Hart" offers a litany of Irish place-names.

> . . . weeping score by score,
> People came into Colooney;
> For he'd died at ninety-four.
>
> There was no human keening;
> The birds from Knocknarea
> And the world round Knocknashee
> Came keening in that day.
>
> The young birds and old birds
> Came flying, heavy and sad;
> Keening in from Tiraragh,
> Keening from Ballinafad;
>
> Keeing from Inishmurray . . .[76]

Yeats himself was the man who dreamed of faeryland in the poem of the same name. Here more of the lilting place-names appear.

> He stood among a crowd at Dromahair . . .
>
> He wandered by the sands of Lissadell. . .
>
> He mused beside the well of Scanavin . . .
>
> He slept under the hill of Lugnagall . . .[77]

In "The Hosting of the Sidhe" the fairy band sweeps across the country.

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74 Op. cit., pp. 20-21

75 Op. cit., pp. 20-21

76 Op. cit., pp. 24-25

77 Op. cit., pp. 49-50

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of CloothnaBare;[78]

while in "The Host of the Air" they fly madly over

. . . the drear Hart Lake.[79]

The place-names in "The Fiddler of Dooney" have the gay and liquid melody of the violin.

When I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My brother is priest in Kilvarnet,
My cousin in Mocharabuiee.[80]

Then there is Innisfree, the refuge of his boyhood, a place immortalized through the nostalgic poem of the same name by which Yeats is probably best known.

Yeats in his later poetry is occasionally freer with description than he was in the earlier poems, but it is largely description of the area around Coole and Ballylee. But in general there are fewer attempts to accent any one place. The poet's interests had turned long before from the particular to the general. Ireland herself should be exalted, he felt, rather than a particular spot. This change had begun when Yeats was about twenty, and it was a shift in his whole way of thought.

Yeats had begun to be a patriot early. When he was a schoolboy in London he had been taunted by his school-mates

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78 Op. cit., p. 61

79 Op. cit., p. 63

80 Op. cit., p. 82

with his nationality, and in his reaction to their invective there may be seen the roots of his later Romantic attitude to his country.

> Anti-Irish feeling was running high, for the Land League had been founded and landlords had been shot, and I, who had no politics, was yet full of pride, for it is romantic to live in a dangerous country.[81]

With his father, himself a patriot and ardent advocate of Home Rule, Yeats began to attend meetings of a Home Rule League and the Contemporary Club when he was about twenty. At the latter club, he met John O'Leary, recently returned to Ireland from exile in Paris. O'Leary, one of the leaders of a Fenian conspiracy in the 1860's, had been sentenced to twenty years penal servitude but after serving five years of the sentence he had been released on condition that he should not return to Ireland until the remaining fifteen years had passed. An extremely handsome old man, he still retained the generous impulses of his youth. He had gathered round him a group of patriots who were held together by the strength of his character and the force of his ideals. His literary standards were as high as those of Yeats, and the latter was ready to admire and to be influenced by the old patriot. It was O'Leary who introduced Yeats to the strongly Celtic poet, Samuel Ferguson, whose verse recreated the Irish mytho-

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81 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 38.

logical and legendary tales, and to Davis, Allingham and Mangan. From them Yeats caught a spark that later flamed into the Irish Literary Revival. His dream had begun to shape itself.

The dream was that of a free and united Ireland. If the two halves of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, could be brought together by "a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory"[82], an important first step would have been taken. He planned, as Thomas Davis had planned before, a new and glorious Irish culture which would have its roots in Gaelic tradition and which would flower in the heart of every Irishman. He was already well-versed in folk-lore, but he now began to read deeply in Irish history, Irish mythology, both in translation. It was a challenge which the young poet faced: he could either write for England or for Ireland, for money or for an ideal. There was no choice; he followed his heart. He had written when a mere boy, "The greatest on earth often have but two aims, two linked and ardoureus thoughts, fatherland and song." 83 Now his patriotism became more conscious and more urgent. He wrote, "Our Irish Romantic movement . . . should make Ireland, as Ireland and all other lands were in ancient times, a holy

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82 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 57

83 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, (smaller volume), p. 37

land to its own people."[84] There was no doubt in the poet's mind that he was to be the creator of this new world. In his own words,

> I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show them in a vision something of the face of Ireland, to any of my own people who would look where I bid them.[85]

In style and language the new literature would, he hoped, adopt the best from both Gaelic and English and transmute it into a new language.

> Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language . . . until there has been made a golden bridge from the old to the new.[86]

> If somebody could make a style which would not be an English style and yet would be musical and full of colour, many others would catch fire from him, and we would have a really great school of ballad poetry in Ireland.[87]

It was under the impulse of this emotion that he wrote The Wanderings of Oisin. The tale came from mythology, and told the story of Oisin, a mighty hero of the Red Branch. He was lured by Niamh, daughter of Aengus who was King of the Young, taken away to the Kingdom of the Young, Tir-na-n'og,

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85 W. B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight, p. 1.

86 W. B. Yeats, in an article written for The United Irishman, December, 1892, quoted by Jeffares, op. cit., p. 92

87 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, (smaller volume), p. 39

and there he lived for three hundred years that passed as three days. Troubled at last by vague memories of earth, he longed to leave the ceaseless joys of Tir-na-n'og for a time. Niamh warned him that he must not touch the earth during his visit, but he accidentally did so. The weight of years came upon him at once, and he could never return to Niamh again. The story has parallels in many literatures, but Yeats managed to invest it with a magic and an enchantment that was peculiarly Irish.

Yeats made use of the myths of the Red Branch cycle in two other early poems. "Fergus and the Druid" is a slight variant of the old myth. Fergus in the old tale lost his throne to Conchubar through the wiliness of Nessa, Conchubar's mother, whom Fergus had married. Yeats transforms the tale and makes Fergus voluntarily surrender the throne and its responsibilities to seek wisdom. The story of Cuchulain is the story of the heroic warrior's accidental killing of his own son, and his despairing yet valiant warring on the waves. Yeats later identified himself with both Fergus and Cuchulain: the latter is, in fact, one of the most persistent and effective of his symbols to indicate courage in the face of insurmountable odds. [88]

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88 See pages 36-40, 395-396, Collected Poems.

Still other mythological tales were used effectively by Yeats. "The Madness of King Goll" is based on an old legend[89], transformed by the poet's lyric gift. In poem as well as in play, the story of Baile and Aillin has been told, -- a story of a love so strong it survived the grave.[90] Another tale of a love that greatly stirred Yeats has been commemorated in the poetic drama 'Deirdre' and in several poems. Deirdre was the Irish Helen, of beauty so great that it carried its own doom with it. Yeats frequently referred to Maud Gonne as Deirdre, the symbol of tragic beauty.[91] The Celtic mythology supplied the poet with other plots for plays, and also a rich store of symbolical references. In fact, much of the alleged obscurity of Yeats's poetry of the middle period is due to his use of Celtic symbol. No critic who does not know the background of myth can understand or explain the verse.

But Yeats did not depend wholly on legend or on myth for a picture of the glorious past which would inspire a glorious future. Many of his poems, particularly those of the later volumes, referred to famous characters in Irish

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89 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, pp. 17-20

90 Op. cit., pp. 327-328, 459-465.

91 Op. cit., "The Rose of the World", p. 41; "Under the Moon", pp. 91-92. Any and all of these tales may be found in Lady Gregory, Cuchulain of Muirthemne.

history. He praised Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet, and Wolfe Tone, all those who faced death so that Ireland's freedom might be won.[92] The patriot, Roger Casement, is sung as well.[93] But it is especially Charles Stuart Parnell, the leader of the Irish party in the British parliament, that Yeats writes of.[94] The poet was stirred by the heroic figure of Parnell, who died a broken and disappointed man in 1891. He praised all who had served Ireland, holding them up as patriotic models to be imitated. Among his last poems there is one addressed to the new generation of poets in Ireland, which urges them to maintain the heroic ideals of former days. The past will be their model.

> Sing the lords and ladies gay
> That were beaten into the clay
> Through seven heroic centuries;
> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry.[95]

In Yeats's early poetry he put into verse his promise of faithful literary service to Mother Ireland, and puts himself thereby into the company of poets whose songs were centred about their country.

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92 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, pp. 121, 319.

93 Op. cit., p. 351

94 Op. cit., pp. 123, 319-320, 355-356, 359

95 Op. cit., p. 400

Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood nurtured, quiet-eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
. . .
Come near; I would before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:[96]

Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song.[97]

Like Davis, Mangan, and Ferguson, he used the tales of the past to make Ireland heroic in present and future. The joys and glories of the past were intimately bound up with freedom. Loss of freedom was the cause of present tragedy.

There was a green branch hung with many a bell
When her own people ruled this tragic isle.[98]

Through the years rebellion has often stirred. In "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" an old man compares past and present. Perhaps it may be true again that

. . . lads are making pikes again
For some conspiracy,
And crazy rascals rage their fill
At human tyranny . . .[99]

When Yeats was planning the ~~National~~ Irish Literary Society (founded in London in 1891), the National Literary Society (founded in Dublin in 1893), and the Irish National Theatre

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96 Op. cit., p. 35
97 Op. cit., p. 56
98 Op. cit., p. 51
99 Op. cit., p. 52

(founded in Dublin 1898) his ideals were lofty and patriotic. The writers of the two literary societies usually took the tone of their writings from Yeats's avowed purpose of glorifying Ireland, and shared his devotion to Celtic tradition and belief in Ireland's lofty destiny. His assertion was their charter:

> We were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end re-establish the old confident joyous world.[100]

That battle may have seemed very far away to Yeats, but it was very real as well. And he was not alone in his belief that the cultural objective was not the final objective. He quotes Standish O'Grady, the eminent Irish Historian and writer, as saying,

> We have now a literary movement, it is not very important; it will be followed by a political movement, that will not be very important; then must come a military movement, that will be important indeed.[101]

Yeats's poem, "The Rose of Battle", is itself a vague and mystical call to "wage God's battles".[102]

There was much of the same stirring patriotism in the purposeful panning[1] of the Literary Theatre. Hone writes that "Yeats was convinced that the Irish people were at that

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100 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, (smaller volume), p. 43

101 W. B. Yeats, Dramatis Personae, p. 42

102 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 42

precise stage in their history when 'imagination, shaped by many stirring events, desires dramatic expression.'"[103] A joint statement issued by the sponsors of this movement stated their wish to show that Ireland was "the home of an ancient idealism",[104] while Yeats quotes with approval Lady Gregory's statement, "We work to add dignity to Ireland."[105] There is no doubt that most of the plays presented did achieve the standard set by Yeats and Lady Gregory. Such a play as Cathleen ni Houlihan, for example, deeply stirred the audiences, and probably had some share in bringing about the Easter Rising of 1916. Even the disturbances which surrounded the presentation of The Countess Cathleen and Synge's Playboy of the Western World proved the intensity of audience reaction, and eventually a more tolerant attitude resulted.

Yeats's own patriotism began to chill somewhat about the turn of the century as a result of his long and anxious wooing, of the disturbances mentioned above which seemed to him proof that "The Soul of Ireland has become a vapour and her body a stone,"[106] and of the pedestrian gait of a people who, had they willed, might have soared.

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103 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, (smaller volume), p. 77

104 Lady Gregory, Journal, p. 9

105 W. B. Yeats, Dramatis Personae, p. 74

106 Op. cit., p. 106

The first of these three reasons was perhaps the fundamental one, the perpetual prick that made other irritations unendurable. "I thought myself loving neither vice nor virtue; but virtue has come upon me and given me a nation instead of a home."[107]

The change in the poet's attitude to Ireland and to literature was complete. The earlier Romantic ideas of country had become more realistic. The first fiery passion of patriotism had given way to a more reasoned, sometimes a more disillusioned, calmness. In Dramatis Personae he discusses this change at more length.

> When I was twenty-five or twenty-six I planned a Légende des Siècles of Ireland that was to set out with my Wanderings of Oisin and show something of every century. Lionel Johnson's work and, later, Lady Gregory's, carried on the work in a different form, and I did not see, until Yeats began to write, that we must renounce the deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City in the imagination, and express the idea of the individual.[108]

> Davis . . . was concerned with ideas of Ireland, with conscious patriotism. His Ireland was artificial, an idea built up in a couple of generations by a few commonplace men. This artificial idea has done me . . . much harm . . .[109]

The poet's disillusion was further increased by the Lane Controversy and the bitterness it stirred up in 1912 and 1913. This bitterness was reflected in the poetry, and was

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107 Op. cit., p. 103

108 Op. cit., p.

109 Op. cit., pp 89-90

directed particularly against the average man who seemed to lack all courage. Maud Gonne had almost started a riot of the Dubliners in 1897 during anti-English demonstrations. Yeats wrote of the event thus:

> . . . she would of late
> Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
> Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
> Had they but courage equal to desire.[110]

The memory of the contempt he had there expressed must have come back to him when the Easter Rising took place. In several poems he paid tribute to these 1916 rebels, and joyed in their courage. 'A terrible beauty is born.'[111]

Thereafter, Yeats gradually regained much of the old patriotic fire, although he saw follies and stupidity wherever they appeared. They did not spoil the dream he had by this time regained, and it held him to the end of his life. He saw excuses for political and social blunders.

> Out of Ireland have we come.
> Great hatred, little room,
> Maimed us at the start.
> I carry from my mother's womb
> A fanatic heart.[112]

His verse was perhaps only incidentally patriotic, but the note of passion was strong just the same.

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110 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 101

111 Op. cit., p. 202

112 Op. cit., p. 288

I sing what was lost and dread what was won,
I walk in a battle fought over again,
My king a lost king, and lost soldiers my men;
Feet to the Rising and Setting may run,
They always beat on the same small stone.[113]

Still the poet remembered with exultation the heroes who accepted death and exile for Ireland's cause, but there is a biting sarcasm side by side with the pride. Through it all, however, there is a deeply grained knowledge of the persistence of all that is heroic.

Remember all those renowned generations,
They left their bodies to fatten the wolves,
They left their homesteads to fatten the foxes,
Fled to far countries, or sheltered themselves
In cavern, crevice, or hole,
Defending Ireland's soul.

Be still, be still, what can be said?
My father sang that song,
But time amends old wrong,
All that is finished, let it fade.

Remember all those renowned generations,
Remember all that have sunk in their blood,
Remember all that have died on the scaffold,
Remember all that have fled, that have stood,
Stood, took death like a tune
On an old tambourine.

Be still, be still . . .

Fail, and that history turns into rubbish,
All that great past to a trouble of fools;
Those that come after shall mock at O'Donnell,
Mock at the memory of both O'Neills,
Mock Emmet, mock Parnell,
All the renown that fell.

Be still, be still . . .[114]

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113 Op. cit., p. 359 114 Op. cit., pp. 377-8

There is particular irony in the repetition of the refrain after the last stanza. The need for continuity of sacrifice is often repeated. Writing as late as 1938 of the 1916 rebels, he said,

> Some had no thought of victory
> But had gone out to die
> That Ireland's mind be greater,
> Her heart mount up on high;
> And yet who knows what's yet to come?
> For Patrick Pearse had said
> That in every generation
> Must Ireland's blood be shed.[115]

In the same year, a very significant year politically, Yeats wrote,

> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark . . .[116]

And mere months before his death Yeats can consider history in its cyclic repetition,

> Many times man lives and dies
> Between his two eternities,
> That of race and that of soul,
> And ancient Ireland knew it all.[117]

The final wish is that the Irish people in days to come may remain "still the indomitable Irishry".[118]

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115 Op. cit., p. 373

116 Op. cit., p. 398

117 Op. cit., p. 398

118 Op. cit., p. 400

So, then, Yeats had planned his ideal world, one that was largely of the spirit. It was built upon an idealized past, transformed by the poet's imaginative power into a world of dream and perfection, and peopled by idealized creatures that were heroic and all but immortal. He himself would fain share such heroism and immortality, to make him a fitter mate for his ideal love, Maud Gonne, who had the heroism and a beauty that seemed immortal. He recorded his dream, and his monument is that some of it was realized in the Literary and Dramatic Revivals, and even in the Irish Free State itself.

3. Yeats's Vision of Nature.

. . . midnight's all a glimmer and noon a purple glow,[119]

Incidental mention has already been made of Yeats's cloudy and dreamy vision of nature, and the subject requires brief discussion before this chapter closes. It has been pointed out in the chapter on Romanticism that the typical Romantic frequently invests nature with a blurred and hazy charm that comes either from distance of the object or from an attitude of mind that transforms what is clearly seen or disregards the clear vision of daylight for the haze of dawn or twilight.[120] In this sense no poet could more truly be a Romantic than Yeats. All was cloud and shadow in his poetry.

It was not through lack of observation that he failed to record the exact object, for in his youth he had been interested in natural science and his observation was then remarkably acute and detailed. Had he wished, he might have reproduced this detail in poetry, and therefore we assume his usual technique to be a matter of deliberate choice. It has been suggested, as well, that his very poor eyesight in later years probably favoured the veiled and misty vision. Examples of his view of nature will clarify these assertions.

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119 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 44

120 See Chapter II, pp. 52, 69.

The poems both early and late abound in references to the "pale dawn"[121], the "grey twilight"[122] and the mingled glimmer and gloom of midnight.[123] There is the muted colour of the "grey wood"[124] at evening, the "dim grey sands"[125] and the "dim grey sea"[126] in the moonlight. The winds blow from "dove-grey fairy lands"[127] to shake the yellow leaves of autumn.[128] The "deep wood's woven shade"[129] is sought for its gloom. The shadows and the starlight and the moths come together.

> . . . white moths were on the wing,
> And moth-like stars were flickering out.[130]

> Upon the dusty, glittering windows cling,
> And seem to cling upon the moonlit skies,
> Tortoiseshell butterflies, peacock butterflies,
> A couple of night-moths are on the wing.[131]

As the moon fails, dreams fail, and at last the poet says,

> I must endure the timid sun.[132]

The mist and the dew add their dim shadows to the world and to natural objects. Always they summon their own dreaming and magical mood.

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121 Op. cit., p. 42
122 Op. cit., p. 65
123 Op. cit., p. 44
124 Op. cit., p. 11
125 Op. cit., p. 20
126 Op. cit., p. 43
127 Op. cit., p. 73
128 Op. cit., p. 16
129 Op. cit., p. 48
130 Op. cit., p. 66
131 Op. cit., p. 269
132 Op. cit., p. 164

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.
Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.[133]

In the late poetry natural objects are not only clouded over in description, but actually transformed. The mind plays with images captured from childhood, or from art, or from some vision.

Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land;
Romantic fish swam in nets coming to the hand;
What are all those fish that lie gasping on the strand?[134]

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough.[135]

A tree there is that from its topmost bough
Is half all glittering flame and half all green
Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;
And half is half and yet is all the scene;
And half and half consume what they renew. . .[136]

The process seems to go in a circle. The Romantic attitude of mind lends its shadowy gleam to natural objects. This haziness itself produces dream and reverie that are themselves Romantic, and finally vision is produced out of the reverie. The tendency is invariably Romantic.

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133 Op. cit., p. 231

134 Op. cit., p. 271

135 Op. cit., p. 280

136 Op. cit., p. 282

Yeats, then, like many another Romantic, found himself dissatisfied with the emptiness, the ugliness, and the restrictions of the world in which he lived. By the power of his imagination he found himself able to create another world, an ideally perfect one, which would right the wrongs of the world he knew. From an idealized past he took some features, but most of the changes were his own. It was to be a world of the spirit, a place of refuge and peace. It was to be, as well, a nationalistic ideal, and this part of the dream was largely realized. To correspond with such a world, the poet pictured an ideal beauty and an ideal love, and recorded them in his verse. His dream of beauty, exquisite and undying, was fulfilled in Maud Gonne. The ideal love he hoped they might share eluded him, but his hope remained strong that it might be found again beyond the grave. By his imaginative force he transformed nature as well, and caused it to correspond with the cloudy beauty of his imaginary world and his ideal love. In this form of escape from reality, Yeats proved himself a complete Romantic, in old age as well as in youth.

CHAPTER VI

THE SUPERNATURAL

> . . . the wan young Celt haunting the twilight, and the occultist performing nocturnal incantations.[1]

In the last two chapters two types of Romantic escape have been considered, especially as they have affected Yeats in his life and in his poetry: the escape into solitude, egotism, and melancholy; and the escape into an ideal love and an ideal world. There is yet another avenue of escape for the Romantic, and that is the quest for sensation. In Yeats this quest largely took the form of a flight from the natural into the supernatural. It was a search that lasted throughout his life, although he was more vocal about it in his youth.

The supernatural is itself a broad term. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word as "due to or manifesting some agency above the forces of nature, outside the ordinary operation of cause and effect." In this sense it includes Yeats's occultism, his spiritualism, and his fairy beliefs, all of which will be discussed in this chapter. There will, however, be discussed as well the poet's preoccupation with

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1 Richard Ellman, Yeats, the Man and the Masks, p. 2

death which was so closely linked to his interest in spiritualism, and his 'mysticism' which also was closely associated with and grew from preoccupation with the supernatural. There will be mentioned, as well, the poet's use of symbolism, most of which can be considered as the language of mysticism, and which is the only vehicle of expression for the mystic vision.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first will be entitled "Dream, Death, and the Spirit"; the second "Fairy Beliefs"; the third "The Mystic Vision and Symbolical Expression". When these topics have been discussed, the analysis of Yeats's Romanticism will be reasonably complete. Since the poet was quite reticent about most of his occult beliefs, especially in his poetry, both because of solemn vows of secrecy and because of his fear of mockery, the importance of this sphere of thought and activity cannot be judged by quantity of lines. Next to his love for Maud Gonne, the supernatural was a major interest of his life.

1. Dream, Death, and the Spirit.

It was the dream itself enchanted me.[2]

Man has created death.[3]

A ghost may come.[4]

Reference has frequently been made to Yeats's tendency, early and late, to dream and reverie. He was an egotist, and his dreams were about himself. It was in solitude that he sought and found these dreams, dwelt at will upon the ideal love and the ideal world the he required, and suffered often the melancholy resulting from disappointment. Nor were all these day-dreams, for Yeats dwelt with a peculiar interest and fascination upon the dreams that came to him in sleep.

The day-dreams were, of course, the more numerous, for they could be summoned at will. They began early and apparently continued as long as life lasted. Yeats cannot have been much more than ten years old when he had a particularly Romantic and heroic dream.

> . . . presently, when I had begun to dream of my future life, I thought I would like to die fighting the Fenians. I was to build a very fast and

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2 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 392

3 Op. cit., p. 264

4 Op. cit., p. 256

> beautiful ship and to have under my command a company of young men who were always to be in training like athletes and so become as brave and handsome as the young men in the story-books, and there was to be a big battle on the sea-shore near Rosses and I was to be killed.[5]

It was not a difficult transition from such a dream as this to the Castle of the Heroes which he projected in manhood. His hope to create an Order of Celtic Mysteries obsessed him about the year 1896. Hone describes the plan thus:

> . . . he dreamed of initiating Young Ireland into a mystical philosophy which would combine the doctrines of Christianity with the faiths of a more ancient world, unite the perceptions of the spirit with those of natural beauty. He had a monachal solitude, a sanctuary for adepts, in mind, the Castle Rock on Lough Key. . . To Maud Gonne Yeats spoke of a Castle of the Heroes, a shrine of Irish tradition, where only those who had proved their devotion to Ireland should penetrate.[6]

The persistence of the dream may be illustrated by his remark to Maud Gonne when she visited him in 1938 that they should have gone on with their plans.[7]

This has been but one example of many that might be given of the poet's absorption in dreams, and his cleaving to such ideals for years. Similarly his plans for Ireland arose at first from his imagination, but were put into effect by his very practical skill in organization.

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5 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 13.

6 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 140

7 Op. cit., p. 503

Similarly, Yeats's dependence upon the dreams that came during sleep was lifelong. He was not yet ten when he screamed in his sleep, and when awakened he described the wreck of a ship in which his grandfather was sailing. His grandfather returned home next day with the news of the actual wreck.[8]

Many of his dreams were later recorded in poetry, probably more than he acknowledged. In the epilogue to The Rose he claimed kinship with other Irish poets such as Davis, Mangan, and Ferguson, despite the deeper significance of his poetry.

> . . . to him that ponders well,
> My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
> Of things discovered in the deep,
> Where only body's laid asleep.[9]

There was, for example, the poem which recorded his dream of Maud Gonne's death,

> I dreamed that one had died in a strange land.[10]

There was the poem, "The Cap and Bells", which came to him in a dream.[11] "His Dream" is an account of one of the troubled dreams which came to him after Maud Gonne's marriage.

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8 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 10.

9 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 57

10 Op. cit., p. 47

11 Op. cit., p. 71. See also Jeffares, W. B. Yeats, p. 96

It was also a dream of death, now a welcome thought.

> It had such dignity,
> By the sweet name of death.[12]

Yeats looked back with delight to a time when, long ago, "the world on dreaming fed," [13] and gladly sings his "songs of old earth's dreamy youth".[14] He sometimes sought forgetfulness in dreams[15], and sometimes with a melancholy pleasure he dreamed of sorrow, or of fairyland.[16]

Always his dreams tended eventually to look towards the future, however. He would remake the world according to his dreams that it might be a fitting shelter for Maud Gonne's beauty.[17] He offered his dreams to his beloved,[18] and found in them, too, the beginning of responsibilities.[19] Nor do they lessen as the years go on, for he wrote as late as 1927, "I must nourish dreams."[20]

Death was sometimes a terror to Yeats, but oftener the passing of a barrier and the opening of a new door that offered new hopes of wisdom and perfect vision. Mention has been made already of his prayers for death in early childhood.

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12 Op. cit., p. 99
13 Op. cit., p. 7
14 Op. cit., p. 8
15 Op. cit., p. 94
16 Op. cit., pp. 9, 49
17 Op. cit., p. 62
18 Op. cit., pp. 70, 81
19 Op. cit., p. 112
20 Op. cit., p. 228

Maud Gonne's marriage and his naturally melancholy disposition made him welcome the thought of death for a time, but finally he gained control of this acute depression. He found himself able to write objectively,

> I waste my breath
> Pretending there can be passion
> That has more life in it than death.[21]

He was powerfully affected by Mabel Beardsley's courage in the face of a painful and lingering death in 1913, and thereafter speaks of death sometimes with serene acceptance and sometimes almost with exultation.

> Death and life were not
> Till man made up the whole.[22]

> . . . what disturbs our blood
> Is but our longing for the tomb.[23]

> Delight becomes death-longing if all longing else be vain.[24]

> Begin the preparation for your death
> And from the fortieth winter by that thought
> Test every work of intellect or faith,
> And everything that your own hands have wrought,
> And call those works extravagance of breath
> That are not suited for such men as come
> Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.[25]

There appears in the poetry at last a strong thought as to that One whom he will meet beyond the grave. An illness

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21 Op. cit., p. 115

22 Op. cit., p. 223

23 Op. cit., p. 237

24 Op. cit., p. 255

25 Op. cit., p. 283

in 1928 brought him cogent meditation upon death and its aftermath.

> Greater glory in the sun,
> An evening chill upon the air,
> Bid imagination run
> Much on the Great Questioner;
> What he can question, what if questioned I
> Can with a fitting confidence reply.[26]

By 1934 the longing for the tomb was becoming stronger. Almost seventy, a man who had lived a stirring and eventful life and had known so many people and so many types of people, he felt that he had seen it all before, and rings out in a refrain:

> 'Who'd care to dig 'em,' said the old, old man,
> 'Those six feet marked in chalk?
> Much I talk, more I walk;
> Time I were buried,' said the old, old man.[27]

The spiritual world was at all times close to Yeats. This was due partly to his early associations and experiences, partly to his natural inclination and temperament, and partly to his occult and psychical research, practice of magic, and spiritualism. His interest began in early childhood with certain apparently supernatural events, and it was fostered by the stories of the servants, the Sligo peasants, the fisherman, his mother and his mother's friends. It developed

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26 Op. cit., p. 278

27 Op. cit., p. 323

through his curiosity into the occult researches and spiritualism of manhood. Although he claimed that he was not credulous, and some facts tend to prove that hewas not over-gullible, still his quest for the cryptic was life-long.

Yeats had been told that as a small boy he saw a supernatural bird in a corner of a room.[28] It was a family belief, strangely enough universal in the family, that the appearance of a white sea-bird in a dream or a vision indicated the death of a member of the family.[29] They shared a common Irish belief in the banshee as a messenger of death.[30] Yeats, as a boy, was fascinated by tales of supernatural events associated with houses he knew, and was thrilled when on a visit to the Middletons at Rosses he heard three supernatural knocks and found that others had frequently heard similar sounds. One of the Middletons was said to have the second-sight, as was Mary Battle, his uncle George Pollexfen's servant. It is small wonder that the child was later so sensitive to every type of experience that might support or give reasons for these early experiences and beliefs.

In young manhood his beliefs were strengthened by fairy lore and by further experiences he had. These will be

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28 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 10

29 Op. cit., pp. 8, 118

30 Op. cit., p. 28

discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter. It was in quest of further experiences and greater enlightenment that he turned to esoteric Buddhism, Theosophy, psychical research, magic, and spiritualism. Yeats's whole life was largely centred around this quest. There was a question mark always before his eyes, some new vista that beckoned, some final significant discovery just around the corner. His attitude was in this thoroughly Romantic, a blending of perpetual doubt and perpetual hope. He was assuredly searching for God and for truth, although by devious and errant ways. The search at least was to his credit, and the reader must pity his failures as well as deplore his methods. He explains his reasons clearly.

> I had not taken up these subjects wilfully, nor through love of strangeness, nor love of excitement, nor because I found myself in some experimental circle, but because unaccountable things had happened even in my childhood, and because of an ungovernable craving. When supernatural events begin, a man first doubts his own testimony, but when they repeats themselves again and again, he doubts all human testimony.[31]

And Richard Ellman explains still further:

> . . . Yeats deliberately magnified his sense of self-division, so that he could be alternately one part or the other and not merely a bad medley. On one side he developed his dreams, corroborating them by the support of fairy tales which, being the literature of the peasantry, were untainted by the doubt which afflicts urban life; then by the

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31 W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, page 226

> support of Blake, then by occult research, then by direct vision, especially group vision which gave him more witnesses; eventually he went on to psychic research, to philosophy, and to Eastern religion. All these proved to his satisfaction the power of the dream -- the meaning of which he had now extended to include imagination and will -- to surpass and to control reality. But it was never enough for him to prove the power without using it; the magic wand, the sacred book, must demonstrate their efficacy in practical action and dumbfound the sceptical world.[32]

Inevitably, each one of Yeats's dreams leads back to action.

In the poetry Yeats's references to the spirit and to the supernatural show a progress from what is apparently complete and questionless belief, through vaguely expressed half belief, to an apparent scepticism that is even closer to a complete acceptance.

The early verse shows frequent references to the poet's evident belief in spirits, their wanderings, and events that accompany their passing. Love, for example, is spoken of as one of the forces which chain the spirit to earth after the body's death.

> . . . when we die our shades will rove,
> When eve has hushed the feathered ways,
> With vapoury footsole by the water's drowsy blaze.[33]

Such a spirit, deprived of rest, is written of as a "whimper-

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32 Richard Ellman, Yeats the Man and the Masks, p. 289

33 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 16

ing ghost",[34] Some of these spirits he speaks of as evil and malicious, devils who can possess the souls of men.

> . . . we bent down above the fading coals
> And talked of the dark folk who live in souls
> Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees.[35]

Supernatural phenomena attend the passing of the soul from the body, perhaps a lesser phenomenon as in the "Ballad of the Foxhunter", where "The hounds wail for the dead", [36] or the greater phenomenon of his own family tradition, when

> At all these death-beds women heard
> A visionary white sea-bird
> Lamenting that a man should die.[37]

There appears in this early verse, as well, a strong belief in the elemental powers of nature. These are sometimes all but personified.

> For the elemental creatures go
> About my table to and fro.
> That hurry from the unmeasured mind
> To rant and rage in flood and wind.[38]

> Great Powers of falling wave and wind and windy fire, . . .
> Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,
> That my old care may cease.[39]

In the poetry of the middle period Yeats has hidden his fundamental beliefs under metaphor and symbol. There he may be free in expression without fear of contradiction, but

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34 Op. cit., p. 65

35 Op. cit., p. 56

36 Op. cit., p. 29

37 Op. cit., p. 177

38 Op. cit., p. 57

39 Op. cit., p. 80

when he speaks without symbol he temporizes and does not altogether commit himself to expression of absolute belief.

> Pardon, old fathers, if you still remain
> Somewhere in earshot for the story's end . . .[40]

The 'if' has a definite significance in the preceding quotation, as has the word 'may' in the one that follows.

> A ghost may come;
> For it is a ghost's right,
> His element is so fine
> Being sharpened by his death,
> To drink from the wine-breath
> While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.[41]

> Since, tavern comrades, you have died,
> Maybe your images have stood,
> Mere bone and muscle thrown aside. . .[42]

> If you have revisited the town, thin Shade. . .[43]

The later poetry is less qualified by conditionals. There may be in it what is almost blunt denial of all his early belief.

> Because there is safety in derision
> I talked about an apparition,
> I took no trouble to convince,
> Or seem plausible to a man of sense,
> Distrustful of that popular eye
> Whether it be bold or sly.
> Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
> The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.[44]

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40 Op. cit., p. 113

41 Op. cit., p. 256

42 Op. cit., p. 116

43 Op. cit., p. 123

44 Op. cit., p. 386

But in general there is greater assurance, more complete conviction. His interest in the supernatural is confirmed in old age.

> . . . The abstract joy,
> The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
> Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.[45]

So he wrote in 1923, and repeated the thought in "To the Unknown Instructors" where he commented of the 'communicators' who had supposedly given him the material for A Vision by means of Mrs. Yeats's automatic writing.

> What they undertook to do
> They brought to pass.[46]

He had laboriously worked out a philosophy which linked natural and supernatural into a perfect circle, symbolic of completeness. This theory included the doctrine of the self and anti-self, especially that phase of it which concerned the spiritual opposite. He believed he had discovered his own spiritual anti-self in Leo Africanus, ancient Egyptian writer and explorer.[47] In the dialogue between Soul and Body in "Ego Dominus Tuus", Soul speaks to Body thus:

> . . . you walk in the moon,
> And though you have passed the best of life, still trace,
> Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,
> Magical shapes.[48]

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45 Op. cit., p. 232

46 Op. cit., p. 287

47 Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 301

48 Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 180

And Body replies:

> By the help of an image
> I call to my own opposite, summon all
> That I have handled least, least looked upon.[49]
> . . .
> 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 at all imaginable things
> The most unlike, being my anti-self.[50]

Yeats felt that his mind in old age had become clairvoyant, that it was

> A mind Michael Angelo knew
> That can pierce the clouds,
> Or inspired by frenzy
> Shake the dead in their shrouds;
> Forgotten else by mankind,
> An old man's eagle mind.[51]

With such a mind he reached at last part of the answer to his questionings:

> Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed.
> . . .
> For things below are copies, the great Smaragdine Tablet said.[52]

This consciousness of a relationship within an identity, a unity with a distinction, had resolved spirit and body, self and anti-self, heaven and earth. The spiritual was the mirror of the physical, the physical of the spiritual. He found himself able at last to resolve the dream and the real, the intangible and the tangible, body and soul.

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49 Op. cit., p. 180

50 Op. cit., p. 182

51 Op. cit., p. 347

52 Op. cit., p. 328

In summary of this section it may be stated that Yeats's dreams were the stepping stones from this world to another, from the real to the ideal; that thoughts of death caused constant questioning of that other world, and of the Ideal which dominated it; that such questionings were finally successful in bringing the two worlds together through a feeling of identity between the spiritual and the physical. There was nothing original in such thoughts; the originality lies rather in the fact that they are expressed in poetry of a very high order. Yeats developed a philosophy that contained the seeds which might have grown into a true realization of God and a true faith. That they did not so grow may have been due largely to the fact that a lifetime would have been insufficient time for such a development, considering the premises from which the deductions started.

2. Fairy Beliefs.

> How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud shadows?
> I only know that all we know comes from you . . .[53]
>
> A man has a hope of heaven
> But soulless a fairy dies.[54]

In the preceding section mention has been made of Yeats's fairy beliefs as one aspect of his interest in the supernatural. The topic is important enough as an aspect of the poet's Romanticism to merit treatment in a special section. Much of Yeats's early poetry concerns the shadowy and Romantic Irish fairies, the Forgetful People, the People of the Dim Kingdom. He is, in fact, the Irish poet who has most successfully captured in verse the essence of his country's fairy lore. This feature of his Romanticism is at once fascinating and easy of analysis. His belief in fairies was evidently quite sincere, particularly in youth and young manhood, so much so that he was frequently ridiculed for this belief to such an extent as almost to discredit his more serious and more important theories.

This knowledge of fairy lore he has acquired honestly, for such beliefs are -- and have been for centuries -- general

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53 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 469

54 W. B. Yeats, early poem in Dublin University Review, March, 1885, quoted by Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 46

and very real in Ireland. An Irishman believes in fairies as easily as he believes in the beauty of Irish mountain, valley, lake, and stream. In this sense Yeats was as truly Irish as he was Romantic.

It is worth mentioning here that the Irish fairies are vastly different from the fairy folk of English legend and literature. The English fairies are mortal in appearance and size and characteristics; they have an air of actual existence, and yet we know that they do not exist. Shakespeare's Mab and Puck and Titania, Spenser's Fairy Queen, place no demands on our faith, for they are hardly removed from our humanity. We feel, still, that they are completely impossible, for their perfection is far too great. They are creatures of fancy and fancy alone, creatures of pure poetry and imagination: they obviously are part of a story. The fairies of Ireland are a race apart, so far from mortal, so elusive and transitory, that they exist and are Romantic as English fairies could never be. One must believe in the Irishman's belief in the fairy folk, but one smiles with the Englishman as he tells his tales.

The Irish fairies have for the Irishman and for the sympathetic reader a reality beyond anything that can be known exactly and with certainty, a reality that stretches beyond human experience. Shadowy, remote, unapproachable, they are all that negatives an air of vivid reality. Yet

they do suggest that they exist in some incomprehensible way. We are required to believe in them because Yeats believes in them, and because the Irish believe in them. The criterion of recognition of Romantic fairies is that they are the fairies in which a Romantic believes. Yeats the Romantic has been admitted to their society, and has captured in prose and verse something of their unearthly, mysterious, and often terrible charm.

There are various interesting theories as to the origin of the daoine sidhe (pronounced deenee shee) or fairy people. In the Introduction to his edition of Irish Fairy and Folk Tales[55] Yeats suggests several alternative theories. One authority says that they are the gods of the earth, the deities of hill and valley, of lake and river, of plain and forest. The antiquarians say that they are the gods of pagan Ireland, the once giant Tuatha de Danaan, but greatly diminished in size with the passing of the years. The peasants say that they are fallen angels who were not good enough to be saved nor bad enough to be lost, or, again, that they were the weaker minded of the rebellious angels, less vicious in their defiance of God, less deserving of punishment in hell, and still hopeful of eventual salvation. Yeats upon occasion

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55 W. B. Yeats, Irish Fairy and Folk Tales, N. Y., Modern Library, [1951], pp. 1-3

makes use of all these theories, but seems to prefer the last mentioned. As proof, he instances their caprice and inconsistency. Writing of the fairies, he states:

> . . . the imagination of the people dwells rather upon the fantastic and capricious, and fantasy and caprice would lose the breath of life, their freedom, were they to unite them either with evil or with good.[56]

The fairies, he explains, have two natures, the kindly and the terrible and, due to the greatness of their fall, the terrible often predominates. Yet they are good neighbours if not offended or crossed, good to their friends at least, even if evil to their enemies. They do not like to be spoken about, especially to the 'stranger', and must always be mentioned respectfully as the 'gentry' or the daoine maithe (the good people). They are easily propitiated, for example by gifts of meal or milk.

They are usually, though not always, tiny and lovely in appearance. The queen, especially, is very beautiful, and sometimes wins the love of a mortal. It is traditional that certain ancient Irish families owe their great personal comeliness to a strain of fairy blood, and whenever a beautiful child is born into a family not previously noted for beauty, the Sidhe are credited with the parentage. On the other hand, especially on Midsummer Eve, they will often

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56 W. B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight, London, Lawrence and Bullen, 1893, p. 55

steal beautiful mortals, -- new-born children, handsome young men, newly married brides, -- and it is seldom, and then only by craft, that these can win or be won back to earth again from the 'royalty', rath, fairy fort, or underwater fairy home to which they have been taken. In a letter to one of his critics Yeats wrote as follows:

> The most of the Irish country people believe that only people who die of old age go straight to some distant Hell or Heaven or Purgatory. All those who are young enough for any use . . . are taken . . . by the fairies, and live, until they die a second time, in the green 'forts'.[57]

He tells, too, the story of Clooth-na-Bare, a mortal who, weary of her fairy life, sought all over the world for a lake deep enough for her to drown the everlasting fairy existence. She leaped from hill to lake, from lake to hill, setting up a cairn of stones wherever her feet rested, until at length she found her final rest in the deep, cold waters of Lough Ia at Sligo.[58] In a poem of The Wind Among the Reeds Yeats describes the fairy host as

> . . . riding from Knocknarea
> And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare,[59]

The favourite occupations of the fairies are, it seems,

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57 W. B. Yeats, article in The Outlook, April 16, 1896, quoted by Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 166

58 W. B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight, pp. 125-126

59 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 61

feasting, dancing, playing bewitchingly lovely music, playing hurley and other games, and (how Irish) fighting. Many a magical tune of old Ireland is supposedly reproduced from fairy music, and many a maiden has heard fairy singing and has pined away for love and longing for the music. Often a mortal, travelling at night near the enchanted fairy 'rings', will be drawn into the dancing or the fighting or the playing of a game. Especially in the two latter occupations the fairy folk are shadowy and helpless without human assistance. The leanhaun sidhe (pronounced leeana shee) is a fairy mistress who seeks the love of mortals, especially poets. She is the Irish muse, and gives inspiration to those whom she enchants. But the poets always die young, for she lives on their life and they gradually waste away.

The sources of Yeats's fairy beliefs are not far to seek. From earliest childhood he had heard tales of the fairies from the servants of the Pollexfen relatives with whom he lived from time to time, from his 'fey' Middleton relatives, and from the peasants in their country homes. He wrote; "It was the servants' stories that interested me."[60] And again he wrote:

> It was through the Middletons perhaps that I got my interest in country stories, and certainly the first

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60 W. B. Yeats, Autobiography, p. 18

faery stories that I heard were in the cottages about their houses.[61]

Yeats was at pains to explain that no matter what one doubted, one never doubted the fairies, for, as an old countryman told him, "They stand to reason."[62]

In The Celtic Twilight Yeats has described Paddy Flynn, an old Sligo man who loved to tell tales of the 'good people', and from whom Yeats learned many of the fairy beliefs he used in his early poems and essays. Paddy lived in the village of Ballisodare, which was, he said, "the most gentle"[63] or the most fairy place in the whole of County Sligo. (This is recalled in the refrain of one of Yeats's last poems;

That is an airy[64] spot
And no man knows what treads the grass.)[65]

When Yeats asked the old man whether he had ever seen the fairies, he replied, "Am I not annoyed with them?"[66] It was of Paddy Flynn that Yeats wrote, "He was a great teller of tales, and unlike our common romancers, knew how to empty heaven, hell, and purgatory, fairyland and eart, to people his stories."[67]

Yeats heard many of the fairy tales as well from Mary

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61 Op. cit., p. 17

62 W. B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight, p. 4

63 Op. cit., p. 4

64 eerie.

65 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 379

66 W. B. Yeats, The Celtic Twilight, p. 5

67 Op. cit., p. 6

Battle, who was his uncle George Pollexfen's servant. Yeats has remarked that much of The Celtic Twilight is but her daily speech.[68]

In addition, however, Yeats made use of some of his own supposedly fairy experiences. Several of these may be described. One day at Ballisodare, when he was walking with one of his Middleton cousins near an old grave-yard and the ruins of an old village, he and the cousin

> . . . saw light moving over the river where there is a great rush of waters. It was like a very brilliant torch. A moment later the girl saw a man coming towards us who disappeared in the water. I kept asking myself if I could be deceived. Perhaps, after all, though it seemed impossible, somebody was walking in the water with a torch. But we could see a small light low down on Knocknarea seven miles off, and it began to move upward over the mountain slope. I timed it on my watch and in five minutes it reached the summit, and I, who had often climbed the mountain, knew that no human footstep was so speedy.[69]

On another night he saw similar fires on a bank less than ten feet away, he says, and another fire answering it from Knocknarea.[70] He says that he began to believe in fairies, not with his intellect, but with his emotions.[71] Later still he adopted the theory that "one should believe whatever had

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68 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, pp. 41-42

69 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, p. 91

70 Op. cit., pp. 91-92

71 Op. cit., p. 91

been believed in all countries and periods, and only reject any part of it after much evidence, instead of starting over afresh and only believing what one could prove."[72]

Still another experience is more obviously connected with his fairy beliefs. He believed that he had actually seen the fairy queen. On this occasion he was with a girl who was supposed to be a medium.

> . . . in a moment a very beautiful woman came out of the cave. I . . . had by this time fallen into a kind of trance, in which [what] we call the unreal had begun to take upon itself a masterful reality, and was able to see the faint gleam of golden ornaments, the shadowy blossom of dim hair. . . I . . . asked her whether it was true that she and her people carried away mortals, and if so, whether they put another soul in the place of the one they had taken? 'We change the bodies,' was her answer. 'Are any of you born into mortal life?' 'Yes.' 'Do I know any who were among your people before birth?' 'You do.' 'Who are they?' 'It would not be lawful for you to know.' I then asked whether she and her people were not 'dramatizations of our moods.' 'She does not understand,' said my friend, 'but says that her people are much like human beings, and do most of the things human beings do.' I asked her other questions, as to her nature and her purpose in the universe, but only seemed to puzzle her.[73]

A little later, about the end of 1890, Yeats further explained his 'dramatization of our moods' theory in accordance with Theosophical doctrine, which seemed to him to answer his questions most satisfactorily.

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72 Op. cit., p. 92

73 The Celtic Twilight, pp. 85-87

> The fairies are the lesser spiritual moods of that universal mind wherein every mood is a soul and every thought a body.[74]

As a mystical poet, Yeats has looked deep beneath the legends and the acts of these shadowy folk, and has perceived there images and symbols of the remoter states of the remoter states of the human soul which exist on the border lands between the material and the spiritual worlds and partake of the nature of both. The world of the senses was to Yeats sometimes an illusion, sometimes a barrier which he must overcome before he could perceive the truer reality of the unknown world of the spirit. He valued the fairies because through them his imagination could conceive of the much greater unknown, and the real purpose of all his fairy poetry is to convey to us this power of the unknown.

Yeats's fairy poetry is found exclusively among the earlier volumes, for with the publication of the poems in Crossways and The Rose, and the earlier poems of The Wind Among the Reeds, he left the general and universal themes of poets and became increasingly preoccupied with symbolism, mysticism, and the contemporary events which more and more dominated his poetry as the years came upon him.

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74 W. B. Yeats, Invoking the Irish Fairies, in Irish Theosophist, Oct., 15, 1892, pp. 6-7, quoted by Ellman, op. cit., p. 67

"The Stolen Child" in Crossways; "A Fairy Song", "The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland", "To Some I have Talked With by the Fire", "To Ireland in the Coming Times" in The Rose; "The Hosting of the Sidhe", "The Unappeasable Host", "The Host of the Air", "The Everlasting Voices" in The Wind among the Reeds make up almost all Yeats's published fairy poetry, and actually all that can be found in published volumes of verse.

The refrain of "The Stolen Child",

> Come away, O human child!
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand,[75]

expressed the eternal invitation of the fairy host to the young and lovely, and pointed the way to the exquisite little poetic drama of fairy enchantment, "The Land of Heart's Desire", in which a newly married bride hears the same song and obeys its command. The whole poem breathes the mood of Romantic escape. The fairy land is another Innisfree, remote and shielded from life and from the world. There the fairy food, berries and cherries, is hidden. There by moonlight the gay throng weave the olden dances and play their innocent games. From dew-bathed ferns they lean out over the wandering stream to waft restless dreams to the slumbering trout. The

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75 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 21

solemn-eyed child has lost many pleasant earthy experiences, the sound of the lowing of the calves and the singing of the kettle on the bob, the sight of the brown mice bobbing around the oat-meal chest, but he is considered fortunate in his escape from a world too often anxious and troubled.

"A Fairy Song" echoes the same note of escape and secret peace. The fairy throng

> We who are old, old and gay,
> O so old!
> Thousands of years, thousands of years,
> If all were told.[76]

sing over the newly wedded lovers, Diarmuid and Grania, the joys of a distant fairy home.

> Give to these children, new from the world,
> Silence and love;
> And the long dew-dropping hours of the night
> And the stars above;
>
> Give to these children, new from the world,
> Rest far from men.
> Is anything better, anything better?
> Tell us it then.[77]

Several of Yeats's poems depart from the gentle and wistful notion of escape, and in these we catch a glimpse of the mingled majesty and terror of the fairy host, of the fear they may inspire and the desolation they may leave behind. Here we see the god-like fairies, the terrible people of the

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76 Op. cit., p. 43

77 Op. cit., p. 44

fairy hills, as the Tuatha de Danaan, the deities of pagan Ireland, riding in the wind as they rode madly through the country in the ancient days. The old country people bless themselves and murmur a prayer when they see the winds whirl the leaves on the road, for they believe the Sidhe are passing at that moment.

"The Hosting of the Sidhe" describes the rout of fairy riders, led by Caoilte and Niamh, riding from the haunted mountain of Knocknarea. Their cheeks are pale, their hair flowing, their breasts heaving, their eyes gleaming, and they wail their invitation to mortals in the eerie howl of the wind.

> Away, come away:
> Empty your heart of its mortal dream.[78]

In "The Unappeasable Host" a mother, whose heart "the winds have shaken",[79] senses in the rising wind the coming of the fairy riders.

> I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,
> And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me.[79]

"The Host of the Air" tells the story of a young husband who heard in the distance the sad yet gay music of a fairy piper and then found his bride dancing among a merry fairy throng. Hoping to capture him as well, they offer him

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78 Op. cit., p. 61

79 Op. cit., p. 65

bread and wine but his wife, knowing the danger, draws him away to play cards among the fairy elders. When the revels were over, the young man awoke to find his wife carried away for ever.

> Old men and young men and young girls
> Were gone like a drifting smoke;
>
> But he heard high up in the air
> A piper piping away,
> And never was piping so sad,
> And never was piping so gay.[80]

But it is not only in the song of the wind and the fairy piping that men may hear the fairy music. Their message may come as well, Yeats writes in "The Everlasting Voices",[81] in the song of birds, in the wail of the wind, in the whisper of the shaken boughs, in the wash of waves on the shore, in the breath of the moods which gladden or trouble the heart of man, even as time decays.

The poet's own consciousness of the fairy spell is revealed in several poems. "To Some I have Talked with by the Fire" tells how full his heart and memory are

> . . . of the wayward twilight companies
> Who sigh with mingled sorrow and content,
> Because their blossoming dreams have never bent
> Under the fruit of evil and of good.[82]

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80 Op. cit., p. 64

81 Op. cit., p. 61

82 Op. cit., p. 56

The note of mysticism is still stronger in "To Ireland in the Coming Times". Yeats's tales of fairies dancing beneath the moon now have underlying them a deeper significance. Here they are elemental creatures who have hurried to existence from the

> . . . unmeasured mind
> To rant and rage in flood and wind . . .
>
> Man ever journeys on with them
> After the red-rose-bordered hem . . .[83]

The red-rose-bordered hem is that of perfect beauty and perfect love.

"The Man who Dreamed of Fairyland" is autobiographical. It is more mystical in its tone, more difficult in its obscurity, than any poem of fairy lore so far considered. Gross material things, -- a pile of fish in a crowded market place, a lug-worm among lonely sands, a clump of knob-grass beside a desolate well, the crawling maggots that trouble his last sleep beneath the hill of Lugnagall, -- they all recall a distant memory and suggest the promise of a better land.

> . . . that somewhere to north or west or south
> There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race
> Under the golden or the silver skies.[84]

Yeats probably felt much of this assurance of ultimate escape

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83 Op. cit., p. 57

84 Op. cit., pp. 49-51

from drabness, of eventual peace and happiness after a long and difficult journey.

It may be concluded that there was a gradual evolution in both Yeats's own fairy beliefs and those of the poems. In fewer than a dozen poems he has captured almost all the fairy lore more lengthily detailed in The Celtic Twilight and in other early essays. Although The Celtic Twilight had been published in 1894, "The Land of Heart's Desire" had been produced in 1894, and the fairy poems had probably all been written by 1895, it cannot be presumed that Yeats in later life had lost or greatly modified his fairy beliefs. They were probably rather dormant during the period of his unhappy love affair and his political and dramatic activities, and developed later into a keener interest in the occult which was for obvious reasons less likely to appear in verse.

Yeats's interest in fairies was a wholly Romantic interest, for it concerned Romantic fairies written about in terms of Romance, symbolism and mysticism. His interest may have faded a little in later years, but the memories remained, more and more distant and shadowy, but carrying their magic consolation like a faintly remembered tale of childhood or a half recollected melody of long ago which give a keener pleasure than anything immediate and tangible.

3. Mysticism and Symbolism.

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.[85]

I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made
Amid the dreams of youth.[86]

The account of Yeats's life given in Chapter I contained, of necessity, comment on the poet's mysticism, and there it was pointed out that his symbolism was frequently an attempt to find expression for some vision or some high mystical mood. Chapter II again referred to Yeats's mysticism as a means of Romantic escape from reality, an attempt to transcend reality and to reach the unity that life denied him. In the same chapter it was pointed out that his symbolism was in itself partly a Romantic tendency, but more important and significant as a vehicle for the expression of a deeper Romanticism -- that of his mystical experiences and ideas. Both mysticism and symbolism are closely enough linked with the supernatural to justify their inclusion in this chapter; both are important enough to deserve a separate section. Too vital to be ignored as aspects of the poet's Romanticism, the topics are at the same time too vast to

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85 W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, p. 284

86 Op. cit., p. 179

studied or discussed exhaustively as part of a thesis. Adequate analysis would be a research topic in itself. Therefore the pages that follow can claim to be only a sampling of a wider field.

The section falls naturally into two divisions, the first treating of Yeats's mystic ideas and experiences in life and in poetry, the second discussing his symbolism in itself and as an expression of his mysticism.

A mystic is defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "one who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths beyond the understanding". Caroline Spurgeon notes further that mysticism is frequently used half contemptuously "to denote vaguely any kind of occultism or spiritualism, or any specially curious views about God and the universe".[87] Yeats, as has been noted, indulged in the latter type of supposed mysticism; that aspect of his thought has been treated in the preceding sections. He did, however, aim at the spiritual apprehension of truth as well, although he never achieved religious mysticism, its highest form.

It must be noted that mysticism is rather an attitude of mind than a doctrine, rather a mental tendency than a philosophy. It depends upon and arises from a certain

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87 Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1913, p. 1

temper of mind that is closely associated with the poetic temperament. There is hardly such a thing as a great poet without a touch of mysticism, just as there is rarely a great poet who has not a touch of Romanticism. It must be noted, too, that mystic moments occur to many very ordinary men.

Blake and Wordsworth were the primary English mystics, although they had very different approaches to the mystic vision. Wordsworth looked at nature to gain his revelations, while Blake considered nature a hindrance. But both shared a conviction of unity in all things. It will not be forgotten that Yeats was powerfully influenced by the thought of Blake, and somewhat shared his tendency to disregard the shapes of things. Like Blake, again, Yeats was convinced that the spirit underlies the material, and that it would be through the spirit that the mystic could apprehend the divinity in which it shared.

There is a further deduction from the consciousness of this unity. Miss Spurgeon explains it thus:

> This sense of unity leads to another belief, though it is one not always consistently or definitely stated by all mystics. It is implied by Plato when he says, "All knowledge is recollection". This is the belief in pre-existence or persistent life, the belief that our souls are immortal, and no more came into existence when we were born than they will cease to exist when our bodies disintegrate. This idea is familiar in Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality". [88]

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88 Op. cit., p. 5

This belief, as well, Yeats fully shared. His poetry from early to late is full of striving towards his mystic vision of the Spirit behind the universe. His belief in the Great Memory, storehouse of image and symbol and knowledge, was also basic in his poetry. Like most mystics he had lived through experiences which forced him to seek the mystic vision.

Yeats read widely among mystical and pseudo-mystical writers. His interest in Blake has been referred to, but he read as well in Plato and in Plotinus, the neo-Platonist whose influence on European mysticism has been so strong. He knew Spenser's poetry and thought, and that of Donne also. He studied the works of Swedenborg, Boehme, and Bergson. His mysticism was, therefore, largely derivative, although he tended to personalize it in his poetry. He had, of course, frequent moments of insight, too.

A natural result of the consciousness of essential unity is the longing for wisdom and the pursuit of beauty, for both are but the soul's hunger to join itself to something the nature of which it shares. Both are found very markedly in Yeats: both are evidences not only of his mysticism but also, in their restless quest, of his Romanticism. There is implicit in his poetry the Platonic theory of beauty. The human beauty was to him the shadow of the Divine.

Yeats first came into intimate contact with mysticism during his association with George Russell (AE). Visionary poet and mystic, Russell sketched his mystical visions. Both sketches and poems powerfully touched Yeats. Yeats wrote in The Celtic Twilight about Russell's poems:

> They, with their wild music as of winds blowing in the reeds seemed to me the very inmost voice of Celtic sadness, and of Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen.[89]

> The poems were all endeavours to capture some high impalpable mood in a net of obscure images.[90]

Recording a conversation with an old peasant as melancholy as Russell, Yeats wrote,

> Both how Celtic! How full of striving after a something never to be completely expressed in word or deed[91]

> Both seek -- one in wandering sentences, the other in symbolic pictures and subtle allegoric poetry -- to express something that lies beyond the range of expression, and both . . . have within them the vast and vague extravagance that lies at the bottom of the Celtic heart.[92]

Yeats's apparent objectivity here was assumed, for he regarded both with a wistful envy. He tried to learn all that Russell could teach him of mysticism. Together they began to seek further illumination, erroneously choosing such vain paths as esoteric Buddhism and Theosophy.

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89 The Celtic Twilight, p. 14

90 Op. cit., p. 16

91 Op. cit., p. 17

92 Op. cit., p. 18

religious and not completely Christian. Nor was his mysticism original, for many of his ideas have been derived from earlier mystics who wrote in poetry and in prose. But it must be admitted that it was a major preoccupation throughout his life, and that the force which lay behind the ceaseless search, the quality of mind which prompted the interest, were strong and commendable. That statement will be borne out by further research.

Yeats's symbolism is rich and varied, intensely personal and frequently obscure. It was closely linked with his mysticism, for symbolism is the most suitable means of expressing mystical ideas. The use of symbolism follows naturally upon the mystic's belief in Unity, the belief that all things in nature have something in common, a resemblance that permits and sometimes necessitates symbolism for its expression. The poet's symbolism has not yet been adequately analysed, and perhaps it never will, for he frequently declined to explain a symbol so that its suggestibility might not be limited. Not only would a student of Yeats's symbolism have to know all the mythology, all the philosophy, all the paintings, all the prose and poetry, that Yeats knew, but he would also have to possess a deep insight into the poet's subtle and complex mind and his occult researches as well. Such a background would be most difficult to attain, and the task of analysis itself would be all but endless.

Henn's very valuable study of Yeats's mysticism points out that there are three main types of mysticism.

> A poet can establish his symbolism, and suggest its values, by one of three methods. He can relate it, directly, or obliquely, or sometimes negatively, to such myths or history as already command a reasonable measure of acceptance; weighing the readiness of the response against the loss that changes in cultural background may, in the future, impose upon his work . . .
>
> Or he can use the so-called archetypal symbols, water, fire, cavern, arrow, horse, and so on, relying on the constancy of human experience of dream and fantasy and vision in which such symbols appear. The penumbra of light thrown round the focal point of such a symbol will be usually deeper or more complicated than that supplied by history or myth. . . the interpretation tends to grow unduly imprecise, as in much later Romantic poetry. . .
>
> The third method is to create a personal mythology and a related symbolism, in the manner of Blake; and here success will depend on a gradual building up of determinant points of meaning through the use of the symbols in varying contexts. This most difficult task will be hampered still further if the meanings themselves vary from context to context . . .[113]

Yeats used all three methods. In his early poetry, and in that of the middle period, he drew freely from mythology and history for his symbols. Later, as his imagination became more assured, he developed his own personal symbolism which enriched the later poetry.

Yeats had, himself, very definite theories as to the use and effects of symbolism. He believed that symbols were effective in evoking emotions which so often were more

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113 T. R. Henn, The Lonely Tower, pp. 119-121

subtle and complex than those otherwise excited. He used symbols as well to evoke an unseen reality, although in this object he was not so successful. He used them as well, particularly in the early poetry, as a disguise for emotions too deep and too personal to be expressed otherwise. Whether he used the mythological and historical, the universal, or the personal symbolism, he was successful in investing it often with surprising strength and effectiveness.

Yeats used natural symbolism very freely throughout the years, using flowers, trees, birds, animals, and even fish to carry their own message and their own image.

Flowers are used frequently and effectively. The Rose is variously used to symbolise the spirit of Beauty, transcendental love, perfection in any sphere, Maud Gonne, or Ireland. "Red Rose, proud Rose, Sad Rose of all my days"[114] conveys at once the perfection and the tragedy and the eternality of beauty. Beauty is "The Rose of the World"[115], while "The Rose of Peace"[116] and "The Rose of Battle"[117] convey their own meaning. Maud Gonne's image "blossoms a rose"[118] in his heart. "The rose tree"[119] is Ireland. "The Secret Rose"[120] indicates mystical knowledge of the secret at the heart of

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114 Collected Poems, p. 35

115 Op. cit., p. 41

116 Op. cit., p. 41

117 Op. cit., p. 62

118 Op. cit., p. 62

119 Op. cit., p. 206

120 Op. cit., p.

the universe. Poppies symbolize dreams and forgetfulness; lilies symbolize innocence and purity.

Trees and parts of trees are frequently used symbols. As is not uncommon, Yeats uses the falling leaves as the symbol of mortality, but also uses them in the special sense of fading and dying love. The ceaseless fluttering of the leaves is used to represent the troubles and distractions of the world. A hazel wand and a hazel tree represent wisdom. The withering of the boughs is used to symbolize despair. A green branch represents knowledge and learning.

> There was a green branch hung with many a bell
> When her own people ruled this tragic Eire.[121]

The bells represent the tales that were current when Ireland was still the Land of Saints and Scholars.

Natural creatures are used also freely as symbols. The gulls, the 'white birds'[122], are symbols of escape, as well as of solitude and withdrawal from the world. Yeats often uses the crane, the heron, and the swan, all aloof and solitary birds, to represent himself. The eagle and the phoenix symbolize Maud Gonne. The falcon is the symbol of the proud and solitary soul.

Maud Gonne is symbolized also as Helen of Troy, and as Deirdre, both beautiful and tragic figures. She is at times represented by the lion, proud and stately, and at

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121 Op. cit., p. 46 122 Op. cit., p. 86

times by the elusive trout. Later she herself is used as the symbol of beauty.

One further example of Yeats's very complex symbolism may be given by quoting such a poem as this. It is addressed to his beloved, and marks a growing passion in his love.

> Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns?
> I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;
> I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of Thorns,
> For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and fear
> Under my feet that they follow you night and day.
> A man with a hazel wand came without sound;
> He changed me suddenly; I was looking another way;
> And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;
> And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.
> I would that the Boar without bristles had come from
> the West
> And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky
> And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.[123]

Yeats explained the poem by saying that the white hornless deer represented the woman, the hound represented the desire of the man who is the hunter, the man with a hazel wand represented Aengus -- the god of love, and the boar without bristles represented the force of destruction such as the end of the world. These are the main symbols, but there are others as well that he has not explained. One may imagine the difficulties attending the explanation of such a poem without any assistance. And there are many poems as heavily symbolic which he did not explain.

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123 Op. cit., p. 68

Among the later poetry there are many symbols that are at once richer, subtler, and more complex. There is the tower, for instance, which at once symbolizes himself, his solitude, his austerity, his family, strength, wisdom, and perhaps endless other connotations. There is Byzantium, which symbolizes culture, the meeting place of the arts, the highest achievement of intellect developed by culture. There is the Sphinx image, "A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw"[124] which is the symbol of ecstasy joined to destruction. There is the image of the gyre, which represents the cyclic pattern of history from creation to disintegration. Each of these has infinitely receding connotations and suggestions, and there are hundredsmore of similar symbols which cannot be adequately discussed within the limits of this section and this chapter. The whole subject of Yeats's symbolism is one that should attract more students who are interested in research fields not already crowded.

In both his mysticism and his symbolism Yeats proved himself a Romantic. A realist would be content with externals, whereas a Romantic would pierce through the material to the spiritual reality beyond. A realist would be content with straightforward expression of the reality he described, while a Romantic would seek the unusual and connotative expression.

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124 Op. cit., p.192

In the study of the supernatural recorded in this chapter, the subject has been analysed and divided into three main sections. The first of these has discussed the poet's treatment of Dream, Death, and the Spirit. The second has treated in some detail of Yeats's Fairy Beliefs. The third has discussed his use of Mysticism and Symbolism. It has been shown that Yeats was preoccupied in life and in his poetry with these subjects, that in his use of them he has shown that form of escape from reality into the search for sensation and the quest of the spiritual, and that thereby he has shown himself a thoroughly Romantic poet in youth and in age. In fact the poet's Romanticism seems actually to have increased in intensity with the coming of old age. This trend has been visible in all preceding chapters as well.

CONCLUSION

. . . he exulted in his incorrigible romanticism.[1]

In the preceding pages there has been given an account of Yeats's life and his poetry, both revealing the strongest evidences of Romanticism. The definition and explanation of Romantic qualities in Chapter II have supplied the criteria by which life and poetry were judged. The account of the poet's life in Chapter I has revealed from youth to age all the Romantic desire for escape in its different forms: revolt; solitude, egotism, and melancholy; the transformation of reality; the quest for the supernatural in all its forms. Because Yeats was predominantly a lyric poet all these moods, various yet one, were echoed in the poetry which arose out of strong personal emotion.

The note of revolt against tradition and authority, against actuality, has been proved to be strong and clear. Most of Yeats's nationalistic verse was inspired by his revulsion against British rule in Ireland. He rebelled as well against the Victorian and English style in poetry, and against the lushness of his own early poems. The poetry of the middle period was marked by increasing simplicity and that of the later period was even more perfectly concrete

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1 Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, p. 498

and adequate. Even though Yeats's rebellion was often unsuccessful, his protests and plans were recorded with deep sincerity.

His desire for solitude, his inherent egotism, and his innate melancholy were traits thoroughly Romantic in nature. From his youth until his old age he fled from men into actual or intellectual solitude where he might nourish dreams without interference. These dreams centred usually about himself, and when they failed his melancholy was intense. The poetry, both early and late, is redolent with the sad and self-centred yearning for seclusion.

In his dreams Yeats usually created an ideal love, an ideal life, an ideal world, ideal surroundings. Perfections in beauty and love were at first in his thoughts, but became real in Maud Gonne. The spell of his dreams was continued as her beauty remained until old age, but the dream of a perfect love failed him after some years. Both inspired him, however, to make plans for that idealized world which would exist when Ireland's freedom was won. Here, too, the reality faibed the dream, and melancholy and disillusion followed.

Throughout his life, whenever all else failed him, Yeats turned to the Supernatural. His boyhood had been spent in surroundings which favoured belief in omens, spirits, and fairies. In manhood this interest continued, and gradually widened into a pursuit of the mystic vision and attempts to

catch the vision in symbols. Here again, the hope was always stronger than the achievement, but the interest persisted until the end. Yeats sought his vision by devious means, in itself a Romantic tendency, and so hampered his search. Yet it seems that he was seeking the right road, and his failures were proof of earnest and persistent search.

It has been shown that, contrary to general critical opinion, Yeats's Romanticism did not fade as old age came, but rather increased in intensity from youth to age. There was a change in the type of Romanticism, a change from the languid to the passionate and intense. There was a distinct change in poetic style and treatment. But Yeats as an old man and as an old poet was as truly a Romantic as he had been as a youth, lost among the dreams and clouds of boyhood. That fact will one day be generally admitted.

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Dramatis Personae, London, Macmillan, 1936, VII-190 pages.
Material also contained in Autobiography.

Yeats, William Butler, If I were Four-and-Twenty, Dublin, Cuala, 1940, 68 pages.
Worthwhile reading for sidelights on poet's character.

Yeats, William Butler, editing Irish Fairy and Folk Tales, N. Y., Modern Library, (1951), XVIII-351 pages.
Valuable for introduction and notes on fairy lore.

Yeats, William Butler, Plays in Prose and Verse, London, Macmillan, 1922, IX-447 pages.
Contains best of Yeats's dramatic output.

Yeats, William Butler, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, N. Y., Macmillan, 1916, VII-131 pages.
Material also contained in Autobiography.

Yeats, William Butler, A Vision, London, Macmillan, 1937, VII-305 pages.
Yeats's 'system' is developed. Obscure.

APPENDIX I

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1865 . . William Butler Yeats born at Sandymount, Dublin, June 13

1867-
1880. . Lived with family in London. Holiday visits to Sligo.

1875-
1880. . Attended Godolphin School, London.

1880 . . Returned to Ireland with family, to live at Howth.

1881 . . Began to attend the Erasmus Smith High School, Dublin.

1884 . . Began to attend the Metropolitan School of Art, Dublin.
Met George Russell (AE).

1885 . . First published poems appeared in Dublin University Review.
Began to study psychical research seriously.
Published The Island of Statues.
Met Katherine Tynan.
Joined Contemporary Club.
Met John O'Leary.
Assisted in founding Dublin Hermetic Society.
Interest in esoteric studies confirmed.

1886 . . Attended first seance.
Interviewed Madame Blavatsky in London.
Founded Dublin Theosophical Lodge.
Met Babu Mohini Chatterjee, Bengal Brahmin.
Published Mosada. A Dramatic Poem.

1887 . . Family moved again to London.
Mother suffered two strokes. Mental weakness followed.
Visited Ireland again in December.

1888 . . Published Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland, an anthology.
Published Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry.
Published Stories from Carleton.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1889 . . Published *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems*.
Associated with Madame Blavatsky.
Attended meetings of London Theosophists.
Came under influence of W. E. Henley.
Met York Powell, Dr. Todhunter, Nettleship, Edwin Ellis.
Began with Ellis explanation of Blake's symbolism and edition of Blake's works.
Met Maud Gonne.
Began to write *The Countess Cathleen*.

1890 . . Met MacGregor Mathers. Joined Order of the Golden Dawn.
Published *Representative Irish Tales*.
Friendship with Florence Farr.

1891 . . Founded Rhymers' Club with Rhys and Rolleston.
Friendship with Lionel Johnson.
Met Ernest Dowson, John Davidson, LeGallienne, Symons, Francis Thompson.
Published *John Sherman* and *Dhoya*.
Developed doctrine of the Self and Anti-Self.
Proposed to and refused by Maud Gonne.
Death of Parnell.
Helped found Irish Literary Society in London.
Visit to company of black magicians in Dublin.
Published *The Countess Cathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics*.

1892 . . Helped found the National Literary Society in Dublin.
Death of Pollexfen grandparents.
Published *Irish Fairy Tales*.

1893 . . Published *The Celtic Twilight*.
Friendship with Arthur Symons, and some acquaintance with French symbolists.
Published with Ellis, *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*.
Published *The Poems of William Blake*, edited by W. B. Yeats.

1894 . . Visit to Paris. Met Bergson and Verlaine. Attended *Axel*.
Met Mrs. Olivia Shakespeare. Met George Moore.
Performance and Publication of *The Land of Heart's Desire*.
Visit to his Uncle George Pollexfen in Sligo.
Visited Lissadell; met Eva and Constance Gore-Booth.

1895 . . Published *Poems*.
Increased interest in Irish Republican Brotherhood.
Published *A Book of Irish Verse Selected from Modern Writers*, edited by W. B. Yeats.
Liaison with Diana Vernon.

1896 . . Publication of *The Savoy*.
Trip to Ireland with Arthur Symons.
Visit to Edward Martyn at Tulira Castle.
Meeting with Lady Gregory.
Trip to Aran Islands.
Trip to Paris. Meeting with J. M. Synge.

1897 . . Publication of *The Secret Rose*.
Visit to Robert Bridges began life-long friendship.
Planned, with Lady Gregory, the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre.
Association with Dr. Douglas Hyde and William Sharp (Fiona MacLeod).
Published *The Tables of the Law* and *The Adoration of the Magi*.
President of Wolfe Tone Memorial Association.

1898 . . Founding of the Irish Literary Theatre.

1899 . . Visit to Paris.
Rejected again by Maud Gonne.
Published *The Wind Among the Reeds*.
Performance of *The Countess Cathleen*.

1900 . . Death of Yeats's mother.
Publication of *The Shadowy Waters*.
Resigned from I. R. B.

1901 . . Collaborated with Lady Gregory in *Where There is Nothing* and *The Pot of Broth*.

1902 . . Irish Literary Theatre replaced by Irish National Dramatic Society.
Production of Diarmuid and Grania, by Yeats and Moore.
Production of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.
Production of Synge's Play, *In the Shadow of the Glen*.
Publication of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

1903 . . Maud Gonne married John MacBride.
Yeats's First Lecture Tour in America.
Production of *The King's Threshold*.
Publication of *Ideas of Good and Evil*.
Publication of *In The Seven Woods*.
Publication of *Where There is Nothing*.
Publication of *Plays for an Irish Theatre*, Vol. I.
London production of *The Hour Glass*, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and *The Pot of Broth*.

1904 . . Opening of Abbey Theatre.
Production of *The King's Threshold*.
Publication of *The Stories of Red Hanrahan*.
Production of *On Baile's Strand*.

1905 . . Maud Gonne obtained legal separation from her husband.

1906 . . Production of *Deirdre*.
Publication of *Poems*, (Bullen).

1907 . . Production of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*.
Yeats involved himself in *Playboy* controversy.
Yeats toured Italy with Lady Gregory and Robert Gregory.

1908 . . Production of poetic version of *The Green Helmet*.
Publication of *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose*.
Visit to Maud Gonne in Paris.

1909 . . Serious illness of Lady Gregory.
Death of Synge.
Yeats in full charge at Abbey Theatre.

1910 . . Visit to Maud Gonne in Normandy.
Publication of *The Green Helmet and Other Poems*.
Death of George Pollexfen.
Yeats given annual grant of £150, on British Civil List.
Yeats accepted seat on Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature.

1911 . . Visited United States with Abbey Theatre Company.
Publication of The Hour Glass.
Yeats in ill health. Lived for time with Ezra Pound.

1912 . . Meeting with Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees.
Lane controversy began.
Continued Ill Health.

1913 . . Publication of Poems Written in Discouragement.

1914 . . Publication of Responsibilities: Poems and a Play.
Began work on Noh plays.
Second lecture tour in United States and Canada.
Movement from magic to spiritualism.

1915 . . Publication of Reveries over Childhood and Youth.

1916 . . Refused knighthood.
Unsuccessful Easter Rising in Ireland.
Death of John MacBride.
Publication of Certain Noble Plays of Japan.
Rejected by Maud Gonne.

1917 . . Production of At the Hawk's Well.
Proposed to Iseult Gonne, and was refused.
Marriage to Miss Georgie Hyde-Lees.
Discovery of wife's automatic writing.
Publication of The Wild Swans at Coole, Other Verses, and A Play in Verse.

1918 . . Death of Major Robert Gregory in Italy.
Quarrel with Maud Gonne, soon resolved.
Publication of Per Amica Silentia Lunae.
Work begun on Thoor Ballylee.

1919 . . Baby daughter, Anne Butler Yeats, born in February.
Publication of Two Plays for Dancers.
Publication of The Wild Swans at Coole.
Third lecture tour in America.

1920 . . Publication of Michael Robartes and the Dancer.
Publication of Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland. (Two essays and notes by Yeats included.)
Publication of Calvary.

1921 . . Publication of Four Plays for Dancers.
Publication of Four Years.
Birth of son, Michael Yeats.

1922 . . Death of J. B. Yeats.
Publication of Seven Poems and a Fragment.
Publication of The Trembling of the Veil.
Publication of Plays in Prose and Verse.
Production of The Player Queen.
Honorary degree from Belfast.
Honorary degree from Dublin.
Yeats appointed Senator of new Irish Free State.

1923 . . Yeats awarded Nobel Prize for literature.

1924 . . Publication of *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems*.
Publication of *Essays*.
Visit to Sicily.

1925 . . Travel in Sicily and Italy.
Publication of *The Bounty of Sweden*.
Publication of *A Vision*.

1926 . . Publication of *Estrangement*.
Publication of *Autobiographies*.

1927 . . Publication of *October Blast*.
Ill health -- lung haemorrhages.
Travel in Spain and France.
Further illnesses.

1928 . . Retirement from the Senate.
Visit to Rapallo.
Return to Ireland.
Publication of *The Tower*.
Publication of Yeats's version of Sophocles' *King Oedipus*.
Publication of *The Death of Synge*.

1929 . . Publication of *A Packet for Ezra Pound*.
Publication of *The Winding Stair*.
Production of *Fighting the Waves*.
Leaving of Thoor Ballylee.
Ill health again -- Malta fever.

1930 . . Stay at Rapallo.

1931 . . Honorary Doctor of Letters from Oxford University.

1932 . . Death of Lady Gregory.
Founding of Irish Academy of Letters.
Third Lecture Tour to America.
Publication of *Words for Music, Perhaps, and Other Poems*.
Publication of *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*.

1933 . . Publication of *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*.

1934 . . Publication of *The King of the Great Clock Tower*.
Publication of *Wheels and Butterflies*.
Publication of *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats*.
Publication of *Letters to the New Island*.
Yeats underwent Steinach operation.

1935 . . Beginning of friendship with Dorothy Wellesley.
Publication of *A Full Moon in March*.
Winter in Majorca with Shri Purohit Swami, and collaborated in translation of the *Upanishads*.

1936 . . *Dramatis Personae, 1896-1902, Estrangement, The Bounty of Sweden* published together.
Publication of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935, Chosen by W. B. Yeats*.

1937 . . Grant of money for declining years by Yeats Testimonial Committee, New York.
Publication of second version of *A Vision*.
Publication of *Essays, 1931-1936*.

1938 . . Publication of *The Herne's Egg*.
Publication of *New Poems*.

1939 . . Death of Yeats, January 28.
Publication of *On the Boiler*.

1940 . . Publication of *Last Poems and Plays*.
Publication of *If I were Four-and-Twenty*.

1941 . . Publication of *Letters to Miss Florence Farr*.
Publication of *Pages from a Diary Written in 1930*.

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