CURIOUS ASTRINGENT JOY

AN EXPLORATION OF
MAJOR NIETZSCHEAN ECHOES
IN THE WRITINGS OF
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

by

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I have written to you little and badly of late for the truth is you have had a rival in Nietzsche, that strong enchanter. I have read him so much that I have made my eyes bad again . . . Nietzsche completes Blake and he has the same roots - I have not read anything with so much excitement since I got to love Morris' stories which have the same curious astringent joy . . .

- William Butler Yeats, in a letter to Lady Augusta Gregory of September, 1902.

I

ENCOUNTER AND KINSHIP

William Butler Yeats first came under the thrall of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche in the Dublin summer of 1902. His friend and patron, the New York lawyer John Quinn, had sent Yeats a modest volume of Nietzsche with the imposing title of *Nietzsche as Critic, Philosopher, Poet and Prophet,* containing 'Choice Selections from His Works' compiled by Thomas Common, who was to become a major contributor to the Oscar Levy English edition of Nietzsche's *Werke.*

Published in London in 1901, Yeats's copy of Common's selections is now in the Deering Library of Chicago's Northwestern University - a valued possession by virtue of the notes scrawled in the margin by Yeats's excited pencil. Underlined sentences, marked passages, scribbled comments, queries, even arguments: all proclaim his debt to the German philosopher.[1]

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1) I am grateful to the Curator of the Special Collections Department of the Northwestern University Library, R. Russel Maylone, for having made a microfilm copy of Yeats's Common available to me. All references to Yeats's marginalia pertain to this original source, hereafter abbreviated to *NACPPP*. Patrick Bridgwater in *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony* (Leicester University Press, 1972), p. 67, "assumes" that Yeats "first became acquainted with Nietzsche's work through Havelock Ellis's brilliant series of articles in *The Savoy,*" No. 2 of which appeared in April 1896, containing the first part of Ellis's 'Friedrich Nietzsche,' along with Yeats's 'Rosa Alchemica' and 'Two Poems Concerning Peasant Visionaries.' This

The question of Nietzsche's direct influence on Yeats does not, however, concern the main thrust of our investigation, which focuses rather on the regions of their kinship themselves. Even with the considerable evidence of Yeats's pencilled comments and the presence of Nietzschean parallels throughout his writings, it remains impossible to determine beyond all doubt the point at which similarities cease to be coincidental and become testimony to direct influence. Just as Yeats ponders the encounter of Leda and the Swan, so should we deliberate whether Yeats, having discovered Nietzsche, did in fact 'put on his knowledge with his power.'[2] Yeats was an incipient Nietzschean long before he encountered Nietzsche, and we should not forget the fatuousness of *post hoc, propter hoc* reasoning. This element of caution is not to deny the fascination of the repeated correspondencies in their thinking, nor does it diminish the fervour with which Yeats devoured Nietzsche, as so many of his letters reveal.

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might not be unlikely, but the point is that Yeats's consuming interest in Nietzsche dates only from his reading of Common's selections, and he does say in a letter to Quinn of 15 May 1903, 'you have been the first to introduce me' to Nietzsche (though this might have been for Quinn's benefit); *cf. Letters* (ed. Allan Wade, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1954), p. 403. Several studies and commentaries make mention of the Yeats and Nietzsche relationship, and four in particular have provided useful points of departure for our current investigation: *William Butler Yeats* (Modern Masters Series, ed. Frank Kermode, Viking Press, New York, 1971), by Denis Donoghue; Richard Ellmann's *The Identity of Yeats* (Faber, London, 1st ed. 1954, 2nd 1964, hereafter referred to as *IY);* Edward Engelberg's *The Vast Design* (University of Toronto Press, 1965); and F.A.C. Wilson's *Yeats's Iconography* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1960, hereafter referred to as *YI).*

2) 'Leda and the Swan,' *Collected Poems* (Macmillan, London, 2nd 1950, rep. 1965, hereafter referred to as *CP*), p. 241.

With the nature of 'influence' an imponderable, we can speak more comfortably of Nietzsche's having provided authority for Yeats's own inclinations, of his having fostered a similarity in thinking, attitude, tone, without necessarily having inspired it. Influence is a *speculative* question, black-on-white kinship a *factual* one. And profitable though speculation might be, it is documentation that must ultimately be harnessed to support contentions. There is certainly no dearth of Nietzschean attitudes in the writings of Yeats, with echoes of the German resounding vibrantly through much of the Irishman's work, right from *Where There Is Nothing,*[3] written in that landmark year of 1902, through to his final political testament of 1938, *On the Boiler.*

Our intention is thus to illuminate these parallels and not to speculate inordinately on their philosophic or artistic worth, nor to claim Nietzsche as the 'parent and original' of those notions in Yeats which echo him, notions which assume a remarkably pronounced Nietzschean quality as the years pass; a pale Nietzschean to start with, Yeats progressively develops a fiercely Nietzschean tone, fervid with all Nietzsche's vatic eloquence, arrogance, and harsh *Weltanschauung.*

Friedrich Nietzsche had a dread of being misunderstood: the very subtitle of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* bears concise testimony to this, describing it as 'A Book for All and None.' 'Have I been understood?' becomes an anxious refrain in *The Twilight of the Gods, Ecce Homo,* and *The Will to Power.* Nietzsche has proved to

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3) Rewritten as *The Unicorn from the Stars; cf.* chapters II and III below, especially pp. 55 and 80-4.

be all things to all men, and the protean diversity of interpretation to which he has been subjected more than justifies his concern. Should we follow what have been termed the 'harsh' Nietzscheans, or the 'gentle?'[4]

The 'harsh' interpretations spring primarily from early twentieth century Germanophobes, and from opponents of those Nazi ideologists who had claimed Nietzsche as their own. Their legacy has been an emphasis on the cruel elements in Nietzsche, and certainly there are many horrors which might result from the practical application of his philosophic thought in the world of action. The 'gentle' Nietzscheans seek to provide an antidote, with Walter Kaufmann[5] possibly being the most generous applier of temperate pastel shades to the harsh picture that had gone before. Others, like Eric Bentley, take an overview which points to the existence of both qualities in Nietzsche, explaining his brutal masculine attitude as a reaction to his essentially feminine psyche. There is cruelty in Nietzsche, but it always has the sanction of a world transfigured by a transvaluation of current moral values.

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4) A division often pointed out, as, for example, in Crane Brinton: *Nietzsche* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1941); Eric Bentley: *The Cult of the Superman* (Robert Hale, London, 1947); Conor Cruise O'Brien: *The Suspecting Glance* (Faber, London, 1972); and the introductions to the newer translations.

5) As in his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1950), and the introductions to his Vintage and Random House translations.

Yeats's father was certainly one who saw the 'hard' Nietzsche rather than the 'soft.' In a letter to his son of 24 March 1909 he writes that 'the *whole* of Nietzsche' is 'malign,' 'so are aristocracies and pessimists,' so are College Dons and *their retinue*, but so were not Shakespeare or Shelley . . . Wordsworth was malign, so was Byron and so is Swinburne. These people could not get away from their self-importance.'[6] He considered William's talent 'benign,' like Shakespeare and Shelley's: 'This benign quality you got from me; I say this remembering my father's family.'[7]

Yeats's mention in *A Vision* of 'arguments with my father'[8] suggests a tendency in him to explore whatever J.B. Yeats might have condemned as 'malign,' and so to submit eagerly to the spell of the 'strong enchanter' and his 'curious astringent joy.'[9] It was a fascination that was to contribute significantly to the development of ideas directly contrary to all his father believed, and in this sense Nietzsche really did have an influence on Yeats. Though the philosopher's enchantment began in 1902, by 1909 his father was still concerned about the potency of Nietzsche's 'malign' influence, indicating just how considerable and lasting his initial impact had been.[10] Did William Butler Yeats also find him 'malign,' or was he a 'gentle' Nietzschean?

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6) J.B. Yeats: *Letters to His Son and Others, 1869-1922* (ed. Joseph Hone, Faber, London, 1944; hereafter referred to as *JBYL)*, p. 117.

7) *JBYL*, p. 118.

8) *A Vision* (Macmillan, 2nd 1937, rep. 1962, London; hereafter *Vision)*, p. 12. *Cf.* also *On the Boiler* (Cuala Press, Dublin, 1939, hereafter *Boiler)*, pp. 14, 15.

9) *Letters*, p. 379.

10) *JBYL*, p. 117.

The 'curious astringent joy' Nietzsche provided suggests that Yeats was attracted to him by this very quality of harshness; but that he also glimpsed the brutal implications of this harshness is indicated by the cautious reflections pencilled next to so many passages in Common's 'Choice Selections.' For example, his questioning pencil was quickly activated by Nietzsche's contention that

> the morality of the ruling class . . . is more especially foreign and irritating to the taste of the present day, owing to the sternness of the principle that one has *obligations only* to one's equals, and that one may act towards beings of a lower rank, and towards all that is foreign to one according to *discretion*, or "as the heart desires," and in any case "beyond Good and Evil."

This prompts Yeats to remark:

> Yes, but the necessity of giving remains. When the old heroes praise one another they say "he never refused any man." Nietzsche means that the lower cannot create obligation for the higher . . .[11]

Is this what Nietzsche means? Whatever the answer to that, it is this kind of caution that keeps Nietzsche's febrile tone subdued for the most part in the calmer, more reflective Yeats.[12]

Yeats's December 1912 poem from *Responsibilities*, 'To a

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11) *NACPPP*, p. 111.

12) Though Wilson *(YI*, p. 180) would claim that the turbulent Nietzsche in fact "taught Yeats to think calmly"! At most, he provided calmness only through providing substantiation.

Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if It Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures,' evokes this selfsame Nietzschean sentiment, but gently excludes 'the sternness of the principle that one has *obligations only* to one's equals:'

> What cared Duke Ercole, that bid
> His mummers to the market-place,
> What th' onion-sellers thought or did
>
> . . .
>
> And Guidobaldo, when he made
> That grammar school of courtesies
> Where wit and beauty learned their trade
> Upon Urbino's windy hill,
> Had sent no runners to and fro
> That he might learn the shepherd's will . . .[13]

Here the aristocrat's lack of concern about what the peasant thinks leads not to bruality but to a 'Delight in Art whose end is peace;' yet there is a trace of discomfort in the injunction to

> give
> What the exuberant heart calls good
> That some new day may breed the best
> Because you gave, not what they would,
> But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

Gentle Nietzscheans - or Yeatsians - would view that eagle only

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13) *CP*, pp.119,120.

in terms of a nobly soaring free spirit, ignoring its hooked beak and ripping talons . . .[14]

Whatever the precise nature of Nietzsche's appeal for the younger Yeats, the maturing Yeats does display an increasingly fiercer quality, so that by *Purgatory* (as Helen Hennessy Vendler remarks) Yeats finds hatred and rage indispensable.[15] Though he might discern higher 'spiritual' dimensions in Nietzsche, Yeats certainly does not ignore his brutal side. One can never know the extent to which Yeats perceives the ugly implications much of Nietzsche's philosophy entails for practical life, or, indeed, to what extent Nietzsche perceives them - the German's remarks on Baudelaire and Flaubert reveal that he saw the horror inherent in aesthetic absolutism, though a crucial tenet in *The Birth of Tragedy* postulates that 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified;*'[16] there is an unmistakably Nietzschean ring to Yeats's remarks on pure aestheticism in 'The Tragic Generation:'

> After Stephane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.[17]

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14) *Cf.* chapter V below and Nietzsche's view of courage in terms of an eagle able to grasp the abyss of despair produced when truth erodes away illusion.

15) Helen Hennessy Vendler: *Yeats's* Vision *and the Later Plays* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), pp. 200-2.

16) Tr. Walter Kaufmann: *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Case of Wagner* (Vintage Books, New York, 1967; hereafter *BT* and *CW)*, (5), p. 52.

17) *Autobiographies* (Macmillan, London, 1955; hereafter *Auto)*, p. 349.

Would Yeats, though, have seen the darker implications of his innocuous desire 'to carry the realisation of beauty as far as possible?'[18] What he found beautiful led to his toying with the Dublin Blueshirts. One of his favourite axioms comes from Adam's *Axël*, a 'sacred book:' 'As for living, our servants will do that for us.' Not only do the servants do the *living*, but the *dying* as well, a dying which might well possess beauty in the eye of the pure aesthetic beholder, who would argue for the destruction of the world and its rebuilding in the aristocratic images of aestheticism.

In 'Discoveries' of 1906 Yeats says, 'I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty;'[19] in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche asserts that 'the purpose of life . . . is the pure aesthetic delight,' only to speak in the next breath of how 'the ugly and the disharmonic, the content of the tragic myth, stimulate aesthetic pleasure . . .'[20]

In charting the flow of Nietzschean currents through Yeats's writings, it is difficult to indicate beyond dispute how Yeats interprets that 'curious astringent joy,' and so what the real nature of his influence is. Is the appeal essentially an aesthetic one, the kind of which gentle Nietzscheans sing? When Nietzsche lauds war and cruelty, they would under-

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18) From a letter to AE, dd 14 May 1903, *Letters*, p. 402, written in the full flood of his absorption with Nietzsche. The disturbing consequences of this pursuit is a major concern of Erich Heller's *Encounter* article of December 1969, entitled 'Yeats and Nietzsche.'

19) *Essays and Introductions* (Macmillan, London, 1961, hereafter *E&I)*, p. 271.

20) *BT* (24), p. 141.

stand him - in the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien - "as calling for spiritual struggle and a stern mastery over the self."[21] Perhaps Yeats revels above all in the force of Nietzsche's intellectual power, much as Nietzsche revels in Machiavelli's, praising the Italian because he

> lets us breathe the subtle dry air of Florence and cannot help presenting . . . thoughts protracted, difficult, hard, dangerous and the most wanton good humour.[22]

In *Twilight of the Idols* he affirms that

> Thucydides and perhaps the *Principe* of Machiavelli are related to me closely by their unconditional will not to deceive themselves and to see reason in *reality* - not in "reason," still less in "morality."[23]

Machiavelli conceivably brought Cesare Borgia to the surface of Nietzsche's consciousness, with Nietzsche bringing him to Yeats's. When reading Nietzsche's description of Borgia as a 'beast of prey,' 'man of prey,' and 'tropical monster,' would Yeats have viewed such passages with approval? Or would he have qualified them with reservations akin to those in his copy of Common, and softened them with a spirituality

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21) O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 52. Dr O'Brien stresses Nietzsche's fierce side and sees Yeats as developing into a decidedly rampant Nietzschean.

22) *Beyond Good and Evil,* tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin Paperbacks, 1973, rep. 1974, hereafter *BGE),* 'The Free Spirit' (28), p. 42.

23) *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale: *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* (Penguin Paperbacks, 1968, rep. 1974; hereafter *TI* and *AC),* 'What I Owe to the Ancients' (2), pp. 106-7.

of the kind Nietzsche employs in *The Will to Power* when speaking of Machiavelli:

> No philosopher will be in any about as to the type of perfection in politics; that is Machiavellianism. But Machiavellianism *pur, cru, sans mélange, dans toute sa force, dans toute son âpreté,* is superhuman, divine, transcendental, it will never be achieved by man, at most approximated.[24]

It is this sort of spiritual quality which Nietzsche has foremost in mind when urging an *Umwertung aller Werte,* a transvaluation of all values leading to the inauguration of a new order of the strong. But in terms of practical revolution the implications are devestating.

It is this brutal, bloody taste - with some aesthetic and spiritual seasoning for the palates of gentle Nietzscheans - that imparts that curious, ambiguous flavour to Nietzsche's work, and to much of Yeats's.

T.S. Eliot says of Machiavelli in *For Lancelot Andrewes* that "he merely told the truth about human nature. What Machiavelli did not see about human nature is the myth of human goodness which for liberal thought replaces divine grace."[25] Freud voiced the opinion that Nietzsche had looked deeper into the soul of man than anyone before him. According to his biographer, Ernest Jones, he "several times said of Nietzsche that he had a more penetrating knowledge of himself than any other man who

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24) *The Will to Power,* tr. Walter Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale (Random House, New York, 1967; hereafter referred to as *WP),* (304), p. 170.

25) As quoted by O'Brien, *op. cit.,* p. 23.

ever lived or was ever likely to live."[26] Just as Machiavelli's refusal to deceive himself had appealed to Nietzsche, so Nietzsche's facing of man's frightful inner nature appealed to Yeats. The poet liked 'lean and fierce minds,' wondering in *Estrangement* whether he was right to have shaped so much of his style 'to sweetness and serenity.'[27] *'Become hard!'* Zarathustra commands mankind,[28] meeting pity as his last sin.[29] Yet when Yeats first encountered Nietzsche's view in Common's selections that 'he who has not had a hard heart when young, will never have a hard heart,' he added the qualifying comment, 'but "hard" surely in the sense of scorning *self* pity.'[30]

In 1904 - two years after encountering Nietzsche[31] - Yeats wrote to AE that he found his earlier lyric verse and that of *The Land of Heart's Desire*

> an exaggeration of sentiment and sentimental beauty which I have come to think unmanly. . . . I have been fighting the prevailing decadence for years . . . it is sentimental and sentimental sadness, a womanish introspection. . . . Let us have no emotions . . . in which there is not an athletic joy.[32]

If anyone despised womanish sentimentality and extolled harsh masculinity, it was Friedrich Nietzsche.

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26) As quoted by Walter Kaufmann in *Collier's Encyclopedia*, vol. 17 (Cromwell-Collier, 1968), p. 532.

27) *Auto*, p. 482.

28) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (56:29), tr. Thomas Common (The Modern Library, Random House, New York), p. 240. Common's archaic translation remains the fitting one for reference purposes, since Yeats discovered Nietzsche in his translations. 'Spoke,' however, is preferable to the obsolete 'Spake.'

29) *TSZ* (62), p. 268.

30) *NACPPP*, p. 110.

31) *Cf*. p. 1n. above.

32) *Letters*, pp. 434-5.

Nietzsche constantly lent Yeats licence to pursue ideas which he might otherwise have suppressed. Not that we should stricly follow Alex Zwerdling who contends that "Nietzsche's actual influence lay in providing authority and reassurance for Yeats's somewhat more hesitant and uncertain thinking."[33] That this is not the whole story we shall see in subsequent chapters, although in a general sense it may be true that his exposure to Nietzsche did indeed nurture in Yeats an inclination towards arrogance and fierceness which might well have wilted were it not for Nietzsche's substantiating views. It is likely that his reading of Nietzsche had bred in him a predilection for aristocracy, and so had alienated him from the popular nationalistic Irish movement well before Maud Gonne's marriage to John MacBride in 1903. Nietzsche prepared the ground for an ever-growing aristocratic outlook, a moving away from that tolerant, liberal background and education common to John Butler Yeats, and to Lady Gregory and most of Yeats's other friends. It was an attitude that was not only to become more evident, but also to harden perceptibly. In 'Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation,' from the 1910 *Green Helmet* collection of poems, Yeats speaks in gentle terms of a noble aristocracy, a 'house' able 'to breed the lidless eye that loves the sun,' and of

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33) Alex Zwerdling: *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal* (New York University Press, 1965), p. 21.

> The sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
> Where wings have memory of wings, and all
> That comes of the best knit to the best.

Here is a glimpse of Nietzsche's vision of a eugenically-bred class possessing 'The rare gifts that govern men' and 'a written speech/ Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease.'[34] One poem later we encounter these same gently aristocratic sentiments maligning the common man as 'These Are the Clouds' speaks of how

> The weak lay hand on what the strong has done
> . . .
> 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.[35]

These are the attributes of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* which gentle Nietzscheans are quick to emphasise. But by *The Winding Stair* collection of 1933, after a passage of over twenty years, we find the same aristocratic thought far more harshly phrased - as evidenced in the opening stanza of 'Blood and the Moon:'

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34) *CP*, p. 106.

35) *CP*, pp. 107-8.

A bloody, arrogant power
Rose out of the race
Uttering, mastering it,
Rose like these walls from these
Storm-beaten cottages -
In mockery I have set
A powerful emblem up . . .[36]

This has all the pungency of a fierce Nietzschean, devoid of any spiritual elements for gentle Nietzscheans to parade: it reveals Yeats as a harsh, brutal Nietzschean, and is strong testimony to the contention that this is indeed what he became as the years passed. What it does not reveal, of course, is whether Yeats perceived the full extent of the implications his attitude held for practical life.

Not that we should ignore other factors which might have induced this increasingly astringent tone in the maturing poet: to repeat an earlier word of caution, the problems raised by the question of influence are complex,[37] and one can point with certainty only to patterns and resonances of literary relationship. Nietzsche's contribution aside, we realise that the poems completed between 1910 and 1014 - *The Green Helmet* and *Responsibilities* - owe their burgeoning severity in some measure to events in Yeats's life which preceded their composition: Maud Gonne's marriage in 1903, Synge's death in 1909, the death of Yeats's favourite uncle George Pollexfen in 1910, followed soon

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36) *CP*, p. 267.

37) An observation often made, as, for example, by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (Galaxy Paperbacks, 1973).

afterwards by that of O'Leary. The newspaper attacks on him had again shown up the Dublin *mobile vulgus,* prompting Yeats to quote Goethe: 'The Irish always seem to me like a pack of hounds dragging down some noble stag.'[38]

Ezra Pound noted Yeats's new harshness when reviewing *Responsibilities,* commenting that "there is a new robustness; there is the tooth of satire which is, in Mr. Yeats's case, too good a tooth to keep hidden. . . . There are a lot of fools to be killed and Mr. Yeats is an excellent slaughter-house . . .'[39] This 'new robustness' is not hard to find: Yeats's toughening stance, his determination to view the world with 'unmoistened eyes,' informs the whole structure of 'A Coat,' in which the poet discards his garment embroidered 'Out of old mythologies,' finding more enterprise 'In walking naked' with a 'sterner conscience.'[40] Again, if anyone viewed the world with 'unmoistened eyes,' it was Friedrich Nietzsche, who favoured 'an intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence.'[41]

In 'If I Were Four-and-Twenty' we find Yeats quoting the Indian saying that 'The food of the spiritual-minded is sweet, but passionate minds love bitter food.'[42] Nietzsche was but

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38) *Auto,* p. 483.

39) As quoted from Häusermann: *W.B. Yeats' Criticism of Ezra Pound,* by T.R. Henn in his essay *'The Green Helmet* and *Responsibilities,' ex* Denis Donoghue and J.R. Mulryne (edd.): *An Honoured Guest, New Essays on W.B. Yeats* (Edward Arnold, London, 1965), p. 39.

40) *CP,* pp. 142,3.

41) *BT* 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism,' p. 17.

42) *Explorations* (Macmillan, New York, 1962; hereafter *Expl),* p. 272.

one of many quarters where Yeats found reinforcement of his views. Synge, too, played his part in the hardening of Yeats's tone. That Yeats admired his 'hunger for harsh facts, for ugly surprising things, for all that defies our hope'[43] reveals Synge as having had a substantial influence on the toughening of Yeats's stand at this particular point, lending further support to the authority which Nietzsche had already given Yeats's own incipient views of life as harsh and tragic.

Yeats's reputation places him among the dominant poet/ playwrights of the first half of the twentieth century; Nietzsche might well be regarded as the key to the harshness of much twentieth century literature extending right into the Seventies - especially as manifested in the Dionysian terror of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, and the 'nausea' of the Theatre of the Absurd and other Existentialist writing.[44] The similarities between the Irishman and the German are many, and in the chapters ahead we shall explore those regions of their affinity which are most pronounced and appear most worthy of investigation: chapter two details their corresponding views on conflict, will, and power; chapter three compares their sense of life as tragic and their related theories of tragedy, character, and personality; chapter four maps their attitudes to rational thought, and to aesthetics and art; chapter five considers their concept of the hero and their ideas of subjectivity and objectivity; and chapter six looks at their kindred views on cyclical history.

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43) 'Preface to the First Edition of John M. Synge's *Poems and Translations*,' *E&I*, p. 308.

44) *Cf*. *BT* (7), where art produces 'the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the *horrible*, and the comic as the artistic discharge of the *nausea of absurdity*.'

How best, then, to illuminate these spheres of similarity? To trace Nietzschean elements broadly through Yeats's writings might result in little more than the compilation of a 'shopping list;' to apply the 'lemon squeezer' method on islolated works would be too distorting, restricting and omissive - and, indeed, almost impossible without copious explanation taken from his letters, essays, introductions, and other prose which would form part of a broad evaluation as it is. No poem or play by Yeats reverberates with Nietzsche in every line (though some very nearly do!), and constriction of scope would exclude so much of what would profitably be revealed by general exposition. An Aristotelian combination of the two approaches would seem yet again to provide the most successful method,[45] and we shall thus pursue a broad exploration reinforced with generous illustrations. Occasionally, works with particularly strong Nietzschean overtones will receive concentrated analysis.

Our exploration consequently covers a wide spectrum of Yeats's writings: his private correspondence, essays, introductions, lectures, autobiographical writings and memoirs, the works collected in *Explorations* and *Mythologies*, *A Vision*, and of course the poems and plays.

Yeats's standing as a poet is secure; his plays find less consensus of praise and are not regularly performed. But Yeats and Nietzsche both approach life in a distinctly theatrical

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45) Though this policy of μηδεν ἀγαν might violate Nietzsche's enthronement of 'excess,' 'measure' is certainly an important attribute of the *Übermensch!* *(Cf. The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and J.R. Hollingdale (Random House, New York, 1967; hereafter referred to as *WP)*, (940), p. 495.

manner, and as such it is fitting to lend the edge of emphasis to the dramatic side of the Irish poet. A dozen-odd plays receive particular attention for their wealth of Nietzschean attitudes, or Yeats's own interpretation of them: *At the Hawk's Well*, *Calvary*, *The Cat and the Moon*, *The Death of Cuchulain*, *A Full Moon in March*, *The Herne's Egg*, *The King's Threshold*, *On Baile's Strand*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, *The Player Queen*, *Purgatory*, and *The Resurrection*.

Before proceeding empirically with our exploration, however, we would do well to stabilise our introductory remarks by reiterating and enriching in general terms the correspondencies we are to probe.

As we have seen, it was in 1902 that Yeats first began his fascination with the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, the man Denis Donoghue would claim to be "the crucial figure in Yeats's poetic life, if any single figure may be named."[46] By September of that year he was apologising to Lady Gregory for having

> written to you little and badly of late for the truth is you have had a rival in Nietzsche, that strong enchanter. I have read him so much that I have made my eyes bad again . . . Nietzsche completes Blake and he has the same roots - I have not read anything with so much excitement since I got to love Morris' stories which have the same curious astringent joy.[47]

Nietzsche's impact on the ever-receptive Yeats was clearly

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46) Donoghue, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

47) *Letters*, p. 379. Editor Wade questioningly dates it 26 September 1902.

forceful and consuming, the poet reading him voraciously to the point of impairing his sight. Yeats's observation about Nietzsche completing Blake prompts Richard Ellmann to comment that "Yeats rightly perceived that there were few irreconcilable differences between the English poet and the German. Both denounced conventional morality, Blake with his 'marriage of heaven and hell,' Nietzsche by moving 'beyond good and evil.'"[48] In the 1903 revised edition of *Ideas of Good and Evil* Yeats writes of 'Nietzsche, whose thought flows always, though with an even more violent current, in the same bed Blake's thought has worn.'[49] Having plunged into Blake between 1889 and 1892, Yeats now embarked on an equally consuming reading of Nietzsche.

With his mind revelling in the philosopher's 'curious astringent joy,' Yeats resolved in 1903 to remake his art, to eschew study of the absolute in the manner of the Nineties, and to celebrate life, to 'delight in the whole man.' We find him writing to AE in May 1903,

> I feel about me and in me an impulse to create form, to carry the realisation of beauty as far as possible. The Greeks said that the Dionysiac enthusiasm preceded the Apollonic and that the Dionysiac was sad and desirous, but that the Apollonic was joyful and self sufficient.[50]

Though there is some distortion of Nietzsche in this, it is a direct echo of his 'aesthetic phenomenon' in *The Birth of Tragedy*[51]

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48) Ellmann, *IY*, p. 92.

49) *Ideas of Good and Evil* (Russell and Russell, New York, 1903, reiss. 1967; hereafter referred to as *IBGE)*, p. 201.

50) *Letters*, p. 204.

51) *BT* (5, 24).

and the likely source of Yeats's interest in the Dionysian and Apollinian myths. (Nietzsche's German word *Apollinisch* is often rendered as 'Apoll*o*nian' in English, but it is preferable to follow commentators like Kaufmann and Morgan in their use of the more correct 'Apoll*i*nian,' since the terms are employed in their Nietzschean sense.) Nietzsche tells us that 'man's vast Dionysian impulse . . . devours his entire world of phenomena, in order to let us sense beyond it, and through its destruction, the highest artistic primal joy, in the bosom of the primordially One.'[52] 'The Magi,' a 1914 poem, is an early instance of Yeats's equating Dionysus-worship with Christianity as like impulses, an allignment so integral to his 1927 play, *The Resurrection*. The poem's 'pale unsatisfied ones' hope

> to find once more,
> Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
> The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.[53]

Kindled in fair measure by the writings of Schopenhauer (himself much admired by Yeats), *The Birth of Tragedy* is Nietzsche's most eloquent statement on his view of the two conflicting tendencies which do battle within the human psyche - man's Apollinian impulse toward illusion and artifice which produces myth, and the Dionysian impulse to see life as tragic, in the way the Greeks did, so gaining a deeper, more comprehensive view of the

52) *BT* (22), p. 132.

53) *CP*, p. 141.

world:

> Through Apollo and Dionysus, the two art deities of the Greeks, we come to recognise that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition in the origin and aims, between the Apollinian art of sculpture, and the non-imagist, Dionysian art of music . . . they continually incite each other to new and more powerful births, which perpetuate an antagonism . . .[54]

This is Yeats's 'consciousness as conflict' given nurture (if not birth), and the precipitation of his turning to an Apollinian 'impulse to create form, to carry the realisation of beauty as far as possible.'[55] This, though, is not to deny his exultant Dionysian joy in destruction and throbbing natural rhythms, joy in harshness and danger: 'Live dangerously,' Nietzsche exhorts in *The Gay Science*, 'Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius.'[56] Life's inherent will to power is never satisfied unless it has opponents and obstacles. 'The "happy man:" a herd ideal;' 'one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.'[57] And, as Donoghue sums it up, Yeats's imagination revels in combat, cultivates force at the risk of aggression and power at the risk of violence, lest death come at the hands of sloth and satisfaction.[58]

Nietzsche does relentless justice to both of these conflicting tendencies. He presents Apollo as the embodiment of the

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54) *BT* (1), p. 33.

55) *Letters*, p. 402.

56) Tr. Walter Kaufmann: *The Gay Science* (Random House, New York, 1974; hereafter referred to as *GS)*, (283), p. 228.

57) *WP* (696), p. 370; *TSZ*, Prologue (5), p. 11.

58) Donoghue, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

'joyous necessity of the dream experience,' the god of light, 'ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy,' adding that

> in one sense, we might apply to Apollo the words of Schopenhauer when he speaks of the man wrapped in the veil of *māyā* (*Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, I, p. 416): " . . . in the midst of a world of torments the human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*."[59]

(It is well to note Nietzsche's inclusion of the phrase 'in one sense' - the danger and confusion of terminology is often to be found in the very fact that terms can be employed in different senses, which is certainly true of both Nietzsche and Yeats.) So 'we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*'[60] among his other titles.

It is, however, through the Dionysian destruction of selfhood that man celebrates 'union between man and man,' and nature 'celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.'[61] Apollo sculpts the self, Dionysus wreaks its destruction, redeeming man from the ego and making everything subjective vanish 'into complete self-forgetfulness.'[62] Nietzsche ultimately prefers this form of escape from the 'world of appearances' to that of the Apollinian, championing 'the glowing life of the Dionysian revellers,' even as exemplified in the German Middle Ages.[63] As we shall see in our chapter on tragedy, the two

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59) *BT* (1), pp. 35-6.

60) *BT* (1), p. 36.

61) *BT* (1), p. 37.

62) *BT* (1), p. 36.

63) *BT* (1), p. 36.

worlds of Apollinian 'dream' and Dionysian 'intoxication' are coupled; Attic tragedy mingles the dark Dionysian wisdom of choric song with the beautiful artifice of the Apollinian fantasy plot.

This central thesis of opposing polar conditions was adapted and modified by Yeats in much of his work, harnessed to Nietzsche's views on subjectivity and objectivity, as evidenced in plays like *The Player Queen*, *Calvary* and the Cuchulain cycle.

Nietzsche channelled Yeats towards the idiom of warfare, and we find the poet using brutal words of arrogance and power in a sense beyond 'good and evil.' Much of their imagery and symbolism is very similar and both impart an apocalyptic atmosphere to a great deal of their work, Yeats presenting images of destruction such as his 'Savage God' and 'rough beast,' Nietzsche recognising the potential beast in beauty, the perverse dimensions beauty can assume for the pure aesthetic beholder. In this, and much else, Nietzsche has a far more penetrating realisation of the ramifications of his aesthetics - yet, in spite of the fact that he thinks himself unsuited to the role of fighter and his intrinsic nature too gentle for the world, he strives to revel in combat since conflict and the will to power lie at the very core of life. Beneath the varnish of civilisation there always lurks the remorseless threat of annihilation, since we base civilisation on the *suppression* of dark instincts rather than on their *utilisation*. In Yeats we

call to mind the apocalyptic dimensions of poems like 'Meru,' where

> Civilisation is hooped together, brought
> Under rule, under semblance of peace
> By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
> And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
> Ravening through century after century,
> Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come
> Into the desolation of reality:
> Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye Rome![64]

'Man's life is thought:' a paradoxical line in that thought yields the 'desolation of reality' and reveals the precarious falsity of man's imposed civilisation, yet it requires thought to refute the validity of reason and all that is not instinctual. Fourteen years before this 1935 line, 'Michael Robartes and the Dancer' had presented thought as a half-dead dragon which prevents the woman in the poem from surrendering herself to erotic abandon, joyous beyond the realm of rational deliberation. It is a decidedly Nietzschean attack on Socratic *ratio* - to be explored further in our chapter IV. As Yeats wonders in his 'Prayer for Old Age,' won't 'life' and 'mind' one day be fused in that 'lasting song' beyond men thinking 'in the mind alone,' but rather in 'a marrow-bone?'[65] Not that this idea was invented by Friedrich Nietzsche,[66] but his Zarathustra certainly is among the most enthusiastic proponents of the marriage between thought and dance as found in the 'complete' man. He has much

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64) *CP*, p. 333.

65) *CP*, p. 326.

66) This doctrine as an ancient Greek impulse is well presented by, for example, E.R. Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), giving Nietzsche and Blake 'the same roots.'

to say, too, about dancers who wear their dance like a mask of innocence; how indeed, as Yeats asks, 'can we know the dancer from the dance?'[67] Nietzsche's demand for the 'automatism of instinct' (or the oneness of dance and dancer) produces this pensive note in the margin of Common's 'Choice Selections:' 'Were bodily functions like that of the pulse once conscious?' Nietzsche wonders whether consciousness is not the primitive beginning and unconsciousness the end, rather than the other way round as argued by Hegel, since conscious actions have over the millennia become automatic and instinctive. Hegelians grant ultimate sovereignty to thought, Nietzscheans place the crown on the god of wine, whose revels merge the self and Yeats's anti-self with the universal dance that actually becomes the dancers in their Bacchic oblivion of individuality.[68]

These attitudes to thought, aesthetics, and art are intricately woven into the texture of works like *At the Hawk's Well*, *A Full Moon in March*, *The Herne's Egg*, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, *The Player Queen*, and *The Resurrection* - not forgetting their systematisation in *A Vision*.

There is little doubt that Yeats's formulation of the hero was triggered, and for ever coloured, by his reading of Nietzsche, as his jottings in his copy of Common suggest. Here we see him underlining Nietzsche's contention in his passage on the 'highest caste' that 'It is only the most intelligent men who have licence to beauty and to the beautiful; it is only in them that goodness

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67) 'Among School Children,' *CP*, p. 245.

68) *Cf.* *BT* (1), p. 36.

is not weakness,'[69] Yeats adding a comment on Nietzsche's 'rulers' being 'living, or wholly free, wholly self moving' individualists. It is a property of the Nietzschean 'great man' which figures prominently among the attributes of the Yeatsian hero, whose sense of life is also dynamic and theatrical, surging with power and strength of will. Indeed, Donoghue would venture that "the definition of Yeats's mind in theatrical terms was achieved mainly under Nietzsche's auspices."[70] The hero in Yeats's plays views life as distinguished by imperious moments, by action and gesture. He also believes that life is hierarchical - and one of Nietzsche's cardinal philosophies is his concept of *Rangordnung*, or 'gradation of rank,' as something germane to all levels of existence. Reading Nietzsche's remarks on 'The Natural System of Ranks and Castes' in Common's translation, Yeats is stimulated to write in the margin beside the section on the 'second caste' with its 'bold warriors:' 'soldiers they obey life;' and beside that on the 'mediocre' who engage in 'business activity:' 'business, the unfree, they serve things, not life.'[71] And in both Nietzsche and Yeats the hero is the man who celebrates *life*, the 'complete' man, a Dionysian man of action whose Apollinian *contemplatio* lends him access to 'higher truth,'[72] there being no such thing as 'absolute' truth, since truth - like all things - is subject to the principle of *Rangordnung*. Nietzsche uses Homer to illustrate

69) *NACPPP*, p. 134.

70) Donoghue, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

71) *NACPPP*, p. 132.

72) *BT* (1), p. 36. For the doctrine of *Rangordnung*, *cf*. especially *WP* (854-86), pp. 457-73.

how the Apollinian artist will visualise the world, and Yeats systematically begins alluding to Homer in his poetry soon after reading the German, eventually making him his own ultimate model as a subjective artist: 'Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.'[73]

So Nietzsche courses vibrantly through the veins of the Yeatsian hero. Seanchan's words just before his death in *The King's Threshold* are gospel Nietzsche, conveying that commingled presence of joy, triumph and ecstatic laughter in the face of death, a gesture so well evoked in poems like 'The Gyres' and 'Lapis Lazuli.'

Keeping to the Apollinian and Dionysian as conflicting subjective and objective elements of the self, we see Yeats moulding his hero as the type of pure subjectivity, or 'self-exaggeration' as he calls it in *A Vision*. His hero is defined by 'the greatest belief in all values created by the personality;' his study should be 'subjective philosophy,' but he is 'fragmentary and violent;' he also has elements of reckless folly and of impassioned opposition.[74] It is Nietzsche whom Yeats offers as the type of the hero in his system , as when phase eleven of 'The Phases of the Moon' passes and

> Athene takes Achilles by the hair,
> Hector is in the dust, Nietzsche is born,
> Because the hero's crescent is the twelfth.[75]

73) 'Vacillation,' VIII, *CP*, p. 286.

74) *Cf. Vision*, p. 127.

75) *CP*, p. 185.

In a passage from *A Vision* - as if in a sentence from *Der Selbstüberwindung* ('Of Self-Overcoming') in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*[76] - Yeats talks of

> the hero, of the man who overcomes himself, and so no longer needs . . . the submission of others, or . . . conviction of others to prove his victory.[77]

Congal in *The Herne's Egg* is as reckless a rebel as the hero of the Cuchulain plays, and just as lavishly imbued with subjective qualities, with the Nietzschean hero and superhero sentiments reverberating further through *At the Hawk's Well, Calvary, The Death of Cuchulain, The King's Threshold, On Baile's Strand,* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer* - the plays earmarked for discussion in chapter V.

Yeats also draws heavily on Nietzsche's concept of the 'mask.' Ellmann writes of the Nietzschean superman wearing "a mask he has designed for himself, while 'the objective man,' whom he (and Yeats after him) describes as a 'mirror,' creeps into a 'God's mask.' In the one case personality is asserted, in the other, rejected."[78] The mask lends distance to the hero from the mob, for whom his open-faced honesty would be too dangerous; the mob is protected from too much reality, the hero from debasement. Other Nietzschean passages, Ellmann continues, present the mask as a weapon in an internal war, with the heroic mind imposing the mask and the heroic heart

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76) *TSZ* (34), pp. 122 ff. Common gives the section the title 'Self-Surpassing.'
77) *Vision*, p. 127. 78) Ellmann ; *IY*, p. 93.

rejecting it. But most often the mask is an image of himself which the heroic man sets up as his goal and then proceeds to become.

In Nietzsche and Yeats the individual creates his own world. The former delcares that what we know as reality is merely an interpretation of the world through the senses, a group of symbols akin to Yeats's 'phantasmagoria.' So-called objective philosophies are nothing more than symbolic expressions of the philosopher's own needs and desires. Similarly, even Nietzsche's supremely aesthetic *Übermensch* is but a means to endure 'abysmal truth,' and to overcome 'nausea' and nihilism. As many commentators emphasise, the superman is something far closer to Castiglione's *Cortegiano* than to a Dublin Blueshirt - though Yeats does admire both. Nietzsche warns that 'to you the Superman would be *frightful* in his goodness,' and suspects we 'would call my Superman - a devil!'[79] Frightful or not, the *Übermensch* certainly exudes the qualities of golden laughter and song, and few poets of this century have made the soul soar with song in the face of agony as exultantly as has Yeats in urging that 'Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing.'[80]

As a comforting, feminine antidote to the harsh masculinity of his *Weltanschauung* (which, though he had to force himself to revel in it, was ironically itself perhaps a reaction to his feminine psyche), Nietzsche develops his theory of joyous recurrence, of the *ewige Wiederkehr* of all things.[81] In this he proves most helpful to the Yeats of *A Vision,* and provides him

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79) *TSZ* (43), pp. 158,9. 80) 'Sailing to Byzantium,' *CP*, p. 217.

81) As suggested by Bentley, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

with a degree of joy in eternal return not known to other forms of the ancient cyclical theory of history. The 'Lapis Lazuli' Chinamen atop their mountain stare upon the 'tragic scene' of life with eyes that are 'glittering' and 'gay.'[82] As Zarathustra declares: 'He who climeth on the highest mountains, laugheth at all tragic plays and tragic realities.'[83] *Ewige Wiederkehr* is 'the marriage-ring of rings . . .'[84]

Opposites, says Nietzsche, occur everywhere and, as Greek philosophy recognised, this is true also of history, where successive cycles tend to display opposite characteristics. These follow Nietzsche's objective and subjective principles, with Babylon, for example, as an objective culture and heroic Greece as a subjective one. And this alternation of objective and subjective cycles we encounter forcefully in plays like *The Cat and the Moon*, *The Death of Cuchulain*, *The Player Queen*, *Purgatory*, and *The Resurrection*,[85] as well as in *A Vision* and poems such as 'The Second Coming.' Chapter VI examines these elements of cyclical history in detail.

These, then, are the spheres in which Yeats's thinking most corresponds with Nietzsche's. Familiarised with these points of kinship by our preceding remarks, let us now turn to a more detailed and penetrating account of them in the chapters ahead.

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82) *CP*, p. 339.

83) *TSZ* (7), p. 40.

84) *TSZ* (60), pp. 257ff.

85) Play references in chapters II and III below are to *Collected Plays* (Macmillan, London, 2nd 1952, rep. 1965; hereafter referred to as *CPl*); in chapters IV, V, and VI references are to the New York 2nd edition.

II

CONFLICT, WILL, POWER

> All events, all motion, all becoming -
> a determination of degrees and relations
> of force - a *struggle* . . .
>
> - Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

> I saw the world as a conflict . . .
>
> - Yeats, *A Vision*

Conflict

'The total character of the world is in all eternity chaos,' Nietzsche announces in *The Gay Science*.[1] In *A Vision* Yeats complains of Shelley that he 'lacked the Vision of Evil, could not conceive of *the world as a continual conflict*, so, though great poet he certainly was, he was not of the greatest kind.'[2] And in one of the last letters to come from his pen, he tells Ethel Mannin,

> To me all things are made up of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other's life, live each other's death.[3]

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1) *GS* (109), p. 168. 2) *Vision*, p. 144. Italics mine.

3) *Letters*, p. 918. Postmark 20 October, 1938, from Riversdale.

He is speaking here of *The Death of Cuchulain,* but the doctrine already appears explicitly in *The Resurrection* of 1931: 'God and man die each other's life, live each other's death.'[4] His Introduction to the play elaborates:

> There was everywhere a conflict like that of my play between two principles or "elemental forms of the mind," each "living the other's life, dying the other's death" . . . everywhere that antinomy of the One and the Many that Plato thought in his *Parmenides* insoluble, though Blake thought it soluble "at the bottom of the graves."[5]

For Nietzsche, all existence is characterised by *Gegensätze* - 'antitheses.' *The Will to Power* lists the properties which constitute the world as 'change, becoming, multiplicity, opposition, contradiction, war.'[6] Even the smallest organism is a multiplicity of wills to power in mutual strife; '"Life" would be defined as an enduring form of processes of the establishment of force, in which the contenders grow unequally.'[7] Even the relationship between command and obedience is an essentially hostile, conflicting one:

> there is in commanding an admission that the absolute power of the opponent has not been vanquished, incorporated, disintegrated. "Obedience" and "commanding" are forms of struggle.[8]

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4) *CP*, p. 594.

5) *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, Russell K. Alspach and Catherine C. Alspach, edd., (Macmillan, New York, 1966), p. 934. Hereafter referred to as *VPl.*

6) *WP* (584), p. 315.

7) *WP* (642), p. 342.

8) *WP* (642), p. 342.

There is a high pitch of tension between what he calls 'Master Morality' and 'Slave Morality,'[9] and also Damoclean tension within Master Morality oligarchies themselves which fosters achievement. While Slave Morality derives a sense of safety from organised groups,

> the instinct of the born "masters" (that is, the solitary, beast-of-prey species of man) is fundamentally irritated and disquieted by organisation. The whole of history teaches that every oligarchy conceals the lust for *tyranny* . . . constantly trembles with the tension each member feels in maintaining control over this lust.[10]

Any organism is a kind of social hierarchy in perpetual tension.

The principle of antagonistic opposites is central to Nietzsche's entire *Weltanschauung*, a principle much stressed by Heraclitus (who also found an enthusiastic follower in Yeats, and whom Eric Bentley calls "the pre-Socratic great-grandfather of Heroic Vitalism"), and by Schopenhauer, both of whom were read in depth by Nietzsche and Yeats. In Book I of *A Vision* Yeats quotes Heraclitus as naming Discord or War 'God of all and Father of all.'[11] He mentions, too, that, his mind full of Blake from boyhood up, he 'saw the world as a conflict.'[12] And since he felt that Nietzsche completed Blake,[13] Yeats unquestionably found in the German added authority for his beliefs.

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9) *Cf.* in particular *BGE* (260).

10) *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale: *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo* (Vintage Books, New York, 1969), Third Essay (18), p. 136. Hereafter referred to as *GM* and *EH*.

11) *Vision*, p. 67. 12) *Vision*, p. 72. 13) As in *Letters*, p.379.

After reading Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea,* Nietzsche wrote that 'the full celestial eye of art gazed at me; here I saw illness and recovery, banishment and refuge, hell and heaven.' "Between these polar opposites Nietzsche oscillated for the rest of his life."[14] This conflict within himself led Nietzsche - as we shall elucidate later - to develop his theory of the tragic divided self, and to formulate the comforting and compensatory doctrine of eternal recurrence. The loss of his father in early childhood meant a life-long search for a father-substitute; Yeats, too, had Oedipal troubles with his father.[15] Nietzsche loved his mother and his sister, Elisabeth, excessively, and so found himself drawn in conflicting directions, "towards," in the words of Eric Bentley, "an heroic paternal ideal and towards a loving and maternal ideal."[16]

Nietzsche relentlessly pursues the theory of dynamic conflict into all its endless ramifications, from the organism to the self to moralities to war. The world is 'a monster of energy, . . . a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back . . .'[17] Chaos, he writes, is necessary to offset the tendency toward stagnation. Mental conflict, for example, is a form of inner turbulence essential to growth:

> One is *fruitful* only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains *young* only on condition the soul does not relax, does

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14) Bentley, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
15) *Cf.*, *inter alia,* his comments on 'arguments with my father,' *Vision,* p. 12.
16) Bentley, *ibid.*, p. 70.
17) *WP* (1067), p. 550. This principle of the world as something wholly in flux was of course well known to antiquity: witness παντα ρει.

> not long for peace. . . . Nothing has grown more alien to us than that desideratum of former times, "peace of soul, " the *Christian* desideratum . . .[18]

Tension is the condition of human advancement.

In his esoteric system of the human psyche in *A Vision* (as earlier - 1917 - in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae),* Yeats speaks of the various 'Discords, Oppositions and Contrasts' which cause the being to become 'conscious of itself as a separate being' as they vie for predominance. Consciousness entails conflict. 'Without this continual Discord, . . . there would be no conscience, no activity.'[19] Speaking of Synge, he writes:

> I think that all noble things are the result of warfare; great nations and classes, of warfare in the visible world, great poetry and philosophy, of invisible warfare, the division of a mind within itself, a victory, the sacrifice of man to himself. I am certain that my friend's noble art, so full of passion and heroic beauty, is the victory of a man who in poverty and sickness created from the delight of expression.[20]

The Birth of Tragedy points out that procreation itself depends on the duality of the sexes and their attendant perpetual strife. Yeats echoes this with Blake's contention that 'sexual love is founded upon spiritual hate' in a 1929 letter to Olivia Shakespeare,[21] as he does long before this in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae,*

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18) *TI,* 'Morality as Anti-Nature'(3), p.44. 19) *Vision,* pp. 93, 4.
20) 'J.M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time,' *E&I,* p. 321.
21) *Letters,* p. 758. Dd 2 March 1929, from Rapallo.

citing it as an image of the warfare of man and his 'Daimon' or 'Anti-Self.'[22] This Nietzschean view of procreation and 'the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations,'[23] is bellowed by the Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand:*

> I have never known love but as a kiss
> In the mid-battle, and a difficult truce
> Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
> Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun
> And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed moon -
> A brief forgiveness between opposites
> That have been hatreds for three times the age
> Of this long-'stablished ground.[24]

Helen Hennessy Vendler[25] finds the Blakean maxim also in the second curse of which the Old Man speaks in *At the Hawk's Well:*

> That curse may be
> Never to win a woman's love and keep it,
> Or always to mix hatred in the love . . .[26]

In 'Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the Dancers' we are told that 'Love is like the lion's tooth,'[27] and in *A Vision* that all sexual passions contain 'cruelty and deceit.'[28] Of himself Yeats writes, 'My outer nature was passive . . . but I know my spiritual nature was passionate, even violent.'[29]

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22) 'Anima Hominis,' *Mythologies* (Macmillan, London, 1959, rep. 1962), p. 336; hereafter referred to as *Myth.* In *BT* (14), Nietzsche speaks also of the *'daimonion* of Socrates,' p. 88. *Cf.* further chapter V below.

23) *BT* (1), p. 33. 24) *CPl*, p. 259. 25) *Op. cit.*, p. 210.

26) *CPl*, p. 215. 27) *CP*, p. 295. 28) *Vision*, p. 237.

29) *Memoirs*, Denis Donoghue, ed. (Macmillan, London, 1972), p. 124.

War, Nietzsche asserts, rejuvenates and energises, and this is one ground for the justification of violent strife between peoples. Yeats also sometimes lauds war for its hardening of muscle, though usually attaching to it some other, loftier vindication: in 'Three Songs to the Same Tune,' grandfather sings that 'a good strong cause and blows are delight.'[30]

Part II of *Human, All-too-Human* contends that a tame, stable society is less likely to kindle the spark of genius than one in which conflict and strong passions are rife. The total character of the universe is one of chaos, and existence derives what Nietzsche calls its 'enigmatic character' from its flux of perspectives. The endless riddles and dangers of life, her seductive sphinx-like nature, are what make him love life most.

The development of moral values is another form of strife, a succession of antithetical ideals. Once an 'evil' principle establishes itself, it becomes the 'good,' much as in the Hegelian doctrine of the rising negative becoming the positive when it has reached the apex of its ascendancy. But once the new good is established, strife continues, because in the transition from one ideal to the next, the older is both destroyed by an outside force and brings about its own destruction by an act of self-transcendence, the inevitable consequence of its previous victory. 'Every generation is against its predecessor' is Yeats's phrasing of Nietzsche's doctrine

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30) *CP*, p. 321.

in *On the Boiler*, soon to quote the German's 'transvaluation of all values' directly.[31]

Nietzsche's dialectical evolution of values requires the 'evil' man as innovator. Life demands both friendliness and hostility:

> For every strong and natural species of man, love and hate, gratitude and revenge, good nature and anger, affirmative acts and negative acts, belong together. One is good on condition one knows how to be evil; one is evil because otherwise one would not understand how to be good.[32]

For everyone to become

> "good human beings," herd animals, blue-eyed, benevolent, "beautiful souls" - or as Mr Herbert Spencer would have it, altruistic - would deprive existence of its *great* character and would castrate men and reduce them to the level of desiccated Chinese stagnation.[33]

Nietzsche despises modern Christianity for just this reason, and sees a tendency to relax the tension between pagan and Christian values by turning Christianity into a comfortable religion for the flock. The Jesuits and the democratic movement made such attempts. It was this tension between Christian and pagan moralities which kept Europe alive, creating a 'splendid tension of spirit.' As George Allen Morgan points out, Nietzsche sees no evidence for the existence

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31) *Boiler*, pp. 15, 25. *Cf.* chapter VI below for historical eras as superseding opposites engendering an antithetical impulse at their mid-points.

32) *WP* (351), p. 191. *Cf.* chapter V below for these as attributes of the hero.

33) *EH*, 'Why I Am a Destiny' (4), p. 330.

of the Christian God, since all experience is evidence against it, because all happening is neither kind, nor intelligent, nor true. Psychological and historical explanations provide an effective refutation: God is the projected wish-fulfilment of human needs baffled by the real world.[34] Yeats, a maverick Irish Protestant with a 'wicked theology' of his own,[35] concurs with many of these views on Christianity, incorporating it as an 'inferior' or 'objective' phenomenon in his system.

Nietzsche, for all his condemnation of Christianity, does acknowledge indebtedness to the Christian heritage for having sharpened and deepened the soul and mind, especially in terms of psychological insight and moral scepticism. Christianity realised that evil can have value, gave suffering a meaning, and spiritualised cruelty. "The ascetic ideal," in Morgan's paraphrase, "made man evil and profound, therefore more interesting; modern science is the fruit of its austere will to truth at any price."[36] This is the essence of the nihilism whose history Nietzsche recounts in *The Will to Power;* science's absolute honesty leads to absolute nihilism, and that to the hope that in time the pure life will reassert itself.

While we appear unable to shake off our need for the static and the permanent in this world of change, Nietzsche would

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34) *Cf.* George Allen Morgan: *What Nietzsche Means* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1943), p. 37.

35) *Cf.,* for example Yeats's letter of 3 May 1936 to Dorothy Wellesley: 'I am a member of the Church of England but not a Christian.'

36) Morgan, *ibid.,* p. 349.

claim to see beyond this to a larger world of flux, strife, and perspectivity - without claiming his own knowledge to be absolute. Even the desire to know the truth about existence is in conflict with the desire to be deluded and so to survive. This conflict appears in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the antagonism of Socrates and Greek tragedy, of science and art.[37] And Yeats surely inlcudes Nietzsche among those mysterious 'instructors' when he writes in *A Vision*,

> 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. Logical and emotional conflict alike lead towards a reality which is concrete, sensuous, bodily.[38]

In his *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche maintains that we with our divided psyche 'yearn immeasurably to become whole;'[39] in *On the Genealogy of Morals* he describes the concepts 'subject' and 'object' as 'errors, nothing but errors!'[40] being mere remnants of language's 'subject,' 'object,' and 'predicate' which remain inherent in logical thought processes.

Nietzsche regards the trim uniformities described by science as only local and temporary when seen against the total chaos and flux of the universe. Nature's so-called 'fixed laws' are changing and will perish. The eternal, invincible, exact Natural Law of the nineteenth century scientist is but another shadow of God, a desire for stability.

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37) *Cf.* especially sections 14 to 24, and 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism.'
38) *Vision*, p. 214. *Cf.* chapter IV below for Nietzsche's critique of reason.
39) Tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 41. 40) *GM*, Third Essay (12), p. 118.

A protracted conflict comes to interpret itself as something enduring and the environment thus also as consisting of enduring phenomena. Nietzsche has a vivid sense of the multiplicity of existence, and of the varied interpretations one might apply to it. So we find him quick to stress that no scheme can contain all possible alternatives, that schematisation tends to falsify the ever-changing nature of living processes: 'I am not narrow enough for a system - and not even for *my* system . . .'[41]

But apart from the multiplicity of the universe, there is - as we have hinted before - the multiplicity of the human self. Nietzsche believes that the unconscious urges at the heart of human nature are terrible and revolting to current moral standards. Man has 'the most savage natural instincts . . . that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always seemed to me to be the real "witches' brew."'[42] An August 1936 letter from Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley reads,

> All depends on the . . . stirring of the beast underneath . . . The moon, the moonless night, the dark velvet, the sensual silence, the silent moon and the violent bright Furies. Without this conflict we have no passion, only sentiment and thought.[43]

He has come a long way since his 1902 pencilled question in

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41) *Nachgelassene Werke, Grossoktavausgabe* (2nd ed., 19 vols, 1901-13), XIV, p. 354; hereafter referred to as *GOA*. Tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

42) *BT* (2), p. 39.

43) *Letters on Poetry from William Butler Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (Oxford University Press, London, 1940), pp. 94,5. Dd 5 August 1936.

Common's 'Choice Selections' which asks

> But why does Nietzsche think that the night has no stars, nothing but bats and owls and the insane moon?[44]

Yeats certainly does depict man as having fearful qualities lurking beneath the whitewash of civilisation, as in *The Player Queen* where the Big Countryman's quota of 'primordial soup' boils over the checking brim of religion when he turns to the Bible for sanction to murder: 'The Bible says, Suffer not a witch to live. Last Candlemas twelvemonth I strangled a witch with my own hands.'[45] In *The Birth of Tragedy* this beast in the man is symbolised by the bearded satyr, the Greek choric representative of the natural Dionysian man.[46] In a way that prefigures Freud, Nietzsche maintains that the loftiest things in human culture - religion, philosophy, art - are sublimations of such passions as cruelty and lust. We find a remarkable echo of this in Yeats when he writes in another 1936 letter to Dorothy Wellesley that 'my poetry all comes from rage or lust.'[47] And thus spoke Zarathustra:

> *Voluptuousness, passion for power,* and *selfishness:* these three things have hitherto been best cursed, and have been in worst and falsest repute - these three things will I weigh humanly well.[48]

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44) *NACPPP*, p. 124.

45) *CPl*, p. 393.

46) *BT*, as in (2) and (7), pp. 39, 58.

47) *Letters*, p. 871. Dd 4 Dec.

48) *TSZ* (54:2), p. 208.

Lust is the bridge between present and future, thirst for power incites the lofty from self-sufficient solitude to exercise power over the lowly, and selfishness distinguishes what is good from what is worthless, promoting self-rejoicing.[49]

Nietzsche sees Hamlet as a thoroughly Dionysian man. The Prince of Denmark has

> looked truly into the essence of things . . . knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion: that is the doctrine of Hamlet . . . man now sees everywhere the horror or absurdity of existence . . . Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the discharge of the nausea of absurdity.[50]

It is in this way that

> the profound Hellene, uniquely susceptible to the tenderest and deepest suffering, comforts himself, having looked boldly right into the terrible destructiveness of so-called world history as well as the cruelty of nature, and being in danger of longing for a Buddhistic negation of the will.[51]

Yeats feels that we can only see truth amid spiritual terror or when everything that holds life together begins to disintegrate.

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49) *TSZ* (54), pp. 207-12.

50) *BT* (7), p. 60.

51) *BT* (7), p. 59.

Nietzsche is deeply intrigued by the existence of the inner antagonism of the 'profound Hellene,' wondering

> why precisely Greek Apollinianism had to grow out of a Dionysian subsoil . . . The immoderate, disorderly Asiatic lies at his roots: the bravery of the Greek consists in his struggle with his Asiaticism; beauty is not given to him, as little as is logic or the naturalness of customs - it is conquered, willed, won by struggle - it is his *victory* . . .[52]

The Greek

> was the first great union and synthesis of everything Near Eastern, and on that account the *inception* of the European soul.[53]

Nietzsche is of the opinion that the Greeks developed all their institutions

> out of protective measures designed for mutual security against the *explosive material* within them. The tremendous internal tension then discharged itself in fearful and ruthless external hostility.[54]

The ἀγον, or contest, created a high pitch of endeavour and provided rivals who could check the individual's impulse toward tyranny.

On the Genealogy of Morals stresses the conflict between man's natural instincts and his 'bad conscience,' produced

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52) *WP* (1050), pp. 539-40. 53) *WP* (1051), p. 542.

54) *TI*, 'What I Owe to the Ancients' (3), p. 107.

> when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and peace. The situation that faced sea animals when they were compelled to become land animals or perish was the same as that which faced these semi-animals . . . they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications.
>
> All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward* - this is what I call the *internalisation (Verinnerlichung)* of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul" . . . Hostility, cruelty, joy in destruction - all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: *that* is the origin of the "bad conscience" . . . thus began the gravest and uncanniest illness, from which humanity has not yet recovered, man's suffering of man, of himself - the result of a forcible sundering from his animal past . . .[55]

Yeats, too, sees man in conflict not only with himself[56] but also with the external world, the 'Body of Fate' of *A Vision*. Peter Ure speaks of the well in *At the Hawk's Well* as "the one precious and mysterious gift that will release Cuchulain from the bitter entanglements of the heroic fate, from the divided and thwarted life of the hero of *On Baile's Strand*."[57] Wilson sees the well as "any ambition inimical to human happiness, any unattainable goal, spiritual or sexual."[58] Though the well means much more besides, let us on this occasion take our cue from *A Vision* and its statement that

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55) *GM*, Second Essay (16), pp. 84,5.

56) *Cf.* further chapter V below, pp. 167-82.

57) Peter Ure: *Yeats the Playwright* (Routlege and Kegan Paul, London, 1963, rep. 1969), p. 71.

58) Wilson: *YI*, p. 59.

> Life is an endeavour, made vain by the four sails of its mills, to come to a double contemplation, that of the chosen Image, that of the fate Image.[59]

This reverberates in the opening lyrics of *The Only Jealousy of Emer,* which find man bound to the 'Wheel of Life:' much as he longs for the perpetuation of the perfect moment, it is 'A fragile, exquisite, pale shell' beside the 'centuries spent. . ./ In toils of measurement/ Beyond eagle or mole.'[60] It is like the moment of 'Unity of Being' which 'The Phases of the Moon' finds 'Too lonely for the traffic of the world.'[61]

For Nietzsche and Yeats, conflict lies at the very heart of existence, making life inherently tragic.

Will and Power

Another cardinal tenet that surges through the philosophies of both men is the doctrine of conscious willing, the postulation and attainment of a desired goal - the very nature of the concept involving desire for some form of power. Nietzsche formulates it as 'will to power,' declaring: *'This world is the will to power - and nothing besides!'*[62]

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59) *Vision,* p. 94.
60) *CPl,* pp. 281,2.
61) *CP,* p. 185. Chapter IV below looks at Unity of Being in greater depth.
62) *WP* (1067), p. 550.

The idea for this all-embracing doctrine flashed upon him one day while he was serving as an ambulance man in Bismarck's 1870 war. Elisabeth Nietzsche recalls how, exhausted, her horror-fatigued brother suddenly heard the thunder of horses behind him and turned to see the awesome charge of fresh Prussian cavalry eager for combat. As Bentley relates, Nietzsche "felt for the first time that 'the strongest and highest will to life does not find expression in a miserable struggle for existence but in a will to war, a will to power, a will to overpower . . . What a good thing it is that Wotan lays a hard heart in the breasts of commanding generals, otherwise how could they bear the awful responsibility of sending thousands to death in order to raise their people and themselves to dominion.'"[63]

When Nietzsche views any organism as consisting of conflicting 'dynamic quanta,' he also feels that this conflict exists because 'Every desire is a kind of lust to rule,'[64] and this spells conflict: 'The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it.'[65] Man is no different, and his ego

> subdues and kills: it operates like an organic cell: it is a robber and violent. It wants to regenerate itself - pregnancy. It wants to give birth to its god, and see all mankind at his feet.[66]

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63) Bentley, *op. cit.*, pp. 79, 80.

64) *WP* (481), p. 267.

65) *WP* (656), p. 346.

66) *WP* (768), p. 403.

Yeats also recognises this power of the ego, and cites Nietzsche when describing Synge's ego, saying of his compatriot that 'He had that egotism of the man of genius which Nietzsche compares to the egotism of a woman with child.'[67] . In *A Vision* he speaks of man's 'Will' as his 'normal ego' which is shaped 'out of all the events of his present life, whether consciously or not.'[68]

Conscious willing is thus often the product of unconscious willing, and the purporting of motives is a very dubious pass-time. Sacrifice, for example, has hidden motives, and unegoistic action is impossible:

> the individual loves *something of himself*, a thought, a desire, a production, more than *anything else of himself*; . . . he therefore divides his nature and to one part sacrifices all the rest . . .[69]

To Nietzsche, 'No egoism at all exists that remains within itself and does not encroach - consequently . . . "allowable," "morally indifferent" egoism . . . does not exist.'[70] Nor is will merely desire, as 'Schopenhauer's superstition'[71] would have it:

> There is no such thing as "willing," but only a willing *something*: one must not remove the aim from the total

67) *Auto*, p. 511.

68) *Vision*, p. 83.

69) *Human, All-too-Human*, Part I (57), tr. Helen Zimmern, Vol. 6 of the Oscar Levy *Complete Works of Frierich Nietzsche* (18 vols, Macmillan, New York, 1909-11, reiss. Russell and Russell, New York, 1964).

70) *WP* (369), p. 199.

71) *BGE*, 'On the Prejudices of Philosophers' (14), p. 27.

> condition - as epistemologists do. "Willing" as they understand it is as little a reality as "thinking:" it is a pure fiction.[72]

Willing entails a strong element of self-command: 'A man who *wills* - commands something in himself which obeys, or which he believes obeys.'[73] We mould ourselves to a chosen image of ourselves through willing ourselves *to* be this or that - or, in the case of mankind, we should will ourselves *to* the condition of the *Übermensch*. For Yeats (who had also encountered strenghtening of the will as a teaching of 'The Order of the Golden Dawn,' a magical society), 'Personality, no matter how habitual, is a constantly renewed choice.'[74] His father insists in a 1910 letter that character is will-power in action, and personality is 'human nature when undergoing a passion for self-expression;'[75] in a 1904 letter to AE, two years after reading Common's compendium of Nietzsche, we find Yeats writing that

> We possess nothing but the will and we must never let the children of vague desires breathe upon it nor the waters of sentiment rust the terrible mirror of its blade.[76]

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72) *WP* (668), p. 353. *Cf.* also *WP* (480), p. 267: 'There exists neither "spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth . . .;' (488), p. 270: '. . . there is no such thing as will;' (490), p. 271: 'The only force that exists is of the same kind as that of the will: a commanding of other subjects, which thereupon change;' (685), p. 347: 'There is absolutely no other kind of causality than that of will upon will;' (671), p. 354: 'There is no such thing as "will" . . .'.

73) *BGE*, 'Prejudices of Philosophers' (19), pp. 30ff. 74) *Vision*, p. 84.

75) *JBYL*, pp. 124,5. 76) *Letters*, pp. 434-5.

A Vision classifies man 'according to the place of *Will*, or choice, in the diagram,'[77] will being man's *'Is'* and 'Mask' his *'Ought.'*[78] So in Nietzsche, man as he exists to-day should gird his will and become as he ought to be in the future, pursue the mask of the *Übermensch*. In 'Anima Hominis' Yeats presents the sentient man searching for his Daimon or anti-self in a process that entails will and dynamism: the saint and the sage *will* their successful victories over their historical cycles.[79]

Nietzsche adopts will to power as the most accurate name for the primal life-force:

> All "purposes," "aims," "meanings" are only modes of expression and metamorphoses of one will that is inherent in all events: the will to power . . . *Willing* in general, is the same thing as willing to be *stronger*, willing to grow - and, in addition, willing the means to this . . . valuation itself is only this will to power . . .[80]

Zarathustra describes life's 'secret' as 'that *which must ever surpass itself*;'[81] life sacrifices itself for greater power. Therefore, as Paul Tillich encapsulates it, "it is wrong to speak of 'will to existence' or even of 'will to life;' one must speak of 'will to power,' i.e. to more life."[82] History is a

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77) *Vision*, p. 73.

78) *Vision*, p. 73.

79) *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, *Myth*, pp. 336-40.

80) *WP* (675), p. 356.

81) *TSZ* (34), p. 125.

82) Paul Tillich: *The Courage to Be* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1952), p. 29.

harsh record of bloody struggles of the will to power - men, families, cities, empires, all wrestling for primacy and advancement of self. The entire cauldron of existence boils down to the fight for *power:* as the final words of *The Will to Power* ring out to the last - 'you yourselves are also this will to power - and nothing besides!'[83] Even grace and beauty depend on power and violence, as Yeats reminds us in the opening stanza of 'Meditations in Time of Civil War:'

> Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
> Called architect and artist in, that they,
> Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
> The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
> The gentleness none there had ever known . . .[84]

In the Introduction to *A Vision* Yeats writes, 'I put *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* into evidence to show that my poetry has gained in self-possession and power.'[85] When we look at these poems we find power clothed not in 'spiritual' raiments but in dynamic, violent ones, with 'Blood and the Moon' blessing the 'bloody, arrogant power' of men of action.[86] Cuchulain's heroism in *At the Hawk's Well* is a bellicose display of dominating, sexual aggression, and in *The Death of Cuchulain* the hero is the supremely self-possessed master of circumstance: 'I make the truth' thunders his Nietzschean assertion of valid individual values.[87]

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83) *WP* (1067), p. 550.

84) *CP*, p. 225.

85) *Vision*, p. 225.

86) *CP*, p. 267.

87) *CPl*, p. 689. *Cf*. chapter V below, p. 201.

This rampant side of Nietzsche's attitude to power is the one emphasised by Yeats, not his occasional *obiter dicta* on the power inherent in gentleness, such as his observations that he has found power in gentle, obliging men, and that

> the Germans imagine that *power* must reveal itself in harshness and cruelty; then they submit gladly and with admiration . . . That there is *power* in gentleness and quietness, they do not easily believe.[88]

This is merely the little Picasso flower painted into a scene of civil war horrors; and goes against the thrust of Nietzsche's general attitude as much as it does against Yeats's; not so the concept of antagonism and the strife of opposites which makes up the very marrow of their *Weltanschauung*.

So we find the German pointing to conflict as a condition inherent in the very structure of the organism, of the human psyche, of war between men, of the tensions between master and slave and their respective moralities and within aristocratic societies themselves, and of the dialectical evolution of values. He sees 'All events, all motion, all becoming, as a determination of degrees and relations of force, as a *struggle* -'[89] the dynamism of conflict which informs plays like *The Resurrection*.[90] Thus antithesis is germane to every form of existence.

Yeats's sense of universal conflict is well sketched by

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88) *GOA* XI, pp. 363f., tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

89) *WP* (552), p. 299.

90) *Cf. CPl*, pp. 579ff.

T.R. Henn in *The Lonely Tower,* where the poet is described as concerning himself with "the deliberate exploitation, the encouragement, of conflict; distinguishing between the internal conflict in himself of which the poetry is made, the external conflict with circumstance, the 'Body of Fate;' for only through these conflicts can man progress towards perfection of knowledge . . ."[91] In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* we read that progress in poetry depends, like all other progress, on conflict: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.'

So Yeats certainly does see 'the world as a conflict,' and even when he ventures uncomfortably into his 'other world' beyond this mundane one, he finds it to be not a placid retreat but a kinetic realm of violent dynamism. Martin Hearne in *The Unicorn from the Stars* describes his vision in the Nietzschean terminology of apocalypse and warfare: the music of Paradise, he says, 'is made up of the continual clashing of swords!' and

> Heaven is not what we have believed it to be. It is not quiet, it is not singing and making music, and all strife at an end. . . . That is the joy of Heaven, continual battle.[92]

And the transcendental world of 'Byzantium' is one of fury and turbulence where

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91) T.R. Henn: *The Lonely Tower* (Methuen, London, 2nd 1965), p. 37.

92) *Cf.* also the earlier version of the play, *Where There Is Nothing,* and chapters III and IV below, pp. 80-4 and 253.

blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor!
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea . . .[93]

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93) *CP*, p. 281.

III

T H E   T R A G I C   D I S P O S I T I O N

> There is only one hope and one guarantee for the future of what is human: it lies in this, *that the tragic disposition shall not perish* . . .
>
> \- Nietzsche, *Unitimely Meditations*

> We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy . . .
>
> \- Yeats, 1922 *Autobiography*

The seminal theory of tragedy which Nietzsche injected into the vapid womb of tragic criticism found its basic ingredients in the Apollinian and Dionysian impulses which the German philosopher had discovered in the ancient Greeks: we recall his words in *The Birth of Tragedy* that through Apollo and Dionysus

> we come to recognise that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in origin and aims, between the Apollinian art of sculpture, and the non-imagist, Dionysian art of music . . .[1]

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1) *BT* (1), p. 33.

Though usually in open conflict, these impulses do

> eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic "will," . . . appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling ultimately generate an equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art - Attic tragedy.[2]

Nietzsche invites us to 'conceive of them as the separate art worlds of *dreams* and *intoxication*.'[3] Apollo is 'the god of all plastic energies,' also 'the soothsaying god.' He is 'the "shining one," the deity of light,' and 'ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy,' the god of individuation, 'the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*.'[4] But he is also the embodiment of limitation: we must not forget 'that measured restraint, that freedom from wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god.'[5]

With Dionysus comes the collapse of individuality and restraint. Providing the basic religious impetus toward tragic utterance, the Dionysian finds expression in 'music,' 'dancing,' 'intoxication, 'self-forgetfulness;' and

> under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man. . . . Now the slave is a free man; now all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice,

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2) *BT* (1), p. 33.
3) *BT* (1), p. 33.
4) *BT* (1), p. 36.
5) *BT* (1), p. 35.

> or "impudent convention" have fixed between man and man are broken.[6]

Every man feels himself 'as one' with his nieghbour, while the ancient myth of the dismemberment of Dionysus by the Titans points to 'the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil . . .'[7] The Hellene was transported by the Dionysian, 'whose waves overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions.'[8] This is tragedy as Yeats's 'drowner of dykes . . .'[9]

Nietzsche asserts that there is no doubt as to the origins of tragedy:

> tradition tells us quite unequivocally *that tragedy arose from the tragic chorus* and was originally only chorus and nothing but chorus. Hence we consider it our duty to look into the heart of this tragic chorus as the real proto-drama.[10]

He considers the most important aspect of the chorus to be the fact that it was originally composed of satyrs with their 'Dionysian wisdom of tragedy,' a wisdom not cerebral like that of Apollo, but passionate and intuitive:

> The Greek man of culture felt himself nullified in the presence of the satyric chorus . . . the state and society, and, quite generally, the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature.[11]

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6) *BT* (1), p. 37.

7) *BT* (10), p. 74.

8) *BT* (2), p. 39.

9) 'The Tragic Theatre,' *E&I*, p. 245.

10) *BT* (7), p. 56.

11) *BT* (7), p. 59.

Or again in Yeats's words, 'tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man . . .'[12]

It is thus the Dionysian process which Nietzsche and Yeats ascribe to the supra-personal dimensions of tragedy, with the German embracing it as affording the spectator a

> surrender of individuality and a way of entering into another character . . . magic transformation is the presupposition of all dramatic art. In this magic transformation the Dionysian reveller sees himself as a satyr, and as a satyr, *in turn, he sees the god,* which means . . . he beholds another vision outside himself, as the Apollinian complement of his own state.[13]

This is the Yeatsian tragic hero transcending the self to communicate with the 'Anima Mundi,' the vaster world beyond the 'Anima Hominis' of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

But important though Dionysus is, it is the beauty of tragedy that it includes Apollo as well, and we have the condition of intoxicated ecstasy combining with dream-inspiration to provide the revelation of primordial Oneness in a *'symbolical dream image.'*[14]

Nietzsche describes the 'self-forgetfulness' that comes with tragedy as being brought about by the 'narcotic draught' provided by 'the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks;'[15] Dionysus is very much a god of wine who enables man to walk about

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12) 'The Tragic Theatre,' *E&I*, p. 241.

13) *BT* (8), p. 64.

14) *BT* (2), p. 28.

15) *BT* (1), p. 36.

> enchanted, in ecstasy . . .: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.[16]

Scientific knowledge and Socratic rationality should be put down in favour of 'wisdom that . . . turns with unmoved eyes to a comprehensive view of the world,'[17] though the myth of Oedipus does suggest that 'wisdom, and particularly Dionysian wisdom, is an unnatural abomination; that he who by means of his knowledge plunges nature into the abyss of destruction must also suffer the dissolution of nature in his own person.'[18] But with this knowledge the Hellenic poet is able to touch 'the sublime and terrible Memnon's Column of myth like a sunbeam, so that it suddenly begins to sound - in Sophoclean melodies.' Tragic wisdom comes only with Dionysian excess and drunkenness: *in vino veritas.*

Draughts of this Dionysian wisdom flow through Yeats's essay on 'The Subject Matter of Drama' in 'Discoveries:'

> All art is dream, and what the day is done with is dreaming-ripe, and what art has moulded religion accepts, and in the end all is in the wine-cup, all is in the drunken fantasy, and the grapes begin to stammer.[19]

This is Nietzsche's art world of dream flooded by his world of intoxication. Paul Ruttledge's torrential sermon in *Where There Is Nothing* rages with Dionysian wisdom, speaking of men as

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16) *BT* (1), p. 37.
17) *BT* (18), p. 112.
18) *BT* (9), p. 69.
19) *E&I*, p. 285.

originally having led their lives 'according to the impulse of their *hearts,*' full of the intuitive 'drunkenness of Eternity.'[20] In *The Player Queen* the cause of Septimus's drunken state might well have been Decima as a 'bad wife,'[21] but his consumption of wine does lead to illumination:

> I will tell you the great secret that came to me at the second mouthful of the bottle. Man is nothing till he is united to an image . . .[22]

The poet later warns his wife, 'Never trust a sober man,' and then goes on to prophesy the end of Christian era.[23] Such wisdom from wine is also laurelled in 'The Blessed:'

> I see the blessedest soul in the world
> And he nods a drunken head.
>
> 'O blessedness comes in the night and the day
> And whither the wise heart knows;
> And one has seen in the redness of wine
> The Incorruptible Rose,
>
> 'That drowsily drops faint leaves on him
> And the sweetness of desire . . .[24]

And so we find Nietzsche's Dionysian 'transformation' and Apollinian 'symbolical dream image' flowing strongly through Yeats's thoughts on tragedy, especially as formulated in 'The Tragic Theatre' where

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20) *Where There Is Nothing, Being Volume One of Plays for an Irish Theatre* (Macmillan, New York, 1903), p. 156. *Cf.* later in this chapter some further Dionysian qualities in the play, pp. 80-4 below.

21) *CPl*, p. 389.

22) *CPl*, p. 420.

23) *CPl*, p. 422.

24) *CP*, pp. 76-7.

> Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance.[25]

This 1910 essay resounds with the key-words of *The Birth of Tragedy:* 'passion,' 'ecstasy,' 'reverie,' 'flood,' 'disembodied.' We move in its theory of tragedy beyond the realm of the self-conscious ego into the timeless, transparent world of primordial being. Synge's Deidre is mentioned as experiencing 'a reverie of passion that mounts and mounts till grief itself has carried her beyond grief into pure contemplation.'[26] *Contemplatio* is the Apollinian quality which provides the satyr with his divine side, the 'other vision outside himself.'[27] To Nietzsche,

> the beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art, and . . . an important part of poetry also.[28]

Again we recall the Yeatsian echo, 'All art is dream . . .'[29]

The chief attribute of tragedy to both Nietzsche and Yeats is thus its promotion of 'self-forgetfulness' and 'transformation:' 'The individual shall be dedicated to something superpersonal - that is what tragedy demands,'[30] Nietzsche announces; 'A poet creates tragedy from his own soul, that which is alike in all men,'[31] comes the reverberation in Yeats, who sets up a firm distinction between 'character' and 'personality'

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25) *E&I*, p. 245.
26) *E&I*, p. 239.
27) *BT* (8), p. 64.
28) *BT* (1), p. 34.
29) 'The Subject Matter of Drama,' 'Discoveries,' *E&I*, p. 285.
30) *GOA* I, p. 523, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
31) *Auto*, p. 471.

along Nietzschean lines. A 1910 letter to his father reads,

> I look upon character and personality as different things or perhaps different forms of the same thing. Juliet has personality, her Nurse has character. I look upon personality as the individual form of our passions. . . . Character belongs I think to Comedy . . .[32]

This was written during the preparation of three lectures Yeats gave during March 1910 "to raise money for the Abbey Theatre."[33] In discussing these lectures, first published in 1975, Robert O'Driscoll comments that "with his father's philosophy carefully articulated in correspondence and conversation, with his own non-naturalistic theatrical experiments, and with the example of John Synge, in whom he could see the living embodiment of the philosophical principles he was discovering in Nietzsche, Yeats in the early twentieth century became preoccupied with understanding what is meant by *personality*."[34] The first lecture sees personality as the living essence that animates thought and action, an overflow of passionate energy from the depths of the soul. An actor, for example, follows his own instincts and loses all consciousness of character, becoming a medium through which the emotion that is embodied in words or in moments of passion can pass. In the second lecture[35] we can discern a Nietzschean point of view which suggests the dissolution of individuality:

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32) *Letters*, p. 548. Dd 23 February 1910.

33) Robert O'Driscoll, 'Yeats on Personality: Three Unpublished Lectures,' from Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (edd.): *Yeats and the Theatre* (Macmillan of Canada, 1975), p. 5n.

34) O'Driscoll, *op. cit.*, p. 5. The ensuing paraphrase draws on O'Driscoll.

35) 'Friends of My Youth,' delivered on 9 March 1910.

> Personality is greater and finer than character. It differs from character in this, that it (i.e. character) is always to some extent under the control of our will.[36]

And in the third lecture we find him lauding the poet who promoted expression of the Dionysian, who 'celebrated drink and lust, and everything men thought wicked . . . a celebration of life itself.'[37]

When it comes to Yeats's definition of character, Edward Engelberg quotes his remarks in *Harper's Weekly* of November 1911 which describe character as comprising individual eccentricities existing in 'accidental circumstance,' 'some one place, some one moment of time.'[38] A letter from his father reads, 'your splendid sentence "character is the ash of personality" has my full assent,'[39] following an earlier comment by J.B. Yeats that 'Personality to my mind is human nature when undergoing a passion for self-expression.'[40] Personality involves passion, and 'The Tragic Theatre' equates tragedy with passion, maintaining that 'Character is continuously present in comedy alone,'[41] while *Estrangement* contends that

> Tragedy is passion alone, and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wandering of passion; while comedy is the clash of character.[42]

In *The Birth of Tragedy* we find Nietzsche deprecating 'the

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36) O'Driscoll, *op. cit.*, p.38. 37) O'Driscoll, *ibid.*, p. 47.
38) Engelberg, *op. cit.*, p. 153. 39) *JBYL*, p. 128. Dd 8 March 1910.
40) *JBYL*, p. 125. *Cf.* chapter II above, p. 51.
41) *E&I*, p. 240. 42) *Auto*, p. 470.

prevalence of character representation and psychological refinement in tragedy from Sophocles onward.'[43] In the tragic art of the Greeks, which 'was really born out of the spirit of music,'[44] emphasis is not on phenomena, but on what is behind them. Heroes 'speak, as it were, more superficially than they act,' and the

> structure of the scenes and the visual images reveal a deeper wisdom than the poet himself can put into words and concepts: the same is observable in Shakespeare . . . the . . . lesson of Hamlet is to be deduced, not from his words, but from a profound contemplation and survey of the whole.[45]

With the advent of Sophocles Greek tragedy begins to suffer from the disease of character delineation, with Euripides feeding the cancer. He 'draws only prominent individual traits of character, which can express themselves in violent bursts of passion.'[46] New Attic Comedy introduces

> frivolous old men, duped panders, and cunning slaves, recurring incessantly. Where now is the mythopoeic spirit of music?[47]

Here is Yeats's contention that

> character is continuously present in comedy alone, and that there is much tragedy . . . where its place is taken by passion and motives . . .[48]

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43) *BT* (17), p. 108.
44) *BT* (17), p. 105.
45) *BT* (17), p. 105.
46) *BT* (17), p. 108.
47) *BT* (17), p. 108.
48) 'The Tragic Theatre,' *E&I*, p. 240.

This sentiment from 'The Tragic Theatre' finds expression again in one of those 1910 lectures which insists that

> Pure tragedy is pure passion; pure comedy contains no passion. If you look at a play of sheer tragedy, Racine or a Greek play, you will see there is no character at all. The persons are defined by differing motives. It is the great glory of Shakespeare that he enriched tragedy by adding to it comedy.[49]

Among the many attributes that Nietzsche finds admirable in the Greeks is the fact that the early Greeks were psychologically superficial, the curse of 'psychological refinement in tragedy' emerging only with Sophocles. In *Ecce Homo* he speaks of himself as being the first tragic philosopher,[50] adding the claim, 'There was no psychology at all before me.'[51] And the *sine qua non* of any character delineation is psychological insight.

In Yeats tragedy pivots around passion leading to calm, a calm he sought to convey through the aristocratic Noh drama of Japan - after having seen a Japanese dancer who provided for him 'the tragic image that has stirred my imagination.'[52] Since tragedy inhabits 'the deeps of the mind,'[53] Yeats feels that

> a mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player . . . the fine invention of a sculptor,

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49) O'Driscoll, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

50) *EH*, *'The Birth of Tragedy'* (3), p. 273.

51) *EH*, 'Why I Am a Destiny' (6), p. 331.

52) 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan,' *E&I*, p. 224. 53) *E&I*, p. 224.

> and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice.[54]

In *Estrangement* he explains that

> the masks of tragedy contain neither character nor personal energy. They are allied to decoration and to the abstract figures of Egyptian temples. Before the mind can look out their eyes the active will perishes, hence their sorrowful calm.[55]

Leonard Nathan is among those who raise the question of how Yeatsian tragedy - which entails the conflict of the divided self - is able to rely ultimately on calm rather than on action, and he finds an answer implicit in this very metaphor-mask convention.[56] Action and character are subordinated to the mask whose artificiality gives personality the 'stillness' needed to reveal its depths. The mask is merely a formal presentation of conflict within the personality itself. Tragedy is a state of mind and should be embodied as such on the actual stage. And in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche sees Greek drama as laying 'the ground for pathos, not for action.'[57]

Nathan also provides a sound explanation of how Nietzsche 'completes' Blake, as Yeats claims he does. "In Blake's conception," Nathan writes, "a universe evilly shattered into rebellious individualities is also restored to oneness by art, that is, by the divine imagination working through individuals

54) *E&I*, p. 226.

55) *Auto*, p. 471.

56) *Cf*. Leonard E. Nathan: *The Tragic Drama of William Butler Yeats* (Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1965), pp. 158-9.

57) *BT* (12), p. 84.

for a universal harmony. Nietzsche indeed improved on Blake by inferring from this conception of the cosmos the Dionysian definition of tragedy."[58]

Yeats thus uses his tragic mask to remove individuality, to share in the core of mankind. He finds 'stillness' necessary to achieve Nietzsche's moments of 'self-forgetfulness,' to

> enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. As a deep of the mind can only be approached through what is most human, most delicate, we should distrust bodily distance, mechanism, and loud noise.[59]

In *At the Hawk's Well* he reduces movement to a minimum, giving directions that the Old Man's movements should, 'like those of the other persons of the play, suggest a marionette.'[60]

When it comes to a general tragic attitude to existence, we find Nietzsche extolling the Dionysian impulse to know and feel 'the terror and horror of existence.' He relates what 'Greek folk wisdom' viewed as 'the best and most desirable of all things for man,' as being best conveyed by the words of wise Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, pronounced at the urging of his captor, King Midas:

> Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery,

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58) Nathan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

59) 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan,' *E&I*, p. 225.

60) *CPl*, p. 210.

> why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is - to die soon.[61]

This is to see life without illusion, demanding that we view the world with Nietzsche's 'unmoved eyes' - the 'unfaltering, unmoistened eyes' of *At the Hawk's Well.*

The Birth of Tragedy perceives an insoluble mystery at the heart of the world. The Nietzschean tragic hero is

> the suffering Dionysus of the Mysteries, the god experiencing in himself the agonies of individuation, of whom wonderful myths tell that as a boy he was torn to pieces by the Titans and is now worshipped in this state as Zagreus. . . . In this existence as a dismembered god, Dionysus possesses the dual nature of a cruel, barbarised demon and a mild, gentle ruler.[62]

This provides us with

> a profound and pessimistic view of the world, together with the *mystery doctrine of tragedy:* the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent . . .[63]

Life is an impenetrably profound mystery - which a Dionysian man like Hamlet recognises: we have seen how he 'looked truly into the essence of things,' and thus *'gained knowledge'* which

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61) *BT* (3), p. 42.

62) *BT* (10), p. 73.

63) *BT* (10), p. 74.

'kills action.' His perception brings the realisation that action cannot 'change anything in the eternal nature of things.' This realisation is not mere reflection, but

> true knowledge, an insight into the horrible truth, [which] outweighs any motive for action, both in Hamlet and in the Dionysian man.[64]

It is Nietzsche's proto-Freudian belief in *Beyond Good and Evil* that

> almost everything we call "higher culture" is based on the spiritualisation and intensification of *cruelty* - this is my proposition; the "wild beast" has not been laid to rest at all, it flourishes, it has merely become - deified. That which constitutes the painful voluptuousness of tragedy, is cruelty . . .[65]

Yeats's heroine Deidre voices this perfectly: 'There's something brutal in us . . .'[66] She has faced the 'horrible truth' about man, faced the awesome reality of existence. And in his essay 'J.M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time' Yeats observes that

> All minds that have a wisdom come of tragic reality seem morbid to those that are accustomed to writers who have not faced reality at all . . .[67]

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64) *BT* (7), p. 60.

65) *BGE* (229), p. 140.

66) *Deidre, CPl*, p. 199.

67) *E&I*, p. 322.

This tragic reality is made bearable by Apollinian art, and so we find that at the heart of Greek tragedy is 'the Dionysian chorus which ever anew discharges itself in an Apollinian world of images;' tragedy is 'the Apollinian embodiment of Dionysian insights and effects . . .'[68] Though antagonists in a world of conflict, we find the Apollinian and the Dionysian fused in tragedy:

> the sublime and celebrated art of *Attic* tragedy and the dramatic dithyramb presents itself as the common goal of both these tendencies whose mysterious union, after many and long precursory struggles, found glorious consummation in this child - at once Antigone and Cassandra.[69]

Apollo shines in Greek tragedy's myth, in the eloquence and noble gestures of its personages, in its dramatic construction and stagecraft; Dionysus throbs in the music and chants of the chorus with its mingling of joy and terror, creation and destruction. But while the sculptor god does serve to keep the god of music in check, they provide each other with strong mutual reinforcement:

> The myth protects us against the music, while on the other hand it alone gives music the highest feedom. In return, music imparts to the tragic myth an intense and convincing metaphysical significance that word and image without this singular help could never have attained.[70]

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68) *BT* (8), p. 65.

69) *BT* (4), p. 47. Kaufmann suggests (p. 47n.) that Sophocles' Antigone is an Apollinian figure, Aeschylus' Cassandra a Dionysian.

70) *BT* (21), p. 126.

The Apollinian Greek recognised that,

> despite all its beauty and moderation his entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and of knowledge, revealed to him by the Dionysian. And behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus! . . .[71]

Twilight of the Idols presents tragedy as revealing '*in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming - that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction.*'[72] Apollo is

> the transfiguring genius of the *principium individuationis* through which alone the redemption in illusion is truly to be obtained; while by the mystical triumphant cry of Dionysus the spell of individuation is broken, and the way lies open to the Mothers of Being, to the innermost heart of things.[73]

In the tragic catastrophe the Dionysian fury shatters the beauty of the dream world and revels in its destruction. For all Apollo's golden harmony, the dissonant music of the wild god provides the final note, as

> In the total effect of tragedy, the Dionysian predominates once again. Tragedy closes with a sound which could never come from the realm of Apollinian art. And thus the Apollinian illusion reveals itself for what it really is - the veiling during the performance of the tragedy of the real Dionysian effect . . . forcing Apollinian drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom and even denies itself and its Apollinian visibility.[74]

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71) *BT* (4), p. 46.

72) *TI*, 'What I Owe to the Ancients,' (5), p. 110.

73) *BT* (16), pp. 100-101.

74) *BT* (21), p. 130.

Consequently, 'The *tragic myth* is to be understood only as a symbolisation of Dionysian wisdom through Apollinian artifices.'[75] For the 'truly aesthetic' listener, the 'vast Dionysian impulse' of the tragic artist

> devours his entire world of phenomena, in order to let us sense beyond it; and through its destruction, the highest artistic primal joy, in the bosom of the primordially One.[76]

Ecce Homo, that all-too-small treasurehouse of 'Nietzsche on Nietzsche,' reflects that 'the cadaverous perfume of Schopenhauer sticks only to a few formulas in *The Birth of Tragedy*.'[77] One of his formulas which does *not*, is that of the 'tragic spirit' leading to 'resignation;' instead we find Nietzsche emphasising the affirmation of life through tragedy: 'How far removed I was from all this resignationism!'[78] Much stronger than this is the Dionysian formula of joy in existence which Yeats was to fuse so ardently with his own ideas on tragedy - further testimony to the impetus Nietzsche lent him in the formation of his views. To them tragedy provides 'the metaphysical comfort that beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows on indestructibly;'[79] through it 'We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence . . .'[80] And this 'tragic joy' rages indestructibly through so many of Yeats's poems and

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75) *BT* (22), p. 131.
76) *BT* (22), p. 132.
77) *EH*, *'The Birth of Tragedy'* (1), pp. 270-1.
78) *BT*, 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism' (6), p. 24.
79) *BT* (18), pp. 109-10.
80) *BT* (17), p. 104.

plays, imparting artistic life to the thoughts we have already encountered in his essays, agreeing with the messianic German that every genuine tragedy conveys a sense

> that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasureable - this comfort appears in incarnate clarity in the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural beings who live ineradicably, as it were, behind all civilisation and remain eternally the same, despite the changes of generations and of the history of nations . . .[81]

Rather than providing Schopenhauerian resignation or, even worse, Aristotelian catharsis by purging our emotions through pity and fear, Nietzschean and Yeatsian tragedy promotes exultation in the midst of terror, brings joyful affirmation of existence:

> *Not* so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge - it was thus Aristotle understood it -: but, beyond pity and terror, *to realise in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming - that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction.*[82]

The tragic artist displays

> fearlessness in the face of the fearsome and questionable. . . . Bravery and composure in the face of a powerful enemy, great hardship, a problem that arouses aversion - it is this *victorious* condition which the tragic artist singles out, which he glorifies. In the face of tragedy the warlike in our soul celebrates

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81) *BT* (7), p. 59.

82) *TI*, 'What I Owe to the Ancients' (5), p.11

> its Saturnalias; whoever is accustomed to suffering, whoever seeks out suffering, the *heroic* man extols his existence by means of tragedy - for him alone does the tragic poet pour this draught of sweetest cruelty.[83]

Cuchulain in *At the Hawk's Well* deliberately seeks out those 'eyes of a hawk'[84] from which everyone else shrinks, the 'bird, woman, or witch' that brings terror to the Musicians and the Old Man. Similarly, in *The Herne's Egg* we find Congal asserting,

> I will come,
> Although it be my death, I will come.
> Because I am terrified, I will come.[85]

Meeting death with joy is an attitude rampant in Yeats. In a pre-Nietzschean essay on Shelley he writes that 'ecstasy is a kind of death,'[86] but when he comes to 'A General Introduction for My Work' we find him raising Lady Gregory's remark that 'Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies,'[87] and lauding Shakespeare's heroes for their 'ecstasy at the approach of death.'[88] A neat reversal. Earlier, in his 1907 essay 'Poetry and Tradition,' he says of Timon of Athens and Cleopatra that

> their words move us because their sorrow is not their own at tomb or asp, but for all men's fate. That shaping joy has kept the sorrow pure, as it had kept it were the emotion love or hate, for the nobleness of the arts is in the *mingling of*

83) *TI*, 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man,' (24), p. 82.
84) *CPl*, p. 214.
85) *CPl*, p. 670.
86) 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry,' *IGE*, p. 101.
87) *E&I*, p. 523.
88) *E&I*, p. 523.

> *contraries*, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy, and marmorean stillness . . .[89]

In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley of 15 August 1938, writing of *On Baile's Strand*, he mentions with satisfaction, '"Cuchulain" seemed to me a heroic figure because he was creative joy separated from fear.'[90] There is indeed a sense of Dionysian flood overwhelming Cuchulain, waves vaster than the individual ego sweeping him into the joy of deliverance.[91] His unwitting, heroic slaying of his son has led to tragic transcendance. It is a defiant, reckless gesture Cuchulain makes, exceeding even the *sprezzatura* or 'recklessness' which Yeats remarks 'Castiglione thought necessary in good manners.'[92] When we divest *sprezzatura* of its more *'cicisbeic'* trappings, we see in it the full power of the heroic gesture as found in Deidre's suicide or Seanchan's fast to the death.

Ecstasy is thus a central part of Yeatsian tragedy, victoriously transforming pain and terror: 'There may be in this or that detail painful tragedy, but in the whole work none.'[93] He speaks of Synge's art having 'ascended into that tragic ecstasy which is the best that art - perhaps that life - can give,'[94] elucidating in *Estrangement* that tragedy 'has not joy, as we understand that word, but ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual.'[95] To Nietzsche,

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89) *E&I*, p. 255. Italics mine. 90) *Letters*, p. 913. From Riversdale.
91) *Cf. CPl*, pp. 277-8. 92) 'Poetry and Tradition,' *E&I*, p. 256.
93) 'A General Introduction for My Work,' *E&I*, p. 523.
94) 'The Tragic Theatre,' *E&I*, p.239. 95) *Auto*, p. 471.

joy is prior to and deeper than pain - prior to because pain is merely the result of the will to joy which means also the joy of creating, shaping, destroying, and is in its highest form but a variety of joy; Zarathustra sings of 'Joy - deeper still than grief can be . . . But joys all want eternity - want deep, profound eternity!'[96] And tragedy is of course 'a draught of sweetest cruelty,' with Yeats writing to Dorothy Wellesley: 'People much occupied with morality always lose heroic ecstasy . . . "Bitter and gay," that is the heroic mood . . .'[97] Here we have the seeds of 'Lapis Lazuli,' where 'Hamlet and Lear are gay;/ Gaiety transfiguring all that dread' which their 'tragic play' entails.[98] This is Nietzsche's conception of tragedy as a triumph over the horror of life, suggesting a transfiguration by Apollo of Dionysian energies as beauty carries off the victory over monstrosity.[99] Art provides illusion and a sense of endurance; as Yeats's Shepherd tells the Goatherd: 'rhyme can beat a measure out of trouble/ And make the daylight sweet once more . . .'[100] Byzantium sweeps us into the 'artifice of eternity,' while in 'Among School Children' we see art transfiguring the 'fit of grief or rage,'[101] overcoming the apocalyptic view of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' with its 'dragon-ridden' days when 'All break and vanish, and evil gathers head,'[102] or of 'Symbols' with its 'All-destroying sword-blade still/ Carried by the wandering fool.'[103]

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96) *TSZ* (59:3), p. 256.
97) *Letters*, pp. 836,7. Dd 6 July 1935.
98) *CP*, p. 338.
99) *Cf.* Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 232.
100) 'Shepherd and Goatherd,' *CP*, p. 159.
101) *CP*, p. 242.
102) *CP*, pp. 233,7.
103) *CP*, p. 270.

Apocalypse, however, also entails a dimension of joy: tragedy, we have seen Nietzsche and Yeats contend again and again, includes 'joy in destruction' which brings rejuvenation and an 'affirmation of life,' triumphant exultation in the face of the terrible. As Yeats writes to Dorothy Wellesley,

> the supreme aim is an act of faith and reason to make one rejoice in the midst of tragedy. An impossible aim; yet I think it true that nothing can injure us.[104]

This is the theme of 'The Gyres,' where

> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.
> What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,
> And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
> What matter? Out of cavern comes a voice,
> And all it knows is that one word "Rejoice!"[105]

Following it in the *Last Poems* is 'Lapis Lazuli' which, as B.L. Reid mentions, accepts the existence of tragic fact ('All things fall'), transmutes it ('and are built again'), and then exults in superiority over it ('And those that build them again are gay').[106] 'Vacillation' asks 'What is joy?' when man must run his course 'Between extremities,' 'those antinomies/ Of day and night;'[107] it is that exultant feeling that comes with the sudden moment in the midst of solitary despair when your 'happiness' is 'so great' that you are 'blessèd' and can 'bless'.[108]

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104) *Letters*, p. 838. Dd 26 July 1935. 105) *CP*, p. 337.

106) B.L. Reid: *William Butler Yeats: The Lyric of Tragedy* (Norman, 1961), pp. 248,9. *Cf*. *CP*, p. 339.

107) *CP*, p. 282. 108) *CP*, p. 284.

In section III we meet the exultant embracing of death by men who come 'Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb,'[109] a more reckless and ecstatic version of the quiet heroism in 'Upon a Dying Lady,' where the woman's eyes are 'laughter-lit' in the midst of death, 'ready to meet all/ Who have lived in joy and laughed into the face of Death.'[110] Zarathustra, consecrator of laughter and champion of the 'spirit of all free spirits, the laughing storm, which bloweth dust into the eyes of all the melanopic and melancholic,'[111] hails those who have '*laughed* themselves to death,'[112] exhorting his 'higher men': '*learn* - to laugh!'[113]

Like the deteriorating Nietzsche who is able to urge his composer friend Peter Gast to 'Sing a new song for me!' Yeats extolls song as much as he does laughter in the face of tragedy:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing . . .[114]

And that 'crazed girl,' 'No matter what disaster occurred/ She stood in desperate music wound.'[115] Dionysian music and laughter transform all dread, strengthen and affirm.

Of all Yeats's works, none courses with such a sustained torrent of Dionysian tragedy as that early play *Where There Is Nothing*, written at the height of his initial absorption with

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109) *CP*, p. 283.
110) *CP*, pp. 177ff.
111) *TSZ* (73:20), pp. 331-2.
112) *TSZ* (52:2), p. 202.
113) *TSZ* (73:20), p. 332.
114) 'Sailing to Byzantium,' *CP*, p. 217.
115) 'A Crazed Girl,' *CP*, p. 348.

the philosopher. Paul Ruttledge is hardly able to open his mouth without betraying the newly-strengthened fervour of Yeats's growing Dionysian *Weltanschauung*, the whole play so charged with Nietzsche that we are left with little doubt as to under whose guiding spirit it was written.

Early in Act I Paul speaks of the loss of man's animal nature with which he had been contented before the imposition of civilisation:

> I think all the people I meet are like farmyard creatures, they have forgotten their freedom, their human bodies are a disguise . . .[116]

He wishes 'to escape - as you say, to pick my living like the crows for a while,'[117] to merge with the natural. The wild crows are his 'darlings,' 'tossing about like witches, tossing about on the wind, drunk with the wind.'[118] It is this unfettered naturalness that constitutes the appeal of the tinkers for him - they ignore man's imposed laws; he, too, is 'going to be irresponsible'[119] and pursue life to the full with abandon. 'I am going to express myself in life,'[120] he declares, for 'I am among those who think that sin and death came into the world the day Newton ate the apple.'[121] He wants to tear down 'all the rigid, hostile barriers that necessity, caprice

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116) *WTIN*, pp. 21-2.
117) *WTIN*, pp. 32-3.
118) *WTIN*, p. 200.
119) *WTIN*, p. 44.
120) *WTIN*, p. 50.
121) *WTIN*, p. 51.

or "impudent convention" have fixed between man and man,'[122] to overcome 'the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil.'[123] He wants

> The dark, where there is nothing that is anything, and nobody that is anybody; one can be free there, where there is nothing.[124]

It is the god of 'intoxication' who helps realisation of this 'feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature,'[125] a drunkenness akin both to Dionysus-worship and Christianity, especially that of the Middle Ages.[126]

> I said just now that when we were all dead and in heaven it would be a sort of drunkenness, a sort of ecstasy. There is a hymn about it, but it is in Latin. "Et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est." How splendid is the cup of my drunkenness![127]

Paddy Cockfight repeats Paul's sentiment, one which later shocks straightlaced Mr Algie, to whom it seems 'a little violent.'[128] But to Paul it is drunkenness which permits attainment of Dionysian excess, that Blakean 'exuberance' which is 'beauty' and 'leads to the palace of wisdom.'[129]

The 'bent and limping' Paul Ruttledge of Act IV effuses his vision of men and women who

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122) *BT* (1), p. 37. 123) *BT* (10), p. 74.

124) *WTIN*, p. 65. 125) *BT* (7), p. 59.

126) *Cf*. especially chapters V and VI below for Christianity as an 'objective' impulse similar to Dionysus-worship, and also Buddhism, pp. 164, 218, 257-9.

127) *WTIN*, p. 95. 128) *WTIN*, p.106.

129) *WTIN*, p. 107.

> wandered here and there, half blind from the drunkenness of Eternity; they had not yet forgotten that the green Earth was the Love of God . . . and so they wept and laughed and hated according to the impulse of their hearts. They gathered the green Earth to their breasts and their lips . . .[130]

He wants the 'drunkenness of Eternity,' demanding that we 'become blind, and deaf, and dizzy. We must get rid of everything that is not measureless eternal life.'[131] The Church must be destroyed, he declaims with Nietzschean 'joy in destruction,'[132] echoing his earlier visions of 'pulling something down,'[133] so that

> When everything was pulled down we would have more room to get drunk in, to drink contentedly out of the cup of life, out of the drunken cup of life.[134]

He longs for 'the happiness of men who fight, who are hit and hit back,'[135] and for the 'music of Paradise' which 'is made up of the continual clashing of swords.'[136]

In these visions of apocalypse Paul encounters a 'terrible wild beast, with iron teeth and brazen claws that can root up spires and towers.'[137] It is a beast that turns out to be 'Laughter, the mightiest of the enemies of God.'[138] It is the Antichrist, the 'antithetical' 'rough beast' that achieves its most terrifying aspect in 'The Second Coming.' One of Paul's

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130) *WTIN*, p. 156. 131) *WTIN*, p. 162.

132) *TI*, 'What I Owe to the Ancients' (5), p. 110.

133) *WTIN*, p. 25. 134) *WTIN*, p. 26.

135) *WTIN*, p. 79. 136) *WTIN*, p. 80.

137) *WTIN*, p. 81. 138) *WTIN*, p. 82.

later meditations brings 'a great many angels riding upon unicorns' who 'laughed aloud, and the unicorns trampled the ground as though the world were already falling in pieces.'[139] This is the exultant Nietzschean laughter of destruction. And even when he is not dreaming or meditating Paul prefers the 'harsh merriment' of the crows to 'those sad cries of the wind and the rushes.'[140] As he says in imitation of a certain saint, 'I must rejoice without ceasing, although the world shudder at my joy;'[141] it is not long before he is teaching that 'Death is the last adventure, the first perfect joy . . .'[142]

So we see the Nietzschean attitudes propelling themselves throughout the play from start to finish as *Where There Is Nothing* becomes a vehicle for Yeats's Dionysian view of tragedy, a view owing much of its incitement to Nietzsche. We find in the words and actions of Paul Ruttledge so many of Nietzsche and Yeats's kindred theories of tragedy as something that strengthens and affirms, revealing the eternal joy in existence, in 'the contemplation of things vaster than the individual.' Tragedy renders man 'as one' with nature. Through satyric Dionysian 'intoxication' which is the 'drowner of dykes' we transcend the self to find 'Anima Mundi,' soaring beyond the limits of 'character' which had brought a decline in post-Sophoclean tragedy. The insights gained from Dionysian excess in turn

139) *WTIN*, p. 147. *Cf.* Giorgio Melchiori: *The Whole Mystery of Art* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960) for the unicorn as Yeatsian symbol.

140) *WTIN*, p. 200. *Cf. TSZ* (73:16ff.), pp. 329ff.

141) *WTIN*, p. 47.

142) *WTIN*, p. 203.

find a complement in the calm of the sculptor god, passion leading to reverie and the calm of the Noh mask. Apollo, god of the dream state, is united in a rare art form with Dionysus, god of drunkenness, myth and music reinforcing each other. And through their union we are transported amid a 'mingling of contraries' beyond pity and terror to find in tragedy 'a draught of sweetest cruelty' which allows us to march 'Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb . . .'

IV

REASON, AESTHETICS, ART

> Our most sacred convictions, the unchanging
> elements in our supreme values, are judgements
> of our muscles . . .
> – Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

> God guard me from those thoughts men think
> In the mind alone;
> He that sings a lasting song
> Thinks in a marrow-bone.
> – Yeats, 'A Prayer for Old Age'

Reason and Instinct

Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is one of the great anti-rational testaments of the nineteenth century, and the pummelling to which the German philosopher subjects Socratic *ratio* throughout his writings provided Yeats with vibrant affirmation of his own similar attitudes to rational thought, further substantiating many of the ideas he had encountered so vividly in Blake. Yeats's increasing emphasis on the physical in the later poems and plays occurs very much with Nietzsche in mind – as 'The Phases of the Moon' well indicates, hailing the moment at which 'Nietzsche is born' as the start of the era when man's 'body moulded from within his body/ Grows comelier,' freed from

the lashing of 'the cat-o'-nine-tails of the mind.'[1]

Nietzsche signals his attack on reason with *The Birth of Tragedy* of 1871, condemning the 'altogether newborn demon, called *Socrates*'[2] as the ruin of Greek tragedy through the voice of Euripides; the collection of notes that is *The Will to Power* ends it by dismissing 'the Socratic disposition' as 'a phenomenon of decadence.'[3] The attack is a powerful one, demanding generous illustration; starting with *The Birth of Tragedy*, we find Nietzsche trumpeting the values of instinct in the face of Socratic condemnation:

> "Only by instinct:" with this phrase Socratism condemns existing art as well as existing ethics.[4]

If we are truly to understand ourselves, we should rather

> start from the *body* and employ it as guide. It is the much richer phenomenon, which allows of clearer observation.[5]

Nietzsche asserts that

> Our most sacred convictions, the unchanging elements in our supreme values, are judgements of our muscles.[6]

Heed the instincts of the muscles, is his injunction - one that concurs with Yeats's own crescive views, destined to find their most telling summation in 'A Prayer for Old Age:'

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1) *CP*, p. 185.
2) *BT* (12), p. 82.
3) *WP* (432), p. 236.
4) *BT* (13), p. 87.
5) *WP* (532), p. 289.
6) *WP* (314), p. 173.

God guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone;
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow-bone.[7]

We find Yeats writing as early as 1887 in a letter to his high school friend Frederick Gregg, 'The only business of the head in the world is to bow a ceaseless obeisance to the heart.'[8] But this is still just an incipient belief of the private Yeats who has not yet encountered Nietzsche, a belief not to be found in the public Yeats of the Innisfree years prior to that authoritative 1902 reading of Common's 'Choice Selections.' With his 1906 essay 'Discoveries' comes a new public stance, even though *The Shadowy Waters* of the same year does return to wallow in the Romantic escapism of the Nineties. Not that Nietzsche can claim sole credit for Yeats's proclivity to denigrate 'reason:' his father had long distrusted the reliability of the questioning intellect, and Yeats had already absorbed the anti-rational ideas of Shelley, Blake, Berkeley, Swift, and others. It did need the German's gusty rhetoric, however, to fan the embers of passion which burn so savagely to the very end in the later Yeats, the Yeats we find longing for 'an old man's frenzy.'

Nietzsche regards thought as the product of 'biological error,' of a long line of valuations which were in fact themselves originally unconscious. Yet any critique of reason is fraught with irony from the outset: since the intellect's

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7) *CP*, p. 326.

8) *Letters*, p. 31.

> capacity to know would be revealed only in the presence of "true reality" . . . we should have to be a higher being with "absolute knowledge"[9]

to understand it, 'true reality' and 'absolute knowledge' being *contradictiones in adiecto*. The English in particular come under heavy fire in the first essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* for their intellectual pride, an attitude Yeats felt had prompted the rebellious thought of men like Berkeley and Swift:

> Born in such a community, Berkeley with his belief in perception, that abstract ideas are mere words, Swift with . . . his disbelief in Newton's system and every sort of machine . . . found in England the opposite that stung their own thought into expression and made it lucid.[10]

'With the clue of the body' becomes something of a refrain in *The Will to Power*, which insists that 'one acts perfectly only when one acts instinctively.'[11] Why this apotheosis of instinct to the detriment of reason, rationality, logic, of knowledge, even of consciousness and thought themselves?

'Body am I entirely, and nothing more'[12] Zarathustra announces to 'The Despisers of the Body.' The body, like all organisms, contains a hierarchy of urges, and the brain is merely one of these, an organ like any other. One would expect an organ or instrument to have some effective function, but the mind turns out to be largely an instrument of deception, simplifying - and so falsifying - the environment in an attempt to make it intelligible and so control it: knowledge is the world

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9) *WP* (473), p. 263.
10) 'Bishop Berekeley,' *E&I*, p. 402.
11) *WP* (440), p. 243.
12) *TSZ* (4), p.32.

'appropriated and made manageable;'[13] reason invents 'the lie of unity, the lie of materiality, of substance, of duration'[14] in a world of flux. Mathematics, with its sign conventions, its straight lines and points, is a particularly falsifying invented fiction. In 'Discoveries' Yeats enthrones art because it

> shrinks from what Blake calls mathematical form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body.[15]

He dismisses reason as 'a drawer of the straight line, the maker of the arbitrary and the impermanent,' lamenting the preoccupation of contemporary art 'with knowledge, with the surface of life, with the arbitrary, with mechanism . . .'[16]

To Nietzsche logic,

> the conceptual understandability of existence, . . . calms and gives confidence - in short, a certain warm narrowness that keeps away fear and encloses one in optimistic horizons.[17]

Logic does not look deeply into things, preferring myopic simplification. Speaking of *On Baile's Strand*, Yeats says in a 1904 letter to Frank Fay, 'Concobhar is reason that is blind because it can only reason because it is cold.'[18] Logic blinds us to the illogicality of existence, says Nietzsche; it is a tool used in an attempt to master the irrational, to explain the inexplicable, to communicate the unknowable. 'The world seems

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13) *WP* (423), p. 227.
14) *TI*, '"Reason" in Philosophy'(2), p. 36.
15) *E&I*, pp. 292-3.
16) *E&I*, p. 288.
17) *WP* (370), p. 328.
18) *Letters*, p. 425.

logical to us because we have made it logical.'[19] The tendency

> to treat as equal what is merely similar - an illogical tendency, for nothing is really equal - is what first created any basis for logic . . . it was . . . necessary that for a long time one did not see or perceive the changes in things. The beings that did not see so precisely had an advantage over those who saw everything "in flux."[20]

Man enshrined those errors of the intellect which helped preserve him, such as his reasoning

> that there are enduring things; that there are equal things; that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself . . . it was only very late that truth itself emerged - as the weakest form of knowledge.[21]

Hence the question in *The Gay Science:* '*For what purpose,* then, any consciousness at all when it is in the main *superfluous?*' What Nietzsche himself terms his 'perhaps extravagant surmise'[22] is that

> *consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication* . . . the result of a "must" that for a terribly long time lorded it over man. As the most

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19) *WP* (521), p. 283.

20) *GS* (111), p. 171.

21) *GS* (110), p. 169.

22) *GS* (354), p. 297.

> endangered animal, he *needed* help and protection, he needed his peers, he had to learn to express his distress and to make himself understood; and for all of this he needed "consciousness" first of all, he needed to "know" himself, what distressed him, he needed to "know" how he felt, he needed to "know" what he thought . . . Man, like every living being, thinks continually without knowing it; the thinking that rises to *consciousness* is only the smallest part of all this - the most superficial and worst part - for only this conscious thinking *takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication,* and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness . . . It was only as a social animal that man acquired a self-consciousness . . . We simply lack any organ for knowledge, for "truth:" we "know" (or believe or imagine) just as much as may be *useful* in the interests of the human herd, the species . . .[23]

Truth, in the familiar words of *The Will to Power*, 'is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live.'[24]

Thought does not only create arbitrary truth in the 'external' world, but in our 'internal' world, too:

> The "apparent *inner* world" is governed by just the same forms and procedures as the "outer" world. We never encounter "facts" . . . "causality" eludes us; to suppose a direct causal link between thoughts, as logic does - that is the consequence of the crudest and clumsiest observation.[25]

To Nietzsche,

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23) *GS* (354), pp. 298-300.

24) *WP* (493), p. 272.

25) *WP* (472), p. 264.

> "Thinking," as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction, arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility.[26]

Far from being a thinking substance with faculties of its own, the mind is merely part of a larger process: 'There exists neither "spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth'[27] *an sich.* The upshot of Descartes's argumentation is, '"There is thinking: therefore there is something that thinks,"'[28] which is simply a conclusion derived at through following the rules of grammar which lend a doer to every deed. The necessity for communication produced language, and we now

> *cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language . . . Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off.*[29]

Reason is thus the offspring of animal need, conceived in error. From language, with its 'subject,' 'predicate,' 'object,' comes our notion of absolute object or *Ding an Sich,* of a 'thinking subject' that 'thinks' a 'thought:' '"substance," "subject," "object," "being," "becoming" have nothing to do with metaphysical truths.'[30] Truth is 'the will to be master over the multiplicity of sensations:- to classify phenomena into definite categories.'[31] The axioms of logic are but a means and measure

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26) *WP* (477), p. 264.
27) *WP* (480), p. 266.
28) *WP* (484), p. 268.
29) *WP* (522), p. 283.
30) *WP* (513), p. 277.
31) *WP* (517), p. 280.

for creating the truth; logic contains the criterion not of truth, but of that which we choose to be real - it is 'an *imperative* concerning that which *should* count as true.'[32]

Since we embrace 'that which *should* count as true,' Nietzsche argues that we do not in fact wish to fathom the actual nature of our false, cruel, contradictory, senseless world, and experience a conflict between the desire to know and the desire to survive - we think of *The Birth of Tragedy* and its emphasis on the antagonism of science and art. We dare not look too deep, because

> the more superficially and coarsely it is conceived, the more valuable, definite, beautiful, and significant the world appears. The deeper one looks, the more our valuations disappear, meaninglessness approaches . . . one should value more than truth the force that forms, shapes, invents.[33]

Our prevailing attitude to knowledge is riddled with moral judgments, such as

> trust in reason - why not mistrust? the "true world" is supposed to be the good world - why?
> appearance, change, contradiction, struggle devalued as immoral;
> desire for a world in which these things are missing . . .
> dialectic a way to virtue.[34]

We should realise that the 'lie - and *not* the truth - is divine.'[35] Trust in reason is a moral phenomenon entirely, and morality is

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32) *WP* (516), p. 279.

33) *WP* (602), p. 326.

34) *WP* (578), p. 310.

35) *WP* (1011), p. 523.

'the Circe of philosophers.'[36] We pursue truth in the moral *belief* that it is good, in the deluded conviction that reality is intelligible through reasoning. And yet we do not want truthfulness, since life demands illusion for survival. This is one of Nietzsche's objections to the Christian conscience, which has been 'translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price.'[37] We can never discover the truth:

> The ancient thinkers sought happiness and truth with all their might - and man shall never find what he is obliged to seek, runs Nature's wicked rule.[38]

Civilisation is a product of thought, an artificial creation which hides the dark truths we prefer not to see. Paradoxically, it is also thought which compels recognition of this artificiality, which asks those things 'one does not ask about.' We recollect Yeats's apocalyptic vision of what will come from civilisation's penetration of the 'truth' in the opening lines of his 1935 poem 'Meru:'

> Civilisation is hooped together, brought
> Under rule, under semblance of peace
> By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
> And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
> Ravening through century after century,
> Ravening, raging, and uprooting, that he may come
> Into the desolation of reality.[39]

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36) *WP* (462), p. 254.

37) *GS* (357), p. 307.

38) *GOA* I, p. 432, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 310.

39) *CP*, p. 333.

This is Nietzsche's view of civilisation as something suspended 'on the back of a tiger,' only seemingly under control, 'under semblance of peace.' And

> woe to the fatal curiosity which should once be able to look through a crack out and down from the chamber of consciousness, and which should then divine that man rests, with the unconcern of his ignorance, on the pitiless, the ravenous, the insatiable, the murderous . . .[40]

Yet man cannot resist 'Ravening, raging, and uprooting that he may come/ Into the desolation of reality.'

As the final pages of *The Will to Power* keep repeating, it is wasteful to eradicate our natural passions - they can be mastered and utilised for undreamed-of achievements, since they are the stronger, truer aspects of existence. Yeats's 'The Statesman's Holiday' urges with restraint the sloughing off of sophistication and a return to the truer sources of beauty, to the 'Montenegrin lute' with its 'old sole string' making 'sweet music,' so that the poet delights once more in the natural - the last stanza bringing the injunction to return to the natural innocence of children, to the true naked self divested of society's trappings, to primitive crime, to the instinctiveness of animals, as the poet goes forth

> With boys and girls about him,
> With any sort of clothes,
> With a hat out of fashion,
> With old patched shoes,
> With a ragged bandit cloak,

40) *GOA* X, p. 191, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

With an eye like a hawk,
With a stiff straight back,
With a strutting turkey walk,
With a bag full of pennies,
With a monkey on a chain,
With a great cock's feather,
With an old foul tune.
Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.[41]

Instinct is deeper than consciousness, which is inherently superficial by virtue of its dependence on appearance, on what pertains to the periphery of action, to its 'surface and skin - which, like every skin, betrays something but *conceals* still more . . .'[42] The world consists of layers of illusion and 'appearance,' each false in relation to the next. Not even the final layer, Nietzsche contends, is 'true being.' All is relativity and flux. Thoughts, feelings, ideas in consciousness only *appear* to occur in a causal sequence, and

> upon this *appearance* we have founded our whole idea of spirit, reason, logic, etc. (- none of these exists: they are fictitious syntheses and unities), and projected these *into* things and *behind* things![43]

We do not know what motivates our actions because we as conscious, purposive creatures are only a small part of the forces that constitute us. The conscious ego is only the tool of a higher comprehensive intellect, and we should learn not to take responsi-

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41) *CP*, p. 389.
42) *BGE*, 'The Free Spirit' (32), p. 45.
43) *WP* (624), p. 284.

bility for ourselves. We have no right to posit consciousness as the aim and wherefore of the total phenomenon of life.[44] The mind cannot know itself with immediate certainty, and we should approach the self through the body instead, so gaining

> the correct idea of the nature of our subject-unity, namely as agents at the head of a community (not as "souls" or "life-forces"), also of the dependence of these regents upon the ruled and of an order of rank and division of labour as the conditions that make possible the whole and its parts . . . The relative ignorance in which the regent is kept concerning individual activities . . . is among the conditions under which rule can be exercised. In short, we also gain a valuation of *not-knowing*, of seeing things on a broad scale, of simplification and falsification, of perspectivity . . . we understand that the ruler and his subjects are of the same kind, all feeling, willing, thinking . . .[45]

Thus Nietzsche's insistence that passions should not be rooted out, but cultivated: '*domination* of the passions, *not* their weakening or extirpation!'[46] proclaims *The Will to Power;* 'passion is to me the essential,'[47] comes the echo in a letter by Yeats, and again in 'William Blake and the Imagination:' 'Passions, because most living, are most holy.'[48] Reason is an instrument of passion, a portion of it, not the controlling mover in human nature. The brain is, at most, just a centralising apparatus. Our senses are far more trustworthy - though Nietzsche does realise that this, too, may be mere *belief:*

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44) *WP* (707), pp. 375, 6.

45) *WP* (492), p. 271.

46) *WP* (933), p. 492.

47) To Hone, 14 Feb. 1932; *Letters*, p. 791.

48) *E&I*, p. 113.

> We want to hold fast to our senses and to our faith in them - and think their consequences through to the end! The nonsensuality of philosophy hitherto as the greatest nonsensicality of man.[49]

Every passion contains some degree of reason. There is no freedom of will and no strictly *conscious* motivation - the mainsprings of action remain unconscious:

> Cause and effect: such a duality probably never exists; in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces, just as we perceive motion only as isolated points and then infer it without ever actually seeing it . . .[50]

Instinct is, paradoxically, more dependable than reason largely because it is something subsequent to reason, a refinement of it. All urges have been learned, they are the result of long-fostered valuations which have become instinctive. The mind is a still-changing product of evolution, developed from crude beginnings; instinct is the result of lengthy repetition of similar activity which has become unconscious automatism; having developed over such an extended period of time, its hidden past renders it also open to suspicion. The oldest judgments - usually perforce false to ensure survival - shape all incoming experience, lending new perceptions to their old ways:

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49) *WP* (1046), p. 538.

50) *GS* (112), p. 173.

> "Reason," evolved on a sensualistic basis, on the prejudices of the senses, i.e., in the belief in the truth of the judgments of the senses.[51]

Mind, with embodied instinctive skills, functions largely beneath the level of consciousness.

Many of these Nietzschean views had already been encountered by Yeats in Blake, who had in turn learned from Jacob Boehme: 'by the reason he meant deductions from the observations of the senses.'[52] As for man knowing what it is that motivates him, Yeats follows Nietzsche in his dislike of George Eliot because

> she knows nothing of the dim unconscious nature, the world of instinct, which (if there is any truth in Darwin) is the accumulated wisdom of all living things from the monera to man.[53]

Consciousness, says Nietzsche, is an accident of experience and makes up 'only one state of our spiritual and psychic world;'[54] as Yeats writes in 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan:' 'We only believe in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body.'[55] To demand abstract reasons for action is to upset the sureness of instinct. Consciousness questions, deliberates, vacillates, whereas instinct insists that one leaves certain things unasked. One feels and acts - to reason 'why' is fruitless

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51) *WP* (581), p. 312. As the Romans said, *'Abeunt studia in mores.'*

52) 'William Blake and the Imagination,' *E&I*, p. 112.

53) Letter of 1187 to Gregg; *Letters*, p. 31.

54) *GS* (357), p. 305. 55) *E&I*, p. 235.

speculation, commentary on what Nietzsche regards as a hidden, unknowable text. The ringing opening of Yeats's *Autumn of the Flesh* proclaims that

> our thoughts and emotions are often but spray flung up from hidden tides that follow a moon no eye can see.[56]

An 1896 letter to W.T. Horton speaks of the intellect as something which merely 'clears the rubbish from the mouth of the sybil's cave but it is not the sybil.'[57]

In Nietzsche and in Yeats it is action, not deliberation, that matters, and the poet explains Hamlet's inaction as the result of 'hesitations of thought . . . outside that he is a mediaeval man of action.'[58] *Beyond Good and Evil* describes how during the prehistoric 'pre-moral' period of mankind, when the imperative 'know thyself!' was still unknown, an action came as little into consideration as did its origin - only its consequences mattered. Man's first attempt at self-knowledge and belief in 'origins' appeared during the 'moral' period, when man started believing that the value of an action resided in the value of the intention behind it. To-day we ought to stand on the threshold of the 'extra-moral' period, with the belief that 'the decisive value of an action resides in precisely that which is *not intentional* in it,'[59] in its *unconscious* source alone. In his copy of Common's selections Yeats has underlined this remark from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, suggesting his agreement:

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56) *E&I*, p. 189.

57) *Letters*, p. 262.

58) *Boiler*, pp. 33-4.

59) *BGE*, 'The Free Spirit' (32), p. 45.

> designations of moral worth everywhere were at first applied to *men*, and were only derivatively and at a later period applied to actions.[60]

With Friedrich Nietzsche the diatribe against the tyranny of reason burns with uncommon vitriol, overwhelming the restrained anti-rational thoughts of his fellow-countrymen like Kant, whose 'Practical Reason' entails a kind of non-rational (but moral) intuition, reminding rationalists that man is foremost a sentient being, or of Schopenhauer, who provides a less religious view of a non-rational impulse which takes its cue from instinct, and of Fichte, who also places action well above philosophy. For Nietzsche, reason commits the crime of impinging on life, a view Yeats shares in a diary entry of 1910, complaining that 'reason is the stopping of the pendulum, a kind of death.'[61] We notice this sentiment again in a note to his poem 'The Dolls,' in which he writes that 'all thought among us is frozen into "something other than human life."'[62] 'The Fascination of What's Difficult' finds him in despair at how

> The fascination of what's difficult
> Has dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
> Spontaneous joy and natural content
> Out of my heart.[63]

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61) As quoted by A. Norman Jeffares: *Yeats: Man and Poet* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1949, rep. 1966), p.161.

62) *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (edd.) (Macmillan, New York, 1957; hereafter referred to as *VP)*, p. 820.

63) *CP*, p. 104.

'Thought kills action,' as Nietzsche says in a phrase that crystallises his myriad views on the enmity between life and thought - views which, having received copious illustration, now require consolidation and further exposition of their presence in Yeats.

Nietzsche's revolution in the realm of psychological tradition deposes the tyrant *ratio* and sets up man's unconscious urges as the genuine rulers of character and conduct. The self is identified not only with what we might term our 'stream of consciousness,' but also with a hierarchy of different urges each playing its part. Consciousness is a minion of the ruling oligarchy, and has no access to infallible, absolute truth - which in any case does not exist. Soul and body are thus not intrinsically antithetical, but are both related to sensation and internal instinct.

Traditional philosophy before Nietzsche had assumed increasing consciousness to be more desirable than unconscious impulse, yet rationality is an invention far removed from natural life which attempts to explain in arbitrary sign language something which is probably unknowable. Constantly falsifying and generalising, it fallaciously interprets chaos and flux as stability and permanence.

Consciousness was evolved as language by social beings desperate to communicate with each other and with the external world. Conscious thought now operates only within the stricture of language, illuminating only our common 'herd nature,' and is something entirely perspectival, rounding

off data, exaggerating, eliminating, ignoring, arranging.

As consciousness has little to do with the genuine motives of action or accurate interpretations of phenomena, it is our unconscious urges on which we should rely. And to create an instinctive tradition we need to cast out consciousness altogether. The strong are usually less prudent than the weak who are compelled to develop their cunning and intelligence to compensate for their inability to act directly. To erect consciousness as the foundation of conduct is to relegate life to sham. Right knowledge cannot spontaneously produce right action. The Socratic postulation that 'virtue is knowledge' results in the exposure of illusions which are needed for sheer survival: the desire for a reasoning virtue is not reasonable. Rationalisation is the invention of specious reasons for what we do on impulse, an attempt by logic to explain the illogical. Illusion is indispensable to life, and man instinctively shies away from penetrating the truth in himself, as in all existence.

But, above all, conscious thought kills action:

> Conscious sensation is sensation of sensation; likewise conscious judging contains the judgment that judging is taking place. The intellect without this redoubling is unknown to us, naturally. But we can show its activity to be much the richer. Consciousness always contains a double reflection - there is nothing immediate.
> . . . thoughts *appear* to us; apperception, the reflection of the process in the process, is only a comparative

exception (perhaps a refraction by contrast).[64]

This is the kernel of Yeats's *Last Poems,* as in 'The Statues:'

> Empty eyeballs knew
> That knowledge increases unreality, that
> Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.[65]

The Birth of Tragedy relates that Euripides, whose Socratic plays Nietzsche holds responsible for the 'suicide' of Greek tragedy, 'has been punished by being changed into a dragon by the art critics of all ages.'[66] But while Nietzsche depicts the proponent of rational thought as a dragon, Yeats, in his *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* anthology of 1921, depicts thought itself as the dragon which denies erotic self-forgetfulness and self-satisfaction to the woman of the title poem. The altar-piece's man-of-action knight who 'loved the lady' has thrust the dragon with his sword,

> and it's plain
> The half-dead dragon was her thought,
> That every morning rose again
> And dug its claws and shrieked and fought.[67]

If the woman were to 'turn her eyes . . . upon the glass,' turn to the cult of the body, and not trust in the mind alone,

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64) *GOA* XV, p. 469, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10.

65) *CP*, p. 375.

66) *BT* (12), p. 82.

67) *CP*, p. 197.

she 'on the instant would grow wise,' wise with Dionysian wisdom. In 'Her Triumph' the woman 'did the dragon's will'[68] because she 'had fancied love a casual/ Improvisation,' until her lover 'broke the chain' and 'set my ankles free.' Bodily experiences are far richer than cerebral pursuits,

> For what mere book can grant a knowledge
> With an impassioned gravity
> Appropriate to that beating breast,
> That vigorous thigh, that dreaming eye?[69]

Women seem more able than men to escape 'from all that is of the brain only,' and, says the 'He' of 'Michael Robartes,' 'Live in uncomposite blessedness,/ And lead us to the like.'[70]

From this point the 'body' opposes 'thought' with ever-increasing vigour in Yeats's poetry, spurred by the images of Michelangelo which

> disclose
> How sinew that has been pulled tight,
> Or it may be loosened in repose,
> Can rule by supernatural right
> Yet be but sinew,[71]

so that the 'wretched dragon is perplexed.'[72]

Yeats does question the validity of thought well before the *Robartes* poems, but without enthroning the body to the extent that he does in his later work. In 'The Dawn' of

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68) *CP*, p. 310.
69) *CP*, p. 197.
70) *CP*, p. 198.
71) *CP*, p. 198.
72) *CP*, p. 198.

1919 he 'would be - for no knowledge is worth a straw -/ Ignorant and wanton as the dawn,'[73] full of the instinct that looks down on 'the withered men' of 'pedantic Babylon.' In 'The Fisherman' he cries that he will write a poem 'as cold/ And passionate as the dawn.'[74] It is in this group of poems from *The Wild Swans of Coole* that we first come across Yeats positively celebrating 'ignorance' and 'passion.' The Shepherd sings to the Goatherd of the bliss that comes with 'All knowledge lost in trance/ Of sweeter ignorance.'[75] By the 'Crazy Jane' poems of 1933 the body has become an even more obsessing subject, though generally as a preference to the world of the spirit. The Bishop, 'an old book in his fist,'[76] cried that Jane and her 'dear Jack' had 'lived like beast and beast' in their pursuit of erotic ecstasy. But 'Great Europa played the fool/ That changed a lover for a bull,'[77] says a 'reproved' Jane. Though abused like a well-travelled road, her 'body makes no moan/ But sings on.'[78] Bodily passion has taught her that 'fair needs foul.'[79]

'A Prayer for Old Age,' one of the 1935 poems *From 'A Full Moon in March,'* is a stormy insistence on passion and the value of non-intellectual wisdom derived from sensuality, ending with a longing that the poet 'may seem, though I die old,/ A foolish, passionate man.'[80] He glorifies not the abstract cerebral wisdom of the philosopher, but the marrow-

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73) *CP*, p. 164.
74) *CP*, p. 167.
75) *CP*, p. 163.
76) *CP*, p. 290.
77) 'Crazy Jane Reproved,' *CP*, p. 291.
78) 'Crazy Jane on God,' *CP*, p. 294.
79) 'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop,' *CP*, p. 294.
80) *CP*, p. 326.

bone wisdom of the Dionysian reveller.

In 'The Statues' the numbers of Pythagoras 'lacked character;' but boys and girls knew

> That passion could bring character enough,
> And pressed at midnight in some public place
> Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.[81]

Yeats's exultant championing of the passions reaches Nietzsche-pitch in 'News for the Delphic Oracle,' where the cerebral Pythagoras sighs 'amid his choir of love,' and Plotinus lies 'sighing like the rest' in a sensual, physical Hereafter. From 'Pan's cavern' appear 'foul goat-head, brutal arm;'

> Belly, shoulder, bum,
> Flash fishlike; nymphs and satyrs
> Copulate in the foam,[82]

as they revel in complete sensual, passional abandon, disciples of Dionysus.

We should not forget, however, that though man's intellect is subordinated to the body by Yeats and Nietzsche, it is certainly not entirely excluded - one of their most cherished themes is that of the 'complete' man who embodies the perfect fusion of 'thought' and 'dance,' as our remarks on the hero will indicate more fully.

'To be classical,' Nietzsche says in *The Will to Power*,

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81) *CP*, p. 375. 82) *CP*, p. 377.

> one must possess *all* the strong, seemingly contradictory gifts and desires - but in such a way that they go together beneath one yoke.[83]

Man yearns immeasurably to become 'whole,' in the manner of Goethe's self-formulation:

> What he aspired to was *totality;* he strove against the separation of reason, sensuality, feeling, will . . . he disciplined himself to a whole, he *created* himself . . .[84]

Attainment of this state requires the mutual loyalty of all urges within the body, which is the case with any biological organism. The 'synthetic,' composite man who encompasses the full spectrum of human traits is the man who successfully unites his most opposing qualities, and the greatest power is that over opposites. Advance comes with the amalgamation of formerly incompatible forces:

> In contrast to the animals, man has cultivated an abundance of *contrary* drives and impulses within himself: thanks to this synthesis, he is master of the earth . . . The highest man would have the greatest multiplicity of drives . . .[85]

Nietzsche admires the Greeks for their model of the composite man who strives for the fusion of living, thinking, seeming, and willing, and this is the creature that

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83) *WP* (848), p. 446.

84) *TI*, 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man' (49), p. 102.

85) *WP* (966), pp. 506-7.

comes to preoccupy Yeats, especially in the years after *The Wild Swans of Coole*, though Yeats's formulation of him is already there to see in 'Discoveries' of 1906, where he rejoices in 'the whole man - blood, imagination, intellect, running together,'[86] and recommends that

> we should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market-place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole.[87]

Beyond Good and Evil describes man as a mixture of creature and creator; in man there is

> matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day.[88]

Yeats includes this view of man as an important element of *A Vision* and the later poems and plays. Crazy Jane tells the Bishop that

> "Fair and foul are near of kin,
> And fair needs foul . . .
> . . . a truth
> Learned in bodily lowliness
> And in the heart's pride.
> . . .
> Love has pitched his mansion in
> The place of excrement . . .
> For nothing can be sole or whole
> That has not been rent."[89]

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86) *E&I*, p. 266. 87) *E&I*, p. 272.

88) *BGE*, 'Our Virtues' (225), p. 136.

89) 'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop,' *CP*, p. 295.

This multiplicity of man is an important aspect of Yeats's world of contraries and conflict, and the struggle between self and soul and heart and mind comes to occupy a large volume of his maturing work. And it is generally the self that wins. Though never altogether free of mysticism, Yeats's emphasis is ultimately on *life*, and all it entails.

Self and Soul

In 'Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty' Yeats writes,

> I am always, in all I do, driven to a moment which is the realisation of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the surrender to God of all that I am . . . Could these two impulses, one as much a part of truth as the other, be reconciled, or if one or the other could prevail, all life would cease.[90]

Since 'all life would cease' without the antinomy of self and soul, their union in the longed-for condition of unity of being can only occur beyond the realm of this world. On earth they are hot fire and cold ice, though equally strong. This same theme is shared by many of the 1932 *Winding Stair* poems, including those on Crazy Jane. The sinewy *Tower* poems which four years earlier had bludgeoned the intellect with the truncheon of sensuality now acknowedge the claims

90) *Expl*, p. 305.

of the metaphysical again.

The first text in *The Winding Stair* crucial to our purpose is 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul,' in which the self can be seen as temporal man casting out remorse for 'the crime of death and birth,' content with the 'ignominy' and 'distress' of blood and bone, seeking not to 'escape' from the 'wintry blast' but rather 'to pitch/ Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,'[91] and be 'blest by everything.' The soul is the man who 'ascends to Heaven,' climbing the winding stair to a state beyond the antinomies of day and night. Here he finds unity of mind, 'For intellect no longer knows/ *Is* from the *Ought*, or *Knower* from the *Known*.'[92]

In 'Blood and the Moon,' 'power' and 'wisdom' are in opposition as self and soul: power, 'like everything that has the stain of blood,' is 'a property of the living;' 'wisdom is the property of the dead,/ A something incompatible with life.'[93] In 'Oil and Blood' the qualities of the soul, suggested by the 'miraculous oil' and 'odour of violet' exuded by 'holy men and women' lie alongside those of the self, 'vampires full of blood.'[94] 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931' speaks of water as 'the generated soul,'[95] while 'the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.'[96] A religious text proves to the woman of 'For Anne Gregory'

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91) *CP*, p. 267.
92) *CP*, p. 266
93) *CP*, p. 269.
94) *CP*, p. 270.
95) *CP*, p. 275.
96) *CP*, p. 276.

That only God, my dear,
Could love you for yourself alone
And not your yellow hair.[97]

'The Choice' meditates the problem of choosing 'Perfection of the life, or of the work;'[98] 'Byzantium' describes the soul as 'A starlit or a moonlit dome' that 'disdains' the self and

All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins,[99]

an unmistakable echo of Nietzsche's 'matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos.'[100] The poem's golden bird scorns 'in glory of changeless metal' 'all complexities of mire or blood,' and the 'flames begotten of flame' oppose the 'blood-begotten spirits.'[101]

And so the opposition of self and soul is advanced by various symbols throughout *The Winding Stair:* day and night, heaven and earth, moon and sun. The self is represented by 'Sato's ancient blade,' flowers, Homer, the Fool, dolphins, gongs, spilt milk; the soul is suggested by the stars, a 'winding ancient stair,' Plato, a hermit, salvation. Next to the passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals* in Common describing 'master' and 'slave' moralities, Yeats has made the following annotation:

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97) *CP*, p. 277.
98) *CP*, p. 278.
99) *CP*, p. 280.
100) *BGE*, 'Our Virtues'(225), p. 136.
101) *CP*, p. 281.

Night (Socrates) (Christ)		one god	night . . . denial of self in the soul turned towards spirit, seeking knowledge.
Day	Homer	many gods	day . . . affirmation of self, the soul turned from the spirit to be its mask and instrument when it seeks life.[102]

So we find Nietzsche prompting much of the symbolism attendant to Yeats's ideas of self and soul.

In 'Vacillation' the self speaks as 'The Heart,' asking: 'What theme had Homer but original sin?'[103] For Yeats, 'Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.'[104] And just as Homer is the ultimate model of the subjective artist for Yeats, so he is for Nietzsche, who sets him up as a 'monument' to the 'complete victory of Apollinian illusion,' the 'utterly sublime . . . individual being,' the supreme 'naïve artist.'[105]

Vacillation is part of the act of love: in 'The Three Bushes' from the *Last Poems* of 1936 to 1939, the Lady desires her lover, 'Yet what could I but drop down dead/ If I lost my chastity?'[106] She will love him 'with her soul;' the chambermaid will provide the flesh. The choice between self and soul is a cruel one - but to the artist of the 'indivi-

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102) *NACPPP*, p. 122.

103) *CP*, p. 285.

104) *CP*, p. 286.

105) *BT* (3), p. 44.

106) *CP*, p. 341.

ual being,' power is ultimately preferable to intellectual wisdom: 'Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young/ We loved each other and were ignorant.'[107] The self wins the day, perhaps taking its cue from Nietzsche's remarks on slave morality and its *'ressentiment'* nature, which bring these Yeatsian comments in *Nietzsche as Critic, Philosopher, Poet and Prophet:*

> Nietzsche . . . opposes organisation from restraint - denial . . . to organisation from power - affirmation. Yet his system seems to lack some reason why the self must give to the selfless or weak or itself perish or suffer diminution - the self being the end.[108]

For both Nietzsche and Yeats the self is 'the end.' But in Yeats this choice is made with a greater sense of loss: in 'Byzantium' the opening stanza evokes the lure of what Yeats calls the 'circuit . . . which carries us into God,'[109] and the third stanza sustains this attraction to the very end of the poem when the last word goes to the dolphin, emblematic of the 'circuit . . . which carries us into man.'[110]

The wedding of these opposites is symbolised in 'Vacillation' by a tree 'that from its topmost bough/ Is half all glittering flame and half all green.'[111] This

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107) 'After Long Silence,' *CP*, p. 301. 108) *NACPPP*, p. 129.

109) 'Pages from a Diary Written in 1930,' *Expl.*, p. 307.

110) 'Pages from a Diary Written in 1930,' *Expl.*, p. 307.

111) *CP*, p. 282.

points to ideal unity of being where spirit and matter, God and man, soul and body, timeless and temporal, chance and choice combine. It is a condition of complete 'harmony,'[112] and harmony is one of Nietzsche's greatest (and most overlooked) goals: perfection and wholeness - *Ganzheit* - are among the highest aims he sets mankind. Yeats's unity of being, however, occurs only beyond the sublunar world, and his view of the eternal tends to go beyond that of Nietzsche's, which sees tragedy as providing access to things that are 'behind all civilisation and remain eternally the same, despite changes of generations and of the history of nations.'[113] Yeats has a greater penchant for the supernatural, and 'Leda and the Swan' signifies his conviction[114] that the eternal or heavenly (Zeus as the swan) needs the temporal or earthly (Leda), and that man (Leda) needs beast (the swan), that soul needs self. Whatever mutations Yeats might have subjected Nietzsche to, the philosopher did feed the poet's appetite for the physical: Yeats's early poetry swirls about in a dream-world where the wind whispers among the reeds and roses beside shadowy waters; with *Responsibilities* of 1914 comes the idea that *'sword-strokes were better meant/ Than lover's music.'*[115] But *'In dreams,'* runs the epigraph to the collec-

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112) As in *Vision*, p. 214.

113) Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (as at 296, 344, 347) harps on the fallibility of 'conviction' and 'belief.'

114) *BT* (7), p. 59.

115) 'The Grey Rock,' *CP*, p. 119.

tion, *begins responsibility.'* The dream-world sanctions the world of the senses, which is perhaps more a transmutation of Platonic thought than a strict reflection of Nietzschean doctrine. Yet while Plato permits no integration of the two realms, Yeats strives for their unity. Nietzsche views Christianity as 'Platonism for the masses,' lamenting 'Stoic self-hardening, Platonic slander of the senses, preparation of the soil for Christianity;'[116] in *A Vision* comes the echoing complaint that when Plato 'separated the Eternal Ideas from Nature and shows them self-sustained he prepared the Christian desert and the Stoic suicide.' 'The Grey Rock' finds a supernatural being in love with a natural man, a Blakean situation where 'Eternity is in love with the productions of Time:' 'Why must the lasting love what passes,/ Why are the gods by men betrayed?'[117]

And, wooed by a being not of the natural world, the woman of 'The Two Kings' eventually rejects him with the argument that she will never believe

> there is any change
> Can blot out of my memory this life
> Sweetened by death, but if I could believe,
> That were a double hunger in my lips
> For what is doubly brief . . .[118]

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116) *WP* (427), p. 232.

117) *CP*, p. 118.

118) *CP*, p. 509.

Unity of Being

Five years after *Responsibilities*, Yeats has begun using the term 'unity of being' as a clear formulation of his developing doctrine:

> if I were not four-and-fifty, with no settled habit but the writing of verse, rheumatic, indolent, discouraged, and about to move to the Far East, I would begin another epoch by recommending to the nation a new doctrine, that of unity of being.[119]

'The Phases of the Moon' of the same year, 1919, puts forward the notion that this unity can only occur beyond the physical world, the united 'Body and soul cast out and cast away/ Beyond the visible world.'[120]

In *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* of 1921, the title poem enthrones the body, but with the qualification that it rules 'by supernatural right.'[121] 'Solomon and the Witch' presents unity of being again as a state of perfection attainable only in a superhuman sphere, its closest earthly approximation to be found in 'the bride-bed.'[122] Here we approach the condition of 'Chance being at one with Choice at last,'[123] opposites combining wholly. *A Vision* depicts the marriage bed as

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119) 'If I Were Four-and-Twenty,' *Expl*, p. 280.

120) *CP*, p. 185.

121) *CP*, p. 198.

122) *CP*, p. 199.

123) *CP*, p. 199.

> the symbol of the solved antinomy, and were more than symbol could a man there lose and keep his identity, but he falls asleep. That sleep is the same as the sleep of death.[124]

Complete unity of being occurs at Phase 15 of Yeats's system in *A Vision,* where man's drive toward individuality and toward oneness combine, and we encounter a being which, by virtue of its complete naturalness, is superhuman - a Christ. In this phase

> thought and will are indistinguishable, effort and attainment are indistinguishable . . . The being has selected, moulded and remoulded, narrowed its circle of living, been more and more the artist, grown more and more "distinguished" in all preference. Now contemplation and desire, united into one, inhabit a world where every beloved image has bodily form, and every bodily form is loved . . . Chance and Choice have become interchangeable without losing their identity.[125]

This unity of being occurs three phases beyond that of 'The Forerunner,' 'the phase of the hero,'[126] and it is at Phase 15 that 'personality' - the condition of greatest archetypal individuality - becomes 'character,' which subordinates the 'subjective' to what it sees as a vaster 'objectivity.'[127] Consequently, it moves beyond the condition of the Nietzschean hero, lending to the idea of Dionysian transcendence dimensions of which Nietzsche would hardly have approved.

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124) *Vision,* p. 52.

125) *Vision,* pp. 135, 6.

126) *Vision,* p. 127.

127) *Cf.* further chapter V below, pp. 161-7.

Yeats also regards communal mass-consciousness as an aspect of objectivity, and his notion of 'some inherited subject-matter known to the whole people'[128] is closely allied to Nietzsche's idea of common ancestral memory. Yeats writes that he

> 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.[129]

A marginal note in Common's selections ponders the possibility that the 'supernatural life' 'may be but the soul of the earth out of which man leaps again, when the circle is complete,'[130] a suggestion which appears beside Zarathustra's exhortation to *'remain true to the earth,* and do not believe those who speak to you of supernatural hopes!' This Yeats develops into his notion of the generic soul of man, of the *anima mundi,* which is also an elaboration of the 'collective unconscious' theory of Jung, whom Yeats had read, too. From the *anima mundi* man, birds, and beasts learn all they know. It is not a Platonic world of Ideal Forms, but is nevertheless a world which complements the temporal one and which harbours man's daimon or opposite. Yeats speaks of Plotinus as having been

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128) *Auto,* p. 190.

129) *Auto,* p. 190.

130) *NACFPP,* p. 193.

> the first philosopher to meet his daimon face to face . . . the first to establish as sole source the timeless individuality or daimon instead of the Platonic Idea, to prefer Socrates to his thought. This timeless individuality contains archetypes of all possible existences . . . , and as it traverses its circle of allotted lives, now one, now another, prevails.[131]

Yeats extends his concept of unity of being and the opposition of self and soul to the ceaseless conflict of Being and Becoming, of the supernatural and the natural. In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche dismisses as 'false conclusions' all ideas that 'this world is a world of becoming: consequently there is a world of being.'[132] He regards as 'ambiguous' the question of whether the cause of creation has been 'the desire for rigidity, eternity, *being*,' or rather 'the desire for destruction, for change, for *becoming*.'[133] He does however, describe 'being' in terms of gods a few pages later: 'Higher than "thou shalt" is "I will" (the heroes); higher than "I will " stands: "I am" (the gods of the Greeks).'[134] Thus the bewildering German provides both substantiation and refutation of Yeats's ideas, though the main thrust of his work denies Being in favour of Becoming.

In the long run, of course, self and soul are impulses of equal strength, alternating through man's individual

131) 'Introduction to *The Words upon the Window-pane*,' *Expl*, p. 368.

132) *WP* (579), pp. 10-11. 133) *WP* (846), p. 446.

134) *WP* (940), p. 495.

life and through whole epochs. Though Yeats might find the body especially attractive, 'Under Ben Bulben' recognises to the end the claims of both:

> Many times man lives and dies
> Between his two eternities,
> That of race and that of soul,
> And ancient Ireland knew it all.[135]

Art

The unity of self and soul, of body and spirit, of the temporal and the timeless, of thought and dance, are germane to Yeats's whole view of art, as his late essay 'The Mandukya Upanishad' succinctly testifies: sculptor and poet strive to draw together

> theme and thought, fact and idea; the dreamer creating his dream, the sculptor toiling to set free the imprisoned image . . . the union of theme and thought, fact and idea, so complete that there is nothing more to do, nothing left but statue and dream . . .[136]

We have seen how in 'Michael Robartes and the Dancer' Michelangelo fashions sinew in a way that enables it to 'rule by supernatural right/ Yet be but sinew.' Nietzsche agrees with artists such as Michelangelo more than

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135) *CP*, p. 397.

136) *E&I*, p. 477. Written in 1935.

> with any philosopher hitherto: they have not lost the scent of life, they have loved the things of "this world" - they have loved their senses.[137]

Moreover,

> artists, if they are any good, are (psychically as well) strong, full of surplus energy, powerful animals, sensual; without a certain over-heating of the sexual system a Raphael is unthinkable.[138]

The early Yeats of the Nineties soon forsakes the 'art for art's sake' tenet of arch aesthetes like Wilde and Pater (himself deeply read in Nietzsche), much as the young Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* later condemns *'l'art pour l'art'* in *The Twilight of the Idols* as 'a snake biting its own tail.'[139] 'Discoveries' of 1906 asserts that what moves natural men in the arts is what moves them in life, that 'all art is sensuous.'[140] For Nietzsche, the 'perfection of existence' is a central function of art:

> art is essentially *affirmation, blessing, deification of existence* . . . Art affirms. Job affirms. - But Zola? But the Goncourts? - The things they display are ugly: but *that* they display them comes from their *pleasure in the ugly.*[141]

This has the sinister qualities of Yeats's desire to pursue the realisation of beauty as far as possible, and hints at

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137) *WP* (820), p. 434. 138) *WP* (800), p. 421.

139) *TI*, 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man' (24), p. 81.

140) *E&I*, p. 293. 141) *WP* (821), pp. 434-5.

the frightful (by conventional standards) ramifications attendant upon aesthetic absolutism. *The Birth of Tragedy* speaks of the beauty born of pain and suffering, while Nietzsche's last postcard to Peter Gast from Turin in 1889 is signed, 'The Crucified.' Yet while we have art in order not to perish of the truth, we should evaluate it in relation to life, excluding 'other-wordly' criteria which remove art from the whole of life.

Art must not be expected to 'mimic' nature completely, however. Here Nietzsche would seem to agree with Plato, though the German explains art as being incapable of reproducing nature completely since nature is disorganised, art moulded. The artist is able to select and arrange, as he is dealing with something of manageable size and is a 'perfector on a small scale, working on material.'[142] Rather than merely reflecting the 'surfaces' available to him through colours, shapes, sounds, thoughts, the artist reshapes them to communicate his 'inner state:' 'Realism in art an illusion. You reproduce what delights, attracts, you in an object . . . Honesty in art - nothing to do with realism!'[143] This imprinting of the artist's own interpretation on objects in the sensual world is derived from his artistic *Rausch*, or 'frenzy.' Yeats ascribes it to his artistic 'imagination' - reality and value reside in the 'world of imagination.' And the imagination is certainly

142) *WP* (795), p. 419.

143) *GOA* XI, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 227, 8.

not an attribute of the artist alone: 'If we poets are to move the people, we must reintegrate the human spirit in our imagination.'[144]

Art, Yeats wrote a year before encountering Nietzsche, 'brings us near to the archetypal ideas themselves, and away from nature, which is but their looking-glass.'[145] When we bear in mind that he is speaking here in terms not of Platonic Ideas but of his *anima mundi*, we appreciate how avidly he supported Nietzsche's contention that art has 'nothing to do with realism' but communicates an 'inner state.' The ancient stage, we read in 'Samhain: 1904,' was more a platform than a stage, since thespians

> did not desire to picture the surface of life, but to escape from it. But realism came in, and every change towards realism coincided with a decline in dramatic energy.[146]

This is not to deny the requirement of form. Nietzsche maintains that 'convention is the condition of great art, *not* an obstacle',[147] while Yeats praises the time when 'players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious.'[148] Nietzsche favours convention for its harnessing and moulding of artistic *Rausch*, an imposition which promotes the development of form. To Yeats,

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144) 'Discoveries,' *E&I*, p. 264.
145) 'At Stratford-on-Avon,' *E&I*, p.102.
146) *Expl*, p. 172.
147) *WP* (809), p. 428.
148) 'Samhain: 1904,' *Expl*, p. 172.

> Style, personality - deliberately adopted and therefore a mask - is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers and the money-changers.[149]

To Nietzsche, fine style comes with 'lightness in what is most difficult:' *la gaya scienza* is what

> *we halcyons* miss in Wagner . . . light feet, wit, fire, grace; the great logic; the dance of the stars; the exuberant spirituality; the southern shivers of light; the *smooth* sea - perfection.[150]

Good style contains synthesis, unity of opposites - which is the very basis of Nietzsche's view of 'beauty:'

> "Beauty" is for the artist something outside all orders of rank, because in beauty all opposites are tamed . . . that everything follows, obeys, so easily and so pleasantly - that is what delights the artist's will to power.[151]

To be 'classical,' as opposed to 'degenerate,' one must

> arrive at the *right* time to bring to its climax and highpoint a *genus* of literature or art or politics . . . reflect a total state (of a people or a culture) in one's deepest and innermost soul . . . one must not be a reactive but a *concluding* and forward-leading spirit, saying Yes in all cases, even with one's hatred.[152]

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149) *Auto*, p. 461.

150) *CW* (11), p. 178.

151) *WP* (803), p. 422.

152) *WP* (848), pp. 446-7.

All that strengthens is beautiful, all that weakens, ugly. Decadence means disintegration, in art as in everything. Buoyant, affirmative art is Apollo's divine gift of illusion through which to endure the nausea engendered by abysmal truth:

> Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.[153]

Paradoxically, this lends an escape from this world, the real world, and Yeats, too, uses art to create his supernatural world, longing in 'Sailing to Byzantium' to be gathered 'Into the artifice of eternity . . .'[154]

So Yeats and Nietzsche promulgate the unity of thought and dance in art, joining Apollo's imagination-inspired artifice and the sensuality of Dionysus to mould the artist's interpretation of existence into an affirming, pleasurable form that offers escape from reality through beautiful illusion.

Reason, Aesthetics, and Art in the Plays

The Nietzschean stances toward reason, aesthetics, and art that we have looked at are adopted by Yeats as much in his plays as in his poetry, particularly in the later plays. *The Hour-Glass,* dated 1914 in the *Collected Plays* but written

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153) *WP* (853:2), p. 452. 154) *CP*, p. 218.

in 1903, might well have taken its very title from Zarathustra's metaphor of the 'sand glass' in his discourse on eternal recurrence. Its theme of the antagonism between the Socratic man and the tragic man is embodied in the Wise Man and the Fool, with the First Pupil demanding proof by rational argument: *'Argumentis igitur proba; nam argumenta poscit qui rationis est particeps.'*[155]

At the Hawk's Well (1917) presents us with complex and manifold symbolism, but its final song certainly leaves little doubt as to the major theme of the play: 'Folly alone I cherish . . . Wisdom must live a bitter life.'[156]

Oliver Gogarty claims that Yeats intends the Guardian of the Well to symbolise the intellect.[157] With this as our cue, we should interpret the hawk which cries through her as abstract thought, and the well itself in one sense as the receptacle holding the answer to the riddle of life, or the means whereby one reaches the world of eternity, the realm in which antinomies are resolved and unity of being is achieved. Containing as it does 'that miraculous water' which makes one live for ever,[158] it harbours the elusive Dionysian wisdom for which all men long at the bottom of their hearts. The intellect denies this condition to the passionate Cuchulain, one

155) 'Now prove by arguments; for he who is a companion of reason demands arguments.' *CPl* (New York, 2nd ed., 1953), p. 204.

156) *CPl*, p. 144.

157) As recorded, *inter alia*, in Reg Skene's *The Cuchulain Plays of W.B. Yeats: A Study* (Macmillan, London, 1974), p. 129.

158) *CPl*, p. 139.

of those natural men who does not 'hate the living world' but is 'crazy for the shedding of men's blood,/ And for the love of women.' The girl guarding the well and her dancers have drained the Old Man of life: 'You have deluded me my whole life through,/ Accursed dancers, you have stolen my life.'[159] They are 'deceivers of men'[160] who have rendered the well a place fit only for 'all that's old and withered,'[161] not the young and passionate. The Old Man has spent his whole life in preparation for what never comes . . .

Cuchulain is but 'a mouthful of sweet air'[162] at the point of the mortal and the immortal, the temporal and the timeless, and Yeats expresses the desire in 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan' that Cuchulain should 'appear perhaps like an image seen in reverie by some Orphic worshiper.'[163] It is Dionysian self-transcendence that we should employ as a means to attaining our urge for unity, not abstract thought. Yeats certainly did 'divine an Irish hatred of abstraction!'[164]

The Cuchulain of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919) confronts Fand as the bodily image of his spirit in a mysterious realm beyond that of the senses. It is Yeats's familiar theme of the relationship between body and soul in which

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159) *CPl*, p. 143.
160) *CPl*, p. 140.
161) *CPl*, p. 141.
162) *CPl*, p. 144.
163) *E&I*, p. 221.
164) *VPl*, p. 961.

the spiritual is endowed with physical attributes. Beauty is a spiritual concept that transports love beyond the mire of sexual instinct - but is formless without it. 'Fair needs foul,' as Crazy Jane reminds us. 'Loveliness' is the product of the 'wounds' and 'bloody press' that 'drag' it into being.[165]

The Player Queen of 1922, one of the plays G. Wilson Knight describes as "strictly Nietzschean in coneption,"[166] adumbrates from its very opening lines that our knowledge of the world is thoroughly unreliable: our intellect misinterprets what our senses apprehend. The First Old Man asks the Second to report what he can see: 'You have better sight than I.' His companion in turn asks him: 'Do you hear anything? You have better hearing than I.' We are unable to perceive and comprehend accurately - those 'narrow streets' will indeed 'be dark for a long while.'[167]

The lurking terror of the unknown spurs the Queen's subjects to a desperate resort to reason as a means of explaining phenomena, but the strength of their inherent irrationality repeatedly gains the upper hand. When rumours fly wildly about the Queen being a witch, the First Citizen asserts that 'We'd have no man go beyond evidence and reason' - only to present the Tapster's bizarre sexual fantasy as evidence enough to prove that 'we cannot leave her

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165) *CPl*, p. 185.

166) G. Wilson Knight: *Christ and Nietzsche* (1948), p. 185.

167) *CPl*, p. 248.

alive this day - no, not for one day longer.'[168] When the crowd 'mistake'[169] Decima for the real Queen, they are content with that which their senses convey to them as real; their reality is delusion. The 'rationality' of the Bishop casts out the Beggar, who is irrational mystery incarnate, because the old man appears to have brayed falsely on this occasion, since there has been no evident changing of the crown. All previous brayings had signaled a new royal era, and the Bishop concludes that the Beggar had been in league with imagined conspirators. The Prime Minister, however, realises that 'God or the Fiend has spoken,'[170] and proposes to exterminate divine mystery by hanging its representative. Sexually aroused by Decima's looks, even he, once the abjurer of passions, now acts at the bidding of the body, 'mad' - like the crowd - 'after her pretty face' and 'the devil in her eye,'[171] feeling compelled by 'The Oracle' to 'have that woman for wife;'[172] just a short while earlier he had dismissed Decima as having 'a bladder full of dried peas for a brain.'[173] Ironically, it is her 'pretty face,' not her 'brain,' that is the cause of his present infatuation.

Septimus, on the other hand, the 'dramatist and poet' who cares only for 'Venus and Adonis and the other planets of heaven,'[174] is 'drunk, but inspired,'[175] in strong contrast to the sober politician whom citizens and countrymen

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168) *CPl*, p. 253. 169) *CPl*, p. 270. 170) *CPl*, p. 272.
171) *CPl*, p. 272. 172) *CPl*, p. 273. 173) *CPl*, p. 257.
174) *CPl*, p. 250. 175) *CPl*, p. 254.

alike regard as 'a crafty man' out to 'deceive' them.[176] The worlds of poetry and politics are mutually antagonistic. The pragmatic politician has no access to Dionysian wisdom; the intoxicated poet Septimus is able to envision the ideal marriage of flesh and spirit, to glimpse the eternal reality behind the appearance. The 'great secret' that 'man is nothing till he is united to an image' comes to him 'at the second mouthful of the bottle'[177] as a gift from the god of intoxication. He feels 'extraordinarily wise,' drinking still more when he no longer feels 'wise enough,' until once again 'all is plain.'[178] Dionysus elevates him to a level of wisdom beyond that of the 'rascally sober man'[179] who engages in deception to stave off the pain of revelation.

It is the body that emerges victorious in the conflict which informs *The Player Queen*. Decima (ten), playing the Queen 'with my whole body,'[180] triumphs over everyone else, she with the 'wicked mouth - beautiful, drowned, flighty mouth,'[181] with the 'pretty face' and 'devil in her eye.'[182] She is positioned above the more spiritual Nona (nine), who is all the same still body enough to 'please a man when there is but one candle.'[183] The Queen - like her patroness, Holy Saint Octema (eight), a martyr comprising only soul -

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176) *CPl*, p. 251. 177) *CPl*, p. 267. 178) *CPl*, p. 268.
179) *CPl*, p. 268. 180) *CPl*, p. 260. 181) *CPl*, p. 269.
182) *CPl*, p. 272. 183) *CPl*, p. 263.

has 'never known love. Of all things, that is what I have had most fear of.'[184] The Queen is an objective type who longs for the 'God's mask' and escapes to a convent, losing her identity in a world removed from that of the body. The subjective Decima asserts her individuality, thriving on power and will ('I choose,' 'I bid you to obey').[185] The idealist Septimus (seven), though professing to care only for the 'planets of heaven,'[186] does nevertheless tap the beats of his Muse-inspired verse on Nona's 'shoulder' and 'spine' as he composes next to her in bed. But he forswears the 'mouth' of woman in order to 'save the noble, high-crowned hat of Noah,'[187] one of the artist's 'images and implements'[188] which must be defended against the 'mob.'

The need of body for soul and of soul for body - so striking in Septimus's fantastic vision of Queen and Unicorn coupling - is also evident in the songs of the play, with Decima singing that 'None has found, that found out love,/ Single bird or brute enough.'[189] And, as the Queen points out, 'It was especially the bleeding feet of Saint Octema that gave pleasure to the unicorn.'[190]

In *The Resurrection* of 1931 Yeats's most strident concern is again the confrontation of the rational and the irrational. The 1938 revised edition of *A Vision* provides

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184) *CPl*, p. 271. 185) *CPl*, p. 272. 186) *CPl*, p. 250.
187) *CPl*, p. 269. 188) *CPl*, p. 267. 189) *CPl*, p. 265.
190) *CPl*, p. 258.

a nutshell summary of the play's major theme, saying of God (or Christ) that,

> considered as more than man He controlled what Neo-Pythagorean and Stoic could not - irrational force. He could announce the new age, all that had not been thought of, or touched, or seen, because He could substitute for reason, miracle.[191]

Christ is thus the irrational returning after centuries of Socratic domination.

At the beginning of the play the musicians hail the return of an era of the soul which will negate the body, as a 'staring virgin' calls 'out of the fabulous darkness.'[192] At the end the musicians sing of the 'Babylonian starlight' ushering in 'a fabulous, formless darkness' which will make 'all Platonic tolerance vain/ And vain all Doric discipline.'[193] Both are irrational impulses which confound the rational mind.

Up to the climax of the play, the Greek is the advocate of the soul, seeing reality as a supernatural world where gods are phantoms untainted by animal flesh; the Hebrew, seeing reality as the world of the senses, promotes the cause of the self. The Syrian, believing in Christ as god incarnate, accepts disorder within himself, acknowledging that 'there is always something that lies outside knowledge,

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191) *Vision*, pp. 274-5.

192) *CPl*, pp. 364, 5.

193) *CPl*, p. 373. *Cf.* chapter VI below for *The Resurrection* as a vehicle for Yeats's views on cyclical history, pp. 257-60.

outside order.'[194]

The Greek considers Christ to be a 'phantom' whose qualities cannot be found in the flesh. He laughs at His crucifiers

> because they thought they were nailing the hands of a living man upon the cross, and all the time there was nothing but a phantom. . . . No god has ever been buried; no god has ever suffered. Christ only seemed to be born, only seemed to eat, seemed to sleep, seemed to walk, seemed to die.[195]

A short while later he repeats his conviction that Christ was nothing but a god who consisted of soul only: 'I am certain that Jesus never had a human body; that he is a phantom and can pass through that wall.'[196] The gods, he says,

> can be discovered by contemplation, in their faces a high keen joy like the cry of a bat, and the man who lives heroically gives them the only earthly body that they covet. He, as it were, copies their gestures and their acts. What seems their indifference is but their eternal possession of themselves. Man, too, remains separate. He does not surrender his soul. He keeps his privacy.[197]

Man merely reflects the divine world through heroic individuals, he does not combine with the supernatural - though

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194) *CPl*, p. 371.

195) *CPl*, p. 366.

196) *CPl*, p. 370.

197) *CPl*, p. 369. *Cf*. chapter V below on the hero, pp. 160-8; 172; 182-9; 203-6, and also chapter VI on cyclical history, p. 259.

the god, the soul, does 'covet' the 'earthly body.'

The Greek's description of the worshipers of Dionysus points to the joy of 'self-forgetfulness,' 'self-abandonment,' and 'surrender,' which are among the more sublime qualities of objectivity:

> In Alexandria a few men paint their lips vermillion. They imitate women that they may attain in worship a woman's self-abandonment.[198]

The revellers, he says,

> are the most ignorant and excitable class of Asiatic Greeks, the dregs of the population. Such people suffer terribly and seek forgetfulness in monstrous ceremonies.[199]

This is to see the impulse towards objectivity in an abhorrent light, and the Greek feels that this Bacchic abandon is not Greek; the Greek gods loved the physical, not the soul:

> I cannot think all that self-surrender and self-abasement is Greek, despite the Greek name of its god. When the goddess came to Achilles in the battle she did not interfere with his soul, she took him by his yellow hair.[200]

The Hebrew, as the voice of the self, champions reason and the senses, considering Christ to have been

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198) *CPl*, p. 368. 199) *CPl*, p. 368.

200) *CPl*, p. 369.

> nothing more than a man, the best man who ever lived . . . He preached the coming of the Messiah . . . Then some day when he was very tired, after a long journey perhaps, he thought that he himself was the Messiah.[201]

He is grateful that Christ was of the sensual world, that this is the 'real' and only world, and that we need not suppress it in favour of a phantom divine one:

> I am glad that he was not the Messiah; we might all have been deceived to our lives' end, or learnt the truth too late. One had to sacrifice everything that the divine suffering might, as it were, descend into one's mind and soul and make them pure. One had to give up all worldly knowledge, all ambition, do nothing of one's own will. Only the divine could have any reality.[202]

The 'drunken'[203] Syrian argues for acceptance of the irrational divine by the rational man of the flesh. Christ 'is no phantom,'[204] nor would it matter were the stone over the mouth of His tomb rolled away by what the Greek would call 'a hand without bones, without sinews.'[205] After all, 'What matter if it contradicts all human knowledge? What is human knowledge?'[206] he asks, laughing. 'The knowledge,' replies the Greek,

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201) *CPl*, p. 367.
202) *CPl*, pp. 367-8.
203) *CPl*, p. 369.
204) *CPl*, p. 370.
205) *CPl*, p. 371.
206) *CPl*, p. 371.

that keeps the road from here to Persia free from robbers, that has built the beautiful humane cities, that has made the modern world, that stands between us and the barbarian.

The Syrian. But what if there is something it cannot explain, something more important than anything else?

The Greek. You talk as if you wanted the barbarian back.

The Syrian. What if there is always something that lies outside knowledge, outside order? What if at the moment when knowledge and order seemed complete that something appears? *(He has begun to laugh.)*

The Hebrew. Stop laughing.

The Syrian. What if the irrational return? What if the circle begin again?

The Hebrew. Stop! He laughed when he saw Calvary through the window, and now you laugh.

The Greek. He too has lost control of himself.[207]

These are Nietzsche's ideas on the limitations of 'human knowledge,' the fresh vigour of the 'barbarian' that breathes new life into the 'humane cities' of stale civilisations, of the virtues inherent in man's condition when he 'has lost control of himself.'

The Greek screams when he touches Christ's side and discovers that He is indeed 'blood and flesh:'

The heart of a phantom is beating! The heart of a phantom is beating! . . . O Athens, Alexandria,

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207) *CPl*, p. 371.

> Rome, something has come to destroy you. The heart of a phantom is beating. Man has begun to die. Your words are clear at last, O Heraclitus. God and man die each other's life, live each other's death.[208]

As in *The Words upon the Window-pane*, irrational perplexity hurls itself into the face of intellect which is unable to comprehend it.

In *A Full Moon in March* of 1935 we meet the confrontation of 'crown of gold' and 'dung of swine,'[209] symbols of the antinomies that demand - but cannot achieve - reconciliation. In life, complete unity is at most only approached in the act of sexual love. Its full attainment occurs in death alone.

How is man's longing for aesthetic immortality to join forces with his impulse towards biological immortality? The intellect which produces aesthetic beauty prevents the man who thinks 'in the whole body' from expressing his instinctive desires. The Swineherd vents his animal instinct with mindless abandon; his antagonist, the Queen, is a distant beauty whose intellect spurns the crassness of blood and flesh.

The Swineherd wears a 'half-savage' mask and is 'bearded'[210] like a Dionysian satyr; the Queen speaks of him as a 'terrifying' man. She has promised to take for her husband 'he that best sings his passion'[211] - but there is, as the Swineherd points out, a 'catch:' the beautiful Queen would not necessarily accept 'some blind aged cripple'[212]

208) *CPl*, pp. 372-3. 209) *CPl*, pp. 390-1. 210) *CPl*, p. 390.
211) *CPl*, p. 391. 212) *CPl*, p. 391.

as her consort. Gross flesh made grosser would be repugnant beyond endurance. The Swineherd, though, has come 'through dust and mire' where 'beasts have scratched my flesh,' and the reflection of his face 'makes me think/ My origin more foul than rag or flesh.'[213] He would happily 'embrace body and cruelty,/ Desiring both as though I had made both.'[214] He has 'rolled among the dung of swine and laughed./ What do I know of beauty?'[215] As the principle of brutal Dionysian sexuality, he knows nothing of the 'soul,' of 'perfection,' of sublime 'beauty,' of restraining 'intellect.' What he provides is 'A song - the night of love,/ An ignorant forest and the dung of swine.'[216] It is blood and flesh that procreates, a fact the Queen cannot bring herself to acknowledge. The Swineherd's story of the woman who had 'a drop of blood' enter 'her womb and there begat a child' is what triggers the Queen's command to have him beheaded.

The Queen, though lacking in carnal knowledge, does realise that 'they that call me cruel speak the truth,/ Cruel as the winter of virginity.'[217] They are wrong who 'hold/ That woman's beauty is a kindly thing.'[218] The First Attendant, 'singing as Queen,' cries that wrongs done to 'child and darling' come from 'virgin cruelty,' and that love is greater when one loves 'in shame.'[219]

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213) *CPl*, p. 391. 214) *CPl*, p. 392. 215) *CPl*, p. 392.
216) *CPl*, p. 393. 217) *CPl*, p. 392. 218) *CPl*, p. 392.
219) *CPl*, p. 395.

The Queen feels compelled to hear the song of the decapitated Swineherd's head, the angelic attracted by the bestial.

"Yet," as John Rees Moore so deftly summarises it, "her virginity *is* her soul just as his singing head *is* his virility. Body and soul must equally be bruised to pleasure each other."[220]

The Queen's cold spirituality is as barren as the Swineherd's hot passion when in isolation: each demands fertilisation by the other to achieve consummation at the full moon in March.

The soul, as the First Attendant sings at the play's close, demands 'desecration and the lover's night.'[221] That is why 'holy, haughty feet/ From emblematic niches must descend.'[222] It is 'desecration and the lover's night' which she 'whose emblem is the moon,' lacks. 'Time's completed treasure' is discovered with the 'desecration' of chaste spiritual beauty by carnal sex. This shocks the Second Attendant, and a great 'fright' descends upon his 'savage, sunlit heart'[223] at the realisation - but yet he urges his heart to 'delight' in this truth, to view it 'with understanding eyes.'

Yeats's sympathies are therefore very much with the Swineherd, whose brand of sexual love 'can make the loutish wise.'[224] The logic and intellectual abstractions that Pythagoras offers cannot match love's gift of days that 'go by in foolishness' - 'O how great their sweetness is!'[225]

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220) John Rees Moore: *Masks of Love and Death/ Yeats as Dramatist* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1971), pp. 269-70.
221) *CPl*, p. 396. 222) *CPl*, p. 396. 223) *CPl*, p. 396.
224) *CPl*, p. 391. 225) *CPl*, p. 391.

In the same way that soul needs body, so art requires the sensual world; art relegated to the Platonic realm of ideal forms is sterile and worthless. What moves men in art moves them in life. In *The Herne's Egg* of 1938, Congal believes - like Nietzsche - that all art is the sublimation of sensual drives, denying any origin in the supernatural. 'Women,' he proclaims, 'make/ An image of god or bird or beast/ To feed their sensuality;'[226] the 'prophetess' Attracta counters that 'there is no reality but the Great Herne.'[227] Not that the Herne represents art alone in Yeats's complex late play so infused with parody. Attracta, yearning for the mystical, sees the heavenly bird as the only happiness, and declares it is in union with him that 'I know what may be known: I burn/ Not in the flesh but in the mind.'[228] And yet her anticipated ecstasy of their coupling is firmly rooted in the sexual, with her longing to 'lie in a blazing bed/ And a bird take my maidenhead.'[229] When envisaging her meeting with the Great Herne, she feels that,

> Though beak and claw I must endure . . .
> No lesser life, man, bird, or beast,
> Can make unblessed what a beast made blessed,
> Can make impure what a beast made pure.[230]

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226) *CPl*, p. 409.
227) *CPl*, p. 409.
228) *CPl*, p. 409.
229) *CPl*, p. 410.
230) *CPl*, p. 419.

This is beast as divinity, with heaven and eternity to be found in the 'beak and claw' that 'horror stir in the roots of my hair.'[231] Attracta expects their essentially passionate, sexual union to lead to a frenzy of transcendence in which the fetters of the flesh are broken and 'I, all foliage gone,/ May shoot into my joy,' since 'strong sinew and soft flesh/ Are foliage round the shaft/ Before the arrowsmith/ Has stripped it.'[232] In this condition, she believes, 'To the unbegotten I return,/ All a womb and a funeral urn.'[233]

The timeless riddle of how this joyous transcendence is achieved is argued without resolution by the girls Kate, Agnes, and Mary: do Attracta and her Godhead couple 'in the blazing heart of the sun,' or 'in blue-black midnight?'[234]

Congal is of the opinion that Attracta's 'obsession' with the soul is nothing which a dose of fascistic sex won't cure, and prescribes a rape by seven brawny males who,

> in the name of the law
> Must handle, penetrate, and possess her,
> And so do her a great good by that action,
> Melting out the virgin snow,
> And that snow image, the Great Herne.[235]

Mathias, 'that coarse hunk of clay,'[236] hopes to be first, but, declares Congal,

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231) *CPl*, p. 419.
232) *CPl*, p. 412.
233) *CPl*, p. 410.
234) *CPl*, p. 413.
235) *CPl*, p. 418.
236) *CPl*, p. 418.

That's for the Court to say.
A Court of Law is a blessed thing,
Logic, Mathematics, ground in one,
And everything out of balance accursed.[237]

While Paul Ruttledge and Martin Hearne call for the abolition of Law, Congal hails it as the product of rationality and the enemy of mysticism as found in the Herne's embrace. In this case it conspires with the body to rid Attracta of her mystic impulse, a sensation born of the rape by the seven: all spiritual joy is bred in 'desecration and the lover's night.'

In her supposed coupling with the Great Herne, Attracta believes she has learned the secret of the universe: 'I share his knowledge;'[238] whatever secret she may have learned stems from the mire of her physical violation. It is a conundrum that persists into the very last song of Yeats's very last play, as the Street-Singer in *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939) sings of the harlot's exultation in loathsome sex:

But that the flesh my flesh has gripped
I both adore and loathe.
Are those things that men adore and loathe
Their sole reality?[239]

Raised as it is at the end of Yeats's life, her question never receives a definitive reply . . .

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237) *CPl*, p. 419. 238) *CPl*, p. 422. 239) *CPl*, p. 445.

V

THE HERO

> Here man is overcome at every moment; the idea "superman" became supreme reality here . . .
>
> \- Nietzsche, *speaking of Zarathustra.*

> . . . the man who overcomes himself, and so no longer needs . . . the submission of others, or . . . conviction of others to prove his victory . . .
>
> \- Yeats, *speaking of the hero.*

Hero and Übermensch

A 1906 letter from John Butler Yeats to his son bears unshakable testimony to Yeats's fervent admiration of the *Übermensch* idea in the years following his first reading of Nietzsche - needless to say, much to the chagrin of his father, who scolded:

> As you have dropped affection from the circle of your needs, have you also dropped love between man and woman? Is this the theory of the overman, if so, your demi-godship is after all but a doctrinaire demi-godship. . . . The men whom Nietzsche's theory fits are only great men of a sort, a sort of Yahoo great men. The struggle is

> how to get rid of them, they belong to the clumsy and brutal side of things . . .[1]

Do Nietzsche's 'great men' 'belong to the clumsy and brutal side of things?' Not according to *The Will to Power*, which speaks of the 'new barbarian' as a man of superior intellect, not a dumb brute; he is one 'who comes from the heights: a species of conquering and ruling natures. . . . Prometheus was this kind of barbarian.'[2] Nietzsche's 'master race' will not only rule, but have 'an excess of strength for beauty, bravery, culture, manners to the highest peak of the spirit.'[3] The Voltaire of *The Gay Science*, with his intellectual independence, is the perfect *cortegiano:* we 'are now emancipated from courtly taste, while Voltaire *perfected* it.'[4] In talking of the 'blonde beast,' Nietzsche contends that

> The noble caste was in the beginning always the barbarian caste: their superiority lay, not in their physical strength, but primarily in their psychical - they were *more complete* human beings.[5]

As Yeats writes in *A Vision*,

> My instructors certainly expect neither a "primitive state" nor a return to barbarism as primitivism and barbarism are ordinarily understood.[6]

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1) *JBYL*, p. 97.
2) *WP* (900), p. 479.
3) *WP* (898), p. 478.
4) *GS* (101), p. 157.
5) *BGE* (257), p. 173.
6) *Vision*, p. 262.

J.B. Yeats's uncertain interpretation of Nietzsche's 'theory of the overman' at once raises the question of what his son understood by it, to what extent Yeats regarded the heroic man and Nietzsche's superman as one and the same creature. Indeed, what is the relationship between hero and *Übermensch* in Nietzsche himself?

Given the elusive nature of the concepts that make up Nietzsche's whirlpool of ideas on his *Übermensch*, we would do well to heed Eric Bentley's caution to realise that Nietzsche's use of the word *Übermensch* is "elastic" to the end: "Christian poets have not defined God, nor has Nietzsche defined the superman."[7] The word is hardly a new one in German, and Nietzsche used it already at the age of fourteen to characterise Byron's heroes. Kaufmann's *Nietzsche* points out that "the *hyperanthropos* is to be found in the writings of Lucian in the second century A.D. *(Kataplous* 16) - and Nietzsche, as a classical philologist, had studied Lucian and made frequent reference to him in his *philologica.*"[8]

The eye of the whirlpool (if there is one) is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but even here Nietzsche regards his mouthpiece as a herald of the *Übermensch* rather than his prototype. Zarathustra is 'a herald of the lightning . . . the lightning, however, is the *Superman.*'[9] The seer articulates most of Nietzsche's sentiments through exhortation rather than by active example. Zarathustra is

7) Bentley, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-2. 8) Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, p. 307.
9) *TSZ*, Prologue, p. 10.

one of the many heroes who are but steps on the long road to the indefinable *Übermensch*. He says of the hero that

> also his hero-will hath he still to unlearn: an exalted one shall he be, and not only a sublime one. . . . For this is the secret of the soul: when the hero hath abandoned it, then only approacheth it in dreams - the superhero.[10]

The man who overcomes himself is the hero; the hero who overcomes himself is the superhero.

'Surpass youself!' is a recurring injunction in *Zarathustra* and elsewhere, and Morgan points to this in the instance of Michelangelo, whom Nietzsche views as an artist who saw

> the problem of the victoriously completed one, who first had need to overcome even "the hero in himself;" the man most lifted up on high, who rose above his compassion even, and mercilessly smashes and destroys what is unsuitable for him - radiant and in undimmed divinity.[11]

This is something very close to the *Übermensch*, a condition beyond that of the hero. Prior to this, the man who overcomes something in himself is achieving 'only' heroic action; we recall Yeats's description

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10) *TSZ* (35), pp. 128, 9.

11) *GOA* XIV, p. 147, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-9.

of the hero in *A Vision* as 'the man who overcomes himself.'[12]

It appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that an egregious few 'higher men' will develop in the course of time through repeated self-transcendence into a race from whom will spring the *Übermensch*. The book's poetic language should not lead us to assume that Nietzsche conceives of the *Übermensch* as an entirely new biological species;[13] *The Anti-Christ* states that a 'more valuable type has existed often enough already: but as a lucky accident, as an exception, never as *willed.*'[14] *Ecce Homo* speaks of Zarathustra as being only 'a relatively superhuman type;'[15] he is but a step on the way of faith, as Cuchulain is. 'Never yet,' he asserts, 'hath there been a Superman.'[16] When he *does* come, 'so shall the Superman speak:'

> "I, for the first time, brought the man of justice, the hero, the poet, the scientist, the prophet, the leader together again . . ."[17]

The hero is just one part of the *Übermensch*.

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12) *Vision*, p. 127.

13) *Cf.*, *inter alia*, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's Introduction to Common's translation of *TSZ* (p. xi), in which she stresses that the *Übermensch* is not 'a new species (in the Darwinian sense) of which we can know nothing . . .'

14) *AC* (3), p. 116.

15) *EH*, 'Why I Am a Destiny' (5), p. 331.

16) *TSZ* (26), p. 99.

17) *GOA* XIV, p. 264, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

Zarathustra's Prologue (which thundered that world-shaking pronouncement, *"God is dead!")* presents man as 'a rope over an abyss'[18] stretched between animal and superman. As ape became superape, so man must surpass himself to become superman. This should be man's *raison d'être;* as Yeats says in his Introduction to *The Resurrection,* 'There is perhaps no final happy state except in so far as man may gradually grow better.'[19] Section four of the Prologue chronicles not so much the qualities of the *Übermensch* himself as those of the men who long for him - the attributes of nobility, courage, pride, generosity through magnanimity, not through compassion (which is not an affirmative quality, but a wasteful reduction to a condition doubly miserable). These are the strengthening attributes with which the 'higher men' of Part Four are imbued, and it is the higher man rather than the superman whom we should view as the Nietzschean hero.

Zarathustra derides Christian charity and meekness, and the eighteenth century positivism that champions reason, virtue, and happiness - those 'herd ideals.' But his encouragement to limit one's 'good' virtues and despise one's neighbour is elevated by his altruism on behalf of future generations. The Nietzschean hero lives for his children.

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18) *TSZ*, Prologue (4), p. 8.

19) *Expl*, p. 398.

Zarathustra's words, however, bring only jeers from the townspeople to whom he has come down to preach: 'they think me cold, and a mocker with terrible jests.'[20] They, like the buffoon who knocks the rope-walker off his rope, want the 'last man,' not the superman. They choose the worser of the two directions open to them:

> The *one* movement is unconditionally: the levelling of humanity, great ant-hills, etc.
> The *other* movement, my movement: is conversely the sharpening of all antitheses and clefts, abolition of equality, the production of supreme men.
> The *former* generates the last man, *my* movement the superman.[21]

Rejected by the rabble, Zarathustra decides to address himself to the select few, and in Part One of his lesson teaches that life is guiltless, decrying past emphasis on sin and elevation of saintliness, asceticism, and abnormal denigration of the body. Man requires three metamorphoses: he must first become a camel, bearing the burden that comes with denial of evasion and so gaining strength, then become a lion, acquiring nobility and freedom, and at last become like a child, with its newborn values and unprejudiced innocence.[22] As the child sees no defilement in pitch, so

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20) *TSZ*, Prologue (5), p. 13.

21) *GOA* XIV, p. 262, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

22) *Cf.* Yeats linking the Blake who loved the 'happy thoughtless person' and the Nietzsche 'at the moment he imagined the "Superman" as child.' (*Auto.*, p. 474).

there is no need for man to recoil from that which is currently viewed as terrible. 'Christian' men drag down the hero and promote stagnation and neurasthenia, men like sapless academics, 'those belauded sages of the academic chairs' who, finding wisdom in 'sleep without dreams,' 'knew no higher significance of life;'[23] men like ascetics who turned away from their own bodies; like cowards, turned into eunuchs in their retreat from struggle; men such as those who parade righteous indignation to hide inner decay. Their friendships are as sterile as their enmities: 'If one would have a friend, then must one also be willing to wage war for him: and in order to wage war, one must be *capable* of being an enemy.'[24] Even loving is 'painful ardour;' but, 'Beyond yourselves shall ye love some day! Then *learn* first of all to love.'[25] The human ideal is the complete man who runs the whole gamut of human experience and includes everything, 'good' and 'evil,' in himself.

In Part Two Zarathustra rages against democracy with its cowardliness, pettiness, and levelling ignobility. Sir Herbert Grierson recounts how Yeats, during a visit to him in Edinburgh, excitedly spoke of Nietzsche's élitist theories: "I had not left the bedroom to which I conducted him to change before he had told me of his

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23) *TSZ* (2), p. 28.

24) *TSZ* (14), p. 58.

25) *TSZ* (20), p. 74.

interest in Nietzsche, as a counteractive to the spread of democratic vulgarity."[26] To Zarathustra, democracy undermines the productive *Rangordnung* among different men, and in Part Three the harbinger of the great race of natural rulers claims that command is actually more difficult than obedience, that life is a will to power rather than a Darwinian will to survival.[27]

In Part Four Zarathustra selects his disciples from among the higher men, those who have the spark of the *Übermensch* within them. He urges them to surpass the 'petty people' who 'preach submission and humility and policy and diligence and consideration and the long *et cetera* of petty virtues.'[28] Courage is essential: 'he who with eagle's talons *graspeth* the abyss: he hath courage.'[29] Real virtue lies in courage, in the strength to affirm the self. Evil, too, is essential: '"Man must become better and eviler" - so do *I* teach. The evilest is necessary for the Superman's best. . . . I . . . rejoice in great sin as my greatest *consolation.*'[30] He ridicules those whose 'goodness' means having 'crippled paws.'[31]

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26) Preface to V.K.N. Menon: *The Development of W.B. Yeats* (Edinburgh, 1942), as quoted, *inter alia*, by O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

27) In 'If I Were Four-and Twenty' (*Expl*, pp. 269-70), Yeats writes of Balzac that 'he explained and proved even more thoroughly than Darwin, the doctrine of the survival of the fittest,' and that 'Nietzsche might have taken, and perhaps did take, his conception of the superman in history from his *Catherine de Medici* . . .'

28) *TSZ* (73:3), p. 321.

29) *TSZ* (73:4), p. 322.

30) *TSZ* (73:5), p. 322.

31) *TSZ* (34), p. 126.

Zarathustra sees man as a virulent creator *and* destroyer:

> And he who hath to be a creator in good and evil, verily, he hath first to be a destroyer, and break values in pieces.
> Thus doth the greatest evil pertain to the greatest good: that, however, is the creating good.[32]

Honesty is another indispensable in Zarathustra's canon of desired attributes: 'nothing is more precious to me, and rarer, than honesty.'[33] On the other hand, 'he who cannot lie, doth not know what truth is.'[34] He begs his higher men to perceive that 'even the worst thing hath two good reverse sides.'[35] These higher men are 'creating ones' whose entire love and entire virtue is in their hopes for their children, and so for the *Übermensch*. They must learn to 'play and mock,'[36] to 'laugh.'[37] They should have 'light feet,'[38] be 'good dancers.'[39] Let them embrace

> that good, unruly spirit, which cometh like a hurricane unto all the present, unto all the populace, -
> - Which is hostile to thistle-heads and puzzle-heads, and to all withered leaves and weeds.[40]

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32) *TSZ* (35), p. 128.
33) *TSZ* (73:8), p. 324.
34) *TSZ* (73:9), p. 325.
35) *TSZ* (73: 19), p. 331.
36) *TSZ* (73:14), p. 328.
37) *TSZ* (73: 15, 16), pp. 328, 9.
38) *TSZ* (73:17), p. 330.
39) *TSZ* (73:17), p. 330.
40) *TSZ* (73:20), p. 331.

But Zarathustra's message is a hard one: ultimately, even the select few desert him, and he is left to propogate his teachings quite alone . . .

Thus Spoke Zarathustra by no means provides all the pointers to Nietzsche's portrait of his ideal man. Nietzsche never did apply all the finishing touches. Morgan finds the fullest description of the *Übermensch* in this comment on Zarathustra:

> He contradicts with every word, this most affirmative of all spirits; in him all opposites are bound into a new unity. The highest and the nethermost forces of human nature, the sweetest, wantonest and fearfullest, flow out from one spring with immortal sureness. . . . Here man is overcome at every moment; the idea "superman" became supreme reality here. . . . The halcyon quality, the light feet, the ubiquity of mischievousness and exuberant gaiety, and all else typical of the type Zarathustra, have never been dreamed of as essential to greatness. Precisely in this amplitude of space, in this accessibility to the diametrically opposed, Zarathustra feels himself to be the *highest species of all existence* . . .[41]

Nietzsche goes on to list as 'the idea of Dionysus himself' so many of the hallmarks peculiar to the excessive heroes of Yeats's plays, those prodigal qualities of the 'amplest soul' which 'plunges with zest into chance,' the 'possessing one' which 'rushes into willing and

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41) *GOA* XV, pp. 95f., tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

craving,' the 'wisest soul, to which folly speaks most sweetly,' and 'the most self-loving in which all things have their current and countercurrent ebb and flow.'

The quality of superabundance is important in Nietzsche's conception of *Selbstüberwindung*, where self-overcoming results from an overflowing of the will to power:

> All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of "self-overcoming" in the nature of life - the lawgiver himself eventually receives the call: *"patere legem, quam ipse tulisti."*[42]

The 'great man,' the 'genius,'

> in his works, in his deeds - is necessarily a prodigal: his greatness lies in the fact that *he expends himself*. . . . One calls this "sacrifice;" one praises his "heroism" therein, his indifference to his own interests, his devotion to an idea, a great cause, a fatherland: all misunderstandings . . . He flows out, he overflows, he uses himself up, he does not spare himself - with inevitability, fatefully, involuntarily, as a river's bursting its banks is involuntary.[43]

This overflowing strength affirms even the 'terrible' as 'beautiful:'

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42) *GM*, Third Essay (27), p. 161.

43) *TI*, 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man' (44), p. 98.

> The feeling of plenitude, of *dammed-up strength* (which permits one to meet with courage and good-humour much that makes the weakling *shudder)* - the feeling of *power* applies the judgment "beautiful" even to things and conditions that the instinct of impotence could only find *hateful* and "ugly."[44]

Nietzsche describes his great ideal of 'perfection' in *The Will to Power* as 'the extraordinary expansion of its feeling of power, riches, necessary overflowing of all limits.'[45]

The idea of surpassing oneself is closely tied to Nietzsche and Yeats's views on conflict within the psyche, the conflict between self and soul, self and anti-self. 'We are necessarily strangers to ourselves,' reads *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 'we do not comprehend ourselves, we *have* to misunderstand ourselves, for us the law "Each is furthest from himself" applies to all eternity . . .'[46] We consist of several selves, and one's real 'higher' self is that to which we aspire, the purpose we give to life - which for Nietzsche is the attainment of the *Übermensch*.

Man suffers painful conflict between his different selves, as the various impulses within himself do battle. What he *is*, surges in his dominant instinct, and *becoming* what he is means planting the other impulses around this

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44) *WP* (852), p. 450.

45) *WP* (801), p. 422.

46) *GM*, Preface (1), p. 15.

'tyrant in us' and nurturing the blooming of our inherent talent. With this realisation of self comes joyous self-sufficiency, and in 'Discoveries' Yeats writes of 'what sweetness, what rhythmic movement there is in those who have become the joy that is themselves.'[47] Morgan mentions Nietzsche's suggestion that we live through "a series of temporary 'selves,' each of which is effective because believed permanent at the time, under the conscious guidance of the ultimate self which finally makes itself known and uses the previous selves as functions. . . . Finding oneself means attaining one's own standard of good and evil, a personal 'legislation' derived from the ideal self."[48]

Nietzsche symbolises this struggle involved in 'becoming' what one 'is' by the personage of the tragic hero. The hero's inner conflict makes of him a 'complete' man, that great desideratum of the mature Yeats. And the final achievement of wholeness requires that one learn to love oneself -

> not, to be sure, with the love of the sick and infected . . . One must learn to love onself . . . with a wholesome and healthy love: that one may endure to be with oneself, and not go roving about.[49]

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47) *E&I*, p. 271.

48) Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

49) *TSZ* (54:2), p. 214.

When one is able to move from 'I will' to 'I am,' one can 'fly,' 'dance,' 'laugh,' 'sing' - the self one has learnt to love no longer being a burden. The whole man loves all his contrasting elements, from basest to loftiest. Ironically, it is man's lack of harmonious animal instincts, producing inner tension, that has raised his potentiality:[50] 'bad conscience,' born of the 'making inward' of man when he turned his savage instincts against himself, was exploited by priests, so that through them the human soul first attained depth and became evil in a higher sense. The resulting states of distress and happiness within man's 'inner world' have overrun stagnation, and when one has

> inherited and cultivated a proper mastery and subtlety in conducting a war against oneself, that is to say self-control, self-outwitting: then there arise those marvellously incomprehensible and unfathomable men, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and the seduction of others . . .[51]

Tied to this psychic conflict within the individual is the antagonism between moralities and classes:

> Without the *pathos of distance* such as develops from the incarnate differences of classes, . . . that other, more mysterious pathos could not have developed either, that longing for an ever-increasing

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50) *Cf.* chapter II above, pp. 35-7, 40-1, 46-7.

51) *BGE* (200), p. 103.

> widening of distance within the soul itself, . . . the elevation of the type "man," the continual "self-overcoming of man."[52]

Every elevation of man has been the work of aristocracies with their belief in a long ladder of gradation between man and man and all the tension that involves. 'It was out of this *pathos of distance* that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for them.'[53] And, as we have seen before, there is tension not only between master morality and slave (or herd or flock) morality, but between the members of aristocracies themselves, since

> the strong are as naturally inclined to *separate* as the weak are to *congregate* . . . every oligarchy tembles with the tension each member feels in maintaining control

over his lust for tyranny.[54] The affirmative instinct of the aristocrat declares that '"imperfection, everything *beneath* us, distance between man and man, the pathos of this distance, the Chandala themselves pertain to this perfection."'[55] The fact is, like the isolated hero of the Cuchulain plays,

> he who *demands and attains great things from himself* must feel himself very remote from those who do not do that -- this *distance* is interpreted by these others as

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52) *BGE* (257), p. 173. 53) *GM*, First Essay (2), p. 26.
54) *GM*, Third Essay (18), p. 136. 55) *AC* (57), p. 178.

> "opinion about self;" but the former knows it only as perpetual work, war, victory, by day and night: of all that, the others know nothing![56]

As is the case with all things, the conflicting urges within the self are all reducible to the comprehensive formula of will to power: through each urge seeking dominion over the others, we desire power over ourselves . . .

Objectivity and Subjectivity

In Yeats, Nietzsche's psychology of inner antagonism takes the form of man's quarrel with himself in desiring - and idealising - his opposite, that which *A Vision* calls his 'Daimon,' his 'anti-self' or 'antithetical self.' *A Vision* provides the most comprehensive systematisation of Yeats's esoteric concepts of objectivity and subjectivity, of primary and antithetical impulses. The presence of Nietzsche is so evident in so many of these notions, that we can reasonably concur with Wilson's carefully considered verdict that Nietzsche gave Yeats "the terms 'subjective' and 'objective' for the divisions of the human psyche."[57] That he gave Yeats these terms for application to much else besides, will become evident as we set out the principles put forward in Yeats's system.

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56) *AC* (57), p. 178. 57) Wilson, *YI*, p. 183.

With his elaborate schemata of circles and gyres, Yeats fashions the theory that all existence is made up of two great rhythms, one a movement toward unity, the other a movement toward individuality. This is as much true of civilisations and religions as it is of the human psyche. Viewing the world as being 'impossible without strife' - as we saw in chapter two - Yeats symbolises the opposing rhythms as two interpenetrating gyres, so that, in Northrop Frye's description, "a movement in one direction which, as it grows more pervasive, develops the counteracting movement within itself, so that the apex of the next gyre appears in the middle of the base of the preceding one and moves back through it."[58] Each gyre thus has some elements of the other, the primary or objective impulse being predominantly a movement toward communal unity, toward absorption in God, and the other - as we have indicated before - being predominantly a drive toward the realisation of individuality and absorption in self. Flowing from (and into) the primary world of 'outward things and events' is the antithetical world of 'our inner world of desire and imagination.'[59]

As is often the case with terminology in both Nietzsche and Yeats, the terms objectivity and subjectivity do not always possess exactly the same meaning and so can induce a sense of confusion if not interpreted

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58) Frye, *ex* Donoghue and Mulryne, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

59) *Vision*, p. 73.

correctly within their context. Thus it is that we find Yeats placing Dionysus and his promotion of pristine 'Oneness' at his objective pole alongside the degraded sense of unity which produces 'sameness' and the 'herd' instinct. Similarly, the subjectivity which produces splendid Apollinian individualists also includes the narrowing ego which tears man from the bosom of the 'primordially One.' Yeats's note to *Calvary* indicates that objectivity does not have one exclusive meaning only, referring to the Roman Soldiers as '*a form of* objectivity' which lay beyond that of Christ.[60] So, while objectivity has a sublime dimension, it is also the realm of the 'reasonable and moral:'[61] 'The *antithetical tincture* is noble, and, judged by the standards of the *primary*, evil, whereas the *primary* is good and banal . . .'[62]

Yeats also places men of science in the sphere of objectivity, and Jaspers comments that Nietzsche sees a striving for objective observation as being the essence of scientific insight, since objectivity increases the more feelings are expressed in words and the more eyes are directed on phenomena. This process - so open to misinterpretation - is not disinterested awareness, but a result of forces struggling to impose limitations upon each other through methodological investigation.[63]

60) *P&C*, p. 460. Italics mine. 61) *Cf. Vision*, pp. 71-3.
62) *Vision*, p. 155.
63) Karl Jaspers: *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, tr. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz (University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1965), p. 175.

Nietzsche regards Hegel's 'Objective Spirit' as a part of nature, with society and the state as great herds. But because Yeats recognises the vaster dimensions of Nietzsche's Dionysian 'Oneness,' he includes it as an objective impulse. While Nietzsche's Apollo is the god of individuation, worship of Dionysus - so crucial to participation in tragic theatre - brings loss of individuation and acquisition of a sense of being 'at one' with the universe; in objective religions of this sort the worshiper hopes to achieve union with the mystic godhead through oblivion of the 'I'. Christianity provides this same Dionysian extinction of self, leading Yeats to categorise it with Dionysus-worship as an objective or primary phenomenon.

Looking at his annotations in his copy of Common, we notice Yeats assigning to objective man the characteristics of belief in 'one god,' the 'denial of self,' and 'the soul turned outwards towards spirit;' to subjective man he assigns the Nietzschean virtues of 'Homer' with his 'many gods,' 'affirmation of self,' and exultation in 'life.'[64]

Most of Yeats's attitudes to rationality and aesthetics are also incorporated along these lines: art, for example, is seen as the product of an antithetical nature, science being that of a primary one. Similarly,

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64) *NACPPP*, p. 122. *Cf.* chapter IV above, p. 114.

master morality opposes slave morality as antithetical against primary, fiction opposes truth, ecstasy wisdom, the solar the lunar, the natural the reasoning, Eros Agape, Apollo Dionysus.

The impulse toward individuality is one toward the instinctive and natural: the antithetical drive from 'Phase 1 to Phase 15 is towards Nature. Phase 15 to Phase 1 is towards God,'[65] man passing through twenty-eight phases during every cycle of Yeats's historical 'Great Wheel.' The goal of individuality is complete self-fulfillment, that state of unity of being which we approach in the phases near Phase 15, the phase which achieves this unity so completely that it can only be consummated beyond flesh and blood. As Frye elucidates, "We thus arrive at the difficult conception of a creature which is superhuman because it is completely natural."[66] The contrary urge toward objective, primary unity aims at absorption in God, with Phase 1 a similarly superhuman condition.

Yeats's cherished 'wisdom of instinct'[67] occurs in Phase 4, with men of the phase opposite 'worn out by a wisdom held with labour and uncertainty.' Phase 28 houses the man who has 'no active intelligence,' 'nothing of the exterior world but his mind and body . . . his thoughts are an aimless reverie; his acts are aimless

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65) *Vision,* p. 104. *Cf.* further chapter VI below, pp. 257-60.

66) Frye, *ex* Donoghue and Mulryne, *op. cit.,* p. 18.

67) *Vision,* p. 110.

like his thoughts; and it is in this aimlessness that he finds his joy.'[68]

When we remember Yeats saying of his 'instructors' that they

> substitute for subject and object and their attendant logic a struggle towards harmony, towards Unity of Being, [that] logical and emotional conflict alike lead towards a reality which is concrete, sensuous, bodily,[69]

we are left with little doubt that high on this list of unconscious instructors is Friedrich Nietzsche.

As with history, all human experience is cyclical in Yeats's view of things, and the progress of the human soul as it travels from a state of objectivity to one of subjectivity and back is charted as a great wheel containing twenty-eight phases of a symbolic moon, including those we have just mentioned. 'This wheel,' Yeats writes,

> is every completed movement of thought or life, twenty-eight incarnations, a single incarnation, a single judgment or act of thought. 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.[70]

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68) *Vision*, p. 182.

69) *Vision*, p. 214. *Cf*. chapter II above, p. 42.

70) *Vision*, p. 81.

In a note of 1921 to *The Only Jealousy of Emer* Yeats had written that

> the soul through each cycle of its development is held to incarnate through twenty-eight typical incarnations, corresponding to the phases of the moon, the light part of the moon's disc symbolizing the subjective and the dark part the objective nature.[71]

Of these twenty-eight phases, twenty six occur in the human world and two (1 and 15, as we have seen) in the superhuman:

> Twenty-and eight the phases of the moon,
> . . . and yet but six-and-twenty
> The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in.[72]

Mask, Self, and Anti-Self

Yeats assigns each individual a phase in his system, with a man of any phase able to appear 'out of phase' at any point in history. He constantly begins his description of typical phase types with an account of this variant of the type. Nietzsche calls Napoleon, that 'ideal of antiquity' who appeared in the midst of the French Revolution with its *ressentiment* mob, 'the most

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71) *VPl*, p. 566.

72) *CP*, pp. 184, 5.

isolated and late-born man there has even been . . . Napoleon, this synthesis of the *inhuman* and *superhuman*.'[73]

Yeats explains each individual in terms of two objective and two subjective factors, known as the four 'Faculties' - 'Will,' 'Mask,' 'Creative Mind,' and 'Body of Fate.' Will is feeling that has not become desire because there is no object to desire; Mask is the image of that which we wish to become, or to give our reverence; Creative Mind is the intellect, the mind that is consciously constructive; and Body of Fate is the physical and mental environment, the stream of phenomena encountered by a particular individual. In describing his great wheel as an individual life, Yeats turns to the example of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, in which

> the stage-manager, or *Daimon*, offers his actor an inherited scenario, the *Body of Fate*, and a *Mask* or role as unlike as possible to his natural ego or *Will*, and leaves him to improvise through his *Creative Mind* the dialogue and details of the plot.[74]

Will is thus man in action, Creative Mind man in thought or sentience, Mask man's vision of what he desires to make of himself or of his environment, and Body of Fate the physical and mental worlds of Nietzsche's 'external' and 'internal' 'phenomenology.'[75] Man (as we saw in

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73) *GM*, First Essay (16), p. 54.

74) *Vision*, p. 84.

75) *Cf.*, *inter alia*, *WP* (477-9), pp. 264-6.

chapter two) is defined by the phase of his will, with his mask deriving from the phase directly opposite, a distance of fourteen phases. In the same way the creative mind and body of fate are diametrically positioned.

The four faculties can also be viewed as four 'Principles,' in which case will and mask become 'Husk' and 'Passionate Body,' the two lower principles of physical subject and physical object, while creative mind and body of fate become 'Spirit' and 'Celestial Body,' the higher principles of soul and eternal forms.

Though later significantly embellished, Yeats's concept of the mask derives in substance from Nietzsche's idea of the 'heroic mask' and its ramifications. Nietzsche develops his theory from his early realisation that man perforce wears a mask of some kind, since full communication with his fellows is impossible. A deliberate choice of masks or 'foregrounds' is essential. Masks are inevitable since nobody is ever any one thing, in that personality is constantly changing - Yeats following him in viewing personality as a constantly renewed choice.[76] The Nietzschean mask protects both the wearer and the viewer by minimising intrusions and providing a delicate, acceptable front. Zarathustra recommends the

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76) *Vision*, p. 84.

wearing of masks even with one's friends:

> Thou wouldst wear no raiment before thy friend? It is in honour of thy friend that thou showest thyself to him as thou art? But he wisheth thee to the devil on that account!
> He who maketh no secret of himself shocketh: so much reason have ye to fear nakedness. Aye, if ye were gods, ye could then be ashamed of clothing! Thou canst not adorn thyself fine enough for thy friend.[77]

While one changes outward masks, there are also masks within and behind masks extending like onion skins to the core of the psyche: 'Ah! there are too many depths for all anchorites,' says Zarathustra, which is why we seek friends who 'betrayeth wherein we would fain have faith in ourselves.'[78] Friends are themselves a kind of mask in reflecting our own countenance in a sort of 'coarse and imperfect mirror.'[79]

Nietzsche adopts masks for himself in a wholly deliberate way, speaking through such figures as the Greeks, Wagner, Schopenhauer, Voltaire, Zarathustra, the 'Free Spirit.' Feeling himself to have appeared too early for widespread comprehension and consumption by the vulgar mass of humanity (a 'Forerunner' 'out of phase' in Yeats's system),[80] Nietzsche wrote to Overbeck in

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77) *TSZ* (14), p. 58. 78) *TSZ* (14), p. 57. 79) *TSZ* (14), p. 58.

80) *Cf.* Yeats's remarks on Phase 15 in *A Vision* (p. 136): 'Where the being has lived out of phase, seeking to live through *antithetical* phases as though they had been *primary*, there is now terror of solitude [Nietzsche's 'terrible mistress'], its forced, painful, and slow acceptance, and a life haunted by terrible dreams.'

1886 that

> I must first supply a multitude of educative premises until I have finally trained my own readers, I mean readers who may be *allowed* to see my problems without breaking in on them.[81]

As Morgan remarks, just when he "planned to come out as openly for his ideas as was possible in public" catastrophe struck, and "what we have left is the series of masks."[82]

Nietzsche's conviction that our natural urges tend to protect us from the truth supports this adoption of masks, but raises the difficulty of reconciling his doctrine of the mask with his abhorrence of dishonesty and *Schauspielerei* - 'acting,' 'affectation,' 'pretence.' Perhaps Yeats provides an answer in speaking of the 'created' mask and the 'imitative' mask[83] - not all masks are desirable. The preferred mask is the one which is the creation of the individualist seeking unity of self. Nietzsche's concept of the mask is further redeemed by its noble intention of providing 'distance' and protection: the 'great man'

> knows that he is incommunicable: he finds it tasteless to be familiar . . . When not speaking to himself he wears a mask. He rather lies than tells the truth; it

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81) Tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

82) Morgan, *ibid.*, p. 20.

83) *Cf. Vision*, p. 84.

> requires more spirit and will. There is a solitude within him, that is inaccessible to praise or blame, his own justice that is beyond appeal.[84]

The *Übermensch* will adopt the mask he has fashioned for himself, the destined image for which all higher men should strive. It is this chosen mask of the subjective hero that is admirable, not the 'God's mask' of the objective man.

The heroic mask also conveys 'symbolic truth,' as in *The Birth of Tragedy* which claims that

> all the celebrated figures of the Greek stage - Prometheus, Oedipus, etc. - are mere masks of this original hero, Dionysus. That behind all these masks there is a deity, that is one essential reason for the typical "ideality" of these famous figures . . . the one truly real Dionysus appears in a variety of forms, in the mask of a fighting hero, and entangled, as it were, in the net of the individual will.[85]

Nietzsche condemns Euripides, however, for - after his murder of the myth of Dionysus - adopting

> a copied, masked myth that, like the ape of Heracles, merely knew now to deck itself out in the ancient pomp . . . your heroes, too, have only copied, masked passion and speak only copied, masked speeches.[86]

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84) *GS* (962), p. 505. *Cf.* the Roman practice of being *splendide mendax.*

85) *BT* (10), p. 73.

86) *BT* (10), pp. 75-6.

And, ironically,

> even Euripides was, in a sense, only a mask: the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysus nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn demon, called *Socrates*.[87]

Yeats is no less an opponent of shallow simulation, observing that among the Stoics - who were

> the first beneficiaries of Plato's hatred of imitation - we may discover the first benefactors of our modern individuality, sincerity of the trivial face, the mask torn away.[88]

He complains that when Anaxagoras 'declared that thought and not the warring opposites created the world,' 'all that had been imagined by great poets and sculptors began to pass away,' echoing *The Birth of Tragedy* and its scorn of 'Anaxagoras with his *"nous"*' who postulated that '"In the beginning all things were mixed together; then came the understanding and created order."'[89]

Nietzsche does not provide his suggestions on the mask with any real systematisation, but his ideas were quickly espoused by Yeats who, as Ellmann mentions, "had been concerned since childhood over the discrepancy between what he was and what he wanted to be, between what he was and what others thought him to be."[90] Men are actors playing roles in a drama being performed in

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87) *BT* (12), p. 82.

88) *Vision*, p. 272.

89) *BT* (12), p. 85.

90) Ellmann, *IY*, p. 93.

time and place. As Zarathustra declares, life 'needeth good actors.' And

> Good actors have I found all the vain ones: they play, and wish people to be fond of beholding them - all their spirit is in this wish.
> They represent themselves, they invent themselves . . .[91]

In a lecture delivered on 9 March 1910, Yeats spoke of Renaissance culture as being based

> *not* on self-realisation, *on* a knowledge of things, *on things* reflecting themselves *in the soul*, but upon the deliberate creation of a great mask. What else was the *imitation* of Alcibiades? Do you not always feel that mask consciously created when at the death scenes of Plutarch's people?[92]

The term 'mask' appears prominently in Yeats's verse just a few months after this in a song written for *The Player Queen* which 'would but find' 'what's behind' the masks we wear.[93] Here mask refers essentially to the self displayed to society - and also to the lover. You should not seek to remove the masks of others completely, since their masks are part of them and that which 'engaged your mind' to start with. Jeffares mentions an entry Yeats made in his diary at the time, August 1910: 'I see always this one thing, that in practical life . . . the

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91) *TSZ* (43), p. 157.

92) As reproduced in O'Driscoll and Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

93) 'The Mask,' *CP*, p. 106.

Mask is more than face.'[94] In 'Anima Hominis' from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* Yeats writes of how

> Saint Francis and Caesar Borgia made themselves overmastering, creative persons by turning from the mirror to meditation upon a mask . . .
> I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a re-birth as something not oneself, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed . . . Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask . . .[95]

'The Forerunner' of Phase 12, we read in *A Vision,*

> follows an Image, created or chosen by the *Creative Mind* from what Fate offers; would persecute and dominate it; and this image wavers between the concrete and sensuous image.[96]

We struggle ceaselessly to become united to an image of ourselves: 'Man is nothing till he is united to an image' is 'the great secret' that came to Septimus 'at the second mouthful of the bottle.'[97] Speaking of 'The Cat and the Moon,' Yeats says,

> I wrote a little poem where a cat is disturbed by the moon, and in the changing pupils of its eyes

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94) Jeffares, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

95) *Myth,* p. 333.

96) *Vision,* pp. 128-9.

97) *The Player Queen, CPl* (New York, 2nd ed.), p. 267.

> seems to repeat the movement of the moon's changes, and allowed myself as I wrote to think of the cat as the normal man and of the moon as the opposite he seeks perpetually . . .[98]

All unity derives from the mask, our 'antithetical mask' being 'the form created by passion to unite us to ourselves.'[99]

'The Phases of the Moon' describes the creative strife entailed in progression toward attainment of the mask, as

> From the first crescent to the half, the dream
> But summons to adventure and the man
> Is always happy like a bird or a beast;
> But while the moon is rounding towards the full
> He follows whatever whim's most difficult
> . . . and . . .
> His body moulded from within his body
> Grows comelier.
> . . .
> The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war
> In its own being . . .
> . . . and after,
> Under the frenzy of the fourteenth moon,
> The soul begins to tremble into stillness,
> To die into the labyrinth of itself![100]

And with 'the crumbling of the moon,'

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98) 'Introduction to *The Cat and the Moon*,' *Expl*, p. 402-3.
99) *Vision*, p. 82.
100) *CP*, p. 185.

> The soul remembering its loneliness
> Shudders in many cradles; all is changed,
> It would be the world's servant, and as it serves,
> Choosing whatever task's most difficult
> Among tasks not impossible, it takes
> Upon the body and upon the soul
> The coarseness of the drudge.
> *Aherne.* Before the full
> It sought itself and afterwards the world.

In antithetical phases it is an image fashioned from the self which inspires action; in primary phases action is motivated by a desire to 'be the world's servant' and be engulfed by it. 'The *primary* is that which serves, the *antithetical* is that which creates.'[101]

Man is wracked by conflicting impulses, and Zarathustra asks whether we perceive the 'double will' of his heart, too:

> This, this is *my* declivity and my danger, that my gaze shooteth towards the summit, and my hand would fain clutch and lean - on the depth!
> To man clingeth my will; with chains do I bind myself to man, because I am pulled upwards to the Superman: for thither doth mine other will tend.[102]

The desire for a mask derives, as we have said, from our quarrel with ourselves, from that inner strife of which Nietzsche so frequently speaks. Again we call to mind

101) *Vision,* p. 85.

102) *TSZ* (43), p. 156.

Yeats saying of his 'instructors' that 'it was part of their purpose to affirm that all the gains of man come from the conflict with the opposite of his true being.'[103] Zarathustra sees the need for friends as deriving in part from a means of diffusing inner arguments: 'I and me are always too earnestly in conversation' which must be prevented from 'sinking into the depth.'[104] Yeats presents the self as constantly seeking that which it would abhor if it did not desire it, to join with the anti-self. Each man yearns to be the type of his antipodal phase: the non-intellectual man of Phase 3, a phase of perfect bodily sanity, becomes the mask for the 'Daimonic' man like Shelley of Phase 17. The saint longs to become the swordsman. 'In one's friend,' who is one countenance of oneself, 'one shall have one's best enemy,' says Zarathustra. 'Thou shalt be closest unto him with thy heart when thou withstandest him.'[105] As for Yeats's hero, his will or 'is' (that of the 'Forerunner') exists in the 'fragmentary and violent' Phase 12; his mask or 'ought' would then be found in the phase of the hunchback.

Nietzsche argues that even that despicable creature the moralist desires his opposite: 'the self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite - into me - that is what the name of Zarathustra means in my mouth;'[106] for

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103) *Vision*, p. 13. 104) *TSZ* (14), p. 57.

105) *TSZ* (14), p. 58.

106) *EH*, 'Why I Am a Destiny' (3), p. 328.

the early Yeats Nietzsche proved to be the very opposite or mask he sought to lend tartness to the sweetness of the Innisfree years.

In 'Ego Dominus Tuus,'[107] the piece of verse most crucial to the doctrine of the mask, *Ille* (or 'Willie,' in Pound's perception) puts forward the impulse experienced by antithetical man:

> By the help of an image
> I call to my own opposite, summon all
> That I have handled least, least looked upon.

Hic counters with an expression of primary man's contrary urge: 'I would find myself and not an image.' 'That,' laments *Ille*,

> is our modern hope, and by its light
> We have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind
> And lost the old nonchalance of the hand;
>
> . . .
>
> *Hic.* And yet
> The chief imagination of Christendom,
> Dante Alighieri, so utterly found himself
> That he has made that hollow face of his
> More plain to the mind's eye than any face
> But that of Christ.
>
> . . .
>
> *Ille.* I think he fashioned from his opposite
> An image that might have been a strong face
> Staring upon a Bedouin's horse-hair roof
> From doored and windowed cliff.
>
> . . .

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107) *CP*, pp. 180-3.

Being mocked by Guido for his lecherous life,
Derided and deriding

. . .

he found
The most exalted lady loved by a man.
Hic. Yet surely there are men who have made their art
Out of no tragic war, lovers of life,
Impulsive men that look for happiness
And sing when they have found it.
Ille. No, not sing,
For those that love the world serve it in action.

. . .

What portion in the world can the artist have
Who has awakened from the common dream
But dissipation and despair?
Hic. And yet
No one denies to Keats love of the world;
Remember his deliberate happiness.
Ille. His art is happy, but who knows his mind?

To *Ille*, Keats's 'deliberate happiness' is a mask expressly adopted to enable him to produce art in an unhappy environment. Rather than finding his 'style' by 'sedentary toil/ And by the imitation of great masters,' as *Hic* would, *Ille* seeks 'an image, not a book.' He invokes

the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self,
And, standing by these characters, disclose
All that I seek . . .

This depiction of man's anti-self, so constant a theme throughout *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair,* was particularly satisfying to Yeats. In 'Hodos Chamelion-tos' he writes,

> And as I look backward upon my own writing, I take pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I have found something hard and cold, some articulation of the Image which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life. [108]

But though the assumption of one's opposite brings satisfaction, achieving one's image entails pain and discord, as the words of 'Anima Hominis' testify:

> The other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may choose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality . . . He only can create the greatest imaginable beauty who had endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and forseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling unforseen wing-footed wanderer . . . He is of all things not impossible the most difficult, for that only which comes easily can never be a portion of our being.[109]

In his lecture notes for 'Friends of My Youth,' Yeats says of Lionel Johnson that

> he made his poetry out of the struggle with his own soul which the sword of Fate had as it were divided in two. All the great things of Life seem to me to have come from battle, and the battle of poetry is the battle

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108) *Auto,* p. 274. 109) *Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Myth,* p. 331.

> of a man with himself.[110]

In Part VII of *Fighting the Waves* he speaks of the kind of love that brings us into contact with our opposite, a love

> which is like the man-at-arms in the Anglo-Saxon poem, "doom eager." Young, we discover an opposite through our love; old, we discover our love through some opposite neither hate nor despair can destroy, because it is another self, a self that we have fled in vain.[111]

Reality lies not in the self alone, nor in the anti-self alone. It is found in the product wrought from their struggle.

The Hero in the Plays

In summarising the hallmarks of the Nietzschean hero, we find him endowed above all with boundless strength of will and passion. He is the sovereign individual, a splendid embracer of all the contraries within himself. He is the flower of uniqueness, self-possessing, self-affirming, self-revering. But Nietzsche does not lose sight of the fact that the deisre for individuation is merely one phase in life, realising that

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110) As reproduced in O'Driscoll and Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

111) *VPl*, p. 571.

> there comes a point when we wish to go beyond the individual and idiosyncratic: but only in alliance with the individual, with the opposite, can we lend force to this endeavour.[112]

The Apollinian individual actively involves himself in the world of Dionysus, for 'how narrow this everlasting meditation on the *ego* makes us!'[113] But while the hero - that upward step on the ladder to the *Übermensch* - plunges himself into the world of Dionysian excess, he should also espouse the Apollinian attributes of the *Übermensch*, those golden qualities of measure and limitation which illuminate the beauty of form and style. Synthesis, wholeness, completeness through the fusion of Apollo and Dionysus is the heroic desideratum. In spite of the hero's passionate, unbridled actions, he should appreciate subtlety and delicacy:

> Set around you small, good, perfect things, ye higher men. Their golden maturity healeth to the heart. The perfect teacheth one to hope.[114]

The higher man who has elements of the *Übermensch* in him possesses the 'golden nature' of ripeness and serenity, the laughter of one who has moved beyond tragedy. He is an affirmer of all things, a *Ja-sagender* full of *amor fati* who is able to meet death by choice, not chance.

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112) *GOA* XII, p. 47, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

113) *GOA* XI, p. 244, tr. Morgan, *ibid.*

114) *TSZ* (73:15), p. 328.

> The most spiritual human beings, as the *strongest,* find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others, in attempting; their joy lies in self-constraint . . . They are the most venerable kind of human being: this does not exclude their being the most cheerful, the most amiable. They rule not because they want to but because they *are* . . .[115]

An intellectual of nobility and culture, the ideal hero is a purest who despises *Schauspielerei* and emphasises courageous sincerity and integrity. He is 'the Roman Caesar with Christ's soul,'[116] the perfect union of those Dionysian and Apollinian qualities so adroitly encapsulated in these passages from *The Will to Power:*

> The word "*Dionysian*" means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passion-ate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more float-ing states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total char-acter of life . . . the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of the necessary unity of creation and destruction. The word "*Apollinian*" means: the urge to perfect self-sufficiency, to the typical "individual" . . .
> . . . Plenitude of power and moderation, the highest

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115) *AC* (57), p. 178.

116) *WP* (983), p. 913.

> form of self-affirmation in a cool, noble, severe beauty: the Apollinianism of the Hellenic will.[117]

Nietzsche's ultimate sympathies lie, of course, with the god of intoxication, and he describes himself as 'the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus,' the god who would advance man and 'make him stronger, more evil and more profound than he is.'[118]

Of all these Dionysian and Apollinian impulses so abundantly discernible in the Yeatsian hero, it is the Nietzschean insistence on strength of will, passion, remoteness, solitude, and boundless self-overflowing that are the mark of men like Cuchulain and Seanchan. In *The King's Threshold* (1904), written during the years of the playwright's first great absorption with Nietzsche, the trenchant Seanchan gives full voice to Nietzsche's heroic rhetoric in his soaring vision of a 'mightier race.'[119] From beginning to end the play bespeaks the German's influence: as Moore observes, "the originally happy ending . . . shows how far Yeats was when he first conceived it from the elevated austerity of the Nietzschean vision."[120]

The self-imposed starvation upon which Seanchan embarks amounts to a conscious, active choosing of death in the manner of the Nietzschean hero: 'He has chosen

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117) *WP* (1050), p. 539.
118) *BGE* (295), pp. 200, 1.
119) *CPl*, p. 89.
120) Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

death,'[121] says the King in the opening moments of the play; 'Dead faces laugh'[122] comes the bard's exultant cry at the end, his words echoed by his Pupils. Brimful of that 'self-possession' of which Yeats speaks in the essays, Seanchan embraces his death with joyous eagerness: 'some strange triumphant thought,' says the Oldest Pupil, 'So filled his heart with joy that it has burst.'[123] The Youngest Pupil, recognising his mentor's revolutionary heroic attitude to death as something willed rather than inflicted, announces that 'The ancient right is gone, the new remains,/ And that is death.'[124] In a display of his Apollinian individualism, Seanchan resists all attempts to 'persuade him,'[125] and, though weakened from hunger, spurns any assistance when - by sheer effort of will - he rises and walks down the palace steps:

> I need no help.
> He needs no help that joy has lifted up
> Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekiel.[126]

Seanchan, complementing the finest of Apollo's qualities with all that is desirable in Dionysus, finds joy not only in death but also in the apocalyptic destruction of mediocrity:

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121) *CPl*, p. 70.
122) *CPl*, p. 93.
123) *CPl*, p. 93.
124) *CPl*, p. 93.
125) *CPl*, p. 71.
126) *CPl*, p. 93.

I would have all know that when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame,
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.
And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
On these bare steps.[127]

This is poetry as viewed by the exultant Dionysian man, and Seanchan meets death and destruction with all the mirth and mockery he ascribes to that 'mightier race' of which he heard the stars sing,

that great race
That would be haughty, mirthful, and white-bodied
With a high head, and open hand . . .
Laughing, it would take mastery of the world.[128]

Here is an unadulterated vision of Nietzsche's *Übermenschen*, those proud, laughing, noble, magnanimous 'lords of the earth.'

Seanchan's efforts, like Nietzsche's, are directed toward the 'breeding' of those 'exalted ones' who are beyond even the 'sublime ones:'[129]

I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick o' time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have voices,
Even in anger, like the strings of harps.[130]

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127) *CPl*, p. 75.
128) *CPl*, p. 89.
129) *TSZ* (35), p. 128.
130) *CPl*, p. 74.

And, like Nietzsche, Seanchan seeks the transvaluation of all values - unlike politicians such as the Mayor or the Chamberlain, who bellows to the Cripples causing a disturbance on the steps, 'Have you no reverence for what all other men/ Hold honourable?'[130] The old servant Brian advises the Mayor to 'root up old customs, old habits, old rights,'[131] while Seanchan displays unfeigned contempt for traditional authority and its representatives who understand his words no more than they do 'the baa of a sheep.'[132] When the Soldier sneeringly calls him 'old hedgehog,' Seanchan replies with Nietzschean remoteness, with an attitude that conveys arrogant self-assurance born of access to esoteric knowledge,

> You have rightly named me.
> I lie rolled up under the ragged thorns
> That are upon the edge of those great waters
> Where all things vanish away, and I have heard
> Murmurs that are the ending of all sound.
> I am out of life; I am rolled up, and yet,
> Hedgehog though I am, I'll not unroll
> For you, King's dog! Go to the King, your master.
> Crouch down and wag your tail.[133]

'Dog' is of course a favourite Nietzschean term for the base, fawning species of man.

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130) *CPl*, p. 79. 131) *CPl*, p. 78.

132) *CPl*, p. 78. 133) *CPl*, p. 82.

This superior 'distance' from the rabble makes of Seanchan a lonely, and in this sense an Apollinian, hero. Early in the play the Oldest Pupil introduces the picture of the solitary

> crane, that starves himself
> At the full moon because he is afraid
> Of his own shadow and the glittering water.[134]

This is an early instance in the plays of the bird imagery which was to recur so importantly as emblematic of Apollinian *contemplatio;* as Yeats's note to *Calvary* reads,

> such lonely birds as the heron, hawk, eagle and swan, are the natural symbols of subjectivity, . . . while the beasts that run upon the ground, especially those than run in packs, are the natural symbols of objective man.[135]

Seanchan despises such 'herd' types with their aenemic faith in reason: 'How comes it that you have been so long in the world,' he asks the Mayor, 'and not found reason out?'[136] The King calls 'most mischievous' Seanchan's

> wild thought that overruns the measure,
> Making words more than deeds, and his proud will
> That would unsettle all . . .[137]

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134) *CPl*, pp. 72-3. 135) *P&C*, p. 459.
136) *CPl*, p. 77. 137) *CPl*, p. 72.

The Monk regards him as setting a bad example for the flock, since 'If pride and disobedience are unpunished/ Who will obey?'[138] The cleric whines that the poet 'is a man that hates obedience,/ Discipline, and orderliness of life.'[139] His Dionysian mettle roused, Seanchan in turn scorns the Monk's 'tame' god, his spineless church that panders to the whims of state, his 'little God/ With comfortable feathers, and bright eyes.'[140] While his celibate detractor condemns dancing and the 'wanton imagination,'[141] the poet urges the girls whose enticements he had rejected to

> Go to the hurley!
>
> . . .
>
> Your feet delight in dancing, and your mouths
> In the slow smiling that awakens love.
>
> . . .
>
> Go to the young men.
> Are not the ruddy flesh and the thin flanks
> And the broad shoulders worthy of desire?[142]

These are the Dionysian injunctions of the passionate man who sees the spirit of music at the heart of the world, the champion of life whose Pupils end the play by hailing his envisioned super race of the future:

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138) *CPl*, p. 81. 139) *CPl*, p. 84.

140) *CPl*, p. 85. 141) *CPl*, p. 84.

142) *CPl*, pp. 85, 6.

O silver trumpets, be you lifted up
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long-throated swans upon the waves of time,
Sing loudly, for beyond the wall of the world
That race may hear our music and awake.[143]

Like Seanchan, the Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand* (also 1904) is resolutely disdainful of political expediency, and pursues his heroic integrity with all the tragic isolation from other men that this commitment entails. He obeys his own inner law, is not 'biddable as others,' having within himself the attributes of 'that clean hawk out of the air'[144] which raise him to isolated superiority over other men. Born of a father who 'came out of the sun,'[145] he experiences the Apollinian individual's conflict with the pressures of his environment, his passion deriving from that 'straining of man's being against some obstacle that obstructs its unity.'[146] Yet even in the very throes of this conflict he revels in his overflowing quota of Dionysian laughter, song and dance, excessive in everything.

The great Irish Red Branch Saga depicts much the same qualities in its picture of the young Cuchulain, making him well-suited to embellishments by the Yeats who had found them so much more forcefully presented in Nietzsche. The narrator, referring to Cuchulain's first

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143) *CPl*, p. 94.
144) *CPl*, p. 168. *Cf*. Nietsche's quotation of Galiani in *WP* (989), p. 516: *'Les aigles ne volent point en compagnie. Il faut laisser cela aux perdrix, aux étourneaux. . . . Planer au-dessus et avoir des griffes, voilà le lot des grands génies.'*
145) *CPl*, p. 167. 146) 'A People's Theatre,' *Expl*, p. 252.

day of knighthood, speaks of his 'manly rage' and of Emain Macha's women trooping out to placate him bare-bosomed, 'without subterfuge of any kind,' 'their manoeuvre being based on Cuchulain's well-known modesty, which like all his other qualities, was excessive.'[147]

If the Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand* is the proud, reckless, excessive, solar individual, Conchubar is the stolid advocate of that which Yeats dislikes in the objective world, the upholder of society's values, of 'threshold and hearthstone,'[148] the bastion of order who 'would leave/ A strong and settled country to my children.'[149] He, the prudently crafty, 'reasonable'[150] politician, is the Blind Man to Cuchulain's Fool. Their contrasts form the fulcrum of the play. They are hunchback and hero. We remember Yeats himself calling them 'the cold moon and the hot sun.'[151] As the Blind Man says, Cuchulain is 'wild'[152] and has 'his head in the clouds.'[153] When Conchubar wishes to discuss pragmatic issues, Cuchulain's 'fancy/ Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.'[154] He is bewitched by his dream of the ideal; as Louis MacNeice comments, Yeats, "having come to admire men of action . . . rationalized his admiration by the theory that the man of action is a dreamer who embraces his opposite, who dramatizes his dream in action;"[155]

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147) As quoted by David H. Green: *An Anthology of Irish Literature* (New York, 1954), p. 60.
148) *CPl*, p. 173. 149) *CPl*, p. 167. 150) *CPl*, p. 168.
151) *Letters*, p. 425. 152) *CPl*, p. 163. 153) *CPl*, p. 164.
154) *CPl*, p. 164. 155) Louis MacNeice: *The Poetry of W.B. Yeats* (Faber, London, 1967), p. 99.

in Nietzschean terminology he is the Dionysian man who has access also to the Apollinian dream state. This helped Yeats alleviate some of his early jealousy of young men of action - a jealousy which Joseph Hone points to in a quotation from MacGreevy's poem 'Homage to Louis IX:' 'W.B. Yeats, turned man of action, said, "MacGreevy, it's difficult to like men of action."'[156]

When the king takes him to task for 'hunting or dancing with your wild companions,' thereby allowing entry to the 'youngster out of Aoife's country,' Cuchulain's independent spirit retorts:

> I'll not be bound.
> I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love,
> Wherever and whenever I've a mind to.
> If time had not put water in your blood,
> You would never have thought it.[157]

With aristocratic strength of will, he refuses to 'be obedient in all things;/ Give up my will,' to 'swear obedience/ As if I were some cattle-raising king.'[158] He will yield even less readily to the High King's progeny who

> have no pith,
> No marrow in their bones, and will lie soft
> Where you and I lie hard.[159]

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156) Joseph Hone: *W.B. Yeats (1865-1939)* (Macmillan, London, 2nd ed. 1962), p. 352.

157) *CPl*, p. 166. 158) *CPl*, p. 167.

159) *CPl*, p. 168.

While Conchubar hopes for orderly perpetuation of the establishment, Cuchulain would 'mock at every reasonable hope,/ And would have nothing, or impossible things.'[160] *Aut Caesar aut nihil:* Cuchulain prefers annihilation to perpetuation of mediocrity, and would have his adherents praise

> Whatever life could make the pulse run quickly,
> Even though it were brief, and that you held
> That a free gift was better than a forced.[161]

When it comes to women, Cuchulain snorts that Conchubar, 'having lived among the spinning-wheels,' would

> have no woman near that would not say,
> 'Ah! how wise!' 'What will you have for supper?'
> 'What shall I wear that I may please you, sir?'[162]

Against this picture of woman as the tame, fawning chattel, he recalls Aoife,

> With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
> Thrown backward, and the bowstring at her ear,
> Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
> Or when love ran through all the lineaments
> Of her wild body.[163]

This is woman painted in Dionysian hues, 'high, laughing, turbulent,' her warrior's 'bowstring' complemented by

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161) *CPl*, p. 172.
162) *CPl*, p. 169.
163) *CPl*, p. 169.

the wisdom imparted by the god of wine, her 'wild body' coursing vibrantly with sexual 'love.' Her son, whose appearance Cuchulain greets with heroic equanimity, is of similar fettle: he will not stoop to offer any proof of his nobility other 'than the hawk gives/ That it's no sparrow!'[164] He has no fear of death, asserting with the fatalism of the noble warrior: 'Whether I live or die is in the gods' hands.'[165] He has his mother's fierceness, Conchubar notes, 'And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.'[166] He is passionate but not sentimental, and Cuchulain would have his friendship because he has 'a hot heart and a cold eye.'[167] Casting his own 'cold eye on life, on death,' Cuchulain asserts:

> Boy,
> If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me,
> As certainly as if I had a son
> And fought with him, I should be deadly to him.[168]

Though J.B. Yeats would have regarded Cuchulain's pursuit of his impersonal, perfect ideal as having led him to have 'dropped affection from the circle of . . . [his] needs,'[169] the hero's grief over his slaying of his son bespeaks a deep love; as Moore remarks, "Yeats's most militant and masculine tragedy is also the warmest in human passion."[170] Ironically - and the play is a

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164) *CPl*, p. 173. 165) *CPl*, p. 174. 166) *CPl*, p. 175.
167) *Cpl*, p. 174. 168) *CPl*, p. 177. 169) *JBYL*, p. 97.
170) Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

quilt of ironies - this succumbing to affection leaves him vulnerable to the remorseless tides of life. Though he 'has killed kings and giants,'[171] the waves master him in spite of the frenzy with which he battles them,[172] and the unheroic creatures around him merely exploit the moment of 'the quenching of this greatness'[173] to put their bourgeois hands 'into the ovens:'[174] 'Life drifts between a fool and a blind man/ To the end.'[175]

Conchubar had sought to join his prudent brand of 'wisdom' to Cuchulain's 'might of hand and burning heart,'[176] but the hero's *sprezzatura* tragically leaves little room for refelction, since 'What's wisdom to the hawk,[177] when that clear eye/ Is burning nearer up in the high air,'[178] stimulated by the prospect of battle. Conchubar's giving of his wisdom and taking of Cuchulain's natural strength did nothing but remove the hero's liberty and independence. Once Cuchulain loses these, his tragic σπαραγμος in a thoroughly physical sense sets in with inexorable tread.

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171) *CPl*, p. 182.

172) Frenzy is, of course, an important attribute of the heroic figure, the poet's artistic *Rausch* (that Roman *furor poeticus*) being a frenzy able to create truth, as in 'An Acre of Grass,' in which Jeffares recognises (*op. cit.*, p. 294) echoes of passages in Nietzsche's *Dawn*. *A Vision* apportions 'an element of frenzy' to the men of Phase 16 who delight in glowing images of concentrated force (*cf*. pp. 138-9).

173) *CPl*, p. 178.

174) *CPl*, p. 182.

175) *CPl*, p. 178.

176) *CPl*, p. 170.

177) The hawk being a composite image of nobility, defiance, bravery, and pride of the kind Birgit Bjersby describes in *The Interpretation of the Cuchulain Legend in the Works of W.B. Yeats*, pp. 87-93.

178) *CPl*, p. 174.

The familiar heroic qualities of pride and prodigality appear again in the Cuchulain of *At the Hawk's Well* (1917), with the Musicians of the opening moments calling

> to the mind's eye
> Pallor of an ivory face,
> Its lofty dissolute air.[179]

The Old Man goes on to speak of Cuchulain as one who does 'not hate the living world' and is 'crazy for the shedding of men's blood,/ And for the love of woman.'[180] He has 'that proud step/ And confident voice,'[181] fearless in his belief that 'My luck is strong:'[182] 'I am not afraid of you, bird, woman, or witch.'[183] And when Aoife and her troop of 'fierce women of the hills' confront him with the 'clash of arms,' he meets them undaunted: 'I will face them./ He comes! Cuchulain, son of Sualtim, comes!'[184] Asserting his own identity, he storms valiantly to his tragic destiny, a lonely subjective destiny devoid of comforting 'human faces,/ Familiar memories.'[185] He exudes self-possession to the end, just as he does in *The Green Helmet* (1910) where his self-assurance in his own destiny propels him into combat with the Red Man in reckless disregard of

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179) *CPl*, p. 136. 180) *CPl*, p. 139. 181) *CPl*, p. 141.
182) *CPl*, p. 140. 183) *CPl*, p. 142. 184) *CPl*, p. 144.
185) *CPl*, p. 144.

his own safety. His grand gesture brings him no material reward. In this 'heroic farce'[186] the other 'heroes' and their wives cluck after personal glory, highlighting Cuchulain's true achievement of honour in his self-sacrifice and self-overcoming. Though itself a form of egotism, this 'sacrifice' is unconscious, the product of his involuntary 'indifference to his own interests,'[187] flowing from his superabundance of power. And Zarathustra teaches that the

> bestowing virtue is the highest virtue . . . Ye constrain all things to flow towards you and into you, so that they shall flow back again out of your fountain as the gifts of your love. . . . When your heart overfloweth broad and full like the river, a blessing and a danger to the low-landers: there is the origin of your virtue.[188]

Cuchulain is intransigently gay in the face of hardship, winning the Red Man's voice because of his

> laughing lip
> That shall not turn from laughing, whatever rise or fall;
> The heart that grows no bitterer although betrayed by all.[189]

The First Musician in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919) speaks of Cuchulain as 'That amorous, violent man,'[190]

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186) The subtitle of the play.

187) *TI*, 'Expeditons of an Untimely Man' (44), p. 98.

188) *TSZ* (22), pp. 78, 79, 80.

189) *CPl*, p. 159.

190) *CPl*, p. 185.

a man of 'passion'[191] and 'the violent hour.'[192] Though not 'The young and passionate man I *was*,'[193] he nevertheless still belongs in the phase of the 'violent and fragmentary' man in Yeats's system - Phase 12 - where the hero is 'wrought to a frenzy of desire for truth of self.' He 'follows an Image, created or chosen by the *Creative Mind* . . . and this image wavers between the concrete and sensuous image.'[194] The images making up Cuchulain's tragic conflict find their representatives in, on the one hand, Emer, the concrete woman of the 'hearth'[195] 'who loved him first/ And loved him through the years when love seemed lost,'[196] but whose ties to the objective world made him 'impure with memory,'[197] and Eithne Inguba whose sexuality provides but temporary gratification, for women like her who lap men 'in cloudy hair or kiss their lips'[198] 'Are flung into some corner like old nut-shells,' 'the violent hour passed over;'[199] on the other hand we encounter Fand, image of spiritual beauty, located beyond the pain of 'flesh and blood'[200] and human memory, 'beauty's bitterest enemy.'[201] Cuchulain's daimonic figure of beauty, she stands at Phase 15, the phase of total subjectivity:

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191) *CPl*, p. 188. 192) *CPl*, p. 187. 193) *CPl*, p. 191.
194) *Vision*, p. 129. 195) *CPl*, p. 187. 196) *CPl*, p. 187.
197) *CPl*, p. 192. 198) *CPl*, p. 190. 199) *CPl*, p. 187.
200) *CPl*, p. 192. 201) *CPl*, p. 191.

> *Ghost of Cuchulain.* Who is it stands before me there
> Shedding such light from limb and hair
> As when the moon, complete at last
> With every labouring crescent past;
> And lonely with extreme delight,
> Flings out upon the fifteenth night?
> *Woman of the Sidhe.* Because I long I am not complete.[202]

She requires the hero's sexuality to complement her:

> When your mouth and my mouth meet
> All my round shall be complete
> Imagining all its circles run;
> And there shall be oblivion
> Even to quench Cuchulain's drouth,
> Even to still that heart.[203]

She offers tranquil sanctuary from the stormy seas of human emotions.

But the Figure of Cuchulain, 'Fand's enemy,'[204] 'Maker of discord among gods and men,/ Called Bricriu of the Sidhe,'[205] dangles the lure of the sublunar world in the form of Emer and Eithne. 'When beauty is complete/ Your own thought will have died;' even when a state of oblivion, devoid of desire, is achieved, the 'danger' of the objective world remains, and 'When the moon's round is finished,'

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202) *CPl*, p. 191. 203) *CPl*, p. 192.

204) *CPl*, p. 192. 205) *CPl*, p. 188.

> He that has loved the best
> May turn from a statue
> His too human breast.[206]

Cuchulain is still too much the hero of the world to pursue impersonal beauty to its limits. He is not yet the *Übermensch*, still the hero who is, after all, *menschliches, allzumenschliches* - 'his hero-will hath he still to unlearn . . .'

The Ghost of Cuchulain is thus the hero's mask, the Figure of Cuchulain his will. And, as the heroic man of passion, Cuchulain forsakes his ideal, Fand, for the loving 'arms' of his mistress and the resilient love of his wife - the self-sacrificing, courageous Emer, her love transcending sexual jealousy. For all her allure, Fand is a 'statue of solitude'[207] who would remove the hero from humanity. But, like all subjective men, Cuchulain does desire that 'emotional antithesis to all that comes out of . . . [his] internal nature.'[208]

In *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939), the final work in the cycle, we find the hero melting into the completed image of the antithetical quest he forsook at the last moment in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. No longer concerned with anything but his ideal, his mask and will merge. His reality is what he chooses it to be: 'I make the truth!'[209] comes the Nietzschean flourish when a servant questions Cuchulain's interpretation of Eithne's words.

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206) *CPl*, p. 194.
207) *CPl*, p. 193.
208) *Autq*, p. 189.
209) *CPl*, p. 441.

In death, as Donoghue says, Cuchulain "is no longer interested in the external marks of heroism, because his existence is purely internal; he lives now in the dream, concentrating whatever will he has upon the next turn of his gyre."[210] He is serenely self-possessed, in control. Not that this control is strictly of the Nietzschean kind alone: Yeats's Upanishads bespeak its Indian origins, too, describing deity as 'your own Self, the immortal; the controller; nothing else matters.'[211]

Yet even with all his control of self, Cuchulain does yield to the brutal and sordid forces of destruction, a Fool to the end, the oneiric hero succumbing to the base man of 'good sense'[212] who sees the reward of 'twelve pennies' as the best 'reason for killing a man.'[213] Scornful of his ilk, Cuchulain utterly ignores the Blind Man's death-strokes, his mind fixed only on his 'soul's first shape'[214] as he begins to die his life and live his death. A sense of weariness and *taedium vitae*, a loss of his once-abundant 'passion necessary to life,'[215] is transfigured into joy in his fate: in the same way the heroic Cuchulain sang amid the tragedy of life, so now his soul 'is about to sing.'[216] He has not 'changed' his ideal, and so appears 'monstrous' to the ordinary

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210) Donoghue, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
211) *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, p. 142.
212) *CPl*, p. 444. 213) *CPl*, p. 444. 214) *CPl*, p. 444.
215) *CPl*, p. 441. 216) *CPl*, p. 444.

'sublunary' breed of man.[217]

Always pursuing his own egoistic will, 'That very day' on which he surrendered it and swore to do Conchubar's will he 'went mad' and 'fought against the sea.'[218] It is a bitter fate that yields the hero's dignity up to the crassness of the world and its clamour for *suffrage universel*,[219] to 'the dancers painted by Degas' with 'their short bodices, their stiff stays, their toes whereon they spin like peg-tops'[220] in 'this vile age.'[221]

Though the dying Cuchulain experiences complete self-absoption, it is the solitary heron of *Calvary* (1920) that remains Yeats's most telling depiction of subjective man and his lonely self-sufficiency. And 'solitude' is a key-word for Zarathustra and his 'stillest hour.'

In his note to *Calvary*, Yeats explains that he uses his bird-symbolism

> to increase the objective loneliness of Christ by contrasting it with a loneliness, opposite in kind, that unlike His can be, whether joyous or sorrowful, sufficient to itself. I have . . . represented in Lazarus and Judas types of that intellectual despair that lay beyond His sympathy, while in the Roman Soldiers I suggest a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help.[222]

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217) *CPl*, p. 441. 218) *CPl*, p. 443.
219) *Cf*. *WP* (854, 61, 2), pp. 457-9. 220) *CPl*, p. 439.
221) *CPl*, p. 438. Cuchulain's rôle as tragic hero is by no means confined to the plays: *cf*. 'Cuchulain Comforted,' 'The Statues,' 'Crazy Jane on the Mountain,' and 'The Circus Animals' Desertion.'
222) *P&C*, pp. 459-60.

In the light of this, the esoterics of the play lose much of their obscurity.

The 'white heron' of which the Musicians sing, absorbed in its ideal, 'Shivers in a dumbfounded dream,'[223] in terrible solitude, as it attempts, in Moore's phrase, "to fix its identity in the distorting mirror of time,"[224] staring 'Upon the glittering image of a heron,/ That now is lost and now is there.'[225] Not only is man's identity illusive, but his mask or desired image of himself, too. As that note to *Calvary* goes on,

> Objective men, however personally alone, are never alone in their thought, . . . while subjective men are the more lonely the more they are true to type, seeking always that which is unique or personal.[226]

Christ, with engulfing objectivity, is unable to satisfy the subjective temperament: 'God has not died for the white heron.'[227] Ultimately, though, both Christianity and the religion of the self are depicted as leading to the spiritual world and oblivion. The moon's phases will soon continue on their cycle, objectivity and subjectivity alternating ceaselessly:

> But that the full is shortly gone
> And after that is crescent moon,
> It's certain that the moon-crazed heron
> Would be but fishes' diet soon.[228]

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223) *CPl*, p. 288. 224) *Op. cit.*, p. 236. 225) *CPl*, p. 288.
226) *P&C*, p. 459. 227) *CPl*, p. 288. 228) *CPl*, p. 288.

The remnants of the passing age of subjectivity taunt Christ, urging Him to call on His Father 'before your bones/ Have been picked bare by the great desert birds.'[229] To the disturbed Musicians, this 'mockers' cry' has the sound of a 'cleverly, softly played'

> flute of bone
> Taken from a heron's thigh,
> A heron crazed by the moon.[230]

Subjective Lazarus does not want Christ's objectivity and sees in death his only means of escaping His 'love;' but his raising from the dead has robbed him of his desire to go 'to the desert, or chuckle in a corner,/ Mere ghost, a solitary thing.'[231] He longs for the 'howling wind and solitary birds.'[232] Judas is just as strongly individualistic. The idea that God has 'put all men' into Christ's hands is intolerable to him:

> That was the very thought that drove me wild.
> I could not bear to think you had but to whistle
> And I must do; but after that I thought,
> 'Whatever man betrays Him will be free.'
> . . .
> When I planned it
> There was no live thing near me but a heron
> So full of itself that it seemed terrified.[233]

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229) *CPl*, p. 289. 230) *CPl*, p. 289.
231) *CPl*, p. 290. 232) *CPl*, p. 290.
233) *CPl*, pp. 291-2.

He is the sovereign Apollinian individual affirming his own inherent freedom. In *A Vision* Yeats speaks of the hunchback as one whose 'greatest temptation may be to defy God, to become a Judas, who betrays, not for thirty pieces of silver, but that he may call himself creator.'[234]

In contrast are the pack 'gathered round Him' who 'live but in His love,' [235] oblivious of their own individuality in the manner Nietzsche ascribes to all followers of objective religions. Losing themselves in the Dionysian spectacle of the Cross and Christ's 'Blood-dabbled feet,'[236] the disciples have submerged their individuality, have become herons 'drowned'[237] in the sea of self-abnegation.

And as the Roman Soldiers with their dice from polytheistic Ephesus dance the dance of the quarrelling multi-faceted dice-throwers, the Musicians review the subjective nature of lone sea-birds wheeling in the 'blue deep of the upper air,'[238] the zone of the soaring spirit and free intellect. The ger-eagle may be 'content with his savage heart,'[239] but there is a decided tinge of discomfort lurking in that final question, 'What can a swan need but a swan?'[240] Perhaps subjectivity and objectivity need each other after all if wholeness is to be achieved.

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234) *Vision*, p. 178. 235) *CPl*, p. 291. 236) *CPl*, p. 291.
237) *CPl*, p. 291. 238) *CPl*, p. 293. 239) *CPl*, p. 293.
240) *CPl*, p. 294.

VI

CYCLICAL HISTORY

' . . . the plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined, - it will again create me!'

- Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

. . . every phase returns, therefore in some sense every civilisation . . .

- Yeats, *A Vision*

Ewige Wiederkehr

From Nietzsche's view of the world as 'a monster of energy,' 'a sea of forces' in relentless strife engendered by conflicting wills to power, spring all his ensuing aesthetics and doctrines of tragedy, of the divided psyche, of *Rangordnung*, of Master and Slave Moralities, of the *Übermensch*, and, ultimately, of the notion which he comes to regard as the crowning glory of his entire philosophy, the idea of *ewige Wiederkehr*.

Nietzsche sees all life as a pattern of birth and decay: in the organism, in man, in the seasons, in

epochs and cultures - all a continuous ebb and flow, integration and disintegration, exhaustion and rejuvenation, systole and diastole.[1] And Yeats, coupling the German's views as before to similar ones encountered elsewhere, adopts and modifies the Nietzschean conception of eternal recurrence within his own cyclical system of history.

Nietzsche describes the origin of his theory of *ewige Wiederkehr* in his *Ecce Homo* remarks on *Zarathustra,* relating that

> the idea of the eternal recurrence, this highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable, belongs in August 1881: it was penned on a sheet with the notation underneath, "6 000 feet beyond man and time." That day I was walking through the woods along the lake of Silvaplana; at a powerful pyramidal rock not far from Surlei I stopped. It was then that this idea came to me.[2]

It is an idea he pursues with nothing less than religious faith - Dionysian faith, to be sure - as a means to transform humanity, as the 'highest formula of affirmation,' fashioning it into a system in a manner he usually decries.

We need a doctrine, he writes in *The Will to Power,* 'powerful enough to work as a breeding agent: strengthening the strong, paralysing and destructive for the

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1) *Cf.* in particluar *TSZ,* Part Three.

2) *EH, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'* (1), p. 295.

world-weary.'[3] In *The Gay Science* he speaks of a demon who prophesies that your life as you lived it

> "will have to return to you - all in the same succession and sequence . . . The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!
> Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke this? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." . . . The question in each and everything, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation . . .?[4]

These are the words of the supreme *Ja-sagender*, the affirming embracer of *amor fati*. Eternal recurrence is, in Richard Lowell Howey's *phrase juste*, the 'necessary fiction'[5] of the *Übermensch*. Affirmation produces ecstasy and courage which strikes even death dead: '"Was *that* life?" will I say unto death. "Well, once more!"'[6] Through eternal recurrence man is able to dispense with the idea of a Great Beyond and yet not be crushed by the thought that this single life is all, after which - nothing. With the endless return of the forces that constitute us we become eternal. Fate acts

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3) *WP* (862), p. 458. 4) *GS* (341), pp. 273-4.
5) Richard Lowell Howey: *Heidegger and Jaspers on Nietzsche* (Marthinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973), p. 152.
6) *TSZ* (79:1), p. 357.

through our own willing and we can thus overcome perpetual nihilism by the strength of our willing ourselves to a higher sphere, redeeming and conditioning all existence, past, present, and future, since time is circular. Every moment becomes exalted:

> Wanted ye ever once to come twice; said ye ever: "Thou pleasest me, happiness! Instant! Moment!" then wanted ye *all* to come back again!
> - All anew, all eternal, all enlinked, enlaced and enamoured, Oh, then did ye *love* the world, -
> - Ye eternal ones, ye love it eternally and for all time: and also unto woe do ye say: Hence! Go! But come back! *For joys all want - eternity!*[7]

Thus speaks Zarathustra, teacher of the eternal recurrence. And like Zarathustra, Yeats longs for the eternal return of passion: 'Passion desires its own recurrence more than any event.'[8]

Complete though his own belief in *ewige Wiederkehr* is, Nietzsche demands unflagging scepticism from his readers:

> Let us beware teaching such a theory as a sudden religion! . . .
> You must have lived through every degree of scepticism . . ., else you have no right to this idea; I wish to *defend* myself against the credulous and fanatical![9]

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7) *TSZ* (79:10), p. 363.
8) 'Anima Mundi,' *Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Myth,* p. 354.
9) *GOA* XII, pp. 68f., tr. Morgan, *op. cit.,* p. 286.

Convinced of its truth by his own desperate longing and the sense of comfort it lends him - 'my consolation is that everything that has been is eternal'[10] - he does all the same try to devise arguments against his 'inevitable hypothesis:' 'Perhaps it is not true:- let others wrestle with it.'[11] He makes no claim of proof beyond all doubt.

Essentially a product of faith, without much connection to empirical science, *ewige Wiederkehr* still has scientific explanations forced upon it - it is 'the most *scientific* of all possible hypotheses'[12] comes the contention in *The Will to Power*.

Time, runs Nietzsche's argument, is infinite, for if the world were capable of coming to an end, it would already have done so:

> If the world could in any way become rigid, dry, dead, *nothing*, or if it could reach a state of equilibrium . . ., then this state must have been reached. But it has not been reached . . .[13]

We are in a world of constant flux, and this would not be the case had the world once reached a state of equilibrium from which it would have been unable to dislodge itself. Only an infinite being outside it - a Divine Creator - could have achieved this, a conception

10) *WP* (1065), p. 548.

11) *GOA* XIV, p. 295, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

12) *WP* (55), p. 36.

13) *WP* (1066), pp. 548-9.

which Nietzsche finds philosophically untenable. Though this flies in the face of the theory of relativity and of the second law of thermodynamics with its postulate of ever-increasing entropy, Nietzsche does state that the scientific 'law of the conservation of energy demands *eternal recurrence*.'[14] While time is infinite, energy and space are not:

> the world, as force, may not be thought of as unlimited, for it *cannot* be so thought of; we forbid ourselves the concept of an infinite force as incompatible with the concept "force." Thus - the world also lacks the capacity for eternal novelty.[15]

All energy would long since have utterly dispersed had space been infinite. In any case, space *an sich* does not exist: in a world where everything is 'a play of forces and waves of forces,'[16] 'empty' space is a fallacy.

Since finite energy can only have a finite number of possible configurations, these configurations must eventually begin to repeat themselves, and when the universe reaches a total state wholly identical to any that has gone before, the entire process of events

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14) *WP* (1063), p. 547. Interestingly, Einstein never accepted the post-relativity theory of quantum mechanics, believing that 'God does not play dice with the universe,' but with Heisenberg's uncertainty principle and modern proposals that matter's building blocks merely have 'tendencies' to exist, Nietzsche's view of irrational universal choas, of the world as flux down to the *n*th degree, continues to receive hints of justification.

15) *WP* (1062), p. 547.

16) *WP* (1057), p. 550.

between the two states must recur identically *ad infinitum:*

> From the gateway, This Moment, there runneth a long eternal lane *backwards:* behind us lieth an eternity.
> Must not whatever *can* run its course of all things, have already run along that lane? Must not whatever *can* happen of all things have already happened, resulted, and gone by? . . . , must we not all have already existed?
> - And must we not return and run in that other lane out before us, that long weird lane - must we not eternally return?[17]

So we find Nietzsche proposing a new form of reincarnation:

> "Now do I die and disappear," wouldst thou say, "and in a moment I am nothing . . .
> "But the plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined, - it will again create me! I myself pertain to the causes of the eternal return. I come again . . . *not* to a new life, or a better life, or a similar life:
> " - I come again eternally to this identical and self-same life, in its greatest and its smallest . . ."[18]

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17) *TSZ* (46:2), p. 174.

18) *TSZ* (57:2), p. 247. Does this not mean that the *Übermensch*, too, would already have existed and been re-created were he at all capable of being realised? Keeping to our resolution of chapter one, we shall avoid too much comment on the philosophical feasibility of Nietzsche's doctrine, since what is important to our current purpose is whether *ewige Wiederkehr* held any appeal for Yeats - which it certainly did, as we shall see below. It is perhaps necessary, however, to mention that this is the most susceptible to (rational) attack of all Nietzsche's major theories, and that it remains the one most readily ascribed to psychological factors.

Recurrence is thus both eternal and identical, and as such is an exception to Nietzsche's denial of eternal regularities and exact duplications in nature. Like the will to power itself, it is the only process in the whirl of existence not subject to change. Yet even here, in spite of this divergence from the tendency of his other cosmological views, Nietzsch welcomes this anomaly as triumphant synthesis in which mechanism and Platonism unite.[19] Here we find eternity within time and not beyond the real world: 'That *everything recurs,* is the closest *approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being:-* high point of the meditation.'[20]

The aspect of Nietzsche's *ewige Wiederkehr* which proves most useful to Yeats is the idea of cyclic patterns in all things, the alternating integration and disintegration of forces:

> Regarded mechanistically, the energy of the totality of becoming remains constant; regarded economically, it rises to a high point and sinks down again in an eternal circle. This "will to power" expresses itself in the interpretation, in the manner in which force is used up . . .
> The same quantum of energy means different things at different stages of evolution.[21]

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19) *WP* (1061), p. 546.

20) *WP* (617), p. 330.

21) *WP* (639), p. 340.

Existence is 'an eternal deifying and un-deifying,'[22] and

> retreat from the high point in becoming (the highest spiritualisation of power on the most slavish ground) to be represented as a consequence of this highest force, which, turning against itself when it no longer has anything left to organise, expends its force on disorganisation.[23]

The *last* physical state of energy must necessarily be the *first* as well, and a state of the highest affirmation follow one of utter negation. So, while there exists a dialectical world pattern of strife and self-transcendence, there is also a cyclical one, as evidenced in the growth and decay of the organism and of cultures within human history. *Ewige Wiederkehr* encompasses all these smaller rhythms, with identical recurrence occurring on a supra-historical scale, as we gather from Nietzsche's scoff at the doctrine of Pythagoras in the second of the *Untimely Meditations.*[24] This repudiation would suggest that while epochs of opposite impulses follow each other in alternating cycles through galactic history and similar, not identical, cycles recur in human history, exactly identical recurrence is not possible within the span of known

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23) *WP* (712), p. 379.

24) Or *Thoughts out of Season*, as in the Oscar Levy edition of the *Complete Works; cf.* Vol. V, p. 19.

history. The Platonic *Magnus Annus*, it would seem, is sufficiently long to include alternating cycles, but repeats itself within observable time. Nietzsche never indicates how long it takes before energy configurations begin their recurrence, but his argument implies a great year or great wheel of enormous duration.

The Apollinian-Dionysian polarity thus alternates through history (at times achieving a glorious synthesis approaching Yeats's unity of being), with all higher cultures beginning in barbarism, then ascending, descending, and being revitalised again by the energy of 'evil' barbaric forces. The pre-Homeric age of Titanic strife was the bedrock of the age of Aeschylus, that culmination of culture when individuality came closest to perfection, only to be demolished by that *roturier* Socrates. In this way the pendulum of history swings from Hellenism to Orientalism and back.

In Europe, the 'blonde beasts' established feudal aristocracy, with peaks occurring in Italy during the *Quattrocento* and in France under *Le Roi Soleil*. Voltaire's free-minded individuality was dragged down by Rousseau, that *canaille* whose *ressentiment* nature sprang from a hatred of aristocratic culture.[25] *On the Genealogy of Morals* chronicles this oscillation between Master and

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25) *Cf. WP* (1021), pp. 528-9.

Slave Moralities as the conflict between Roman and Jew: 'The symbol of this struggle, inscribed in letters legible across all human history, is "Rome against Judea, Judea against Rome."'[26] The Renaissance and Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century France almost saw a reinstitution of Rome's values:

> There was, to be sure, in the Renaissance an uncanny and glittering reawakening of the classical ideal, of the whole mode of evaluating all things; Rome itself, oppressed by the new superimposed Judaised Rome that presented the aspect of an ecumenical synagogue and was called the "church," stirred like one awakened from seeming death: but Judea immediately triumphed again thanks to that thoroughly plebeian (German and English) *ressentiment* movement called the Reformation . . . With the French Revolution, Judea once again triumphed over the classical ideal . . . the mendacious slogan of *ressentiment*, "supreme rights of the majority," . . . the will to the lowering, the abasement, the levelling and the decline and twilight of mankind . . .[27]

In the midst of this collapse, however, there did appear Napoleon, 'the *noble ideal as such* made flesh,'[28] only to be cut down by the German wars of independence.

As Judaic religious prinicples undermined Rome, so in ancient India cultures declined with the self-destruction of religious bases. In China, too, atheism was

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26) *GM*, First Essay (16), p. 52.

27) *GM*, First Essay (16), pp. 53, 54.

28) *GM*, First Essay (16), p. 54.

followed by the apotheosis of moral values, with both countries declining into cultural cesspools. Europe is also heading for a period of being 'more Chinese,'[29] of experiencing a 'new Buddhism.'[30] Europeans will become complete herd animals, but from them will spring the 'new barbarians,' bred by the same conditions. Thanks to the tension produced in the European soul by absolute morality, *décadents* will be eradicated and the healthy will revaluate all values. Moral values are a succession of antithetical ideals, and 'what is new . . . is always *evil*, being that which wants to conquer and overthrow . . . and only what is old is good,'[31] occasioning its own destruction through self-overcoming - the unavoidable result of its preceding history.

Essentially, the world contains fluctuating cultures which are either 'dominantly *Socratic* or *artistic* or *tragic*' or, 'if historical exemplifications are permitted, there is either an Alexandrian or a Hellenic or a Buddhistic culture.'[32] Of this aspect of Nietzsche's view of recurrence there is a great deal to be found in Yeats.

The value of such cultures should not be determined by their length, but by their level: "Humanity must live in *cycles*, *sole* form of duration. Not culture as

29) *GM*, First Essay (13), p. 44.

30) *GM*, Preface (5), p. 19.

31) *GS* (4), p. 79.

32) *BT* (18), p. 110.

long as possible, but as short and high as possible.'[33] Not that any part of history can be dismissed; the past lives on in its consequences and in human memory, and can be justified by being given a meaning and a goal in retrospect. That goal is the *Übermensch*. If everything is a great ring, then all is of the same worth, and necessary. Yet though each cycle and *ewige Wiederkehr* are necessary, they are not the product of *purposed*, teleological order:

> The "chaos of the All" as exclusion of every purposiveness does *not* stand in contradiction to the idea of periodic return: the latter is precisely an *irrational necessity*, without any formal, ethical, aesthetic consideration.[34]

Yeats, too, reconciles his view of perpetual strife and his concept of patterned cyclical history:

> Life is no series of emanations from divine reason . . ., but an irrational bitterness, no orderly descent from level to level, no waterfall but a whirlpool, a gyre.[35]

Strangely, Nietzsche's theory has a far gentler, comforting, and benign quality than Yeats's with its perception of history as harsh cyclical gyration.

Ideas postulating the cyclical nature of history are of course by no means anything new. As a Greek

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33) *GOA* XIV, p. 260, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

34) *GOA* XII, p. 61, tr. Morgan, *ibid.*, p. 289.

35) *Vision*, p. 40.

scholar, Nietzsche certainly knew of similar theories in antiquity, and his knowledge (albeit disparaging for the most part) of Eastern philosophy acquainted him with like ones there. In relating Nietzsche's thought to Greek literature and thought, A.H.J. Knight has traced the history of the idea of recurrence in Greek philosophy, as in the concept of the *μέγας ἐνιαυτός* and the Stoic theory of *ἐκπύρωσις*, the periodic destruction of the world by the fire which is its basis.[36]

But in that summer of 1881 Nietzsche perceived something new in all of this, something so revolutionary to him that it imbued him with the 'fundamental conception' of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,[37] and found him writing to Overbeck a good three years later,

> it is possible that there has come to me for *the first time* the idea which will cleave the history of mankind into two halves. . . . *If it is true*, or rather: if it is believed true - then everything changes and revolves and *all* previous values are devalued.[38]

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36) A.H.J. Knight: *Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche and Particularly of His Connection with Greek Literature and Thought* (Russell and Russell, New York, 1933, reiss. 1967); *cf.* in particular pp. 100-11.

37) *EH*, '*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*' (1), p. 295.

38) In a letter of *c.* 10 March 1884, tr. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 285. Though he never claims complete proof of his theory, Nietzsche does impart the strong feeling that his crowning doctrine, conceived with such inspired fervour in the woods of Silvaplana, *se non è vero, è ben trovato*. It is *worthy* of belief.

This, and his remarks on *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo,* suggests the originality of the conception as Nietzsche himself formulated it, and so narrows the extent of any outside influence - at least as far as the author himself was concerned. But then Yeats, too, would ascribe his cyclical system in *A Vision* to unknown 'instructors' rather than to previous philosophy. Nietzsche is certainly never slow in making claims of being an originator and forerunner: we recall his assertion of him being the first tragic philosopher and the father of psychology.[39] He would seem in this to be very much one of those who tend to believe in the fulfillment of their wish, *'pareant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.'* In *The Will to Power,* though, he does concede that 'I have come across this idea in earlier thinkers,'[40] but adds the qualification that 'every time it was determined by other ulterior considerations.' *Twilight of the Idols* speaks of the Hellene guaranteeing to himself through the 'Dionysian mysteries'

> *eternal* life, the eternal recurrence of life; the future promised and consecrated in the past; the triumphant Yes to life beyond death and change; *true* life as collective continuation of life through procreation . . .[41]

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39) *Cf.* chapter III p. 67 above; *EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy'* (3), p. 273, and 'Why I Am a Destiny' (6), p. 331.

40) *WP* (1066), p. 548.

41) *TI,* 'What I Owe to the Ancients' (4), p. 109.

In *Ecce Homo* comes the acknowledgment that

> the doctrine of the "eternal recurrence," that is, of the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things - this doctrine of Zarathustra *might* in the end have been taught already by Heraclitus - at least the Stoa has traces of it, and the Stoics inherited almost all of their principal notions from Heraclitus.[42]

Zarathustra makes a direct reference to the Heraclitean 'great year' in 'The Convalescent:'

> Thou teachest that there is a great year of Becoming, a prodigy of a great year; it must, like a sand-glass, ever turn up anew, that it may anew run down and run out: -
> - So that all those years are like one another in the greatest and also in the smallest, so that we ourselves, in every great year, are like ourselves in the greatest and also in the smallest.[43]

He speaks also of the 'great wheel:'

> Everything goeth, everything returneth; eternally rolleth the wheel of existence. Everything dieth, everything blossometh forth again; eternally runneth the year of existence.[44]

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42) *EH, 'The Birth of Tragedy'* (3), pp. 273-4.

43) *TSZ* (57:2), p. 247.

44) *TSZ* (57:2), p. 244.

Knight points to the mention of this wheel also in *Human, All-too-Human,* where Nietzsche speaks of the great wheel which *'has turned and keeps on turning,'*[45] while in Yeats the Great Wheel becomes a pivotal element of his cosmological theories: just as Nietzsche had his thoughts on recurring cycles prompted - unconsciously perhaps - by earlier thinkers, so Yeats drew from the ancients of both hemispheres to develop his views on cyclical epochs, finding fresh sanction in the German.

While Nietzsche proved especially helpful in substantiating other cyclical ideas, the singular attitude of exultant affirmation produced by his doctrine of *ewige Wiederkehr* was adopted by Yeats without inducement from earlier philosophies; he is unlikely to have perceived this dimension of the Dionysian myth without having come across Nietzsche's interpretation of it. Where Shelley, voicing the Platonic tradition, meets cyclic return with weary despair in the final chorus of *Hellas,* Nietzsche and Yeats rejoice in recurrence. We remember Zarathustra calling it 'the marriage-ring of rings'[46] and that the 'ancient, glittering eyes' of Yeats's lapis lazuli Chinamen 'are gay'[47] amid their recognition of the tragic pattern of history. Shelley would welcome only the 'world's great age' and the 'golden years;' Nietzsche and Yeats delight in all

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45) Knight, *op. cit.,* p. 94.

46) *TSZ* (60), pp. 257ff.

47) 'Lapis Lazuli,' *CP,* p. 338.

return.

Yeats's 'Stylistic Arrangements' of History

Not far into *A Vision* Yeats raises the question of 'whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon.'[48] And well he might. His is a theory enwebbed in a dizzying maze of circular symbols and calendars of protean lengths, his 'stylistic arrangements' designed for the purpose of systematising his abstract ideas.

Though he minimises the influence of earlier thinkers on the formulation of his system, Yeats does - like Nietzsche - make extensive mention of cyclic return as a phenomenon known to antiquity. In *A Vision* he links Empedocles, who in 'The Gyres' 'has thrown all things about,'[49] with Heraclitus as claiming that 'the universe had first one form and then its opposite in perpetual alternation.'[50] In the *Sophist* (242, D, E) Plato cites Empedocles and Heraclitus as teachers of the belief that God appears as One during one cycle of civilisation, and as Many in the next; this, together with the Platonic system of 'inferior' and 'superior' cycles, fits well into Nietzsche's views on objective

48) *Vision*, p. 24. 49) *CP*, p. 337.
50) *Vision*, p. 246.

and subjective epochs, Dionysus against Apollo, Judea against Rome, one god against many - ideas so intrinsic to the themes of plays like *Calvary* and *The Resurrection*.

Heraclitus is an important figure for both Nietzsche and Yeats. We recall the former mentioning that the Stoics derived most of their notions from Heraclitus, and in *On the Boiler* Yeats alludes directly to 'the old Stoic prophecy of earthquakes, fire and flood at the end of an age,'[51] the Heraclitean tradition of ἐκπύρωσις which has so many parallels in Hindu and Jainist myth,[52] fire being both the substance and the destruction of the world. As Wilson observes, the Platonic *Magnus Annus*, too, has parallels in Indian and Buddhist philosophy, being the time necessary for one complete revolution of an historical pattern in all its detail.[53] But, judging from those remarks on Pythagoras, Nietzsche would view Zarathustra's great year or great wheel as repeating identically in its greatest and smallest parts only beyond the realm of known history, with shorter cycles of similar impulse recurring within that larger turn in periodic alternation with ones of opposite impulse.

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51) *Boiler*, pp. 19-20.

52) Wilson (*W.B. Yeats and Tradition*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1958, hereafter referred to as *YT*, 149n.) points to this in a study made by the Jungian psychologist Joseph Campbell of "the persistent tendency of the human psyche to evolve, in all periods, cyclic theories of history . . . *vide The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, pp. 255-378."

53) Wilson, *ibid.*, p. 147.

For all this, Yeats maintains that his central treatise on cyclical history - *A Vision* - was fashioned from his wife's 'automatic writing,' his 'teachers' speaking through her and providing him with his 'symbolical maps.'[54] It hardly seems the sort of basis for a philosophy of history that Nietzsche would have approved! Indeed, Yeats professes ignorance of any philosophical explanations of history before the composition of a *A Vision:* 'When the automatic script began, neither I nor my wife knew, or knew that we knew, that any man had tried to explain history philosophically.'[55] He writes that his teachers had

> asked me not to read philosophy until their exposition was complete, and this increased my difficulties. Apart from two or three of the principal Platonic Dialogues I knew no philosophy.[56]

Be that as it may, there is much in the revised edition that bears traces of antiquity, not least of all Book IV and its 'great year of the ancients.' Yeats employs several calendars of different lengths, stating that 'the symbolic wheel is timeless and spaceless,'[57] and offering variations on the great year as found in classical literature:

> There was little agreement as to the length of the Great Year, every philsopher had a different calculation . . .[58]

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54) *Vision*, pp. 8-25. 55) *Vision*, p. 261. 56) *Vision*, p. 12.
57) *Vision*, p. 205. 58) *Vision*, p. 251.

And in the same way that all those philosophers who preceded him lent their own calculations to concepts that had gone before, so Yeats embroiders his vision of history on a canvas already there.

Much of his information as to what the ancients thought comes from Pierre Duhem's *Le Système du Monde*, and Yeats often mentions Graeco-Roman writings. He speaks of the Etruscans and their trumpet which signaled '"the mutation of the age and a general revolution of the world;"' of Vergil's prophecy a generation later that '"the cycles in their vast array begin anew,"' and echoes Nietzsche in his view that 'Caesar and Christ always stand face to face in our imagination.'[59] He quotes Cicero's uncertainty as to '"when the whole of the constellations shall return to the positions from which they once set forth, thus after a long interval re-making the first map of the heavens, that may indeed be called the Great Yeat wherein I scarce dare say how many are the generations of men."'[60] Proclus found in the Golden Number of Plato's *Republic* a Greatest Year and in his *Timaeus* a much smaller year. Scholars, Yeats says, have found fourteen different solutions to Plato's Golden Number: to Taylor it suggests 36 000 years, 360 incarnations of 'Plato's Man of Ur' (or Er).[61] In the second century before Christ

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59) *Vision*, pp. 243, 4. 60) *Vision*, pp. 245-6.

61) *Vision*, p. 248.

Hipparchus pointed out that the zodiacal constellations were moving, but only in the next century did Ptolemy fix the rate of movement at 100 years for each degree, so that the precession of the equinoxes would be completed, and Aries return to its original position, every 36 000 years. He named this period the Platonic Year. 'In the East, multiplied by twelve as if it were but a month of a still greater year, it became the Manvantra of 432 000 years . . .'[62]

So Yeats presents his great year as a rhythm in history larger than individual historical cycles, a year lasting for 26 000 in one of his calculations, made up of twelve 'months' of about 2 200 years each. And 26 000 years certainly transcends the bounds of recorded history, though it is hardly likely that the identical, not merely similar, configuration of finite energy in finite space and infinite time would - according to Nietzsche's argument - begin afresh after so short a duration. But, as Yeats points out, 'whatever its length,' the great year 'divided, and so did every unit whose multiple it was, into waxing and waning, day and night, or summer and winter.'[63]

In *A Vision*,

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62) 'Introduction to *The Resurrection*,' *Expl*, p. 396.

63) 'Introduction to *The Resurrection*,' *Expl*, p. 395.

> The lunar months of 2 200 years apiece in a year of 26 000 years, are years of civilisation, while the solar months of a similar symbolical length correspond to periods of religion.[64]

Thus in one reading of his great mandala, in each of the great year's months we encounter the rhythms of growth, florescence, and decay as found in the organism, with the period of highest development coinciding with the age of greatest individuality - which is precisely the attitude Nietzsche lauds in his cherished age of Aeschylus. Yeats sees in both the early and the late periods of each month the opposite impulse toward communality, appearing initially as primitive mentality and ultimately as decadent mentality - hence the different qualities encompassed by the term objectivity, as we saw in chapter five. These cycles of opposite impulse alternate endlessly, recurring with no overall progress - a keen reminder of Nietzsche's heated denial of progress.[65]

In Phase 8 of each cycle's twenty-eight phases, the tug of individuality begins to mount as an outgrowth of the early phases of impulse toward unity, and we pass into the antithetical sphere, individuality rising to heroic dimensions as the phases pass. Consequently we find men like Parnell in Phase 10 and Nietzsche

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64) *Vision*, p. 203.

65) As in *WP* (684), p. 363.

in Phase 12, until we begin the return to communal consciousness after Phase 15, when individualistic heroes (like the Napoleon of Phase 20) begin to view themselves as the world's servants. 'Personality' mutates into 'character,' so that by Phase 26 fragmented personality assumes the figure of the physically deformed hunchback - as opposed to women of mature physical beauty - or the mentally deformed fool by Phase 28. The religious leader of Phase 25 and the saint of Phase 27 seek to surrender themselves to a greater objectivity, echoing the desire for absorption in God characteristic of Phase 1.

Each of the cycles lasting about two-thousand years contains two, thousand-year 'sub-cycles' which also have twenty-eight phases analogous to those of the individual. In this way we have the circular great wheel which is the great year having twelve, two-thousand-year cycles which are complete twenty-eight-phase wheels in themselves and each of which contains two circular sub-cycles of one-thousand years' duration apiece. On one scale, then, a completed rhythm of objective and subjective cycles spans four-thousand years.

When one divides this completed wheel into twenty-eight phases, marking its cardinal points at Phases 1, 8, 15, and 22, each of these points is one-thousand years from the next. Phase 1 is the point assigned to

the year 2 000 B.C., Phase 8 thus the one to 1 000 B.C., Phase 15 the one to the time of Christ, Phase 22 that to A.D. 1 000; it follows that Phase 1 also marks A.D. 2 000 (roughly our present time), and Phase 8 also A.D. 3 000. Yeats positions classical civilisation between Phases 8 and 22 (1 000 B.C. to A.D. 1 000), and Christian civilisation between Phases 22 and 8 (A.D. 1 000 to A.D. 3 000). Midway through each of these two-thousand-year cycles the counteracting movement begins to rise, and so we find Christ appearing at the midpoint of the classical era, the Christian civilisation commencing under his aegis a thousand years later:

> Instead of that old alternation, brute or ascetic, came something obscure or uncertain that could not find its full explanation for a thousand years.[66]

Religions emerge at right-angles, as it were, to secular epochs.

Since we are now half-way through the Christian cycle of civilisation, we are on the point of encountering the religious antithesis of Christ who is to preside over the subjective civilisation destined to materialise a millennium hence; if anyone deemed himself the Antichrist, it was Friedrich Nietzsche. Our present civilisation, says Yeats, is 'about to reverse itself, or

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66) *Vision*, p. 285.

some new civilisation to be born from all that our age . . . rejected, from all that my stories symbolised as a harlot.'[67] We are now where the classical age was at the time of Christ, at the midpoint of a cycle.

Yeats offers Troy and Byzantium as symbols for Phases 8 and 22 - 1 000 B.C. and A.D. 1000, the start and finish of the classical cycle and, conversely, the end of one earlier objective cycle and the beginning of another, that of the Christian dispensation. Phase 1, when it refers to our present time, is represented by the 'rough beast' or 'Savage God,' and hence requires different symbolism when referring to 2 000 B.C., the point at which the herald of the classical age was to have appeared. This promulgation of the Greek cycle of culture survives in the myth of Leda and the Swan (Zeus) - whose union meant the eventual fall of Troy - and that of Oedipus, whose patricide and incest inaugurated a tragic, though heroic, epoch. The Christian cycle was prefigured by the myth of the Virgin and the Dove, so our own day will therefore experience the annunciation of new Ledaean and Oedipal myths:

When our historical era approaches Phase 1, or the

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67) 'Introduction to *The Resurrection,*' *Expl,* p. 393.

> beginning of a new era, the *antithetical* East will beget upon the *primary* West and the child or era so born will be antithetical.[68]

Since Christ's mother was a virgin, the new Messiah's mother will be a harlot, as she is in 'The Adoration of the Magi.'

Phase 1 as 2 000 B.C. is the midpoint of the pre-classical period, that cycle which was the objective antecedent of the Christian objective cycle, and Yeats associates it with 'Babylonian starlight,' echoing Nietzsche's reference to 'Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea' as embodiments of an objective 'Dionysian impulse,' that same objective impulse he discerns in the Christian era's 'singing and dancing crowds' of 'the German Middle Ages:' 'In these dancers of St. John and St. Vitus we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their prehistory in Asia Minor.'[69] Being objective cycles, both are dominated by a primary mentality; classical civilisation and that following A.D. 3 000 thus have antithetical, individualistic, and heroic traits, are tragic rather than comic, aristocratic rather than democratic.

Because the classical and Christian circuits each have a duration of two-thousand years and we are now midway through the Christian civilisation, we are nearing the end of its first millennium, a sub-cycle of a

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68) *Vision*, p. 257.

69) *BT* (1), p. 36.

vaster objective civilisation. The acme of this sub-cycle - Phase 15, the antithetical highpoint of individuality - occurred during the *Quattrocento,* a time Nietzsche singles out for its aristocratic and heroic individuals. The Renaissance took its inspiration from the Byzantine glory which had finally collapsed four-hundred years earlier, a period of opposite 'tincture:'

> 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 brought Byzantine glory, Rome fell; and that at the outset of our westward-moving Renaissance Byzantium fell . . .[70]

After the Renaissance we find that 'the world begins to long for the arbitrary and accidental, for the grotesque, the repulsive and the terrible,'[71] bringing Phases 19, 20 and 21 from 1650 to 1875. In the mid-nineteenth century, though, there appear men like 'Blake, Coventry, Patmore at moments, Nietzsche . . . begotten in the Sistine Chapel' who still dream

> that all can be transformed if they be but emphatic; yet Nietzsche, when the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence drifts before his eyes, knows for an instant

70) *Vision,* pp. 270-1. 71) *Vision,* p. 295.

> that nothing can be so transformed and is almost
> in the next gyre.[72]

The period from 1875 to 1927 (Phase 22) is one of abstraction, and now men, 'for the first time since the seventeenth century, see the world as an object of contemplation, not as something to be remade . . .'[73]

Though our present age is Phase 15 of the two-thousand-year Christian cycle, it is also Phase 1 of the larger wheel of four-thousand years which embraces both the Christian and the classical dispensations. As a result, we are in the crescent of the 'fool' and are about to hear 'the irrational cry, revelation - the scream of Juno's peacock'[74] announcing the antithetical age which will manifest itself in A.D. 3 000.

Yeats explains 'the fundamental symbol of my instructors' in terms of Empedocles' Discord and Concord, thinking

> of the vortex attributed to Discord as formed by
> circles diminishing until they are nothing, and of
> the opposing sphere attributed to Concord as forming
> from itself an opposing vortex, the apex of each
> vortex in the middle of the other's base.[75]

The twelve months comprising the great year can therefore also be seen as making up

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72) *Vision*, p. 299.
73) *Vision*, p. 300.
74) *Vision*, p. 268.
75) *Vision*, p. 68.

> an expanding cone, and to this is opposed another cone which may also be considered as divided into twelve cycles or months. As the base of each cone has at its centre the apex of the other cone the double vortex is once more established,[76]

objective and subjective cycles gyrating endlessly up and down and in and out within each other. So we have the complex situation of history being cyclical in three dimensions.

How much in all of this intricate system of circles, gyres, wheels, great years, cycles, sub-cycles, phases derives from Friedrich Nietzsche, or receives its impetus from him? The elaborations are naturally Yeats's, but many of the premises against which they are developed clearly find much incitement in the writings of the German who lends freshness to ancient notions - though he might well frown upon such a superimposed schematic network of mandalic intricacies. Ironically enough, it is Yeats who complains of just such inaccessibility in Nietzsche, commenting in his copy of Common, 'How full he is of esotericism . . .'[77]

There are, nevertheless, so many ways in which the essences of their cyclical views of history do intertwine. We recall the Yeatsian echo of Zarathustra's assertion that 'the plexus of causes returneth in which

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76) *Vision*, p. 209.

77) *NACPPP*, p. 131.

I am intertwined,'[78] though Yeats postulates not so much exact duplication as the fact that 'every phase returns, therefore in some sense every civilisation.'[79] We discern in Yeats's views the Nietzschean belief in cyclical world rhythms, those fluctuations which occur within cultures as much as in the smallest organism, and the belief in superseding opposites, that a state of affirmation must follow one of negation. Yeats also takes from Nietzsche his terms objective and subjective as synonyms for primary and antithetical in application to civilisations, and embraces his sense of exultation in the thought of eternal recurrence, not to mention his joy in the apocalyptic emergence of new values with changing epochs, welcoming the fact that 'the whole thing turns bottom upwards, Nietzsche's "transvaluation of all values."'[80]

Most of Yeats's compulsion to design elaborate schemata very likely derives chiefly from Blake, who has a passion for such intricacies. Shelley's ideas meet with less approval; as Northrop Frye reminds us, Yeats finds that, 'great as Shelley is, those theories about the coming changes of the world, which he has built up with so much elaborate passion, hurry him from life continually.'[81] In 'The Mental Traveller' - whose

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78) *TSZ* (57:2), p. 247. 79) *Vision*, p. 206.

80) *Boiler*, p. 25.

81) *Cf.* Frye, *ex* Donoghue and Mulryne, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

aphoristic notions on cyclical theory found amplification in Nietzsche - Blake divides his larger cycle into four principal phases, and in 'My Spectre Around Me' allots seven 'loves' to each of four phases, ending up with a total of twenty-eight divisions, the number of phases used in the various diagrams of *A Vision*.

There are also numerous gyres in the writings of another 'instructor,' Madame Blavatsky, whom Yeats first met following his 1887 move to London,[82] and who mentions in *Isis Unveiled* that classical philosophy "divided the interminable periods of human existence on this planet into cycles, during each of which mankind gradually reached the culminating point of highest civilisation and gradually relapsed into abject barbarism."[83] There is much of Nietzsche in this, though he - and Yeats with him - regards barbarism as a force which rejuvenates worn out civilisations, rather than as an "abject" phenomenon. Yeats encountered similar theories, too, in Joachim de Flora, an eleventh century monk whose works were well known to yet another 'instructor,' Swedenborg; both, however, believed in eventual consummation, in contrast to Greek and Indian teachings which view history as an endless procession of cycles.

Yeats contends that all these possible sources for *A Vision* were of little use to him in formulating what

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82) *Cf.*, *inter alia*, Frank Tuohy: *Yeats* (Macmillan, New York, 1976), chapter three.

83) *Isis Unveiled*, I, 5, as quoted by Wilson, *YT*, p. 148.

his instructors conveyed to him:

> I had once known Blake as thoroughly as his unfinished confused Prophetic Books permitted, and I had read Swedenborg and Boehme, and my initiation into the "Hermetic Students" had filled my head with Cabbalistic imagery, but there was nothing in Blake, Swedenborg, Boehme or the Cabbala to help me now. They encouraged me, however, to read history in relation to their historical logic, and biography in relation to their twenty-eight typical incarnations, that I might give concrete expression to their abstract thought.[84]

The impact of the 'Mystics,' and of other philosophies which dealt with cyclic theory, on Yeats's fertile unconscious must have been considerable, in spite of his minimising their contribution. Our rational minds are left perplexed, however, by his account of his work's similarity to Spengler's chronicle of European history, which was published in English well after the 1925 publication of the first edition of *A Vision:*

> I found that not only were dates that I had been given the same as his but whole metaphors and symbols that had seemed my work alone . . . I knew of no common source, no link between him and me, unless through
>
> *The elemental things that go*
> *About my table to and fro.*[85]

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84) *Vision,* p. 12.

85) *Vision,* pp. 14-15.

Yeats's instructors had drawn their first symbolical map

> some days before the publication of the first German edition of Spengler's *Decline of the West*, which, though founded upon a different philosophy, gives the same years of crisis and draws the same general conclusions . . .[86]

The poet soon found further similarities in Petrie's *Revolutions of Civilisation*, and then discovered

> Spengler's main source in Vico, and that half the revolutionary thoughts of Europe are a perversion of Vico's philosophy . . . Certainly my instructors have chosen a theme that has deeply stirred men's minds . . .[87]

Further reading failed to provide precedents for his complex diagrams: 'I found neither the geometrical symbolism nor anything that could have inspired it except the vortex of Empedocles.'[88] But having said this, Yeats does mention the related symbolism of

> Daniel's angels, the Pythagorean numbers, . . . those complicated mathematical tables that Kelley saw in Dr. Dee's black scrying-stone, the diagrams in Law's *Boehme*,[89]

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86) *Vision*, p. 11.
87) *Vision*, pp. 261-2.
88) *Vision*, p. 20.
89) *Vision*, p. 23.

and also in the *Speculum Angelorum et Hominum* of 'a certain Giraldus' which included

> a large diagram in the shape of a wheel where the phases of the moon were mixed up with an apple, an acorn, a cup, and what looked like a sceptre or wand.[90]

Yeats speaks, too, of the gyres in the *Timaeus* and in St Thomas Aquinas, 'in Macrobius, in an unknown medieval writer,'[91] and of Flaubert's double cone, which is not as complicated as those of Yeats's instructors. He perceives further a circular movement similar to his wheel as 'fundamental in the works of Giovanni Gentile,'[92] Italy's Fascist Minister of Education.

If Yeats did indeed not know of the existence of this related symbolism before embarking on the writing of *A Vision,* Nietzsche's claim to influence might actually be strengthened, since Yeats certainly had read *him* well before the days of *A Vision* and knew his thoughts on *ewige Wiederkehr.* Yet the poet insists on the originality of his cyclical view of history and its attendant symbolism, answering that question as to whether he believes in all his elaborate circuits by saying that

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90) *Vision,* p. 38.

91) *Vision,* pp. 68, 9.

92) *Vision,* p. 81.

> if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice.[93]

Later he wonders with Nietzschean self-scrutiny,

> Will some mathematician some day question and understand, as I cannot, and confirm all, or have I also dealt in myth?[94]

His assignation of historical dates to points on his system has largely been an attempt 'to substitute particulars for an abstraction like that of algebra.'[95]

Ultimately, one cannot simply dismiss the plethora of thought on cyclical history similar to Yeats's which preceded him: at some point his exposure to previous theories treating on cyclical history must have penetrated his own, hence the elements of Graeco-Roman notions, those of Eastern philosophy, of de Flora, Vico, Blavatsky, Swedenborg, Shelley, Blake - and of course Nietzsche. Thus it is that we find Yeats echoing the German so repeatedly in the fundamentals of his theory.

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93) *Vision*, pp. 24-5. 94) *Vision*, p. 213.

95) *Vision*, p. 301.

Cyclical History in the Poems

Yeats's views on history and the symbolism attached to them as set out in *A Vision* do not receive prominence in the poems and plays until *Responsibilities* of 1919, soon becoming axial themes of many poems, from 'The Second Coming' through to 'Under Ben Bulben' and the lines penned during Yeats's final year, and of dramatic works like *The Player Queen* and *The Resurrection.*

The great wheel appears in its entirety only in 'The Phases of the Moon,' which forms part of *A Vision* and which we have seen describe an individual life as man strives for unity with his anti-self, and also mankind as it experiences opposing impulses. The first direct instance in the poems of history being shown as susceptible to a rhythm of eternally recurring cycles is 'The Magi'[96] from *Responsibilities.* Here the 'pale unsatisfied ones' hope 'to find once more' 'The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor' which characterised a past age when body, not soul, held sway. Christianity, constricting man in 'stiff, painted clothes,' is not a one-time phenomenon destined to endure for ever; its impulse will be superseded by one of opposite tincture, just as 'Calvary's turbulence' had wrecked the age

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96) *CP*, p. 141.

that went before it. The end of any cycle is accompanied by turbulence and 'loss of control,'[97] as 'the whole thing turns bottom upwards, Nietzsche's "transvaluation of all values,"' and the birth of Christ occurred not only at the end of a cycle or gyre, but at the end of a zodiacal great year as well. Hence the heightened tumult. In a note to 'The Dolls'[98] Yeats describes the Magi as 'complementary forms of those enraged dolls,'[99] who - as representatives of a long-established, stable order - express their disgust at the presence of the Christian babe, 'A noisy and filthy thing.' The 'wretch' has signalled their collapse; they will fall just as Troy fell to Greece.

If there was turbulence at the birth of Christ, so there is turbulence once again at the birth of the Antichrist in our day - a turbulence which is given its most powerful evocation in 'The Second Coming,'[100] where,

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned.[101]

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97) *Vision*, p. 268. 98) *CP*, p. 141.

99) *VP*, p. 820. 100) *CP*, p. 210.

101) We will not speculate here on the parochial meanings of the poem and its allusions to events at the time it was written.

This is the fragmentary Phase 15 of the Christian dispensation, a phase which, in the words of *A Vision*, 'comes also at a period of war or trouble.'[102] We are thus at Phase 28 of one of its two sub-cycles which each last a thousand years, and towards the end of an era we find 'first a sinking in upon the moral being, then the last surrender, the irrational cry, revelation.'[103] To-day, then, amid violent turmoil,

> Surely some revelation is at hand;
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand,

the Second Coming (indeed, the Umpteenth Coming) of an antithetical, subjective era, 'its hour come round at last.'

From the deep well of human memory, which Nietzsche sees as containing man's entire racial history,[104] surges forth the frightening vision of a terrible Blakean Babe, a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*, that 'general storehouse of images which have ceased to be a property of any personality or spirit.'[105] Any '*antithetical* revelation is an intellectual influx neither from beyond mankind nor born of a virgin, but begotten from our spirit and history.'[106] The 'rough beast' is a monstrous Nietzschean spectre of apocalypse 'with

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102) *Vision*, p. 268. 103) *Vision*, p. 268.

104) *Cf.* chapter IV above, pp. 99-100, 120.

105) Yeats's note to 'An Image from a Past Life,' *VP*, p. 822.

106) *Vision*, p. 262.

lion body[107] and the head of a man,' his gaze 'pitiless as the sun,' a powerful herald of solar values who has transcended Zarathustra's last sin.[108] 'Twenty centuries' - a two-thousand-year cycle - since the appearance of the herald of lunar values, the 'rough beast' now 'Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born.'

In *A Vision* we learn that

> when the old primary becomes the new antithetical, the old realisation 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."[109]

The beast 'moving its slow thighs' 'somewhere in sands of the desert' is about to unleash a Nietzschean 'destruction of ideals, the new desert.'[110]

Yeats's note to 'The Second Coming' makes explicit reference to his cyclical theory:

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107) *Cf*. Zarathustra's picture of *'laughing lions'* who will be 'higher ones, stronger ones, triumphant ones;' *TSZ* (71), p. 316. Yeats does, though, mention his own long-pictured image of 'a brazen winged beast that I associated with laughing, ecstatic destruction' as being the one 'described in my poem "The Second Coming."' ('Introduction to *The Resurrection*,' *Expl*, p. 393.)

108) 'My last sin which that been reserved for me, - knoweth thou what it is called?'
' - "Pity!" answered the soothsayer from an overflowing heart . . .' (*TSZ*, 62, p. 268.)

109) *Vision*, p. 105. *Cf*. the antithetical tirades of Paul and Martin.

110) *WP* (617), p. 331.

> the end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment the gyre is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion.[111]

Religious and secular eras being at right-angles, we find with the birth of Christ that

> religious life becomes primary, secular life antithetical - man gives to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. A *primary* dispensation looking beyond itself towards a transcendent power is dogmatic, levelling, unifying, feminine, humane, peace its means and end; an *antithetical* dispensation obeys imminent power, is expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical.[112]

So the cycles come and go, and in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'[113] we find again how

> the Platonic year
> Whirls out new right and wrong,
> Whirls in the old instead;
> All men are dancers and their tread
> Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

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111) *VP*, pp. 824-5.

112) *Vision*, p. 263.

113) *CP*, p. 232.

We are once more in a time of 'Violence upon the roads: violence of horses;' 'Thunder of feet, tumult of images,' and, Nietzsche-like, we 'Traffic in mockery.'

The myth of Leda and the Swan alluded to in *A Vision* appears as a 1923 poem in *The Tower* collection of 1928, 'A shudder in the loins' begetting the destruction of Troy, 'The broken wall, the burning roof and tower/ And Agamemnon dead.'[114] In *A Vision* Yeats adds that, though he imagines the rape to be 'the annunciation that founded Greece,' he finds that

> when in my ignorance I try to imagine what older civilisation that annunciation rejected I can but see bird and woman blotting out some corner of the Babylonian mathematical starlight.[115]

In the anthology's next poem, 'On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac,'[116] the poet has 'gathered old mummy wheat/ In the mad abstract dark,' seeking the antithetical in the primary to achieve unity of being. The closest historical approximation of unity of being is evoked in 'Byzantium,'[117] which celebrates Justinian's reign as that glorious Phase 15 in which 'maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one.'[118] In 'Conjunctions'[119] Yeats revels in the prospect of a new combination of

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114) *CP*, p. 241.
115) *Vision*, p. 268.
116) *CP*, p. 242.
117) *CP*, p. 280.
118) *Vision*, p. 279.
119) *CP*, p. 333.

Saturn and Jupiter which would preside over an age in which unity of being is possible: 'If Jupiter and Saturn meet,/ What a crop of mummy wheat!' As *A Vision* elaborates, when

> a religious dispensation begins and ends at Phase 15, a Mars-Venus conjunction presides over its beginning and a Saturn-Jupiter over its close. The group of phases so dominated are those where Unity of Being is possible. . . . A *primary* revelation begins . . . under Mars-Venus, an *antithetical* under Saturn-Jupiter.[120]

In the *Last Poems* the historical symbols are seldom far from the surface. Their presence is ushered in by the very opening poem, 'The Gyres'[121] - with its ringing declaration that 'all things run/ On that unfashionable gyre again.' Once more we come across the elements of modern apocalypse and the Nietzschean exultation with which they are greeted:

> Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
> Empedocles has thrown all things about;
> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.

Though our age was announced by Christ 'Out of cavern,'[122]

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120) *Vision*, p. 208. 121) *CP*, p. 337.

122) *Cf. A Vision*, p. 204: 'At or near the central point of a lunar month of classical civilisation - the first degree of Aries on the Great Wheel - came the Christian *primary* dispen-

Those that Rocky Face holds dear,

Lovers of horses and of women shall

. . . disinter

The workman, noble and saint . . .

In 'Lapis Lazuli'[123] comes the echo that 'All things fall and are built again,/ And those that build them again are gay.' Like Zarathustra, the Chinese figures are men 'who climbeth on the highest mountains, laugheth at all tragic plays and tragic realities.'[124] 'What Was Lost' repeats that though 'Feet to the Rising and Setting may run,/ They always beat on the same small stone.'[125] We find the spiralling primary and antithetical historical impulses also in 'The Statues,'[126] in which 'All Asiatic vague immensities' are transformed by the 'plummet-measured' sculptures of Phidias, only to have 'One image' cross the 'many-headed' and become 'a fat/ Dreamer of the Middle Ages,' so that 'When gong and conch declare the hour to bless/ Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.' Out of phase 'upon this filthy modern tide,' the Irish should 'Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace/ The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.'

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sation, the child born in the Cavern. At or near the central point of our civilisation must come *antithetical* revelation, the turbulent child of the Altar.' A footnote relates the two symbols to those 'discovered by Frobenius in Africa, the Cavern symbol of the nations moving westward, the Altar at the centre of radiating roads, symbol of the nations moving eastward.'

123) *CP*, p. 338.
124) *TSZ* (7), p. 40.
125) *CP*, p. 359.
126) *CP*, p. 375.

With 'Under Ben Bulben' of September 1938 we are given a last brilliant telescoping of the ageing poet's conviction that the 'Gyres run on,' that grave-diggers 'but thrust their buried men/ Back in the human mind again:'

> Measurement began our might:
> Forms a stark Egyptian thought,
> Forms that gentler Phidias wrought,
> Michel Angelo left a proof
> On the Sistine Chapel roof,
> Where but half-awakened Adam
> Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
> Till her bowels are in heat,
> Proof that there's a purpose set
> Before the secret working mind:
> Profane perfection of mankind.
>
> Quattrocento put in paint
> On backgrounds for a God or Saint
> Gardens where a soul's at ease;
> . . .
> Gyres run on;
> When that greater dream had gone
> Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude,
> Prepared a rest for the people of God,
> Palmer's phrase, but after that
> Confusion fell upon our thought.[127]

Here, encapsulated within the compass of an acorn, is Yeats's oak of a theory.

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127) *CP*, p. 397.

Cyclical History in the Plays

Those recurring circular symbols appear repeatedly throughout the plays as well. In *On Baile's Strand* the fool and the blind man who exploit Cuchulain's heroic battle with the waves as an opportunity to plunder the full ovens of the empty houses, signal the passing of the Cuchulain cycle, the blind man being the false Creative Mind - Cunning - of the 'natural man, the Fool' of Phase 28, the culminating figure of objectivity as 'The Child of God.'[128] The fool of *The Hour-Glass* is another fool from this phase, while in *The Cat and the Moon* the blind man and the lame man combine to form the 'Multiple Man, also called "The Hunchback"'[129] of Phase 26, placed alongside the saint, Yeats's representative of Phase 27. Yeats expressly cites the play as an illustration of cyclical history, and in the first edition of the work says that

> when the Saint mounts upon the back of the Lame Beggar he personifies a certain great spiritual event which may take place when Primary Tincture . . . supersedes Antithetical.[130]

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128) *Vision*, p. 182.

129) *Vision*, p. 176.

130) *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems*, p. 35.

The Lame Beggar's union with the Saint produces a state of unity of being of the kind Yeats discerns in Justinian's Byzantium. He can dance in the midst of life's struggle.

In *The Unicorn from the Stars* we see in Martin's vision the Dionysian injunction to 'Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver!'[131] and 'To bring again the old disturbed exalted life, the old splendour.'[132]

> Once men fought with . . . all that they call their sins, unhelped, and their souls became hard and strong. When we have brought back the clean earth and destroyed the Law and the Church, all life will become like a flame of fire, like a burning eye . . .[133]

Martin hears and sees 'a thousand white unicorns trampling'[134] to pieces the sterile age of objectivity; the unicorn of *The Player Queen*, however, 'alas, he is chaste, he hesitates,'[135] and must be bidden to 'trample mankind to death and beget a new race.'[136] The new cycle is slow to manifest itself - we remember how Christian culture triumphed only a thousand years after the birth of Christ.

In spite of the unicorn's reticence, his annunciator, Septimus, unequivocally raises him up as the symbol of the new antithetical age which will supplant Christianity:

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131) *CPl*, p. 225. 132) *CPl*, p. 227. 133) *CPl*, p. 233.
134) *CPl*, p. 243. 135) *CPl*, p. 265. 136) *CPl*, p. 266.

> Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn.[137]

He is the opposite which the Christian era seeks, its mask or anti-self: 'the Unicorn is both an image and a beast,'[138] though he does not have the horrendous aspect of the 'rough beast.' He may be 'an heroic brute that bathes by the sound of tabors at the rising of the sun and the rising of the moon, and the rising of the Great Bear,'[139] but he does have a 'most milky whiteness.' Like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Yeats's New Adam is terrible when viewed in the light of present morality. To the man of vision, though, he is a thing of 'beauty,' 'a most noble beast'[140] which 'dances in the sun' - the Dionysian 'beast' delighting in Nietzsche's symbolic activity which connotes halcyon lightness and ease as he frolics about Apollo's celestial emblem.

The play evokes all the atmosphere of an age at the turn of a gyre. The desiccated Christian epoch has been reduced to platitudes like 'my Saviour was content with a stable,'[141] and man's spirit has begun flexing its muscles to snap the weakening strictures of Christian culture. Septimus does not 'care for any one now except Venus and Adonis and the planets of heaven,'[142]

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137) *CPl*, p. 265. 138) *CPl*, p. 267. 139) *CPl*, p. 254.
140) *CPl*, p. 253. 141) *CPl*, p. 250. 142) *CPl*, p. 250.

and finds himself in a distinctly 'unchristian place'[143] - its witch-strangling 'crowd becoming wickeder every minute'[144] as 'confusion' sets in. While Christianity was born of a virgin, Decima, the figure who presides over the birth of the new era, sings 'the song of the mad singing daughter of a harlot'[145] and is described in licentious terms, the proponent of the body. She is 'a bad wife'[146] who has 'offered herself to every man in the company,'[147] a 'beautiful, bad, flighty woman' who is 'beautiful as the Unicorn, but fierce.'[148] She is 'terrible' to her husband, just as the 'Unicorn will be terrible when it loves,' being the 'flighty beast'[149] that it is. Such similarities cast Unicorn and Player Queen into the same rôle as spirits of the new age, antithetical creatures whom Septimus would save from being absorbed by the great oneness of the dying primary age, from the 'danger of drowning,'[150] which is the fate that befell Noah's sister, representative of an earlier antithetical cycle with 'her rosy cheeks and rosy mouth, that drowned, wicked mouth.'[151]

The play chosen for performance by the players is 'The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge,' the cataclysmic annihilation of a past era. The company had performed 'The Fall of Troy' before Kubla Khan, and now they are about to witness the crowd destroy this town,

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143) *CPl*, p. 249. 144) *CPl*, p. 258. 145) *CPl*, p. 259.
146) *CPl*, p. 249. 147) *CPl*, p. 269. 148) *CPl*, p. 268.
149) *CPl*, p. 254. 150) *CPl*, p. 255. 151) *CPl*, p. 267.

'burn the place down as if it were Troy,'[152] and so effect the fall of yet another objective civilisation.

The Old Beggar who speaks to Decima of the eternal recurrence of all forces within the world - 'You don't know what you will be put to when you are dead, into whose gullet you will be put to sing or to bray'[153] - is the Old Beggar who had 'brayed like a donkey'[154] at the onset of the Queen's reign. Now when he wants straw so that he might 'lie down and roll,'[155] uttering the change of dispensations in his trance, people make 'the sign of the cross, as if it were a devil that puts me rolling.' Before, when braying like the beast that 'carried Christ into Jerusalem,'[156] he had promulgated the Christian era; now he is the mouthpiece of the Antichrist. Once 'fate has brayed on that man's lips'[157] in that comical way again, the Prime Minister declares 'that there has been a miracle, that God or the Fiend has spoken.'[158]

Though the populace at large do not realise that the crown has in fact changed heads, a new Queen sits on the throne - a Queen who sings of how 'a passion for a swan/ Made Queen Leda stretch and yawn.'[159] The antithetical epitome of Phase 13 has succeeded the primary one of Phase 27.

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152) *CPl*, p. 266. 153) *CPl*, p. 270. 154) *CPl*, p. 255.
155) *CPl*, p. 269. 156) *CPl*, p. 255. 157) *CPl*, p. 273.
158) *CPl*, p. 272. 159) *CPl*, p. 264.

While *The Player Queen* treats of the antithetical overthrowing the primary, *Calvary* depicts the primary supplanting the antithetical. Here the gods of Roman antiquity find their last victory in Christ's death, but as they drain away his physical life, so he drowns their spirit of subjectivity. 'God has not died for the white heron'[160] but for those 'That live but in His love' and 'are gathered round Him.'[161] *The Resurrection,* Yeats's Introduction to which cites it as an illustration of the cyclical nature of history, stresses Christianity's emergence as the recurrence of an earlier impulse by making Christ analogous to Dionysus. In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche speaks of Paul as emphasising 'the *unio mystica* with the "sacrifice"' and as seeking to bring the afterlife 'as resurrection into a causal relationship with that sacrifice (after the type of Dionysus, Mithras, Osiris).'[162]

The songs of *The Resurrection* tell of 'a staring virgin'[163] who bears away the 'beating heart' of 'holy Dionysus,' at which 'did all the Muses sing/ Of Magnus Annus at the spring.' Now the objective qualities of Dionysus are about to return with the birth of Christ and the start of another great year. *A Vision* points out that the date of the great year's recommencement is uncertain, though Syncellus was of the opinion that

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160) *CPl*, p. 288.
161) *CPl*, p. 291.
162) *WP* (167), p. 101.
163) *CPl*, p. 364.

a new epoch began when the constellation Aries returned to its original position.[164] Whatever the precise date, its fixing would depend on the day selected for the equinox (at Rome, 25 March) and on what star seemed to mark the end of Aries and the start of Pisces. In any event, 'it was certainly near enough . . . to the Cruxifiction to confer upon the early Church, had it not been committed to its war with Grecian fatalism, the greatest of its miracles.'[165] And the spring equinox was long given to commemoration of Dionysus and Attis before it became a period hallowed to Christendom.

So it is that 'Another Troy' (another objective cycle) 'must rise' - but also 'set,' the fate of Christianity as much as of any cycle. The 'Roman Empire stood appalled/ . . . / When that fierce virgin and her Star/ Out of the fabulous darkness called,'[166] reintroducing the tendency to surrender the multi-faceted self to the oblivion of the Whole. Now 'Wandering women call'[167] on the virgin Mary as before they hailed the 'virgin Astrea.' 'In pity for man's darkening thought'[168] as he coveted the mask of oblivion characteristic of man in Phase 28, Christ had issued in 'Galilean turbulence,' a return of that ancient 'Babylonian star-

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164) *Vision*, p. 253. 165) *Vision*, p. 254.
166) *CPl*, p. 365. 167) *CPl*, p. 369. 168) *CPl*, p. 373.

light' which 'brought/ A fabulous, formless darkness in,' a return of those 'Asiatic vague immensities' of 'The Statues.'[169] The Irrational has returned, making 'all Platonic tolerance vain/ And vain all Doric discipline.'

The 'followers of Dionysus'[170] in *The Resurrection* are described in Yeats's terminology for objective men as 'a pack of wolves,' 'the most ignorant and excitable class of Asiatic Greeks'[171] who 'seek forgetfulness in monstrous ceremonies.' The Greek, arguing the case for subjective polytheism,

> cannot think that all that self-surrender and self-abasement is Greek, despite the Greek name of its god. When the goddess came to Achilles in the battle she did not interfere with his soul, she took him by his yellow hair.[172]

In worshipping the gods of Greece man retains his individuality, 'does not surrender his soul. He keeps his privacy.'[173] He is sovereign, his

> 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.[174]

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169) *CP*, p. 375. 170) *CPl*, p. 365. 171) *CPl*, p. 368.

172) *Cf*. chapter IV (pp. 133-9) above for *The Resurrection* as an exploration of the rational against the irrational, of self against soul.

173) *CPl*, p. 369. 174) 'A Prayer for My Daughter,' *CP*, p. 211.

Christ, like Dionysus, rises from the dead, and His followers will soon echo the 'worshipers of Dionysus' in 'their lunatic cry, "God has arisen! God has arisen!"'[175] It is a lunatic cry that confirms the fear inherent in the Syrian's frightening question, 'What if the irrational return? What if the circle begin again?' 'The unique'[176] is indeed about to intervene, just as at the end of the Christian cycle 'A shape with lion body and the head of a man'[177] intervenes. The Syrian perceives that a new cycle is at hand: 'O Athens, Alexandria, Rome, something has come to destroy you.'[178] The types of subjectivity - and in this case the rational - have been engulfed by the type of objectivity. Before, 'every man's sins' were 'his property;'[179] now 'The Messiah is able to exhaust human suffering as though it were all gathered together in the spot of a burning-glass.' He would have man 'sacrifice everything.' We are reminded of the statement in *A Vision* that

> before the birth of Christ religion and vitality were polytheistic, *antithetical*, and to this the philosophers opposed their *primary*, secular thought. Plato thinks all things into Unity and is the "First Christian." At the birth of Christ religious life becomes *priamry*, secular life *antithetical* . . .[180]

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175) *CPl*, p. 371. 176) *Vision*, p. 263. 177) *CP*, p. 210.
178) *CPl*, p. 372. 179) *CPl*, p. 367. 180) *Vision*, pp. 262-3.

The termination of a cycle is seen again in *The Herne's Egg*, where the new Messiah will be the offspring of Attracta and the terrible Great Herne, and in *Purgatory* we slide down three generations from a condition of greatness, from a house where 'Great people lived and died,'[181] to an age 'stripped bare'[182] of any noble heroism, in which there is 'The shadow of a cloud upon the house,' 'Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty.'

The Old Man of the play is obsessed with thoughts of anniversaries and repetitions, and his son is now at the same age the Old Man was when he stabbed his father to death while the great house burned. It is an intersection of times with terrible portent. The boy at once has a sense of this cyclic presence of the past in the present, a sentiment akin to that experienced by Nietzsche in the year he formulated his intuitions on eternal recurrence. His letters to Peter Gast during that cardinal year of 1881 illustrate his fear that this would be a fateful year for him, as he had reached the age at which his father had died - a belief in recurrence taken to uncharacteristically superstitious lengths.

The boy asks his father,

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181) *CPl*, p. 431.

182) *CPl*, p. 430.

> What if I killed you? You killed my grand-dad,
> Because you were young and he was old.
> Now I am young and you are old.[183]

But in the atmosphere of violence that accompanies every reversal of an age, it is the Old Man who stabs his son in a fatal repetition of his earlier crime: 'My father and my son on the same jack-knife!'[184] Yet even this does not purge him of his Oedipal nightmare, and the vision of his father's return to abuse his mother drums in on him with iterative remorselessness: 'Hoof-beats! Dear God,/ How quickly it returns . . .'[185]

The Death of Cuchulain offers a similar contrast between 'this vile age'[186] and a noble one of old. We are surrounded by 'pickpockets and opinionated bitches' far removed from the heroic Cuchulain of days past - and future. To current moral standards, Cuchulain is 'montrous'[187] and the harlot despicable. But just as the harlot is reviled in our era, cast out to the fringes of society, so will she be central to the coming age,[188] an age which will again have men like 'Conall, Cuchulain, Usna's boys,/ All that most ancient race,'[189] even though 'centuries have passed/ Since they were living

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183) *CPl*, p. 434. 184) *CPl*, p. 435.

185) *CPl*, p. 436. 186) *CPl*, p. 438.

187) *CPl*, p. 441. *Cf*. again *TSZ* (43), p. 158: 'the Superman would be *frightful* in his goodness . . .'

188) *Cf*. 'Introduction to *The Resurrection*,' *Expl*, p. 393, and p. 232 above.

189) *CPl*, p. 445.

men.' Like that of the 'rough beast' in 'The Second Coming,' their hour will 'come round at last,'[190] bringing the renewal of a past cycle within one of Nietzsche's

> tremendous years of reucrrence, with an ebb and flow of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally . . .[191]

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190) *CP*, p. 210.

191) *WP* (1067), p. 550.

EPILOGUE

Having sounded the remarkable frequency and scope of the Nietzschean echoes in Yeats, we come full circle to that elusive question of 'influence.' As we have seen, influence is an unfathomable quantity and varies according to one's definition of it. Certainly there is little danger of overestimating Nietzsche's influence on Yeats when one understands influence as including the stimulation, confirmation, justification and fomentation of ideas, and the fostering of attitude, tone, and outlook. Here Nietzschean influence was considerable and lasting.

Yeats's involvement with Nietzsche was by no means limited to the period immediately following his 1902 reading of Thomas Common's *Nietzsche as Critic, Philosopher, Poet and Prophet:* Mrs Yeats has confirmed that her husband was still reading Nietzsche at the end of his life,[1] while Hone recounts that Yeats decided during his visit to Rapallo in the spring of 1929 ten years earlier that "such leisure as he had should be reserved for the study of local memories of Nietzshce," who had begun writing *Zarathustra* there in late 1882.[2] As for the years

1) *Cf.* Jeffares, *op. cit.*, pp. 294 and 337, note 66.

2) Hone, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

before and after the First World War, we recall his father's 1910 letter of complaint at Nietzsche's continuing 'malign influence,' while in 1915 the spell was still just as potent, with the Irish poet Austin Clarke remembering how at a centenary commemoration meeting of Thomas Davis, Yeats "brought in irreverently the name of Nietzsche, for the German poet and philosopher of the Superman was regarded with horror in all our pro-British press . . ."[3]

Yeats found in Nietzsche a kindred spirit who provided him with the mask he sought to help him shake off the trappings of the Nineties. He had an instinctive sympathy with Nietzsche's views and stances, and his interest was often one of obsessive preoccupation and thrall, as his description of Nietzsche as 'that strong enchanter' indicates. Yeats drew from his example the impetus and incitement to pursue his own embryonic attitudes, to have confidence in his own thought, and found justification for his proclivities which ran so much against the prevailing current, and substantiation for so many familiar concepts he had come across elsewhere - occasionally finding the seeds of ideas he had not yet encountered.

So it is that we find a wealth of like attitudes in their entire *Weltanschauung*, in their disposition

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3) F. McManus (ed.): *The Yeats We Knew* (1965), p. 86.

to approach life as tragic, a remorseless interplay of forces, of conflicting wills to power, and in their attitudes to art and aesthetics, to the hero, and to history. Not that Yeats's predilection for Nietzsche rendered him uncritical of the German - as his marginalia in Common testify; he often modified and went beyond him.

Thus, while Nietzsche is not the sole source or progenitor of all the Nietzschean echoes in Yeats, he certainly increased their strident vociferousness. One could not accredit Nietzsche with having altered the tenour of Yeats's work single-handed, of having provided revolutionary illumination - his influence (if such it may be termed) lies more in substantiation and incitement. In this he emerges as a towering figure in Yeats's poetic life.

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GUIDE TO ABBREVIATIONS

Footnotes employ the following abbreviations for works frequently cited:

1. *Auto:* Yeats: *Autobiographies* (Macmillan, London, 1955).
2. *Boiler:* Yeats: *On the Boiler* (Cuala Press, Dublin).
3. *BGE:* Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale (Penguin Paperack, 1973, rep. 1874).
4. *BT:* Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, New York, 1967).
5. *CP:* Yeats: *Collected Poems* (Macmillan, London, 2nd ed. 1950, rep. 1965).
6. *CPl:* Yeats: *Collected Plays* (Macmillan, London, 2nd 1952, rep. 1966 in chapters I to III above; Macmillan, New York, 2nd ed. 1953 in chapters IV to VI above).
7. *CW:* Nietzsche: *The Case of Wagner*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, New York, 1967).
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