

TENNYSON AND YEATS: EARLY POETRY

FROM DUALITY TO RECONCILIATION:
AN AESTHETIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY POETRY OF
TENNYSON AND YEATS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
I. THE AESTHETICS OF DUALITY	12
II. THE POETRY OF DUALITY	34
III. THE POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	98

INTRODUCTION

The middle and late nineteenth century were years of aesthetic self-division. A recurrent theme throughout much of the literature is that of the divided personality which forces men, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, to be "alien to themselves."¹ Works such as Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray are reflections of the schizoid element throughout segments of Victorian art. Several critical theories of the time express an aesthetic attitude which analyzes poetic creations in dualistic terms. Arthur Henry Hallam's "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson" and Robert Browning's "Essay on Shelley" both explain poetry and poets in dichotomous terms. Browning, as Hallam before him, saw poets as either one of two types, the "subjective" or the "objective". The "subjective" poet, according to Browning, is the man concerned with his own soul and its transcendental workings:

¹"The Buried Life", l. 22.

Such a poet does not deal habitually with the picturesque groupings and tempestuous tossings of the forest-trees, but with their roots and fibres naked to the chalk and stone. He does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes: we must look deep into his human eyes, to see those pictures on them. He is rather a seer, accordingly, than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence.²

Thus the subjective poet is a seer capable of seeing beyond the ordinary and mutable world of ordinary men. He is concerned:...

. . . not so much with reference to the many below as to the One above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth, -- an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees but what God sees -- the Ideas of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand.³

The objective poet concerns himself with the workings of the mutable world. He is:

. . . one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human heart and brain) with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men.⁴

The essays of Hallam and Browning both expound the theory that the ultimate virtue of the "whole poet" is his ability to combine the powers of both the subjective and

²Browning, "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley", in Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 337.

³Ibid., p. 336.

⁴Ibid., p. 336.

objective vision. Arthur Hallam regarded Alfred Tennyson as such a "whole poet" as Browning did Shelley. W. B. Yeats was greatly influenced by both Browning's and Hallam's essays. In 1892 he wrote:

If one set aside Shelley's essay on poetry and Browning's essay on Shelley, one does not know where to turn in modern English for anything so philosophic -- anything so fundamental and radical -- as the first half of Arthur Hallam's essay "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson."⁵

Yeats, too, was concerned throughout his life with becoming a "whole poet". Since Hallam regarded Tennyson as a "whole poet", I feel it would be profitable to investigate the relationships between the poetic developments of Tennyson and Yeats.

Throughout his life, Yeats often made disparaging remarks on the subject of Victorian aesthetic conventions and Alfred Lord Tennyson, as laureate of that age, would often be the subject of the tirade. Typical of Yeats's attitude towards Tennyson's work was that it contained "passionless sentiment"⁶ or that his poetry was filled with "'impurities', curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion"⁷ and that he had substituted

⁵Yeats, "A Bundle of Poets", in Uncollected Prose, I, p. 277.

⁶Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p. 351.

⁷Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 167.

"moral values that were not aesthetic values."⁸ Tennyson, became a standard target for the Yeatsian invective against Victorian poetic principle which, to Yeats, involved a social impetus detracting from poetic purity:

The poetry which found its expression in the poems of writers like Browning and Tennyson, and even of writers who are seldom classed with them, like Swinburne, and like Shelley in his earlier years, pushed its limits as far as possible, and tried to absorb into itself the science and politics, the philosophy and morality of its time; but a new poetry, which is always contracting its limits, has grown up under the shadow of the old.⁹

As a maker of a new and purer poetic form, beyond the mundane realm, and within the rarefied atmosphere of Pre-Raphaelite aestheticism, the young Yeats objected more and more strenuously to a poetry whose conventions were publically determined:

Surely most of us, whatever be our politics, feel that The Idylls of the King are marred a little by the dedications to the Prince Consort and to the Queen, and not necessarily because either was unworthy of exceeding praise, but because neither represents to us a fuller and more beautiful kind of life than is possible to any mere subject, and because the attempt to make them do so, even though so mighty a poet made it, has a little lessened the significance of the great imaginative types of Arthur and Guinevere, and cast round

⁸Ibid., p. 313.

⁹Essays and Introductions, p. 190.

the greatest romantic poem of the century a ring of absurdity. We can only just tolerate Spenser's comparison of the Queen of the Fairies to Queen Elizabeth, for even then all such comparisons were growing obsolete, whereas we can hardly forgive at all this injury which the Court poet of our day has done to the laurelled poet of the people.¹⁰

This letter, published in "The Bookman" (November 1892), on the occasion of Tennyson's death, seems to establish a dichotomy towards Tennyson which involved Yeats throughout his creative career. On the one hand the poetry of the "Court poet" has a "ring of absurdity", and on the other, the "laurelled poet of the people" is a "mighty poet" capable of shaping "the greatest romantic poem of the century". Yeats, it seems, does not object to the poetic centre of Tennyson, but rather to the prescribed public trappings which enveloped his later work. It would be Auden, not Yeats, who would call Tennyson "the stupidest of English poets."

The image of the fragmented personality striving towards Unity of Being which so dominates the poetry of Yeats seems to be seminally established within many of his comments concerning Tennyson. Tennyson, to Yeats, was a poet whose work had become divided against a central poetic direction by the social demands of his time:

¹⁰ The Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed., Allan Wade, p. 219.

If people were to accept the theory that poetry moves us because of its symbolism, what change should one look for in the manner of our poetry? A return to the way of our fathers, a casting out of descriptions of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennyson. . . .¹¹

Tennyson's "central flame", according to Yeats, arises from the aesthetically rooted, purely imaginative verse of his early period. Arthur Henry Hallam in his 1831 essay, "On Some Characteristics of Modern Poetry and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson", noted the value of purely aesthetic concerns in the creative process:

Whenever the mind of the artist suffers itself to be occupied, during its period of creation, by any other predominant motive than the desire of beauty, the result is false in art.¹²

Hallam describes and deplores a process of fragmentation which had led to an irrecoverable "period of degradation"¹³ within contemporary poetry:

We have indeed seen it urged in some of our fashionable publications, that the diffusion of poetry must be in the direct ratio of diffusion of machinery, because a highly civilized people must have new objects of interest, and thus a new field will be open to description. But this notable argument forgets that against this objective amelioration may be set the decrease of subjective power, arising from a prevalence of social activity,

¹¹Essays and Introductions, p. 163.

¹²Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 849.

¹³Ibid., p. 852.

and a continual absorption of the higher feelings into the palpable interests of ordinary life. The French Revolution may be a finer theme than the War of Troy; but it does not so evidently follow that Homer is to find his superior!¹⁴

Tennyson's 1830 volume, Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, offers to Hallam, a release from the dualistic and inferior popular poetry of the time:

The volume of 'Poems, Chiefly Lyrical', does not contain above 154 pages; but it shews us much more of the character of its parent mind, than many books we have known of much larger compass and more boastful pretensions. The features of original genius are clearly and strongly marked. The author imitates nobody; we recognise the spirit of his age, but not the individual form of this or that writer.¹⁵

Within this early volume Hallam recognizes in Tennyson the ability to assimilate both "subjective" and "objective" reality into a poetic mode of "sensation" through which he describes "all the forms of nature with the 'eruditus oculus'".¹⁶ The Tennyson described by Hallam is a man who seems capable of attaining the Yeatsian ideal of Unity of Being:

. . . no poet can be fairly judged of by fragments, least of all, a poet like Mr. Tennyson, whose mind conceives nothing isolated, nothing abrupt, but every part with reference to some other part, and in subservience to the idea of the whole.¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., p. 852.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 853.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 853.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 853.

Yeats recognized the importance of Hallam's essay early in his own career and used Hallam's dictum to give shape to his early verse: "The doctrine of what the younger Hallam called the Aesthetic School was expounded in his essay on Tennyson, and when I was a boy the unimportance of subject was a canon."¹⁸ Thus, from his reading of Hallam's essay, Yeats is made aware of the purity and unity of Tennyson's early verse, a dictum which he espouses as his own poetic principles:

When I began to write I avowed for my principles those of Arthur Hallam in his essay upon Tennyson. Tennyson, who had written but his early poems when Hallam wrote, was an example of the school of Keats and Shelley, and Keats and Shelley, unlike Wordsworth, intermixed into their poetry no elements from the general thought, but wrote out of the impression made by the world upon their delicate senses. They were of the aesthetic school -- was he the inventor of the name? -- and could not be popular because their readers could not understand them without attaining to a like delicacy of sensation and so must needs turn from them to Wordsworth or another, who condescended to moral maxims, or some received philosophy, a multitude of things that even common sense could understand.¹⁹

Through Arthur Hallam, W. B. Yeats equates his early career with that of Alfred Tennyson and this equation would be maintained throughout his life:

¹⁸Autobiographies, pp. 489-490.

¹⁹Essays and Introductions, pp. 347-348.

J. B. Y. would rail against Tennyson and Wordsworth but probably these two poets received more of W. B.'s youthful admiration than he would have admitted at the time to his father's face. Fifty years afterwards he was asked, 'Whom did you venerate as a young man, Mr. Yeats?' His answer came without hesitation, 'Tennyson'. On the question being repeated by the enquirer, who had not expected this answer, the reply was the same with the addition of 'Wordsworth'.²⁰

Both Yeats and Tennyson began their poetic careers as conscious "Romantics" and throughout their lives the poetry of these two men was forced, through personal and social pressure, to metamorphosize beyond solipsistic romanticism into a larger, more inclusive, framework outside of the self and aesthetic sensuousness. In 1892 Yeats described Tennyson's poetic development:

As the years passed over him the poet grew not less and the man grew incomparably greater, and this growth was accompanied ever by a shedding off of hopes based upon mere mechanical change and mere scientific or political inventiveness, until at last his soul came near to standing, as the soul of a poet should, naked under the heavens.²¹

Yeats might have been very well describing his own poetic career, for there seems to be curious echoes of the 1892 essay in the final poem of his pivotal Responsibilities volume written some twenty-two years later:

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies

²⁰ Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats, pp. 35-36.

²¹ Yeats, Uncollected Prose, I, 232-233.

From heel to throat;
 But the fools caught it,
 Wore it in the world's eyes
 As though they'd wrought it.
 Song, let them take it,
 For there's more enterprise
 In walking naked.²²
 ("A Coat")

The purpose of this thesis will not be to trace Tennysonian elements in the poetry of W. B. Yeats. Rather, I have chosen to investigate the early poetic development of two poets, who, because their poetic origins seem closely linked, attempted, within their poetry, a reconciliation and fusion between the "subjective" and "objective" realities.

Throughout the thesis I define "objective" in much the same way as Browning. Objective reality is the world of man, nature, and mutability: the world as it exists to the common eye, Yeats's "rag-and-bone shop of the heart". Subjective reality is also defined in a similar manner to Browning's definition. The subjective world is that of the purely solipsistic imagination: the realm of escape from mutability, of undying permanence, or the retreat into aestheticism.

As a limited investigation of two major poets, this thesis traces the development of a poetic strain within

²²The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats, eds., Allt and Alspach, p. 320. Hereafter cited as Variorum.

the verse of Tennyson and Yeats. Beginning with the conflict of the subjective Romantic in an objective world, both poets within their 1842 and 1914 volumes respectively, attempt to reconcile the two realms. The reconciliation process, in both cases, involves an acceptance of objectivity as a means by which the poet becomes "whole". Hallam, in 1831, wrote: "Art is a lofty tree, and may shoot up far beyond our grasp, but its roots are in daily life and experience."²³ It is a theory which Yeats echoes and applies to his own life and work:

There are two realities, the terrestrial and the condition of fire. All power is from the terrestrial condition, for there all opposites meet and there only is the extreme of choice possible, full freedom.²⁴

This thesis will trace the metamorphosis of both Tennyson and Yeats as they move from a high Romantic abhorrence of mutability to an acceptance of the power and passion of the objective world as a means of reconciling "the two voices" of their poetry.

²³Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 851.

²⁴Mythologies, p. 356.

I

THE AESTHETICS OF DUALITY

Yeats's 1917 declaration, "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry",¹ is a statement of an aesthetic conflict with roots which extend back to and beyond the poetry and attitudes of the Romantic Movement. The Romantic poet is traditionally seen as a man apart from prevailing social convention; what Keats has called, "The weariness, the fever and the fret."² In his solitary retreat, the archetypal Romantic seeks images and evidence of a reality which transcends the transitory nature of phenomenal creation. Artistic production was to Keats a means of triumphing over time:

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' -- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.³

However, Keats was simultaneously aware that withdrawal from the world into an aesthetic retreat would not

¹W. B. Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae", Mythologies, p. 331.

²"Ode to a Nightingale", l. 23.

³"Ode on a Grecian Urn", ll. 56-60.

overcome mutability, and in "Ode on Melancholy", he accepted as inevitable the workings of time:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand and let her rave;
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.
She dwells with Beauty, Beauty that must die.
(ll. 10-21)

Here Beauty is no longer associated with an eternal and unchanging Truth as in the "Grecian Urn" ode, but rather it exists in close correspondence with the changeable nature of "droop-headed flowers", "globed peonies", and rainbows of "the salt-sand wave". Keats came to accept the inconstancy of the world and, like Alfred Tennyson and W. B. Yeats after him, he looked upon the struggle and pain of life as a means of self-definition:

I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read -- I will call the 'human heart' the 'horn book' used in that School -- and I will call the "Child" able to read, the Soul made from that school and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to where the heart must feel, and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, it is the teat from which the mind or intelligence sucks its identity.⁴

By distinguishing a dualistic concept in which

⁴Hyder E. Rollins, ed., The Letters of John Keats, II, 102-103.

beauty exists either within the eternal and ultimately solipsistic framework of truth, or within the inconstant realm of flux, Keats defines the limits of what may be called "the Romantic dilemma". The Romantic artist (especially the second generation Romantics: Byron, Shelley, and Keats) sought his poetic identity at either pole of experience: the Romantic temperament, seemingly, would not allow for the reconciliation of the opposites:

This montage of the Romantics no doubt over-generalizes many of the problems specific to one or another of the poets, but for all alike there is no question but that their experience of their own self-identity was profoundly related to this tension between imagination and reason, the Higher Reality and the external world. ... Joy in a transcendental union of mind and matter was suspect to them, and uneasy indulgence, even as they trusted in the imagination as the great unifier.⁵

The fragmentation of the poetic self which is articulated in Keats's odes "On Melancholy" and "On a Grecian Urn" is somewhat analogous to what T. S. Eliot called the "dissociation of sensibility". In 1921 Eliot wrote that something "had happened to the mind of England between the time of Donne or Lord Herbert of Cherbury and the time of Tennyson and Browning; it is the difference between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet."⁶ Eliot argues that, "In the seventeenth century a

⁵Masao Miyoshi, The Divided Self, p. 49.

⁶T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets", Selected Prose, p. 110.

dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered."⁷ The "dissociation" is that of "thought from feeling" by which poetry becomes divided into two distinct poles, and from which Eliot felt no reconciliation had emerged:

The sentimental age began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected. In one or two passages of Shelley's Triumph of Life, in the second Hyperion, there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated.⁸

Arthur Hallam's essay, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry", concerns itself with the fragmentation of poetry in much the same manner as Eliot's review of H. J. C. Grierson's collection of Metaphysical verse:

But the age in which we live comes late in our national progress. That first raciness and juvenile vigour of literature, when nature "wantoned as in her prime, and played at will her virgin fancies" is gone, never to return. Since that day we have undergone a period of degradation. . . . It would be tedious to repeat the tale so often related of the French contagion and the heresies of the Popian school.

With the close of the last century came an era of reaction, an era of painful struggle to bring our over-civilised condition of thought into union with the fresh productive spirit that brightened the morning of our literature. But repentance

⁷Ibid., p. 111.

⁸Ibid., p. 111.

is unlike innocence. . . . Those different powers of poetic disposition, the energies of Sensitive, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion, which in former times were intermingled, and derived from mutual support an extensive empire over the feelings of men, were now restrained within separate spheres of agency. The whole system no longer worked harmoniously. . . .⁹

Although the historical analyses of Hallam and Eliot are dissimilar, their diagnoses of the literary dilemma are essentially the same. Both essays are concerned with the disunity of poetic perception, and in particular, the divided state of Romantic poetry. Hallam and Eliot differ greatly, however, in respect to their attitudes towards Tennyson. Eliot unites Tennyson with Browning and the Romantics in that he characterizes Tennyson as passively "ruminating" in romantic despair. Hallam, though, states that Tennyson is a poet of unique quality who "imitates nobody", in whom "the spirit of his age, but not the individual form of this or that writer"¹⁰ is recognized. Tennyson, within his 1830 volume, Poems Chiefly Lyrical, is to Hallam a poet capable of reuniting the poetic "whole system harmoniously." In Hallam's estimate, he does not acknowledge Romantic disunity, for "he conceives nothing isolated, nothing abrupt but every part with reference to some other part,

⁹Arthur Hallam, Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 852.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 853.

and in subservience to the idea of the whole."¹¹ Tennyson's poetic method, according to Hallam, is one which allows for the articulation of unity:

Mr. Tennyson's way of proceeding seems to be this. He collects the most striking phenomena of individual minds until he arrives at some leading fact, which allows him to lay down an axiom or law; and then, working on the law thus attained, he clearly discerns the tendency of what new particulars his invention suggests, and is enabled to impress an individual freshness and unity on ideal combinations.¹²

This theory of Tennysonian technique, in which the poet establishes an "axiom or law", leading to a purity of thought and producing a poetry of "freshness and unity on ideal combinations" is similar to a statement by Yeats concerning symbolism:

All writers, all artists of any kind, in so far as they have any philosophical or critical power, perhaps just in so far as they have been deliberate artists at all, have had some philosophy, some criticism of their art; and it has often been this philosophy, or this criticism, that has evoked their most startling inspiration, calling into outer life some portion of the divine life, or of the buried reality, which could alone extinguish in the emotions what their philosophy or their criticism would extinguish in the intellect. They have sought for no new thing, it may be, but only to understand and to copy the pure inspiration of early times, but because the divine life wars upon our outer life, and must needs change its weapons and its movements as we change ours, inspiration has come to them in beautiful startling shapes.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., p. 853.

¹² Ibid., p. 859.

¹³ Yeats, Essays and Introductions, pp. 154-155.

Symbolism, to Yeats, is a means of uniting the warring factions of "divine and outer lives" and Hallam casts Tennyson as a "pre-symbolist" or a "proto-symbolist" who can "unite the whole system harmoniously" because of his "peculiar skill with which he holds all of them [delineated objects] fused."¹⁴

Tennyson is, of course, not a symbolist in the Yeatsian sense, for although Hallam feels him capable of "fusing" objects into harmony, the textual evidence within the poetry up to the 1842 volume indicates that Tennyson was engaged in the Romantic "quarrel with the self" involving what Yeats called the "outer and divine" lives. A major theme throughout Tennyson's early poetry and life is a struggle with the dualities of the "objective" (mutable) and "subjective" (eternal) modes of being. His early poetic self was trapped within a "damned vacillating state"¹⁵ between the poles of aesthetic and mutable beauty as defined by Romantic sensibility and particularly by John Keats. John Pettigrew elaborates on the close relationship between the two poets:

Very real affinities of spirit are reflected
in essential similarities in their early developments,
and in their poetry generally. Indeed,

¹⁴Hallam, Victorian Poetry and Poetics, p. 853.

¹⁵"Supposed Confessions of a Second Rate Sensitive Mind", l. 190, in The Poems of Tennyson, ed., Christopher Ricks, p. 202. Hereafter cited as Poems of Tennyson.

no two major nineteenth-century English poets seem so akin. Could anyone else but Tennyson conceivably have written Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" or "To Autumn", and anyone but Keats, Tennyson's "Oenone" or "The Lotus Eaters"?¹⁶

In that he was engaged in a quarrel with himself, in much the same manner as Keats and Tennyson, the early Yeats could also have written some of Keats's lines. Yeats recognized the dualistic paradox which gave rise to Keats's poetry: "No mind can engender till divided into two, but that of a Keats or a Shelley falls into an intellectual part that follows, and a hidden emotional flying image...."¹⁷ The poetry which arises from the conflict between the objective ("the intellectual part") and the subjective ("an emotional flying image") is to Yeats an ultimate mode of expression:

Hallam argued that poetry was the impression on the senses of certain very sensitive men. It was such with the pure artists, Keats and Shelley, but not so with the impure artists who, like Wordsworth, mixed up popular morality with their work.¹⁸

In their early careers, Tennyson and Yeats were in the dramatic frame which made the production of "pure art" possible. Both poets were preoccupied in a quarrel between divided aspects of the self. Tennyson sought to reconcile and unify his being while Yeats, I would argue, consciously used the dilemma to produce even his early work.

¹⁶John Pettigrew, Tennyson: The Early Poems, p. 8.

¹⁷Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 345.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 490.

Tennyson's life was one of conflict, and conflict shaped his poetry from the beginning:

Since Tennyson's temperament was at all times and to an unusual extent characterized by a variability between the extremes of exaltation and despair, it is a small wonder that the enigma of human consciousness with its conflicting intuitions should from the outset appear as a dominant motif in his poetry. Already in his earliest writing a polarity is observable, represented by two kinds of poetry, one showing a morbid preoccupation with the artist's subjection to his times, the other marked by a refusal to accept any such restriction.¹⁹

Tennyson's preoccupation with the antipodal nature of existence which contrasts the actual with the ideal or the mutable with the eternal is further revealed by statements in Hallam Tennyson's Memoir. A letter to an aunt shortly after his arrival at Cambridge indicates Tennyson's concern with the dichotomies of the inner and outer life:

I am sitting owl-like and solitary in my rooms (nothing between me and the stars but a stratum of tiles). The hoof of the steed, the roll of the wheel, the shouts of drunken Gown and drunken Town come up from below with a sea-like murmur. I wish to Heaven I had Prince Hussain's fairy carpet to transport me along the deeps of air to your coterie. Nay, I would even take up with his brother Aboul-something's glass for the mere pleasure of a peep. What a pity it is that the golden days of Faerie are over! What a misery not to be able to consolidate our gossamer dreams into reality!²⁰

¹⁹E.D.H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, pp. 3-4. Any study of Tennyson's conflicting self and the antithetical nature of his poetry must acknowledge Johnson as an important critic in this field.

²⁰Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir, I, 34.

The dualistic pull between commitment to life and escape into eternal and ethereal realms haunted Tennyson throughout his life:

. . . Tennyson was committed both to the knowledge of things seen or felt in sensuous terms and to the reality of his private intuitions, his central concern with the individual soul and the problem was strangely ambivalent, charged with the tension of opposites.²¹

Yeats, too, was "charged with the tension of opposites." Like Tennyson, his early self reflected a dislike for the present situation and sought escape into the eternal realms of the subjective self. In a letter to Katharine Tynan, Yeats indicates, with some self-mockery, his escapist temperament:

I am one of those unhappy people for whom between act and deed lies ever the terrible gulf of dreams. I sit down to write and go off into a brown study instead. At least if circumstances offer me the slightest excuse.²²

However, the escapist life of dream could not hold the young Yeats as it held other members of "The Tragic Generation". He writes that during the years in which he was associated with the aesthetic movement he "began to pray that my imagination might somehow be rescued from abstraction and become as preoccupied with life as had

²¹Jerome Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p. 15.

²²Letters, p. 164.

been the imagination of Chaucer."²³ Yeats is openly critical of Morris for his escape-centred existence:

The dream world of Morris was as much the antithesis of daily life as with other men of genius, but he was never conscious of the antithesis and so knew nothing of intellectual suffering.²⁴

To the young Yeats, total escape into the magic of Pre-Raphaelite dream was an abhorrent shirking off of a commitment to life. However, Yeats as a poet, who used as his canon Blake's "Without contraries there is no progression", is aware that in order to create "pure art", the conscious adaptation of antithetical modes of life must take place. Yeats, in order to write, followed the dictum by which he analysed Shelley and Keats: "to engender", he "divided his mind in two". He finds the following in an "old diary":

I think all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life, on a re-birth as something not one's self, something, created in a moment and perpetually renewed. . . . If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline on ourselves. . . . Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic the wearing of a mask.²⁵

This early articulation of Yeats's theory of the Mask, which achieves its full elaboration in A Vision and the

²³Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 188.

²⁴Ibid., p. 142.

²⁵Yeats, Mythologies, p. 334.

"Estrangement" section of Autobiographies, has its immediate source in the aesthetic doctrines of the eightennineties as expressed by Yeats's associates in the "Rhymers Club". Yeats quotes Oscar Wilde on the mask:

'Olive Schreiner", . . . 'is staying in the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks upon their faces, but I have told her that I live in the West End because nothing in life interests me but the mask.'²⁶

The poetry of this early period reflects the tensions which developed out of the antithetical nature of Yeats's assumed roles. His growing awareness of his chameleon poetic nature is indicated in a letter written in 1888 to Katharine Tynan:

I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before, . . . that it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight. The Chorus to the 'Stolen Child' sums it up -- that it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint -- the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope someday to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge.²⁷

Yeats, however, did not engage in the writing of "poetry of insight and knowledge" until after the beginning of the twentieth century. One may argue, then, that much of his verse of the nineties, as with the later work, is a poetry in which he consciously assumes a poetic persona which makes use of the "subjective and objective" polarities of the Romantic dilemma.

²⁶Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 165.

²⁷Letters, p. 63.

The "vacillating state" which Yeats knowingly adopted in order to "engender a pure poetry by dividing his mind" was a state in which Tennyson unwillingly found himself. The divided state of his mind offered Tennyson no sense of value, no self-knowledge, and no self-identity. He was tormented throughout his life by the problem of integrating the subjective self into the world of change. Buckley writes that "Self-control born of self-conquest was thus central to the mature Tennyson's thought and 'message'."²⁸ Tennyson's awareness of the need for self-development in order to attain knowledge and power is evident in the epyllion "Oenone":²⁹ "Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, / These three alone lead life to sov^ereign power" (ll. 142-143). Tennyson, unlike Yeats, who defined himself as an artist, sought his self-identity within a framework of rigid moral dictates: "For I hold nothing so clear as this, that I must be as good and noble as a man can be."³⁰ Hallam Tennyson relates the advice his father had given to a young man about to enter university:

'If a man is merely to be a bundle of sensations, he had better not exist at all. He should embark

²⁸Buckley, The Victorian Temper, p. 80.

²⁹Poems of Tennyson, p. 392.

³⁰Memoir, I, p. 317.

on his career in the spirit of selfless and adventurous heroism; should develop his true self by not shirking responsibility, by casting aside all maudlin and introspective morbidities, and by using his powers cheerfully in accordance with the obvious dictates of his moral consciousness, and so, as far as possible in harmony with what feels to be the Absolute Right.³¹

Tennyson's own early life, however, did not follow his own later rules for existence. The dominant theme throughout the earliest poetry is of morbid melancholia with definite "maudlin" undertones in the laments for lost relatives, dying friends and decayed civilizations:

Why should we weep for those who die?
 They fall -- their dust returns to dust;
 Their souls shall live eternally
 Within the mansions of the just.³²
 ("Why should we weep for those who die?", ll. 1-4)

These lines, written when the poet was eighteen, indicate the early infatuation with Byron which held Tennyson prior to his Cambridge years. (Christopher Ricks points to the echoes of Byron's "Bright Be the Place of the Soul" in this poem of Tennyson's since Byron's stanza ends with the line "For why should we mourn for the blest?")³³

As well as the obvious echoes of Romantic despair which permeate much of the earliest poetry, Tennyson's "juvenilia" also contains indications of the antithetical

³¹Ibid., p. 317.

³²Poems of Tennyson, p. 86.

³³Ibid., p. 86.

relationships between contraries which continue throughout his entire canon. The poem "Why should we weep for those who die?" establishes a paradoxical situation in which life and death exist in harmony but at opposite poles of existence. The harmony which results when Tennyson merges life and death is an obvious oxymoron and to Tennyson they seem at best to establish an uneasy marriage. These tensions reverberate throughout much of his work. The 1830 volume contains two companion poems, "Nothing Will Die" and "All Things Must Die" which, in their analogous language, affirm the dual nature of existence in much the same manner as Keats's "companion" odes, "On Melancholy" and "On a Grecian Urn". "Nothing Will Die" expresses the notion that there is permanence in the world but, unlike Keats's urn, it is the permanence of mutability:

The world was never made;
It will change, but it will not fade.
So let the wind range;
For even and morn
 Ever will be
 Through eternity.
Nothing was born;
Nothing will die;
All things will change.³⁴
 (11. 30-38)

The antithetical notion that there is no permanence is expressed in "All Things Will Die":

And old earth must die.
So let the warm winds range,

³⁴Poems of Tennyson, p. 226.

And the blue wave beat the shore;
 For even and morn
 Ye will never see
 Through eternity.
 All things were born.
 Ye will come never more,
 For all things must die.³⁵
 (ll. 41-48)

Within these companion poems³⁶ Tennyson defines the poles of his own poetic and personal dilemma in which the tensions between eternal continuation and finality are contrasted but not resolved. Tennyson sought throughout his poetry to unify the divergent concepts of permanence and mutability and it may be argued that the tension of opposites shaped his verse into the days of his Laureateship and Idylls of the King. (Arthur and Guinevere may be seen as representations of the divergent forces of intellect and emotion.) Each element within the Tennysonian scheme implies its own antithesis, which works with its opposite in harmony; but a harmony of tension which seemingly cannot be resolved. The 1830 poem "Dualism" illustrates the nature of the Tennysonian concept of harmony in antithesis:

Two children lovelier than Love adown the lea are singing
 As they gambol, lilygarlands ever stringing:
 Both in blosmwhite silk are frocked:
 Like, unlike, they roam together
 Under a summervault of golden weather;
 Like, unlike, they sing together
 Side by side,

³⁵Ibid., p. 228.

³⁶The 1830 volume contains other "companion poems" such as "The Mermaid" and "The Merman" that offer interesting comparisons in terms of their antithetical nature.

MidMay's darling goldenlocked,
 Summer's tanling diamondeyed.³⁷

Tennyson was not content, however, with the dubious harmony of opposites and like Lucretius in his own 1868 poem, he felt that "Twy-natured is no nature"³⁸ and sought to unite the antithetical aspects of the self into a coherent whole. The sestet of the early sonnet, "Mine be the strength of spirit, full and free" (1832), reflects Tennyson's active striving for "unity of being":

Mine be the power which ever to its sway
 Will win the wise at once, and by degrees
 May into uncongenial spirits flow;
 Even as the warm gulf-stream of Florida
 Floats far away into the Northern seas³⁹
 The lavish growths of southern Mexico.
 (ll. 9-14)

From the time of his youth, W. B. Yeats, like Tennyson, sought to unify the divergent patterns of his life:

One day when I was twenty-three or twenty-four
 this sentence seemed to form in my head, without
 my willing it, much as sentences form when we
 are half asleep: 'Hammer your thoughts into
 unity'. For days I could think of nothing else,
 and for 35 years I tested all I did by that sentence.⁴⁰

The poetry and prose of the late eighties and early nineties, however, would indicate that Yeats did not "hammer" the

³⁷Poems of Tennyson, p. 254.

³⁸"Lucretius", l. 194, Poems of Tennyson, p. 1204.

³⁹Poems of Tennyson, p. 350.

⁴⁰Explorations, p. 263.

antithetical elements of subjective and objective realities into a unity. "The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland" illustrates the dichotomies of permanent and mutable existence which individually offer no solace to man and are, within this poem, beyond reconciliation:

He stood among a crowd at Dromahair;
 His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
 And he had known at last some tenderness,
 Before earth took him to her stony care;
 But when a man poured fish into a pile,
 It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
 And sang what gold morning or evening sheds
 Upon a woven world-forgotten isle
 Where people love beside the ravelled seas;
 What Time can never mar a lover's vows
 Under the woven changeless roof of boughs.⁴¹
 (ll. 1-11)

The elusive symbolism of the poem lends itself to many interpretations of specific details, yet it seems that the central figure of the poem, as a result of the reverie of dream, transcends the mutable existence of the daily "crowd at Dromahair" and enters into the realm of permanence.

The language which is used to describe the eternal world is the language of artistic creation, specifically weaving: "His heart hung all upon a silken dress", "a woven world-forgotten isle". The sea, which may symbolise the world of mutability is "ravelled" whereas the "changeless roof of boughs" is "woven". Parallels with the tapestry images

⁴¹Variorum, p. 126.

in Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" seem obvious⁴² and, as in Tennyson's poem, the central figure cannot unify the two worlds:

Now that the earth had taken man and all:
 Did not the worms that spired about his bones
 Proclaim with that unwearied, reedy cry
 That God has laid His fingers on the sky,
 That from those fingers glittering summer runs
 Upon the dancer by the dreamless wave.
 Why should those lovers that no lovers miss
 Dream, until God burn Nature with a kiss?
 The man has found no comfort in the grave.
 ("The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland", ll. 40-48)

Man, within the early Yeatsian scheme, lives within a universe of dualities and unity seemingly is only attained through the Apocalyptic power of God.⁴³

Rather than "wandering in [the] darkness and sorrow" of Romantic anomie, which arose from the antipodal movements within his art and life, Yeats chose to actively explore the ramifications of dualistic existence. In 1891, using the pseudonym "Ganconagh", he published a 150 page novel entitled John Sherman of which he said, "There is more of myself in it than in anything I have done."⁴⁴ Richard Ellmann reinforces the autobiographical content of the novel

⁴²The image of a permanent retreat as a woven tapestry is an almost archetypal Romantic image which stems back to Spenser's bowers and into Shelley's "Alastor" and Keats's "wreath'd trellis" in "Ode to Psyche".

⁴³Several other poems of this time, such as "The Madness of King Goll" and "The Stolen Child" illustrate the impossible nature of reconciliation.

⁴⁴Letters, p. 165.

when he says, "In John Sherman it is clear that he has cut himself definitely into two parts."⁴⁵ The narrative movement of the book is primarily mental and may be described as "lightweight" Henry James. Yeats recognized the interior preoccupation of the novel and wrote when critics unfavourably reviewed the work that they were incapable of dealing with a book which was not involved with "the ordinary stuff of novels" but a mind in vacillation.⁴⁶ The tale, by Yeats's own admission, deals more with character than plot: "I am also writing a short story -- it goes on fairly well, the style quite sane and the theme modern, more character than plot in it."⁴⁷ The plot of John Sherman does indeed seem slight. John Sherman is a dreamy young man who lives in the west Ireland town of Ballah which he regards as the most perfect place on earth. He has little ambition except for gardening and the wish to marry a rich woman in order to live in idle comfort indefinitely. Sherman's acquaintance in the book is Reverend William Howard, a worldly curate of the English Church who thrives in fashionable surroundings and large cities. Sherman is offered a job in his uncle's London shipping office and at the urging of Mary Carton, a childhood

⁴⁵Ellmann, The Man and The Masks, p. 78.

⁴⁶Letters, p. 174.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 72.

companion, he takes the job. While in London he meets his rich woman, Margaret Leland, a flirtatious socialite, and manages to become engaged to her. However, after a return voyage to Ballah, he realizes he would never be happy with Margaret and so manipulates William Howard into proposing to the debutante. Sherman then returns to Ireland, marries Mary Carton and lives happily farming the soil of Ballah.

The symbolic dichotomies between escape and commitment throughout the novel are carefully controlled. London, like the London of Wordsworth's Prelude, is a place of strife and toil; and Ballah, like the Beulah of Bunyan and Blake, is a retreat of peace, bliss and self-unity. (Yeats and Ellis were in the process of editing Blake during the time Yeats was writing John Sherman and Yeats wrote that, "Beulah -- Bunyan's place of pleasant rest -- is interpreted in concordance to mean 'marriage'. In Blake it is a dwelling place of repose, antechamber of inspiration and dwelling of the muses⁴⁷ Ellmann writes that Sherman and Howard represent the divergent natures of Yeats at the age of twenty-three:

The traits of the two characters show the nature of the choice as it looked to Yeats at the end of 1888.

 Summing up the differences between them, Howard remarks

⁴⁸Ellis and Yeats, eds., The Works of William Blake, I, p. 260.

to Sherman, "Your mind and mine are like two arrows. Yours has got no feathers, and mine has no metal on the point."⁴⁹

The work of both Tennyson and Yeats within the first ten years of their careers can be described as a literature of vacillation. In this chapter I have tried to define the poles of that vacillation. The next will examine the literature in which the dichotomies are merged but in which unification does not take place.

⁴⁹Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and The Masks, p. 79.

II

THE POETRY OF DUALITY

A mood of Romantic isolation pervades much of the early poetry of W.B. Yeats and Alfred Tennyson. The dominating figures throughout their early verse are the solitary dreamer and the isolated wanderer, both of whom are alienated from their natural and social environments. The egocentric style of aestheticism which Yeats had adopted in the eighteen-eighties and nineties is reflected in the poetry of these years. In the preface to his collection of essays, Letters to the New Island (1934), he describes his life of isolation:

I can remember sitting there [the Dublin National Library] at the age of twenty-six or twenty-seven looking with scorn at those bowed heads and busy eyes, or in futile revery listening to my own mind as if to the sounds in a sea shell. I can remember some old man a stranger to me, saying, 'I have watched you for the past half hour and you have neither made a note nor read a word.' He had mistaken the proof sheets of "The Works of William Blake", edited and interpreted by Edwin Ellis and William Butler Yeats', for some school or university text book, me for some ne'er do-well student. I am certain that everybody outside my own little circle who knew anything about me thought as did that cross old man, for I was arrogant, indolent, excitable.¹

¹Yeats, Letters to the New Island, p. xi.

The self-absorbed dreamer, at odds with, or oblivious to, his surroundings, is the primary pose taken by many of the personae in the poetry of Yeats's "decadent" period.

The companion pieces which open Yeats's Collected Poems reflect the alienated position taken by the poet during the latter half of the eighteen-eighties. "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" begins with the death of Romantic nature and the emergence of the dispassionate rationality of "logic-choppers":

The woods of Arcady are déad,
And over is their antique joy;
Of the old world on dreaming fed;
Grey Truth is now her painted toy.²
(ll. 1-4)

In an attempt to create a newer world, the persona advises turning to the craft of making verse. With the qualification that "Words alone are certain good" (l. 10), this newer world is realized to be a lesser world than that of the original Arcady due to its solipsistic and isolated nature. Thus, in order for the creative personality to survive, he must abandon the mutable realm of natural processes, as described by the logic of science, and enter into the imaginative self:

Then nowise worship dusty deeds,
Nor seek, for this is also sooth,

²Variorum, pp. 64-65.

To hunger fiercely after truth,
 Lest all thy toiling breeds
 New dreams, new dreams; there is no truth
 Saving in thy own heart. Seek, then,
 No learning from the starry men,
 Who follow with the optic glass
 The whirling ways of stars that pass --
 Seek, then, for this is also sooth,
 No word of theirs. . . .

("The Song of the Happy Shepherd", ll. 22-32)

Nature may offer some solace to the poet if he dismisses the objectifying tendency of scientific logic which compartmentalizes natural phenomena into the cold dicta of causal relationships:

. . . the cold star-bane
 Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
 And dead is all their human truth.

("The Song of the Happy Shepherd", ll. 32-34)

The scientific observation of nature which has given rise to the truth of reason has simultaneously destroyed the passion of "human truth". The poet, however, may use nature in order to create a world of compassion within the retreat of the self:

Go gather by the humming sea
 Some twisted, echo-harbouring shell,
 And to its lips thy story tell,
 And they thy comforters will be,
 Rewording in melodious guile
 The fretful words a little while,
 Till they shall singing fade in ruth
 And die in pearly brotherhood;
 For words alone are certain good.

(ll. 35-43)

The internalization of nature by the poet-dreamer of "The

Song of the Happy Shepherd" creates a totally solipsistic world in which natural forms act only in reaction to the will and words of the persona. (The sea shell only absorbs the fretful words of the singer until the words "fade" and finally "die".)³ It is interesting that in an early printing of the poem line 42 read "For ruth and joy have brotherhood".⁴ It would seem that Yeats, in revising the poem was concerned, not only with rhyme, but did not wish to offer this reconciliation between opposites. Thus the line subsequently reads, "And die in pearly brotherhood". The sequestered escapism of the poet-singer is complete, for although the earth is no longer capable of creating romance, the poet can fulfil that role through his own internalized dreaming, becoming his own cunningly made, little world:

And still I dream he treads the lawn,
Walking ghostly in the dew,
Pierced by my glad singing through,
My songs of old earth's dreamy youth;
But ah! she dreams not now; dream thou!
For fair are poppies on the brow:
Dream, dream, for this is also sooth.
(ll. 51-57)

The poetic creation of a world in which natural

³The sea shell as an image of the created self, or the permanent realm of eternity which resists the flow of time (the sea) is a Romantic image of subjectivity best illustrated in the dream sequence of Book Five of Wordsworth's Prelude.

⁴Variorum, p. 66.

objects reflect the psyche of their creator alone is escapism, which Yeats, as a poet who "values above all energy and conflict"⁵, could not fully endorse. Denis Donoghue describes Yeats's method of creating "dramatic poetry" out of antithesis:

His mind needs two terms, one hardly less compelling than the other: action and knowledge, essence and existence, power and wisdom, imagination and will, life and word, personality and character, drama and picture, vision and reality. Any one of these may engage his feeling, but the feeling longs to touch its opposite, the pairs are entertained for the tension they engender.⁶

Thus, the solace arising from the retreat into the self and the internalization of the world of mutable nature, which characterizes "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", is counterpointed in the next poem of Yeats's Collected Poems, "The Song of the Sad Shepherd". Man, within the Yeatsian scheme, cannot be "fitted" to objective outer reality as Wordsworth had argued. To Yeats, nature is in apposition to humanity:

There was a man whom Sorrow named his friend,
And he, of his high comrade Sorrow dreaming,
Went walking with slow steps along the gleaming
And humming sands where windy surges wend:
And he called loudly to the stars to bend
From their pale thrones and comfort him, but they
Among themselves laugh on and sing away:

⁵Denis Donoghue, Yeats, p. 17.

⁶Ibid., p. 17.

And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend
 Cried out, Dim Sea, hear my most piteous story!
 The sea swept on and cried her old cry still,
 Rolling along in dreams from hill to hill.⁷
 ("The Song of the Sad Shepherd", ll. 1-10)

"The Song of the Sad Shepherd", in direct opposition to the sentiment expressed by "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", postulates that no release or comfort from human misery arises from the integration of nature into the self:

And then the man whom Sorrow named his friend
 Sought once again the shore, and found a shell,
 And thought, I will my heavy story tell
Till my own words, re-echoing, shall send
Their sadness through a hollow, pearly heart;
And my own tale again for me shall sing,
And my own whispering words be comforting,
And lo! my ancient burden may depart.
 Then he sang softly nigh the pearly rim;
 But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone
 Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
 Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.
 (ll. 17-28)

With these two opening poems of his collected edition, Yeats has created a poetic universe of duality, and it is from this conscious engendering of a dialectic scheme that the Yeatsian poetic world unfolds. Yeats was aware that a singular system of poetic inspiration led to artistic laziness: to create he needed the tension of opposites:

I have been looking at some Venetian costumes of the sixteenth century as pictured in the mask. All

⁷Variorum, pp. 67-68.

fantastic bodily form hidden or disguises. . . . Life had become so leisured and courtly that men and women dressed with no thought of bodily activity. They no longer toiled much. One feels that if they still fought and hunted their imagination was not with these things. Does not the same thing happen to our passions when we grow contemplative and so liberate them from use. They also become fantastic and create the strange life of poets and artists.⁸

Tennyson, too, seeks the subjective isolation of the artist within his own created universe, but, unlike Yeats, he does not consciously explore the antithesis of the retreat into the self. Tennyson was very much possessed, however, with the dilemma arising out of the conflicting demands of art and life: the world of subjective permanence as opposed to objective reality and social responsibility. Tennyson's reaction to R. C. Trench's famous statement, "Tennyson we cannot live in art",⁹ was to investigate poetically the divergent worlds of subjective and objective truth within the poem "The Palace of Art". However, up to that time (1832) Tennyson's poetry had been oriented towards an internal vision. Moreover, the poems of 1832, such as "The Hesperides", which deal with the dilemma of the artistic self as opposed to the social self, indicate a perplexity of poetic identity not in concordance

⁸Yeats, in a diary quoted by Jeffares in W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet, p. 161.

⁹Memoir, I, p. 118.

with Tennyson's 1890 statement that, "'The Palace of Art' is the embodiment of my own belief that the Godlike life is with man and for man. . . ."¹⁰ ("The Palace of Art" as printed in 1832 is a much different poem from the revised version of 1842 and thanks to Christopher Ricks' 1969 annotated edition of Tennyson's poems, one may easily investigate and compare the two versions in order to establish the metamorphosis that Tennyson's poetic self underwent during the "ten years silence". Within this chapter, it is the 1832 version of "The Palace of Art" to which reference will be made.)

Jerome Buckley notes that as a youth Tennyson "was sensitive to his own human limitations, fearful of misunderstanding, reluctant to face the outside world."¹¹ This diffidence is reflected in one of his earliest poems, "Armageddon". Written when Tennyson was about fifteen years old, "Armageddon's" major theme is the withdrawal into a subjective retreat beyond the world of objective reality in much the same manner as Yeats's "Song of the Happy Shepherd". As with Yeats's poem, "Armageddon" opens with an account of a dying world, not the world of romance, but

¹⁰Memoir, I, pp. 118-119.

¹¹Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p. 19.

the realm of natural process:

The beasts fled to their dens; the little birds
 All winged their way home shrieking: fitful gusts
 Of violent tempest shook the scanty palm
 That clothed the mountain-ridge whereon I stood:
 And in the red and murky Even light,
 Black, formless, unclean things came flitting by;
 And seemed of bestial similitude
 And some half human, yet so horrible,
 So shadowy, indistinct and undefined,
 It were a mockery to call them aught
 Save unrealities, which took the form
 And fashioning of such ill-omened things
 That it were a sin almost to look on them.¹²
 (I, ll. 42-56)

The persona of the poem, while watching the forces gather
 for the last battle, is visited by a seraph who bestows a
 mystical revelation:

'O Son of Man, why stand you here alone
 Upon the mountain, knowing not the things
 Which will be, and the gathering of nations
 Unto the mighty battle of the Lord?
 Thy sense is clogged with dull Mortality,
 Thy spirit fettered with the bond of clay --
 Open thine eyes and see!'

I looked, but not
 Upon his face, for it was wonderful
 With its exceeding brightness, and the light
 Of the great Angel Mind which looked from out
 The starry glowing of his restless eyes.
 I felt my soul grow godlike, and my spirit
 With supernatural excitation bound
 Within me, and my mental eye grew large
 With such a vast circumference of thought,
 That, in my vanity, I seemed to stand
 Upon the outward verge and bound alone
 Of God's omniscience.
 (II, ll. 10-27)

¹² Poems of Tennyson, p. 67.

Like the sea shell of the Happy Shepherd, the vision imparted by the angel has a catalytic effect which alters the observer's relationship to the world. The soul now internalizes objective reality and all creation is taken into the self due to the glimpse of Eternity offered by the archangel:

I wondered with deep wonder at myself:
My mind seemed winged with knowledge and the strength
Of holy musings and immense Ideas,
Even to Infinitude. All sense of Time
And Being and Place was swallowed up and lost
Within a victory of boundless thought.
I was part of the Unchangeable,
A scintillation of Eternal Mind,
Remixed and burning with its parent fire.
Yea! in that hour I could have fallen down
Before my own strong soul and worshipped it.
("Argameddon", II, ll. 40-50)

The sea shell, which offers blissful retreat to the Happy Shepherd, is qualified within the Yeatsian scheme by the pitilessness of the shell in "The Sad Shepherd". Tennyson, however, in the poetry of the 1820s and 1830s, demonstrates a willingness to create poetry only from an internal, subjective position. David Daiches suggests that Yeats's poetic development began as a two-term dialectic and progressed to become a three-term dialectic.¹³ I would argue, in terms

¹³David Daiches, "The Early Poems: Some Themes and Patterns", as published in In Excited Reverie, p. 50. I do not agree with Daiches and would argue that Yeats, rather than introducing a third term into his dialectic scheme, endeavors to unite the two-term dialectic, thus creating a new reality apart from subjectivity and objectivity.

of Daiches' idea, that Tennyson's poetry had its origins in Romantic solipsism which, when personal and social pressures impinged on his aesthetic retreat, was forced to become a dialectic.

Many of Tennyson's early poems invoke a nostalgia for the remote past or distant places. Poems such as "Timbuctoo", Tennyson's 1829 prize-winning reworking of "Armageddon", which is a lament for the death of an ancient and ideal civilization, illustrate his reluctance to accept that the woods of Arcady are indeed dead. By using segments taken directly from his "Argameddon", Tennyson presents his persona with an ideal vision of the past, usurped by the workings of the world:

'. . . Child of Man,
Seest thou yon river, whose translucent wave,
Forth issuing from the darkness, windeth through
The argent streets o' the city, imaging
The soft inversion of her tremulous Domes,
Her gardens frequent with the stately Palm,
Her Pagods hung with music of sweet bells,
Her obelisks of ranged Chrysolite,
Minarets and towers? Lo! how he passeth by,
And gulphs himself in sands, as not enduring
To carry through the world those waves, which bore
The reflex of my City in their depths.
Oh City! oh latest Throne! where I was raised
To be a mystery of loveliness
Unto all eyes, the time is well-nigh come
When I must render up this glorious home
To keen Discovery: soon yon brilliant towers
Shall darken with the waving of her wand;
Darken, and shrink and shiver into huts,
Black specks amid a waste of dreary sand,
Low-built, mud-walled, Barbarian settlements.
How changed from this fair City!'

Thus far the spirit:
 Then parted Heaven-ward on the wing: and I
 Was left alone on Calpe, and the Moon
 Had fallen from the night, and all was dark!¹⁴
 ("Timbuctoo", ll. 224-248)

The destruction of the world as expressed in "Timbuctoo" and "Armageddon" leaves only a formless void which forces the poet to take an internalized artistic stance which permits creativity only from within the self.

Poems such as "I Wander in Darkness and Sorrow", "Unhappy man, why wonder there", and "The Outcast", exemplify Tennyson's affinity with the isolated wanderer who is forced to exist in a world apart from society and for whom nature offers no comfort:

I wander in darkness and sorrow,
 Unfriended, and cold, and alone,
 As dismally gurgles beside me
 The bleak river's desolate moan.

.
 I wander in darkness and sorrow,
 Uncheered by the moon's placid ray;
 Not a friend that I loved but is dead,
 Not a hope but has faded away!
 Oh! when shall I rest in the tomb,
 Wrapt about with the chill winding sheet?
 For the roar of the wind is around me,
 The leaves of the year at my feet.¹⁵

("I wander in darkness and sorrow", ll. 1-4
 and 9-16)

Tennyson's personae, throughout his early work, are

¹⁴Poems of Tennyson, pp. 180-181.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 92-94.

generally isolated from the world of men. Like "The Lady of Shalott", they tend to define their world through art and from within the subjectively self-created realm. By a process which Brian John has called "individuation", Tennyson, in his 1830 "Recollections of the Arabian Nights", "shows himself capable of marrying the process of the individuation, or self-fulfilment, to the imagination in a way that makes it a significant statement in the early poetry of the different levels of experience known and harmonized by art."¹⁶ The journey into Romanticism begins with a reversal of the normal forward-flow of time as the wanderer enters into the Edenic past of timelessness:

When the breeze of a joyful dawn blew free
 In the silken sail of infancy,
 The tide of time, flowed back with me,
 The forward-flowing tide of time;
 And many a sheeny summer-morn,
 Adown the Tigris I was borne,
 By Bagdat's shrines of fretted gold,
 High-walled gardens green and old.¹⁷
 ("Recollections of the Arabian Nights", ll. 1-8)

Like Coleridge's persona in "Kubla Khan", Tennyson's figure becomes enchanted by an exotic muse-like female:

Then stole I up, and trancedly
 Gazed on the Persian girl alone,
 Serene with argent-lidded eyes

¹⁶Brian John, "Tennyson's 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights' and the Individuation Process", Victorian Poetry, IV (1966), 275.

¹⁷Poems of Tennyson, p. 206.

Amorous, and lashes like to rays
 Of darkness, and a brow of pearl
 Tressed with redolent ebony,
 In many a dark delicious curl,
 Flowing beneath her rose-hued zone;
 The sweetest lady of the time.
 (ll. 133-141)

With this poem, Tennyson consolidates one aspect of his aesthetic position: the retreat into the subjectivity of the Romantic self. "Tennyson's achievement in 'Recollections of the Arabian Nights' lies in his celebration of the attainment of joy, the attribute of grace, integration and vision, and in his affirmation of the Romantic imagination."¹⁸

The wanderer in Yeats's poetry also longs for the isolation of Romantic or exotic seclusion, but he accepts the transient nature of objective reality more readily than his Tennysonian counterpart. The isolationism of pure aesthetic escape, untempered by the moderating influence of its antimony, life, does not, to Yeats, engender the production of great art. J. B. Yeats, in a letter to his son, articulates the aesthetic posture W. B. Yeats followed throughout his life:

I want to preach to artists a new doctrine which I will call the doctrine of the environment as more important than all. A man of genius is not only divine. There is also the child's heart within the

¹⁸Brian John, Victorian Poetry, IV, 278.

man's, and the child's heart is for all the environment.

In M. Angelo's time it was not possible to escape for life was there every minute as real as the toothache and as terrible and impressive as the judgment day.¹⁹

"The Stolen Child" illustrates Yeats's dissatisfaction with a purely escapist aesthetic stance even at the outset of his poetic career. Written in 1886, the poem deals with the spiriting away of a child by faeries who promise a world of bliss unlike the world of men, which is "full of troubles" (l. 22).²⁰ The pain of the world is emphasized throughout the poem by the chorus:

Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping
than you can understand.

The perversion of total escape from the travail of mutability is emphasized in the final stanza which illustrates the harmony that may be offered by natural and social processes:

Away with us he's going,
 The solemn-eyed:
 He'll hear no more the lowing
 Of the calves on the warm hillside
 Or the kettle on the hob
 Sing peace into his breast,
 Or see the brown mice bob
 Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
 (ll. 42-49)

¹⁹J. B. Yeats: Letters to his son W. B. Yeats and Others 1869-1922, ed. J. Hone, pp. 143-144.

²⁰Variorum, p. 87.

The awareness that self-absorption leads to poetic sterility is fundamental and central to Yeats's theory of art. An 1899 letter to George Russell indicates the close relationship between artistic or mystic vision and mutable reality which Yeats felt to exist:

I think that a poet, or even a mystic, becomes a greater power from understanding all the great primary emotions and these one only gets out of going through the common experiences and duties of life.²¹

The Yeatsian system, however, is one in which opposites balance each other. Thus, too close an adherence to the tangible realities leads to spiritual weariness. In the 1898 essay, "The Autumn of the Body", Yeats sets forth another theory which seemingly contradicts that which he would postulate to George Russell a year later:

Man has wooed and won the world, and has fallen weary, and not, I think, for a time, but with a weariness that will not end until the last autumn, when the stars shall be blown away like withered leaves. He grew weary when he said, 'These things that I touch and see and hear are alone real,' for he saw them without illusion at last, and found them but air and dust and moisture. And now he must be philosophical above everything, even about the arts, for he can only return the way he came, and so escape from weariness, by philosophy. The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our

²¹Letters, p. 315.

thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things.²²

The dominant theme throughout major portions of the early poetry is the incorporation of these divergent aesthetic systems so that they interact in tension with each other and simultaneously maintain their own individuality. The epigraph which opens "The Wanderings of Oisín" illustrates the dichotomous framework which becomes a major thematic concern within those selections of verse. "The Wanderings of Oisín" is prefaced with a statement from an unknown "Tulka": "Give me the world if Thou wilt, but grant me an asylum for my affections".²³ The statement divides experience into two moulds: "the world", and the seclusion of "an asylum for my affections". It is this dialectic which provides much of the tension throughout the long narrative. Yeats, looking back on "Oisín" in 1932, describes the poem in terms of a dialectic and a renunciation of the workings of time:

My first denunciation of old age I made in The Wanderings of Usheen (end of part I) before I was twenty and the same denunciation comes in the last pages of the book. The swordsman throughout repudiates the saint, but not without vacillation. Is that perhaps the sole theme-- Usheen and Patrick -- "so get you gone Von Hügel though with blessings on your head?"²⁴

²²Essays and Introductions, pp. 192-193.

²³Variorum, p. 1

²⁴Letters, p. 798.

The debate in "Oisín", as is the case with the "Crazy Jane" poems of 1930, is one between codified religious ritual and the primitive energy of the life force. But on another level it is, as the epigraph indicates, a dialectic in which objectivism and subjectivism are counterpointed.

"The Wanderings of Oisín" is a heavily allegorical poem which "needs an interpreter"²⁵ to sort out the meaning of Oisín's three voyages and sojourns in the timeless realm of faery. The poem, according to Yeats, deals with the "three incompatible things which man is always seeking -- infinite feeling, infinite battle and infinite repose."²⁶ As well as these Yeatsian fundamentals, "The Wanderings of Oisín" is concerned with the antithetical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity: the dream as opposed to mutable reality.

The poem begins with St. Patrick chastizing Oisín for remaining under the spell of "a demon thing" (I, l. 4) with whom he had spent "three centuries" (I, l. 4). Because his experience is rooted only in the world of mutability, Patrick is spiritually myopic as compared to Oisín. Oisín has been to eternal realms with Niamh, his faery lover,

²⁵Letters, p. 111.

²⁶Ibid., p. 111.

whose home is far from the world of mutability, "Beyond the tumbling of this tide" (I, l. 49). The world to which Oisín is spirited is one in which death and decay are unknown:

'O Oisín, mount by me and ride
To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,
Where men have heaped no burial-mounds,
And the days pass by like a wayward tune,
Where broken faith has never been known,
And the blushes of first love never have flown.'
(I, ll. 80-84)

The three islands of faery which are visited by Oisín (islands of eternal youth, eternal conflict, and eternal sleep) are worlds of absolute permanence. Here the inhabitants may mock the passage of worldly time in a dance of defiance:

He held that flashing sceptre up.
'Joy drowns the twilight in the dew,
And fills with stars night's purple cup,
And wakes the sluggard seeds of corn,
And stirs the young kid's budding horn,
And makes the infant ferns unwrap,
And for the peewit paints his cap,
And rolls along the unwieldy sun,
And makes the little planets run:
And if joy were not on the earth,
There were an end of change and birth,
And Earth and Heaven and Hell would die,
And in some gloomy barrow lie
Folded like a frozen fly;
Then mock at Death and Time with glances
And wavering arms and wandering dances.
(I, ll. 260-275)

Oisín, as a mortal, is alien to this world of stasis, and throughout the poem is constantly being made aware of his mutable nature and the temporal flux which binds him to

his native world:

When one day by the tide I stood,
I found in that forgetfulness
Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
From some dead warrior's broken lance:
I turned it in my hands; the stains
Of war were on it, and I wept,
Remembering how the Fenians stept
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
Equal to good or grievous chance:
(I, ll. 364-372)

The world of men which Oisín longs for, is one of strife, pain, and tragedy and it is to this life that he chooses to return, knowingly forsaking the immortality of his faery love:

'Then go through the lands in the saddle and see what
the mortals do,
And softly come to your Niamh over the tops of the tide;
But weep for your Niamh, O Oisín weep; for only if
your shoe
Brush lightly as haymouse earth's pebbles, you will
come no more to my side.

'O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn
to your rest?'
I saw from a distant saddle; from the earth she made
her moan:
'I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn,
for bheast unto breast
We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their
sweetness lone.'
(III, ll. 125-132)

The world of Niamh is one of harmony and permanence, but it is a harmony which, as the above quotation indicates,

²⁷The characteristic "long-line" of Tennyson which so influenced William Morris is evident throughout Book III of "The Wanderings of Oisín".

is dependent upon the marriage of two antithetical realms in order that its state of permanence be maintained. Niamh and her race of immortals are described throughout the poem in a language which binds them to the natural processes of the world. Niamh, for example, is discovered by Oisín in contact with the sea, and she is described in terms which link her to the ocean:

And found on the dove-grey edge of the sea
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
And like a sunset were her lips,
A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
And with the glimmering crimson glowed
Of many a figured embroidery;
And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
That wavered like the summer streams,
As her soft bosom rose and fell.
(I, ll. 19-30)

Niamh, in her faery form, embodies the linking of idealized human beauty, ("high-born lady") with the natural beauty of the sea and its timeless tides ("her soft bosom rose and fell"). The sea to Oisín (and Cúchulain in other of Yeats's poems and plays) represents man's variance with nature and the inevitable end of man and civilization through time. The "blood ~~and~~ tide" of "The Second Coming" and Cúchulain's futile battle with "the invulnerable tide" in "Cúchulain's Fight With the Sea" represent the standard Yeatsian attitude to the sea's "murderous innocence".²⁸

²⁸"A Prayer for my Daughter", l. 16, Variorum, p. 403.

Though Niamh and her countrymen live in sequestered permanence in a realm where outward reality may be incorporated into the self, this realm offers no contentment:

And then lost Niamh murmured, 'Love, we go
To the Island of Forgetfulness, for lo!
The Islands of Dancing and of Victories
Are empty of all power.'

'And which of these
Is the Island of Content?'

'None know,' she said;
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.
(II, ll. 245-250)

In order to know contentment (and tragedy) mortal man must dwell in his own realm, so Oisín returns to a broken Ireland where the Fenian warriors have been replaced by the Church. Oisín, however, just as he had rejected faeryland, will not succumb to the sequestered permanence of the church, and chooses, rather, the way of heroic and tragic defiance:

I throw down the chain of small stones! when life
in my body has ceased,
I will go to Caoilte; and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan,
Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in
flames or at feast.
(III, ll. 222-224)

The harmonious relationship offered by the "butting together" of faery and natural worlds within "The Wanderings of Oisín" does not satisfy Yeats's need "to hammer his thoughts into unity."²⁹ Throughout his early career, he

²⁹Explorations, p. 263.

sought to explore the antithetical relationships between the self and externalities. David Daiches remarks:

The poet, said Wordsworth, 'considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature.' So for Wordsworth the key word is relationship. But for Yeats, even in his early romantic phase, it was a conviction of the essential dichotomy between man and nature that possessed him.³⁰

Poems such as "The Madness of King Goll" and "Fergus and the Druid" illustrate Yeats's essential interest in exploring the antithetical relationship between man and nature. In examining this dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, he is able to distance himself and "cast a cold eye" on his work:

Yet this I know, I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems. To make them I have broken my life in a mortar, as it were. I have brayed in it youth and fellowship, peace and worldly hopes. I have seen others enjoying, while I stood alone with myself -- commenting, commenting -- a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves.³¹

The ability to "break his life with a mortar" and thus allow multiple viewpoints within his poetry, is important when one differentiates between the poetic philosophies of W. B. Yeats and Alfred Tennyson.

Tennyson, like Yeats, concerns himself with the

³⁰ Daiches, In Excited Reverie, p. 49.

³¹ Letters, p. 84.

dialectics of outer and inner reality. The tension which develops between a yearning for escape from actuality and the conscience-directed will to commit oneself to society is reflected within many poems of 1830 and 1832. The individuation process applied to "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" occurs in many of the personae of Tennyson's early poems where the image of the solitary figure predominates. "Mariana" epitomizes the loneliness of the Tennysonian heroine who exists apart from society:

About a stone-cast from the wall
 A sluice with blackened waters slept,
 And o'er it many, round and small,
 The clustered marish-mosses crept.
 Hard by a poplar shook alway,
 All silver-green with gnarled bark:
 For leagues no other tree did mark
 The level wast, the rounding gray.
 She only said, 'My life is dreary,
 He cometh not,' she said;
 She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!'³²
 ("Mariana", ll. 37-48)

Mariana, as a figure of frustration, may reflect Tennyson's despair at his own situation within what he saw as a wasteland world. Buckley postulates that "Mariana", "may have had its counterpart in the loneliness of Tennyson's first term at Cambridge."³³ The isolation and despair of the

³²Poems of Tennyson, p. 189.

³³Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet, p. 40.

artist is a theme which recurs throughout the poems of 1830 and 1832 and this may indicate Tennyson's inability or reluctance to remove his self-reflection from the poems. However, he regards the poet as a man capable of vision which pierces the veil of mutability:

He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
 He saw through his own soul.
 The marvel of the everlasting will,
 An open scroll.³⁴
 ("The Poet", ll. 5-8)

The poetic vision, however, is misunderstood or ignored by the world, for the poem which follows "The Poet" in Poems, Chiefly Lyrical begins:

Vex not thou the poet's mind
 With thy shallow wit:
 Vex not thou the poet's mind
 For thou canst not fathom it.
 Clear and bright it should be ever,
 Flowing like a crystal river;
 Bright as light, and clear as wind.³⁵
 ("The Poet's Mind", ll. 1-7)

The sophist minds of mutability can only ridicule the mystic-like vision of the poet for in their "eye there is death" ("The Poet's Mind", l. 16). It is this reaction to poetry which forces the artist into the isolation reflected in poems such as "The Lady of Shalott", "The Hesperides" and "The Palace of Art".

³⁴Poems of Tennyson, p. 222.

³⁵Ibid., p. 224.

"The Lady of Shalott" is a poem which is concerned with the dualities of art and life. Buckley discusses the poem in terms of Jungian constructs: "She is the dedicated artist, the complement or antitype of the poet, perhaps properly to be understood in Jungian terms as the anima, the unconscious self."³⁶ The central theme of "The Lady of Shalott" is the loneliness and limited vision of the artist, who can create only in the isolation of her tower and views life through the reflections of her mirror. The antithetical relationship between aesthetic creativity and mutability is expressed throughout the poem by the rhyme scheme of the fifth and ninth lines of each stanza. With the exception of the first stanza of the third section, lines five and nine throughout each verse end with the words "Camelot" and "Shalott", thus counterpointing the irreconcilable nature of two existences. Because she is "half sick of shadows" (l. 71) the Lady decides to confront the experience of life directly by gazing at Lancelot as he rides by her tower. Lancelot, according to Buckley, represents "all the vitality she has denied".³⁷ When she contacts this manifestation of objective reality, the subjective artist dies and her magic web is destroyed. As is

³⁶Tennyson, p. 49.

³⁷Ibid., p. 49.

the case with "The Poet's Mind", the world of mortality and mutability cannot comprehend the artistic creator or creation:

They crossed themselves, their stars they blest,
 Knight, minstrel, abbot, squire and guest.
 There lay a parchment on her breast,
 That puzzled more than all the rest,
 The wellfed wits of Camelot.
'The web was woven curiously
The charm is broken utterly,
Draw near and fear not -- this 'is I,
The Lady of Shalott.' 1832. ³⁸
 (ll. 163-171)

To Yeats, the contact by creatures from the mutable realm with those of the permanent faery world leads to an eternal life of dissatisfaction. To Tennyson, the contact of opposites leads to death. The kraken will die when it awakens and is touched by the mutable, "'Then once by man and angels to be seen, / In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die" (ll. 14-15).³⁹ Thus the 1830 and 1832 poems indicate Tennyson's belief that poetry can exist only in the sequestered realms of permanence as exemplified by the zealous guarding of the golden apple in "The Hesperides", "Lest one from the east come take it away" (l. 42).⁴⁰ G. Robert Stange has argued that "The Hesperides"

³⁸Poems of Tennyson, p. 361.

³⁹Ibid., p. 247.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 426.

is one of a group of poems in which Tennyson examined the relationships of poetry and the poet to society.⁴¹ The role of poetry within "The Hesperides" is one of exclusion from the world of mutability, for man perverts the meaning of art, "If the golden apple be taken / The world will be overwise" (ll. 63-64). The world is incapable of understanding poetic art for it is "wasted with fire and sword" (l. 104). And so the daughters of Hesper stand their vigil to keep the world of mutable reality from despoiling the eternal realm:

The golden apple, the golden apple, the hallowed fruit,
Guard it well, guard it warily,
Watch it warily,
Sing airily,
Standing about the charmed root.
(ll. 112-116)

The isolated artist whose message cannot be fathomed by society is but one pole of the Tennyson dialectic. Social and moral demands so disturbed the poet that he had to attempt to descend from "The Palace of Art":

Tennyson's hostility to aestheticism was deeply serious. From the beginning he had been drawn to the Palace of Art by a force stronger and more personal than any empty slogan and yet repelled by a horror of aesthetic isolation far more decisive than any desire for popular acclaim.⁴²

Written in response to Richard Trench's statement dealing

⁴¹G. Robert Stange, "Tennyson's Garden of Art: A Study of 'The Hesperides'", PMLA, LXVII, 732-743.

⁴²Buckley, Tennyson, p. 165.

with the unsatisfactory nature of aestheticism, the 1832 "Palace of Art" is not entirely successful in rejecting pure subjectivity. The maiden of the tower is again the subject of the poem and from her position of isolation she passively observes the mutable realm:

'O God-like isolation which art mine,
 I can but count thee perfect gain,
 What time I watch the darkening droves of swine
 That range on yonder plain.'⁴³
 (ll. 196-200)

The retreat, however, turns into a tomb all but cut off from the world of man:

Shut up as in a crumbling tomb, girt round
 With blackness as a solid wall,
 Far off she seemed to hear the dully sound
 Of human footsteps fall.
 (ll. 272-276)

The lady abandons her tower (thinking she will die by touching the world of mutability [l. 284]) and takes a cottage in the vale. Her palace, however, still remains:

'Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
 So lightly, beautifully built:
 Perchance I may return with others there
 When I have purged my guilt.'
 (ll. 293-296)

Buckley comments that:

"The Palace of Art" supplies no very convincing alternative to the aesthetic retreat, it delineates with some clarity the artist's confused state of mind, his isolated endowment and the burden of communication

⁴³ Poems of Tennyson, p. 414.

that he may feel forced upon him. No other poem of the 1832 volume registers so directly or didactically the poet's sense of social responsibility.⁴⁴

After 1832 Tennyson, due to Hallam's death, enters his "ten years silence" of despair.. The poems which emerge from the early years of that silence, most notably "The Two Voices", are indications that Tennyson found that the gap between objectivity and subjectivity, permanence and mutability could not be bridged by escaping into towers of aestheticism.

The poetry of both Tennyson and Yeats begins in isolation. Both poets create poetic universes which echo their particular world views. In the case of Yeats, he knowingly establishes a dualistic realm which allows for the poet to investigate, through various personae, divergent attitudes towards his life and towards the world. Tennyson, however, does not openly adopt various viewpoints in his early poetry and thus cannot explore from objective distance the nuances of his attitudes. The poetry which closes with Tennyson's 1832 volume and Yeats's 1904 volume, In The Seven Woods, is a poetry of dichotomy. In the following chapter I will investigate a means by which both poets attempt to reconcile the opposite poles of their poetry.

⁴⁴Tennyson, p. 53.

III

THE POLITICS OF RECONCILIATION

The early poetry of Alfred Tennyson and W. B. Yeats is concerned with the relationships between a singular and often creative personality and a dualistic universe. In order to create a poetry which would be "consciously dramatic"¹ Yeats postulated the maxim that poets "try to assume that second self".² This conscious engendering of an alter-ego, Yeats's "mask", gives to the poet a self-discipline, facilitating self-definition and thus generating a poetry based on truths as perceived individually rather than inherited from social convention:

Active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. . . [sic] Wordsworth, great poet though he be, is so often flat and heavy partly because his moral sense, being a discipline he had not created, a mere obedience, has no theatrical element.³

Late in his life Tennyson, too, held much the same opinion of Wordsworth. While touring in Plymouth, Tennyson was recorded by a Miss Rundle as saying: "Wordsworth was great

¹Mythologies, p. 334.

²Ibid., p. 334.

³Ibid., p. 334.

but too one-sided to be dramatic".⁴

The dramatic tension which gives rise to Yeats's poetry originates in his ability and willingness to cast a double viewpoint on his life and on his art:

I had gathered about me all gods because I believed
in none. . . but held myself apart, individual,
indissoluble, a mirror of polished steel.

.
. . . even in my most perfect moment I would be two
selves, the one watching with heavy eyes the other's
moment of content.⁵

The spirit of the Victorian Age which stressed commitment to social responsibility and the Romantic poet's wish for aesthetic retreat, were divergent elements which created dramatic conflict in the early poetry of Alfred Tennyson: "His conflict, though highly individual, was also broadly typical of the conflict which all major Victorian artists had to face."⁶ Johnson defines the dilemma of the Victorian artist from which arises the theatrical tension of Tennyson's early verse:

. . . any tendency to exalt individual awareness at the expense of conventionally established attitudes ran counter to the concept of the rôle of the artist which the Victorian age tried to impose on its writers, there resulted a conflict which has been too often ignored, but which must be taken into account in reaching any satisfactory evaluation of Victorian

⁴Memoir, I, 278.

⁵Mythologies, pp. 268-269.

⁶Buckley, The Victorian Temper, p. 68.

literature.⁷

Tennyson's awareness is individualized to the point of solipsism. His poetry often reflects "an almost total withdrawal from physical reality and an approximation of the self to images of the Creator".⁸ Coupled with this solitary romanticism is the disparate need for Tennyson to fulfill a public role. From his earliest youth, he had the desire for fame. Arthur Tennyson, the poet's brother, relates that as a young child during a walk, "while talking of our respective futures, he [Alfred] said most emphatically, 'Well, Arthur, I mean to be famous.'"⁹ Even after he had attained fame, Tennyson's mind was concerned with the dichotomy between his private and his public self:

Tennyson says that as a boy he had a great thirst to be a poet, and to be a popular poet. He would rove through the fields composing hundreds of couplets, and shouting them to the skies; but now he is inclined to think popularity is a bastard fame which sometimes goes with the more real thing, but is independent of and somewhat antagonistic to it. He appears to shrink from his own popularity. He maintains that the artist should spare no pains, that he should do his very best for the sake of his art, and for that only.¹⁰

However, his poetry is neither merely a reflection of his biography nor of Victorian social and aesthetic mores.

⁷Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, p. ix.

⁸Paden, Tennyson in Egypt, p. 71.

⁹Memoir, I, 17.

¹⁰Memoir, II, 79-80.

Tennyson, like Yeats, (as both poets' comments on Wordsworth illustrate) was aware of the dramatic value gained by adopting divergent points of view. Hallam Tennyson writes that his father, "was sometimes described as advancing opposite opinions at different times. This was because from his firm sense of justice he had a dramatic way of representing an opinion adverse to his own in a favourable light."¹¹ Tennyson was also aware that solely biographical interpretations are often misleading and warns that his monologues may have their creative origins not in the biography of the poet:

In a certain way, no doubt, poets and novelists, however dramatic they are, give themselves in their works. The mistake that people make is that they think the poet's poems are a kind of 'catalogue raisonné' of his own very self, and of all the facts of his life, not seeing that they often only express a poetic instinct, or judgment on character, real or imagined and on the facts real or imagined.¹²

"The Two Voices" is a poem which suffers greatly from biographical criticism. In retrospect, Tennyson himself said, "When I wrote 'The Two Voices' I was so utterly miserable, a burden to myself and to my family, that I said, 'Is life worth anything?'"¹³ It is this statement which seems to have influenced many commentators,

¹¹Memoir, I, 185.

¹²Ibid., 402.

¹³Ibid., 193, N. 2.

notably Harold Nicolson, who writes:

In "The Two Voices" we have a definite and disturbing picture of Tennyson's panic-stricken bewilderment at the blow that had fallen; a picture of him gazing in an agony of despair at the ashes of a faith and fire that had once been his; a picture of a lonely frightened spirit, crouched broodingly over thoughts of death.¹⁴

Nicolson describes an important aspect of the poem, but in relying too heavily on biographical interpretation, seems to oversimplify the imaginative and aesthetic dimension of the work. Christopher Ricks provides evidence that the poem was first conceived in June 1833¹⁵ and thus there is no need to assume that it was written in response to Arthur Hallam's death which occurred in September of that year. Tennyson's changing of the title from "Thoughts of a Suicide"¹⁶ to "The Two Voices" seems to indicate that the poet wished the poem to be read in a broader context than simply a biographical one.

As I have indicated earlier, Tennyson's poetry presents a dichotomous universe in which subjective and objective ("escape" and "involved") modes of behaviour are counterpointed and investigated. From its earliest beginnings, Tennyson's poetry is involved with disparate and

¹⁴Nicolson, Tennyson, p. 125.

¹⁵Poems of Tennyson, p. 522.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 522.

clearly delineated viewpoints. The early lyric, "A Spirit Haunts the Year's Last Hours",¹⁷ establishes two separate poetic voices: the internal (subjective) and the external (objective), which in the two stanzas of the poem, describe the phenomena of the dying year from their different perspectives. R. B. Wilkenfeld writes that in this poem Tennyson:

. . . embodies the 'two voices' in the shape of his elegant lyric, but he does not suggest that because two views of experience exist they are, necessarily, mutually exclusive or even conflicting in the claims they make on our consciousness. Rather, he offers the double vision of the 'two voices' in the service of that complete experience which sees life steadily and sees it whole.¹⁸

As Wilkenfeld suggests, the "subjective and objective" voices are not "necessarily conflicting", yet, as previously indicated, attempts to unite those divergent elements into an integral whole prove disastrous to personae such as the Lady of Shalott. Although not mutually exclusive, the subjective and objective elements within Tennyson's early poetry often seem mutually destructive.

"The Two Voices" diverges from his earlier work, in that it is a thesis poem in which Tennyson endeavors to discover a technique which will merge the two "poetic" voices. John Pettigrew writes that "The Two Voices" "involves

¹⁷Poems of Tennyson, p. 215.

¹⁸R. B. Wilkenfeld, "The Shape of Two Voices", Victorian Poetry, IV (1966), 165.

internal debate between conflicting claims of escape and involvement, with its speaker again turning finally to fresh woods and pastures anew."¹⁹ The internal debate which is recorded in "The Two Voices" takes place between "a still small voice" which offers escape from the mutable world and the first person singular "I" of the narrator who urges a commitment to life. The entire poem may be seen as a debate in which Tennyson's early poetic principle of duality is examined. Following this interpretation, "the still small voice" with its offer of death and the eternal beauty beyond the grave, represents the "subjective voice" of Tennyson's early work, offering transcendent escape from life. The voice argues by analogy in order to encourage escape:

'Today I saw the dragon-fly
Come from the wells where he did lie.

'An inner impulse rent the veil
Of his old husk: from head to tail
Came out clear plates of sapphire mail.

'He dried his wings: like gauze they grew;
Through crofts and pastures wet with dew
A living flash of light he flew.'²⁰
(ll. 8-15)

The speaker rejects this rhetorical flourish of subjective romanticism and counters with an equally idealized but

¹⁹Pettigrew, Tennyson: The Early Poems, p. 52.

²⁰Poems of Tennyson, pp. 523-524.

Biblically rooted, response:

I said, 'When first the world began,
Young Nature through five cycles ran,
And in the sixth she moulded man.

'She gave him mind, the lordliest
Proportion, and, above the rest,
Dominion in the head and breast.'
(ll. 16-21)

Like the refuge that it urges the speaker to enter, the arguments used by the "still small voice" remain static. Throughout the poem, the means of escape offered by the subjective side of the soul are of a decidedly mystic quality:

'Forerun thy peers, thy time, and let
Thy feet, millenniums hence, be set
In midst of knowledge, dreamed not yet.

'Thou hast not gained a real height,
Nor art thou nearer to the light,
Because the scale is infinite.'
(ll. 88-93)

The arguments of the "still small voice" are unchanging and simplistic, qualities which the objective narrative voice recognizes and objects to:

'O dull, one-sided voice,' said I,
'Wilt thou make everything a lie,
To flatter me that I may die?'
(ll. 202-204)

The speaker's arguments for a commitment to life are not "one-sided" and may be seen to reflect the process of growth in a poetic mind. His arguments begin in the standard answers of religious cliché which idealize man's state and his individuality:

Then did my response clearer fall:
 'No compound of this earthly ball
 Is like another, all in all.'
 (ll. 34-36)

This type of argument is easily dismissed by the "small voice" thus forcing the speaker to constantly question and redefine the reasons behind his faith in the process of mutability. The voice of subjective escape illustrates the pain of dualistic existence which Tennyson had termed earlier "the damned vacillating 'state'":

'Sick are thou--a divided will
 Still heaping on the fear of ill
 The fear of men, a coward still.
 (ll. 106-108)

However, the speaker does not remain in his state of cowardice and duality, but attempts to marry the "blood and mire" of human veins with an aspect of eternity which will fuse the subjective and objective realms:

'I sung the joyful Paeon clear,
 And, sitting, burnished without fear
 The brand, the buckler, and the spear--

'Waiting to strive a happy strife,
 To war with falsehood to the knife,
 And not to lose the good of life--

'Some hidden principle to move,
 To put together, part and prove,
 And mete the bounds of hate and love--

'As far as might be, to carve out
 Free space for every human doubt,
 That the whole mind might orb about--

'To search through all I felt or saw,
 The springs of life, the depths of awe,
 And reach the law within the law.'
 (ll. 127-141)

Through the tension of debate with the "still small voice", the speaker comes to accept the world of mutability as a means by which glimpses of eternity may be realized:

'I know that age to age succeeds,
Blowing a noise of tongues and deeds,
A dust of systems and of creeds.

'I cannot hide that some have striven,
Achieving calm, to whom was given
The joy that mixes man with Heaven.'
(ll. 205-210)

With the merging of mutable and permanent or subjective and objective realities, the speaker is able to look on existence with a wholeness of vision by which he may "'see the end, and know the good'" (l. 432). Through his struggle, the speaker attains a sense of self-definition beyond solipsistic escape for he has actively chosen to define and discuss the objective and subjective poles of his existence rather than retreat. Out of this self-examination, a new reality has emerged which, as in the case of Coleridge's ancient mariner, permits the speaker a vision of universal harmony through universal love:

Such seemed the whisper at my side:
'What is it thou knowest, sweet voice?' I cried.
'A hidden hope,' the voice replied:

So heavenly-toned, that in that hour
From out my sullen heart a power
Broke, like the rainbow from the shower,

To feel, although no tongue can prove,
That every cloud, that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love.
(ll. 439-447)

The "hidden hope" is the newly acquired ability of the speaker to "toil beneath the curse" (l. 229) of mutability and to use the pain and struggle of life to achieve epiphanal visions of harmony between the two realities:

'It may be that no life is found,
Which only to one engine bound
Falls off, but cycles always round.

'As old mythologies relate,
Some draught of Lethe might await
The slipping through from state to state.

'As here we find in trances, men
Forget the dream that happens then,
Until they fall in trance again.

'So might we, if our state were such
As one before, remember much,
For those two likes might meet and touch.'
(ll. 346-357)

The concept of permanence within mutability expressed in the above quotation (ll. 346-348), and a general theme running throughout the whole poem; that man may perceive universal patterns through the travail and tragedy of life, is an early articulation of Tennyson's philosophy, a philosophy which achieves mature expression in In Memoriam. It also echoes a principle which W. B. Yeats endorses throughout his middle and late periods. To achieve the permanence of Byzantium, for example, the questor must be united with the cycles of natural process:

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor!

Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,
 That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.²¹
 ("Byzantium", ll. 33-40)

Throughout "The Two Voices", the speaker's response to natural processes undergoes a complex metamorphosis. He begins by speaking of man as a specific entity apart from nature, in a state of grace and individuality (ll. 34-36). The poem concludes by returning full-circle to religious imagery, but rather than the cliché sentiment of the dogma expressed in the poem's opening, the speaker has come to a point where he may define his own beliefs:

'Behold, it is the Sabbath morn.'

And I arose, and I released
 The casement, and the light increased
 With freshness in the dawning east.
 (ll. 402-405)

The experience of self-debate awakens a new life within the narrative voice which is now capable of assigning to man and natural objects a spiritual life. The subjective and objective realms, so mutually destructive in much of Tennyson's earlier verse, are successfully fused in "The Two Voices":

One walked between his wife and child,
 With measured footfall firm and mild,
 And now and then he gravely smiled.

The prudent partner of his blood
 Leaned on him, faithful, gentle, good,
 Wearing the rose of womanhood.

²¹Variorum, p. 498.

And in their double love secure,
The little maiden walked demure,
Pacing with downward eyelids pure.

These three made unity so sweet,
My frozen heart began to beat,
Remembering its ancient heat.

I blest them, and they wandered on:
I spoke, but answer came there none:
The dull and bitter voice was gone.
(ll. 412-426)

"The Two Voices" marks a watershed in the poetic development of Alfred Tennyson. No longer are the dichotomies of subjectivity and objectivity relegated to separate and mutually destructive realms, but freely intermingle within the same poem. "Morte D'Arthur", composed after "The Two Voices" and the death of Hallam (winter 1833-1834), is another debate poem which deals with the problems of mutability and permanence or, more correctly, progress and tradition. Again, as in the case of "The Two Voices", mutability is accepted:

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'²²
(ll. 239-242)

John Pettigrew observes that "Morte D'Arthur" occupies a pivotal position in Tennyson's poetic development:

Tennyson stands at the point of crisis in his career, his old world destroyed but his new one

²²Poems of Tennyson, p. 595.

not yet born. The lyric poet is reaching beyond his former grasp to exercise himself in new forms that may accommodate both his lyric gifts and his new didactic aims. The private poet, formerly dazzled by the beautiful, is reluctantly and fearfully, turning to a public poetry with spiritual values.²³

It is questionable whether Tennyson's "new world" did, in fact, ever achieve "birth". His original title for Idylls of the King was "The True and the False", and on his eightieth birthday he stressed the theme of tension which exists within the work, "My meaning in the Idylls of the King was spiritual. I took the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustration. I intended Arthur to represent the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh. . . ." ²⁴ "The Two Voices" reveals a theme which dominates Tennyson's mature attitude towards the reconciliation of opposing realities. The spiritual or permanent realm, which arises from the unification of opposing objective and subjective realities can be realized only through conscious effort. (The number of poems concerned with the "quest motif" in Tennyson's canon indicates his belief in the effort needed in order to journey "from out our bourne of Time and Place" ["Crossing the Bar", l. 13]).

However, the efforts of the body alone cannot lead

²³Tennyson: The Early Poems, p. 55.

²⁴Poems of Tennyson, p. 1465.

to the unification of mutable and eternal realms. In 1887, Tennyson wrote, "The higher moral imagination enslaved to sense is like an eagle caught by its feet in a snare, baited with carrion, so that it cannot use its wings to soar."²⁵

Tennyson was convinced from his youth that a spiritual power was needed in order that man and the immutable be linked:

Throughout his life he had a constant feeling of a spiritual harmony existing between ourselves and the outward visible Universe, and of the actual Immanence of God in the infinitesimal atom as in the vastest system. 'If God', he would say, 'were to withdraw Himself for one single instant from this Universe, everything would vanish into nothingness.' When speaking on that subject he said to me: 'My most passionate desire is to have a clearer and fuller vision of God. The soul seems to me one with God, how I cannot tell. I can sympathize with God in my poor little way.' In some phases of thought and feeling his idealism tended more decidedly to mysticism. He wrote: 'A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has frequently come upon me thro' repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.'²⁶

Trance, mysticism or spiritualism as the singular medium for attaining a vision of higher reality is a concept which was

²⁵Memoir, II, 337-338.

²⁶Memoir, I, 319-320.

nonetheless held suspect by Tennyson:

I grant you that spiritualism must not be judged by its quacks: but I am not convinced that God and the ghosts of men would choose something other than mere table-legs through which to speak to the heart of man. You tell me it is my duty to give up everything in order to propagate spiritualism. I cannot see what grounds of proof (as yet) you have to go on. There is too much flummery mixed up with it supposing as I²⁷ am inclined to believe there is something in it.

Tennyson's "The Ancient Sage" (1885), expresses his belief that a vision of the ultimate arises only after striving through life:

If thou would'st hear the Nameless, and wilt dive
 Into the Temple-cave of thine own self,
 There, brooding by the central altar, thou
 Mayst haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,
 By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise,
 As if thou knewest, though thou canst not know;
 For knowledge is the swallow on the lake
 That sees and stirs the surface-shadow there
 But never yet hath dipt into the abysm,
 The Abysm of all Abysms, beneath, within
 The blue of sky and sea, the green of earth,
 And in the million-millionth of a grain
 Which cleft and cleft again for evermore,
 And ever vanishing, never vanishes.²⁸
 (ll. 31-44)

A resounding urge for self-commitment dominates this late poem, which deals with the process needed to attain a mystic vision of universal unity. The call to "dive / Into the Temple-cave of thine own self" is directly opposite to the method employed by the seer of the 1830 poem "The Mystic"

²⁷Memoir, II, 342-343.

²⁸Poems of Tennyson, p. 1351.

who transcends mutable reality with a "still serene abstraction" (l. 5).²⁹

The poems of the first of Tennyson's two 1842 volumes stress duality and isolation. Poems such as "Mariana", "Recollections of the Arabian Nights", and "The Lady of Shalott" express isolation and retreat. Duality is stressed in companion poems such as "The Poet", "The Poet's Mind" and "The Mermaid", "Merman". The second volume, however, contains poems in which the reconciliation between dichotomies and the acceptance of mutability as a means of unification are predominant themes. "The Two Voices" and "Ulysses" are both in the second 1842 volume. Of "Ulysses", John Pettigrew writes, "Ulysses became the correlative not for one simple feeling but for a complexity of feelings, a unified product of a divided sensibility, a fine example of Coleridge's 'balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities'".³⁰ The reconciliation which is fulfilled within "Ulysses" arises out of the process of self-examination in "The Two Voices" which was written some months before "Ulysses". That unification process is one which involves striving through the world of mutability, in order that one's thoughts be "hammered into unity". The poetic attempts

²⁹ Poems of Tennyson, p. 230.

³⁰ John Pettigrew, "Tennyson's 'Ulysses': A Reconciliation of Opposites", Victorian Literature, p. 77.

of W. B. Yeats to achieve a reconciliation of the divergent objective and subjective voices in his poetry seem somewhat analogous to the process we see in Tennyson;

Yeats's 1919 essay, "If I were Four-and-Twenty" expresses a personal philosophy similar to the "reconciliation of opposites" which John Pettigrew argues characterizes Tennyson's "Ulysses":

I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came together. Then for years I said to myself that these two had nothing to do with my form of philosophy, but that I had only to be sincere and to keep from constraining one by the other and they would become one interest. Now all three are, I think, one, or rather all three are a discrete expression of a single conviction.³¹

This personal integration which Yeats had achieved is reflected by the unification of divergent elements in the poetry of his 1914 volume, Responsibilities. The process by which he realizes poetic unity is, in some ways, similar to the means employed by Tennyson in "The Two Voices". Both poets utilize mystic trance and other occult practices as aids for attaining a vision of higher reality. However, since Tennyson found many spiritual practices of dubious repute and, at best, a medium which would offer only brief

³¹Explorations, p. 263.

intimations of eternity,³² I have chosen to concentrate on the poetry which deals with his striving through and within the mundane and mutable realms towards a reconciliation. This is not to deny the importance of occult or mystic phenomena as elements of unification within the poetry of either Yeats or Tennyson. However, the parallel development of their poetry is better illustrated by an investigation of the attitudes of both poets towards "the fever and the fret" of worldly life. As was the case with John Keats, both Tennyson and Yeats came to recognize "the world of pains" as "the teat from which the mind or intelligence sucks its identity."³³

In 1892, Yeats described the world as perceived by the Irish peasantry as dualistic:

In Ireland this world and the world we go to after death are not far apart.

Indeed there are times when the worlds are so near together that it seems as if our earthly chattels were no more than the shadows of things beyond.³⁴

He sought to link these two worlds in the poetic universe of his Collected Poems. In his early career, Yeats endeavoured to attain personal and poetic unity in the dream-trance

³²Tennyson indicates the transient nature of mystic revelation in "The Two Voices": "As we find in trances men / Forget the dream that happens then, / Until they fall in trance again"(ll. 352-354).

³³The Letters of John Keats, II, 102-103.

³⁴Mythologies, p. 98.

visions of aesthetic decadence. Although he never fully adopted the personal philosophy of the decadent school, his early poems are those "of escape. . . which are anti-Victorian melodramas with beauty as hero and duty as villain."³⁵ During the early years of the twentieth century, Yeats became disillusioned with fin de siècle aestheticism. In a 1906 segment of The Cutting of an Agate, "The Holy Places", Yeats discusses the shift of his poetic theories away from aesthetic escapism:

Unless the discovery of legendary knowledge and the returning belief in miracle, or what we must needs call so, can bring once more a new belief in the sanctity of common ploughland, and new wonders that reward no difficult ecclesiastical routine but the common, wayward, spirited man, we may never see again a Shelley and a Dickens in the one body, but be broken to the end. We have grown jealous of the body, and we dress it in dull unshapely clothes, that we may cherish aspiration alone. . . . And at last we have Villiers de l'Isle-Adam crying in the ecstasy of a supreme culture, of a supreme refusal: 'As for living, our servants will do that for us.' One of the means of loftiness, of marmorean stillness, has been the choice of strange and far-away places for the scenery of art, but this choice has grown bitter to me, and there are moments when I cannot believe in the reality of imaginations that are not inset with the minute life of long familiar things and symbols and places.³⁶

A similar thought, indicating the pull towards mutability, is expressed in a letter to Florence Farr, written in

³⁵Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity, p. 221.

³⁶Essays and Introductions, p. 296.

February 1906:

I have myself by the by begun eastern meditations -- of your sort, but with the object of trying to lay hands upon some dynamic and substantialising force as distinguished from the eastern quiescent and supersensualizing state of the soul -- a movement downwards upon life, not upwards out of life.³⁷

Yeats believed that by drawing his inspiration from the mutable world, by a "movement downwards upon life", he could produce an art which involved the power of human passion. Passion is the important element which Yeats felt to be missing from the subjective art of the aesthetic school:

All art is sensuous, but when a man puts only his contemplative nature and his more vague desires into his art, the sensuous images through which it speaks become broken, fleeting, uncertain, or are chosen for their distance from general experience, and all grows unsubstantial and fantastic.³⁸

Richard Ellmann remarks that during the nineties, Yeats built up a world of "skillful evasion"³⁹ and not one which would reveal eternal truths. He postulates that during these years, Yeats made "his passion unrecognizable by subduing and obfuscating it; he escapes from personal statement but, his freedom secured, has nowhere to go."⁴⁰ Personal statement and passion are united in Responsibilities.

³⁷Letters, p. 469.

³⁸Essays and Introductions, p. 293.

³⁹Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, p. 162.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 162.

As with Tennyson's second 1842 volume, Yeats's 1914 work marks an important change in his poetic development. T. R. Henn states that, "The turning point, or watershed, as a recent critic has called it, of Yeats's poetry is usually considered to be the period that produced the poems in Responsibilities."⁴¹ The volume opens with two epigraphs which provide an indication of the poetic and personal metamorphosis which will occur throughout the volume. As Yeats's art progressed upwards through various poetic plateaus, by necessity, he would have to transform that art in order to fit it into his changing sensibilities. If the characteristic expressive mode of his early verse was dream-based and romantically self-indulgent, then the epigraphs of Responsibilities indicate a marked departure from those early preoccupations. The opening epigraph is from an "Old Play" which states "In dreams begins responsibility".⁴² With this first dictum Yeats assigns a utilitarian function to dreams (and to dream-based poetry). Dreams are somehow the starting point for responsible actions. The key operative word of the first epigraph is "begins", for in order that the dreams be realized within the world of objective reality, man must abandon his subjective self and strive within the world. The

⁴¹Henn, The Lonely Tower, p. 88.

⁴²Variorum, p. 269

first epigraph which stresses the seminal function of dreams, is qualified by the second which is an open indication that Yeats has, with this volume, abandoned or was forced to abandon, his preoccupation with the self and dreams so that he can establish a new poetic voice. Attributed to Khoung-Fou-Tseu, the second epigraph states: "How am I fallen from myself, for a long time now / I have not seen the Prince of Chang in my dreams". The "falling from the self" which leads to the loss of dreams counterpointed with the realization that dreams are necessary as a starting point for responsible actions, are the poles which establish the boundaries of the internal debate which occurs throughout Responsibilities. Responsibilities serves much the same function in Yeats's poetry as "The Two Voices" does in Tennyson's. In both cases the elements of subjective escapism and objective commitment are conjoined and forged into a new and unified whole. "The Two Voices" is a poem which explores this poetic process and Responsibilities is a volume which attempts to fulfill that same purpose.

Many poems of Responsibilities are direct and angry responses to specific social and political events which had affected Yeats in the years between The Green Helmet (1910) and Responsibilities (1914). Henn, taking his title from a later Yeats poem ("Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient"), calls the section of his book dealing with

Responsibilities "The Study of Hatred". The poems do, in many cases, deal with definite events within the objectively actual world of the Abbey Theatre ("On Those Who Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World', 1907") and Irish politics ("September 1913" and "To a Shade"). However, a more important thematic concern in the volume is the complex relationship between those specific social and political stimuli and the poet as he expresses himself through his art. As with Tennyson in "The Two Voices", the problem Yeats confronts in Responsibilities is one of forging two conflicting realities into a unity.

Whereas Tennyson reached a harmonious reconciliation of contraries by employing a continually developing logic within "The Two Voices", Yeats, during the period which produced Responsibilities, believed reconciliation could be achieved only through the creative passion of an artist who was involved with the pain of life:

. . . he can see himself as but part of the spectacle of the world and mix into all he sees that flavour of extravagance, or of humour, or of philosophy, that makes one understand that he contemplates even his own death as if it were another's and finds in his own destiny but, as it were, a projection through a burning-glass of that general to men. There is in the creative joy an acceptance of what life brings, because we have understood the beauty of what it brings, or a hatred of death for what it takes away, which arouses within us, through some sympathy perhaps with all other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror or the sweetness

of our exaltation, at death and oblivion.⁴³

The "creative joy", arising from the "movement downwards upon life" and allowing the poet to "laugh aloud at death", resembles Nietzsche's "tragic joy" in which Apollonian and Dionysian elements are united. Norman Jeffares describes Yeats's life during the period 1902-1914 in Nietzschean terms:

He had been introduced to Nietzsche by John Quinn, the great Irish-American patron of the intellectual movement, and had found that Nietzsche divided the soul's main movements into the Dionysiac and Apollonian, transcending and creating forms respectively. He decided that his Dionysiac period was over, and that he must leave the methods of Mallarmé and Symons. He became dissatisfied with the beauty of his Celtic poetry and told H. W. Nevinson that Byron was the last man who made poetry; he wanted to combine the two sides of his character, the dreaming and the active.⁴⁴

The unification of the dreaming (subjective) and active (objective) aspects of the artist allows him to experience and to articulate the tragic truth of life. The "creative joy" of the artist involved with outer reality as well as his personal vision, gives to mankind a vision of union between the inner and outer realities and thus reveals the:

Proof that there's a purpose set
Before the secret working mind;
Profane perfection of mankind.⁴⁵
("Under Ben Bulbin", ll. 50-52)

⁴³Essays and Introductions, p. 322.

⁴⁴Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet, p. 143.

⁴⁵Variorum, p. 639.

The artist, to Yeats, is the man at the interface, the man who, at the nexus of two realities, loses himself in the art that is being produced: "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?" ("Among School Children", ll. 63-64).⁴⁶ The problem of poetically articulating the moment of union between contraries, is one which preoccupies Yeats throughout what is traditionally considered his "middle period". The metaphor of union between two opposing poles of existence, be they known as Apollonian and Dionysian, primary and antithetical, subjective and objective, or lunar and solar, is the underlying theme which runs through the Responsibilities volume. The dominant theme of Responsibilities is the conjunction of distinct elemental forms in the epiphanal passion of "creative joy", or, to use the language of the volume itself, the frenzy or delirium of creative energy.

The introductory poem, "Pardon, Old Fathers", begins the volume in a tone of self-deprecatory sterility:

Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,
 Although I have come close on forty-nine,
 I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
 Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.⁴⁷
 (ll. 19-22)

With these lines, the poet seems to admit the infertility of vain aestheticism:

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 446.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 270.

. . . that stirred
 My fancy and set my boyish lips to say,
 'Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun'.
 (ll. 16-18)

If Responsibilities begins with self-chastisement, it ends
 in self-acceptance and resolution:

I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs,
 Those undreamt accidents that have made me
 -- Seeing that Fame has perished this long while,
 Being but a part of ancient ceremony --
 Notorious, till all my priceless things
 Are but a post the passing dogs defile.⁴⁸
 ("While I, from that reed-throated whisperer", ll. 9-14)

Yeats's poetic self has undergone metamorphosis, for he no
 longer writes of "barren passion" and "wasteful virtues" of
 aesthetic escapism, but has transcended the self and is now
 truly a voice of the universal muse, a "reed-throated
 whisperer" who, because of his transcendence through the
 mundane, can write with "A clear articulation in the air"
 (l. 3). The closing rhyme of Responsibilities thus resolves
 the theme of sterility which opens the volume.

The great artist, in Yeats's view, has the ability
 to approach and articulate the true vision of this universe:

. . . the core is always, as in all great art, an
 overpowering vision of certain virtues. . . . The
 imaginative writer shows us the world as a painter
 does his picture, reversed in a looking-glass, that
 we may see it, not as it seems to eyes habit has
 made dull, but as we were Adam and this the first
 morning. . . .⁴⁹

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 320.

⁴⁹Essays and Introductions, p. 339.

When dealing with the major theme of Responsibilities, the key phrase in the above statement is "overpowering vision". The truths which the artist is capable of attaining seem too great to be contained by an ordinary mind and so the poet or artist who is in contact with these realities, is overpowered and enters into the frenzy of revelation:

And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
 So wild that every casual thought of that and this
 Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out
 of season
 With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
 And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
 Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
 Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken.⁵⁰
 ("The Cold Heaven", ll. 3-9)

Peter Ure gives high praise to "The Cold Heaven" as an individual lyric, "'The Cold Heaven' is one of Yeats's greatest poems, a poem one can never finish describing, and yet which does not need to be described at all, for it describes itself by what it does."⁵¹ What "The Cold Heaven" "does" within the context of Responsibilities and Yeats's poetic development, is similar to what "The Two Voices" "does" in Tennyson's work. With its apocalyptic and purgatorial language, "The Cold Heaven" creates a moment of revelation and true insight for the persona (Yeats) who, until this moment, seemed to

⁵⁰Variorum, p. 316.

⁵¹Peter Ure, Yeats, p. 59.

be blindly groping towards vision, "Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven / That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice" (ll. 1-2). The distinctions which separate the antinomies of a dualistic universe are violently united in "The Cold Heaven". Ice is now seen to burn and rather than be consumed, more ice is created in the process. The reality which the poet now sees is a vision of a unified world which has tragedy at its foundation. This "injustice of the skies", however, and the acceptance of that injustice with 'tragic joy', allows for a unified vision of a world where "the king is but as the beggar" ("Running to Paradise", refrain).⁵² Although the reality which the poet's vision can now encompass is cruel and unjust, there emerges with the revelation a definite sense of regeneration. The ghost (mask?), surfacing from the obscurity of previous existence, now reveals itself as a kind of death:

. . . the ghost begins to quicken
 Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
 Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken.
 By the injustice of the skies for punishment?
 (ll. 9-12)

"The Cold Heaven" marks the crisis or crescendo point of Responsibilities. The poems which follow it ("That the Night come", "An Appointment", "The Magi", "The Dolls" and "A Coat") are all poems in which the antinomies of subjective

⁵²Variorum, p. 301.

and objective reality are forged together by the unity of tragic or creative joy. Political reality; for instance, which so concerned the poet in the earlier part of the volume, is now fit subject for laughter:

And he, with that low whinnying sound
That is like laughter, sprang again
And so to the other tree at a bound.
Nor the tame will, nor timid brain,
Nor heavy knitting of the brow
Bred that fierce tooth and cleanly limb
And threw him up to laugh on the bough;
No government appointed him.⁵³
("An Appointment", ll. 5-12)

As in the case of the debate in "The Two Voices", the trauma of "The Cold Heaven" allows Yeats to view the universe as an amalgamated whole where the distinctions between the objective and subjective are no longer valid. As with "The Two Voices", there emerges from the experience of "The Cold Heaven" a new poetic voice which accepts the validity and importance of the mutable world as perceived and transfigured by an imaginative and creative individual personality. Yeats describes the process of his development in "Discoveries":

I was interested in nothing but states of mind,
lyrical moments, intellectual essences. . . . I
had not learned what sweetness, what rhythmic movement,
there is in those who have become the joy that is
themselves. Without knowing it, I had come to care
for nothing but impersonal beauty. . . . Then one day
I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that
I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and

always outside myself, a Stone or an Elixir that was always out of reach, and that I myself was the fleeting thing that held out its hand. . . . Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life. . . . To put it otherwise, we should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market-place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole.⁵⁴

With "The Cold Heaven" and other poems in Responsibilities Yeats casts aside his old poetic coat made "Out of old mythologies" and learns "there's more enterprise / In walking naked" ("A Coat", ll. 9-10). Yeats had earlier used precisely the same language to describe Tennyson's poetic development, explaining that "his soul came near to standing, as the soul of a poet should, naked under the heavens."⁵⁵ Both poets, in order that the opposing voices of the poetry be reconciled, underwent a similar poetic metamorphosis. Both men returned from the dream-world of Romantic escape to the mutable self in order that a new and unified poetic voice could be forged within the crucible of the self.

⁵⁴Essays and Introductions, pp. 271-272.

⁵⁵Uncollected Prose, I, 232-233.

CONCLUSION

"The Two Voices" and "The Cold Heaven" are central and significant poems in the poetic development of Alfred Tennyson and W. B. Yeats. With these poems both men, in Yeats's phrase, remake themselves by remaking their verse. The poems mark a plateau for both poets upon which a new poetic principle is based. These poems also mark a point of departure in a hitherto analogous development.

Both Tennyson and Yeats were heirs to the high Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century which stressed that the poet perceives an ultimate reality beyond the mundane. In order to achieve this vision of the ultimate, both poets sought, in their beginnings, to escape into the subjective realm of pure aestheticism. However, the objective demands of actuality constantly impinged on their carefully fabricated world of permanence. The tension which resulted from this dualistic dimension within the self shaped the most significant poetry of both men within their early careers.

With "The Two Voices" Tennyson, through active debate, attempts to unify the self and reconcile the dualistic

nature of his poetry. The poetry which follows the 1842 volume, including "In Memoriam", "Maud", and "Idylls of the King" are all concerned, in subtle or suppressed ways, with the attempts to make whole the divergent natures of the self. Whether or not Tennyson ever succeeded is a matter beyond the scope of this thesis. What is important within the limits of this thesis is that Tennyson, like Yeats, ultimately chose involvement with and not escape from objective mutability as a means towards this reconciliation.

Yeats, with his 1914 volume, came to realize the value of accepting the tragic reality of the objective world. Unlike Tennyson, who became a "public" poet after 1842, Yeats took the knowledge gleaned from the struggle within Responsibilities and applied it to the later poetry in order to further explore the self in relationship to the world.

Thus the kinship between the development of Yeats and Tennyson ends with Tennyson's acceptance of public and comfortable fame. Yeats chose to maintain the tragic conflict of dualities throughout his poetry and life. Rather than camouflage the struggle towards reconciliation, he found poetic power in the strife within the world. It was in November 1850 that Tennyson became England's Poet Laureate. The public poetry and allegorical verse which

Tennyson wrote after that time, in Yeats's opinion, "extinguished the central flame."¹ Tennyson's "central flame" -- the imagination engendered by the tension which shaped his early verse -- and the reconciliation which occurs by toil, debate and tragedy within the mutable body are, in many ways, similar to the process which engaged W. B. Yeats during his career up to 1914.

In 1932 Yeats wrote a four-line epigraph entitled "The Nineteenth Century and After". It is a poem which laments the passing of the "world's last great poetical period":

Though the great song return no more
There's keen delight in what we have:
The rattle of pebbles on the shore
Under the receding wave.²

One of the purposes of this thesis has been to demonstrate that, as well as Blake, Shelley and Morris, Alfred Tennyson was a part of that "great song" which so influenced the poetry of W. B. Yeats.

¹Essays and Introductions, p. 163.

²Letters, p. 759.

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