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THE EVOLUTION OF YEATS'S POETIC  
THEORY, 1886-1917.

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THE EVOLUTION OF YEATS'S POETIC  
THEORY, 1886-1917

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University

November, 1979.

MASTER OF ARTS (1979)  
(English)

McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Evolution of Yeats's **Poetic** Theory, 1886-1917.

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SUPERVISOR: Dr. Brian John.

NUMBER OF PAGES: 107,

Abstract:

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that Yeats's articles, reviews, and essays, spanning the years 1185-1911, accurately describe the evolution of his theory of Unity. The Image, which he stressed in his critical work, was one that he forged for Ireland as an national ideal, and in his poetry, it was a symbol of Unity. On both national and poetic levels, it represented passion, tragic gaiety, the heroic anti-self, "perfection of personality" and self-fulfilment, all of which are aspects fundamental to his Doctrine of the Mask, outlined in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917). Moreover, we cannot fully understand the metamorphosis of the Image without considering various influences: Blake, Shelley, the Rhymers, The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and Mythology. These influences, combined with the cultural situation in Ireland, thus gave rise to the matrix of ideas premised in his essays, reviews, and articles, with clear effects on his poetry and drama. Furthermore, what evolves from these premises is a literary tradition in Ireland, a cyclic theory of history (Unity of Era and Culture being correlative to Unity of Being), a key to interpreting the universe, a psychology of self, and a metaphysics.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my Supervisor, Dr. Brian John for his patience, his assistance, and most of all, for his "...wisdom of the daimonic images."

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## INTRODUCTION

"Be secret and exult"<sup>1</sup> is the predominant theme of Yeats's critical, poetic and dramatic work. It is a cry that demands man's confrontation with tragedy and, consequently, his ability to rise out of it and be "gay". For to triumph over despair, to be fascinated by that which is difficult, is to confront life's tragedy and demand that the self be sustained by the "bitter crust" that it represents. It is on this basis that Yeats's theory of Unity is deeply "rooted in humanism,"<sup>2</sup> and consequently, his Doctrine of the Mask, from its nascent concept to its full expression in A Vision (1927), is a declaration that heralds man's quest for self-fulfilment, for ultimate "Unity of Being."

Yeats's theory of Unity, which he had fully developed by 1917, included the belief that man had fallen from a former state of unity and now lived in a state of partial being. Yeats's instinct was to return to that lost state,

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<sup>1</sup>W. B. Yeats, "To a Friend whose work has come to Nothing" (1914), Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 122. Henceforward, this volume will be referred to as C.P.

<sup>2</sup>Brian John, Supreme Fictions (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), p. 154.

to be re-united with his "buried self". He saw that "subjective" men, men who were aware of this tragic fall into disunity, were spurred into the positive, creative action of self-fulfilment.

As early as 1886, Yeats recognized this spiritual conflict and by 1895, in a short essay entitled "The Moods", he outlined his first philosophical boundaries of this belief. He affirmed that the artist, as a creative being, was spiritually bound to his past and could, through art, "discover immortal moods in mortal desires," an "undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions," and a "divine love in sexual passion."<sup>3</sup> In such a way, man could re-achieve Unity.

Thus, that "mysterious instinct"<sup>4</sup> for Unity of Being forced man to create art, and there, actively, to seek reality. For in art, as Yeats later said in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917), man could create a mask that represented all those qualities that he most lacked, and consequently, re-attain Unity of Being. Therefore, art was a vision of reality because its creation arose from a tension of opposites, and

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<sup>3</sup>"The Moods" (1895), Essays and Introductions (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 195. Henceforth, this work will be referred to as E.I.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

that tension, once sustained, gave rise to vision because "we sing amid our uncertainty."

Passion is the goal of the artist, Yeats had always believed, for passion forces him to reject a mundane, monochrome life and to seek out an heroic past. In his Autobiography<sup>5</sup>, he describes this necessity for passion if man is to sustain himself on life's tragedy and regain his lost antithetical self:

My mind began drifting towards that doctrine of "the Mask" which has convinced me that every passionate man (I have nothing to do with mechanist, philanthropist, or men whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were linked to another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy.<sup>6</sup>

This doctrine, that proclaimed man's drive for "Unity of Being," was a reaction to what Yeats saw in a passive and negatively hostile Ireland. It was a philosophy, and mythology that was bent on giving back an heroic and passionate past to an effete and tragic generation of anglicised Irishmen whose passive lives were rooted in the mundane and in materialism.

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<sup>5</sup>It must be noted that while Yeats was writing Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) he also was compiling his Autobiography. Consequently, biographical data anachronistically yields to mythical time, thus enabling Yeats to seed, strategically, the "doctrine of the Mask" where it suits him.

<sup>6</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 133. Henceforward, this work will be referred to as Autobiography.

Declaring in his early critical work that it was necessary to stir the forgotten instincts from the past, to bring back Cuchulains, to disinter from their graves the O'Learys of a dead "romantic Ireland," the poet affirmed the belief that through the revival of the past, Era, Culture and Being could re-achieve their former unity of Magnus Annus.<sup>7</sup> It was this craving for fulfilment and for a renaissance of a moribund passionate past that heralds his work as a doctrine of Unity.

The doctrine of the Mask (1917) was a correlative metaphor for all things natural and supernatural and it combined era, nation and man in an image composed of antitheses. Although it did not form as a complete cosmic theory until after 1909, the poet always struggled to find that metaphor for a personal religion, for as he said when he rebelled against his father's skepticism: "I did not think I could live without religion."<sup>8</sup>

In his Autobiography, he describes his reasons for such a doctrine which would synthesize opposing forces in "Nations, races, and individual men" and so "seek unity" when the will is roused "to full intensity":

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<sup>7</sup>Magnus Annus forms part of Yeats's completed cosmological system. It refers to that time when Era, Culture and Being were a unified whole. "The Second Coming" (1921) would represent its antithesis, since the "scattering" predicts total destruction in the millennium. The 'revolution' of Magnus Annus takes 26,000 years.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1959), p. 19. Henceforward this work will be referred to as Unterecker.

Nations, races, and individual men are unified by an image, or a 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. I had seen Ireland in my own time turn from the bragging rhetoric and gregarious humour of O'Connell's generation and school, and offer herself to the solitary and proud Parnell as to her anti-self, buskin following hard on sock, and I had begun to hope, or to half-hope, that we might be the first in Europe to seek unity as deliberately as it had been sought by theologian, poet, sculpture, architect, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. <sup>9</sup>

Yeats's critical work offers the most accurate description of the development of his theory of Unity. More exactly than his Autobiography, his articles, reviews, and lectures, spanning the years 1886 to 1911, reveal his national and personal motives for creating a formula which would serve as a basis for his work, and provide a literary tradition for Ireland. Moreover, his essays present an elaboration of his various interests, ranging from mythology, occultism, Shelley and Blake to the Japanese Theatre, therein disclosing his ontological principles of the world and man.

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<sup>9</sup> Autobiography, p. 170.

This early side of Yeats, as revealed in his Uncollected Prose,<sup>10</sup> Ideas of Good and Evil (1903) and The Cutting of an Agate (1912), will be the focus of this thesis. Dealing first with the period 1886 to 1896, I will show Yeats's early belief in antitheses, unity, passion, and the power of art to reveal a vision of unity and man's infinite status. "Life is greater than the cause,"<sup>11</sup> O'Leary once told Yeats, and in view of Yeats's beliefs, we see to what extent this principle influenced his conception of man and the world of the imagination.

During the subsequent years 1896 to 1911, Yeats amassed his previously gained information into a more structured theory of Unity, his work with the theatre providing him with a means for dramatizing this theory. An interesting shift occurs in this period, for although still concerned with mythology and folk-lore as a cultural strength in Ireland, he began to focus his attention more on the spiritual power of that life as being an extension of

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<sup>10</sup>W. B. Yeats, Uncollected Prose, 2 vols., I: First Reviews and Articles, ed. John P. Frayne; II: Reviews, Articles, etc., ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, 1976). Both these volumes have been invaluable, providing introductory chapters, extensive commentaries, and thorough editorial work. Henceforward, these volumes will be respectively referred to as U.P., I/II.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats, ed. Donald K. Pearce (Bloomington, 1960), p. 16.

the soul, an internal history momentarily forgotten. As a result, the action of his drama is centrifocal, delving into man's subconscious existence and producing an internal drama, the end of which is vision and self-revelation.

However, in 1932, commenting to Horace Reynolds on his years spent as a critic-reviewer, Yeats spoke unfavourably:

I am glad to have read these essays of mine after so many years. I find that I am still in agreement with all the generalizations, but not with the examples chosen. I praise Todhunter and others out of measure because they were symbols of generalizations and good friends to my Father and myself. The articles are much better than my memory of them, but I knew better than I wrote. I was a propagandist and hated being one. It seems to me that I remember almost the day and hour when revising for some reprint my essay upon the Celtic movement I saw clearly the unrealities and half-truths propaganda had involved me in, and the way out. All one's life one struggles towards reality, finding always but new veils. One knows everything in one's mind. It is the words, children of the occasion, that betray.<sup>12</sup>

As he himself stated in his Autobiography, "It was many years before I understood that I had surrendered myself to the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil.

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<sup>12</sup>Letter, dated December 24, 1932. Quoted in U.P. I, 34.

Metrical composition...."<sup>13</sup> Yet, conversely, he admitted, at an earlier date in 1898, that he had derived many "work-able subjects" and sources for "plots and atmosphere"<sup>14</sup> from critical work.

Although the literary method displeased and frustrated him, Yeats's critical work enabled him to amass an impressive amount of knowledge, suitable for his personal art. Moreover, his artistic goal -- to foster a theme of Unity, whether in his own art or in the literary tradition of Ireland -- does not deserve the label of "propaganda" as much as it does the term "positive Nationalism." For according to Torchiana:

From the national point of view W. B. Yeats occupies an almost unique position in Irish life; for he is virtually the first man since Swift who has been able to bring the Anglo-Irish tradition into line with positive Nationalism.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, whether as a critic, dramatist or poet, Yeats does not relinquish his belief in man's potential for self-

<sup>13</sup>Autobiography, p. 173.

<sup>14</sup>Letters, p. 85. Quoted in U.P., I, 21.

<sup>15</sup>Donald T. Torchiana, W. B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 166. Henceforward, this work will be referred to as Torchiana.

fulfilment, and the theory of unity which he endeavoured to present in his criticism is ideally portrayed in one of his final essays, "A General Introduction for my Work" (1937):

'When the mind is lost in the light of the Self' says the Prashana Upanishad, 'it dreams no more; still in the body it is lost in happiness.'

'A wise man seeks in Self,' says the Chandogya Upanishad, 'those that are alive and those that are dead, and gets what the world cannot give.' The world knows nothing because it has made nothing, we know everything because we have made everything.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>"A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), E.I., pp. 509-510.

## CHAPTER I

1886 - 1896

"I seek an image, not a book..."

The first decade of Yeats's critical work represents an era of struggle and conflict in his literary life, an era during which he tried to realize his personal goals as an artist and, as a critic, his national dreams for literature. The two are intrinsically linked because that which he endeavoured to achieve for himself -- "Unity of Being"<sup>1</sup> and self-fulfilment -- he struggled to attain for his nation -- "Unity of Culture."

The main influence that directed him towards establishing such "unity" was the political and cultural situation in Ireland. The nineteenth century was "a world of whirling change, where nothing becomes old and sacred."<sup>2</sup> Aware of the dichotomy between a mythological, heroic,

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<sup>1</sup>The term itself is not used until around 1906. However, I will use it as a point of reference to demonstrate development of his theory of Unity.

<sup>2</sup>W. B. Yeats, "Old Gaelic Love Songs" (Bookman, October, 1893), U.P., I, 295.

passionate past, and a present which repudiated "prolonged toil" and "tragic gaiety", the leaders of the Irish Renaissance, political and literary, knew that at the heart of their cause lay the mythological. For "a conception of myth possessing an aesthetic and psychic worth, reality and purpose"<sup>3</sup> would enable Irishmen to transcend abstract rationalism and fulfil themselves through the revival of the "ancient" self.

Yeats's awareness of the antithetical elements in the nation, and in people like himself ("the Tragic Generation"<sup>4</sup> as he called them), together with his firm belief in passion and the potential for unity if one could reunite with it present the early bases for his philosophy of Unity. In Ideas of Good and Evil (1903), a revealing selection of criticism focussing on the Romantics, Theosophy, Occultism and the Aesthetic movement, he elaborates further

his faith in a system of Unity. It is a system which combines supernatural elements with natural through the creative quality of the imagination, thereby qualifying the poet as a prophet with visionary faculties.

By 1895, in an article "Irish National Literature, III", Yeats, affirming his belief in his mystic precursors,

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<sup>3</sup>Brian John, "Ireland Mythologized", Mosaic, XII (Summer, 1979), p. 181.

<sup>4</sup>The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1938).

presents a formula for art which, eclectic in nature, simultaneously draws its theories from Blake, Shelley, Occultism and Theosophy. This formula forms the basis for Yeats's poetry, drama, and prose, serving as a standard by which he judges his critical appreciation or depreciation of literature in general;

It seems to a perhaps fanciful watcher of the skies like myself that this age of criticism is about to pass, and an age of imagination, of emotions, of moods, of revelation, is about to come in its place; for certainly belief in a supersensual world is at hand again; and when the notion that we are 'phantoms of the earth and water' has gone down the wind, we will trust our own being and all it desires to invent; and when the external world is no more the standard of reality, we will learn again that the great passions are angels of God, and that to embody them 'uncurbed in their eternal glory,' even in their labour for the ending of man's peace and prosperity, is more than to comment, ever so wisely, upon the tendencies of our time, or to express the socialistic, or humanitarian, or other forces of our time, or even 'to sum up' our time, as the phrase is; for Art is a revelation, and not a criticism.<sup>5</sup>

This passage, concerned with theories of the imagination and an evolving age of passion, in which "Art is a revelation, and not a criticism"<sup>6</sup> of life, is summed up

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<sup>5</sup>"Irish National Literature, III" (Bookman, September, 1895), U.P., I, 376.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 377.

in Yeats' definitive statement about the world of art and the artist: "Literature and philosophy cannot be separated."<sup>7</sup> However, these thoughts also involved belief in the reality of the supernatural and spiritual world where other beings existed. This theory, which would mature into a mythology of man, and man's tragic struggle to find his passionate "daimonic self" so that he may attain Unity, represented a belief unacceptable to the majority of Yeats's literary peers. These "unpopular thoughts",<sup>8</sup> as Yeats termed them, form an integral part of the poet's artistic concerns, and his wish to expound them in a literary form prompted his dislike for critical work and "metrical composition."

Therefore, by 1896, despite his admirable national endeavours, which contributed to what can be called the Irish Literary Renaissance, he became increasingly alienated from other national writers and critics, although the Irish Literary Society in London (1891) and the National Literary Society in Dublin (1892) were to a large extent the result of Yeats's organizational skills. Thus, in 1896, subsidized by Lady Gregory, Yeats was released from producing critical work as a means of support. At which point, he turned

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<sup>7</sup>Frayne, preface to "The Wandering Jew" (Bookman, April, 1893), U.P., I, 264.

<sup>8</sup>Letter to Katharine Tynan, The Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (New York: 1955), p. 97. Quoted in U.P., II, 20.

seriously to the theatre and his poetry in order to expound his "veiled prophecy."<sup>9</sup>

Yeats was always aware of the antithetical elements of life, and his formative years spent in Ireland provided him with the most obvious example of antitheses in the form of Irish tradition and culture. Born in Sligo in 1865, he grew up in an atmosphere steeped in folk-lore and in the years preceding 1885, when he began to write critical work, he became increasingly conscious of another side of Ireland, a side lacking tradition, and which ignored her mythological heritage. Concerned with this cultural dichotomy, Yeats stated, in his article "Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland" (1889), that "Behind Ireland fierce and militant, is Ireland poetic, passionate, remembering, idyllic, fanciful and always patriotic."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the main focus of Yeats's critical work was the revival of her mythological past, the patriotic, passionate element which, he hoped, would strengthen and invigorate, with heroism, her present "fierce," "militant" culture, based on diverse political aims.

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<sup>9</sup>U.P., II, 21. In an unpublished letter from Lady Gregory (1900), in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, Lady Gregory wrote: "... , that we long to see you at your own genuine work... your lyrics, and that [your] essays on Shelley and Blake are after all only your second best." (U.P., II, 24).

<sup>10</sup>"Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland" (Leisure-Hour, London, November, 1889), U.P., I, 147.

Yeats's feelings towards Ireland's social status and her political inclinations were ones of frustration and anger. During 1875 and 1880 he travelled between England, where he went to school, and Sligo where he returned for his holidays. Thus by 1884, when he registered at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, he was acutely aware of and antagonised by England's opinion of Ireland and her influence over Irish cultural life. For this influence generated a population of cynics who favoured political upheaval, tyranny, massacre, and abstract rationalism, and which reflected oppression by England in the form of an urban, middle-class, Anglo-Irish population.

Because Irish tradition was rapidly giving way to British industrialization and mechanization, the Irish urban population also consisted of apathetic skeptics accepting whatever status Britain imposed on it. Therefore, as Yeats saw it, a de-Anglicization<sup>11</sup> of Ireland's politics, culture and literature was necessary, for the ramifications of her subservience to England had also spread to her academic institutions and the literature they fostered. This literature was devoid of "Irishry" and, copying English literary themes and traditions, described a country lacking in cultural pride and heroism.

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<sup>11</sup>In his Autobiography Yeats said: "To transmute the anti-English passion into a passion of hatred against the vulgarity and materialism whereon England has founded her waste life and the whole life that she sends us, has always been a dream of mine." (Auto., p. 368).

When Yeats referred to the Anglo-Irish establishment, he did not refer to those who worked for Ireland's liberty. Himself Anglo-Irish, he declared in a speech (1937) that "nearly all the literature of modern Ireland and most of its political intelligence" had been created by leaders such as Burke, Swift, Grattan, Emmet and Parnell,<sup>12</sup> Protestants<sup>13</sup> who fought against "the despotism of fact" and who provoked a "necessary revolt against a popular materialism."<sup>14</sup>

The need arose, therefore, for a literary tradition upon which to structure the new trend in literature. W. E. Henley, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson and Yeats were those Rhymers in 1891 who were mainly concerned with creating a new tradition.<sup>15</sup> According to Yeats, the literature of Ireland was still young "and on all sides of the road is Celtic tradition, the Celtic passion crying for singers to

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<sup>12</sup>The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats, ed. Donald R. Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), p. 199. Quoted in Torchiana, p. 90. Although Yeats praised the work of Protestants who fought for Ireland's liberty, he did not include Burke and Swift until 1937.

<sup>13</sup>"Protestant Ireland had immense prestige, Burke, Swift, Grattan, Emmet, Fitzgerald, Parnell, almost every name sung in modern song, had been Protestant; Dublin's dignity depended upon the gaunt magnificence of buildings founded under the old Parliament." (Auto., p. 357).

<sup>14</sup>"Mr. Lionel Johnson's Poems" (Bookman, February 1898), U.P., I, 91.

<sup>15</sup>"I came now to be more in London, never missing the meetings of the Rhymers' Club, nor those of the Council of the Irish Literary Society, where I constantly fought out our Irish quarrels and pressed upon the unwilling Gavan Duffy the books of our new movement." (Auto., pp. 254-255).

give them voice."<sup>16</sup> England had exhausted her literary history. She had over-worked her epic, dramatic and lyric modes and her poets, like Tennyson and Matthew Arnold "must scrape up the crumbs of an almost finished banquet."<sup>17</sup>

Ireland, on the other hand, "has still full tables."<sup>18</sup> Her dramatic, epic and lyric literature had scarcely been touched. Consequently, Yeats as a critic became an advocate of those authors who explored the themes of Ireland's vast mythological past and structured those themes according to an Irish literary tradition. Although "generations may pass by before this tradition is mature enough in the new tongue for any to measure its full importance, its importance to Ireland needed and needs no measuring."<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Yeats hoped for a future Gaelicized generation of Irishmen, which at that time was not possible, "for no man can write well except in the language he has been born and bred to and no man, as I think, becomes perfectly cultivated except through the influence of that language."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, de-Anglicization fell more into

<sup>16</sup>"Bardic Ireland" (Scots Observer, January, 1890), U.P., I, 163.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>"Irish National Literature, I" (Bookman, June, 1985).

<sup>20</sup>"Mr. W. B. Yeats" (The Leader, September, 1900), p. 13. Quoted in Torchiana, p. 109.

the context of developing an Irish tradition, independent of British literary subject matters, than in the enforcement of Gaelic, although he fostered the latter. In essence, Yeats "was interested in two extremes of literary consciousness": "one was to be a simple literature based on peasant life and themes", which "would satisfy a gaelic-speaking peasantry." The other was to be "a sophisticated, aristocratic literature derived from the remote Celtic past," which "could rival English literature for the attention of the educated class in Ireland."<sup>21</sup>

On this basis, Yeats severely criticised any authors who did not conform to his national ideals for Irish literature. He decried those authors who filled their work with "impurities" and "curiosities" about politics, science, about history, about religion", because, as he explained, literature had long lain in the hands of those who, "because they served some political cause which could not wait, or had not enough patience in themselves," rebuked the "unfolding and developing of an Irish tradition."<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, those authors copied the "mature English methods of utterance and used them to sing of Irish wrongs or preach of Irish purposes:"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Frayne, "Twilight Propaganda," U.P., I, p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>"Irish National Literature, I" (Bookman, June, 1895), U. P., I, 361.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

...what was Irish in it looked ungainly in an English garb, and what was English was never perfectly mastered, never wholly absorbed into their being.<sup>24</sup>

Among those writers who produced such literature and who were, unfortunately, "the most influential voices of the first half of the century"<sup>25</sup> were Thomas Moore and John Mitchel. Moore, according to Yeats, "quenched an admirable Celtic lyricism in an artificial glitter learned from the eighteenth century," and Mitchel was a "passionate orator," "expounding opinions which were none the less true because the utterance was alien." Although Yeats condoned their patriotism, their lack of "perfect devotion" to creativity provoked a diatribe in verse:

A dreamer born,  
Who with a mission to fulfil,  
Left the muses' haunts to turn  
The crank of an opinion mill.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the wrongs of the Anglo-Irish poets involved not only a plagiarism of English literary techniques. Their poetry was filled with "political enthusiasm" and there was no

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. All references to these authors are taken from the same article. "Poetry and Tradition" (1907), E.I., p. 256. In this essay, Yeats states: "Our attacks, mine especially, on verse which owed its position to its moral or political worth, roused a resentment which even I find it hard to imagine today,..."

"distinction between literature and rhetoric." Furthermore, Yeats said, it would have "done no permanent mischief" "were it not that our educated classes are themselves full of a... noisy, political passion."<sup>27</sup>

Charles Lever and Samuel Lover, together with Moore and Mitchel, also incited Yeats's wrath:

They were never poets of the people.  
Moore lived in the drawing rooms,  
and still finds his audience therein...  
Ireland was a metaphor to Moore, to  
Lever and Lover a merry harlequin,  
sometimes even pathetic, to be  
patted and pitied and laughed at so  
long as he said "your honour", and  
presumed in nowise to be considered  
a serious or tragic person.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the debasement of Irish character and Irish literature, through the transformation of the Irish hero into a buffoon, provoked an antagonistic critical response from Yeats. His main contention, which echoes similar objections throughout the century to other fictional portraits of the Irish, was that they too readily turned the Irish into figures of fun, thus rendering "Irishry" contemptible in others' eyes.

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<sup>27</sup>"Irish National Literature, IV" (Bookman, October, 1895), U.P., I, 383.

<sup>28</sup>"Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland" (Leisure Hour, November, 1889), U.P., I, 161-2.

The academic institutions also represented a destructive force in Ireland because they aborted any creative impulse, leaving the students "with no ideal at all by robbing them of the enthusiasm which lay at their own doors."<sup>29</sup> Professor Edward Dowden, from Trinity College, bore the brunt of this attack on the university system. For although Dowden wrote a Life of Shelley, something to commend him to Yeats, he represented the negative side of Protestant Ireland, upheld by Trinity College, just as University College, Dublin, was associated with the Catholic middle-class. Thus Dowden (who also was a friend of Yeats's father), became the scape-goat for the "vacant verses" composed "year after year" by the graduates:

I quote this criticism not because I have any special quarrel with Prof. Dowden, ...but because his offence is new and flagrant, and because like criticism has done and is doing incalculable harm. It is too empty of knowledge and sympathy to influence to any good purpose the ignorant patriotic masses and it comes with enough authority to persuade the undergraduates and the educated classes that neither the history, nor the poetry, nor the folk-lore, nor the stories which are interwoven with their native mountains and valleys are worthy of anything but contempt.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>"Irish National Literature, IV" (Bookman, October, 1895), U.P., I, 383.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Thus, what Yeats was looking for was a reaction to the cultural environment in Ireland. And those who concurred with the sterility of the age, he described, in a terminology similar to that in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, as "objective" artists whose goals are immediate. Conversely, those whom Yeats fostered, provide an insight into the development of his belief in antitheses, in passion, tragic heroism and in the mythological past. The three authors whom Yeats elected as a literary triad,<sup>31</sup> fighting the abstraction of the nineteenth century, were Sir Samuel Ferguson, James Clarence Mangan and Thomas Davis, all representative of Ireland's poets "uttering the evangel of the Celtic peoples."<sup>32</sup>

Nor may I less be counted one  
 With Davis, Mangan., Ferguson,  
 Because, to him who ponders well,  
 My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
 Of things discovered in the deep,  
 Where only body's laid asleep.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>"The school of writers I belonged to tried to found itself as much of the subject matter of this poetry, and, what was almost more in our thoughts, to begin a more imaginative tradition in Irish literature, by a criticism at once remorseless and enthusiastic. It was our criticism, I think, that set Clarence Mangan at the head of the Young Ireland poets in the place of Davis, and put Sir Samuel Ferguson, who had died with but little fame as a poet, next in succession." ("Poetry and Tradition" (1907), E.I., p. 256).

<sup>32</sup>"Irish National Literature, III" (Bookman, September, 1895), U.P., I, 382.

<sup>33</sup>"To Ireland in the Coming Times" (1892), C.P., p. 56.

Yeats's poem, "To Ireland in the Coming Times" (1892), praised the prophetic qualities of those poets who, rebelling against "nineteenth-century egoism", made passion the focus of their work. Moreover, such passion was not unrelated to Yeats's own more occult and esoteric pursuit of the rose.

Passion was the quality which drew Yeats to the work of Davis, Mangan and Ferguson, and, interestingly enough, parallels can be drawn between them and O'Leary, Yeats's own Irish hero and mentor. As Yeats said of his relationship with him, "It was through the old Fenian leader John O'Leary I found my theme."<sup>34</sup> For O'Leary represented a nationalism which focussed on culture and literature as being the only true political strength. Together, O'Leary, Mangan, Ferguson and Davis created the heroic picture of the tragic, isolated bards, and their literature, like the mythopoeic, historical accounts given by Standish O'Grady, made "the ancient gods and heroes live over again their simple passionate lives."<sup>35</sup>

Clarence Mangan, who was "absorbed, moody and morbid, in penury, one of the people, wilful and self-trained, wasted by routine,"<sup>36</sup> prefigured the portrait of the tragic

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<sup>34</sup>"A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), E.I., p. 510.

<sup>35</sup>"Battles Long Ago" (Bookman, February, 1895), U.P., I, 350-51.

<sup>36</sup>"Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland" (Leisure Hour, November, 1889), U.P., I, 38.

artist in Per Amica Silentia Lunae. For, "patient" and yet "gay", he confirmed Yeats's belief that "All the great poems of the world have their foundations fixed in agony."<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, his poem "The One Mystery" demonstrates an interesting similarity to Yeats's insistent advice to Lady Gregory, "Be secret and exult" ("To a Friend who work has come to Nothing" (1914). Mangan like\_wise urged:

No more, no more, with aching brow,  
And restless heart, and burning brain,  
We ask the When, the Where, the How,  
And ask in vain  
And all philosophy, all faith,  
All earthly -- all celestial lore,  
Have but one voice, which only saith --  
Endure -- adore.<sup>38</sup>

Mangan 's ability to sustain himself on the "food of the passions" defined him as "one who gave to almost everything" "a rueful and visionary tinge."<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, the antiquarian Sir Samuel Ferguson epitomised Yeats's conception of the poet-hero, "some old half-savage bard chanting to his companions at the forest

<sup>37</sup>"Clarence Mangan " (Irish Fireside, March, 1887), U.P., I, 118.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>39</sup>"Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland" (Leisure Hour, November, 1889), U.P., 157.

fire."<sup>40</sup> Yeats described him as "the greatest Irish poet, because ... his poems and the legends, ... embody more completely than in any other man's writings, the Irish character."<sup>41</sup> Here, Yeats's interest in the "Irish character", coupled with his dislike of Lever and Lover who portrayed the Irish figure as a buffoon, revealed Yeats's increasing fascination with "personality", a fascination which began when his father took him to see Shakespearian plays, notably Hamlet, and his idea of the self-possessed tragic hero took shape.

Therefore, in Ferguson's "Deirdre" and "Congal," those "indomitable pagans",<sup>42</sup> Yeats saw heroic ideals, passionate anti-selves and "makers of character." Equally important, was that Ferguson's poetry aroused "action" and 'deepened' the soul:

Heroic poetry is a phantom finger swept over all the strings, arousing from man's whole nature a song of answering harmony. It is the poetry of action, for such done can arouse the whole nature of man. It touches all the strings -- those of wonder and pity, of fear and joy. It ignores morals for its business is not in any way to make us rules for life, but to make character. It is not, as a great

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<sup>40</sup>U.P., I, 44.

<sup>41</sup>"The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, II" (Dublin University Review, November, 1886), U.P., I, 87.

<sup>42</sup>"The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, I" (Irish Fireside, October, 1886), U.P., I, 85.

English writer has said, 'a criticism of life,' but rather a fire in the spirit, burning away what is mean and deepening what is shallow.<sup>43</sup>

The image of the unified self as a stringed instrument, learnt originally from his father, is an early one which gives way later, in Autobiography, to the Dantean "perfectly proportioned human body."

Yeats held opposing views about Thomas Davis, the third member of the literary triumvirate. On the one hand, he felt that Davis's thoughts and his poetry were too political, although it was commendable that the children sung his ballads in the streets. Yeats thought that Davis's "Young Ireland Movement"<sup>44</sup> was "abortive", "uninteresting, unsatisfactory" and "pathetic", because it was more concerned with politics than with tradition. Yet, on the other hand, Davis was one of the gentry. "Happy", "noble", "university-trained" and a man of "action",<sup>45</sup> he embodied qualities which Yeats felt lacking within his own self. Furthermore, since his death in 1845, Davis had retained an heroic status in Ireland as one of the leaders of the Irish liberation movement, a status which Yeats would have had difficulty in either undermining or matching.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>"Irish National Literature, I", U.P., I, 362.

<sup>45</sup>"Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland", U.P., I, 157.

The themes of passion and heroism which attracted Yeats to the work of Ferguson, Mangan and Davis are also inherent in his own poetry. And in an admirable mythopoeic attempt to "create some new Prometheus Unbound; Patrick or Columcille, Oisín or Finn, in Prometheus' stead,"<sup>46</sup> the poet recreated for Ireland a mask based on mythology, an anti-self which, although not defined as such until 1909, reveals Yeats's early awareness of oppositions.:

...There remains but a wild anarchy  
of legends -- a vast pell-mell of  
monstrous shapes: huge demons  
driving swine on the hill-tops;  
beautiful shadows whose hair has a  
peculiar life and moves responsive  
to their thoughts; and here and  
there some epic needing only  
deliberate craft to be scarce less  
than Homer. There behind the  
Ireland of today, lost in the ages,  
this chaos murmurs like a dark and  
stormy sea full of the sounds of  
lamentation. And through all these  
throbs one impulse -- the persistence  
of Celtic passion: a man loves or  
hates until he falls into the grave.  
Years pass over the head of Conchobar  
and Finn: they forget nothing.<sup>47</sup>

Fairy and Folk Tales (1888), The Wanderings of Oisín and Other  
Poems (1889), John Sherman (1891), The Countess Kathleen and

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<sup>46</sup>Autobiography, p. 213.

<sup>47</sup>"Bardic Ireland" (Scots Observer, January, 1890),  
U.P., I, 166.

Various Legends and Lyrics (1892), The Celtic Twilight (1893), The Land of the Heart's Desire (1894) and The Shadowy Waters (begun in 1894) form Yeats's contribution to the revival of a mythology, in which his Cuchulain, Fergus, Oisín and Red Hanrahan embody the "heroic part of us", which "desires always dreams and emotions greater than any in the world."<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, Yeats also recognised the tragic struggle involved in heroic aspirations, in desiring "dreams and emotions greater than any in the world." This tragic element is crucial to his theory of Unity in Per Amica Silentia Lunae and is noticeable in his character studies of Irish heroes in "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson" (1886). In this article, Yeats's depiction of the true Irish character found in Cuchulain, Deirdre and Conor, "in Setanta watching by the door of Cullan," reveals the critic's early awareness of the Celt's "unflinching devotion to some single aim", his fidelity "to things tragic and bitter, to thoughts that wear one's life out and scatter one's joy." "Images of persistence; implacable hate, implacable love", "all capable of high tragedy"<sup>49</sup> fill the Celtic past, prefiguring Yeats's later conception of the tragic artist, in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, as a being sustained by the "food of the passions."

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<sup>48</sup>Review of Ernest Rhys' Welsh Ballads (Bookman, April, 1898), U.P., I, 71.

<sup>49</sup>"The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, I", U.P., I, 87.

But these tragic, passionate figures were not only to be found in Ireland's past. Latter-day heroes, the "tragic generation" of Irishmen fill a substantial section of Yeats's Autobiography. Furthermore, describing the years of 1887 to 1891, Yeats reminisced on his involvement with those "tragic penitents" of the Rhymers' Club, thereby disclosing his growing concern with the "image," a cultivated anti-self or mask which Morris, Wilde, and Henley, members of the Rhymers' Club, "copied, or tried to copy." With reference to the last, and the image he created out of his tragedy, Yeats said:

Henley, half inarticulate -- 'I am very costive,' he would say -- beset with personal quarrels, built up an image of power and magnanimity till it became, at moments, when seen as it were by lightning, his true self. Half his opinions were the contrivance of a subconsciousness that sought always to bring life to the dramatic crisis and expression to that point of artifice where the true self could find its tongue.<sup>50</sup>

Already Yeats conceived of a reality beyond the state of consciousness, a subconscious reality born out of a contrived image when life is brought to "dramatic crisis" so that the "true self" "find[s] its tongue." Similarly, this is the dramatic moment in Per Amica Silentia Lunae when the artist, assuming the mask of his antithetical self,

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<sup>50</sup>Autobiography, p. 149.

achieves totality.

The cultivated image, the antithetical nature of man, a subconscious existence, and the need for tragedy to achieve "perfection of personality" constitute Yeats's theory of Unity. Moreover, these concepts, for the most part, stem from Blake<sup>51</sup> and Shelley<sup>52</sup>, Romantics to whom he is highly indebted for his belief in Unity and in the possibility of attaining fulfilment through the creative powers of the imagination. Furthermore, Blake's statement, "Without Contraries is no progression" (Marriage of Heaven and Hell),<sup>53</sup> echoes Yeats's call to Irishmen to revolt against abstract rationalism, and to "stand amid the

<sup>51</sup>In a letter to Katharine Tynan, 1890, Yeats wrote that his work on Blake rendered his "mind a great deal of good in liberating me from formulas and theories of several kinds" (Letters, p. 153, U.P., II, 21).

<sup>52</sup>According to Frayne, "He took from Shelley's Defence of Poetry his conviction that poetry existed to enlarge the mind and imagination and not to preach a moral which might be only the reflection of a transient conventional opinion. In Shelley, Yeats also found corroboration for his 'Immortal Moods' as permanent archetypes of the emotions. Shelley had said that a poem is 'the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds.'" (U.P., I, 60; Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, reprinted with Peacocks' Four Ages of Poetry, and Browning's Essay on Shelley, no. 3 of The Percy Reprints, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, Oxford, 1937, p. 30).

<sup>53</sup>William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (1790-3), The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 34. Henceforward this text will be referred to as Blake.

whirlwinds"<sup>54</sup> of tragedy like the artist in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1917). Consequently, his essays on Blake (1897) and Shelley (1900) reveal the extent to which they affected his critical and poetic work, influencing his appreciation of the mythopoeic artist, and conversely, his depreciation of those who conformed to the trend of the era.

The effect of the Romantics on Yeats's poetry is apparent. Yeats's early conception of an anti-self found in mythology relates to Blake's "ancestral beings" and the Shelleyan theory of the self as a multi-faceted character which "we labour to see ... in many mirrors that we may possess it the more abundantly."<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1901) he cites the poet's description of a figure which resembles the 'hungering' daimon or anti-self in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917): "We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness."<sup>56</sup>

From the evidence given in his articles, we see that between 1886 and 1896, Yeats conceived of life in terms of

<sup>54</sup>W. B. Yeats, Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917), Mythologies (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 333. Henceforth, this work will be referred to as Per Amica Silentia Lunae.

<sup>55</sup>"The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), E.I., p. 69.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

antitheses. Yet more important, is the fact that he also saw unity.<sup>57</sup> For instance, although referring more particularly to Allingham, Yeats expresses in turn his own belief in a vision of unity:

He saw neither the great unities of God or of man, of his own spiritual life or of the life of the nation about him, but looked at all through a kaleidoscope full of charming accidents and momentary occurrences. In greater poets everything has relation to national life or to profound feeling; nothing is an artistic isolated moment; there is unity everywhere, everything fulfils a purpose that is not its own; the hailstone is a journeyman of God, and the grass blade carries the universe upon its point.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Virginia Moore, The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1954). p. 23. Henceforward this work will be referred to as Moore. Virginia Moore has this to say: "...he had formed his metaphysics, being absolutely certain of a spiritual order generating and yet in a sense opposed to the natural order. But to present this idea to the world he needed strong support from the past. With renewed energy he studied Hermetic literature, Plato, Plotinus, Paracelsus, Boehme, Swedenborg, Blake, mastering with his intelligence their shared and central (however variously expressed) doctrine of correspondence: the doctrine that the world and man mirror God; that microcosm reflects macrocosm, making one vast whole."

<sup>58</sup>"William Allingham", contributed to Alfred Miles's The Poets and the Poetry of the Century (London, 1892), U.P., I, 260.

Like Blake, Yeats veered away from the scientific, abstract rationalism of the age and, turning to its antithesis, announced that "Imagination" was "God in the world of Art." In Blake's words he stated that "imagination divides us from mortality by the immortality of beauty, and binds us to each other by opening the secret doors of all hearts." Furthermore, the "Passions, because most living, are most holy ... and man shall enter eternity; borne upon their wings."<sup>59</sup>

In view of this, Yeats's theory of the self and the world is greatly influenced by Blake. Having begun editorial work on Blake in 1889, with Edwin Ellis as collaborator, they finally published a three-volume Works of William Blake (1893), which bears proof of the sway that Blake's theory held over Yeats. "He was a symbolist who had to invent his symbols", "He was a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand." What these statements reveal is Yeats's own belief in symbolism which appears in the image of the Rose in The Countess Kathleen (1892) and The Celtic Twilight (1893). Moreover, Blake's personal mythology was an incentive to Yeats to create his own. For he too made "one because he could not find one to his hand,"<sup>60</sup> But it was a mythology

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<sup>59</sup>"Blake's Illustrations to Dante" (1897), E.I., pp. 112-113.

<sup>60</sup>"William Blake and the Imagination" (1897), E.I., p. 114.

heavily indebted to the earlier Romantics:

The historical Christ was indeed no more than the supreme symbol of the artistic imagination, in which, with every passion wrought to perfect beauty by art and poetry, we shall live, when the body has passed away for the last time; but before that hour man must labour through many lives and many deaths. Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curbed and governed their passions, but because they have cultivated their understandings. The treasures of Heaven are not negations of passion, but realities of intellect from which the passions emanate uncurbed in their eternal glory....<sup>61</sup>

Yeats's concern with mythology and the heroic ideals that it represented for modern man leads directly to his belief in a Unity of Nation. For mythological literature symbolized not only an early version of a mask for man, but also a "common design," a "first unity" that "marries" a nation "to rock and hill".<sup>62</sup> "Of all the many things the past bequeaths to the future, the greatest are great legends; they are the mothers of nations",<sup>63</sup> affirmed Yeats in 1886. Therefore, in legends, Irishmen discovered "the Celtic

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<sup>61</sup>"Blake's Illustrations to Dante" (1897), E. I., pp. 137-138.

<sup>62</sup>Autobiography, p. 169.

<sup>63</sup>"The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson, II" (1886), U.P., I, 104.

heart" and escaped from "the personal perplexities of life," "the leprosy of modern -- tepid emotions and many aims."<sup>64</sup>

Thus, as early as 1886, Yeats conceived the possibility of a unified nation, a "common design" found in mythology. Thirty years later, in his Autobiography, he elaborates:

Is there a nation-wide multiform reverie, every mind passing through a stream of suggestion, and all streams acting and reacting upon one another no matter how distant the minds, how dumb the lips? A man walked, as it were, casting a shadow, and yet one could never say which was man and which was shadow, or how many shadows he cast. Was not a nation, as distinguished from a crowd of chance comers, bound together by this interchange among streams or shadows; that Unity of Image, which I sought in national literature, being but an originating symbol ?<sup>65</sup>

This theory of the general soul that binds nations forms part of Yeats's code of unity , a code which also stems from his association, at the Metropolitan School of Art (1884) with A. E. and mysticism, his subsequent attendance **at** meetings held by the Dublin Hermetic Society (1885), his membership of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society, in London (1887) and his long-lasting association with the

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Autobiography, pp. 225-226.

Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (1890). As a result, his essay "Magic" (1901) posits a code of unity rooted in Theosophy, which purports that "the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another", thus revealing "a single mind, a single energy."<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, the "unity of image" that Yeats "sought in national literature" could stir "the deep political passions", causing the "little memories" to become one with the "great memory". But in order for man to reunite with Shelley's "dwelling house of symbols,"<sup>67</sup> the nation must seek out its heroic past so that its partial self could reunite with the Blakean ancestral being.

But Yeats's premises for Irish literature, that it should be based on mythology, enlarge the mind and excite the spirit, tended to alienate him from his literary peers because it inclined towards a mystical and ontological concept of the self. Moreover, by 1896, his own work was becoming more esoteric, lyrical and symbolic, concerned "with the communication in highly sophisticated forms of his own evanescent moods." And, as he himself said:

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<sup>66</sup>"Magic" (1901), E. I., p. 28.

<sup>67</sup>"The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), E.I., p. 79.

...poetry steps out of the market-place, out of the general tide of life and becomes a mysterious cult, as it were, an almost secret religion made by the few, for the few.<sup>68</sup>

Such a statement, made in 1893, presages Yeats's later pronouncement on poetry, made in his essay on Synge (1909), a pronouncement which offers a succinct insight into and description of Yeats's artistic goals in 1896 as he began to veer away from critical work. Referring to a conversation (1909) with Synge, he re-iterates Synge's words in what, ultimately, is a self-revelation: "We must unite asceticism, stoicism, ecstasy, two of these have often come together, but not all three."<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, since the publication of The Wanderings of Oisín in 1889, Yeats had stressed his increasing desire to "write poetry of insight and knowledge."<sup>70</sup> His growing distaste for critical work arose as his poetic self wished to find its full artistic expression, but was constantly thwarted because criticism provided him with a financial income. An increasing dichotomy between the two selves

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<sup>68</sup>"Nationality and Literature" (United Ireland, May, 1893), U.P., I, p. 271.

<sup>69</sup>"J. M. Synge's Poems and Translations," (1909), E.I., p. 308.

<sup>70</sup>Letter to Katharine Tynan, March 14, 1893, Letters p. 63, U.P., I, p. 24.

became evident, and in 1897, in a letter to Robert Bridges, Yeats said:

...you must not judge it [his review of Bridges' Return of Ulysses] as you would judge an essay meant to be permanent. It is merely ... journalism like all my criticism so far, and done more quickly than I would like: one has to give something of one's self to the devil that one may live. I have given my criticism.<sup>71</sup>

In the same year, financially subsidized by Lady Gregory, Yeats was able to stop writing critical work as a means of support and, thereafter, redirected his energies towards writing "poetry of insight and knowledge."

But as Yeats saw it, the decade 1886 to 1896 was a frustrating period. According to Frayne, he found journalism "the most oppressive form of Adam's curse,"<sup>72</sup> since most of his artistic energies were devoted to "ephemera" and "metrical composition." Furthermore, Yeats's long-term rivalry with Sir Charles Gavan Duffy to gain editorship of an Irish anthology resulted in Duffy being chosen for the position.

In retrospect, Yeats's literary accomplishments between 1886 and 1896 are more creditable than he himself admitted. Eighty-seven book reviews and articles, written

<sup>71</sup>Letters, p. 286, U.P., I, 33.

<sup>72</sup>Autobiography, p. 217.

during that period and published in America, England and Ireland, provide an accurate description of his endeavours to create a national literature and also his struggle to shape a personal philosophy for his poetry:

...and for ten years to come my most impassioned thought was a vain attempt to find a philosophy and to create ritual for that Order... and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature and set before Irishmen... an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Autobiography, p. 279.

## CHAPTER II

1896 - 1911

"I seek an image of the modern mind's  
discovery of itself, of its own  
permanent form."

In an article, "Irish National Literature, II"  
(1895), Yeats presented a theory of literature to serve as a  
philosophical basis for his work:

Literature differs from explanatory  
and scientific writing in being  
wrought about a mood, or a community  
of moods, as the body is wrought about  
an invisible soul; and if it uses  
argument, theory, erudition,  
observation, and seems to grow hot in  
assertion or denial, it does so merely  
to make us partakers at the banquet of  
the moods. It seems to me that these  
moods are the labourers and messengers  
of the Ruler of All, the gods of ancient  
days still dwelling on their secret  
Olympus, the angels of more modern days  
ascending and descending upon their  
shining ladder; and that argument,  
theory, erudition, observation, are  
merely what Blake called 'little devils  
who fight for themselves,' illusions of  
our visible passing life, who must be made  
to serve the moods, or we have no  
part in eternity. Everything that can  
be seen, touched, measured, explained  
understood, argued over, is to the  
imaginative artist nothing more than a  
means, for he belongs to the invisible  
life, and delivers its ever new and ever  
ancient revelation. We hear much of his  
need for the restraints of reason, but  
the only restraint he can obey is the

mysterious instinct that has made him an artist, and that teaches him to discover immortal moods in mortal desires, an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passion.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, faith in the creative powers of the imagination, the "mysterious instinct" which, when channeled into art, can reveal man's "invisible life" and his potential divine being, is central to Yeats's conception of the artist during the period 1896-1911. Moreover, although supernatural and mythological influences on his work between 1886 and 1896 survive through the subsequent years, those worlds become less a part of Irish tradition and more exemplary of the artist's "invisible life", a spiritual extension of the self.

In view of these ideas as a philosophical basis for Yeats's work, "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1917) in Per Amica Silentia Lunae stresses the creative instinct as the means to achieve Unity of Being. Moreover, the tragic struggle involved in the creative act, as the artist endeavours to combine the antithetical, divine and mortal properties of his nature, was a concept central to Yeats's theory of unity. However, his poetry and drama of the period 1896-1911 did not provide adequate expression of these thoughts as did the critical work, reviews and Ideas of Good and Evil (1903).

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<sup>1</sup>"Irish National Literature, II" (1895), U.P., I, 367; "The Moods" (1895), E.I., p. 195.

Yeats's prose serves as an accurate reflection of the growth of his ontological theory. One difference, however, between the earlier and later critical work lies in the greater artistic freedom of the prose. For financial help from Lady Gregory released him from the restrictions placed on literature by criticism, thus giving him the time and freedom in which to elaborate his metaphysical ideas as a base for his philosophy.

Since during this period Yeats turned to the theatre above all else to express his philosophy, this chapter will show the critic's endeavours to dramatize his concept of Unity of Being. Although still strongly nationalistic, Yeats's nationalism, as before, tends more to stress "perfection of personality"<sup>2</sup> than to advocate strident political themes and partisan arguments. Consequently, his drama shows a close correlation between his personal artistic goals and his national hopes. For the "perfection of personality" which he sought to inculcate in Irishmen is the very basis of his theory of unity.

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<sup>2</sup>Autobiography, p. 401. "Browning said that he could not write a successful play because he was interested **not** in character in action but in action in character. I had begun to get rid of everything that is not, whether in lyric or dramatic poetry, in some sense character in action." ("An Introduction for my Plays" (1937), E.I., p. 530).

Yeats's endeavours to create a philosophy of unity are in part a reaction to the national atmosphere in Ireland between 1896 and 1911. In fact, a statement made in his 1909 diary, "The Death of Synge", retrospectively reveals the reason for his faith in the imagination, creativity, and a supernatural world, and, consequently, the reason why his critical, poetic and dramatic works emphasize the need for such a belief:

The root of it all is that the political class in Ireland -- the lower-middle class from whom the patriotic associations have drawn their journalists and their leaders for the last ten years -- have suffered through the cultivation of hatred as the one energy of their movement, a deprivation which is the intellectual equivalent to a certain surgical operation. Hence the shrillness of their voices. They contemplate all creative power as the eunuchs contemplate Don Juan as he passes through Hell on a white horse,<sup>3</sup>

Personal frustrations over Maud Gonne, his considerable grief over Synge's death in 1909, and public disasters such as the Abbey riots and the controversy over the Lane pictures all contributed to this response. However, his earlier, continuing annoyance with the commercially-minded middle class and the academic institutions mainly Trinity College

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<sup>3</sup>Autobiography, p. 415.

which, according to Yeats, "has worked against imagination and character, against the mover and sustainer of manhood,"<sup>4</sup> remained the central focus of his anger.

A look at Yeats's earlier activities explains the trend of his national thoughts and personal artistic goals up to 1903 when, directly involved with the theatre, he was able to pronounce his thoughts more actively.

Between 1896 and 1903 Yeats travelled extensively to the west of Ireland, Paris, London, Dublin, Coole and Sligo. Although the highlights of the tours were meetings with Synge (Paris, 1896), and Lady Gregory during the same year, and his residence at Coole Park during the summer of 1897, his tour of England with Maud Gonne to raise funds for the Wolfe Tone Memorial revealed to him the extent to which Ireland's morale had declined.

What he concluded about Ireland's situation from his travels and communication with Irishmen and foreigners alike provoked an even stronger nationalist response than he had hitherto felt. He saw that instead of an improvement, there was a deterioration in public morale which, in a later pronouncement in his Autobiography ("Ireland after Parnell"), he termed as the "cynical indifference" of "Popular Nationalism and Unionism":

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<sup>4</sup>"Academic Class and Agrarian Revolution" (Daily Express, March, 1899), U.P., II, 152.

When we loathe ourselves or our world,  
 if that loathing but turn to intellect,  
 we see self or world and its anti-self  
 as in one vision; when loathing remains  
 but loathing, world or self consumes  
 itself away, and we turn to its  
 mechanical opposite. Popular Nationalism  
 and Unionism so changed into one another,  
 being each but the other's headache. The  
 nationalist opinion, I must, I knew, see  
 to it ideas of some hysterical women, a  
 part of the mind turned into stone, the  
 rest a seething and burning; and Unionist  
 Ireland had reacted from that seething  
 and burning to a cynical indifference, and  
 from those fixed ideas to whatever might<sup>5</sup>  
 bring the most easy and obvious success.

Individuality, creativity and "the prolonged toil"  
 of victory yielded to the politics of "momentary aims."  
 Ireland no longer saw her heroic side, only her present  
 tragic situation and fought for that alone. Yeats, on the  
 other hand, saw "self or word and its anti-self"<sup>6</sup> for he  
 believed in a visionary world, a world of unity antithetical  
 to Ireland's present society. Undoubtedly, this view was  
 fostered by his former association with Madame Blavatsky and  
 the Theosophical Society (1887) and the Hermetic Order of  
 the Golden Dawn (1890), his study of Blake and his zealous  
 examination of Ireland's mythological and supernatural past.

Thus, Yeats's awareness of the antithetical nature  
 of nation and individual, and the possibility of conceiving

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<sup>5</sup>Autobiography, p. 201.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

a world of unity if man and race realized this, led him to present such a world in literature. Ireland's antithesis lay in her heroic past, and he saw the necessity of reviving such a mythology so that she could become culturally strong and vital. In his various roles as a critic, a poet, and a dramatist, he reinforced his belief in unity.

The reviews and articles written between 1896 and 1903 advocated the "religion" of art and the creativity of the imagination. Such concepts, when based on Ireland's mythology, represented freedom from the "hot-faced bargainers and money-changers"<sup>7</sup> of a mechanized society. And already, there was an "aristocracy" of individuals, artists who did not preach anarchistic patriotism, but the nationalism of the "agrarian revolution":

We no longer complicate imagination with criticism, and we have begun to recover the ancient trust in passion and in beauty, and will soon have forgotten that we ever doubted. I am convinced that this change is bringing new kinds of temperaments into our literature -- temperaments that have been too wild and hasty for deliberate criticism of life, and that it is this change which is making countries like Ireland, ... begin to be full of voices.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Autobiography, p. 393.

<sup>8</sup>"Miss Fiona Macleod" (The Sketch, April, 1897), U.P., II, 42-43.

The Gaelic Movement, gaining strength during this period, was an integral part of the "agrarian revolution",<sup>9</sup> and it won Yeats's admiration since it counteracted any intellectually sterilizing forces in Ireland. It "is helping to preserve the national character of the people, and to prevent the country from becoming as imitation England,"<sup>10</sup> stated Yeats in his article, "The Gaelic Movement and the Parliamentary Party" (1902). Furthermore, the revolution caused a necessary break from the tradition of the Old Movement, which was "scientific and sought to interpret the world" through "speculations" and "criticism of life."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the Gaelic Movement "found a typical expression in the contentment of The Well at the World's End," in the "ecstasy of Parsifal," in "the humility of Aglavaine and Selysette," and in "the pride of Axel."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Yeats argued, it found "its explanation in the saying of William

<sup>9</sup>The "Agrarian Revolution" was a movement headed by Fenianism, The Gaelic League, The National Literary Societies and Davitt's Land League. It engendered a nationalism which defied the Anglo-Irish culture fostered by Trinity College.

<sup>10</sup>"The Gaelic Movement and the Parliamentary Party," (The Echo, April, 1902), U.P., II, 288.

<sup>11</sup>"Mr. Rhys' Welsh Ballads" (Bookman, April, 1898), U.P., II, 91-91.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

Blake that art is a labour to bring again the golden age." For as a "religion", he sought "to bring into the world, dreams and passions, which the poet can but believe to have been born before the world."<sup>13</sup>

Yeats's articles also substantiate his contention that mythology and the supernatural were the answer to Ireland's situation. For his friendship and collaboration with Lady Gregory, from 1897 onwards, resulted in an even greater interest in folk-lore and its theme of man's immortality and his ability, in daily life, to be united with the spiritual world.

Six articles and essays appeared which disclosed his belief in the pagan Irish supernatural world. "The Tribes of Danu" (1897), "The Prisoners of the Gods" (1898), "The Broken Gates of Death" (1898), "Ireland Bewitched" (1898), "Irish Witch Doctors" (1900), and "Away" (1902) constitute a study of folk-lore describing and substantiating Yeats's belief in the proximity of the supernatural world to the natural, transmutation, reincarnation, and man's spiritual capacity to unite with the "other world" while in a trance. Although the majority of these essays are more concerned with examples of extra-terrestrial phenomena than with a theory, Yeats concludes the article "Away" with an explanation of the soul in relation to myth:

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

It may be that the druids and poets meant more at the beginning than a love story, by such stories as that of Cuchullain and Fand, for in many ancient countries as even among some African tribes today, a simulated and ceremonious death was the symbol, or the condition, of the soul's coming to the place of wisdom and of the spirits of wisdom; and, if this is true, it is right for such stories to remind us of day and night, winter and summer, that men may find in all nature the return and history of the soul's deliverance.<sup>14</sup>

Yeats's poetry during this time represents folk-lore and the supernatural as a symbol of the soul's spiritual life, the "spirits of wisdom" awaiting resurrection. The Countess Kathleen (1892), The Wind Among the Reeds (1899) and In the Seven Woods (1903) all depict Ireland's mythological past as a world of dreams in which the poet seeks wisdom and fulfilment. As in The Wanderings of Oisín (1889), Yeats maintains that if man is to attain poetic vision, heroic virtues must be retained, and man must strive to unite past and present. The quest is for Unity of Being and representative of the goal is the Rose, a symbol of the soul -- earthly yet mystical. The Rose also signifies a fallen world in which beauty cannot exist without sorrow:

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<sup>14</sup>"Away" (Fortnightly Review, April, 1892), U.P., II, 282.

...the quality symbolised as The Rose differs from the intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar.<sup>15</sup>

In "The Rose of Peace" (1893) Yeats describes the Rose as being simultaneously part of both worlds, offering spiritual reconciliation while experiencing man's sorrow:

And God would bid his warfare cease,  
Saying all things were well;  
And softly make a rosy peace,  
A peace of Heaven with Hell.<sup>16</sup>

In Yeats's drama, however, the trysting — place of "Heaven" and "Hell", immortality and mortality is the surreal world of the "spirits of wisdom" wherein the poet-seeker wanders through an extra-temporal world. Plays such as The Land of the Heart's Desire (1894), On Baile's Strand (1902), The Shadowy Waters (begun in 1894, published in 1902 and finally produced in 1904), The Pot of Broth (1903), The Hour Glass (1903), Where there is Nothing (1903), and The King's Threshold (1904) represent Yeats's endeavours to integrate mythology and the supernatural into a dramatic form. The poet-seeker in these plays is a multi-faceted persona

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<sup>15</sup>C.P., p. 524.

<sup>16</sup>"The Rose of Peace" (1893), C.P., p. 14.

who searches for his true identity, struggling to reconcile his affiliation with both worlds. Concerned with man's need to develop character and self, Yeats depicts the hero as a tragic figure, a symbol of man's continual search for unity and fulfillment.

But Yeats's attempts to dramatize his theory of Unity were not only for personal gain (inasmuch as he aimed at rendering his theory in art, and thus providing a metaphor for his belief in unity), but also he had the national cause in mind. When, in 1902, he founded the Irish National Theatre society with the help of Maud Gonne, Douglas Hyde, and George Russell (A.E.), he explained their national intentions:

Our movement is a return to the people, like the Russian Movement of the early seventies, and the drama of society would but magnify a condition of life which the country man and the artisan could but copy to their hurt. The play that is to give a quite natural pleasure should tell them either of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions. Plays about drawing-rooms are written for the middle-classes of great cities, for the classes who live in drawing-rooms; but if you would ennoble the man of the roads you must write about the roads, or about the people of romance, or about great historical people.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>"Irish Dramatic Movement" (1902). Quoted in Leonard E. Nathan, The Tragic Drama of William Butler Yeats (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), p. 85. Henceforth, this work will be referred to as Nathan.

"The object of the drama was to be a revelation of lofty and heroic life"<sup>18</sup> which would represent an ideal culture to which Irishmen should aspire. Their passionate hereditary and mythological "ancestral beings" (here conceptualised as national ideals embodied in Finn, Patrick, Oisín, Cúchulain and Deirdre) became an early form of a national anti-self. Mythology should represent an ideal for the nation:

For legends are the magical beryls in  
which we see life, not as it is, but  
as the heroic part of us, the part  
which desires always dreams and  
emotions greater than any in the world,  
and loves beauty and does not hate  
sorrow.<sup>19</sup>

Thus for Yeats, the theatre was a means to unity. Commenting on his national hopes for Ireland in "The Irish Literary Theatre" (1899), he referred to Victor Hugo's theory that "in the theatre the mob became a people."<sup>20</sup> It represented "part of the ceremony of religion" which could "help to bring a little ideal thought into the common

<sup>18</sup>"The Irish Literary Theatre" (Lecture on the "Ideal Theatre" addressed to The Irish Literary Society, Bookman, April 23, 1899), U.P., II, 292.

<sup>19</sup>"Bardic Ireland" (Bookman, April 1893), U.P., I, 200. "Folklore is at once the Bible, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Book of Common Prayer, and well-nigh all the greater poets have lived by its light. Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, and even Dante, Goethe, and Keats, were little more than folk-lorists with musical tongues." ("The Message of the Folk-lorist", Speaker, August, 1893), U.P., I, 284).

<sup>20</sup>"The Irish Literary Theatre" (Daily Express, January, 1899), U.P., II, 141.

thought of our times "<sup>21</sup> because it depicted the "ceaseless heroic aspirations of the Irish people." Furthermore, dramatic "revelation of lofty and heroic life," left the audience "strengthened from looking upon some passion that could, whatever its chosen way of life, strike down an enemy."<sup>22</sup>

But Yeats's dramatic and poetic work between 1896 and 1903 continually frustrated him. He felt that it represented escapism, "flights into fantasy"<sup>23</sup> instead of confrontation. Moreover, he experienced difficulty in trying to present the "other world" as a possibility for man. However, on the contrary, his essays in Ideas of Good and Evil (1903) show that, in theory, he had already established a coherent picture of the "other world" which would evolve as Anima Mundi.

Influenced by Blake and Shelley, and their Romantic<sup>24</sup> conception of the universe, Yeats affirmed that the "imagination

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>"Discoveries" (1906), E.I., p. 265.

<sup>23</sup>Letter to Katharine Tynan, March 14, 1893, Letters, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup>"The movement most characteristic of the literature and art and to some small extent of the thoughts, too, of our century has been romanticism. We all know the old formal classicisms gave battle to it and was [sic] defeated when Hernani's horn rang out of the French stage [V. Hugo, 1830]. That horn has been ringing throughout the world ever since. There is hardly a movement in which we do not hear its echo. It marked the regained freedom of the spirit and imagination of man in literature." ("An Exhibition at William Morris's" (Providence Sunday Journal, October, 1890), U.P., I, 183.

was the first emanation of divinity, 'the body of God', 'the Divine Members of the soul'" and as a result, "the imaginative arts were ... the greatest of Divine revelations "<sup>25</sup>:

Our imaginations are but fragments of the universal Imagination, portions of the universal body of God, and as we enlarge our imagination by imaginative sympathy, and transform with beauty and peace of art the sorrows and joys of the world, we put off the limited mortal man more and more and put on the 'unlimited immortal man.'<sup>26a</sup>

Thus by 1897, Yeats had already conceived of an early version of Anima Mundi,<sup>26b</sup> the universal mind to which man's individual mind is attached. Unfortunately, he encountered difficulty in applying this theory to his art for, frequently, this world, which he tried to dramatize as Arcadia, lost its spiritual relevance to man by appearing external, ephemeral and fantastical instead of another facet of the self.

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<sup>25</sup>"William Blake and the Imagination" (1897), E.I., p. 111.

<sup>26a</sup>"Blake's Illustrations to Dante" (1897), E.I., pp. 138-39.

<sup>26b</sup>In "Hodos Chameliontos " Yeats states that Henry More "considered that the bird's instinct proved the existence of the Anima Mundi; with its ideas and memories." For, as he saw it, how otherwise could a bird know how or why to build a nest, if it were not intuitively linked to the past. Autobiography, p. 301.

By 1900, when Yeats succeeded Mathers as head of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in London, his theory of the "Other World" was strengthened by the more concrete concept offered by the Theosophists. It became the "Great Memory", a world of passions to which those of mortal men are linked. In his essay, "Magic" (1901), Yeats explains:

Whatever the passions of men have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the great memory, and in the hands of him who has the secret it is a wonder of wonders, a caller-up of angels or of devils. The symbols are of all kinds. For everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial, in the Great Memory, and one never knows what forgotten events may have plunged it, like the toadstool and the rag-weed, into the great passions.<sup>27</sup>

This world was not totally alienated from mortal man. In sleep, when "daily life has fallen away among prosaic things and ignoble things," "our dreams remember the enchanted valleys".<sup>28</sup>

Thus, by 1900, the "otherworld" has become a form of sub-conscious existence, so that consciousness and unconsciousness are inter-dependent states of being as they are in Per Amica Silentia Lunae. In "The Philosophy of

<sup>27</sup>"Magic" (1901), E.I., p. 50.

<sup>28</sup>"The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900" (The Dome, January, 1900), U.P., II, 200.

Shelley's Poetry", written in the same year, Yeats describes the similarities which unite both worlds and the creative impulse which is born of "imaginative sympathy" -- creation being the product of an awareness of man's immortal "spiritual essences":

These are "gleams of a remoter world  
which visit us in sleep," spiritual  
essences whose shadows are the de-  
lights of all the senses, sounds,  
"folded in cells of crystal silence,"  
"visions swift, and sweet, and  
quaint," which lie waiting their  
moment.<sup>29</sup>

These "gleams of a remoter world", which the "imaginative" artist recalls, are sources of creativity because through them occurs the revelation of the infinite qualities of man. "When a man writes any work of genius, or invents some creative action is it not because some knowledge or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind?"<sup>30</sup> Yeats asked later in his Autobiography. But this "knowledge" or "genius", he thought, could only be "called up by an image" or a symbol:

...all things are the symbols of  
things more unsubstantial than them-  
selves... A bird with diamond wings

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<sup>29</sup>"The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900),  
E.I., p. 75.

<sup>30</sup>Autobiography, p. 233.

passes through his imagination, and he knows it a soul wandering from its body in a deep sleep; and when he thinks of the girdle of twilight eyes in the moon may see about the earth, where night and day mingle, he thinks of beauty hung between death and life, eternity and time, sleep and waking. He would bring before his eyes the eternal house of the soul,...<sup>31</sup>

This statement, made in 1898 in an article on A.E., Yeats calls "the doctrine of the mystics". Considering himself a mystic, he relied heavily on the use of symbolism, as in his use of the Rose. However, by 1910, because his symbols were inclined to be rather esoteric, he rendered them in a more concrete form, drawing from contemporary sources so that the principle remained the same, but the practice was transformed. Yeats's main interest in symbols resides in their capacity to reveal, a revelation which occurs when opposites are held in tension, as in death and life, eternity and time, sleep and waking.

This "eternal house of the soul" that is revealed when opposites, held in tension, are perceived simultaneously, is an important motif in Yeats's thought, for it marks the shift towards an internal focus. For instance, in "The Tribes of Danu" (1897), he describes the artist as one who

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<sup>31</sup>"'A.E.'s' Poems" (The Sketch, April, 1898), U.P., II, 112.

<sup>32</sup>"The Tribes of Danu" (The New Review, November, 1897), U.P., II, 57.

would "go inward to God, outward to the gods."<sup>32</sup>

By seeking the passionate, heroic ideal in mythology, he reveals an inward divinity, a spiritual fulfilment achieved through the recreation of the past life which, when held in tension with the self, results in a uniform, whole state of being.

From as early as 1898, Yeats conceived of the early version of the "daimon", the antithetical passionate self which seeks to be reunited with the partial being. Indebted to Blake, Shelley, A.E., and the Theosophists for such a concept, he referred to the spiritual beings of the "other world", which he had hitherto thought of as only an ideal, as Blake's "shapes of beauty haunting our moments of inspiration", a "people older than the world, citizens of eternity, appearing and re-appearing in the minds of artists and of poets..."<sup>33</sup> A.E. likewise saw man in terms of antitheses, and perceived him as a being consisting of an "interior soul" and "exterior shadow". "All things are double, for we either choose 'the shadowy beauty' and our soul weeps, or the invisible beauty that is in our own 'high ancestral self,' and the body weeps", Yeats explained in his article on A.E. in 1898. An important addition here is the idea of the artist's choice, similar to that of Ille in "Ego Dominus Tuus", which results in either defeat or victory but still involves sorrow.

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<sup>33</sup>"Blake's Illustrations to Dante" (1897), E.I., p. 117.

The correlation between the external and internal, which Yeats, in Blakean terms, described in his 1908 analysis of The Unicorn and the Stars as "the marriage of Heaven and Hell", was a concept he had always upheld, but which he had difficulty portraying in his poetry and his drama. Since the external self, mythological or otherwise, was also part of the internal, partial self, there was the problem of representation on stage. This difficulty of combining the supernatural and the natural he never completely resolved until his experiments with the Japanese No.

Commenting on those years, in 1909, Yeats explains his frustrations. His plays were too distant from the people, and the national ideals that they thematically depicted reflected "his own inability to achieve even the smallest success in bringing common humanity into the ideal of the theatre."<sup>35</sup> Yeats's own "unpopular thoughts" about the supernatural, which he tried to integrate into his national themes, constantly frustrated his efforts to achieve a structured philosophy, which would render the social and personal, the external and the internal, as one system:

I could not get away, no matter how  
closely I watched the country life,  
from images and dreams which had all  
too royal blood, for they were

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<sup>35</sup>Nathan, p. 147.

descended like the thought of every poet from all the conquering dreams of Europe, and I wished to make that high life mix into some rough contemporary life without ceasing to be itself, as so many old books and plays have mixed it and so few modern... I feel indeed that my best share in it [The Unicorn And the Stars (1908)] is that idea, which I have been capable of expressing completely in criticism alone, of bringing together the rough life of the road and the frenzy that the poets have found in their ancient cellar, -- a prophecy, as it were, of the time when it will be once again possible for a Dickens and a Shelley to be born in the one body.<sup>36</sup>

Between 1903 and 1911, Yeats's work in the theatre preoccupied him most. His poetic output, for example, during those years was relatively small. In "Poetry and Tradition" (1907), he describes the essential theme of his work as "perfection of personality". "There could be no aim for poet or artist except expression of a "unity of Being" like that of a "perfectly proportioned human body".<sup>37</sup> The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed," but instead, "like some pilgrim to the Holy Land"<sup>38</sup> "setting out to find knowledge",<sup>39</sup> be "content to find his pleasure in

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<sup>36</sup>Yeats, The Collected Works (8 vols.; Stratford on Avon, 1908), II, 251. Quoted in Nathan, p. 147.

<sup>37</sup>Autobiography, pp. 211-212.

<sup>38</sup>"Discoveries" (1906), E.I., pp. 287-288.

<sup>39</sup>Autobiography, p. 401.

all that is forever passing away", "in whatever is most fleeting, most impassioned, as it were, for its own perfection, most eager to return in its glory."<sup>40</sup>

After his return from a successful lecture tour in America in 1903, during which he learned that Maud Gonne had married Major John MacBride, Yeats devoted himself to the theatre and to dramatizing his theory of Unity. The Abbey Theatre opened in 1904; in 1906, Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory became its directors. In a speech on the British Association's visit to the Abbey Theatre in 1908, Yeats described the artist's work and in turn revealed his own dramatic concerns: to "name and number the passions and motives of men" so that "mankind must be seen and understood in every possible circumstance , in every conceivable

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<sup>40</sup>"Discoveries" (1906), E.I., pp. 287-288. And in a lecture, "The Ideal in Art", delivered to the Royal Hibernian Academy, Yeats stated: "The greatest joy that ever came to the artist -- the highest element in his creative joy was to contemplate his own personality, enlarging itself, completing itself with the mirror of his writings and of his paintings" ("The Watts Pictures" (January 25, 1906), U.P., II, 344).

situation."<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, Yeats's dramatic themes focus on the schism between man's "immortal and imperishable" self and the mortal being, "an image in a looking-glass" and the conflict that arises when the hero seeks to combine the two selves and discover his true identity. In an unfinished dialogue (1915), Yeats describes the dramatic crisis:

Now the art I long for is also a battle, but it takes place in the depths of the soul and one of the antagonists does not wear a shape known to the world or speak a mortal tongue. It is the struggle

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<sup>41</sup>"British Association Visit to the Abbey Theatre" (Lecture, September 4, 1908), U.P., II, 369-370. The following Section, taken from the lecture, stresses Yeats' main concern with drama: passion and tragic ecstasy. It reads:

We, ...are Adams of a different Eden, a more terrible Eden perhaps. For we must name and number the passions and motives of man. There, too, everything must be known, everything understood, everything expressed; there, also, there is nothing common, nothing unclear; every motive must be followed through all the obscure mystery of its logic. Mankind must be seen and understood in every possible circumstance, in every conceivable situation. There is no laughter too bitter, no irony too harsh for utterance, no passion too terrible to be set before the minds of man. The Greeks knew that. Only in this way can mankind be understood, only when we have put ourselves in all the possible positions of life, from the most miserable to those that are so lofty that we can only speak of them in symbols and in mysteries, will entire wisdom be possible.

of the dream with the world -- it  
 is only possible when we transcend  
 circumstances and ourself, and the  
 greater the contest the greater  
 the art.<sup>42</sup>

The being is in a form of purgatory. Between "the extremity of joy" and "the extremity of sorrow" he artistically "plays" "with all masks", until, "within a pulsation of the artery" his soul becomes "disentangled from unmeaning circumstance," and from "the ebb and flow of the world" and he reaches the "state beyond dreams", an "intensely living state" "in which one recovered one's personality."<sup>43</sup>

Deirdre (1907) and revised versions of The Shadowy Waters (1906), On Baile's Strand (1907) and Where There is Nothing (1908) represented Yeats's efforts to dramatize that "ecstatic" moment "in which one recovered one's personality." These plays, for the most part, succeeded in presenting the moment as an internal process, as it is in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917). They represent Yeats's improved version of the struggle between opposites, Anima Mundi and Anima Hominis, which had always fascinated him, but which he had not as successfully conveyed in his earlier works The Wanderings of Ossin (1889), John Sherman (1891), and The Countess Kathleen (1892).

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<sup>42</sup>Yeats, The Poet and the Actress, unfinished dialogue of 1915. Quoted in Nathan, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup>Torchiana, p. 233.

Yeats's essay "J. M. Synge's Poems and Translations" (1909), reveals the prominent characteristics which he wished to employ in his drama. These mainly consist of the heightening of that moment of dramatic crisis by the hero's "devotion to something afar/From the sphere of our sorrow"<sup>44</sup>, a "delight in setting the hard virtues by the soft, the bitter by the sweet, salt by mercury" and "the stone by the elixir." For out of this "hunger for harsh facts, for ugly surprising things, for all that defies our hope" would be born "an ecstatic contemplation of noble life."<sup>45</sup>

Yeats's involvement with the Abbey Theatre proved frustrating, on both national and personal levels. By 1907, he still encountered theatrical difficulties in trying to render the natural and the supernatural as a conflicting and yet unified state of Being. According to Nathan, "the natural tended to absorb the spiritual, whose presence could easily enough be explained away as symbolic of heightened states in the psychology of characters."<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, on the national side, both his and Synge's efforts to awaken Ireland out of her spiritual lethargy and

<sup>44</sup>"The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" (1900), E.I., p. 308.

<sup>45</sup>"J. M. Synge's Poems and Translations" (1909), E.I., p. 308.

<sup>46</sup>Nathan, p. 147.

Yeats's endeavours to make his themes represent Ireland's ideals and potentials, resulted in frustration. "On those that Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World'" (1914) describes the audience as "Eunuchs" running "through Hell" and Synge, over whose play they rioted in 1907, as Don Juan riding by. This statement echoes his diary entry in "The Death of Synge" (1909) with its accusations against the "political class in Ireland" which cultivated "hatred" "as the one energy of their movement".

Similarly, in 1908, Connell's play The Piper, which the Abbey Theatre presented, provoked the audience to anger. Appearing before the spectators, Yeats pointed out the satiric quality of the play and its potential to awaken Irishmen to the facts of their national tragedy:

The play meant to me a satire on those dreadful years of the Parnellite split -- those years of endless talk, of endless rhetoric, and driveling folly -- years which were taken out of the history of this nation. It meant to me something else. My imagination went back to the rebellion of Robert Emmet -- to that heroic figure, the folly that surrounded him, the slackness that was as bad as treachery.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>"Mr. W. B. Yeats and 'The Piper'" (Daily Express, February 17, 1908), U.P., II, p. 362.

But there was another quality inherent in the play which won Yeats's admiration. It was the heroic theme which he portrayed in mythological terms, and which Connell and Synge defined politically, showing that Ireland's "martyrs have married her forever" to that "ideal" to "something lofty and strange" in her character, "put there by her years of suffering" and "by the memory"<sup>48</sup> of martyrs such as Parnell and Emmet:

In Mr. Connell's play I see the generous impulses, the underlying heroism, which is in the midst of all that folly. I see the ceaseless heroic aspirations, of the Irish people imaged in the character of the Piper. I see a figure which had deeply impressed my boyhood in the character Charles Stewart Parnell. I see that angry heroic man once again as I saw him in my boyhood face to face with Irish futility. I see in the whole play simply a satire on all that dreadful epoch.<sup>49</sup>

"At the Abbey Theatre" (1910), "September 1913" (1914) and "To a Friend Whose Work has come to Nothing" (1914) were, among other poems, Yeats's response in poetry to the problems that he encountered in Ireland and in the theatre between 1907 and 1909. But the year 1909 represented an even greater personal tragedy for Yeats: it was the year in

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<sup>48</sup>"Emmet the Apostle of Irish Liberty" (The Gaelic American, March, 1904), U.P., II, 319.

<sup>49</sup>"Mr. W. B. Yeats and 'The Piper'" (Daily Express, February 17, 1908), U.P., II, 362.

which Synge died. Although a valuable friend, Synge epitomised the tragic hero of the age, an image admired by Yeats.

Furthermore, Synge's advice on the theatre motivated him towards perfecting his theatrical goal -- the tragic crisis and climax of drama. "'We must unite asceticism, stoicism, ecstasy; two of these have often come together, but not all three'",<sup>50</sup> Synge once said to Yeats, and that statement embodied the dramatic feature which would enforce Yeats's theme of unity. For it implied transcendence.

During the same year, Yeats met Ezra Pound who encouraged him in a new theatrical technique, the mask. Thus, provided with a stage metaphor for his theme, "perfection of personality", Yeats could epitomise Synge's theatrical goal and "unite asceticism, stoicism," and "ecstasy" in one vision.

The mask would provide the "trysting place of mortal and immortal, time and eternity", the "mingling of contraries", "overflowing turbulent energy," "marmoreal stillness,"<sup>51</sup> and more important, "perfection of personality." In his article, "The Tragic Theatre" (1910), Yeats described it as an image capable of evoking the spiritual world:

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<sup>50</sup>"J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910) E.I., p. 329.

<sup>51</sup>"Poetry and Tradition" (1907), E.I., p. 255.

If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance; and if we are painters, we shall express personal emotion through ideal form, a symbolism handled by generations, a mask from whose eyes the disembodied looks, a style that remembers many masters that it may escape contemporary suggestion; or we shall leave out some element of reality as in Byzantine painting, where there is no mass, nothing in relief; and so it is that in the supreme moment of tragic art there comes upon one that strange sensation as though the hair of one's head stood up.<sup>52</sup>

The mask "from whose eyes the disembodied looks" provided Yeats with a dramatic technique which represents the basic metaphor for his theory of Unity in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917). Hereafter, Yeats's fundamental principles take on a more consistent, unified, and increasingly systematized form, with clear effects upon his poetry (Responsibilities [1914]).

"Action in character," self-generating personality where "all creation requires one mind to make and one mind of enjoyment"<sup>53</sup> were qualities that Yeats sought to create on stage and which recur in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917). And the mask, "once-created, . . . is like the mind of an

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<sup>52</sup>"The Tragic Theatre" (The Mask, August, 1910), U.P., II, 388.

<sup>53</sup>Autobiography, p. 442.

individual in solitude immeasurably bold -- all is possible to it".<sup>54</sup> For it portrays the fusion of the antitheses, time and eternity, the natural and the supernatural, passion and intellect, in one creative impulse which is Unity of Being, the discovery of true identity.

"Style, personality -- deliberately adopted and therefore a mask"<sup>55</sup> -- was Yeats's main concern in the theatre, for it involved a struggle and confrontation with tragedy. And as Ille said in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1917):

... those that love the world serve  
it in action,  
Grow rich, popular and full of influence,  
And should they paint or write, still  
it is action:  
The struggle of the fly in marmalade.<sup>56</sup>

Thus the mask for Yeats represented "arduous" toil, the "active virtue" involved in the effort to "assume the second self":<sup>57</sup>

There is a relation between discipline  
and the theatrical sense. If we  
cannot imagine ourselves as different

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Autobiography, P. 393.

<sup>56</sup>"Ego Dominus Tuus", Per Amica Silentia Lunae,  
p. 323.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of arduous full life.<sup>58</sup>

Yeats's use of the tragic theatre, in which "drama is a picture of the soul of man, and not of his exterior life,"<sup>59</sup> is an important aspect of his theory, because "tragedy is passion alone", "unmixed passion" "lyricism" and "the integrity of fire". Through the poets creation of "tragedy from his own soul, that soul which is alike in all men," there is no "joy" as in comedy, "but ecstasy, which is from the contemplation of things vaster than the individual." "Yet", Yeats concludes in his Diary, "is not ecstasy some fulfilment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of it like an overflowing well?":<sup>60</sup>

[To ascend] into that tragic ecstasy...  
is the best that art ... perhaps that  
life can give. At last when Deirdre,  
in the paroxysm before she took her

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<sup>58</sup> Autobiography, pp. 400-401.

<sup>59</sup> "The Freedom of the Theatre" (The United Irishman, November, 1902), U.P., II, p. 297.

<sup>60</sup> Autobiography, p. 402; "The Tragic Theatre" (1910), E.I., p. 240.

life, touched with compassionate fingers him that had killed her lover, we know that the player had become, if but for a moment, the creature of that noble mind which had gathered its art in waste Islands, and we too were carried beyond time and persons to where passion living through its thousand purgatorial years, as in the wink of an eye, becomes wisdom; and it was as though we too had touched and felt and seen a disembodied thing.<sup>61</sup>

Tragedy, as in "Deirdre's cry at the edge of the grave," evokes a "reverie of passion that mounts and mounts till grief has carried her beyond grief into pure contemplation."<sup>62</sup>

"Tragic art, passionate art", Yeats continued, "moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance."<sup>63</sup> And the players "greaten till they are humanity itself," causing our minds to "expand convulsively, or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened, image-crowded sea."<sup>63</sup> Tragedy was a state of mind, not an action and needed to be embodied as such on stage, so that it became a symbol, capable of unifying audience and player alike. Deirdre was the mask of audience and player alike, and

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<sup>61</sup>"The Tragic Theatre" (The Mask, August, 1910), U.P., II, p. 385.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>"The Tragic Theatre" (1910), E.I., p. 245.

by heightening their emotions, unified the "phantom" of passion with the fragmented self, so that "all hate and hope vanishes in the dream."<sup>64</sup>

Reflecting on his theatrical career in 1907, Yeats felt that the theatre had "not gone my way or in any way I wanted it to go." Contrarily, however, he considered that he "had greater luck than any other modern English-speaking dramatist," for he had "aimed at tragic ecstasy" and, in his own work and in the work of his friends, "had seen it greatly played:"<sup>65</sup>

It was only by watching my own plays that I came to understand that this reverie, this twilight between sleeping and waking, this bout of fencing, alike on the stage and in the mind, between man and phantom, this perilous path as on the edge of a sword, is the condition of tragic pleasure, and to understand why it is so rare and so brief.<sup>66</sup>

Although Yeats experienced difficulty with his drama, the theatre helped him to come to terms with the problems of rendering unity as a climactic, instantaneous balance between antitheses, "the condition of tragic pleasure." And it is precisely this achievement which forms the theoretical basis of Per Amica Silentia Lunae.

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<sup>64</sup>"Poetry and Tradition" (1907) E.I., p. 255.

<sup>65</sup>W. B. Yeats, On the Boiler, (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1939), p. 14.

<sup>66</sup>"The Tragic Theatre" (The Mask, August, 1910), U.P., II, p. 389.

### CHAPTER III

#### PER AMICA SILENTIA LUNAE (1917)

"...that Dante and Villon might through passion become conjoint to their buried selves, turn all to Mask and Image."

Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) represents Yeats's completed version of his philosophical vision. Not as complex nor as baffling as A Vision (1925), it presents a system that unifies all of Yeats's ontological theories of man and his relation to the universe. It is, in fact, ultimately representative of the religion of "Unity of Being" which heralds man's quest for self-fulfilment:

I was born into this faith, have lived  
in it, and shall die in it; my Christ,  
a legitimate deduction from the Creed  
of St. Patrick as I think, is that  
Unity of Being Dante compared to a  
perfectly proportioned human body,  
Blake's 'Imagination,' what the  
Upanishads have named 'Self': nor is  
this unity distant and therefore  
intellectually understandable, but  
imminent, differing from man to man and  
age to age, taking upon itself pain and  
ugliness, 'eye of newt, and toe of frog.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"A General Introduction for My Work" (1937), E.I.,  
p. 518.

From his earliest work to his final literary achievements, Yeats saw and depicted man, race and era on an antinomial basis. Per Amica Silentia Lunae presents the poet's most coherent theory of his belief in a potential unity for race, era, and individual. For, despite the tragedy of a diffracted spiritual existence, awareness of such a state combined with the struggle to join self with anti-self or the antithetical image, results in a return, at fleeting moments, to a former, immortal Unity of Being, Race and Era.

The "Doctrine of the Mask", expounded in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, represents Yeats's formula for Unity of Being with which he had hitherto endeavoured to come to terms in his drama and his poetry. Furthermore, it forms the basis of his later work, providing him with "metaphors for poetry", as he termed it. The "Mask" portrays the antithetical qualities of the self which the Being must assume in his self-portrait in order to become fulfilled. The subjective artist Ille, in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (the prefatory poem to Per Amica Silentia Lunae), is the embodiment of all those who struggle to create their mask and therefore represents the theoretical version of those figures we have seen previously -- the mythopoeic artist, the questing hero of Yeats's poetry and drama, and his artistic companions in the National Literary Societies, the Rhymers' Club and the Abbey Theatre.

Passion, as Yeats saw it, was the root of subjectivity. It was also the quality most lacking in modern-day men. His

former definitions of that lost quality, which Irishmen must revive, range from the abstract "moods", "Chimeras that haunt the edge of trance", to a personified definition of passion derived from Blake's "ancestral beings", "citizens of eternity", "A.E.'s" "high ancestral self", and Shelley's "spiritual essences." By the time of Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Yeats defines those spiritual forces as the image of the 'daimon', the "ghostly", "buried self" that lives as an unfulfilled passion in Anima Mundi, the "Great Memory" which Yeats described in his essay "Magic" (1901). Spurred on by the passion of his daimon, the artist seeks to reunite with that passion and thereafter destines himself to a tragic struggle until he attains his mask, an attainment that is realised when man and daimon coalesce.

The struggle to find and maintain the "Mask" is an important feature in Yeats's theory since it symbolises endurance in spite of tragedy. The daimon provides this struggle, for, seeking to be reunited with its partial self, its antithetical essence to man polarises it from him. Thus, when it brings the soul to crisis, to destiny, antinomies are more acutely experienced, for the daimon comes,

...not as like to like but seeking its  
own opposite, for man and daimon feed  
the hunger in one another's hearts.  
Because the ghost is simple and the  
man heterogeneous and confused, they  
are but knit together when the man  
has found a mask whose lineaments  
permit the expression of all the man

most lacks, and it may be dreads,  
and of that only.<sup>2</sup>

It is from this struggle born out of the antinomies, that man can hope to be "conjoint" with his "buried self" and "turn all to mask and image".<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, the tragic struggle to achieve Unity of Being, which Yeats dramatised as man labouring to achieve "perfection of personality", an example for Irishmen to follow, heralds man's ability to sustain tragedy and be satiated by "the bitter crust of life".<sup>4</sup> Yeats declares:

The poet finds and makes his mask in  
disappointment, the hero in defeat.  
The desire that is satisfied is not  
a great desire, nor has the shoulder  
used all its might that an unbreakable  
gate has never strained.<sup>5</sup>

Reminiscent of Yeats's call to Irishmen to sustain the tragedy of defeat, to ascend "into that tragic ecstasy which is the best... that life can give,"<sup>6</sup> and to become, like

<sup>2</sup>W. B. Yeats, Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) in Mythologies (New York: MacMillan, 1969), p. 335. Henceforward, all quotations will be from this text.

<sup>3</sup>Autobiography, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 342.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>6</sup>"The Tragic Theatre" (The Mask, October, 1910), U.P., II, p. 385.

Parnell and Emmet, Cuchulain and Finn, filled with heroic aspiration, the passage also recalls Yeats's prophecy of 1897: "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the spiritual history of the world has been the history of conquered races."<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, purification, born out of the struggle, depends on man's ability to sustain defeat and to thrive on it until "tragic gaiety" provides him with the ecstasy of the "condition of fire". For as Yeats said in 1908, there is "no laughter too bitter, no irony too harsh for utterance, no passion too terrible to be set before the minds of men."<sup>8</sup> Then in a later pronouncement on his drama he announced: "no tragedy is legitimate unless it leads some great character to his final joy." Such a character, as Deirdre, whose "cry at the edge of the grave" initiated "a reverie of passion that mounts and mounts till grief has carried her beyond grief into pure contemplation":<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>"Three Irish Poets" (The Irish Homestead, December, 1897), U.P., II, p. 70.

<sup>8</sup>"British Association visit to the Abbey Theatre." Speech, delivered September 4, 1908 and published in U.P., II, p. 370.

<sup>9</sup>"The Tragic Theatre" (The Mask, October, 1910), U.P., II, p. 385.

It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from Anima Mundi, embodied there, and drunk with that sweetness, would like a country drunkard who has thrown a wisp into his own thatch, burn up time.<sup>10</sup>

Timeless ecstasy revolves around this condition. It is that moment burst upon through creativity when dancer and dance are one, and when the hero, having "found hanging upon some oak of Dodona an ancient mask", puts it on, and "when at last he looked out of its eyes he knew another's breath came and went within his breath upon the carved lips, and that his eyes were upon the instant fixed upon a visionary world."<sup>11</sup> It was that state "in which one recovered one's personality"<sup>12</sup> and became the eternal self.

"Perfection of personality",<sup>13</sup> achieved through the struggle to combine the antithetical elements within the self, is the goal of the tragic artist. Since his early efforts in drama and poetry, Yeats endeavoured to structure his work according to this belief. But it was not until Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) that any coherent theory

<sup>10</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 365.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Torchiana, p. 233.

<sup>13</sup>Autobiography, p. 401.

emerged. The result is a formula that provides him with a cyclical theory of history (Unity of Era and Culture being interdependent with Unity of Being), a key to interpreting the past, present and future, a psychology of self, and a metaphysics.

Yeats's belief in Unity of Culture and Era, which he used as a theory in the poetry following Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917), began as early as 1885 when he became increasingly aware of the rift between Ireland's present cultural situation and her mythological past. He saw the necessity for such a philosophy of unity, because Ireland at the turn of the century was an age of objectivity, of sterility and abstraction, of general masses starved of an heroic goal. By 1917 he had created a history, based on the antithetical eras of a culture, which accounted for the fall from what he considered a subjective state (as in the Renaissance when knowledge and imagination were supreme), into an objective one. In his poem "The Phases of the Moon"<sup>14a</sup> (1919) a

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<sup>14a</sup>Yeats also used the symbol of the gyres, a symbol which dominates his poetry subsequent to Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917) and which he explains more fully in A Vision (1927):

"By the antithetical cone... we express more and more, until it broadens, our inner world of desire and imagination, whereas by the primary,... we express more and more, as it broadens, that objectivity of mind which, in the words of Murray's Dictionary, lays 'stress upon that which is external to the mind' or treats of outward things and events rather than of inward thought or seeks 'to exhibit the actual facts, not coloured by the opinions or feelings.' The antithetical tincture is emotional and aesthetic whereas the primary tincture is reasonable and moral." (W. B. Yeats, A Vision [London: MacMillan, 1962], p. 73).

product of the theory of Unity expounded in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, he symbolises the cycle of the fall, according to the image of a waning moon, as the era becomes passionless. He expatiates further on this symbolism in his Autobiography:

The bright part of the moon's disk, to adopt the symbolism of a certain poem, is subjective mind, and the dark, objective mind, and we have eight and twenty phases for our classification of mankind, and of the movement of its thought. At the first phase -- the night where there is no moonlight -- all is objective, while when, upon the fifteenth night, the moon comes to the full, there is only subjective mind.<sup>14b</sup>

Yeats believed that man reflected the cycle, and therefore, era, nation and individual underwent the same process:

somewhere about 1450, ... men attained to personality in great numbers, "Unity of Being," and became like a "perfectly proportioned human body", and as men so fashioned held places of power, therein nations had it too, prince and ploughman sharing thought and feeling. What afterwards showed for rifts and cracks were there already, but imperious impulse held all together. Then the scattering came...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14b</sup>Autobiography, pp. 248-249.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 247-248.

The subjective phase fifteen of the moon represented the passion, creativity and individualism of the mid-renaissance, for at that phase, the moon's magnetic powers were most potent. However, there was "no human life at the full"<sup>16</sup> because it was necessary to have tension between subjective and objective qualities, so that "we see self or world and its anti-self as in one vision."<sup>17</sup> Hence, the mid-renaissance "could but approximate to the full moon."<sup>18</sup> As the moon continues to wane, the centuries take on more objective qualities, approaching phase twenty-eight, when the moon's magnetic powers are at their weakest.

This is the future phase that Ireland and indeed the whole world would enter, until finally, according to Yeats's cosmological system, "Era", "Culture", and "Being" would diffract into fragments. In his Autobiographies, Yeats remarks on this transition from phase twenty-two to phase twenty-eight:

Doubtless because fragments broke  
into ever smaller fragments we saw  
one another in the light of bitter  
comedy, and in the arts, where now  
one technical element reigned and now

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>17</sup>Autobiography, p. 201.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

another, generation hated generation,  
 and accomplished beauty was snatched  
 away when it had most engaged our  
 affections. One thing I did not  
 foresee, nor having the courage of  
 my own thought: the growing murderous-  
 ness of the world.

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.<sup>19</sup>

This grim picture, which occurs with the final revolution of the gyres in "The Second Coming" (1921) represents Yeats's poetic version of the decline into total solar objectivity. It recalls the superficial, culture of Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And as a future poetic metaphor for spiritual sterility, the solar phase is symbolised by the gaze of the sphinx, a gaze which is as "blank and pitiless as the sun."<sup>20</sup>

But Yeats's generation had not yet reached that phase of total abstraction. According to Joseph Ronsley, they were in phase twenty-two and in danger of future annihilation:

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>20</sup>"The Second Coming" (1921), C.P., p. 210.

The world having arrived at the breaking point symbolised by phase twenty-two, this generation of artists had witnessed the shift into the primary objective half of the cycle. The generation was tragic because under the spell of an abstract age in which it had been trapped, it had lost vital contact with the world; it had renounced the visible world.<sup>21</sup>

And in Yeats's own words:

...that a half, as I affirm it, of the twenty-second night still lingers, they may subdue and conquer, cherish even some Utopian dream, spread abstraction even further till thought is but a film, and there is no dark depth any more, surface only.<sup>22</sup>

This phase twenty-two provided Yeats with an explanation for all those who, like himself, were aware of Ireland's imminent tragedy, the decline into phase twenty-eight. (The only difference between himself and his peers was a greater awareness of his tragedy, on his part as a visionary poet, and therefore he saw himself in phase sixteen). Describing the tragedy in "September 1913" (1914), he realized early that "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,/"

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<sup>21</sup>Joseph Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography: Life as Symbolic Pattern (Cambridge: Mass., 1968), p. 96 in Yeats and the 1890's, eds. Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (Shannon: Irish Univ. Press, 1971).

<sup>22</sup>Autobiography, p. 249.

It's with O'Leary in the grave."<sup>23</sup> For in the face of democracy and the "abstraction" that it represented, the aristocracy of a heroic past had died. It was a scene that an even earlier poem, "The Song of the Old Mother" (1907), echoed: "the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold."<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the literature of this period reflected the disintegration of the new generation in Ireland. It was passionless art, journalism, polemical, a "criticism of life."<sup>25</sup> And instead of the "fire" of creativity, on the contrary, there was the "fire" of a "Celtic Hell", the "Hell" of the artist. Consequently, "all who sought after beautiful and wonderful things with too avid a thirst, lost peace and form and became shapeless and common." Inert, passive, indifferent and submissive, the artists were like "charioteers standing by deserted chariots and holding broken reins in their hands." And the only passion left to them "out of all the passions of the world" was "sexual passion."<sup>26</sup> Realising this, Yeats

<sup>23</sup>"September, 1913", C.P., p. 121.

<sup>24</sup>"Speaking to the Psaltery" (1907), E.I., p. 27.

<sup>25</sup>"Irish National Literature, III" (Bookman, September, 1895), U.P., I, p. 376.

<sup>26</sup>"Ireland and the Arts" (1901), E.I., p. 204.





tragedy it is a "deliberate happiness," and the fate of such an artist is that of Wordsworth who, in "withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted," climbs "to some waste room," to find, "forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust."<sup>33</sup>

It was revolt against such a fate, and awareness of the tragedy of that fate, described in "The Phases of the Moon" (1919) as phase twenty-two, which Yeats had always sought to inculcate in Irishmen. "Opposing virtue", creation, and a belief in the imagination were the weapons of those who, unlike Wordsworth and Hic, did not succumb to "deliberate happiness". Moreover, awareness of the tragedy came to "subjective, "lunar" men. For although a poet may live in an era symbolised by phase twenty-two, his own being may pertain to a more subjective phase. Such was Oscar Wilde who, Yeats believed, existed in phase nineteen. Consequently, those men were in a dilemma for their subjectivity conflicted with the objectivity of the age.

"Active virtue" as opposed to the "passive acceptance of a code"<sup>34</sup> was the quality by which subjective men could achieve "Unity of Being". It was the quality which Yeats

<sup>33</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 342.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

sought in artists as he resolved to spur a quiescent Ireland into recognising an heroic past of passion. In his essay "Ireland and the Arts" (1901), Yeats wrote:

We who care deeply about the arts find ourselves the priesthood of an almost forgotten faith, and we must, I think, if we would win the people again, take upon ourselves the method and fervour of a priesthood. We must be half-humble and half-proud. We see the perfect more than others, it may be, but we must find the passions among the people. We must baptise as well as preach.<sup>35</sup>

The arts should precipitate man into re-seeking his lost passions; they should "fire and liberate him from a thousand obediences and complexities"<sup>36</sup> and thus "re-integrate the human spirit" into man's "imagination."<sup>37</sup> Thus, according to Yeats's theoretical explanation in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, all men who, like Wilde, "felt the strain of an intensity that seemed to hold life at the point of drama,"<sup>38</sup> were "subjective" men who denied the common thought of their era and "conceived life as tragedy."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup>"Ireland and the Arts (1901), E.I., p. 203.

<sup>36</sup>"Poetry and Tradition" (1907), E.I., p. 249.

<sup>37</sup>"Discoveries" (1906), E.I., p. 264.

<sup>38</sup>Autobiography, p. 115.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 165.



our penury until the world has been consumed and become a vision."<sup>43</sup>

The "life beyond the world", to which Yeats refers, is the world of passion. Representative of the antithesis of the modern age, its sources date back to Irish mythology. In "The Golden Age" (1893), Yeats describes the spiritual world:

I seemed to hear a voice of lamentation  
out of the Golden Age. It told me that  
we are imperfect, incomplete and no  
more like a beautiful woven web, but  
like a bundle of cords knotted together  
and flung into a corner. It said that  
the world was once all perfect and  
kindly, and that still the kindly and  
perfect world existed, but buried like  
a mass of roses under many spadefuls  
of earth. The faeries and the more  
innocent of the spirits dwelt within  
it, and lamented over our fallen world  
in the lamentation of the wind-tossed  
reeds, in the song of the birds, in the  
moan of the waves, and in the sweet cry  
of the fiddle. It said that with us  
the beautiful are not clever and the  
clever are not beautiful, and that the  
best of our moments are marred by a  
little vulgarity, or by a needle-prick  
out of sad recollection, and that the  
fiddle must ever lament about it all.  
It said that if only they who live in  
the Golden Age could die we might be  
happy, for the sad voices would be  
still; but they must sing and we must  
weep until the eternal gates swing open.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>"The Celtic Element in Literature" (1902), E.I.,  
p. 184.

<sup>44</sup>"The Golden Age" (1893), Mythologies, p. 104.

The Golden Age in opposition to the present, spirit contrasted with mortal, antitheses within the self, the "lamentation" of the spectre and man, and the soul, symbolized by roses, buried in the terrestrial life, are early aspects of Anima Mundi in Per Amica Silentia Lunae. It is a world in which one could re-attain "Unity of Being" because the mortal body has achieved "a mystical union with the multitude who govern this world and time."

Similar to the "Great Memory" described in his essay "Magic" (1901), Anima Mundi also has sources in Shelley's "remoter world" of "spiritual essences". In Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Yeats depicts it as a form of sub-conscious existence, so that consciousness and unconsciousness are inter-dependent states of being. And the "daimon", which exists in Anima Mundi as an unfulfilled passion, "desires its own recurrence more than any other event" and therefore drives man to seek "The other self, the anti-self or antithetical self, as one may choose to name it," coming "to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality."<sup>46</sup>

In dreams, man and daimon could momentarily unite because when man sleeps he "suspends the critical faculty"

<sup>45</sup>"Rosa Alchemica" (1897), Mythologies, p. 273.

<sup>46</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 331.

and "brings up from his subconscious" "anything that he already possessed a fragment of,"<sup>47</sup> for the subconscious and the "general soul" (Anima Mundi) are "scarce separable."<sup>48</sup> Man's creative faculty comes from this world of the "Great Memory", because the minds of passionate men are like the "line of foam" on that "vast luminous sea":

...and so when a starved or banished passion shows in a dream we, before awaking, break the logic that had given it the capacity of action and throw it into chaos again. But the passions when we know that they cannot find fulfilment, become vision; ... we select our images from past times, we turn from our own age and try to feel Chaucer nearer than the daily newspaper.<sup>49</sup>

Founded on passion, subjective men, Yeats felt, were in touch with this past world of Anima Mundi and therefore were sustained by it. Elaborating on this theory in his Autobiography, Yeats explained:

As life goes on we discover that certain things sustain us in defeat, or give us victory, whether over ourselves or others, and it is in these thoughts, tested by passion, that we call convictions. Among

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<sup>47</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 334.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

subjective men (in all those, that is, who must spin a web out of their own bowels) the victory is an intellectual daily recreation of all that exterior fate snatches away and so... that fate's antithesis; while what I have called "the Mask" is an emotional antithesis to all that comes out of their internal nature,...<sup>50</sup>

But the daimon in Anima Mundi not only represents man's antithesis, but also the creative impulse which forces man to seek the right "mask."

This drive originated from "instincts" such as those Yeats described in his essay "The Moods" (1895) and which he dramatised as supernatural beings in his plays. In Per Amica Silentia Lunae he explains them as the daimonic passions that arise out of Anima Mundi. These passions are man's past, his "ghostly" "buried self", his daimon, and if man is to achieve Unity of Being he must reunite with his past self, the "age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb."<sup>51</sup> It is this instinct to reunite which forces man to create, seeking the right "mask" so that he may achieve unity.

But the daimon or "genius" "that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial life" is also man's

<sup>50</sup> Autobiography, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> Autobiography, p. 233.

destiny and thus, as his destiny, leads him to "crisis" so that they, man and daimon, may be "conjoint":

There are, indeed, personifying spirits that we had best call but Gates and Gate-Keepers, because through their dramatic power they bring our souls to crisis, to mask and image, caring not a straw whether we be Juliet going to her wedding, or Cleopatra to her death; for in their eyes nothing has weight but passion.<sup>52</sup>

The dramatic crisis which Yeats endeavoured to create in his poetry and drama is "the heart's discovery of itself," the moment between immortality and mortality "in which persons recovered again their personality, only more transcendent and in a more intensely living state."<sup>53</sup>

As the man's destiny, the daimons "bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle he may confront without despair":<sup>54</sup>

The Daimon, by using his mediatorial shades, brings man again and again to the place of choice, heightening temptation that the choice may be as final as possible, imposing his own

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in Torchiana, p. 233.

<sup>54</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 326.

lucidity upon events, leading his victim to whatever among works not impossible is the most difficult.<sup>55</sup>

But the task is toil-worn and tragic because, unlike the saint who has "renounced experience itself" and who "will wear his mask as he finds it,"<sup>56</sup> the poet and hero are driven to seek out their mask through experience.

"What portion in the world can the artist have/Who has awakened from the common dream / But dissipation and despair?"<sup>57</sup> Yeats asked in "Ego Dominus Tuus". For as he saw it, those who sought their antithesis, in order to achieve Unity of Being, were destined to struggle continuously to maintain their mask because they ever sought to perfect life.

Since the struggle in Per Amica Silentia Lunae between daimon and self is the result of their antithetical natures, the "descending power" of the daimon is a "zigzag" line that "illuminates" the passive and active qualities between them. Consequently, the tension between the polarities, provokes an "enmity", antinomies that form a type of dialectic warring between daimon and self. For although they are interdependent,

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>57</sup>"Ego Dominus Tuus", Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 323.

their antithetical qualities act as a repelling force, and, consequently, the "hunger" that daimon and self try to satiate is constantly thwarted:

I understand why there is a deep enmity between a man and his destiny, and why a man loves nothing but his destiny. In an Anglo-Saxon poem a certain man is called, as to call him something that summed up all heroism, 'Doom Eager'. I am persuaded that the Daimon delivers and deceives us, and that he wove that netting from the stars and threw the net from his shoulder.<sup>58</sup>

Since their relationship is founded on "spiritual hate" and the "warfare" between man and daimon is constant, the battle demands the artist's continuous effort to create. Therefore, the warfare is that of "Active Virtue" as "distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code." The combat enables the artist to live dramatically, to seek reality by accomplishing the most difficult task, because he does not "stand within the sacred house but lives amid the whirlwinds that beset its threshold "; and there he "may find his pardon."<sup>59</sup>

The place where the experience occurs, the "threshold" of the "sacred house", is the "terrestrial condition." It

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<sup>58</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 336.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

symbolises man's confrontation with, and not escapism from, life and mortality. In Per Amica Silentia Lunae, Yeats has finally managed, theoretically, to create this "condition" as the "trysting place" for the immortal and mortal elements-- an accomplishment which he found difficult to achieve during his early dramatic work:

All power is from the terrestrial condition,  
 For there all opposites meet and there only  
 is the extreme of choice possible, full  
freedom.  
 And there the heterogeneous is, and evil,  
 For evil is the strain one upon another of <sup>60</sup>  
opposites.

Because the "terrestrial condition" is the meeting place of opposites, it offers the greatest possibility of creation, for the victory of the artist is all the greater when he transcends the conflict between the mortal and immortal selves.

Yeats's conception of the "terrestrial condition" provided him with an important basis for his later poetry. From The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) to the climactic volumes, The Tower (1928) and The Winding Stair (1933) and beyond, Yeats's work focusses, more acutely than hitherto, on the struggle of man against the polarities of mortality and immortality. One poem in particular, "Vacillation" (1932),

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 356-357.

describes this necessary tension if man is to reach the state of ecstasy in the "terrestrial condition":

Between extremities  
 Man runs his course;  
 A brand, or flaming breath,  
 Comes to destroy  
 All those antinomies  
 Of day and night;  
 The body calls it death,  
 The heart remorse.  
 But if these be right  
 What is joy?<sup>61</sup>

"Seek out reality, leave things that seem", "look on that fire, salvation walks within", states the soul, for by seeking reality, the poet discovers "salvation".<sup>62</sup>

Compounded from antitheses, the poem stresses that man must experience both worlds as he moves between extremities. Moreover, the progress is towards the wisdom in parts VII and VIII. Having begun with autobiographical references to Yeats's youth, with the image of the double tree ("The Two Trees" [1893]) as a symbol of his early occult and Celtic studies, the poem covers the "main symbols" of Yeats's major poetry. In a letter to Sturge Moore (1921) he lists "Sun and Moon (in all phases), Tower, Mask, Tree (Tree with Mask hanging on the trunk), Well",<sup>63</sup> as representative of

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<sup>61</sup>"Vacillation" (1932), C.P., p. 282.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>63</sup>Quoted in John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1959), p. 221. Henceforward this work will be referred to as Unterecker.

man's struggle to "satisfy ambition"<sup>64</sup> so that he goes  
 "Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb."<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, Unterecker remarks on the close  
 correlation of part IV in the poem to Yeats's personal  
 experience of the "Condition of Fire":

Perhaps I am sitting in some crowded  
 restaurant... I look at the  
 strangers near as if I had known them  
 all my life, and it seems strange  
 that I cannot speak to them: every-  
 thing fills me with affection, I have  
 no longer any fears or any needs; I  
 do not even remember that this happy  
 mood must come to an end.<sup>66</sup>

In the poem, his "body of a sudden blazed" and, "so great"  
 was the "happiness,/That I was blessed and could bless."<sup>67</sup>  
 "Struck dumb in the simplicity of Fire" like the golden bird  
 of "Byzantium" (1930), "Salvation" and "reality", derived  
 from "tragic joy", climax man's confrontation of tragedy in  
 the "terrestrial condition."

It is this point of dramatic crisis -- to thrive on  
 tragedy -- around which Yeats's tragic theatre and later

<sup>64</sup>"Vacillation" (1932), C.P., p. 283.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, pp. 364-365.

<sup>67</sup>"Vacillation" (1932), C.P., p. 284.

poems revolve. He recognised this climax as early as 1885, and later, articulated it in "To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing" (1914):

Be secret and exult  
Because of all things known<sup>68</sup>  
That is the most difficult.

In 1936, his poem "Lapis Lazuli" echoes the theme when the crisis is confronted by the "Chinamen", their "gaiety transfiguring all that dread":

There, on the mountain and the sky,  
On all the tragic scene they stare.  
One asks for mournful melodies;  
Accomplished fingers begin to play.  
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,  
Their ancient glittering eyes, are gay.<sup>69</sup>

At least one critic has paralleled Yeats's conception of tragic ecstasy with that of Carlyle:

...the lip is curled in a kind of god-like disdain of the thing that is eating-out his heart, -- as if it were withal a mean insignificant thing, as if he whom it had power to torture and strangle were greater than it. The face of one wholly in protest, and

<sup>68</sup>"To a Friend Whose Work has come to Nothing" (1914), C.P., p. 122.

<sup>69</sup>"Lapis Lazuli" (1936), C.P., p. 339.

life-long unsundering battle,  
against the world.<sup>70</sup>

"If I denied myself any of the pain I could not believe in my own ecstasy",<sup>71</sup> Yeats echoes in Per Amica Silentia Lunae. For it is precisely out of this struggle and confrontation with tragedy imposed on one in the "terrestrial condition" which delivers the artist to the tragic ecstasy of the "Condition of Fire". Creation wrought by "pain" is the achievement of the highest goal because the poet "cannot keep his mask and his vision without new bitterness, new disappointment."<sup>72</sup>

These "Doom Eager" desires of the artist Yeats saw in artists like Dante and Synge who created supreme work out of tragedy. In his essay "J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910) Yeats described Synge as one who maintained "a correspondence between a lasting mood of the soul and this life that shares the harshness of rocks and wind."<sup>73</sup> For Synge, like the poet in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, "loves

<sup>70</sup>Brian John, "To Hunger Fiercely After Truth": Daimonic Man and Yeats's Insatiable Appetite," Eire-Ireland, IX (Spring, 1974), p. 98. The passage is taken from Carlyle's On Heroes and Hero Worship.

<sup>71</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 332.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>73</sup>"J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), E.I. p. 327.

all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand, all that heightens the emotions by contest, all that stings into life the sense of tragedy."<sup>74</sup>

Out of this struggle in the "terrestrial condition" the artist creates supreme work. For in art he attains Unity of Being and man and daimon are joined: "The halves of their nature are so completely joined that they seem to labour for their objects, and yet to desire whatever happens, being at the same time predestinate and free, creation's very self."<sup>75</sup> This is the attainment of Unity of Being, when one gazes, not at the work of art, but at the recreation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man,"<sup>76</sup> wherein self and anti-self are fused in a sublime poise that transcends the passion that created it. This poise, Yeats defines as the "Condition of Fire":

When all sequence comes to an end,  
time comes to an end, and the soul  
puts on the rhythmic or spiritual  
body or luminous body and contemplates  
all the events of its memory and  
every possible impulse in an eternal  
possession of itself in one single  
moment.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 326-327.

<sup>75</sup>Autobiography, p. 234.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 357.

In "A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), Yeats describes the ecstatic state in which the antitheses are held so perfectly in tension that the polarised actions occur simultaneously, therein annihilating "hunger" and loathing:

My hatred tortures me with love, my  
love with hate. I am like the  
Tibetan monk who dreams at his  
initiation that he is eaten by a  
wild beast and learns on waking  
that he himself is eater and eaten.<sup>78</sup>

This is the "sole reality" of the human being -- to transcend antinomies and be transported to a state of "pure contemplation" -- when the toil of the "terrestrial condition," where "all opposites meet",<sup>79</sup> is eclipsed in "one single moment". "I have something about me that, though it makes me love, is more like innocence,"<sup>80</sup> Yeats explains. But like the "pulsation of the artery," vision is as instantaneous as a bolt of lightning and thus suffers "decline."<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup>"A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), E.I., p. 519.

<sup>79</sup>Per Amica Silentia Lunae, p. 356.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 361. In his article "The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900", Yeats says:

"...all life is revelation beginning in miracle and enthusiasm... Progress is miracle, and it is sudden, because miracles are the work of an all-powerful energy; and nature in herself has no power except to die and to forget. If one studies one's own mind, one comes to think with Blake, that 'every time less than a pulsation of the artery is equal to six thousand years, for in this period the poet's work is done; and all the great events of time start forth and are conceived in such a period, within a pulsation of the artery'" ("The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900", The Dome, January, 1900), U.P., I, 199]).

For Yeats, reality lies neither in that "buried self" nor in the partial self, but in the product born of struggle when, through the creative power of the imagination, man achieves "Unity of Being." When vision occurs in the "terrestrial condition", it is instantaneous, and therefore man must constantly strive for its recurrence. It is on this basis that Yeats's work exalts man's ability to toil, to risk all and yet be "gay". For to endeavour to achieve perfection, sustaining oneself on the "bitter crust" of life, describes a will that creates ecstasy, passion and heroism:

I think that all noble things are the result of warfare; great nations and classes, of warfare in the visible world, great poetry and philosophy, of invisible warfare, the division of a mind within itself, a victory, the sacrifice of a man to himself. I am certain that my friend's noble art, so full of passion and heroic beauty, is the victory of a man who in poverty and sickness created from the delight of expression, and in the contemplation that is born of the minute and delicate arrangements of images, happiness, and health of mind.<sup>82</sup>

Man's tragic struggle to achieve Unity of Being, in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, is the focal point of all of his work. His early interest in the conflict that occurs when

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<sup>82</sup>"J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910), E.I., p. 321.

man's antithetical nature reaches a crisis, as symbolised by the "Rose", emerges in his plays as an increasing preoccupation with tragedy and dramatic conflict between mortal and immortal selves. Determined to present this belief in terms of a spiritual warfare within the self, a warfare which had hitherto resembled a conflict between separate mortal and immortal beings, Yeats presented a theory in Per Amica Silentia Lunae based on a groundwork of personal myth. This mythical frame succeeds in defining the antithetical nature in man and the potential unity of those polarities. When self and daimon, representatives of those oppositions, fuse, the being is thus transported into a transcendent state of spiritual purity. On the basis of this formula, a poetry emerges which heralds man's enduring impulse to fulfil himself in the "terrestrial condition."

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