

THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE POETRY OF

W. B. YEATS

(1865 - 1939)

BY

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"I asked a great friend, a very old woman, what I should read tonight. She said, 'Read them poems about women.'"

-- W.B. YEATS: BBC LONDON BROADCAST (10 APRIL, 1932)

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this study is to examine the development of W.B. Yeats's concept of woman as it is revealed in his poetry and to evaluate its literary treatment.

It is generally accepted that women played an important part in Yeats's life and that they exerted a significant influence in various directions -- a fact that is borne out by the numerous friendships and relationships with women throughout his lifetime. It is not sufficiently realized, however, that they provided him with both a powerful source of poetic inspiration and an important subject matter throughout his poetic career. Woman, as an object of contemplation and speculation, forms an integral part of the very stuff and fibre of Yeats's poetry, as is testified to by the range, depth and inclusiveness of his vision, which comprises not only the expression of his personal dreams and longings but a more far-reaching and penetrating study of women's relationship to society, history and ethics.

It is surprising, therefore, that the significance of woman in Yeats's poetic development has been so scantily treated by Yeats's critics. Apart from a few brief, though interesting, essays and articles -- in particular, those by T.R. Henn, A.N. Jeffares, Thomas Parkinson and Muriel C. Bradbrook\* (the last two being concerned mainly with the love interest in Yeats's poetry) as well as a considerable body of writing on individual poems and poem sequences, there has been no full-scale treatment, to my knowledge, of the subject as a whole. It is hoped that

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\*They are T.R. Henn, "Women Young and Old", in The Lonely Tower. Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats, University Paperbacks (London: Methuen, 1966), pp. 51-71; A.N. Jeffares, "Women in Yeats's Poetry", in The Circus Animals. Essays on W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1970); pp. 78-102; Thomas Parkinson, "Yeats and the Love Lyric", James Joyce Quarterly, XIII (1966), 109-123; Muriel C. Bradbrook, "Yeats and Elizabethan Love Poetry", Dublin Magazine, IV, 2 (1965), 40-55.

this thesis will fill the gap.

The method adopted is chronological, in that I have selected a key image of woman at every phase of Yeats's poetic development and have examined it both conceptually and technically in relation to the poem or poems in which it appears. In so doing, I have pinpointed possible influences on the image, biographical and literary, and have attempted to define it in terms of Yeats's imagination and the climate of his thought.

The first chapter deals with Yeats's earliest concept of woman, manifested in the "dream" woman of the poetry written between 1884 and 1899. The predominant "dream" image, which is marked mainly by its sense of unreality and fantasy, is expressed in terms of three subordinate images based largely on literary models: the image of "Pre-Raphaelite" woman, which reaches its ultimate expression in the love poems of The Wind among the Reeds; the femme fatale, of which the clearest example is Niamh, fairy heroine of The Wanderings of Oisín, and the more loosely related evocations of the poet's desire evident in the minor love poems of the period, "To an Isle in the Water", for example, and the "Indian" love poems. While I have been careful to point out the variety of possible "real" sources of inspiration, I have stressed the peculiarly "literary" character of the poetry and, in particular, Yeats's inheritance of two literary traditions: that manifestation of nineteenth-century romanticism generally known as "Pre-Raphaelitism", and the cult of the femme fatale (predominantly through the influence of Swinburne and Rossetti) with which he magically fused, in the figure of Niamh, elements of his Gaelic models.

The second chapter deals with Yeats's gradual break with literary tradition and his simultaneous creation of a new myth of the unrequiting beloved, based on his tortured, torturous

relationship with Maud Gonne. The period, which extends from 1889, the date of their first meeting, to 1916, that of Maud Gonne's rejection of Yeats's final proposal, reveals the poet's development from his early symbolic method (wherein the image of his beloved is employed predominantly as symbol) to the fully-fledged portraiture of the poems written between 1902 and 1915. The comprehensiveness of Yeats's portrayal has been emphasized, as well as the growing impact of a real source of poetic inspiration and its ultimate effect in what may well be the most fully delineated example of female portraiture in English poetry.

In the third chapter I have discussed Yeats's idea of heroic woman and its manifestation in two independent yet closely related images: that of heroine and aristocratic respectively. In this connection I have outlined Yeats's concepts of heroism and aristocracy, their relation to his theory of the Masks and their expression in poems concerning Maud Gonne, Lady Gregory and Mabel Beardsley. The extension of Yeats's poetic horizons has been stressed, and the period seen as an important link between his early love poetry and his broader views on the nature of woman in his "middle" period.

Chapters Four and Five are concerned with the summation of Yeats's concept of woman and womanhood between the years 1914 and 1929. Chapter Four deals specifically with the spiritual aspect of woman (1914 to 1919), and Yeats's unique "formula" of ideal womanhood, fully expounded in "A Prayer for My Daughter", has been discussed at length. Pertinent factors, such as the example of Lady Gregory and, more important, of Yeats's wife, Georgina Hyde-Lees, have been examined, as well as his esoteric concept of ideal personality, formulated in his concept of Unity of Being. Further concomitant factors -- Yeats's bitter dis-

illusionment with Maud Gonne and Constance Markiewicz, for example, and his experience of paternity (both actual and vicarious) -- have been considered; and the poet's idiosyncratic idealization of spiritual beauty in woman, sanctified within the framework of social aristocracy, evaluated and assessed.

Chapter Five, which runs almost concurrently with Chapter Four, is confined to Yeats's concept of woman's physicality, to her sexual psychology and her sexual role both inside and outside marriage. The sudden release from the unnaturally prolonged sexual restraint of the poet's early manhood, and the subsequent erratic sexual relief which marriage abruptly afforded, has been hazarded as the main reason for the late emergence of interest in this aspect of woman; and Yeats's handling of the ideal marital relationship (symbolized by Solomon and Sheba) briefly discussed. Of greater significance is his treatment of female sexual psychology in the relatively neglected "A Woman Young and Old" sequence, the most comprehensive and intimate treatment of its kind ever attempted (as far as I am able to establish) by a male poet writing in English. The weakness of the period as a whole has been pointed out, and Yeats's technical achievement of the sequence has (I believe, for the first time) been fully acknowledged and assessed.

Chapter Six is concerned with Yeats's unique concept of woman's relationship to history (developed during the period 1917 to 1937) wherein woman emerges as an innocent agent of the perpetuation of history, ironically endowed with the seeds of violence, destruction and chaos. Yeats's home-made historical "system" (published in A Vision) has been outlined in brief, and his poetic treatment of the images of Leda and Mary, as archetypal representatives of the pagan and Christian eras respectively (and in particular, Yeats's great sonnet, "Leda and the Swan") fully discussed.

The seventh and last chapter is devoted to Yeats's final estimate of the nature of woman, revealed in woman's relationship to society. Formative factors, such as the poet's ultimate need for self-assertion and affirmation, and his crucial relationship with Lady Dorothy Wellesley, have been examined; and the complex problem of woman's attempt to come to terms with her sexuality within an orthodox social framework explored in terms of two independent but closely related poem sequences, the "Crazy Jane" poems and "The Three Bushes" sequence. Crazy Jane and the Lady have been juxtaposed as the main protagonists in the difficult attempt at adjusting sexual desire to conventional morality, and Yeats's assertion of the moral superiority of Crazy Jane has been stressed. The technical achievement of the period as a whole has been scrutinized and it is my personal contention that these poems represent the height of Yeats's power as a dramatic poet, primarily in the creation of original characterization (in the figure of Crazy Jane) and secondarily in the handling of the technique of first-person dramatization. While I do not suggest that Yeats was consciously trying to juxtapose these sequences, I believe that the common underlying problem of woman's ultimate identity interested and intrigued him: my examination of them as independent variations on the same theme is thus (as far as I know) an entirely new contribution to Yeats studies.

The underlying contention of this thesis is that Yeats's concept of woman is predominantly romantic and that this romanticism manifests itself in a variety of ways throughout his poetic career. Though style and language differ considerably between his early and late periods, all the major images of woman, from the first tentative "dream" woman to the objective characterization of Crazy Jane are marked by that state of sensibility and quality of imagination, that predisposition to idealism and idealization -- seen, for example, in the assertion of the world of the imagination over

reality, or, in the last poems, of passion and the senses over conventional morality and ultimately of the individual over society -- that are commonly termed "romantic". Yeats's romanticism is further evident in the use of myth -- ready at hand in Niamh, Leda, Mary, Sheba, self-created in Maud Gonne, Lady Gregory, Mabel Beardsley -- and symbol, of which the most powerful example is Crazy Jane. It is hoped that this study will provide a further insight into the spirit and quality of imagination of perhaps the greatest poet of our time.

With regard to handling of material, it is worthwhile noting that unless otherwise stated, the poetry quotations have been taken from the first printed version, except where differences between first and final versions were too slight (in the case of minor punctuation changes,\* for example), to warrant detailed examination of these differences. Where the latter proved to be the case, the final version, as it appears in the two-volume limited signed edition published by Macmillan of London in 1949 -- number ninety-eight (no. 98) of the books used in the collations listed in the bibliography of the Variorum Edition -- was used. My reason for adhering to the first printed versions was to keep as closely as possible to the original form of the poem (or poems) as it (they) appeared in the period under discussion, although I have discussed later and final versions wherever possible. I have furthermore limited myself to poems included in the two-volume definitive edition referred to, although references have been made, where relevant, to poems not included in that edition.

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\*While I have been careful to take cognisance of punctuation changes, the reader should bear in mind Jon Stallworthy's observation that, owing to Yeats's inability to understand commas and stops, "Punctuation ... was frequently put in after the words were written, and put in as often by Mrs Yeats, or the publisher, as by the poet himself. For this reason we should not take the changes in punctuation, listed so scrupulously in the Variorum, as necessarily made by Yeats." (Between the Lines. Yeats's Poetry in the Making / Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963 /, p.13.)

Where poetry quotations are specific, as in detailed analyses of a particular poem or poems, the source reference used is the Variorum Edition (VE in the list of Abbreviations in Footnotes); in all other cases that used is the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1950) (CP in the list of Abbreviations). The terms "supra" and "infra" employed in footnote references to the Variorum Edition refer to the main text and sub-text respectively of the particular poem under discussion.

I wish to thank, in the first instance, Professor R.G. Howarth, for allowing me to pursue this study over what must have appeared to him an unnaturally long period of time; my supervisor, Dr J.D. Bowers, for his firm guidance in the early and final stages of this thesis; Professor A.N. Jeffares, for his prompt reply to an elementary question by a mere novice; Jon Stallworthy, poet and Yeats authority, for a personal interview in which he offered an illuminating first-hand impression of the late Mrs W.B. Yeats, as well as numerous interesting comments and insights; and above all, Dr T.R. Henn, of St. Catharine's College, Cambridge University, who imbued me, in a brief interview during his recent visit to Cape Town, with the courage, energy, insight and determination without which this thesis may never have been concluded.

# ABBREVIATIONS IN FOOTNOTES

## Books by Yeats

- A      Autobiographies. London: Macmillan, 1955.
- CP      The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1950.
- CP1.    Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1952.
- E      Explorations, sel. Mrs. W.B. Yeats. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1962.
- E&I    Essays and Introductions. London: Macmillan, 1961.
- M      Mythologies. London: Macmillan, 1959.
- Letters The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954.
- V(A)    A Vision. An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon Certain Doctrines Attributed to Kusta Ben Luka. London: T. Werner Laurie, 1925.
- V(B)    A Vision. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1937.
- VE      The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach. New York: Macmillan, 1957.

## Books on Yeats

- Bib.      Allan Wade, A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats, 3rd ed., rev. & ed. Russell K. Alspach. / London: / Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968.
- Comm.    A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats, London, Melbourne, Toronto: Macmillan, 1968.
- IdY.      Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats. London: Faber and Faber, 1964.
- LT      T.R. Henn, The Lonely Tower. Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats. University Paperbacks. London: Methuen, 1965.
- ProYP    George Brandon Saul, Prolegomena to the Study of Yeats's Poems. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1957.
- ProYPl    George Brandon Saul, Prolegomena to the Study of Yeats's Plays. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1958.
- WBY      J.M. Hone, W.B. Yeats 1865-1939. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1965.
- Y:M&M    Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks. London: Faber and Faber, 1961.
- Y:M&P    A. Norman Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet. 2nd ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.



## CHAPTER 1

### FIRST MODELS (1884-1899)

... she did seem ...  
Like the bright shade of some immortal dream ...  
-- Shelley: Laon and Cythna

The poetry of W.B. Yeats between 1884 and 1899 provides an important starting-point for an understanding of his concept of woman. Not only does it reveal the underlying romanticism that characterizes his attitude to woman throughout the course of his poetic career but it also defines the shadowy, dreamlike quality of the early work, thus distinguishing it from the active, dynamic and, at times, astringent quality of the later poetry.

Yeats's earliest concept of woman may best be understood in terms of his own assessment of his poetic achievement, expressed in a letter to Katharine Tynan, dated 14 March 1888:

It is almost all a flight into faeryland from the real world, and a summons to that flight.... It is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint -- the cry of the heart against necessity.<sup>1</sup>

The main image of woman that emerges during this period is that of the "dream" woman -- woman is seen variously as remote, distant, elusive, unattainable -- and her image is rooted not in reality but in the shifting flux of the imagination, based on literary models:

When I thought of women / Yeats writes in his Autobiographies / they were modelled on those of my favourite poets and loved in brief tragedy, or like the girl in

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, p. 63.

The Revolt of Islam, accompanied their lovers through all manner of wild places, lawless women without homes and without children.<sup>2</sup>

The predominant "dream" woman in the poetry of the period takes three distinctive forms. First, there is the "Pre-Raphaelite" model, vaguely discernible in "Ephemera", becoming more clearly defined in the poems of the early nineties ("The Cap and Bells", "The Rose of the World", "The Sorrow of Love") and reaching its ultimate expression in the later poems of The Wind among the Reeds (1899). Secondly, there is the image of the femme fatale, already evident in some of Yeats's very early poems -- in The Island of Statues, for example, and in Mosada -- but most successfully embodied in Niamh, fairy heroine of The Wanderings of Oisín. Finally there are the tenuous evocations of the poet's desire, not rooted in a specific literary tradition: the subject of "To an Isle in the Water" and the thin, shadowy, impalpable women in the "Indian" love poems.

Despite the prevailing influence of literary models, the poems in the latter half of the period under discussion (from 1889 to 1899) receive their main impulse from two women who were to effect a profound change in Yeats's life: Maud Gonne, the woman whom he loved but was destined never to marry; and Olivia Shakespear, with whom he sought compensation in his frustrated love for Maud Gonne. Yet it would be wrong to assume that women played little or no part in his childhood and adolescence -- a misleading impression, created by Yeats's autobiographical writings, that led one biographer to claim

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<sup>2</sup>A, p.64. The influence of Shelley's idea of woman is seen in Mosada, Yeats's first tragic heroine, in the poem of that title (VE, pp.689-704).

that the poet's first years were spent mainly in "a little patriarchal society".<sup>3</sup> A close scrutiny of the period up to 1889 (the date of Yeats's meeting with Maud Gonne) reveals the presence of numerous women -- friends and family, acquaintances and servants -- with whom he was frequently in contact and who influenced him in various ways.

Some of the subtlest influences are hidden in the shadowy folds of the poet's early childhood. There was his mother, Susan Pollexfen ("Your mother married me," J.B. Yeats once explained to his son, "'because I was always there and the family helped'")<sup>4</sup> who imbued her son with a love of the fisherfolk of Howth and Sligo;<sup>5</sup> and it is not unlikely that his early ambition "to be taken as an Irish novelist ... choosing Ireland as a background"<sup>6</sup> was rooted in stories overheard between mother and servant, "a fisherman's wife, with whom his mother used to talk over a cup of tea in the kitchen."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Hone, WBY, p. 15. Yeats's Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955) abounds in references to his father, John Butler Yeats, and the memory of his grandfather, William Pollexfen, is vividly preserved (vide pp. 8-9).

<sup>4</sup> WBY, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Y:M&P, pp. 14, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> WBY, p. 36. Note (ibid.) that "he got the story Village Ghosts in this way." For a further illustration of Mrs J.B. Yeats's narrative gift, vide A, p. 61. The influence of Mrs Yeats has generally been neglected; for although she is hardly mentioned in her son's autobiography and letters, it was from her perhaps that he derived his poetic sensibility and on her that his earliest concept of woman was subconsciously based. Oliver Elton recalls "a silent, flitting figure ... from the fairy shores of Sligo ... the right kind of mother for a poet and dreamer" (J.B. Yeats, Letters to His Son W.B. Yeats and Others 1869-1922, ed. ... Joseph Hone ... London: Faber & Faber, 1944, p. 5); and Thomas Parkinson points out the poet's partial identification with "the passive gentle dreamy figure of his mother." (Vide "Yeats and the Love Lyric", James Joyce Quarterly, III / 1966 /, p. 109.) Cf. J.B. Yeats's wellknown comment: "'By marriage with a Pollexfen we have given a tongue to the sea cliffs.'" (A, p. 23.)

There was his grandmother, "who painted delicate water colours when her busy Victorian housekeeping allowed her time, ... kind in the Middleton manner ... 'not forceful but strong ... most unselfish, even-tempered, intuitive, observant, progressive, and, I am sure, ambitious.'"<sup>8</sup> There were his sisters "Lily" (Susan Mary), a girl with psychic propensities and "Lolly" (Elizabeth), a perceptive young lady with a shrewish tongue and "much practical capacity as a teacher and craftswoman",<sup>9</sup> who was to set up the Dun Emer press (later called the Cuala press)<sup>10</sup> for the printing of her brother's poems. There were, furthermore, numerous aunts, whose influence should not be underestimated, for it was under them that his education began: specially mentioned are his great-aunt Mickey (Mary) Yeats, renowned for her freedom in expatiating upon the history of the Yeats family,<sup>11</sup> and an Agnes Pollexfen to whom Yeats's father once attributed "that mysterious energy which is the pulse of immortal life" and on another occasion decried as a termagant".<sup>12</sup>

Pleasant memories revolve around the Pollexfen servants: Kate McDermott, who would amuse the children during the long, sombre meals with their grandparents, by "prancing on all fours

<sup>8</sup>Y:M&P, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>J.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 5. My impression of Elizabeth Yeats is based upon excerpts from her diary, reprinted by Joseph Hone, "A Scattered Fair. From a Diary in a Neutral Country", The Wind and the Rain, III, 3 (1946), pp. 111-13.

<sup>10</sup>Holbrook Jackson, The Eighteen Nineties. A Review of Art and Ideas ..., Life and Life Letters Series, No. 17, new ed. (London & Toronto: Jonathan Cape, 1927), p. 266.

<sup>11</sup>Y:M&P, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup>WBY, p. 17. For the influence of Yeats's aunts as his first educators, vide p. 18.

outside the door with lighted tapers in her hair",<sup>13</sup> just out of view of the "sober-minded Pollexfens"; Ellie Connolly, who had a special fondness for Willie, whom she would greet, on his holiday arrivals at Sligo quay, with the cry: "'The Lord love you, Master Willie'";<sup>14</sup> and, when the poet was in late adolescence, Mary Battle, his Uncle George Pollexfen's second-sighted housekeeper, whose "humour and rich turn of speech" were woven into the fabric of his The Celtic Twilight.<sup>15</sup>

Two names emerge during the latter part of these formative years. One was Katharine Tynan, whom Yeats met in 1885, author of a volume of verse, Louise de la Vallière, with which he was greatly impressed.<sup>16</sup> A plain, rather gawky girl (judging from a reproduction of a portrait painted by Yeats's father in 1887),<sup>17</sup> she had a strong flair for journalism and was to strike up a literary friendship with the poet, to the mutual benefit of both. And though she probably gained the more from his careful criticism of her poetry<sup>18</sup> and the rich storehouse of his reading -- there are references to Willie reading Chapman's Homer "in a quiet hour" after lunch; "Willie chanting poetry to himself in the watches of the night"; "Willie holding the umbrella [one very wet night] pouring

<sup>13</sup>Y:M&P, p.10.

<sup>14</sup>WBY, p.30.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.40. Vide also A, pp.70-71; and notice his later affinity with her in sharing dreams and visions. (Y:M&P, pp.95-96.)

<sup>16</sup>Y:M&P, p.58. For further details about Katharine Tynan vide Letters, p.33, *infra*. For date of Yeats's meeting her, vide WBY, p.55.

<sup>17</sup>Y:M&P, pl. between pp. 182 and 183.

<sup>18</sup>Vide Letters, pp. 98-99, 114.

the while into my ears "The Sensitive Plant"<sup>19</sup> -- it was she who "attempted to urge [him] into profitable work"<sup>20</sup> and introduced him, some time in 1886, to his first séance.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, she was the earliest of all those sympathetic women friends of whom Yeats seems to have felt the need: after his family moved to London, he wrote her numerous letters containing intimate details about the progress of his work, and queries about hers, as well as confessions of his hatred of London and longing for Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

A completely different influence was exerted by Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, author of Isis Unveiled (1877) and The Secret Doctrine (1888-97) and founder of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society, which Yeats joined in 1887.<sup>23</sup> Despite charges of fraudulence levelled against her by the Society for Psychical Research, the "'pythoness of the movement'"<sup>24</sup> seemed to him "to surpass all others in honesty, as she sat there talking, vast and shapeless of body, perpetually rolling cigarettes, inconsequent and incomprehensible":

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<sup>19</sup>Katharine Tynan [Mrs H.A. Hinkson], Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences (London: Smith & Elder, 1913), pp. 190, 191, 192.

<sup>20</sup>Y:M&P, p. 304, n. 67.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 36. Vide, however, K. Tynan, Twenty-Five Years, p. 208, where she says that she "participated most unwillingly", and W.B. Yeats, Letters to Katharine Tynan, ed. Roger McHugh (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1953), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup>Vide Katharine Tynan [Mrs H.A. Hinkson], The Middle Years (London: Constable, 1916), pp. 31-72. Cf. Tynan: Twenty-Five Years, pp. 264-73.

<sup>23</sup>Virginia Moore, The Unicorn. William Butler Yeats's Search for Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 23. Information about Madame Blavatsky obtained from Letters, pp. 56-57, infra; A, pp. 173-82 and Comm., pp. 6-7. For a recent revival of interest in theosophy in the United States of America vide Time (Atlantic Edition), July 19 1968, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup>Y:M&P, p. 51.

"All her life is but sitting in a great chair with a pen in her hand", Yeats wrote to /John/ O'Leary. "For years she has written twelve hours a day. I have no theories about her, she is simply a note of interrogation."<sup>25</sup>

And though he was later to dispute many of her precepts, this "sort of female Dr Johnson" with her "great passionate nature" and "air of humour and audacious power"<sup>26</sup> profoundly affected Yeats's search for the religion of which his father's agnosticism had deprived him.

If it is true to say that each of these women contributed something to the growth of the young man or the embryonic poet, and though they touched him at many points, at times opening up new avenues of interest and experience, it is also true that they were not celebrated in the poetry of the period. There exists no literary equivalent of his father's charming and sensitive drawing of Mrs J.B. Yeats "in Victorian cloak and bonnet";<sup>27</sup> no verses recalling the figure of his grandmother "in her black silk jacket and flowered silk sun-bonnet",<sup>28</sup> collecting the Healing Plant in her garden; no satiric sketches of formidable and shrewish aunts. And, since it would be unreasonable to expect a youth of the essentially romantic disposition of Yeats<sup>29</sup> to draw fire from a Tynan or Blavatsky, we should at least look at his amatory relationships for more obvious sources of inspiration.

<sup>25</sup> WBY, p.70.

<sup>26</sup> A, pp.175,173.

<sup>27</sup> WBY, p.11. Vide also A, pl. facing p.32.

<sup>28</sup> Y:M&P, p.11.

<sup>29</sup> For evidence of Yeats's romanticism, vide J.B. Yeats's letter to his wife dated 1 November 1872 (Y:M&P, pp.9-10); the strong fantasy-making of the period, reflected in Yeats's solitary play-acting (A, p.64) and in his invention of "fantastic and incoherent plots" (A, pp.66-67); and his inability to concentrate, the probable cause of his failure to excel at school (A, p.23. Cf. Y:M&P, pp.22, 54).

For the sake of convenience the period may be divided into two parts: up to 1889, the date of Yeats's meeting with Maud Gonne, and from 1889 to 1899, which saw his growing obsession with Maud Gonne and his subsequent involvement with Olivia Shakespear. With regard to Yeats's early love interest, the first name to emerge is that of a distant cousin, Laura Johnston, a pretty red-haired girl with a "wild dash of half-insane genius",<sup>30</sup> whom he first saw driving in a pony-carriage at Howth.<sup>31</sup> Despite the adolescent nature of this relationship (revealed in a letter to Yeats, dated 10 August 1884)<sup>32</sup> it is important for two reasons. She was the first woman to provide an original source of poetic inspiration -- there exists a previously unpublished poem in the compilation of Yeats's letters<sup>33</sup> -- and in writing to Katharine Tynan on 21 March 1889, he was to comment:

Laura is to me always a pleasant memory. She woke me up from the metallic sleep of science and set me writing my first play.... Time and the Witch Vivien was written for her to act. The Island of Statues was begun with the same notion ... The part of the enchantress in both poems was written for her....<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the devotional aspect of this relationship and the young girl's virtual unattainability were to be re-enacted in Yeats's later association with Maud Gonne:

<sup>30</sup>Letters, p.117.

<sup>31</sup>A, p.76. Cf. However, Allan Wade's account in Letters, p.117, n.1, *infra*, where she is referred to as Laura Armstrong. The date of the beginning of Yeats's passion for her is given as 1881 in Comm., p. xiii.

<sup>32</sup>Letters, p.117, n.1, *infra*.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.117-18, *infra*.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.117-18.



I did not tell [Laura] that I was in love, however, because she was engaged. She had chosen me for her confidant and I learned all about her quarrels with her lover. Several times he broke the engagement off, and she fell ill, and friends had to make peace.... I wrote her some bad poems and had more than one sleepless night through anger with her betrothed....<sup>35</sup>

Another woman with whom he was emotionally involved was Florence Farr (Mrs Emery), a "young independent professional woman ... clever, good-natured, and very good looking [with whom] all her men friends fell in love ..."<sup>36</sup> She had married unhappily and had separated from her husband and it was not until he met her that Yeats's sisters believed he was in love.<sup>37</sup> The poet, attracted to her by her acting, "her subtle gestures and fine delivery"<sup>38</sup> of verse, hoped that she would help him in the production of the verse plays he intended writing. She was later to illustrate his theories on verse-speaking to the psalter;<sup>39</sup> of her extraordinary ability he once wrote:

I have just heard a poem spoken with so delicate a sense of its rhythm, with so perfect a respect for its meaning, that if I were a wise man and could persuade a few people to learn the art I would never open a book of verses again ...<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>A, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup>Y:M&P, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., and cf. WBY, p. 74. The date of their meeting was almost certainly 1889 (vide Comm., p.xiv), and Yeats knew her before Maud Gonne (vide Y:M&P, p. 58, WBY, p. 74). Margaret M. Vanderhaar, in an unpublished dissertation "Yeats's Relationships with Women and Their Influence on His Poetry" (Tulane Univ., 1966), p. 11, gives the date, apparently incorrectly, as 1893.

<sup>38</sup>WBY, p. 74.

<sup>39</sup>Y:M&P, p. 134.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted by Margaret Vanderhaar, "Yeats's Relationships with Women ..." (diss., 1966), p. 11.

Although their romantic attachment soon terminated, the intimacy of their friendship is illustrated by a comment to his wife, years later, that "he could tell Florence Farr everything."<sup>41</sup>

Of Maud Gonne I shall say little at present, except that her relationship with Yeats proved to be the major "trouble of [his] life",<sup>42</sup> haunting him, torturing him, pursuing him, so that in the end he could write, with a generosity born only out of the humility of final defeat:

No dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full  
As though with magnanimity of light,  
Yet a most gentle woman ...<sup>43</sup>

Yeats's early letters and unpublished autobiography bear adequate witness to the intoxicating effect of their first meeting; a more sober assessment has been made by one critic, Thomas Parkinson:

[Yeats's] feelings for her were so serious that one has to say that few men have ever suffered for a woman as Yeats did for Maud Gonne.... To say that Yeats loved her is too much and not enough. He adored her, devoted his personal and poetic energies to her service, allowed her to disrupt and muddy every clear valid relation he had with other women; and she was his escape from any other deep involvement.... Whatever miseries his frustrations caused him, and they were great, they were probably less than he would have suffered in marriage to her, and more rewarding. This statuesque woman with the marble heart released a passion in him that allowed him to create in his poetry a figure that will have a practically endless life.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Y:M&P, p.61.

<sup>42</sup>Unpublished autobiography (Y:M&P, p. 59).

<sup>43</sup>CP, p.382.

<sup>44</sup>In "Yeats and the Love Lyric", James Joyce Quarterly (1966), p.111. For Yeats's early reactions to Maud Gonne, vide Letters, pp. 108, 110; Y:M&P, pp. 59-60.

To find relief from his frustrated love for Maud Gonne Yeats turned to Olivia Shakespear (referred to as "Diana Vernon" in his unpublished autobiography) "a woman of great beauty",<sup>45</sup> herself a writer, whom he met at a literary dinner held early in 1894.<sup>46</sup> On returning from a visit to Maud Gonne in Paris he was formally introduced by Mrs Shakespear's cousin, Lionel Johnson; and after a brief correspondence decided that "if [he] could not get the woman [he] loved it would be a comfort, even but for a while, to devote [himself] to another."<sup>47</sup> After meeting for a year "in railway carriages and at picture galleries and ... at her home",<sup>48</sup> Yeats "broke through his doubts, took rooms in Woburn Buildings, and in [January] 1896 when he was past thirty had ... his first experience of physical love."<sup>49</sup> This brief liaison was finally terminated on account of Yeats's consuming passion for Maud Gonne. Some time in December 1896 his mistress, convinced that his obsession was still with her said, "There is someone else in your heart", and broke off the affair.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Y:M&P, p. 100.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid. For Mrs Shakespear's creative capacity vide M. Vaanderhaar, "Yeats's Relationships with Women", p.17: "[She] also enjoyed a career as a novelist publishing some half a dozen books between 1894, the year she met Yeats, and 1910." Cf. Letters, p. 233, n.4, *infra*.

<sup>47</sup>Y:M&P, pp. 100-101.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>49</sup>Curtis Bradford, "Yeats and Maud Gonne", Texas Studies in Literature and Language. A Journal of the Humanities, III, 4 (Winter, 1962), 459.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Despite the variety of possible real sources of inspiration the image of the "dream" woman in Yeats's early poetry shows a curious consistency in its dependence on literary models. Of the six love poems written between 1884 and 1889 and included in the two-volume definitive edition (published by Macmillan in 1949), for example, only one ("To an Isle in the Water"), with the possible exceptions of "Ephemera" and "The Falling of the Leaves", appears to have been inspired by a real source.<sup>51</sup> The others are either acknowledged adaptations, romantic fantasies or poems in which even the external evidence is so slight that it is difficult to distinguish between real and literary models. "Down by the Salley Gardens", one of Yeats's most popular love songs, is by his own attestation "an attempt to reconstruct an old song from three lines imperfectly remembered by an old peasant woman in ... Ballysodare, Sligo ..."<sup>52</sup> Louis MacNeice calls it "a trimmed version of an Irish folk-song";<sup>53</sup> and H.E. Shields has identified the original as "The Rambling Boys of Pleasure", an Anglo-Irish broadside.<sup>54</sup> In the "Indian" love poems, the women are purely fictional creations manipulated

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<sup>51</sup>The six poems referred to are "Anashuya and Vijaha", "The Indian to His Love", "The Falling of the Leaves", "Ephemera", "To an Isle in the Water" and "Down by the Salley Gardens" (CP, pp. 10-14, 15-16, 16, 22 respectively). The same may not be said of the love poems not included in the two-volume definitive edition: "Life", "Remembrance", "A Dawn-Song" (VE, pp. 686, 704-705, 705-706, respectively). Another poem, "Love Song", is, according to the subtitle, an adaptation from the Gaelic, though it is impossible to say whether Yeats had someone in mind at the time of writing.

<sup>52</sup>VE, p. 90.

<sup>53</sup>In The Poetry of W.B. Yeats (London & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 61.

<sup>54</sup>In "Yeats and the 'Salley Gardens'", Hermathena. A Dublin Univ. Review, Yeats Number CI / Autumn 1965 / , p. 24. Part of the original is also quoted in Comm., pp. 14-15.

within an avowedly romantic setting;<sup>55</sup> and the woman in "Ephemera" and "The Falling of the Leaves" is so clearly a stereotype of the Pre-Raphaelite model that it is difficult to identify a possible real source of inspiration, such as Laura Johnston.

The poems between 1889 and 1899 pose a different problem, however; for though there is ample evidence of a real source of inspiration, it is often difficult to distinguish from intrinsic evidence the exact source.<sup>56</sup> "He Mourns for the Change that Has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World",<sup>57</sup> for example, could have been inspired either by Mrs Shakespear or Maud Gonne. While I personally think it is the latter (on account of the emotional intensity of the closing lines), extrinsic evidence could well point to the former: the poem is dated June 1897, six months after the breakup of Yeats's relationship with Mrs Shakespear,<sup>58</sup> while the tenderness of the opening lines resembles that of other poems to her ("He Bids His Beloved Be at Peace", for example, and "The Lover Asks for Forgiveness because of His Many Moods").<sup>59</sup> Again, the opening

<sup>55</sup> Dr T.R. Henn, in a talk given at the University of Cape Town in May, 1971, referred to Yeats's relationship with an Indian Princess. I have not been able to substantiate this. Cf. Ch.1, pp.46-47 of this thesis.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Parkinson talks, however, of a "divided image", one "obliging", the other "aloof" and "demanding" ("Yeats and the Love Lyric", James Joyce Quarterly, pp. 113-114). For a full discussion of the possible sources of the poems of the period vide Appendix A, pp.238-241 of this thesis.

<sup>57</sup> CP, p.68. It was originally entitled "The Desire of Man and of Woman" (VE, p. 153).

<sup>58</sup> VE, p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> CP, pp. 69, 73-74.

lines of "The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love" has the effect of a deliberately contrived anonymity;<sup>60</sup> and either woman could have inspired "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty",<sup>61</sup> were it not for the rarified style generally characteristic of poems concerning Mrs Shakespear:<sup>62</sup> a history of its printings reveals that it was originally written for Maud Gonne -- there is evidence of a manuscript version entitled "Dedication of 'John Sherman and Dhoya", dated 1 September 1891;<sup>63</sup> and its choice as a companion poem for what was ultimately entitled "A Poet to His Beloved"<sup>64</sup> suggests that Yeats may have turned a love poem originally conceived for Maud Gonne into one for his mistress!

This overall uniformity in image was partly due, no doubt, to Yeats's desire for secrecy in his affair with Olivia Shakespear -- a fact which is supported by his use of personages in the titles -- Aedh, Hanrahan, Michael Robartes, later reduced to "The Lover", "The Poet" and "He" -- and partly, perhaps, because he wanted to create an overall pattern of beautiful effects and not poems that would be read for their biographical interest alone. But it was probably moulded mainly by Yeats's idea of love:

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p.68.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp.74-75.

<sup>62</sup>Vide Yeats's statement, recorded by A.N. Jeffares (Y:M&P, p. 101): "I wrote her several poems all curiously alike in style ..."

<sup>63</sup>Vide Y:M&M, p. 258.

<sup>64</sup>Vide VE, pp. 157, 164.

... I had gathered from Shelley and the romantic poets an idea of perfect love. Perhaps I should never marry in church but I would love one woman all my life.<sup>65</sup>

The poetry of the period bears out Yeats's romantic attitude to love. First, there is the concept of the ideal beloved, generally unattainable or considered to be unattainable, with whom union is contemplated in perpetuity. This is illustrated in the Celtic legend of Oisín, in Amrita, the shadow-phantom of the poet's desire ("Anashuya and Vijaha") and in the "distancing" of the lover and beloved in "To an Isle in the Water". Closely related is the idea of the "special" quality of love: the parting lovers in "Ephemera" are willing outcasts, "earth's aliens";<sup>66</sup> the lover in "The Indian to His Love" whispers "how [they] alone of mortals are / Hid under quiet boughs apart ...",<sup>67</sup> and a similar emphasis on solitude and isolation occurs in "Anashuya and Vijaha".<sup>68</sup> Thirdly, love for Yeats constitutes a nostalgic longing for escape from the hazards of reality to a never-never land of unearthly bliss, for which the island is the chief symbol:

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<sup>65</sup>Y:M&P, p. 58. His father may have provided a sub-conscious influence, however. Remember his comment: "Imagine ... how the right sort of woman would despise a dutiful husband." (A, p. 58.) This is in direct contrast to the "middle-class" attitude pointed out by A.N. Jeffares, "Women in Yeats's Poetry", in The Circus Animals: Essays on W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1970), and substantiated by J.B. Yeats's view of "marriage for life" (J.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 236).

<sup>66</sup>VE, p. 80, l. 12a, *infra*.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 78, ll. 11-12, *supra*. Underlining my own.

<sup>68</sup>Vide:

Vijaha. ... we alone have round us woven woods  
And feel the softness of each other's hands,  
Amrita ...

(VE, pp. 73-74, ll. 56-58)

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan  
 shore,  
 Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near  
 us no more;  
 Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of the  
 flames would we be,  
 Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on  
 the foam of the sea!<sup>69</sup>

Finally, there is the devotional aspect, the idea of  
 worship derived from the Pre-Raphaelites, and particularly  
 from Morris and Rossetti. A.N. Jeffares writes:

Because he was still a boy there was an air of  
 unreality about his ideas, for he would sing his  
 imagined mistress's charms with all the tragedy and  
 hopelessness of one of Morris's heroes, and all would  
 be for her approval, all in her service.... Devotion  
 without reward was the keynote of his love....<sup>70</sup>

The summation of Yeats's idea of love occurs in The  
 Shadowy Waters, a poem in dramatic form, originally intended  
 as a play, and first conceived when he was still eighteen.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup>CP, p. 47. For the repeated use of the island image in  
 Yeats's early poetry vide "To an Isle in the Water" and "The  
 Indian to His Love" (CP, pp. 22, 15-16 respectively).

<sup>70</sup>Y:M&P, pp. 59, 58. The concept of Yeats as a poet  
 writing in the tradition of "courtly love" has, I think, been  
 overstressed. Apart from the fact that Yeats became familiar  
 with the poetry of the troubadours only from about 1913  
 onwards (through his friendship with Ezra Pound), so that all  
 his love poetry written before that date must necessarily be  
 excluded from such a comparison, the devotional aspect of his  
 early love poetry bears a closer resemblance to that of  
 William Morris or Rossetti than to the love poetry of the  
 twelfth-century troubadours. Though there are undoubtedly  
 resemblances -- in his idealization of his beloved in her  
 virtual unattainability, in his posture of self-abasement  
 and in the manifestation of certain physical maladies  
 associated with the lovers'suffering (fear, trembling,  
 sickness) -- Yeats's early love poetry, and particularly his  
 poems about Maud Gonne, lacks some of the important elements  
 of the poetry of the troubadours, such as its wit, its  
 capacity for scorn and contempt, its sexuality and its sense  
 of earthy passion. (This aspect of troubadour poetry has been  
 carefully treated by James J. Wilhelm, The Cruellest Month.  
 Spring, Nature, and Love in Classical and Medieval Lyrics  
 [New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1965], pp.151-230.)

<sup>71</sup>WBY, p. 39.



While the first published version (1900) suffers from an inconsistency in plot and a certain static quality, it already foreshadows the revised 1906 version in its vision of an idealized, romantic love.

Forgael, searching for love "of a beautiful, unheard-of kind / That is not in the world", captures a ship carrying a proud, beautiful queen Dectora and casts a spell over her, so that she forgets her murdered husband and falls in love with her captor. The first printed version differs from the second in that, having succeeded in winning Dectora's love, Forgael rejects her on the grounds of her mortality and insists on continuing his search for an immortal beloved; but Dectora has cut the rope of the galley and the two drift away into the unknown. (In the revised version, Dectora's order that the ship carrying her and Forgael be severed from the captive ship constitutes a positive choice by the lovers towards the fulfilment of their love).

The poem represents "the quest of an ideal, a spiritual ideal of which love is the symbol"<sup>72</sup> or, as Maurice Bowra has put it, "It is the poem of the poet's ideal love, of all such love as he understands it", a "symbolical expression", "lyrical" rather than "dramatic", of "dreaming ecstasy [and] of withdrawal into an ideal world of dream ..."<sup>73</sup> Yet it is interesting to note that Forgael's "dream", like Oisín's Tir Na N-Oge, is not a pale copy of reality but a substantial reality of which the real world is but a shadow:

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<sup>72</sup>A.M. Killen, "Some French Influences in the Works of W.B. Yeats at the End of the Nineteenth Century", Comparative Literature Studies, VIII (1942), 8.

<sup>73</sup>C.M. Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism (London: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 194, 195.

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....

                          I shall find a woman,  
 One of the Ever-Living, as I think --  
 One of the Laughing People -- and she and I  
 Shall light upon a place in the world's core,  
 Where passion grows to be a changeless thing,  
 Like charmed apples made of chrysopase,  
 Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chysolite;  
 And there, in juggleries of sight and sense,  
 Become one movement, energy, delight,<sup>74</sup>  
 Until the overburthened moon is dead.

The most important manifestation of the "dream" woman in Yeats's early poetry is that of the "Pre-Raphaelite" woman, first discernible in "Ephemera" and recurrent in the poetry of the period up to 1899. The influence of the Pre-Raphaelites was very strong; for not only had Yeats's father "talked to him [when he was fifteen or sixteen] of ... Rossetti, given [him] his work to read and told him of his own essentially Pre-Raphaelite literary principles",<sup>75</sup> but there was everywhere about him, "in his father's studio and among his painter friends",<sup>76</sup> examples of Pre-Raphaelite paintings. The influence was to be reinforced by his friendship with William Morris after 1887;<sup>77</sup> even as late as 1913 he could discern traces of its prevailing power:

<sup>74</sup>VE, p. 227, ll. 100-104; p.231, ll. 209-218.

<sup>75</sup>Y:M&P, p. 22. Cf. A, 114-115. For Yeats's reading of Rossetti's Poems (1870) in 1880-1881, vide T.L. Dume, "William Butler Yeats: A Survey of the Reading" (diss., Temple Univ., 1950), p. 281.

<sup>76</sup>Graham Hough, The Last Romantics, University Paperbacks (London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961), p. 216. For the pictorial impact of Rossetti, vide, for example, A, pp. 114-15.

<sup>77</sup>For Yeats's early reading of Morris vide A, p.141; and for his personal influence vide A, pp. 139-43. The Pre-Raphaelite influence of Morris on Yeats's early poetry is fully discussed by Peter Faulkner, William Morris and W.B. Yeats (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1962), pp.4-12.

Two days ago I was at the Tate Gallery to see the early Millais's, and before his Ophelia, as before the Mary Magdalene and Mary of Galilee of Rossetti that hung near, I recovered an old emotion. I saw these pictures as I had seen pictures in my childhood. I forgot the art criticism of friends and saw wonderful, sad, happy people, moving through the scenery of my dreams. The paintings of the hair, the way it was smoothed from its central parting, something in the oval of the peaceful faces, called up memories of sketches of my father's on the margins of the first Shelley I had read, while the strong colours made me half remember studio conversations, words of Wilson, or of Potter perhaps, praise of the primary colours, heard, it may be, as I sat over my toys or a child's story-book. One picture looked familiar, and suddenly I remembered it had hung in our house for years. It was Potter's Field Mouse. I had learned to think in the midst of the last phase of Pre-Raphaelitism and now I had come to Pre-Raphaelitism again and re-discovered my earliest thought.<sup>78</sup>

Yeats's estimate of the women in the poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites is given in his reply to a request by Katharine Tynan for an article she was writing for Wilde's Woman's World in 1888:

... I have been thinking about the women of the poets, but I fear cannot help you much; I have not read any modern verse for so long a time ... Do you not think that there is a considerable resemblance between the women of all the neo-romantic London poets, Swinburne, Morris, Rossetti and their satellites? For one thing they are essentially men's heroines with no separate life of their own.... The ir heroines ... are powerful in conception, shadowy and unreal in execution ...<sup>79</sup>

The impact of the Pre-Raphaelite feminine ideal is evident in an excerpt from his unpublished autobiography:

I was a Romantic, my head full of the mysterious women of Rossetti, and those hesitating faces in the art of Burne Jones seemed always awaiting for some Alastor at the end of a long journey ...<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> E&I, p. 346.

<sup>79</sup> Katharine Tynan /Mrs H.A. Hinkson/, The Middle Years (London: Constable, 1916), pp. 37-38.

<sup>80</sup> Y:M&P, p.57. For a later estimate of Rossetti's woman "who have too much passion", vide V(B), p. 133.

The seeds of the Pre-Raphaelite influence are present in "Ephemera", Yeats's earliest known love poem to be included in the two-volume definitive edition published in 1949,<sup>81</sup> where the woman's "mournful beauty ... [and] frigid apathy" mildly recalls the "mysterious agony of Pre-Raphaelite love with its droop and heavy-lidded frustration",<sup>82</sup> embodied in the pale, langorous, sorrowful yet impassioned model of Elizabeth Siddal:

"Your eyes that once were never weary of mine  
Lie now half hidden under pendulous lids,  
Veiled in a dreamy sorrow for their love  
That wanes." "Ah, wistful voice," replied the other,  
"Though our sad love is fading, let us yet  
Stand by the border of the lake once more,  
Together in that hour of gentleness  
When the poor tired child, passion, falls asleep.  
How far away the stars seem, and how far  
Is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!"  
Pensive they paced along the faded leaves,  
While slowly answered he whose hand held hers --  
"Often has passion worn our wandering hearts,  
Earth's aliens. Why so sorrowful? Our souls  
Shall warm their lives at many a rustling flame!"

The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves  
Fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once  
A rabbit old and lame limped down the path --  
Autumn was over him -- and now they stood  
On the lone border of the sullen lake.  
Turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves,  
Gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,  
In bosom and hair.

Then he: "Let us not mourn  
That we are tired, for other loves await us.  
Hate on and love through unrepining hours.  
Before us lies eternity; our souls  
Are love, and a continual farewell."

He spake once more and fondled with his lips  
That word of the soul's peace -- "Eternity."

The little waves that walked in evening whiteness,  
Glimmering in her drooped eyes, saw her lips move  
And whisper, "The innumerable reeds  
I know the word they cry, 'Eternity!'  
And sing from shore to shore, and every year  
They pine away and yellow and wear out,  
And ah, they know not, as they pine and crease,  
Not they are the eternal -- 'tis the cry!"<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> It was written in 1884 (Comm., p.10).

<sup>82</sup> William Gaunt, The Pre-Raphaelite Dream (London: The Reprint Society, 1943), pp. 46, 65.

<sup>83</sup> VE, pp. 79-81.

The theme of this self-conscious "Autumn Idyl"<sup>84</sup> is the painful discovery of love, and the young lovers' individual responses to this discovery. The youth consoles himself with a belief in future loves; the woman disconsolately replies that eternity is evident only in the cyclic rhythm of nature and its indifference to human suffering.

Unlike the dialogue in Yeats's later semi-dramatic scenes ("Adam's Curse", for example, or "Michael Robartes and the Dancer") where there is a subtle interplay between the speakers and a rich appreciation of psychological and emotional tensions, the dialogue here is a mere dirge for two voices, the young woman echoing and throwing forward the dying cadences of her lover.

The mood of melancholy is enhanced by the fidelity to detail loved by the Pre-Raphaelites -- the faded leaves, the old rabbit, the dying reeds; and it is against this landscape that the image of woman emerges; the dolorous, languid woman of the Pre-Raphaelite dream. Indeed, all the Rossettian paraphernalia is there: the high-lighting of selected features -- eyes, lids, lips, bosom and hair -- leaving the rest of the woman's form, like the "Beata Beatrix" or the chalk drawing of Jane Morris entitled "Water Willow",<sup>85</sup> to recede into the misty reaches of the imagination; the (patently unsuccessful) eroticism in "pendulous lids" and, with unintentionally lugubrious effect, "drooped eyes"; the shy, prim (Yeatsian rather than Rossettian) allusion to "bosom and hair". By 1895 the second line had been tightened into a stylized Pre-Raphaelite posture, emphasizing the melodramatic

<sup>84</sup>The subtitle of the first printed version (VE, p. 79, *infra*).

<sup>85</sup>Vide H.C. Marillier, D.G. Rossetti ... (London: George Bell & Sons, 1899), pls. facing p. 126 and p. 165 respectively.

ritual of the dead leaves:

"Your eyes that once were never weary of mine  
Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,  
Because our love is waning".

And then she:  
"Although our love is waning, let us stand  
By the lone border of the lake once more ..."<sup>86</sup>

The type is more succinctly portrayed in "The Falling of the Leaves", a condensed version of the longer poem, in which the semi-dramatic interest has been pared to direct apostrophe. The conventional poetic diction is, if possible, even more painfully self-conscious and the lingering rhythms, their accent on long open vowels, serve to intensify the lovers' etiolated passions:

The hour of the waning of love has beset us,  
And weary and worn are our sad souls now;  
Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,  
With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.<sup>87</sup>

We should not be blamed entirely for mistaking the final results for parody.

A more poignant example of the Pre-Raphaelite type is contained in "The Cap and Bells", written in 1893.<sup>88</sup> The poem, based on a dream of which Yeats said: "The authors are in eternity",<sup>89</sup> is a pseudo-mediaeval allegory of love (owing something, I think, to Rossetti's "The Staff and Scrip"),<sup>90</sup> in

<sup>86</sup> VE, p. 79, ll. 1-5, supra.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 79, ll. 5-8, supra.

<sup>88</sup> Comm., p. 68.

<sup>89</sup> VE, p. 808.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. the emblematic titles; the Queen's three symbolic gestures in Rossetti's poem with the jester's threefold ritual of courting in Yeats's poem; the first line of the fifth stanza of Rossetti's poem with the opening line of Yeats's poem; and the sensuousness of the fifth stanza of Rossetti's poem with the first version of the seventh stanza of Yeats's poem. For Rossetti's poem vide Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Poems, ed. ... Oswald Doughty (London: J.M. Dent, 1957), pp. 28-33.

which the jester's three-fold ritual of courting implies a total surrender, reminiscent of "courtly love" in its sense of gallantry, obeisance and devotion. Though it suffers from an overlay of sentimentality and an element of selfconsciousness in the handling of the language, there is a certain simplicity and directness in the narrative, softened by the pervading dream atmosphere:

A Queen was loved by a jester,  
And once, when the owls grew still,  
He made his soul go upward  
And stand on her windowsill.

In a long and straight blue garment  
It talked, ere the morn grew white,  
It had grown most wise with thinking  
On a footfall hushed and light.

But the young Queen would not listen:  
She rose in her pale night-gown,  
She drew in the brightening casement,  
She snicked the brass bolts down.

He bade his heart go to her,  
When the bats cried out no more:  
In a garment red and quivering  
It sang to her through the door,

The tongue of it sweet with dreaming  
On a flutter of flower-like hair;  
But she took up her fan from the table,  
And waved it out on the air.

"I've cap and bells" (he pondered),  
"I will send them to her and die";  
And as soon as the moon had whitened  
He left them where she went by.

She took them into her bosom,  
In her heart she found a tune,  
Her red lips sang them a love-song,  
The night smelled rich with June.

She opened her door and her window,  
The heart and the soul came through:  
To her right hand came the red one,  
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,  
A chattering wise and sweet;  
And her hair was a folded flower,<sup>91</sup>  
And the quiet of love in her feet.

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<sup>91</sup>VE, pp. 1592461.

The Queen is perhaps the clearest illustration of Yeats's borrowings from the Pre-Raphaelites, although her proud petulance, delineated in the third and fifth stanzas, is closer to the impassioned gesticulations of Morris's women than to the restrained passion, sublimated in reverie, usually associated with Rossetti. Shades of Guenevere, perhaps, though even here the resemblance is physical rather than emotional: notice her sensuousness (in references to "red lips", feet and hair -- the latter an image always popular with the Pre-Raphaelites) and the contrived eroticism in her contrasting pallor ("She rose in her pale night-gown ..."). To this Yeats has brought his own peculiar ethereality and lightness ("... a footfall hushed and light" or better still, the "quiet and light footfall" of the revised 1899 version), while his description of hair is remarkably less sensuous than that of either Morris or Rossetti.<sup>92</sup>

The 1899 version shows greater confidence in the handling of the narrative and subtler variations in the manipulation of rhythm (indicated, for example, in the opening stanza and in the removal of the inversions in lines eight and fifteen), while the awkwardness of the third quatrain has been brought into line with the dream atmosphere of the whole:

She drew in the heavy casement  
And pushed the latches down.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Compare, for example, his "flutter of flower-like hair" or the metaphor of hair as "a folded flower" with Rossetti's physicality ("Sweet dimness of the loosened hair's downfall") (D.G. Rossetti. Poems, ed. O. Doughty [London, 1957], Sonnet XIII, p. 111) or that of Morris:

So Guenevere rose and went to meet him there,  
He did not hear her coming, as he lay  
On Arthur's head, till some of her long hair  
Brush'd on the new-cut stone -- ...

(William Morris, "King Arthur's Tomb")

<sup>93</sup> VE, p. 159, ll. 11-12, supra.



"The Sorrow of Love" and "The Rose of the World" differ from the poems previously discussed first, in that the "Pre-Raphaelite" image has been inspired by a powerful original source; and secondly, in that they represent Yeats's first conscious attempts to transform the image of woman into symbol.<sup>94</sup> What is interesting about these poems is the way in which the literary model prevails over the real source of inspiration (Maud Gonne), a fact which is substantiated by comparing the woman of the poems with the woman behind the poems, even as she is drawn by the same hand in the poet's unpublished autobiography. Witness Yeats's account of their first meeting:

I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the bloom of apples and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and stature so great that she seemed of a divine race. Her movements were works of grace and I understood at last why the poets of antiquity, where we would but speak of face and form, sing, loving some lady, that she seems like a goddess. I remember nothing of her speech that day except that she vexed my father full always of Mill and humanitarianism, by her praise of war, for she too was of the romantic movement ... As I look backward it seems to me that she brought into my life -- and yet I saw only what lay upon the surface -- the middle of the tent [*sic*], a sound as of a Burmese gong, an overpowering tumult that had yet many pleasant secondary notes ... There was something so generous in her ways that it seemed natural that she should give her hours in overflowing abundance ... But mixed with [*a*] feeling for what is permanent in human life there was something declamatory, but later in a bad sense perhaps even more unscrupulous.... She meant her ends to be unselfish but she thought almost any means justified in that service ... I felt in the presence of a great generosity and courage and a mind without rest, and when she ... had gone ... I had what I thought was a clairvoyant perception (of some immediate disaster) but was I can see now but an obvious deduction of an immediate waiting disaster.... I was in love but had not spoken of love and never meant to speak of love and as the months passed I gained a mastery of myself again. What wife would she make, I thought, what share could she have in the life of a student?<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>For a fuller discussion of these poems vide Ch. II, pp. 61-67 of this thesis.

<sup>95</sup>Y:M&P, pp. 59-60. Cf. C. Bradford, "Yeats and Maud Gonne", Texas Studies in Literature and Language (Winter 1962), 453, who writes "the middle of the tint". The latter is undoubtedly correct.

In "The Sorrow of Love" (written October 1891),<sup>96</sup> the Pre-Raphaelite core of the image (seen in the sensuousness of the "red mortal lips" and the overall effect of dreamy sorrow) is carefully built up into a powerful symbol of universal suffering. The image fails to carry its full weight, however, not only because of the second-person pronoun on which the subsequent hyperbole depends ("the whole of the world's tears", "all the sorrows", "all burden") but also because of its intrinsic anonymity. Yeats has failed to convey to the general reader the full significance of what is essentially a private symbol:

The quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,  
The full round moon and the star-laden sky,  
And the loud song of the ever-singing leaves  
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

And then you came with those red mortal lips,  
And with you came the whole of the world's tears,  
And all the sorrows of her labouring ships,  
And all burden of her myriad years.

And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,  
The crumbling moon, the white stars in the sky,  
And the loud chanting of the unquiet leaves  
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry.<sup>97</sup>

In the revised (1925) version, the underlying image has been filled out into a wholly intelligible symbol of universal dimensions. The anonymous "you" has been replaced by the word "girl" -- a not entirely satisfactory substitution, owing to its slightness and frailty, but nevertheless an improvement; the association with Helen of Troy is conveyed in the allusion to the Trojan War, suggested in the tragic overtones of the words "greatness", "doomed", "proud" and in the solemn, dignified rhythms; and though the handling of the image reveals an uneasy imbalance between style and sentiment, its total impact is stronger, harder, more lucid, and the image itself more concrete and objective:

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<sup>96</sup>Comm., p.35.

<sup>97</sup>VE, pp. 119-120.

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,  
 The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,  
 And all that famous harmony of leaves,  
 Had blotted out man's image and his cry.

A girl arose that had red mournful lips  
 And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,  
 Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships  
 And proud as Priam murdered with his peers;

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,  
 A climbing moon upon an empty sky,  
 And all that lamentation of the leaves,  
 Could but compose man's image and his cry.<sup>98</sup>

In the "Rose of the World" the Pre-Raphaelite "dream" woman is fused with the rose symbol of the title, symbolizing the permanence of Beauty and spiritual love in the midst of material flux:

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?  
 For these red lips with all their mournful pride --  
 Mournful that no new wonder may betide --  
 Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,  
 And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:  
 Amid men's souls that day by day give place,  
 More fleeting than the sea's foam-fickle face,  
 Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,  
 Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels in your dim abode;  
 Before ye were, or any hearts to beat,  
 Weary and kind one stood before His seat;  
 He made the worlds to be a grassy road  
 Before her wandering feet.<sup>99</sup>

Despite the technical weaknesses of the first printed version, the strength of this exquisite lyric lies in Yeats's complex handling of the image of his beloved: notice the expansion of the intrinsically "Pre-Raphaelite" model into an image of epic proportions (in the allusions to Helen of Troy and her Celtic counterpart, Deirdre); the use of conflicting tensions -- familiarity and remoteness, earthiness and

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., supra.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., pp.111-12.

ethereality, humanization and deification;<sup>100</sup> and the ingenious merging of woman and rose -- the latter an esoteric symbol derived from Yeats's interest in Rosicrucianism,<sup>101</sup> spoilt, however, by the introduction of the stylized "ninetyish" pose in the last stanza.

The love poems written during the second half of the nineties mark the summation of Yeats's early "dream" woman: the introduction of the "white goddess of the Pre-Raphaelite dream".<sup>102</sup> Though most of these poems were inspired not by Maud Gonne but by Mrs Shakespear, and though the underlying image is simultaneously more sensual and remote than that previously discussed, the woman evoked is, in fact, an extension and refinement of the Pre-Raphaelite type, modified by the influence of the poets of the nineties with whom Yeats came into contact through the Rhymers Club -- Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symonds, Oscar Wilde, among others. A characteristic feature of these poems is the total idolization of the beloved, coupled with the poet's obeisance or prostration before his mistress; and though her "cloud-pale eyelids" and "dream-dimmed eyes"<sup>103</sup> are strongly redolent of the Rossettian model, the image is conveyed in an idiom at once more rarified and sensual, precious and refined.

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<sup>100</sup>R. Ellmann refers to her as "beauty herself before God's throne, a conception ... indebted to the Kabbalistic and neo-Platonic theory that the Shekhinah or eternal womanhood is coeval with God." (IdY, p. 73.)

<sup>101</sup>Though in a note to Poems (London, 1895), Yeats refers to the rose symbol by the Irish poets (vide VE, p.842), he was later to ascribe it to Valentin Andrea, a seventeenth-century German theologian and mystic (vide Letters, p. 592). The symbol probably acquired further significance from a ritual of the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn, an order which Yeats joined on 7 March 1890, involving meditation upon the central symbol of the Rose. (Y:M&M, pp. 96-97, 89.) Cf. Ch. II, pp. 65-66 of this thesis.

<sup>102</sup>Thomas Parkinson, "Yeats and the Love Lyric", p.114.

<sup>103</sup>Vide "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty" (VE, p.164, 1899 version) and "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers" (*ibid.*, p. 163).

These elements are most clearly expressed in "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty", "A Poet to His Beloved" and "He Gives His Beloved Certain Rhymes". The first poem mentioned is an interesting example of the growing impact of the decadence, though woman continues to be worshipped not for her own sake but as a representation of the kind of beauty evoked by the poetry and art-work of the Pre-Raphaelites:

When my arms wrap you round, I press  
 My heart upon the loveliness  
 That has long faded in the world;  
 The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled  
 In shadowy pools, when armies fled;  
 The love-tales wrought with silken thread  
 By dreaming ladies upon cloth  
 That has made fat the murderous moth;  
 The roses that of old times were  
 Woven by ladies in their hair,  
 Before they drowned their lovers' eyes  
 In twilight shaken with low sigh;  
 The dew-cold lilies ladies bore  
 Through many a sacred corridor  
 Where a so sleepy incense rose  
 That only God's eyes did not close:  
 For that dim brow and lingering hand  
 Come from a more dream-heavy land,  
 A more dream-heavy hour than this;  
 And, when you sigh from kiss to kiss,  
 I hear pale Beauty sighing too,  
 For hours when all must fade like dew  
 Till there be naught but throne on throne,  
 Of seraphs, brooding, all alone,  
 A sword upon his iron knees,<sup>104</sup>  
 On her most lonely mysteries.

The significant features of the first printed version (which appeared in The Savoy in July 1896)<sup>105</sup> are the miraculous transformation of the material into the immaterial, the combined effect of sensuousness and ethereality, of time and timelessness. Here all is passion, sighs, sleepy odours, coloured by the romanticism, charm and remoteness of a Morris tapestry. The poem suffers from vacuity -- a sense of words being spun for their own sake -- and a certain extravagance in the hyperbolic claim that Beauty itself regrets the fading of passion;

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., pp. 155-56.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

but it should be remembered that these qualities are intrinsic to Yeats's method of composition and to the kind of effect he was attempting to achieve.

While the woman imaged is essentially "Pre-Raphaelite" -- notice the dream-heavy sensuousness of Rossetti -- certain telltale features already indicate the influence of the nineties: the stylized posturing in "lingering hand", the implicit sensuality of the kiss and the extended metaphor of woman as personified Beauty. By 1899 the closing lines had been reworked into a more intricate, closely woven climax:

And when you sigh from kiss to kiss  
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,  
For hours when all must fade like dew,  
But flame on flame, and deep on deep,  
Throne over throne where in half sleep,  
Their swords upon their iron knees,  
Brood her high lonely mysteries.<sup>106</sup>

The difference between these versions is not merely of pitch but of kind and intensity of imagination, the effect being more sensational and ultimately less in keeping with its soporific tapestried backdrop. The most significant feature of the revised version is the introduction of the idea of whiteness with its paradoxical associations, among the poets of the nineties, of innocence and voluptuousness, virginity and abandonment. In his interesting analysis of the "keen colour sense of the period", Holbrook Jackson explains:

White gleamed through the most scarlet desires and the most purple ideas of the decade, just as its experimental vices went hand in hand with virtue. In midmost rapture of abandonment the decadents adored innocence, and the frequent use of the idea of whiteness, with its correlatives, silver,

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 156, ll. 18-24.

moonlight, starlight, ivory, alabaster and marble, was perhaps more than half-conscious symbolism. It had also a dash of the debauchee's love of virginity....<sup>107</sup>

The clearest example of the "white" woman in Yeats's poetry occurs in "A Poet to His Beloved", the second of two poems originally entitled "O'Sullivan the Red to Mary Lavell". and almost certainly inspired by Olivia Shakespear:

I bring you with reverent hands  
The books of my numberless dreams,  
White woman that passion has worn  
As the tide wears the dove-grey sands,  
And with heart more old than the horn  
That is brimmed from the pale fire of time:  
White woman with numberless dreams,  
I bring you my passionate rhyme.<sup>108</sup>

The poem is a semi-religious incantation or votive offering -- precious, rarified, intense, weakly delicate -- the focal point being the relationship between the poet's reverent adoration and the object of his adoration. In one sense it is little more than an exercise in vowel music, with its closely interwoven rhyme scheme, the accent on the long open vowels, its part-rhymes and subtle vowel echoes: "numberless" - "dove-grey", "hands" - "passion", "white" - "tide", "woman" - "passion". This is poetry for the ear, carefully wrought and perfectly sustained, Swinburnian in its technical facility, hypnotic and spell-binding in effect. The image of the woman addressed is distant and remote, sensual yet mysterious, langorous and weary. There is a sense of timelessness about her; she is all flesh and vapour, passion and ice, mildly recalling the combined attractiveness and repulsive-

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<sup>107</sup> The Eighteen Nineties. A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century, The Life and Letters Series, No. 17 (1927), p. 140. For a fuller discussion of their obsession with whiteness by the men of the nineties vide Jackson, pp.140-42.

<sup>108</sup> VE, p. 157. It was written in 1895 (Comun., p. 67).

ness of a Beardsley drawing. Despite the poem's technical excellence, the overall effect is literary and contrived.

"He Gives His Beloved Certain Rhymes" marks the extreme limit in this pale, weary, etiolated adulation of woman. Originally sung by a man's severed head in an early story by Yeats,<sup>109</sup> it is almost a parody not only of his "decadent" style, seen in the abundance of twin-epithets ("pearl-pale", "candle-like", "dew-dropping") but of the image of woman characteristic of this period. Notice the absurd posturing of clichés such as "pearl-pale hand" and "wandering tress", and the supreme abasement of the poet before his beloved:

Fasten your hair with a golden pin,  
And bind up every wandering tress;  
I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:  
It worked at them, day out, day in,  
Building a sorrowful loveliness  
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,  
And bind up your long hair and sigh;  
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;  
And candle-like foam on the dim sand,  
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,  
Live but to light your passing feet.<sup>110</sup>

The second type of "dream" woman in Yeats's early poetry is that of the femme fatale, embodied in Niamh, fairy heroine of The Wanderings of Oisín, and sporadically evoked in some of his very early poems not included in the two-volume definitive edition. According to Mario Praz's fascinating study, the image of the Fatal Woman -- the type of diabolical beauty whose irresistible attraction proves "fatal" to her innocent and generally morally superior victim -- seems to have captured the imagination of Europe during the latter part of the nineteenth century: a particular brand that originated in Gautier and

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<sup>109</sup>"The Binding of the Hair" (vide VE, pp. 157, 840, IV).

<sup>110</sup>VE, pp. 157-58 (1897 version).



Flaubert, was fully developed in Swinburne and passed through him to Pater and Oscar Wilde.<sup>111</sup> The influence of Wilde and Pater on Yeats's femme fatale must necessarily be discounted -- he read The Renaissance only from about 1889 to 1891,<sup>112</sup> while Salome and The Sphinx were published in 1893 and 1894 respectively,<sup>113</sup> both after significant manifestations in his own poetry; but he must have encountered the concept in Keats whom he read from the age of seventeen,<sup>114</sup> and Swinburne (Poems and Ballads [1866], Atalanta in Calydon, Chastelard),<sup>115</sup> while Rossetti's Poems (1870) and Morris's The Defence of Guenevere may have provided more subtle influences.<sup>116</sup>

One of the earliest instances of the femme fatale in Yeats's poetry is that of the beautiful Enchantress, the "sad lady" in The Island of Statues, which appeared in The Dublin University Review from April to July 1885.<sup>117</sup> Following the tradition of the Shakespearean romantic

<sup>111</sup>The full development is discussed by Mario Praz. The Romantic Agony, tr.... Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 210, 213-58, 312-17.

<sup>112</sup>Vide T.L. Dume, "William Butler Yeats ... His Reading" (1950), p. 278.

<sup>113</sup>Vide M. Praz, The Romantic Agony (1970), pp. 312, 256.

<sup>114</sup>Dume, "Yeats's Reading", pp. 260-61.

<sup>115</sup>According to Dume (p.296), Yeats read Atalanta in Calydon in 1881-1882, Poems and Ballads (1866) in 1884, and Chastelard about 1888. For a detailed analysis of the femme fatale in Swinburne's work, vide Praz, pp. 229-46. For a specific reference by Yeats to women in Swinburne's poetry vide Katharine Tynan [Mrs H.A. Hinkson] The Middle Years (1916), p. 37.

<sup>116</sup>According to Dume (pp. 281, 274) Yeats read these works in 1880-1881 and in about 1882 respectively. For the element of the femme fatale in Morris and Rossetti, vide Praz, The Romantic Agony, pp. 227-29. With regard to Morris, note especially "Praise of My Lady", "King Arthur's Tomb" and "The Eve of Crecy". (Vide William Morris, Prose and Poetry (1856-1870)....London, Edinburgh, Glasgow: Oxford Univ. Press, 1913), pp. 307-309, 196-207, 269-270 respectively.

<sup>117</sup>VE, p. 645.

comedies, the heroine (the "wittie" plucky Naschina) has disguised herself as a boy, in order to find the mysterious flower which will release her lover Almintor from the clutches of her enemy. After a series of fantastic episodes the spell of the hapless Enchantress is broken, and, somewhat less spectacularly than Matilda, the diabolical witch in Lewis's The Monk who, according to Praz's excerpt, disappears from her lover's sight "'in a cloud of blue fire'",<sup>118</sup> she creeps away to die:

Naschina.

I plucked her backwards by her dress of green  
To question her -- ...

But the goblin queen  
Faded and vanished, nothing now is seen,<sup>119</sup>  
Saving a green frog dead upon the grass.

The moral of this "Arcadian Faery Tale", whose stylized poetic diction and limping rhythms hardly anticipate the later Yeats, is presumably the triumph of good over evil, represented by the respective contending female characters. Although the young poet's delineation of the Enchantress cannot be expected to reveal the superb imaginative insight into evil of a Coleridge, for example, it is interesting to note that he has tried to portray her as a femme fatale: our first immediate knowledge of her is derived through a singing voice which proclaims her identity with Lilith -- the influence of Rossetti's sonnet of that title, perhaps?<sup>120</sup> reference is made to her pallor<sup>121</sup> -- the typical "fatal woman" is always pale;

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<sup>118</sup> Praz, p. 204.

<sup>119</sup> VE, p. 676, ll. 264-65, 267-69.

<sup>120</sup> Vide Rossetti: Poems, ed. O. Doughty (1957), p. 142.  
For the Song vide VE, pp. 654-55, ll. 60-83.

<sup>121</sup> She is addressed as "pale one" (VE, p. 673, l. 196): note also her "wan face" (ibid., p. 674, l. 200).

and the image of her flashing eyes ("What mean the lights that rise / As light of triumph in thy goblin eyes --")<sup>122</sup> evokes all those fatal women whose look blinds or dazzles the beholder: Matilda, her eyes "'sparkl[ing] with terrific expression";<sup>123</sup> Nyssia, "cette apparation surhumaine . . . , ce monstre de beauté", whose eyes are double-pupilled, "fabulous",<sup>124</sup> la belle dame sans merci who has "wild" eyes.

Traces of the "fatal woman" are evident also in "Time and the Witch Vivien", where the beautiful Enchantress contemplates her reflection in water ("Gold unto gold, a gleam in its long hair");<sup>125</sup> and in Mosada, in the poem of that title, which was first printed in The Dublin University Review, in June 1886.<sup>126</sup> The story concerns a beautiful Moorish woman, deserted by her lover Gomez during the Spanish Inquisition, for fear of reprisals by the Christian Church. Owing to her open practice of magic, she is imprisoned by the fanatic monk Ebremar and condemned to death at the stake. Unaware that Ebremar is really her lover in disguise, she takes poison. Too late he reveals his identity and plans for escape, and Mosada dies in his arms.

Though she is portrayed primarily as a tragic heroine -- indeed, she may be considered Yeats's first tragic heroine --

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<sup>122</sup>VE, p. 674, ll. 198-99.

<sup>123</sup>Praz, p. 203.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>125</sup>VE, p. 720, l. 3. Cf. the following lines from Rossetti's "Lilith":

... so went  
Thy spell through him, and left his straight neck bent,  
And round his heart one strangling golden hair.

(Rossetti: Poems, p.142)

<sup>126</sup>VE, p. 689.

there is an element in Mosada's character which is out of keeping with the overall impact of goodness: her association with witchcraft. Early in the poem she summons "a Phantom fair / And calm, robed all in raiment moony white ...",<sup>127</sup> "a great enchantress" whose "far-off singing guile"<sup>128</sup> has lured many a man to his death -- a re-casting of the legend of the Siren, one of the oldest examples of the "fatal woman" in literature.<sup>129</sup> The Second Monk, furthermore, rebukes the First Inquisitor's pleas for her release with a reference to her "fatal" hold over the boy Cola:

And know you not she kissed that pious child  
With poisonous lips, and he is pining since?<sup>130</sup>

The most important manifestation of the femme fatale in Yeats's early poetry, is, however, Niamh, fairy heroine of The Wanderings of Oisín, Yeats's first significant recreation of Gaelic myth.<sup>131</sup> Though one can only speculate about the poem's personal significance for Yeats -- "The romance is for my readers. They must not even know there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out ..."<sup>132</sup> -- there is sufficient evidence to assume a strong, though subconscious identification with "noble Oisín and his fame", the poet and the man of action:

" ... for he is fair above  
All men, and stronger of his hands,  
And drops of honey are his words,  
And glorious as Asian birds  
At evening in their rainless lands ..."<sup>133</sup>

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 693, ll. 76-77.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., ll. 78, 88.

<sup>129</sup>Vide Praz, p. 199.

<sup>130</sup>VE, p. 696, ll. 6-7.

<sup>131</sup>It was first published in 1889; the first version seems to have been completed in the autumn of 1887 (Comm., p. 521).

<sup>132</sup>Y:M&P, p. 46.

<sup>133</sup>VE, p. 7, ll. 62a-66, *infra*.

In "News for the Delphic Oracle", he was to reassess her as a "man-picker"<sup>134</sup> and "The Circus Animals' Desertion" contains a frankly autobiographical comment:

What can I but enumerate old themes?  
 First that sea-rider Oisín led by the nose  
 Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,  
 Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,  
 Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,  
 That might adorn old songs or courtly shows;  
 But what cared I that set him on to ride,  
 I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride?<sup>135</sup>

The theme of the poem is the futility of man's attempt to escape the knowledge of his mortality and the fact that death, and its concomitant factor sorrow, are inextricably bound up with the mortal condition.<sup>136</sup> In Yeats's version of the story, Oisín hunting one morning after the battle of Gabhra, is approached by Niamh, daughter of the king of Tir Na N-Oge, who invites him to come away with her to the Land of the Young where she promises him immortal happiness. Despite the pleas of his father and of his comrades of the Fianna, Oisín agrees; and together they leave for the Land of the Young, stopping first at the Island of the Living where they hunt and fish and love for a hundred years. Their happiness is interrupted by the appearance of a dead warrior's lance washed up by the tide, which reminds Oisín of his former comrades. Niamh, sensing his nostalgia, persuades him to accompany her to the Island of Victories, where they find an unhappy maiden held captive by a fiendish demon, which Oisín gallantly fights for a hundred years, when the sight of a beech-bough, borne by the surges, again brings back memories of his past. Knowing that their happiness together is over, Niamh takes him to the Island of Forgetfulness, where they fall into a deep sleep for a further hundred years. On awaking he sees a starling fall from the air

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<sup>134</sup>CP, p. 376.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>136</sup>Vide Appendix B, pp. 242-43 of this thesis.

and is again reminded of his companions. This time the desire to return to Ireland is irresistible and Niamh reluctantly gives him leave to go, on condition that he does not set foot on mortal soil. Oisín promises; but on arriving in Ireland discovers that the Fenians have died many years ago and that a new dispensation has replaced the old. "Lonely, and longing for Niamh", he decides to return to her fairy kingdom; but while leaning from his saddle to assist two men in lifting a sack of sand, he falls from his horse and instantaneously becomes a withered old man. In this state he is taken to the church of Saint Patrick, where he defiantly declares his allegiance to the Fenians.

Like the "glimmering girl" in "The Song of Wandering Aengus" or the fairies in "The Stolen Child" or the fairy child in The Land of Heart's Desire, Niamh represents man's desire for immortal happiness, freedom from care and responsibility, or, as Edmund Wilson puts it, "the world of the imagination ... infinitely delightful, infinitely seductive ... [yet] somehow incompatible with, and fatal to, the good life of [the] actual world which is so full of weeping and from which it is so sweet to withdraw."<sup>137</sup>

Yeats's delineation of Niamh reveals an interesting, though uneasy, amalgam of two clearly definable yet strangely complementary traditions.<sup>138</sup> On the one hand he has taken over the main lines of the Naimh figure prevalent in the adaptations from the Gaelic; on the other, he has attempted to recast her as a kind of femme fatale. From the Gaelic tradition Yeats inherited mainly the conception of Niamh as

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<sup>137</sup>Vide ["W.B. Yeats"], in The Permanence of Yeats, ed. James Hall and Martin Steinmann, Collier Books (New York: Crowell-Collier), 1961, p. 16.

<sup>138</sup>I do not know to what extent they are independent, however.

a tangible, albeit illusionary embodiment of the "other world", essentially non-moral and lacking in the deliberate intent to do evil.<sup>139</sup> On the other hand, he has invested her with a demoniac element almost totally lacking in the Gaelic models from which he adapted his poem and probably suggested to him by the "fatal women" in the English poets from Keats onwards: Swinburne's Dolores, Faustine, Venus (in "Laus Veneris"); Rossetti's Helen, Sister Helen, Lilith; and, subconsciously perhaps, Keats's belle dame sans merci.

To elaborate: Yeats's Niamh really is a supernatural visitant, sent, as Bryan O'Looney has written in his preface to Michael Comyn's poem,<sup>140</sup> by the "fairy nobles" of Fairy Hill, one of whose duties is "to mark the persons suitable to [The Land of Youth], and ... [to] meet or send messengers to carry off those persons":

It is in the shape of a beautiful lady, such as ... golden-headed, (haired) Niamh, that this messenger is generally seen. After the human creature whom she has visited has seen her, she vanishes in some magic way, and goes back to her own country. Ere long the person visited will pine away by some formal disease, and will be said to die, but fairy tradition proves that he or she ... does not die, but that they go into this elysium, where they will become young again and live for ever.<sup>141</sup>

Yeats's rendering adheres, furthermore, to a human element in Niamh evident in O'Looney's translation of Comyn's poem -- her capacity for weeping and sorrow -- though in

<sup>139</sup>For this observation I am indebted to W.T. Stace, "The Faery Poetry of Mr. W.B. Yeats", British Review, I,1(January 1913), 117-130, and Edmund Wilson, ["W.B Yeats"], in The Permanence of Yeats, p. 16.

<sup>140</sup>"The Land of Youth", ed. Bryan O'Looney, Transactions of the Ossianic Society for the Year 1856, IV (Dublin, 1859) pp. 234-79. For the preface vide O'Looney, pp.229-32. According to Russell K. Alspach, "Some Sources of Yeats's The Wanderings of Oisín", PMLA, LVIII, 3 (September 1943), 856, Yeats must have read O'Looney's preface in Crofton Croker's Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland, 3 vols. (London, 1825-28).

<sup>141</sup>Bryan O'Looney, ed., "The Land of Youth", p. 232.

paler terms.<sup>142</sup> Learning of Oisín's avowed intent to fight the evil demon, she weeps; on perceiving his nostalgic longing for his former companions she is "mournful, white with sudden cares ..."; realizing his intended departure she is "sad Niam"; and ultimately, after a gradual reversal of rôles, she is clearly at the mercy of the "flaming lion of the world".<sup>143</sup>

That Yeats intended to portray her as a kind of femme fatale is seen, however, not only in the laborious wording of the title of the first published version (The Wanderings of Oisín and How a Demon Trapped Him ...)<sup>144</sup> but in persistent allusions to her diabolical motives. Saint Patrick opens the poem with a reference to the "amorous demon thing"<sup>145</sup> who has held Oisín in her clutches -- the idea is retained in later versions, though the wording is pared and pruned -- and even Oisín refers to her as "that goblin rare",<sup>146</sup> while his taking off suggests the victory of a calculated seduction:

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<sup>142</sup>Vide the following stanzas from O'Looney's translation:

O/isín/ " 'Tis a woe to me, O loving Oisín,  
That thou ever goest to green Erin;  
'Tis not now as it has been;  
And thou never shalt see Fionn of the hosts.  
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.  
I looked up into her countenance with compassion,  
And streams of tears ran from my eyes,  
O Patrick! thou wouldst have pitied her  
Tearing the hair off the golden head.

("The Land of Youth", p.269)

<sup>143</sup>Vide VE, p. 35, l. 92, *infra*; p. 44, l.229a, *infra*; p.52, l. 74, *infra*; p. 56, l. 136, *infra* respectively.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p.1.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 2., l. 4. *infra*.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 6, l. 54, *infra*.



Then sighed she softly, "Late! 'tis late!  
Mount my white steed, for my fairy state  
Lies far." I mounted, and she bound me  
In triumph with her arms around me ...<sup>147</sup>

It is difficult to say whether the "fatal" element in Yeats's delineation of Niamh was subconsciously reinforced by the underlying idea of fatality in the adaptations from the Gaelic. Certainly the most important Gaelic models upon which Yeats drew are remarkably free of the femme fatale. With the exception of John Hawkins Simpson's version in which Oisín's companion is described as a "fair enchantress" -- and evidence is lacking that Yeats knew it<sup>148</sup> --- and John Banim's The Celt's Paradise, parts of which could have come straight from Coleridge,<sup>149</sup> the most important earlier renderings depict Niamh with wholesome admiration and delight.

Chief of these is O'Looney's translation of Michael Comyn's poem "The Lay of Oisín on the Land of Youths," which appeared in Transactions of the Ossianic Society (1859) and provided, according to Russell K. Alspach, Yeats's chief source:

O/ísin/: 'Twas not long 'till we saw, westwards,  
A fleet rider advancing towards us,  
A young maiden of most beautiful appearance,  
On a slender white steed of swiftest power.  
  
We all ceased from the chase,  
On seeing the form of the royal maid;  
'Twas a surprise to Fionn and the Fianns,  
They never beheld a woman equal in beauty.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 9, ll. 102-103, 106-107 *infra*.

<sup>148</sup> Vide R.K. Alspach, "Some Sources of The Wanderings of Oisín", p. 857. For the quotation vide John Hawkins Simpson, Poems of Oisín, Bard of Erin ... (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1857), p. 187.

<sup>149</sup> Vide The Celt's Paradise. In Four Duans (London: John Warren, 1821), pp. 29-30. It is difficult to know for certain, however, whether Yeats had read it before the completion of the first manuscript version of Oisín in the autumn of 1887. For Yeats's familiarity with it vide Alspach, p. 857, n. 31, *infra*.

A royal crown was on her head;  
And a brown mantle of precious silk,  
Spangled with stars of red gold,  
Covering her shoes down to the grass.

A gold ring was hanging down  
From each yellow curl of her golden hair;  
Her eyes blue, clear, and cloudless,  
Like a dew drop on the top of the grass.

Redder were her cheeks than the rose,  
Fairer was her visage than the swan upon the wave,  
And more sweet was the taste of her balsam lips  
Than honey mingled thro' red wine.<sup>150</sup>

One of Patrick Kennedy's versions, "The Old Age of Oisín", which, according to Alspach, Yeats "knew without doubt",<sup>151</sup> refers briefly to Niamh's "resplendent beauty";<sup>152</sup> in another he dwells on her appearance with loving detail:

A maiden of the most rare beauty, mounted on a white steed, was seen advancing towards them. Her hair was the colour of red gold, her robes of green and azure silk, and wreaths of diamonds and pearls decked her head, and encircled her neck and shoulders.<sup>153</sup>

And Patrick Weston Joyce, whose version Yeats probably knew,<sup>154</sup> paints a similar picture in prose of ethereal lightness and charm:

We were not long ... engaged / in raising the deer from the thickets / when we ... perceived ... a maiden on a white steed.... A slender golden diadem encircled her head; and she wore a brown robe of silk, spangled with stars of red gold, which was fastened in front by a golden brooch, and fell from her shoulders till it swept the ground. Her yellow hair flowed far down over her robe in bright, golden ringlets. Her blue eyes were as clear as the

<sup>150</sup> O'Looney, p. 237. The question of sources is fully discussed by Alspach, pp. 849-66.

<sup>151</sup> Alspach, p. 857.

<sup>152</sup> In Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts (London: Macmillan, 1891), p. 212.

<sup>153</sup> "Oisín in Tir Na-N-Oge", in The Bardic Stories of Ireland (Dublin, 1871), p. 143.

<sup>154</sup> Alspach, p. 857.

drops of dew on the grass; and while her small, white hand held the bridle and curbed her steed with a golden bit, she sat more gracefully than the swan on Lough Lein.<sup>155</sup>

Yeats's delineation differs from those of his Gaelic models in two ways: first, in his attempt to reconcile the demoniac and human facets of Niamh's appeal; and secondly, in sacrificing their brilliant sensuous detail in favour of a certain Shelleyean fluidity and the remote externalized description characteristic of William Morris. After the first casual impression of quiescent innocence, there emerges suddenly a dark disquieting note, a nervous unrest that is strangely disturbing:

His mistress was more mild and fair  
Than doves that moaned round Eman's hall  
Among the leaves of the laurel wall,  
And feared always the bow-string's twanging.  
Her eyes were soft as dewdrops hanging  
Upon the grass-blades' bending tips,  
And like a sunset were her lips,  
A stormy sunset o'er doomed ships.  
Her hair was of a citron tincture,  
And gathered in a silver cincture;  
Down to her feet white vesture flowed,  
And with the woven crimson glowed  
Of many a figured creature strange,  
And birds that on the seven seas range.  
For brooch 'twas bound with a bright sea-shell,  
And wavered like a summer rill,<sup>156</sup>  
As her soft bosom rose and fell.

The reason lies, of course, in the introduction of a demoniac, sinister element in Niamh's beauty, in the sense of power to do or will evil (vaguely reminiscent of the Ancient Mariner's confrontation with Life-in-Death), silver and citron, and by the conflict, always prevalent in delineations of the

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<sup>155</sup>"Oisín in Tirnanog; or, The Last of the Fena" in Old Celtic Romances, 3rd ed., rev. & enlarg. (London, New York, Bombay: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907), pp. 385-86.

<sup>156</sup>VE, pp. 3-4.

"fatal woman", between the lurid and virginal aspects of her appeal. And though the lovingly elaborated description is strongly reminiscent of William Morris,<sup>157</sup> there is a hint of "Christabel", even in the use of the rhymed tetrameter:

There she sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair.<sup>158</sup>

The 1895 version is more delicately tinted; the threads of the tapestry more finely drawn. Instead of the sprawling, one-dimensional effect of her earlier counterpart, Niamh is viewed first from afar, silhouetted against the horizon, then at shorter distance. Her immediate visual appeal, one of translucent, almost unearthly beauty, glows through the misty eeriness of the poem. A further moral dimension, suggested by the assonance in "doomed" - "gloomed", "glimmering crimson", ironically offsets the first fleeting impression, in the harder magnetic attraction, the fatal luminosity of her allure. The result is a swiftly changing yet harmonious combination of fate and surprise, rendered with superb artistry. Iseult has given way to Guenevere:

<sup>157</sup> Cf., for example, the description of Brynhild in The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs, 8th imp. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1904), pp. 163-64, and vide also p. 214. For the date of Yeats's reading of the poem vide Dume, p. 274. Cf., however, Yeats's comment to Katharine Tynan, The Middle Years (1916), p. 38.

<sup>158</sup> S.T. Coleridge, Coleridge's Poems, sel. and ed. J.B. Beer, Everyman's Library (London: Dent, New York: Dutton, 1963), p. 196, ll. 58-65. For the influence of Coleridge, whom Yeats probably read for the first time in 1884, vide Dume, p. 235. For further details concerning Yeats's attitude to Coleridge vide WEY, pp. 62-63.

Caoilte, and Conan, and Finn were there,  
 When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,  
 . . . . .  
 And passing the Firbolgs' burial mounds,  
 Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill  
 Where passionate Maeve is stony-still;  
 And found on the dovey-grey edge of the sea  
 A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode  
 On a horse with bridle of findrinny;  
 A citron colour gloomed in her hair,  
 But down to her feet white vesture flowed,  
 And with the glimmering crimson glowed  
 Of many a figured embroidery ...<sup>159</sup>

The third kind of "dream" woman differs from those already discussed in that it does not belong to a clear-cut literary tradition. "To an Isle in the Water", is, artistically speaking, a mere trifle; yet in its wistful de la Marish innocence, its sense of simplicity and undeniable sincerity, it has a refreshing charm and appeal:

Shy one, shy one,  
 Shy one of my heart,  
 She moves in the firelight  
 Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes  
 And lays them in a row.  
 To an isle in the water  
 With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,  
 And lights the curtained room,  
 Shy in the doorway  
 And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,  
 Helpful and shy.  
 To an isle in the water  
 With her would I fly.<sup>160</sup>

Certain features of the poet's description suggest that the "shy one" of his heart was almost certainly drawn from life; she has a characteristic bearing -- was she an obscure servant in the Pollexfen household?-- and moves with a distinct, if hesitant existence of her own. But even here Yeats's timid

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<sup>159</sup> VE, pp. 3-4, ll. 13-14, 16-27, supra.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 89, final version.

evocation of her figure, whose pensiveness is apprehended as if from a dim distant corner of the half-lit room, invests her with an aura of unreality.

Less earth-bound and home-spun are the women in the "Indian" love poems written under the influence of Shelley and probably prompted by Yeats's meeting with the Bengali Brahmin, Babu Mohini Chatterji, in about 1886.<sup>161</sup> Though Yeats's evocation of these women is more impalpable and intangible than their Shelleyean counterparts, there is something of Shelley's visionary quality in these poems, of his "dream of hopes ... [whose] voice was like the voice of his own soul", whose music

Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held  
His inmost sense suspended in its web  
Of many-coloured woof and changing hues.<sup>162</sup>

In the little Indian dramatic love poem, "Anashuya and Vijaha" (originally entitled "Jealousy / Scene"),<sup>163</sup> where the lover is torn between desire for the young priestess Anashuya and her illusionary counterpart, the latter, though she is described as "the daughter of the grey old wood-cutter", is little more than a whispered name, Amrita.<sup>164</sup> And the woman in "The Indian to His Love" is remote and shadowy as the

<sup>161</sup> WBY, pp. 47-49.

<sup>162</sup> P.B. Shelley, The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Harry Buxton Forman (4 vols.; London: Reeves & Turner, 1876-77), I (1876), 26.

<sup>163</sup> VE, p. 70.

<sup>164</sup> According to The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 3rd ed. (1946), p. 243, "Amrita" is a Sanskrit word meaning "immortal". In this context the poem may be interpreted as a conflict between mortal and immortal desire, symbolized by the two women. Cf. D.A. Stauffer, The Golden Nightingale (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 113; 163, n. 5.

landscape in which she moves, a pale phantom of a dis-embodied dream:

O wanderer in the southern weather,  
Our isle awaits us, on each lea  
The pea-hens dance, in crimson feather  
A parrot swaying on a tree,  
Rages at his own image in the dim enamelled sea.

. . . . .

There we will moor our lonely ship  
And wander ever with woven hands,  
Murmuring softly, lip to lip,  
Along the grass, along the sands --  
Murmuring how far away are all earth's feverish lands.<sup>165</sup>

The "dream" woman of Yeats's early poetry is thus an interesting and varied expression of the romanticism of the young poet, a romanticism that, while it is an integral part of his temperament, is nevertheless strongly reinforced by literary tradition. Though the predominant image takes a variety of forms drawn from numerous sources and models, it is curiously consistent in its sense of unreality and fantasy, and in its almost exclusive dependence on literary models. Within the limitations of the poet's youthful vision, his presentation of the image is fairly rich and varied, ranging from complex symbolism or extended metaphor to mere suggestion or evocation. In the following chapter we shall see how the continued impact of a forceful original source of inspiration was to transform this shadowy image into a highly individualized portrait, imbued with the first intimations of reality.

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<sup>165</sup>VE, pp. 77-78, infra. It is interesting to compare the following lines from Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon, excerpted by Mario Praz, p. 236:

... stretch thyself upon me and touch hands  
With hands and lips with lips ....

## CHAPTER II

### MAUD GONNE: THE MAKING OF MYTH (1889-1916)

The poems between 1889 and 1916 mark the extension, refinement and ultimate re-creation of the "dream" woman already evident in Yeats's early poetry. The Pre-Raphaelite model which continues to dominate the early poems of the period ("The Rose of the World", and "The Sorrow of Love", for example) gradually fades before the emergence of woman as unrequiting beloved, cast in a peculiarly individual mould -- beautiful, passionate, courageous, heroic, but simultaneously cruel, unkind and indifferent -- or, to put it differently, literary example gives way to the creation of original myth. The image in the early part of the period is expressed primarily in terms of symbol; that in the latter part, as it emerges in the numerous poems of the period, through word-painting or portraiture. Behind these images and this range of experience lies a single unifying factor: the powerful inspirational force of Maud Gonne.

Maud Gonne was the daughter of an English mother and an Irish father who served as a colonel in the British army.<sup>1</sup> Her first years were spent in apparent comfort and security; after her mother's death (when she was only four) she and her younger sister were entrusted to the care of a proud, respectable English nurse.<sup>2</sup> Her early upbringing was nevertheless carefree, if somewhat indulgent -- there are memories of eating giant strawberries in the garden of Howth Castle, while

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<sup>1</sup>A.G. Stock, "The World of Maud Gonne", Indian Journal of English Studies (Calcutta), VI (1965), 56.

<sup>2</sup>Maud Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen. Reminiscences. (London): Victor Gollancz, 1938), pp. 11-12, 17-19.



nurse spent hours in recurling the ostrich feathers of her hat<sup>3</sup> -- and her adolescence spent travelling through Europe and mixing with upper-class European circles, until she was recalled to Dublin (where her father had been appointed Adjutant General) and, though not yet seventeen, was required to fulfil social duties on his behalf.<sup>4</sup> At her father's sudden death she was placed under the guardianship of a dry and unimaginative uncle; and after a brief flirtation with acting, unfortunately cut short by illness on the eve of her first theatrical tour, she decided to dedicate her life to the attainment of freedom for Ireland.<sup>5</sup> In this she may have been subconsciously influenced by her father's intention to become a Home Rule candidate after he had resigned his Colonelcy in the British army: more likely she was flattered by the attentions of Millevoe, French orator, editor and Boulangiste, who was clearly using her for his own political purposes.<sup>6</sup>

Her relationship with Yeats, which resulted in nearly twenty-eight years of pursuit and almost totally unrelieved passion on his side, seems to have stemmed initially from the use she could make of him in advancing her acting career and later, through their long tortured friendship, in treating him as confidant in times of personal sorrow. While it is only fair to point out that, apart from one occasion which might have been interpreted as a prelude to love,<sup>7</sup> there was

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-29, 36-37.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-65.

<sup>6</sup>Vide especially Gonne MacBride, pp. 64-65.

<sup>7</sup>Vide Curtis Bradford, "Yeats and Maud Gonne", Texas Studies in Literature and Language. A Journal of the Humanities, III, 4 (Winter 1962), 460.

never any indication on her part of reciprocating Yeats's passion -- remember her affirmation in the early stages of their relationship -- never to marry<sup>8</sup> -- "only a hard woman could have [said] to a man really suffering from hopeless love [ 'You make poetry out of what you call your unhappiness and you are happy in that' ] and still have recorded [it] with pride a generation later."<sup>9</sup> George Moore pinpoints the affair truthfully, if unkindly, as "'the common mistake of a boy'",<sup>10</sup> while A.N. Jeffares sums it up more tactfully in the statement:

[Yeats] sought to serve her; and she found him a useful friend.<sup>11</sup>

Though it may be said that Yeats never really extricated himself emotionally from Maud Gonne -- a fact which is supported by the numerous references to her in his poetry even after his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees<sup>12</sup> -- their relationship between 1889 and 1916 falls into four distinct phases. The first opens with their meeting in London on 30 January 1889 (fully detailed in his unpublished autobiography)<sup>13</sup> and ends with Maud's rejection of his second proposal during Yeats's first visit to Paris, in February 1894.<sup>14</sup> The period is marked mainly by a series

<sup>8</sup>Y:M&P, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup>Marion Witt, "William Butler Yeats", English Institute Essays, 1946 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1947), p. 86.

<sup>10</sup>Y:M&P, p. 315, n. 33.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>12</sup>Vide especially "Human Dignity", "First Love", "Among Schoolchildren", "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?", "The Circus Animals' Desertion", "A Bronze Head" (CP, pp. 250, 249, 242-45, 388-89, 391-92, 382-83).

<sup>13</sup>Vide Y:M&P, pp. 59-60.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

of brief intermittent meetings in London, substantiated by correspondence; his visit to Maud in Dublin in the summer of 1891, concluding with his first unsuccessful proposal; Maud's intimation of her personal sorrow rising from the death of a little boy "Georgette" (whose father was presumably Millevoe); her initiation into and resignation from the Order of the Golden Dawn; their common meeting ground in work for Ireland; and a quarrel in 1893 followed by Maud's departure to Paris.<sup>15</sup>

The second phase (1894 to December 1896) constitutes Yeats's relationship with Olivia Shakespear, a married woman of literary and artistic interests whom he met early in 1894 and with whom he tried, with only partial success, to alleviate his "love sorrow":

Her face had a perfectly Greek regularity though her skin was a little darker than a Greek would have been, and her hair was very dark. She was quietly dressed with what seemed to me very old lace over her breast and had the same sensitive look of destruction I had admired in Eva Gore Booth. She was it seemed alone of our age to suggest to me an incomparable distinction ... She had profound culture -- a knowledge of French, English and Italian literature and seemed always at leisure. Her nature was gentle and contemplative and she was content it seemed to have no more life than leisure to talk to her friends. Her husband whom I saw but once was much older and seemed a little heavy ... As yet I did not know how utterly estranged they were. I told her of my love sorrow indeed it was my obsession never leaving me by day or night ... Her beauty, dark and still, had the nobility of defeated things....<sup>16</sup>

Though they were to maintain a sympathetic friendship (revealed in their "vivid and varied correspondence") for "more than forty years",<sup>17</sup> his mistress finally ended their liaison,

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<sup>15</sup>For these facts of their relationship vide C. Bradford, "Yeats and Maud Gonne", pp. 453, 454, 455 (twice), 457. For a detailed sympathetic account of the way in which Ireland's needs drew them together, vide A.G. Stock, "The World of Maud Gonne", pp. 61-64. Cf. Letters, p. 117.

<sup>16</sup>Y:M&P, p. 100.

<sup>17</sup>Letters, p. 916.

which lasted altogether "only some ten months",<sup>18</sup> owing to Yeats's inability to break emotionally with Maud Gonne.

The third stage extends from the renewal of his relationship with Miss Gonne during his second visit to Paris in 1896 to her sudden marriage, in February, 1903, to John MacBride. The period is marked mainly by Yeats's re-entry into Irish politics on a practical level (predominantly for the sake of Maud Gonne), evident in his reluctant membership of the Irish Republican Brotherhood late in 1896, involving his participation in preparations for the centennial celebration for Wolfe Tone, founder of the United Irishmen, by the end of that year.<sup>19</sup> (He also helped her to found a Young Ireland Society in Paris and accompanied her on a tour of the Irish in England and Scotland).<sup>20</sup> Despite their closer involvement in these political activities, Yeats was permitted no sexual relief in his love and was on the verge of emotional and physical collapse. After Maud's confession that "marriage was impossible because 'I have a horror and terror of physical love'",<sup>21</sup> they agreed to enter into a "mystical marriage" -- an attempt to send their souls to a meeting on some astral plane<sup>22</sup> -- to which Yeats remained faithful from 1898 until Maud's actual marriage five years later. In spite of her rejection of two further proposals, one in Paris at the beginning of 1899 and the other in London

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<sup>18</sup>Bradford, p. 459.

<sup>19</sup>Vide Y:M&P, pp.111-12, 112 respectively. Bradford (p.459) says however, that in joining the IRB "he had acted without any thought of Maud Gonne."

<sup>20</sup>Y:M&P, p.108; WBY, p. 150. For differences in their outlook on Ireland vide Y:M&P, p. 139, and Maud Gonne, "Yeats and Ireland" in Scattering Branches, Tributes to the Memory of W.B. Yeats, ed. Stephen Gwynn (London: Macmillan, 1940), pp. 20-25.

<sup>21</sup>Bradford, p. 461.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

in 1900,<sup>23</sup> Yeats was completely shattered by news of her marriage to "a red-haired high-spirited Celt ... who had led the Irish Brigade with the Boers."<sup>24</sup> He was thirty-seven years old and "broad-awake" and his most cherished dream had been blasted at a stroke ...

The years 1903 to 1916 echo the previous pattern of pursuit and rejection. After Maud's separation from her husband in 1905 -- she had converted to Catholicism and was thus unable to get a divorce -- Yeats turned to other women (Curtis Bradford mentions Olivia Shakespear and "a passionate interlude during his long friendship with Florence Farr")<sup>25</sup> and in June 1908 visited Maud in Paris, where he agreed to her offer of renewing the "spiritual marriage" of 1898.<sup>26</sup> Two years later he was involved in a liaison with "an unmarried woman past her first youth"<sup>27</sup> -- which led to further complications concerning possible pregnancy, and almost resulted in enforced marriage; but the outcome of further visits to Maud Gonne between May 1910 and 1916<sup>28</sup> was merely

<sup>23</sup>Vide WBY, p. 155; Y:M&P, p. 133 respectively.

<sup>24</sup>WBY, p. 188.

<sup>25</sup>P. 465. A.N. Jeffares offers further information about Mabel Dickinson around the period 1908-1911. (Vide "Women in Yeats's Poetry", in The Circus Animals. Essays on W.B. Yeats / Macmillan, 1970 /, p. 91, n. 41, infra.) This helps to clear up some of the mystery surrounding Miss Dickinson created by Thomas Parkinson, in "Yeats and the Love Lyric", James Joyce Quarterly, III (1966) 109, 115-16.

<sup>26</sup>Bradford, p. 465.

<sup>27</sup>WBY, p. 301. For this episode vide Bradford, pp. 466-67.

<sup>28</sup>Hone specifies May 1910 as "the first of many visits to her in Normandy ..." (WBY, pp. 236-37).

the continuation of this unsatisfactory state of affairs:  
 after the execution of her husband on account of his  
 participation in the Easter Rising of 1916, Yeats proposed to  
 her for the last time, only to be rejected again.<sup>29</sup> The  
 aftermath of this long, circuitous relationship was an  
 emotional involvement with Iseult, Maud's "adopted" daughter,  
 to whom he proposed -- and was rejected -- in 1917,<sup>30</sup> and his  
 sudden marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees on 20 October.

What ultimately can be said about Maud Gonne and how  
 is she portrayed in Yeats's poetry? Her most outstanding  
 feature was what G.B. Shaw appropriately termed her  
 "outrageous" beauty.<sup>31</sup> This fact is borne out not only by  
 Yeats's awe-inspiring accounts in his early letters and  
 unpublished autobiography<sup>32</sup> but by the spontaneous reactions  
 of men and women everywhere. Lily Yeats wrote of her: "She  
 is an immense height and very stylish and well dressed in a  
 careless way ... She has a rich complexion, hazel eyes";  
 while Elizabeth, with an edge of ill-concealed malice,  
 described her as "the Dublin beauty who is marching on to  
 glory over the heads of the Dublin youths."<sup>33</sup> Henry Nevinston,  
 a contributor to the Yellow Book said that she was so lovely  
 that "at the first sight of her I held my breath in

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<sup>29</sup>Y:M&P, p. 189. Cf. Ch. III p. 92 of this thesis

<sup>30</sup>Y:M&P, p. 190. An Irish nun with whom I chatted in Cape Town in January 1969 says that it was "common knowledge" in Ireland that Maud Gonne had two children by Millevoeye.

<sup>31</sup>WBY, p. 155, *infra*.

<sup>32</sup>*Vide* Letters, pp. 108, 116; Y:M&P, pp. 59-60 respectively.

<sup>33</sup>Y:M&P, p. 306, n. 35a.

adoration ...";<sup>34</sup> and Katharine Tynan refers to her "strange and winning beauty" which "drew all eyes to her":<sup>35</sup>

She was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and in keeping with her beauty was an exquisite voice. She dressed beautifully as well, and in Dublin, where taste in dress is not a strong point, her dress made her as conspicuous as her beauty. When one met her walking in a Dublin street one felt as if a goddess had come to earth ...<sup>36</sup>

Even in old age she was described as "the most spontaneous creature who ever bore the burden of beauty and purpose through a long tempestuous life";<sup>37</sup> and on another occasion as "the most beautiful ruin"<sup>38</sup> in Europe.

The essence of her character can be understood in terms of two dicta, urged on her by her father, which she upheld as the yardstick of her behaviour: "'You must never be afraid of anything, not even of death'" and "'Will is a strange incalculable force. It is so powerful that if, as a boy, I had willed to be the Pope of Rome, I would have been the Pope.'"<sup>39</sup> From these injunctions stems that courage and fearlessness which did not at first come easily, if we remember her self-imposed tests during childhood, of endurance against fear,<sup>40</sup> but which,

<sup>34</sup>Katharine Lyon Mix, A Study in Yellow. The "Yellow Book" and Its Contributors (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas; London: Constable), 1960, p. 258.

<sup>35</sup>In Twenty-Five Years. Reminiscences (London: Smith & Elder, 1913), p. 318.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Micheál MacLiammóir, "Maud Gonne", Harper's Bazaar, No. 2908, 124.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen, pp. 14, 15-16, respectively.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-15.

coupled with a love of adventure and novelty and a desire for being the centre of a drama, she learnt increasingly to cultivate on appropriate occasions.<sup>41</sup>

Her determination and resoluteness, backed by a passionate love of Ireland and a hatred of Ireland's oppression under English rule, are seen not only in her decision to work for Ireland, notwithstanding Michael Davitt's disappointing response to her eager offers of help and Irish hostility towards the intervention of women in political affairs, but also in the intensity with which she threw herself into her work, "equally reckless of the consequences to herself and the value of victory ... till her strength was exhausted and the victory won."<sup>42</sup> There is evidence, furthermore, of a strong ideal of service, coupled with a powerful gift of oratory<sup>43</sup> and a not inconsiderable acting ability. Witness the viewpoint of Micheál MacLiammóir, actor and founder of the Gate Theatre, who was to write:

Had Ireland had a different history or had this woman possessed a different spirit, she, with her great beauty and power would have been, I think, its leading tragic actress. As it was she became deeply engrossed in other labours and the stage suffered the loss. Those who remember her performances will agree with me; and

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<sup>41</sup>Remember, for example, the harrowing account of her first visit to Irish political prisoners in Portland Prison and her attempt to conceal her nausea at the conditions she found there, in order to boost the morale of the prisoners (ibid., pp. 127-30).

<sup>42</sup>A.G. Stock, "The World of Maud Gonne", p. 58.

<sup>43</sup>For Yeats's admiration of her oratory, first on the occasion of her description of the '48 famine before an audience of twelve hundred at Bordeaux, secondly during her tour of the Irish in England and Scotland, vide W.B. Yeats, Letters to the New Island, ed. H. Reynold (Cambridge: Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1934), pp. 149-53; A, pp. 364-65 respectively.



for us who know her as she is there can be little doubt.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, many of these qualities take on a bitter harshness when viewed against her private dealings or the results of her intense political beliefs. Despite the honesty and forthrightness of her autobiography, the reader is left with a growing sense of disquiet at her tendency to uphold as virtues measures which should be regarded at most as necessary evils -- her belief in the use of violence for the attainment of Irish freedom, for example -- and at her "one-idea'd-ness",<sup>45</sup> fanaticism and anglophobia which, however justified in terms of her country's history, seems silly and eccentric when expended on trifling issues: remember her petty triumph in hounding the simple British family who occupied the flat beneath hers in Paris, resulting in their forced removal from the building.<sup>46</sup> There is, furthermore, a persistent core of self-centredness, illustrated by her delight in creating a public stir wherever she went, and by an exaggerated sense of her own importance,<sup>47</sup> as well as a growing headiness stemming from her

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<sup>44</sup>Vide Theatre in Ireland, Irish Life and Culture, I (Colm Ó Lochlainn, 1950), pp. 11-12. Cf. Yeats's claim that "'she made Cathleen seem like a divine being fallen into our mortal infirmity'" and Stephen Gwynn's assertion that "Miss Gonne's impersonation had stirred the audience as I have never seen another audience stirred." (WBY, p. 175; Y:M&P, p. 138 respectively.)

<sup>45</sup>A term which she applied to Paul Déroulède, Boulangiste extremist and friend of Millevoe, and was honest enough to apply to herself (Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen, pp. 148, 124).

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 150-53. Cf. Micheál MacLiammóir's comment: "If she had a fault, it lay in the blind devotion that narrowed her outlook to a stony cloister." (Vide "Maud Gonne", Harper's Bazaar, No. 2908, 124.)

<sup>47</sup>For illustrations of these qualities vide her account of the grand finale of the chase of the two Dublin Castle sleuths ordered to follow her movements and her reaction to the news that a warrant had been issued for her arrest during her work in Donegal (Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen, pp. 101, 143 respectively).

success in dealing with evictions, which resulted in rash, at times irresponsible, behaviour. One remembers the assurance with which she promised the Irish prisoners release within specified periods and her attitude to tearing down the boarded up houses of the evicted tenants:

One by one the priests and I reinstated the evicted and collected the neighbours to rebuild the gables and put in the broken window panes. The honour of tearing down the wooden planks nailed across broken doors by the bailiffs was left to me. It was even more fun than building Land-league huts and much quicker ... I thought of the life-sentenced prisoners and breezily promised they should be released. I had no idea how it should be done, but I had convinced<sup>48</sup> myself as well as the people that we were invincible.

More important, however, and more relevant to our theme is her insensitivity in some of her personal relationships and her tendency to use people unscrupulously for her own ends. A casual paragraph in her autobiography proves that Yeats was not the only man to suffer at her hands; and there is a note of callousness in her reference to a

Mr Morton /a young barrister /with a remarkable gift of speech, who had a real love of justice coupled with a passing love for myself ... His devotion to me lasted some years and I fear was bad for his own career, but I had to encourage it for the sake of the prisoners.<sup>49</sup>

This is endorsed by Katharine Tynan's remark that "she was absorbed by an enthusiasm so passionate and sincere that nothing else mattered to her. For men, or women, she had no use at all, as men and women. They were so many pawns in the revolutionary game."<sup>50</sup>

The image that emerges in the poetry of the period continues the idealizing tendency characteristic of Yeats's

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>50</sup> Twenty-Five Years. Reminiscences. (London, 1913), p. 319.

early love poetry but introduces also a strong anti-idealistic strain. Although the counterpointing of "positive" and "negative" qualities and the denigration of the poet's beloved on the grounds of her unattainability resemble the handling of the image of the beloved in the poetry of the troubadours (as demonstrated by James J. Wilhelm, in his book on the subject),<sup>51</sup> Yeats's condemnation of unrequited love is based on emotional rather than physical grounds -- indeed, his love poetry concerning Maud Gonne is remarkably lacking in earthiness and sexuality.

There is, furthermore, evidence of a highly personal portrayal of his beloved, of a unique ability to apprehend her essential features and to expand them, fill them out, highlight them, until his portrait takes on a vibrant independence of its own. Part of the strength and impressiveness of these poems derives from the range and inclusiveness of Yeats's portrayal, from his delineation not only of her positive attributes -- her beauty, her heroic qualities, her energy, her fearlessness, her intensity, generosity and reckless courage -- but of her cruelty, her cold, unyielding austerity, her demanding nature, her aloofness and her almost total indifference to her lover's suffering. A.G. Stock traces the progression from an image that is merely the projection of Yeats's subjective longing to an individualized image with its own unique personality;<sup>52</sup> and Muriel C. Bradbrook talks of "the image of the beloved [as] an instrument of the primary imagination" and of the

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<sup>51</sup>The Cruellest Month: Spring, Nature and Love in Classical and Medieval Lyrics (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press), pp. 151-230. Vide especially pp. 151-66.

<sup>52</sup>Vide "The World of Maud Gonne", pp. 76-77 and cf. Ch. III p. 93 of this thesis.

poet, like the Elizabethan poets before him, "constantly remaking his world in his love poetry / and working out ... through one supreme relationship / the changing relation to everything else."<sup>53</sup>

The poems show a steady progression from the predominantly "Pre-Raphaelite" image of Maud at the beginning of the period to the mature full-bodied portraiture of middle age in "Broken Dreams". Within these polarities they become increasingly less dependent on literary models and more distinctly individualized, from the first significant evidence of individualized portraiture in "The Folly of Being Comforted" to the gradual emergence of an heroic element in the spate of poems written between 1908 and 1915: "A Woman Homer Sung", "Fallen Majesty", "Against Unworthy Praise", "No Second Troy", "The People", "Her Praise". At the same time the delicate idiom of Yeats's early poetry gives way to a more vigorous, manly style, reflected in and probably intensified by his altered literary taste: in his reading of Jonson, between 1901 and 1907,<sup>54</sup> in his admiration for Donne, whom he read in Herbert Grierson's edition of 1912,<sup>55</sup> and in the influence of Ezra Pound, of whom he wrote to Lady Gregory on 3 January 1913:

Ezra ... helps me to get back to the definite and the concrete away from the modern abstractions. To talk over a poem with him is like getting you to put a sentence into dialect. All becomes clear and natural.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>In "Yeats and Elizabethan Love Poetry", Dublin Magazine, IV, 2 (1965), 41.

<sup>54</sup>Vide T.L. Dume, "William Butler Yeats: A Survey of His Reading" (diss., Temple Univ. 1950), pp. 257-58.

<sup>55</sup>Vide Letters, p. 570.

<sup>56</sup>Y:M&P, p. 167. Yeats met him in 1909 and he became Yeats's secretary between 1913 and 1916. Vide Alex Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal (London: Peter Owen, 1966) pp. 71, 174-75. The date of their meeting is confirmed in Letters, p. 519.

Throughout this development Maud's image is filled out, elaborated and expanded against the broad mythologizing fabric of legendary queens, heroines and goddesses -- Maeve, Deirdre, Helen of Troy, Pallas Athene -- while she is simultaneously upbraided or reproached for her unkindness, inconstancy and indifference to the poet and finally, for her inability to requite his love.

The earliest poems in which Maud Gonne is significantly imaged are "The Sorrow of Love" and "The Rose of the World", both written before January 1892.<sup>57</sup> The presentation of the image differs from that of the later poems of the period first, in that the woman evoked is predominantly Pre-Raphaelite, indicating the pervading influence of Yeats's early "dream" woman and thus his continued dependence on a literary model; and secondly, in that the image is treated as a symbol (representation of an idea or an abstract reality beyond itself) rather than for its own sake. Though Yeats had not yet formulated his ideas on symbolism expounded in his essays "Magic", "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry", "The Symbolism of Poetry", "Symbolism in Painting", "Spenser's Poetry" and "William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy",<sup>58</sup> both poems are interesting examples of the kind of technical problem with which he was grappling and which he was tentatively exploring under the combined influence of his Blakean and occult interests on the one hand and the French

<sup>57</sup>The former was written October 1891; the latter appeared in National Observer, January 2, 1892 (Comm., pp. 35, 29 respectively).

<sup>58</sup>Vide E&I, pp. 49-50; 87; 155-59, 160-63; 146-47, 382; 116 respectively.

Symbolists (through the medium of Arthur Symonds)<sup>59</sup> on the other.

The underlying image common to both poems is that of the Pre-Raphaelite woman (fully discussed in the first chapter): sorrowful, dolorous, mournful, still, sensuous and "dream-heavy". Both the first and final versions of "The Sorrow of Love" and "The Rose of the World" emphasize her "red lips", and both poems stress her association with sorrow or suffering: "the whole of the world's tears", "the sorrows of her labouring ships" (in the first version of "The Sorrow of Love"), her "mournful pride" and loneliness in "The Rose of the World".<sup>60</sup> The poems differ, however, not only in the handling of the image of the poet's beloved but also in its symbolic significance -- explicit in the former poem, complex and allusive in the latter.

In "The Sorrow of Love" the poet's beloved is celebrated not merely for her own sake but as a symbol of universal suffering. The poem is an intimate record of a profound moral experience: the poet's re-discovery or renewed awareness, through the catalytic agent of his beloved, of the sorrow of the human condition. Despite its controlled, dignified pace

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<sup>59</sup>For the influence of Yeats's occult interests on his ideas on symbolism vide Giorgio Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art. Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W.B. Yeats. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 19-26; and for the French influence vide Graham Hough, The Last Romantics, University Paperbacks (London: Methuen; New York: Barnes & Noble), pp. 208-12, and E. Davis, Yeats's Early Contacts with French Poetry, Communications of the University of South Africa C29 (Pretoria: Univ. of South Africa, 1961) pp. 28, 51, 52. Cf., however, Letters, p. 592.

<sup>60</sup>For these references vide VE, p. 120, l.5, supra and infra, p. 111, l.2; p. 120, ll. 6, 7 infra; pp. 111, 112, ll. 2, 10 respectively.

and its moving simplicity, the poem suffers from a number of important defects: the first stanza is too "busy" and variegated for the length of the poem; the emotional key of the third stanza is pitched too high; and phrases like "the full round moon" and "earth's old and weary cry" show signs of selfconsciousness and straining after effect.

(Jon Stallworthy sums it up quite neatly when he says: "Yeats has not brought his subject into focus. The emotional colour is there, but the intellectual outlines are everywhere indistinct.")<sup>61</sup>

The most important feature of the poem, and its greatest strength and weakness, is the image of the woman in the second stanza, around which the poem's structure revolves and on which its meaning depends. Although the forcefulness of the image suggests a real source of inspiration (Micheál MacLiammóir tells us, incidentally, that Maud Gonne's lips were "naturally red to the end of her life"),<sup>62</sup> it is still strongly Pre-Raphaelite in impact, betraying its literary dependence; and though Yeats has succeeded in building up a powerful symbol of universal suffering -- we are reminded of his own Countess Kathleen, "the sadness of the world upon her brow"<sup>63</sup> -- the underlying image is too slight to support the accumulated weight of the hyperbole ("the whole of the world's tears"; "all the sorrows", "all burden", "myriad years")<sup>64</sup> and too intimate -- note the repetition of the second-person pronoun "you" -- to be conveyed to the general reader.

<sup>61</sup> In Between the Lines. W.B. Yeats's Poetry in the Making. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 50.

<sup>62</sup> In "Maud Gonne", Harper's Bazaar, p. 124.

<sup>63</sup> Y:M&P, p. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Vide VE, p. 120, ll. 6, 7, 8, *infra*, respectively.

The revised (1925) version, while it is undoubtedly more accomplished, more polished and more resonant than its earlier counterpart, is also harsher, more strident and more selfconsciously rhetorical: note, for example, phrases like "that famous harmony of leaves", "that lamentation of the leaves".<sup>65</sup> Yeats's remarks that his revisions were "but an attempt to express better what I thought and felt when I was a very young man"<sup>66</sup> are fully evident in the attempt to graft the style and insight of his later poetry onto the mood and emotion of the earlier version and the consequent imbalance between these elements.

The most remarkable change in this version is the increased objectivity of the poem's central image, a greater density and concentration, carrying with it a universality that is entirely intelligible to the reader. And though the basic image is still Pre-Raphaelite, it has been expanded and filled out into an entirely meaningful symbol. The implicit reference to Helen of Troy in the earlier version -- the source of which was probably Todhunter's Helena in Troas, a nineteenth-century neo-classical drama<sup>67</sup> -- has now become explicit: there is the suggestion of tragedy in the Greek sense, created by the key ideas of greatness, doom and pride wherein are mirrored and re-enacted the whole drama of the fall of Troy and a sense of national doom working itself out in history. Furthermore, the anonymous private symbol in the earlier version has now become an overt symbol: this is the woman whose beauty has sparked off the long train of historical events involving the fate of a whole nation. And in this

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 120, ll. 3, 11, supra, respectively.

<sup>66</sup>VE, p. 842.

<sup>67</sup>Y:M&P, pp. 60, 308, n. 70.



tragedy that is expanded now to epic proportions it is not man's suffering that has altered the poet's enjoyment of the natural landscape, but the knowledge that in the eternal working out of history, "man's image and his cry" are reduced to an insignificant nullity.

"The Rose of the World" is the most important example of Yeats's attempt to convert the image of woman into symbol. Though the image is, strictly speaking, used to personify the rose symbol of the title (the poem was originally called "Rosa Mundi",<sup>68</sup> owing to its Rosicrucian origins), so subtly is this done that it is almost indistinguishable from the predominant symbol of the rose.

The poem is a hymn of praise to Eternal Beauty in the flux of time, its most striking feature, apart from its extraordinarily original imaginative genius, being its exquisite musical qualities: the modulation of the iambic pentameter into the trailing infinality of the trimeter at the close of each stanza; the subtle interweaving of the rhyme endings with their long open vowels: the whole suffused with a pervading gentleness. Despite its structural discipline -- notice how each stanza opens with a rhetorical question, statement or command, followed by an elaborate eulogy -- the first printed version suffers from obvious technical defects -- the monosyllabic onslaught of the seventh line, the silly alliterative effects of the ninth -- which have fortunately been ironed out in the 1895 version.

The most important aspect of the poem, however, is the way in which Yeats has fused the image of his beloved with the complex Rose symbol of the title. Yeats's rose symbol has an

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<sup>68</sup>VE, p. 111, *infra*.

interesting and varied history; for though it must have been familiar to him through his study of Irish poetry (evident in a note to one of his "Rose" poems appearing in a volume published in 1892),<sup>69</sup> he later attributed it to Valentin Andrea (Johannes Valentine Andreae or Andreas), a seventeenth-century German theologian and mystic.<sup>70</sup> The complexity of the symbol in Yeats's poetry may thus be ascribed not only to the personal significance for him of the beauty of his beloved but also to its Rosicrucian origins: in Rosicrucian terms it means "the Divine Light of the universe",<sup>71</sup> in opposition to the temporal material world, symbolized by the cross.

In his handling of the image of his beloved, Yeats has seized on certain features of the Pre-Raphaelite model, but the image has been filled out and expanded by references to both Helen of Troy and Deirdre, thereby giving it tragic, sombre overtones. Part of the complexity and interest of the image derives from the tensions between opposing polarities: the woman's proximity and familiarity (suggested in "these red mortal lips") as if the poet were contemplating her beauty at close quarters, and her simultaneous remoteness in space and time, her combined sensuousness and ethereality, humanization and apotheosis. (Many years later Yeats was to write that "the quality symbolized as the Rose differ~~ed~~ from the Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that ~~he~~ had ~~im~~ imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar".)<sup>72</sup> The total impact is

<sup>69</sup>Vide VE, 798-99 and cf. VE, pp. 811-12.

<sup>70</sup>Vide Letters, p. 592.

<sup>71</sup>Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), p. 92.

<sup>72</sup>VE, p. 842.

unfortunately spoilt by the disparity of styles in the third stanza, where the phrase "weary and kind" carries with it the languid stylization of the nineties -- (an echo of Pater, perhaps?) -- though one critic (AE) disapproved of it on the basis that it introduced the "transient and incidental"<sup>73</sup> -- with the result that the personification here exceeds the bounds of the containing symbol. Nevertheless, apart from the "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time",<sup>74</sup> where the personification is sensitively handled, Yeats was never to achieve the degree of harmony between woman and rose that occurs in this poem.

The greatest change in Yeats's delineation of Maud Gonne occurs ten years after the first printing of "The Rose of the World", in "The Folly of Being Comforted", Yeats's first significant expression of individualized portraiture:

One that is ever kind said yesterday:  
 "Your well-beloved's hair has a thread of grey,  
 And there are little creases about her eyes;  
 Time can but make it easier to be wise,  
 Though now it's hard, till trouble is at end;  
 And so be patient; be wise and patient friend."  
 But heart there is no comfort, not a grain:  
 Time can but make her beauty over again  
 Because of that great nobleness of hers;  
 The fire that stirs about her when she stirs  
 Burns but more clearly; O she had not these ways  
 When all the wild summer was in her gaze;  
 O heart O heart if she would but turn her head,  
 You would know the folly of being comforted.<sup>75</sup>

The main weaknesses of the first printed version (which appeared on 11 January 1902)<sup>76</sup> are the self-conscious dialogue, especially in the fifth and sixth lines, a certain flaccidity in the handling of the language (note especially lines two and

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<sup>73</sup>Y:M&P, p. 308, n. 69.

<sup>74</sup>Vide CP, p. 35.

<sup>75</sup>VE, pp. 199-200.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

three) and the ambiguity of the closing lines: does the "she" designated in the concluding couplet refer to the beloved, thereby confirming the poet's belief that though she is more beautiful and thus more desirable in middle age, she is still unattainable; or does it refer to the friend, signifying that behind her kindly advice lies silent confirmation of the poet's own knowledge?

Despite these defects, the poem shows an important development in Yeats's portrayal of Maud Gonne: evidence of a real source of inspiration (opposed to the prevailing literary influence in the poems already discussed) and of the poet's attempt, in working out his relationship with his beloved, to portray the woman for her own sake rather than as a symbol.

The form that this individualized portraiture takes is threefold. First there is the heroic element (to be further developed in the numerous poems written about Maud Gonne between 1908 and 1915), seen in the reference to her "great nobleness" and in the hyperbolic claim that her beauty has been re-created in time: notice the sense of burning spirituality in the "fire" image, an image frequently associated with Maud Gonne.<sup>77</sup> Secondly, there is a suggestion of passion and wilfulness, of joyful intensity and sensuality (already prevalent in "The Old Age of Queen Maeve")<sup>78</sup> conveyed in the image "wild summer". Thirdly, the heroic element is juxtaposed with and enhanced by tell-tale realistic details (the "thread of grey" in her hair; "little creases about her eyes") which tend to soften the vibrant picture of her youthful beauty. Behind this idealizing tendency lies the image of woman as unrequiting

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<sup>77</sup>This is further developed in Ch. III, pp.105-107 of this thesis.

<sup>78</sup>Vide CP, 451-52, and cf. Ch. III, p.107 of this thesis.

lover: indifferent, unrelenting, unattainable.

Yeats's dissatisfaction with the poem is shown by his constant revision of it up to 1933, when it achieved its final form. The most important revision occurs in Selected Poems (1929) where the deliberate marking off of the closing couplet indicates his attempt to remove its ambiguity, with the effect of reinforcing the futility underlying the kindly words of advice by the well-meaning friend.<sup>79</sup> The final 1933 version is thus a brilliantly contrived drama moving from confidential talk to passionate self-examination where truth defies well-meaning commonplaces, back to the anguished declaration of truth, in which the friend's silent agreement is delicately suggested:

One that is ever kind said yesterday:  
 "Your well-beloved's hair has threads of grey,  
 And little shadows come about her eyes;  
 Time can but make it easier to be wise  
 Though now it seems impossible, and so  
 All that you need is patience."

Heart cries "No,  
 I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain.  
 Time can but make her beauty over again:  
 Because of that great nobleness of hers  
 The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,  
 Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways  
 When all the wild summer was in her gaze."

O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,  
 You'd know the folly of being comforted.<sup>80</sup>

While Yeats was forging a powerful image of individualized energy, he was still haunted by the softening effects of the memory of Maud's beauty. In the first version of "The Arrow" (written in 1901),<sup>81</sup> a brief evocation of her

<sup>79</sup>Vide VE, pp. 199-200, *infra*.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, *supra*.

<sup>81</sup>Comm., p. 87.

former freshness and innocence, the idiom and diction are already colloquial ("marrow", "for a reason", "out of season"), the rhymes affectedly casual ("no man" - "woman"; "blossom" - "bosom") and the rhythms reminiscent of daily speech; but the quality of imagination and a certain element of stylization in the delineation of his beloved are still suggestive of William Morris or Burne Jones:

I thought of your beauty and this arrow  
 Made out of a wild thought is in my marrow.  
 There's no man may look upon her, no man;  
 As when newly grown to be a woman,  
 Blossom pale, she pulled down the pale blossom  
 At the moth hour and hid it in her bosom.  
 This beauty's kinder yet for a reason  
 I could weep that the old is out of season.<sup>82</sup>

Behind the literary element, soon to be developed into images of queenliness and regality, lies the more individualistic element evident in the woman's intimate gesture. In the revised version of 1922, the portrait is stronger, leaner, more powerful, more in keeping with the characteristic energy of the later poems:

There's no man may look upon her, no man,  
 As when newly grown to be a woman,  
 Tall and noble but with face and bosom  
 Delicate in colour as apple blossom.<sup>83</sup>

In contrast to the delicacy of Maud's beauty delineated in this poem, the poems written between 1908 and 1915 pick up the heroic thread discerned in "The Folly of Being Comforted", thus paving the way for the fully-rounded portraiture of "Broken Dreams". "No Second Troy" (written in December 1908)<sup>84</sup> celebrates her as another Helen, stressing the heroic aspect of her beauty, its austerity and severity, of a kind "That is not natural in an age like this, / Being high and solitary and

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<sup>82</sup>VE, p. 199.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., ll. 3-6.

<sup>84</sup>Comm., p. 102.

most stern ..."<sup>85</sup> This description of her beauty is akin to that in "Peace", written two years later,<sup>86</sup> where the idea of conflict between a stormy life and a peaceful beauty, heightened by the austere classical analogy, is conveyed in terse, sinewy rhythms:

Ah, that Time could touch a form  
That could show what Homer's age  
Bred to be a hero's wage.  
"Were not all her life but storm,  
Would not painters paint a form  
Of such noble lines", I said,  
"Such a delicate high head,  
All that sternness amid charm,  
All that sweetness amid strength?"  
Ah, but peace that comes at length,<sup>87</sup>  
Came when Time had touched her form.

In the poems of the period Maud's heroism separates out into three main strands: her essential nobility, seen in her alliance with legendary queens and heroines; her energy, intensity, pride and passion, reflected in the images of fire and phoenix, and further expanded in "A Woman Homer Sung", "No Second Troy", "Fallen Majesty" and "That the Night Come";<sup>88</sup> and her generosity of spirit, evident in her attitude to both her social and moral inferiors.

Maud's nobleness is revealed not only in Yeats's frequent use of the word in describing her (in "Peace", "The Folly of Being Comforted", "No Second Troy" and "A Thought from Propertius")<sup>89</sup> but in his obsessive comparison of her with images denoting queenliness and majesty. In "The Old Age of

<sup>85</sup>CP, p. 101.

<sup>86</sup>It was written 11 May 1910 in Yeats's Diary (Comm., p.105).

<sup>87</sup>CP, p. 103.

<sup>88</sup>Vide CP, pp. 100, 101, 138, 140 respectively.

<sup>89</sup>Vide CP, pp. 103, 86, 101, 172 respectively.

Queen Maeve", the similarities between her and the great Queen of Celtic myth are pointed out again and again, with regard to their majestic beauty and wisdom, their kindred spirits and "equal courage";<sup>90</sup> while in "Baile and Ailinn", Maud is exalted above Deirdre, a famous Celtic heroine, in respect of beauty and wisdom:

She is not wiser nor lovelier,  
And you are more high of heart than she, ...<sup>91</sup>

The resemblance between Maud and Helen of Troy is made in at least three poems, in connection with her beauty ("A Woman Homer Sung")<sup>92</sup> and the disastrous consequences of that beauty ("No Second Troy", "The Rose of the World");<sup>93</sup> while in "Presences" and "The Old Age of Queen Maeve", she is alluded to as a queen:

For there is no high story about queens  
In any ancient book but tells of you; ...<sup>94</sup>

But perhaps the supreme compliment lies in her near-apotheosis as a handmaiden to Pallas Athene, expressed in the taut, compressed idiom reminiscent of Pound:

She might, so noble from head  
To great shapely knees  
The long flowing line,  
Have walked to the altar  
Through the holy images  
At Pallas Athene's side,  
Or been fit spoil for a centaur  
Drunk with the unmixed wine.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>CP, pp. 451-52, 455. Cf. Ch. III, p. 109 of this thesis.

<sup>91</sup>CP, p. 465.

<sup>92</sup>CP, p. 100.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 101, 41.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 455. For "Presences", vide CP, p. 174.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 172.



The energy, intensity, pride and passion characteristic of Yeats's portrayal of Maud Gonne are mirrored in various important images in the poetry of the period. Her pride and haughtiness are instantaneously captured in the image of her "eagle look"<sup>96</sup> -- the idea of pride is re-iterated in "Against Unworthy Praise" and "His Phoenix"<sup>97</sup> -- while images of fire and phoenix frequently recur, evoking her burning spirituality and intensity. The former is evident in references to "The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs" and to her mind "That nobleness made simple as a fire", and associated images of burning ("His Phoenix", "Fallen Majesty" where her look and gait are compared with "the burning sun" and "a burning cloud" respectively);<sup>98</sup> the latter in "The People" and "His Phoenix", a good-natured high-spirited compliment to Maud wherein she is symbolized as a phoenix, symbol of spiritual purity or rebirth:

There is a queen in China, or maybe it's in Spain,  
And birthdays and holidays such praises can be heard  
Of her unblemished lineaments, a whiteness with no stain,  
That she might be that sprightly girl trodden by a bird;  
And there's a score of duchesses, surpassing womankind,  
Or who have found a painter to make them so for pay  
And smooth out stain and blemish with the elegance of his mind:  
I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps Yeats's purest portrayal occurs in "A Woman Homer

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<sup>96</sup>Vide "Friends" (CP, p. 139).

<sup>97</sup>CP, pp. 103-104, 172 respectively.

<sup>98</sup>Vide CP, pp. 86, 101, 172, 138 respectively.

<sup>99</sup>CP, pp. 170-71. For the phoenix image in "The People", vide CP, p. 170 and cf. Ch. III, p. 116 of this thesis.

Sung", where her pride, passion and intensity exalt her to the stature of Helen of Troy, throwing reality into pale relief:

For she had fiery blood  
When I was young,  
And trod so sweetly proud  
As 'twere upon a cloud,  
A woman Homer sung,  
That life and letters seem  
But an heroic dream.<sup>100</sup>

Equally characteristic, though more mellow in mood, are the poet's reminiscences of a majestic beauty that has all but been forgotten in the passing of time:

Although crowds gathered once if she but showed her face,  
And even old men's eyes grew dim, this hand alone,  
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping-place  
Babbling of fallen majesty, records what's gone.

The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,  
These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd  
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street  
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.<sup>101</sup>

Another aspect of Maud Gonne's heroic nature is her almost superhuman indifference to and aloofness from mob hostility, revealed when she was hissed by an Abbey Theatre audience at a time when she was trying to obtain a separation from her husband.<sup>102</sup> It is to this quality that Yeats pays tribute in "Against Unworthy Praise" which moves, in powerful, stately rhythms, from open self-chastisement to awed reverence for his beloved's moral strength and childlike simplicity:

Yet she, singing upon her road,  
Half lion, half child, is at peace.<sup>103</sup>

In "Her Praise" and "The People", there is the emergence of a new note of courage and leadership, the ideal of service and generosity to one's inferiors. The former poem, a

<sup>100</sup> CP, p. 100.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>102</sup> Comm., p. 106.

<sup>103</sup> CP, p. 104.

recollection of a vigorous dialogue between the poet and his "phoenix", depicts the finest aspect of her heroism: her magnanimity, courage and generosity, her aristocratic humility in forgiving former supporters who had turned against her after marital separation. To the poet's violent attack on "this unmannerly town", with its lack of appreciation for those who had served it most nobly and its malicious, petty gossip, Maud Gonne replies that despite her disillusionment in "Those [she] had served and some that [she] had fed", she still finds it impossible to complain of the cause she has chosen to serve; at which the poet, stunned by her generosity, attempts to rationalize his attitude. Yet

... because my heart leaped at her words,  
I was abashed, and now they come to mind  
After nine years, I sink my head abashed.<sup>104</sup>

In its handling of passion and the nuances of emotional tension within the controlled yet flexible framework of blank verse, this is one of Yeats's most compelling poems.

"Her Praise" is a more intimate revelation of Maud Gonne's ideal of service, evident in her kindness to her inferiors and her charitable work among the Dublin poor. It differs from the previous poem discussed mainly in its mingled pride and tenderness: notice the relaxed, intimate style, the colloquial diction and natural speech rhythms:

She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.  
I have gone about the house, gone up and down  
As a man does who has published a new book,  
Or a young girl dressed out in her new gown,  
And though I have turned the talk by hook or crook  
Until her praise should be the uppermost theme,

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 170, Cf. Ch. III, pp. 114-16 of this thesis.

A woman spoke of some new tale she had read,  
 A man confusedly in a half dream  
 As though some other name ran in his head.  
 She is foremost of those that I would hear praised.  
 I will talk no more of books or the long war  
 But walk by the dry thorn until I have found  
 Some beggar sheltering from the wind, and there  
 Manage the talk until her name come round.  
 If there be rags enough he will know her name  
 And be well pleased remembering it, for in the old days,  
 Though she had young men's praise and old men's blame,  
 Among the poor both old and young gave her praise.<sup>105</sup>

Despite Yeats's exaltation of Maud's heroic qualities, there are brief references, generally glossed over and obscured, to her human foibles. In "A Memory of Youth", there is a passing, and not very flattering, reference to her feminine vanity;<sup>106</sup> "To a Young Girl" brutally exposes her latent sexuality,<sup>107</sup> while "King and No King" reveals an intimate capacity, not generally realized, for personal communication:

... how shall I know  
 That in the blinding light beyond the grave  
 We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?  
 The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,  
 The habitual content of each with each  
 When neither soul nor body has been crossed.<sup>108</sup>

Praise of Maud Gonne does not, however, preclude Yeats's condemnation of her on the grounds of her ultimate unattainability. Though the specific charge may alter from inconstancy, in "The Lover Pleads with His Friend for Old Friends" and "O Do Not Love Too Long" to shallowness ("Never Give All the Heart") or cruelty ("The Cold Heaven"), the dominating fact of their relationship -- "that monstrous thing / Returned and yet unrequited love ..." <sup>109</sup> -- runs like a glittering thread through these poems, offsetting their idealizing tendency.

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<sup>105</sup>CP, pp. 168, 69.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 138, supra.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 157-58.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

The earliest indication of the duality of Maud Gonne's nature is in "The Two Trees", where the "holy tree", the benign aspect of the Sephirotic tree of the Kabbala, is contrasted with the "fatal image" of the storm-beaten tree in "the bitter glass", representing man's capacity to work for good or evil respectively.<sup>110</sup> Though the charge of "outer weariness" levelled against her is general rather than specific,<sup>111</sup> and though the poem is almost as much an allegory of good and evil as a personal reprimand, it nevertheless provides a useful starting-point for Yeats's two-fold portrait:

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,  
 The holy tree is growing there;  
 From joy the holy branches start,  
 And all the trembling flowers they bear.  
 The changing colours of its fruit  
 Have dowered the stars with merry light;  
 The surety of its hidden root  
 Has planted quiet in the night;  
 The shaking of its leafy head  
 Has given the waves their melody,  
 And made my lips and music wed,  
 Murmuring a wizard song for thee.

. . . . .  
 Gaze no more in the bitter glass  
 The demons, with their subtle guile,  
 Lift up before us when they pass,  
 Or only gaze a little while ...<sup>112</sup>

Of the poems written before 1899, the date of publication of The Wind among the Reeds, perhaps the most illuminating is

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<sup>110</sup>This explanation is given by Ellmann (IdY, p. 76).

<sup>111</sup>Frank Kermode, in Romantic Image (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 98-99 has, however, offered the ingenious interpretation of the "holy tree" as the "Tree of Imagination ... inhabited by Love, and /-growing/ in the heart of a woman who is beautiful and does not think" as opposed to "the tree of the Fall", representing subordination of beauty to intellectual abstraction.

<sup>112</sup>CP, pp. 54-55.

the manuscript version of a poem entitled "Subject for a Lyric" (contained in a manuscript book dated 29 August 1893), reflecting the full extent of Yeats's emotional disintegration and Maud's ability to torture:

O my beloved you only are  
not moved by my songs  
Which you alone understand  
You only know that it is  
of you I sing when I tell  
of the swan on the water  
of the eagle in the heavens  
of the faun in the wood.  
Others weep but your eyes  
are dry.

## II

... I am  
like the children, O my  
beloved & I play at  
marriage. I play  
at <sup>with</sup> images of the life  
you will not give to me O  
my ~~cruel~~ <sup>cruel</sup> one

## III

I put away all the romances,  
How care I now of queens  
& of noble women, whose  
very dust is full of sorrow,  
are they not all but my  
beloved whispering to me.  
I wait at the woods, I  
hear the cry of the birds  
& the cry of the deer  
& I hear the wind among the  
reeds, but I put my hands  
over my ears for were not  
they my beloved whispering to  
me. O my beloved why do  
you whisper to me of sorrow  
always.

## IIII

O my beloved what were verse to me  
If you were not then to listen  
& yet all my verses are little to you.

. . . . .  
... you have no thing but  
these verses, that are but like  
mire & leaves in the middle of a crowd.  
Other eyes fill with tears but  
yours are dry.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>J. Stallworthy, Between the Lines ... (Oxford, 1963), pp. 2-4.

Not all the poems of the period are as painfully shattering, however; some, at least, are tenderly reproachful. "When You Are Old", a fairly free adaptation of Ronsard's sonnet "Quand vous serez bien vieille ..." implicitly chastises his beloved for the non-reciprocation of love;<sup>114</sup> "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" is a gentle injunction that he be spared pain or suffering;<sup>115</sup> while "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead", despite the sentiment expressed, is cautiously restrained:

Were you but lying cold and dead,  
And lights were paling out of the West,  
You would come hither, and bend your head,  
And I would lay my head on your breast;  
And you would murmur tender words,  
Forgiving me, because you were dead:  
Nor would you rise and hasten away,  
Though you have the will of the wild birds,  
But know your hair was bound and wound  
About the stars and moon and sun:  
O would, beloved, that you lay  
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,  
While lights were paling one by one.<sup>116</sup>

On the other hand, Maud's inconstancy is clearly delineated in "The Lover Pleads with His Friend for Old Friends", the first printed version of which suffers from a curious disparity between blatant rhetoric ("Time's bitter flood ...") and colloquial idiom, between flaccid rhythms and plain speech rhythms, though this defect is partly compensated for by careful phrasing and interesting part-rhymes ("most" - "lost"). By 1899 the vacillating rhythms of the first three lines had been considerably tautened into vigorous speech rhythms and phrases like "high beauty" pared, giving the poem the asperity and clarity of Jonson, the pure cold passion of Catullus:

Though you are in your shining days,  
Voices among the crowd  
And new friends busy with your praise,

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<sup>114</sup>CP, p. 46.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81.

Be not unkind or proud,  
 But think about old friends the most:  
 Time's bitter flood will rise,  
 Your beauty perish and be lost  
 For all eyes but these eyes.<sup>117</sup>

The falseness of the inconstant friend who alters her loyalties according to her station in life and who treats her previous acquaintance with scornful aloofness is suggested in the image "shining days", with its associations of the glamour and allure of social success: it is interesting to note a similar image (in the word "glitter") appearing in a little-known poem, "The Glove and the Cloak" -- not included in the two-volume definitive edition -- in which Maud Gonne is crudely (and uncharacteristically) represented as a kind of femme fatale:

I saw her glitter and gleam,  
 And stood in my sorrows apart,  
 And said: "She has fooled me enough,"  
 And thought that she had no heart.

I stood with her cloak on my arms  
 And said: "I will see her no more,"  
 When something folded and small  
 Fell at my feet on the floor.

The little old glove of a child:  
 I felt a sudden tear start,  
 And murmured: "O long grey cloak,  
 Keep hidden and covered her heart!"<sup>118</sup>

Yeats's disillusionment with his beloved is further expressed in "O Do Not Love Too Long" and "Never Give All the Heart", two poems distinguished by their technical accomplishment, their strong melodic line and their fine evidence of

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<sup>117</sup>VE, pp. 172-73. For first printed version vide VE, pp. 172-73, *infra*.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 744.



vowel music. In its melancholy plaintiveness, its essential melodiousness (created partly by the open vowels and partly by the liquid alliteration in the second line) and its adoption of the posture of the forsaken lover, the former poem chastising Maud for her sudden, inexplicable change of affection, is curiously reminiscent of certain Elizabethan love songs, of Raleigh's "A Lover's Complaint", for example:

She hath lefte me here all alone  
 All allone as unknowne  
 Who somtymes did me lead with her selfe  
 and me lovde as her owne: ...

or of Wyatt:

But all is turnde now ...  
 Into a bitter fashion of forsaking ...<sup>119</sup>

The poem reads:

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

All through the years of our youth  
 Neither could have known  
 Their own thought from the other's,  
 We were so much at one.

But O, in a minute she changed --  
 O do not love too long,  
 Or you will grow out of fashion  
 Like an old song.<sup>120</sup>

The image of the woman "who makest but game on earnest payne" forms the substance of the latter poem, whose excellence lies in the confidence of its attack in the opening injunction,

<sup>119</sup>The Penguin Book of English Verse, ed. John Hayward [London, 1956] pp. 37, 1 respectively.

<sup>120</sup>VE, pp. 211-12, final version.

and the ease with which it moves from generalized to private complaint. While the phrasing reveals an ear highly sensitive to speech rhythms, and the interweaving of off-rhymes and whole rhymes imbues the poem with a prevailing melancholy that is terminated only by the painful finality of the closing couplet, its most important feature from the viewpoint of this discussion is the image of the inconstant mistress, the type of woman who regards love as a mere game. Though she is very little mirrored, Yeats has provided the reader with just enough detail to glimpse into her soul: she is both "passionate" and shallow, the image of her "smooth lips" evoking both her physical attractiveness and the glibness with which she dallies with his love:

Never give all the heart, for love  
Will hardly seem worth thinking of  
To passionate women if it seem  
Certain, and they never dream  
That it fades out from kiss to kiss;  
For everything that's lovely is  
But a brief, dreamy, kind delight.  
O never give the heart outright,  
For they, for all smooth lips can say,  
Have given their hearts up to the play.  
And who could play it well enough  
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?  
He that made this knows all the cost,  
For he gave all his heart and lost.<sup>121</sup>

Accusations of inconstancy and insincerity do not, however, disguise the unalterable fact of Yeats's relationship with Maud Gonne: her inability to requite his love. This is seen not only in the impassioned rejection of the anonymous friend's kind words in "The Folly of Being Comforted", with its strange affinity with Hopkins's "terrible sonnets",<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 202, final version.

<sup>122</sup>Cf.: "But heart there is no comfort, not a grain" (VE, p. 200, l. 7, *infra*), with "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee ..." (Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins sel. .... W.H. Gardner, Penguin Books / London, 1953 /, p. 60.)

but in Maud's heartless cruelty recalled in "Friends":

And what of her that took  
All till my youth was gone  
With scarce a pitying look?  
How could I praise that one?<sup>123</sup>

In "Words" he complains of her inability to understand him and in "Old Memory" resigns himself to painful acceptance of the situation on the basis that her behaviour is as wayward, and therefore as impossible of reproof, as that of an erring child:

But enough,  
For when we have blamed the wind we can blame love;  
Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said  
That would be harsh for children that have strayed.<sup>124</sup>

But perhaps a truer reflection of the impact of the relationship is contained in "The Cold Heaven", one of Yeats's most powerful and moving poems, in which he asks whether his past suffering will continue after death:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven  
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,  
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven  
So wild that every casual thought of that and this  
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season  
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;  
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,  
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,  
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken,  
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent  
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken  
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?<sup>125</sup>

The poem in which strains of adulation and disillusionment run most freely together is "Broken Dreams", perhaps

<sup>123</sup>CP, p. 139.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 87. For "Words" vide CP, pp. 100-101.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

Yeats's most complete portrait of Maud Gonne and undoubtedly one of his loveliest and most poignant poems. Written when Yeats was fifty,<sup>126</sup> it is an excellent illustration of his mature, relaxed style:

There is grey in your hair.  
 Young men no longer suddenly catch their breath  
 When you are passing;  
 But maybe some old gaffer mutters a blessing  
 Because it was your prayer  
 Recovered him upon the bed of death.  
 For your sole sake -- that all heart's ache have known,  
 And given to others all heart's ache,  
 From meagre girlhood's putting on  
 Burdensome beauty -- for your sole sake  
 Heaven has put away the stroke of her doom,  
 So great her portion in that peace you make  
 By merely walking in a room.

Your beauty can but leave among us  
 Vague memories, nothing but memories.  
 A young man when the old men are done talking  
 Will say to an old man, "Tell me of that lady  
 The poet stubborn with his passion sang us  
 When age might well have chilled his blood."

Vague memories, nothing but memories,  
 But in the grave all, all, shall be renewed.  
 The certainty that I shall see that lady  
 Leaning or standing or walking  
 In the first loveliness of womanhood,  
 And with the fervour of my youthful eyes,  
 Has set me muttering like a fool.

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

The last stroke of midnight dies.  
 All day in the one chair  
 From dream to dream and rhyme to rhyme I have ranged  
 In rambling talk with an image of air:  
 Vague memories, nothing but memories.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>126</sup> It was dated 24 October 1915 (Comm., p. 187).

<sup>127</sup> VE, pp. 355-57, final version.

The theme is the poet's awareness of the ageing of his beloved and the certain knowledge that his love will never be fulfilled. The form is the semi-dramatized inner monologue, conveyed in the apparently free, random ranging over the image of the poet's beloved in a time sequence that moves easily between present, past and future with the unselfconsciousness characteristic of dreams or memories. Beneath the apparently formless accumulation of reminiscence and reverie, frequent asides, interpolations, repetition and thoughts in parenthesis, there is evidence of a closely integrated structure: first, in the careful reversion to the present and the insistence on the present as the focal point of the poet's awareness -- notice how each stanza opens with the present and how the reader is gently brought back to the present with the re-iteration of the phrase "vague memories"; secondly, in the subtle patterning of rhymes -- off-rhymes, part-rhymes, whole rhymes -- and assonance, particularly between stanzas ("blood" - "renewed", "talking" - "walking"; "fool" - "beautiful"); and finally in the unifying and multi-faceted portrait of Maud Gonne. Maud Gonne is ultimately the subject of the poem; and the interest of Yeats's handling of her image derives not only from the tensions between his varied evocations of her beauty, past, present and future, but from the variety of stances adopted by the poet -- intimate friend, distant admirer, formal courtly lover -- and from the poem's tonal differences, revealed in the contrasting elements of idealization and realism, the public and the intimate, the formal and familiar.

An examination of the poem reveals the emergence of four separate aspects of Maud Gonne. First, there is the idealized portrait, the heroic element with which the reader

is already familiar, seen in the hyperbolic claim that death has spared her because of the sense of peace which her presence diffuses (ll. 10-13), in her sublime faith, displayed during her work among the poor (ll. 4-7), and in the implied analogy with tragic heroines (Helen of Troy, Deirdre) suggested in the phrase "burdensome beauty".<sup>128</sup> Secondly, there is the formal or "courtly" element: the little cameo of the "lady" of the poem, with shades of Dante and Beatrice in the lovely image of "that lady / The poet stubborn with his passion sang us / When age might well have chilled his blood." Thirdly, there is the human aspect, revealed in her capacity for suffering (also evident in "Two Years Later")<sup>129</sup> and in certain intimate and familiar details, such as the reference to Maud's grey hair and the tender plea that she retain, even after her purification at death, her only physical flaw, her "unbeautiful" small hands. Finally, there is the element of disillusionment or disenchantment: her capacity not only for suffering but for inflicting suffering, which underlines the more obvious strain of idealization; and indeed, the re-iterated phrase "vague memories", together with the double meaning of the title and the pervading pathos throughout, all point to the finality of unrequited love, the irrevocability of the past and the impossibility of future change. Thus in the course of this poem Yeats has ranged over the entire history of his relationship with Maud Gonne -- his hopes, illusions and ultimate defeat -- producing, finally, a composite portrait. It is eclipsed only by his last tribute, "A Bronze Head", wherein his ultimate appraisal is a question mark:

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<sup>128</sup>Cf. Y:M&P, p. 326, n. 77.

<sup>129</sup>Vide CP, p. 137.

Here at right of the entrance this bronze head,  
 Human, superhuman, a bird's round eye,  
 Everything else withered and mummy-dead.  
 What great tomb-haunter sweeps the distant sky  
 (Something may linger there though all else die;)  
 And finds there nothing to make its terror less  
Hysterica passio of its own emptiness?

No dark tomb-haunter once; her form all full  
 As though with magnanimity of light,  
 Yet a most gentle woman; who can tell  
 Which of her forms has shown her substance right?  
 Or maybe substance can be composite,  
 Profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath  
 A mouthful held the extreme of life and death.

But even at the starting-post, all sleek and new,  
 I saw the wildness in her and I thought  
 A vision of terror that it must live through  
 Had shattered her soul. Propinquity had brought  
 Imagination to that pitch where it casts out  
 All that is not itself: I had grown wild  
 And wandered murmuring everywhere, "My child, my child!"

Or else I thought her supernatural;  
 As though a sterner eye looked through her eye  
 On this foul world in its decline and fall;  
 On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,  
 Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,  
 Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave,  
 And wondered what was left for massacre to save.<sup>130</sup>

The poems about Maud Gonne, then, reveal a number of important developments in Yeats's poetic treatment of woman. First, and most important, is the gradual disappearance of literary models and the simultaneous emergence of a new, vibrant, highly original myth inspired by a real person. Secondly, in the course of working out his relationship with Maud Gonne, Yeats explores the full gamut of her personality, ranging from the high idealization of her heroic qualities to outright condemnation of her cruelty and indifference, so that we are left not only with one of the most significant bodies of love poetry in English but also with a complete portrait of the woman behind the poems; indeed, with what may well be the most fully realized delineation of a single woman in English

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<sup>130</sup>CP, pp. 382-83.

poetry. Thirdly, in attempting to portray the essential quality of his beloved, Yeats covers a wide variety of techniques, ranging from symbolic evocation and analogy to the mature, full-bodied portraiture of his "middle" period. Furthermore, the emergence of the most singular feature of Maud Gonne -- her dynamic heroism -- was to provide an important exemplification of Yeats's heroic ideal, with its particular relevance to woman, which reached its fullest development almost at the same time. The poems of the period prove ultimately that Yeats had fought the battle over the "prevailing decadence ... [*its*] sentiment and sentimental sadness, [*its*] womanish introspection ... [*and*] brooding emotions", and broken through to a new "pure energy of spirit".<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Y:M&P, p. 313, n. 2a.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE HEROIC IDEAL (1896 - 1919)

Two main images of woman, fundamentally different in nature but similar in origin, emerge in the early "middle" period of Yeats's poetic development. The one is that of heroic woman, whose origins lie in the heroines of ancient Irish literature, represented predominantly in the spate of poems to Maud Gonne written between 1908 and 1915. The other is the model of aristocratic woman, a totally new development in Yeats's concept of woman, embodied in Lady Gregory and her estate Coole Park, and summed up in "A Prayer for my Daughter". Somewhere between the two, but mainly on the side of the former, lies that combination of heroism and aristocracy of spirit revealed in Mabel Beardsley's brave gaiety in the face of death, poignantly captured in "Upon a Dying Lady". Owing to the variety of sources, these images, while fairly clear-cut in type, are nevertheless fluid in tone and character: Maud Gonne's heroism, for example, has a different timbre from that of the dying actress' courageous front offered to her friends; and the magnanimity with which she forgives the crude Dublin mob differs both from Miss Beardsley's clearly cultivated graciousness and from the dignity of mien and bearing rooted in Lady Gregory's lineage. It is interesting to note, though, that Yeats was consciously broadening his poetic horizons and finding in a more varied social circle "fresh matter" for celebration, reminiscence and contemplation.

In examining the influences on the images of the period a number of factors must be taken into consideration. With regard to the heroic ideal, there were the powerful examples of two women, Maud Gonne and Mabel Beardsley, the one with whom he

was emotionally involved, the other whom he knew well, illustrating in the very texture of their lives the kind of behaviour which he most passionately admired and envied. The image of aristocratic woman was influenced predominantly by Yeats's friendship with Lady Gregory and the mirror she held up to increasing coarseness and vulgarity in Ireland. Thirdly, both images were made more meaningful by Yeats's gradual formulation, from about 1908 onwards, of the theory of the Masks -- a theory of personality based primarily on self-knowledge and hence self-improvement -- which possibly accentuated his awareness of the attributes of these women, and incidentally contributed towards the cultivation of his "public" manner in the poems about Lady Gregory. A more detailed discussion of each of these factors will clarify their influence on the images of the period.

Yeats's admiration for the heroic attributes of Maud Gonne and Mabel Beardsley may best be understood in terms of his concept of heroism in general. Though his earliest idea of heroic woman (first evident in *Mosada*) may well have been based on the tragic heroines of his "favourite poets", and in particular of Shelley,<sup>1</sup> the development of this concept went hand in hand with his admiration for the qualities, feats and achievements of the great heroes and heroines of Celtic literature.

Yeats's desire to "get our heroic age into verse"<sup>2</sup> -- to create a body of national literature, "some new Prometheus Unbound; Patrick or Columcille, Oisín or Finn, in Prometheus's stead"<sup>3</sup> -- was part of the general growth of a national

<sup>1</sup>Vide A, p. 64, and cf. Ch. I, pp. 1-2 of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup>ProY, p. 182. I cannot find the original source of this quotation.

<sup>3</sup>A, p. 194.

consciousness manifested in late nineteenth-century Ireland. Behind this desire, however, lay a didactic aim: the propagation of the ideal which the Irish heroic virtues held up to reality. His dissatisfaction with the emasculating effects of formalized Christianity, for example, and his obvious preference for the heroic ethic of pagan Ireland are already evident in The Wanderings of Oisín, where the harsh, punitive asceticism of Saint Patrick is contrasted with Oisín's unrelenting defiance:

I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan,  
Lomair,  
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in  
flames or at feast.<sup>4</sup>

And his later disillusionment with the cultural mediocrity and vulgarity of the Irish middle-classes was to be counterpointed by his admiration for the "aloof and aristocratic hero"<sup>5</sup> exemplified by Parnell, for example, or Synge, or Wilde.

What were the qualities that appealed to Yeats in the hero or heroine of Celtic literature? Generally speaking, they were those that raised him (or her) above the flow of ordinary humanity and emphasized his (or her) power as a unique, superior individual. These included the "aristocratic" virtues, generosity and courtesy, in particular, of the lord towards his dependent vassal; the "public" virtues, courage and leadership, and a fearless unflinching attitude to death; and a passionate engagement in and enjoyment of life in all its physical attributes -- eating, drinking, fighting, loving -- that was to make one of the characters in The Only Jealousy of Emer

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<sup>4</sup>CP, p. 447.

<sup>5</sup>Northrop Frye, "Yeats and the Language of Symbolism", Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, XVII, 1 (Oct. 1947), 8.

refer to Cuchulain as "that amorous, violent man",<sup>6</sup> and Yeats says of him that he seemed an heroic figure "because he was creative joy separated from fear".<sup>7</sup>

Yeats's celebration of Maud Gonne is thus rooted in a very real resemblance to the heroines of Irish literature; and she is linked furthermore by the attribute of beauty. In "The Old Age of Queen Maeve", for example, he claims that she is at least equal in beauty and courage to the great legendary queen,<sup>8</sup> while "Baile and Aillinn" asserts her superiority over a tragic heroine, Deirdre:

Let rush and bird cry out their fill  
Of the harper's daughter if they will,  
Beloved, I am not afraid of her,  
She is not wiser nor lovelier,  
And you are more high of heart than she ...<sup>9</sup>

This gesture of conscious praise and tribute, repeated in such poems as "Against Unworthy Praise", "Her Praise" and "The People",<sup>10</sup> was accentuated by Yeats's need for continual reassessment of Maud Gonne's character, born out of his desire to ascertain its essence and thereby justify the years of wasted courtship. Between the commencement of their "spiritual marriage" in 1898 and Maud's rejection of his final proposal in 1916 -- a period covering her marriage to and separation from John MacBride in 1903 and 1905 respectively, the renewal of Yeats's "astral union" in 1908, a series of visits to her in

<sup>6</sup>The First Musician. Vide CPl., p. 283.

<sup>7</sup>Letters, p. 913, supra. For these definitions I am indebted to Alex Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal (London: Peter Owen, 1966), pp. 53-55. Cf. Lady Dorothy's comments on Yeats's concept of aristocracy in Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 196.

<sup>8</sup>CP, pp. 451-52, 455.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 465.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104, 168-69, 169-70.

Normandy from May 1910 onwards and the execution of Maud's former husband -- Yeats came gradually to see her as she was, to reassess her in the light of her real rather than imagined qualities. A. G. Stock writes:

His poetic image of her ... is not static, but grows and changes as he matures. At first, when he still hoped to win her, it was no more than a projection of his own longing.... Thereafter, using his poetry to master his experience, he sets out to capture in words the quality not only of his passion but of the woman herself who evoked and rejected it.... Not only the bodily image but the personality animating it becomes clearer as his art advances in the conquest of reality. She compels him to acknowledge qualities he does not share.<sup>11</sup>

The result was, of course, a number of poems expressing his hurt and torment -- "Words", for example, where he reluctantly admits her inability to understand his plans and ambitions,<sup>12</sup> "A Deep-Sworn Vow" and "The Cold Heaven", the latter a cry of anguish at the possibility of continued suffering after death;<sup>13</sup> but there are also poems like "Fallen Majesty" and "That the Night Come" where, in seeking to capture her memory, he recreates the very essence of the spirituality that fired and inflamed her;<sup>14</sup> and others, like "No Second Troy" and "Friends", where the process of weighing the good and the bad induces him to believe that, like Helen, she is beyond judgement:<sup>15</sup>

Why, what could she have done, being what she is?  
Was there another Troy for her to burn?<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>A.G. Stock, "The World of Maud Gonne", Indian Journal of English Studies (Calcutta), VI (1965), 76, 77.

<sup>12</sup>CP, pp. 100-101.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 174, 140.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 138, 140.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 101, 139.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

In the case of Mabel Beardsley, wife of an actor George Bealby Wright,<sup>17</sup> the heroic ideals of bravery and fearlessness were to be re-enacted in her magnificent gesture of courage before death -- together with the pathos that all heroes share in the face of disaster and defeat. The origin of Yeats's relationship with her is not known; but it seems she was an occasional guest at his Monday evenings in Woburn Buildings. Aubrey Beardsley's "dear sister Mabel whom all artistic London loved"<sup>18</sup> was a tall girl with a good figure and flaming red hair, who played one of the leading roles in Netta Syrett's play, "The Finding of Nancy, in 1898.<sup>19</sup> An unusually close bond had existed between brother and sister, and after the former's death on 16 March 1898, Mabel resumed her acting career, only to fall ill with cancer.<sup>20</sup> Yeats, who used to visit her every Sunday afternoon during the winter of 1913, wrote to Lady Gregory on 8 January:

Strange that just after writing those lines on the Rhymers who "unrepenting faced their ends" I should be at the bedside of the dying sister of Beardsley, who was practically one of us.... She was propped up on pillows with her cheeks I think a little rouged and very beautiful. Beside her a Xmas tree with little toys containing sweets, which she gave us.... On a table near were four dolls dressed like people out of her brother's drawings. Women with loose trousers and boys that looked like women. Ricketts had made them, modelling the faces and sewing the clothes.... She had all her great lady airs and asked after my work and my health as if they were the most important things in the world to her.... I cannot over-state her strange charm -- the pathetic gaiety.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Letters, p. 574, n. 2, *infra*. Cf. ProYP, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> K.L. Mix, A Study in Yellow. The "Yellow Book" and its Contributors (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press; London: Constable, 1960), p. 264.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>21</sup> Letters, pp. 574-75. Cf. tribute by J., New York, "Yeats's 'Upon a Dying Lady'", The Little Review (Sept. 1917), 31: "There was no wearing of black there, no making a luxury of her grief, no flaunting it in the face of others, even though they might sympathize with or share her feelings. It was all quite French, what a spirited French woman would do...."

Nearly a month later he was to write:

I still see Mabel Beardsley every week. She is now very weak and I think in pain, but she has the same gaiety. I have made five little poems about her. She spoke yesterday of her life as finished and the moment after was "as merry as a bird."<sup>22</sup>

On 8 May 1916, Charles Ricketts was to record:

Death of poor Mabel Beardsley after five years, of which the last five months were very black. Curiously, with the increase of pain and the loss of hope came a new clinging to life -- the wish to live....<sup>23</sup>

In turning to the image of aristocratic woman in Yeats's poetry, we must take into account his concept of aristocracy. The aristocratic ideal has its roots in the qualities of generosity, bountifulness and courtesy inherent in the heroic ideal but extends beyond these qualities into a more complex self-contained ethic. For Yeats the aristocrat was an amalgam of the "best" qualities available in a human being at a given time: "the most cultured, most polished, most powerful.... most urbane, the product of the oldest and best families in the land."<sup>24</sup> Added to this was a gladly accepted sense of obligation as well as privilege, "a feeling for custom and ceremony, an emotional reticence, an active intellectual life, and even a kind of physical perfection."<sup>25</sup> The essence of aristocracy lay, in fact, in "that beautiful balance of power and duty.... not of duty as the word is generally understood, but of burdens laid upon [it] by [its] station and ... character"<sup>26</sup> that existed

<sup>22</sup> Donald T. Torchiana and Glen O'Malley, "Some New Letters from W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory", A Review of English Literature, IV, 3(July 1963), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Cecil Lewis, ed. Self-Portrait Taken from the Letters and Journals of Charles Ricketts, R.A., coll. & comp. T. Sturge Moore (London: Peter Davies, 1939), pp.256-57.

<sup>24</sup> A. Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal (London, 1966), p.64.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Cf. A, p.395.

among the aristocratic classes of eighteenth-century Ireland.

Yeats's aristocratic leanings reach further into the past, I believe, than his friendship with Lady Gregory; for there was the influence of Arthur Symons, with whom he was friendly in the nineties, who wrote:

We were surrounded by commonplace, middle-class people, and I hated commonplace, and the middle-classes...<sup>27</sup>

and his association with the Rhymers Club, where "manners took precedence over morality" and "Victorian middle-class verse gave way to an aristocratic poetic."<sup>28</sup> Two further factors later intensified his admiration for the "aristocratic" virtues: the influence of a number of writers, in particular, Pound, Nietzsche and Castiglione (in the last of whom he found the concept of sprezzatura -- the nonchalance, ease and recklessness that mark the true courtier);<sup>29</sup> and the tangible evidence of increasing commonness, coarseness and vulgarity among the Irish middleclasses.<sup>30</sup>

The most obvious influence on Yeats's concept of aristocratic woman and one of its finest representatives was, however, Lady Gregory, with whom he maintained a friendship from 1896 until her death in 1932. Opinions of her vary, from those of Yeats's father, who admired her perfect "disinterestedness", though he confessed that "it [was] not easy personally to like her", to Arthur Symons, who "hate[d] Lady Gregory" and "never [spoke] of her except as the

<sup>27</sup> Derek Stanford, Poets of the Nineties. A Biographical Anthology (London: John Baker, 1965), p.95.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>29</sup> For these influences I am indebted to A. Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal (1966), pp. 20-22, 67-73.

<sup>30</sup> This is further expanded by Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal, pp. 73-78. Vide also Appendix C, pp. 244-45 of this thesis.



'Strega' which is the Italian for witch."<sup>31</sup> Maud Gonne regarded her as "a queer little old lady, rather like Queen Victoria", whose books she loved but who was in a different camp because she believed in Art for Art's Sake; and whose effect on Irish writers was that they came back from visits to Coole "less passionately interested in the National struggle and more worried about their own lack of money."<sup>32</sup> George Moore recalled a young woman, "very earnest, who divided her hair in the middle and wore it smooth on either side of a broad and handsome brow. Her eyes were always full of questions and her Protestant high-school air became her greatly..."<sup>33</sup>

Isabella Augusta Gregory was the youngest of seven daughters of Dudley Persse of Roxborough, County Galway. In 1880, at the age of twenty-eight, she became the second wife of Sir William Gregory of Coole Park, Gort, who died in 1892, leaving her with one son, Robert. Her first meeting with Yeats, which took place at Edward Martyn's Castle at Galway, in 1896, resulted in an invitation to spend a few days at Coole -- the prelude to almost twenty-one years of summers spent at Coole.<sup>34</sup>

Lady Gregory's friendship with Yeats must have been inspired by her newly acquired interest in literature and her desire to participate in some way in the Irish literary movement.

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<sup>31</sup>J.B. Yeats, Letters to his Son W.B. Yeats and Others 1869-1922 ... (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), pp.152, 151, 151-52.

<sup>32</sup>Maud Gonne MacBride, A Servant of the Queen. Reminiscences (London Victor Gollancz, 1938), p. 332.

<sup>33</sup>H. Howarth, The Irish Writers 1880-1940. Literature under Parnell's Star (London: Rockliff, 1958), p. 84.

<sup>34</sup>Information is taken from Howarth, The Irish Writers (London, 1958), Ch. III, and Letters, p. 287, n.1, *infra*. Note that Jeffares gives the year of her birth as 1852 (Y:M&P, p.337,n.57).

Two years after her husband's death she had published his memoirs, but "her early passion for books was inseparable from a patriotic passion.... Literary nationalism ... was her secret centre."<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, during his first visit to Coole, she asked Yeats whether he could "set her to some work for our intellectual movement" to which he replied: "If you get our books and watch what we are doing you will soon find your work."<sup>36</sup>

A.N. Jeffares observes that in Lady Gregory and Coole Park Yeats found at last

what I had been seeking always, a life of order, and of labour, where all outward things were the image of an inward life..... Here many generations, and no uncultured generations, had left the images of their service in furniture, in statues, in pictures and in the outline of wood and of field.<sup>37</sup>

More important, she offered him firmness and care during his illness and exhaustion resulting from the nervous strain of his affair with Maud Gonne; and apart from sending in cups of soup during that sad and miserable year of 1899, "she gave him, for long spells, the peace and good diet of Coole, and when he was not at Coole, she sent him wine, biscuits or bottled fruit and sometimes, calling, left money on his mantelpiece."<sup>38</sup> Knowing that open-air walks would do his health good, she took him folk-lore gathering on the cottages of her estate; and increased his enjoyment by inviting congenial company for him, Douglas Hyde, ~~A.~~, William Sharp and others.<sup>39</sup>

Her literary bent, first evident almost immediately after she had been widowed, was rather surprising, together with

<sup>35</sup>Howarth, p. 88.

<sup>36</sup>Y:M&P, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Howarth, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup>Y:M&P, pp. 119, 120.

the astonishing swiftness with which she tossed off her plays -- mainly comedies and "wonder" plays -- at least twenty-six in all.<sup>40</sup> There were, besides, essays of Irish balladry and poetry (including a vivid and compelling essay on Raftery, the blind eighteenth-century Poet);<sup>41</sup> Irish folklore and visions -- "stories of saints, of heroes, of giants and enchanters"<sup>42</sup> -- gathered from Galway and neighbouring islands; two arrangements and translations of Irish legends, Gods and Fighting Men, and Cuchulain of Muirthemne, which Yeats called "the best [book] that has come out of Ireland in my time" and perhaps even "the best ... that has ever come out of Ireland ...";<sup>43</sup> an account of Coole, showing an intimate knowledge and love of its library and natural scenery;<sup>44</sup> and another of the formation, in 1897, of the Irish Literary Theatre.<sup>45</sup>

It is for this last venture and her co-directorship of the Abbey Theatre that she is, perhaps, best known; and it is this that probably evoked T.P. O'Connor's reference to her as "the unselfish, devoted and unconquerable

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<sup>40</sup>This number is based upon the holdings of the Jagger Library, University of Cape Town. Vide Plays, 4 vols. (London:Putnam, 1913-37), which contains nineteen plays; and furthermore The Golden Apple. A Play for Kiltartan Children (London: Murray, 1916); The Jackdaw (Dublin: Talbot Press, n.d.); The Rising of the Moon (London: Putnam, n.d.); The Story brought by Brigit: A Passion Play in Three Acts (London:Putnam, 1924); and Three Last Plays (London: Putnam, 1928), which contains Sancho's Master, Dave and The Would-be Gentleman.

<sup>41</sup>Vide Lady [Isabella Augusta Persse] Gregory, Poets and Dreamers, Studies and Translations from the Irish (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., London: John Murray, 1903).

<sup>42</sup>Lady [Augusta Persse] Gregory. Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland .... 1st ser. (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), I, p.4.

<sup>43</sup>E, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup>Lady Augusta Persse Gregory, Coole (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1931).

<sup>45</sup>Lady [I.A. Persse] Gregory, Our Irish Theatre. A Chapter of Autobiography (New York & London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913).

women who has helped Yeats and Ireland towards the great literary renaissance of modern days."<sup>46</sup> Lady Gregory used her social position to gain support and financial aid from distinguished Unionists; and her history of the theatre's development reveals not only the fight against Irish antagonism towards and English banning of certain plays, but also the extent to which she assisted Yeats in writing some of his own plays.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, her influence on his playwriting has only recently been fairly fully assessed; and Daniel J. Murphy asserts that "not only did Lady Gregory have a share in all Yeats's plays before he began the Noh plays ... in 1917, but she also helped him with other work, particularly with the Stories of Red Hanrahan (Cuala, 1904)."<sup>48</sup> Yeats himself has confessed that in their collaboration

I never did anything that went so easily and quickly; for when I hesitated [Lady Gregory] had the right thought ready and it was almost always [she] who gave the right turn to the phrase and gave it the ring of daily life.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the soundest assessment of her achievement is given by Herbert Howarth, in The Irish Writers, who says:

<sup>46</sup> Lady Gregory's Journals 1916-1930, ed. Lennox Robinson (London: Putnam & Co., 1946), p. 259. In a letter to Mario M. Rossi, dated 6 June 1932 Yeats wrote: I have lost one who has been to me for nearly forty years my strength and my conscience.... She had been indomitable to the last, seeing to all her household duties and weekly charities -- there were many." (Letters, p. 796.)

<sup>47</sup> Vide Our Irish Theatre ... (N.Y. & London, 1913), Chs. IV and VII; Ch. VI; and Ch. III respectively.

<sup>48</sup> In "Yeats and Lady Gregory: A Unique Dramatic Collaboration", Modern Drama, VII, 3 (Dec. 1964), 323. The plays specifically cited (p. 324) are Where There Is Nothing, Diarmuid and Grania, The Pot of Broth, Kathleen ni Houlihan, The King's Theshold, Deirdre, The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand, Oedipus. Hazard Adams has recorded the direct influence of The Travelling Man on Yeats's unfinished play The Country of the Young (vide "Yeats's Country of Young", PMLA, LXXII 3 [June 1957], 510-19). For a less favourable review than that of Murphy, vide W. Chislett, "On the Influence of Lady Gregory on William Butler Yeats" in Moderns and Near-Moderns (New York: Grafton Press, 1928), pp. 165-67.

<sup>49</sup> Lady Gregory, Our Irish Theatre, p. 81.

In the long run the interest of her life lies in the way she pressed beyond what birth gave her.... Of the possibilities afforded her by her traditions, growing-up, marriage, she took those that made for action and change.... She managed to carry a strength from her orthodoxy and the complacent power of her class, and assimilate it to the touch of revolutionary poetry in her.<sup>50</sup>

The final factor influencing the emergence of Yeats's concept of heroic and aristocratic woman was his theory of the Masks, which began to appear in his writings during the first decade of the century. The formulation of this theory may well be traced to Yeats's upbringing and its concomitant emphasis on personality. C.M. Bowra points out:

[Yeats's] Irish upbringing had given him an independence from established English ideas and a mental outlook impossible in England. Brought up largely in the west of Ireland, he had in early childhood absorbed the beliefs of an unspoiled peasantry and lived in an atmosphere uncontaminated by science. In that world personality was still as important as it had been in the eighteenth century, and a man was entitled to be unlike his fellows.... In an unspoiled landscape among unsophisticated people Yeats grew to manhood unlike the Wykehamist Johnson or the cosmopolitan Wilde.<sup>51</sup>

The complexity and importance of the doctrine are evident in Richard Ellmann's definition, which provides an analysis of its psychological origins:

To start with its simplest meaning, the mask is the social self ... It includes all the differences between one's own and other people's conception of one's personality.... In addition, the mask is defensive armour: we wear it ... to keep from being hurt. So protected, we are only slightly involved no matter what happens.... Finally, the mask is a weapon of attack; we put it on to keep up a noble conception of ourselves; it is a heroic ideal which we try to live up to. As a character in The Player Queen affirms: "To be great we must seem so.... Seeming that goes on for a lifetime is no different from reality." ... A poet should be instantly recognizable by his demeanour. The poet looks the poet, the hero looks the hero; both may be deceiving others and they may even be practising a form of deception upon themselves....<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>(London: Rockliff, 1958), p. 89.

<sup>51</sup>Vide The Heritage of Symbolism (London: Macmillan, 1943), p. 183.

<sup>52</sup>Y:M&M, p. 176.

Two factors not sufficiently emphasized in this definition are the rôle of the Mask in providing the artist with both a moral discipline and a source of creative energy. Yeats believed that it was only through the cultivation of the anti-self or other self that man could attain true, that is, self-imposed discipline:

"If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon others. Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask...."<sup>53</sup>

And again:

"I think all happiness in life depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, or a rebirth as something not one self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed...."<sup>54</sup>

The tension between opposing elements of one's character forms, in fact, the basis for creativity for:

We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric,  
but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.<sup>55</sup>

Yeats's Mask was therefore not merely a social asset in the Wildean sense, but a moral force which lay purely within the grasp of subjective man, "all those, that is, who must spin a web of their own bowels",<sup>56</sup> "who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality."<sup>57</sup> To Yeats the supreme test of such men -- Dante and Villon for example, who, though they were "mirrored in all the suffering of desire", "would not, when they speak

<sup>53</sup>M, p. 334.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 331. Cf.: "The artist searches for a mask, originally to conceal his natural self, but ultimately to reveal his imaginative self, the body of his art." (Northrop Frye, "Yeats and the Language of Symbolism", Univ. of Toronto Quarterly [1947], 15).

<sup>56</sup>A, p.189.

<sup>57</sup>M, p.331.

through their art, change their luck"<sup>58</sup> -- was their ability to contemplate without despair the greatest obstacle that could rouse their will to full intensity. Such men we regard with awe, because "we gaze not at the work of art, but at the re-creation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and it may even seem that the hairs of our heads stand up, because that birth, that re-creation, is from terror."<sup>59</sup>

The relationship between the theory of the Mask and Yeats's idealization of heroic and aristocratic woman lies in what is perhaps the essential element of the Mask doctrine: admiration for those qualities which one feels are lacking in oneself and the attempt to re-create oneself by upholding and incorporating into one's personality the admired qualities. Though Yeats never attempted, apart from his spirited defence of The Playboy, to don the mask of the hero (in the popular sense of that word), he undoubtedly admired, and probably envied too, the courage of Maud Gonne, the fearlessness with which she carried out her political work and the dramatic flamboyance with which she displayed "the wasteful virtues" that "earn the sun".<sup>60</sup> As for the mask of the aristocrat, there was ample opportunity for comparing, during his stays at Coole, Lady Gregory's freedom from pecuniary cares with his own financial embarrassment; and his abortive attempt to convince of his lineal descent from the Great Duke of Ormonde underscores a rather petty snobbism that could be derived only

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<sup>58</sup> A, p. 273.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> This is all the more evident when we remember Yeats's basically shy, sensitive and introspective nature, revealed in his father's letter to Mrs Yeats, written when the boy was only seven: "I am very anxious about Willy ... [He] is sensitive, intellectual and emotional, very easily rebuffed and continually afraid of being rebuffed ...", while a significant entry in Yeats's diary for August 1910 reads, "O Masters of life give me confidence in something even if it be my own reason." (Y:M&P, pp. 9, 10, 161 respectively.)

from envying and admiring one's hereditary superiors. More important, however, was the sense of ordered calm and composure, of inherited ease and self-possession which he saw in Lady Gregory and associated with the aristocracy in general, qualities that were in direct conflict with his own inner turmoil and disquiet during his disastrous affair with Maud Gonne. Yeats's emulation of aristocracy is most clearly seen in the eloquence of his poems to and about Lady Gregory. Charles Tomlinson says:

Yeats revives for us the language of courtesy that we know from the seventeenth century. His poems on great houses, and on their ruin, stand at the end of the line of the English country-house poem, descendants of Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst", of Carew's "To My Friend G.N., from Wrest", Herrick's "Panegerick to Sir Lewis Pemberton", Marvell's "Appleton House" and the fourth epistle of Pope's moral essays. The language of these poems is the language of tact and the language of power.... The very existence of the houses ... is sanctioned only by the vitality such houses transmit. "Leisure, wealth, privilege were created", says Yeats in Dramatis Personae, "to be a soil for the most living."<sup>61</sup>

It remains now to discuss the treatment of heroic and aristocratic women in his poetry.

## II

In considering the image of heroic woman, three factors emerge: the passion, intensity, joy and vitality of Maud Gonne (and, to a lesser extent, of Mabel Beardsley); the courage of Mabel Beardsley (and, to a similar extent, of Maud Gonne) and the generosity and courtesy of them both. In the case of Maud Gonne, the most outstanding feature is a vibrancy that is like a joyous affirmation of life, reflected in her physical appearance and testifying to an inner burning spirituality. The main effect is to give Yeats's portrayal of her an active quality; and it is a token of his genius

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<sup>61</sup> Vide "Yeats and the Practising Poet", in An Honoured Guest. New Essays on W.B. Yeats, ed. Denis Donoghue and J.R. Mulryne (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), p.2.



that he has succeeded not only in breaking away from the langorous Pre-Raphaelite image of his beloved but in creating an entirely new image of woman that at once captures the radiance of the original and results in a completely living, breathing portrait. Nor has Yeats been influenced by the sudden emergence, in the nineties, of the "New" or "Advanced" Woman who "smoked cigarettes, cut her hair, ... didn't wear corsets ..." <sup>62</sup> and espoused causes like Adult Suffrage and Socialism. The woman Yeats draws is feminine to the core; and the originality of his creation testifies to the poet's truth to his subject and his total independence of popular cult or fashion.

The image which most accurately captures Maud Gonne's joyful intensity (and, incidentally, her loftiness and majestic pride), is the fire image which predominates in these poems. The earliest poem in which this image appears is "The Folly of Being Comforted", the first version of which was printed on 11 January 1902, <sup>63</sup> where the lover gainsays his friend's well-meaning advice to be "wise and patient" in the hope that time will reduce the physical attraction of his beloved, and argues that her nobleness has actually enhanced her beauty in middle age:

But heart there is no comfort, not a grain;  
Time can but make her beauty over again  
Because of that great nobleness of hers;  
The fire that stirs about her when she stirs  
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways  
When all the wild summer was in her gaze; ...<sup>64</sup>

By 1913 the disputable logic of the second and third lines quoted had been altered, providing a free flow for the

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<sup>62</sup>K.L. Mix, A Study in Yellow.... (Lawrence & London, 1960), p.133.

<sup>63</sup>Comm., p. 88.

<sup>64</sup>VE, p. 200, ll. 7-12, *infra*.

sweep and swell of emotion as it rises toward the climax  
 "burns": the thought is that the burning spirituality of her  
 beauty, rising from an inner nobility of mind and heart, is  
 more evident in her middle age than in her youth:

But, heart, there is no comfort, not a grain;  
 Time can but make her beauty over again;  
 Because of that great nobleness of hers  
 The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs  
 Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways,  
 When all the wild summer was in her gaze.<sup>65</sup>

It is interesting to note that the fire image, used primarily  
 to suggest Maud's purity and spiritual nobility, is enhanced  
 by the alliterative effects of "hers", "stirs" and "burns",  
 which suggest the flickering of a flame. There is also in  
 the words "wild summer" a suggestion of passion and wilful-  
 ness, of sensuousness bordering on sensuality that is evident  
 in the poem about Queen Maeve.

The fire image again appears in the grandeur and fiery  
 intensity of "that proud look as though she had gazed into the  
 burning sun ...",<sup>66</sup> where his beloved's beauty mirrors the  
 sun's natural force; and in the memory of that intensity,  
 softened though it is by rambling nostalgia:

The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,  
 These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd  
 Will gather, and not know it walks the very street  
 Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> CP, p. 172. Cf. "And lo, the man's face burned upon her  
 eyes / As though she had turned them on the naked sun ..."  
 (A.C. Swinburne, The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne  
 / 6 vols.; London: Chatto & Windus, 1911/, IV, 63), although  
 Jeffares quotes a line containing similar imagery from Blake's  
Edward the Third. (Vide Y:M&P, p. 317, n. 58.)

<sup>67</sup> CP, p. 138. Cf. Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism (1943),  
 p. 200. "There is still some of the old majesty here, but it is  
 clear and firm. The words come from common life and have all  
 its strength and roots. The rhythm exalts them into high poetry."

The fierce intensity of her nature is captured in the brief trimeter beat and pulsating end-rhymes of "A Woman Homer Sung" (written April 5 - 15 1910),<sup>68</sup> where she is transformed into a Helen so real and tangible that his memories seem but a pale copy of reality:

For she had fiery blood  
When I was young,  
And trod so sweetly proud  
As 'twere upon a cloud,  
A woman Homer sung,  
That life and letters seem  
But an heroic dream.<sup>69</sup>

In the description of Maeve, to whom Maud Gonne approximates closely, there is a sense of burning energy, where her personality bursts into spontaneous flame:

And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,  
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,  
At need, ...<sup>70</sup>

while "No Second Troy" reveals a purity that is fraught with restlessness in the rather flatulent lines:

What could have made her peaceful with a mind  
That nobleness made simple as a fire...<sup>71</sup>

Some of this energy, this nervous intensity is succinctly caught in the little poem "That the Night Come", where the fairly lax handling of the iambic trimeter in the opening lines gives way to tighter, more compressed rhythms, with more frequent pauses for breath, till the whole explodes into an impassioned climax in the phrase "To bundle time away", rounded off by the decisive finality of the closing dimeter:

<sup>68</sup> Comm., p. 101.

<sup>69</sup> CP, p. 100.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

She lived in storm and strife,  
 Her soul had such desire  
 For what proud death may bring  
 That it could not endure  
 The common good of life,  
 But lived as 'twere a king  
 That packed his marriage day  
 With banneret and pennon,  
 Trumpet and kettledrum,  
 And the outrageous cannon,  
 To bundle time away<sup>72</sup>  
 That the night come.

Part of the weakness of this poem lies in the fact that it does not come alive until the sixth line and depends almost entirely for its vitality on the concluding simile. This figure of speech is nevertheless startlingly original in concept and impact -- the rather bizarre comparison of the woman's soul with male royalty emphasizes her strength and regality of character; and the insistent use of plosives-- "packed", "banneret", "trumpet", "bundle" -- intensifies the image, as do the contrasting images of life and death, day and night.

There are, furthermore, other brief phrases, not directly conveyed by or associated with the fire image, which testify to "that beauty, ... high birth ..., vigour of bone, and ... royal bearing" of which T.R. Henn so eloquently speaks.<sup>73</sup> In the 1922 version of "The Arrow" she is "tall and noble"<sup>74</sup> (echoing the majestic frame of Queen Maeve who is described as "great-bodied and great-limbed"); in the first version of "The Lover pleads with his Friend for Old Friends" he forecasts the downfall of her "high beauty";<sup>75</sup> Yeats's memory of her "eagle look"<sup>76</sup> magnificently captures her power and proud majesty; and recollections of her strength, "so lofty and fierce and kind"<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>73</sup>Vide LT, p. 55.

<sup>74</sup>VE, p. 199, l. 5, supra.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 173, l. 7, infra.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 316, l. 25.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 201, l. 3.

evoke a nobility of mind and spirit reminiscent of the pagan joyousness of Maeve.

The second important quality associated with the ancient heroic virtues is courage and leadership, which for Yeats involved a deliberate renunciation of popular success and appeal and the maintenance of a solitary almost godlike detachment and aloofness. This pride and solitude and indifference to public opinion Yeats admired in the life of Parnell and dramatized in the character of Seanchan, the rebellious poet-hero of The King's Theshold; and though he was later to condemn Maud Gonne for submerging her personality in her cause, there are brief references in the poems of the period to that solitude and courage that raised her above mob worship or hostility. The passage containing praise of her high-heartedness in "Baile and Aillinn" has already been quoted;<sup>78</sup> and "Queen Maeve" interrupts the narrative to pay a direct tribute:

Friend of these many years, you too had stood  
With equal courage in that whirling rout;  
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,  
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone...<sup>79</sup>

"The People" (to be discussed in greater detail later) reveals her courage in enduring the antagonism of her enemies, no-good ruffians who succeeded in turning her sympathizers against her during a period of advertisy;<sup>80</sup> and in "No Second Troy" her beauty, "high and solitary and most stern ..." <sup>81</sup> underlines

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<sup>78</sup>Vide Ch. II, p.72 of this thesis.

<sup>79</sup>CP, p. 455.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 169-70. Vide WBY, pp. 209-210, and cf. pp.114-16 of this chapter.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 101, Cf.:

a spirit that is at once proud, dignified and aloof.

One of the finest compliments appears in "Against Unworthy Praise" (written 11 May 1910)<sup>82</sup> where her pride, idealism and indifference to mob hatred raise her above the flux of popular opinion and serve as an example to the poet, torn between the private significance of his work and his craving for public applause. Here the terse rhythmic effects, savagely suppressed emotion and lean, sinewy texture of the poetry culminate in two images, the lion and the child, signifying that strength, simplicity and inner tranquility that are known only to the truly great:

Oh, heart, be at peace, because  
Nor knave nor dolt can break  
What's not for their applause,  
Being for a woman's sake.  
Enough if the work has seemed,  
So did she your strength renew,  
A dream that a lion had dreamed  
Till the wilderness cried aloud,  
A secret between you two,  
Between the proud and the proud.  
What, still, you would have their praise !  
But here's a haughtier text,  
The labyrinth of her days  
That her own strangeness perplexed.  
And how what her dreaming gave  
Earned slander ingratitude  
From self-same dolt and knave;  
Aye, and worse wrong than these.  
Yet she, singing upon her road,  
Half lion, half child, is at peace.<sup>83</sup>

The greatest instance of courage, however, is not in the poems about Maud Gonne, but in "Upon a Dying Lady", a semi-dramatized episodic poem on the slow death of

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... Maud Gonne at Howth Station waiting a  
train,  
Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head:  
All the Olympians; a thing never known again.

(CP, p. 348)

<sup>82</sup>Comm., p. 105.

<sup>83</sup>VE, pp. 259-60.

Mabel Beardsley, written between January 1912 and July 1914.<sup>84</sup>  
 Here the dying actress's attitude toward death is closer to the joyful intensity of the pagan warrior in battle than the self-contained aloofness of the public hero: in the first section we are told that her eyes, despite her illness, are "laughter-lit ..."; in the last there is reference to her "laughing eye"; in the sixth she is raised to the status of "all who have lived in Joy and laughed into the face of Death."<sup>85</sup>

The poem consists of seven moods or movements, each of which illuminates a fresh aspect of the patient's character or the poet's observation: the sickroom scene with its brave but pathetic exchange of persiflage between patient and visitors; the poet's description of the dolls and drawings made by an artist friend (Charles Ricketts) for the dying woman's pleasure, amusement and distraction; his annoyance at the interruption of this attempted gaiety by the arrival of a priest; a cameo of the patient at evening, crowding in the moment by her frantic playing with the dolls; the poet's comment on the courage and nobility of her nature; his imaginative projection into the first joyful moment after death; and finally his plea with Death to "give her a little grace."

The sections most concerned with her courage are the first (entitled "Her Courtesy"), the fifth ("Her Race") and the sixth ("Her Courage"). The poem opens with a deceptively casual, informal pen-picture of the sickroom with the patient propped

<sup>84</sup>Comm., p. 191. Vide also "Some New Letters from W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory", ed. D.T. Torchiana and G. O'Malley, A Review of English Literature, IV, 3 (July, 1963), 20, 26. Austin Clarke attributes something of Yeats's poem to an earlier poem on Mabel Beardsley by Victor Plarr (Vide The Celtic Twilight and the Nineties, intro. Roger McHugh, The Tower Series of Anglo-Irish Studies I [The Dolmen Press, 1969], p. 11.)

<sup>85</sup>CP, pp. 177, 180, 179 respectively.

up on pillows, entertaining the circle of friends gathered about her bed with jokes and wicked stories:

With the old kindness, the old distinguished grace  
 She lies, her lovely piteous head amid dull red hair  
 Propped upon pillows, rouge on the pallor of her face,  
 She would not have us sad because she is lying there,  
 And when she meets our gaze her eyes are laughter lit,  
 Her speech a wicked tale that we may vie with her  
 Matching our broken-hearted wit against her wit,  
 Thinking of saints and of Petronius Arbiter.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the apparent ease of the description with its speech cadences and almost imperceptible rhyme endings, there is an underlying tautness and tension that keeps the whole thing together, while certain carefully selected images flare up and die down, highlighting the central figure in all her pathetic gaiety: the contrast between her former beauty and the ravaging effects of illness ("She lies, her lovely piteous head among dull red hair ..."); the hard brittle quality only partially concealing the painful truth of her plight ("Laughter-lit" eyes, the sharp alliterative effect of "wicked" - "wit"); and her ironic exemplification of the death of saints and of Petronius Arbiter, Roman voluptuary and satirist, who spent his last hours in amusements and social pleasures.

Further confirmation of her courage occurs not only in direct illustration but in the poet's comments (in the fifth section) on her reaction to her illness. Here the vigorous rhythms underline both the patient's indomitable will power and the poet's contention that her courage is due largely to an inner aristocratic spirit that has taught her how to conduct herself in times of trouble:

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<sup>86</sup>VE, p. 362.



She has not grown uncivil  
 As narrow natures would  
 And called the pleasures evil  
 Happier days thought good;  
 She knows herself a woman  
 No red and white of a face,  
 Or rank, raised from a common  
 Unreckonable race.  
 And how should her heart fail her  
 Or sickness break her will  
 With her dead brother's valour  
 For an example still.<sup>87</sup>

Some of this self-control is suitably conveyed in the contained alliterative effects of "rank" - "raised" - "unreckonable race"; and the aristocratic mood is carefully offset by sharp contrasts in the choice of diction: "uncivil", "narrow natures", "common".

Finally, in the sixth stanza she is equated with a variety of figures, Irish, oriental, Homeric and Renaissance, who lived and died in the fearless pagan tradition. The section opens with a slow-moving solemn evocation of the moment after death and by a series of stops, pauses, ornaments and parentheses swells out, like some Bach fugue or Miltonic epic, into a powerful hymn of glory to the human spirit. Though the first version suffers from a certain woolliness, it already foreshadows the epic weight and density of the final version:

When her soul flies to the predestined dancing-place  
 (I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made  
 Amid the dreams of youth) let her come face to face,  
 While wondering still to be a shade, with Grania's shade,  
 All but the perils of the woodland flight forgot,  
 And that made her Dermuid dear, and some old cardinal  
 Pacing with half-closed eyelids in a sunny spot  
 Who had murmured of Giogione at his latest breath --  
 Aye and Achilles, Timor, Babar, Barhaim all  
 Who lived in shameless joy and laughed into the face of death.<sup>88</sup>

There is an element in Mabel Beardsley's demeanour which reflects the third quality typical of Yeats's heroic type: generosity and courtesy. This is her graciousness in concealing

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 365-66.

her true feelings before her friends and thus sparing them unnecessary awkwardness and embarrassment ("She would not have us sad because she is lying there ..."), though the delineation of her "old kindness" and "old distinguished grace" testifies to an inborn courtesy which is closer to the aristocratic spirit of Lady Gregory. In Maud Gonne, on the other hand, the "aristocratic" virtues of the ancient heroes are revealed in a different way: in her ideal of service and her attitude to her inferiors. Her work among the poor, for example, is poignantly captured in the loving memories of the ragged beggar "sheltering from the wind ..." <sup>89</sup> and of the "old gaffer" muttering a blessing "because it was [her] prayer / Recovered him upon the bed of death." <sup>90</sup> Equally powerful in impact is the magnificent tribute, in "The People", to Maud Gonne's magnanimity and generosity in forgiving former supporters who had turned against her after separation from her husband.

The poem, written 10 January 1915, <sup>91</sup> consists of a dialogue between the poet and his beloved; and it is interesting to note that out of thirty-seven lines of almost pure dialogue, only six-and-a-half are devoted to the woman's reply; twenty-one comprise the poet's complaint about the ingratitude of the town to which he has given a lifetime of service; five-and-a-half are devoted to the poet's defensive reply to his beloved's reproof; and three to his reminiscence and conclusion. Yet it is the very brevity of his beloved's reply, following the raving spume of the poet's attack, that creates an image of her magnanimity, courage, generosity -- heroism in the broadest sense, not unmixed with an aristocracy of spirit that comes with true humility:

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<sup>89</sup>CP, p. 169.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 172-73.

<sup>91</sup>Comm., p. 182.

"What have I earned for all that work", I said,  
 "For all that I have done at my own charge?  
 The daily spite of this unmannerly town  
 Where who has served the most is most defamed,  
 The reputation of his lifetime lost  
 Between the night and morning. I might have lived --  
 And you know well how great the longing has been --  
 Where every day my footfall should have lit  
 In the green shadow on Ferrara wall;  
 Or climbed among the images of the past,  
 The unperturbed and courtly images,  
 Evening and morn, the steep street of Urbino  
 To where the duchess and her people talked  
 The stately midnight through until they stood  
 In their great window looking at the dawn.  
 I might have had no friend that could not mix  
 Courtesy and passion into one, like those  
 That saw the wicks go yellow in the dawn.  
 I might have used the one substantial right  
 My trade allows -- chosen my company,  
 And chosen what scenery had pleased me best."

Thereon my phoenix answered in reproof:  
 "The drunkards, pilferers of public funds --  
 All the dishonest crowd I had driven away --  
 When my luck changed and they dared to meet my face,  
 Crawled from obscurity and set upon me  
 Those I had served and some that I had fed;  
 Yet never have I, now nor any time,  
 Complained of the people."

All I could reply  
 Was: "You that have not lived in thought but deed  
 Can have the purity of a natural force;  
 But I, whose virtues are the definitions  
 Of the analytic mind, can neither close  
 The eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech."

And yet, because my heart leaped at her words,  
 I was abashed, and now they come to mind<sup>92</sup>  
 After nine years, I sink my head abashed.

In its abrupt opening, muscular texture and Renaissance backdrop this poem is typically Browningsque, though Yeats was probably more indebted to his 1907 visit to Italy and his reading of Castiglione than to Browning.<sup>93</sup> The speech rhythms and speech cadences show remarkable fluency within the limitations imposed by blank verse yet are never lost in meaningless pomp or oratory. There is, furthermore, a keen sense of "moment" or climax, not only in the course of individual speeches, but in the emotional climate between the two speakers:

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<sup>92</sup>VE, pp. 351-53.

<sup>93</sup>Y:M&P, p. 156; WBY, p. 219.

notice how the laborious climb up "The steep street of Urbino" (the effort of which is emphasized in the long open vowels) opens out into the calm, majestic image of the Duchess in her window; how the break at the end of the woman's reply suggests the poet's gasp of astonishment and baffled admiration: and how the poet's final sense of shame gradually floods the poem, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions.

More important, however, is the difference between the characters of the speakers revealed in the change of tone. The testiness, irritation and spluttering indignation of the first gives way to the second speaker's reaction of hurt pride --- there is a considerable rise of emotional temperature from her opening words to the vehement climax "crawled from obscurity..." --- but it is the quiet reasoning of the closing lines with their incredible gentleness that wins over the first speaker. Finally, the poet's astonishment at this magnanimous gesture finds expression in the reasons he seeks for rationalizing their difference of attitude; but it is his shame and wondering admiration at the end that make him bow his head in praise. The image of the phoenix which, apart from the Helen image, most frequently signifies Maud Gonne in the poems of the period is used here with half tender, half serious, half bantering effect. In a sense the poem forms an interesting counterpart  
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to Yeats's chastisement of Lord Ardilaun, except that Yeats is now the recipient instead of the giver of advice: it is ironic that the very "courtesy and passion" that he desires are inherent in his beloved's nature and that she wins him over not by pompous rhetoric but by example.

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<sup>94</sup>Vide "To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription ..." (CP, pp. 119-120).

The "aristocratic" virtues implicit in the heroic ideal pave the way for the image of aristocratic woman evident in the poems to and about Lady Gregory and culminating in "A Prayer for My Daughter". Nevertheless, in the six poems of the period concerning Lady Gregory and the three in which her home is evoked she is very little imaged,<sup>95</sup> and it is only in the later poems written between 1927 and 1937 that a fuller, more intimate portrait is provided.<sup>96</sup> Both "Friends" and "A Friend's Illness"<sup>97</sup> for example, testify to the depth of Yeats's feeling for her, the former revealing an emotional warmth that is reminiscent of Pope's feeling for Mrs Martha Blount, the latter being a pithy expression of his horror and helplessness at the news of her illness, which resulted "from overwork, and ... the slanders levelled against their joint work in the Abbey."<sup>98</sup> "The New Faces" (written December 1912)<sup>99</sup> portrays the pathos of their growing old, while in "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing" he exhorts her to exult in the face of attacks by journalists who accused her of using the Abbey Theatre as a vehicle for the production of her own plays:

<sup>95</sup>They are "These Are the Clouds", "A Friend's Illness", "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing", "Friends", "Shepherd and Goatherd", "The New Faces" (CP, pp. 107-108, 109, 122, 139, 159-63, 238) and "Upon a House Shaken ...", "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "The Shadowy Waters" (1906 version) (CP, pp. 106-107, 147-48, 469-70 respectively). "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (CP, pp. 225-26) could almost certainly not have been written without Yeats's experience of Coole.

<sup>96</sup>They are "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", "Coole Park, 1929" and "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" (CP, pp. 368-70, 273-75, 275-76).

<sup>97</sup>CP, pp. 139, 109. They were written January 1911 and February 1909 respectively. (Comm., pp. 145, 113.)

<sup>98</sup>LT, pp. 30-31. For further information about Yeats's reaction to her illness vide excerpts from his diary for February 1909. (Y:M&P, p. 150.)

<sup>99</sup>Comm., p. 282.

Now all the truth is out,  
 Be secret and take defeat  
 From any brazen throat,  
 For how can you compete,  
 Being honour bred, with one  
 Who, were it proved he lies,  
 Were neither shamed in his own  
 Nor in his neighbours' eyes?  
 Bred to a harder thing  
 Than Triumph, turn away  
 And like a laughing string  
 Whereon mad fingers play  
 Amid a place of stone,  
 Be secret and exult,  
 Because of all things known  
 That is most difficult.<sup>100</sup>

It is only in "These are the Clouds" and "Shepherd and Goatherd" that she is drawn to any extent and even then the treatment is rather scanty. The former poem (written in May 1910)<sup>101</sup> is a pompous piece of oratory commending Lady Gregory's perpetuation of the aristocratic ideal in the face of the levelling effects of Irish democracy. Though there is a solemn grandeur in the stately, dignified pace, the poem suffers from a preponderance of verbiage which is not concealed by the repetition of the magnificent image of the opening lines:

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
 The majesty that shuts his burning eye;  
 The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,  
 Till that be tumbled that was lifted high  
 And discord follow upon unison,  
 And all things at one common level lie.  
 And therefore, friend, if your great race were run  
 And these things came, so much the more thereby  
 Have you made greatness your companion,  
 Although it be for children that you sigh:  
 These are the clouds about the fallen sun,  
 The majesty that shuts his burning eye.<sup>102</sup>

Associated with the idea of greatness is the "aristocratic self-possession", the "stoical acceptance of adversity" seen in Lady Gregory's calm composure at the news of her son's death. Though "Shepherd and Goatherd", written between February and

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<sup>100</sup>CP, p. 122. For biographical background vide A, p. 482. It was written Sept. 1913 (Comm., p. 132).

<sup>101</sup>Comm., p. 112.

<sup>102</sup>VE, p. 265.

19 March 1918,<sup>103</sup> is primarily an elegaic pastoral in honour of Robert Gregory, who was killed in action during the First World War, it contains a little cameo of Lady Gregory's reserve and quiet courage. The pace is slow and measured, befitting the general mood of grief, though there is a sense of emotion strained beyond its proper limits that detracts from the poem's sincerity:

Shepherd. She goes about her house erect and calm  
 Between the pantry and the linen chest,  
 Or else at meadow or at grazing overlooks  
 Her labouring men, as though her darling lived  
 But for her grandson now; there is no change  
 But such as I have seen upon her face  
 Watching our shepherd sports at harvest-time  
 When her son's turn was over.<sup>104</sup>

Lady Gregory's aristocracy is reflected not so much in the poems about her, however, as in her association with her estate Coole Park, and its symbolical significance for Yeats. In a sense, Lady Gregory is synonymous with Coole and the values it represents are indistinguishable from those which she embodies: Yeats's claim that "this house has enriched my soul"<sup>105</sup> obviously includes the impact on him of its mistress. The aristocratic ideal is crystallized in "Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation" (written on 7 August 1909),<sup>106</sup> born out of Yeats's dismay and indignation at the reduction of rent imposed by the courts and the consequent threat to the existence of the "great houses":

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<sup>103</sup>Comm., p. 172.

<sup>104</sup>VE, p. 340, ll. 35-42.

<sup>105</sup>Y:M&P, p. 151.

<sup>106</sup>IdY, p. 288. Vide, however, Comm., p. 109.

How should the world be luckier if this house  
 Where passion and precision have been one  
 Time out of mind became too ruinous  
 To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun  
 And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow  
 Where wings and memory of wings, and all  
 That comes of the best knit to the best; although  
 Mean roof-trees were the sturdier for its fall,  
 How should their luck run high enough to reach  
 The gifts that govern men, and after these  
 To gradual Time's last gift a written speech  
 Wrought of high laughter, loveliness, and ease.<sup>107</sup>

This poem is a superb piece of rhetoric, with its proud pace, its carefully calculated thought sequences and the balance and sanity of its phrasing. The main quality that emerges is the fibre of the aristocratic spirit, forcefully conveyed by the image of the eagle and of the "lidless eye" fearlessly matched against the sun, evoking power, majesty and a joyful affirmation of life; by the tense effects of the plosives in "passion and precision"; and the sense of grace and ease in the liquid consonants in "lidless", "loves", "laughing".

The image on which the poem turns, however, is that of growth and breeding, which suggests another important aspect of the aristocratic ideal: lineage, tradition and an inherent sense of caste. The house provides the breeding-grounds, the conditions of nourishment and sustenance of the aristocratic spirit; and the handing down of inherited ideas and values is powerfully conveyed in the image of the eaglet, discovering its own magnificence in the example of its ancestors. This idea is echoed in "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing" (already mentioned), where Lady Gregory is urged to exult in the face of defeat, as any attempt to retaliate would be beneath the dignity of one who is "honour bred", "bred to a harder thing / Than Triumph,...";<sup>108</sup> while in "Coole Park and

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<sup>107</sup> VE, p. 264.

<sup>108</sup> CP, p. 122.



Ballylee, 1931", she is depicted as "a last inheritor"<sup>109</sup> of values and possessions that have been loved and admired from generation to generation.

Closely allied to the idea of breeding and lineage is the concept of custom and ceremony, a way of life that is established, settled, unchanging, which Yeats idealized in "A Prayer for my Daughter". Yeats undoubtedly exaggerated these claims in the light of the rising uncultured parvenu; but the impassioned plea that his daughter "live like some green laurel / Rooted in one dear perpetual place"<sup>110</sup> has a ring of earnestness and conviction that reveals a belief in the values for their own sake. The stately dignity of this poem opens out into the splendid climax of the concluding stanza, where the case for custom and ceremony is richly argued in emblems of cornucopia and laurel tree, while the amplitude of Yeats's rhetorical manner helps to accommodate the pedantic attack on the lowness of mere controversy and opinion, vehemently made in the image of the bartering huckster:

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house  
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;  
For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
Peddled in the thoroughfares;  
How but in custom and in ceremony  
Are innocence and beauty born?  
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.<sup>111</sup>

The last quality which Yeats associated with aristocratic woman emerges in "Upon a House Shaken by the Land of Agitation": that of excellence, the kind of all-round virtuosity that Yeats admired in Robert Gregory, the perfect Renaissance man. I

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 214. Less palatable is the unintentional pomposity of "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931", where custom and ceremony are reflected in "ancestral trees, / Or gardens rich in memory", forming the perfect background to "marriages, alliances and families" and the satisfaction of "every bride's ambition". (Ibid., p. 276.)

personally find the sentiment concerning the aristocrat's inherent superiority oppressive ("... all / That comes of the best knit to the best"); but the illustration of the sentiment belies its arrogance. The idea of excellence is expressed in the reference to the combined gifts of government and letters (notice the proud sweeping oratory of "a written speech / Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease ..."): in Lady Gregory it is revealed, in terms of manners, character and intellect, "that pride and that humility"<sup>112</sup> which for Yeats constituted the essence of aristocratic courtesy. Courtesy, which Yeats equated with "style" in the arts, so far from indicating the absence of manhood (or womanhood), he considered, together with courage, its essence;<sup>113</sup> nor was it incompatible with inner passion. "In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned ..." he emphatically states in "A Prayer for My Daughter";<sup>114</sup> for courtesy, that is, charm and kindness, in a plain woman can be more winning and persuasive than beauty in an unkind one. But Lady Gregory's courtesy is equally matched by her intellectual prowess and character. "Coole Park, 1929" testifies to the "intellectual sweetness"<sup>115</sup> in the air; and the final version of "Friends" recounts the pleasurable intercourse between "mind and delighted mind ..."<sup>116</sup> Finally, Yeats pays tribute to that "powerful character" that "could keep a swallow to its first intent,"<sup>117</sup> a reminder of Lady Gregory's firmness, stability and inner discipline that guided him through his unhappy season at Coole.

The poetry of the period, then, shows a number of

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 369. Cf. the "pride established in humility" which Yeats found at Coole Park. (Ibid., p. 274.)

<sup>113</sup>Vide Zwerdling, p. 82.

<sup>114</sup>CP, p. 212.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

important developments in Yeats's literary treatment of woman. There is the emergence of an important new concept (although the heroic element was already evident in the poems about Maud Gonne),<sup>118</sup> while both Lady Gregory and Mabel Beardsley provide entirely fresh sources of inspiration. Moreover, both the aristocratic and heroic concepts of woman show a mental and emotional advance on those of the earlier periods: the former indicates a greater awareness of woman in a social context, thus providing a refreshing extension of Yeats's frontiers after the predominating love interest of the earlier poems; and the latter reveals an eye for character and personality that is close to that of the portrait painter. Finally, there is a remarkable broadening of style to suit the spirit and individuality of the subject matter and source of inspiration: the heroic image is intense, passionate and energetic, as befits Maud Gonne, or bitter and pathetic for Mabel Beardsley, while the poems evoking the aristocratic ideal show Yeats's mastery not only of the courtly language of the seventeenth century but of the rhetorical mode in general. Nevertheless, both images are still idealized and, to a certain extent, romanticized evocations of their sources. In the following chapter we shall see this prevailing attitude translated into a broader, more generalized view of woman and womanhood.

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<sup>118</sup>Vide Ch. II, pp. 70-76 of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV  
ON WOMAN AND WOMANHOOD (1914-1919)

The period 1914 to 1929 marks the summation and crystallization of Yeats's concept of woman in his middle years. On the one hand there is evidence of preoccupation with the physical aspect of woman, brilliantly depicted in Yeats's delineation of the fundamental relationship between the sexes -- and in the first-person dramatizations of the "A Woman Young and Old" series -- extending over the period 1914 to 1929; on the other, there is concern with the moral and spiritual aspect, fully expounded in "A Prayer for My Daughter" and implicitly advocated in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (dealt with in the years 1914 to 1919). These images, though rooted in Yeats's personal experience, take on a broader, more generalized character than those previously discussed; and treated as a whole may be said to constitute a uniquely personal "middle-aged" philosophy of ideal woman and ideal womanhood. Owing to the sharp dichotomy between these aspects, however, and for the sake of clarity, they will be discussed separately, the spiritual aspect being confined to this chapter, the physical to the following chapter.

In considering the former (that is, spiritual) aspect, three main factors must be taken into account. The first is the personal example of Lady Gregory, whose "strength, intelligence and kindness"<sup>1</sup> formed the foundation for that capacity for friendship which Yeats valued so highly in woman. "She has been to me mother, friend, sister and brother", he wrote at the news of her illness in February 1909, "I cannot realize the world without her .... Friendship is all the house

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<sup>1</sup>A, p. 391.

I have."<sup>2</sup> Secondly, there was the influence of his wife, Georgie Hyde-Lees (who incidentally bore a remarkable resemblance to Lady Gregory): one critic marks the emergence of "delight -- a rare emotion in his early poetry"<sup>3</sup> -- from the year of his marriage, and it is not impossible to attribute the element of merriment in "A Prayer for My Daughter" to the impact of his young bride on the middle-aged poet. Thirdly, there was Yeats's preoccupation, in the process of writing A Vision, with the concept of Unity of Being, of the Fifteenth Phase of beauty in his theory of human personality, which was to colour the idea of spiritual beauty expressed in the same poem. These factors must be seen against Yeats's total revaluation of his concept of ideal womanhood resulting first from his bitter disillusionment with both Maud Gonne and Constance Markiewicz, two women of beauty and breeding who sacrificed their femininity to a life of obsessional hatred and politics, and secondly from the "paternal" insight gained from the birth of his daughter and from his tender relationship with Iseult Gonne, wherein he willingly undertook the rôle of protector and mentor.

Yeats's friendship with Lady Gregory, which lasted from 1896 to her death in 1932,<sup>4</sup> was undoubtedly the main factor contributing to his vision of ideal woman in the poems of the period. Her influence on his concept of aristocratic woman has already been fully discussed in the previous chapter;

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 477-78.

<sup>3</sup>Jon Stallworthy, in Vision and Revision in Yeats's "Last Poems" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). p. 34.

<sup>4</sup>Vide Comm., p. xv, Letters p. 796, and cf. WBY, pp. 131, 427.

suffice it to say that she provided the model, too, for the kind of moral beauty that he was to revere in his most pontifical poem on ideal womanhood. In Lady Gregory there is evidence of the integration of personality, moral strength, firm good humour, inner discipline and sanity that were to guide him through the shattering experience of his unhappy love affair and through the harrassing affairs of the Abbey Theatre. "She brought to my wavering thoughts steadfast nobility ..." he wrote in Autobiographies;<sup>5</sup> and T.J. Kiernan, a friend of Lady Gregory, later appointed trustee and executor of her will, records her courage in attempting, without experience of the theatre, her first play (Twenty-Five) and her "grit" in managing the Abbey in its "early very lean years."<sup>6</sup> That courage was further demonstrated by her composure and self-possession at the news of her son's death; and her "dogged perseverance"<sup>7</sup> in her twelve years' struggle to restore to Ireland Hugh Lane's collection of French Impressionists appropriated by the London National Gallery. As Kiernan poignantly puts it, "She who had won in worlds where genius and imagination and fine-pointed intelligence are plenipotentiary, lost this grim battle with bureaucracy."<sup>8</sup>

The springs of her character and personality are contained within a rigid social framework, in a prescribed code of courtesy, manners, tradition, breeding and lineage that were to provide the outward form of an inner moral fibre. The point of view of "that simple and profound woman", as

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<sup>5</sup>Pp. 477-78.

<sup>6</sup>In "Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats", The Dalhousie Review, XXXVIII (1958), pp. 297, 300.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

Yeats later called her,<sup>9</sup> was founded

not on any narrow modern habit, but upon her sense of great literature, upon her own strange feudal, almost mediaeval youth.... Looking back, Cuchulain of Muirthemne and Gods of Fighting Men at my side, I can see that they were made possible by her past; semi-feudal Roxborough, her inherited sense of caste, and her knowledge of that top of the world where men and women are valued for their manhood and their charm, not for their opinions ...<sup>10</sup>

This aristocratic sense of established behaviour and inherited values is clinched in the "custom and ceremony" celebrated in the final stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter".

A subtler influence was exerted by the woman who was to become Yeats's wife, Georgina Hyde-Lees.<sup>11</sup> Despite Lady Gregory's objection to Yeats's prospective bride -- she had long been trying to pair him off with some eligible beauty, her favourite candidate being Miss Elizabeth Asquith<sup>12</sup> -- there was a strong resemblance between the two women in terms of personality and temperament. This is borne out in a letter to the older woman, dated 16 December

[1917]:

My wife is a perfect wife, kind, wise and unselfish. I think you were such another young girl once. She has made my life serene and full of order. I wish you could see Woburn Buildings now -- nothing changed in plan but little touches here and there, and my own

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<sup>9</sup>In a letter to T.J. Kiernan, written from Cap Martin before 1939, excerpted in "Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats", Dalhousie Review, XXXVIII, p. 306.

<sup>10</sup>A, pp. 392, 456.

<sup>11</sup>For poems in which she is featured vide Appendix D, pp. 246-47 of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup>Virginia Moore, The Unicorn. William Butler Yeats's Search for Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 239.

bedroom ... with furniture of unpainted unpolished wood such as for years I have wished for.... Then too all is very clean ...;<sup>13</sup>

and in an earlier letter;

I think Georgie has your own moral genius.<sup>14</sup>

Yeats authorities and students alike pay tribute to her kindness, helpfulness and co-operation. Richard Ellmann speaks of her "remarkable subtlety and sense of humour ... specially fitted for organizing a lyric poet's errant life ..." <sup>15</sup> and describes her furthermore as "a friendly, witty young woman ... exceptionally intelligent and sympathetic ... kind and self-sacrificing, [who] understood [her husband's] strange mixture of arrogance and diffidence, and behind the pose which he put on before strangers found him deeply human."<sup>16</sup> R.K. Alspach speaks of her "encyclopaedic knowledge of her husband's work and her shrewd judgement of what a textual variorum should be", <sup>17</sup> and Thomas Rice Henn, in the introduction to his superb study, commends her "unfailing courtesy and encouragement ..." <sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Letters, p. 634.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Y:M&M, p. 222.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp.225, 224 passim.

<sup>17</sup> VE, p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> LT, p. xvi. A younger authority, Jon Stallworthy, who met her in 1959 when he was working on the manuscripts (later published as Between the Lines: W.B. Yeats' Poetry in the Making [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963]), that were to become the subject of his well-known thesis, confirmed these views in a personal interview on 28 August 1970, at Cape Town. He summed her up as "a magnificent woman, highly intelligent, extremely astute, with a very good sense of humour (far superior to her husband's), efficient, capable, very well read (she was about seventy at the time and still reading Italian magazines... 'to keep up [her] Italian'); very fond of her grandchildren (Michael's); clearly devoted to her husband and, while obviously revering his work, unwilling to regard him, or give the impression that she regarded him, as a 'monument'; quite aware of his shortcomings, though perfectly willing to tolerate them."



Yeats's relationship with Georgie Hyde-Lees stems from an introduction by Mrs Shakespear, the young girl's step-aunt, in 1911.<sup>19</sup> Accounts of their first meeting differ; for while Virginia Moore paints a romantic picture of a chance meeting at the British Museum, where Miss Hyde-Lees apparently "saw Yeats rush past her like a meteor; and that very afternoon, taking tea with her mother at Olivia Shakespear's, was formally introduced ...",<sup>20</sup> Joseph Hone recounts a more leisurely introduction at the home of Miss Hyde-Lees's parents, Mr and Mrs Tucker, whom Yeats had met through Mrs Shakespear, in Lynton, Devonshire.<sup>21</sup>

Georgie, whom Yeats, in deference to her dislike of her name, called George, was then "a short eighteen-year old girl ... [with] Romanish nose, reddish colouring, lightish yellow-green eyes; and ... an eagerness for all of Yeats's subjects."<sup>22</sup> Soon after his marriage Yeats wrote to his father:

She is not so black and white, but has red-brown hair and a high colour which she sets off by wearing dark green in her clothes and earrings, etc. ...<sup>23</sup>

Reproductions of a photograph and a drawing by John Butler Yeats<sup>24</sup> reveal a calm countenance, the eyes full of wisdom and tenderness, the mouth firm, with just a hint of mischievous good humour.

<sup>19</sup>This date is given in Letters, p. 519. It is confirmed in WBY, pp. 258-59 and Y:M&M, p. 222. Virginia Moore, in The Unicorn ... (N.W.: Macmillan, 1954), p. 229, suggests 1910, however.

<sup>20</sup>In The Unicorn ... (1954), p. 229.

<sup>21</sup>WBY, pp. 258-59.

<sup>22</sup>Moore, p. 229.

<sup>23</sup>WBY, p. 307.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pl. facing p. 396; Y:M&P, pl. between pp. 182 and 183 respectively.

The history of their courtship, complicated as it is by Yeats's final proposal to Maud Gonne after the execution of her husband in 1916, and by his subsequent emotional involvement with Iseult,<sup>25</sup> is sporadic; but it seems that during the course of their acquaintance he discovered that she proved a "charming companion and a kindred spirit in his occult studies".<sup>26</sup> After reading a book by Lombroso she had become interested in psychical research and occasionally helped Yeats check the authenticity of information given by mediums. In 1914 she joined a group of Rudolph Steiner Theosophists and became, at Yeats's suggestion, a member of the Golden Dawn.<sup>27</sup> After Iseult's rejection of his proposal of marriage in 1917, Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory that he was going to ask Mrs Tucker's daughter if she was not "tired of the idea",<sup>28</sup> to become his wife. They were married -- Yeats was fifty-two, his bride twenty-six -- at the Harrow Road register office in London on 20 October 1917, Ezra Pound acting as best man.<sup>29</sup>

The third influence on Yeats's concept of spiritual beauty in woman was his idea of Unity of Being, first mentioned in Autobiographies<sup>30</sup> but ultimately formulated in A Vision.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Vide Y:M&P, pp. 189-90.

<sup>26</sup>Y:M&M, p. 222.

<sup>27</sup>Information from Y:M&M, p. 222.

<sup>28</sup>Letters, p. 633.

<sup>29</sup>WBY, p. 307.

<sup>30</sup>Vide A, p. 190.

<sup>31</sup>Although Yeats had more or less worked out this system before his marriage (vide Y:M&P, p. 193), Mrs Yeats's automatic writing inspired him to re-order his thoughts within a more ambitious framework. The validity of her share in the excitement of this process is no longer debatable, as Virginia Moore has the frank admission that, to detract her husband from his unhappy preoccupation with Iseult Gonne, she decided to "make an attempt to fake automatic writing." (The Unicorn ... [1954], p. 253). For a variety of possible sources, vide LT, p. 194.

The first part of the 1925 version of Yeats's home-made religion, outlined by the end of November 1917,<sup>32</sup> dealt with the classification of human personality into twenty-eight types (or twenty-eight phases of the moon), "each phase being pictured as one of the spokes of a Great Wheel".<sup>33</sup>

The link between Yeats's scheme of human personality and the spiritual beauty which he considered the essence of ideal womanhood is the concept of Unity of Being, manifested in the Fifteenth Phase of the cycle. Though this phase falls beyond the human sphere -- it is known, together with the first, as one of the "'superhuman phases'"<sup>34</sup> -- ("For there's no human life at the full or the dark")<sup>35</sup> -- Unity of Being is attainable by man only to a limited extent:

He who attains Unity of Being is some man who, while struggling with his fate and his destiny until every energy of his being has been roused, is content that he should so struggle with no final conquest. For him fate and freedom are not to be distinguished; he is no longer bitter, he may even love tragedy like those "who love the gods and withstand them"; such men are able to bring all that happens, as well as all that they desire, into an emotional or intellectual synthesis and so to possess not the Vision of Good only but that of Evil.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Y:M&M, p. 226.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. For a brief summary of Yeats's scheme of personality, for which I am indebted to Richard Ellmann's excellent paraphrase (in Y:M&M, p. 226), vide Appendix E, p.243 of this thesis.

<sup>34</sup>LT, p. 178.

<sup>35</sup>CP, p. 185.

<sup>36</sup>V(A), pp. 28-29. In this version (p.29) Yeats locates the possibility of the attainment of Unity of Being between Phases 12 and 18 and finds it "most common" at Phase 17. In V(B), p. 81, he writes: "Man seeks his opposite or the opposite of his condition, attains his object so far as it is attainable, at Phase 15 and returns to Phase 1 again." (Underlining my own.)

In the table of the Twenty-Eight Embodiments, the Fifteenth Phase is further depicted as possessing that harmony and integration of personality "compared by Dante in the Convito to that of 'a perfectly proportioned human body'"<sup>37</sup> and epitomized, in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes",<sup>38</sup> in the image of the dancing girl. At this phase all is beauty:

Thought and will are indistinguishable, effort and attainment are indistinguishable ... Contemplation and desire, united into one, inhabit a world where every beloved image has bodily form, and every bodily form is loved.... Fate is known for the boundary that gives our Destiny its form, and -- as we can desire nothing outside this form -- as an expression of our freedom. Chance and Choice have become interchangeable without losing their identity. As all effort has ceased, all thought has become image, because no thought could exist if it were not carried towards its own extinction ... All that the being has experienced as thought is visible to its eyes as a whole, and in this way it perceives ... according to its own perception, all orders of existence.<sup>39</sup>

The impact of this concept on the spiritual ideal imaged in "A Prayer for My Daughter" and "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" will be discussed later.

The factors mentioned must be viewed against Yeats's total revaluation of his ideal woman resulting from two further experiences: his profound disappointment in the obsessional political activity of Maud Gonne and Constance Markiewicz, and the insight acquired through the paternal rôle thrust on him by the birth of his daughter and

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<sup>37</sup>V(B), p. 82. Cf. the following passage in A, p. 190: "I thought that in man and race alike there is something called 'Unity of Being', using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the Convito to a perfectly proportioned human body. My father, from whom I had learned the term, preferred a comparison to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string all the strings murmur faintly."

<sup>38</sup>CP, pp. 192-94.

<sup>39</sup>V(A), pp. 69-71, V(B) pp. 135-36.

spontaneously undertaken in his relationship with Iseult Gonne.

Yeats's quarrel with Constance Markiewicz, though not as deep-rooted and intense as that with Maud Gonne, was almost certainly inspired by the similarity in the sacrifice of her beauty and womanliness to a political credo of violence and hatred;<sup>40</sup> and his condemnation of Constance Markiewicz's mind as "a bitter, an abstract thing" resembles his more flagrant attack on Maud Gonne in his treatment of the Sixteenth Phase of personality:

If ... /-it/ subordinate its intellect to the Body of Fate, all the cruelty and narrowness of that intellect are displayed in service of preposterous purpose after purpose till there is nothing left but the fixed idea and some hysterical hatred.... Capable of nothing but an inescapable idealism ... it must, because it sees one side as all white, see the other side as all black ... /-In this phase/ are beautiful women, whose bodies have taken upon themselves the image of the True Mask, and in these there is a radiant intensity.... They walk like queens, and seem to carry upon their backs a quiver of arrows, but they are gentle only to those whom they have chosen or subdued, or to the dogs that follow at their heels.<sup>41</sup>

In 1908 he had questioned, with helpless incomprehension, the fact that Maud

<sup>40</sup>Vide the following lines from "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (CP, p. 392):

I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,  
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,...

and cf. one of Yeats's best-known poems about Constance Markiewicz, "On a Political Prisoner" (CP, pp. 206-207).

<sup>41</sup>V(A), pp. 72-74; V(B), pp. 138-39. Cf. the following passage from Yeats's 1910 Diary: "Women because the main event of their lives has been a giving of themselves give themselves to an opinion as if it were a stone doll -- ..." (Y:M&P, p. 326, n. 77).

... would of late  
 Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,  
 Or hurled the little streets upon the great,  
 Had they but courage equal to desire ...<sup>42</sup>

Eight years later he was to charge Constance with "conspiring among the ignorant ..."<sup>43</sup> A previously admired physical resemblance -- their low soft voices -- was to undergo a similar deterioration<sup>44</sup> and in a letter to Mrs Yeats, written in 1918, Yeats confessed that he was "writing [a poem] on Con to avoid writing one on Maud. [Both] of them are in prison...."<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that the very qualities which Yeats detested in Maud Gonne were diametrically opposed to those which he admired in Lady Gregory; and there is substantial truth in the contention that "in every way Lady Gregory serves in Yeats's poems as the opposite of Maud Gonne, for she is kind, calm, tolerant, honourable."<sup>46</sup>

Yeats's association with Constance Gore-Booth and her sister Eva goes back to the winter of 1894-1895, which he spent at Lissadell, one of the "great houses" of County Sligo.<sup>47</sup> In those days Constance was acknowledged to be the

<sup>42</sup>CP, p. 101.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. the following lines about Constance Markiewicz (CP, p. 203):

That woman's days were spent  
 In ignorant good-will,  
 Her nights in argument  
 Until her voice grew shrill.

with these about Maud Gonne:

Some have known ...  
 A Helen of social welfare dream,  
 Climb on a wagonette to scream ...  
 (CP, p. 388).

<sup>45</sup>Y:M&P, p. 188.

<sup>46</sup>Vide Marion Witt, "William Butler Yeats", English Institute Essays (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1947), pp. 87-88.

<sup>47</sup>Y:M&P, p. 189.

loveliest girl in the country and was known not only for her dash and nerve in riding to hounds but for her talent in painting and woodcarving.<sup>48</sup> After her marriage in 1900 to a Polish artist, Count Casimir Markiewicz, she threw herself into social work and, among numerous activities, helped the starving children of twenty thousand unemployed workers during the 1913 Lockout. As a result of her participation in Easter Week, she was taken to Kilmainham Gaol and condemned to death, though later pardoned and served with a life sentence with hard labour. Her courage, resilience, buoyancy and optimism are revealed in the simple assertion that "no one has it in his power to make me unhappy ...";<sup>49</sup> and a fitting tribute to the selflessness of her involvement in Irish politics appeared in an obituary in The Nation:

To the people of Ireland she gave herself and she held nothing back. It was a giving of which the lavishness cannot be measured or described. It is symbolized by the circumstance of her death -- the hospital ward, without privacy, without beauty, and the ceaseless loving care of the nurses, and the prayers of the throngs of people who stood all night long outside.<sup>50</sup>

The other factor influencing Yeats's revaluation of his concept of ideal womanhood was the insight acquired from his almost "paternal" relationship with Iseult Gonne. Although from 1916 onwards Yeats's feelings for Iseult took a distinctly

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<sup>48</sup> WBY, p. 115; Countess [Constance Georgina de] Markiewicz, Prison Letters of Countess Markiewicz ... (Longon, New York, Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1934), p. 3. Yeats was later to count the image of the "Two girls in silk kimonos, both / Beautiful, one a gazelle ..." "among the dear memories of my youth". (Vide "Some New Letters from W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory", ed. Donald T. Torchiana and Glenn O'Malley, A Review of English Literature, IV, 3 [July, 1963], excerpt from photographic reproduction of letter betw. pp. 24 and 25.)

<sup>49</sup> Countess Markiewicz, Prison Letters ..., p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

amatory turn, the paternal element still prevailed, as is evident in the confession (to Lady Gregory) that "Iseult has always been something like a daughter to me ...",<sup>51</sup> and in his statement, contained in an earlier letter to Lady Gregory, dated August 1916, "She makes me sad, for I think that if my life had been normal I might have had a daughter of her age. That means I suppose, that I am beginning to get old."<sup>52</sup>

Yeats's concern for her is revealed in several poems written before and after his marriage. "Two Years Later" expresses his anxiety at her inevitable discovery of sorrow and suffering and "To a Young Girl" reveals a kindly, if rather patronizing insight into the latent sexuality of a girl at the onset of puberty.<sup>53</sup> In "Two Songs of a Fool" there is a suggestion of guilt lest, in the ease of marital content, he should forget Iseult's need for protection;<sup>54</sup> and "To a Young Beauty" -- born out of Yeats's unhappiness about her association with Bohemian circles in Dublin -- contains a well-meaning, if sententious, admonition:

Dear fellow-artist, why so free  
With every sort of company,  
With every Jack and Jill?  
Choose your companions from the best;  
Who draws a bucket with the rest  
Soon topples down the hill.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Letters, p. 631.

<sup>52</sup>WBY, p. 303.

<sup>53</sup>Vide CP, pp. 137, 157-58 respectively.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 190-91.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 157. Iseult is almost certainly identified with the dancer in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", and further depicted as the "lady" in "Men Improve with the Years", the "child / That never looked upon man with desire" in "Presences" and the "young child ... so wildly bred" in "Owen Aherne and His Dancers". (Vide CP, pp. 197-98, 152-53, 174, 247-49 respectively.) For the relationship between Iseult and the Dancer in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", vide Y:M&P, p. 212.



We first hear of Yeats's acquaintance with her when "as a child she ... told him that she disliked plays in modern dress and preferred the Iliad to any other book".<sup>56</sup> At the beginning of May 1910 he and Maud visited Iseult's convent at Caen;<sup>57</sup> two years later, she asked Yeats for a "Bengali grammar and dictionary so that she might read Tagore in the original";<sup>58</sup> and in 1916 read him a dialogue from Jammes that "moved them both to tears, some Claudel, and a volume of Peguy's Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc".<sup>59</sup>

Despite his awareness of her beauty in 1916, his behaviour to her was still fatherly -- there is a reference to his "managing Iseult very well", especially in a "prolonged appeal for an extra cigarette";<sup>60</sup> but after Maud's final rejection, he found himself falling in love with the young girl and gradually decided to propose to her. Although she enjoyed flirting with Yeats throughout the summer of 1917, she consistently refused him, however. His ultimatum to come to a definite decision met with no success; and Yeats, who was worried about her future, helped to organize a post for her as assistant librarian in the School of Oriental Languages.<sup>61</sup> When she married Francis Stuart, a chicken-farmer-cum-novelist whom Yeats had earlier praised as one of Ireland's most promising young writers,<sup>62</sup> his fears for her future were justified:

Some have known ...  
A girl that knew all Dante once  
Live to bear children to a dunce...<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> WBY, p. 238.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 236, 238.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>59</sup> Y:M&P, p. 190.

<sup>60</sup> WBY, p. 303.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>62</sup> Letters, pp. 799-800.

<sup>63</sup> CP, p. 388. It was written in January 1936 (Comm., p. 503).

## II

Yeats's concept of ideal womanhood should be seen against his perception of woman as she really is, derived from his experience. "On Woman" (written on 25 May 1914 before his marriage)<sup>64</sup> was almost certainly inspired by his unhappy experience with Maud Gonne; and as the poem moves from its wry, mock-serious opening to its climactic close, the man-woman relationship is described in terms of the Solomon and Sheba metaphor ironically reduced to the harrowing, exquisite torment of the sexual chase:

May God be praised for woman  
That gives up all her mind,  
A man may find in no man  
A friendship of her kind  
That covers all he has brought  
As with her flesh and bone,  
Nor quarrels with a thought  
Because it is not her own.

Though pedantry denies,  
It's plain the Bible means  
That Solomon grew wise  
While talking with his queens,  
Yet never could, although  
They say he counted grass,  
Count all the praises due  
When Sheba was his lass,  
When she the iron wrought, or  
When from the smithy fire  
It shuddered in the water:  
Harshness of their desire  
That made them stretch and yawn,  
Pleasure that comes with sleep,  
Shudder that made them one.  
What else He give or keep  
God grant me -- no, not here  
For I am not so bold  
To hope a thing so dear  
Now I am growing old,  
But when, if the tale's true,  
The Pestle of the moon  
That pounds up all anew  
Brings me to birth again --  
To find what once I had  
And know what once I have known,  
Until I am driven mad,  
Sleep driven from my bed,  
By tenderness and care,  
Pity, an aching head,  
Gnashing of teeth, despair;

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<sup>64</sup>Comm., p. 179.

And all because of some one  
 Perverse creature of chance,  
 And live like Solomon<sup>65</sup>  
 That Sheba led a dance.

The most complete expression of ideal womanhood in Yeats's entire poetic career is undoubtedly "A Prayer for My Daughter", completed about four months after the birth of his daughter, Anne Butler, on 24 February 1919:<sup>66</sup>

## I

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid  
 Under this cradle-hood and coverlid  
 My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle  
 But Gregory's Wood and one bare hill  
 Whereby the haystack and roof-levelling wind,  
 Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;  
 And for an hour I have walked and prayed  
 Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

## II

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour,  
 And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,  
 And under the arches of the bridge, and scream  
 In the elms above the flooded stream;  
 Imagining in excited reverie  
 That the future years had come  
 Dancing to a frenzied drum  
 Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

## III

May she be granted beauty, and yet not  
 Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,  
 Or hers before a looking-glass; for such,  
 Being made beautiful overmuch,  
 Consider beauty a sufficient end,  
 Lose natural kindness, and maybe  
 The heart-revealing intimacy  
 That chooses right, and never find a friend.

## IV

Helen, being chosen, found life flat and full,  
 And later had much trouble from a fool;  
 While that great Queen that rose out of the spray,  
 Being fatherless, could have her way  
 Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.  
 It's certain that fine women eat  
 A crazy salad with their meat  
 Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

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<sup>65</sup>CP, pp. 164-66.

<sup>66</sup>WBY, p. 317. A.N. Jeffares, in *Comm.*, p. xvii, gives 26 February as the date of Anne's birth.

## V

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned; 32  
 Hearts are not had as a gift, but hearts are earned 33  
 By those that are not entirely beautiful. 34  
 Yet many, that have played the fool 35  
 For beauty's very self, has charm made wise; 36  
 And many a poor man that has roved, 37  
 Loved and thought himself beloved, 38  
 From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes. 39

## VI

May she become a flourishing hidden tree, 40  
 That all her thoughts may like the linnet be, 41  
 And have no business but dispensing round 42  
 Their magnanimities of sound; 43  
 Nor but in merriment begin a chase, 44  
 Nor but in merriment a quarrel. 45  
 Oh, may she live like some green laurel 46  
 Rooted in one dear perpetual place. 47

## VII

My mind, because the minds that I have loved, 48  
 The sort of beauty that I have approved, 49  
 Prosper but little, has dried up of late, 50  
 Yet knows that to be choked with hate 51  
 May well be of all evil chances chief. 52  
 If there's no hatred in a mind 53  
 Assault and battery of the wind 54  
 Can never tear the linnet from the leaf. 55

## VIII

An intellectual hatred is the worst,  
 So let her think opinions are accursed.  
 Have I not seen the loveliest woman born  
 Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,  
 Because of her opinionated mind  
 Barter that horn and every good  
 By quiet natures understood  
 For an old bellows full of angry wind?

## IX

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,  
 The soul recovers radical innocence  
 And learns at last that it is self-delighting,  
 Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,  
 And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will,  
 She can, though every face should scowl  
 And every windy quarter howl  
 Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

## X

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house  
 Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;  
 For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
 Peddled in the thoroughfares.  
 How but in custom and in ceremony  
 Are innocence and beauty born?  
 Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,  
 And custom for the spreading laurel tree.<sup>67</sup>

This is one of Yeats's most ambitious poems, mature, resonant and accomplished, with more than a hint of Wordsworthian solemnity and didacticism.<sup>68</sup> Its main weakness is the absence of a clearly discernible integrated logical framework; but beneath the semblance of a rambling discursive exterior there is evidence of a close structural synthesis; rational and intellectual on the one hand, "imagistic" on the other.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the poem may be seen as a powerful symphony welded together by a rich orchestration of images -- storm, wind, tree and sea, horn, tower and house -- and subtly interfused with the less tangible dimensions of space and time: "inside" and "outside" space; time -- past, present and future.<sup>70</sup>

The first two stanzas provide the "occasion" of or

<sup>67</sup>VE, pp. 403-406. Note that the stanzas are unnumbered in the final version. The punctuation changes in the first and final versions are highly significant. Owing to the length of the poem, it is impossible to discuss them, however.

<sup>68</sup>Yeats had read Wordsworth in Dowden's edition in 1916 (WBY, p. 295).

<sup>69</sup>Yeats's method of fusing two structural modes, the "discursive" and the "imagistic", is examined in relation to "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", in Sarah Youngblood's "The Structure of Yeats's Long Poems", Criticism. A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts (Wayne State), V, 1 (Winter 1963), 323-35.

<sup>70</sup>For Yeats's use of spatial imagery and "multiple time-consciousness" vide John Hardy, "Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter'. The Dimensions of the Nursery", in The Curious Frame: Seven Poems in Text and Context (Indiana: Notre Dame, 1962), pp. 121-22; 120, 130 respectively.

prelude to the main theme: the poet's premonition of an age of chaos and violence in which his daughter must grow up.<sup>71</sup> The remainder of the poem examines those qualities which Yeats deemed necessary in order that she might cope with the future, each facet (with the exception of the impulsive prayer at the end of the sixth stanza) being introduced by the incantation "May she...": stanzas three to five are concerned with the ideal of moral beauty; stanzas six to nine with Unity of Being, while the final stanza unites these ideas under the official sanction of social aristocracy. A detailed analysis will perhaps clarify these points.

The first quality Yeats requires in his daughter is beauty, the idea of which is introduced in the opening line of the third stanza and immediately qualified, contradicted even, by the kind of beauty sought. For this is no physical beauty, narcissistic in kind and inflammatory in effect, but moral beauty, comprising warmth and spontaneity ("natural kindness"), honest intercourse with like-minded people ("heart-revealing intimacy") and a capacity for friendship. In the following stanza the consequences of excessive beauty (either of kind or quantity) are illustrated by the unhappy examples of two legendary figures, Helen of Troy and Aphrodite. Both are reduced to the lowest common factor of beauty that has over-reached itself in the gratification of lust; both have abused the abundance of the Horn of Plenty -- the gift of beauty -- for the sake of some capricious whim. (The idea

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<sup>71</sup> Hardy points out that Yeats's immediate fears may have been prompted by the apparently irreconcilable contradictions in his daughter's horoscope (read by Mrs Yeats) that she would be both "good-looking and lucky". ("Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter' ... " / Indiana, 1962 / pp. 124-25.)

is echoed in the eighth stanza, in that modern Helen, Maud Gonne, who also threw away her gift of beauty, though for a different reason: obsession with a political ideal).

The antithesis to the ill-effects of physical beauty is, according to Yeats, the cultivation of courtesy -- the dispensation of warmth and kindness which far-out-shines its more superficial counterpart. The term "courtesy", as John Hardy points out,<sup>72</sup> derives from "the politeness of the 'court'": it is "'magnanimity'", "generosity", "good nature ... formalized in good manners".<sup>73</sup> In this sense courtesy is an aristocratic value; for while society at large tends to express itself in terms of "undirected and instinctive emotional impulse",<sup>74</sup> aristocracy alone is concerned with the aesthetic form of personal morality, the conscious translation of innate good nature into a visually pleasing art. It is important to remember, however, that Yeats's chief concern is with the inner charm and beauty of the heart, the "glad kindness" which surges up from within. This is evident in the responses of the observer, the singular "eye" ("May she be granted beauty, and yet not / Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught") suggesting an excited, restless, unsurfeited visual feast; the plural "eyes" ("Many a poor man that has roved ... / From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes") evoking a keen, intelligent and altogether saner appraisal.

The second quality Yeats desires in his daughter -- integration of personality and spiritual beauty -- is more complex. Just as in the earlier section of the poem, face and heart are juxtaposed to convey moral beauty, so in this

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

section mind and thought become an index of the soul; and as the horn image earlier predominated as a symbol of bounty, so the tree image is subtly introduced to take its rightful place as a symbol of evergreen Unity of Being.<sup>75</sup>

The first stanza of this section -- the sixth of the entire poem -- is particularly important, not only in its structural relationship to the opening stanza -- notice the parallel interplay of movement and stasis, of "inside" and "outside" imagery -- but in its introduction of the mood of merriment which paves the way for the idea of innocence to come. The main effect of this stanza is, as Hardy points out, "the sense of innocence and its delight ... the freedom of play ...";<sup>76</sup> but this state of blissful ingenuousness, charmingly captured in the image of the bird chase among the foliage, is momentarily darkened by the brief reference to "quarrel" which sets the mood for the following three stanzas.

Stanzas seven to nine constitute some of the most flatulent, self-indulgent rhetoric in Yeats's poetic writing. Yet so cunningly related are they to the poem's first section that to remove them would destroy the total patterning of image and idea. The ominous note struck in the sixth stanza becomes progressively darker-toned as the idea of spiritual assault through obsessional conviction is relentlessly pursued: "choked with hate", "hatred", "intellectual hatred", "accursed" opinions, "angry wind", "howl" and "scowl". And as the emotional temper quickens, so are the predominant images thickened and filled out into variations on earlier themes.

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<sup>75</sup>Cf. "F.A.C. Wilson suggests that ... the tree is a symbol of Unity of Being. Yeats asks, in effect, that his daughter may become 'a living image of the (Kabbalistic) Tree of Life.'" (Jon Stallworthy, Between the Lines ... /Oxford, 1965/, p.35.)

<sup>76</sup>"Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter'...", The Curious Frame ... (Indiana, 1962), p. 146.



The tree image, hitherto rich, sturdy and flourishing, is subject to a double assault by rancorous weeds (conveyed in "dried up", "choked", "evil chances") and storm;<sup>77</sup> indeed, there is an interesting parallel between the "one bare hill" bravely defying the Atlantic winds in the opening stanza and the linnet tenaciously clinging to the leaf in the seventh. The examples of Helen and Aphrodite in the earlier section are fused in the image of Maud Gonne, who also abandoned the gift of "Plenty's horn" (for a life of petty political dogma). Furthermore, the image of wind and storm grows from the pleasant "magnanimities of sound" (characterizing the linnet-thoughts of the young girl), into a vicious tempest which threatens to destroy her integrity and inner equilibrium, thereby echoing the physical storm at the beginning of the poem; while the "bellows" image (representing Hephaestus's stock-in-trade, Aphrodite's man) provides a deliberate contrast to the Horn of Plenty, while simultaneously contributing to the general uproar and turbulence.<sup>78</sup>

If the main argument in the two preceding stanzas offers a challenge, the ninth stanza constitutes a response, a triumphal declaration of the soul's victory over circumstance. The concept of "radical innocence", whereby happiness is maintained in the face of ill fortune, is a curious and complex one, originating, I believe, partly in Yeats's idea of Unity of Being and partly in his views on reincarnation expounded in A Vision.

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<sup>77</sup>It is interesting to compare this dual aspect of the tree image with that of an earlier poem, "The Two Trees" (CP, pp. 54-55).

<sup>78</sup>Cf. J. Hardy, "Yeats's 'A Prayer for My Daughter'..." pp. 125-26.

The idea of purgation of hatred ("all hatred driven hence") resembles that state of the soul in its journey after death, "where the Spirit / that is, the supernatural co-equivalent of Creative Mind / is freed from pleasure and pain and is ready to enter the Shiftings where it is freed from Good and Evil ..."<sup>79</sup> The recovery of "radical innocence" suggests the restoration of a lost state of innocence, the soul's primordial state before it has taken on its mortal condition, and seems to correspond to the fifth stage of the soul's journey after death, where "a new Husk and Passionate Body / supernatural co-equivalents of Will and Mask / take the place of the old; made from the old, yet, as it were, pure."<sup>80</sup> The most important concept, the soul's knowledge of its individuality, its self-sufficiency and responsibility perfectly according with Divine Will, seems to anticipate that section of A Vision (already cited)<sup>81</sup> dealing with Unity of Being; there is a resemblance, too, to the passage relating to Purification where "all memory / having / vanished, the Spirit ... is at last free and in relation to Spirits free like itself.... It becomes self-shaping, self-moving, plastic to itself ..."<sup>82</sup>

The integration of the twin concepts of moral beauty

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<sup>79</sup>V(A), p. 229. V(B) (p. 231.) substitutes "purified of" for "freed from", making the similarity more obvious.

<sup>80</sup>V(B), p. 233.

<sup>81</sup>Vide p. 131 of this chapter, *supra* and *infra*.

<sup>82</sup>V(B), p. 233. Cf. Yeats's reference to the "whimsical, self-awakening, self-exciting, self-appeasing soul." (E&I, p. 370.)

and Unity of Being occurs in the final stanza, where the marriage ceremony sets the seal on their continued existence. Yeats's aristocratic leanings are strongly prevalent in his specification of custom and ceremony as necessary constituents of the marriage ritual. The house, which stands at the end of the bride's journey, forming a cyclical counterpart to the tower in the opening stanzas, is set aside from the clamorous huckstering of the thoroughfares, and together with the symbols of tree and horn, represents a sturdy centre of traditional aristocratic values. This sense of prevailing order and dignity, the consciousness of the richness of its cultural heritage, Yeats considered essential for the nourishment of spiritual excellence in woman. It is interesting to compare this highly personal, idiosyncratic philosophy with the simpler Christian viewpoint of a later parent-poet, Anne Ridler:

... as the sun that shines through glass  
 So Jesus in His Mother was.  
 Therefore every human creature,  
 Since it shares in His nature,  
 . . . . .  
 ... should show its own way of light.  
 May no parental dread or dream  
 Darken our darling's early beam:  
 May she grow to her right powers  
 Unperturbed by passion of ours.<sup>83</sup>

The idea of Unity of Being is further propagated in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", born out of Yeats's relationship with Iseult Gonne.<sup>84</sup> The poem is an informed, skilful and witty debate on the nature of true womanhood,

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<sup>83</sup>Excerpt from "For a Child Expected", in The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse 1918-60, new rev. ed., sel.... Kenneth Allott, Penguin Books [London, 1962], p. 245.

<sup>84</sup>Y:M&P, p. 212.

presented in a semi-dramatized dialogue between Robartes (the sensual recluse whom Yeats invented for his preposterous function in A Vision) and the Dancer (supposedly Iseult), an innocent young girl uncertain of her rôle as woman. While the texture is muscular, energetic and masculine, showing the obvious influence of Donne, the poem's structure is admirably self-contained, the Dancer's questions and interjections not only assisting in the development of the argument but paving the way for her gradual reduction, through Robartes's forcefulness, from quiet confidence to timorous confusion. Yeats's handling of the rhymed tetrameter couplets, furthermore, is so natural and supple that the dialogue approximates to the rhythms and cadences of everyday speech:

He. Opinion is not worth a rush;  
 In this altar-piece the knight,  
 Who grips his long spear so to push  
 That dragon through the fading light,  
 Loved the lady; and it's plain  
 The half-dead dragon was her thought  
 That every morning rose again  
 And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.  
 Could the impossible come to pass  
 She would have time to turn her eyes,  
 Her lover thought, upon the glass  
 And on the instant would grow wise.

She. You mean they argued.

He. Put it so;  
 But bear in mind your lover's wage  
 Is what your looking-glass can show,  
 And that he will turn green with rage  
 At all that is not pictured there.

She. May I not put myself to College?

He. Go pluck Athena by the hair;  
 For what mere book can grant a knowledge  
 With an impassioned gravity  
 Appropriate to that beating breast,  
 That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?  
 And may the devil take the rest.

She. And must no beautiful woman be  
 Learned like a man?

He. Paul Veronese  
 And all his sacred company  
 Imagined bodies all their days,  
 By the lagoon you love so much,  
 For proud, soft, ceremonious proof  
 That all must come to sight and touch;  
 While Michael Angelo's Sistine roof  
 His Morning and his Night disclose  
 How sinew that has been pulled tight,  
 Or it may be loosened in repose,  
 Can rule by supernatural right  
 Yet be but sinew.

She. I have heard said  
 There is great danger in the body.

He. Did God in portioning wine and bread  
 Give man His thought or His mere body?

She. My wretched dragon is perplexed.

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

She. They say such different things at school.<sup>85</sup>

The poem opens dramatically and abruptly with Michael Robartes's assertion that the cultivation of beauty in woman is more important than that of intellect. The Dancer expresses concern at the thought of being deprived of a formal education: Robartes replies that she should take counsel from the goddess Athena ("Athene" in the revised version), the feminine embodiment of wisdom, composure and sexuality. (The irony in the reversal of rôles is deliberate: in the Iliad it is Athene who seizes Achilles "by his golden locks" in order to "check ... [his] angry impulse" to kill Agamemnon.)<sup>86</sup> Further arguments in favour

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<sup>85</sup>VE, pp. 385-87. Variations in the final version are very slight. (Cf. E&I, pp. 269-70.)

<sup>86</sup>The Iliad, tr. E.V. Rieu, Penguin Books [London: 1950], p. 28. Cf.: "Athene takes Achilles by the hair ..." (CP, p. 185).

of learning are firmly rejected on empirical, theological or philosophical grounds. When the Dancer suggests that the natural endowments of a beautiful woman would be enhanced by learning, Robartes replies that the chief concern of even the supreme masters of the arts, Veronese and Michelangelo for example, was the body. The Dancer's argument of the danger inherent in mere physicality is refuted by Robartes's reference to the symbolic significance of the Christian sacrament; and his advocacy of the cultivation of physical beauty is sanctioned by a mock-serious citation of an appropriate Latin text. The poem has the intense inner logic -- the "opening up", the "hammering out" and the "shutting in" -- of a Donne poem.

Yeats's emphasis on physicality is a far cry from the coarse vulgarity of Kipling or even the mystical romanticism of D.H. Lawrence: we should remember that in his eagerness to expose the intellectual arrogance of Maud, he is deliberately over-stating the case. What Yeats is advocating is a proper recognition of the body as a necessary element in and adjunct to the attainment of spiritual beauty, a state of inner blessedness in which the conflicting demands on woman are gracefully and harmoniously reconciled. The key lies in the saving clause of the last (but one) five lines, which specifically state that intellectual prowess in woman is not to be dismissed if it is found to be naturally in harmony with her physical mien. Hence the apparent contradiction in Yeats's belief in the "thinking lineaments" is resolved in a creed of intensely religious significance, prevalent also in Aherne's assertion that "All dreams of the

soul / End in a beautiful man's or woman's body",<sup>87</sup> and in an explanatory note on The Only Jealousy of Emer that "'The invisible fifteenth incarnation ... is that of the greatest bodily beauty ... '"<sup>88</sup> In a sense, Robartes is telling the Dancer that in order to attain supreme Unity of Being she must first reject the False Mask of intellect.

Yeats's concept of woman during this period, then, shows a considerable advance on earlier concepts in that it is not merely a projection of her personal experience but an attempt to formulate a broader general statement. The resultant image is at once personal and unique; and there is a degree of technical diversity, seen in the "public" rhetorical manner employed in "A Prayer for My Daughter" on the one hand, and the use of the first-person dramatization in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" on the other. The main weakness is Yeats's condemnation of the cultivation of intellect in woman which, though understandable in the light of his personal experience, smacks very strongly of "sour grapes"; and his belief in the aristocratic social framework for the perpetuation of selected values in woman is hopelessly out of keeping with the times. Despite these shortcomings, Yeats has begun to incorporate his immediate experience into a comprehensive vision and prepared the ground for his ultimate conception of woman.

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<sup>87</sup>CP, p. 186.

<sup>88</sup>LT, p. 181. The play was first published in 1919. (ProYPl, p. 57, CPl, p. 279)

## CHAPTER V

### WOMAN AND LOVE (1914-1929)

Love ... is a form of the eternal contemplation of what is.

-- Yeats: Letters on Poetry to Dorothy Wellesley

All love is shackled to mortality ...

-- Yeats: line from King of the Great Clock Tower

The concept of woman to be discussed in this chapter offers a direct antithesis to that already dealt with in that it is primarily concerned with woman's physicality, with her sexual psychology and her sexuality both inside and outside marriage. Although the physical aspect constitutes an extension of woman's spirituality, it should be seen as an independent entity, owing to the sharp dichotomy between the two aspects and to the absence of any attempt on the part of the poet to integrate them into a unified system. On the one hand woman is presented as a Sheba symbol in a highly idealized marital relationship; on the other, she is depicted, outside the bond of marriage, as a purely physical creature, fully conscious of and absorbed in her sexuality, in a series of vignettes that brilliantly trace her psychological development from childhood to old age.

The sudden emergence of Yeats's interest in the physical aspect of woman was probably due to his marriage to a woman far younger than himself and the accompanying release from the abstinence and sexual restraint of his youth. The influence of the Steinach glandular operation early in 1934 has clearly been overestimated; for as early as 25 May [1926] Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear from the Tower, that he was "writing poetry ... and, as always happens, no matter how I begin, it becomes love poetry before I am finished with it;<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letters, pp. 714-15.



and again, on 2 (or 4) October /1927/, albeit ironically:

I am still of opinion that only two topics can be of the least interest to a serious and studious mind -- sex and the dead.<sup>2</sup>

The "humanizing and normalizing experience"<sup>3</sup> that marriage turned out to be provided the serenity and content celebrated in the Solomon and Sheba poems (as well as in the first of "Two Songs of a Fool"),<sup>4</sup> in which Mrs Yeats almost certainly served as a model; and it is not impossible that Yeats's re-reading of Donne, evident in a letter to Professor H. Grierson, dated 21 February 1926<sup>5</sup> was partly responsible for the sensuality, "wit" and passion of certain of the poems in the "A Woman Young and Old" series.<sup>6</sup>

Before analyzing the main images in the poetry of the period, let us examine Yeats's attitude to love. It is interesting to note that in this respect two conflicting viewpoints emerge. First there is the idea, born, no doubt, out of Yeats's frustrating relationship with Maud Gonne, of love as a hunt or chase, in which the participating partners assume the respective rôles of hunter-hunted, victor-victim, pursuer or pursued. This idea, overtly expressed in "On Woman"<sup>7</sup> and

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 730. Cf. "The Spur" (CP, p. 359). A.N. Jeffares talks of the influence of Oliver St John Gogarty, who had possibly "encouraged Yeats in the ribaldry he enjoyed -- the simple, bucolic, Rabelaisian strain in his work described by F.R. Higgins, with whom he greatly enjoyed discussing woman." (Vide "Women in Yeats's Poetry", in The Circus Animals. Essays on W.B. Yeats /Macmillan, 1970/, p. 100.)

<sup>3</sup>Y:M&M, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup>Vide CP, pp. 190-91. Cf. Appendix D, p. 247 of this thesis.

<sup>5</sup>Letters, p. 710.

<sup>6</sup>In particular, "Her Triumph", "Chosen", "A Last Confession". (Vide pp. 165-66, 167-69, 171-73 of this chapter).

<sup>7</sup>Vide CP, pp. 164-66, and cf. Ch. IV, pp. 138-39 of this thesis.

poignantly captured in "The Death of the Hare" and "Two Songs of a Fool",<sup>8</sup> is carried to its ultimate conclusion in "Her Vision in the Wood" and "Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers"<sup>9</sup> and forms the basis for Yeats's explanation of Blake's "The Mental Traveller", where "the woman and the man are two competing gyres growing at one another's expense ... [the conflict between them compelling] each to be slave and tyrant by turn...."<sup>10</sup>

The image of the chase or hunt in the love relationship between the sexes has an interesting parallel in the first version of A Vision, begun prior to Yeats's marriage and first published in 1925.<sup>11</sup> In his definition of aspects of the Great Wheel, Yeats introduces the concept of the Daimon, a supernatural co-equivalent of man's Mask and Creative Mind, "the Will of the man being the Mask of the Daimon, the Creative Mind of the man being the Body of Fate of the Daimon and so on."<sup>12</sup> Yeats furthermore conceived of the man-Daimon relationship in terms of physical intercourse, just as his view of history may be seen as a dialogue with a personified "interlocuter":<sup>13</sup>

Man's Daimon has ... her energy and bias in man's Mask, and her constructive power in man's fate, and man and Daimon face each other in a perpetual conflict or embrace. This relation (the Daimon being of the opposite

<sup>8</sup>CP, pp. 250-51, 190-91.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 312-13, 295-96.

<sup>10</sup>V(A), p. 134.

<sup>11</sup>Vide Y:M&P, p. 193. The first part was outlined by the end of November 1917 (Y:M&M, p. 226).

<sup>12</sup>V(A), p. 27.

<sup>13</sup>This view of Yeats's concept of history has been offered by Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow. Yeats's Dialogue with History. (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1964). Vide Ch. VI, p.177 of this thesis.

sex to that of man) may create a passion like that of sexual love. The relation of man and woman, in so far as it is passionate, reproduces the relation of man and Daimon, and becomes an element where man and Daimon sport, pursue one another, and do one another good or evil.... In so far as man and woman are swayed by their sex they interact as man and Daimon interact, though at other moments their phases may be side by side. The Daimon carries on her conflict, or friendship with a man, not only through the events of life, but in the mind itself, for she is in possession of the entire dark of the mind....<sup>14</sup>

And again:

When man is in his most antithetical phases the Daimon is most primary; man pursues, loves, or both loves and hates -- a form of passion, an antithetical image is imposed upon the Daimonic thought -- but in man's most primary phases the Daimon is at her most antithetical. Man is now pursued with hatred, or with love ...<sup>15</sup>

The second idea is the idealized concept of love as a "discipline" comprising intuition and "wisdom", which had solidified into a cohesive code as early as 1909:

It seems to me that true love is a discipline, and it needs so much wisdom that the love of Solomon and Sheba must have lasted, for all the silence of the Scriptures. Each divines the secret self of the other, and refusing to believe in the mere daily self, creates a mirror where the lover or the beloved sees an image to copy in daily life; for love also creates the Mask.<sup>16</sup>

Though in "On Woman", Sheba emerges as the sexually attractive courtesan, wilful, tantalizing, elusive, perverse, expert in the arts of love, in "Solomon to Sheba" and "Solomon and the Witch" she is portrayed as the ideal marriage partner, subordinate yet complementary to her lover, humble and eager to please, representing the "pleasant relationship of the poet

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<sup>14</sup>V(A), pp. 27-28. Cf. M, p. 336.

<sup>15</sup>V(A), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup>A, p. 464. It may have first appeared in Estrangement: Being Some Fifty Thoughts from a Diary Kept by William Butler Yeats in the Year Nineteen Hundred and Nine (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1926). (Vide Bib., p. 153.) Cf. J.B. Yeats's views on marriage for life (J.B. Yeats, Letters, p. 236).

and his wife"<sup>17</sup> in a way that closely resembles the Old Testament view or, one would imagine, Kate's revised attitude to Petruchio.<sup>18</sup> "Solomon to Sheba", a rather vacuous narrative lyric written in [March?] 1918,<sup>19</sup> presents the lovers discussing in leisurely manner the supremacy of love; and though the soporific mood is successfully sustained, there is an element of self-consciousness and remoteness which might have been avoided if Yeats had taken a cue from Donne:<sup>20</sup>

Sang Solomon to Sheba  
And kissed her dusky face,  
All day long from midday  
We have talked in the one place,  
All day long from shadowless noon  
We have gone round and round  
In the narrow theme of love  
Like an old horse in a pound.

To Solomon sang Sheba  
Planted on his knees,  
If you had broached a matter  
That might the learned please,  
You had before the sun had thrown  
Our shadows on the ground  
Discovered that my thoughts, not it,  
Are but a narrow pound.

Said Solomon to Sheba  
And kissed her Arab eyes,  
There's not a man or woman  
Born under the skies  
Dare match in learning with us two,  
And all day long we have found  
There's not a thing but love can make  
The world a narrow pound.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the ethereal women of his early poetry, Sheba is meant to represent the idealization of the warm, sensuous and

<sup>17</sup>Y:M&P, p. 207. Vide also p. 325, n. 65.

<sup>18</sup>For a commentary on the Old Testament view of the marital status of woman vide J.H. Hertz, C.H., ed., The Pentateuch and Haftorahs ...2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 5729 - 1968), pp. 9-10, Genesis II, 18-25.

<sup>19</sup>Comm., p. 166.

<sup>20</sup>Vide especially "The Good-Morrow", The Metaphysical Poets, ed. Helen Gardner, Penguin Books [London: 1957], p. 56.

<sup>21</sup>VE, pp. 332-33.

essentially human woman, but fails to convince owing to Yeats's silly attempt to romanticize a commonplace marital situation. As a symbol of womanly wisdom she is nevertheless apt; for as Yeats has already intimated in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", a woman's wisdom lies in her appreciation of her sexuality rather than her intellect, and her understanding of love is more important than her learning.

In "Solomon and the Witch" (written in the same year), Sheba is reduced to a mere vehicle in the propagation of Yeats's ideal of the "solved antimony", although there are overtones of the worldly woman fully aware of her function in pleasuring her lover:

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

And he that knew  
 All sounds by bird or angel sung  
 Answered: "A crested cockerel crew  
 Upon a blossoming apple bough  
 Three hundred years before the Fall,  
 And never crew again till now,  
 And would not now but that he thought,  
 Chance being at one with Choice at last,  
 All that the brigand apple brought  
 And this foul world were dead at last.  
 He that crowed out eternity  
 Thought to have crowed it in again.  
 A lover with a spider's eye  
 Will find out some appropriate pain,  
 Aye, though all passion's in the glance,  
 For every nerve: lover tests lover  
 With cruelties of Choice and Chance;  
 And when at last that murder's over  
 Maybe the bride-bed brings despair  
 For each an imagined image brings  
 And finds a real image there;  
 Yet the world ends when these two things,  
 Though several, are a single light,  
 When oil and wick are burned in one;  
 Therefore a blassed moon last night  
 Gave Sheba to her Solomon."

"Yet the world stays."

If that be so,  
Your cockerel found us in the wrong  
Although he found it worth a crow.  
Maybe an image is too strong  
Or maybe is not strong enough."

"The night has fallen; not a sound  
In the forbidden sacred grove  
Unless a petal hit the ground,  
Nor any human sight within it  
But the crushed grass where we have lain;  
And the moon is wilder every minute.  
Oh, Solomon! let us try again."<sup>22</sup>

This is a difficult and complex poem, the tone mordantly witty, the images rich and bold, the language (with the exception of lines six to nine and nineteen to twenty-two, which were later brilliantly revised)<sup>23</sup> vigorous and robust. The underlying idea is that all lovers, at the supreme moment of sexual union, experience to some extent the beauty of the Fifteenth Phase, reconciliation of thought and will, Choice (Destiny) and Chance (Fate), that supreme Unity of Being that constitutes -- insofar as it is possible for man -- freedom from the necessity of the cycles. In the second version of A Vision, Michael Robartes declares that "The marriage bed is the symbol of the solved antimony ...",<sup>24</sup> and one critic refers to the "obvious sexual symbolism of the "interpenetrating gyres",<sup>25</sup> (a gyre being the simplest geometric index of the "individual soul, and that soul's history ...").<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup>VE, pp. 387-89. For its date of composition vide Comm., p. 218.

<sup>23</sup>In Later Poems, revd. and reprinted (London, 1924). (Vide VE, p. 387, ll. 6 - 9, supra; p. 388, ll. 19-22, supra.)

<sup>24</sup>V(B), p. 52.

<sup>25</sup>Richard Ellmann, in Y:M&M, p. 232. Cf. V(A), p. 149, supra, Ch. VI, p. 191, n. 74, supra of this thesis. They are, however, predominantly representative of "the archetypal pattern which is mirrored and remirrored by all life, by all movements of civilization or mind or nature." (Ibid., p. 231.)

<sup>26</sup>V(A), p. 129. It is also the simplest unit representing history or "general life". (Ibid.)

The poem opens with Sheba's enquiry into the meaning of a supernatural incident at the moment of orgasm, which Solomon interprets as the heralding of a new age of Innocence to be initiated by the intercourse of the great Lovers. This era -- the antithesis to the preceding age of the Fall -- is marked, according to the wise king, by the cock crow, symbol both of the spiritual world and of untiring sexual vigour;<sup>27</sup> and is possible, despite the shortcomings and torture of human love -- brilliantly conceived in the image of the spider's eye which, with its multifaceted "refracting and mangifying lenses",<sup>28</sup> suggests an agonizing scrutiny or "sizing up" of its mate's defects, as well as the ruthless post-copulative destruction of the male by the female<sup>29</sup> -- only at rare moments of physical union. When Sheba points out, with the matter-of-fact wisdom that is her feminine prerogative, that the material world as she knows it still prevails, Solomon explains that the representative of the spirit world was perhaps mistaken in its choice of lovers; that they were not perhaps worthy of this sacred rôle. The poem concludes with Sheba's passionate invitation to another round of love. Within the context of this highly cerebral, expository poem, which contains, incidentally, the rudiments of Yeats's theory of history, the world's great lovers are, literally and metaphorically, stripped bare, and become elemental abstracts in the attempt to attain perfect Unity of Being.

The second main image of the period differs from the first in that it extends over a wider period and is not limited exclusively to woman's marital role. The image of woman as a

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<sup>27</sup>LT, pp. 236-37. Cf. p. 233.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. pp. 57-58.

physical creature, rooted in her sexuality and subject to the inevitable laws of time, change, decay and death, appears not only in the last portraits of the "A Woman Young and Old" sequence but also in the latter-day image of Maud Gonne ("Did Quattrocento's finger fashion it / Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind / And took a mess of shadows for its meat?")<sup>30</sup> "From the 'Antigone'", a powerful injunction to youth to transcend the grossness of daily life and defy the very fabric of the firmaments, concludes with a powerful lamentation for youth's ultimate defeat by death:

Pray I will and sing I must,  
And yet I weep -- Oedipus' child  
Descends into the loveless dust...<sup>31</sup>

while "Three Things", a prayer for the restoration of the three prime pleasures of womanhood, grotesquely contrasts images of woman's life-giving forces, fertility and abundance with her final annihilation by time:

"O cruel Death, give three things back,"  
Sang a bone upon the shore;  
"A child found all a child can lack,  
Whether of pleasure or of rest,  
Upon the abundance of my breast":  
A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.

"Three dear things that women know,"  
Sang a bone upon the shore;  
"A man if I but held him so  
When my body was alive  
Found all the pleasure that life gave":  
A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.

"The third thing that I think of yet,"  
Sang a bone upon the shore,  
"Is that morning when I met  
Face to face my rightful man  
And did after stretch and yawn":  
A bone wave-whitened and dried in the wind.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>CP, p. 243. Vide also "Crazy Jane on the Mountain" (ibid., p. 390), where the fierce moral critic is reduced finally, in all the loneliness of her private vision to a state of abject destitution.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 300.



But if, in the last analysis, woman is infinitely mortal, she derives her power from her sexuality, the deepest centre of her emotional, spiritual and physical being. In "A Woman Young and Old", the most comprehensive literary treatment of female sexual psychology in English poetry, of which I am aware, woman is revealed in full consciousness of her sex and sexuality, absorbed throughout her lifespan in exploring, examining, defining and articulating her experience of love. The series, presented in a sequence of dramatized postures or stances, provides a complete kaleidoscope of woman's development from the unself-conscious amorality of childhood to the pãthos of old age; from the first conscious coquetry to the final knowledge of sexual pleasure.

It seems that the poems were at some stage of their composition conceived as a companion series to the "A Man Young and Old" series. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear dated 7 December /1926/, Yeats wrote:

I told you and showed you part of two series of poems in which a man and woman in old or later life remember love. I am writing for each series contrasting poems of youth...<sup>33</sup>

And in another letter dated 23 June /1927/ :

Here is an innocent little song -- one of the first /of/ my woman series to balance that of "The Young and Old Countryman", and after that one not so innocent.<sup>34</sup>

The exact dating of the poems is in any case not conclusive. Richard Ellmann gives a detailed chronology ranging from June 1926 (the date of composition of "A Last Confession") to November 1929 ("Her Triumph"), with which A.N. Jeffares concurs.<sup>35</sup> While the former date is supported by Yeats's

<sup>33</sup> Letters, p. 720.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 725.

<sup>35</sup> Vide IdY, pp. 292-93; Comm., p. 392-98 respectively. Jeffares's alterations tend towards more particular dating, as in

statement, in a letter to Olivia Shakespear written 24 September, that he was "gradually enlarging [his] woman series ...",<sup>36</sup> the latter conflicts with another comment (supposedly written in July or August 1927) that he had "finished those love poems -- 19/sic in all -- ..." <sup>37</sup> The specific number cited is in any case puzzling, for even if we add the last poem (XI) of "A Man Young and Old" (written in March 1927 but clearly not conceived as part of the Series until 1933)<sup>38</sup> to the seven poems of the "Woman" series written by that date<sup>39</sup> the total falls short of Yeats's count by one.

In their first and final order, which appeared for the first time in The Winding Stair (New York, 1929),<sup>40</sup> the poems represent a kind of Songs of Innocence and Experience of the inner life of woman, falling into three distinct groups: from the birth of sexual awareness in a young girl to her first conflict with morality (poems I - III); from the awakening of love, both physical and spiritual, to the moment of parting (poems IV - VII); and the imaginative recreation of love from the vantage point of old age (poems VIII - X), concluding with the poet's summing up in poem XI.

"Father and Child", the opening poem of the series, constitutes a delightful vignette of the spirited amorality of a young girl on the edge of puberty, the father's impassioned outburst followed by the daughter's unanswerable reply:

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the case of "Her Triumph", "Consolation", "Her Vision in the Wood" and "A Last Confession". His main contribution is his attempt to date "Meeting" (which he gives as "uncertain [probably 1926<sup>7</sup>"] (Comm., p. 398), not included by Ellmann.

<sup>36</sup>Letters, p. 719.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 727.

<sup>38</sup>Comm., p. 312. For history of printings, vide VE, p.459, *infra*.

<sup>39</sup>They are "Chosen", "A Last Confession", "Parting", "Her Vision in the Wood", "Father and Child", "A First Confession" and possibly "Meeting".

<sup>40</sup>Vide VE, pp. 531-39, *infra*.

She hears me strike the board and say  
 That she is under ban  
 Of all good men and women,  
 Being mentioned with a man  
 That has the worst of all bad names;  
 And thereupon replies  
 That his hair is beautiful,  
 Cold as the March wind his eyes.<sup>41</sup>

In this dramatic confrontation of parental authority and childlike wilfulness, the apparent freedom of natural speech rhythms, phrasing and cadence belies the underlying economy of thought and structure, held together by the intricate patterning of accent and echo. (Notice the subtle interweaving of the plosives in "board", "ban", "bad"; the forceful rhymes in "ban", "man", "bad" and the casual effect of the rhyming in "replies", "eyes").

The second poem of the series, "Before the World Was Made", is a superb study in the art of feminine deception and self-deception:

If I make the lashes dark  
 And the eyes more bright  
 And the lips more scarlet;  
 Or ask if all be right  
 From mirror after mirror;  
 No vanity's displayed,  
 I'm looking for the face I had  
 Before the world was made.

What if I look upon a man  
 As though on my beloved,  
 And my blood be cold the while  
 And my heart unmoved!  
 Why should he think me cruel  
 Or that he is betrayed?  
 I'd have him love the thing that was  
 Before the world was made.<sup>42</sup>

Though the subtle shift in the refrain at the end of the second stanza suggests a genuine desire to be loved for herself alone, and not merely for her appearance,<sup>43</sup> the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 531, final version.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 531-32. It was written in February 1928 (IdY, p.292.)

<sup>43</sup>Cf. "For Anne Gregory" (CP, p. 277). A.N. Jeffares (in Comm.,

juxtaposition of worldly sophistication and professed spirituality is handled with fine irony, and the portrayal of vanity and self-centredness, through the medium of coquetish sophistry, admirably sustained.

"A First Confession" carries the experience of the young girl a stage further in the progression towards maturity and self-knowledge:

I admit the briar  
Entangled in my hair  
Did not injure me;  
My blenching and trembling,  
Nothing but dissembling,  
Nothing but coquetry.

I long for truth, and yet  
I cannot stay from that  
My better self disowns,  
For a man's attention  
Brings such satisfaction  
To the craving in my bones.

Brightness that I pull back  
From the Zodiac,  
Why those questioning eyes  
That are fixed upon me?  
What can they do but shun me  
If empty night replies?<sup>44</sup>

The highlight of this poem is the sensitive rendering of mingled shame, defiance, anxiety and desire of the adolescent in the throes of physical passion and moral searching. As in "Father and Child", the language, cadence and phrasing have the deceptive simplicity and fluency of everyday speech, while the visual trick in "briar" - "hair" and the part-rhyme in "me" - "coquetry" subtly evoke her casual fickleness. The diction is, furthermore, varied and original: the verb "admit" (substituted for "declare", in an earlier unpublished version)<sup>45</sup>

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pp.392-93) suggests that the young girl is "searching for her archetypal face" and points out the Platonic parallel.

<sup>44</sup>VE, pp.532-33, final version. (Dated June 1927 by R. Ellmann. [IdY, p. 292].)

<sup>45</sup>Letters, p. 725.

striking a delicate balance between outright defiance and shame-faced guilt, "craving" depicting the speaker's earthiness and lust, while "stay" suggests, in its archaic sense, the guilt of the sinner unable to abstain from the forbidden fruit, and (in its colloquial) the coquetry and banter of love play ("I cannot stay"). Finally, the topographical images "briar", "Zodiac" and "night" not only provide the scenic backdrop but also suggest, in their broad associations with Christian suffering and empty blackness (out of which appears the steady interrogatory gaze of God and lover) the moment of moral truth.

In the next four poems -- "Her Triumph", "Consolation", "Chosen" and "Parting" -- woman is depicted moving away from the conflicts of childhood and adolescence toward the actual experience of love. "Her Triumph", a Yeatsian variation of St George and the Dragon,<sup>46</sup> provides a masterly dénouement of a young girl's first apprehension of physical passion, and its promise of spiritual delight:

I did the dragon's will until you came  
 Because I had fancied love a casual  
 Improvization, or a settled game  
 That followed if I let the kerchief fall:  
 Those deeds were best that gave the minute wings  
 And heavenly music if they gave it wit;  
 And then you stood among the dragon-rings.  
 I mocked, being crazy, but you mastered it  
 And broke the chain and set my ankles free,  
 Saint George or else a pagan Perseus;  
 And now we stare astonished at the sea,  
 And a miraculous strange bird shrieks at us.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>For its pictorial sources in "Saint George and the Dragon", ascribed to Bordone, and possibly Cosimo Tura's St George and the Dragon" in the cathedral at Ferrara, vide LT, pp. 49-50. The dragon image is also used to represent woman's misconceptions in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" (CP, pp. 197-98). Kathleen Raine, in "Yeats's Debt to William Blake", Texas Quarterly, VIII, 4 (1965), 175, suggests, as a possible source, Blake's Urizen.

<sup>47</sup>VE, pp. 533-34, final version.

The poem passes through the superficial motions of courtship to the "'disarming isolation of suddenly realized love'",<sup>48</sup> from the playful coquetry of simulated passion to the opening out of new vistas of sexual and emotional experience. Its power lies not only in the formalized rhythms (suggesting some pavane) with their ingenious combination of run-on lines, pauses and stops, but in the mood of quiet splendour which emerges concurrently with the lover's arrival, heralding the rapid sequence of events; the young girl's astonished disbelief; the hero's masterful act of deliverance (notice the underlying eroticism in "mastered", "broke the chain", "set ... free"), the speaker's miraculous apprehension of the St George-Perseus parallel. This is a dramatic and exciting revelation of a young girl on the threshold of womanhood.

"Consolation", the second poem of this section (and the fifth of the series) depicts woman as a purely physical creature revelling in her sexuality and in her capacity for giving sexual pleasure. Its "message" -- that woman is the only true source of comfort and pleasure -- is conveyed in an inner monologue whose worldly wisdom, sardonic humour and earthy coarseness are mildly reminiscent of Donne:

O but there is wisdom  
 In what the sages said;  
 But stretch that body for a while  
 And lay down that head  
 Till I have told the sages  
 Where is comforted.  
  
 How could passion run so deep  
 Had I never thought  
 That the crime of being born  
 Blackens all our lot?  
 But where the crime's committed  
 The crime can be forgot.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>LT, p. 58.

<sup>49</sup>VE, p. 534, final version. According to Jeffares (Comm., p. 394), it was probably written in June 1927. A detailed analysis of the poem is given by J.B. Thompson in "The Wisdom of Crazy Jane. A Study of the Recurrent Theme in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats" (diss., Univ. of Stellenbosch, 1966), pp. 146-47.

In contrast to the previous poem, "Chosen" shows woman at her most spiritual:

The lot of love is chosen. I learnt that much  
Struggling for an image on the track  
Of the whirling Zodiac.  
Scarce did he my body touch,  
Scarce sank he from the west  
Or found a subterranean rest  
On the maternal midnight of my breat  
Before I had marked him on his northern way,  
And seemed to stand although in bed I lay.

I struggled with the horror of daybreak,  
I chose it for my lot! If questioned on  
My utmost pleasure with a man  
By some new-married bride, I take  
That stillness for a theme  
Where his heart my heart did seem  
And both adrift on the miraculous stream  
Where -- wrote a learned astrologer --  
The Zodiac is changed into a sphere.<sup>50</sup>

This poem is a personal statement on the inevitable ephemerality of love -- and an intimate revelation, from the woman's viewpoint, of complete union with the beloved.

The central idea -- the fixity of love's course, its inevitable progression in time -- is conveyed in two important interrelated images: the determining of one's destiny through the choice of lots, and the progression of the sun on its fixed course through the heavens. The former image, probably derived from Plato's myth of Er, where the souls of men and women in heaven, resting between incarnations, "choose" the lots that represent their destinies in afterlife,<sup>51</sup> introduces the idea of necessity, the use of the passive ("is chosen") emphasizing the helplessness of the individual in the face of his fate.

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<sup>50</sup>VE, pp. 534-35. final version. Jon Stallworthy, in Between the Lines. W.B. Yeats Poetry in the Making (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 139, makes the interesting point that "the manuscripts show [this poem and "Parting"]... to have been originally the same poem".

<sup>51</sup>LT, p. 105 and vide Comm., p. 394. For original source vide Plato's Republic, intro. A.D. Lindsay Everyman's Library (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1935), pp. 318-25.

The latter, that of the sun's path through the whirling Zodiac, reinforces this idea and provides the underlying sexual symbolism for the whole gamut of the sex act, from the first exploratory touch to the moment of orgasm. The somewhat puzzling reference to the sun's "northern way" -- an image reminiscent of Donne, and in particular of "The Good Morrow"<sup>52</sup> (indeed, the use of the astronomical imagery in the poem is strongly evocative of Donne) -- is explained in terms of the "symbolic marriage of the Sun and Light with the Earth and Darkness, current in literature since the Renaissance", as "the sun's passage under the earth, his sojourn in the bed of love. Earth would bar his way and so prevent the dawn...."<sup>53</sup>

In the second stanza the woman recounts the most pleasurable moment of love as that moment at which her soul is united with her lover. Yeats's dictum that "the marriage bed is the symbol of the solved antimony"<sup>54</sup> is nowhere more exquisitely expressed than in this image of stasis-in-flux which marks love's summation; indeed the entire poem may be seen as the conflict between movement and the containment of movement ("struggling", "whirling", "sank", "marked", "stillness", "adrift") and its resolution into the perfect unmoving sphere.

The sphere symbol is explained in notes that Yeats wrote for A Vision two years before writing "Byzantium":

At first we are subject to Destiny ... but the point in the Zodiac where the whirl becomes a sphere once reached, we may escape from the constraint of our nature

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<sup>52</sup>Cf.: "Where can we finde two better hemisphaeres / Without sharpe North, without declining West?" (The Metaphysical Poets, ed. H. Gardner [1957], p. 56.)

<sup>53</sup>J. Stallworthy, Between the Lines ... (Oxford, 1963), p. 139.

<sup>54</sup>V(B), p. 52.



and from that of external things, entering upon a state where all fuel has become flame, where there is nothing but the state itself, nothing to constrain it or end it.<sup>55</sup>

F.A.C. Wilson explains that "the harmonious soul ... is a sphere ...and the lovers's souls seem to be back at their starting point on the Milky Way, 'both adrift on the miraculous stream' of the galaxy, ... [where] the spiritual and material worlds intersect and the imperfect is transformed into the perfect ..."<sup>56</sup> We are reminded of the circle of light given off by the resurrected lovers in "Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillinn", revealing their achievement of perfect harmony.

Despite its abstruseness and the self-conscious transitions between major thought sequences, this is one of Yeats's most admirable love poems, rich, complex and inspired. Its power lies not so much in the slow build-up from the quiet resignation of the opening lines to the ecstatic close as in that density of "wit" and metaphor that is characteristic of the Metaphysical poets, and in particular of Donne; and woman's absorption in the spiritual ecstasy of sexual intercourse is depicted with rare sensitivity and insight.

The last poem in this section, "Parting", moves from spirituality to sensual abandonment, though the coquettish frippery of some of the earlier poems is noticeably absent. This stark revelation of woman's sensuality, heightened by the conventional setting, the tender endearments of the lover and the secrecy surrounding the sex act ("household spies", "murderous stealth of the day") is a splendid illustration of Yeats's genius for transforming and exalting essentially thin, mediocre material:

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<sup>55</sup>Idy, p. 221. Cf. V(B), pp. 210-11, 240.

<sup>56</sup>In W.B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958), pp. 210-211.

He. Dear, I must be gone  
While night shuts the eyes  
Of the household spies;  
That song announces dawn.

She. No, night's bird and love's  
Bids all true lovers rest,  
While his loud song reproves  
The murderous stealth of day.

He. Daylight already flies  
From mountain crest to crest.

She. That light is from the moon.

He. That bird ...

She. Let him sing on,  
I offer to love's play  
My dark declivities.<sup>57</sup>

The last three poems depict woman in the steady decline of life to abject old age. "Her Vision in the Wood", one of the earliest in the series, (it was written in August 1926),<sup>58</sup> reveals a woman past her prime, tormented by the tangible evidence of the corrosion of time.

The poem opens with the woman's impassioned outcry at the loss of youth and her attempt to prove otherwise by self-mutilation:

Too old for a man's love I stood and raged  
At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood,  
Dry timber under that rich foliage,  
Imaging men. Imagining that I could  
A greater with a lesser pang assuage,  
Or but to find if withered vein ran blood,  
I tore my body that its wine might cover  
Whatever could recall the lip of lover.<sup>59</sup>

The sacramental act is interrupted by a vision of a solemn procession: a troop of chanting, grief-stricken women carrying a dying man -- a powerful re-enactment of the pagan and

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<sup>57</sup>VE, pp. 535-36, final version. It bears a close resemblance to Blake's "The Birds" (Blake's Poems and Prophecies, ed. with an introduction by Max Plowman, Everyman's Library / London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1959), p. 343).

<sup>58</sup>Comm., p. 397. Cf. ProYP, p. 153.

<sup>59</sup>VE, pp. 536-37, ll. 1-8.

Celtic myths of Adonis and Diarmuid. So real is the vision that the woman participates in the song: she is shocked back to reality when she recognizes in the wounded man her former lover -- "my heart's victim and its torturer" -- and momentarily relives the painful actuality of youthful love.

Apart from its lush imagery and admirable rhythmic control, this is one of Yeats's least successful poems, over-ambitious, forced and contrived. Though it constitutes a violent testimony to physical deterioration, and though the mood of frustration is powerfully sustained, its portrayal of woman is both histrionic and melodramatic.

"A Last Confession" (written between June and August 1926)<sup>60</sup> depicts woman at that station in life at which truth in love takes on new meaning within a wholly unorthodox moral framework. Unlike her younger counterpart in "A First Confession", the woman in this poem is free from the anxiety and turmoil of moral conflict:

What lively lad most pleased me  
Of all that with me I lay?  
I answer that I gave my soul  
And loved in misery,  
But had great pleasure with a lad  
That I loved bodily.

Flinging from his arms I laughed  
To think his passion such  
He fancied that I gave a soul  
Did but our bodies touch,  
And laughed upon his breast to think  
Beast gave beast as much.

I gave what other women gave  
That stepped out of their clothes,  
But when this soul, its body off,  
Naked to naked goes,  
He it has found shall therein  
What none other knows.

And give his own and take his own  
And rule in his own right;

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<sup>60</sup> Comm., p. 398.

And though it loved in misery  
 Close and cling so tight,  
 There's not a bird of day that dare  
 Extinguish that delight.<sup>61</sup>

The poem is a provocative challenge to the conventional belief that sexual pleasure is commensurate with spiritual love, and a hymn to the spiritual union of lovers after death. In keeping with its disarming frankness (notice the shock effect of the juxtaposition of "profane" subject matter and "sacred" title), the language is simple, the images vivid and direct, like that "stripping down to the common impulse of the body"<sup>62</sup> that T.R. Henn so admirably describes. There is evidence, too, of careful structuring, from the rhetorical question of the opening line to the ecstatic climax at the end, the mood of which is strangely reminiscent of the spiritual ecstasy of "The Exequy":

That fit of fire  
 Once off; our bodies shall aspire  
 To our souls bliss: then we shall rise  
 And view our selves with clearer eyes  
 In that calm Region, where no night  
 Can hide us from each others sight.<sup>63</sup>

The poem is furthermore bound together by vigorous rhythms and subtle rhyme effects: "misery" - "bodily", for example, suggesting a nimble theological debate; "breast" -

<sup>61</sup>VE, p. 538, final version.

<sup>62</sup>LT, p. 66.

<sup>63</sup>The Metaphysical Poets, sel. and ed. Helen Gardner (Penguin Books, 1957), p. 109. Cf., also, the following passage from Plotinus, which Yeats probably read about May 1926 (Vide Y:M&P, pp. 237-38: "Therefore we must ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every Soul.... To attain it is for those that will take the upward path, who will set all their forces towards it, who will divest themselves of all we have put on in our descent:- so, to those that approach the Holy Celebrations of the Mysteries, there are appointed purifications and the laying aside of the garments worn before, and the entry in nakedness -- until, passing on the upward way, all that is other than the God, each in the solitude of himself shall behold that solitary indwelling Existence, the Apart, the Unmingled, the Pure, that

"beast", denoting the woman's momental indifference to her lover's suffering; "day" - "dare" striking, in its mood of spirited defiance, just the right passionate note. Finally, the play on "close" at the beginning of the fourth line in the last stanza, heightens the dramatic impact, suggesting in both its adjectival and verbal senses, the pleasure of the sex act.

The last vignette of the series ("Meeting") ends, like the first, with a confrontation, this time between two aged lovers filled with the bitter sweetness of a past love. In language that has been pared to its most elemental and functional, the poem provides a subtle exploration of two proud, jealous people, torn between conflicting emotions of love, hate, resentment and remorse, and discovering, in "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart", a remnant of their former passion. The image of the mask, employed in an earlier poem of that title,<sup>64</sup> is recoined to convey the forlorn and the pathetic; and if this is not a great poem, it has produced at least a masterly phrase:

Hidden by old age awhile  
In masker's cloak and hood,  
Each hating what the other loved,  
Face to face we stood:  
"That I have met with such," said he,  
"Bodes me little good."

"Let others boast their fill," said I,  
"But never dare to boast  
That such as I had such a man  
For lover in the past;  
Say that of living men I hate  
Such a man the most."

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from which all things depend, for which all look and live and eat and know, the Source of Life and of Intellection and of Being.

"And one that shall know this vision -- with what passion of longing to be molten into one with This, what wondering delight!"  
(The Six Enneads), ... tr. from the Greek by Stephen MacKenna  
[ 5 vols; London: The Medici Society, 1917-30 ], I (1926), 85-86.)

<sup>64</sup>Vide CP, p. 106.

"A loony'd boast of such a love,"  
 He in his rage declared:  
 But such as he for such as me ---  
 Could we both discard  
 This beggarly habiliment ---  
 Had found a sweeter word.<sup>65</sup>

In scope and variety, then, this series has achieved, within a succession of brief first-person lyrics, what no poet writing in English has, to my knowledge, hitherto attempted: a revelation, uncanny in its penetration, intimacy and truth, of the psychology of woman in all its major phases, and at its most crucial moments, from the viewpoint of woman. Rossetti attempted a comparable frankness; but it is important to remember that he was writing purely from the male viewpoint. The same may be said of Donne and D. H. Lawrence, while the female dramatizations of Browning<sup>66</sup> are, by comparison, crude and gauche. In these poems Yeats has broken through an area of human experience relatively neglected in English poetry and handled it with astonishing insight, sensitivity and realism.

Yeats's idea of woman's relationship to love and sex thus comprises an interesting, though loosely related variety of attitudes. On a realistic level woman is seen in numerous postures or stances covering a wide emotional range within a broad chronological compass that reveals her ultimate mortality and frailty in the face of death; in an ideal sense, she is represented as perfect marriage partner, symbolized by the universal figure of Sheba. Although these images are fragmentary and seemingly haphazard, without evidence of any attempt to

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<sup>65</sup>VE, p. 539, final version. According to Jeffares, the date of composition is uncertain. It was probably written in 1926 (Comm., p. 398).

<sup>66</sup>Vide, for example, "Any Wife to Any Husband", "A Woman's Last Word", "In a Year" and "James Lee's Wife". (The Poetical Works of Robert Browning ... / London, New York, Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953 /, pp. 235-37, 216, 242, 467-72.)

integrate them into a cohesive system; they offer a refreshing extension of the spiritual aspect of woman discussed in the previous chapter. While the technical accomplishment of the period is uneven -- the Sheba symbol being little more than a dramatized mouthpiece for the propagation of Yeats's views on marriage -- the "A Woman Young and Old" series constitutes a significant development in Yeats's handling of first-person female dramatization, thereby paving the way for such later characterizations as Crazy Jane and those contained in "The Three Bushes" sequence.

## CHAPTER VI

### WOMAN AND HISTORY (1917-1937)

Man is in love and loves what vanishes,  
What more is there to say? ...  
-- Yeats: Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen

Between 1917 and 1937 Yeats conceived, perfected and refined his implacable view of the universe incorporated in A Vision. The purpose of this vast "cosmic machinery", this "formidable and formal" pattern of moving "cones and wheels and changing moons"<sup>1</sup> was to endow its maker with a "God's eye view"<sup>2</sup> of people and history and provide him with a presumably infallible key to their essence and movements. Within the framework of this darkly obscure, strangely prophetic and oracular work -- "one of the grammars of romantic symbolism", one critic has astutely called it<sup>3</sup> -- woman has been assigned a dual function: as "man's goal and limit ... object of desire and object of thought, the one a perpetual rediscovery of what the other destroys, the seventh house of the horoscope where one finds friend and enemy ...";<sup>4</sup> and, more important,

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<sup>1</sup>Donald A. Stauffer, The Golden Nightingale. Essays on Some Principles of Poetry in the Lyrics of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow. Yeats's Dialogue with History (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 8. Cf. Yeats's comments on Whitehead (Y:M&P, p. 237).

<sup>3</sup>Northrop Frye, "Yeats and the Language of Symbolism", Univ. of Toronto Quarterly, XVII,1 (Oct. 1947), 11.

<sup>4</sup>V(B), p. 213, Cf.: "Mask and Body of Fate are symbolic woman, Will and Creative Mind symbolic man; the man and woman of Blake's Mental Traveller" (V / B, p. 262). This is clearly of the ultimate clarification of Yeats's earlier confusion about the relation between the sexes: "Every man is, in the right of his sex, a wheel, or group of Four Faculties, and ... every woman is, in the right of her sex, a wheel which reverses the masculine wheel. In so far as man and woman are swayed by their sex they interact as man and Daimon interact, though at other moments their phases may be side by side." (V / A, pp. 27-28).



as passive agent in the perpetuation of the alternating cycles of history. The former aspect has already been mentioned in relation to Yeats's concept of the Daimon, a supernatural co-equivalent and personification of man's Mask and Creative Mind:<sup>5</sup> the latter may best be understood against the background of Yeats's concept of history.

At the outset I wish to state that I accept, as intrinsic to Yeats's historical outlook, Thomas R. Whitaker's interesting and challenging thesis that history was for Yeats

a mysterious interlocutor, sometimes a bright reflection of the poet's self, sometimes a shadowy force opposed to that self ... /-endowed at times /- with his own imaginative life /- and at other times capable of disclosing /- all that seemed contrary to his own conscious state, all that lurked in his own depths, unmeasured and undeclared ...<sup>6</sup>

The boundaries of this "visionary and paradoxical dialogue"<sup>7</sup> were sufficiently flexible to allow a shift of perspective from the macroscopic vantage point of one of those gay Chinamen perched on the "little half-way house" between earth and sky or of an Oriental hermit on Mount Meru to an intimate "close-up" view of Irish history; from the panoramic revelation of history as a "human drama, keeping the classical unities by the clear division of its epochs, turning one way or the other because this man hates or that man loves ..."<sup>8</sup> to the more immediate immersion in the history of the poet's time; from the "broad and sweeping chronicle of ... historical

<sup>5</sup>Vide Ch. V, pp. 154-55 of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup>In Swan and Shadow, p. 4. This personification of history, comparable to Yeats's personification of the Daimon, is evident in his analogy of civilization with "some great tragic person, some Niobe who must display an almost superhuman will ..."  
(V /-B /-, p. 268).

<sup>7</sup>Whitaker, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>E, p. 290.

events"<sup>9</sup> to the cultural degeneration of the year 1927.

Inherent in Yeats's idea of history is the recurrence of three fundamental concepts. First there is the view of history as a series of consecutive cycles passing through a predetermined round of twenty-eight embodiments, corresponding to twelve Great Wheels or Lunar Months (with which are equated Solar Months, coinciding with mathematical divisions represented by the twelve signs of the Zodiac),<sup>10</sup> equivalent to a period of twenty-six thousand years, known as the Great Year. Secondly, there is the idea of conflict within the cycles, of a clash or opposition between successive eras or dispensations, imaged in the eternally rotating and whirling gyres or cones. Thirdly, there is the relationship of Yeats's own time and age to the total system and, in his appraisal thereof, his reactions of alternating optimism and disgust.

Yeats's assertion that "civilization is hooped together, brought / Under a rule of manifold illusion"<sup>11</sup> contains the essence of his cyclical view of history. The underlying idea, implicit as early as 1897 in his allegory "The Adoration of the Magi",<sup>12</sup> was later developed through a variety of sources<sup>13</sup> -- indeed

<sup>9</sup>LT, p. 192.

<sup>10</sup>"The Lunar Months of 2200 years apiece, in a year of 26,000 years, are years of civilization, while the Solar Months of a similar symbolical length correspond to periods of religion." (V/B, p. 203.) For the equation of Lunar and Solar Months with the signs of the Zodiac, vide V(A), pp. 141-42. Yeats's view of history is, incidentally, brilliantly and succinctly summed up by Frye, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup>CP, p. 333.

<sup>12</sup>Vide M, pp. 308-315.

<sup>13</sup>Some of them are cited by T.R. Henn in LT, p. 193. Vide also V(B), p. 81, *infra*. For Yeats's "later discovery" of Spengler, vide V(B), p. 18, and Letters, p. 716.

it has been said that "some system of cycles there must always be for every historical student";<sup>14</sup> but Yeats's system is necessarily complicated by an indeterminate number of cycles, or circles or wheels (on which are superimposed the Four Quadrants, representing the Four Faculties)<sup>15</sup> ranging from the imperceptible movement of the Great Year during which "the metronome ticks millenniums",<sup>16</sup> through the faster-moving cycles of the Great Wheel (approximating roughly to 2200 years), through a half of the Great Wheel, constituting a period of about 1050 years,<sup>17</sup> to the diminutive life cycle of individual man. The wheel, a central symbol which Yeats defines as "every completed movement of thought or life, twenty-eight incarnations, a single incarnation, a single judgement or act of thought"<sup>18</sup> is, in fact, "a single archetypal circle seen according to different measures of time"<sup>19</sup> reflecting the relentless, unchanging theme of what he was to call "the essence of my politics".<sup>20</sup>

I sing what was lost and dread what was won,  
I walk in a battle fought over again,  
My king a lost king, and lost soldiers my men;  
Feet to the Rising and Setting may run,  
They always beat on the same small stone.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Attributed by Whitaker (p. 76) to R.G. Collingwood, "The Theory of Historical Cycles," II, Antiquity, I (1927), p. 446.

<sup>15</sup>LT, pp. 195-96.

<sup>16</sup>Stauffer, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup>V(B), p. 267; and cf. LT, p. 198.

<sup>18</sup>V(B), p. 81. Cf. "... the very owls in circles move..." (CP, p. 229).

<sup>19</sup>V(A), p. 140.

<sup>20</sup>In Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (London: New York, Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940), p. 136.

<sup>21</sup>CP, p. 359. Cf. also "The Great Day" and "Parnell" (*ibid.*, pp. 358, 359).

The second aspect of Yeats's view of history is his theory of the gyres; two interpenetrating cones whirling or spiralling within each other around a spool or "perne" (a Scots or Irish word) in a series of alternating expansions and contractions. This complex, three-dimensional figuration suggested, as far back as 1889, by MacGregor Mathers's Key of Solomon,<sup>22</sup> was further derived, according to Yeats, from the vortex of Empedocles, with its alternating gyres of Concord and Discord; from the circuits of Plato's "'the Other'" and St Thomas Aquinas, from Swedenborg's "double cone" and Flaubert's spirale:<sup>23</sup> it first appeared in his wife's automatic writing on 6 December 1917<sup>24</sup> providing Yeats with a powerful image of the antimonies, oppositions or tensions at the root of human consciousness. The recognition of conflict, founded in Blake's belief in the contraries ("There is a place at the bottom of the graves where contraries are equally true")<sup>25</sup> and confirmed by the Heraclitean idea of War or Discord,<sup>26</sup> is fundamental to Yeats's view of the universe, a powerful testimony to man's awareness of his fallibility in his obsessive struggle for perfection and to the restless, relentless progression in history from all that it has achieved:

<sup>22</sup>For this fact I am indebted to Giorgio Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art. Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W.B. Yeats (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 23-24.

<sup>23</sup>Vide V(B), pp. 67-70. T.R. Henn also adds Heraclitus, Descartes, Boehme and Blake (LT, p. 194).

<sup>24</sup>Y:M&M, p. 231.

<sup>25</sup>V(B), p. 72; and cf.: "'Contraries are positive ... a negation is not a contrary.'" (Ibid.)

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 67, I.

My instructors identify consciousness with conflict, not with knowledge, substitute for subject and object and their attendant logic a struggle towards harmony, towards Unity of Being. Logic and emotional conflict alike tend towards a reality which is concrete, sensuous, bodily.<sup>27</sup>

And again:

This whirling / of the cones / though it is not creative, is not evil, for evil is from the disturbance of the harmony.<sup>28</sup>

The conflict is expressed in terms of two diametrically opposed predispositions or viewpoints, subjectivity and objectivity (antithetical and primary tincture),<sup>29</sup> in a predetermined, never-ending series of cycles through which pass the human soul, historical movements or epochs or dispensations, and ultimately the Great Year itself. In historical terms the conflict is reflected in the perpetual expansion and contraction of the cycles<sup>30</sup> -- summed up in Blake's "The Mental Traveller" -- and more specifically in the opposition between the pagan and Christian eras:

A primary dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end; an antithetical dispensation obeys imminent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup>V(B), p. 214. The conflict towards perfection is seen in "subjective" man's struggle for Unity of Being.

<sup>28</sup>V(A), p. 149.

<sup>29</sup>According to Yeats, the term "tincture" is borrowed from Boehme; "antithetical" derived from his own Per Amica Silentia Lunae (V / B /, p. 72).

<sup>30</sup>Cf.: "History can be interpreted as a series of expanding cones; each age, as it wears on, generating a centrifugal tendency, which finally produces decadence or disintegration." (LT, p. 195)

<sup>31</sup>V(B), p. 263.

And again:

Primary means democratic. Antithetical means aristocratic.<sup>32</sup>

The transition between primary and antithetical (known as the interchange of the tinctures)<sup>33</sup> is not, however, a sudden or dramatic reversal of the preceding age but the result of a long period of preparation and nurture. Polybius's idea that "every civilization carries with it from the beginning what shall bring it to an end"<sup>34</sup> and the Heraclitean idea of change or flux ("Dying each other's life, living each other's death")<sup>35</sup> have been incorporated in Yeats's belief in the necessary destruction of one era or civilization (which partially explains his belief in war or violence)<sup>36</sup> in preparation for the next:

I do not doubt ... that every movement, in feeling or in thought, prepares in the dark by its own increasing clarity and confidence its own executioner.<sup>37</sup>

The movement is summed up in the following passage:

Each age unwinds the thread another age had wound;  
and it amuses one to remember that before Phidias, and  
his westward-moving art, Persia fell, and that when full  
moon came round again, amid eastward-moving thought, and  
and brought Byzantine glory, Rome fell; and that at the

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>34</sup>Y:M&P, p. 264.

<sup>35</sup>V(B), p. 68. Cf. lines spoken by the Greek in The Resurrection (CP1., p. 594).

<sup>36</sup>Vide Michael Robartes's exhortation to war (V/B pp. 52-53) and the invocation of "Mitchel's prayer" in "Under Ben Bulbin" (CP, p. 398).

<sup>37</sup>M, p. 340. Quoted by Whitaker, p. 32.

outset of our westward-moving Renaissance Byzantium fell; all things dying each other's life, living each other's death.<sup>38</sup>

In relation to the Great Year, the Christian era is the second of the twelve Great Wheels (gyres or Lunar Months) comprising roughly 2200 years. According to one exponent, Christ's Crucifixion and Conception traditionally took place two days after the Vernal Equinox,<sup>39</sup> His Birth (following Yeats) "at or near the central point of a lunar month of classical civilization -- the first degree of Aries on the Great Wheel."<sup>40</sup>

The characteristic features of the Christian (or primary) era are clearly identifiable:

At the birth of Christ religious life becomes primary, secular life antithetical -- man gives to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.... God is ... conceived of as something outside man and man's handiwork, and it follows that it must be idolatry to worship that which Phidias and Scopas made ... The mind that brought the change, if considered as man only, is a climax of whatever Greek and Roman thought was most a contradiction to its age ... We say of Him because His sacrifice was voluntary that He was love itself, and yet that part of Him which made Christendom was not love but pity, and not pity for intellectual despair, though the man in Him, being antithetical like His age, knew it in the Garden, but primary pity, that for the common lot, man's death, seeing that He raised Lazarus, sickness, seeing that He healed many, sin, seeing that He died.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> V(B), pp. 270-71.

<sup>39</sup> T.R. Henn. Vide LT, p. 196.

<sup>40</sup> V(B), p. 204. In V(A), pp. 155-57, Yeats tries to locate this astronomically and give it mathematical validity. For the relationship between the life of Christ and the Four Principles, vide V(B), p. 263, XVIII.

<sup>41</sup> V(B), pp. 263, 273-75, passim. Cf.: "In pity for man's darkening thought ..." (CP, p. 240).

Since "an age is the reversal of an age", the coming civilization would be born from "all that our age had rejected, from all that my stories symbolized as a harlot, and take after its mother ..."<sup>42</sup> In this cycle of "present decay and future rebirth",<sup>43</sup> the old primary gives way to the new antithetical ("Christ gave a primary revelation at the climax of an anti-thetical civilization and will be followed by His contrary"):<sup>44</sup>

The old realization of an objective moral law is changed into a subconscious turbulent instinct. The world of rigid custom and law is broken up by "the uncontrollable mystery upon the bestial floor".<sup>45</sup>

The approaching era is further seen as a symbolic marriage of East and West, "the one begetting upon the other":

When it commenced at its symbolic full moon in March --- Christ or Christendom was begotten by the West upon the East. This begetting has been followed by a spiritual predominance of Asia. After it must come an age begotten by the East upon the West that will take after its Mother in turn.<sup>46</sup>

The child to be born of this marriage is seen as the antithetical revelation, the "turbulent child of the Altar", opposed to the primary child or era, "the child born in the Cavern."<sup>47</sup> In the words of Michael Robartes:

"After an age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace, comes an age of freedom, friction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war. Has our age burned to the socket?"<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup>E, p. 393.

<sup>43</sup>Melchiori, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup>V(A), p. 148.

<sup>45</sup>V(B), p. 105.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 203. Yeats's uncertainty about the validity of the geographical reality of this equation is evident in V(B) p. 205. Cf., however, V(B), p. 257.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 52.



Yeats's view of his age is marked by a mood of intense disgust that gradually gives way to heroic gaiety.<sup>49</sup> The last quarter of the Christian era (the period 1875 to 1927, beginning at Phase 22 of the Great Wheel and initiating the third millennium)<sup>50</sup> is seen as "a period of abstraction ... preceded by the great popularizer of physical science and economic science /to be/ followed by social movements and applied science."<sup>51</sup> His immediate quarrel with his time lies in his observation of "decreasing ability and energy and increasing commonness",<sup>52</sup> an almost total obliteration, by the "indifferent multitude", of heroic reverie: the substitution, for aesthetic supremacy, nobility, myth and romance, of intellect, science and mass culture:

... beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,  
And ancient lineaments are blotted out ...  
. . . . .  
Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul ...<sup>53</sup>

The dislocation of the times is variously expressed: in symbols of the loosening gyre and the truncated tower ("Is every modern nation like the tower, / Half dead at the top?"),<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Cf.: "The one heroic sanction is that of the last battle of the Norse gods, of a gay struggle without hope." (LT, p.212.)

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 209. For a further reference to the "last quarter of the Christian era", cf. Yeats's statement to Dorothy Wellesley: "Europe is in the waning Moon, are all those things that we love waning?" (Letters ... to Dorothy Wellesley, p.128).

<sup>51</sup>V(B), p. 299. For further details of this period corresponding to Phases 23, 24 and 25, vide LT, pp. 209-10.

<sup>52</sup>Letters, p. 386.

<sup>53</sup>CP, p. 337. Cf. "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", first stanza (ibid., pp. 232-33).

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 210-11, 269 respectively.

in the sapping of ancient lineages by a new breed, infinitely inferior ("... gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry ...");<sup>55</sup> and in the nightmare reality of the artist waking "in an old ruin that the winds howled through ...":

The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,  
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen,  
where are they? ...

O what of that, O what of that,  
What is there left to say?<sup>56</sup>

The aesthetic aspect of this decline, viewed (as it is in "Three Movements" and "The Nineteenth Century and After") against the achievement of Elizabethan and Romantic literature,<sup>57</sup> is directly related to the age of mechanism depicted, with characteristic Blakean power and compression, as a nineteenth-century re-enactment of the Creation and Fall:

Locke sank into a swoon;  
The Garden died;  
God took the spinning-jenny  
Out of his side.<sup>58</sup>

The new positive note that emerges in the poetry from 1936 onwards ("All things fall and are built again / And those that build them again are gay ...")<sup>59</sup> probably derives from Yeats's ultimate synthesis of his historical system, in which the disenchanting features of his age are seen as a prelude to

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 350. Cf. Yeats's comment on "The Curse of Cromwell": "It is very poignant because it was my own state watching romance and nobility dissappear /-sic/." Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 135.)

<sup>57</sup>Vide CP, p. 271 (twice) and cf. "Statistics" (ibid.)

<sup>58</sup>CP, p. 240; and cf. IdY, p. 263.

<sup>59</sup>CP, p. 339.

a new antithetical millennium. This optimism, already evident in such early essays as "The Autumn of the Body" and "The Body of Father Christian Rosencrux",<sup>60</sup> though eclipsed by the blind terror of "The Second Coming", is renewed in Yeats's detection, in the very characteristics of his age which he detested, evidence of the coming era:

Abstraction which began at Phase 19 will end at Phase 25, for these movements and this science will have for their object or result the elimination of intellect. Our generation has witnessed a first weariness, has stood at the climax, at what ... I call Hodos Chameliontos, and when the climax passes will recognize that there common thought began to break and disperse ... Even before the general surrender of the will, there came synthesis for its own sake, organization where there is no masterful director, books where the author has disappeared, painting where some accomplished brush paints with an equal pleasure, or with a bored impartiality, the human form or an old bottle, dirty weather and clean sunshine. I too think of famous works where synthesis has been carried to the utmost limit possible ... and I notice that when the limit is approached or past, when the moment of surrender is reached, when the new gyre begins to stir, I am filled with excitement. I think of recent mathematical research'... with its objective world intelligible to intellect; I can recognize that the limit itself has become a new dimension, that this ever-hidden thing which makes us fold our hands has begun to press down upon multitudes. Having bruised their hands upon that limit, men, for the first time since the seventeenth century, see the world as an object of contemplation, not as something to be remade, and some few, meeting the limit in some special study, even doubt if there is any common experience, doubt the possibility of science.<sup>61</sup>

The expression of "hatred of the abstract" and the desire for myth will be paralleled by a total reversal of existing thought and of the existing social structure. T.R. Henn explains:

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<sup>60</sup>Dated 1898 and 1895 respectively (E&I, pp. 189-94, 196-97).

<sup>61</sup>Y(B), pp. 299-300. Cf.: "Perhaps now that the abstract intellect has split the mind into categories, the body into cubes, we may be about to turn back towards the unconscious, the whole, the miraculous." (LT, p. 210.) For Yeats's early awareness of the beginnings of this movement, vide the concluding paragraph of "The Celtic Element in Literature", dated 1897 (E&I, p. 187).

The cultivated classes will be separated from the community. A new philosophy will arise, concrete in expression, established by immediate experience, personal. It will teach individual immortality and the re-embodiment of the soul ... "Men will no longer separate the idea of God from the human genius, human productivity in all its forms." ... The "new thought" ... is to be the product of an aristocracy, the learned and the rich -- "and the best of those that express it will be given power, less because of that they promise than of that they seem and are. This much can be thought because it is the reversal of what we know, but those kindreds once formed must obey irrational force and so create hitherto unknown experience, in that which is incredible."<sup>62</sup>

Or, to put it differently:

... Those that Rocky Face holds dear,  
Lovers of horses and of women, shall,  
From marble of a broken sepulchre,  
Or dark betwixt the polecat and the owl,  
Or any rich, dark nothing disinter  
The workman, noble and saint, and all things run  
On that unfashionable gyre again.<sup>63</sup>

But perhaps the true source of this jubilation is the ultimate revelation of Yeats's "plan" for Ireland, his belief that Irish poets, in full awareness of the purity and astringency of their classical heritage, would prove themselves, amidst the decay and formless confusion of Europe, "still the indomitable Irishry":<sup>64</sup>

We Irish, born into that ancient sect  
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide  
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,  
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace  
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>LT, pp. 210-11.

<sup>63</sup>CP, p. 337. For various explanations of "Old Rocky Face", vide Comm., pp. 435-38, ProYP, pp. 160-61.

<sup>64</sup>CP, p. 400.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 376. It is interesting to note that in Yeats's "revolutionary" scheme for Irish education, Greek and Gaelic are considered the most important languages (E, pp. 438-40).

## II

In Yeats's historical system woman emerges as a passive agent in the perpetuation of history, a mere vehicle of a vast cosmic plot which she does not foresee and cannot understand. This concept, a more subtle expression of Yeats's romanticism than hitherto discussed, is nevertheless handled with heavy irony; for the woman represented is not some Rhea, Gaea or Cybele, impassive symbol of Primordial Motherhood, but a stricken virgin, innocent victim of a Divine whim "that changed some childish day to tragedy", carrying within herself, nevertheless, the seeds of violence and destruction on the one hand, formless chaos on the other.

Both Leda and Mary are archetypal representatives of the Virgin Mother, pagan and Christian aspects respectively of an historical (or mythological) theme that in Yeats's hands is characterized mainly by the shock and terror of the supernatural conception and by the woman's paradoxical insignificance in the cosmic design. Despite differences in literary treatment, the main lines of the image follow a fairly consistent and identifiable pattern. Both are unwilling and reluctant partners in a supernatural sexual congress that is forced upon them; to both the Divine Annunciation is made in the form of a natural physical symbol (the swan in the pagan story, the dove,<sup>66</sup> star or "fallen flare"<sup>67</sup> in the poems about Mary), both experience

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<sup>66</sup>This is suggested in "Wings beating about the room ..." (CP, p. 281).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid. Cf. "the brighter star" in "Parnell's Funeral" (CP, p. 319). Henn comments: "The star-conception image ... is perhaps linked in association with the vision of the arrow shot at a star and therefore another aspect of this world-image" (LT, p. 203); and cf. LT, pp. 164-65. Is the universality of this image revealed also in the "flame of fire" and "the two bright starres" springing from the eggs of Leda, described in the Hyperotomachia Poliphili? (Vide Melchiori, p. 136.)

terror, or horror, that is compounded of awe and dread of the unknown; both conceive (Leda through the natural sex organs, Mary through "the hollow of an ear")<sup>68</sup> and "produce momentous births";<sup>69</sup> in both the issue of the birth and conception is starkly delineated, either in terms of abstract historical epochs ("Leda and the Swan", "Two Songs from a Play") or, (in "The Mother of God" and "Wisdom"), in the tangible concrete image of the infant.

That Yeats regarded his "historical" woman as symbolic rather than literal is evident in his statement, in the revised version of A Vision, that "antithetical revelation is an intellectual influx neither from beyond mankind nor born of a virgin, but begotten from one spirit and history."<sup>70</sup> And again:

We must hold to what we have that the next civilization may be born, not from a virgin's womb, nor a tomb without a body, not from a void, but of our own rich experience.<sup>71</sup>

This view is synonomous with his final assessment of his system as "myth" rather than "philosophy"<sup>72</sup> and as "stylistic arrangements of experience" that helped him to hold "in a single thought reality and justice."<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup>CP, p. 281.

<sup>69</sup>LT, p. 256.

<sup>70</sup>V(B), p. 262

<sup>71</sup>E, p. 437.

<sup>72</sup>Vide letter to Olivia Shakespear, dated February /-1931/ Letters, p. 781), and cf. his earlier viewpoint, stated in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (M, p. 340) and quoted by Whitaker, p. 32: "I do not doubt those heaving circles, those winding arcs, whether in one man's life or in that of an age, are mathematical, and that some in the world, or beyond the world, have foreknown the event and pricked upon the calendar the life-span of a Christ, a Buddha, a Napoleon."

<sup>73</sup>V(B), p. 25.

The differences in Yeats's handling of the Christian and pagan facets of the Virgin Mother figure are largely technical. The image of Leda has a depth and complexity that is noticeably absent in the poems about Mary, thereby allowing a variety of interpretations. On the simplest and most elemental level, Leda may be seen as the female principle in the fundamental sexual conflict underlying the universe (the Swan symbolizing power, potency, phallic strength, the male principle), a conflict which Yeats envisaged as central to his cosmology:

I see the Lunar and Solar cones first, before they start their whirling movements, as two worlds lying one within another -- nothing exterior, nothing interior, Sun in Moon and Moon in Sun -- a single being, like man and woman in Plato's Myth, and then a separation and a whirling for countless ages, and I see man and woman as reflecting the greater movement, ... all whirling perpetually.<sup>74</sup>

In an allegorical sense she may represent natural man, in a pagan parable of the Garden of Eden differing from its Hebraic counterpart only in its emphasis on the predetermined event rather than on the element of free will; and in a broader sense, if the poem be seen as a symbolic statement on the dual nature of man -- the human, temporal aspect opposed to the eternal and divine -- as man's mortal aspect.<sup>75</sup>

There is a further, esoteric, reading in which Leda is clearly a frail yet ominously powerful medium in the eternal succession of the cycles. Giorgio Melchiori postulates that

<sup>74</sup>V(A), p. 149. Cf. "The marriage bed is the symbol of the solved antimony ..." (V/B, p. 52).

<sup>75</sup>Melchiori (pp. 143-44) further suggests a complete set of correspondences based on the Yeats-Ellis commentaries on Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. For various interpretations of the swan symbol vide LT, p. 256; and cf. Melchiori, p. 78.

"for some reason (possibly a confused recollection of the "beasts" in the Book of Revelation) Yeats saw the crucial events, the most important moments in universal and personal history, as produced by the conjunction and the conflict of human and animal forms ...";<sup>76</sup> and the relationship between woman and history, already implicit in the Helen-Troy equation in "The Rose of the World" and "The Sorrow of Love",<sup>77</sup> is revealed in a note to the first printed version of "Leda and the Swan" (appearing in The Dial, June 1924), originally entitled "Annunciation":<sup>78</sup>

I wrote Leda and the Swan because the editor of a political review asked me for a poem. I thought, "After the individualist, demagogic movement, founded by Hobbes and popularized by the Encyclopaedists and the French Revolution, we have a soil so exhausted that it cannot grow that crop again for centuries." Then I thought, "Nothing is now possible but some movement from above preceded by some violent annunciation." My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor, and I began this poem; but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it, and my friend tells me that his "conservative readers would mis-understand the poem."<sup>79</sup>

The source of the image of Leda in Yeats's sonnet has been the subject of much lengthy, and at times, tantalizing, speculation. Melchiori's painstaking, but largely hypothetical analysis (in The Whole Mystery of Art)<sup>80</sup> has now been almost decisively refuted by Charles Madge's suggestion, fully endorsed, incidentally, by Melchiori himself, that the true

<sup>76</sup>In The Whole Mystery of Art, p. 78.

<sup>77</sup>CP, pp. 41, 45-46 respectively.

<sup>78</sup>Mentioned by Melchiori, p. 77. It was not, however, printed under that title. (Vide VE, p. 441, *infra*.)

<sup>79</sup>VE, p. 828. The poem was written 18 September 1932 (Comm., p. 295).

<sup>80</sup>Pp. 133-63.



source may have been a "bas-relief ... exhibited in the Etruscan Room at the British Museum ... made about the first century A.D., [the] motive [of which] goes back to the late fourth century B.C."<sup>81</sup>

Madge's evidence is not only extrinsic -- "Yeats lived in Woburn Buildings from 1895 to 1917, two minutes's walk from the British Museum, and could easily enough have come across it at any time during this period"<sup>82</sup> -- but intrinsic, and peculiarly sympathetic to the spirit and feeling of Yeats's poem:

Every detail of [the opening six lines of the sonnet] seems to be taken directly from the sculpture ... [which] strikes me as freshly and vividly imagined, tender in feeling and strangely evocative -- the kind of image which would have made a strong impression on Yeats at this turning point in his development.... It may well be, however, that in the last four lines he is also thinking of the rape of<sup>83</sup> Ganymede by the eagle, as first suggested by G.D.P. Allt. The idea of Leda being caught up and dropped is another imaginative extension of the scene on the relief.... [And he concludes:] Must not Yeats have stood spell-bound when he first came upon this work of exquisite violence in a dark corner of the British Museum?<sup>84</sup>

A further, less convincing suggestion, is that of Charles B. Gullans, who has pointed out a woodcut bookplate designed by T. Sturge Moore, for A.G.B. Russell, published in Modern Woodcutters No. 3. T. Sturge Moore (1921), which Yeats could have seen in that volume at an exhibition of Moore's work, or at Moore's house. He also cites a possible literary source

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<sup>81</sup>"Leda and the Swan", Times Literary Supplement, July 20, 1962, p. 532. For Melchiori's endorsement of Madge's hypothesis vide TLS, August 3, 1962, p. 557.

<sup>82</sup>Madge, p. 532.

<sup>83</sup>This has been more fully dealt with by Melchiori, in The Whole Mystery of Art, pp. 155-61. Vide also pl. VII(b) betw. pp. 154 and 155.

<sup>84</sup>Madge, p. 532.

in Sturge Moore's ode "To Leda", which first appeared in To Leda and Other Odes (1904) and was reprinted in Poems Collected in One Volume (1906).<sup>85</sup>

Madge's description does not take cognizance of other possible sources, both visual and literary, probably subconscious, but nevertheless noteworthy, of Yeats's great poem. The most important are the "Leda-Swan" figure in Blake's "Jerusalem"; Shelley's translation of the "'Homeric' Hymn to the Dioscuri" and Spenser's depiction of the myth in "Prothalamion" with, possibly, Pater's essays on "The Poetry of Michelangelo" and "Leonardo da Vinci" thrown in for good measure.<sup>86</sup> From these works Yeats derived, if we are to read Melchiori correctly, the symbolical character of Blake, Shelley's diction, Spenser's stress on Leda's whiteness and the Leda-Helen relationship and pagan-Christian equation in Pater -- the whole catalytically released, as it were, by Yeats's reading, some time in August 1923, of Oliver St John Gogarty's "To the Liffey with the Swans".<sup>87</sup> T.R. Henn has added a reference to a drawing by Ricketts depicting a "terrified half-naked girl" clasping the feet of a "winged angel in a narrow cell", a Cretan coin showing the union of the dove with Dictynna, the Cretan Diana, and a further link, through the connection of Leda with Death, with Michelangelo's Night.<sup>88</sup>

Yeats's delineation of the image of Leda is predominantly

<sup>85</sup>Vide Times Literary Supplement, November 9, 1962, p. 864.

<sup>86</sup>Cited by Melchiori in The Whole Mystery of Art, pp. 143, 147-48, 86-87, 137-40 respectively.

<sup>87</sup>For the background and possible influence of this reading vide Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art, pp. 90-98.

<sup>88</sup>Vide LT, p. 256.

naturalistic, the emotions of the young girl being recorded with a curious power and pathos that evoke both her helpless innocence and her terrifying capacity for perpetuating war and destruction. Despite the signs of overt violence in the mating of bird and woman, the first printed version falls sadly short of the power, sensuality and vigour of the final version:

A rush, a sudden wheel, and hovering still  
 The bird descends, and her frail thighs are pressed  
 By the webbed toes, and that all-powerful bill  
 Has laid her helpless face upon his breast.  
 How can those terrified vague fingers push  
 The feathered glory from her loosening thighs!  
 All the stretched body's laid on the white rush  
 And feels the strange heart beating where it lies;  
 A shudder in the loins engenders there  
 The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
 And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,  
 So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
 Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
 Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?<sup>89</sup>

Though the novel handling of thought sequences within the conventional sonnet form was still to come -- the break between the eighth and ninth lines appeared only in the 1928 publication of The Tower<sup>90</sup> -- the heavily revised 1925 version contains all the significant features of the final printed version.<sup>91</sup> The bird's approach has been condensed into a concentrated image of brute force; the silly physiological

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<sup>89</sup>VE, p. 441. For the first draft vide Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art, p. 74. The drafts have also been discussed by Thomas Parkinson, W.B. Yeats. The Later Poetry (Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1964), pp. 136-41.

<sup>90</sup>Vide VE, p. 441, *infra*.

<sup>91</sup>It appeared in A Vision (1925) (VE, p. 441). Note, however, punctuation changes, at the end of lines 6 and 8, in the 1928 printed version.

details ("webbed toes", "all-powerful bill") obliterated by an overriding impression of terror ("great wings", "dark webs"); the relationship between objective description and subjective experience (poet-observer and innocent girl), between active godhead and passive mortal, are subtly balanced and resolved:

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs,  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies,  
A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?<sup>92</sup>

The poem moves from awed observation in the opening stanza to philosophical speculation in the closing lines. Within these controlling polarities, it opens out into a powerful delineation of the sex act from the sudden descent of the swan to its brutal post-coital indifference; from the girl's helpless struggle to the moment of entry; from her mingled terror, shock and confusion at the unexpected sexual embrace to the orgasmic fury engendering the entire pagan era. The relationship between poet and subject is sensitively handled, the predominance of the poet in the opening lines fading imperceptibly into the emotions of the young girl until the poet's mind, suddenly released, as it were, from total identification, gradually reasserts itself at the end.

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<sup>92</sup>VE, p. 441, fourth printed version.

The dramatic opposition between bird and woman is powerfully conveyed in a sequence of deliberate, violently juxtaposed images so placed as to suggest not only the entire movement from the moment of attack to direct confrontation ("beating wings" - "staggering girl"; "thighs" - "dark webs"; "nape" - "bill"; "breast" - "breast") but the general invasion by the swan, intent on "accomplish[ing] his predestined will", paralleled by Leda's corresponding struggle as she is gradually beaten down into reluctant submission and surrender. Kinaesthetic imagery plays an important part in this act, the active-passive, dominating-suffering tensions between the male-female protagonists being cunningly imaged in the careful choice and sequence of prepositions: "wings beating above ..."; thighs caressed by ..."; "nape caught in ..."; "breast upon breast"; fingers pushing the "feathered glory from ... loosening thighs"; "body ... laid in that white rush ..." <sup>93</sup> Finally, the erotic impact of the "verbal tensions" <sup>94</sup> is powerfully reinforced by the violent plosive alliteration and subtle off-rhymes in "blow" - "beating"; "caressed" - "caught", "push" - "loosening"; "loosening" - "laid" "lies"; "shudder" - "engenders". In this fine, admirably controlled sonnet, Yeats has achieved a splendid synthesis of the sexual paradox at the heart of his cosmic system.

Yeats's treatment of the Christian Virgin shows greater variety but less power. Of the three poems concerning Mary,

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<sup>93</sup>Note the significant alteration of the first printed version: "All the stretched body's laid on the white rush ..." (VE, p. 441, l.7, infra).

<sup>94</sup>LT, p. 257.

"The Mother of God" (written 3 September 1931 and finally revised on 12 September)<sup>95</sup> most closely parallels the pagan myth in the young girl's terror at the miraculous birth and conception:

The threefold terror of love; a fallen flare  
Through the hollow of an ear;  
Wings beating about the room;  
The terror of all terrors that I bore  
The Heavens in my womb.

Had I not found content among the shows  
Every common woman knows,  
Chimney corner, garden walk,  
Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes  
And gather all the talk?

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,  
This fallen star my milk sustains,  
This love that makes my heart's blood stop  
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones  
And bids my hair stand up?<sup>96</sup>

This first-person dramatization of the Virgin constitutes a fairly sensitive rendering of virginal innocence and quiet domesticity, of affability and sociability brutally interrupted by enforced conception and unwanted birth. The terror is convincingly portrayed (note the obsessive repetition of the word, as well as the sense of fear in "chill" and in the image of hair standing on end);<sup>97</sup> but despite its wistfulness (represented in the simple homely images of domestic felicity), the poem moves uneasily between spontaneous reaction and self-conscious rhetoric ("What is this flesh I purchased with my pains?").

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<sup>95</sup>Comm., p. 359.

<sup>96</sup>VE, p. 499, final version.

<sup>97</sup>Cf.:

"When beak and claw their work begin  
Shall horror stir in the roots of my hair?  
Sang the bride of the Herne and the great Herne's bride.

(CP1., pp. 664-65).

In "Wisdom", Mary's horror at the mystery of the birth, followed by the gradual normalizing experience of motherhood ("Considering what wild infancy / Drove horror from His Mother's breast ..."), is ironically juxtaposed with the traditional image of homely domesticity and maternal content portrayed in the Mediaeval and post-Renaissance art work of Western Europe:<sup>98</sup>

The true faith discovered was  
When painted panel, statuary,  
Glass-mosaic, window-glass,  
Straightened all that went awry  
Through the peasant gossellers'  
Dream of shavings on a floor  
And dirty nails of carpenters.  
Miracle had its playtime, where  
In damask clothed and on a seat  
Chryselephantine, cedar-boarded,  
His majestic Mother sat  
Stitching at a purple hoarded,  
That he might be nobly breeched,  
In starry towers of Babylon  
Noah's freshet never reached.  
King Abundance got Him on  
Innocence; and Wisdom He.  
That cognomen sounded best  
Considering what wild infancy  
Drove horror from His Mother's breast.<sup>99</sup>

The poem is a mock-serious denunciation of the conventional view of the Immaculate Conception and, in particular, of its refinement and elaboration through successive historical periods. As in "On Woman", the short lines and staccato rhythms reveal a playful skittishness, a conscious leg-pulling that is radically different from the profound scepticism of "Ribh denounces Patrick", for example, or the jocular obscenity of "A Stick of

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<sup>98</sup>T.R. Henn states that lines 8-12 were "almost beyond doubt, based on a poorish seventeenth-century painting / of the Italian School / formerly hung in the Dublin National Gallery" (LT, p. 257). Vide LT, pl. facing p. 297.

<sup>99</sup>VE, p. 440. Jeffares in Comm. (p. 306) gives the date of composition as probably belonging to the period of "Two Songs from a Play".

Incense",<sup>100</sup> Though the levity of tone is weighted down by an element of self-consciousness ("freshet", "nobly breeched"), the shock effect of Yeats's peculiarly personal portrayal of the Virgin in the closing lines is cleverly offset by the traditional image of the Virgin wherein the Mother of Christ is demurely portrayed as personified Innocence.<sup>101</sup>

In contrast with the irony of the previous poem, the image of Mary in the first of "Two Songs from a Play" is handled with a strange admixture of awesome majesty and remoteness and hard pagan sensuality. Some of this quality probably derives from her astronomical and mythological associations in Homeric and classical literature: with Astraea (connected with the constellation Virgo), "the last goddess to leave the world after the golden age"<sup>102</sup> and thus herald of the new Golden Age; and the goddess Athena, the "staring virgin" of Yeats's poem, who plays a significant rôle in the resurrection of the slain god Dionysus.<sup>103</sup> The impersonal and emblematic treatment of Mary is therefore crucial to this powerful, ritualistic poem, in which the approaching Christian era is seen as the appalling termination of the high achievement of classical culture:

I saw a staring virgin stand  
Where holy Dionysus died,  
And tear the heart out of his side,  
And lay the heart upon her hand  
And bear that beating heart away;  
And then did all the Muses sing  
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,  
As though God's death were but a play.

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<sup>100</sup>CP, pp. 328-29, 383.

<sup>101</sup>For an esoteric interpretation vide Whitaker, p.314, n.46.

<sup>102</sup>IdY, p.260. According to Ellmann, the Virgin Astraea is mentioned in Virgil's Fourth Eclogue. (Ibid). Vide also IdY, p.261

<sup>103</sup>For details concerning this relationship vide IdY, pp.260-61.



Another Troy must rise and set,  
 Another lineage feed the crow,  
 Another Argo's painted prow  
 Drive to a flashier bauble yet.  
 The Roman Empire stood appalled:  
 It dropped the reins of peace and war  
 When that fierce virgin and her Star  
 Out of the fabulous darkness called.<sup>104</sup>

Yeats's concept of woman in history is thus simultaneously macroscopic and microscopic, objective and subjective, approached both from the viewpoint of a total world-structure and from the immediacy of its personal agents. His choice of Leda and Mary as parallel media of the pagan and Christian eras is in itself interesting and adds a tender dimension to a system that is intrinsically aloof and remote.

The poems represent, furthermore, Yeats's first significant attempt, exploratory and hesitant though it may be, at portraying the emotional reactions of woman from the woman's viewpoint, thus paving the way for the more supple, complex and diverse treatment of woman's sexual psychology in his later poem sequences: "A Woman Young and Old", the "Crazy Jane" poems and "The Three Bushes" sequence. Though the use of first-person dramatization (in "The Mother of God", for example) provides only a meagre starting-point for the full-blooded dramatization to come, the fluid treatment of the woman portrayed anticipates in a small way the range and technical versatility of the later poems. Though Yeats's technical achievement during this period is inconsistent, the poems present a unique synthesis of sex and history and mark an important stage in the "process of development from longing into system."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>VE, p. 437, final version. It was written in 1926 (IdY, p. 260).

<sup>105</sup>Thomas Parkinson, "Yeats and the Love Lyric", James Joyce Quarterly, III (1966), p. 114.

## CHAPTER VII

### WOMAN AGAINST SOCIETY (1929-1939)

The period 1929 to 1939 constitutes Yeats's last major achievement in his poetic treatment of woman, and it is characteristic of his old age that he should have devoted it almost exclusively to a revelation of woman's ultimate identity. Apart from a sporadic interest in Margot Ruddock, a beautiful young actress and would-be poetess, and a final splendid tribute to Maud Gonne, Yeats's main concern is with woman's attempt to come to terms with her nature within the framework of society. This theme is illustrated by two diametrically opposed characters: Crazy Jane, the fierce, iconoclastic beggarwoman who creates her own set of moral values in defiance of orthodox convention and the Lady in "The Three Bushes" sequence, who sacrifices her innate sexuality to an artificial moral code. The result is the formulation of a difficult, painfully honest sexual ethic; and a conception of woman that is romantic in the best sense, vital and dynamic.

The strongly affirmative element in Yeats's final conception of woman may be attributed to three important factors. The first was his desire to transcend the limitations of old age and to create and uphold a mask of rigour, energy and passion. The second was his association, from 1935 onwards, with Lady Dorothy Wellesley, which was to sharpen his insight into woman's sexuality and prove invaluable in his handling of "The Three Bushes" sequence. Finally, there was the pervading influence of Blake and Donne (and, to a lesser extent, of Swift), whose impact is everywhere prevalent in the "Crazy Jane" poems, both conceptually and in terms of the energy that informs them. Before assessing Yeats's poetic achievement, I wish to examine these influences more fully.

The dynamic romanticism of Yeats's concept of woman during his last years must be seen as part of a larger process of reassessment and revaluation. This is evident not so much in his refinement of A Vision, involving twelve years of laborious re-writing, as in his re-appraisal of ideas earlier expressed: his re-working of the "Irish" theme, for example, reflected in the numerous marching songs and ballads; his ultimate rejection of the Plotinian standpoint and its vigorous assertion of Old Tom and Ribh the Hermit, and his constant soul-searching in the various "autobiographical" poems -- A Dialogue of Self and Soul", "Vacillation", "The Choice", "At Algericas", "The Man and the Echo". Indeed, there is a strong retrospective element in the poems of the period, revealing an attempt to review the whole of life, to come to some kind of quintessential appraisal of its totality. What T.R. Henn says of the Last Poems is equally true of Yeats's revised concept of woman:

I suggest that [they] can be seen as a clearly defined pattern, a projection of previous thought and technique; neither a regression nor a senile perversity, but a reconsideration and readjustment ... of nearly everything that had gone before.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most pressing aspect of this need for revaluation was the impact of increasing illness, physical debility and encroaching death which, as it moved perceptibly closer, caused Yeats's mind to turn, "in self-defence, as it were, towards life ...."<sup>2</sup> The poet's resentment of and bitterness towards the accompanying frustrations of old age evident, for example, in the opening section of "The Tower" are not unrelated to his prophecy of "simplicity" made in the introduction to A Vision,<sup>3</sup> and was to lead to a revelation of

<sup>1</sup>LT, p. 319.

<sup>2</sup>Y:M&M, p. 261.

<sup>3</sup>V(A), p. xii.

the poet, his mask stripped bare, crying out for the perpetuation of passion, truth and reality:

Grant me an old man's frenzy,  
Myself must I remake  
Till I am Timon and Lear  
Or that William Blake  
Who beat upon the wall  
Till the Truth obeyed his call ...<sup>4</sup>

The result was a return to the primary and elemental, an amazing deviation from "the intellectual and exotic to the simple and elemental, from the mystical to the sensual ... Or, to put it differently, Yeats the poet and Yeats the aristocrat were submerged beneath the powerful sense of Yeats the man."<sup>5</sup>

The second factor was, I believe, Yeats's little-explored relationship with Lady Dorothy Wellesley, an aspirant poetess. This "warm, latently passionate friendship between an attractive woman and a vehement old man", as Edward B. Partridge calls it,<sup>6</sup> is revealed in the heightening of emotional tension in the letters written from 20 April 1936 onwards,<sup>7</sup> in the Phoenix and Turtle theme that runs through their correspondence<sup>8</sup> and in the personal significance for Yeats of a poem by W.J. Turner, a condensation of which he sent to his friend:

"But when a man is old, married & in despair  
Has slept with the bodies of many women;  
Then if he meet a woman whose loveliness  
Is young and yet troubled with power.  
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<sup>4</sup>CP, p. 347.

<sup>5</sup>Walter E. Houghton, "Yeats and Crazy Jane: The Hero in Old Age", in The Permanence of Yeats, eds. James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 328, 334.

<sup>6</sup>Vide "Yeats's 'The Three Bushes' -- Genesis and Structure", Accent, A Quarterly of New Literature, XVII, 2 (Spring 1957), 72.

<sup>7</sup>Vide Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley (London: New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 64 ff.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 90, 166, 167.

Terrible is the agony of an old man  
 The agony of incommunicable power  
 Holding its potency that is like a rocket  
                   that is full of stars.<sup>9</sup>

This relationship resulted, of course, in the composition of "The Three Bushes" ballad and its attendant Songs, which he had clearly discussed with Lady Dorothy;<sup>10</sup> but there is evidence also of an insight into a woman's nature and a curiosity about woman's experience of sex -- almost certainly reinforced by the masculine element in Lady Dorothy -- that was to become finally apparent in Yeats's handling of the Lady's and Chambermaid's Songs. After visiting her at Penns in October 1936 Yeats wrote:

O my dear I thank you for that spectacle of personified sunlight. I can never while I live forget your movement across the room just before I left, the movement made to draw attention to the boy in yourself.<sup>11</sup>

And later, on 28 November:

My dear, my dear -- when you crossed the room with that boyish movement, it was no man who looked at you, it was the woman in me. It seems that I can make a woman express herself as never before. I have looked out of her eyes. I have shared her desire.<sup>12</sup>

And again:

What makes your work so good is the masculine element allied to much feminine charm -- your lines have the magnificent swing of your boyish body. I wish I could be a girl of nineteen for certain hours that I might feel it even more acutely.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 71, 74; and for further references vide Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, pp. 76-122, passim.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

The last influences on the poems of the period were those of Blake, with whose writings Yeats had been intimate since 1889,<sup>14</sup> Donne whom he had read from 1912 onwards and, to a lesser extent, Jonathan Swift in whom he experienced a revival of interest between the years 1927 and 1932.<sup>15</sup> From Blake, whose prevailing impact is revealed in a postscript, dated 1924, to an earlier essay,<sup>16</sup> and in Yeats's reference to Laurence Binyon's Blake in a letter of 1923,<sup>17</sup> he derived certain key concepts prevalent in the "Crazy Jane" poems: the holiness of passion, implicit in "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" and "Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgement"; the necessity of contraries to human existence (expounded in the refrain of "Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers") and the necessary integration of body and soul. More important, however, was the power, passion and energy with which Crazy Jane herself is imbued, a testimony to the genius not only of her creator but of his master's voice. The influence of Donne is equally discernible, not only in those qualities which Yeats expressly admired -- his "precise" and "learned" thought, the "intricacy and subtlety of his imagination", his "passion" and "obscenity"<sup>18</sup> -- but also in his affirmation of spiritual reality in the flesh; while Crazy Jane's vehemence owes something, I think, to the fierceness, anger and indignation of Swift.

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<sup>14</sup>Y:M&P, p. 56. He had, however, been introduced to Blake by his father at the age of fifteen or sixteen (*ibid.*, p. 22).

<sup>15</sup>For Yeats's reading of Swift vide *Dune*, p. 295; for his reading of Donne in 1912 vide Letters, p. 570.

<sup>16</sup>"William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy", E&I, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup>Vide Letters, p. 698. In an essay on Berkeley dated 1931, he also refers to Mona Wilson's *Life of Blake* (vide E&I, p. 408, *infra*).

<sup>18</sup>Vide Letters, p. 570.

In Yeats's final poetic treatment of woman, the main protagonists, Crazy Jane and the Lady (in "The Three Bushes" sequence), represent directly opposite attempts at adjusting sexual desire to traditional morality. The options, as Yeats saw them, were twofold: outright defiance of society's dictates wherein lay the path to spiritual redemption, or blind submission to conventional morality with consequent loss of dignity and disintegration of personality. If Crazy Jane may be justly seen as woman in direct conflict with conventional sexual mores, her aristocratic counterpart emerges as victim of a false (though admittedly self-imposed) morality.

Crazy Jane is the living embodiment of the totality of love in defiance of orthodox convention, and passionate critic of all that opposes it. Her existence is rooted in the physical foundation of love and in the integration of its physical and spiritual elements; and she not only accepts the fallibility and ephemerality of mortal love but also welcomes pain and hatred as necessary constituents in the love relationship. On the other hand, she detests and delights in exposing smug sanctimoniousness, pomposity and hypocrisy, especially when they take refuge in authority. (That Yeats originally conceived of her as a moral critic on topical issues is evident in the unpublished poem "Crack Mary's Vision", provoked by George V's opening of the new wing of the Tate Gallery, housing the "'stolen'" Lane pictures;<sup>19</sup> and in "Crazy Jane on the Mountain", which implicitly attacks the English King's weakness in not abdicating in sympathy with his murdered Russian peers during the 1917 Revolution.)<sup>20</sup> Peter Ure brilliantly captures the essence of her personality when he writes that Crazy Jane represents

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<sup>19</sup> WBY, p. 401, *infra*.

<sup>20</sup> Vide E, pp. 442-43. Cf. Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p.188.

the triumph over everything in time / that is associated with the horror of death /. For she is often shown as natural vigour incarnate and unrepentant, but also as old age similarly unrepentant though fully aware of impending death, and deriving the sweetness of her triumph from the knowledge that old age has brought not defeat but a reconciliation with time -- a reconciliation whereby old age is forced to accept the terms of the natural life of youthful desire. Beyond death and time, Crazy Jane re-iterates, lies the reality of the natural life, which illumines age ...<sup>21</sup>

The poems form part of a larger series originally intended to be called Twelve Poems for Music, rising out of Yeats's recuperation in the spring of 1929, from a long period of illness which began in October 1927:

Sexual abstinence fed their fire -- I was ill and yet full of desire. They sometimes came out of the greatest mental excitement I am capable of.<sup>22</sup>

After an attack of lung congestion he travelled to Spain (where his lung began to bleed), to Cannes (where he went down twice with influenza) and Rapallo, whither he returned in the winter of 1928-1929 and, later that year, nearly died of Malta fever.<sup>23</sup> It was during this second stay at Rapallo that he experienced the resurgence of the imaginative excitement and energy that were to result in the first of the "Crazy Jane" poems: "Cracked Mary's Vision" (an unpublished poem, written 24 February 1929), followed by "Cracked Mary and the Bishop" (later entitled "Crazy Jane and the Bishop"), "Cracked Mary and the Dancers" (Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers") and "Crazy Jane Reproved", written 2, 6 and 27 March

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<sup>21</sup> In Towards a Mythology. Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), pp. 108-109. Cf. C.M. Bowra's conception of her and identification of her with Yeats. (The Heritage of Symbolism [London: Macmillan, 1943], p. 215).

<sup>22</sup> Letters, p. 814. For Yeats's convalescence vide letter to Mrs. Shakespear (Letters, p. 758) and VE, p. 831.

<sup>23</sup> For sequence of events concerning Yeats's illness vide Letters, pp. 641-42, 753, and cf. WBY, pp. 389-98, 410-12 and Y:M&P, pp. 252-59. Note that G.B. Saul wrongly states that the "Crazy Jane" poems were begun after Yeats's attack of Malta fever (ProYP, p. 146).



respectively.<sup>24</sup> Most of them were composed by November 1931, the date of both "Crazy Jane and Jack: the Journeyman" and "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop",<sup>25</sup> although "Crazy Jane on the Mountain", a late "sport" was written in July 1938,<sup>26</sup> while "Cracked Mary's Vision" proves on examination to be a variant of a poem excerpted by Oliver St John Gogarty, "Crazy Jane and the King":

Yesternight I saw in a vision  
Long-bodied Tuatha de Danaan  
Iron men in a golden barge,  
Those great eyes that never wink  
Mirrored on a winking wave  
That a righteous king must have ---  
When I think of him I think  
May the devil take King George.<sup>27</sup>

Crazy Jane derives from a number of sources both real and literary. In his alteration from "Cracked Mary" to "Crazy Jane", made perhaps because of "possible invidious religious implications",<sup>28</sup> Yeats may have been influenced by a little-known eighteenth- or nineteenth-century poem entitled "Crazy Jane" by M.G. Lewis, about a "wand'ring wretched creature", "forlorn and broken-hearted, / And with frenzied thoughts beset",<sup>29</sup> who has been "undone" by her false lover Henry.

Yeats's first reference to her is in a note to The Pot of Broth, a play written in 1902:

<sup>24</sup>For dating of "Cracked Mary's Vision" vide WBY, p. 401; for remaining dates vide Comm., pp. 371, 376, 371 respectively. Note that Jeffares (in Comm., p. 376) agrees with Hone (WBY, p.401) in the dating of "Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers", while Ellmann (in IdY, p. 292), gives 2 March.

<sup>25</sup>Vide Comm., pp. 372, 375 respectively. For dates of other poems of this sequence, vide Comm., pp. 371-76.

<sup>26</sup>Comm., p. 506.

<sup>27</sup>IdY, pp. 101-102, first stanza. Cf. the stanzas excerpted by Oliver St John Gogarty's It Isn't This Time of Year At All! ... (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1954), p. 223.

<sup>28</sup>IdY, p. 275. For Jeffares's alternative reason for the change, vide Y:M&P, p. 256.

<sup>29</sup>In E. Tomkins's Poems on Various Subjects ... new ed. (London: B. Crosby & Co., 1804), pp. 237-38.

The words and air of "There's Pot in the Broth" were taken down from an old woman known as Cracked Mary, who wanders about the plain of Aidhne, and who sometimes sees unearthly riders on white horses coming through stony fields to her hovel door in the night time.<sup>30</sup>

Twenty-seven years later he apparently combined her with another old woman of whom he wrote to Mrs Shakespear:

Crazy Jane is more or less founded upon an old woman who lives in a little cottage near Gort. She loves her flower-garden -- she has just sent Lady Gregory some flowers in spite of the season -- and /has/ an amazing power of audacious speech. One of her great performances is a description of how the meanness of a Gort shopkeeper's wife over the price of a glass of porter made her so despair of the human race that she got drunk. The incidents of that drunkenness are of an epic magnificence. She is the local satirist and a really terrible one.<sup>31</sup>

It is possible to find the prototype of Crazy Jane in the frank, sensual character of Mary Byrne, the old tinker woman of Synge's play The Tinker's Wedding;<sup>32</sup> certainly the vivid physical details seem to owe something to "An Old Woman's Lamentations", one of Synge's translations from Villon:

The man I had a love for -- a great rascal would kick me in the gutter -- is dead thirty years and over it, and it is I am left behind, grey and aged. When I do be minding the good days I had, minding what I was one time, and what it is I'm come to, and when I do look on my own self, poor and dry, and pinched together, it wouldn't be much would set me raging in the streets.

Where is the round forehead I had, and the fine hair, and the two eyebrows, and the eyes with a big gay look out of them would bring folly from a great scholar? Where is my straight, shapely nose, and two ears, and my chin with a valley in it, and my lips were red and open?

Where are the pointed shoulders were on me, and the long arms and nice hands to them? Where is my bosom was as white as any, or my straight rounded sides?

<sup>30</sup>Quoted in IdY, p. 275.

<sup>31</sup>Letters, pp. 785-86.

<sup>32</sup>For this observation I am indebted to Raymond Mise, "Yeats's Crazy Jane Poems", Paunch (Buffalo, New York), No. 25 (1966), 19.

It's the way I am this day -- my forehead is gone gone away into furrows, the hair of my head is grey and whitish, my eyebrows are tumbled from me, and my two eyes have died out within my head -- those eyes that would be laughing to the men -- my nose has a hook on it, my ears are hanging down, and my lips are sharp and skinny.

That's what's left over from the beauty of a right woman -- a bag of bones, and legs the like of two shrivelled sausages going beneath it.

It's of the like of that we old hags do be thinking, of the good times are gone away from us, and we crouching on our hunkers by a little fire of twigs, soon kindled and soon spent, we that were the pick of many.<sup>33</sup>

The poems display the theme and mood of the larger sequence (finally entitled "Words for Music Perhaps"), the idea of time and timelessness in love, and the effect of time on the beauty of the beloved being developed in "Girl's Song", "Young Man's Song" and "Her Anxiety";<sup>34</sup> the theme of the price of love in "His Confidence" and "Love's Loneliness"; and of the passionate affirmation of the natural sexual life in the Old Tom Poems. Their final ordering and arrangement, which appeared for the first time in 1933,<sup>35</sup> shows a unity of plan and mood, an inner logic that not only strengthens their dramatic impact but also provides a loose narrative framework.

The sequence opens with a vehement attack upon the hypocritical Bishop, which is further elaborated in Crazy Jane's cryptic reply to his reproof ("Crazy Jane Reproved"). There follows an assertion (in "Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgment") of the totality of love; while "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman" states the old woman's case for the temporal realization of

<sup>33</sup> J.M. Synge's Plays, Poems and Prose, intr. Ernest Rhys, Everyman's Library (London: J.M. Dent & Sons; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1954), pp. 241-42.

<sup>34</sup> CP, pp. 296, 296-97, 297-98. For the remaining poems cited vide CP, pp. 298, 298-99; and 305, 306, 306 respectively.

<sup>35</sup> In The Winding Stair and Other Poems (London & New York, 1933). Vide VE, p. 507, *infra*.

love in full knowledge of the consequences, and in defiance of the Christian option. "Crazy Jane on God" proclaims Jane's heroic faith in God despite love's transitory nature. This idea is reinforced (in "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop") by the further adjunct that sex is an essential element in the love relationship. The sequence concludes with a passionate acceptance of hate and violence as necessary components of the love relationship and, as in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", with the desire for "A charter to commit the crime once more." I shall discuss them in order of clarity and importance.

The opening poem, "Crazy Jane and the Bishop" serves to introduce the three-cornered relationship between beggarwoman, Bishop and journeyman:

Bring me to the blasted oak  
That I, midnight upon the stroke,  
All find safety in the tomb,  
May call a curse out of the sky  
Ere the one or t'other die,  
None so old as he and I:  
The solid man and the cockscomb.

Nor was he bishop when his ban  
Banished Jack the Journeyman,  
All find safety in the tomb,  
Nor so much as parish priest,  
Yet he, an old book in his fist,  
Cried that we lived like beast and beast:  
The solid man and the cockscomb.

The bishop has a skin, God knows,  
Wrinkled like the foot of a goose,  
All find safety in the tomb,  
Nor can he hide in holy black  
The heron's hunch upon his back,  
But a birch tree stood my Jack:  
The solid man and the cockscomb.

Set me by that oak, for he  
That had my virginity  
All find safety in the tomb  
Wanders out into the night  
And there is shelter under it,  
But should that other come, I spit:  
The solid man and the cockscomb.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>VE, pp. 507-509.

The poem is a savage indictment of the falseness and hypocrisy of the Church and a passionate affirmation of the love that defies it. Mood, rhythm, imagery and refrain are united into an energetic malediction whose seriousness of purpose vies only with its sly, cleverly pointed "black" humour.

The first image -- that of the "blasted oak" -- sets the scene, representing furthermore not only Crazy Jane's riven love but the beggarwoman herself, stalwart and devoted still, though shattered by time, injustice and suffering.<sup>37</sup> The "midnight" image enhances the supernatural mood -- we are reminded of the Witches' scene in Macbeth -- and prepares the reader for the pathetic portrayal, in the last stanza, of Jack's lonely banishment.

Yeats's choice of rhyme and rhythm is admirably suited to the overall mood and intent of the poem: the tetrameter meter (frequently trochaic) relentlessly hammering out the crazed woman's curse, the rigid rhyme scheme in the narrative section contrasting curiously with the off-rhyme of the refrain ("tomb - "cockscomb"). The refrain itself is a masterly piece of insight and humour: the first ("All find safety in the tomb") providing a delicious parody of the Bishop's sententious moralizing, the second ("The solid man and the cockscomb") throwing an ironic glance at the true weight of the respective men. Of course, it is Jack who emerges as the "solid man", the Bishop as the cockscomb. The underlying saeva indignatio is strongly reinforced by the powerful caricature of the Bishop, whose crooked nature hidden by his deceptive apparel is cleverly contrasted with the

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<sup>37</sup>J.B. Thompson, in "The Wisdom of Crazy Jane: A Study of the Recurrent Theme in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats" (diss., Univ. of Stellenbosch, 1966), p. 39, points out that the oak is "witchcraft's favourite tree for most of the beliefs and practices of witchcraft are survivals from the old fertility cults ... directly opposed to Christianity."

upright disposition of Jane's lover: notice the vehemence in the alliteration of "parish priest", the scorn in the assonance of "skin" - "wrinkled"; the contempt, like simulated hissing, in the string of aspirated consonants: "hide", "holy", "heron's hunch".<sup>38</sup>

By 1932 Yeats had strengthened the dramatic impact of the first stanza by introducing Jack's death and eliminated the flaccidity and irrelevance of the fourth, fifth and sixth lines; substituted for the inept repetition of the last stanza a vivid evocation of Jack's wildness ("Jack had my virginity, / And bids me to the oak, for he... / Wanders out into the night ..."), and italicized and isolated the first refrain, thereby giving it the same prominence as the second. The result is his most characteristic "Crazy Jane" poem, the image of the old woman -- angry, violent, vehement, defiant, contemptuous, scornful of hypocrisy, true, tender and devoted to her lover -- being fixed indelibly in the mind of the reader.

That lover of a night  
Came when he would,  
Went in the dawning light  
Whether I would or no;  
Men come, men go:  
All things remain in God.

Banners choke the sky;  
Men-at-arms tread;  
Armoured horses neigh  
Where the great battle was  
In the narrow pass:  
All things remain in God.

Before their eyes a house  
That from childhood stood  
Uninhabited, ruinous,  
Suddenly lit up  
From door to top:  
All things remain in God.

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<sup>38</sup>Thompson suggests that the Bishop's "disgust for physical love ... is almost pathological.... Though in conformity with his church's stand against extra-marital sex, / his public 'decrying' and separation of the lovers / originated chiefly in frustration and jealousy..." ("The Wisdom of Crazy Jane ..." [1966], p. 42). Cf. Yeats's delineation of the Hunchback (V/B, pp. 176-79).

I had wild Jack for a lover;  
 Though like a road  
 Men have passed over  
 My body has not moaned  
 But sings on:  
All things remain in God.<sup>39</sup>

The first stanza evokes the ephemerality of love, linking it with "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman" and preparing the ground for Jane's renewed faith. The second breaks in upon the first with Jane's vision of war and warfare, brilliantly conceived in a series of brief images with amazing cinematic effect. The clamour and confusion of battle ("banners", "battle", "choke", "tread", "neigh") are suddenly eclipsed by a further vision of a ruined house whose light mysteriously quells the noise and din, serving, in its nostalgic associations with childhood, as a permanent reminder of God. In the last stanza Jane reverts to the love theme of the first, reaffirming her acceptance of suffering and her stalwart faith.

This is a structurally sound poem, the idea of permanence in the midst of transience being carefully reinforced by the vision described in the second and third stanzas, the whole bound together by the insistent import of the refrain. The erotic symbolism of images such as road, battle and lighted house is forceful and direct -- woman's body is a battlefield subject, like "the narrow pass", to the onslaughts, whims and fancies, comings and goings of her lover -- and the religious ecstasy of the third stanza underlines the climax of love, the moment of orgasm. The "light" image serves furthermore to yoke these disparate images, pointing up their differences: the

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<sup>39</sup>VE, p. 512. Note that the main revisions were in the last stanza, ll. 21-22.

Though like a road  
 That men pass over  
 My body makes no moan...

The poem was written 18 July 1931 (Comm., p. 373).

dawning light in the first stanza serving as a reminder of the impermanence of sexual love, the light in the ruined house as a miraculous revelation of the permanence of God.<sup>40</sup>

W.E. Houghton points out, however, that Jane's faith is far from Christian:

Crazy Jane is not sustained ... by any atom of faith that she will find her lover again when time is gone. Her fortitude rests on an act of love once realized.... Jane is not filled with the love of God but the love of Jack; and, however she may describe her destiny as the providence of God, she accepts it with the same heroic fortitude that stands alone, without religious reference, at the close of the "Dialogue [of Self and Soul]".<sup>41</sup>

The overall impact is that of a powerful visionary and deeply religious poem.

The affirmative element in this poem is reinforced in "Crazy Jane on the Day of Judgement" which constitutes a subtle refutation of the orthodox concept of Judgement held by the Bishop:

"Love is all  
Unsatisfied  
That cannot take the whole  
Body and soul";  
And that is what Jane said.

"Take the sour  
If you take me,  
I can scoff and lour  
And scold for an hour."  
"That's certainly the case," said he.

"Naked I lay,  
The grass my bed;  
Naked and hidden away,  
That black day";  
And that is what Jane said.

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<sup>40</sup>A.N. Jeffares, in Comm., p. 375, gives the source of this image as Castle Dargan near Sligo, described in Yeats's play The King of the Great Clock Tower and A (p. 53), and mentions a ruined house in both Purgatory and "The Curse of Cromwell". He suggests that Yeats may have had Leap Castle in mind (vide V/B, p. 224).

<sup>41</sup>In "Yeats and Crazy Jane...", The Permanence of Yeats, ed. J. Hall and M. Steinmann, pp. 344-45.



"What can be shown?  
 What true love be?  
 All could be known or shown  
 If Time were but gone."  
"That's certainly the case," said he.<sup>42</sup>

The poem is an inspired proclamation of the ideal love relationship which, according to Jane, implies total acceptance of the beloved. This is illustrated in her forthright challenge to be accepted for her sullen moodiness and bad temper, followed by a flashback to the day on which she gave herself to Jack and her mingled nostalgia, delight and regret for lost innocence. The reference to "that black day", with its double connotation of desecrated virginity and the act of judgement, holds together past and future, the final stanza suggesting that this is not a day of Divine Retribution (as the Bishop sees it) but of revelation, beyond Time, of the nature of true love.

The beauty of this lyric lies in its sheer musical quality: its fluid line, both visual and auditory, cunning rhythms, contained thought sequences and self-conscious "stops" between stanzas. The movement from general statement to exemplification back to general statement is skilfully manipulated, the first refrain (at the end of the first and third stanzas) emphasizing Jane's defiance and simulated casualness; the second (at the end of stanzas two and four) her lover's brutal indifference. Thus despite her uncompromising belief in the wholeness of love, she is depicted as sensitive and vulnerable in love, proud and defiant.

"Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop" (written in November 1931) rejects the Bishop's belief in the dichotomy of body and soul -- a theme that is more subtly treated in "The

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<sup>42</sup>VE, p. 510, final version. It was written in October 1930 (Comm., p. 372).

Three Bushes" sequence --- and asserts not only their fundamental kinship but the importance of physical love:

I met the Bishop on the road  
And much said he and I.  
"Those breasts are flat and fallen now,  
Those veins must soon be dry;  
Live in a heavenly mansion,  
Not in some foul sty."

"Fair and foul are near of kin,  
And fair needs foul," I cried.  
"My friends are gone, but that's a truth  
Nor grave nor bed denied,  
Learned in bodily lowliness  
And in the heart's pride.

"A woman can be proud and stiff  
When on love intent;  
But Love has pitched his mansion in  
The place of excrement;  
For nothing can be sole or whole  
That has not been rent."<sup>43</sup>

The poem opens with a graphic account of the confrontation between old woman and ecclesiastic, followed by a brief sententious sermon which Jane scornfully repudiates. The diction is simple and direct, the rhythms forceful and vigorous, emphasizing the mutual antagonism of the opponents and the incompatibility of their viewpoints. The highlight of the poem, however, lies in its clever use of paradox and contradiction. In terms of one explanation:

"Whole" means "integral and integrated", perhaps "virginal". "Rent" means, in the first place, "torn, split, disorientated"; but it may also, in a more graphic sense, refer to the ruptured hymen. Jane is claiming that the whole woman is the non-virgin, or at any rate the woman who is in some sense rent.... [In opposition to the Bishop's / ideal of heavenly wholeness / she / sees that the road to wholeness passes through destruction and dissolution -- through the rent life.... Thus ... the ruined woman ... has at least been through the destroying baptism of sin.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>VE, p. 513. For date of composition vide Comm., p. 375.

<sup>44</sup>Anselm Atkins, "The Vedantic Logic of Yeats's 'Crazy Jane'", Renascence, XIX (1966), 38-39. Cf. Yeats's remark in a letter to Mrs. Shakespear: "One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision -- that the mystic way and sexual love use opposed yet parallel existences ..." (Letters, p. 715).

In the midst of philosophical profundity there is room for comic mimicry. The first two lines with their casual nonchalance and delightful understatement, successfully cut the Bishop to size (Yeats allows Jane three times as much talking space as the Bishop), while her spirited defence provides an amusing parody of the Bishop's pompous sermonizing. There are the same rhetorical flourishes ("bodily lowliness", "heart's pride", "place of excrement"); the same didactic use of contrast and paradox ("fair and foul"; "bodily lowliness" - "heart's pride"; "Love's mansion" - "the place of excrement"); the same cadences redolent of the pulpit. Crazy Jane thus provides a delightful foil for the Bishop's stern pomposity. As David Daiches has said, "It is Crazy Jane who tells the moralizing bishop what he has been unable to find out for himself ... and can explain the true relationship of the opposites by seeing them related outside time ..." <sup>45</sup>

"Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers" makes two further contributions to the beggarwoman's unorthodox view of love. Not only are hate and violence accepted as necessary constituents in the love relationship but love is celebrated from the viewpoint of old age, as the most challenging and exciting experience possible:

I found that ivory image there  
Dancing with her chosen youth,  
But when he wound her coal-black hair  
As though to strangle her, no scream  
Or bodily movement did I dare,  
Eyes under eyelids did so gleam;  
Love is like the lion's tooth.

When she, and though some said she played  
I said that she had danced heart's truth,  
Drew a knife to strike him dead,  
I could but leave him to his fate;  
For no matter what is said  
They had all that had their hate;  
Love is like the lion's tooth.

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<sup>45</sup>In Poetry and the Modern World. A Study of Poetry in England between 1900 and 1939, 2nd imp. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 187-88.

Did he die or did she die?  
 Seemed to die or died they both?  
 God be with the times when I  
 Cared not a thraneen for what chanced  
 So that I had the limbs to try  
 Such a dance as there was danced --  
Love is like the lion's tooth.<sup>46</sup>

Owing to the curious disparity between the sentimental element and the vigorous hate theme, the poem, founded on a dream described in a letter to Mrs Shakespear,<sup>47</sup> is the least successful of the sequence. It opens promisingly with a description of an art work, the savagery and sensuality perceived beneath its surface being skilfully reinforced by the refrain. The second stanza endorses the underlying tension between the lovers; but the third, instead of swelling out into a passionate confirmation of the theme sinks into unsatisfactory reminiscence, while the use of the vernacular ("Cared not a thraneen ...") obtrudes upon the overall fluency of style. The only consistently good feature, apart from the refrain, is the simulation of dancing (an important image) achieved by the fluid run-on lines and smooth, almost hypnotic, rhythms. Yeats has unfortunately reduced the tragic heroine to the stature of a pathetic rather nostalgic old woman.

"Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman" hazards a tentative reply to the question regarding the nature of love and expresses Jane's belief in physical fulfilment despite possible retribution after death:

I know, although when looks meet  
 I tremble to the bone,  
 The more I leave the door unlatched  
 The sooner love is gone,  
 For love is but a skein unwound  
 Between the dark and dawn.

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<sup>46</sup>VE, pp. 514-15, final version.

<sup>47</sup>Vide Letters, p. 758.

A lonely ghost the ghost is  
 That to God shall come;  
 I, love's skein upon the ground  
 My body in the tomb,  
 Shall leap into the light lost  
 In my mother's womb.

But were I left to die alone  
 In an empty bed --  
 The skein so bound us ghost to ghost  
 When you turned your head  
 Passing on the road that night --  
 Mine would walk, being dead.<sup>48</sup>

The first stanza bravely acknowledges the ephemerality of love, cunningly reflected in Plato's image of the unwinding skein.<sup>49</sup> The second expresses Jane's awareness of the consequence of her chosen belief: her ultimate loneliness at death tempered, however, by the joyous prospect of reincarnation, of a return to the pre-natal condition.<sup>50</sup> In the last she postulates the consequences of the Christian option (implicitly advocated by the Bishop): the eternal restlessness of the beloved after death, poignantly evoked in the image of the walking ghost.<sup>51</sup> By 1933 Yeats had altered the second-person pronoun in the last stanza to the third person; and in the Collected Poems (1950) the last line appears considerably tautened and condensed, with the effect less of a sentimental declaration of love for the

<sup>48</sup> VE, p. 511.

<sup>49</sup> Plato associates it with the spinning distaff (symbolizing Necessity), passed from hand to hand by the daughters of Necessity, the three Fates. (Plato's Republic, Everyman's Library / 1935/, pp. 320-22). J.B. Thompson, in "The Wisdom of Crazy Jane", p. 77, on the other hand, points out the simple homeliness of images such as "skeins, beds, doors and latches." The image also occurs in "His Bargain" (CP, p. 299).

<sup>50</sup> Thompson (p. 81) explains Jane's philosophy thus: "Appropriately, conditions in the womb are used to depict the figurative darkness and restriction that the body imposes on the soul throughout its earthly life. Thus it is implied that by his very humanity man is sealed off from God ('the light') in a sort of prison, from which only death can release him." Cf. Blake's "Infant Sorrow" (Blake's Poems and Prophecies, ed.... Max Plowman ... Everyman's Library / London: J.M. Dent & Sons; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1959 /, p. 32).

<sup>51</sup> Cf.: "All is well with Æ. His ghost will not walk. He had no passionate human relationships to draw him back." (Letters on Poetry to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 13).

no-good journeyman than of a moving inner monologue.<sup>52</sup>

"Crazy Jane Reproved", the most difficult poem of the sequence, constitutes a reply to a reproof, though at a first reading the identity of the reprover and the exact nature of the reproof are concealed in deliberate obscurity:

I care not what the sailors say:  
All those dreadful thunder-stones,  
All that storm that blots the day  
Can but show that Heaven yawns;  
Great Europa played the fool  
That changed a lover for a bull.  
Fol de rol, fol de rol.

To round that shell's elaborate whorl,  
Adorning every secret track  
With the delicate mother-of-pearl,  
Made the joints of Heaven crack:  
So never hang your heart upon  
A roaring, ranting journeyman.  
Fol de rol, fol de rol.<sup>53</sup>

The poem is a retort to two separate charges, presumably levelled by the Bishop, whose accusatory shadow lurks, Book in hand, in the not-too-distant background. The first stanza fiercely denies what seems to be his opening line of attack: that the storm, an Old Testament symbol of Divine wrath or vengeance, has been visited on Jane as punishment for illicit love. The second is a scornful repudiation of the implicit injunction that Jane should renounce Jack for the infinitely superior, omnipotent and unchanging love of God.

Crazy Jane's reply to both these charges is skilful, persuasive, informed, and, in fact, nothing short of brilliant. First she refutes the fatal properties traditionally attributed to storms -- witness, for example, the Jonah story -- citing, in support of this argument, the myth of the mystical union of Zeus

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<sup>52</sup>Vide VE, p. 511, ll. 13-18, supra.

<sup>53</sup>VE, p. 509, final version.

and Europa, which she roundly dismisses with irreverent scorn.<sup>54</sup> Her reply to the second part, hidden though it is in the dense logic, hyperbolic extravagance and subtle allusiveness of a semi-deranged mind, is a daring refutation of the omnipotence of God, revealed in the toil and effort in the very act of creation.<sup>55</sup> Implicit in this argument is a further analogy and innuendo: a comparison between the relative difficulties involved in the act of creation, evidence of Divine Love, on the one hand, and the endurance of mortal love on the other, especially when one of the partners is a "roaring, ranting journeyman". Thus, by throwing the Bishop's taunt (in lines twelve to thirteen) back at him, Jane acknowledges the indisputable frailty, fickleness and transitoriness of mortal love, and simultaneously bids the Bishop think again.

In conception and execution this is one of Yeats's most brilliant poems, the boldness of conception vying only with the power and originality of language. Yeats's power of orchestration is evident, furthermore, in his apparently effortless ranging from awesome majesty to the utmost delicacy, shot through with passion, scorn and contempt. The simulated nonchalance of the refrain sharply deflates the Bishop's pompous rhetoric,<sup>56</sup> while the patterned off-rhymes ("thunder-stones" - "storm" - "yawns"; "fool" - "bull"; "upon" - "journeyman") subtly underscores the effect of wizardry, weaving a magical spell about Jane's unanswerable reply.

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<sup>54</sup>Thompson (p. 55) quotes Ovid's description: "The father and ruler of the gods, whose hand wields the flaming three-forked bolt, whose nod shakes the universe, adopted the guise of a bull ..."

<sup>55</sup>Cf.: "Is it not certain that the Creator yawns in earthquake and thunder and other popular displays, but toils in rounding the delicate spiral of a shell?" (A, p. 249).

<sup>56</sup>For Yeats's comments on the refrain, vide Ah, Sweet Dancer. W.B. Yeats- Margot Ruddock: A Correspondence, ed. Roger McHugh (Macmillan, Gill & Macmillan, 1970), pp. 30-31.

In "Crazy Jane on the Mountain" and "Cracked Mary's Vision" the object of attack shifts from the hypocrisy of the Church to the moral ineptitude of the State. The former poem constitutes a profound and disturbing critique of the weakness of George V;<sup>57</sup> the latter contrasts "the Irish idea of kingship with the English store-dummy king ..."<sup>58</sup> Compared with the poems in the main sequence, "Crazy Jane on the Mountain" is dark and sombre, the language bare, and Jane is portrayed as the lonely visionary, endowed with a poignant sense of tragedy but impotent to change the existing state of affairs. In "Cracked Mary's Vision", she is more closely related to the biting satirist of "Crazy Jane and the Bishop", though one suspects that the reason for the suppression of the poem is less its personal diatribe against the "poor old king" (as Ezra Pound put it),<sup>59</sup> than Yeats's own perception of its flaccidity.

To sum up, then: Crazy Jane is the most significant image of woman in Yeats's last poems -- the prototype of spiritual integrity in the face of hypocrisy, weakness and corruption. Her main concern is with passion, courage, moral strength and conviction; the object of her contempt, false piety protected by authority and endorsed by orthodoxy. In the sphere of love she stands for a wholly integrated relationship in which energy, violence, hatred and sexuality not only take their rightful place but are welcomed as integral principles in their own right. She represents also steadfast devotion and fidelity -- indeed, faith in love itself, irrespective of the consequences.

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<sup>57</sup>The poem was written in July 1938 (Vide Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 199.)

<sup>58</sup>Oliver St John Gogarty, It Isn't This Time of Year at All! ... (London, 1954), p. 211.

<sup>59</sup>IdY, p. 102, *infra*.



But it would be wrong to see her merely as a mouthpiece for Yeats's views on love and justice or as the ultimate refinement of his dramatic technique. She is both these things but she is above all a fully conceived character in her own right, moving with a "life" and independence of her own. First and foremost she is a woman, proud, passionate, defiant, a fierce lover, courageous in the face of love's hazards and all its loneliness, but essentially sensitive and vulnerable. She is, furthermore, a visionary, divinely inspired, deeply religious and firm in her faith. Finally, she is a satirist, with a keen sense of comic observation and a fine flair for mimicry. Ultimately she is Yeats's most original dramatic creation (saving perhaps the heroine of The Player Queen), richer than any of the women in his plays, and comparable in vision, function and impact to the Shakespearean Fool.

## II

At the opposite end of the scale is the figure of the Lady in "The Three Bushes" sequence which Yeats wrote between June and November 1936. The ballad, a "dramatic fable"<sup>60</sup> growing out of an idea which he had discussed with Lady Dorothy Wellesley, provides a narrative framework for the sequence, in which "the psychological facets of [the three main protagonists] in the drama",<sup>61</sup> which is held together by the "fourth choric voice of a narrator",<sup>62</sup> are explored in turn. Though Yeats restricted himself to a treatment of her sexual attitudes, the Lady is handled in three clearly discernible veins: tragic (in "The Lady's First Song"); ironic (in "The Three Bushes"

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<sup>60</sup>Vivienne Koch, W.B. Yeats. The Tragic Phase. A Study of the Last Poems (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 130.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

and "The Lady's Second Song") and darkly comic in ("The Lady's Third Song").

The theme of "The Lady's First Song", the most powerful and intensest of the lyrics, is the conflict between physical desire and psychological rejection of that desire -- in her own words, it is the state of being "in love" which the Lady finds disgusting and repellent:

I turn round  
Like a dumb beast in a show,  
Neither know what I am  
Nor where I go,  
My language beaten  
Into one name;  
I am in love  
And that is my shame.  
What hurts the soul  
My soul adores,  
No better than a beast  
Upon all fours.<sup>63</sup>

In keeping with its portrayal of moral confusion, the mood of the poem is dark, the emotion intense, the argument hammered out in short elemental metres. Unlike the other poems in which she appears, the Lady is depicted as the tragic victim of an acute moral crisis, a grim bestial figure caged within the narrow confines of violently conflicting desires. The result is a powerful image of tragic intensity, approximating in emotional impact to Blake's pencil drawing of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>64</sup>

"The Lady's Third Song" is a sardonic variation on the body - soul conflict underlying the sequence, the insistent tetrameter, frequently accented on the first beat, spelling out, in terse rhymed couplets, the compulsive rhythms of the sex act:

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<sup>63</sup>VE, p. 572, final version. The first draft was published in a letter to Lady Dorothy (Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 115). Cf. Comm., p. 454.

<sup>64</sup>Reproduced in Pencil Drawings by William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927), No. 13. It is specifically mentioned in his essay "William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy" (E&I, pp. 118-19), which Yeats had written in 1897 be re-read about 1924 (E&I, p. 145).

When you and my true lover meet  
 And he plays tunes between your feet,  
 Speak no evil of the soul,  
 Nor think that body is the whole,  
 For I that am his daylight lady  
 Know worse evil of the body;  
 But in honour split his love  
 Till either neither have enough,  
 That I may hear if we should kiss  
 A contrapuntal serpent hiss,  
 You, should hand explore a thigh,  
 All the labouring heavens sigh.<sup>65</sup>

The poem provides a fascinating revelation of female sexual psychology at its most ruthless and debased. It opens with a warning to the Chambermaid lest she deceive her mistress in lying with her lover, and closes with a bribe to share further the spoils of a divided love. The Lady's desire for sexual intercourse, wistful and nostalgic in "The Three Bushes"<sup>66</sup> and in the opening question of her "Second Song", is here insidious, evil, diabolic. The latent perversion in the key lines "For I that am his daylight lady / Know worse evil of the body ..." may be explained in a number of ways: as a veiled threat holding knowledge of sexual exploits calculated to seduce the Lover more effectively than the relatively innocent pleasures offered by the Chambermaid; as a dark hint at the greater evil in the imaginative byways of self-imposed asceticism working on sex and sexual pleasure than in the act itself; and as a suggestion that physical denial may in fact be worse than the spiritual "neglect" consequent on sexual satisfaction.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>VE, p. 573, final version. For dating vide Yeats's letter to Lady Dorothy dated Tuesday (July 1936), pp. 80-87.

<sup>66</sup>Notice her regret (ll. 33-34) at evidence of the Chambermaid's satiety, in "[She] heaved a sigh if the Chambermaid / Looked half asleep all day."

<sup>67</sup>It is interesting to note that the first draft quoted by Yeats in a letter to Lady Dorothy (vide Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 86) is totally lacking in these subtleties. There the Lady's threat to "abuse the body" is nothing more than a frank retaliation for possible treachery by the Chambermaid:

The underlying abnormality in this attitude is revealed in the insidious analogy of the sex act with the playing of a musical instrument ("he plays tunes between your feet") and in the hissing of the serpent (an image associated with the Fall) writhing in ecstasy on the point of attack. But there is a more serious perversion, bordering on the mock-serious, in the Lady's cold-blooded use of conventional phrases of love and prim propriety. She refers to her lover as her "true" lover";<sup>68</sup> she is his daylight lady"; the act of dividing his love is done "in honour". Thus she unwittingly allies herself with the hypocritical Bishop in the "Crazy Jane" poems.

The treatment of her image in "The Three Bushes", on the other hand, is refreshingly light and amusing. The poem (probably written late in June 1936)<sup>69</sup> relates how "a lovely lady", fearing to lose both her chastity by giving herself to her lover, and her lover by withholding herself, plans to save both:

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If you dare abuse the soul  
Or think the body is whole  
  
I must, that am his daylight lady,  
Outrageously abuse the body ...

This is supported by further excerpts from the manuscript versions cited by Jon Stallworthy, in Vision and Revision in Yeats's "Last Poems" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp.95-96, 96 respectively:

Should you dare his daylight  
that  
I am his daylight lady  
Will in love abuse the body  
  
Must in love abuse the body

and:

If you dare abuse the soul  
must that am  
I shall be his daylight lady  
Outrageously abuse the body.

<sup>68</sup> Underlining my own.

<sup>69</sup> Vide Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 76.

"I love a man in secret,  
 Dear chambermaid," said she,  
 "I know that I must drop down dead  
 If he stop loving me,  
 Yet what could I but 'drop down dead  
 If I lost my chastity?"

O my dear, O my dear.

"So you must lie beside him  
 And let him think me there,  
 And maybe we are all the same  
 Where no lit candles are,  
 And maybe we are all the same  
 That strip the body bare."

O my dear, O my dear.<sup>70</sup>

Though this poem may well be counted among the finest examples of ballad revival in twentieth-century English poetry, and though its technical achievement cannot be faulted,<sup>71</sup> I dislike its overall sense of contrivance, revealed particularly in the laboured didacticism of the allegorical rose in the last three stanzas. The image of the "divided" Lady, split between an ardent adulation of "spiritual" love and an over-refined abhorrence of its physical expression is handled with admirable detachment; and her true motivation in withholding herself subtly established in the mock-serious tone of the first stanza. Her fastidious attitude to sex is revealed in a pendent dictum of moral "correctness" ("None can rely upon / A love that lacks its proper food ..."); and her horror at the prospect of a possible confrontation with her own nudity, together with her timely death (notice the poet's quiet assertion that she "loved him with her soul"), beautifully underscores the absurdity of this superb piece of self-deception.

This subtlety of treatment is more sharply revealed in "The Lady's Second Song", a fine first-person dramatization

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<sup>70</sup>VE, pp. 569-70, second and third stanzas.

<sup>71</sup>J. Stallworthy talks of the masterly fusion of the "popular and the intellectual" that is the hallmark of true ballad. (Vision and Revision in Yeats's "Last Poems" / Oxford, 1969 /, p. 111.)

of the longer narrative account:

What sort of man is coming  
To lie between your feet?  
What matter, we are but women.  
Wash; make your body sweet;  
I have cupboards of dried fragrance,  
I can strew the sheet.  
The Lord have mercy upon us.

He shall love my soul as though  
Body were not at all,  
He shall love your body  
Untroubled by the soul,  
Love cram love's two divisions  
Yet keep his substance whole.  
The Lord have mercy upon us.

Soul must learn a love that is  
Proper to my breast,  
Limbs a love in common  
With every noble beast.  
If soul may look and body touch,  
Which is the more blest?  
The Lord have mercy upon us.<sup>72</sup>

The poem opens with a series of curt instructions to the Chambermaid in preparation against the arrival of the lover. (There is an amusing reversal of rôles here, whereby the Lady, involved in the traditional ritual of preparing the bed, acts as handmaiden to her servant).<sup>73</sup> The second stanza expounds the main theme of the sequence -- the dichotomy of love into its spiritual and physical elements, despite the Lady's avowed intent to preserve the integrity of love; while the third attempts to justify her behaviour in terms of her self-imposed morality.

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<sup>72</sup>VE, pp. 572-73, final version. For dating vide Yeats's letter to Dorothy Wellesley (dated Tuesday /July 1936/), in Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, pp. 80-86, and cf. Comm., p. 454.

<sup>73</sup>Edward B. Partridge refers to the indirect "counterpoint" in the Lady's words "I can strew the sheet", which evoke the image of the Lady taking the part of her maid in preparing the marriage bed, even as the maid is going to take her part in being the bride." ("Yeats's 'The Three Bushes' -- Genesis and Structure", Accent, XVII, 2 /Spring, 1957/, 75.)

In keeping with the absurdity of the situation, the tone of this poem is humorous, the rhythms crisp and staccato, skilfully conveying the Lady's eager anticipation of vicarious pleasure. Her exposition of the underlying conflict characteristically suggests a philosophical quibble rather than one that stems from the real experience, while the liturgical refrain provides a delightfully sly comment on her false piety.

The poem may be interpreted in another way which, though it does not adhere to the original narrative account related in "The Three Bushes", is not unacceptable.<sup>74</sup> If we assume that the Lady, prompted by curiosity about the sex act, has persuaded the Chambermaid to let her lie with her lover for one night, it may be read as an inner monologue, the opening question being of course rhetorical. In terms of this reading, the rapid interchange of first- and second-person pronouns in the first stanza suggests the Lady's ambivalent vacillation, while the second stanza indicates a clear psychological dichotomy between her spiritual aspirations on the one hand and her physical desire on the other. The second stanza may be read as an expression of her subconscious desire to experience the whole of love, of which the disagreeable physical aspect is simultaneously displaced ("He shall love your body"); the third as a summing up of the basic conflict.

Thus the poem becomes an interesting, if somewhat horrific study of sexual desire and sexual guilt, the refrain sardonically commenting on and highlighting the Lady's moral crisis. Incidentally, this reading makes good sense after the intense passion of the "First Song" which possibly anticipates a

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<sup>74</sup>For the psychological aspect of this poem, vide Arra M. Garab, "Fabulous Artifice: Yeats's 'Three Bushes' Sequence", Criticism. A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts, VII (1965), 240-41. Note, however, that her general interpretation is the conventional one.

lapse in her original intention, and lends a macabre quality to the pious didacticism of the "Third Song" ("For I that am his daylight lady ..."). It is feasible if we remember Yeats's freedom in handling the original story (seen, for example, in "The Lady's First Song") and the Lady's capacity for self-deception.

The remaining poems of the sequence poignantly and pathetically reveal the outcome of the Lady's perversion. "The Lover's Song",<sup>75</sup> a mere six-lined lyric of wistful yearning, represents the incompleteness of the Lover in his desire for peace, while the Chambermaid's Songs (originally entitled "The Chambermaid's Prayer before Dawn" and "The Chambermaid's Song after his Death"),<sup>76</sup> provide a tender comment on his vulnerability and exhaustion after the completion of the sex act:

How came this ranger  
Now sunk in rest,  
Stranger with stranger,  
On my cold breast?  
What's left to sigh for?  
Strange night has come;  
God's love has hidden him  
Out of all harm,  
Pleasure has made him  
Weak as a worm.<sup>77</sup>

It is interesting to note that the worm image,<sup>78</sup> a phallic symbol recurring in "The Chambermaid's Second Song", is a mild, if ineffectual echo of the virulent "contrapuntal serpent" of the Lady's dark imaginings.

<sup>75</sup>VE, p. 574. The first draft appeared in a letter to Lady Dorothy dated Monday, 9 November 1936. (Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 112.) Cf. Comm., p. 455.

<sup>76</sup>Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup>VE, p. 574, final version.

<sup>78</sup>For Yeats's and Lady Dorothy's correspondence about his "worm poem" vide Letters to Dorothy Wellesley, pp. 116, 118, respectively.



To sum up, then: the Lady is the complete epitome of that compartmentalization of love which Yeats ultimately rejected. As such she is the perfect victim (at times tragic, at other times comic or merely pathetic) of her emotions, of obsessive sexual desire and of a morality which, though it is contained within a rigid armour of respectability, borders on the deceptive, prurient and perverse. In terms of this morality, she is capable of both self-deception and deception of others, and succeeds in destroying not only her lover (who is deliberately represented in these poems as a mere tool in her designs, ("a blind force seeking to discharge its burden of necessity")<sup>79</sup> but herself. It is not impossible that the underlying moral of this sequence is a subconscious throwback in old age of Yeats's tortured, tortuous relationship with Maud Gonne.

Yeats's final concept of woman is thus ontological in essence, didactic in effect. In his attempt to resolve the dichotomy of the spiritual and physical aspects of woman so strongly evident in his "middle" period he is not merely one of the "last romantics" but perhaps the first romantic in a very special contemporary idiom; for his idealization of Crazy Jane is, after all, nothing more than an expression of sympathy with the lonely rebel, pitted against society, and acting out her home-made, self-created system of ethics. Technically speaking, these poems represent the height of Yeats's power as a dramatic poet, the richness, complexity and subtlety of the "Crazy Jane" sequence revealing his final realization of the three-dimensional character, "The Three Bushes" and its attendant lyrics illustrating his diverse treatment of a single subject and a single theme.

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<sup>79</sup>Vivienne Koch, W.B. Yeats. The Tragic Phase ... (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 134.

Though Yeats was only partially successful in achieving a total synthesis in his appraisal of woman -- for in endowing Jane with the divine gift of madness, did he not exempt her from the necessity of answering to society? -- he has finally put behind him his early shadowy illusions and created an image that is at once original, dynamic and unique.

## CONCLUSION

The main conclusion of this study is that Yeats's concept of woman is predominantly romantic and that this romanticism takes on a variety of forms throughout his poetic career. The term "romanticism" is in any case widely disputable and capable of a number of interpretations; but if we accept that it is marked predominantly by preoccupation with the life of the imagination (or the spiritual life) over reality, with the ideal over the real and ultimately with the assertion of the primacy of the individual over the claims of society, it must be admitted that, despite superficial differences in expression, these qualities characterize the body of Yeats's poetry as a whole.

Between the polarities of the shadowy illusionary quality of the early poetry and the dynamic vigour of the late poetry, Yeats's romanticism asserts itself again and again, in a variety of interesting (and at times, idiosyncratic) ways: in his high idealization of Maud Gonne, counterpointed by outbursts of open condemnation (the disillusionment aspect is a strong characteristic of the true romantic); in his assertion of the heroic ideal, exemplified by Maud Gonne, Lady Gregory, Mabel Beardsley over the moral and cultural vulgarity of middle-class Ireland and twentieth-century democracy; in his belief in the superiority of spiritual beauty to obsessive political activity resulting in the loss of woman's birthright, her femininity; in his preoccupation with the importance of woman's understanding of her fundamentally physical nature, both inside and outside marriage; and in his unique version of the duality of woman's rôle in history -- her combined innocence and destructiveness, passivity and capacity for violence, frailty and power.

Secondly, Yeats's poems about women show an interesting development from subjectivity to objectivity, from imaginative evocation and speculation (derived largely from fantasy and literature) to the assertion of an idealism that has been wrung from experience and ultimately, in the creation of Crazy Jane, a return to the imagination that, in his own words, "sink[s] down into [its] own soil and take[s] root again." While the "dream" woman of his early poetry is predominantly an expression of fantasy and imagination, each subsequent image reveals the growing impact of actual experience, evident first of all in the supplanting of "unreal" or literary sources of inspiration by "real" sources drawn from the poet's life and secondly, in the gradual broadening of the poet's horizons from subjective longing to larger considerations that include the social, historical and ontological.

With regard to Yeats's technical achievement, these poems yield an amazing diversity of forms and techniques, ranging from the use of symbolism and extended metaphor in the early poetry (notably in The Wanderings of Oisín, "The Rose of the World" and the love poems in The Wind among the Reeds) to the original three-dimensional characterization of Crazy Jane. Between subjective suggestion and evocation on the one hand and objective dramatization on the other lies a wide range of exciting techniques, testifying to a tireless willingness to experiment: the use of word-painting or portraiture in the poems surrounding Maud Gonne (as well as Lady Gregory), resulting in one of the most fully realized portraits in English poetry; the use of the "public" rhetorical manner (in particular, in "A Prayer for My Daughter") and the "courtly" tone of some of the poems about Lady Gregory, and the employment of first-person characterization, not only in the "Crazy Jane" poems already mentioned but also in the "A Woman Young and Old" and "The Three

Bushes" sequences, which constitute some of the most subtle and comprehensive literary treatments of female sexual psychology in English poetry.

An examination of the image of woman in Yeats's poetry, therefore, provides a fascinating study in miniature of the spirit and technical achievement of this great poet. The misleading suggestion offered by one critic\* that Yeats be regarded primarily as a love poet, however tempting and popular, must be necessarily discounted in favour of the larger view, and his range, richness, variety and comprehensiveness fully recognized and appreciated.

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\* Muriel C. Bradbrook, "Yeats and Elizabethan Love Poetry", Dublin Magazine, IV, 2 (1965), 40.

## APPENDIX A

### IDENTIFICATION OF POEMS INSPIRED BY MAUD GONNE AND OLIVIA SHAKESPEAR (1889-1899)

Owing to the confusion surrounding the source of inspiration of many of the love poems in The Wind Among the Reeds (1899), written or printed for the first time during or after Yeats's affair with Mrs Shakespear, it is difficult to state with certainty the number of poems written to or about Mrs Shakespear and Maud Gonne during the period as a whole. This difficulty is aggravated by the fact that most of these poems are not fully developed evocations of the woman concerned but expressions of the poet's adoration, anguish or despair, which could have been inspired by either woman. The final ordering and arrangement of the poems with their third-person titles, moreover, has the effect of a deliberately contrived anonymity, probably intended to enhance the secrecy surrounding Yeats's affair with Mrs Shakespear, partly, perhaps, because he wanted to create a pattern, an overall structure, and not poems that would be read for their biographical interest alone. Finally, the use of characters such as Aedh, Michael Robartes, Hanrahan, O'Sullivan the Red (or O'Sullivan Rua) and Mongan before the final revision of these poems in 1906, though helpful, are not always reliable in ascertaining about whom the poem was written: it should be remembered that the first three names mentioned Yeats described not as "actual personages" but as "principles of the mind";<sup>1</sup> and Aedh, for example, who generally appears in poems to Maud Gonne, is nevertheless used in "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty" and "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers",

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<sup>1</sup>VE, p. 803.

poems almost certainly written for Mrs Shakespear.

What distinguishes the source of inspiration of these poems, then, is not biographical content alone, wherever this is evident, but style and/or intensity of emotion. "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers",<sup>2</sup> for example, could have been inspired by either, were it not for the contrived effect characteristic of poems concerning Mrs Shakespear: we should remember Yeats's statement in his unpublished autobiography that he wrote her several poems, "all curiously alike in style".<sup>3</sup>

My estimate for the period under discussion is about twenty-one poems concerning or inspired by Maud Gonne and included in the two-volume definitive edition published by Macmillan of London in 1949, with a further four not included in that edition. Between 1889 and August 1895, the date of composition of the earliest known poem to have been inspired by Mrs Shakespear ("The Lover Asks Forgiveness because of His Many Moods"), Yeats wrote fifteen poems concerning or inspired by Maud Gonne, of which two were not included in the definitive edition, while two constituted the manuscript versions of what were later to become "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven", and "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty".<sup>4</sup> A further manuscript version entitled "Subject for a Lyric" which, according to Jon Stallworthy is the "last entry in a manuscript book dated 29 August 1893,"<sup>5</sup> was never totally reworked. The ten poems

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<sup>2</sup>CP, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup>Y:M&P, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>They were called "Your Pathway" and "Dedication of 'John Sherman and Dhoya'" respectively (Y:M&M, p. 158).

<sup>5</sup>Vide Between the Lines. W.B. Yeats's Poetry in the Making. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 2.

included in the definitive edition are: "The Rose of the World", "The Rose of Peace", "The Pity of Love", "The Sorrow of Love", "When You Are Old", "The White Birds", "A Dream of Death", "The Two Trees", "The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart", and "The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers",<sup>6</sup> the last two being included in The Wind among the Reeds. The two poems not included in the definitive edition are "When You Are Sad" and "Where My Books Go".<sup>7</sup>

The period 1895 to 1899 resulted in thirteen poems concerning or inspired by Maud Gonne, of which two ("The Glove and the Cloak" and "A Song of the Rosy Cross")<sup>8</sup> were not included in the definitive edition. Of these eight were undoubtedly inspired by Maud Gonne; one almost certainly but not definitely and two possibly but not definitely.

In the first group I would include the following: "The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love", "To His Heart, Bidding It Have No Fear", "He Hears the Cry of the Sedge", "He Thinks of Those Who Have Spoken Evil of His Beloved", "The Lover Pleads with His Friend for Old Friends", "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead", "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven", and "He Thinks of His Past Greatness When a Part of the Constellations of Heaven".<sup>9</sup> In the second: "He Mourns for the Change That Has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World",<sup>10</sup> and in the third, "The Fish" (formerly "Bressel the Fisherman") and "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Vide CP, pp. 41, 41-42, 45, 45-46, 46, 46-47, 47-48, 54-55, 62, 80.

<sup>7</sup>VE, pp. 738, 739.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 744 (twice).

<sup>9</sup>CP, pp. 68, 71, 75 (twice), 79, 80-81, 81-82.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65, 74.



During the same period Yeats wrote about eight poems which, with varying degrees of certainty, may have been inspired by Mrs Shakespear: "He Bids His Beloved Be at Peace", "The Travail of Passion", "He Reproves the Curlew", "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty", "A Poet to His Beloved", "He Gives His Beloved Certain Rhymes" (1899 version), "The Lover Speaks to the Hearers of His Songs in Coming Days".<sup>12</sup> She is further reflected in "The Lover Mourns for the Loss of Love".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 69, 78-79, 69, 67-70, 70, 71, 73-74, 79. The first of these, originally entitled "The Shadowy Horses", was definitely inspired by Mrs Shakespear (vide Y:M&P, p. 101), and A. N. Jeffares (ibid., p. 102) singles out "The Travail of Passion" as another, while J. Hone (WBY, p. 123) cites "He Gives His Beloved Certain Rhymes".

<sup>13</sup>CP, p. 68.

## APPENDIX B

### A CONSIDERATION OF VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE WANDERINGS OF OISIN

The poem may be interpreted on various levels: as an allegory of man's search for "three incompatible things, infinite feeling, infinite battle, infinite repose" -- a partial explanation offered in a letter to Katharine Tynan and ironically recast in "The Circus Animals' Desertion";<sup>1</sup> as a "precise reflection ... of the poet's subconscious mind";<sup>2</sup> or even as a mythological means of accounting for the socio-historical changes in Ireland on the advent of Christianity -- an interpretation suggested by Patrick Kennedy's detailed account in "Oisín in Tir Na-N-Oge", of Irish conditions on Oisín's return.<sup>3</sup> Yet all these interpretations seem to me to be either limited or misleading: the first concentrates on only one aspect of the poem's symbolism -- the repetition of the three islands -- without relating it to the larger scheme of Oisín's retreat from mortality; the second substitutes psycho-analysis for critical interpretation; the third ignores the poem's broader unifying vision. My interpretation seems to me to be the only one which is both workable, valid and consistent: not only does it provide the underlying thread from which the more obvious symbolism of the three islands is suspended; but the poem is so structurally organized as to emphasize the

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<sup>1</sup>Vide Y:M&P, p. 46, CP, p. 391 respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Morton Irving Seiden, "A Psychoanalytical Essay on William Butler Yeats", Accent, VI, 3 (1946), p. 179. He is here referring to "The Cap and Bells", though he later applies the same method to Oisín, which he reads (p. 181) as "a study in Yeats's sense of psychotic loss due to an exaggerated Oedipus complex and imagined castration". I am not qualified to contest this interpretation.

<sup>3</sup>Vide The Bardic Stories of Ireland (Dublin: M'Glashan & Gill, 1871), pp.146-50.

mortality of man at each of its most vital points.

The first book, for example, opens with the gloom overhanging the survivors of the battle of Gabhra owing to the death of their companions and closes with the Immortals' lamentation for the human condition. Each of the journeys to the Islands represents Oisín's attempt to cast off, by means of joy, active engagement and oblivion respectively, the knowledge of insidiously approaching death; in each case this attempted evasion is disturbed or interrupted by a simple yet persistent reminder of his mortality. The last book constitutes the revelation of Oisín's knowledge of his mortality.

## APPENDIX C

### W. B. YEATS'S QUARREL WITH THE IRISH MIDDLE-CLASSES

The intellectual vulgarity and preference for mediocrity of the Irish middle-classes were brought home to Yeats the more sharply by a series of incidents which filled him with increasing anger and spleen against the stupidity of his "fool-driven land". The first was the Parnell controversy precipitated by Parnell's involvement, at the height of his career, in a notorious divorce suit which led ultimately to the downfall of one of Ireland's most brilliant leaders. Yeats later commented, "There were reasons to justify a man's joining either party, but there were none to justify, on one side or the other, lying accusations forgetful of past service, a frenzy of detraction."<sup>1</sup> The second was public hostility to the production, in 1907, of Synge's The Playboy of the Western World, a reaction born partially out of the play's originality and strangeness, but predominantly out of the audience's outrage at Synge's choice of hero and his use of the word "shift". "There may have been reasons", Yeats wrote, "for opposing as for supporting that violent, laughing thing, though I can see the one side only, but there cannot have been any for the lies, for the unscrupulous rhetoric spread against it in Ireland, and from Ireland to America."<sup>2</sup> The third was the Hugh Lane controversy, which took place in the winter of 1912-1913, involving the Dublin Corporation's rejection of Lane's offer of his collection of French Impressionists to the city on condition that it was suitably housed. The chief objections were to Lane's choice of a

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<sup>1</sup>CP, p. 529.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

bridge site across the Liffey, and his preference for the design of an English architect, Sir Edward Luytens; but other attacks included a comparison of the paintings with the Trojan horse which destroyed a city, descriptions of Lane and his friends as "'self-seekers'", "'self-advertisers'" and "'log-rolling cranks and fanatics'" and a demand rather for pictures like "'those beautiful productions displayed in the windows of our city shops'".<sup>3</sup> It is little wonder then that Yeats allied himself increasingly with the culture, taste and breeding of the aristocracy.

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<sup>3</sup>WBY, p. 266.

## APPENDIX D

### POEMS REFERRING TO MRS W.B. YEATS

Though Mrs Yeats is not fully imaged in Yeats's poetry, she is directly, though briefly, referred to in three poems and indirectly in six others. In "Under Saturn" (dated November 1919, by Yeats),<sup>1</sup> he asks his wife's forgiveness for his surly mood, occasioned by the memory of a broken pact with his ancestors, pleading:

For how should I forget the wisdom that you brought,  
The comfort that you made?<sup>2</sup>

and in the fourth section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War" mentions that he chose his house "For an old neighbour's friendship .../ And decked and altered it for a girl's love ..."<sup>3</sup>

"A Prayer for My Son" contains a reference to Mrs Yeats as mother,<sup>4</sup> while "To Be Carved in a Stone at Thoor Ballylee" pays rough tribute:

I, the poet William Yeats,  
With old mill boards and sea-green slates,  
And smithy work from the Gort forge,  
Restored this tower for my wife George;  
And may these characters remain  
When all is ruin once again.<sup>5</sup>

Indirect references to her occur in "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid", "Two Songs of a Fool", "Towards Break of Day", "An Image from a Past Life" and the two Solomon and

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<sup>1</sup>Comm., p. 224.

<sup>2</sup>CP, p. 202. Cf.: "And that was my first news of her that now is my delight and comfort." Quoted by Jon Stallworthy, Vision and Revision ... (1969) p. 34.

<sup>3</sup>CP, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

Sheba poems ("Solomon to Sheba" and "Solomon and the Witch".) Of these the first mentioned is the most important, the young girl of occult wisdom offered as a bridal gift to the elderly philosopher Kusta Ben Luka almost certainly representing the telepathic Mrs Yeats:

"But what if I  
Have lit upon a woman who so shares  
Your thirst for those old crabbed mysteries,  
So strains to look beyond our life, an eye  
That never knew that strain would scarce seem bright,  
And yet herself can seem youth's very fountain,  
Being all brimmed with life?"

"Were it but true  
I would have found the best that life can give,  
Companionship in those mysterious things  
That make a man's soul or a woman's soul  
Itself and not some other soul."<sup>6</sup>

Both "An Image from a Past Life" and "Towards Break of Day" seem to anticipate this sensitive communion of minds;<sup>7</sup> for while the former delineates, in languid neo-Pre-Raphaelite manner, Mrs Yeats's distress at her husband's obsession with the Over Shadower or Ideal Form of a previous existence, the latter evokes the complementary image of a shared dream. Finally, the first of "Two Songs of a Fool", a thin-textured wildly inspired poem written between July and September 1918,<sup>8</sup> depicts her as the "speckled cat" eating and sleeping at the poet's hearthstone and totally dependent on him for "learning and defence".

<sup>6</sup>CP, pp. 515-16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 200, 208 respectively.

<sup>8</sup>Comm., p. 213. For the poem vide CP, p. 190.

## APPENDIX E

### SUMMARY OF YEATS'S SCHEME OF PERSONALITY ACCORDING TO HIS LUNAR SYMBOLISM

In terms of Yeats's lunar symbolism, any individual could be classified within one of the phases, and any human soul passed through all (but two) of the twenty-eight phases, either in a series of incarnations or within a single lifetime. Each phase was determined by the degree of "objectivity" and "subjectivity" (primary and antithetical tincture) it contained, the first being totally "objective" or "solar" (dominated by sun or absence of moon), the fifteenth totally "subjective" or "lunar" (dominated by moon, lacking in sun). The intervening phases were marked by a proportional admixture of subjective and objective factors, with equal amounts of both at the eighth and twenty-second phases.



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## II Personal interviews.

Personal interviews with

- \* Conroy, Sister Maria Enstelle, at Cape Town, January 13, 1969.  
[First-hand impressions of Maud Gonne c. 1920, and personal comments on Countess Constance Markiewicz and Lady Gregory].

Henn, Dr Thomas Rice, at Cape Town, May 24, 1971.

- \* Stallworthy, Jon, at Cape Town, September 1970. [First-hand impressions of the late Mrs W.B. Yeats and Michael Yeats and general discussion of Yeats, man and poet, and Yeatsiana].

## III Lectures

- \* Henn, Dr Thomas Rice, at the Univ. of Cape Town, May 21, 1971.  
[General discussion of literature and the problems of literary study, with special reference to W.B. Yeats].

Segal, Philip. "English Modern -- Eliot and Yeats": part of a series of lectures entitled The Image of Man in Literature, given under the auspices of the Dept. of Extra-Mural Studies (Univ. of Cape Town) at the Univ. of Cape Town Annual Summer School, February 10, 1966.

Stallworthy, Jon. "The Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Wilfred Owen", given under the auspices of the Dept. of Extra-Mural Studies (Univ. of Cape Town), at Cape Town, October 6, 1970.

## IV Recordings.

The Caedman Treasury of Modern Poets Reading Their Own Poetry  
TC-0995-A.

(Includes readings by W.B. Yeats of "The Song of the Old Mother", "The Lake Isle of Innifree" and "Coole and Ballylee" [extract] and reading by W.H. Auden of "In Memory of W.B. Yeats".)

Lennox Robinson Presents W.B. Yeats: Poems and Memories, produced by Arthur Luce Klein. Spoken Arts JO-8P-1043. ("Includes readings of "The Stolen Child", "Down by the Salley Gardens", "The Happy Townland", "The Lake Isle of Innifree", "The Cap and Bells", "The Ballad of Father Gilligan", "September 1913", "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing", "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", "Easter 1916", "The Rose Tree", "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz", "On a Political Prisoner", "To Ireland in the Coming Times", "From 'Oedipus at Colonus'".)

Poems of W.B. Yeats, read by Siobhan McKenna, Spoken Arts: Great Artists Series XTV24544. (Includes readings of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", "The Stolen Child", "The Ballad of Moll Magee", "The Song of Wandering Aengus", "He Reproves the Curlew", "The Cap and Bells", "A Drinking Song", "The Wild Swans at Coole", "The Mermaid", "Three Things", "Before the World Was Made", "The Four Ages of Man".)



Recital of Elizabethan Lute Songs (Peter Pears, Tenor; Julian Bream, Lute). Decca LW 5243.  
 (Includes renderings of Dowland's "I Saw My Lady Weep", "Awake, Sweet Love", "In Darkness Let Me Dwell", Morley's "Come, Sorrow, Come", "It Was a Lover and His Lass", "Mistress Mine, Well May You Fare" and Rosseter's "When Laura Smiles", "What Then Is Love But Mourning".)

Revolutionary Speeches and Poems of Ireland, read by Micheál MacLiammóir. Argo: A Spoken Arts Recording RG 193.  
 (Includes readings of "Red Hanrahan's Poems about Ireland", "Easter 1916", "The Red Rose Tree".)

Travatori, Laude. Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Troubadour Songs and Hymns of Praise (Claudia Carbi, mezzo-soprano; Raffaello Monterosso, harpsichord), ed. Vittorio Negri Bryks, Milan.  
 (Includes renderings of works by Rudel, Marcabru, Bernart de Ventadorn, Peirol, de Vaqueirus.)

#### V Radio Broadcasts.

Biggs, Murray, Lecturer in English at New College, Oxford.  
 "W.B. Yeats. Series of Lectures about the Irish Poet" in University of the Air (South African Broadcasting Corporation /English Programme/), September 21, 28, October 5, 1971.  
 9.50-10.05 pm.  
 The series comprises  
 I Ireland: Politics and Heroic Attitudes.  
 II Women, Love and Lyricism  
 III Philosophy and Late Poems.