# SYMBOLISM AND W. B. YEATS

A Thesis

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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

It is the purpose of this thesis to show William Butler Yeats's development towards unity in his work and life, and how symbolism provided for him that focal point where his life and work could converge.

In the epilogue to "A Vision" Yeats drops his mask, and reveals the uncertainty which had followed him, wraithlike, throughout his life. "Day after day I have sat in my chair turning a symbol over in my mind, exploring its details, defining and again defining its elements, testing my convictions and those of others by its unity, attempting to substitute particulars for an abstraction like that of Algebra. I have felt the convictions of a lifetime melt through at an age when the mind should be rigid, and others take their place, and these in turn give way to others..... Then I draw myself up into the symbol and it seems as if I should know all if I could but banish such memories and find everything in the symbol." [1].

This statement, made at the end of Yeats's life, shows the importance of the symbol to himself and to his work. Through the medium of symbolism Yeats produced some of the

most beautiful lyric poetry of our age, and its excellence testifies to the intense personal interest he had in the symbol. It ~~is~~ was a faith for him, to which he willingly dedicated his life and his work. Because of the personal importance of the symbol, he had to define his theories of symbolism precisely, and in essays and letters, he constantly clarified his theories, which, of course, resulted in poetry which ~~is~~ was always evolving, always becoming more lucid and precise.

Yeats makes a distinction between symbolism and allegory, which reveals not only an attempt to clarify his theories, but shows his bent of mind toward a unity of art. "A symbol," he says, "is indeed the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual plan, while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to fancy and not to imagination: the one is a revelation, the other an amusement."[2] This conception of the symbol as "the only possible expression of an invisible essence" makes it difficult to talk about symbols at all. For instance, who is to determine that the symbol is the only possible expression? The Poet himself? If so, he falls into the personal and private heresies of the French symbolists, who often construct puzzles from their individual experiences, which very few readers can unriddle. Can a poem evolve such personal symbols completely and precisely? If a symbol is the only possible expression of some invisible essence, how can it be analyzed at all? Yeats was no doubt

assailed by these problems when he produced his definition of the symbol. He is confronted with the dilemma of all mystics, who cannot describe their mystical experience because if it were describeable it would not be unified but composite--it would be comprehended, and therefore no longer a mystical apprehension. How then is the unique experience transferable? A start towards a solution is Yeats's belief in the "Great Mind"and"Great Memory"--that the thoughts of any mind, those of the dead as well as the living are not bounded by personality, but may flow into other minds.

The essence of Yeats's solution to the problems of these theories is in his conception of the unified imagination. In his theory of art, Yeats is one of the latest of the Romantics. He is of the tribe of Wordsworth and Coleridge, Blake and Shelley. He says that allegory is an amusement of the fancy, making the late poet's distinction, which is more a judgment of value than of kinds. Fancy for Yeats is a superficial play of the intellect, which, for instance, wishing to embody courage will choose among lion, mother bird, Thomas Beckett, and Horatius at the bridge. None is inevitable--one is as good as the other. Symbolism, however, is "the only possible expression," and it belongs to imagination in Coleridge's sense of the harmonious, indivisible, complete functioning of the poet's mind. Yeats says,

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"I am now certain that the imagination has some way of lighting at the truth that the reason has not."[3] The characteristics of these imaginative poetic symbols are:

1. Each is unified and indivisible.

2. Each has a meaning. Yeats is not a theorist of pure poetry, which maintains that music is the end of poetry.

3. Though a symbol is indivisible as a perfect sphere, one may witness its hemispheres, seeing the permanent expressed in the particular, the dreaming in the waking, the boundless in the bounded.

4. This complex meaning is untranslateable; it cannot satisfactorily be expressed in other terms.

5. Each symbol is inexhaustibly suggestive, rooted in the past, whether that past is that of the artist or mankind.

6. Each symbol has a moral meaning in the sense that the sympathetic awareness of reality makes men better.

7. Each symbol is self-creating, and cannot be deliberately sought.

8. Each symbol grows slowly, its existence often realized before its meaning is understood.

9. Every artist has his central symbol, or a group of related symbols, that form a dominating symbolic pattern.

10. This unified symbol constitutes a revelation.

These characteristics of Yeats's symbols are consistently expressed in his writings and poems, and the idea of unity is the beginning and end of Yeats's conception of symbolism. He is convinced that intuition and expression are one, and quotes Blake: "I am like others, just equal in invention

been fractured by "abstraction" by which he means "the isolation of occupation, or class or faculty." Yet even today or in the future "a nation, or an individual with great emotional intensity might....give to all those separated elements and to all that abstract love and melancholy, a symbolical, a mythical coherence."

"Today I add to that first conviction, that first desire for unity, this other conviction, long a mere opinion vaguely or intermittently apprehended. Nations, races and individual men are unified by an image, or bundle of related images, symbolical or evocative of the state of mind, which is of all states of mind not impossible, the most difficult to that man, race or nation; because only the greatest obstacle that can be contemplated without despair, rouses the will to full intensity."[8]

Such power as the symbol has, according to Yeats's conception, must have meaning. This may seem unnecessary to say, but some believe that because symbolism transcends the reason, it must be meaningless. On this, Yeats quotes Goethe: "a poet needs all philosophy, but he must keep it out of his work."[9] The poet suggests though, that it is occasionally possible to have pure philosophy as part of the genuine poetic creation.

Yeats believes that the ordinary symbol presents a

double world: "some invisible essence" in its embodiment. These two aspects, though, are inseparable "like the yolk and white of the one shell"[10] and he talks about this in his phrase "True art is expressive and symbolic, and makes every form, every sound, every colour, every gesture, a signature of some unanalyzible imaginative essence."[11] Art is created where two modes of being meet - unearthly glory and the light of common day. Yeats constantly returns to his conception of the trance-like state, between sleeping and waking, where the timeless for a moment, enters into the world of time. An essence becomes a presence. This joining of two modes of being is the poet's need. To Yeats it is so sacred that he almost obscures the distinction between the bounded and the boundless, that each may partake of the other: "I am orthodox and pray for a resurrection of the body, and am certain that a man should find his Holy Land where he first crept upon the floor, and that familiar woods and rivers should fade into symbol with so gradual a change that he never discovers, no, not even in ecstasy itself, that he is beyond space, and that time alone keeps him from Primum Mobile, Supernal Eden, Yellow Rose over all."[12]

This belief in the unifying power of symbolism never left Yeats, and through it he managed to hammer both his work and his consciousness into a unified whole, despite the contra-

dictions which were ever-present to him. "Hammer your thoughts into unity" is a constantly expressed theme of Yeats, and the symbol provided the focal point for his life and work. Since both converged there, his poetry is constantly the personal expression of a man in search of knowledge of himself. His courageous cry "Why should we honour those that die upon the field of battle, a man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself"[13] echoes throughout his poetry; and the symbol is the instrument with which he sounds the abyss.

## CHAPTER I

### The A GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OF YEATS'S SYMBOLIST DOCTRINE.

1. The Symbolist Movement.

During the 'nineties Yeats visited Paris where he met Mallarmé, the acknowledged leader of the new Symbolist movement, which was causing much excitement among the French writers. The enthusiasm of the symbolists was that of a confused, skeptical man who had suddenly found a faith - something to which he could dedicate his life and work. They had rejected the fashionable desire for religious sensation-seeking which had arisen all over Europe. In Paris, strange religious cults had mushroomed in a grotesque fashion.[14] Yeats was seeking a faith, and his "I do not think I could live without religion" was an unconscious echo of the symbolist poets. Consequently it was with little effort that Yeats's enthusiasm for this new faith was aroused. He returned to Ireland, elated, and began to read Mallarmé and the other symbolist writers in translation, aided by his close friend, Arthur Symons, the eminent English critic of the new movement. Symons did much to elucidate the symbolist doctrines not only for Yeats's benefit, but for the benefit of many young English

writers. It was through knowledge of the symbolist theories that Yeats first found a method to unify his art and resolve the problems in his personality. From this time on symbolism became his predominate interest. From "The Wind Among The Reeds" (1899) to his great myth "A Vision" (1925) Yeats constantly ~~strived~~ strove to make his life and work converge in symbolism. Although he later broke from the influence of Mallarmé, and the other French symbolist writers, Valery, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, de l'Isle Adams and Maeterlinck, it was they who started him on a long but unbroken journey.

Before discussing Yeats's personal doctrine, it would be profitable to discuss briefly the French symbolist movement, which gave Yeats the impetus to go in a certain direction for the greater part of his life.

The Symbolist movement was actually divided into two parts, although the name "Symbolist Movement" is generally understood to include only that branch of symbolism which exerted the greatest influence during the latter part of the 19th century, and the early part of the 20th century. This, Cleanth Brooks names the serious-aesthetic branch of symbolism, of which Mallarmé was the leader, and whose authors held to traditionally poetic subject matter while increasing the subtlety of their writing. But they made no apparent development of discords. It was the later authors of the

conversation-ironic branch who developed the discords. The leader of this group of symbolists was Jules Laforgue, a former disciple of Mallarmé. Laforgue's followers broke with traditional concepts, and attempted to integrate a variety of materials by making violent comparisons between seemingly unrelated subjects. They used the metaphysical school of John Donne as their model, while the writers of the serious-aesthetic branch still clung to the theories of the romantic movement of the 19th century. However, the influence of the conversation-ironic branch of symbolism steadily extended its influence, and today is at its peak in the writings of such authors as James Joyce and T. S. Eliot.

Although the conversation-ironic branch of symbolism did influence many writers in the late 19th century, it was comparatively isolated, and the symbolist movement was chiefly concerned with the development of the traditional concepts of the romantic movement; consequently the serious-aesthetic branch of symbolism has been given the more general name of the Symbolist movement and the latter term will be used in this manner throughout the thesis.

The symbolist movement of France at the end of the 19th century was fundamentally mystical. The protagonists of this new movement found that the fabric of their Christian beliefs had been undermined, and having

a need of a gospel to take its place, they found in the Beautiful something which unified their activities and gave a purpose to their work. They clung to this belief with a mystical conviction because of its intensity and irrationality (rationalism was the order of the day, and had resulted in chaos), its disregard for other beliefs and its reliance on a world beyond the senses. These writers were religious in the sense that the Beautiful unified life for them, and gave a meaning to it. It was Mallarme "with his shining, pensive gaze"[15] who unified the movement. He was a professor at the Sorbonne, and such artists as Huysmans, Whistler, Valery, Gide, Symons, Yeats, and Laforgue gathered at his home.

The essence of the symbolist movement ~~was~~ *is* its insistence on a world of ideal beauty, and its conviction that this is realized through art. The ecstasies which religion claims for the devout through prayer and contemplation, are claimed by symbolism for the poet through the exercise of his craft. For the undivided attention which the enraptured worshipper gives to the object of his prayers, and the sense of timeless contentment which he finds through them, are not deliberately different from the pure aesthetic state which seems to obliterate distinctions of time and place, of self and not-self, or sorrow and joy, of life and death. This aesthetic rapture resembles religious devotion in many ways.

For instance, the medieval church considered the illumination of manuscripts to be a proper way of serving God. For those who believe in a world above the senses, there is more than one way to approach it. The church has its own symbols of august majesty, hallowed by time, and familiar from centuries of religious art. The symbols of Christianity are rich in associations and are easily recognized. But the poet who writes of his private ~~exaltations~~ associations has to find his own symbols, and it may be difficult for others to appreciate them at their full value. This was certainly true of the poets of this movement and their esoteric work often caused much perplexity. Edmund Wilson in "Axel's Castle" says: "Symbolism indeed, sometimes had the result of making poetry so much a private concern of the poet's that it turned out to be incommunicable to the reader. The peculiar subtlety and difficulty of symbolism is indicated by the name itself. This name has often been complained of as being inadequate for the movement to which it was given and inappropriate to certain of its aspects; and it may prove misleading to English readers. For the symbols of symbolism have to be defined differently from symbols in the ordinary sense - the sense in which the cross is the symbol of Christianity or the stars and stripes the symbol of the United States. This symbolism differs from such symbolism as Dante's. For the familiar

kind of symbolism is fixed and conventional; the symbolism of the Divine Comedy is conventional, logical and definite. But the symbols of the Symbolist School are usually chosen arbitrarily by the poet to stand for special ideas of his own - they are a sort of disguise for these ideas. "The Parnassians, for their part," wrote Mallarmé, "take the thing just as it is and put it before us - and consequently they are deficient in mystery; they deprive the mind of the delicious joy of believing that it is creating. To name an object is to do away with three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it - that is what charms the imagination."[16] To intimate things rather than suggest them was thus one of the primary aims of the symbolists. What matters is the aroma, the air of a thing, not the mere thing itself. Mallarmé's technique was to omit the machinery of similes and comparisons and directly identify his emotion with what it resembles.

In pure aesthetic pleasure there is sometimes an absolute quality which seems to bear no intelligible relation to the actual work of art which provokes it, a pure joy which is not bound to any meaning in words and is, for that reason, like the pleasure that comes from music. Mallarmé knew this and made it the center and goal of his beliefs. He hoped so to purify poetry that

it would produce an unmixed ecstasy, an absolute joy which transcends the limitations which nature imposes upon words, and seems to belong to an ideal world.

Symbolism then was, in origin, a mystical kind of poetry, whose technique depended on its metaphysics and whose first popularity was due to the importance that it gave to the poet's self and to the element of music in his art. It affirmed that experience gave "not the truth of eternal outlines, ascertained once for all, but a world of fine graduations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we ourselves change."[17]

Mallarmé's symbolism and that of the whole movement failed in part in that words cannot be wholly divorced from their meanings - that music is not the end of poetry. However the two great protagonists of the period, Mallarmé and Valery, did achieve a great deal. Mallarmé brought an enlivened sensibility to poetry, and Valery a proper regard for its sound. They widened the sphere of ideal Beauty, and showed that poetry lives by change. Once a style is perfected it must be thrown away, for there is nothing which resembles a great style so little as its imitations. Yeats, at first, was bound by the techniques and beliefs of the symbolist movement, but his ideas matured quickly, and so he escaped the label of "imitator".

2. Yeats's Symbolist Doctrine.

In three significant essays, written in the 'nineties, Yeats lays down his general theories of symbolism, having willingly accepted the view of the French Symbolists, that symbols are essential to poetry. These essays are "Magic", "Symbolism in Painting", and "The Symbolism of Poetry".[18]

In "Symbolism in Painting" he says: "All art that is not mere story-telling is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which medieval magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it entangles, in complex colours and forms, a part of the Divine essence."[19]

Yeats had found his artistic method. In "Magic" he shows that he does not regard poetry as complete in itself with its own ritual and its own meaning, but as a part of a larger experience, as a means of communicating with the spiritual world which lies beyond the visible. For him, a poet is a medium, an interpreter of the unseen, and his poetry is the record of the revelations given to him. "I believe in the practice and the philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in which I must ~~call~~ include the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating

magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and, I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:-

(1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this <u>great mind</u> and <u>great memory</u> can be evoked by symbols."[20]

Unlike Mallarmé, Yeats distinguishes between two kinds of symbolism, <u>the symbolism of sounds</u> and <u>the symbolism of ideas</u>. The first class contains <u>emotional</u> symbols: "All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain embodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions, and when sound, and colour and form, are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become as it were, one sound, one colour, one form

and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion."[21] Also unlike Mallarmé, and Baudelaire, Yeats limits the use of symbols in this category to the expression of emotions. Mallarme was not concerned with these, but with the pure aesthetic experience. ~~Yetas~~ Yeats, closer to ordinary life despite his magical airs, isolates the emotions as a special field for symbols.

His second class of symbols is of those which express ideas, and he says: "There are intellectual symbols, symbols that evoke ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions....If I say 'white' or 'purple' in an ordinary line of poetry, they evoke emotions so exclusively that I cannot say why they move me; but if I bring them into the same sentence with such obvious intellectual symbols as a cross or a crown of thorns, I think of purity or sovereignty. Furthermore, innumerable meanings which are held to 'white' or to 'purple' by bonds of subtle suggestion, alike in the emotions and in the intellect move visibly through my mind and move invisibly beyond the threshold of sleep, casting lights and shadows of an indefinable wisdom on what had seemed before, it may be, but sterility and noisy violence."[22]

Yeats fully recognizes that words evoke associations. Mallarmé would not have allowed that symbols in poetry could be evocative only of ideas. He believed

in an idealism "which rejects the natural materials and, as brutal, a direct thought ordering them; to retain no more than suggestion."[23] Yeats does not go so far. He maintains that a symbol may stand for an idea and play a corresponding part in poetry. At the outset he rejects the drastic view which excludes as much thought as possible from verse. He sees that ideas have a function in verse which must be recognized. Although he believed that the French symbolists were the only people saying anything new, he was soon forming his own ideas of what this new poetry should be. It is marked by a return to imagination, to the state between waking and dreaming.

> Half close your eyelids, loosen your hair,
> And dream about the great and their pride.[24]

He says that he will cast out energetic rhythms and seek "wavering, meditative, organic rhythms". He will pay great attention to technique, and employ, if necessary, obscure and ungrammatical forms, but they must have "the perfection that escapes analysis, the subtleties that have a new meaning every day." Poetry is to be a record of a state of trance. Yeats had already set himself a high standard, but one that he was able to reach. In "The Wind Among the Reeds", the poem, "He Wishes For The Cloths of Heaven" is a significant example of that achievement.

> Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
> Enwrought with golden and silver light,
> The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
> Of night and light and the half-light,
> I would spread the cloths under your feet,
> But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
> I have spread my dreams under your feet,
> Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.[25]

He is living up to his theory, in which he partly restates some of the fundamental principles of lyric poetry, and partly introduces the revolutionary notion that a poem is a charm or instrument of enchantment. Yeats liked the symbolist doctrine not only because its high standards appealed to his artistic sense but because its mystical claims appealed to the sense of mystery within him. However his mysticism is of a special kind. It is not aesthetic rapture, not pure vision, not creative ecstasy, but a belief in powers beyond the visible world, powers evoked from dream and trance. For Yeats, poetry is a communication with spirits, with an unseen order of things, and the poet is one who conducts the passage from one order to the other and finds words for those mystical messages.

In general Yeats's early symbolism creates the impression of mystery, of remoteness, of kinship to ancient and strange forces;

> The Powers whose name and shape no living creature knows....[26]

He related present events to remote antecedents and sets the poet's love in a timeless legendary world. "To Ireland In the Coming Times" illustrates this:

Know, that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page.
When time began to rant and rage
The measure of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;
And time bade all his candles flare
To light a measure here and there;
And may the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon a measured solitude.

While still I may, I write for you
The love I lived, the dream I knew.
From our birthday, until we die,
Is but the winking of an eye;
And we, our singing and our love,
What measurer Time has lit above,
And all benighted things that go
About my table to and fro,
Are passing on to where may be,
In truth's consuming ecstasy.
No place for love and dream at all;
For God goes by with white footfall.
I cast my heart into my rhymes
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart wait with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.[27].

3. Yeats's Method of Symbolism and His Early Poetry.

Yeats's method of symbolism is to take some figure or creature of legend and through it express some state of mind of his own.[28] In the first editions of his poems he appears in different characters, as Aedh, Hanrahan or Michael Robartes, according to the part he plays, but in later editions these characters are reduced to "he". The crises in his soul are

depicted through legend. This is well illustrated in his long narrative poem "The Wanderings of Oisin", which was published in 1889 in "The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems". Oisin is a heroic projection of Yeats himself, and the essential symbolism of the poem is contained in three imperceptible things man is always seeking "infinite feeling, infinite battle, infinite repose."[29] The main light which the poem casts on Yeats's own personality is that it reveals him in love with the idea of love. Oisin himself was a legendary king of Ireland, and the source of the poem was an old story known to Thomas Campion in 1571.

His poem begins with Oisin's tale to Saint Patrick of how Finn and those of Fianna who survived after the great battle of Gabhra, were out hunting one morning and saw

> A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
> On a horse with bridle of findrinny
> And like a sunset were her lips,
> A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
> A citron colour gloomed in her hair....

She was Niamh, daughter of the King of Tir-nan-Oge, the land of the young, who had come to the land of men through her love for Oisin Yeats. She asks him to come away with her, and he, in love with her at first sight, is glad to do so, although he must leave his father Finn and his comrades of the Fianna:

> And then I mounted and she bound me
> With her triumphing arms around me,
> And whispering to herself unwound me;
> Caolte, Conan and Finn came near,
> And wept, and raised their lamenting hands,
> And bid me stay, with many a tear;
> But we rode out from human lands.

Together the mortal and the fairy leave for the land of the young. They journey over the sea to the Island of the living, and there they hunt and fish and love for a hundred years. Then the staff of a dead warrior's lance is found in the sea by Oisin, and he begins to remember those he left; Niamh understands and they depart on the magic horse.

In the second book the two lovers come to the Island of Victories. They find, at the top of a long flight of stairs, a maiden who is the prisoner of a demon:

> A lady with soft eyes like funeral tapers,
> And face that seemed wrought out of moonlit vapors,
> And a sad mouth, that fear made tremulous
> As any ruddy moth, looked down on us.....

Oisin spends the next hundred years in a struggle with his enemy, the demon, and vanquishes him:

> Horror from horror grew; but when the west
> Had surged up in a plumy fire, I drave
> Through heart and spine; and cast him on the
> → wave lest Niamh shudder.

At the end of the hundred years Oisin again remembers the Fianna, and he and Niamh depart, this time for the Island of Forgetfulness.

In the third part the lovers sleep amid the heroes of Ireland until Oisin is wakened by the fall of a Starling; again, remembrance of the Fianna comes upon him, and he tells Niamh he must return to Ireland to his companions.

> "I cried, 'O Niamh! O white one! if only a twelve-houred day,
> I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where the old men and young
> In the Finian's dwelling of wattle lean on The chess-boards and play,
> Oh, sweet to me now were even bold Conan's slanderous tongue!"

She warns him not to touch the ground with any part of his body; he promises and departs on the magic horse. He finds none of his old companions in Ireland, and turns to the realms of his fairy bride.

But on the way, seeing two men unable to lift a sack of sand, he leans from his saddle and hurls the sack five yards with one hand. The saddle girths break, and as he falls upon the earth his years descend upon his body:

> "I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a summer fly;
> And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose and walked on the earth,
> A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on his beard never dry."

In this state, although with unbroken spirit, he is brought to Patrick and he finally declares that he will dwell with the Finians, whether in the flames of Hell, as Patrick affirms, or at their famous feasting.

This poem has been described in detail to illustrate all that has been said about Yeats's early symbolism. We can see his belief in enchantment, the wavering, meditative rhythms, ~~and~~ writing which expresses the trance-like state between consciousness and sleep , and his method of using a legend to express his own states of consciousness. When he wishes to get away from ordinary life and feels the fierce fascination of dreams, the influence that shakes him is figured in the Sidhe, fairies who travel in the wind, or on white horses, and seduce men from their habitual lives.

The image of Oisin as a wandering old man, or the image of a wandering bard, has its own interest,but it has symbolical importance as well, because the idea of wandering suits Yeats's desires for hidden and mysterious forces, and may be applied to all who have such desires. The wandering bard becomes a symbol for universal longing which is all the clearer for being presented in a vivid, particular, concrete case. In this drama, as in all of his dramas, Yeats is so thoroughly the poet that he hardly varies his tone throughout. The characters, both men and women, speak with his voice and intensity, with the result that they are not characters at all in the dramatic sense. They are not even types, but creatures of the imagination who speak poetically about matters of great and universal import. They have no personality but are symbols of the poet's dreams.

The symbolism of his poems is both emotional and intellectual. The images are delightful in themselves and stand for ideas which are best grasped through images. In some cases, however, his symbolism is more emotional than intellectual, especially in his early poetry when he writes about the Rose.

Generally Yeats's early poetry is more emotional than intellectual and the Rose is his outstanding symbol of this period. In later years, however, his symbolism becomes more intellectual and the Gyre is the most significant symbol, again symbolizing not only certain personal ideas, but, unconsciously, his attitude to life at that time.

The claim of the symbolist method is that it allows the poet to deal with subjects which ordinary speech must leave vague. Such subjects play a large part in aesthetic experience and are the stuff of which mysteries are made. To define these subjects more closely would rob them of some essential characteristics; to express them in ordinary abstractions would be entirely inadequate for anyone who feels their real character. They can only be revealed in symbols. As Mallarmé conveyed the distance and impersonality of his absolute through the symbol of the azure sky, so Yeats conveys a different absolute of Beauty through the Rose. Its meaning may seem to change with the content, but only because of the variety which it possesses in itself and because it enters into many forms. It exists at a level where precise definition is impossible and it finds a greater precision of meaning according to the

clarity of the context in which it is placed. But in every context, it keeps its own air and atmosphere, its own claim to devotion and honour.

As Yeats's theory of symbolism is developed in this thesis, it is to be noticed that his symbols fall into two definite classes; emotional symbols and intellectual symbols. The Rose, the representative symbol of Yeats's early poetry is emotional, while the Gyre, the representative symbol of his later poetry, is intellectual. Perhaps the words "emotional" and "intellectual" are too ex~~in~~clusive, for although the appeal of the Rose is mainly emotional, it <u>is</u> emotionally intelligible. In some of his early poetry, however, while still under the influence of the French symbolists, and before he has developed his own theories, he is imitative of those writers of the <u>serious-aesthetic</u> branch of symbolism, who believed that words should have no meaning, that the end of poetry is music. For instance, "The Cap and Bells" in his collected poems "The Wind Among the Reeds", (1899), illustrates the first binding influence of the French symbolists. Ideas are non-existent, and the meaning lies wholly in the poem's emotional suggesti~~bility~~veness:

> The Jester walked in the garden
> The garden had fallen still;
> He bade his soul rise upward
> And stand on her window-sill.
>
> It rose in a straight blue garment,
> When owls began to call:
> It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
> Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night-gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming
Of a flutter of flower-like hair.
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air."

'I have cap and bells,' he pondered
I will send them to her and die;
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,
Under a cloud of her hair,
And her red lips sang them a love-song,
Till stars grew out of the air.

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

They set up a noise like crickets,
A chattering wise and sweet,
And her hair was a folded flower
And the quiet of love on her feet.

In this poem, what matters is the suggesti~~bility~~verses, the emotional air induced by the wavering, meditative rhythms. The symbols of cap and bells, red and blue, are used almost entirely for their emotional power and are not related to an intelligible core. The colours of red and blue, which are meaningless in an intellectual sense, affect the imagination and produce a pure aesthetic emotion rather than any particular emotion. Yeats is adhering closely to the

theories of the symbolist movement, which poetry belongs to an order where familiar objects have an unfamiliar significance, and is far removed from the poetry which treats of common life. So long as the poetry of this movement delights and provides its rhythmical effect, it has done its work and given its meaning.

For the most part, however, in "The Wind Among the Reeds," published in 1899, Yeats has adapted the symbolism method to his own view. No longer does the meaning of a poem lie only with its suggestiveness and rhythm. For Yeats the meaning lies in the message conveyed through the dream, the information which, when interpreted as cipher, is given about the life of the spirit. Even for him, his poems have more than one meaning. His method is symbolical, but Yeats is not content that a poem should be only emotionally and aesthetically satisfying. He wants to relate it to a special scheme of existence and finds in it clues to secrets outside ordinary knowledge.

> I dreamed that I stood in a valley, and amid sighs,
> For happy lovers passed two by two where I stood;
> And I dreamed my lost love came stealthily out of the wood
> With her cloud-pale eyelids falling on dream-dimmed eyes:
> I cried in my dream, O women, bid the young men lay
> Their heads on your knees, and drown their eyes with your hair,
> Or remembering hers they will find no other face fair
> Till all the valleys of the world have been withered away."30

Although of the same aroma as "The Cap and Bells", in "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers", there is an emotionally intelligible meaning. Yeats has related the

poem to the idea that love is on a plane removed from the ordinary world, and that his mistress is of surpassing beauty. The symbolist method suited an important element in his nature, the deep trust in dreams and visions in the mysterious and the occult. Symbolism allowed him the freedom of personal interpretation, where he did not have to see anything as a rigid abstraction. It suited his belief that a poet is a kind of medium between spirits and men; a seer who interprets the clues to the mysteries of life.

4. Yeats's Later Poetry.

With "The Green Helmet," published in 1910, Yeats's whole outlook had changed. He had shaken off the cloying dreaminess of the French symbolists to use simplicity, directness, plain vivid imagery and terse, concentrated rhythms. The poem "Words" is far removed from "The Cap and Bells" or "The Wanderings of Oisin":

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

And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain;

That every year I have cried, 'at length
My darling understands it all,
Because I have come into my strength,
And words obey my call,'

That had she done so who can say
What would have shaken from the sieve?
I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live.

Yeats has turned away from his pale, dreamy imagery in horror, as his imitators began to class themselves with him. In "Responsibilities", published in 1914, he says:

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

With this poem his twilight poetry fades and Yeats, ~~is~~ now writing in a naked verse, has developed from the serious-aesthetic to the conversation-ironic branch of symbolism. His verse has become hard and glittering and intellectual. The soft dreamy emotions have been swept ruthlessly aside for irony, laughter, horror and anger.

It was the French symbolists who gave Yeats his start, but from this point on he writes more and more from the personal experience of a mature person. This swing from <u>emotion</u> to <u>intellect</u> however was gradual and took place within a period of(approximately) seventeen years, between 1889 and 1906. In these years he belonged mostly to the serious-aesthetic branch of symbolism and wrote "Crossways"

(1889), "The Rose" (1893), "The Shadowy Waters", "The Wind Among the Reeds" (1899), "In the Seven Woods" (1904), and "The Green Helmet" (1910), which marked Yeats's emergence from the partially sheltering cocoon of Mallarmé's theories. However, despite the very strong influence of the symbolists, Yeats had soon evolved his own theories about the nature and purpose of poetry and could rarely be called an imitator at any time. His poetry from "Crossways" to "Last Poems and Plays" written in 1939 bears the distinct stamp of Yeats's own personality.

With a strong nationalistic spirit, and an overwhelming desire to know himself, he could not long cling to the vague and dreamy moods which characterized the poetry of the symbolist movement. It was Yeats who claimed the symbolist movement, rather than the movement which claimed Yeats. Although more imitative when he first came under its influence, he still adapted it to his nationalistic and personal feelings. It was a ladder enabling him to climb to his own symbolist beliefs, and once he had established his outlook sufficiently, he dropped the ladder. "The Green Helmet" represents the mature Yeats who was from this time onwards to develop in his own way. It was not consciously that he adopted the theories of the conversation-ironic branch of symbolism. It was a natural step for a man of his character to develop from uncertainty and suggestion, to certainty and declamation. Yeats's style

naturally evolved as well, from the wavering, meditative rhythms and vague, dreamy moods to precise, glittering imagery and direct, questioning thought.

Although his poetry evolved with his own maturing, the earlier method was as complete as the later, for in each he attained near perfection. His early style had been brought to its ultimate end with his earlier thought, and it was only when he had developed the Symbolist style as far as it would hold his expanding personality, that he knew he must change. Yeats knew he could no longer live in the dream-world of fairies. He always fought to resolve the dichotomy in his personality, between the dreamer and the man of action, and he knew that this gap could never be closed unless he faced the world rather than retreating into his own dreams.

In "Sailing to Byzantium,"[31] he realized he had always been faced with the choice between the dream, the unrealizable ideal, and the real world which had sustained him. He played with the metaphysical notions of escape and believed that he might make his own destiny. In the end, however, he accepted his lot and earthly condition with all its limitations. In "Among School Children", published in 1928 the conclusion is not despair, but a proclamation that the body must be bruised to pleasure the soul (which is for Yeats that which seeks abstraction), and what matters is

the instinctive joy of life symbolized by the chestnut tree in blossom and the body swaying to its music. Philosophy may hold out consolations to Yeats, but in the end he rejects them and goes back to life.

I.

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning;
A kind old man in a white hood replies;
The children learn to cipher and to sing,
To cut and sew, be neat in everything
In the best modern way - the children's eyes
In momentary wonder stare upon
A sixty- year-old smiling public man.

II.

I dream of a Ledaean body, bent
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she
Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event
That changed some childish day to tragedy-
Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,
Into the yolk and white of the one shell.

III.

And thinking of that fit of grief or rage
I look upon one child or t'other there
And wonder if she stood so at their age -
For even daughters of the swan can share
Something of every paddler's heritage -
And had that colour upon cheek or hair,
And thereupon my heart is driven wild:
She stands before me as a loving child.

IV.

Her present image floats into the mind -
Did Quattracento finger fashion it
Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind
And took a mess of shadows for its meat?
And I,though never of Ledaen kind
Had pretty plumage once - enough of that,
Better to smile on all that smile, and show
There is a comfortable kind of old scarecrow.

V.

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
Honey of generation had betrayed,
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
As recollection or the drug decide,
Would think her son, did she but see that shape
With sixty or more winters on its head
A compensation for the pang of his birth,
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

VI.

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays
Upon a shastly paradigm of things;
Solider Aristotle played the taws
Upon the bottom of a king of kings;
World-famous golden-thighed Pythagoras
Fingered upon a fiddle-stick or strings
What a star sang and careless Muses heard:
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare a bird.

VII.

Both nuns and mothers worship images,
But those the candles light are not as those
That animate a mother's reveries,
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.
And yet they too break hearts - O presences
That passion, piety or affection knows,
And that all heavenly glory symbolize -
O self-born mockers of man's enterprise;

VIII.

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer
Are you the leaf, the blossom, or the bole?
O Body swayed to music, O brightening glance
How can we know the dancer from the dance?[32].

The entire poem has been presented as characteristic of his later symbolism, and far removed from the

early mythological symbolism of "The Wanderings of Oisin". The chestnut tree and the dancing body are symbols standing for complex ideas and yet are full of emotional significance. In this poem the mature method of Yeats is shown in all its strength. The situation is real, with the children studying history ~~and~~ with the "kind old ~~man~~ nun in a white hood." The poet's thoughts follow a natural course. He passes from the present scene to memory back to thoughts of the present and from there to meditation on what it all means. Everything takes place in his mind, and the poem tells of this. His earlier poetry, however, has not this realism. "The Wanderings of Oisin" is a dream allegory and Yeats has actually projected himself into the central figure who acts out his moods. In his later poetry he more often made symbols from what he saw about him. They were created from his own circumstances. For instance, he distinguished between logic and intuition by the symbols of the hawk, with its direct swoop to kill, and the butterfly, which hovers from flower to flower. He dramatized his own ideal love as that of Paris for Helen or of Solomon for Sheba, conventional ideal lovers. His symbols were more concrete and less vaguely suggestive. Among the symbols he took from his own circumstances was the old tower in which he lived, with its winding staircase, a Japanese sword which lay on a table, and streams flowing underground from one

place to another. The tower stood ~~differently~~ for aspiration of the intellect, ~~and the sword for the self as~~ for assertiveness, and for a modern nation "dead at the top".[33] The staircase was connected with the gyres, whereby the self ascends to complete knowledge; the sword stood for action, and the underground streams for spiritual forces which make for a new life. The symbols may vary in their content, but their meaning is much more concrete and less esoteric than the Rose, hair, and wind, for instance, which he used in his earlier poetry. These symbols no longer show a person who is trying to be secret merely for the love of secrecy. They are a short-cut to save much explanation, giving a concrete form to ideas which would be dim otherwise.

Perhaps that which is most characteristic of Yeats is the mythology which he made out of people. Till old age he kept his legendary figures, characters of history and poetry, who symbolized moods and ideals of his own.[21] He supplemented them with others from among his own friends. Just as in "A Vision" each section of reality has its special and appropriate human type, so in all of Yeats's poetry different characters stand for different kinds of existence. This is a new kind of symbolism. Mallarme was little concerned with human beings until they had passed into eternity. But Yeats, with his great feeling for the concrete and his desire for an insight into

human nature, saw the universe largely as a matter of human types. Even the strange conflicts of his soul were reduced to differences between opposing types of men. Sometimes this method is too simple, in that his human beings represent too much, but it is extraordinarily expressive. It gives to the great issues of existence a quality of some intimate and intensely felt relation.

In his old age, Yeats wanted truth, and he dropped his "mask", or tried to drop it, and wished to be himself. "Words for Music Perhaps" published in 1929 is indicative of this new realization. These poems have the new easy rhythms of song, refrains suggesting contrasts and backgrounds, and absolute frankness represented in the speeches of "Crazy Jane". She is an entirely natural person who accepts the world and enjoys it, and because she is physical and simple, is in touch with truth. She stands for what Yeats believes himself to have become.

Yeats's whole career is an instructive commentary on the symbolist doctrine. He was well fitted to welcome it, and through it he found his first real style. Even when he was brought down to reality, and abandoned ~~an~~ his earlier manner, he was still a symbolist. He still dealt with the subtle intangibles beyond the immediately visible world. Yeats was unique in that through symbolism he found a way to create an extremely lively and concrete

poetry about himself. He attached great importance to the emotions and tried to make poetry of them.

In general the later Yeats, like the other poets who fall into the conversation-ironic branch of symbolism, accepts the fact that words have meanings and that poetry is meant to be understood. However he has kept to the magical view of it, and to his first principles laid down in the essay "Magic". His poetry is not only an incantation, but based on the belief that the poet is in touch with some superior order of things and that his art is the ritual by which this is brought down to men. He had the philosophy that the phenomenal world exists in the poet and he gets his apprehension from it. This belief, shared by all the poets of this later period of symbolism was a result of a rediscovered self and the failure of old systems to satisfy modern needs. They know that everything that is theirs is somehow in them and that their work starts from this.

Yeats evolved from his earlier symbolism with the realization that the aesthetic approach of the symbolist movement was dangerous to himself and consequently to his work. He knew that by concentrating on beautiful objects he was losing his taste for ordinary things and becoming even pained or disgusted by them. Carried to its ultimate end, it would have led him to a passive melancholy and a

refusal or inability to face experience as it comes. Yeats was intensely excited about living, and because of this it was inevitable that he ~~changed~~ should change his attitude and method.

Yeats had the confidence to assert human values on the face of meaningless circumstances, and consequently his poetry could rise to tragic grandeur. From the griefs of mankind he extracted a noble exaltation. Despite his yearning for other worlds his feet were firmly on the ground. His mystical yearnings give a significance to life by relating its multiple phenomena to a single scheme; the Ideal, remote and intangible, is known through its sensible instances.

## CHAPTER II

Introduction. [The Rose]

As has been mentioned in the Introduction, to the thesis, the purpose of this thesis is to show how and why Yeats's life and work converged in symbolism. The Rose and The Gyre represent not only central symbols that form a dominating symbolic pattern in Yeats's poetry, but unconscious to him, represent distinct attitudes to life. The purpose of this chapter is to show the symbol of the Rose as a focal point for his life and work, unifying both, in the 'nineties. The Rose will be discussed only in relation to Yeats's early poetry, where it is the dominating symbol. Although he used it frequently in his later work, it had ceased to reflect a certain style of poetry and way of life, and was only used as a support for his later symbols.

This chapter, consequently is divided into two main sections, The Rose as it represents and unifies Yeats's early work, and The Rose as it represents and unifies his early life.

In treating of the meaning of The Rose in Yeats's early work and life, each poem in which this symbol appears will be discussed. Unfortunately, the chapter on "The Gyre" cannot be treated in this manner, and must be more general,

for this dominating symbol appears in so much of Yeats's later work that it would be unprofitable and unnecessary for the achievement of the purpose of this thesis, to discuss each poem in which the Gyre figures.

The period of The Rose, representing Yeats's early work, is mostly confined to four books: "Crossways" (1889), "The Rose" (1893), "The Wind Among the Reeds" (1899), "In the Seven Woods" (1904). Within this period he published other poems, and numerous plays, but these four books are representative of his early poetry, and will be used as the basis for the discussion of this period.

In Yeats's poetry The Rose is a symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty, and to this extent it is intellectual. But such abstract notions as these are too comprehensive to be clear to the mind, and consequently it is mainly an emotional symbol. It stands for something exalted and pure. It is also some vaguer form of blessedness symbolizing something too vast and too exalted for ordinary words, something which can only be expressed in metaphor. As will be seen, the meaning of The Rose may seem to change with the context in which it appears, but this is because of the variety which it possesses in itself, and because it enters into many forms. It exists at a level where precise definition is impossible, and finds a greater precision of meaning according to the clarity of the context in which it is placed.

What were Yeats's beliefs at this time? On Oct. 15th, 1892 in the paper "United Ireland", Yeats wrote this letter:

"In England amongst the best minds art and poetry are becoming every day more ends and all life is made more and more but so much fuel to feed this fire. It is partly the influence of France that is bringing this about. In France a man may do anything he pleases; he may spend years in prison even, like Verlaine, and the more advanced of the young men will speak well of him, if he have but loved his art sincerely, and they will worship his name as they worship Verlaine's life if he have but made beautiful things and added a little to the world's store of memorable experiences. The influence of France is every day more completely pervading English literary life. The influence of that school which calls itself, in the words of its leader, Verlaine, a school of the sunset, and which was also known by the term 'Decadents' which was flung at it as a reproach and caught up as a battle cry," ~~Decadents,~~ is now the dominating theme in many lives. Poetry is an end in itself, it has nothing to do with life, nothing to do with anything but the music of cadences, and beauty of phrase. This is the new doctrine of letters. To them (English imaginative writers) literature ... had become a terrible queen in whose service the stars rose and set, and for whose pleasure life stumbles along in the darkness....it is not possible to call literature produced in this way the literature

of energy and youth. Here in Ireland we are living in a young age, full of hopes and promises - a young age which has only begun to make its literature."

Yeats has half-closed his eyes, loosened his hair upon the wind and with the Rose in his hand, is prepared to run along the mountains of Ireland like a flame. With this letter the Rose has been hoisted over Yeats's poetry for the next thirteen years. The Rose has become, for a time, a faith for him through which he could resolve the dichotomy in his personality between the dreamer and the man of action. The Rose fused the dream and real life. Although he believed, at times, that the dichotomy had actually been resolved in his personality, there were times when he knew he was hypnotizing himself. If the Rose had actually been the solution to his problem, he would never have evolved his later conception of the Gyre, a more intellectual and all-embracing symbol.

In "Discoveries" a book of essays published in 1906 Yeats writes: "<u>What moves natural man in the arts is what moves him in life</u>...

Without knowing it I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential but as I imagined the visions outside myself

my imagination became full of decorative landscapes and still life. ... 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... Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrink from what Blake calls mathematic 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."

This is a completely different attitude from that of the letter written in 1892. It marks the definite end of the Rose period. From this point on, Yeats develops quickly to become the man of the Gyre.

## A~~X~~. Yeats's Early Work Converges in The Rose.

From this introduction then, the meaning of the Rose will be discussed as it appears in Yeats's early poetry.

The Rose first appears in "The Wanderings of Oisin".[34] Oisin and Niamh have just ridden out of human lands to the Danaan Land of the Young. As they gallop "over the glassy sea", night comes upon them and

> .... The moon like a white rose shone
> In the pale west, and the sun's rim sank,
> And clouds arrayed their rank on rank
> About his fading crimson ~~wall~~ ball

→ The moon always held great significance for Yeats.[35] He connects it with night-dreams of an unchangeable, eternal ideal. Here the moon is invested with the qualities of a white Rose. In "A Vision" a myth which Yeats created in the later part of his life, the moon stands at the pole of complete objectivity, where nothing can live, it being the point of supreme beauty, where everything is dream and symbol. The use of "white" however is not just to describe the appearance of the moon in the beautiful night, but seems to have the aura of purity about it. The moon and sun are always in close relation to each other in Yeats's work, appearing in "A Vision" as opposite and ideal poles of his system of reincarnation; the sun is complete subjectivity and the moon complete objectivity. The "White Rose" is on the side of the moon, and the qualities invested in it seem to be impersonal beauty connected with some aura of purity. It might be mentioned that the moon and the sun also symbolize the dichotomy in Yeats's personality between the dreamer and the man of action. Throughout his life he sought to bring the dream into reality and reality into the dream. He wished to fuse reality with the dream.

"O may the sun and moon
Seem one ~~men~~intricable beam."[36]

Further on in the dramatic poem, Oisin and Niamh arrive in the first country, to remain for a hundred irresponsible years, dancing and making love. Oisin says:

"We danced to where in the winding thicket
The damask roses bloom on bloom
Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom
And winding over them softly said,
Bending over them in the dance,
With a swift and friendly glance from
Dewy eyes: Upon the dead
Fall the leaves of other roses
On the dead dim earth encloses;
But never, never on our graves,
Heaped beside the glimmering waves,
Shall fall the leaves of damask roses,
For neither Death nor changes comes near us..."

Obviously Yeats has a special rose, in mind, one not connected with the ordinary one that blooms in a back garden. This rose has a timeless and changeless quality about it and is divorced from human contact. There "damask Roses" in the Land of the Young are eternal, and are not the kind which fall upon the graves of our world. As in ~~Like~~ the previous passage, the Rose is connected with evening nostalgia. It hangs in the gloom. Its connection with "Crimson meteors" emphasizes a fleeting, distant quality.

Although the Rose is used throughout the poem it appears in the same context as these two passages indicate. From them it can be gathered that the Rose is remote, beautiful, eternal, occasionally glimpsed,and has a noble purity about it. The Rose symbol does not appear in "Crossways", Yeats's first book of collected poems, although the theme expressed in the Rose poems, the transience of life and love, the love of beauty, the exaltation of wisdom and the

sorrowful
~~beautiful~~ Pre-Raphaelite world-weariness, is present. A typical poem in this collection is "The Falling of the Leaves."[37]

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

The influence of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, closely associated with the symbolist movement, is clearly seen. In his poetry, Yeats is imitating the Pre-Raphaelite style of Swinburne and Rossetti, while in prose he has borrowed the flowing, flowery style of Pater. In "The Falling of the "Leaves" we see Swinburne infecting ~~polling~~ the ~~his~~ wandering, meditative, sensuous ~~pen~~ style[38] of

> "Even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea"[39]

→ The Rose first appears in the collected poems of "The Rose" published in 1893, and the symbolist influence is upon Yeats. In the poem "The Rose of the World"[40] which begins

> "Who dreams that beauty passes like a dream?
> For those red lips, with all their mournful pride,"

t
There is no specific mention of the symbol except in the title, but obviously Yeats is investing those qualities apparent in the poem within The Rose. The theme of the poem is the transience of beauty in our life. Beauty passes like a dream. From the generalization of the first line the poet speaks of eternal

beauty mourning at the death of beautiful things. In the second stanza "This lovely face" of beauty remains while "We and the labouring world are passing by". In the third stanza, the "archangels in their dim abode," are commanded to bow down before Beauty's"wandering feet". This ideal beauty is connected with a woman whose face is lovely. In the last stanza she becomes a creature of Holiness, "Weary and kind", who lingers by the "seat of God", and to whom the archangels bow down in reverence. The mood of nostalgia, of loneliness (rather than aloneness; loneliness is distinctly pleasureable) is transferred to the Rose, which ~~thus~~ may take the form of a woman with "red lips". The Rose in this poem is transient and although glimpsed in reality belongs to the dream.

"The "Rose of Peace"[41] has a distinctly religious connection. The author personifies the Rose as "You". In the first stanza he says that Michael would forget his deeds. "...When Heaven and Hell are met", upon looking down and contemplating "her". The "You" is obviously the feminine quality.

In "The Rose of the World"[42] Michael would no more brook upon God's wars but would

> "Go weave out of the stars
> A chaplet for your head"

In the next stanza Yeats says that people, seeing Michael bow down before the <u>peace</u> of beauty, would

....come at last to God's great town,
Led on by gentle ways.

and God would then stop all warfare, and unite good and evil in His place;

And softly make a rosy place
A peace of Heaven with Hell.

It is not just an ordinary peace treaty, but a Rosy peace, one achieved through the contemplation of supreme beauty. The Rose then is also peaceful.

The three poems "The Rose of the World", "The Rose of Peace" and "The Rose of Battle" appear in sequence. The last has perhaps the least intelligible meaning although in all of them the idea is subordinated to the emotion. The Rose in "The Rose of Battle" is universal, and connected with ships and water. The mood ~~however~~ is indicative of the emotion of ecstatic sorrow which is transferred to The Rose.

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the world
You too, have come where the dim tides are hurled
Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring
The bell that calls us on; the sweet far thing?
Beauty grown sad with its eternity
Made you of us, and of the dim grey sea.
Our long ships loose thought-woven sails and wait,
For God has bid them share an equal fate.
And when at last, defeated in His wars
They have gone down under the same white stars,
We shall no longer hear the little cry
Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

The poem so captures the mood intended for "The Rose" that the last stanza has been quoted in full.Yeats symbols so reflect each other that it is often difficult to de-

fine their meanings except in terms of each other. However, he has written that he connects water with the moon. "'Solar' according to all that I learnt from Mathers meant 'elaborate, full of artifice'...whereas "'water'" meant "'lunar'" and "'lunar'" all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional."[43] The connection between The Rose and The Moon has already been mentioned. Here the connection is with water, and consequently with the moon, and "all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional". It can be seen how the Rose represents the focal point for Yeats's symbolism of this period, as the Gyre does in his later work. Perhaps the two lines of this poem which are most significant are

...the sweet far thing
Beauty grown sad with its eternity....

←—— They set the mood of the poem and reveal the significance which is given to the Rose in it. The nostalgic Rose with its "sweet" feminine softness, is symbolic of eternal Beauty and has a sadness about it, an emotion usually connected with the contemplation of beauty.

"To Ireland In the Coming Times"[44] adds a further significance to the Rose. It is the last poem in "The Rose" and ~~being~~ printed in Italics, shows that it is meant both as a dedication and as an epilogue. The author wishes to connect himself patriotically to Ireland, and to those famous Irish figures who have helped "To sweeten Ireland's wrong."

Know that I would accounted be
True brother of a company
That sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong
Ballad and story, rann and song.

Ireland is personified as a woman whose robe has a "rose-bordered hem",

~~Because~~ the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan.

The Rose is the hem on the robe of Ireland. The qualities of the rose are thus transferred to the country. Yeats is attempting to connect his dream with his native land. He wishes to unite the eternal beauty of the Rose with Ireland, by means of his poetry; The "red-rose-bordered hem trails all about the written page". To The Rose is added a loyalty and courage through its patriotic connection, while it in turn imparts to Ireland a religious significance (which will be later discussed) and the aura of immortal beauty.

The next book "The Wind Among the Reeds" published in 1899 represents the ultimate refinement of Yeats's restricted expression of a love, symbolized in the Rose, which only admitted the contemplation of an exalted Beauty and an exalted sorrow. The first Rose poem is "The Lover tells of The Rose in His Heart".[45] The author's theme is:

"The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told" and
"All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old...

"Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose on
the deeps of my heart."

The love here is less vague, and the poem is a direct love poem to a woman. Although he connects the Rose with "woman" in former poems, it is with "womanhood" rather than any particular person. Here the image is less vague and more specific. Her image is a rose in his heart, and being so beautiful, is wronged by anything "uncomely" or "broken". In the second stanza the author wishes to re-make the world like a "casket of gold":

For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in
The deeps of my heart.

The imagery is more precise and Yeats is bringing his wandering meditative rythms to their ultimate refinement. The Rose here is represented as an image, something removed from the real world and yet affected by it. It is an ideal artifice seen in the dream, an archetypal pattern by whose standard he can remake the world, or at least Ireland.

In "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty"[46] the author nostalgically remembers the beauty

...That has long faded from the world,

When his arms are wrapped around his beloved. The remembrance of ancient beauty is apparent in the lines

The roses that of old time were
Woven by ladies in their hair,...

Hair plays a great part in the poems of the Rose period and through its connection with an ideal love for an ideal woman in each poem, suggests fertility, and a less remote, more immediate sexuality than the Rose itself. When the Rose is placed in conjunction with hair its ~~each other the~~ sexual significance ~~of the Rose~~ is more apparent, although it has still the remoteness of some former time. Again there is the connection with absolute Beauty, this time of an overpowering nature:

> Where such grey clouds of incense rose
> That only God's eyes did not close.

The Rose, as emblematic of some form of blessedness, and of noble purity is also shown when the author says:

> I hear White Beauty sighing too....

The "White" gives Beauty a religious purity, for it is used in close conjunction with "God." The ideal quality of The Rose is revealed again in a constant connection with sleep and dream. He speaks of "dreaming ladies", "dream-heavy land", "dream-heavy hour"; and "in half-sleep" he ~~Yeats~~ reveals the rose as being an artifice, something more than real, an image of his experience, ~~image~~ which being crystallized is easily manipulated by him.[47] The image to Yeats represents a fusion between the dream and experience, for taking the image from experience he could stabilize it in an ideal world, the dream, which would always be at his call, being still and unchangeable. "Sailing to Byzantium"[48] is a clear expression of Yeats's belief in the symbol, or image

as the true reality. He asks to be gathered

"In to the artifice of eternity"...

Eternity is an artifice, something made by an artificer. The flux of life lies within the still and eternal image for Yeats. Both the Rose and the Gyre are archetypal images for Yeats, representing solutions to problems at different periods. The problem was the same for each, but the solution found on the Gyre was obviously more satisfactory than that found in "The Rose".

In "The Secret Rose"[49] the distant, untouchable and mysterious quality of the Rose is revealed in the first line:

Far off most secret and inviolate Rose ....

The second line shows its tenderness;;

Enfold me in my hour of hours"...

The "hour of hours" is the time between consciousness and sleep, where the dream has greatest clarity. In this trance like hour, The Rose is revealed:

.....and deep
Among pale eyelids, heavy with the sleep
Men have named beauty.

In this period of trance, whether induced by "prayer" or "wine" lies Supreme Beauty. The timeless quality of the Rose is shown by connecting it with Ancient Irish legends

.....They great leaves enfold
The ancient beard....."

Yeats speaks of one man who gives up all his earthly possessions to seek for

> A woman, of so shining loveliness
> That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,
> A little stolen tress.

The woman is the incarnation of the Rose, and the man a symbol of all men who seek beauty. At the end of the poem however, a further quality is added to the Rose. It is connected with wind:

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

The Wind has a destructive, courageous quality, and also, with its capacity for love and hate, reveals a religious omnipotence. The Wind is a significant symbol for Yeats as the title of the book "The Wind Among the Reeds" shows, and it is used in many poems. Again it can be seen how Yeats's symbols reflect each other, and converge in The Rose.

The religious significance of The Rose is more specifically revealed in "The Travail of Passion"[50] where it is directly connected with the death of Christ. When

> Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited
> Thorns, the way
> Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in
> palm and side....

the "Roses of passionate dream" will drop their faint perfume

and cover the horror of the reality of the crucifixion. The crucifixion is a symbol of the hardship of the real world which the heart must endure. The ~~act of~~ crucifixion and, subsequent death becomes endurable when one thinks of the ideal beauty and courage of Christ's life,

When an immortal passion breathes in mortal~~ity~~ clay....

The immortal passion of Christ covers ~~his~~ the sorrow and bitterness of His actual death, for the connection between "immortal passion" and "roses of passionate dream" shows that Christ's life is symbolic of Ideal Beauty. His life remains immortal in the "passionate dream".

"The Roses of passionate dream" are connected with hair, the Symbol of Beauty and fertility. The hair dropped over the sufferer who sees the death of Christ, is perfumed faintly, inducing the dream-image of The Rose.

It is extremely difficult to define the intelligible meaning of the poem, for its meaning lies in the emotional response which it incites. In some of the Rose poems however, the meaning does become more intelligible, as we have seen. To separate the meanings of Yeats's various symbols is ultimately impossible, for they have meaning only in relation to each other. The Rose and hair in "The Travail of Passion" shows this.

The last poem in which the Rose is mentioned in this

book is in "The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers"[51]

The poet asks protection of

> The powers whose name and shape no living creature knows.....
>
> - - - - - - -
>
> Great Powers of falling wave and windy fire ....
>
> - - - - - - -
>
> Dim powers of drowsy thought,

to protect his love, to "Sing her into peace" and

> Let a gentle silence wrought with music flow
> Whither her footsteps go.

"The immortal powers" represented by the falling wave, the "wind", and "Windy fire", are connected with the Rose. In the second line Yeats says that these powers have pulled the "Immortal Rose". The interrelation between the symbols is again clearly revealed. I will not go into the definition of the various symbols which converge in Yeats's archetypal symbol, for it will suffice to have shown that they all are interrelated and reflect each other.

By omitting these definitions it does not mean that the Rose itself is not defined, for these v^arious symbols represent certain symbolized qualities which converge in the Rose. For instance, the wind is a symbol of vague hopes and desires and the religious quality inherent in the Rose, which makes these qualities more apparent, and understandable. The Rose is Yeats's primary symbol of this period,and it is the

purpose of the various subsidiary symbols to give further clarity to the facets of the Rose. It is an intricate hierarchy of symbols which Yeats uses. From this it can be seen that all the Poems from "Crossways" to "In the Seven Woods" are connected to the Rose. One could read each poem, and trace the symbols to it. Consequently each poem not only has its own meaning but a meaning related to all the other poems, and ultimately to the Rose symbol. By showing then, the qualities symbolized by the Rose, it is revealed as the central symbol of this period, giving unity to all of his early work. There are certain words which appear frequently in all of Yeats's poetry of this period, ~~qualifying his work~~ —words which grouped themselves about the Rose, and ~~consequently the Rose~~. These words are "dim tides", "pale eyelids", "grey", "heart", "God", "angels", "far", "blossoms", "sighing.", "dreams", "image.", "faded.", "old time.", "clouds", "secret", "far-off", "enfold", "~~time~~", "sleep", "bitter", "flame", "passion", "drowsy", "silence" "flow", "music". A poetry which is only concerned with the contemplation of an ideal beauty has of necessity a limited, and consequently, repetitious, vocabulary. The Ideal, objective, Beauty symbolized by the Rose, has certain well defined qualities which are revealed in the content of the poems. The Rose is "immortal", "remote", "changeless", and "pure". It is "blessed" in its "gentle" beauty and is "courageous" and "loyal". The emotion

it reflects is one of exalted sorrow, revealed by "death", "gloom", "weary", "sad", "lonely", and "pale". It may take its own form, or it may become a woman, or her hair, the moon, water, a tree, or Ireland.

The Rose appears in a dream-image between consciousness and sleep, when the eyes are half shut. That the Rose lives, neither in the fully conscious mind, nor the fully sleeping mind, but where both are fused, is not accidental. It partakes of both reality and the dream. The image to Yeats represents a fusion between the dream and real experience, for experience becomes stabilized and manipulateable when brought within the image-dream form. The image is where the sun and the moon meet to become one "inextricable beam" and where true reality exists.

Eternity is an artifice, something made by an artificer. Life lies within the still and unchangeable image gathered from experience. By revealing the qualities of the Rose in each of the "Rose" poems, the atmosphere created by all of Yeats's poetry, from "Crossways" to "In the Seven Woods" is also revealed. The "Rose poems" not only develop the meaning of "Intellectual Beauty" but impart a related meaning to all of the poems. If the Rose itself does not appear in its own form, it is identified with some other form, ~~with which it is identified~~, and so all of the atmosphere, the method, and the style of Yeats's early poetry converges in this symbol.[52]

The perfumed petals of the distant Rose are parted, and inside languishes a pale youth, contemplating, in noble sorrow, the passing of time and mortal love, rejecting the ordinary world and seeking eternal wisdom in his sanctuary. Sometimes the petal walls dissolve and Yeats lies in the arms of a beautiful woman whose mournful lips reflect the sorrow of immortal beauty. Her hair falls over him to cover his half-closed eyes, that he might see nothing but her hair and face, and feel nothing but the pure religious exaltation and nostalgia induced by her perfume. Sometimes vague winds move her hair, and he can see the white moon shining. This image dissolves and once more he lies in the soft warmth of the Rose whose petals close over him, shutting out the light, and leaving him in darkness to continue his contemplation of eternity.

B. Yeats's Early Life Converges in the Rose.

~~B. I.~~ (a) The Youth.

~~The~~ a theme that forces its way through Yeats's life is his dependence upon an intellectually dominating father, John Butler Yeats, an artist, and Yeats's constant efforts to escape that dependence.

From the time that he was old enough to understand his family situation, Yeats saw a father who was affectionate but intellectually dominating, filling the house with his personality and with his opinions. J. B. Yeats had little sense of financial responsibility, and the financial burden was often trying to the family. "Perennially hopeful" as he described himself, he had little business sense, and would paint his friends or a good subject for nothing. He was always convinced that the solution of his problems lay just ahead; either he was about to master the secret of style or about to win an order for a portrait from a wealthy man. The unfinished protraits that lay about the studio were tributes to his conscientiousness as an artist but not as a good provider.

For Yeats, the problem of revolt against a father whose intellect dominated him so completely was complicated, because J. B. Yeats had himself revolted against the standard values of the nineteenth century. William was thrown into the

~~the~~ position of the counter-revolutionary, and wishing to escape from his father's influence, his father being rebellious and skeptical of traditional religion, he was obliged to attack from the viewpoint of the conservative. Such a position is difficult for a young man, and because of its difficulty Yeats had much trouble in finding a basis for self-expression.

In a significant passage in "Autobiographies", Yeats said that he remembered little of childhood except its pain. He was rarely happy. His personal appearance was uncommon; he was delicate, with a complexion so dark that he looked foreign. His eyesight was bad, and he was eventually to lose the sight of one eye. His awkwardness and physical weakness kept him from being a favourite with the wealthy Pollexfens, his mother's parents, who were good athletes. To his father's anger he did not learn to ride well nor had he the physical courage with which J. B. Yeats himself made up for his own lack of horsemanship. The athletic and wealthy Pollexfens began to think Yeats mentally as well as physically defective when he could not be taught to read.

Seeking refuge from the Pollexfens' disapproval of his awkwardness and physical inadequacies, the boy regained some of his self-esteem in reverie and solitude; he wandered by himself about the Sligo caves and dreamed the days away.

The sociable J. B. Yeats, adept in conversation, confident of his opinions, and hopeful of the future, had a

great influence over a son, so lacking in these qualities. He realized that William was very malleable and decided to shape him. He took over his education and, finding him at nine years of age unable to read and a difficult pupil, he boxed his ears. Then in subsequent lessons he adopted the more effective method of terrorizing him by references to his son's"moral degradation" and his "likeness to disagreeable people". The Puritan conscience inculcated into Yeats by the Pollexfens responded; he was filled with remorse over his sins, and in a state of terror, learned to read. But his timidity was not helped, his mind retained its restlessness and may even have increased it as a result of his inner rebellion. He never learned how to study successfully.

To rescue his self-esteem the boy cast about him for defenses; the chief defense had to be against his father, and he found it in the religious feelings which his mother accepted; then one day his father's refusal to go to church set him wondering about belief. Though he stayed at home, as he stated in his "Autobiographies", Yeats began to seek for evidence to confute his father's scepticism. Meanwhile his daydreaming continued, and contributed to the psychological "weakness" as he later described it, which hindered concentrated study. When he was fifteen, the awakening

of sex, which came upon him "like the bursting of a shell", made his dreams so enticing that he wished to be alone with them. In his dreams he dramatized himself as a sage, magician, or poet, as can be seen in his very early poetry. He was fascinated above all by his childish image of the magician, an image which is common in boyhood but took hold of him with peculiar force. The boy who was weak, awkward, an timid let his enraptured imagination dwell on the magician who could master the whole world by his mind. He wondered afterwards whether he had not written poetry "to find a cure for my own ailment, as constipated cats do when they eat valerian. I was humiliated, and wrote always of proud, confident men and women." Lonely and powerless himself, he painted in his mind's eye a solitary and omnipotent hero. Oisin, the mighty warrior king is the prototype of this kind of person, although he filled his earlier verses with such heroes.

When Yeats left high school, his father had assumed that his son would follow a tradition of three generations of the Yeats family and go to Trinity College, but the young man refused. As he later admitted, he concealed from his father the real reason for his refusal. He told J. B. Yeats that Trinity College was old-fashioned and uncongenial to his wakening spirit, but actually he was unable to meet the entrance requirements in classics and mathematics. He would

have liked to go to the university, and his lack of an orthodox education was to dog him throughout his life and give him an excessive respect for learning.

Having rejected Trinity, Yeats decided to earn his living as an artist with poetry as an avocation. At the art schools the principles of anti-Romantic French impressionist painters were dominant. J. B. Yeats himself had dropped the Romantic Pre-Raphaelite style in favour of the latest ~~page~~ school, and although his son wanted to paint in the manner that his father had abandoned, he found himself weakly imitating his father's portrait style. He "was too timid" he says "to break away". Had he possessed the courage he would have liked to create pictures like tapestries in his painting, as he was doing in his poetry.

The French impressionists, with whom he connected his father on the grounds that they painted from life, were further associated in his mind with the rationalism of Huxley and Mill; since his father spoke of rationalism with sympathy, and since revolt was stirring in his own mind, he looked around him for authority to contest the paternal position. He found it in the person of George Russell, (who later took the pen name of A.E.) a fellow painter at the art school. Russell was a mystic, and his canvasses were peopled with spirits wrapped in weird other-wordly mists. Here was a positive

repudiation of the principles of the French school and of his father. The dream of the magician was no longer absurd, for powers did exist beyond his father's understanding as Russell had proved. J. B. Yeats disliked his son's friendship with Russell, but the two boys, rebels against the actual, and hopeful of discovering a truth which science would not supply, became intimate at once. Yeats began to hate science with "a monkish hate", associating it with paternal scepticism and with his own earlier, unhappy youth, on which he now turned with fury. He and Russell began to write long dramatic poems about magicians who could discourse like Shelley and condemn modern civilization from glittering ~~asoon~~ Asian thrones.

They did not have much poetic theory beyond the necessity of writing about, and in favour of, dreams. Yeats uses no clear cut symbolism until he comes under the influence of the French symbolists. He is still wrapped up in dreams for protection, and only dimly grasps that they may one day serve him as offensive weapons as well. In these early poems he is groping towards his later use of the theme of father against child, and his later theory of the divided or double self which came to maturity with his use of the symbol of the mask and the interlocking gyres.

Between 1884 and 1888 Yeats left boyhood behind.

He was violently extending his interest and actions as he dashed forward trying to disregard the confusion he inwardly felt. Up to this time he had been able to keep his life and poetry simple, but was now stormed by a mob of ideas, uncertainities, and passions, which grew difficult to control.

In a letter to Katherine Tynan, concerning his poetry, written late in 1888, Yeats showed that he had left boyhood.

"I am sure the 'Island" (of Statues) is good of its kind. I was then living a quiet, harmonious, poetic life. Never thinking out of my depth. Always harmonious, narrow, calm. Taking small interest in people but most ardently moved by the more minute kinds of natural beauty. "Masada" was then written and "Time and Vivien" which you have not seen. Everything then was quite passionless. The "Island" was the last. Since I have left the "Island" I have been going about on shoreless seas. Nothing anywhere has clear outline. Everything is cloud and foam. "Oisin" and the "Seeker" are the only readable result... The early poems I know to be quite coherent, and at no time are there clouds in my details, for I hate the soft modern manner. The clouds began about four years ago. I was finishing the "Island". They came and robbed Naschina of her shadow. As you will see, the rest is cloudless, narrow and calm."

He had left the harmonious, unified thinking of

boyhood for the discords of maturing thought. The change was caused by the mounting disquietude he felt about the scepticism imparted to him by his father, the feeling of guilt over his failure to follow his father to Trinity College, the inability to escape his father's style of painting, though he disagreed with its principles, the league with George Russell in the battle of imagination against science, and his natural growing need for self-assertion and self-expression. Now his energies burst forth in three directions - in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality.

To find an intellectual support for his vague feelings of rebellion, Yeats joined the Theosophists, an occult group, which naturally upheld the imagination over rationalism and science. On June 16, 1888, Yeats as chairman, gave the following address to the group:

"Take this for your answer if you will, if you will not follow us into the maze of eastern thought, but I warn you that on the road to truth lurks many a dragon and goblin of mischief in wait for the soul. Miracle hunger is one of them. The dragon of the abstract is another, devouring forever the freedom and the pride of life. It beset Immanuel Kant and compelled him on his daily constitutional to count his steps and try and breathe with his mouth shut."

One must not be deceived by the elaborate warnings about pitfalls into thinking that Yeats is sceptical as his father would have been sceptical. Yeats was thoroughly convinced that science had failed and that another way of discovering truth exists. Though he waits for proof, he waits impatiently and with a certain amount of deliberate credulity. Like Goethe he is destitute of faith, yet terrified at scepticism - a zealot in search of a creed. The zealot soon put forth his one unshakeable belief that "whatever of philosophy has been made poetry is alone permanent, and that one should begin to arrange it in some regular order, rejecting nothing as the make-believe of poets."[53] So far as this belief implied that poetry was a superior form of knowledge, his father would have agreed, but he would have objected violently to his son's attempt to formalize a new religion and thus bind himself to an artificial pattern. J. B. Yeats encouraged his son to be a poet, for he himself, unable to rest easy with his scepticism, yet opposed to faith, exalted poetry as a form of knowledge independent of both. What he wrote to his son about the poet was also true of himself:

"There are two kinds of belief; the poetical and the religious. That of the poet comes when the man within has found some method or manner of thinking or arrangement of face (such as is only possible in dreams) by which to

express and embody an absolute freedom, such that his whole inner and outer-self can expand in a full satisfaction. In religious belief there is absent the consciousness of liberty. An enforced peace is set up among the warring feelings. By the help of something quite internal, as for instance the fear of hell, some feelings are chained up and thrust into dungeons that some other feelings may hold sway, and all the ethical systems yet invented are a similar denial of liberty, that is why the true poet is neither moral nor religious."

To have convictions was the unhappy lot of the religious man and systematizer, to lack them was the curse of the sceptic, but to have them or have them not as he chose and felt was the source of the poet's fuller liberty.

During these formative years, the youthful Yeats plunged into the occult mysteries of the Theosophists and constantly sought to rationalize the stand he had made in favour of his dreams. His vague generalizations, such as appear in his address to the society, had more of the spirit than the substance of revolt; Yeats made up in vehemence for what he lacked in knowledge. He had chosen to conquer his timid, shy personality by rushing into the world with it instead of hiding with it.

By early 1886 Yeats was not only an occultist, but a rabid nationalist; he had yet to choose decisively to become a poet. However, he was writing poetry all the time, and in a letter written to Katherine Tynan, on September 6, 1888, he

reveals the path his life was to take. He had just finished his long dramatic poem, "The Wanderings of Oisin/":

"I am not very hopeful about the book. I have been, I feel, somewhat inarticulate! I had indeed something I had to say. Don't know that I have said it. All seems confused, incoherent, inarticulate. Yet this I know, I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems. To make them I have broken my life in a mortar, as it were. I have brayed in it youth and fellowship, peace and worldly hopes. I have seen others enjoying life while I stood alone with myself - commenting, commenting - a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves. I buried my youth and raised over it a cairn - of clouds."

The letter has a dramatic ring. It seems unusual that the twenty-three year old Yeats can talk like an old man. But he was telling the truth. Because he still felt the dream to be his natural element he thought of himself as standing apart from all that he did when he left dreams behind. The gift of spontaneous composition, which he had in boyhood, had left him; he had to premeditate everything for a long time. Underneath the aggressive critic (which he had become) and the energetic organizer of the Theosophists, was his timid and sensitive self, as he well knew, but he was determined to conceal his weaknesses. To act naturally and spontaneously as other young men and women did would be to give himself away as a timid dreamer. But not to act spontaneously was to give up his youth,

to become detached from life, like an old man. Reality withers him as it had withered Oisin.

It can be seen that Yeats's battle with his father was merging into a battle with himself, This conflict, joined to his Nationalist, occultist and poetic activities, helped to produce the confusion of mind of which he complained to Katherine Tynan in the letter written in 1888. He realized that the poems he was now writing were poems "of longing and complaint" and wished to write instead poems "of insight and knowledge". But to do so he would have to arrive at a more systematic arrangement of life than he had so far achieved. He would have to mould his intentions into sources of hidden power and wisdom. All secrets were congenial to him, for secrets gave strength; the first fascination of symbolism was that it did not altogether disclose the secrets upon which its use depended. Yet he was uneasy, and in a letter describing thi~~s~~e symbols of "~~OISM~~Oisin" as pervading the poem, ~~it~~ he shows him~~,~~self still diffident about letting the world know he was using a symbolic method. One day he wants the symbols to be comprehensible only to him, and a few days later he feels they should be interpreted to the public.

Examining Yeats's uneasiness, it is suspected that he thought symbolism a slightly illegitimate device. He had come upon it through Arthur Symons' accounts of the

School of Mallarmé,[54] principally, and through an extension of his father's theories. J. B. Yeats had prepared for Yeats's ready acceptance of the Symbolist doctrine, by teaching him that the only criterion in life, as in art, is the fullness or totality of one's personality. The external world's importance is therefore easily reduced to the roll of stimulus upon the self. From here it is only a little way to the theory that the external world could be used to represent states of mind. J. B. Yeats was not a symbolist, but there are two factors which made his son believe in symbolism with the faith of a fanatic. The first factor is that Yeats's frequent failures in arguments with his father had much to do with the cultivation of his image-making faculties. Yeats soon found that a picture, unlike a logical proposition, cannot be refuted. The second factor lies in his dissatisfaction with himself and the consciousness of his own imperfections. By use of symbols, especially traditional symbols, ~~e.g.~~ viz. the Rose, the Mask and the Gyre, he could make his work less personal and identifiable.

Yeats's use of symbols, then, was in part evasive. But if he adopted symbolism in part to compensate for psychological weaknesses, he was also conscious that its value transcended mere compensation. As he matured he wished to discover more and deeper secrets which were withheld from logicians and literalists, as well as protect the inviolability

a Wildean hero was the extent to which he altered the raw material of life into something quite different. The "Picture of Dorian Gray" reveals this clearly. In Wilde, and the other Pre-Raphaelites, the artist revolted not against society but against life. In France there were signs of the same movement. Mallarmé was fabricating a separate life out of a perverse syntax, and a verbal subtlety as different as possible from common speech. Yeats noticed everywhere about him, confirmation of his sense of internal division. He vigorously defended Wilde against the charge of being a poseur, saying he was merely living artistically, and that it was the duty of everyone to have a conception of themselves, although it may differ from someone else's conception. He began to use his theory of the divided consciousness as a theme, from time to time, in his early verse although it was not fully developed until he wrote "A Vision". He planned to make it a subject of "The Shadowy Waters", in which, as he told George Russell, "his hero was a world wanderer trying to escape from himself. He surprises a galley in the waters. There is a beautiful woman there. He casts a magic spell on Dectora. Then in the original version he found the love created by a spell was an empty echo, a shadow of himself, and he unrolled the spell seeking alone for the immortals."[55] So far his sense of division was chiefly connected with frustration and filial revolt. He was then twenty-two,

painfully turned inwards, self-conscious and aware of a vast gulf between what he was in actuality and what he was in his dreams.

Yeats had come to that stage, which he later described in "A Vision" where man "is suspended; he is without bias," and "only a shock resulting from the greatest possible conflict can make the greatest possible change." The shock came on January 30th, 1889, when Maud Gonne knocked on the family's door for the first time. Yeats immediately fell in love, and the question was, which of his two selves should he show her? He could not use duplicity, he had to show her his inmost heart, - the wild yet timid dreamer. But at the same time he knew that she would be satisfied only if he were a master of men as well. His problem was stated clearly in a story he wrote early in the 'nineties, called "The Wisdom of the King". A king, having fallen in love with a beautiful princess.

"Called her to him...and told her of her beauty, and priased her simply and frankly as though she were a fable of the bards; and he asked her humbly to give him her love, for he was only subtle in his dreams. Overwhelmed with his greatness, she half consented, and yet half refused, for she longed to marry some warrior who could carry her over a mountain in his arms...He laid down his wisdom at her feet...

and still she half refused."

Stated directly, Yeats's dilemma was that he was naturally dreamy, poetic, and self-conscious, and therefore unable to act with the spontaneity of a man of action. To win Maud Gonne he would have to be a man of action, organizing and building for Ireland. But this would be to change his dreamy ineffectual self and he felt that true love could not be secured through artifice.

The only solution was to love Maud Gonne in vain. Because that intermediate state suited him, he glorified during the 'nineties all intermediate things. He would choose finally neither one state nor the other, neither dream nor action, but the twilight state between spirit and sense where he was not committed. The symbols which he used during this period, all converging in the Rose, symbolized all vague indeterminate moods. The Rose was soft and dreamy and grew in the twilight which demanded no decision. He filled his poems with the dim, pale Rose, and longed to Sligo an island like Innisfree where his "old care will cease," because an island was neither mainland nor water, but something of both, and because the Return to Sligo, his childhood home, though he knew it to be impossible, would be to return to the stage when his consciousness had not been split in two. He buried himself in his mistress's hair, or hid in the

mystical Rose.

One wonders how a young man in his state of mind could act at all. Would not dream cancel out action and action dream? Yeats evolved a stratagem to prevent him from becoming inert - he could have two distinct personalities; the man of action and the dreamer. He became The man of action, however, ~~was used~~ more and more often under the pressure of his new love. Tentatively, but with increasing assurance he adopted the role of the Irish revolutionary.

To guide himself when he played this part, Yeats had his twin doctrines of passion and failure. The great thing in life, as his father had taught him, is to express one's whole passionate self; thus the active man throws himself with utmost energy into what he does, and expresses himself always with reckless vehemence and confidence. But life does not reward the man of action with success; he must end, like Oisin, in failure. Yeats must try to change Ireland or the world or to win his mistress's favour, and in failure finds his exaltation. He makes a cult of frustration, and courts defeat like a lover.

So much a part of him did his theories of unsuccessful action and unsatisfied love become, that in 1895 and 1896, when a beautiful married woman fell in love with him, he spent the first year in idealized chastity, finally slept with her, and left her to return to his former hopeless adoration of Maud

Gonne. Underneath all this theorizing and idealizing, Yeats was too ardent to be happy in this state, and so the poems of the Rose period are full of vague sorrow.

Yeats had, by this time, a considerable reputation, but in spite of success he continued to see himself as a divided man. He functioned in two spheres of activity, of layers of reality. On the one hand he was the prominent public figure in the Irish Nationalist movement; on the other he was a member of a secret order of occultists. Superficially they had little connection with one another, but he hoped to unify them, and was always trying to find some public outlet for his secret work and some secret group where he could apply his public nationalism. The severed halves of his selfhood, their characters varying with their creator's mounting years and experience, cried out for one another.

It can be seen how Yeats saw himself as two personalities, and I would like now to survey his actions up to 1903, (when he climbed out of the Rose) as two personalities, and his efforts through symbolism to combine these fluctuating personages into a well integrated man.

b
2B. The Dreamer.

On March 7, 1890, a few months before he left the Theosophists, Yeats joined the Hermetic students of the Golden

Dawn and was thereby "shaped and isolated".

The Golden Dawn, or the "Order," was one of many cults which grew up during the nineteenth century in Western Europe. The occult tradition was particularly strong in France. At the core of occult teaching was the Kabbalah, a collection of Ancient Hebrew writings which occultists since the middle ages have treated as a kind of secret bible. Through many myths surrounding it runs a central conviction that the magician can ascend the sephiratic ladder towards the source of spiritual and material power. (The Universe is considered to be a series of emanations or sephiroth from an ineffable, boundless source; the further from the source that the sephiroth go, the cruder they become until they form the world of matter, which is spirit in its lowest form.) The magician ascends toward the source, ~~by~~ annihilating the individuality by use of symbols, until at last he raises his mind to the flaming moment when it transcends itself.

Magic offered to the symbolists a reinforcement of their belief in the power of the word or symbol to evoke a reality otherwise inaccessible. The feeling of alienation from society caused them to seek spiritual citizenship elsewhere.

By the end of the century Paris was swarming with cults. A man by the name of Bois made a survey of the little

religions of Paris in 1893 and found they ranged from Luciferians with their black masses to the strange votaries of August Comte, who worshipped humanity and used the armchair of Comte's mistress as their altar.

The interest in magic was not, then, so extraordinary and in the setting of the French developments the establishment of the Golden Dawn can be better understood. Yeats joined the order in 1890, and instead of giving him theories as the Theosophists had done, the "Order" gave him the opportunity and method for constant experimentation and demonstration. He spoke of it later as the chief influence upon his thought up to his fortieth year.

The Rituals of the "Order" fascinated him. Each member meditated upon the central symbol of the Rose, the exact meaning of which was difficult to define, though it mainly signified the power of love that blossoms from the cross of sacrifice. The central symbol of the order became the central symbol of Yeats's work, and he was within his occult rights when he made it a symbol of beauty, of transcendental love, of mystic rapture, of the inner reality, of divinity. The man and his work converge within the protective petals of the Rose. Yeats was following the example of Stanislas de Guaita, who founded in 1888 "a Kabbalistic order of the Rosy ~~brass~~ Cross", and had written in his book, "Rosa Mystica":

"The Rose that I invite you to pluck - a sympathetic friend who turn these pages - does not flower on the shores of far-away countries; and we shall take, if you please, neither the express train nor the transatlantic steamer.

Are you susceptible to a deep emotion of the intellect? And do your favourite thoughts so haunt you as to give you at times the illusion of being real?...You are then a magician, and the mystic Rose will go of her own accord, however little you desire it, to bloom in your garden."

Yeats was moving deeper into magical practice and theory, associating with magicians, performing invocations of spirits, calling up visionary forms, and meditating on the Rose. In the preface to the first collected edition of his poems, in 1895, he testified openly to his occult interests:

This book contains all the writer cares to preserve out of his previous volumes of verse...He has printed the ballads and lyrics from the same volume as "The Wanderings of Usheen", and two ballads written at the same time, though published later, in a section named "Crossways", because in them he tried many pathways; and those from the same volume as "The Countess Cathleen" in a section named "The Rose", for in them he has found, he believes, the only pathway whereon he can hope to see with his own eyes, <u>The Eternal Rose of</u>

of Beauty and of Peace".

The reason for this bold statement of his position was that through the Golden Dawn Yeats had begun to satisfy his craving for a religion. He began to speak more categorically than ever before of the power of the imagination to call up intangible forces, ~~as~~ and in a letter to Florence Farr in 1901, he writes:

"All that we do with intensity has an origin in the hidden world, and is the symbol, the expression of its powers, and even the smallest detail in a professedly magical dispute may have significance...We who are seeking this greater Order must never forget that whatever we build in the imagination will accomplish itself in the circumstances of our lives".

To Yeats the rituals of the Order seemed profound and beautiful, and the influence it had over him determined to a great extent the poetry he wrote within the "Rose Period. He was particularly moved by the central myth, which was the mystical death and resurrection of the adept. In the earlier grades of the order the candidate was encouraged to think of this myth as primarily a Rosicrucian one: Christian Rosen Kreuz was said to have attained such spiritual perfection that, after his death, his body lay undecayed in his tomb. But in the later grades, as Yeats discovered in 1893, the order no longer spoke of Rosen Kreuz but of Christ. The

extraordinary power which this mixture of paganism and Christianity exerted over Yeats, can be understood if it is remembered how dissatisfied he was with himself, and how eager he was to be "self-born, born anew". The "Order" dwelt a great deal upon this rebirth of the individual, and compared it to the alchemical tranmutation of base metal into gold, which was considered to be symbolical of the change of the dross of matter into the pure spirit of the perfected man.

From the attempt to achieve personal transmutation it was only a brief step to achieve a more general tranmutation. The order taught that its doctrines should affect daily life. Many members felt that they must become " a perfect instrument for the regeneration of the world." Thus the Golden Dawn of the individual's transmutation was closely associated with that of the world's rebirth, or more particularly, with ~~Yeats's, Ireland's~~ his country's rebirth. He had many projects to bring about the transmutation for which he hoped.

C
4. The Man of Action.

Although Yeats's nationalistic activities were concurrent with his occult studies, to his mind ~~they~~ the two subjects were so separated as to seem almost the work of two people.

He seemed to have grasped instinctively that the time had come for him to act and he had a new reason for wanting

to work for Ireland on a larger scale than before. The reason ~~for~~ was his infatuation for Maud Gonne whom he met on January 30th, 1889. It was from his first meeting with her that he received the impulse to act.

Maude Gonne was said to be the most beautiful woman in Ireland; six feet tall, with the carriage of a goddess, and features perfect and full of charm. She had been brought up in the atmosphere of the Viceregal court, her father having been an officer in the British garrison in Dublin. However the evictions of poverty-stricken Irish tenants which she had frequently witnessed, roused an unquenchable nationalism within her. Because of this no ordinary career could be adequate for her. Perhaps she dreamt of becoming an Irish Joan of Arc. Yeats himself had thought that his mission was to make Ireland ready so she might become, as he said to her, "The fiery Hand of the Intellectual Movement"...Maud Gonne, like Yeats, was a romantic which meant she shared his ignorance of economics, history, sociology, and politics, although both had a fierce devotion to the Irish cause.

Provided with this impetus to act, and to organize a nationalistic movement, it was Yeats's intention that art be dedicated to the service of heroic dreams, and that in Ireland the dreams must be Irish ones. With this conviction,

it is clear that he fought for a movement of the future rather than of the past. The new writers who wanted to deal with Irish subjects without being flattered by catch-words, found a protector and defender in Yeats. The Irish literary Renaissance began within the shelter of courageous battle by speech and written word against the hitherto sanctified misconceptions of nationalism.

Yeats's heroic position is made clear in a speech he gave at the Wolfe Tone banquet in London, on April 13th, 1891: "And then Ireland too, as we think, will be a country where not only wealth will be well distributed, but where there will be an imaginative culture and power to understand imaginative and spiritual things, to be distributed among the people. We wish to preserve an ancient ideal of life. Wherever its customs prevail, there you will find the folk song, the folk tale, the proverb and the charming manners that come from ancient culture. In England you will find a few thousands of perfectly cultivated people, but you will find the mass of the people singing songs of the music hall....In Ireland alone among the nations that I know you will find, away on the western seaboard, under broken roofs, a race of gentlemen, keeping alive the ideals of a great time when men sang 'the heroic life' with drawn swords in their hands."

Little comment need be made on this passage.

Yeats's purpose is made clear, to the attainment of which he spent many active although often disillusioning years.

d.
~~c~~. Unity.

Yeats then was two people - the occultist and the nationalist. However he hoped to mould both occultism and nationalism into his art. This can be seen in his statement "....where there will be an <u>imaginative culture</u> and power to understand imaginative and spiritual things <u>distributed among the people</u>". No sooner had Yeats realized his sense of division, and magnified it, than he wanted to make peace between them, seeking the center that he fled from in continual competition with himself and finding it in symbolism.

The desire to fuse his interests began to occupy his mind a great deal. In 1919, reminiscing about his youth, Yeats said that when he was twenty-three, or twenty-four, "This sentence seemed to form in my head without my willing it much as sentences form when we are half asleep: 'Hammer your thoughts into unity'". During the 'nineties his writings mention unity a great deal. This search for unity was in part defensive. Yeats was not sufficiently self-confident to disregard the continual condemnation of his interests by his father and many friends. J. B. Yeats thought that occultism was absurd, and also that his son was wasting energy in patriotic organizations, which would better have gone into his poetry. Sometimes they

almost came to blows over their theories. Yeats defended himself fiercely, but he keenly felt the criticism because his "nervous, mocking self" was telling him the same things. Resisting his own scepticism, he set out to prove the value of his interests by showing that they informed both the spirit and subject matter of his literary work.

If Yeats could demonstrate that everything he did was integrally part of his life, he would justify occupations that might otherwise be held capricious.

In the poem "To Ireland In the Coming Times" Yeats shows the attempt to unify his occultist and nationalist practices, and bring together the dreamer and the man of action. However, to state his nationalist and occult practises was not enough; he must organize a group to support them. As early as 1891 Yeats thought of starting a secret spiritual propoganda in Ireland with the aid of Maud Gonne. This became fused with theories of druidic worship and Celtic revival which were moving about Britain and France during the 'nineties. He thought he could revive an ancient form of worship, by combining Druidism with Christianity as the Golden Dawn had combined Rosicrucianism with Christianity.

Thus the vague dream of an Irish cult possessed Yeats's mind - a cult with the same doctrines as those of the Golden Dawn, but specifically associated with Ireland. They "would unite the radical truths of christianity with

those of a more ancient world." Yeats hoped that this cult would provide him with an "orderly background to work upon", something that up to this time he had lacked and had need of, and that it would also supply a background for the Irish literary movement. He had another purpose which was even more practical. Driven frantic by loving "the most beautiful woman in the world" in vain, he thought that in collaborating with Maud Gonne their minds would become so united that she would consent to be his wife.

Yeats's chief task was to prepare a rite for the new order. "An obsession more constant than anything but my love itself was the need of mystical rites - a ritual system of evocation and meditation - to reunite the perception of the spirit of the dream, with natural beauty." The rituals were elaborate but of little use, for his dream of an Irish cult progressed no further than the embryo stage. However what Yeats succeeded in saying throughout the rituals was that Irish life must have a basis in faith such as existing churches could not provide.

As he put the 'nineties resolutely behind him the defect of his work during the first half of his life becomes apparent in retrospect and can partially be traced to psychological causes. The relations between a ~~fact~~ poet and his poetry is admittedly not even and precise; any good poem, when completed, has escaped somewhat out of the poet's life, into an independent existence, so that the act of creation

is also one of separation. Yet the danger of not allowing for this separation is probably less with minor verse, where the poetic process is not worked at white heat, and Yeats's early verse is no more than minor because of the limited thought and subject matter in it. Looking closely at the Rose poetry, it is noted that instead of solving the problem of creation, Yeats had largely dodged it. His problem is seen from studying his psychological difficulties in youth, and in part from examining his later solution ~~by~~ of becoming the Man of the Gyre. Given his sense of divided mind, Yeats had to try to achieve in his verse what Coleridge called the "balance or reconcilement of discordant qualities." His short-coming in the 'nineties was that he conceived of his art, not as a balance or reconcilement but as a see-saw, sometimes between scepticism and belief, sometimes between natural and supernatural love, sometimes between action and the dream, sometimes between the peasant and aristocratic traditions. In later life, as will be seen, Yeats welded such oppositions together, but he earlier conceived of his artistic method largely as an absorption of contrary impressions which he liked to believe were often visions.

The world which Yeats builds within the petals of the Rose is not really an independent world at all, but a skillful evasion, neither her nor there. His professed object was, like Mallarme's, to evoke an unseen reality, and symbols were the only way to do it. But in practice Yeats used symbols primarily to hide this world rather than to re-

veal another one. He was not so much concerned with truth as with concealment by decoration.

Yeats's attitude to Maud Gonne had much to do with the state of mind that generated his early poetry. The fact that his love centered on a woman so beautiful as to be a symbol of beauty seemed to justify his uncertainty as to how she would finally act towards him.

Symbolism, instead of providing a means for balance and reconcilement, furnished an elaborate robe to cover a thoroughly wretched young man. This, then, was the effect of his life upon his early verse: just as he accepted Maud Gonne's supremacy in his love affair, so he could adopt no masterful attitude towards his symbols, of which she made one. Instead of manipulating his symbols, Yeats drowned himself in them. He lay in the bosom of the Rose and pulled the petals about him, so that he could see only his own life mirrored on the shiny walls, not reality, and smell the perfume of eternal beauty rather than see the natural beauty of the surrounding world. The result is that the Rose, and consequently its subsidiary symbols, is an imperfect symbol, if "symbols" in Baudelaire's sense of the word is accpeted; that they are the means by which man can penetrate the temple of nature. The Rose, and its qualifying symbols, although used with great technique, are pegs to hang moods on, and suggest a symbolical meaning that they do not ultimately sustain.

Yeats himself saw that his early verse had not done what he intended, when he wrote in 1908 "I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and still life."

J.B. Yeats once wrote to Edward Dawden that some men are born in full armour; others have to develop slowly, and Yeats was the latter sort. He moved ahead by trial and error only gradually learning his own potentialities. He failed frequently, but found instruction through his failures. Thus his early efforts to bring his thoughts into unity on an Irish mystical order and in a dramatic movement were not successful, first, because the revelations which he hoped to receive from the other world did not come, and second because he avidly embraced the ~~peasant~~ folk quality. He was later to return to both, but with a less naive point of view. The mystical rites were eventually transformed into the elaborate machinery of the "Vision". His endeavor to find spontaneity and escape from deliberateness in folk tradition was to be successful for him, when, as an old man, he achieved real instead of an artificial simplicity. This was only to be achieved by a better understanding of himself.

# CHAPTER III

## THE MASK

The Intermediate State between the Rose and the Gyre.

The period which now begins for Yeats, from approximately 1903 to 1917, is primarily a theoretical one, as dangerous as the easy, emotional Rose Period. Instead of representing his inner conflict in various half-instinctive projections, Yeats tries now to expose it to theoretical investigation. He moves from the twilight to the cold of dawn before the sun appears. He felt called upon to rebel against his own past, as he had repeatedly since his revulsion against science in his late childhood, and particularly against the vague unity in his life and work which he had tried to obtain in the Rose period, at the end of the Century. In order to mend his soul, Yeats had to split it up again into pairs of opposites; these pairs were constantly changing according to his mood and interest. Since he was older, however, the results were different from what they had been before.

While this re-division of himself is investigated, it should be remembered that as early as 1906 the

counter-process of re-uniting had begun, and Yeats was conscious of both the processes of division and fusion and was attempting to find a rational justification for his peculiar method of self-development, which had earlier come partially through instinct and partially through the appeal of the symbolist movement. The change was caused so abruptly by Maud Gonne's marriage in 1903 to Major JohnMcBride. Yeats blamed himself for not being a dashing man of action like him. He had lost the the capacity for acting on instinct, which men like McBride, lacking a critical mind, possessed. Her marriage was therefore an indictment; instead of condemning her, he condemned himself.

By examining Yeats's plays and poems from 1903 to 1920, we find them filled with a sense of guilt at having separated himself from "the normal active man." Through his work, if we try to assemble the terms of the dichotomy of his personality, we find such oppositions as these: spontaneity against craft, lightheartedness against seriousness, pretense against sincerity, and chiefly, mask against face.

The shock of Maud Gonne's marriage emphasized how torturous his mind's workings were and how far from instinct he had gone. Yeats, now, must extol qualities which are instinctive. The world must not know how deeply

he had been hurt. The young man who had been jilted puts his injured pride in the place of love and conceals his wound. Yeats threw himself savagely into his work, though he was no longer an inhabitant of the same world. In his poems he held emotion out at arm's length, putting it in the mouths of legendary characters who are more animate parts of himself than living people. They keep their sufferings inarticulate, and act boldly and decisively. Tight-lipped restraint was now the constant feature of his work.

The policy of concealment of his more intimate self was more definite than ever before. Yeats's timid, sensitive nature and his keen sense of personal failure was enveloped for the world's view in the dress of arrogance and of power. It was not until many years later that he described himself as he truly was at this period:

> "One that ruffled in a manly pose [55]
> For all his timid heart."[55]

The word that constantly begins to occur in Yeats's writing after 1903 is "mask", a concept which lent dignity and a kind of traditional sanction to his theories of poetry. He first used it prominently in a verse he wrote in August 1910, for "The Player Queen", called "The Mask".

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

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

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

The doctrine of the mask is so complex and so central in Yeats that it must be attended to closely. Even at this early stage of its development it has its multiple meaning and is a variable concept. In its simplest meaning, "The Mask" is the social self. Yeats's doctrine assumes that one faces both the world and the beloved one with a mask. A closely related meaning is that the mask includes all differences between one's own and other people's conception of one's personality. To be conscious of a discrepancy which makes a mask of this sort, is to look at oneself as if one were somebody else. In addition, the mask is defensive armour. One wears it to keep from being hurt, and so protected, one is only slightly involved, no matter what happens. Finally, the mask is a weapon of attack; it is put on to keep up a noble conception of ourselves; or an heroic ideal which we try to live up to. As a character in "The Player Queen" says, "to be great we must seem so. Seeming that goes on for a lifetime is no different from reality."

The mask, however, is not to be dismissed as only the conception of a timid man. Yeats is eliciting all ambiguities in the motions of "The Mask" and insisting upon a relation between reality and the dream which makes the dream not just a capitalized abstraction, but a driving force in life.

There is a paradox implicit in Yeats's belief that the "mask", a word which he chose deliberately because it was the creation of an artifice, could be filled with instinct and passion. Like every artist, he believed that the best of him was in his work rather than in his life. But the theory must also be understood in part, as one of desperation. Yeats was so removed from natural passions that he had to recover them in some way. As he wrote in 1909, "I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self; that all joyous or creative life is a re-birth as something not oneself, something which has no memory, and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed."

It can be seen that Yeats began to devote a great deal of time and thought to effect a new unity which would be more inclusive and impregnable than the one he had built up during the 'nineties, although the unity was not achieved until "A Vision" had been completed.

In the 'nineties Yeats had a cult of passion and

perfect love; in the mask period passion was renewed but it now tended towards pure hatred. He wrote in 1905 to Stephen Gwynn, complaining of the mild policies of two Dublin magazines: "Damn all Celtic Christmases now and for ever. What Dublin wants is some man who knows his own mind and has an intolerable tongue and a delight in enemies." He fancied himself in this role, although he was far from entirely assuming it.

The opposition Yeats felt towards his former belief in disembodied emotion led directly to his new opposition to disembodied expression. He wrote to John Quinn on September 15th, 1905: "I believe more strongly every day that the element of strength is in common idiom, just as the element of strength in poetic construction is common passion." This is shown in "The Green Helmet," the first book of poems representing Yeats's new, hardened beliefs.

The mask had come to occupy in his system, the position which The Rose had held in it during the nineties. Both were fluctuating symbols which somehow, he felt, contained the solution to his difficulties. The difference was that the Rose was remote, perhaps inaccessible, while the mask fitted securely on the face; the rose was soft, the mask was hard. Yeats had the same uncertainty with his new symbol as with the old one, but he was bringing all his fac-

ulties to bear on it. However he had not worked out a satisfactory theory until "A Vision" had been conceived.

It is to be remembered that Yeats had not swerved from his one consistent belief that the human mind had the power to control the universe, to make and unmake reality.

The conflict which he visualized as internal and psychological might be an external battle between a living man and a dead one, between this world and the next. Thus Yeats would have a supernatural sanction for the pose he had built up since childhood; the mask would be filled with cosmic drama, and as such would have to be changed into a more inclusive symbol, the Gyre.

He was latently sceptical by nature, but craving the irrefutable evidence of the supernatural which would finally lay his doubts at rest and prove that the child's refusal to follow his father's scepticism was more than a son's champing against paternal authority. Yeats drew himself into The Gyre, and subsequently into the myth of "A Vision."

## CHAPTER IV

### The Gyre and "A Vision"

1. The Purpose of the "Vision".

The development of the symbol of the gyre led Yeats to write "A Vision" which revealed his character much more clearly than did his "Autobiographies". It expresses Yeats's faith and represents the culmination of a long lifetime of trying to close the gap between reality and the dream, that he might be fully integrated. Since the purpose of this thesis is to show the development of Yeats's work and his search for a system of significant values through symbolism, I have placed the discussion of the gyre within its larger context of "A Vision".

"A Vision" was created over a period of twenty years and represented a correlation of all Yeats's thought within a bounded form. Without some knowledge of this work, a great deal of his later poetry has little meaning, for the "Vision" became theconstant source of reference for his later work. In "A Vision" he created what on the surface seemed to be the most deterministic of systems, to explain his beliefs seemingly as irrefutable cosmic laws, about the nature of man as an individual and about his place in the stream of history. When one first glances through the book with its whirling gyres and its moons running madly

about in a great circle, one thinks that Ptolemy himself would have been puzzled. Such critics as Louis Macniece denounce the book as being merely a bad dream. He sees Yeats spinning about in a gyre for twenty years, finally lurching off at a tangent to jot down all that came into his dizzy brain.

A classical scholar, F.P. Sturm, wrote to Yeats when the first edition was published in 1925:

"I know that I am a pedant, but pedants read you. We cough in the ink to the world's end, as you so cruelly said, but the least of us would save you from the errors which spoil the Vision as it is now. Personally I think your philosophy smells of the fagot. Some dead or damned Chaldean Mathematekoi have got hold of your wife and are trying to revive a dead system. All these gyres and cones and wheels are parts of a machine that was thrown on the scrap heap when Ptolemy died. It won't go. There is no petrol for such. The ghosts of the mathematekoi are weeping over their broken toy universe: the Primum Mobile no longer moves, the seven planetary spheres of crystal are dull as a steamy cookshop window so they are trying to speak through your wife and are using much that she has read in the past.... No doubt many an Inquisitor has sighed as he condemned some author to the flames. You would not have escaped.... My new book, when I write it, is

to be called Seven Fagots for the Burning of the Great Heretic Yeats, or The Wheel Dismantled-printed for the author by Michael Paleologus, and is to be purchased at the Sign of the Screaming Seraph in Byzantium."

Was Yeats merely an old man in his dotage, poking about in the rubbish of time, picking up the broken wheels and tinsel moons of Ptolemy?

All his life Yeats had been passionately interested in symbols, in the apprehension of the permanent within the transient, and it is wrong, I feel, to consider this book as being other than a continuation of his consistent beliefs, as being other than a symbol in itself.

Yeats's poetry was motivated by two strong principles; his search for a religion, and his hatred of science with its cold abstractions, its unconcern with human values, and its affording of no interpretation. He was not then delineating a creaky, deterministic philosophy, but trying to effect a change of sensibility; some new way of looking at the world which he had discovered through many years of significant experience. He feared the secularization and objectivity of the times. A period of madness or phantasy is the necessary ploughing-up before new beliefs are possible. "The Wasteland" and "King Lear" tell us that much. Yeats wished for a more imaginative, contemplative, emotional life.

"I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created or could create part of the one history, and that of the souls." [56]

For the abstract, valueless system of science, he proposed to substitute a concrete, meaningful system, substitut-ing symbol for concept. His system had for him, consequently, the authority and meaning of a religion, "combining intellect and emotion as they were combined before the great analytic and abstracting process of modern science broke them apart." In short Yeats had created a myth.

In the preface to the 1925 edition of "The Vision" Yeats says:

"A book of modern philosophy may prove to our logical capacity that there is a transcendental portion of our being that is timeless and spaceless...and yet our imagination remain subjected to nature as before....It was not so with ancient philosophy because the ancient philosopher had something to reinforce his thought - the Gods, the Sacred Dead, Egyptian Theurgy, the Priestess Diotime....I would restore to the philosopher his mythology."

"The Vision" is symbolic, then, and its importance lies not in the science of the system but in its imaginative truth. It is Yeats's attempt to show the mystery and emotion of life,

and so effect a change of sensibility. Yeats has created a myth to show man's ever recurring experience. About the myth in general I. A. Richards says: "The saner and greater mythologies are not fancies; they are the utterance of the whole soul of man, and as such, inexhaustible to meditation." The Vision was published in two editions; the first in 1925 and the revised edition in 1937. He was unsatisfied with the first. In the second edition he explained his purpose in writing the myth in a series of explanatory letters entitled "A Packet for Ezra Pound." He also clarified hitherto puzzling ideas within the system itself, and added a phantasy of how the book was written, that its imaginative, symbolical truth might be more clearly understood by people like Sturm.

2. "A Packet for Ezra Pound"

In the first part of "A Vision", "A Packet for Ezra Pound", Yeats explains his reason for writing the book, through a series of letters to Pound. In one letter Yeats says:

"I may, now that I have recovered leisure, find that the mathematical structure, when taken up into imagination, is more than mathematical, that seemingly irrelevant details fit together into a single theme, that there is no botch of tone and colour, all Hodos chameliontos, except for some odd corner where one discovers beautiful detail like the finely modeled foot in Porteous's disastrous picture." 57

3. Yeats's Introduction to "A Vision".

The next section is the actual introduction in which Yeats explains in a series of numbered essays how and why he wrote the myth. On October 24th, 1917, four days after his marriage to ~~Fannie~~ Georgie Hyde-Lees, she startled him by proving herself to be a medium, and commenced automatic writing, the results of which were so exciting to Yeats that he said that he was willing to spend the rest of his life fitting together the puzzles given to him by the spirits. However they evidently objected to this, saying through his wife: "No, we have come to give you metaphors for poetry". The theme of the metaphors was taken from a former book of his, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" written some years earlier, in which, through numerous essays and poems the ideas for his future system first became apparent. He says in it:

"I had made a distinction between the perfection that is from a man's combat with himself and that which is from a combat with circumstances, and upon this "simple distinction" he (the unknown writer) built up an elaborate classification of men according to their more or less complete expression of one type of the other."[58] This "elaborate classification" was enacted through a dialogue between Hic, the objective viewpoint, and Ille, the subjective viewpoint. It was the first expression of Yeats's idea of the anti-self . As some scholar wittily

remarked, the dialogue was actually between Hic and 'Willie'. In the poems which followed the essays, Yeats showed extreme interest in the distinction between a person as he is, and his mask, or what he aspires to be. A clear expression of this idea is to be found in the poem "Ego Dominus Tuus." [59]

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

It was this symbol of the mask which he later dropped in favour of the more intellectually inclusive symbol of the Gyre which provided the basis for "A Vision". In a final summing up of his purpose in Essay XV of the Introduction, Yeats says: "Some will ask whether I believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon. Those that include now all recorded time in one circuit, now what Blake called 'The pulsaters of an artery' are plainly symbolical, but what of those that pinned, like a butterfly upon a pin, to our central state, the first day of our Era, divide actual History into Periods of Equal length? To such a question I can but answer that 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."

4. Yeats's Phantasy.

The next section begins Yeats's charming and fantastic story of the writing of "The Vision", giving imaginative truth to the book by divorcing it from himself. The story begins with a poem, which describes three of the characters who appear in the story;

> Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O'Leary
> Delighted me as a child;
> But where that roaring, ranting crew
> Danced, laughed, loved, fought through
> Their brief lives I never knew.
>
> Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O'Leary
> Delighted me as a child;
> I put three persons in their place
> That despair and keep the pace
> And love wench Wisdom's cruel face.
>
> Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O'Leary
> Delighted me as a child
> Hard-living men and men of thought
> Burn their bodies up for nought
> I mock at all so burning out. [60]

Yeats takes three historical characters, whose adventures he knew as a child, and transmutes them into symbol. He takes them from the frenzy and purposelessness of their lives, and transforms them into their masks, from the "roaring, ranting crew", into men that "Love wench Wisdom's cruel face". It is an old trick of Yeats's to personify moods of his own conscious-

ness, as he has done here. Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O'Leary belong no more to themselves, to their tombs, but have been resurrected as symbols of Yeats's moods. From the pre-Raphaelite and French symbolist days he had personified his own consciousness in this manner. There is Aedh, who "Thinks of those who have spoken evil of his Beloved" and "Tells of the Perfect Beauty." There is Michael Robartes who figures importantly in the "Vision," and "Remembers forgotten Beauty." There is Red Hanrahan who "Speaks to the lovers of his songs in coming days." All express love, pain, suffering, and ecstacy of hope fulfilled, or about to be fulfilled. For the most part, and especially in his earlier poems, his personifications are connected with absolute Beauty and they are seen and felt in an objective vision.

Through the preface to the poem, then, and from his former dealings with people in his poems, it is not difficult to see that the story will concern itself not with people as people, but people as symbols for Yeats's own experience of life.

There are seven characters in the story; Huddon and Duddon who, it seems to me, are more allegory than symbol, objectively representing Yeats's belief in the self and anti-self; O'Leary, Yeats (helping, by placing himself in the story, to disguise the flatness of his other characters, and their personification of his own moods), Denise de L'Isle Adams, Owen Aherne and Michael Robartes. The last two people are the most important,

for they appear not only in " A Vision' but in many of his poems. Unlike Huddon and Duddon who merely represent Yeats's theory of the man and his mask, Owen Aherne and Michael Robartes actually represent the dichotomy in Yeats's own personality. For the rest of his life, these two people played a predominant role in his poetry. Robartes is the protagonist of the story, and is Yeats's mask; what he wishes himself to be. Robartes has a face "more like a mask than face," which immediately gives the clue. His features are "something between a debauchee, a saint and a peasant." Aherne is Yeats as he is, and as he actually sees himself. He is a pious Catholic on the verge of becoming a Dominican monk. Robartes tries to tempt Aherne away from a quiet, meditative life, and draw him into his own order of the Alchemical Rose, a prospect which terrifies Aherne. Yeats had violently turned away in his search for a faith, from his early pagan belief in Supreme Beauty symbolized in the Rose. That Aherne is a Catholic, is not meant to show that Yeats was one himself. Catholicism is his symbol for conventional and prudent beliefs. All his life Yeats tried to bring together Aherne and Robartes, the dreamer and the man of action. He describes the two men in the following passage:

"Presently Robartes came in with a big old man. Aherne, now that I saw him in a good light, was stout and sedentary looking, bearded and dull of eye, but this other was lank,

brown, muscular, clean-shaven, with an alert, ironical eye."[61]

Denise De L'Isle Adam symbolizes all of Yeats's experience of women. Yeats took her name from the playwright Villiers de L'Isle Adam, whose Rosicrucian play "Axel" so impressed Yeats during the 'nineties. She is the beautiful, supremely pure Martha of that play. She is the lovely, passionate Maud Gonne, the kind sympathetic woman who was his wife, and the sensuous "crazy Jane" of his poetry, showing every side of her varied character through her adventures in the stories which she recounts. These people have congregated at the home of Michael Robartes through interest in the Order of the Alchemical Rose, a mystic society, of which Robartes is the leader. Each in turn recounts an adventure, or adventures, which reveal his and her innermost character. The adventures are strange and discordant, producing an effect of mysticism which prepares the reader's imagination for an acceptance of Yeats's forthcoming Myth.

Michael Robartes, the teacher of the group wakes up one morning to find his stool overturned, and a book lying on the floor beside it. Picking it up he sees that it is ancient and strange, with the title "Speculum Angelorum et Hominum". It apparently had been written by a certain Geraldus at Cracow in 1599. On the inside cover is a portrait of the author, who bears a close resemblance to Yeats. In the book are a series of alleg-

orical pictures; a man being torn by an eagle, a wild beast, a man whipping his shadow, a man between a hunchback and a fool in cap and bells, and many others to the number of twenty-eight. There is a constant repetition of the Unicorn figure, and on one page is a great wheel with the phases of the moon outlined around it. Needless to say Robartes was excited and puzzled by this strange event.

The next day appears an old Arab of an ancient tribe called the Judwalis. He walks into the room and draws a symbol of two interlocking gyres for Robartes, explaining that the gyres are the key to the whole book. The old man then leaves. Robartes discovers that the Judiwalis tribesmen were also called "diagrammatists", for their children were taught dances which left symbolical tracings on the sand.

Robartes and Aherne go away together, and John Aherne, Owen's brother, having access to Robartes diary, writes a letter to Yeats in which he says that the "Speculum" is similar to Yeats's own experiments and that Geraldus himself looks like Yeats.

It is not hard to gather that Yeats is trying to suggest that Geraldus is one of his own incarnations at a former period, and by his book gives a traditional confirmation to his own belief in "A Vision". Yeats is weaving his myth with great care.

5. Source of the Gyres.

Following his story Yeats begins to explain the sources of the Gyre, around which "A Vision" revolves. In this symbol he was able to contain a) a cyclical theory of History and b) a means to categorize the individual person's thought, action and soul. The first source is Swedenborg's "Principia" in which, Yeats says, "all physical reality, the universe as a whole, every atom, is a double cone.[62] He also mentions an intended story of Flaubert's, "La Spirale", in which Flaubert wished to use the double cone. He died before this plan could be carried into action, although his thoughts about it were published. Yeats says, "It would describe a man whose dreams during sleep grew in magnificence as his life grew more and more unlucky. The wreck of some love affair coinciding with his marriage to a dream princess."[63] Although Yeats does not mention it, Dante's "Inferno" was another source. He was very fond of Doré's prints of the myth, and one of them shows Dante and Virgil ascending to the eighth circle of Hell, on the back of Geryon, half man and half falcon, whose body is shaped like a gyre or cone.

> "But He whose succour then not first I proved
> Soon as I mounted, in his arms aloft
> Embracing, held me up; and thus he (Virgil) spake:
> Geryon, I now move thee: be they wheeling gyres
> Of ample circuit, easy thy ascent....
> As falcon that hath long been on the wing
> But hare nor bird hath seen, while in despair
> The falconer cries 'Ah me! Thous stoopst to earth,"

"Wearied descends when humbly he arose
In many an airy wheel and lighting sits
At distance from his lord in angry mood."[64]

In his poem 'The Second Coming' which I shall discuss later, Yeats uses ~~this~~ Dante's gyres, falcon, and falconer.

6. A General Description of his System.

I shall return to a fuller explanation of the gyres, after outlining the following, and principal section of "A Vision". Yeats commences here to explain his system of categorizing humanity under various phases of the moon. The basic theory of the book is outlined in a poetic dialogue between Aherne and Robartes, entitled "The Phases of the Moon."

Aherne: Why should not you
Who know it all ring his (Yeats's) door, and speak
just truth enough to show that his whole life
Will scarcely find for him a broken crust
Of all those truths that are your daily bread;
And when you have spoken take the roads again?

Robartes: He wrote of me in that extravagent style he had
learnt from Pater, and to round his tale/said I was
dead; and dead I choose to be.

Aherne: Sing me the changes of the moon once more;
True song, though speech;'mine author sung it me'.

Robartes: Twenty and eight the phases of the moon
The full and the moon's dark and all the crescents,
Twenty-and-eight, and yet but six-and-twenty
The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in:
For there's no human life at the full or the dark.
From the first crescent to the half, the dream
But summons to adventure and the man
Is always happy like a bird or beast;
But while the moon is rounding towards the full
He follows whatever whim's most difficult

Among whims not impossible, and though scarred
As with the cat-o'-nine-tails of the mind
His body moulded from within his body
Grows comelier. Eleven pass, and then
Athena takes Achilles by the hair,
Hector is in the dust, Nietzche is born
Because the hero's crescent is the twelfth.
And yet, twice born, twice buried, grow he must,
Before the full moon, helpless as a worm.
The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war
In its own being, and when that war's begun
There is no muscle in the arm; and after,
Under the frenzy of the fourteenth moon
The soul begins to tremble into stillness,
To die into the labyrinth of itself." [65]

The dialogue continues after this with Robartes giving instances of the various reincarnations of the individual soul, but this poem contains the principle with which his diagrams are concerned. The fifteenth phase ~~with~~ Robartes is describing is the link between "a Vision" and Yeats's poetic method. This "phase of complete beauty" is inhabited only by spirits; no human life is possible there. Though he does not say so, it is clear that this phase belongs to the symbols of his poetry, caught up into reconcilement. "Thought and Will are indistinguishable", he writes elsewhere of the phase, "contemplation and desire are interchangeable without losing their identity. As all effort has ceased, all thought has become image, because no thought could exist if it were not carried towards its own extinction, amid fear or in contemplation ..." [66]

The Great wheel about which the phases revolve is a development of the interlocking gyres, making it easier for

Yeats to delineate his theory of man.[67] Because I am chiefly interested in the symbol of the gyre, I shall only summarize the ideas expressed by Yeats through his diagrams, ideas which are meticulously worked out at great length, ~~and so complete the discussion of "A Vision" itself~~.

Human life, in the book, may be compared to spirals traced on two transparent cones so related that the tip of each cone touches the centre of the base of the other, and as one spiral expands, the other narrows. The great wheel, a development of the cones, ~~makes the most complete comparison to~~ goes a more complete representation of the human life and soul. It is like a watch face with four hands and twenty-eight numbers on the dial; two hands are always diametrically opposite the other two; while also, in another movement, the two sets of hands move counter to each other, balancing their positions ~~in the spatial pattern~~ on the watch face, as if they were reflected in a mirror set vertically in the watch face. The four hands of the clock represent the human soul. One set is the Creative Mind, which might be called the Imaginative Intellect, and its opposite, the Body of Fate or external circumstance. The second set of hands represents the will, a person as he is, and its opposite, the mask, a person as he would like to be, his ideal life. There are twenty-eight phases on the wheel corresponding to the twenty-eight phases of the moon; and in the transmigration of souls, the Will may spring up in any of these positions, which dictates the patterned posi-

tions of the Mask, the Creative Mind, and the Body of Fate.

The Great Wheel governing the individual soul in its many incarnations is also a diagram for the phases of the moon in its waxing and waning. And if one thinks of general history, history waxes and wanes as it goes through the cycle of the Great Wheel. To fulfill this cycle requires a little over two thousand years. ~~With the gyres, human history is also compared, so that as one spiral waxes the other wanes~~. The historical cycle on the great wheel is only one of twelve cycles ~~that fulfills~~ which constitute a greater movement of twenty-six thousand years which must elapse before the planets are again in their places, reproducing the original pattern and allowing another universal dance to begin.

Outside the twelve two thousand year cycles is the thirteenth ~~cone, or~~ sphere, or cycle, providing an escape from the rigid mechanism of "Yeats the great watchmaker". This escape represents Yeats's uncertainty, the act of faith, and the unknown. It is his way of saying "Perhaps this book does not matter". Yeats admitted there were parts of his system that he did not understand, and it is the thirteenth cycle that allows for misrepresentation. He says that the thirteenth sphere "is in every man and called by every man his freedom".

Yeats has geared wrist watches into cosmic machinery. The pattern is formidable and formal; all is held in place by ceremony and return, by powerful oppositions of full moon and dark moon, antithetical and primary, subjective and objective,

beauty and flux, intellect and body, man and world. It requires a strong visual imagination to sense the rigidly balanced and simultaneous motions of cones and wheels and changing moons.[68]

It can now be seen that "The Vision" ~~is~~ embodies a system constructed with the elaborateness of Blake's system, although it is not so esoteric. It was a new religion at times for Yeats, combatting his father's scepticism which was always a reference for his thought and action. It was a huge projection of his own life, and more satisfactory than the system in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae", for rather than seeing life as merely a dichotomy, it represented a more intricate ~~the~~ complication; ~~of several facultiies~~; gyres, phases, cycles, principles, spheres, spirits and demons displaying the conflict in all its forms. Yeats saw more clearly that his early posing and masking were attempts to make his life and work converge in symbolism. "The Vision" shows a power to classify and control, exhibiting the new sense of strength which had crept into his writing.

7. The Gyres.

On December 16, 1917, prior to the composition of ~~writing~~ "A Vision" a new symbol was introduced by the automatic writing, as a corrollary to his lunar symbolism, which Yeats had been developing for some years to find its fullest expression in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae". This was the spiral, or gyre, or whirling cone, or "pern" (an Irish and Scots word) or spool.

As I have mentioned before, two interlocking cones were drawn and related to European History, which, like the human soul, passes through the cycle from subjectivity to objectivity. The cones are interpenetrating and whirling inside one another, one subjective and the other objective. The gyres provided Yeats with the image to represent the many dichotomies which were always in his mind. The cones represented "beauty and truth, value and fact, particular and universal, quality and quantity, the bundle of separated threads that are still in the pattern, abstracted types and forms as distinguished from those that are concrete, Man and Daemon, the living and the dead, and all other images of our first parents." [69] This symbol was more successful than the mask of "Per Amica Silential Lunae", as the relation between mask and face was difficult to diagram, and was much more restricted.

Yeats thought that the gyres were the archetypal pattern mirrored by all life, all movements of civilization, mind and nature.

In the spinning gyre, man or history moves from left to right and then back. As soon as the fullest expansion of the objective cone is reached, there is a counter movement to the fullest expansion of the subjective cone.

Yeats sees history at the time of Christ as objectivity at its fullest expansion. The self is struggling to escape from personality, lost in otherness, while in the Rennaissance, sub-

jectivity is at its fullest expansion when great personalities are fulfilling themselves to the utmost. He sees history as now swinging back again to objectivity, (for the cycles eternally recur). With its mass movements such as democracy, socialism, and communism especially, there is evidence for Yeats that the present is a shift to objectivity with its repression of individuality and personality.

To illustrate the historical function of the gyres, I have chosen "The Second Coming",[70] which contains the whole of Yeats's cyclical theory of history.

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

Although a knowledge of "~~The~~ A Vision" is helpful to the full experience of the poem, Yeats was careful not to make his poetry too dependent on any arbitrary theory, and as a poem, it is a whole in itself. The gyres are related to the ascending falcon

and the uninitiated reader need not have any knowledge of Yeats's system to realize the experience of dread and impending doom through such awful images as:

> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Certainly an understanding of his symbolism makes the experience more subtle, and more immediate. The poem could not have been written with such prophetic authority without "A Vision". The "widening gyre" is the gyre of objectivity which is reaching its fullest expansion, and when it does so history, having reached the base of the cone (through some cataclismic event), changes to the point of the subjective cone, which starts back again on its ever widening journey. Each time the widest expansion of movement is reached there is a sudden revolution, and the base becomes point. The falcon represents man while the falconer is Christ. Man is spiraling higher and higher away from Christ's influence, and as the cone reaches its widest expansion, a revelation is about to occur when the "Second Coming" will take place in the shape of some nightmare age. Every two thousand years marks a change in the opposite direction for the whirling gyres, and the horror of the new age "where the ceremony of innocence is drowned" when the shape of the beast of the imagination after its "twenty centuries of stormy sleep" rises to be born into reality. "The centre cannot hold", and there must be a change from base to point once more.

Although the twenty centuries represents the dawning of a new era in the very wide sense, it does not conflict with Yeats's idea, for instance that the Rennaissance travelled on the subjective cone, for this movement back and forth is not only seen in terms of centuries but in years, months, minutes and seconds and "the pulsaters of an artery". The gyres are the archetypal pattern mirroring all life, and consequently include time as a whole, and not any specified passage of time.

We see from "The Second Coming" that Yeats not only used the gyres to interpret past time, but future time as well. In the chapter "Dove or Swan" in "A Vision" he says that he is "... searching out signs of the whirling gyres of the historical cone as we see it and hoping that by their study I may see deeper into what is to come." [71]

Having shown how Yeats has used the gyres to contain his cyclical theory of History, I now intend to discuss his use of them in his theories about the individual man and his soul.

If ~~one~~ I were asked to state one word which expresses the theme of most of Yeats's poetry, I ~~would~~ should not hesitate to say "passion". Because most of his poems were written in passionate moments, they are short and highly charged. However in his later years just prior to writing "A Vision" some of his lyrics had lost intensity and seemed to be only illustrations and comments applied to passionate mo~~v~~ements. The light was of the glittering diamond, rather than of the fire,

and his poetry seemed to have the detachment of a mirror. There is no doubt that Yeats felt this subtle change considerably and in the dedication to the 1925 edition of "A Vision", he admitted that the book was not finished since he had mentioned little about sexual love and nothing about the "Beatific Vision". The position of the two subjects was not accidental for the conflicting, interpenetrating gyres were an excellent symbol for sexual love, while in "the conflagration of the whole being of the sexual act", he saw the conflicts resolved, and apprehended the momentary "Beatific Vision".

He wrote in a letter on May 25th, 1926: "One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision - that the mystic vision and sexual love use the same means - opposed yet parallel existences!" Yeats welcomed the sexual aspect of the gyres, as it anchored them in life. It is interesting to note that the interpenetrating gyres bear a close resemblance to Solomon's seal which is a most important device for magical invocations. In his earlier years, when he was studying occult philosphy, and mysticism, and belonged to such secret orders as the society of the Golden Dawn, there is no doubt that Yeats was familiar with the symbolic seal of Solomon. In the seal of one triangle is <u>water</u> and in the other <u>fire</u>. The union of fire and water symbolizes the "marriage of spirit and matter", which Yeats terms the "magical beatitude".

In his poem "The Chosen"[72] written in 1937, Yeats speaks

of the whirling Zodiac, or sphere, containing the whirling gyres, which symbolize reality in this case. He has little to tell of "Beatitude", the immediate apprehension of reality, beyond the aspect of it symbolized in sexual ecstasy.

> The lot of love is chosen. I learnt that much
> Struggling for an image on the track
> Of the whirling Zodiac.
> Scarce did he my body touch,
> Scarce sank he from the west
> Or found a subterranean rest
> On the maternal midnight of my breast
> Before I had marked him on his Northern way,
> And seemed to stand although in bed I lay.
>
> I struggled with the horror of daybreak,
> I chose it for my lot! If questioned on
> My utmost pleasure with a man
> By some new-married bride, I take
> That stillness for a theme
> Where his heart my heart did seem
> And both adrift on the miraculous stream
> Where - wrote a learned astrologer
> The Zodiac is changed into a sphere.

The gyres are the symbol of sexual love, but as Richard Ellmann says: "It would be equally true to say that sexual love is s symbolic of the gyres; symbols reflect one another like mirrors so that a great range of connotation is called into play, and there is no way of separating the two parts of the metaphor, "the dancer from the dance".[73] In "Leda and the Swan", Yeats was just beginning to understand this magical beatitude, this conflagration of the whole body, through the sexual act, although he had not yet symbolized the apprehension of reality, when all problems were immediately resolved, in the outward form of the gyres.

At times Yeats saw the humorous side of his desire for faith in an archetypal pattern which would give him the

key to a resolution of his problems, and a mystical insight into reality. In "Under the Round Tower"[74] written in 1918, the subject matter is a parody on his developing ideas for "A Vision", and shows the interaction of the two cones, which are made into a dance of the Sun and Moon in the round tower (what was to be the sphere to contain the phases of the waxing and waning moon), in the wild dream of a beggarman:

> Although I'd be lapped up in linen
> A deal I'd sweat and little earn
> If I should live as live the neighbours,
> And the beggar, Billy Byrne;
> Stretch bones till the daylight come
> On great-grandfather's battered tomb.
>
> Upon a grey old battered tombstone
> In Slendalough beside the stream,
> Where the O'byrnes and Byrnes are buried,
> He stretched his bones and fell in a dream
> Of sun and moon that a good hour
> Bellowed and pranced in the round tower;
>
> Of golden king and silver lady,
> Bellowing up and bellowing round,
> Till toes mastered a sweet measure,
> Mouth mastered a sweet sound,
> Prancing round and prancing up
> Until he pranced upon the top.
>
> That golden king and that wild lady
> Sang till stars began to fade,
> Hands gripped in hands, toes close together,
> Hair spread in the wind they made;
> That lady and that golden king
> Could like a brace of blackbirds sing.

The sun and moon, or "golden king and silver lady" "bellowing up and bellowing round", in the spinning gyre show all the ironic humour of a man never certain of himself, and desperately searching for a faith.

In "Shepherd and Goatherd"[75] written in 1918, there is a preview of the theory evolved in "A Vision" that the after life is a gradual unwinding of life's memories. The goatherd at the end of the dramatic dialogue sings a song describing life after death.

> Jaunting, journeying
> To his own dayspring,
> He unpacks the loaded pern
> Of all 'twas pain or joy to learn,
> Of all that he had made.
> The outrageous war shall fade;
> At some old winding whitehorn root
> He'll practise on the shepherd's flute,
> Or on the close-cropped grass
> Court his shepherd lass,
> Or put his heart into some game
> Till daytime, playtime seem the same;
> Knowledge he shall unwind
> Through victories of the maid
> Till, clambering at the cradle-side,
> He dreams himself his mother's pride,
> All knowledge lost in trance
> Of sweeter ignorance.

Here we have Yeats's theory of the imortability of the soul.. Yeats borrowed much from oriental thought, including the idea of reincarnation. However his scepticism caused him to add the thirteenth sphere, referred to previously, where man could finally escape rebirth. Having discovered his archetypal pattern for life in the gyres, he evolved it into the personal religion of "A Vision". Yeats knew that he now could live more and more in a world of his own creation. "We had pieced our thoughts into philosophy," he says, and the universe seemed to be coming at last within the influence of his magician's wand.

"Such thought - such thought have I that hold it tight
Till meditation master all its parts,
Nothing can stay my glance
Until that glance run in the world's despite
To where the damned have bawled away their hearts,
And where the blessed dance;
Such thought, that in it bound
I need no other thing,
Wound in mind's wandering
As mummies on the mummy-cloth are wound." 76

The winding-cloth refers to the gyres, and Yeats says "I need no other thing" to complete his apprehension of reality, and achieve the "Unity of Being" for which all men strive and few attain.

The ideal phase in "A Vision" the phase "where Unity of Being is more possible than at any other phase" comes shortly after the full moon, phase 17, and here Yeats classifies himself along with Landor, Dante and Shelley. "The Unity of Being" which he struggled so hard to achieve, is a variant of his father's old ideal of "personality". It is the result of a struggle, for the mind is beginning to burst into fragmentary images, and consequently "The being has for its supreme aim... to hide from itself and others this separation and disorder"; [77] hence the pose and the mask.

Yeats classified all his friends according to their various phases, and most were consigned to less attractive phases than his own, where they could not hope to achieve the Unity of Being which he holds to be the most satisfying condition to be attained in life.

"A Vision" thus became a justification. Yeats was

proud of his own "Unity of Being", and in the essay "If I were Four-and-Twenty", a note of self-congratulation can be detected:

"One day when I was twenty-three or twenty-four this sentence seemed to form in my head, without my willing, much as sentences form when we are half-asleep: "Hammer your thoughts into unity". For days I could think of nothing else, and for years I tested all I did by that sentence. I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy and a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came together. Then for years I said to myself that these two had nothing to do with my form of philosophy, but that I had only to be sincere and keep from constraining one by the other and they would become one interest. Now all three are, I think, or rather all three are a discreet expression of a single conviction and have gained thereby a certain newness - for is not every man's character peculiar to himself - and that I have become a cultivated man."[78]

From 1919 to 1922 Yeats rewrote that first draft of "Autobiographies" which he had written in a mood of self-purgation before his marriage; with "A Vision" in mind ~~reticence was put into~~ he made his narrative more reticent and he suffused it with the serenity of the man who has achieved "Unity of Being." Memories which had been all-important a few years ago, such as the intertwining of Maude Gonne with all his thought and

action during his youth, ~~he~~ were now ~~is~~ considerably reduced in scale; his desperate search for the secrets of the occult world was played down and fitted into unity; the crisis in his fortunes were smoothed over. He had removed many particularities and turned himself into the man of phase 17. Once he had painted the picture of himself, he decided to resemble it. At times he realized this change was a conscious act of the will implying that it had to be thought about to be maintained ; that the resemblance was still semblance and not real. But for the most part it sufficed.

Thus he slowly welded himself and his surroundings into his myth. He was not only a poet, but the symbol of a poet, and as he thought of himself in this capacity his gestures became more noble and his speech more considered. His normal processes of life did not stop of course. He retained his old friendships and the need for them. But his principal interest was to surround himself with material objects which became part of his secret ritual. One of these was the tower, Thoor Ballylee, which he bought in 1915. He wrote of it to John Quinn on July 23, 1918:

"I am making a setting for my old age, a place to influence lawless youth, with its severity and antiquity." He refused to accept a teaching position in Japan because his tower needed "another year's work under my eyes before it is a fitting monument and symbol." The tower and many of its furnishings took on deep significance. The winding stair

which led up the tower became a symbol of spiritual ascent, with a side reference to the visionary gyres, which could be conceived of as the antimony of spirit and matter or heaven and earth. Outside in the garden flowered the Rose. The Yeats touch had turned everything to symbol.

# CHAPTER V

## Conclusion

In an essay on Shelley Yeats said: "... voices would have told him how there is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture that is the image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images, and that this one image, if he would but brood over it his life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household, where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp."[79] Yeats indicated that the poet did not actually have to experience such an adventure, but could experience it in a dream. The adventure then was not real , but created from the imagination.

For some time I have been thinking about this statement, and trying to devise an "adventure" which would reveal the whole of Yeats's life. To provide this, two things have to be considered. First, what was the theme of his life, as he expressed it in his poetry? Secondly, what was the problem

he had to overcome to obtain his desires?

Throughout his life Yeats clung tenaciously to a single theme. As T. S. Eliot says: "Yeats set out to build a system of references which would allow for a unification of sensibility." [80] He wished to find, in his transient life, that "Unity of Being" which would give him a mystical insight into experience, a mastery over life and death. He wished to become a symbol, a receptacle for all human experience, rather than just a symbolist. "His system has for him, consequently, the authority and meaning of a religion, combining intellect and emotion as they were combined before the great analytic and abstracting process of modern science broke them apart. In short Yeats has created a myth". [81] Cleanth Brooks is speaking of "A Vision" which represented a form in which Yeats could contain his whole life and thought. Yeats wished to give "the authority of intellect to attitudes and the intensity of emotions to judgments". [82] He wrapped himself in the symbol so that he might peer beyond the transient world of appearance to find the permanence of eternity. He wanted to arrive at a point where time and death were only meaningless words, where all was timeless and deathless. However, to achieve this mystical experience, this "Unity of Being" as he called it, he had to resolve the dichotomy in his personality between the dreamer and the man of action. This was partly achieved

through tenacious thought, in old age, but the gap between these two facets was never fully closed. He had to be either the dreamer or the man of action. He tried to carry the dream into action, but because he was essentially a dreamer, action was only intended to support the dream. Yet in the dream he desired to be active, to live integrally.

Yeats wished to resolve the man he was, into the man he wanted to be. He was the dreamer. He wanted to be the man of action. To achieve this he donned the mask of the active man - the mask of a senator, a theatre director, an orator; but it was not real. It was still a mask.

In meditating upon Yeats's desires, and that which he had to overcome to achieve those desires, I have imagined the following "adventure" which I think might be close to what would be "the secret image of his life".

I see a pale, dream-filled young man, languishing under a tree with a rose in his hand. A full moon is shining upon him, and in the shadowy distance, looms the slender spires of an ancient eastern city. Closer, the moon makes silver reflections on a silent lake, in the middle of which is an island. He slowly rises to his feet and walks across the dark valley through vague, hovering shadows to where a brilliant sun is shining. Before passing from the moon-filled night into the bright daylight, he dons an arrogant, passionate mask, the opposite of his own dreamy face. He squares

his shoulders defiantly, puts the rose in his pocket, and with the mask securely on his face, walks casually into the daylight. He has been reluctantly forced to leave the night for, lying under the tree, he has seen a beautiful woman, standing defiantly under the glaring sun, screaming to a sullen mob, and has fallen in love with her. Near the woman is a man, sneering at the boy under the tree. Walking into the daylight, his mask becomes loose and he rushes back into the darkness, sobbing, only to return once again into the daylight. He makes several attempts to woo the woman in the sunlight, but she refuses to pay attention to him. He finally carries back an image of her to the twilight land with other various images; a city, a sword, a tower, and two interlocked cones, to stand them about in the shadowed land.

This is the "adventure" which seems to me to reveal the theme of Yeats's life; to reveal his desires, the problems in the way of their achievement, and to reveal to what extent these problems were overcome. I would like now to delineate one "image", still, and unchangeable, that his "secret life" ~~might~~ may be shown as a more composite symbol than the "adventure".

I see a man standing on the edge of moonlit darkness with arms outstretched. He is peering into the night at the shadows filling the landscape. The hand extended to the night holds a rose. The other hand is held in the harsh sunlight,

and holds a gyre, or cone. To the back of his head, and consequently facing the sun, is attached a mask whose features are of a proud, arrogant, passionate person.

The purpose of the "adventure" is to make the "image" more understandable, for it is more ~~composite~~ inclusive than the "adventure" and consequently a better symbol for Yeats's life.

The sun and moon, daylight and darkness are more important symbols to Yeats as has been shown in the previous chapters. They represent the dream world and the world of action respectively. The moon is all that romance implies: ideal beauty, ideal love, and ideal virtue. The land of shadow held the true significance for Yeats.

> ....and yet when all is said
> It was the dream itself enchanted me.[83]

His active life in the sunshine, in the world of appearance, was intended to support and improve the dream world where he could

> ....mock at Death and Time with glances
> And wavering arms and wandering dances.[84]

The eastern city in the "adventure" is Byzantium, the place of the young and the imagination, where intellect is neglected and old age can never enter.

> That is no country for old men.
> The young in one another's arms, birds in the trees,
>
> - - - - -
>
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
> Monuments of unaging intellect".[85]

without a religion ~~or~~ *and* without a system of ethics, and he had to make them for himself. "....my father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidence of religion and I weighed the matter perpetually with great anxiety for I did not think that I could live without religion". He could not live in his dream, because he was forced to prove its validity in the light of logic - to investigate it thoroughly.

The woman haranguing the sullen mob is Maud Gonne, an active, passionate woman who is the opposite of the dreamy Yeats. To win her love he had to become like her - for she respected only men of action. Consequently he became an active man for her, but this was only self-deception. It was not the true character of Yeats. Entering the daylight, the world of appearance, he dons the mask to hide the moonlight youth. However, Maud Gonne, saw through the mask and did not love him. She had no desire for his kind of life and Yeats had no desire for hers, although he symbolized her under such names as Helen, and Sheba, making her an immortal ideal under the moonlight. His attitude to the unrequited love, and to her career, is well shown in "No Second Troy".[88.]

> Why should I blame her that she filled my days
> With misery, or that she would of late
> Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
> Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
> Had they but courage equal to desire?
> What could have made her peaceful with a mind
> That nobleness made simple as a fire,
> With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind

That is not natural in an age like this,
Being high and solitary and most stern?
Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
Was there another Troy for her to burn?

It was not possible for Yeats to maintain a mask and practice self-deception, because of his desire for stability and faith, which had not been given to him by his sceptical father; he had to fix and stabilize the world for himself. Consequently, he had to be a symbolist. He had to make the transient eternal; he had to make all he experienced and saw in his passing life, permanent. When he returned to the gloom and took off the mask, he always carried something back with him to settle it in the deathless "Land of the Young". The Greek city of Byzantium was resurrected in the moonlight as the eternal city of the imagination. Innisfree, an island off Sligo, his home as a youth, became the island of eternal peace. Maud Gonne became Helen of Troy, the symbol of heroic womanhood. The tower, Thoor Ballylee, in which he lived as an older man, became transformed into the tower of the intellect - the eternal searching for truth. It was the same tower where

Il Penseroso's Platonist toiled on
In some like chamber, shadowing forth
How the daemonic rage
Imagined everywhere.
Benighted travellers
From markets and from fairs
Have seen his midnight candle glimmering .89.

With no inherited faith to rely upon, Yeats had to make his own. He wished to resolve the dichotomy, to bring the dream and reality together.

> Oh may the moon and sunlight seem
> One inextricable beam....

His attempt to achieve that "Unity of Being" was the attempt to make thought and feeling coincide. The partial resolution of the dichotomy was his belief that man made his own destiny - that life and reality was an act of the individual will. Man makes his own reality.

> I mock Plotinus' thought
> And cry in Plato's teeth,
> Death and Life were naught
> Till man made up the whole
> Made lock, stock and barrel
> Out of ~~the~~ his bitter soul.
>
> Aye, sun and moon and star, all
> And further add to that
> That, being dead we rise,
> Dream and so create
> Translunar Paradise.[13]

To pass from the "adventure" to the "image", the dichotomy in his personality is represented by the opposing symbols of night and day, moon and sun, man and mask.

The gyre he holds in his sunlit hand is a later development of the mask. The mask was an excellent symbol for man making his own reality, but ~~he~~ it could not apply to events, to history, and to all human experience. It was too restricted. He needed some larger artifice, something he had created, some-

thing bounded that he might show the boundless; something known to contain the unknown. This was the gyre, cone or "pern" which contained his whole thought of "reality and justice". In the gyre he had created his destiny:

> ...You can fashion everything
> From nothing every day, and teach
> The morning stars to sing....[92.]

Despite the changes in his method, style and personality, Yeats's life was consistent. From the dreamer who wished to control the world with a magician's wand, to the old man who said, "I make the truth," he stated his themes, which he developed in childhood, with increasing maturity. His physical weakness and timidity as a child encouraged him to nourish his imagination on heroic self-projections until his dreams far exceeded reality. He was Oisin, the mighty warrior, loved by the beautiful Queen Niamh, who says of him:

> I loved no man though kings besought,
> Until the Danaan poets brought
> Rhyme that rhymed upon Oisin's name,
> And now I am dizzy with the thought,
> Of all that wisdom and the fame
> Of battles broken by his hands,
> Of stories builded by his words
> That are like coloured Asian birds
> At evening in their rainless lands.[93.]

He then tried to become the hero of his dreams and instill that heroic atmosphere into Ireland. He connects Ireland with the Rose, his symbol of noble beauty and the fire of

romance, in "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time" :[94].

"Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
The Druid, grey, wood-dashed nutured,
Quiet-eyed
To cast round Fergus dreams, ....
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

- - - - -

Come near; I would before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.

Yeats finally grasped the main theme behind all his father's remarks, that a poet's knowledge of truth is different from a priest's or scientist's, and that Yeats's kind of truth was best expressed in poetry. Louis Macniece says in the Introduction to "The Poetry of W. B. Yeats": "Poetry, I think cannot be assessed solely in terms of itself; it must be referred back to life. But to what life? The great difference, I would say, between the scientist and the artist is that life for the scientist means something outside himself, neither affecting him nor affected by him, as life for the poet is essentially his life". From this paragraph, I think two valuable things can be drawn with reference to Yeats. Firstly, the difference between the scientist's and the poet's knowledge is the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. Because he sought self-knowledge, Yeats could not be impersonal. Second,

that poetry must be referred to life. Yeats's father influenced his pre-Raphaelite belief at first in art for art's sake, rather than for the sake of life, which was dangerous for the young man who, always having been timid and retiring, could make the pre-Raphaelite belief into an excuse for complete withdrawal from active life. Yeats was a poet because he had to be; because it was the only way he could express his kind of truth. In his revolt against J.B. Yeats's theories, Yeats was still conditioned by his father's artistic temperament, and he had to find a belief in himself. Poetry being the medium of inward vision, was necessary for him. He passionately wished to believe in himself, not only as an individual but in the universal sense of the word "self". Poetry is the most complete, because the most apprehended form, for asking such questions as, What is man? What is life? Who am I?

Yeats went into manhood without a system of religious belief, politics or ethics, but he was held together by the single-mindedness of his revolt against his father and the times. In trying to write from his mask, all that he was not, he broke from Victorian optimism, decorum and sensibility, which "subordinated the imaginative act of assimilating the incongruous, to the logical act of matching the congruent," 95. and carefully disciplined his dramatic powers. He wished to

make the revolt as decisive and systematic as possible.

He clothed himself in passionate aggressiveness but was never completely sure of himself because of his failures, especially in love, and because he had accepted too much of his father's scepticism. "There was no dominant opinion I could accept. Then finding out that I.... had become both boor and bore, I invented a patter, allowing myself an easy man's sincerity, and for honesty's sake a little malice, and now it seems I can talk nothing else." 96. If he had not been uncertain of himself, he would have gone into a private world and written for small audiences like most poets in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As it was, his uncertainty drove him to make an accomodation to his times and audience.

However, he always drew back from excesses, even in passion, his trade-mark, and believed that "Truth is the dramatic expression of the highest man." He would not tolerate passion unless it was noble. His nationalist feeling in which passion was self-justifying might have made for demagoguy were it not for this spirit. In "The Dedication to a Book of Stories Selected from the Irish Novelists" [97] can be seen this noble, disciplined passion.

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

- - - - -

I tore it from green boughs winds tore and
tossed
Until the sap of summer had grown weary!
I tore it from the barren boughs of Eire,
That country where a man can be so crassed;

Can we so battered, badgered and destroyed
That he's a loveless man; gay bells bring
laughter
That shakes a mouldering cobweb from the rafter;
And yet the saddest chimes are best enjoyed.

Gay bells or sad, they bring you memories
of half-forgotten innocent old places.
We and our bitterness have left no traces
On Munster grass and Connemara skies.

Throughout his life Yeats read personal problems into national problems, and national problems into personal ones, as in "No Second Troy". He wanted to give to his country what he himself lacked, "a liberated, unified personality, free of certainty about power and principle, no longer struggling in the bonds of the past."

He was always contemptuous of the middle self; the middle ground which was neither this nor that. He thought it better to be a dreamer or a heroic man of action, not a weakling hovering between the two. It can be seen why he hated the bourgeouis class and exalted the peasant and the nobility. This attitude, which has often been taken for an aristocratic snobbishness, can be seen in the preface to "Responsibilities," written in 1914.

Merchant and scholar who have left me blood
That has not passed through any huckster's loin...

Because he was torn between action and the dream, he deliberately magnified the dichotomy, that he could alternate between them rather than make them a medley. On one side he developed his dreams, supporting them by fairy tales of peasantry, which had not the doubt in them expressed in poems of urban life, then by supporting Blake, occult research, visions, psychic research, philosophy, and Eastern religion. All these proved the power of the dream, which extended to include imagination and will, to control reality. He not only proved that power, but used it; the dream must be shown in practical action. For this reason there was no real escape in dreams. They all led to action. He had to pit himself directly against the world and prove to both it and himself that the dreamer could control reality. The life of action was only tolerable because it was the supreme artifice to him. Success in action was only a passing reward.

> I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs,
> Those undreamt accidents that have made me
> - Seeing that Fame has perished this long while,
> Being but a part of ancient ceremony -
> Notorious, till all my priceless things
> Are but a post the passing dogs defile.[98]

He played with reality, and all the time sought confirmation of his dreams. Through marriage and his new home, Thoor Ballylee, he anchored the dream, making it large and manipulateable, to give him a great control over reality. Armed

with his "Vision" which had been created through much help from his wife, Yeats could enter life more fully without losing his identity. He believed that all human experience could be controlled. His dream, then, was more than a dream; ~~but~~ it was a symbol, "a stylistic arrangement of experience, a representation of the flux of life which transcends the flux but is also immenent in it."[99] He made the dream strong and untouchable by connecting it to everything that happened, and as he found that life fitted into it without much paring, he lived more and more in this stylistically arranged world, which rotated according to a design discovered in his household. The dream was no longer a beautiful refuge. The symbols of "A Vision" comfort by coherence, but they are not beautiful nor are they a refuge, because they represent reality, and without reality they are nothing.

Symbolism, then, was Yeats's method because he could not otherwise have written. The symbol allowed him to escape uncertainty and to partake of the advantages of both dream and reality. It protected him from the sceptic with his direct arguments, and the realist with his collection of distrubing facts. The symbol gave his life unity and liberation, being the living form between scepticism and superstition. He could pin man on a diagram and include God under the name of the Thirteenth Cycle. Thus God, re-

presenting the uncontrollable could be controlled. He worked hard to change his terms of reference from sceptism and superstition, to knowledge and faith. He wished to reconcile "spiritist fact with credible philosophy," to bring myth and fact into a new religion, or as he called it, a "sacred drama" of "Unity of Being".

To reach this position it was impossible to know where the dream left off and reality began. Yeats was never satisfied with his accomplishment and continued his uneasy searching to the end.

> 'The work is done,' grown old he thought
> 'According to my boyish plan;
> Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
> Something to perfection brought.'
> But louder sang that ghost," 'What then?' [100]

He realized that his use of symbolism resulted partly from his timidity, and evasion of life. He often observed in some of his friends a natural insight into reality, which he could only equal through prolonged study. Although he was consoled that his symbols revealed reality and were not direct statements, all his successes seemed inadequate beside his failure to achieve direct insight into reality. The answers came no more easily when old than when young. This is well shown by the heroic despair felt by the protagonist, in "The Black Tower",[101] when the king would not come.

The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber
Catching small birds in the dew of the morn
When we hale men lie stretched in slumber
Swears that he hears the king's great horn.
But he's a lying hound.

Stand we on guard oak-bound

Chorus:

There in the tomb the dark grows blacker,
But wind comes up from the shore:
They shake when the winds roar,
Old bones upon the mountain shake.

Yeats's poetry is exclusively of the individual who rarely indicates social sympathies or an awareness of moral laws, though he has a conscience from an unexplained source. He was never an individualist like Blake, however, but wrote for an audience, to be understood. Richard Ellman says, "Though he never ceases to regard himself as a rebel whom society has imprisoned, he builds his own jails, escapes from them, then builds others; or to put it in another way, Yeats hides in the center of the city and emblazons his name on his hiding place and equips it with a public-address system."[102] The jails are Yeats's symbols in which he passionately believes for a time, then becomes sceptical of the, and builds others only to become eventually sceptical of them as well. He never achieved actual unity, he could not resolve the dichotomy in his personality, for his symbols represented that unifying force to him, and during his sceptical moments, he disbelieved in his "faith", realizing

that the unity was only achieved by a conscious act of the will, and therefore not permanent.

His poetry is popular, not personal or occult and his verse is lyrical. The brevity of most of the poems suggests that they were written in times of great excitement. His poetry is of the most passionate experiences. It is quite understandable that it is full of miracles, for miracle is the point where dream and reality meet. His miracles are those of being possessed, whether sensually, Divinely or artistically. They are a conflagration of the whole being; the god descends or man rises. Matter is transmuted into spirit. This transmutation is well shown in 'Leda and The Swan'[103], where matter and spirit meet to produce a conflagration of the whole being.

> A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
> Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
> By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
> He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
>
> How can those terrified vague fingers push
> The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
> And how can body, laid in that white rush,
> But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
>
> A shudder in the loins engenders there
> The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
> And Agamemnon dead.
> Being so caught up,
> So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
> Did she put on his knowledge with his power,
> Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Sexual intercourse is a miracle for Yeats, who finds the con-

flagration of being, where spirit and matter meet, and all problems are resolved, in the height of passion, when identity is lost.

In his poetry there is a counter theme as well, the dispossession or failure to possess, ~~can~~ and consequent remorse for this failure.

> Did she put on knowledge with his power
> Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

after satiation was anything changed?

In "Sailing to Byzantium", the main image is an enraptured pray for transmutation, for possession by the god.

> O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre
> And by the singing-masters of my sould.
> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.

The vision descends and demands emotional response, not belief.

> ....; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.

In his early work, Yeats lingered between sense and spirit, but soon realized his mistake. "How often had I heard men of my time talk of the meeting of spirit and sense, yet there is no meeting but only change upon the instant, and it is by the perception of a change, like the sudden "blacking out" of the lights of the stage, that passion creates its most

violent sensation." [104].

Yeats always walked the thin line between false choices, always uncertain and always seeking a faith. He echoes the belief of Arthur Rimband in his prose poem "A Season in Hell."

"'To whom shall I hire myself out? What beast should I adore? What holy image is attacked? What hearts shall I break? What lies should I uphold? In what blood tread?.... - ah! I am so utterly forsaken that to any divine image whatsoever, I offer my impulses toward perfection?"

Yet despite this uncertainty, Yeats's intense desire for stability informed his poetry with tremendous organization, and this poetic sensibility saved him from making a case history of crises. Every crisis is mastered in the poems through this organization. He often spent years of preparation over a single poem, leaving nothing to chance. Cleamth Brooks in "'Modern Poetry and the Tradition'" says that in Yeats's poems there was "nothing but concrete and meaningful images, in terms of which the play of the mind may exhibit itself - that play being not rigidly conceptual and bare, but enriched with all sorts of associations. Yeats's later poetry, like the poetry of John Donne, reveals the 'mind at the finger-tips'".[105].

Throughout his life Yeats kept asking: What is

truth? What is reality? What is man? His answers were symbolic and in harmony with each other, for they sprang from a unified consciousness. "Few poets have found mastery of themselves and of their craft so difficult or have sought such mastery, through conflict and struggle, so unflinchingly." [106].

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## NOTES

### Introduction.

1. ESSAYS, P. 301.

2. IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL, P.176. From "William Blake and His Illustrations To 'THE DIVINE COMEDY.'"

3. IBID., Pp.90-91. From "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry", 1900.

4. IBID., P.196. From "William Blake and His Illustrations," 1897.

5. THE CUTTING OF AN AGATE, P.22. From "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," April, 1918.

6. IBID., P.94. From "Discoveries", 1906.

7. IBID., P.104. From "The Thinking of the Body" in "Discoveries".

8. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, Pp.236, 239, 241. From "The Trembling of the Veil", 1922.

9. IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL, P.239. From "The Symbolism of Poetry", 1900.

10. C.P., P.242. From "Among School Children".

11. IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL, P.217. From "William Blake and His Illustrations", 1897.

12. THE CUTTING OF AN AGATE. P.110. From "Discoveries", 1906, the section entitled "The Holy Places."

13. YEATS: THE MAN AND THE MASK. Richard Ellmann. Macmillan Co., New York, 1948. P.6.

### Chapter I

14. See p. 73.

15. AXEL'S CASTLE, Edmund Wilson. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1948. P.18.

16. IBID., P.20

17. THE HERITAGE OF SYMBOLISM, C.M. Boura. Macmillan Co., London, 1947. P.206.

18. ESSAYS, Pp.33, 180, 188. From "Ideas of Good and Evil."

19. IBID., P.183.

20. IBID., P.33.

21. IDEAS OF GOOD AND EVIL, P.192. From "The Symbolism of Poetry".

22. IBID., P.197. From "The Symbolism of Poetry."

23. THE HERITAGE OF SYMBOLISM. C. M. Boura. P.186.

24. C.P., P.75. From "He Thinks of Those Who Have Spoken Evil of His Beloved."

25. C.P., P.81.

26. C.P., P.80. From "The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers".

27. C.P., P.56. From "To Ireland in the Coming Times."

28. See Pp.29, 100, 101, 102.

29. W.B. YEATS MAN AND POET. A. Norman Jeffares. Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1949. P.46.

30. C.P.,P.74.

31. IBID., P.217.

32. IBID., P.242.

33. The top of Yeats's tower, Thoor Ballylee, had been damaged before he bought it. Although he fully intended to rebuild the whole upper part, he did not do so, and consequently used the damaged section as part of his symbolic meaning.

34. See Pp. 13, 100, 101, 102.

## Chapter II.

35. See Pp. 38, 128, note 67.

36. C.P., P.220. From "The Tower".

37. IBID, P.16.

38. Swinburne, at this time, had a great influence upon Yeats.

39. SWINBURNE. From "The Garden of Proserpine".

40. C.P., P.41.

41. IBID, P.41.

42. IBID., P.41.

43. ESSAYS. From "The Celtic Twilight". P.210.

44. C.P., P.56.

45. IBID, P.62

46. IBID, P.69.

47. See P.52.

48. C.P., P.217.

49. IBID, P.77.

50. IBID, P.78.

51. IBID, P.80.

52. See Pp. 74, 76, 82, 83, 84.

53. ESSAYS, P. 79.

54. See Pp. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Chapter III

55. C.P.. P.279. From "Coole Park, 1929."

Chapter IV.

56. A VISION. Privately printed edition of 1925.

57. IBID. From The Introduction, Section II, P.5.

58. PER AMICA SILENTIA LUNAE, P. 34.

59. C.P., P.180.

60. A VISION. From stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends: An Extract From a Record Made by His Pupils. P.32.

61. IBID. P.37, II.

62. IBID., P.69.

63. IBID., P.70.

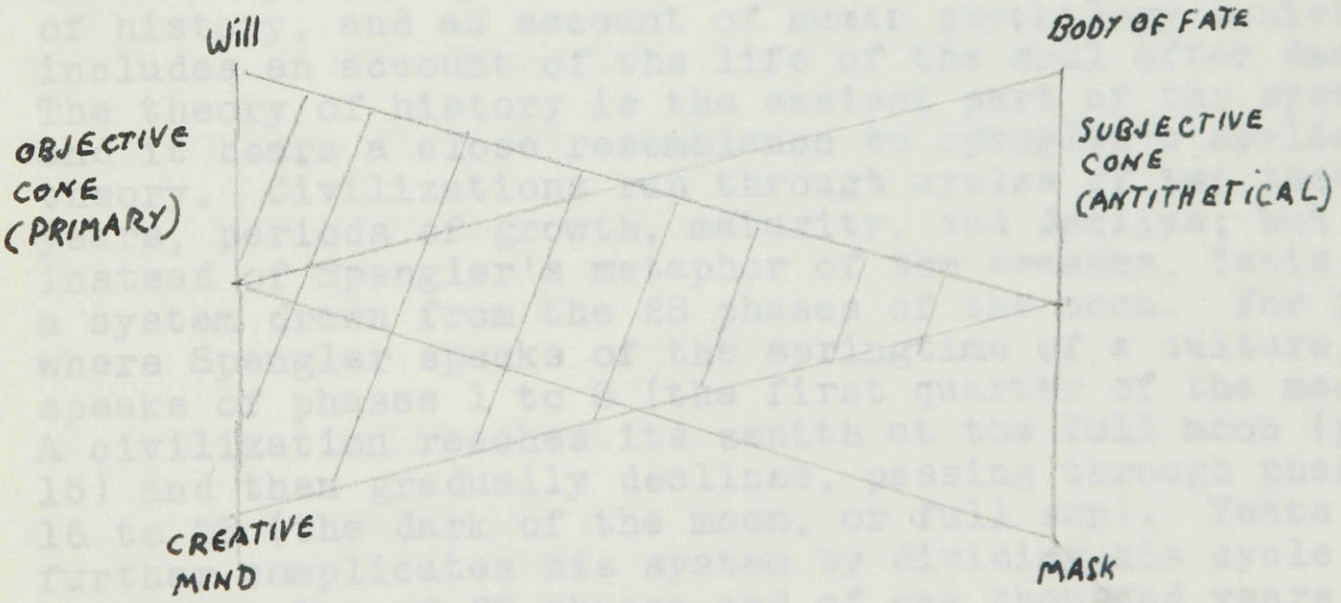
64. THE VISION OF HELL. Dante. Canto xvii, Cary's translation (Dent, 1908 and 1909), Pp.73, 128 seg.

65. A VISION. From "The Phases of the Moon", P.59.

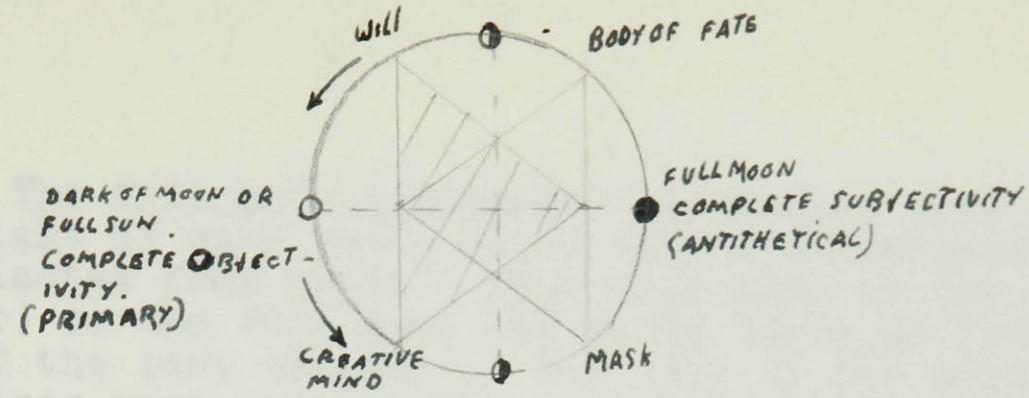
66. A VISION, P.69-71.

67. The following diagrams and the added explanation of the system should help the reader to understand the theory of the "great wheel" as a development of the theory of the interlocking gyres.

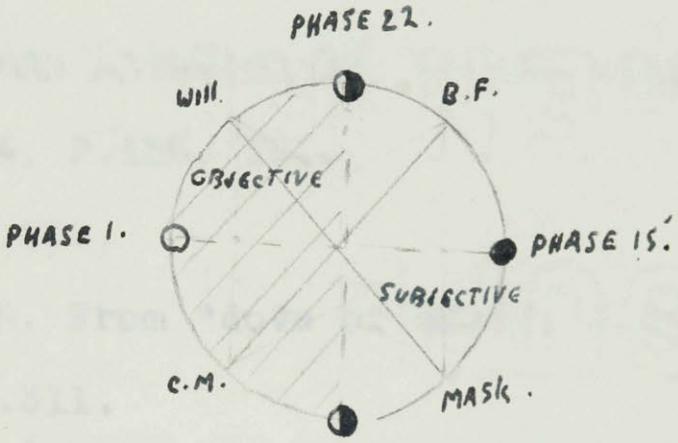
1.



2.




3.




Yeats's system may be broken up into two parts: a picture of history, and an account of human psychology (which includes an account of the life of the soul after death). The theory of history is the easiest part of the system, and it bears a close resemblance to Spengler's cyclic theory. Civilizations run through cycles of two thousand years, periods of growth, maturity, and decline; but instead of Spengler's metaphor of the seasons, Yeats uses a system drawn from the 28 phases of the moon. For instance, where Spengler speaks of the springtime of a culture, Yeats speaks of phases 1 to 8 (the first quarter of the moon). A civilization reaches its zenith at the full moon (phase 15) and then gradually declines, passing through phases 16 to 28 (the dark of the moon, or full sun). Yeats further complicates his system by dividing his cycle into two subcycles of 28 phases and of one thousand years each. The phases 15 of these two subcycles which make up the two thousand years of Christian civilization under Justinian and the Renaissance. Our own period is at phase 23 of the second subcycle. The moon is rounding toward the dark when the new civilization to dominate the next two thousand years will announce itself - "The Second Coming".

The full moon (phase 15) symbolizes pure subjectivity, the height of what Yeats calls the "Antithetical" which predominates from phase 8 (the half moon of the first quarter) to the full moon and on to phase 22 (the half moon of the last quarter). The dark of the moon (full sun) symbolizes pure objectivity, the height of what Yeats calls the "primary", which dominates from phases 22 to phase 8. The critical phases themselves, 8 and 22, since they represent equal mixtures of primary and antithetical, are periods of great stress and change. Each of the various 28 phases, is assigned a special character in the same way.

68. THE GOLDEN NIGHTINGALE. Donald Stauffer. P.11.

69. A VISION, P.130, 131.

70. C.P., P.210.

71. A VISION. From "dove or Swan", P.230.

72. C.P., P.311.

73. C.P., P.242. From "Among School Children".

74. C.P., P.154.

75. C.P., P.159.

76. C.P., P.259. From "All Soul's Night."

77. A VISION. From "Phase Seventeen", P.75, 77.

78. IF I WERE FOUR-AND-TWENTY, 1.

## Chapter V.

79. ESSAYS, P.116. From "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry".

80. MODERN POETRY AND THE TRADITION. Cleanth Brooks. The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, 1939. P.176.

81. IBID, P.176.

82. IBID., P.177.

83. LAST POEMS. From "The Circus Animals Desertion", P.81.

84. C.P., From "The Wanderings of Oisin", P. 332.

85. IBID., P.217.

86. IBID., P.326.

87. IBID., P.44.

88. IBID., P.101.

89. A VISION. From "The Phases of the Moon", P.59.

90. C.P., From "The Tower". P.220.

91. IBID., P.91. From "The Tower."

92. IBID., P.239. From "A Prayer For My Son."

93. IBID., P.325. From "The Wanderings of Oisin."

94. IBID., P.35.

95. MODERN POETRY AND THE TRADITION. Cleanth Brooks. P.200.

96. YEATS: THE MAN AND THE MASKS. Unpublished letters to Edward Dowden.

97. C.P., P.51.

98. IBID., P.143. Epilogue to "Responsibilities", 1914.

99. YEATS: THE MAN AND THE MASKS. Richard Ellmann.P.290.

100. LAST POEMS, P.30.

101. LAST POEMS, P.13.

102. YEATS: THE MAN AND THE MASKS. Richard Ellmann. P.293.

103. C.P., P.241.

104. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, P.403.

105. MODERN POETRY AND THE TRADITION. Cleanth Brooks. P.212.

106. YEATS: THE MAN AND THE MASKS. Richard Ellmann. P.295.