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ABSTRACT

W.B. YEATS THE DIMENSIONS OF POETIC VISION

by Frederic Stewart Colwell

This study traces the emergence of a crucial dualism in Yeats's thought and art, his efforts to clarify and portray these terms of conflict, and his struggle to yoke them in the central paradox of his poetic vision.

Yeats recognized in Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition the classic articulation of the impulse to create unity and pattern, the vocabulary of Being which he characterized as Primary experience. In its quest for a transcendence beyond multiform reality, Yeats's earliest work suggests a theocentric or primary orientation, and the metaphor of the journey dramatizes the transition from the world of Becoming to a transfigured life beyond the cycles of generation.

Yeats defined an aspect of his personal and creative life in terms of the vocabulary provided by Platonic tradition, but to isolate this aspect of his art is to ignore the fact that Yeats was ever of two minds. Primary experience represents but one half of the Yeatsian coin; to treat it in isolation is to reduce Yeats's role as poet to that of a fabricator of inert Platonic allegory. The manuscript and published versions of The Shadowy Waters witness Yeats's predisposition to divide his world into antinomies, and chronicles his efforts to define their implications and come to terms with Primary and Antithetical experience as elements of a viable aesthetic.

It is the dilemma of the poet who serves the demands of organic form and the integrity of his personal vision to affirm as well the irreducible



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nature of the existential. As poet, Yeats was committed to the immediacy of things through the very fabric of his art. He was aware of the threat Platonism held for the poet, that it tolerated his art as no more than a Shelleyan rite du passage, a flight from the Antaean qualities of experience as well as the stubborn substantive grain of language itself.

The dialectic of the Mask served the Yeatsian dualism as an account of the individual psychomachia, and by the <u>pars pro toto</u> process which is fundamental to the exercise of the mythopoeic imagination, the personal integration which is effected through Unity of Being is projected in terms of the play of world history. To satisfy Yeats's desire for an integrated poetic vision, the Mask and Unity of Being must achieve final expression as a cosmic principle. Only when Yeats achieved an emotional affirmation of temporality and impermanence, Becoming as well as Being, was he able to project his dualism in temporal terms, whereby it emerges as process, the cyclic process recounted in A Vision.

The phasal progressions by which Yeats's Great Wheel charts the circular passage from Primary through Antithetical experience enacts the same process by which <u>Timaeus</u> and the zodiac dramatize the life of the universe as split into opposing yet complementary phases which effect ultimate resolution. Yeats's figure of the daimon functions as mediator between primary and antithetical experience; his persona, the hero, saint, fool, and artist dramatize various aspects of the myth of integration.

Yeats's awareness of the cyclic myth of integration was rooted in his insight into the course of his own career as poet and public man. Having confronted the antithetical crisis, his sympathies came full circle and realigned themselves with theocentric or objective Being. Yeats's final phase represents his final struggle for integration. The condition anticipating the achievement of unified consciousness must in terms of the

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growth of the mythopoeic imagination presuppose the cleavage of dualism. Yeats's achievement involved, however, no reversion to a poetically untenable position, but a deepened awareness of the two halves of his "round dance of life," and wrung from it the toughened knowledge won in the embattled arena of experience.



W. B. YEATS
THE DIMENSIONS OF POETIC VISION

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Ву

Frederic Stewart Colwell

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Man shares with a few others of the higher mammals the curious privilege of citizenship in two worlds. He enjoys in daily alternation two distinct kinds of experience— $\mathring{v}\pi\alpha\rho$ and $\mathring{o}v\alpha\rho$ as the Greeks called them—each of which has its own logic and its own limitations; and he has no obvious reason for thinking one of them more significant than the other. For normal men the dream world is the sole experience in which they escape the offensive and incomprehensible bondage of time and space.

E.R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational

The perennial conflict of dream and reality, or of the emotions and the intellect. finds its expression in that tradition of epistemological dualism which is inseparable from the course and character of western thought. Its imprint is to be found in the Platonic distinction between the One and the Many and, in philosophy and theology, between Being and Becoming. In the seventeenth century it took on the character of the Cartesian dualism, when the philosophes methodically divided the tide of experience into the mutually exclusive categories of idealism and mechanism. Whitehead called this particular division of experience the fons et origo malorum of all subsequent reflection and philosophical speculation. 2 But. in effect, the need to divide and categorize experience existed in human nature long before Descartes, before Plato, and before the earliest of the Ionian thinkers. Anthropology tells us that this impulse arises from the needs of the primitive consciousness to derive its orientation from the baffling chaos of experience. Psychology attributes it to that bifurcation of the conscious and un4

conscious world which is the first stirring of self-consciousness within the ego, and myth and religion, in their own peculiar languages, recount the same tale of human alienation resulting from man's first perception of otherness.

Those who found themselves uneasy heirs to these fragmentations of experience gave their support variously to the dream, or
to the testimony of their five senses. Often they redefined the
terms entirely, and sought to embrace the world of dream as more
real and more substantial than an illusory world of the senses.
There were those as well who chose to avoid such commitments and
dwell in a twilight world somewhere between the two extremes. But
given the world in pieces, the more enterprising sought to rediscover
its primal integration. This thirst for unity and coherence, which
A.O.Lovejoy has called the "metaphysical pathos," appears to be as
unexpungable an impulse as that which first led to its fragmentation.

Lovejoy describes man's "two-fold belief that he is on the one hand in the midst of realities which are not himself nor mere obsequious shadows of himself, a world which transcends the narrow confines of his own transient being; and, on the other hand, that he can himself somehow reach beyond those confines and bring these external existences within the compass of his own life, yet without annulment of their transcendence." Man has ever been torn between a desire to explore his instinctive awareness for a possible ubiquity of things in time and space, and at the same time, to essay a practical knowledge of concrete, irreducible fact.

Hence the traditional rationalist, with his <u>horror vacui</u>, seeks to stabilize the sensuous flux, and curtly dismisses as irrational 5

that which fails to fit his static world of Being, while the foes of rationalism dismissed reason as an aery fabrication which has lost its Antaean touch with the often terrible testimony of experience. The commitment of the traditional philosopher appears to have been to the integrity of his system. This is no less true of the poet, but in the case of the poet there is a further commitment whose demands are equally if not more pressing. If the dilemma of man is to recognize and respect the irrational and apparently irreducible aspects of his experience, and at the same time to struggle to wield it into a viable system, it is no less that of the poet who must serve the demands of a unified form, and who, yet, is contracted to the immediacy of "thingness" through the very fabric of his craft, his personal experience of things.

It is in the light, or shadow, of this conflict that I propose this study of Yeats, who was himself aware of its relevance not only to his personal life and growth, but to his understanding of human history, to the exercise of the mythopoeic imagination, and to his art.

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Nothing retains its own forms; but Nature the great renewer, ever makes up forms from forms. Be sure there's nothing perishes in the whole universe; it does but vary and renew its form.

Metamorphoses, VII

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.

Yeats, untitled poem

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In the first chapter, a study of the revisions of the play The Shadowy Waters, I have attempted to deal with the earliest signs of dualism in the young Yeats. In its earliest manifestations. this conflict appears as little more than an antipathy between a revulsion against the practical world and a desire for the seductions of the dream. In the course of Yeats's encounters with this play, there is evident a struggle to clarify the terms of conflict. What began as personal predisposition struggled to find realization in art and within the stringent demands of dramatic expression. The recasting of this play as well as the later revisions of Yeats's poetry suggests more than a growing awareness of the demands of a direct and vigorous poetic statement, but a changing attitude toward art and life. Perhaps this gradual awareness of the necessity of change is one of the most important aspects of Yeats's mature thought, and his revisions of plays and poetry suggest the impossibility of recapturing a sensibility which has already slipped into the past.

Chapter two examines two of the traditional sources which
Yeats pursued: Heraclitus and Plato. It is clear that he did not
discover what he was to recognize as "primary experience" in
Platonism, but he did rediscover or realize an aspect of himself in
the impulse represented by Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition, and
these served to provide and articulate the vocabulary with which
this sensibility found its expression. Thus Yeats's heady plunges
into philosophical, historical, and esoteric tradition witness an
attempt to widen and deepen a conceptual awareness of what began
as a purely personal orientation. They provided it with the



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resonance of what tradition has preserved as generic human experience, and enabled Yeats to wield a personal and cultural synthesis by discovering a personality and an art which was at one with the pulse of human experience. It is clear, however, that as Yeats's inquiry into Neoplatonism deepened, so did his awareness of its failure to account for the purely experiential. The labours which lay behind the fashioning of The Shadowy Waters had already proven as much, that one aspect of experience could not exist or find expression without the other. Characteristically, Yeats's instincts led him to opposing traditions in order to affirm what he recognized as countertruth, the experiential or antithetical nature of man.

Chapter three traces a specific departure from Platonic tradition: Yeats's permutations on the figure of the daimon. The Yeatsian daimon functions as a principle of integration, and is crucial to the creative rapport between antithetical and primary experience. I have attempted to trace the genesis of the daimon as a compound of traditional sources and the demands of Yeats's own system, as well as in the psychological process by which the individual is both drawn to and repelled by the "total demand" of primary Being.

Yeats's struggle to provide an integrated account of cultural history echoes the same struggle through which he sought to account for and integrate the facets of his personal life. The subject of chapter four, Unity of Being, describes a personal as well as a cultural synthesis, and traces its final projection in the figure of the sphere which affirms Unity of Being as the principle of

cosmic synthesis comprehending the apparent oppositions of Being and Becoming, primary and antithetical experience.

Chapters five and six define the roles of the hero, the artist, saint, and fool, which served Yeats as exempla or dramatizations of various manifestations of primary and antithetical experience.

These, titans and grotesques, struggle to integrate the terms of conflict, to realize in themselves, in their actions, or in their art, the creative synthesis.

The concluding chapter examines the lineaments of the Yeatsian myth as it unfolds from an operative dualism to paradoxical resolution.

I have already suggested the importance of Yeats's personal acceptance of the necessity of change and growth to his thought and art. Throughout this study I have attempted to emphasize the consequences which accrued when what had once been no more than a static dualism or play of opposition was projected into a temporal dimension. Under such circumstances, dualism becomes process, specifically, cyclical process, the process of Becoming whose expression lies solely within the language of myth. Yeats was faced with the necessity of evolving a mythic cosmos in those spatial and temporal terms which are peculiar to the dimensions of the mythopoeic mind. In spite of its often galling esoteric aspects, the Yeatsian mythology served its author well in realizing that integration of those opposing terms which are essential to the poetry maker's art, the marriage of the personal with the universal.

I wish to record my thanks to the librarians of Michigan
State University, The National Library of Ireland, Trinity College



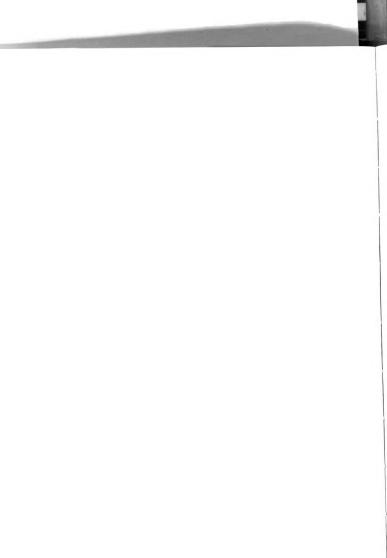
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CHAPTER I

The Shadowy Waters: The Clarification of Conflict



The Shadowy Waters and its many revisions occupied Yeats for over twenty-three years from its earliest drafts until the completion of the final acting version in 1907. This period saw much of his development as a poet and dramatist. It spans his early "dramatic" poems, Mosada and The Island of Statues, The Wanderings of Oisin, and the years of his greatest success with the Abbey Theatre. A study of the play with its published and manuscript revisions throws considerable light on the progress of the young Yeats, his assimilation of influences, and his early stages of development as a playwright. These aspects of the play's evolution have been examined by a number of Yeats's critics who have drawn on the successive published versions in order to document the poet's stylistic development, the remarkable transition from a vague, dream-like PreRaphaelitism to the tensile strength of his mature poetic statement.

Perhaps the most succinct index of the trend toward the play's simplification in language and in detail is that which is demonstrated by the changes in the stage directions in the successive versions from 1900 to 1907. No less bewildering than the language was the detailed stage picture itself. The stage directions for 1900 describe a cumbersome array of symbolic detail: "3 rows of hounds, the first dark, the second red, and then white with red ears, make a conventional pattern on the sail. Forgael. . . has a silver lily worked on the breast of his garment, Dectora a



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rose."² The evolution of Yeats's sail throughout the revisions illustrates a gradual simplification as strikingly as the pruning of the dialogue. In 1905 Dectora and Forgael relinquish their heraldic devices, but Yeats, reluctant to forego all his imagery, replaces his hounds with a "blue pattern on a dark green sail."³ By 1907 the cutting is drastic, and Yeats contents himself with a terse description of a simple sail "of a dull copper colour."⁴

The relation of Yeats's occult hereldry to the action is tenuous and certainly dramatically irrelevant. Its context was The Wind Among the Reeds and Cisin, where the hound and deer, as Yeats explained, are images of the desire of man for woman, woman for man. 5 The red-eared hounds of The Shadowy Waters wound their way through an overripe dialogue burgeoning with symbolic detail. The sailors describe them as running from the silver arrow of the eternal pursuit, and Dectora, in an interminable revery, seals her surrender to Forgael with the somewhat superfluous observation:

". . . silver arrows/ Ah they have pierced his heart."

Mone of Yeats's critics, however, have suggested that the transformation effected by the successive and improved dramatizations indicates any more than the poet's growing awareness of the exigencies of dramatic form, and a recognition of the poetic potentialities inherent in common speech as opposed to a highly mannered poetic diction. In a writer of Yeats's integrity it is reasonable to assume that a marked change in style would reflect as well a change or clarification of the conceptual basis which first sustained the early style. It is unlikely that Yeats laboured over seemingly endless revisions merely for the sake of practising

his talents as a fledgling dramatist, or from a nostalgic loyalty for his early work. Yeats was at the same time occupied with other plays and other revisions which furnished a more rewarding schooling as dramatic poet. Yet, repeatedly, he returned to <u>The Shadowy Waters</u>, apparently anxious to preserve something of value which he felt was as valid in his maturity as it had been in his youth.

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The changes wrought in Yeats's reworkings of his play in manuscript before its first publication in 1900 are no less revealing than those which marked the succeeding published editions. As Yeats himself had boasted to his father, he had written for the narrative version of 1900 what was almost an entirely new play. The early manuscript versions have neither been published nor received any critical attention, although they repay careful examination by furnishing a valuable guide to Yeats's early preoccupations and method. The National Library of Ireland preserves twenty-four portfolios of fragments, drafts, and nearly completed texts written over the years previous to the date of the first published version. None of these are dated, and in those cases where the drafts are only fragmentary, they defy any attempt to establish a precise chronology. Their sequence, however, is relatively simple to determine.

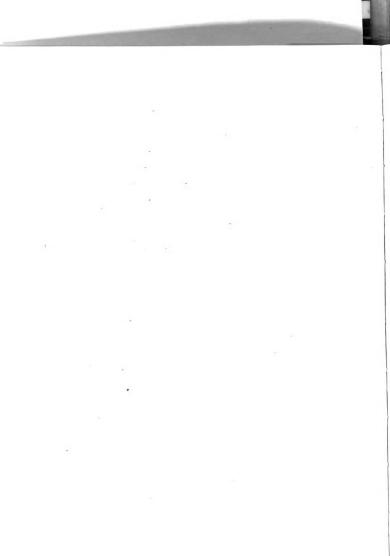
In order to indicate the contrast between the early efforts and the published version, I quote Yeats's own synopsis which appeared in a program note for the Abbey production of 1906. The

plot itself (apart from its treatment) remains substantially the same in all the published versions.

Once upon a time, when herons built their nests in old men's beards, Forgael, a sea-king of ancient Ireland, was promised by certain human-headed birds, love of a supernatural intensity and happiness. The birds were the souls of the dead, and he followed them over seas toward the sunset where their final rest is. By means of a magic harp, he could call them about him when he would, and listen to their speech. His friend, Aibric, and the sailors of his ship thought him mad, or that he and they were being lured to destruction. Presently, they captured a ship, and found a beautiful woman upon it, and Forgael subdued her and his own rebellious sailors by the sound of his harp. The sailors fled upon the other ship, and Forgael and the woman drifted on alone following the birds. awaiting death and what comes after, or some mysterious transformation of the flesh, an embodiment of every lover's dream.

Considering the pains which Yeats took in the successive published versions to render his characters dramatically credible, one is surprised to find the Forgael of the earliest drafts more firmly and vividly drawn than his successors. Descended from seagods, a "man of great stature," a brigand, and even a remorseless murderer, he provides a more virile and arresting figure than that of the emasculated dreamer who emerged in 1900. Yeats's subsequent efforts to recast his characters seem largely to have been a struggle to retrieve them from a PreRaphaelite cast which lessened their effectiveness in the narrative version of 1900.

The Forgael and his companions of the manuscript versions contrast forcibly with the somewhat pastoral figures of 1900. The Seabar and his eagle-headed followers who haunt the ship (and who anticipate the bird-like creatures of the later <u>Plays for Dancers</u>) subsist on human sacrifice, and Forgael, acting as their surrogate, plunders and harries passing ships, strewing the ocean with corpses



for their gratification. The eagle-headed men are referred to as the progeny of Tethra, father of the acquiline race who were deposed by the Tuath de Danaan. In subsequent drafts they are referred to simply as "Fomors."

Yeats sketched the background of the Fomorah in his notes to The Wanderings of Oisin, although they appear to have been modified somewhat in his play. Their origins derive from the earliest of the Irish mythic parables. Balor, the leader of the hosts of darkness, led his people, the Fomorah, to defeat in a decisive battle with the Tribes of Danu, the children of light. The Fomorah of myth were monstrous, goat or bull-headed creatures with one leg and one arm growing from their chests, and were the ancestors of all the misshapen. The Book of the Dun relates that the Fomorah among other monstrous creatures were the descendants of Ham and the heirs to his father Noah's drunken curse. They were, then, associated with the progeny of Cain, accursed, and condemned to walk in darkness. Rhys euhemerized the conflict of the Fomorah and the Tuath de Danaan into an important historical struggle, but MacCulloch affirms that the Fomorah, who ruled Ireland for a time from their glass stronghold on Tory Island, were gods of darkness. They are certainly contrasted with the Tuath de Danaan whom legends described as arriving from Heaven. The Tuath reached Ireland on Beltane and are associated with the rebirth of the season celebrated in the spring festival, while the Fomorah exacted their tribute on Samhain, which ushers in the winter night. "The strife of Fomorians and Tuath de Danaan, " MacCulloch writes, "suggests the dualism of all nature religions," and in particular the Zoroastrian dualism

of Ahriman and his daevas set against Ahura Mazda and his angels, the conflict of light and darkness which formed the basis for an ethical dualism of good and evil.

The sinister Fomorah with their long grey robes and iron talons in Yests's play, bring with them from their mythic context, impressions of a dark world of primitive cruelty and terror, which Forgael's barbarous murder of Dectora's lover, Aleel the poet, does nothing to mitigate. These Fomorah were obviously the source of Lady Gregory's dismay when, as she recounts in <u>Our Irish Theatre</u>, she had been startled on first meeting Yeats by his curious description of a play in which half the characters bore the faces of eagles. 10

Forgael, however, does bear the discontent of his successors. Dissatisfied with his macabre role as breadwinner for the Fomorah and overcome by "a breath of Danaan roses," he is enchanted by a vision of the island of the children of Dana.

Among the sighing foam, and roses hang
Above the foam, like little dropping flames.
And he who gathers them about his heart
Endures the wisdom, day after day
Until the sun and moon are dead
And heaped up. 11

Forgael is distracted from his obligations to the Fomorah, and is directed in his quest by mysterious voices which pervade the night, describing the delights of the Danaan land. In the earliest manuscript drafts, the voices sing of a country which is prized "because there is no desire there." In succeeding versions we are told "A song comes over the waters, praising the islands of the

gods, because there is no battle there. The song cries out for protection against the dark multitudes who toss upon the sea in dream and rapine."12

Yeats's clarification of the goal of Forgael's quest provides perhaps the most revealing insight offered by a study of these early plays. It is, in effect, a clarification of Yeats's own concept of reality.

A prose scenario in manuscript marks the abrupt transition to the "new play" which Yeats prepared for publication in 1900. The Fomorah disappear along with the figure of the poet Aleel, Dectora's lover and counsellor. Aibric is introduced as Forgael's interlocutor, and the crew, no longer cowed by their captain, are openly mutinous. Forgael has lost much of his heroic stature and has been sapped of his primitive energy. He remains a hollow, listless wanderer committed to a pale dream of unfulfilled desire. The ship, however, takes on considerable ballast when the mysterious voices which pressed Forgael on give way to a motley convoy drawn from Yeats's personal symbolic preoccupations of the moment. hornless deer, the multicoloured hounds, the fool and the fool's harp, the silver arrow, the figures of Aengus and Edain, the grey birds or winged souls, and a puzzling apparition "half a lamb and half a goat" who "walked on the waters" all serve to launch Forgael or pilot him on his venture. 13 The ether is as well trafficked as that of Prospero's enchanted isle.

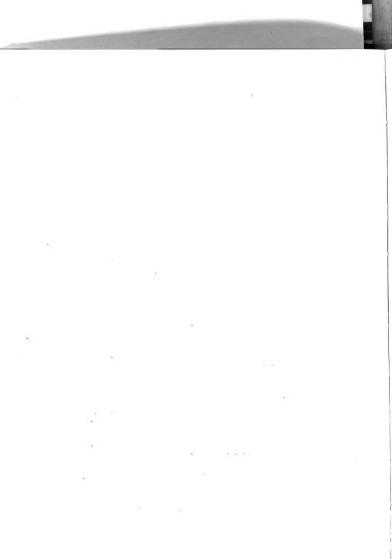
In this version of the play (1900), the island of the Danaans loses its explicit mythic context; no longer the home of Danaan deities, it becomes a vague expression of the poet's aspirations,

a land of heart's desire where "time and the world and all things dwindle out." Having forfeited the Irishry associated with its Danaan title, the island goal has become more suggestive of a reality transcending mere geographic location, and recalls a wider range of European and Indo-European tradition, as a vision of the eternal Eden beyond the western twilight. Yeats was undoubtedly aware of the affinity of the Celtic land of enchanted streams with the Land of Cockayne and the Hebrew paradise, with their rivers of oil, milk, wine and honey, or the beautiful and transparent rivers rolling down to the otherworld sea in Lucian's True History. His efforts to widen the mythic reference, however, only serve to blur the goal as well as the voyager's aspirations. The play of 1900 and all successive narrative versions are prefaced with the poem "Walking at Coole" in which Yeats describes a fleeting vision of his here and hereine.

How shall I name you, immortal, mild, proud shadows? I only know that all we know comes from you, Ahd that you come from Eden on flying feet.
. . . Is Eden out of time and out of space? 15

It is within this Eden that Forgael seeks to consummate an eternity of love.

It is at this stage that <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> assumes its most characteristic <u>fin</u> <u>de siècle</u> pose. Forgael's indefinite yearnings



for a mysterious transcendence, his disdain for the world and his self-conscious withdrawal are characteristic of the protest against nineteenth century materialism and religion which Edmund Wilson has diagnosed as the prevailing <u>fin de siècle</u> malaise. Fundamentally, it was a revulsion against transience, the impermanence of things and emotions in the sensible world, and it offered a retreat to an ideal existence bounded by the world of the imagination. Forgael is clearly identifiable with a number of his fictional contemporaries, Axel, Marius, Des Essientes, and perhaps at this time with Yeats himself. All chose the anti-realistic faith, the subjective rather than the objective life.

My isolation from ordinary men and women was increased by an asceticism destructive of mind and body, combined with an adoration of physical beauty that made it meaningless. Sometimes the barrier between myself and other people filled me with terror; an unfinished poem and the first and never finished version of The Shadowy Waters had this terror for their theme.

If Forgael's speech "all could be well/Could we but give us wholly to our dream" supplied in itself any satisfying definition of purpose in the nineties, it meant little to the poet of 1905. As early as 1889, however, Yeats appears to have diagnosed the disease, but his recovery was a slow and laboured one. He had then written Katherine Tynan:

I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before, in this process of correction; for instance, that it is almost always a flight into fairyland from the world, and summons to that flight. The chorus to "The Stolen Child" sums it up—that is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint—the cry of the heart against necessity.

By 1904 Yeats had attained the luxury of perspective, and wrote A.E.:



I cannot possibly be quite just to any poetry that speaks to me with the sweet insinuating voice of the dwellers in that country of the shadows and hollow nights. I have dwelt there too long not to dread all that comes out of it.19

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Before publishing the first version of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u>, Yeats admitted attempting "to get into this play a grave kind of ecstasy."²⁰ The ecstasy which he sought perhaps floundered in the poet's own indecision as to the object of Forgael's quest for transcendence in that somewhat impalpable region "where the world dwindles out." But as Yeats clarified his own aims and consolidated his characters, he inserted a new speech in which his voyager's goal becomes a sort of supernal ecstasy. "The play is now upon a single idea," he wrote Florence Farr in July, 1905, "which is in these lines:

When the world ends Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible joy The flagstone under all, the fire of fire The root of the world. "21

The importance Yeats attaches to these lines suggests that they have become crucial to an understanding of the play, or at least to his new conception of the play's meaning. Before considering their significance it is necessary to reconsider the nature of the goal and the flight, Yeats's dialectic of reality and the drama as embodied in the dramatic action.

The typewritten manuscript draft for the version which Yeats quotes in his earlier letter to Miss Farr witnesses the new course which Yeats had set. The additions, which are for the most part wersion. They are few, but all serve to buttress a new interpretation. Very little of consequence has been eliminated from the old copy. This would indicate that Yeats found no real discrepancy between the two versions, that the additional passages served to clarify the imperfectly articulated ideas already latent in his play. The course Yeats set for The Shadowy Waters, in spite of its numerous modifications, had been a true one; his struggle lay chiefly in bringing into focus its destination.

Until this point, the play had never entirely freed itself from the implication that the land of heart's desire, the home-land of Forgael's aspirations, was any more than a world of dreams as contrasted with the waking world of common life. One of the few images in the play which survives from the earliest manuscript drafts to the final published version, gradually derives from its changing context an entirely new weight of meaning.

Forgael: I hear a music heavy with the dreams
The children of Dana make with purple breath
Upon the mirrors of the world
Then smooth out with busy hands and sigh. 22

In 1900 the speech is given to Aibric.

• • • and he who longs
For happier love but finds unhappiness
And falls among the dreams the drowsy gods
Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world
And then smooth out with ivory hands and sigh. 23

There is something deceptive and misleading about these will o' the wisp dreams which are a god's caprice and which promise no more of real permanence than life itself. When the words are given to Aibric, who is unable to fathom Forgael's intimations, they are used to dismiss his captain's vision of reality as insubstantial, hallucinatory, the stuff of Druid dreams.

In 1906 the speech reverts to Forgael, and Yeats turns the argument upon itself. Forgael condemns the world:

. . . that old promise breaker,
The cozening fortune-teller that comes whispering,
'You will have all you have wished for when you have earned
Land for your children or money in a pot'.
And when we have it we are no happier,
Because of that old draught under the door,
Or creaky shoes.

. . . We have fallen in the dreams the Ever-living Breathe on the burnished mirror of the world. . . . 24

In spite of the new element of earthiness which salts Yeats's dialogue, it is clear that the world, its possessions, and its promises have finally emerged as the dream. Reality lies now only with the distant goal; all else is illusory. But Forgael, his own way clear, is unable to clarify matters for Aibric. He falters in his attempted explanation, and it falls on deaf ears:

Forgael:

It's not a dream
But the reality that makes our passion
As lamps shadow—no—no lamp, the sun.
What the world's million lips are thirsting for rust be substantial somewhere.25

With this in mind, the following passage can only serve to compound Aibric's confusion:

All would be well
Could we but give us wholly to the dreams
And get into their world that to the sense
Is shadow, and not linger wretchedly
Among substantial things; for it is dreams
That lift us to the flowing, changing world
That the heart longs for.
. . . Could we but mix ourself into a dream
Not its image on the mirror!
. . . And yet I cannot think they're leading me
To death. 26

The Shadowy Waters was from the beginning founded upon a



tension, or at least an imputed tension between two realities, the dream and the world, the spiritual and material orders. When these two are viewed separately by their respective proponents, Aibric and Forgael, the one is incapable of recognizing the opposing claims of the other. Consequently, Aibric will uphold the reality of the sensible world against the promises of Forgael's dreams. Forgael, on the other hand, whose commitment lies with the spiritual order, sees Aibric's reality as itself no more than a deceptive dream. When Forgael, in his efforts to explain his vision to Aibric, attempts to bridge the gap between their discrepant modes of thought, he arrives at a dialectical impasse, and adopting the terms of both camps, his excursus becomes a baffling series of equivocations.

The single word "substantial" appears within these contrasting contexts within Forgael's speech, and it is apparent that in his equivocal use of the term, the voyager has placed himself in the heart of a characteristically Platonic dilemma. Man customarily regards abstractions as having been drawn from things, but the Platonist sees things as if proceeding from abstractions. He whose thought and loyalties have been shaped by the experiences of the sensible world cannot comprehend the bestowal of objective existence on what he considers to be no more than subjective abstraction or fancies. Forgael has cast his lot with that of the Platonist, and looks upon the rest of mankind as imprisoned within its cave, habitually mistaking shadows for reality.

In Yeats's final acting version, the poet inserts a speech

in which Forgael is forced to admit his pedagogical failure.

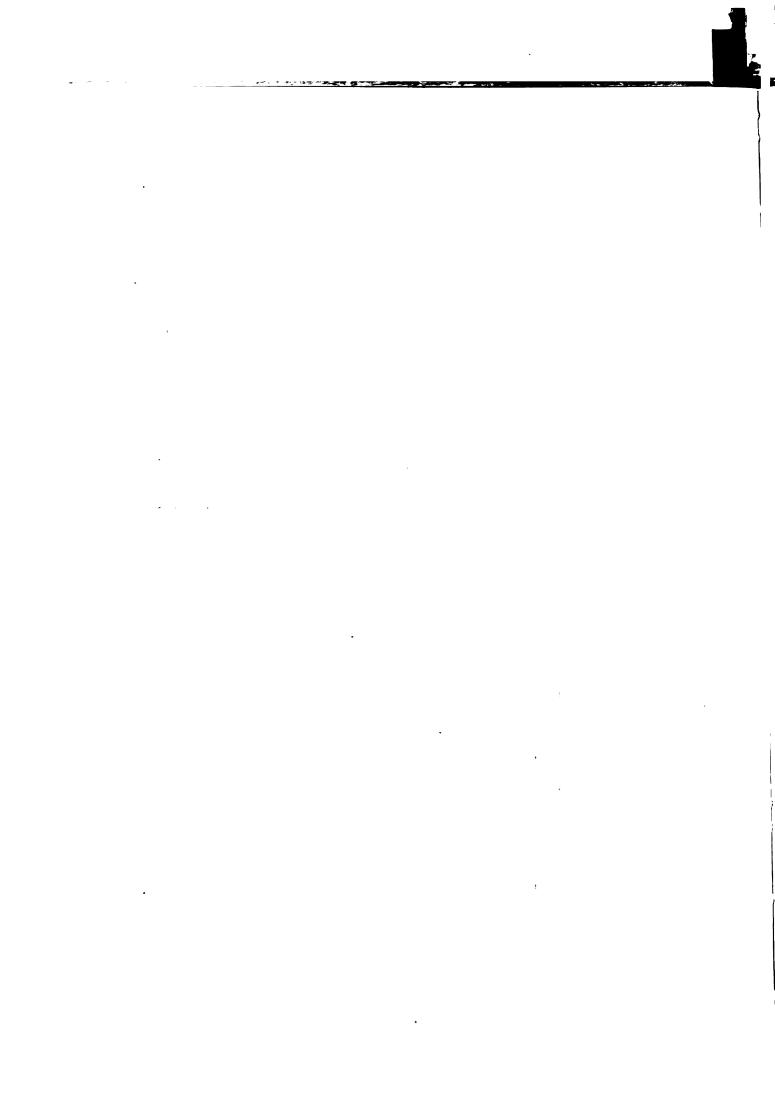
His inability to explain his position to Aibric is, in effect,

the failure of discursive language to delineate the paradoxical

nature of a visionary experience which transcends expression.

The vision, as personally experienced, alone provides the momentary flare which illumines reality with certainty and conviction. The poetic mind, however, finds its only recourse in the uncertainty provided by analogical expression. The poet is committed to the "impure" experiential materials of the sensible world, while Forgael's vision subsists in the unfaltering conviction of unimpaired spiritual apprehension. Having clarified the final implications of Forgael's argument, Yeats could no longer ally himself with Forgael's position, in which the office of the poet was that of a fabricator of the "beautiful lie" of Platonist fable.

The Shadowy Waters is, above all, Forgael's play, and it is Forgael's vision of reality which commands our attention. The common dichotomies of the dream and the world, illusion and reality, life and death, have been inverted, and the vision lies solely with the visionary hero who will, because of this, always be misunderstood by his fellows. These antithetical modes of being



which threatened dialectical chaos are bridged first by Dectora whose surrender (abetted by supernatural promptings) permits her to share Forgael's vision. Dectora has died the death of the visionary into reality. Her memories of her previous life and attachments fade for what they now are, dreams.

But in the passage interpolated in the 1906 version, it would seem that the two discrete orders have themselves been wed in a central metaphysical paradox.

Forgael:

Where the world ends
The mind is made unchanging, for it finds
Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible hope,
The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,
The roots of the world. 28

"Ecstasy. . . the flagstone under all" no longer belongs solely to a remote realm at the close of the journey, but is brought into juxtaposition with "the roots" of the sensible world. Reluctant to forego entirely his dream of a transfigured existence, Yeats has nevertheless intimated his loyalties to the here and now of experience. It required but a further step for the poet to entertain the concept of an incarnate reality inseparable from its physical expression in the sensible world. Yet, Forgael, dedicated Platonist that he is, persists in his refusal to content himself with the imperfections of a substantial world which he regards as no better than a flawed image of transcendent reality.

At this point in his play's evolution, Yeats dissociated himself from Forgael and the ideals of his quest. Forgael, with his enchanter's arts and his captivating song, had long served as an idealization of the poet's role, and in particular, as a projection of Yeats's own poetic odyssey. The disappearance of Aleel

from the published versions leaves Forgael as the sole exponent of the poetic role. Aleel, with his professed loyalties to home, hearth, and the consolations of this world had supplied a dramatic foil for Forgael's unswerving dedication to his transcendent goal. As pallid a creation as Forgael himself, Aleel proved a singularly ineffectual advocate. In the published versions, Aleel's role is usurped by the commonsensical Aibric and the somewhat strained bawdry of the crew. The conflict is now more forcibly realized, but the implications in terms of Yeats's own ambivalence as a poet were more clearly suggested in the earlier antagonism of the rival poets Aleel and Forgael. The lines which Yeats interpolated in 1906 point the direction toward the final resolution of his dilemma.

Yeats's passage with Forgael had long threatened to lead him into the troubled waters plied by his archromantic idol, Shelley. If the poet chooses to cast his lot with the Platonist, his art becomes a mere <u>rite du passage</u>, a struggle to overcome the world of things in order to create awareness of a reality which lies beyond predication and the limits of finite expression. But in refusing the substantial world, he denies, in effect, the fabric of his own art, experience and language. Should the poet turn to affirm the world of immediate experience as reality or incarnate reality, the metaphor of the voyage towards a transfigured goal becomes superfluous, and the poet's role becomes that of an artificer of reality.

•



beginning he saw the world as an encounter of opposing values, and as this view was embodied in his earliest trials with The Shadowr Waters, it too, was in this respect germinal drama. The revisions continued to develop a latent tension between two realities, but it is clear that Yeats only gradually became aware of their implications and acquired the craftsmanship to embody them in dramatic terms. The action in the earliest published versions was limited to a single shuffle: Aibric moved toward his homeland and Dectora from it. Forgael maintained his unwavering conviction throughout. The movement was simple and fluid, with no palpable resistance created between the antagonists who, all speaking with the same tongue, could offer no resistance to one another or convincing contrast.

By 1905 Years had rewritten the sailors' dialogue until they spoke in the rhythmic prose of the comedies in which Lady Gregory collaborated. They begin to speak colloquially, and to think like ordinary seamen. The uniformity of texture gives way to a playing off of prose and poetry, which sets the crew apart from Forgael and reinforces their essential differences.

An unswerving dedication to an ideal marks as well as mers the character of Forgael by 1900. Mothing exists for the dreamer but the dream, an overwhelming longing for what he as yet, can neither name nor comprehend. Dramatically, the play's characterization fails because one can not discriminate between the dreamer, his shipmates, and Dectora herself. Yeats was faced with the practical necessity of making his poem dramatic, and it involved, principally, delineating two contrasting types of humanity,

those who give their allegiance to the world, and those who would move beyond the world to a higher reality. The characterization required is rudimentary; what conflict there is derives from the friction created between these two types. As early as 1899 Yeats had seen the necessity for evolving two distinct orders within his play. He had written AE. at this time: "The new Shadowy Waters could be acted on two tables in a drawing room." Yeats's letter referred to the play of 1900, but it is clear that the finished play failed to fulfil Yeats's designs. The 1900 Shadowy Waters' ineffectual characters might just have well been played upon a single table.

To reconstruct his play as a dramatic vehicle, Yeats was forced to portray two distinct ways of knowing, the intuitive and the discursive, in order to dramatize his fundamental duality, and in spite of the fact that he would give his own support to but one of these. Forgael changes little, he remains the solitary dreamer, but he is now thrown into some relief by the more plausible characterizations of Aibric, Dectora, and the seamen. Their varying allegiances are made clear in the text of 1906 when a sailor is made to boast: "The ale cup is my father and mother," and when, in the closing scene, Forgael tells Dectora: "we grow immortal/. . . and dreams,/That have had dreams for father live in us." 30

Forgael's speeches never fully recover from monologue, and suffer from the impasse created by his solitary commitment to an ideal which is entirely alien to that of the other characters. Except for Dectora, who finally surrenders to Forgael's vision, the remaining characters are uncomprehending, and Forgael must, in effect, address his words to the winds. Dectora herself, until her previous existence has slipped away into a dream, can only see her captor as a madman.

Aibric has extended a hand of perplexed friendship to his master, but in spite of his willingness to share Forgael's destiny, he cannot share his vision, and must return to land with the others. The lot of the visionary hero is a solitary one, and demands total alienation from the processes and activities of the world. Socrates, in describing to Adeimantus the plight of the true philosopher in his relationship to the state, portrayed the same dilemma. "Now in vessels which are in a state of mutiny and by sailors who are mutineers, how will the true pilot be regarded? Will he not be called by them a prater, a star-gazer, a good-for-nothing?" 31

If Socrates' description appears to have been tailored for Forgael, it applies equally well to Seanchan and Martin, the heroes of The King's Threshold and The Unicorn from the Stars. In these plays, however, Yeats has rescued his heroes from the image-crowded sea, only to emphasize their isolation by drawing them in open conflict with an indifferent social order. Seanchan, the chief poet, must openly oppose society, and impose upon it his own vision of order. He must reform it or die.

Martin's predicament is more fully developed. He has, for a time, mistakenly allowed himself to be trapped within an alien, destructive social order. His inability to meet Father John on common terms anticipates his chronic inability to impart his vision to his followers, which precipitates general disaster. Martin



inaugurates his mission by attempting a destruction of self, and severs his most tangible link with the world by destroying his own masterpiece, the golden coach. Johnny Bocach and the rabble who follow him consistently misinterpret Martin's words in the light of their own personal predilections. Partin's appeal to destroy the law becomes for them a challenge to defy English law. Similarly, the destruction of the church is understood by them as Luther's church and "the hump-backed discourse of Seaghan Calvin's Bible."32 But Martin, as his brother Andrew realizes, "is a Mearne like myself; " a solitary whose home lies beyond social order, and whose entire responsibility lies with wholly subjective commitments.33 Martin has preached the destruction of selfhood, the bonds which hindered his vision of the full realization of the soul. He finally recognizes his true role, but it is too late, and the social chaos which he inadvertantly unleashed turns upon him with redoubled fury. Incapable of understanding their leader's motives, his followers can only scent betrayal, and fall upon him as their scapegoat.

Proud in the certainty of his conviction, and aloof because he is unwilling to effect its compromise with the world, "inhuman" because his is a total unwavering commitment to what must lie beyond human experience, the early Yestsian hero enacts a cold, unsympathetic role, one which is, I believe, fundamentally sterile as a dramatic conception. Aware of the inadequacies in the characterization of The Shadowy Waters, Yests appears to have made an effort to restore to Forgael a measure of his original heroic stature. The effort is useless, and only serves to heighten the disparity between Forgael's lot and that of those embroiled in the commitments of

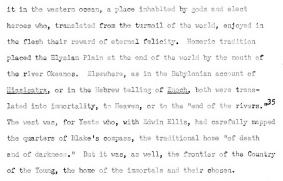


human experience. As Yeats "deepens" the characterization of Aibric and the sailors by allowing them the more vivid rhythms and imagery of common speech, he can only heighten the otherworldliness in his characterization of Forgael. Locked within a common dramatic structure, they become mutually dependent concepts, defining and delineating one another, achieving mere contrast rather than conflict. The properties they exhibit are centripetal, each tending to evade rather than collide with or overpower the other. And yet the antagonists are yoked in a process of affirming their separate identities. The lesson Yeats draw from The Shadowy Waters was an important one in the development of his own poetic vision. In spite of his loyalties to one order of reality, he was faced with the necessity of accepting even affirming the other.

v

The Shadowy Waters proposes a dramatic sequence which explores a resonant area of mythic experience. The sea journey invites inevitable parallels with similar tales in the Celtic tradition. The Voyage of Bran, the Ech tra Condla, and what has been recognized as a prevalent and distinct genre, the imrama, the numerous accounts of the overseas voyage which followed in the wake of the immensely popular Voyage of Saint Brendan, all furnish a formidable precedent. Alfred Mutt, in his studies of The Voyage of Bran established the prevalence of this recurrent theme in Greek as well as Celtic literature. The object of the voyage in either case is a happy land, Flutarch's fortunate isles, or the Isles of the Blest of Hesiod and Pindar. Celt and Greek originally placed





The ship of state, the boat of love, the vessel of the church or of the soul, established themselves firmly in the reservoir of medieval and renaissance metaphor. The sea, as W. H. Auden has pointed out, with its suggestions of a boundless and formless potency, suggested to the rationally minded Greek an alien and threatening environment which necessity bade him cross, but on which he had little desire to linger. 36 His only thought was to find promised haven at the end of the harrowing voyage. For the romantic imagination, however, a curious reversal took place. It is now the sea which provides the true condition of life, and the voyage or the quest becomes the fulfilling of man's appointed role. The voyage effects an escape from the necessities imposed by life on land, a release of the spirit from finite nature. The romantic artist with his voyage or Shelleyan flight becomes the hero of his own epic journey, and it provides for him direction, purpose, and the promise of discovery which lies beyond the cycles of generation.



Yeats's fragile craft found its passage in a mythic mediterranean well trafficked by both romantic and Greek imagination.

The point of embarkation for the mythic sea journey in western tradition appears to have been furnished by the striking precedent provided by Platonic metaphor. It is not my intention to suggest that Yeats consciously set out to fashion a Platonic parable. Like the Christian tradition, and often through its medium, Platonic and Meoplatonic speculation have so swollen the coffers of conventional poetic metaphor that it is unlikely that anything might be written without being accused of usurping their materials. One might gloss with very little ingenuity and the full canon of Meoplatonic authority any number of songs in which a jaded amoreuse bleats for a consummation of her unfulfilled or unfulfillable desires. It might be conjectured that if a song such as "Somewhere over the Rainbow" had first appeared as a fragment of a Homeric hymn, it would have busied for generations the school of Alexandrian exegetes, and eventually found its way into the liturgy of the Christian church.

The genesis of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> was probably rooted in the young Yeats's personal life, and he relates in the notes to <u>Plays for an Irish Theatre</u> that it "was woven to a very great extent out of certain visionary experiences." Yeats continually fed his own personal predispositions with the materials of literary, personal and visionary experience. His early admiration for Shelley, fortified by the pervasive theme of contemporary <u>Sahnsucht</u>, finds its expression in the disembodied and vaguely



articulated longing for an ideal consummation evident in the 1900 version of The Shadowy Waters, The Land of Heart's Desire, and the poems "The Hosting of the Sidhe" and "The Stolen Child." Although those poems all suggest the nostalgia as well as a desire to escape which characterizes "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," they never entirely free themselves from an ambiguity of attitude which inhibits the call to promised enchantment.

It has been suggested in the Introduction to this study that the impulse to escape the world, to dismiss the heterogeneous for a unified concept of reality as a haven from the conflict and contradiction of irascible experience would seem to be an unexpungible impulse in human thought and history. Arthur O. Lovejoy has characterized it as a sort of "metaphysical pathos" which finds its archetypal expression in Platonic thought, the Platonic temper which dramatizes the thirst for the One of the imprisoned soul bound to its mundane existence.

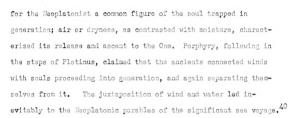
I hope to suggest that one important facet of Yeats's experience was crystallized and articulated through his Platonist readings, and that the unific impulse or sensibility which characterizes this aspect of Yeats's aesthetic was frequently couched in the traditional terms of Platonist myth, in effect, in the language of Platonism. It is necessary, however, to emphasize that Yeats never accepted uncritically a doctrinaire Platonism as the sole basis for his poetic vision. Considered as a whole, his art is realized in the play between the poet's Platonic temper and his very unplatonic loyalties to the mire of human experience.

His vision of reality affirms neither one nor the other, but a synthesis which comprehends the two. My principal objection to the often ingenious exegeses proposed by F.A.C. Wilson lies with his implied acceptance of but one side of the Yeatsian coin. 33 Mr. Wilson's resourceful glossing of the poems with the authority of the Neoplatonic canon threatens to reduce Yeats's art to an inert sort of Platonic allegory which fails to generate its own individual values. Perhaps the most damning criticism to be made of The Shadowy Waters is that it lends itself to an interpretation of this sort. The course of the play's revisions lay in the direction of clarification, and at this point in Yeats's development, the dramatist's ideas of clarification were influenced by his awareness and preoccupation with the Platonic temper and its mythic implications.

Plotinus had charted the course of the wandering soul and cast it in terms highly suggestive of the metaphoric sea-voyage:

If the soul returns to this sphere it finds itself under the same spirit or a new, according to the life it is to live. With this spirit it embarks in the skiff of the universe: the 'spindle of necessity' then takes control and appoints the seat for the voyage, the seat of the lot in life. . . . The universal circuit is like a breeze, and the voyager, still or stirring, is carried forward by it. He has a hundred varied experiences, all sorts of events. The vessel itself furnishes incident, tossing as it drives on. And the voyager also acts of himself in virtue of that individuality which he retains because he is on the vessel in his own person and character. 39

The Meoplatonists, and earlier, Heraclitus, recognized in water the archetypal signature of generation and diversity. "A dry soul," Heraclitus claimed in his fragments, "is wisest and best. . . . It is delight to souls to become moist." Water became



The goal of Forgael's voyage had been variously described in the early published editions as the "ends of the rivers," "the loud streams," but in 1906 Dectora speaks of it as

...Some island where the life of the world Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world Had run into one fountain. $41\,$

The parallels with the Greek conceptions of the Isles of the Elest have already been noted; it was these same mythical rivers which were later assimilated into the metaphor of the Plotinian fountains.

The poet of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> eventually came to recognize in the contours of his own seascape a world ordered by the parables of Platonic myth. <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> becomes by 1906 a psychic interlude depicting the soul wandering across the seas of generation seeking its eternal homeland. The numerous Meoplatonic exegetes of Momer had unravelled precisely the same sequence at the heart of the wanderings of Odysseus, who plied the same sea, seeking release from the bondage of the flesh, and following the same homebound course.

The cumbersome mythological apparatus under which <u>The Shadowy</u>
<u>Waters</u> had laboured in its early drafts, and the allegoric excrescences which characterized the first published version were



dispensed with soon after 1900. In 1884 Yeats had written his father: "doing nothing except the play The Shadowy Maters which will, I think, be good. It is, however, giving me a devil of a job. In my struggle to keep it concrete I fear I shall so overload it with legendary detail that it will be unfit for theatrical performance."

The play had been overloaded, and although Yeats realized what was necessary in order to achieve effective dramatic expression, a certain quality of "concreteness," he lavished it on detail, on setting, and in peopling his play with a horde of subsidiary mythical figures, when what was needed was a clarification of the central struggle and its relevant mythic implications. Yeats had provided an elaborate rigging for his ship but failed to man it with a competent crew.

Gradually he fashioned his play into a generic mythic sequence, a sort of Platonic Ur-myth shorn of much of the particularity of its once specifically Irish context. The sea passage no longer lies, as suggested in the early manuscript drafts, somewhere north, north-west of the Hebrides, nor in "the seas" of 1900, the "waste seas" of 1905, but in the "waste places of the great sea." The stage directions for this Abbey performance of 1906 call for only a suggestion of sea and sky, as "a dark abyss." Robert Gregory's setting and a carefully contrived monotony of colour and movement served to wed the action with a timeless ritual in the heart of a great myth. Yests had translated his homeland of the soul from its terrestrial locale, as had Plato, to an insubstantial spiritual dimension.

vi

The earliest fragments of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> suggest that Yeats had originally intended to draw his action against a background of one of the oldest expressions of sythical dualism, the battle of the sons of light and the sons of darkness. Of the countless mythological and literary versions of this parable, it has frequently been observed that the sons of light, in spite of their epic victory have, as imaginative creations, ever fallen short of the vivid portrayals accorded their antagonists. Man's perennial fascination with the diabheries of the middle ages, those of the mysteries and the Anglo Saxon accounts of the Hexamera, and with Milton's infernal company has coloured the lesers' camp in the cosmic agon more arrestingly, if more luridly, than their foe.

Blake's claim that the forces of goodness have been traditionally, and erroneously, associated with passive obedience to reason, serves to account for much of the comparative pallor of the Miltonic hero. Although Yeats had already read his Blake, he had not yet achieved the same insight into the nature of the conflict he wished to dramatize. But with the later crystallization of $\underline{\mathbf{A}}$ Vision he would align himself with Blake's sympathies by characterizing the extreme objectivity of primary or theocentric experience by the curiously ineffectual passivity of his saints, fools and mandarins.

The Fomorah who appear in the early drafts of Yeats's play provide a more compelling dramatic conception than that of the

hollow voices chanting across the waves of the homeland of
the children of light, free from desire, free of longing, and
for the most part, free from any conviction. We have no indication
as to how the early manuscript versions might have ended. Teats
was unable to furnish his play with a conclusion until he remapped his passage as a journey to an earthly paradise in the
manner of William Morris and his contemporaries of the PreRaphaelite brotherhood. In 1900 the outlines of a dualistic
conception were barely discernable; the poet turned his back on
the sensible world and eschewed any dualistic implications by
focusing his attention wholly on the mists which shrouded Forgael's
indeterminate goal. Forgael's ship is indeed lost at sea; we are
provided with no bearings, neither a convincing statement of what
he is escaping from, nor what he is floeing to.

The province of the soul has always proven notoriously inhospitable to the poet. To achieve expression as poetic statement
it demands actualization, either by being subsumed in symbol or
symbolic act, or by contrast with what it is not, by negative
definition. The demands imposed by dramatic representation are
even more stringent. Dramatic expression belongs to the animate
world, the arena of conflict, desires, thwarted aspirations, and
brief triumphs. Its initial appeal must be engagingly and
immediately substantive.

Yeats's play reaches its attenuated climax when Forgael severs the rope which binds the lovers to the captive ship, and the crew who will return to their own homeland. Dectora speaks:

Forgael has severed more than his ship's hawser. He has shrugged off mortality, his bondage to the cosmic serpent or dragon which Morthern mythology described as entwined among the roots of the world ash, Yggdrasil. Symbolic of the waters of the abyss, the serpent embodies the demiurgic qualities belonging to the world of generation.

Philip Wheelwright suggests that the origins and development of dramatic action and convention demonstrate their affinities with chthonic rather than uranian experience. "The gods of the bright sky invite mimesis in other media—in the clear delineations of sculptured forms in the geometry of temples and shrines, and, where literature is concerned, in the epic." Wheelwright's observation implies that he has fallen prey to the same equation of deity with reason which Blake attacked as fallacious, but his argument is borne out by the evidence of the dramatic tradition.

If dramatic expression falters as an instrument for the revelation of transcendent reality, it is clear from Forgael's speech in the final acting version of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> that Yeats also doubts the efficacy of language itself as a medium for conveying visionary experience.

Forgael: Yet sometimes there's a torch inside my head
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone
I have but images, analogies46

With this might be compared Shelley's thwarted struggle to express the climactic apotheosis of <u>Epipsychidion</u>.

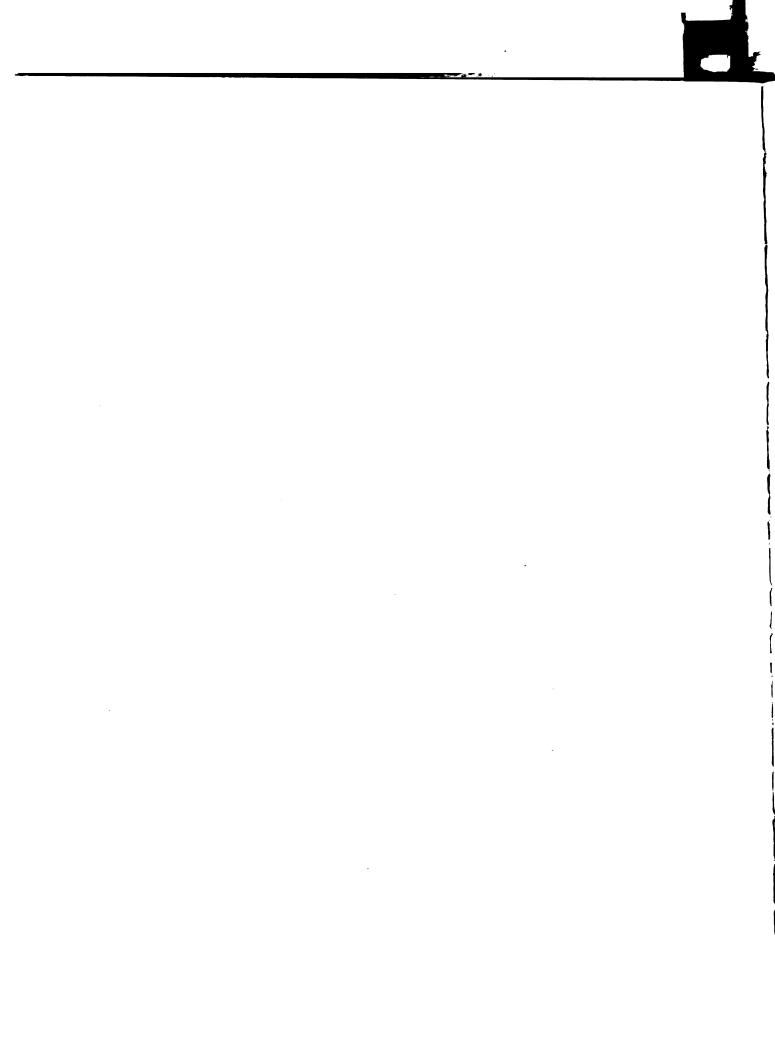


41

The winged words on which my soul would pierce Into the height of Love's rare Universe, Are chains of lead around its flight of fire--47

Yeats eventually turned to the Meoplatonic theory of anima mundi as a means of justifying symbolic expression as something more than mere images or analogies, but as a way of unfolding in its integrity the transcendent perspective of visionary experience. Yeats was to extend these speculations to his dramaturgy as well, and contrive a peculiar mode of dramatic expression which he felt induced the trance-like response requisite to visionary revelation. But symbol, he came to realize, must be subsumed in or reinforced through symbolic action, which is defined only by dramatic conflict in the turbulent arena of human experience. Again Yeats was brought face to face with his obligation as a dramatist to the world of generation. Yeats was free to indulge his speculations in anima mundi, the life of the soul, only by affirming its counterpart, anima hominis, the existential experience which his own apprenticeship as a practising dramatist could no longer permit him to disregard.

The Shadowy Waters was, for Yeats, a personal veyage of discovery. The discipline imposed by dramatic form was certainly not in itself wholly responsible for focusing his attention on the sensible world, but the ever present nagging dilemma posed by his play could not help but bring it forcefully to his attention as an aesthetic responsibility. The Shadowy Waters probably articulated a great deal more for Yeats himself in terms of a growing awareness of the implications of his art then it ever managed to impart to its bewildered audiences.



CHAPTER II

Plato and Heraclitus: Two Sides of One Coin

The previous chapter has attempted to describe Yeats's growing awareness of the two facets of experience which were to inform his poetic vision. At first no more than vaguely felt conflicting sensibilities of sympathy and revulsion, they were defined and articulated in the laboratory of the poet's art; in short, understood in themselves and in their implications. I have suggested that Yeats came to terms with his own Platonist temper and the dissolution it threatened as a viable aesthetic, by augmenting it with its countertruth, the existential experience. Yeats's Platonist tendencies had discovered their proper mask, just as Yeats the dreamer would find his alter ego in his commitment to a national theatre and the public world of Irish politics.

Yeats's first duty was to serve his personal, literary, and political commitments as he understood them, but like many a young writer, he began with no more than a vague assemblage of sympathies, certain emotional or ill-defined predispositions, so that it was long before he was to become aware of what his stance or orientation actually was. The interplay between Yeats's reading in traditional philosophy and the formulation of his own symbolic system is, then, understandably complex. One can never be certain when Yeats is imposing upon his reading a set of rigid preconceptions or when his own position is being shaped and modified by his exposure to tradi-



tional philosophy. Yeats himself would have denied any deliberate attempt to rationalize experience, for this, he recognized, was the way of the meddling intellect as opposed to the role of the poet. One can only propose a continuous interplay between his experience as a poet and thinker, and a systematic but pliant arrangement of experience, a conclusion which would appear to be borne out by Yeats's constant development and growth as a poet and by the consistency and integrity of his roles as playwright, thinker, and public man.

It might well be considered foolhardy to hazard a brief account of such complex traditions as those of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, and a gross misrepresentation to yoke these with certain apparently heterogeneous elements of Heraclitan speculation, but my chief concern is to consider these elements which Yeats himself, with baffling ingenuity and little trepidation, chose to yoke together in his own poetic system. My only defense in proposing such a <u>Schmeltzprozess</u> is that Yeats himself may have been guilty of similar misdemeanors. Yeats was not, as the curious implication behind the research of F.A.C.Wilson would suggest, an historian of ideas dedicated to preserving in its integrity a body of inviolable traditional thought. He was, before all, a poet in search of metaphor. On the other hand, Yeats did not recklessly pillage tradition, but brought to it, if not the objective bent of the conscientious historiographer, his enthusiasm and respect.

ii

The Platonist position announces the first major triumph of

the dialectical progression from the particular to the general known as the inductive method. The traditional means of moral and political inquiry, it was to provide as well the basis for the subsequent development of the scientific method. Individual persons and unique events have always proven the bane of the scientific as well as the philosophic mind in its efforts to merge the particular with a universal order. The multiplicity and heterogeneity of experience which obstinately resists assimilation in a rational system of thought has traditionally been accorded short shrift by the systematic thinker. The failure of the method of generalization lies in its inability to cope with those unassimilable elements which it has cursorily relegated to the "irrational."

Flato first speaks of his "ideal theory" tentatively, as a dream, one possibility among many alternative solutions (Crat.439C). But his readiness in the early dialogues to accept even its contrary, the concept of universal flux, eventually gives way to the deification of ideas as final realities. Consequently, the duty of the philosopher is to turn his back on the sensible world and seek these, the unchanging and eternal. 1

Plato proposed a cosmic dualism, but one which was, nevertheless, subjected to the overriding potency of the One. <u>Timaeus</u> relates that two things are in themselves unable to effect a satisfactory union, that they must share a common bond welding them together into perfect unity.² The dialectical frustration which results from attempting to compare apparently diverse and unrelated entities can only be resolved through the mediatorial presence of an Absolute, a fixed



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point to which all relationships may be referred in order to reveal their own nature and relevance. It is this method which constitutes the "upward dialectic," the Flatonic dialectic of the One.

The world-soul, in its Janus-role mediating between the intelligible and terrestrial, comprises both Nous and Ananke, umpredicated spirit and material necessity, the two circles of same and other whose conjunction first brought the cosmos into being. It is necessary to keep constantly in mind the poles of the Platonic paradox, the ultimate unity which eternally emanates and resolves that which gives form to multiform reality. To this end, Plato proposed mathematics as the vital educative discipline, the mode of thought which trained the mind to a habitual awareness of both dichotomy and unity. Thomas Taylor writes of the Platonic paradox: "But Plato . . . delivers as the concause of natural things, an all-receiving matter, and a material form, as subservient to proper causes in generation, but prior to these, he investigates primary causes, i.e. the producing, the paradigmatical, and the final."

The essential attribute of the generative world, Taylor relates in his commentary on <u>Timaeus</u>, is the act of Becoming: "the body of the world should be consummately vital, and perpetually generated or have a subsistence in perpetually becoming to be." Pure Being, which is an ideal consummation, resides in a condition of apparent stasis uncontaminated with Becoming. The opposition between <u>Nous</u> and <u>Ananke</u> lies between that which always is and that which is always becoming. The motive principle of the world soul is in the eternal



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act of rising above generation or falling back into its bondage. Freedom, then, lies with the disembodied, and only the disembodied soul fleeing multiplicity and determinateness, and striving unimpeded toward the One, realizes its freedom. Will, therefore, is the rational act of the soul toward Good, and will and essential Being are one.

Finite form, the spirit "ensouled" in the material, is treated as a retrogression in the Platonic scale of Becoming. Fullest Being is the final realization of the disembodied soul, an "ontic indeterminateness" in which the soul transcends the limits of "this and that." The Platonic terminology, understandably, gives rise to some confusion. It must be remembered that what would appear to be "indeterminate" spirit, represents in Platonic terms the full realization of its forms. Consequently, Plotinus is enabled to describe "blind" matter or evil as "measureless," lying in a "state of unmeasure" (Enneads 1:8:8). From the Platonist point of view. the soul does not "realize" itself by imbuing matter with form and order; it limits its former transcendence through its commerce with the material. The scale from limited to full transcendence encompasses the system of values which are inherent in the Platonic cosmos, and it is from this hierarchy, bridging the poles of the cosmic paradox, which Plato derives his moral and ethical universe.

Plato appears to have derived his definition of psyche from the puritan dualism which characterized the distinctive religious and magical legacy of Thrace and Asia Minor. The figures of Dionysus, Bacchus, and Orpheus introduced to Greek thought the themes of guilt and atonement, condemnation and election. The telistic madness

which characterized the rites of the Orphics, Eleusinians, and the Cabiri promised release from the sins and suffering of the psyche which had been attributed to its pollution by the mortal body.

The Orphic accounts of the dismembering of Bacchus or Dionysus Zagreus furnished a vivid myth of the nature and fate of the soul, which was conducive to an explicitly Platonic interpretation.

Bacchus, the intellect of the mundane gods, is ensnared through the wiles of the Titans, the mundane gods, who provide him with the treacherous mirror of selfhood. Through contemplation of self, Bacchus forfeits his transcendence and sinks to the world of generation where he is dismembered and devoured by his betrayers. The myth establishes its relevance as a cosmic principle when man is created by Zeus from the ashes of the Titans, so that mankind embodies the mundane circle of generation as well as his innate communion with spiritual reality, the mixed blessing of titanic nature and the divine spark of the fallen god. 5

The <u>Cratylus</u>, <u>Georgias</u>, and the <u>Republic</u>, as Plotinus was to observe, agree with Orphic doctrine and the mysteries in suggesting that a sense of guilt and punishment is associated with the arrival of the soul at the body. Plato and the Neoplatonists share a common vocabulary in describing the soul's plight: it has been "imprisoned," "entombed"; it has undergone an "enchainment" or "encavernment."

Taylor's translation of Plotinus relates that "when the soul has descended into generation she participates of evil, and profoundly rushes into the region of dissimilitude, to be entirely merged in which is nothing more than to fall into the mire."

Under Plotinus the doctrine of the soul received its systematic philosophic form, and the Neoplatonic ethical position emerges as a fully articulated moral rendering of the Platonic metaphysic.

Plotinus observes that the soul's design and all its properly directed energies are contrived to effect its escape from "couplement," to overcome the promptings of the body by emulating or attaining likeness to God. To effect this, the soul is not to model itself on man or sensible nature, which is no more than the distorted image of an image, but on the Supreme Exemplar. Its mode of perceiving is properly through the "eye" of the soul, by noetic apprehension rather than through the senses. It is this way of knowing which constitutes the life of the intellect, the apperception of true reason, as contrasted with the doxastic, the sensibly generated products of opinion and persuasion.

Human virtue lies in the harmonious adjustment of the body to the vision and will of the entrammeled soul, the submission of the material to its informing spiritual impulse. Vice is discord, when body seeks to command soul. Desire, emotion, evil, experience, and sense perception belong to the animate and are not the province of the soul, though they conspire to encumber its movement and hinder its intellective act. Evil has no existence within Authentic Being, but finds its source in self-will, the continual down-going from the good by which the slothful soul accepts that which is alien to its own essential nature. Similarly, the material attains beauty only through communion with the thought which flows from the Divine, by submitting to its penetrant form. This is the condition which induces pleasure. Ugliness lies in the self-imposed isolation from the One,

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and pain is the conscious recognition of this alienation, that the body is in process of being deprived of soul.

The final stage of the descent, total alienation from the Good, is the condition of matter, in which the active principle has succumbed to an inert level of non-being. Ugliness and evil are associated with the want of form or its overmastery by the material. However, Plotinus denies that matter is an independent existing principle against the One, as it performs the appointed service of providing the receptive element for divine forms. 11 The moral scale which Plotinus has elaborated from the dialogues appears to have mitigated the suggestion of a more defined cosmological duality, and further affirms the all-embracing potency of the One. Plotinian matter is not illusory, yet it is non-material in any physical sense. It is treated simply as the principle of externality, the nether limit of what has become in Plotinus a preeminently moral universe. By qualifying matter into a moral category, and transforming the universe into what is essentially a moral paradox, Plotinus has repressed the spectre of Manicheanism which inevitably hovers over dualistic implications. But Manicheanism dies hard, even when subordinated and subsumed in a unified conception of reality, and its moral implications still serve to delineate the antithetical nature of non-being.

Although the Neoplatonist defines more rigorously the concepts of immaterial and subjective existence, he affirms an ideal of theoretic virtue rather than surrendering to mere practical moralizing. The strain of personal asceticism which colours the Enneads, and the subsequent eminence of Plotinus as the forerunner of medieval mysticism



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have served to emphasize a significant change in the moral interpretation of the Flatonic cosmology.

Plotinus establishes his position as the classical exponent of mysticism by claiming that the objects of our spiritual vision are not outside the percipient, but inherent in that facet of the psyche which contemplates the world-soul. By effecting a division of the One as a triad of divine hypostases, Plotinus evolved as the third stage in the process of emanation that which he described as the universal soul. It "overflows from all sides into this mass, spreading within it, penetrating it intimately, illuminating it as the rays of the sun gild a dark cloud imparting to it movement, life and immortality" (Enneads: V:1:2). The world soul has become the mystical immanent principle of production and activity, and in consequence, the individual soul has derived a real existence of its own in which the universal laws lie encompassed within the individual. "The flight hence . . . is not a matter of place, but of acquiring virtue, of disengaging the self from the body; this is the escape from matter" (Enneads I:8:7). The derangement of the body from the principle of the Good has become, then, an inner spiritual detachment, and Plotinus can dispense with the spatial metaphor which had characterized Platonic myth.

Flotinian asceticism is evident in the philosopher's claim that freedom or self independence belongs properly to the contemplative and not to the active life. It may be recalled that the "upward dialectic," the path of the philosopher of the <u>Phaedo</u>, lay in forsaking sensible appearances and turning to the unchangeable objects of discourse. But the quest for ideal forms is, in terms of the generative world, a



seeking after death. "The true votary of philosophy." says Socrates. "is always pursuing death and dying." 12 (In terms of the Platonic paradox. it might be considered as an ascent from death to life.) In order to affirm the material world as an integral aspect of the self-perpetuating whole, Plato is forced to bridge the poles of his paradox, and mind must complete the cosmic circuit and return to resolve the relation of form to events. Timaeus is preeminently the dialogue of the return, the "downward dialectic" by which mind returns to the material. The Republic, which explores the organic relationship of soul and state (as Timaeus is built on the homology of soul and cosmos), proposes the return of the philosopher king from his contemplative pursuits as a necessary commitment to the political processes of the state. The Platonic cycle of knowing, then, is from death to life, from life to death. The career of the philosopher king in carrying his vision to the demos, is a perilous one, however, and the parable of the Orphic myth furnishes a discomforting precedence in portraying the plight of the mundane soul at the hands of the demiurgic Titans. Plotinus, who took comfort in the consolations of asceticism was, perhaps, even less anxious to hazard a return.

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Heraclitan thought, as well as that of the later Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition, had developed a unified concept of reality, but countered Platonic speculation by proposing as its cosmogenetic principle the eternal conflict of dissident elements. The law of eternal and recurrent motion which Plato describes in <u>Cratylus</u> (but which he always attributes to the activity of the self-moved soul)

was for Heraclitus the immanent cosmological principle, with its origin not in soul, but in the internal necessity of the material universe. In the Heraclitan cosmos nothing is permanent, neither a Nous nor Ananke. Birth and death, growth and decay, are the conditions of its origin as well as its continued vitality. All is involved in unremitting process; there can be nothing fixed, no peripatetic first mover or first cause other than absolute motion and eternal flux.

The Heraclitan world is rooted in the concept of primal fire, but this itself undergoes ceaseless change, passing successively into air and water. 13 The Empedoclean primal elements are not fixed or unchanging, but continually passing into one another. The sun itself sinks to a diurnal death, passing into the surrounding ether, and thence into the waters of the western sea. 14 The three-fold transformation and its reversal, the "way up" or return to the fiery element are analogous with the daily life of the soul and the periodicity of the world itself. Elemental fire is characterized not by the generative impulse of the Platonic Nous, the benign impulse to imbue all with penetrant form, but the tendency to descend into the strife of opposing elements and transform its own essential character. Fragment XXVI suggests the nature of Heraclitan "deity": "God is day and night. winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger. But he undergoes transformations, just as fire, when it is mixed with spices, is named after the savour of each."

The Flatonic Nous or the transcendentalism of a Xenophanes posit as the center of Being, an Absolute which is indivisible and unmoved, a condition of aspatial stasis. Anaxagoras and Flato effected the

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full separation of reason and materiality, and this concept of a transcendent reason traditionally rests upon two defining characteristics, that of identity, and that of pure separation. Anaxagoras proposed the divorce of reason from materiality, while Plato established the complete transcendence of the ideal world. The transcendent ideal, however, is completely untenable from the Heraclitan point of view, in which the world intelligence itself is committed to universal process. The Heraclitan world abhors stasis, and derives its own characteristic harmony or unity from opposition itself. "God" ceaselessly takes new forms: His is a hylotheistic immanence rather than an unsullied transcendence. While Xenophon and the Platonic tradition stood opposed to the manifold, the Heraclitan cosmos thrives on the diverse, and derives its unity from including the manifold within itself.

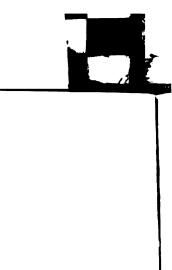
The Heraclitan "God" is, in effect, a Divine Law or Universal Reason which orders the universal process, but he is in no way remote from it, his nature being absolute motion. Heraclitus commonly calls this unity of the whole "Fate," "Justice," "God," "Will," or "Zeus," but it is clear that in doing so he intended no more than to appeal to traditional forms and concepts in order to render his own thought intelligible. Fundamentally, he was unalterably opposed to anthropomorphic conception.

The greatest source of dissatisfaction with the Heraclitan system probably lay in what seemed to be its apparent disregard for the habit of mind which characterizes the unific impulse which ordered Platonic thought. The "harmony" which Heraclitus had projected, offered but cold comfort to the soul in the threes of an embattled life or death.

Yet, as G.T.W. Patrick has observed, Heraclitus had evolved a principle in his Universal Law which imparts an overriding metaphysical stability to the impermanent world of experience. "He nearly formulated the concept that the one permanent abiding element in a universe of ceaseless change is mathematical relation." 15

Act in the Platonic world is essentially a psychic attribute. The imprisoned, but essentially inviolate soul, animates the generative world and finally overcomes the bonds of matter and embarks on its homeward flight. Matter without the vital principle, or matter which has encumbered and enslaved it, is inert. The source of all motion lies solely in man's intellectual being and its participation in pure Intellect. But in Heraclitus, it would seem that the vital perception is rooted in the senses, and that the motive source of human action lies in the emotions. Understanding is not conferred on human nature, whose capacity to surrender to the universal law is measured in terms of his receptivity to it. But receptivity in a Heraclitan world carries no suggestion of a personal or ascetic passivity, rather, it implies the pure desire for activity, the thirst to live one's life in accordance with perceptible cosmic activity by abandoning oneself to desire and conflict.

Conceivably, the hero of a Heraclitan myth might find his own proper role in the way of the world, wracked on the wheel of necessity. By his own volition, he is impelled into the arena of conflicting experience and warring circumstance, not as a mere sensationalist, but as one who has found the vision of reality and the act of Becoming inseparable from the turmoil of the human and cosmic condition.



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The Heraclitan position, which identifies the motive source of human action with the emotions, finds but an echo in the Platonic dialogues, where its implications would appear to be almost entirely alien to the Platonic position. The Symposium, however, suggests that love, rather than the quest for a purely intellectual correspondence, might stimulate the motive energies of the soul. The myth of Eros, the inciter of souls toward his mother Aphrodite Ouranos, supernal beauty, or the soul freed from matter, suggests something more than a frigid intellectual attraction. Plotinus' own interpretation and elaboration of this myth as it appeared in the Phaedrus and the Symposium, reveals his own interest in the psychological aspect of the intellective act, and suggests an attempt to render the Platonic myth somewhat more compatible with his own predilections. 16 It is likely, however, that he would have regarded his own reading of the myth as no more than a clarification of what had already been latent in the Platonic account. Here Plotinus discusses the emotional nature of the attraction of the soul for the Beautiful: "Now everyone recognizes that the emotional state for which we make this 'Love' responsible rises in soul's aspiring to be knit in the closest union with some beautiful object. . . . "17 In the Enneads, and among the later exponents of mysticism, the desire of the soul for fulfillment is cast in terms which portray vividly the intensity of the psychic experience. That the soul desires to be at one with its divine source is constantly in evidence in the Platonic dialogues. But because Plato had hypostatized the human faculty of reason into God, the characteristic rationalism of his universe tends to determine the nature of all its

processes. In spite of the asceticism which colours Flotinus! writings, and perhaps, because of it, his personal narrative acquires an emotionally charged poetic character which often brings to his writings the intensity of religious experience. The Flotinian concept of ecstasy, and Flotinus! accounts of his own experiencing of Godhead in an ineffable act of identification bring about a fusion of religion and philosophy which contrasts forcibly with the rational restraint of the dialogues. In this respect, Flotinus might be considered as having effected, or at least having emphasized the reintegration of the emotions and intellect as the vital response of the soul in its pursuit of the One.

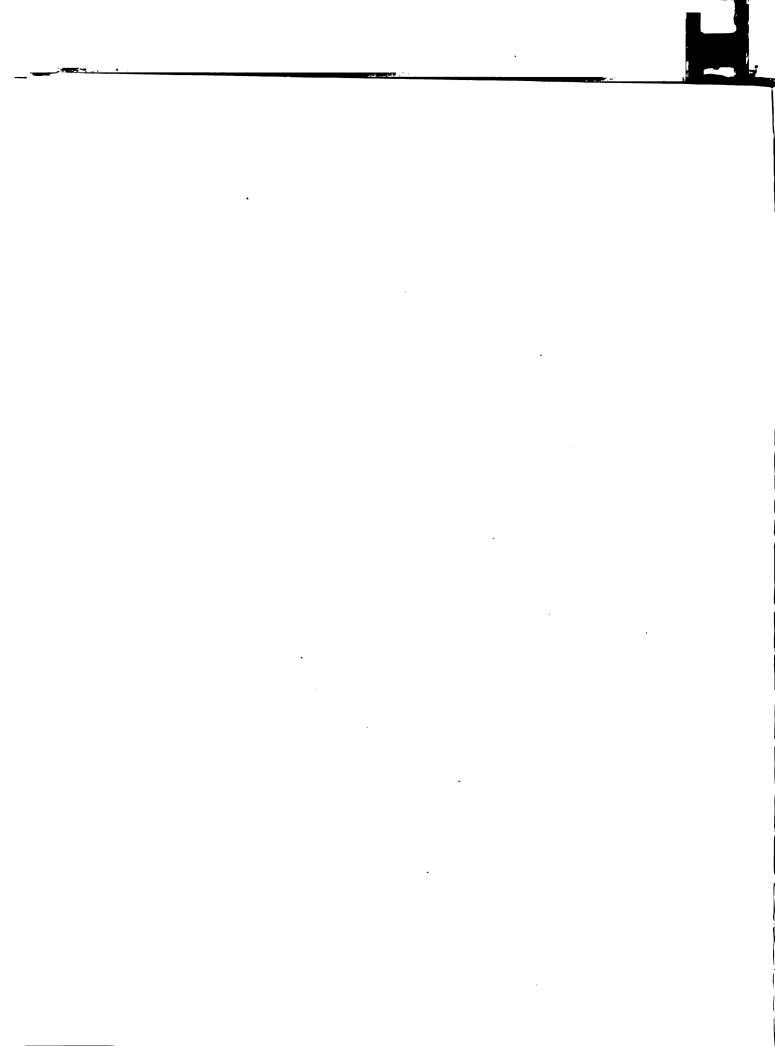
The two movements which constitute the Flatonic soul journey, the systole or flight from the multiform to the One, and the contrary diastolic emanation from the One to the Many are understood as aspects or processes of a unified Absolute providing metaphysical stability to the cosmos as well as imposing a unified field for ethical inquiry. The two poles of Flatonic experience in which Nous and Ananke enact the archetypal combat of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, are subsumed in a vision of universal self-perpetuation, an eternal act of Becoming sustained by the ineffable presence of a peripatetic unmoved first cause.

The Heraclitan world with its incompletely defined moral centre, in which an awareness of the nature of Divine Iaw serves merely to reconcile one with the vicissitudes of the human condition, rather than procure for him the means of effecting his own salvation, gives way to the Platonic microcosmic arrangement of soul, history, cosmos, and state. With the inclusion of the state within this homologous

structure, morality and cosmology fall into a unified pattern culminating in the identity of the Good with the One. Systole therefore becomes the condition which is morally relevant to human action and conduct, while diastole is largely a matter of cosmic necessity and logical coherence. It is this, the systolic journey toward God, which elicited the fervid emotional responses of the Neoplatonists. Flotinus had associated freedom with the contemplative rather than the active life, and it is this spiritual agrophobia which appears to have coloured much of subsequent Neoplatonic tradition. The ascent to the One or the ineffable awareness of Godhead with which Flotinus associated ecstasis provided the overwhelming moral focus and emotional immediacy which perpetuated Neoplatonic thought.

The reaction which the seventeenth century Cambridge Platonists, More, Cudworth, Glanvil, and Burthogge, launched against Hobbesian materialism, in upholding the concrete unity of life and spirit, was cast in the mould of the traditional pattern. Opposing analysis and the Cartesian dualism of spirit and matter, More concentrated almost solely on the reality of spirit in its act of Becoming, and showed little concern at all with the problems of matter and the soul's descent into generation.

The Cambridge Platonists found in Plotinus their spiritual mentor, and in the syncretist efforts of the Alexandrian Platonists, their dialectical procedure. The enormous eelecticism of their pursuits led them to mine the workings of the Flotinian pantheism, Jewish philosophy, the writings of the gnostics and the mystics, the Rosicrucians, and the Cabala, and to synthesize an unwieldy composite



of precedent and sanction for their own fusion of Platonism with the Christian moral ethos. Their overruling preoccupation was with the spiritual and pietistic significence of their heterogeneous doctrine rather than its purely logical aspects.

As had Pico della Mirandola before him, More himself had little difficulty in adapting his sources to his own syncretic pietism. The Cabala provided a cosmogeny remarkably consistent with that of the Neoplatonists. The Cabalistic universe, as an emanation of the Sephiroth, the corresponding tripartite font of illimitable Being, descends in a hierarchy of created forms to the lowest ebb of spirit, matter. The ascent, moreover, is perfectly consonant with the Neoplatonic account. The ascent of the Sephirotic ladder, or Mount Abeignos, the symbolic mountain which the hermetic initiate must scale, is effected by an annihilation of self and a condition of ecstasis achieved through obedience to a succession of traditional initiatory disciplines.

Thomas Taylor, the Platonist, managed to preserve the Platonic heritage in spite of the unfriendly philosophic temper of the eighteenth century. His translations and commentaries, moreover, appear to have played an important role in the establishment of the romantic reaction against the "age of enlightenment." Plato was henceforth perpetuated as "Taylor's Plato," and the Taylor translations served as canon well into Yeats's own day. Yeats himself appears to have looked upon the new Jowett translation with its air of contemporaneity and suggestion of a "scientific scholarship" with some mistrust.

Like More, Taylor had reacted against the spiritual aridity which he found in contemporary thought, but as a dedicated classicist, Taylor showed little sympathy for More, Pico, or Ficino, whose efforts to reconcile Christianity with Platonism acted, he felt, to the detriment of both. This in itself might have enabled Taylor to right the imbalance which Neoplatonism had imposed upon Platonic thought, had not Taylor, in spite of his title, been himself an avowed Neoplatonist. Taylor's glosses on the dialogues are almost entirely derived from Flato's own Neoplatonic commentators, and Taylor further indulged his fascination for the involved methods of Neoplatonic exeges in his translations of their own works.

The mainstream of Platonist thought then, acquired a dominant moral tone which characterized the upward dialectic almost to the exclusion of the other half of the Platonic cosmology, the demiurgic aspect of Being. Plato himself appears to have been concerned principally with these aspects of theocentric experience, and although he effected a dialectical or mythic nexus between the two in the cosmology of <u>Timaeus</u>, he seems to have reached no emotional reconciliation. The result was that the Neoplatonists produced what might be described as a pietism rather than a comprehensive dialectic of Being.

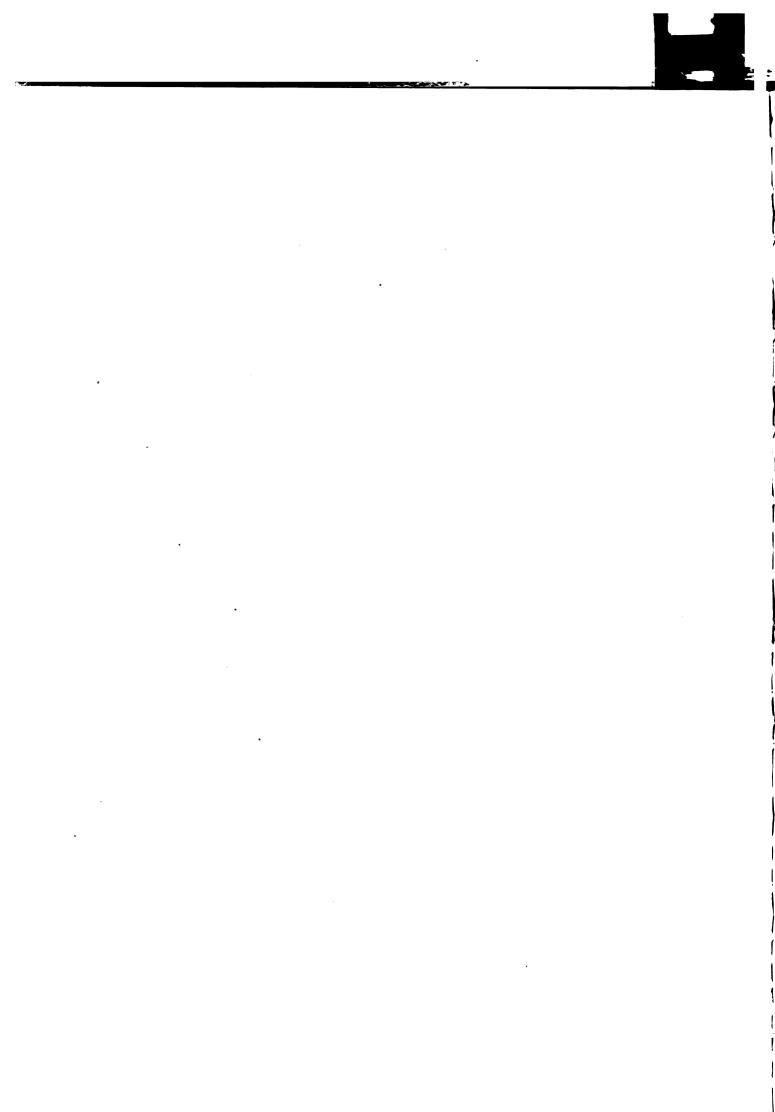
Yeats's own dissatisfaction with this aspect of the "Platonic pathos" may well have been fed by his enthusiasm for Heraclitus.

It is clear, at least, that Heraclitus provided a philosophic sanction for stabilizing the imbalance of the Platonic impulse.

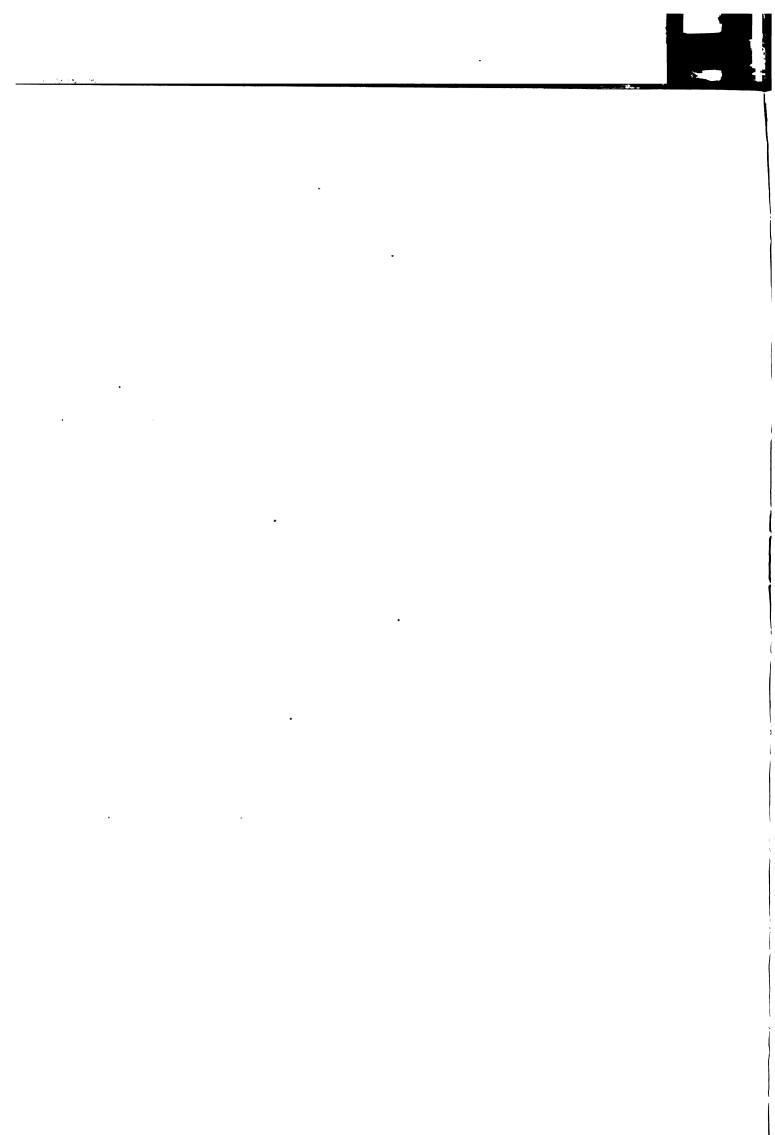
The most repugnant aspect of the Platonic cosmos was for Yeats, as it had been for Blake before him, its traditional association with a "reasoning" deity, and the soul's reluctance to affirm the experience of generation.

I have endeavoured to outline in the briefest manner those positions held by the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Heraclitan schools which appear to be relevant to Yeats's own speculations. Yeats was, in the course of his lifetime, continually preoccupied with the claims and solutions offered by these traditions. And yet, in spite of his fascination with Platonic thought and imagery, Yeats appears to have been just as often repelled by the implications of the Platonist or primary position. He repeatedly resorts to the gnomic Heraclitan fragments as a sort of antidote or counter-truth to the Platonic argument. This sort of ambivalence, however, reflects an already familiar and fruitful dilemma, and served, moreover, to fashion Yeats's own dialectic as well as the vocabulary itself with which he realized in his art the conflict between Being and Becoming.

Plato has recognized in <u>Timaeus</u> and in the <u>Republic</u> what has been called the downward dialectic, or the necessity of confronting the existential, although he had accorded it short shrift. The Neoplatonists had ignored this almost entirely in their obsession with primary orientation, but Heraclitan speculation revels in the mire and conflict which constitutes antithetical experience. Each point of view served to clarify much of what already lay in Yeats's own preoccupations, his fascination with



the cosmic duel of Being and Becoming. Plotinus might well have served to clarify a question which disrupted the somewhat erratic course of The Shadowy Waters. In the Enneads the Platonic metaphor of spatial separation gives way to a principle of immanence or incarnate Being which led Yeats to pursue its implications in terms of anima mundi or the "world soul" throughout the whole canon of the Neoplatonists and the Cambridge Platonists. And yet, the world of Plotinus and his followers, ascetic, moralized, spiritualized, and immaterial as it was, scarcely found a sympathetic emotional response in the Yeats who learned to cast his lot with the experiential and the concrete. Platonism and the Neoplatonic pietism might well have satisfied Yeats's temperament in his early career, but it did not in itself provide the rounded view of life he sought with his maturity. Heraclitus too, offered a principle of immanence, but one which affirmed and glorified the changing world of Becoming with an intensity which matched the primary enthusiasm of the Neoplatonist or mystic. But Yeats's solution lay neither with Plato nor Heraclitus alone; it sought to explore that vital resolution between these which might be effected by a historical, aesthetic, or personal integration, Unity of Being.



CHAPTER III

The Daimon: The Failure of Neoplatonism





Although acquiring a unique character from its fusion with the dialectic of the Four Faculties, Yeats's conception of the daimon, as it is described in A Vision, finds its roots in a number of traditional sources as well as experiences of an entirely personal nature. I have chosen to examine the role of the daimon in Yeats's cosmology, not only because it exemplifies the poet's habit of refashioning traditional sources in accordance with his own personal predilections, but because the figure of the daimon emerges as the agent or mediator between primary and antithetical being. The daimonic role effects the nexus of theocentric and existential experience and anticipates Yeats's formulation of Unity of Being as a psychological, cultural and historic solution to their opposition. The most obvious sources for the account of the daimon are Platonic in origin, but it was characteristic of Yeats to seek out contrasting accounts and traditions in order to supplement what he recognized as the onesidedness of Platonic experience. Yeats's eagerness to embrace contrasting points of view and to exhume a formidable array of esoteric precedence is not mere perversity, but the poet's attempt to comprehend in a symbolic system the ambivalence and diversity of human experience.

Yeats's formulation of the "daimonic nature" is characteristic

of his customary practise of feeding and fortifying personal predilection with the full authority of traditional precedent. "We are starved," his instructors complain, and it is apparent that in his final version of $\underline{\mathbf{A}}$ <u>Vision</u>, Yeats did his utmost to satisfy their hunger for metaphor. \(^1\) "We have come to give you metaphors for poetry," they insist, but it is Yeats himself who must clothe those metaphors in substantial dress. In the portions of $\underline{\mathbf{A}}$ <u>Vision</u> where he feels that his system is still threatened with the spectre of abstraction, Yeats offers his hurried apology and proceeds with apparent misgivings. \(^2

This does not appear to have been entirely the case of the earlier 1925 version, which is characterized by a more cautious, tentative approach to the subject. Yeats first disowns authorship of his system, and speaks of it as a net woven for "the herring fisher" which might, when drawn from the depths, repay the poet's efforts with a rewarding harvest. With this in mind, the 1925 version might be considered as merely a preliminary sketch anticipating the subsequent elaboration of the final published version. Drawn from his own experience, both personal and literary, A Vision represented a commitment to a systematic arrangement of this experience, which would serve as a program for future poetic growth. With its help, Yeats might seine the confused tide of his own observations, gathering in that which would serve to clothe his thought in a coherent symbolic whole. In preparation for his 1937 edition, Yeats embarked on an intensive reading program, one which immersed him in a flood of history and philosophy, grist for

the mill which would charge his thought with the resonant metaphor of his poetic vision.

The diligence with which a number of Yeats's commentators have ransacked his literary and philosophical readings and the repositories of traditional symbols as a means of performing their exegeses, has often been sadly misdirected. Those who have laboured to compile the <u>Glossa Ordinaria</u> of the numerous traditions with which Yeats was familiar, applying them as a touchstone to the "total meaning" of his poetry, exhibit a lamentable indifference to the distinction proposed by Coleridge between prosaic fancy and the alchemy of poetic imagination. Yeats was undoubtedly less devoted to conscientiously preserving the contextual integrity of his sources than those he chose to damn as "p_ariah dogs, devourers of dead symbol."

Yeats's poetic system, as it is elaborated in A Vision and embodied in his poetry, involves a highly personal and often idiosyncratic synthesis of traditional forms and thought. A Vision proposes a systematic dramatization of experience in which values are constantly shifting and realigning themselves about fundamental antitheses. Had Yeats evolved an inert abstraction from traditional precedent as a program for his poetry, he would have committed his future career as poet to allegory. Coleridge, who also defined character as rooted in the play of antitheses, was, as was Yeats himself, fully aware that the complexity of human experience was not to be reduced to a simple mechanical shuffling between extremes, but involved "the infinite gradations between opposites which form the play and all the interest of our intellectual and moral being."

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Although in his 1937 edition Yeats must have felt that he had finally achieved a systematic account of human experience which allowed for infinite variation and modification, in reality, A Vision could never be completed, it could only grow and deepen with the mind of its creator.

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As Richard Ellmann has pointed out, the term "daimon" enters the Yeatsian vocabulary as early as 1895 in an essay on Verlaine in which it suggests no more than a striking, if somewhat limited, metaphor. 6 Yeats's title as an initiate of the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn, Demon est Deus Inversus, implied the opposition inherent in the daimonic conception, and probably drew on standard hermetic authority, in particular the persistent doctrine of the "subtle body" which G.R.S. Mead had traced to its Byzantine and Neoplatonic origins. The fuller implications of the daimon as an integral figure in Yeats's evolving system appear to have been consciously grasped when, as Yeats claimed, he encountered his spiritual interlocutor and daimonic mentor, Leo Africanus. Yeats recounts with some skepticism, but apparent fascination, his subsequent correspondence with Africanus, in which the poet acted the double role of interrogator and surrogate pedagogue for his spiritual tutor, a form of automatic writing which anticipates that which in A <u>Vision</u> he would attribute to his wife's mediumship. Yeats chose to recognize in his dialogue with a personal daimon the affirmation of his own theory of the mask as a cosmic rather than merely a limited psychological principle. The mask, as Yeats

had conceived of it, had hitherto derived its form from a wish projection of the individual will or ego, but it was not necessarily relevant, as Yeats might have wished it, to anything beyond the scope of personal activity. By establishing a link between two orders of being, the spiritual context of the daimon and his mundame interlocutor, Yeats extends the dialectic of the mask into an overriding metaphysic, so that history and the cosmos align themselves about a single psychic process. Africanus had obligingly suggested to Yeats the relevancy of the daimonic ministry to the historical as well as individual development: "What was Christ himself but the interlocutor of the pagan world, which had long murmured in his ear, at moments of self abasement & death. & thereby summoned." The idea that the daimon ushers not only the individual soul through its phasal transitions, but history or human activity as a whole, finds its final enunciation in A Vision: "Nations, cultures, schools of thought may have their Daimons. These Daimons move through the Great Year like individual men and women and are said to use men and women as their bodies, to gather and disperse those bodies at will." It is this daimonic intercession which is responsible, in the essay "Dove or Swan," for the destiny of Hellenic civilization. "Certainly their tribes after a first multitudinous revelation-dominated each by its Daimon and oracle-driven-broke up a great Empire and established in its stead an intellectual anarchy."10

In <u>A Vision</u>, Yeats describes the daimon as the "ultimate self" of man, a being enacting a vital reciprocal relationship with its



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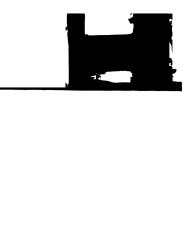
interlocutor, a reciprocation which serves to dramatize the role of the mask, which had been previously thought of as no more than an inert projection of the will. The exchange between man and his daimon is frequently depicted as an attraction and repulsion analogous to that between the sexes, and by 1925 Yeats habitually thought of it as a confrontation with a female principle enacting its sexual rapport: "Man and <u>Daimon</u> face each other in perpetual conflict or embrace." In <u>Per Amica Silentia Lunae</u> the daimonic opposition suggests a similar pattern: "The <u>Daimon</u> comes not as like to like but seeks its own opposite, for man and <u>Daimon</u> feed the hunger in one another's breast."

At this point it might be useful to summarize the nature of the four interrelated Faculties as Yeats describes them in A Vision. It must be understood, however, that Yeats further elaborates his design by proposing four interlocking "Principles" or spiritual counterparts which inform and complement the operation of the Faculties. The Faculties, however, dramatize the process of the human personality only in its earthly sojourn between birth and death. The contrapuntal Principles extend the pattern to the life of the soul in its mediary path between successive incarnations. Consequently, it is the Faculties which are conscious, and which impose their dialectic upon human action in time, thereby shaping the course of human history. Moreover, Yeats seems anxious to disclaim responsibility for essaying the "forbidden gates of Fluto" in his account of the Principles in the essay "The Soul in Judgment." However, A Vision is filled with such disclaimers: a prevalent

ironic tone, the occasional buffo circumstances behind Yeats's encounters with his spectral "instructors," and the high comedy of the mask enacted in his incredible account of Huddon, Duddon and O'Leary, a burlesque which has much in common with The Player Queen, which Yeats finally exorcised only by turning to mockery those speculations which he had once approached with temerity and a tragic sincerity. Was Yeats apologetic in "The Soul in Judgment" for a systematization which he felt had not yet managed to banish the spectre of abstraction which the whole formulation of the final version of A Vision was intended to exorcise? He later suggests that the value of "The Soul in Judgment" lies, or will lie, in shaping his poetry yet to come: "I set down what follows less for present use than because at some later date I may return to the theme and wake these dry astrological bones into breathing life."13 Yeats appears to have found his account of life after death a necessary component in the dialectical integrity of his system, but had, as yet, failed to subsume it completely in metaphor.

The Faculty of the Will, Yeats proposes, is synonomous with ego, the "first matter of the personality," the unarticulated composite of personal feelings, emotions and tendencies whose energies have not yet been channeled and directed towards a single object of desire.

Mask is the sum of one's personal aspirations, everything he is not, and all that he wishes to become. As a projection of the ego, it is predisposed in terms of the various components of ego and the ego's own recognition of itself. Consequently, one might choose either a true or false mask.



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Creative Mind is defined as Intellect, not in the sense of a purely rational faculty, but the Intellect as Yeats understood it before its historical dissociation of sensibility, the total energies of the mind which are consciously constructive.

Body of Fate, the Fourth Faculty, constitutes the contextual physical and mental environment.

By virtue of its reciprocal relationship with man, the daimon shares in the Four Faculties. The Will of man is the mask of the Daimon, and the Creative Mind of Man is the Body of Fate of the Daimon, so that the two are locked interdependently, sustaining and opposing one another, drawing upon their mutual energies. Yeats provides the following account:

If one will think of a man as Will and Creative Mind alone, perpetually face to face with another being who is also Will and Creative Mind, though these appear to man as the object of desire, or beauty, and as fate in all its forms. If man seeks to live wholly in the light, the <u>Paimon</u> will seek to quench that light in what is to man wholly darkness, and there is conflict and Mask and Body of Fate becomes evil; when, however, in antithetical man the <u>Paimonic</u> mind is permitted to flow through the events of his life (Paimonic Creative Mind) and so to animate his Creative Mind, without putting out its light, there is Unity of Being.

Elsewhere, Yeats explains his elaborate game of psychic charades in terms of the <u>Commedia dell'Arte</u>. Since Yeats insistently plots his psychomachia in distinctly dramatic terms, the analogy is appropriate.

The daimon, then, acts as our mentor as well as our frustrator, turning the mind on itself in a condition of internecine war, or leading it to the achievement of a vital harmony between its individual elements. Yeats identifies the psychic harmony which has

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been effected through daimonic intercession with Unity of Being, that individual or historic collusion of antitheses when "Intellect and emotion, primary curiosity and the antithetical dream are for the moment one."

Socrates, it appears, was attended by a similar "daimonion," and he tells us in the Apology that it appeared to him frequently. opposing him even in the most trifling matters, a circumstance which was to be turned against him by his enemies in his own indictment. 16 Socrates personal gadfly, however, was more than a mere frustrator, and Plutarch attributed to the philosopher's attunement with his daimon, the source of his greatness, or as Yeats might have it, his Unity of Being. Plutarch writes: "As human speech affects the ear, so the Logoi of the demons directly affect the human soul. What ordinary people experience only in the relaxation of sleep is given to human beings with a pure, serene soul-whom we then call holy or demonic -- in their waking lives. Such a human being, free from disharmony and turmoil, was Socrates."17 Yeats too, had proposed in A Vision that the products of our dreams and fantasies find their source in the Creative Mind of the daimon which expresses her energy or bias. 18 In Per Amica Silentia Lunae. where Yeats identifies the daimon with the souls of the dead in the trials of their purification, he describes the daimon as the vehicle of anima mundi, creating the intuitive link between anima mundi and anima hominis: "The dead living in their memories are.

The tradition of Greek demonology upheld the common view that the daimonic realm acted as mediator between the human and divine. Although a pertinent passage from Heraclitus' Fragments has given rise to innumerable interpretations, E.R. Dodds maintains in a convincing argument, that in Fragment CXXI, Heraclitus had attempted to kill the popular Greek daimonic tradition. Dodds translates it as "character is destiny," and it may with equal authority be construed as "A man's character is his daimon."

Yeats, however, in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, quotes it from memory as "the Daimon is our Destiny." Yeats's memory may have played him false, but it is clear that he thought of Heraclitus as providing a sanction for his own concept of daimon, that which was more compatible with the polytheistic implications of the popular tradition.

Timaeus tells us that the god gives to everybody a daimon as part of his soul, while the <u>Republic</u> affirms freedom of choice and moral responsibility in claiming that the soul is free to select its daimon or way of life before it enters the cycles of incarnation: "The demon will not cast a lot for you; but you will choose the demon."

Thus, character is not confined to earthly life, but passes across the threshold of spirit between its succesive incarnations. Yeats describes the saint and the love he brings to God as having been founded under somewhat different circumstances in a past life, pillowed "upon a woman's breast."

In order to preserve the preëminence of the active intellect,

Plato is forced to stress a correspondence between it and the daimon,
and consequently, in the <u>Statesman</u>, the supreme power is referred
to as the greatest daimon.²⁴ It is probable that in the <u>Symposium</u>

he conceived of the principle of Eros as subordinate to the overruling daimon.

The Socratic "daimonion" received conscientious amplification at the hands of Plutarch, Apuleius, and Proclus; and what had once been myth assumed the characteristics of a rigid schematization. Philippos of Opus effected an ingenious union of the daimon with the five elements, while Xenocrates defined their nature in terms of the geometry of triangular forms. Dionysius the Areopagite appears to have associated them with the trones, cherubim, and seraphim of the flowering science of angelology. Yeats appears to have been at least conversant with this final permutation of the daimonic tradition. He relates that "Lionel Johnson was fond of quoting from Dionysius the Areopagite. 'He has set the borders of his nations according to his angels!, but Swedenborg thought that all angels had once been men."25 Johnson's observation, Yeats was bound to recognize, would have applied as well to the office of the daimon, but Yeats would take sides with Swedenborg in placing the origin of angels among the dead.

Plutarch's myth of Timarchos provides what is perhaps the classic account of the daimonic nature. Timarchos, hidden in the cave of Trophonios, learns from an oracular voice that the daimons are the stars which he sees floating above the darkness. They are, it is explained, that part of the reason which has not suffered the mingling of soul and body, that which serves to buoy up the encoupled soul, a guardian to which it is inevitably conjoined, whether willingly or unwillingly.

Some [souls] are merged entirely into body, and are disturbed by passions throughout their whole being during life. Others are in part mixed up with it, but leave outside their purest part, which is not drawn in, but is like a life-buoy which floats on the surface, and touches the head of one who has sunk into the depth, the soul clinging around it and being kept upright. . . . That which is left free from dissolution most persons call mind, taking it to be some thing inside themselves resembling the reflected images in mirrors; but those who are rightly informed know that it is outside themselves and address it as spirit.

The Trismegistic tractates, as G.R.S. Mead has indicated, are deeply tinged with Neoplatonist influence, and the "subtle body" after death, known as the image (eidolon, imago, simulacrum) or shade (skia, umbra) permeates the Hermetic tradition. The term "Augoeides" had received a new currency under Bulwer Lytton in his novel Zanoni, in which he described it as the radiant sphere of the soul, unconstrained by couplement. The doctrine of the subtle body appears to have recognized the existence of two forms of manifestation: a hollow image or phantom of the physical body after death, and a more substantial daimonic nature which retains the character and personality of its earthly life.

"perhaps his most significant departure from orthodox Platonic theory," and bases his argument on the fact that the Platonist daimon came to man as "like to like," while the relationships between Yeats's daimon and his interlocutor subsist through its opposition. Wilson cites a passage from Per Amica Silentia Lunae in which Yeats appears to graft on the Platonic daimonic tradition the more congenial doctrine of Heraclitan opposites: "Plutarch's precepts. . .have it that a strange living man may win for Daimon

an illustrious dead man; but now I add another thought: Daimon comes not as like to like but seeking its own opposite, for man and Daimon feed the hunger in one another's breast."29 Yeats had effected a permutation of the orthodox Platonist account of the daimon, a redefinition which was imposed by his awareness of the implications behind his own formulation of the contrasting roles of primary and antithetical man. The Platonic daimon, however, does not come "like to like" to a deserving man, as Yeats had implied; it provides an inherent link between the encoupled soul and its divine source which has never, in effect, been severed. One might think of the worthy soul in its sojourn in the generative world as strung on a leash which serves it as a constant reminder of its proper master, and which will eventually recall it to its proper home. In effect, the daimon is no more than a convenient personification bridging the inevitable metaphorical spatialization of Nous and the encoupled soul, accounting for the loyalties of the soul to the hypostasized divinity which it bears within itself.

The Platonic account would perhaps furnish a rationale for Yeats's concept of primary man, whose role is to abjure the mask and surrender to an external order, but it does not serve the role of antithetical man who must constitute an "inner order" by seeking mastery over all that he recognizes as opposing him. The role of the Platonic daimon, then, is associated with the primary upward dialectic of the One, but the antithetical "path of the serpent" represented for Yeats the obverse side of primary experience, a diastolic impulse through which the soul acquires its mastery by imposing its own forms on discrete experience. The Platonic daimon

thetical man, and he was forced to reconstruct his daimon from the more congenial materials provided by the Heraclitan doctrine of opposites. Yeats had on a previous occasion, it will be remembered, understood Heraclitus as affirming the daimonic tradition. Moreover, in the light of his repeated borrowings from the Fragments, Yeats appears to have looked to Heraclitus as the champion of antithetical experience. However, in this instance at least, Yeats need not stand accused of toppling the Platonic tradition. His daimons, which are still heavily indebted to Plato, are merely the supernatural machinery which account for that obverse function of the Platonist cosmology which he felt the Platonist tradition, as primary theocentric speculation, had slighted.

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The concept of the daimon might well pose a threat to the Platonic concept of the One by proposing a pantheon or plurality of gods, each exercising an individual potency. Plato had forestalled such a conclusion by associating the gods with the One, and Plotinus upheld the orthodoxy by placing "all the gods" within the Nous. Plotinus had been content to find the origins of plurality in the intelligible world, but, as Yeats suggests, paved the way for the belief that the autonomous daimonic natures become limitless: "It was perhaps obvious, when Plotinus substituted the archetypes of individual men in all their possible incarnations for a limited number of Platonic Ideas that a Greatest Year

for whale and gudgeon alike must exhaust the multiplication table."30

The last major figure of the Platonic school, Proclus, sought the highest authority for multiformity, and projected the origin of plurality into the highest stage of emanation, the First Authentic Existant. To this end, he posited a congeries of "Divine Henads," self completed unities emanating from the Primary, through which the One is mediated to the ends of the universe. Because of their relative position, below the infinite, they must of necessity be finite in number, but they are nevertheless infinite in their potency since they remain unbounded in their relation to what lies below. By accepting such an arrangement, Proclus was able to preserve the Neoplatonic practice of subordinating Fate to the order of Providence. Nevertheless, it is apparent that he developed what amounted to a highly sophisticated rationale for polytheism. 31

Both Henad and the Primal One participate in each other, the Henad resembling a small world, each with its Primal sun, but these "monads" are inevitably thought of as gods in themselves. The order of Being, Proclus affirms, is in accordance with the providential order of Henads, and the Henads are graduated correspondingly, some more universal, some more particular, but it is the universal which exercise the greatest causal efficacy.

Although Yeats associates the daimonic realm with the Third

Emanation, the <u>anima mundi</u> of the Plotinian hypostases, his

schematization owes much to the submerged tradition of Greek daimonology as it was reasserted and systematized by Proclus. "I



shall," he wrote, "when I come to write upon the Great Year of antiquity, refer to the fact that Proclus had the same conception and gave to the smallest living creature its individual year." 32

In Book II of A Vision, "The Completed Symbol," Yeats proposes a triadic schematization by which he attempts to identify his Principles with the Flotinian hypostases. "With some hesitation" he writes, "I identify the Celestial Body with the First Authentic Existant of Flotinus, Spirit with his Second Authentic Existant, which holds the First in its moveless circle; the discarnate <u>Daimons</u>, or Ghostly Selves, with his Third Authentic Existant or soul of the world, which holds the Second in its moving circle." But Yeats is obviously dissatisfied with his formulation, and is unwilling to accept the ordered hierarchy implied in such a conception, just as he had shown himself unwilling to accept the peripatetic concept of a First Authentic Existant as a remote, unmoved mover bearing no immediate relation to human activity.

But this diagram implies a descent from Principle to Principle, a fall of water from ledge to ledge, whereas a system symbolising the phenomenal world as irrational because a series of unresolved antinomies, must find its representation in a perpetual return to the starting point. The resolved antinomy appears not in a lofty source but in the whirlpool's motionless centre, or beyond its edge."

In a footnote, he identifies the whirlpool as an antithetical symbol, the descending water as primary.

Yeats's sentiments as well as his metaphor find their echo in the earlier remarks of Michael Robertes in the playful account of the maskings of Huddon, Duddon, and O'Leary: "Life is no series of emanations from divine reason such as the Cabalists [or Neoplatonists] imagine, but an irrational bitterness, no orderly descent from level to level, no waterfall, but a whirlpool, a gyre."

"All things are from antithesis," Yeats claimed, and when he seeks that which overthrew the Platonic "cabinet of perfection," he offers the figure of Christ, the ultimate expression of all that opposed Greek rationalism: "He controlled what Neopythagorean and Stoic could not—irrational force. He could announce the new age, all that had not been thought of or touched, or seen, because he could substitute for reason, miracle." When the Greek rationalist of Yeats's play The Resurrection encounters the risen Christ, he is confronted with a living embodiment of the irrational, the miraculous order which gives the lie to his own passing world, and recoils in horror, "The heart of a phantom is beating!" 37

Yeats does not call into question the validity of primary experience, although he does recognize that it bears little apparent relevance to his times. In his 1930 diary he observes, somewhat grudgingly, that many of the younger poets seemed to have turned against the monotheistic system. In the same diary, Yeats sets up the two conceptual modes which he finds at the root of all human experience. The first is the single enduring reality which he finds expressed in Shelley's The Sensitive Plant: "We become aware of those of the first kind when some symbol, shaped by the experience of itself, has descended to us, and when we ourselves have passed, through shifting of the threshold con-

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sciousness into a similar state." The experience which Yeats has outlined in his Flatonist reading of Shelley is essentially unific, intuitive, permanent, and enduring. "The second kind, because it has no universal virtue, because it is altogether particular is related only to the soul whose creation it is..."

In his discussion of Paul Valery's Cimetière Marin in A Vision, Yeats recounts his enthusiasm over the poet's initial images: the "ouvrages purs d'une eternelle cause," and their counterpoint with the "ephemeral foam of life." However. he balks at what he recognized as a cultivated urbanity which leads the poet, in a fashionably hollow lament, to deny the possibility of immortality. Yeats turns to the memory of a young girl standing at the edge of the sea, singing of change and the passing of civilizations, but with the imploring refrain "O Lord, let something remain." Valery's testimony, and all the evidence of our conscious rational being can but affirm transience and mortality. but the cry of the spirit forever hungers for the consolations of permanence and continuity. "I cannot imagine an age without metropolitan poet and singing girl."41 Yeats, in effect, can imagine nothing without the two principles which these figures embody. and it is on these abiding truths which his vision must rest.

If Yeats's loyalties appear to alternate between the primary and the antithetical, between the cry of the spirit and the lament of the cosmopolitan, they find their counterpart in the doctrine of the mask and the formulation of the Great Wheel, his account of the transitional phases of soul and of history, which dramatize the varying pursuits of the individual. Yeats had identified him-



self with solitary, antithetical man, hopelessly out of phase in a primary dispensation. His efforts as a mythmaker to dramatize the history of the soul as cosmic process commit him to reading into all experience that which he recognized as his own nature, a practice which can only serve to compound his isolation from the primary. But the kingdom of the poet, to appease his instinct for permanence, must provide for him as well, the kingdom of God. His own system must pern with the fabric of the phenomenal world, but also trap in its whirling matrix the likeness of the incarnate God. Yeats's role as a poet is to achieve this mythopoeic mastery, that which in A Vision, he had attributed to Dante, who "in the Divina Commedia imposes his own personality upon a system and a phantasmagoria hitherto impersonal; the King has everywhere found his kingdom." In his commentary on the Mandukya Upanishad, he traces the elaborate system of correspondences proposed by Indian thought, in which mind, heart, intellect, and ego merge into Brahma, and exults in his discovery: "I found myself reflected everywhere in the whole universe; 43

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"What if Christ and Oedipus, or, to shift the names, Saint Catherine of Genoa and Michaelangelo, are the two scales of a balance, the two butt-ends of a seesaw?" The two vital principles which, in <u>A Vision</u>, Yeats arrays upon his hyperbolic seesaw, the historic, cosmic, and psychic principles, must owe their efficacy to the presence of their opposing play-fellows. The consequence, should Saint Catherine or Michaelangelo desert their



post, are painfully foreseeable. Without the presence of the opposing party, there could be no game. Yeats writes in his 1930 diary: "could those two impulses, one as much a part of truth as the other, be reconciled, or if one or the other could prevail, all life would cease." Reality, Yeats maintains, rests with neither principle in itself, nor with a motionless point of equilibrium between the two, but encompasses the whole continuing process.

In order that two conflicting principles perpetuate themselves, they must enter into a single circulation. Diastolic movement must find its inevitable recourse in systole; systole must in turn find its course in diastole.

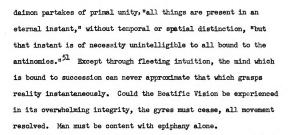
... the ultimate reality must be all movement, all thought, all perception extinguished, the two freedoms unthinkably, unimaginably absorbed in one another. Surely if either circuit, that which carries us into man or that which carries us into God were reality, the generation had long since found its term.

If ultimate reality is spheroid, Yeats maintains, it must



remain unknowable. Subjected to our limited conceptual capacities and the derangement of our senses, it can only be consciously perceived in the imperfect terms of antinomies or a phasal pattern. "All the symbolism in this book applies to begetting and Birth," Yeats wrote of <u>A Vision</u>, "for all things are a single form which had divided and multiplied in time and space." ⁴⁸ The mutations imposed by the conscious mind are not unlike those which characterize Shelley's "charnel house" of the mutable world in <u>Adonais</u>. The preconceptual "white radiance of eternity," shattered on the refracting dome of the sky, washes the world of man in the fleeting and brilliantly deceptive hues which constitute the limited perceptions of his finite mind. Having finally established the ultimate nature of reality, Yeats can now claim that the cones and tinctures of his system are but imperfect mirrors of that reality, and "are in themselves pursuit and illusion." ⁴⁹

A Vision establishes the realm of the daimon within the phaseless sphere, or the crucial thirteenth cone, which serves to mitigate the determinist inferences of Yeats's system by admitting
free will and deliverance from the cycles of generation, that which
each minor cycle has imperfectly mirrored in those phases alloted
to supernatural incarnation. But "life cannot exist at the dark
and full of the moon," and because dispensed in time, the supernal
vision cannot be perfectly achieved. The sphere, incarnate in
the temporal flux, can at best offer direction and impetus, and
a visionary experience which must be fragmentary, momentary, what
Yeats has described as the sudden lightning. "We perceive in a
pulsation of the artery and after slowly decline." Because the



The reluctance which Yeats's instructors demonstrate in their refusal to expatiate on the nature of the sphere, and their preference for dwelling on the processes of the phenomenal world, are partially explained by their medium's chronic inability to comprehend that which they experience in its totality. Moreover, the instructors come to be fed, and not as altruistic pedagogues. They seek in the lives of the phenomenal world the means through which they might constitute those personal syntheses which they themselves had been unable to command in their previous life, thereby achieving the perfected freedom of the soul which has resolved all its antinomies. Consequently, their revelation is apt to be as frustrating as it is illuminating.

In his 1930 diary, Yeats wrote:

I think that two conceptions, that of reality as a congeries of beings, that of reality as a single being, alternate in our emotion and in history, and must always remain something that human reason, because always subject to one or the other, cannot reconcile. I am always, in all I do, driven to a moment which is the realisation of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the surrender to God of all that I am. I think that there are historical cycles wherein one or the other predominates. . . .

Yeats has proposed two orders of being, those of Saint Catherine and Oedipus, a primary or providential order, and an antithetical "congeries of autonomous selves," an order of providences, which, could they be intuitively or imaginatively grasped, are one, the phases of a total sphere. The congeries which Yeats describes as "autonomous beings each seeing all within its own unity," are identifiable with the daimonic souls who serve as human destinies in the act of achieving their own purification. 53

Those beings which Yeats has proposed as the "providences" of antithetical man, have much in common with the Henads of Froclus. The Flotinian order, Yeats recognized, was shaped by the primary tincture which characterized Flotinus' epoch, and which led him to propose primary order as ultimate reality. Flotinus had only supplied the beginnings for a rationale of the congeries, and hesitated to follow those implications which would prove entirely alien to his primary position—Flatonist loyalties. The Henads of Froclus represent a departure from the primary impulse in proposing a congeries of beings which threaten to acquire the character of an autonomous polytheistic pantheon, were it not that they, as well as the primal One, participate in all Being. Yeats has, in effect, as had Froclus before him, pushed the principle of plurality into a higher stage than that of the intelligible world, yet retaining the essential unitive nature of his congeries.

Yeats had expressed his dissatisfaction with the hierarchical conception of successive emanative levels (the waterfall) in their relevance to a phenomenal world torn between primary and antithetical experience, substituting for the Neoplatonic figure the gyre as a symbol of recurrent process in the temporal dimension. The gyre, however, and the waterfall (which Yeats never makes use of as a poetic metaphor), as symbols of the two orders, are consubstantial within the overriding efficacy of the ultimate phaseless sphere. But in spite of Yeats's tentative proposal, "with some hesitation I identify the Creative Body with the First Authentic Existant of Plotinus," it is clear that the Plotinian triad has undergone a radical transmutation; one that suggests its decapitation. 54 If this is the case, Yeats's most significant modification of the Neoplatonist tradition lies not merely in the perversity of his daimons, but in a radical adaptation of the essential tripartite Godhead.

Yeats's descriptions of ultimate reality are understandably confusing, often incoherent, necessarily fragmentary, but from what we can gather from his struggles to express the inexpressible, it would appear to have little in common with a peripatetic unmoved mover. More compatible with his own system is the second Plotinian Emanation, Divine Thought or Nous, from which emanates the all-soul or anima mundi. A similar truncation is suggested in Proclus, who posits no more than $\Theta \epsilon \circ \varsigma$ and $\Theta \epsilon \circ \iota$, the Primal One and the mediatory order of Henads, in what is more akin to a dyadic arrangement. $^{55}*$

^{*} A diagram illustrating these relationships is found at the end of Chapter III.

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Although the Platonic tradition had sought to align the figure of the daimon with that which Yeats understood as primary orientation. for Yeats, the daimon was generally associated with the chameleon path of antithetical experience. The motivation behind this permutation lies perhaps deeper than the authority of any philosophic tradition, but in the selfsame impulse by which the mythopoeic mind tends to polarize its cosmos, to oppose the noumenous with the demonic, heaven with hell. The experience of the noumenous or the sacred inevitably evokes an ambivalent response, the awesome sense of mystery which the aestheticians of the sublime described as both humbling and exalting. More specifically, the sacred elicits not only an attraction towards the supernally desirable, but a fearsome revulsion as well, a reluctance to surrender to the total demand of the noumen. Man. Mircia Eliade writes, "is called upon to make the supreme decision, either to give himself over completely and irrevocably to sacred things, or to continue in an uncertain attitude toward them."56 The noumenal then, offers to the imagination not only the conception of a primary, rational reality, but an irrational or demonic phase of experience as well, the self-assertive recoil which seeks to preserve the personal and individual integrity of wholly subjective experience. The extreme expression of this response is an "antithetical mysticism," a mysticism of horror, such as that evolved by certain forms of eastern Tantrism, or the nonrational demonic phase of the noumenous as elaborated within the Christian cosmology by the German mystic Jakob Boehme.

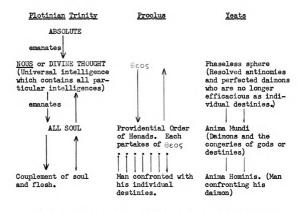
Yeats's enquiries into Neoplatonic tradition and his subsequent dissatisfaction with what he felt were its shortcomings inevitably led him to seize upon those writers who offered a way out of the impasse created by a solely rational or primary account of experience. He appears to have found some consolation in Proclus, under whom the Platonist orthodoxy was already tottering, and in A Vision, he acknowledges the influence of Nicholas of Cusa, whom he knew through Pierre Duhème's Le Système du Monde. Nicholas was a seminal figure in the late medieval protest against the extreme rationalism of Thomism, and provided Yeats with the final lineaments of his vision, the intuited sphere which Yeats described as "Nicholas of Cusa's undivided reality which human experience divides into opposites." Georges Poulet claims that the earliest extant reference to the sphere as such comes from a twelfth century hermetic text: "Deus est sphaera cujus centrum ubique, circumferentia nusquam," but the spheroid was traditionally represented by those philosophers from Parmenides on who affirmed an absolute Being.⁵⁷ It served as a figuration of divine immensity, a metaphoric expression of eternity in which contraries are reconciled in the divine life. By the analogical pars pro toto process which is characteristic of mythic expression, and which is fundamental to Yeats's own system, the sphere was understood to be relevant to all aspects of human life and experience as well as to the divine. Incarnation makes manifest the infinite within the finite, so that the sphere of divine vision manifests itself within the narrow sphere of the corporeal. Yeats had found in Unity of



Being the expression of the individual and cultural integration which overmasters the conflicting terms of experience. The analogical projection of the principle of Unity of Being as the perfected sphere of cosmic process and integration witnesses the fundamental inherence of Yeats's personal and universal vision.



* The following diagram attempts to illustrate the correspondence between Yeats's "phaseless sphere," the @EOG of Proclus, and the Nous of Plotinus. Yeats and Proclus have, in effect, jettisoned the unmoved mover, the first person of the Plotinian trinity.



Yeats describes the Plotinian trinity in hierarchical terms (the waterfall). Although a diagram may imply as much, it is misleading to conceive of Yeats's arrangement as a hierarchy, although his own account of the ascent or purification of the soul in judgment may suggest this. Temporalized man's inability to conceive of the phaseless sphere which transcends the categories of his thought leads him to think in terms of succession and antinomies (the gyre), and to pursue but one of these alternatives at a time, in Yeats's words, "to serve one master." These fundamental antinomies are seen as primary and antihetical. Thus:

which are, in reality, one--the phaseless sphere Primary
The temporalized sphere
is recognized as God or
a unific principle.

Antithetical
The sphere is interpreted as a daimonic dispensation, a congeries of individual realities.

Man, or anima hominis, must either choose willfully, or surrender. Surrender associates him with primary being, choice with antithetical.



CHAPTER IV

Unity of Being: Integration



The predisposition which led Yeats to divide his poetic world into antinomies, and which eventually led him to conjoin them as terms of an essential paradox, finds its expression in his conception of Unity of Being, a principle which he extended through a series of analogous relationships from the soul to the historical continuum, and to the appointed roles of his artist, saint, sage, and hero. In the 1925 version of <u>A Vision</u>, Yeats wrote: "I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose, yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul." Dante and the Greeks, he maintained, had disdovered such a system. ¹

Yeats's fundamental antinomies were those exemplified by
Platonic tradition: spirit and matter, Nous and Ananke, and the
corresponding systolic and diastolic movements of the soul. Yeats
claimed to have found in the early Byzantine and renaissance epochs
those historical periods which were most expressive of the achievement
of Unity of Being as a generalized cultural phenomenon. On his tour
of Italy with Lady Gregory and her son Robert, Yeats had recognized
in the vast, formalized Byzantine freizes of Ravenna, a mastery of
design which he understood as expressive of the unified cultural
aspirations of a whole people. Although the Byzantine culture failed
to offer Yeats a comparable literary tradition because, as he
feared, language had taken on discursive qualities and turned solely
on argument and abstraction, he was to describe in 1912 his new-found



These lyrics . . . display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition where poetry and religion are the same thing has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thoughts of the scholar and the noble.

These cultural phenomena are integrated with the system of gyres and historical process outlined in A Vision, but it is clear that in this respect Yeats's system shuns a rigid historical determinism. An individual, or a group of individuals might attain a comparable Unity of Being through their own efforts, although these must needs fly in the teeth of the more pronounced cultural and historic moment. Yeats was later to recognize in the failure of his own poetic movement, and in his frustrated efforts to impose an unpopular drama upon an indifferent audience, that "the dream of my early manhood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture is false; though it may be we can achieve it for some small circle of men and women, and there leave it till the moon bring round its century." 4 Yeats's efforts to achieve an "emotion of multitude" failed to find their attentive multitudes, although he doggedly held on to the hope that his theatre might find a sympathetic following among an intellectual aristocracy, a coterie audience.

"We lose life by losing that recklessness Castiglione thought necessary even in good manners, and offend our Lady Truth." Castiglione, as Yeats was fond of relating, served as spokesman for the renaissance synthesis which upheld an ideal of conduct in which recklessness and courtesy were held in fee, a modus vivendi in which passion and intensity

enacted a fruitful union with traditional forms of conduct. Yeats's account of literary history, his "soul history" of the literary artist, proposes a sort of dissociation of sensibility following the wake of the early renaissance and continuing until the present age, save in those exceptional cases where the artist has successfully achieved an individual Unity of Being in his role as artist, and transcended the impetus of historic moment.

Somewhere about 1450, though later in some parts of Europe by a hundred years or so, and in some earlier, men attained to the personality in great numbers. 'Unity of Being', and so became like a 'perfectly proportioned human body', and as men so fashioned held places of power, their nations had it too, prince and ploughman sharing that thought and feeling. What afterwards showed for rifts and cracks were there already, but imperious impulse held all together. Then the scattering came, the seeding of the poppy, bursting of pea-pod, and for a time personality seemed but the stronger for it. Shakespeare's people made all things serve their passion, and that passion is for the moment the whole energy of their being-beasts, men, women, landscape, society, are but symbols and metaphors, nothing is studied in itself, the mind is a dark well, no surface, depth only.

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

By 1934 Yeats had felt that the cinematograph might yet accommodate him by reversing itself, and in his introduction to <u>The Cat and the Moon</u>, he no longer bemoaned the fact that we might never find a Shelley and Dickens in the one body, but anticipated the advent of an antithetical dispensation, a new turn of the gyre of history

which would effect the desired reintegration of the artist with his culture. "Perhaps now that the abstract intellect has split the mind into categories, the body into cubes, we may be able to turn back toward the unconscious, the whole, the miraculous."

Yeats repeatedly cites Chaucer as having given tongue to an age in which artist and his public were in perfect accord, an age in which intellect turned to renew itself with the vitalizing materials of common experience. "When there was but one mind in England Chaucer wrote his Troilus and Cressida A whole people, a whole civilization seems to have been taken up into this imagination, and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature our voice as in a dream." 8 The Autobiographies relate the continuing influence which the example of Chaucerian vitality held for Yeats. When ashamed of his own tendencies to seek truth in generalization and forsake the world of experience for a remote world of literary allusion, he relates that he resolved to sleep upon a board, "I began to pray that my imagination might somehow be rescued from abstraction and become as preoccupied with life as had the imagination of Chaucer." Later in life. Yeats was to find in Balzac his modern literary hero. Balzac. in his breadth of interests and literary explorations, appeared to Yeats as a nineteenth century Chaucer. Balzac, as had the hero of his novel Louis Lambert, accepted "all that lay hidden in his blood and his nerves." and while Seraphita and Louis Lambert's Swedenborgian affinities prepared Yeats for his eastern ventures, his fascination with the Noh, and the idealism of an eastern philosophy which dismissed matter as the illusory dance of Maya, the massive



accomplishment of the <u>Comédie Humaine</u> served to redirect his attention to the national and social drama. 10

The Unity of Sensibility which Yeats recognized in Balzac, however, differed from that of Chaucer, which was imposed externally by an achieved cultural synthesis. As a man of phase twenty in Yeats's schematization, Balzac had attained, as had his phasal counterpart, Shakespeare, a unity through creative flat, rather than a personal Unity of Being. Yeats's explanation owes, it would seem, much to Keats's theory of negative capability: "He no longer seeks to unify what is broken through conviction, by imposing those very convictions on himself and on others, but by projecting a dramatization or many dramatizations." The accomplishment of Shakespeare and Balzac was perhaps even more meaningful to Yeats than that of Chaucer, for these were solitary figures writing "out of phase," confronting an antagonistic cultural tide with a synthesis of their own creation.

Shelley, whom Yeats gradually came to regard as his most pervasive influence, and possibly his most pernicious one, is placed in the forefront of the moderns: the French symbolists, the PreRaphaelites, and Yeats's companions of The Cheshire Cheese, those of the "tragic generation," all those who found their delight in "essences," "states of mind," "pure imagination": those who divorced their concerns as artists from instrusive experience. Of Rossetti, Yeats had claimed: "His genius like Shelley's can hardly stir but to the reflection of matter, whose delight is profusion, but never intensity, and like Shelley's it follows the Star of the Magi, the Morning and Evening star, the mother of impossible hope." 12 Yeats charts their common



course as that of the flight of the bird, "Upward into evergrowing subtlety," a refinement of the gross and material, a literature aspiring toward a condition of religion. Those efforts to achieve a rarified passion, Yeats claimed, spring from an inherent imbalance of sensibilities:

We have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man-blood, imagination, intellect, running together-but we have found a new delight in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily in elaborate music. ¹⁴

When Yeats wrote these words, he was filled with enthusiasm for the new movement. Such, he felt, was the condition of modern literature and the modern sensibility. It might be suggested that he never completely lost his fascination for the "poetry of essence," that it had absorbed his energies as a young poet, and had insistently shaped his theories of the drama, those theories which had subordinated character and action to an overriding lyric effect. But at the same time, it is clear that Yeats had always been wracked with misgivings, that Chaucer and Balzac, and perhaps even the figure of his own father, loomed as admonitory spectres in the back of his mind. Yeats recalled in the <u>Autobiographies</u> memories of his father reading to him as a child passages from his favourite poets:

He never read me a passage because of its speculative interest, and indeed did not care at all for poetry where there was generalization or abstraction however impassioned . . . He did not care even for a fine lyric passage unless he felt some actual man behind its elaboration of beauty, and he was always looking 15 for the lineaments of some desirable, familiar, life.

Gradually the poetry for which Yeats had once felt such a strong attraction came to represent all that he had grown to detest in contemporary literature, the soft, insinuating effeminacy and

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pallid otherworldliness which characterized much <u>fin</u> <u>de siècle</u> writing, and to which he had once, in his essay "The Autumn of the Body" given all his enthusiasm. However, the overwhelming evidence of what Yeats could not fail to regard as highest literary achievement constantly stood before him, until even his own early theories must have met with a hollow ring in his ears. The writingsof the medieval saints, he was to admit, had somehow lost their appeal for those whose tastes have, since the renaissance, been nurtured on an art "where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seem one." Here and there," he wrote, "in Blake, in Keats, in Blunt, in Browning, . . . there is a deep masculine resonance, that comes, I think, from a perfect accord between intellect and blood, lacking elsewhere since the death of Cowley." 17

Consequently, Yeats came to balance the elusive flight of the bird with the way of the market cart, or as he suggested elsewhere in even more graphic terms, the nightingale with the bull: the downward movement of the soul in its descent to experience, where it acquires simplification and solidity, its "baptism of the gutter." This diastolic movement, I have suggested, does not represent a complete volte face; Yeats was not oblivious to its appeal even in the days of the Celtic Twilight. It represents simply the obverse side of his personal experience as well as the logical extension of his personal metaphysic, an insight no longer limited as a simple two-dimensional pattern, but extended into the depth of many-faceted experience.

In his essay "J.M.Synge and the Ireland of His Time," Yeats proposes to compound his antitheses through the integrating power of the poetic imagination. Imagination becomes the unific element which, like the Flatonic psyche, meditates Janus-faced on the two opposing categories of experience. But for Yeats, imagination as a poetic faculty implies a measure of personal passivity, and is not associated with an act of will or fiat which serves to impose an intellectual integration:

Artists like Byron, Goethe, Shelley, who have impressive personalities, active wills and all their faculties at the service of their wills, but he [Synge] belonged to those who, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Goldsmith, Keats, have little pergonal will but fiery and brooding imagination.

In his essay on Shelley, Yeats examines the enigmatic figure of Demogorgon in Prometheus Unbound, whose presence, he contends, renders the whole poem incomprehensible. Shelley, he finds, was motivated by the necessity to balance a miraculous and superhuman conception of reality with a figure from nightmare, a figure thrust upon him by his personal compulsions. Yeats attributes the horrific rendering of Demogorgon to Shelley's unconscious acceptance of the Victorian bogey, an intrusion of an external moral order which conflicts with that generated within the poem itself. Demogorgon. as Yeats himself had found in his rewritings of The Shadowy Waters, is indispensable in providing the limits of the poetic vision, and in serving to induce an awareness of the uranian quality which he serves to define through opposition. Yeats's quarrel with Shelley is not simply over the inclusion of Demorgon, the eternal combatant in the struggle of Nous and Ananke, but over his refusal to affirm the demiurgic aspect, and the moral revulsion with which Shelley confronts it. Similarly, he cites the case of Aubrey Beardsley, whom he

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associated with Shelley in having sublimated sex to a condition of "unearthly receptivity" in his Salome drawings, as having been compelled to "sacrifice to Priapus" by embellishing the corners of his engravings with the grossest obscenities: "...he [Beardsley] had come to see the images of the mind in a kind of frozen passion, the virginity of the intellect." Beardsley, the street urchin, leaves his graffiti upon the great church door of Victorian propriety, but his furtive gesture is not unlike that which is demanded of Yeats's virginal heroine of A Full Moon in March, who must needs descend into the "dung of passion." But "desceration and the lovers' night," the descent into passion and experience, is no more reprehensible than the sterility of the chaste intellect; "fair and foul are near of kin," as Crazy Jane instructs her bishop, and "nothing can be sole or whole/ That has not been rent."

Against Shelley, Yeats produces the example of Blake, whose poetic world is generated in its entirety within the terms of his personal symbolic system, owing nothing to the conventions of a vicarious public morality, and affirming the marriage of heaven and hell, Aphrodite and Priapus, Nous and Ananke, within one overmastering imaginative vision.

Shelley, Yeats contends, was not a mystic, but a Platonist, "his system of thought was constructed by his logical faculty to satisfy desire, not a symbolic revelation received after the suspension of all desire." Yeats's tone of disapprobation suggests that the poet might do better if he were a Flotinian rather than a Platonist, and that the arch-romantics, Shelley, Byron, and Goethe forfeit much of their poetic integrity by surrendering their vision to the meddling intellect.

Shelley, Yeats was to confess in <u>A Vision</u>, where he placed him with Dante in the seventeenth phase, that of daimonic man, was not entirely to blame. Unlike Dante, Shelley lived in an unaccommodating age which thwarted Unity of Being, "...but partly because, being out of phase so far as his practical reason was concerned, he was subject to an automatism which he mistook for poetical invention, especially in his longer poems." Hence, Yeats finds the justice of <u>Prometheus Unbound</u> "no more than a vague propagandist emotion, and the women that await its coming are but clouds."²³

To give intellect its due, and at the same time to relegate it to its proper role, Yeats claims that it is with the intellect, as distinguished from the imagination, "that we enlarge the bounds of experience and separate it from all but itself, from illusion, from memory, and create among other things science and good journalism."24 Yeats has recognized in the intellect or the rational mind those qualities from which it has derived its strength as well as its liabilities. Intellect effects the fundamental synthesis of discrete perceptions, but in divorcing experience from its vital context, and in imposing upon it its own conscious forms, it violates the essential unity of all human experience. It is significant that Yeats attributes to the rational mind as its major accomplishments, his two personal bêtes noires, science and journalism. The relevance of the intellect to the role of the creative artist, as Yeats suggests in his criticism of Shelley, is a menacing one, and although it is unlikely that he would suggest that the romantics were allegorists by default. Yeats does imply that they failed through their submission to the promptings of intellect to maintain a desirable equipose between their roles as visionaries and artificers. Intellect is committed exclusively to a

world of matter, "the discursive mind must by its nature pursue something, find something," and in his essay on Blake, Yeats claimed:
"A symbol is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to fancy and not to the imagination: the one is a revelation, the other an amusement."

But because imagination and symbolic expression mediate between spirit and matter, and subsume as well the intellective synthesis, thus restoring its equilibrium, these only can perceive and affirm the total vision of reality, Nous and Ananke absorbed in their mutually interdependent cosmic drama.

Yeats's use of the term "intellect" as preoccupied with matter, should not be confused with the Platonic Intellect, which also seeks to impose its form on matter, but at the same time acts upon a schizophrenic impulse to be rid of it and to revert to pure spirit.

Yeatsian "intellect," unlike the imagination, presents but one face, and that toward matter, seeking to draw into itself those materials which buttress its own self-centred being. Intellect and the rational mind, which provide only one aspect of experience, are generally terms of disapprobation for Yeats, until in <u>A Vision</u>, he redefines intellect and restores it to its original meaning, before the seventeenth century dissociation of sensibility, as those total energies of the mind which are consciously creative. Having done this, Yeats might apply the Keatsian touchstone, confirming with the pulses the measure of all thought.

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Imagination, for Yeats, is synonomous with the energies of the Platonic soul in the performance of its systolic and diastolic act. Consequently, when Yeats warns that "we should ascend out of common interest, the thought of newspapers, of the market place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole," he is not denigrating the baptism of experience, but affirming it as a vital, though partial, aspect of the integrative process. ²⁶ "We believe," Yeats maintains, "only in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but the whole body."

Yeats offers as his symbol for immediate sensation, the raw material of the intellect, water, and contrasts it with the wine of emotion. It is not unlikely that he imagined the situation in explicitly sacramental terms, and we are perhaps justified in extending his own metaphors, so that wine and water, intellect and blood, find their antinomies transmuted in the eucharist of the imagination. This sacramental view of the imagination fittingly lies behind Yeats's personal conception of the historic figure of Christ, who serves to exemplify his frequent allusions to the attainment of a personal Unity of Being.

Yeats submits as his creed:

...the natural and supernatural are knit together, that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science ...a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in dead history, but flowing, concrete, phenomenal. I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it, my Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of

St. Patrick, as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportional human body. Blake's 'Imagination', what the <u>Upanishads</u> have named 'Self,' nor understandable, but immanent, differing from man to man, age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt, and toe of frog.'

In "Dove or Swan" Yeats describes the earliest sculptural representations of Christ as having been copied from those of the apotheosis of Alexander the Great, and interprets these in terms of his own symbolic system as expressive of Christ's attainment of Unity of Being.²⁹ He cites the prevalent medieval tradition which claimed that Christ's stature and bearing were those of perfected physical man, the merging of athlete and sage. But as perfected physical being, Christ must die, just as civilization perfectly achieved must itself face its inevitable annihilation.

The primary dispensation which Christ ushers in demands sacrifice, and the drama of the Incarnation and the Passion serve Yeats's purposes as yet another explicit reenactment of the mission of the scapegoat hero. Christ, the new Adam, must die for mankind in his appointed role in order to perpetuate the vital principle which he embodies.

The distinction which Yeats acknowledges between fancy and imagination is a characteristically Coleridgean one. But Coleridge, who proposed his account of the primary imagination as analogous to that of God in the eternal act of creation, attuned his metaphysics to the sanctions of Christian orthodoxy. Yeats, in constructing his poetic cosmos, provides no imaginative account of the drama of creation, because the historic process as he conceives it knows no beginning or end, but subsists only in eternal recurrence.

On those occasions, for the most part in his early writings,

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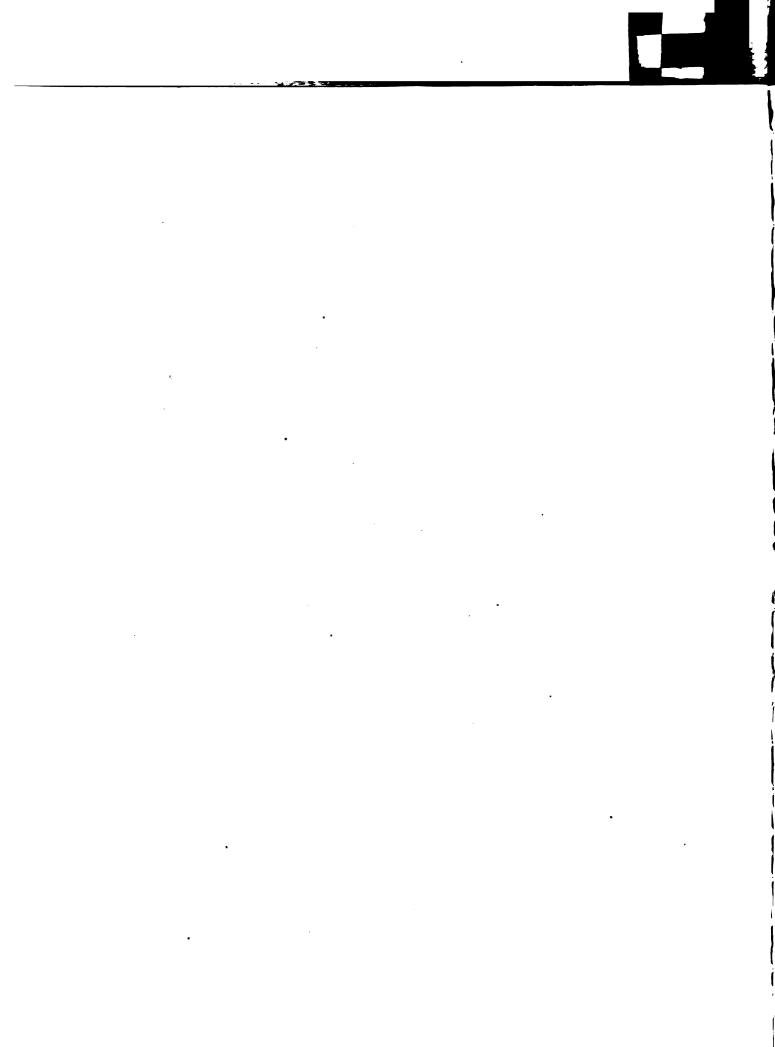


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when Yeats refers to millennium or apocalypse, the ultimate flowering of the Rosicrucian "yellow rose over all," or a Blakean or Swedenborgian vision of a triumphant last day when "the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy," it is generally in terms of traditional symbol or someone else's thought. Yeats appears curiously reluctant to fashion his own myth of creation. His own preoccupations with apocalypse as a historical consummation are never really distinguishable from the vague goal of a spatial passage to a Tir nan og, or a personal consummation beyond the western sea. When in 1904 Yeats inserted in The Shadowy Waters the lines:

When the world ends Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible joy The flagstone under all, the fire of fire The root of the world

the metaphor of the spatial journey became for him, as it had for Plotinus, superfluous. Eternity is indwelling, immanent, the vital element of the soul in the generative world. No longer a remote goal, it is incarnate within the spatial and temporal dimensions of the physical world. Thus the concept of a cosmic apocalypse, an ultimate temporal goal toward which all creation and history proceed at the "far end of time," is equally superfluous, and gives way before a succession of epiphanies which serve to direct and impel historic moment. Yeats balks at extending the limits of his poetic vision to an Alpha and Omega beyond the bounds of time and space. Surveying the succession of historical epochs, he will go no further than the Ledaean annunciation, and beyond, a glimpse of Babylonian "mathematical starlight," the anterior primary dispensation in its decadence. Yeats proves himself unwilling to hazard the perilous journey backward to a





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preexistent One, or forward to ultimate resolution, those conditions which admit of no predication, no conflict, and hence, of no metaphor. There can be no ultimate victor in the incessant warfare of Nous and Ananke which defines our mortality, and it is within this squalid arena which the poet must find his anchorage and the lineaments of his poetic vision.

Yeats then, does not dramatize his vital principle of the imagination in terms of an initial act of Divine fiat as did Coleridge, but in terms of a recurrent historic role, and his Christ achieves His eminence not in His unique capacity as the historic Galilean, but as the incarnation or expression of the inexorable historic process which brings forth successive "Christs" who have attained Unity of Being. It is difficult to subscribe to Virginia Moore's well-intentioned but entirely misleading claim that Yeats was at heart an orthodox Christian, when the messianic role he portrayed is usurped by a succession of Messiahs whose office is wittingly or unwittingly to introduce antithetical as well as primary dispensations. those turbulent epochs which at every perming of the gyre, indifferently evolve a historic realization of a principle of "anti-Christ."31 Yeats's "Galilean Symbol" (his own expression) is, in effect, no more than a trope expressive of a principle of historic continuity and the attainment of a personal Unity of Being which secures that principle. As such, His role is no more preeminent than that of Oedipus and his descent into the earth "riven by love." or the offspring of those dubious parents, the ravished, uncomprehending Leda, the Swedenborgian Attracta, or the nightmare creature who



nurses its young in the dark, drum resonant grove: "What from the forest came? What beast has licked its young?"

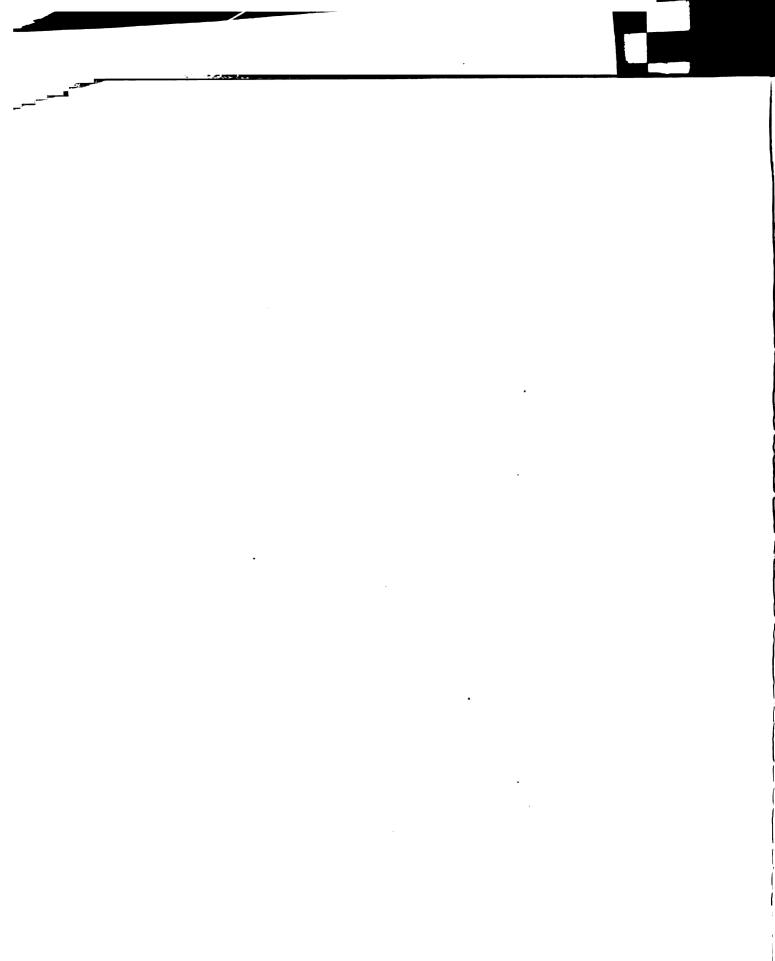


CHAPTER V

The Hero: The Chameleon Path

The aristocratic arrogance of Yeats's solitary heroes has been variously ascribed to the poet's disillusion with his public, his reaction to the Civil War "days of the rabblement," his personal pretensions as a seemingly self-conscious poseur, or the character of the heroic tradition of Celtic literature from which they are derived. More significant than any of these considerations, I believe, is the manner in which Yeats's conception of the heroic role meshes with his own rationalization of experience, and his aesthetic.

Yeats's <u>Autobiographies</u> and many of his prose writings provide a mine of information for those who would isolate the earliest experiences which shaped the thought of the mature poet. In reading the <u>Autobiographies</u>, however, one cannot but be aware that Yeats is already at work fashioning from his memories a poem of childhood and youth, a <u>vita poetae</u> in which a deliberate sifting of personal experience anticipates the more comprehensive "stylistic arrangement" of <u>A Vision</u>. Occasionally it would appear that the <u>Autobiographies</u> have been accepted as an objective case history providing access to the poet's personal psychology at a formative stage of his life. However, Yeats himself had little confidence in his own powers of memory, and claimed to retain only those incidents which had been dramatically impressive or meaningful



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through association with a memorable place or event. The Autobiographies tell us more of Yeats at the time of their writing than they do of his childhood. They are not, however, a calculated sham, a deliberate falsification of experience, for Yeats was conscientiously attempting to give his own life form and meaning, and wrote John Quinn in 1916, before continuing his account: "I will purify my own imagination by setting the past in order." Those who are determined to "set the poet's life in order" by reconstructing his childhood memories cannot fail to recognize that the autobiographer has anticipated their efforts, and that they run the risk of violating the integrity of the form which he himself had evolved. The Autobiographies are of incalculably greater value than any "objective" account in revealing through a studied arrangement and selection of incident the pattern which Yeats would seek to impose upon all experience.

The "hindsight" afforded by the <u>Autobiographies</u> suggests, in Yeats's account of his boyhood idols, divided loyalties which could only have been consciously grasped through the enhanced clarity of perspective. Yeats's earliest heroes were typical of those which people a childhood dream of romance. They came from his earliest literary enthusiasms: "My mind gave itself to gregarious Shelley's dream of a young man, his hair blanched with sorrow, studying philosophy in some lonely tower."

In 1894 Yeats attended with Maude Gonne the first performance of Villier de l'Isle Adam's <u>Axel</u> at the Théatre Montparnasse. The story of Axel of Auersburg, a young student of the occult, who had renounced the world for a life of study and meditation in his stronghold in the Black Forest, met with a responsive chord.

Yeats had found his new sacred book, and responded with an enthusiastic review for the London Bookman: "The infinite is alone worth attaining, and the infinite is in the possession of the dead." Axel combined all the elements that had hitherto fascinated Yeats: his early romance with the Gothic gloom and romanticism of solitary dreamers, Alastor, Manfred, and Athanase, and his own predilection for Rosicrucianism and the occult.

But Axel and Shelley's dreamers manqués, who preferred to leave the distractions of life to those less deserving than themselves, could do little to feed Yeats's admiration for that which his father had often praised as "intensity." Of his mother, Yeats recalls in the <u>Autobiographies</u>, "she had always, my father would say, intensity, and that was his chief word of praise. . . ." J.E. Yeats's passion for dramatic poetry, and his detestation of abstraction and generalization, his son would suggest, provided him with one aspect of that personal conflict which led him at one moment to seek out his Shelley, and at another to lean upon his Chaucer. It was, perhaps, during his "Chaucerian moments" that Yeats lent his childish fascination to the figure of the brawling squireen of Dargen Castle, "the last household where I could find the reckless Ireland of a hundred years in final degradation."

Yeats had from an early age cast his seafaring grandfather in a heroic mould, and would later confess that "even today when I read King Lear his image is always before me and I often wonder if

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the delight in passionate men in my plays and in my poetry is more than his memory." Nor was he to forget the family miniatures of the Yeatses with their carefully drawn air of courtesy, gentleness, and a "half-feminine charm." Pollexfen and Yeats had indeed fulfilled their roles in the poet's personal mythology. In the <u>Autobiographios</u> he recalls with some pride: "It was a Yeats who observed we have ideas and no passions, but by marriage with a Pollexfen we have given a tongue to the sea-cliffs." Their role was no less important to him in 1919 when in his poem "Under Saturn," the mixed seed of his ancestry continued to goad him on:

my horses flanks are spurred By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen, And of a Middleton, whose name you never heard, And of a red-haired Yeats whose looks, although he died Before my time, seen like a vivid memory. 10

ii

A young writer might well admire those passionate lives which seem to express a vitality remote from the isolation of his own bookish pursuits, but almost invariably his thoughts will turn on his own self-conscious role as artist, and those "sacred books" which he feels have shaped or gained access to his creative life. Yeats found in his Alastor and Axel his first vocabulary as a poet, and in their stock romantic posturing his earliest model for heroic action. Forgael, who is a direct descendant of this eviscerated breed, and Aleel, the listless poet of The Countess Cathleen, fulfilled their highly mannered roles all too well, and rewarded Yeats with characterizations which were implausible and

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dramatically ineffectual. But even in 1898, when at the height of his infatuation with Villier de l'Isle Adam's pallid hero, in his essay "Blake's Illustrations to Dante." Yeats was to enumerate approvingly those qualities which Blake had found essential to all good art: "to seek determinate outline, to avoid generalized treatment, to desire abundance and vitality." II Yeats had not yet learned the vocabulary of the "reckless brawling squireen" who had once exerted a tug on his sympathies, he was soon to acquire it through his collaborations with Lady Gregory. The King's Threshold in its earliest version, and Deirdre, with their somewhat bloodless characterizations remember their affinities with an earlier selfconscious tragic breed, and neither can number characterization among its virtues. The King's Threshold earns its laurels largely through the powerful verse of its closing scene, while Deirdre is significant largely as a technical triumph, as a remarkably controlled exercise in classic form and compression. But when the figure of Cuchulain grips Yeats's imagination in On Baile's Strand, the squirarchy and its brawling vitality reassuringly asserts its transformation of the tragic role.

The words "reckless" and "gesture" become increasingly important to Yeats's tragic theory, but neither are to be interpreted as implying that Yeats is less concerned with the seriousness and the centrality of the tragic nature of life. "Tragic gesture," although it may suggest the futility of the tragic role is, in effect, double edged; it implies as well, a triumphant heroic defiance, "that assertion of the eternity of what Nature declares ephemeral." But Yeats's own experience with the theatre nevertheless made him

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painfully aware of those single-minded judgments which persist in dismissing tragedy, with beauty, as a "strange unserviceable thing."

It was, however, precisely in those values which were most "unserviceable" that Yeats placed his poetic faith. John Sherman, Yeats's thinly veiled alter ego in his early short story, had found little of value in life beyond the moments of idleness which he had spent in his boyhood home in the West Country, and until he resolved to return and share them with his patient Solveig, only their memories served to sustain him through a restless London career. Yeats recounts in his Letters to the New Island gloating over the busy drones in the reading room of the National Library while savouring the idle play of his imagination, and his essay "If I were Four and Twenty" provides an engaging defense of the riches of impracticability. 13 Red Hanrahan, Proud Costello, Seanchan, Forgael, Michael Robartes, and Martin Hearne are all figures who have very little in common with what Yeats would stigmatize as the prosaic "garden city mind." All are solitaries whose lot it is to be misunderstood by the practical good sense of their neighbours. "Decadent," Yeats maintains, thinking perhaps of his companions of the Tragic Generation, is "a favourite reproach from the objective everywhere. . . . How could they that dreaded solitude love that which solitude made"? 14 The solitary is irreconcilably riven from primary man: "all minds that have a wisdom come of tragic reality seem morbid to those that are accustomed to writers that have not faced reality at all: just as the saints with that obscure Night of the Soul, which fell so

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certainly that they number it among the spiritual states. . . seem morbid to the rationalist and the old fashioned Protestant controversialist. 15

as instruments of that particular form of knowledge known to Plato as doxa, are forever at odds with the subtleties of the noetic or intuitive understanding. "Indeed all art which appeals to individual men and awaits the confirmation of his senses and his reveries, seems, when arrayed against the moral zeal, the confident logic, the ordered proof of journalism, a trifling, impertinent, vexatious thing, a tumbler who has unrolled his carpet in the way of a marching army." The popular optimism which results from their limited vision fails to grasp the nature of the eternal conflict, the vision of "evil" as well as that of the "good", that the nature of life is tragedy, and that it is played in the midst of armed camps where there is no final victory.

In his essay "At Stratford-on-Avon," Yeats castigates the utilitarian heroes of George Eliot and her contemporaries:

They and she grew up in a century of utilitarianism when nothing about a man seemed important except his utility to the state, and nothing so useful to the state as the activities whose effect can be weighed by reason. The deeds of Coriolanus, Hamlet, Timon, Richard II, had no obvious use, were indeed no more than the expression of their personalities. . .a revelation and not reformation.

Because society exalts social success and judges all endeavour in these terms, Shakespeare, Yeats maintains, has been reduced by his readers to a "vulgar worshipper of success," and Henry V has been offered to generations of schoolboys as a model of exemplary

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conduct. But Richard II, whom Yeats regards as an example of the solitary dreamer, had no less a place among Shakespeare's affections, and though he should lay claim to a comparable place in our own, he has consistently fallen prey to those who recoil before his ineptitude as a social functionary. By utilizing reason as its measure of excellence, society has chosen that limited instrument of judgment which seeks to propagate its own values, and which blinds itself to all others.

The heroic figure, whose misfortune it is to be born "out of phase," will inevitably be misjudged by his contemporaries until that sensibility or direction which he has imparted to the historical current establishes itself. Society and civilizations, committed to an unremitting but futile struggle to perpetuate themselves, create and impose law and reason. But law and reason are no more than rigid forms which seek to arrest the constant flux which impels civilization toward its flowering or its destruction. A created form of this sort might well lead a civilization toward its highest achievement by providing a disunified people with an image of their own desires, an ideal which serves to marshal individual effort and create social coherence, the self-realization which Yeats has described as Unity of Being. But Unity of Being. whether individual or cultural, is of the order of epiphany, a momentary condition, if indeed it may be achieved fully in time at all. Yeats's Great Wheel of history refuses to pause in its course. What had served as a transforming ideal becomes in the face of change a rigid, constricting pattern.



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"If we were not certain of law," Yeats writes, "we would not feel the struggle, the drama, but the subject of art is not law, which is a kind of death, but the praise of life, and it has no commandments that are not positive." Rigidity, law and reason, as Yeats would have it, vaunts its nay-saying before the vital processes of life itself. If life is essentially formless, defying rational formulation, law and reason enact no more than a futile struggle to stem a restless tide. Rational form then, is paradoxically that which gives expression to life, but that which at the same time seals its own death pact, and condemns its own fragile crystalization of life to destruction, just as civilizations are driven from the mixed seeds of their inception to their final dissolution.

Yeats's tragic heroes take their stand with life against the inbred forces of self-destructive order, and our sympathies are theirs because of our own painful suspicion of the inequality of the match. But in reality, we suffer from the limitations of our own cramped perspective, and the match, though seemingly catastrophic, is in the long run not unequal. "No battle has been finally won or lost," and there is perhaps something of heroism on either side.

It is our consciousness of law, because we ourselves are subjected to it, as a seemingly palpable reality, which provides the friction between personal and public motive. One must defy something before he can aspire to personal heroics, and the spectators of the tragic agon must be equally aware of a concrete struggle against substantial odds. The lack of this sense of

"dramatic friction" provided by a confrontation or open combat between dramatized values served to inhibit any sympathetic response to Yeats's play The Shadowy Waters, where his audience could only be uncomfortably aware that they were asked to exchange one insubstantial reality for another.

The tragic act falls beyond reason and logic, as that which flies in the teeth of form and order must inevitably be consigned to the irrational. The hero's lot is a solitary one because it is played in defiance of those bastions of the moral law, "the enemies of life, the chimeras of the Pulpit and the Press." Yeats has drawn his hero as antithetical man cast upon an ordered, primary dispensation. A primary world demands of its disciples surrender to an accepted code of behaviour or thought, whereas subjective man is content only "to spin a web out of his own bowels," to fabricate his own vision of reality. Shakespeare's heroes, Yeats claims, suffer at the hands of the primary morelist who cannot comprehend that Shakespeare himself, as well as his own creations, rose from an age and mind which had begun to throw off external order.

Shakespearewrote at a time when solitary great men were gathering to themselves the fire that had once flowed hither and thither around all men, when individualism in words and thought was breaking up the old rhythms of life, when the common people, sustained no longer by the myths of Christianity and of still older faiths, were sinking into the earth.21

To sink into the earth is, in Yeats's terms, that descent into the "dung of passion," the shrugging off of abstract morality for a regeneration through experience. It is Yeats's Christ who would

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ascend into an abstract sky, but his Oedipus who sinks into the earth, "riven by love." Surely Yeats's thought had turned to Oedipus when he wrote: "I cannot discover truth by logic unless that logic serve passion, and only then if the logic be ready to cut its own throat, tear out its own eyes."²²

Although the subjective here must confront primary order, he knows, in the only way he can know--through his instincts and emotions--nothing of primary experience. Yeats had, it will be remembered, expressed his belief in opposing views of reality in his 1930 Diary:

If reality is timeless and spaceless this is a goal, an ultimate Good. But if I believe that it is also a congeries of autonomous selves I cannot believe in one ever victorious Frovidence, though I may in Frovidences that preside over a man, a class, a gity, a nation, a world—Providences that may be defeated.

By accepting primary reality as an ultimate goal, one is committed to a moral system which identifies the One with the Good, and which rationalizes all human effort in terms of a unifying ethic. But if the unified conception gives way, either historically, or for the individual, its moral implications collapse with it. Morality becomes arbitrary, and indeed if it exists at all, is relevant only to the individual himself and the efficacy of his own struggle toward a unique self-realization.

In so far as we believe that reality is a congeries we shall be uncertain of victory. We and those other souls to whom we are as it were bound and sworn, with whom we share a morality, may be defeated, and to those who believe in the final victory of Good there is greater heroism in our uncertainty. In morality itself there may be something arbitrary, as in the morals of Oedipus, as perhaps in all morality before the philosophy of Unity prevailed, as if it were the special discipline of a class, or a regiment. A

The stature of the tragic hero is enhanced by the uncertainty which clouds his struggle. He is neither a reformer nor a self-conscious martyr convinced of material or spiritual rewards, but one aware of nothing but personal conviction and certainty, striking out blindly and instinctively with the full strength of his will in a frenzy of self-assertion. In 1904 Yeats wrote of the artist what might well serve to define the moral relativity which he associated with the heroic act:

Every argument carries us backwards to some religious conception, and in the end the creative energy of man depends upon their believing that they have, within themselves, something immortal and imperishable, and that all else is but an image in a looking glass. So long as that belief is not a formal thing, a man will create out of a joyful energy, seeking little for any external test of an impulse that may be sacred looking for no foundation outside life itself.

iii

The subject of all art is passion, Yeats claimed, and "art at its highest moments creates intense feeling, pure life." 26

Tragedy, above all, necessitates the play of a pure passion, and to achieve his impersonalized sense of tragedy, Yeats sought to simplify action and purge "character" of those qualities which inhibit rather than express passion. The antagonists in the tragic agon are refined of all those personal idiosyncrasies which serve to particularize them as individual man, until they represent no more than a nascent ideal, a single passion defined only by its motive. The workings of such a passion are intensified by directing it towards an obstacle, the visible or material world, or a principle which seeks to obstruct its pursuit. Character gives

way to an all-absorbing activity of soul, "aroused into a perfect intensity by opposition with some other passion, or it may be with the law," and the result "is an eddy of life purified from everything but itself," or as Coleridge might have described it, "the melting down and fusion of the sensual into the spiritual." 27

Viewed from a perspective of naturalism, Yeats's characters appear uncompromisingly inhuman, incapable of establishing a sympathetic bond with their audience. But to insist upon an identification between the audience and the individualized character of the hero, and the consequent arousing of pity for his dilemma, is to lose sight of the peculiar qualities which Yeats's tragedy has to offer. Yeats seeks identification not with the accidental nature of character, but a rapport with the generic experience which that character in his role has come to embody. The essence of tragedy is for Yeats the revelation of reality, the point at which the actors assume in the mind of the spectator the generic properties of mythic figures engaged in their timeless agon. Baudelaire had found the same experience essential to all mythology, where "human relations almost completely lose their conventional form, which is intelligible only to the abstract reason and show what is eternally comprehensible in life."28

Yeats wrote in the <u>Autobiographies</u>: "I was indeed to number character itself among the abstractions." Character, he insisted, could be no more than an arbitrary and inconsequential category imposed by the rational mind, and as such had, in terms of antithetical man, no validity of its own. Actually, Yeats has very little to

say of what he understands as character at any time, even in the schematization of the Four Faculties proposed in A Vision. In this system it appears to be loosely associated with will or ego, the undefined collocation of impulses which we first bring to our bout with the daimon. These unarticulated energies achieve their true existential being through act, but previous to this, they have no reality of their own. Will must find an object to love or strive toward, and this it recognizes in its mask, the sum of all its aspirations. Mask, then, as the object of pursuit, is the formal cause which delineates will and calls it into being, just as food might serve to define and make intelligible hunger. Directed against that which seeks to thwart its attainment of mask, and hence Unity of Being, it becomes pure potency, shorn of those original extraneous impulses which weighed it to a chaos of indecision.

But this unleashing of will or passion, Yeats claims, cannot be of a purely cerebral nature, for it must involve the combined energies of mind and body seeking hypostasis in Unity of Being. Rational thought alone excludes a whole order of vital experience, and scorns synthesis for sterile, desiccating analysis. "An exciting person, whether the hero of a play or the maker of poems, will display the greatest volume of personal energy, and this energy must seem to come out of the body as out of the mind We believe only in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body." Rather than rational in its origin, the heroic impulse of the will is purely intuitive, a matter of blind faith, and as such, Yeats claims, owes more to the body than it does to the

brain. "Our bodies are nearer to our coherence because nearer to the unconscious than our thought."31

When attacking George Bernard Shaw's dramatic cerebrations in On the Boiler, Yeats insists "but thought is not more important than action; masterpieces, whether of the stage or study, excel in action, their visibility. . .we are not coherent to ourselves through thought but because our visible image changes slowly." 32 Thought seeks to impose its artificially rigid concept of character on the processes of human life in the same manner as it attempts to arrest historical and cultural change within the created forms of law and rational order. The attempt to arrest change serves to inhibit act, and consequently the self-realization which threatens its sovereignty. Character therefore, implies fixity, acquiescence to the primary rule of thought, but human life is broken upon the selfsame cycles which impel history, and which abhor the static; antithetical man must therefore meet his world on his own terms, through a constant act of Becoming.

In spite of the lyric qualities of a number of his plays, and Yeats's own bemused proposal to rehearse his actors in barrels in order to curb their movements, Yeats was intent upon utilizing all the auxiliary resources of the theatre: music, the dance, painting, and sculpture, thereby achieving a <u>Gesantkunstwerk</u>, or Wagnerian fusion of all the arts. His conception of theatre owed nothing to a static realization. If Yeats sought to inhibit his actors' movements, it was only to exorcise their stock repertory of meaning—less melodramatic gesture, so that gesture and movement might

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recapture their expressiveness and significance. Yeats's fascination with the controlled movement of the Japanese Noh plays and his own experiments with the dance, were largely an attempt to achieve a further dimension of meaning through dramatic action.

A play, he maintained, must "use the bodily energies of its principal actors to the full." Yeats's strictures were not merely unrelated exercises in practical theatricalism, but were rooted in his conception of the nature of action as fundamental to the process of Becoming.

The Platonic tradition had always upheld activity as the essential attribute of the soul. Plato's doctrine in the <u>Phaedrus</u> of the self-moved soul as the initiator of all local motion received considerable emphasis at the hands of the Cambridge Neoplatonists. Henry More based his whole argument for the existence of spirit on the need for a cause for motion in the world, and Whichcote, in his redress of the Cartesian dictum, spelled out the Cambridge position as "I act, therefore I am." 34

Although Yeats's hero might be described as antithetical man confronting an alien primary or recognizably Platonic world, the constitution of his soul is nonetheless identical with that of his Platonist fellows; only his instincts differ. The soul in its intellective or systolic act, as well as in its antithetical diastolic movements, retains its essential nature; it merely seeks varying expressions of its inherent dual impulses. In 1904 Yeats wrote John Quinn: "I have always felt that the soul had two movements, primarily: one to transcend form, and the other to

create forms. Nietzsche called them the Dionysian and the Apollonian, respectively. I think I have to some extent got weary of that wild god Dionysus, and I am hoping that the fardarter will come in his place. "35 Yeats's Nietzschean distinction might appear strangely inappropriate when applied to his early plays and poetry. One hesitates to associate a Forgael with "that wild god," but nonetheless, Forgael's role as a hero is essentially that characterized by Dionysus Lusios, the liberator, and the aspirations toward an ineffable inane which is expressed everywhere in Yeats's early writings, is recognizable as a yearning to transcend the world of things, as the systolic impulse to slough off the imperfect traces of the experiential world for an ideal condition.

In the same year, Yeats had described his <u>Ideas of Good and</u>
<u>Evil</u> to AE as

. . . only one half of the orange, for I only got a grip on the other half very lately. I am no longer in much sympathy with an essay like "The Autumn of the Body," not that I think that essay untrue. But I think I mistook for a permanent phase of the world what was only a preparation. The close of the last century was full of strange desire to get out of form, to get some kind of disembodied beauty, and now it seems to me the contrary impulse has come. I feel about me and in me an impulse to create form, to carry the realization of beauty as far as possible. The Greeks said that the Dionysiac enthusiams preceded the Apollonic and that the Dionysiac was sad and desirous, but the Apollonic was joyful and self sufficient.

Yeats's "other half of the orange" (perhaps his first intimation of the nature of reality as a sphere) was to emerge as the arena of antithetical man, whomhe had come to associate with the Apollonian. Antithetical man seeks to assert his own mastery by

imposing form through a self-assertive creative fiat which enables him to stand at the centre of his own universe. As an artist, he defies primary order with his artifact, the embodiment of his personal vision. But as hero, he seeks to express it in terms of his own flesh and blood, to achieve a perfected Unity of Being which lies beyond all established order and, probably, as Yeats came to admit, beyond the human condition itself. The hero as well as his primary counterpart seeks the Beatific Vision, to become in reality what he is potentially. But unlike primary man, he seeks it on his own terms. The primary would find God in surrender or contemplation, while the spiritual egoism of Yeats's "doom-eager" heroes impels him blindly and catastrophically on a course of action bent on victory in the here and now. The hero of Yeats's poem "The Hero, the Girl, and the Fool" tells his love:

I have heard one say That men have reverence for their holiness And not themselves.37

Yeats's heroes doubtlessly held his sympathies no less than they hold our own, and the ultimate victory of the heroic gesture is not denied them. But neither is the comparatively unappealing victory, if indeed it may be described as such, of primary man, Yeats's saint or sage. Yeats had perhaps discovered in his Heraclitus, long before he encountered Nietzsche, that "the road up and the road down is one and the same." 38

Tbsen and Shaw, the most controversial dramatists of their

day, appear to have exerted no direct influence on Yeats's drama. Ibsen's plays in particular drew down Yeats's withering criticism of the whole movement of realistic theatre: "I was divided in mind," he said of The Doll's House, "I hated the play,...I resented being invited to admire dialogue so close to modern educated speech that music and style were impossible." Resmersholm could offer Yeats no more than a savour of symbolism and "a stale odour of spilt poetry." He retreated imperiously to the security of Goethe's pronouncement: "Art is art because it is not nature." Realism, Yeats concluded, was for those "who are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety"; it was clearly the bare of modern literature and drama, and represented everything Yeats had rebelled against. 42

of Shaw, Yeats was never certain, although he apparently associated his plays with the new movement. He hated the plays and delighted in the iconoclast, never certain whether "the cock crowed for my blame or for my praise." As a dramatist, Yeats had associated himself not with popular realism, but with the conflicting tradition: that of Wagner, Maeterlinck, Claudel, and the later Strindberg, those symbolists who had found their expression in the theatre. Ibsen, Shaw, and their followers chose the naturalist expression of Balzac and Flaubert, which Zola had first adapted to the stage in his <u>Thérèse Raquin</u>, while Yeats chose the stage of the anti-realist, which had come to him largely through the work of Wagner's friend and admirer Villiers de l'Isle Adam, who represented the link between the symbolist music drama and the symbolist theatre.

Impatient with theses, social problems, character, and the detail which he associated with both comedy and realism, Yeats remained loyal to his tradition, which was essentially a poetic one.

"There is no observation of life," and little of character,

"because the poet would set before us all those things which we feel and imagine in silence."

In lieu of the conventional realist's approach, the poet was to search out his own private synthesis of spiritual, dramatic, and poetic values.

Yeats's position was influenced largely by his sympathies of the eighties, when the intellectual life seemed divided into two opposing camps. In one were the scientists and the realists, who maintained an optimistic faith in the efficacy of progress, and in the other were the aesthetes: Johnson, Wilde, Dowson, Beardsley, and others of the Rhymer's Club, who were united by a common distaste for modern life and regarded the "new age" as the trump of doom. Yeats, who regarded science "with a monkish hate," sided with his companions. 45 Years later he wrote in his "Introduction to The Resurrection! "When I was a boy everybody talked about progress, and rebellion against my elders took the form of aversion to that myth."46 The times were against the Rhymers, however, and Yeats later saw in that ill-timed group and its thwarted aspirations the reckless heroism of subjective man, alone and misunderstood before the popular hollow optimism. "I do not know whether John Davidson, whose life also was tragic, made that 'morbid effort' that search for 'perfection of thought and feeling,' for he is hidden behind failure to unite it 'to perfection of form'."47 Had John Davidson achieved that solitary perfection in life, Yeats

discloses, his role might have been a heroic one; had he achieved it in his art, he might have taken his place with those artificers "of the great moment" who express in their art the unity for which they hesitated to stake their lives. When the battle against realism and the popular optimism of the eighties had been fought and lost, it assumed for Yeats the character of the archetypal heroic struggle.

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Although Yeats's acceptance of the anti-realist faith allied him with that theatrical tradition which stemmed from the music drama of Richard Magner, it is doubtful whether Yeats, with his unmusical ear and his notorious mistrust of musicians, ever attended a Wagner performance, or would have felt any sympathy with the music drama had he done so. But Yeats had, as early as 1887, acknowledged Wagner as the master of the symbolist movement in Germany, and grouped him with those with whom he chose to cast his lot.

The reaction against the rationalism of the 18th century has mingled with a reaction against the naturalism of the 19th century, and the symbolical movement, which has come to perfection in Germany with Wagner, in England with the PreRaphaelites and in France with Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Mallarmé and Maeterlinck. . .is certainly the only movement saying new things.

Wagner, the <u>enfant terrible</u> of nineteenth century letters and music, had inaugurated a theatrical as well as a musical revolution, and enlisted a number of partisans as vehement as his many critics.

Among these were the young Nietzsche, and Baudelaire, who in <u>L'art</u>

Romantique, a book which came to Yeats's attention, defended Wagner's position while the composer was flailed by the Faris critics. 49 It is reasonable to claim that an admixture of Wagnerian and symbolist ideals formed a significant part of the intellectual and creative milieu of <u>fin</u> <u>de</u> <u>siècle</u> England and France.

Yeats had read Nietzsche as early as the summer of 1903, and it is evident from his letters to John Quinn that he had accepted, or at least recognized his own position in the aphorisms of Zarathustra. It may reasonably be assumed that he also read The Birth of Tragedy, a work which was to become the gospel of many a nineteenth and twentieth century dramatist. The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music, written before Nietzsche's disenchantment with Wagner, was an adulatory confirmation of the composer's dramatic theories and, in particular, the tragic principle behind his Tristan und Isolde.

Yeats had indicated a continuing interest in Wagner. In 1901 he had voiced his approval of the design of the Bayreuth auditorium, and in March 1903 he had written Sturge Moore of his intention to stage The Shadowy Waters in costumes "of Wagner's period." Moore had recommended to Yeats a copy of one of Adolph Appia's books, probably La Mise en Scène du Drame Wagnerien. The Swiss designer Appia was the first cousin of Marie Sturge Moore and the forerunner of Gordon Craig, who had built on Appia's techniques for the staging of symbolist drama. Appia's book was not a mere handbook of stage-craft, but an inquiry into Wagner's theories of drama, and an attempt to create through them a more suitable style of production

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than the clumsy mechanical wizardry of Bayreuth could provide.

In July 1905, Yeats had read in <u>The Quarterly Review</u>, while rewriting <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> and <u>The King's Threshold</u>, and plotting his <u>Deirdre</u>, Arthur Symons' article "The Ideas of Richard Wagner," and he replied to its author:

My dear Symons, the Wagnerian essay touches on my own theories at several points, and enlarges them at one or two. . . I have spent the entire summer rewriting The Shadowy Waters. . . . In one place your Wagner essay helped me. A certain passage had always seemed wrong to me, and after I had rewritten it several times it was still wrong. I then came on that paragraph where Wagner insists that a play must not appeal to the intelligence, but by being, if I remember rightly, a piece of self consistent life directly to the emotions.

Symons' essay, a consideration of Wagner's "A Communication to My Friends," concerns itself with the composer's avowed anti-intellectualism. "He proves to us," Symons relates, "step by step, that none of his motivations were prolonged by reflection, but solely by practical experience and the nature of his aesthetic aim." Symons relates, "step by step, that none of his motivations were prolonged by reflection, but

Art is an inbred craving of the natural, genuine and uncorrupted man, not an artificial product, and not a product of mind only, which produces science, but of that deeper impulse which is unconscious. . . . In drama. . . an action can only be explained when it is completely justified by the feeling; and it is there the dramatic poets look not to invent actions but to make it so intelligible through its emotional necessity that we may altogether dispense with the intellect's assistance in its justification. The corrupt of the service of the control of the

We might assume that Wagner's essay helped Yeats in more than a single passage; it furnished an impressive corroboration for his own concept of tragedy and the nature of art. The Wagnerian world is essentially anti-rational and anti-intellectual. Passion becomes the only reality in our experience, Wagner observed, and charted

his drama accordingly. Had Yeats read enough Wagner, he probably would have found his position too extreme for his own tastes.

But Wagner had forcefully outlined Yeats's own sentiments concerning the inadequacy of rational thought, and his description of the drama coincided perfectly with Yeats's own observations on the tragic experience. For Yeats the tragic moment offered "pure lyricism, unmixed passion, the integrity of fire," and tragic art "the passionate art, is the confounder of the understanding." The test of poetry, Yeats wrote in the "Discoveries" of 1906, "is not in reason but in a delight not different from the delight that comes to man at the first coming of love into the heart."

Yeats and Wagner chose identical themes to underlie their art: the conflict between intuitive and discursive knowledge. Their motivations were similar: Wagner had built his world, as Nietzsche had constructed his ethics, as a protest against nineteenth century materialism and religion. Yeats had abandoned rhetoric as the language of a reasoning materialism to the naturalistic theatre, and chose the language of symbol and intuition as a means of exploring a world transcending rational discourse and rational experience.

Because of their common footing as artists in the <u>fin de siècle</u> impasse, there are, in spite of the forcible contrast in their personal characters, a number of striking parallels in their respective careers. The need of the <u>fin de siècle</u> artist to synthesize a poetic myth in an age which had abandoned myth for a mutually exclusive dualism of materialism and idealism, drove him in a number of desperate directions. Very often the path led,

through embittered frustration, either to the church, or the weary pilgrimage to the brothel. Not entirely oblivious to the lures of either, Yeats and Wagner turned to found churches of their own; first a national church, and then a private chapel. "Wagner," Yeats observed in 1900, "spent seven years arranging and explaining his ideas before he began his most characteristic music." Yeats was to spend a great deal longer. He would turn from his dream of creating a national myth to the highly personal and eclectic liturgy of <u>A Vision</u>; Wagner, from his <u>Ring</u> to the elaborate pagan and Christian syncretism of <u>Parsifal</u>.

Yeats was not unaware of his kinship with Wagner and their relation to those of their contemporaries who had, in a similar fashion, been forced back upon a tradition that had provided them with a common fund of symbol which poet and priest had, from antiquity, held in common.

Wagner's dramas, Keats' odes, Blake's pictures and poems, Calvert's pictures, Rossetti's pictures, Villier de l'Isle Adam's plays, and the black-and-white art of Mr. Beardsley and Mr. Rickets, and the lithographs of Mr. Shannon, and the pictures of Mr. Whistler, and the plays of M. Maeterlinck, and the poetry of Verlaine in our own day, but differ from the religious art of Giotto and his disciples in having accepted all symbolisms, the symbolism of the ancient shepherds and star-gazers, that symbolism of bodily beauty which seemed a wicked thing to Fra Angelico, the symbolism of day and night, winter and summer, spring and autumn, once so great a part of an older religion than Christianity. 58

But there were, Yeats was to recognize, varying degrees of allegiance to the past: a servile antiquarianism which was, in effect, not unlike the flight to the church, or that position which he associated with Wagner's as well as his own as mythmaker: "There is indeed a

systematic mystic in every poet or painter who, like Rossetti, delights in a traditional symbolism, or, like Wagner, delights in a personal symbolism." 59

Both Wagner and Yeats would renounce the world of their Tristan and The Shadowy Maters, which are, in effect, the same world. The Shadowy Waters shares with Tristan its fin de siècle background, its basic attitudes, and even much of its internal symbolism. The circumstances in the two stories are broadly similar. Forgael and Dectora are adrift in a night-world, they are at first antagonistic, but are "awakened to love/By magic strings," a supernatural device as efficacious as Isolde's love-potion. The conflict of Yeats's play, identical with that of Tristan as a struggle between the spiritual and material, is resolved, or more properly, overwhelmed, in a similar fashion, in a medley of night, love, death, and primordial oneness.

In 1851, in "A Communication to My Friends," Wagner wrote:

"To the path which I struck with the conception of The Flying Dutchman belong the two succeeding dramatic poems, Tannhauser and Lohengrin."

The path which Wagner described was a search for redemption through mystic union which often found its expression, as in Yeats, through sexual symbolism. The sehnsucht motive,

Forgael's indefinite yearnings, and Tristan's longing for transcendence are entirely characteristic of the fin de siècle love-in-death formula.

Tristan had been written after Wagner laid aside the second act of his Siegfried, and the path which he had claimed to follow

in Tristan, the exaltation of <u>Liebestod</u>, was inevitably projected into the more complex world of his Ring cycle. Yeats too, had come to reject the thirst for an "impossible perfection," a fatal adolescent Sehnsucht which he had associated with his heroes Axel and Alastor. but their "longing after death" nevertheless served to colour his own mature concept of tragedy, the curiously hybrid "tragic joy" which he proposed as the essential tragic experience. Wagner's Ring concludes with the destruction of the gods and heroes. but also with the leitmotiv of redemption through love. Siegfried is destroyed, but his death implies his own salvation through love, enabling him to exult in death: "Leuchtende Liebe/Lachender Tod! gleaming love, laughing death. 62 The tone is Nietzschean, the tone of Zarathustra's vision of tragic joy and laughing destruction: "The world now laughs, the great curtain is rent, the marriage of light and darkness takes place." It is, moreover, that of the closing scene of Yeats's play The King's Threshold, and the poems The Gyres and Lapis Lazuli: "They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay/ Gaiety transforming all that dread."63

Yeats's enumeration of the traditional symbols which he, Wagner, and their contemporaries revered (day-night, winter-summer, spring-autumn) suggests those antithetical symbols through which the <u>fin</u> de siècle artist dramatized what he recognized as the dualism of the cosmic and human condition. They suggest, moreover, the cyclic pattern by which dualism as a temporal manifestation emerges as recurrent process. As Yeats realized, his own generation had reenacted the romantic revolt against an arid rationalism, and the romantic poet too, had found night as the kingdom of sensibility

against reason, his congenial home. Tristan and The Shadowy Maters share also a night-world of their own. The nocturnal world of Tristan provides the lover's night and constitutes the only "real" world. All else is illusory; darkness and night become symbols of good: day is "lying," "deceitful," "full of dread." It is to reject the false light of reason that Isolde extinguishes her torch, surrendering to the infinite possibility of night.

The night and day conflict as such, is scarcely evident in Yeats's play. There is, however, the implication that his image-crowded sea must, of necessity, belong to a night-world. In fact, it is much too perishable for the light of day. But the same conflict is very much in evidence in the characters and the contrasts between them, contrasts which Yeats had struggled to heighten in his successive revisions. Yeats consistently characterized the primary, rational order as solar, and his antithetical as lunar or nocturnal. The visionary experience belongs exclusively to a night-world, and the visions of <u>Byzantium</u> follow upon the coming of night, when "the unpurged images of day recede." Elsewhere Yeats associates day and night with male and female principles:

There are some who understand that the simple unmysterious things living as in a clear noonlight are of the nature of the sun, and that vague many-imaged things have in them the strength of the moon. Did not the Egyptian carve it on emerald that all living things have the sun for father and the moon for mother, and has it not been said that a man of genius takes the most after his mother?

Thomas Mann in his essay "Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner" commented on Wagner's use of night in terms which are equally applicable to Yeats's usage:

This deliberate stress upon the night, the lovelier half of the day is arch-romentic; and its romanticism is bound up with the whole mother-and-moon cult which since the dawn of human time and human sunworship has stood epposed to the male and father-religion of the light.

Yeats was to become increasingly sensitive to the effete quality which he felt had threatened his early work, and which he found everywhere about him in the writings of his contemporaries. He wrote AE in 1904: "I cannot possibly be quite just to any poetry that spoke to me with the sweet insinuating voice of the dwellers in that country of the shadows and hollow nights. I have dwelt there too long not to dread all that comes out of it." 66 Yeats had resolved to overcome the "soft insinuating voice" by the "sound of steel on steel."

Yeats's most common emblem for the subjective role is the moon, which he describes in his Shelley essay as "the most change-able of symbols, and not merely because it is the symbol of change. As mistress of the waters she governs the life of instinct and the generation of things." Associated with Yeats's changeful path of the chameleon, existential experience, the moon has suggested to the myth-maker a perennial pattern analagous to that of the human tragic condition. Its phasal fragmentation and reintegration enact an unending parable of death and rebirth, the rhythms and cycles of sublunary life. The sun, however, is ever the same, never in any sense "Becoming," but the cosmic analogue of "Being." The moon probably gave rise to the first primitive conceptions of time; its perpetual return to beginnings, its cyclic nature, and the im ediacy

of its association with the realities of natural life, the tides, the menses, and the crops appear to have imprinted it as a potent symbol on many a primitive culture. Mircea Eliade cites a prevalent symbolism of spirals, snakes, and lightning, all of which are associated with the notion of the moon as the measure of rhythmic change and fertility. All of these are, of course, identified by Yeats with the moon haunted hodos chameliontos of antithetical man. Eliade has quoted Hentze's opinion that in effect, all dualisms find in the moon's phases if not their historical cause, at least a mythic and symbolic model. Moreover, the lunar passage has always been linked with the way of intuition, magic, and the imagination, as contrasted with the solar attributes of reason, reflection, and objectivity.

It was inevitable, perhaps, that Yeats respected this traditional association. If one is to accept Becoming (or in Bergsonian terms, duration) rather than an abstract, static ideal of Being, it follows that intuition alone provides the only possible instrument of knowledge. Moreover, Yeats was undoubtedly aware of the power of the moon over the Irish imagination, that the Celtic moon goddess Dana presided over the pantheon of the Tuath de Danaan, the progenitors of the race of faery and supernatural beings which persisted in haunting the Irish imagination in Yeats own day.

Although Yeats's sympathies lie with the solitary lot of his antithetical hero and his chameleon path, his ultimate solution rests with the attainment of Unity of Being, the power to command the totality of experience, both primary and antithetical. It is,

however, only antithetical man who seeks actively to effect the interpenetration of these opposed planes, to banish dualisms, perpetual return and fragmentary existences by integrating experience with the primal unity of an overmastering vision of reality. Only in this way can the purely existential be transmuted, made incarnate with the totality of Being.

The legendary figure of Cuchulain in Irish mythology has been associated by Rhys with the attributes of a solar god or hero, but the symbolism which Yeats had elaborated in A Vision places heroic man within the twelfth lunar phase, where antithetical man seeks self-realization at the full of the moon. 69 night-world, or the solitary world of mists and still waters, is the traditional habitat of Yeats's antithetical figures who shun the anatomizing light of reason for the solace of the lunar night. But the heroic role demands that the hero do battle, and the heroic stand is not a surrender or retreat to the more congenial world of night. The role of antithetical man seeking Unity of Being derands activity, not passivity; the promise of victory lies in battle, not acquiescence. The hero, who is driven into an impassioned frenzy in pursuit of his mask (which, if it is a true mask must come from a primary phase), seeks to attain that self-realization or Unity of Being which promises victory over the antinomies of day and night, reason and intuition. He must, therefore, do battle in an unfriendly dawn before the cold light and tumbling clouds. where the perishable half-tints of his dusky world give way before naked conflict in its terrifying clarity. Until Yeats had extricated his hero from an interminable sojourn in the night-world,

and impelled him into open conflict, he had no opportunity to dramatize heroic action or tragedy.

But day follows night in the same diurnal round in which night triumphs over day, and the hero must meet his ritual nemesis on the battlefields of dawn. By the harsh light of reason, he has met with total and ignoble defeat; his sacrifice is without consequence and meaning. But reason, which worships only its own limited ends and is blind to all else, seeks to arrest or, more properly, disregard time and change, and fails to look to the gathering dusk. Beneath its bark, Yeats's tree of life, like the world of Heraclitus, resounds with the continual clash of swords, and what appears as conciliation or stasis to the myopic eye of reason, is no more than illusion or a mere ebb and gathering of forces in the drama of the cosmic agon, "dying each other's life, living each other's death."

Even our best histories treat men as function. Why must I think the victorious cause the better? Why should Mommsen think the less of Cicero because Caesar beat him? I am satisfied, the Platonic Year in my head, to find but drama. I prefer that the defeated cause should be more vividly described than that which has the advertisement of victory. No battle has been finally won or lost; 'to Garret or Cellar a wheel I send'.

Artist, Saint, and Fool: The Paths of Chameleon and Arrow

Of the various roles defined by the phasal scheme of A Vision, those of the hero, the saint, and the artist, recur most frequently among Yeats's inquiries into the nature of the creative process. Although hero and saint are assigned explicit positions at phases twelve and twenty-seven of Yeats's Great Wheel, the poet or artist, depending on his personal characteristics and the character of his art, might be found in any number of primary or antithetical phases. It is the saint and hero, however, who anticipate the crucial phases or supernatural incarnations which impart to the whole wheel its direction and moment and, in consequence, serve to define and clarify the graduated nature and roles of all intermediary incarnations.

The saint, or the final triad in which the figure of the saint emerges, is diametrically opposed to the heroic triad which ushers in the fifteenth phase, perfected Unity of Being. The increasing subjectivity which is expressed by the hero, "the sensualist," and "the obsessed man" (phases twelve to fourteen), mark the culmination of the antithetical term, the diastolic movement from a primary, unific order towards complete self-realization. Conversely, the condition symbolized by the final triad of the cycle (phases twenty-six to twenty-eight), dramatizes the soul's systolic impulse towards its goal of total absorption in primary Being. These two goals of the One and the Many, yoked within their common circuit, imply as well, distinct orders of knowing, the paths of intuition and reason which Yeats characterized in <u>Per Amica Silentia Lunae</u> as the serpentine path of Nature, and the straight line of logic or Sanctity. 1

The artist is committed to the experiential world of the manycoloured serpent, where all is tangible and recurrent, and where insight is limited to the momentary illumination of instinct and epiphany.

Instinct creates the recurring and beautiful, all the winding of the serpent; but reason. . . is a drawer of the straight line, the maker of the arbitrary and the impermanent. . . Sanctity has its straight line, also, darting from the centre, and with these arrows the many-coloured serpent theme of all our poetry is maimed and hunted.

The course of the arrow, which Yeats associates with the sanctity of the saint and his rationalist precursors, is the natural antagonist of the poet and his art, indeed of all the vital processes of life itself. The poet, could be forsake his commitment to the serpentine path of the experiential world, and his personal vision, would forfeit as well his role as artificer, and the very fabric of his art, experience, language, and form. Primary man, in the closing phases of his cycle, eschews the dialectic of the mask which binds him to the experiential world, surrendering to a supernatural unity rather than struggling for the synthesis achieved by heroic or creative fiat.

I now know that there are men who cannot possess 'Unity of Being,' who must not seek it or express it,—and who, so far from seeking an anti-self, a Mask that delineates a being in all things the opposite to their natural state, can but seek the suppression of the anti-self, till the natural state alone remains. These are those who must seek no image of desire, but await that which lies beyond their mind—unities of God.

If we are to think of the saint as choosing a mask, it is clear that his mask lies not among the procession of earthly incarnations, but with the "antithetical self of the world," with the perfected sphere which is the antithesis of the existential act of Becoming. The choice of Sanctity is to be nothing, whereas the heroic would become everything.

The saint provides a curious and comparatively lacklustre mirror image of the hero, an inversion of those self-assertive qualities which define and energize the tragic role. Whereas the tragic hero articulates the extreme tendency of antithetical man's course toward self-realization, the saint embodies the objective tendency which anticipates the complete re_nunciation of selfhood for an obsessive preoccupation with the noumenal.

The saint, who achieves the total vision of reality by renouncing experience, is subject neither to the reasoning blindness which characterizes his fellow primaries, nor to the blind unreason which characterizes the hero in his emotional struggle to attain his mask. Because the saint perceives both orders dispassionately as mere facets of a comprehensive reality, he can surrender his loyalties neither to the one nor to the other; his allegiance lies with the serenity of the whole rather than with its warring parts, and he forgoes the necessity to do battle. In choosing the impassivity of the meditative life, he renounces the process of Becoming which is the generative world, for inactivity, a waiting upon God. And yet, Yeats insists, the saintly office is not mere escapism: "Saint and hero cannot be content to pass at moments to that hollow image and after become their heterogeneous selves, but would always, if they could, resemble that antithetical self."4 Both saint and hero are impelled, not by mere dissatisfaction with the world as they find it, but by the desire to make deliberate sacrifice in order to achieve their own ends, to realize in its fullness an impounded sanctity of soul.

If we are to consider the rewards that are his, it would appear

to be the saint rather than the tragic hero whose efforts to achieve his mask are crowned with success:

For a hero loves the world until it breaks him, and the poet till it has broken faith; but while the world was yet debonair, the saint has turned away, and because he renounced experience itself, he wears his mask as he finds it. . . And yet is the saint spared despite his martyr's crown and his vigil of desire, defeat, disappointed love, and the sorrow of parting.

Consequently, the saint might well represent the heroic culmination of the primary term, and were it not that "success" belongs to the primary vocabulary alone, he might assert as well his preeminence over the role of the tragic hero. But primary and antithetical orders embody contrasting values, and antithetical man recognizes in a world whose nature lies in tragic uncertainty, no system of rewards, no measure of success, and he offers no allegiance to what might constitute external necessity. From an impartial perspective, the saint might appear the equal of his heroic counterpart, but impartiality, from within the world of A Vision where all subsists by conflict and mutual antagonism, and the final assertion of life lies in the tragic assertion of mixed triumph and defeat, is unimaginable.

The supernatural incarnations, phases one and fifteen, cannot, from an omniscient or visionary point of view, be evaluated in terms of an individual efficacy or superiority. As the limits of experience, they simply exist as sustaining polar principles. Judgment belongs to the limited perspective and loyalties of the <u>sub specie aeternitatis</u>, and implies an inevitable blindness to the comprehensive nature of reality. Values, then, derive from one's own relative position and limited point of view from within Yeats's system itself. Before one can pass judgment, he must recognize a fundamental predication of

experience to which he applies his terms of good and evil; he must create his heaven and hell. The supernatural incarnations, as the perfected expression of the human antagonists, are removed, because of their perfection, from the arena of conflict, and as such they might be considered as the informing ideologies of opposing camps; one's heaven is inevitably another's hell. Unless he is caught up within the omniscient impartiality offered by the visionary pose, man cannot attain from within the cycles to the luxury of the impartial perspective; he is committed to one term or the other, and his values spring from his loyalties.

Yeats cast his lot, or recognized that his lot lay, with the company of subjective beings. For Yeats, primary experience gradually lost its appeal, except as it served to define his own antagonisms and to sustain his conception of cosmological and psychological process. In this respect, Yeats recognized in his own loyalties an inversion of the moral and ethical emphasis which characterized Neoplatonic tradition, in which antithetical or diastolic motivation had been largely ignored for a moral scale deriving from the summit of primary existence, the One. And yet, Yeats could not but be conscious of the incompleteness of his own position, and he could not accept a vision of reality which did not take into account the existence of the primary term. To surrender to the vision of the perfected sphere, however, was to surrender to visionary indifference. As a poet, Yeats's commitment lay with the materials of experience, and as a dramatist, it lay with conflict, and although the historic process had accorded to primary order its moment of fleeting triumph, Yeats persisted in his ill-timed sympathies: "I prefer that the

defeated cause should be more vividly described than that which has the advertisement of victory. **16**

The ambivalence from which Yeats's portrayal of the saint emerges, produces an ironic characterization which suggests both a tacit acceptance and an emotional rejection of the primary role. Although Yeats does not deny his saints their experience of the beatific vision, they emerge in his poetry and plays as curiously ineffectual grotesques in the company of Yeats's lusi naturae, the hunchback and fool. Yeats's saint in his poem The Three Hermits, stands on the shores of the sea of life, rummaging rags and hair, cracking fleas, between the figures of hunchback and a hundred-year fool who is primary Being in its ultimate physical incarnation, who "Giddy with his hundredth year, /Sang unnoticed like a bird." The saint of the play The Cat and the Moon, and the tonsured Ribh, studying the pages of his holy book by the spiritual conflagration which is the intercourse of angels, are in their perfected innocence little more than drolleries, strangely supercilious in the knowledge which they alone possess, and which "makes them better than other men."

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Whereas the saint wholly rejects the experiential world, the hero is totally committed to it, and it is the role of the artist which, Yeats writes, "stands between the saint and the world of impermanent things." In the struggle to achieve Unity of Being, the hero wagers his life. The artist, who seeks his "impossible perfection" only when he writes, would appear to risk much less, although unlike hero and saint, he enters a Faustian pact in which

he stakes his art for his soul.

The imaginative writer differs from the saint in that he identifies himself—to the neglect of his soul, alasi—with the soul of the world, and frees himself from all that is impermanent in that soul, an ascetic not of women and wine, but of the newspapers. Those things that are permanent in the soul of the world, the great passions that trouble all and have but a brief recurring life of flower and seed in any man are indeed renounced by the saint who seaks not an eternal art but his own eternity.

The saint dedicates himself to the antithetical self of the world, or chooses as mask the perfected sphere which transcends flux and recurrence, but the artist identifies himself with the "soul of the world," and pursues his mask among the fleeting incarnations within the circuit of the gyres. "The poet, because he may not stand within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold, may find his pardon." Unlike the saint, he has no assurance of salvation or ultimate reward. The artist's lot is a solitary bout with his mask and his art, a heroic creation of order in the midst of turbulence and uncertainty.

The intellect of man is forced to choose Perfection of the life, or of the work.

And if it take the second must refuse

A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

The apparent equivocation in Yeats's understanding of the word "permanent" lies in the inevitable ambiguity within the word which suggests one meaning for primary Being, another for the subjective. The saint seeks an eternity which lies beyond flux; the artist, the eternity which is flux, the recurrent pattern of the eternal return. For the saint, impermanence might constitute all activity, all Becoming, everything but the divine Being to which he must surrender. The artist recognizes impermanence in that primary reasoning principle



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which seeks to arrest flux and change: the newspapers, the polls of public opinion, the bastions of a fixed but precarious morality.

If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again. The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed, for that has no life for him. Yet perhaps he must endure the impermanent a little, for these things raturn, but not wholly, for no two faces are alike.*

Yeats's saint or sage, an orthodox Plotinian or Christian ecstatic, seeks those transcendent forms which are won only through an annihilation of self. In the curiously ambivalent figures of his saint, sage, or mandarin, may be discerned the final evalution of Yeats's early "Dionysian" heroes, Axel, Forgael, and Martin Hearne, who, through their refusal of life, are shorn of all relevancy to life itself, and become mere curios, enigmatic men "with a secret" which might, perhaps, not even be worth the telling.

The tragedy of Martin Hearne in <u>The Unicorn from the Stars</u> lies in his credulous assumption that he can carry to the masses his personal vision. Martin is a saint returned from the visionary mount, a "man with a secret" miscast as a revolutionary. His personal desire to "become nothing," to achieve primary union with God, is misinterpreted by his followers as a rallying cry for political anarchy. Martin has no more rapport with his followers than had Forgael with his mutinous crew. His personal vision is mistakenly identified by his followers with apocalypse, and he forfeits the security of the saintly office for the role of scapegoat in an irrational world.

If the saint's quest is for the transcendent, the artist's is for immanent form inseparable from the coursing tide of experience.



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As artificer, he substitutes for the passivity of sanctity, pure action.

Only where the mind partakes of a pure activity can art or life attain swiftness, volume, unity: that contemplation lost, we picture some slow-moving event, turn the mind's eye from everything else that we may experience to the full our own passivity, our personal tragedy; or like the spider in Swift's parable, mistake for great possessions what we spin out of our guts. . . . 13

The mind at rest is the reasoning, not the creative mind; it arbitrarily isolates events, abstracts, anatomizes, and loses the power of synthesis, the demiurgic capacity to perceive and imbue form. "The artist." Yeats claims. "becomes as all the great mystics believed, a vessel of the creative power of God." an Apollonian giver of forms. 14 But the saint would relinquish even his capacity as a divine vessel, for the emotion of sanctity, which characterizes the final phases of the wheel, emerges when all attempts at synthesis have been abandoned for an acceptance of fate. The saint would become God's fool: "His joy is to be nothing, to do nothing, to think nothing, but to permit the total life expressed in its humanity to flow in upon him and to express itself through his acts and thoughts."15 And in the following incarnation, which expresses the final deterioration of form prior to complete dissolution, the saint's aspirations find their culmination; it is the fool who achieves as much: mindless, selfless, he drifts "a straw blown by the wind. "16

If the emotion of sanctity lies in the rejection of the desire for personal salvation, and a surrender to external fate, the heroic casuistry of the artist and hero lies in the affirmation of the personal, the ultimate triumph of self, and a desperate defiance of external



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necessity.

Among subjective men. . . the victory is an intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away, and so that fate's antithesis; while what I have called 'The Mask' is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of their internal nature. We begin, to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.'

The artifact, like the heroic act, is proffered in defiance of external order. "The artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness. . .for being without fear they have held to whatever pleased them. "18 Denied and. in effect, spurning the rewards and popular acclaim accorded the confident rhetorician, Yeats writes, "we sing amid our uncertainty." and like the heroic assertion, the song is pure gesture, whose integrity lies beyond all external criteria of judgment. 19 Its permanence lies in its unique articulation of those recurrent patterns which elude the rational mind, but which inform all human experience, while the heroic gesture finds its permanence in its affinity with the same forms which have been accorded traditional expression as ritual enactment. Both partake of pure activity as opposed to the passivity or inaction exemplified by the saint, the ill-fated heroic confrontation of will with necessity, or the creative conflict of soul divided within itself, a psychomachia which absorbs no less the total energies of being.

The gap between Yeats's creative aesthetic and his dramatic concept of the tragic hero had been bridged by his speculations in the essay "Hodos Chameliontos," where the tragic hero's struggle for mask and a perfected Unity of Being is perfectly consonant with the efforts of the artist absorbed in the creative process.

become conjoint to their buried selves, turn all to Mask and Image, and so be phantoms in their own eyes. The two halves of their nature are so completely joined that they seem to labour for their objects, and yet to desire whatever happens, being at the same time predestinate and free, creation's very self. We gaze at such men in awe, because we gaze not at a work of art, but at the recreation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and it may even seem that the hairs of our head stand up, because that birth, that recreation, is from terror.

The visionary knowledge which the saint, artist, and hero, as well as the initiates of the tragic spectacle share is essentially one and the same, that of the paradoxical nature of life. Their awareness, however, varies according to the nature of their varying degrees of commitment, as well as in the fundamental difference which the act of knowing implies for primary and antithetical experience. For the artist and the tragic hero, and perhaps to a lesser extent through the empathy by which the audience engages in the tragic agon, the vision of reality is fought for and won, born from the battleground of the experiential world, and their awareness is consequently one of the pulses rather than the intellect. The artist creates his paradox, bridging the abyss between two orders of being, or rather, containing them within the sphere of his art. The hero would himself become the paradox, and the tragic spectacle provides a sacramental participation in the same visionary ritual. The saint as well, is aware of the existential paradox, but having long since fallen out of love with the world, and having offered himself on the visionary mount, he merely contemplates the paradox itself, intellectually and dispassionately, because his true allegience lies with an eternal referent beyond the contrivances of paradox and metaphor.

The saint has "shot his arrow at the sun," and the predication of experience which provides the signposts for the winding road of the chamelion and its journeyman is merely superfluous and futile. His vision is no more nor less than that of others, but because he has quit the tragic arena, his vision can scarcely be described as "tragic."

To the awakening, the revelation of reality which is attributed to the saint, the creative process, the here, and the heightened awareness which accompanies the tragic spectacle, Yeats applies the single epithet, "ecstasy." "This is the end of all art, the achievement of a joyous energy." "It is not joy, as we understand that word, but an ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things waster than the individual and imperfectly seen." The triumph over thesis and antithesis which constitutes Yeats's ecstatic vision of reality, has been identified by Henri Bergson with the aesthetic experience. It "takes us into a region that is not only antipredicative but preconceptual, where subject and object are coalescing into a concrete 'being' of the world, but when that being still retains some of its possibilities."

For Bergson, as for Yeats, the aesthetic experience provides an awareness of a preconceptual, and hence, unpredicated, suprarational reality, and as such, its apprehension lies solely with the intuition. Yeats's and Bergson's insistence upon the intuitive nature of the aesthetic experience finds its parallel in the "joyful knowledge" ascribed by the Thomist Jacques Maritain to the apprehension of all beauty. Maritain describes what Yeats might well have acknowledged as "ecstasy":

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The beautiful is that which gives joy, not all joy, but a joy superabounding and overflowing from such an act because of the object known. If a thing exalts and delights the soul by the very fact of its being given to the intuition of the soul, it is good to apprehend, it is beautiful. 23

The heightened awareness which Bergson and Maritain describe is not limited to tragedy, but applied to all aesthetic experience, the apprehension of the beautiful. Neither does Yeats reserve his "tragic ecstasy" solely for formal tragedy, but proposes it as the ultimate test of all creative expression.

All art, Yeats maintains, derives from the relationship of man and his mask, and constitutes "man's flight from his entire horoscope," the limitations both of self and external necessity. 24

But that "happy art" which Yeats attributes to Keats and those who he felt had failed to achieve the noblest expression, he describes as a "fulfilled image of desire," an all-too successful flight which results in a hymn of surrender to the mask. The poet, in his anxiety to create a perfection remote from the vicissitudes of his own life, has given himself wholly to what he regards as his mask of perfection, and dreams away his awareness of the antinomies. Like the saint, he foregoes the creative struggle within his own soul.

All happy art seems to me that hollow image, but when its lineaments express also the poverty of exasperation that set its maker to work, we call it tragic art. Keats but gave us his dream of luxury; but while reading Dante we never long escape the conflict.

Dante's dream of the <u>Beata Beatrix</u> was in itself incapable of providing his art with the tragic dimension. But Yeats is drawn to an "element of baseness" in Dante's character which delineates

both Dante's Beatrice and Dante the squabbling Florentine partisan, and it is through the continuing struggle of the heavenly vision and the earthly reality that the lineaments of his tragic art emerge.

Had not Dante and Villon understood that their fate wrecked what life could not rebuild, had they lacked their vision of Evil, had they cherished any species of optimism, they could have found a false beauty and suffered no change at all but changed as the wild creatures, or from Dayil well to Devil sick and so round the clock.

Unless the antinomies of the dream or the vision of the Good are held to their turbulent pact with the Vision of Evil, the visionary poise or the creative synthesis gives way to the unyielding stasis of the rational mind, or consciousness is bound wholly to the temporality of the circling gyres.

"If you take away from art its martyrdom," Yeats writes, "you take away from its glory. It might still reflect the passing modes of mankind, but it would cease to reflect the face of God." The martyrdom which is the heroic gesture and the artist's willingness to forego sanctity of soul for the integrity of his art, rise from the acceptance of the tragic nature of life, the eternal combat which creates the noblest forms of art, as well as those of society, nations, and philosophy. "All life is such a struggle," and the creative synthesis which is the highest social or artistic achievement is founded on that bifurcation of self whereby the extremes of human consciousness must themselves be experienced to the full before they yield their final knowledge. "Neither must we create, by hiding ugliness, false beauty as our offering to the world. He can only create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs. . . "28"

The drama of awareness Yeats describes as a "struggle between the sexes," and one must become possessor and possessed, "thrall and enthralled"; he must know triumph as well as defeat before commanding the resolution of antinomies promised by their marriage bed. 29

In his 1930 Diary, adapting a metaphor which might well have been drawn from Thomas Taylor's Neoplatonist commentary on the Timaeus, Yeats limns with a chilling brevity the dimensions of his tragic vision of a world whose triumphant assertion lies with the final knowledge born of conflict and human suffering: "When a plant draws from and feeds upon the soil, expression is its joy, but it is wisdom to be drawn forth and eaten." Yeats's argument spells out his final quarrel with primary experience and the Neoplatonist tradition. Taylor's metaphor of the soul, sown in the soil of generation and flowering in the sunlight of its own intellective act, boasts a comparatively pallid bloom when contrasted with Yeats's vision of the human tragedy. Taylor writes:

For it is necessary that the soul which is hurled like seed into the realms of generation, should lay aside the stubble and bark, as it were, which she obtained from being disseminated into these fluctuating realms; and that, purifying herself from everything circumjacent, she should become an intellectual flower and fruit, delighting in an intellectual life instead of doxastic nutriment. and pursuing the uniform and simple energy of the period of sameness, instead of the abundantly wandering motion of the period which is characterized by difference. For she contains each of these circles and two fold powers. And of these horses, one is good, and the other the contrary: and one of these leads her to generation, but the other from generation to true being; the one also leads her round the circle of sense, but the other round an intellectual essence... which life those that are initiated by Orpheus in the mysteries of Bacchus and Proserpine pray that they may obtain, together within the allotment of the spheres, and a cessation of evil.

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Taylor's Neoplatonic commentary echoes the characteristic figures of Yeats's poetic myth: the hodos chameliontos, the path of sanctity, and the divided loyalties of the soul. As a rationale of the nature of primary experience. Taylor's account might well have been recounted by the complacent Owen Aherne, or by one of Yeats's enigmatic saints in his solitary hermitage on the Mount of Abnegation. But for Yeats, the testimony of the primary or Neoplatonic experience alone, could no longer command any more authority than that which we are asked to accord his saint, sage, or fool. Yeats's sympathies lie with his Michael Robartes, who unlike the ineffectual Aherne, strives heroically to encompass within his own nature the struggle between saint and sinner, the vision of Good and the vision of Evil. The hodos chameliontos, or Taylor's "period of generation, is no longer for Yeats a descensus ad inferos, but is affirmed as a "vale of soul making" in which man achieves his final vision of tragic fulfillment, when in embracing the role of the fallen god, he joyfully lends himself to be rent and devoured.

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Yeats's career as a dramatist testifies to the poet's growing awareness of the demands of dramatic form as well as his continuing search for a <u>poésie du théâtre</u>. But the experience which Yeats brought from his personal trials with the Abbey plays and their audiences shaped not only his evolving dramatic art, but his poetry and personal aesthetic as well. The "passionate syntax" which Yeats pursued as his characteristic poetic voice owed much to his schooling before the Dublin public, and it is apparent that his own theories

and lyric verse. The ideals and the debilities which shaped Yeats's early verse are recognizably those of the plays as well, and the colloquial pungency and tensile strength which characterize the mature poems are equally characteristic of the later plays. Yeats's public and private voices, his theatrical and lyric expression, are inseparably one through all their permutations in a long and varied career, and it is clear that the poet chose to recognize no distinction between the lyric and the dramatic, that both in their intensity are one, and constitute the highest expression of the poetic sensibility.

The development of Yeats's poetic expression is closely associated with his efforts to resolve the personal and aesthetic problems posed by the dualism which informs his earliest work. In his early plays, as in the poems, Yeats had already arrived at a simple division of experience, the opposition between spiritual and materialist values. His first impulse as a dramatist was to extend his poetic techniques to the stage, and embody his latent conflict solely in the metaphoric resources of his language. But the subtlety of the narrative technique was wholly unsuited to the clarification and discipline necessary to dramatic performance, and Yeats's first tentative solution led to an impasse. In order to emphasize the nature of his theme. Yeats "thrice-piled" his hyperbole, and the fragile craft of his voyage of discovery wallowed under a smothering flow of metaphor. Inevitably, Yeats became aware of the necessity to personify his dualism in terms of warring characters engrossed in a tangible conflict.

The Shadowy Waters, witness Yeats's efforts to align his characters with an external principle of duality. In 1895 Yeats had advised Olivia Shakespeare concerning the portrayal of character in her novels: "you need never seek for the half tints, but must strive for the black and white." The statement is of importance, both in indicating Yeats's dissatisfaction with the vague, elusive quality of his early work, and in revealing the tendency which would manifest itself in the course of the revisions. Yeats was obviously groping toward a concept of character in drama, although he had as yet, insufficient experience to understand its practice. For several years he continued writing in the half-tints of Oisin and the early Shadovy Waters, until it was clear that a tint was infinitely more perishable on the stage than a bold stroke of colour.

The emergence of a more tangible "black and white" quality in the heroic plays of 1904 lent a new urgency to dramatic conflict, and supplied a new definition (if not a completely satisfying credibility) to character and situation. It promoted a tendency toward an improved dramatic structure, and snatched character and situation out of the mists so that they might supply opposition and friction, and a much needed sense of dramatic movement.

Traditional form would have committed Yeats to exposition, character, motivation, and those conventions which he dismissed as the abstractions of the reasoning mind, the tools of the detested dramatic realism. Consequently, he satisfied himself with the rudiments of characterization, the personified dichotomies by which his actors fell into one of the two camps, black or white: the

Yeatsian actor was either the visionary or the materialist, hero or administrator, the subjective or objective being. The narrowness of this theory of opposition when applied to traditional drama forced Yeats to condemn the "excesses" of characterization which he found among the Elizabethans. Yeats had attempted to reduce Hamlet and Othello to two conflicting principles, dismissing character and subtlety as unnecessary extravagance and concessions to public taste. Although Yeats would eventually reappraise the role which he had assigned to character in the light of a deepening awareness for dramatic experience, during the Abbey years he treated it simply as an extension of the antitheses he found central to life and art. But despite his professed distaste for Elizabethan drama. Yeats was ever of two minds, and the characteristic ambivalence which lent his sympathies at one moment to Axel and at another to his Chaucer, had elicited his grudging admission that the only dramatist he had ever cared for was Shakespeare. Yeats's dramatic theory was as yet incapable of serving the breadth and complexity of his own sympathies.

The principles which Yeats had personified by warring characters gradually found their expression as warring factions within the individual psyche, and developed into the dualism of self and antiself which constituted the doctrine of the mask. With a deepening awareness of its dramatic implications, Yeats had restored the conflict to its place of origin, the battleground of the human soul.

The doctrine of the mask, as it is outlined in <u>Per Amica Silentia</u>

<u>Lunae</u>, provides more than a view of human personality; it becomes an account of creativity itself, and consequently assumes a central role in Yeats's aesthetic. With <u>Per Amica Silentia Lunae</u>, <u>The</u>

Player Queen had undergone its long and troublesome gestation.

It would appear to have been Yeats's first enthusiasm for his doctrine of the mask and the daimon, and his efforts to embody it within the relationships of his characters, which thwarted his efforts to write the play as tragedy.

I began in, I think 1907, a verse tragedy, but at the same time the thought I had set forth in Per Amica Silentia Lunae was coming into my head, and I found examples of it everywhere. I wasted the best working months of several years in an attempt to write a poetical play where every character became an example of the finding or not finding of what I have called the antithetical self; and because passion and not thought makes tragedy, what I made had neither simplicity nor life. I knew precisely what was wrong and yet could neither escape from thought nor give up my play. At last it came into my head all of a sudden that I could get rid of the play if I turned it into a farce, and never did I do anything so easily, for I think that I wrote the present play in about a month.

The abrupt transition of Yeats's play from tragedy to comedy is hardly compatible with the ideals of the early Yeats. Yeats had written comedy before, under the tutelage of Lady Gregory, but had attached little significance to his efforts or to the genre itself. The urge to farcify a situation which he had taken up in high seriousness was, perhaps, indicative of a new grasp and command of experience, both personal and poetic. Much of his early work had been uncompromisingly humourless, and Yeats's doom-eager heroes had often suffered in consequence from a limited breadth of conception.

In 1906 Yeats had told of witnessing a dreary play of heroic

Ireland in a rural community, where the audience had failed to

respond sympathetically. He too, had turned from the play in distaste.

A comedian then began to act a farce, and the audience recovered its

good-humour. Recalling a glass shattered by a drunken harriden in a quarrel with her bishop, Yeats observed: "here was something secular, abounding, even a little vulgar." Yeats permitted a long repressed sense of humour to run riot in <u>The Player Queen</u>, humour which reappeared in many of the later plays and poems, until it would seem inseparable from that "toughened wisdom" which Miss Ellis-Fermor had found underlying the strength and power of his mature work.

The doctrine of the mask, as it was first conceived, proposed a reduction of human experience to a simple psychomachia, a psychologizing of external antithetical principles, and the limited possibilities of Yeats's mechanism of the mask threatened to reduce his play to an allegorical rationale of human behaviour. Yeats, as a dramatist, had unwittingly placed himself in the primary role, submitting the vitality and complexity of human motivation to a rigid behaviourism which narrowly determined the possibilities of character, as well as limiting the suggestibility of his own art.

As a practising dramatist, Yeats was forced to move from allegiance to a contrived principle into the infinite possibilities offered by the world of A Vision. Only through this step could be acknowledge and exploit the Chaucerian abundance and vitality which held his admiration, and yet contain it within an integrated account of human experience. Yeats had discovered that the systematic dichotomies which shaped his conception could yield, in Coleridge's words: "the infinite gradations between opposites which form the play and all the interest of our moral and intellectual being." A Vision projects Yeats's conflicting principles and their assimilation as

the doctrine of the mask into the temporal dimension, allotting to human character its twenty-six incarnations and the limitless possibilities provided by combination and perspective. Yeats's two-dimensional principle had found its fulfillment in a multi-dimensional world. A Vision is largely the result of the redaction and assimilation of Yeats's own experience as a practising dramatist, and it provided him with a world of infinite possibility in which a metaphoric rather than discursive congruity rescues it from artistic Chaos.

From Yeats's earliest plays and poems onward, it is clear that the poet recognized in his own work an attempt to evoke an experience analogous to the visionary ecstasy which he later accorded to his saint, hero and artist. In this sense, his poems as well as his plays might be considered as a poetry of process, an initiatory rite contrived to induce in the sympathetic reader heightened sensibility. Yeats's odyssey as a poet and playwright was primarily a search for the poetic syntax which might serve this end. To achieve his impersonalized sense of tragic revelation, Yeats began by employing a raft of poetic and theatrical devices which would minimize any illusion of character of the Dinglich qualities which he associated with the experiential world. In his early plays Yeats began with a generalized or mythically remote setting, and through the hypnotic inducements offered by a monotony of language and controlled rhythm, attempted to induce revery, or the trance-like response which he associated with the visionary experience. The method eschewed action and dramatic movement for a thoroughly static realization, and its effect was perhaps more sommolent than revelatory.

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Yeats's final stand, clarified by his experience with the Abbey and assimilated in the theory of personality evolved in A Vision, signalled a new acceptance of the role of character and a willingness to dramatize personality, which is, perhaps more in evidence in the mature poems than in the plays. Although the hero as an unindividualized figure remained essential to the generic nature of the revelation provided by tragic experience, Yeats could now afford a measure of characterization set in a comparatively vivid temporal situation, and effect at the climactic moment a heightened intensity through an abrupt movement from the particular to the general, from the personal to the generic. "The persons upon the stage, " Yeats wrote in 1910, "greaten till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image-crowded sea. "36 The abrupt psychic transition which Yeats would provide, he describes elsewhere as a "sort of violent imaginative puberty" which is "the excitement at the first reading of the great poets, " a process of psychic readjustment which, of necessity, must begin with the limited and the particular, and move to the revelation of a seemingly illimitable and confounding perspective. 37 Yeats's account of psychic transformation finds its echo in Bergson:

When the darkest depths of the soul are stirred what rises to the surface and attains consciousness, takes on there, if it be intense enough, the form of an image or emotion. The image is often pure hallucination just as the emotion may be meaningless agitation. But they both may express the fact that the disturbance is a systematic readjustment with a view to equilibrium on a higher level: the image then becomes symbolic of what is about to happen, and the emotion is a concentration of the soul awaiting transformation.

. • • Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of Yeats's technique is furnished by the volatile compression of his sonnet "Leda and the Swan," in which the intensity of focus and dramatic immediacy established by the octave is riven by the sweeping visionary perspective of the sestet. As in the play The Dreaming of the Bones, we are thrust from the confines of a carefully delineated dramatic situation into an overwhelming rush of multiple associations and an unfolding of a historical perspective, a divided world made whole in the congruity and magnitude of its metaphoric resonance.

The ingenuity of Yeats's efforts to forge the theatrical <u>Gesamtkunstwerk</u>, a fusion of all the arts providing a rich field of reverberation for action and language, finds its further expression in his essays on the Japanese <u>Noh</u> tradition. The crux of the <u>Noh</u> play, its moment of "no action"—the symbolic pause of frozen gesture suggesting both repose and exertion, the static and the kinetic—accretes as do Yeats's dance interludes, the entire symbolic significance of the dramatic action. Yeats recognized in the dance, defined by its explicit literary context within the dramatic text, the opportunity to force an enhanced awareness of the nondiscursive totality which both lyric and dramatic art would offer.

In the play The Cat and the Moon, Yeats's blind beggar shoulders his antithetical self, the crippled beggar, and attains the vision granted to those who have achieved Unity of Being. He looks on the tawdry relics and votive offerings cluttering the holy well of Saint Coleman, and sees it transfigured as "a great and a blessed sight." For Yeats, the office of art is to provide precisely this experience, an insight into the "trysting-place of mortal and immortal, time and eternity," the revelation of a world made whole

through the power of the imagination. 40

CHAPTER VII

The Dimensions of $\underline{\underline{\mathbf{A}}}$ <u>Vision</u>

This study of Yeats has dealt with the emergence of a crucial dualism in the poet's thought and art, with his efforts to clarify and portray these terms of conflict as dramatic or poetic statement, and finally with his struggle to wield them into the central paradox of his poetic vision. Edward Engelberg and Thomas R. Whitaker have, in separate studies, dealt with Yeats's vision of historical and cultural evolution. Whitaker has examined the sources and influences behind Yeats's theory of history, and Engelberg has traced the projection of the Yeatsian dualism in terms of the poet's idiosyncratic history of art and world civilization. What Yeats's critics have often failed to emphasize, however, is the crucial unity inherent in these aspects of his thought, that Yeats's view of history, that his dialectic of east and west, and his psychology of the mask are analogous constructs, projections of the individual or psychic microcosm. As Plato wrote his Republic as a macrocosmic construct of his ethical vision of the human soul, so did Yeats construct A Vision as his account of the schism which the individual soul has always confronted.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the spatialization of Yeats's world, his metaphoric geography of east and west as it unfolds from a personal dualism, and to relate this polarity to

• . • . • • the mythopoeic mind. Yeats has often been accused of utilizing shoddy and unreliable sources in his account of the cultural play between east and west. Considering the dubious nature of Yeats's historical assumptions and the often baffling logic of his conclusions, can his efforts be dismissed summarily as no more than a poetic fiction, Dante's bella menzogna? Or does the "lie" commend itself through the truth that lies beneath the web of fiction? Perhaps the answer lies with the "truth" or pattern which is embodied in the exercise of the mythopoeic faculty itself.

Before discussing Yeats's own elaboration of the spatial pattern within A Vision, we might consider the relevance of Ernst Cassirer's account of mythopoeic structure to Yeats's own speculations. Cassirer's description of the self-contained, self-sustaining "charmed circle" of the forms of myth, religion, art, and science furnishes a penetrating account of the inner cosmos generated by the work of art. 2 Clearly, Yeats thought of A Vision as of this order. A Vision shares the nature of the poem or the heroic gesture, which generate their own statement in the teeth of external opporsition and empirical evidence, and which insist only upon the unity of their own expression and the intensity with which it is realized. "I have constructed a myth," Yeats wrote in 1931. "but then one can believe in a myth—one only assents to philosophy."3 The element of belief is, for Yeats, all important, as it implies the fundamental distinction between myth or poetry and philosophic assertion. One appeals to the whole man, to the "unified sensibility," as Yeats understood it, while the other addresses itself

only to the partial comprehension of the intellect. It is this particular quality of myth which Mircea Eliade has described as being "addressed to the whole man, neither to intelligence nor imagination alone. "4 Eliade insists upon the preconceptual nature of mythical expression, and describes its decadence as the systematization it undergoes at the hands of the allegorists, the philosophers, the systematizers who would divorce it from its vital office of revealing the structure of reality, "an unveiling of mystery." In Plays and Controversies Yeats wrote, "somebody has said that every nation begins with poetry and ends with algebra, and passion has always refused to express itself in algebraic terms." Yeats had read Croce in 1926, and he was to confess that his familiarity with the writings of Vico was acquired through Croce. 6 In 1934 he wrote in his Introduction to the play The Cat and the Moon: "Myth is not, as Vico perhaps thought, a rudimentary form superseded by reflection. Belief is the spring of all action; we assent to the conclusions of reflection but believe what myth presents; belief is love, and the concrete alone is loved." It is characteristic of Yeats, perhaps, that these reflections were written on a play completed seventeen years earlier. In 1930 Yeats wrote in his diary an observation that applies not only to this practice of delayed reflection, but to the process which gave rise to A Vision itself: "By the study of those impulses that shape themselves into words without context we find our thought, for we do not seek truth in argument or in books but in clarification of what we already believe."8

By its very nature, Eliade insists, myth cannot be particular,

private or personal. On the other hand, Ernst Cassirer's strenuous objections to Platonic myth lay with his contention that Plato was forced to utilize the language of myth in <u>Timaeus</u> as the only language capable of expressing the process of Becoming which the dialogue recounts. But Cassirer sees <u>Timaeus</u> as a consciously intellectual construct or dramatization of a preconceived dialectic, so that its roots lay within the philosophy, rather than philosophy emerging from the mythic pattern itself. Scassirer and Eliade would appear to be diametrically opposed in their views on the nature of the "personal" and the "public" myth but, in effect, each position serves to illuminate separate aspects of the Yeatsian dialectic.

For Yeats, the gratuitous nature of the hero's or poet's role identifies it as a creative one, an assertion of order by personal or poetic fiat which might bear seemingly little relevance to that which lies beyond its immediate scope. In effect, it is this apparent irrelevance to social or historical contexts which brands it as defiance or heroic gesture, the triumph of the human spirit. But poetry, the mythmaker's art as well as the heroic gesture, finds its genesis in "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart," within the pulses of generic human experience. Moreover, implicit in the creative fiat of poet or hero is an enactment of the cosmogonic myth itself, the myth of creation. Eliade relates that "when the cosmogonic myth tells us how the world was created, it is also revealing the emergence of that totality of the real which is the cosmos, and its ontological laws; it shows in what

sense the world is."10 The antithetical role of the Yeatsian hero or poet, as we have seen, is synonymous with the act of Becoming, but the act of Becoming is at the same time, the emergence of a reality and the disclosure of its fundamental structures." Since Becoming, then, is fundamentally the revelation of cosmogony, the existential mode of myth serves to reveal itself, as does ritual, as a manifestation of plenary Being. Since myth serves to reveal the structures of reality, all myths or all action, heroic or poetic, are for Yeats's purposes relevant to one myth, the myth of integration, that revelation which ultimately overmasters all the apparent dualisms of primary and antithetical, of Being and Becoming. Myth then, is for Yeats the dialectic of incarnation, the assertion of integration and synthesis, while philosophy or that didactic art which claims lip service to philosophy is analytic, destructive of the integrity of human experience as well as of cosmic process itself.

The zodiac, by means of which Yeats charts the path of his Great Wheel, traditionally pertains not only to cosmic process but to the life of the individual as well. The significance of the zodiac, J.E. Cirlot claims, "concerns the process by which primordial energy, once fecundated, passes from the potential to the virtual, from unity to multiplicity, from spirit to matter, from the non-formal world to the world of forms." The phasal progressions by which Yeats marks the passage from primary to antithetical experience (and for which he provides the corresponding figures of the zodiac) enact, moreover, the same process

by which the <u>Timeeus</u> dramatizes the life of the universe as split into two opposing yet complementary phases: the material and the spiritual, and their ultimate resolution. 13

In considering the development of Yeats's own poetic sensibility in terms of Cassirer's and Eliade's accounts of the primitive mythopoeic sensibility, one must be aware of the differences as well as the striking affinities. It must be realized that the poet, unlike the primitive, is to some extent a self-conscious artificer who is sustained by his romantic dream of the primal unity of a world beyond the limitations of necessity. Yeats's earliest poems express an ill-defined longing for such a romantic transcendence. The pattern of his earliest verse, and in some measure, that of his earliest play, The Shadowy Waters, suggests in particular a Shelleyan flight to the disembodied, a sustained effort to realize a uranian aspect of experience.

In their studies of the growth and development of the mythic consciousness, Cassirer and Eliade describe an initial sense of primal unity which has not yet been subjected to the separation or spatialization of the sacred and the profane, an awareness which recognizes neither conceptually nor linguistically any distinction between the universal and the particular. The golden age recounted by western myth witnesses this primal synthesis, an existential world as a manifestation of pure presence. The fall, which Eliade has described suggestively as "the secularization of work," anticipates the beginning of conceptual thought, which must utilize the fundamental distinctions that proliferate from

the polarization of the sacred and the profane. 14 The structure of conceptual thought presupposes and affirms dualism, thrives on distinction, and is contingent upon a linguistic structure which has learned to manifest itself in terms of a syntax of predication.

eventually gives way to the sexual dualism of the fertility celebration and its presiding gods. This withdrawn god, or deus otiosus, forfeits his religious actuality and yields to a surrogate pantheon, the emergence of the Great Mother and her doomed lovers, whose relation to the interests and preoccupations of a new agrarian society are immediate and dramatically relevant. Hence, Ouranos, who provided nothing more than a figure of chaotic procreation, gives rise to Aphrodite—order and balance, proportion, or in Yeats's account, the Swedish actress he noted riding the sea near Rapallo, or the Doric discipline imposed by Hellenic civilisation on the formless potency of the East. 16

The same rupture within Being is described by Cassirer as the earliest urge of man to create distinction, to dissolve the union of holy and profane, to create the distinctions of temporal and spatial division. The first of these created distinctions is the spatial determination through which we acquire an awareness of the attributes of the divine, demoniac, holy, or the profane.

From this awareness of a fall from unity, man moves to enact a third stage. Now that he has known the particular, he seeks to reintegrate, to return to the original feeling for space and a God which transcends the particular. Having passed through the secondary stage of distinction, the process becomes a conscious effort to overcome the created forms and reintegrate the bifurcated sensibility which has been broken on opposition. Cassirer cites Schelling as having established that the initial conception of unity can be attained only through its bifurcation into opposites. An "other" emerges as a viable conception only after the unific consciousness passes through its necessary cleavage. Only this recourse to polytheism can serve to advance conceptual monotheism. The general sequence which has been outlined can be seen as yet another expression of the cosmogonic round as traced by Timaeus: the descent from Absolute presence and a transcendent One to the duality of soul and matter, and the impulse of the alienated soul to effect its return, to recover its lost Eden.

Cassirer's refusal to accept the mythography of Plato springs from his insistence that myths are intuited and turned into images, and that Plato's system is rooted in the intellect rather than in man's intuition of the world of things. Rather than acknowledge a schism between these ways of knowing, Cassirer implies a close and inseparable union: two spheres or, more properly, two hemispheres conjoined in the process of awareness. But it is Timaeus itself which established precisely this solution. Cassirer apparently ignores the central myth of the Timaeus which grapples with this same reconciliation between the two phases of knowing, one which seeks to transcend the finite categories of an empirical world, and one which seeks to accept the limitations of that world.

It is precisely this dual aspect which distinguishes Plato's thought from the mysticism of his Neoplatonic followers. The tendency to surpass the limits of the empirical world is checked dialectically by a contrary demiurgic function which leads back to this world in order to organize it and bring it into rational values. Only thus can the universal reveal its meaning and purpose by rendering possible the order of the particular.

Cassirer's claim that the two are left unreconciled in the Platonic vision ignores the fact that these two impulses are comprehended within the cyclic process proposed by the Timaean cosmology.

In spite of the emphasis on rationalism which is generally associated with the Socratic dialogues, it is clear from the Timaeus that Plato's world must, as must any other system of thought, be reared on a foundation of intuited experience. Moreover, in any system of dialectic, the final resolution of that system must always be intuitive. A symbolic system tends to proliferate without end, and in order to maintain its stability, closure must be effected by an element which is not in itself part of that system. Rationalism must, in the final analysis, take recourse in something which is not rational; and its final resolution must be understood as an act of intuition, of faith. The half-humourous and bizarre circumstances which Yeats recounts in connection with the dictation of $\underline{\mathbf{A}}$ <u>Vision</u> serve to emphasize the irrational genesis of his system. Moreover, Yeats insists that his system, once evolved in its outline, became a selfgenerating process whose growth was governed neither by dialectical logic nor even by evidence offered by empirical observation. When

examples of his final triad of the Great Wheel, Yeats could find none. "One must create the type from its symbols without the help of experience," he writes, and the process he describes in limning his mythic cosmos is one of symbolic proliferation. 19

Yeats's spiritual interlocutors appeared to have little faith in his specious philosophizing. "I am always afraid," an exasperated communicator apologized, "that when not at our best we may accept from you false reasoning." 20

ii

To accept a chronological sequence imposed by the concept of serial time was, for Yeats, to endorse an abstraction which could not be concretely experienced. The problem, as Philip Wheelwright has suggested, lies in the fundamental antagonism between the existential and rationalist views of experience:

Nothing in our experience attests to so sterilized a graph [the concept of linear time]. Spatial models of time detract us from our existential knowledge of its character. . .we fasten upon any set of concepts which reassure us by their familiarity and formal stability; we forget that they are artifacts and not confrontable realities.²¹

In the mind of the mythopoeic historian, events appear to coalesce and align themselves through a congruity or similarity of pattern in the same manner in which the primitive consciousness, as Cassirer has pointed out, effects a similar concrescence of events in the mind of the celebrant during the enactment of a rite.²² Ritual enactment, Cassirer writes, is not to be thought of as a symbolic commemoration of an historically remote event,

but a moment when the ritual act coalesces with its archetype, and when normal succession gives way to what Eliade has called "sacred time."

The sacred time in which the mystery occurs of the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is different not only in quality from the profane succession from which it is detached like a space enclosed between the present and the future; not only is this sacred time linked with that of the Masses preceding and following it, but it can also be looked on as a continuation of all the Masses which have taken place from the moment when the mystery of transubstantiation was first established until the present moment. The profane succession, on the other hand, which flows between two Masses, not being transformed into sacred time, cannot have any connection with the hierophanic time of the rite: it runs parallel, so to speak, to sacred time which is thus revealed to us as a continuum which is interrupted by profane intervals in appearance only.23

Consequently, mythic time eschews past time as a disparate, self-contained entity, and because the world of myth is anchored in existential experience rather than abstraction, in affirming the process of Becoming, it finds its expression somewhere between present and future, a presence which Leibnitz has described as "chargé du passé et gros de l'avenir," that which is ever coming to be. 24

Similarly, the mythopoeic attitude is reluctant to recognize an arrangement of its physical universe in which the four cardinal points of the compass exist only as an abstraction providing no more than a system of relative orientation. The world of myth, Cassirer has shown, is segmented structurally rather than by a purely functional system such as that offered by geometry. Because the space of myth is not a homogeneous space, it cannot be symbolically represented by geometry. The confusion generated

by an examination of the maze of interlocking cones, gyres, and schematizations with which Yeats's bride illustrated A Vision is, then, perfectly understandable. Yeats himself was fully aware of the inadequacies of geometrical constructions as a gloss to the machinations of a system already fully subsumed in its own symbolic language. To attempt the reduction of A Vision to geometry was to revert to abstraction. "I think," he writes, "that the forms of geometry can have but a symbolic relation to spaceless reality, "25 and later, when he attempts to anchor his system in the conventional spatial and temporal rationale of the historian, he confesses: "Is that marriage of Europe and Asia a geographical reality? Perhaps, yet the symbolic wheel is timeless and spaceless." 26

Cassirer's studies of the nature of the primitive imagination recount the manner in which the mythopoeic or literary imagination creates the dimensions of its own cosmos. Mythic directions,

Cassirer writes, are neither abstract nor ideal, but independent entitles charged with a life of their own.

even attaining the characteristics of gods...

perhaps there is no cosmology however primitive, in

which the contrast of the four cardinal points does

not in some way emerge as the cardinal point of its

understanding and explanation of the world....It

is an organization in which the various spatial

positions and distances exhibit definite characters

of expressive meaning...Proximity and distance,

height and depth, left and right are not realized

as mere variables of a sophisticated space thinking;

in the world of myth they figure as true values,

interpreted with reference to given systems of magical

significance.27

But before any systematization of this order can acquire its congruity, the various elements must evolve and express their

individual characteristics. These, Cassirer proposes, are acquired by the introduction of the fundamental opposition which informs all mythic thought, that of the sacred and the profane. Since myth is recognized as the conceptual language of a phenomenal world of Becoming, it must submit to this spatialization in order to establish a centre of orientation amid an apparent chaos of total relativity; but if it should seek to stabilize sensuous phenomena in order to achieve this, it degenerates into a system of abstraction.

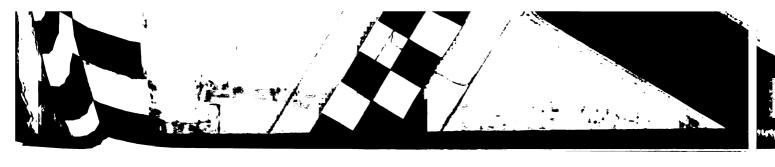
The development of this rudimentary feeling for the character of space appears to have taken its origins from an awareness of the natural opposition of day and night, light and darkness, perhaps the most potent stimulus for either the primitive or the creative imagination. As the dichotomy of the holy and the profane aligns itself with that of diurnal light and darkness, the realm of the dead and the dying sun becomes spatially distinct from that of the living and resurgent light, just as other events of life begin to acquire their meaning from the relation in which they stand to the solar passage. Similar values begin to extend to north, south, east, and west, which emerge as hostile or divine in their connotations. Cassirer writes:

It is this "walled-in" zone or mythic cosmos—whether it encompasses a tribal organization of totem and belief, or whether it constitutes the bounds of a historical or literary vision of reality—which affirms its relevance to the restless change of the phenomenal world; yet, in evolving its centre of orientation, it provides its resolution of the existential crisis.

iii

Yeats's spatialization of his poetic world owes much to mythical sources, speculative and often specious accounts of cultural migrations, literary analogies, and a highly idiosyncratic personal integration of these with the operative dualism which informs A Vision. Irish folklore, Christianity, astrology, and theosophy constructed an elaborate system of correspondences based on the quaternary. The Zohar relates the four cardinal points to the four elements; it also extended these to the four seasons. Through tradition, a recognizable pattern of equations evolved. East is associated with spring, with air, infancy, dawn and the crescent moon; south with summer, fire, youth and the full moon; west with autumn, water, evening, the waning moon; north with winter, earth, old age, night, and the new moon. 29

Mythic or ritual orientation affected the sites of pre-Christian places of worship as well as that of the great European cathedrals. Christian tradition developed an elaborate dialectic of the four cardinal points, and as Christianity fashioned its own temporal dialectic in which human history centres about the incarnation, so it developed a spatial segmentation in which the



extremities of the cross were identified with celestial and cosmic directions. The Christian practise of turning the novice eastward in the sacrament of baptism in order to profess his faith, and westward to denounce Satan echoes the same polarization which led tradition to associate the isles of the dead with the direction of the westering sun. It is this sort of mythic articulation of the four cardinal points which provides the fundamental orientation which derives cosmos from the baffling relativity of chaotic experience. Nissen has furnished evidence tracing the manner in which the mythical cardinal points arranged about the solar path gave rise to the entire system of Roman theology and left its formative imprint on every aspect of the juridical, social, and political life of Roman civilization.

East and west, as they first appear in Yeats's writings, carry those connotations which western tradition commonly read into the diurnal passage of the sun. West implied the direction of the dying sun, and east, the source of life. Hence the island of the immortals, Elysium or Tir nan Og, lay in the western sea, while the course of human life, whether individual or collective, moved westward from its eastern source. "Every civilization," Yeats wrote in his essay "The Holy Mountain," "no matter where its birth, began with Asia." Yeats never really altered this fundamental ur-myth, and he derived from it an elaborate mythical account of cultural geography and history based upon the fundamental duality suggested by the two cardinal points. "Asia seeks solar or primary orientation," he explains in A Vision. 35 The west is

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identified with antithetical Being, and the interplay of these hemispheres provides the poet's dramatization of world history as well as the personal psychomachia which is realized by the individual. East and west confront one another like man and his daimon, and Yeats's customary metaphor for this confrontation is explicitly sexual.

Yeats's initial spatial division into symbolic east and west reflects the simple two-dimensional dualism which first lay behind his theory of the mask. With the formation of A Vision and the charting of Yeats's Great Wheel, simple opposition proliferates into sequential oppositions and a series of masks. Thus human life is conceived no longer in terms of the struggle of fixed characteristics, but as a struggle which manifests itself in Becoming. Dualism, projected into the temporal dimension, has become the operative principle of process and is symbolically represented by the sphere which embraces the two modes of Being. Consequently, Yeats utilizes the zodiac as a gloss to the machinations of the Great Wheel, the representation of universal process and integration. Moreover, east and west are supplemented by the remaining cardinal points, north and south. Phase one, absolute objectivity or primary Being, is associated with the north and those attributes which Yeats chose to identify with the character of northern civilization: geometry, non-objective art, and the creation of abstract systems. 36 Phase one is the absolute (hence unrealized) expression of these characteristics; humanity and incidence disappear; its attribute is total passivity. The descent

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from transcendent Being becomes, at phase eight, aligned with the west, and its emblem as represented in Dulac's woodcut for A Vision is a cup or chalice. That eight is described as potency (the pure potency manifest from phase one) in the process of submitting to form or limitation. The chalice or receptable represents the traditional demiurgic cup or crater in which pure spirit accepts the lineaments of matter. The passage then ranges through the antithetical hemisphere and reaches its culmination at phase fifteen, the subjective or antithetical extreme. Opposed in all its attributes to the north, south represents naturalistic human form, the human and the spontaneous, W.H. Auden's "southern gesture," the existential as opposed to the primary or noumenal.

Phases, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen follow, those stages at which Unity of Being er Unity of Culture are realized, and anticipate the east, which is reached at phase twenty-two. Symbolic of human power, will or spirit, the east represents the gathering forces of intellectual authority, as opposed to the emotional or natural intoxication associated with the west; hence, its emblem is the scepter. Yeats's identification of the east with a formless potency antagonistic to the evolved forms of the west underlies the same cultural and metaphysical conflict which E.M. Forster has drawn between the colonial and the Anglo-Indian Raj in his novel, A Passage to India.

For Yeats, the struggle between form and potency realizes itself in the historical confrontations of western culture with the east. The vitalism of the west is achieved by its imposition

of form on the primary east, but such forms outlive their efficacy and inevitably prove to be no more than a codification of that which is inherently vital, becoming in the course of time and change increasingly rigid, irrelevant, and finally selfdestructive. Western history, therefore, in contrast with that of the east, is a revolutionary one, a violent and unremitting process of casting off those forms which no longer serve to accommodate its drives and desires. In the essay "An Indian Monk" Yeats describes an encounter with "an exceedingly religious Mohammedan" at Wilfred Blunt's, who maintained that India would never organize. "There are only three eternal nations, ' he said, 'India, Persia, China: Greece organized and Greece is dead'."38 Mircea Eliade comments on the same antipathy to the abstract formulations of history which the Indian dismisses as the illusory dance of Maya. "India has never allowed philosophic importance to History. India is preoccupied with Being; and History, created by becoming is just one of those forms of Non-being."39 Considering the course of modern history, Yeats might have gloated over the ill-advised and disastrous dream of Adolf Hitler to drive the relentless logic of the autobahn into the remote wastes of the asiatic steppes.

The schematization of <u>A Vision</u> provided Yeats with more than simply "metaphors for poetry." Its influence on Yeats's thought and art are far reaching and pervasive. Rather than signalling the emergence of a new dimension in Yeats's sensibility, it is, however, more a symptom and confirmation of an awareness that had

been shaping over the years. A Vision did not spring newly born from Mrs. Yeats's mediumship in the early years of their marriage, but poetry and prose, as I have indicated elsewhere, witness its gradual formation long before 1925. Yeats's early plays and poems evince at times a certain disconcerting shallowness, an attenuated remoteness from genuine human experience which is rooted in a conceptual pose reducing life to simple fixed terms of conflict. (In its earliest expression, Yeats shies even from this, and rather than conflict, he resorts to flight.) This approach did, in effect, court the sort of abstraction and hazard the allegorical expression which Yeats himself abhorred. The most vital innovation in Yeats's art was his projection of life, not as an oscillation between fixed and intransigent extremes, nor as a static system, but as a dynamic process. With this development, character, event, and circumstance root themselves in a conception which admits of infinite variation, combination, and interaction, and a deepened awareness of their contingencies.

iv

The "systematic arrangement of experience" proposed by Yeats's Great Wheel in <u>A Vision</u> serves as an account of historical process as well as the psychic growth of the individual and, as such, it recounts the personal odyssey of Yeats's poetic and public career.

I have attempted to show that Yeats's early poetic ideals attest to a theocentric or, in Yeats's words, a "primary"

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orientation. When primary reality is recognized as spatially distinct from, rather than immanent in, the experiential world, identity and integration give way to dualism and metaphoric tension, and the quest, as in The Wanderings of Oisin and The Shadowy Waters, emerges as a rite du passage. The theocentricism which informed Yeats's early work threatened to lead him into the same impasse which snared the young Shelley, the inability to express the inexpressible, to run against the stubborn substantive grain of language itself. And so Yeats entered upon the phase of his career which he understood as a commitment to the experiential. The desire for the integration of the personality and for permanence in art led no longer in the direction of a disembodied transcendence, but to a confrontation with experience, and its affirmation as incarnate reality.

In the course of Yeats's education as a practising dramatist there emerged a gradual definition of these opposing terms. To achieve his immediate goals as nationalist and dramatist, Yeats was forced to accept at least a momentary commitment or perspective.

"This isn't just an epigram," observed the chronicler of Jay Gatsby's career, "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window."

Yeats's "single window" provided a view of his antiself, his aspirations of the moment, and the dialectic of the mask urged a conflict between self and anti-self in order to achieve personal mastery or integration. However, exposed to new goals and the varied and often conflicting testimony of experience, one chooses in the course of a lifetime not a single mask, but a

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succession of masks, or a pantheon of gods. Thus, spiritual growth, the breaking through successive thresholds of personal limitations, is realized in a series of confrontations, the act of Becoming which is impelled by each turn of the Great Wheel. The solution proposed by <u>A Vision</u> was not a resolution of the tensions generated by the Yeatsian dualism, but an affirmation of cyclic process which encompasses the two terms of Being and Becoming in the cosmic round which represents the totality of experience.

With this, there unfolded the final chapter in Yeats's growth as a poet. Having confronted the antithetical crisis, or the extreme of subjective experience, there began the final passage in which his sympathies came full circle and realigned themselves with theocentric or objective Being. But no longer is this merely a reversion to what had once proven a naive, mawkish sentiment. Yeats's final phase represents his final integration. The condition anticipating the achievement of a unified consciousness must in Yeats's, as in Plato's world, presuppose the cleavage of dualism. In his old age, Yeats was drawn to the transcendentalism of the east, which dismissed the arena of experience as no more than the illusory dance of Maya. He addressed himself to the study of philosophy, biography, and history, those frail abstractions which he had once dismissed as objective pursuits which did violence to the integrity of experience. This direction involved, however, no mere reversion to a poetically untenable position, but a deepened awareness of the two halves of experience, and Yeats brought to it the toughened wisdom won in the gutter of experience.

Yeats was, in effect, still struggling to redress an imbalance in sensibility, still striving for the integration of the opposed facets of his personality and thought.

A year before his death, Yeats wrote Ethel Mannin that "all men with subjective natures move towards a possible ecstasy, all with objective natures towards a possible wisdom." The time for ecstasy was long past, and the wisdom of age was to come, if it was to come at all, from living life whole, in the complete awareness of its cyclic passage. In his last month of life Yeats wrote: "When I try to put all into a phrase I say, 'Man can embody truth but he cannot know it.' I must embody it in the completion of my life. The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence."

The course of Yeats's own life as he understood it provides the central paradox of his poetic vision, that which contains both the career of the Saint and the street singer, those dancers in the round dance of life.

FOOTNOTES

Whenever possible, I have made use of the Variorum edition of Yeats's poems, the Macmillan editions of the prose, plays, and poetry, and the Wade <u>Letters</u>. The citations for these are as follows:

W.B.Yeats, Autobiographies (London, 1961).

Essays and Introductions (London, 1961), cited as Essays.

Explorations (London, 1962).

Mythologies (London, 1959).

The Collected Plays of W.B.Yeats (London, 1953), cited as Collected Plays.

The Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats (London, 1933), cited as Collected Poems.

A Vision (London, 1962). The privately printed early version of this work is cited as A Vision (1925).

Peter Allt and Russell Alspach, eds. The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B.Yeats (New York, 1957), cited as Variorum.

INTRODUCTION

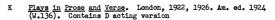
1 E.R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley, 1951), 102.

²A.O. Lovejoy, <u>The Revolt Against Dualism</u> (New York, 1930), 2.

³<u>Ibid</u>., 12.

The publishing history of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u> is a confused one, and Yeats's own notes to the play in later collections are not always reliable. The following is a brief account of its various appearances. (We refers to the numeration in Wade's bibliography.)

- A Narrative version. North American Review, CLXX (May, 1900).
- B The Shadowy Waters. London, 1900, 1901 (W.30); N.Y., 1901 (W.31); N.Y., 1901 (W.32); N.Y., 1905. A new narrative version.
- Poems 1899-1905. Dublin and London, 1906 (W.64). Another new narrative version, apparently that produced at the National Theatre Society in January 1904. Yeats was in America at the time and did not see the performance. Following this, Yeats busied himself with rewriting the play for a London Theosophical convention in July 1905 at the Court Theatre under the direction of Florence Farr. He appears to have been revising the play well up until the time of performance. Immediately after this "execrable performance" he spent the rest of the summer rewriting his play once again.
- D The Shadowy Waters. London, 1907 (W.66). This was described by Yeats as a "Special Acting Version," the product of his labours during the summer of 1905. It served as script for the Abbey production of December 1906.
- E The Poetical Works of W.B.Yeats. vol.II, <u>Dramatical Poems</u>. N.Y. and London, 1907, 1909, 1911 (W.71). Contains the C narrative and the D acting versions.
- F <u>The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats</u>. Stratford-on-Avon, 1908. vol. II (W.76). Contains narrative and acting versions identical with E.
- G <u>Poems:</u> <u>Second Series.</u> London and Stratford, 1910, 1913 (W.92). Contains C narrative version.
- H Plays for an Irish Theatre. London and Stratford, 1911, 1913 (W.92). Contains C narrative and D acting versions.
- I The Poetical Works of W.B.Yeats. Dramatic Poems, vol.II.
 N.Y. and London, 1912 (W.98). Acting and narrative versions following H. Reissued 1914, 1916, 1917, 1919, 1921.
- J <u>Later Poems</u>. London, 1922. Am. ed. 1924, 1928 (W.134). Preserves C narrative version.



All subsequent editions preserve either the C narrative or D acting text, or both.

²The Variorum edition of Yeats's poems collates only the narrative versions of <u>The Shadowy Waters</u>. Whenever possible, references have been made to this edition. <u>Variorum</u>, 746,7 (1900 version).

³Variorum, 221. Identical with the narrative version published in <u>Flays for an Irish Theatre</u> (London, 1911), 193.

Acting version from Plays for an Irish Theatre, 193.

⁵Variorum, 843.

In his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), Yeats mentions Clain's vision of the hounds and a deer chasing one another across the water, and attributes it to a Gaelic poem. He explains that the image represents desire and longing. Essays, 90.

⁷The Arrow, I (24 September 1906), no pagination.

⁸J.A. MacCulloch, <u>The Religion of the Ancient Celts</u> (Edinburgh, 1911), 52.

⁹<u>Thid.</u>, 58. Cf. John Rhys, <u>Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Geltic Heathendom</u> (London, 1888), 395 ff.

10 Lady Augusta Gregory, Our Irish Theatre (New York, 1914), 3.

11 National Library MS. 8762, # 1, 9, 19.

12 Tbid., #8, 9.

13 Variorum, 747n.

14_{Tbid.}, 749.

15 Ibid., 745,6.

16 The Shadowy Waters, North American Review, CLXX (1900), 714, 726.

17 Letters to the New Island (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), xii.

18 Letter to Katherine Tynan, March 1888. Letters, 63.

19 Letter to A.E., April 1904. <u>Letters</u>, 434.

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²⁰ Letter to Mrs. Clement Shorter, 21 June 1899. Letters, 322.

²¹Letter to Florence Farr, July 1905. <u>Letters</u>, 454.

²² National Library MS. 8762, #9.

²³ Variorum, 750 (1900 version).

^{24&}lt;sub>Tbid.</sub>, 228.

²⁵Ibid., 229.

^{26&}lt;sub>Tbid.</sub>, 230.

²⁷ Plays for an Irish Theatre, 197.

²⁸ Variorum, 227.

²⁹Letter to A.E., November 1899. <u>Letters</u>, 327.

³⁰ Variorum, 222n, 252.

³¹Plato, <u>Republic VI, The Dialogues of Plato</u>, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford, 1892), III, 186.

³² Collected Plays, 360.

^{33 &}lt;u>Tbid.</u>, 363.

³⁴Alfred Nutt, The Voyage of Bran (London, 1895), II.

³⁵Erwin Rohde, <u>Psyche</u>, <u>The Cult of the Soul and Belief in Immortality Among the Greeks</u>, trans. W.B. Hillis (London, 1925), 56.

³⁶W.H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood (New York, 1950), 20.

³⁷ Variorum, 817.

 $^{^{38}{\}rm F.A.C.}$ Wilson, Yeats and Tradition (London, 1958), and Yeats's Loongraphy (New York, 1960).

³⁹Flotinus, <u>The Enneads</u>, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London, 1956), 190.

⁴⁰ Heraclitus, On the Universe, fragments Loxiv, Loxii. Porphyry, On the Cave of the Nymphs in the Thirteenth Book of the Odyssey, trans. Thomas Taylor (London, 1917), 29, 30. Yeats was familiar with the fragments and with Taylor's translation of The Cave of the Nymphs. A discussion of Porphyry's imagery is to be found in Yeats's essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900) in Essays, 82 ff.

⁴¹ Variorum, 249.

- 42 Letter to J.B. Yeats, 5 November 1884. Letters, 236.
- 43 Plays for an Irish Theatre, 193. Acting version.
- 44 Variorum, 251.
- 45 Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain (Bloomington, 1954), 191.
 - 46 Collected Plays, 152.
- 47 Shelley, Epipsychidion, The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley (Oxford, 1956), 424.

- Plato, Phaedo, 64.
- Plato, <u>Timaeus</u>, 31B.
- ³Plato, <u>The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus</u>, trans. Thomas Taylor (London, 1793), 370. Wherever possible I have used the Taylor translations, which were read and admired by Yeats.
 - 4<u>Ibid.</u>, 379.
- ⁵Taylor follows Plotinus in interpreting the Orphic myth in Neoplatonic terms. Thomas Taylor, <u>The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries</u>, <u>A Dissertation</u> (New York, 1891), 187-209. Cf. Walter Wili, <u>The Orphic Mysteries</u> and the <u>Greek Spirit in the Mysteries</u> (New York, 1955), 64-92.
- The body is described in <u>Cratylus</u>, 400C as the grave $(6\bar{\eta}_{uq})$ of the soul, and Plato cites Orphic belief as authority. <u>Georgias</u>, 493A; <u>Republic</u>, 514. Plotinus comments on Socrates account of the myth of the cave: "Everywhere he blames the commerce of soul with body as an enchainment and entombment, and upholds as a great truth the saying of the mysteries that the Soul is here a prisoner" (<u>Enneads</u> IV:8:1).
- 7Thomas Taylor, The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries, A Dissertation (New York, 1891), 38. Taylor translates Enneads I:8.
 - 8 Enneads III:8:4.
- The distinction between <u>doxy</u> and <u>dianoeia</u> is discussed in <u>Phaedrus</u>, 247.
 - 10 Enneads I:8:1.
 - 11 Enneads I:8:3, 5.
 - 12 Plato, Phaedo, 64.
- 13Heraclitus, fragment xx. I have made use of the translation of G.T.W. Patrick, The Fragments of Heraclitus of Ephesus on Nature (Baltimore, 1889).
 - 14 Heraclitus, fragments xxiv, xxxii.
 - 15G.T.W. Patrick, 60.
 - 16 Plato, Symposium, 203C. Plotinus, Enneads, III:5:1-9.



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17 Plotinus, Enneads III:5:1.

18 Plotinus, Enneads III:8:6.



CHAPTER III

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1 Vision, 12.
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²Ibid., 8.

³ Vision (1925), 251.

^{4&}quot;1930 Diary," Explorations, 302.

⁵S.T. Coleridge, <u>Lectures on Shakespeare</u> (London, 1907), 33.

⁶Richard Ellmann, <u>Yeats</u>, <u>The Man and the Mask</u> (New York, 1958), 195.

⁷G.R.S. Mead, <u>The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition</u> (London, 1919). Mead cites the prevalence of the idea that the physical body is an exteriorization of an invisible subtle embodiment of the life of the mind. The "subtle body" is the envelope or vehicle of the soul.

⁸Ellmann, 197.

^{9&}lt;u>A Vision</u>, 209.

¹⁰ Ibid., 269.

¹¹ Nision (1925), 27.

^{12 &}quot;Per Amica Silentia Lunae," Mythologies, 335.

^{13 &}lt;u>A Vision</u>, 207n.

^{14&}lt;u>A Vision</u> (1925), 28.

^{15 &}lt;u>Vision</u>, 293.

¹⁶ Plato, Apology, 40A.

¹⁷ Flutarch, About the <u>Daimonion of Socrates</u>, quoted in Paul Friedlander, <u>Plate</u>, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York, 1958), L37.

^{18 &}lt;u>Vision</u> (1925), 28.

^{19&}quot;Per Amica Silentia Lunae," Mythologies, 359.

 $^{^{20}}$ E.R. Dodds, <u>The Greeks and the Irrational</u> (California, 1951), 42.

²¹ Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Mythologies, 336.

- 22 Plato, The Republic, 617E.
- 23<u>A Vision</u>, 206.
- ²⁴Plato, <u>The Statesman</u>, 272A.
- 25<u>A Vision</u>, 209.
- 26A.O. Prickard, "On the Genius of Socrates," <u>Selected Essays</u> of <u>Plutarch</u> (Oxford, 1918), II, 38. In his essay "Swedenborg, Mediums and Desolate Places," <u>Explorations</u>, 59, Yeats claims to have read Plutarch on the daimon.
- ²⁷G.R.S. Mead, <u>The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition</u> (London, 1919).
 - 28 F.A.C. Wilson, Yeats and Tradition (London, 1958), 245.
 - 29"Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Mythologies, 335.
 - 30" Introduction to The Resurrection, " Explorations, 3%.
- This is claimed by Thomas Whittaker, <u>The Neo-Platonists</u> (Cambridge, 1901), 174. E.R. Dodds's translation of Proclus, <u>The Elements of Theology</u> (Oxford, 1933) is indispensable for the study of Proclus, but I am convinced that Yeats was familiar with Whittaker's study.
 - 32A Vision, 202.
 - ³³<u>Tbid</u>., 193,4.
 - 34_{Tbid.}, 194,5.
 - 35<u>Ibid.</u>, 40.
 - 36<u>Tbid.</u>, 274,5.
 - 37 Collected Plays, 372.
 - 38,1930 Diary," Explorations, 330.
 - 39<u>Ibid.</u>, 330.
 - 40 <u>Vision</u>, 219.
 - 41 <u>Ibid.</u>, 220.
 - 42_{Ibid.}, 289.
 - 43"The Mandukya Upanishad, " Essays, 481.
 - 44A Vision, 28,9.

- 45"1930 Diary," Explorations, 305.
- 46<u>Ibid.</u>, 307.
- 47_{mBishop Berkeley, ** Essays}, 401.
- 48 <u>Vision</u>, 212.
- 49<u>Ibid.,</u> 73.
- 50 "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," Mythologies, 361.
- 51 Vision, 193.
- 52₁₁₉₃₀ Diary, Explorations, 305.
- ⁵³Ibid., 311.
- 54<u>A Vision</u>, 193-4.
- 55 See diagram p. 91.
- 56 Mircia Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York, 1958), 460.
 - 57 Georges Poulet, Les Metamorphoses du Cercle (Paris, 1961), iv.

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1 Vision (1925), 81.
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²A <u>Vision</u>, 280.

^{3&}quot;Gitanjali," Essays, 390.

⁴mThe Tragic Generation, Mutobiographies, 295.

⁵nJ.M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time, * Essays, 315.

^{6&}quot;The Tragic Generation," Autobiographies, 295.

^{7&}quot; Introduction to The Cat and the Moon, " Explorations, 404.

^{8&}quot;Gitanjali," Essays, 391,2.

^{9&}quot;Four Years, 1887-1891," Autobiographies, 188.

¹⁰ The Holy Mountain, Essays, 448.

¹¹ Vision, 151.

^{12&}quot;The Happiest of Poets," Essays, 54.

^{13&}quot;Discoveries," Essays, 226-7.

^{14&}lt;sub>Tbid.</sub>, 226.

^{15&}quot;Reveries over Childhood and Youth," Autobiographies, 65.

¹⁶ Gitanjali, Essays, 392.

^{17&}quot;Louis Lambert, Essays, 446.

^{18&}lt;sub>n</sub>J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time, * Essays, 329.

^{19&}quot;The Tragic Generation, " Autobiographies, 332.

²⁰ Collected Plays, 390-6.

²¹ Collected Poems, 255.

²² Prometheus Unbound, Essays, 421.

²³ Vision, 144.

^{24&}quot;Discoveries," Essays, 284.

- 25 "Blake's Illustrations to Dante," Essays, 116.
- 26"The Tree of Life," The Cutting of an Agate (New York, 1912), 70.
 - 27 "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, 235.
 - 28 A General Introduction, Essays, 518.
 - 29 <u>A Vision</u>, 273.
 - 30 Letter to Florence Farr, July 1905. Letters, 454.
 - 31 Virginia Moore, The Unicorn (New York, 1954).

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1"Reveries over Childhood and Youth, " Autobiographies, 32.
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²Letter to John Quinn, 1 August 1916. Quoted in Richard Ellmann, Yeats, The Man and the Masks (New York, 1958), 216.

^{3&}quot;Four Years, 1887-1891," Autobiographies, 171.

Review in London Bookman, April 1884; quoted in Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats 1865-1939 (New York, 1943), 112.

^{5&}quot;Reveries over Childhood and Youth," Autobiographies, 62.

^{6&}lt;u>Ibid</u>., 54.

^{7&}lt;sub>Ibid., 9.</sub>

^{8&}lt;u>Tbid</u>., 23.

^{9&}lt;sub>Ibid</sub>.

¹⁰ Variorum, 391.

^{11 &}quot;Blake's Illustrations to Dante," Essays, 123.

^{12&}quot;1930 Diary," Explorations, 295.

¹³ Letters to the New Island, ed. Horace Reynolds (Harvard, 1934), 144-5.

¹⁴mA People's Theatre," Explorations, 253.

^{15&}lt;sub>u</sub>J.M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time, * Essays, 323.

^{16 &}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 318.

^{17&}quot;At Stratford-on-Avon, " Essays, 103.

¹⁸ Samhain: 1904, Explorations, 155.

^{19&}quot;Samhain:1903," Explorations, 119.

²⁰ Four Years 1887-1891, Autobiographies, 189.

^{21 &}quot;At Stratford-on-Avon," Essays, 110.

^{22,1930} Diary, Explorations, 301.

²³Ibid., 309.

- 24<u>Tbid.</u>, 308-9.
- 25"Samhain:1904," Explorations, 151.
- 26 "Estrangement," Autobiographies, 470.
- 27S.T. Coleridge, Lectures on Shakespeare (London, 1907), 14.
- 28 Charles Baudelaire, <u>L'art Romantique</u>, <u>Oeuvres Complètes</u> (Paris, 1961), III, 227.
 - 29"Four Years, 1887-1891," Autobiographies, 191.
 - 30 "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, 235.
 - 31"On the Boiler," Explorations, 446.
 - 32 Ibid.
- 33 Personality and the Intellectual Essences, The Cutting of an Agate, (New York, 1912), 58.
- 34Benjamin Whichcote, Quoted in Flora Mackinnon, Philosophical Writings of Henry More (New York, 1925), 296.
 - 35 Letter to John Quinn, 15 May 1903. Letters, 402.
 - 36 Letter to AE, 14 May 1903. <u>Letters</u>, 402.
 - 37 Variorum, 448.
 - 38 Heraclitus, On the Universe, fragment lxix.
 - 39"The Tragic Generation, * Autobiographies, 279.
 - 40<u>Ibid.</u>, 280.
 - 41 <u>Ibid.</u>, 279.
 - 42"Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, 227.
 - 43"The Tragic Generation, * Autobiographies, 284.
 - 44"Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, 231.
 - 45 Reveries over Childhood and Youth, * Autobiographies, 82.
 - 46 Introduction to The Resurrection, * Explorations, 392.
 - 47"The Tragic Generation, " Autobiographies, 315.
 - 48 Ideas of Good and Evil, " Essays, 187.

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- 49 Charles Baudelaire, <u>L'art Romantique</u>, <u>Oeuvres Complètes</u> (Paris, 1961), III.
- 50 nAt Stratford-on-Avon, Essays, 99. Letter to Sturge Moore, March 1903. W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore, ed. Ursula Bridge (London, 1953), 7.
- Yeats does not give the title of Appia's book, but it was either La Mise en Scène du Drame Wagnérien (1895) or Musik und Inszenierung (1899). Yeats had no knowledge of German, so in all probability it was the former.
 - 52 Letter to Arthur Symons, 10 September 1905. Letters, 459-60.
- 53Arthur Symons, "The Ideas of Richard Wagner," Quarterly Review, CCIII (July 1905), 74.
 - 54<u>Tbid.</u>, 77-9.
 - 55"The Tragic Theatre," Essays, 240.
 - 56"Discoveries," Essays, 279.
 - 57 Ideas of Good and Evil, Essays, 154.
 - ⁵⁸Ibid., 149-50.
 - ⁵⁹Ibid., 150.
 - 60 Collected Plays, 105.
- Richard Wagner, "A Communication to my Friends," Richard Wagner's Prose Works, trans. W.A. Ellis (London, 1895), I, 306.
- 62 Richard Wagner, <u>Music Dramas</u>, trans. Ernest Newman (Leipzig, 1914), 364.
 - 63 Variorum, 565.
 - 64m Emotion of Multitude, " Essays, 216.
- 65 Thomas Mann, "Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner," Essays of Three Decades, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York, 1947), 334.
 - 66 Letter to AE, April 1904. Letters, 434.
 - 67"The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," Essays, 91.
- 68 Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York, 1958), 156,7.

Rhys suggests that Cuchulain, whom the <u>Book of the Dun tells</u> us is Lug reborn through the body of Dechtere, is the reincarnation of the Celtic Apollo, and therefore the sun, or a personification of the sun. John Rhys, <u>Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by Celtic Heathendom</u> (London, 1888), 435. Rhys's account belongs to the school which attempted to reduce all mythology to a fundamental solar myth. The issue has been hotly contested. Cf. J.A. MacCulloch, <u>The Religion of the Ancient Celts</u> (Edinburgh, 1911), who refutes the identification of Cuchulain with the solar god.

70 Yeats's account of the Eden tree is from his 1930 diary: "I do not know whether it was before or after this that I made a certain girl see a vision of the Garden of Eden. She heard the music of Paradise coming from the Tree of Life, and when I told her to put her ear against the bark, that she might hear the better, found that it was made by the continuous clashing of swords." Yeats's paraphrase of Heraclitus is from "On the Boiler," Explorations, 430.

⁷¹ Introduction to The Resurrection, * Explorations, 398.

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1"Per Amica Silentia Lunae," Mythologies, 340.

Vision to the automatic writing which began with his marriage in 1917, the materials of A Vision and even certain aspects of its formal elaboration are apparent in his poetry long before this. Responsibilities (1914) indicates that Yeats had already arrived at some understanding of the nature of his Great Wheel, although it may not yet have been consciously articulated as a coherent pattern. The personal dilemma which Yeats confronted in Responsibilities, a fascination with the attractions of the public life and the consolations of the solitary, readily follows the antinomial pattern suggested by primary and antithetical experience.

The question which King Guaire poses in the comic debate, "The Three Beggars," suggests a weighing of the merits of saint and hero: "Do men who least desire get most/ Or get the most who most desire?" The poems in this collection alternate between the public and the introspective pose, and the titles "To a Wealthy Man. . . . " "On those that Hated the Playboy" suggest the intrusion of an Augustan element of "public poetry." These are contrasted with poems dealing with the role of the solitary. Yeats's Father Rosicross, surely one of Yeats's men "with a secret." who in the midst of a rousing wake "lies all wisdom shut into his onyx eyes." "The Hour Before Dawn" is resolved in a bitter denunciation of he who would, like the saint or sage, forego the inconveniences of the temporal world "And wait Him in a drunken sleep." Yeats's "cursing rogue" leaves the sleeper in the security of the Cruachan to face his own cold comfort before the tumbling clouds of dawn. The characters in the poem "The Three Hermits" are recognizable as Yeats's hunchback, saint, and fool, and their appearance suggests that the poet had already evolved the final triad of incarnations of his Great Wheel.

²"Discoveries," Essays, 288.

^{3&}quot;Ireland after Parnell," Autobiographies, 247.

⁴mPer Amica Silentia Lunae, Mythologies, 333.

⁵<u>Ibid</u>., 337.

^{6&}quot;Introduction to The Resurrection," Explorations, 398.

⁸ Discoveries, Essays, 286.

^{9&}lt;sub>Ibid</sub>.

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- 10 Per Amica Silentia Lunae", Mythologies, 333.
- Variorum, 495.
- 12"Discoveries, * Essays, 287.
- 13"Bishop Berkeley," Essays, 409.
- 14. The Return of Ulysses, * Essays, 202.
- 15<u>A Vision</u>, 180.
- 16 <u>Ibid.</u>, 182.
- 17"Four Years, 1887-1891," Autobiographies, 189.
- 18 "Poetry and Tradition," Essays, 251.
- 19"Per Amica Silentia Lunae," Mythologies, 331.
- 20 "Hodos Chameliontos," Autobiographies, 273.
- 21 "Estrangement," Autobiographies, 471.
- ²²Henri Bergson, quoted in I.W. Alexander, <u>Bergson</u>, <u>Philosopher of Reflection</u> (London, 1957), 94.
- ²³Jacques Maritain, <u>Art and Scholasticism and other Essays</u>, trans. J.F. Scanlon (London, 1943), 23.
 - 24mPer Amica Silentia Lunae, Mythologies, 328.
 - ²⁵<u>Ibid</u>., 329.
 - 26 "Hodos Chameliontos," <u>Autobiographies</u>, 273.
 - 27" Ireland and the Arts, " Essays, 207-8.
 - 28 Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Mythologies, 332.
 - 29"1930 Diary," Explorations, 302.
 - 30 Ibid.
- Plato, The Timaeus and the Critias, trans. Thomas Taylor (New York, 1944), 15 n.
 - 32 Letter to Olivia Shakespeare, 12 April 1875. Letters, 257.
 - 33W.B. Yeats, Plays in Prose and Verse (London, 1922), 428-9.
 - 34m Discoveries, " Essays, 263-4.

- 35S.T. Coleridge, <u>Lectures on Shakespeare</u> (London, 1907), 33.
- 36"The Tragic Theatre," Essays, 245.
- 37"Synge and the Ireland of His Time," The Cutting of an Agate, 151-2.
- 38 Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. R.A. Audra and C. Brereton (London, 1935), 196.
 - 39 Collected Plays, 300.
 - 40 "Poetry and Tradition," Essays, 255.



CHAPTER VII

1 Edward Engelberg, The Vast Design: Patterns in W.B. Yeats's Aesthetics (Toronto, 1964). Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow (North Carolina, 1964).

²Carl H. Hamburg, <u>Symbol</u> and <u>Reality</u> (The Hague, 1956), 79.

³Letter to Olivia Shakespeare, February 1931. <u>Letters</u>, 781.

Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, trans. Philip Mairet (New York, 1960), 16.

Samhain, 1904. Explorations, 167.

⁶Yeats tells of reading Croce in a letter to Olivia Shakespeare 24 Sept 1926. <u>Letters</u>, 719. He admits knowing Vico through Croce's writings in a letter to Mario Rossi, 5 October 1931. <u>Letters</u>, 784.

7"Introduction to The Cat and the Moon," Explorations, 400.

⁸<u>Toid.</u>, 310. <u>The Cat and the Moon</u> was probably written in 1917, although it was not performed until 1928.

Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of the State (New Haven, 1946), 47.

10 Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, 15.

11 Ibid.

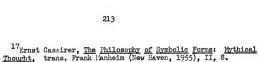
12J.E. Cirlot, <u>A Dictionary of Symbols</u>, trans. J. Sage (New York, 1962), 362.

 13 Yeats admits to a structural relationship between A <u>Vision</u> and <u>Timeous</u>. When comparing the consistency of his own system with that of the zodiac, he writes: ". . . they have much the same character, being respectively particular and universal, as the circles of the Other and the Same in the <u>Timaeus." A Vision</u>, 251.

Limitcea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, 37.

15 Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trans. W.R. Trask (New York, 1964), 92. Eliade furnishes a fuller account of this in his Patterns in Comparative Religion (New York, 1958), 127.

16"On the Boiler," Explorations, 451.



18 Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of State (New Haven, 1946), 47.

19 <u>A Vision</u>, 177.

20 <u>Tbid.</u>, 21.

²¹Philip Wheelwright, <u>The Burning Fountain</u> (Bloomington, 1954), 318.

²²Ernst Cassirer, <u>The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Mythical Thought</u>, II, 238,9.

23 Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, 388.

24 Ernst Cassirer, op. cit., 111.

25 Vision, 69.

26 Ibid., 205.

²⁷Ernst Cassirer, op. cit., 97. Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: The Phenomenology of Knowledge, trans. Frank Manheim (New York, 1957), III, 98.

28Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Mythical Thought, II, 103,4.

29J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, 256-8.

³⁰The association of the weather and seasons with the quaternary was not unknown to Ireland, the kingdom of the four kings. In the following poem from the Feis Tigh Ghonoin the cardinal points demonstrate their role as benign or malignant influences presiding over birth and directing the fate of the newborn:

The son who is born when the wind blows from the West, Shall obtain raiment and shall obtain food; He shall obtain from his lord Only food and raiment.

The son who is born when the wind is from the South, Shall get honey: he shall get fruit; In his house he shall entertain Both bishops and musical performers.

The locality of gold is the wind from the East: This is the best wind of all winds: The son who is born when that wind blows Want shall never reach him. The son who is born when the wind blows from the North, Shall win victory and be subject to defeat; He shall be wounded, he shall wound another, Before he shall ascend to Heaven of the angels.

Whenever the wind does not blow Over the grass of the plain, or the heather; Whosoever is then born Whether male or female, shall be an idiot.

"Fate," from Vol. II of the Ossianic Society Publications, translated by Hyde for Mackenzie, and quoted in D.A. Mackenzie, The Migration of Symbols (New York, 1926), 39, 40.

- Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Mythical Thought, II, 102.
- Daniélou writes: "Praying towards the East re-connects us with the paradisiac themes; to turn to the East appears to be an expression of the nostalgia for Paradise." Jean Daniélou, <u>Bible et Liturgie</u> (Paris, 1951), 46.
- 33Heinrich Nissen, <u>Das Templum</u>, Antiquarische Untersuchgen (Berlin, 1869), 8.
 - 34_{Essays}, 467.
 - 35 Nision, 203.
- ³⁶Yeats acknowledges his sympathy with the work of the archeologist Josef Strzygowski in associating the cardinal points with the different modes of visual expression. A Vision. 282.
 - 37<u>A Vision</u>, 66. Cf. 258.
 - 38 Essays, 427.
 - 39 Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries, 238.
 - 40 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1953), 4.
 - Letter to Ethel Mannin, October 1938. Letters, 917.
 - 42 Letter to Lady Elizabeth Pelham, 4 January 1939. Letters, 922.

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