THE NIETZSCHEAN VOICE IN YEATS'S LAST POEMS

HEROIC REVERIE: THE NIETZSCHEAN VOICE IN YEATS'S LAST POEMS

By

JOHN PETER REARDON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: John Peter Reardon, B.A. (Carleton University)

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an attempt to illuminate some of the philosophic and thematic connections that exist between Yeats and Nietzsche, particularly as they are found in Yeats's Last Poems. While Yeats has certainly not suffered from lack of critical attention, it is my view that the Yeats/Nietzsche connection has not been dealt with fully, and that Yeats's later work especially is more accurately read and understood in the light of Nietzsche's role in the development of Yeats's thought. Where the Nietzschean element in Yeats has been dealt with, the focus has been primarily on the plays, and the more important links between the two writers have been passed over quickly, misconstrued, or ignored altogether. By examining three themes common to both writers, the thesis tries to show that Yeats's connection with Nietzsche is not simply a matter of literary influence, but that Yeats and Nietzsche are united by a common philosophic temperament and way of understanding the world. First and foremost, Yeats and Nietzsche approach life and the world on aesthetic terms. Second, they share a similar tragic world-view. Finally, their conceptions of art, morality and human stature are based on an ideal of strength or power. After the Introduction, which delineates Yeats's reading and acceptance of Nietzsche's work, Chapter One elaborates on these three themes. Chapter Two attempts to show how these themes form the philosophic basis of Yeats's Last Poems.

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For my parents and Julia

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Introduction

The question of influence among writers is never an easy one. The intellectual affinity and creative osmosis that occur when one original mind encounters the work of another is that rare and private experience before which the tools of literary investigation fall silent. One can cite sources and index marginalia, but the precise chemistry of feeling that takes place, the merging of a shared vision or mode of understanding in the crucible of the imagination, lies ultimately beyond the reach of conventional criticism. Like the man in Plato's cave, the critic in this regard always has his back to the light.

And yet, in another and perhaps limited but still vital sense, such a direction is not altogether fruitless. Even if the exact mysteries of the process of influence cannot be identified, one can, by reading with a comparative eye, illuminate important areas of one writer's work by a simultaneous response to and analysis of another's thought. The case of Yeats is certainly no exception. While an attempt to isolate the precise process by which his mind and spirit absorbed and took strength from the works of other writers in his efforts to create "those masterful images" ("The Circus Animals' Desertion")[1] of his art would be futile, one can still,

I think, gain a clearer understanding of Yeats's poetry and thought by seeing them against the work of those writers, artists and philosophers from whom Yeats took inspiration and instruction.

Of these numerous "singing-masters"("Sailing to Byzantium", CP, p. 217) of the poet's soul Nietzsche must be recognized as being one of the most prominent and powerful. And yet, given Yeats's virtually unchallenged stature in modern scholarship, the critical attention given this aspect of his work is strangely limited. Although the fact that Yeats read and embraced parts of Nietzsche's thought is noted by most Yeats critics, the absence of a major and sustained published account of the relationship may suggest that commentators have not fully taken into consideration Denis Donoghue's remark that "Yeats's kinship with Nietzsche" would seem to be "a more telling relation than that between Yeats and Plato, Plotinus, or Blake."[2] The remark is a suggestive one, for it speaks of the connection between Yeats and Nietzsche not so much in terms of literary influence, but in terms of a profound kinship of spirit and attitude of mind. It is this special correspondence between Yeats and Nietzsche, their similarity of thought, outlook and voice, the closeness of their philosophical temperaments and strategies of understanding that is the formative principle of this thesis.

The lineaments of this special kinship may be sketched initially and synoptically through the direct references to

Nietzsche and his work that we find in Yeats's writings, particularly his letters and other prose writings. What these references serve to reveal are the deep emotions that Nietzsche seemed to stir in Yeats, the immediate, if inchoate, enthusiasm for Nietzsche's thought that arose upon reading him and the important position that Yeats assigned Nietzsche in his personal poetic and philosophic pantheon. An early expression of this sudden and profound impact that the philosopher's thought had on Yeats may be found in a letter to Lady Gregory (September 26, 1902):

> . . . I have written to you little and badly of late I am afraid, for the truth is you have a rival in Nietzsche, that strong enchanter. I have read him so much that I have made my eyes bad again. . . . Nietzsche completes Blake and has the same roots--I have not read anything with so much excitement since I got to love Morris's stories which have the same curious astringent joy.[3]

Aside from the declared enthusiasm here, the letter is important for the connection that Yeats draws between Blake and Nietzsche, a connection he had made earlier in his essay "William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy" (1897). In it we find, in reference to what Yeats took to be Blake's "pagan philosophy":

> One is reminded of Shelley, who was the next to take up the cry, though with a less abundant philosophic faculty, but still more of Nietzsche, whose thought flows always, though with an even more violent current, in the bed Blake's thought has worn.[4]

Both of these references to Nietzsche are crucial. Not only is Yeats right in asserting the similarities between

Blake and Nietzsche (a subject which we will need to return to later), but the passages show that, even at this relatively early stage of his poetic career, Yeats saw Nietzsche as belonging to that tradition of writers with which he constantly and consciously strove to align himself.

Yeats first came into contact with Nietzsche's writings in 1902, either in Thomas Common's translated anthology Nietzsche as Critic, Philosopher, Poet and Prophet (1901) or in a copy of Thus Spake Zarathustra (one of the few works of Nietzsche to have been translated in whole at the time) given to him by John Quinn. Doubtless, however, Yeats was familiar with some of Nietzsche's major concepts before this date, even if on a less authoritative basis than direct reading would have provided. The passage just quoted from his 1897 essay might attest to his earlier familiarity. The Nietzschean vogue (or "Neo-Nietzschean clatter",[5] in Pound's words) that existed in literary circles in England during the late 1800's and early 1900's has been explored thoroughly and comprehensively by David S. Thatcher,[6] and Yeats must have absorbed something of Nietzsche's thought simply by virtue of having been part of this particular milieu.

A letter of May 15, 1903 credits John Quinn with having first introduced Yeats to Nietzsche's work and suggests clearly that Yeats was at this time familiar specifically with The Birth of Tragedy:

> I have always felt that the soul has two movements primarily: one to transcend forms, and the other to create forms. Nietzsche, to whom you have been the first to introduce me, calls these the Dionysiac and the Apollonic, respectively. I think I have to some extent got weary of that wild God Dionysus, and I am hoping that the Far-Darter will come in his place.[7]

Although perhaps marginal, this is an interesting early example of Yeats's attempts to read Nietzsche's thought in relation to his own. Especially important is Yeats's linking Nietzsche's Apollonian/Dionysian duality with his own dialectical conception of life, a conception which would remain the basis of Yeats's attempts to understand and express the nature of reality and human personality. This idea shall be explored and expanded upon later. More relevant to our introductory purposes is the sense of kinship, the parallel movement of mind that is in evidence here.

In the fragments of Yeats's diary for 1909 which were later gathered together under the title Estrangement, we are given another brief but interesting example of Yeats's efforts to interpret Nietzsche's thought directly. Yeats felt that Blake preferred to "any man of intellect a happy thoughtless person," a preference that Yeats felt was shared by Nietzsche. Of this preference, he writes, "Nietzsche had it doubtless at the moment when he imagined the 'Superman' as a child".[8] There is an obvious objection here. The image of the child in Nietzsche's thought is never meant to signify merely a "happy thoughtless person". Nietzsche revolted (as did Blake

and Yeats) against the passionless, mechanistic, purely rational view of man that had been the inheritance of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century empirical and utilitarian philosophy, a view that ignored the variables of individual spirit and will, but to suggest that Nietzsche totally rejected knowledge and intellect for a kind of blissful tabula rasa is to over-simplify the case. Nietzsche chose the child as an emblem of the highest level of man's spiritual development because it symbolized a sense of newness, perpetual beginning, and acceptance and affirmation of life, and also because by becoming like a child man could overcome the traits of affectation, self-consciousness and conformity, and rise to a level (that of the Superman) where his intellect and emotions would be natural expressions of his personality. The Superman must be child-like, but he still possesses the strength and intellect of the artist, saint and philosopher. Contrary to conventional Romantic tradition, as it may be found in aspects of Rousseau, Blake and Wordsworth, Nietzsche did not see the intellect as a fetter, nor did he adhere to the tendency toward 'naturalism'. For Nietzsche, man's natural condition was precisely that which had to be overcome. To be child-like was admittedly to be pure and spontaneous:

> Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness,
> a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling
> wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea.[9]

But it was a gaiety that was won and maintained through self-imposed discipline and deliberately forged style.

Again, however, the question of Yeats's interpretation of Nietzsche is here only tangential and need not detain us long. More germane to this part of our discussion is the fact that the diary excerpt shows Yeats to be familiar with one of Nietzsche's key concepts, and again that Yeats connected Nietzsche with the intellectual and artistic tradition of which he himself felt a part.

The other direct references to Nietzsche that deserve introductory mention are from "The Phases of the Moon" and A Vision. The poem, written in 1918, assigns Nietzsche a very prominent place in Yeats's lunar scheme:

> . . . Nietzsche is born
> Because the hero's crescent is the twelfth.
>
> (CP, p. 183)

The corresponding section in A Vision (1937) gives us a more elaborate prose explanation of Nietzsche's position:

> The man of this phase, out of phase, is always in reaction, is driven from one self-conscious pose to another, is full of hesitation; true to phase, he is a cup that remembers but its own fullness. . . . The nature is conscious of the most extreme degree of deception, and is wrought to a frenzy of desire for truth of self. If Phase 9 had the greatest possible "belief in its own desire", there is now the greatest possible belief in all values created by personality. It is therefore before all else the phase of the hero, of the man who overcomes himself, and so no longer needs, like Phase 10, the submission of others, or, like Phase 11, conviction of others to prove his victory.[10]

Here Yeats's assessment of the Nietzschean stance carries a greater degree of validity and assuredness than his

earlier understanding of the Superman, and, one senses, takes its strength from the fact that Yeats is discussing something very close to his own bone. The phrase "the man who overcomes himself" is a deliberate evocation of Zarathustra's frequent admonition that "man is something that is to be surpassed",[11] but also, the "frenzy of desire for truth of self" that characterizes the man of Nietzsche's phase seems to anticipate the later lines from "An Acre of Grass" in Last Poems:

> Grant me an old man's frenzy,
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till truth obeyed his call; . . . .
>
> (CP, p. 346)

In addition, one might also say that the phrase "the greatest possible belief in all values created by personality" comes as close as anything in Yeats to describing the premises around which the central movements of his life were enacted and, as we shall see, very accurately defines one of the primary concerns of Nietzsche's philosophy.

These examples are by no means exhaustive and could be discussed at much greater length, but I cite them only to indicate something of the immediate and spontaneous affinity that Yeats himself felt toward Nietzsche, and to point out the central position that Nietzsche came to occupy in Yeats's imagination. This peculiar consanguinity that existed between the two writers' thought is perhaps

best expressed in Erich Heller's observation, "Nietzsche's imagination burrowed in the same soil from which Yeats's imagination grew."[12]

However, the revelations provided by such direct references are necessarily limited and ancillary to larger questions. Having seen the high regard and admiration that Yeats reserved for Nietzsche's thought, we must ask: What precisely was it in Nietzsche that interested and attracted Yeats? What are the specific points of contact between their respective outlooks? In a sense these two questions are really one, for doubtless Yeats felt a kinship with Nietzsche because the philosopher seemed to share many of his own already formulated ideas and inclinations. As before, with his reading of Blake, Yeats found in Nietzsche a strong figure who, because of their similarity of thought, gave support and credence to his own work and ideas.

In any case, there are, I think, three major co-ordinates of thought and feeling, each with its own component categories, that mark the connection between Yeats and Nietzsche: first, the conception of life as an aesthetic phenomenon; second, the theme of tragic joy; and third, the notion of strength or power. We shall now turn to these three areas and examine them in detail in order to discover the specific philosophic and thematic links that exist between Yeats and Nietzsche.

Chapter One

The supreme article of faith for both Yeats and Nietzsche is the power of the individual to transform, shape and, in essence, create his own life. For both, greatness is manifest in overcoming the random contingencies and chaos of one's condition and organizing the welter of passions, perceptions and experiences of this condition into a coherent, meaningful whole. In short, one must make of one's life a work of art. Thus, in The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche writes that "only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world eternally justified".[1] Similarly, Yeats writes in "A General Introduction for my Work" that the poet "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete."[2] By conceiving life as art--that is, as an image or idea to be created and completed--the individual asserts the shaping, organizing, creative powers of imagination and intellect against the meaninglessness and fortuity of existence. In this way the individual can affirm life by investing it with dignity and significance. And as we shall see, it is this principle of affirmation that functions as the generative agent in both Yeats's and Nietzsche's art and

philosophy. Nowhere is this particular conception of life more actively conveyed than in the two writers' idea of style. We might first turn to Nietzsche's exposition of this notion.

(i) Style

In discussing the concept of style in Nietzsche's thought one must differentiate between the questions of diction, rhetoric and formal innovation that constitute the matter of literary style and the meaning of the word as it relates to human personality. While Nietzsche was constantly attempting to forge a new and distinctive writing style that would break with literary and philosophical tradition, and while the problem of literary style was a crucial one for him ("Of all that is written I love only what a person hath written with his blood", Zarathustra says, and later, "He that writeth in blood and proverbs doth not want to be read, but learnt by heart"),[3] it is the second meaning of the word, that is, as it pertains to human personality, that bears more closely on the central themes of Nietzsche's thought. In The Joyful Wisdom Nietzsche writes:

> To "give style" to one's character--that is a grand and rare art! He who surveys all that his nature presents in its strength and in its weakness, and then fashions it into an ingenious plan, until everything appears artistic and rational, and even the weaknesses enchant the eye--exercises that admirable art.[4]

By giving style to one's character Nietzsche means that one must create and adopt a personality through self-mastery, sublimation and organization of the baser, chaotic urges that constitute one's being; in short, to create a coherent form out of the formlessness of one's passions. Such sublimation is natural to the strong individual who does not need to resort to extraordinary means to master his impulses (both asceticism and purely instinctual behavior were wrong for Nietzsche) but accepts and embraces his passions and impulses and through a conscious but natural control makes them part of the image he has created for himself. As we shall see, this idea is at work in Nietzsche's theory of art, in which the formless, Dionysian impulse is absorbed and given meaningful shape and expression by the Apollonian powers of reason and intellect.

It is this insistence upon mastering and sublimating the impulsive, irrational side of one's nature that forms the basis of Nietzsche's critique of Romanticism. Nietzsche saw Romanticism as tending toward unbridled emotionalism, the glorification of extreme states for their own sake, and the rejection of constraint and discipline. It was, therefore, weak and aesthetically flawed, lacking the ordering, form-giving properties of the Apollonian element. While this may seem a one-sided view, it must be remembered that Nietzsche, despite the attempts by others to see his celebration of

the Dionysian as a type of Romanticism, is, in fact, more correctly understood in the light of Classical ideals and models. His aesthetic and philosophic roots were planted firmly in ancient Greece, particularly the ancient Greece of the pre-Socratics. It should be noted as well that Nietzsche's modern idol was Goethe who, Nietzsche felt, had emerged from the impetuous Romanticism of the Sturm und Drang movement to a more restrained and refined Classicism. Goethe became Nietzsche's exemplar of the individual who had overcome and mastered the baser, amorphous aspects of his life and art through a self-imposed constraint and discipline. Nietzsche was wholly in accord with Goethe's observation which equated Classicism with health and Romanticism with sickness, and he saw the same dichotomy evident in attitudes toward life. The life that is ordered, mastered, controlled and shaped into an artistic whole is the ideal life for Nietzsche. To be ruled by one's passions and instincts alone is to be little better than an animal. Passion and instinct are integral, necessary and vital to life, but they must be brought under the rule of the artistic will and mind.

Nietzsche sees style, then, as giving character to or creating one's personality or self. This is the meaning of Nietzsche's insistence that life is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. The individual, through the conscious ordering of his attitudes, expressions and way of life,

transcends the randomness and anonymity of existence and becomes an example, an image, a work of art. And like art, the created life had to aspire to wholeness or totality. Just as Yeats imagined the ideal individual as the "whole man--blood, imagination, intellect, running together",[5] Nietzsche saw the highest man as having integrated all antinomies and facets of human personality in himself. Of Goethe, who, as we have seen exemplified this ideal, Nietzsche wrote in Twilight of the Idols:

> That to which he aspired was totality; he was opposed to the sundering of reason, sensuality, feeling and will. . . ; he disciplined himself into a harmonious whole, he created himself.[6]

This idea of style and creation of the self is bound up, too, in Nietzsche's theory of the supra-historical, which we shall have occasion to discuss in the final chapter.

In Yeats's notion of style we find a distinct parallel to Nietzsche in that the poet's idea of style is based upon an aesthetic conception of life. Just as he attempted to shape his work into a unified, cohesive whole, so Yeats sought to make of his life an integrated, formal creation. In a letter to Elizabeth Pelham (January 4, 1939) composed shortly before his death, Yeats wrote:

> When I try to put all into a phrase
> I say 'Man can embody truth but he
> cannot know it'. I must embody it
> in the completion of my life.[7]

Yeats understood life as a drama in which the individual, throught his gestures, convictions and manners, created a

role for himself and adopted a style through which he might bring his life to perfection. It was with this idea in mind, no doubt, that Yeats wrote in "A General Introduction for my Work":

> The world knows nothing because it has made nothing, we know everything because we have made everything.[8]

The creation of an individual style is expressed in Yeats most forcefully through the idea of the mask, an idea he shared with Nietzsche. "Style", he wrote in Estrangement,

> personality--deliberately adopted and therefore a mask--is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers and the money changers.[9]

The idea of the mask serves several different but related purposes in Yeats's work and thought. As the above quotation indicates, the mask was a means of separating or distinguishing the profound, creative person--the poet, artist or philosopher--from the common run of humanity. Further, it suited Yeats's dramatic and aesthetic conception of life in that it was something consciously adopted and created in order to give style and personality to one's life. This ideal view of life as stylized, ritualized and ceremonial also permeates Yeats's attitude toward art, an attitude in which the mask figures prominently. Indeed, the mask was a doctrine that Yeats considered "the first principle"[10] of his art. In "A General Introduction for my Work" (1937), Yeats stated that the poet "never speaks

directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a phantasmagoria".[11] This view stemmed from Yeats's belief in the value of indirectness, a type of expression that would transcend the limitations of literal representation and evoke, through image and symbol, the eternal aspects of man's life. But Yeats knew also that poetry, although written from the poet's personal experience and imagination, could not be a wholly immediate, formless expression of emotion, for "all that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt."[12] Because art was a creation, it required an objective form to mediate its direct, subjective expression. By adopting a mask, a different persona in which to write, the poet could, in a sense, establish a filter for his thoughts and emotions, objectifying and purifying them and giving them a meaningful form.

But Yeats also applied the doctrine of the mask to his conception of human personality. As was suggested earlier, Yeats saw life and reality in dialectical terms, as a perpetual struggle of antithetical forces. All creation stemmed from such struggle. The individual chose, either from his own imagination or from the realms of history or mythology, a fictive anti-self, his ideal opposite or daimon, and by striving to become the opposite or anti-self, created the tensions and energies out of which art arose. Hence,

the introverted or subjective man (Yeats, for instance) would adopt the mask of the man characterized by extroverted, passionate action and heroic gesture (Cuchulain or the Wild Old Wicked Man). Thus, in "Ego Dominus Tuus", Yeats would write:

> I call to the mysterious one who yet
> Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of
> the stream
> And look most like me, being my double,
> And prove of all imaginable things
> The most unlike, being my anti-self,
> And, standing by these characters, disclose
> All that I seek; . . .
>
> (CP, p. 180)

The idea of the mask, then, for Yeats, was born of the recognition of the necessity for inner struggle or conflict in the act of creation, and an increasing desire to move from the shadowy formlessness of his early work and thought to the hardness and clarity of a more formal art. A letter to George Russell (May 14, 1903), written just after his initial reading of Nietzsche, expresses this latter desire:

> The close of the last century was full of
> a strange desire to get out of form, to get
> some kind of disembodied beauty, and now it
> seems to me the contrary impulse has come.
> I feel about me and in me an impulse to create
> form, to carry the realization of beauty as
> far as possible.[13]

Yeats's conception of the mask may have derived from a number of sources. The notion of the double self, the German Doppelgänger, had long been a central theme in Romantic and Victorian literature, from E.T.A. Hoffmann to

Robert Louis Stevenson. In the Nineties the idea was given more modish currency, principally through the interest in advances in psychological theory, particularly schizophrenia, and also through Wilde's remarks on "the truth of masks"[14] and "the decay of lying".[15] Yeats's investigations into the theatre and dramatic theory no doubt helped to crystallize his thoughts in this area, too. In addition, there was the poet's own awareness of the division within himself, the division, that is, between what he was and what he desired or imagined himself to be. The crucial influence of Yeats's reading and editing of Blake in the 1890s has been noted by A. Norman Jeffares.[16] All of these forces may have contributed to Yeats's formulation of the idea. However, as Richard Ellmann[17] and Patrick Bridgwater[18] have both pointed out, it was after Yeats's reading of Nietzsche that the term "mask" became a vital node in Yeats's writings. Certainly the similarities between the two writers' ideas of the mask speak of a certain indebtedness on Yeats's part. Like Yeats, Nietzsche's conception of the mask was based on a belief in the value of indirectness, of a stylized, symbolic approach to art and life. In the Second Article of Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche writes:

> Everything that is profound loves the mask; the profoundest things have a hatred even of figure and likeness. Should not the contrary only be the right disguise for the shame of a God to go about in?[19]

The profound individual uses the mask to separate and elevate himself from the herd and also to disguise his thought so that it could not be defiled and corrupted by the mob who would misinterpret what he says. Moreover, Nietzsche felt that the most profound truths, if expressed directly and openly, would be too much for man to bear, and so required a mask or disguise. Indeed, many truths could not be spoken at all. Like Wittgenstein, who later recognized the limits of language in conveying certain states and qualities,[20] Nietzsche was aware of the gulf of silence to which many deep thoughts and feelings were consigned. In an illuminating passage in Thus Spake Zarathustra, Nietzsche writes, "only in the dance do I know how to speak the parable of the highest things".[21] The seminal expression of Nietzsche's idea of the mask, however, is to be found in Beyond Good and Evil:

> There are proceedings of such a delicate nature that it is well to overwhelm them with coarseness and make them unrecognizable; there are actions of love and extravagant magnanimity after which nothing can be wiser than to take a stick and thrash the witness soundly: one thereby obscures his recollection. . . . there is not only deceit behind a mask--there is so much goodness in craft. I could imagine that a man with something costly and fragile to conceal, would roll through life clumsily and rotundly like an old, green, heavily-hooped wine-cask: the refinement of his shame requiring it to be so. A man who has depths in his shame meets his destiny and his delicate decisions upon paths which few ever reach, and with regard to the existence of which his nearest and most intimate

> friends may be ignorant; his mortal danger conceals itself from their eyes, and equally so his regained security. Such a hidden nature, which instinctively employs speech for silence and concealment, and is inexhaustible in evasion of communication, desires and insists that a mask of himself shall occupy his place in the hearts and heads of his friends; and supposing he does not desire it, his eyes will someday be opened to the fact that there is nevertheless a mask of him there--and that it is well to be so. Every profound spirit needs a mask; nay, more, around every profound spirit there continually grows a mask,. . .[22]

The mask, then, for both Yeats and Nietzsche, functions as a means of communicating truths that require indirect expression either because of their awful profundity or their subtlety and refinement, of formalizing those truths in a manner more purely aesthetic than realism or naturalism would permit, and also as a means of giving style to one's character. Yeats's search for an art "as cold/And passionate as the dawn" ("The Fisherman," CP, p. 166) and his attempt to organize his life into a unified image are both examples of the urge toward self-mastery and artistic control that marks Yeats's philosophical and aesthetic development. Nietzsche's aesthetic outlook was no less rigorous than Yeats's, carrying as it did the conviction that it was art alone, the shaping powers of imagination and intellect, that could give life meaning and that an individual's capacity for creative action was commensurate with his greatness and stature. In The Joyful Wisdom, Nietzsche wrote of the

necessity for such an attitude in terms very applicable to the stance Yeats adopted toward the end of his life:

> It will be the strong and imperious natures which experience their most refined joy in such constraint, in such confinement and perfection under their own law; the passion of their violent volition lessens at the sight of all disciplined nature, all conquered and ministering nature: even when they have palaces to build and gardens to lay out, it is not to their taste to allow nature to be free.[23]

"Under their own law" is a vital and indicative phrase. It was through the mastery and discipline of poetic form and the energy of daimonic opposition, tempered in the fire of his own imaginative laws, that Yeats 'remade' himself in his attempt to "embody truth".

Underlying this conception of life as an aesthetic phenomenon is a dialectical design. In Yeats, as we have seen, this is expressed as the deliberately constructed conflict between the self and its adopted mask, the anti-self or "daimon", and in Nietzsche as the interaction of the Apollonian and Dionysian powers. For both Yeats and Nietzsche, absolutes such as truth, reality and art could only be discovered and expressed through the dialectical relationship of antithetical forces. However, it is always the goal of wholeness that Yeats and Nietzsche seek--the completed image that transcends in a final gesture of affirmation the conflicting elements out of which it was made. Just as the raw material of passion, experience and

contradiction that made up one's life had to be mastered and organized into a rational, artistic design, so the work of art had to synthesize and ultimately transcend the diverse fragments and antithetical forces from which it was made. This point is probably best illuminated by an examination of the idea of tragedy in Yeats and Nietzsche, for it is the notion of tragedy and its primary corollary, tragic joy, that form the second major connection between the two writers.

(ii) Tragedy

The movement in Yeats's art and thought can be seen as a movement from formlessness to form--a rejection of weakness and passivity and an affirmation of art controlled and informed by rigorous design and intellectual mastery. And, as we have seen, the notion of style acts as a pivotal point in this movement. But both Yeats's and Nietzsche's conceptions of style are closely related as well to their respective ideas of tragedy and tragic joy. Existence was for both a form of art and the highest art for both was the tragic.

Nietzsche's idea of tragedy has been touched on already in regard to the part played by the Dionysian and Apollonian elements in the creation of the self, but we must elaborate further on this point. The creator, for Nietzsche, naturally possesses a superabundance of artistic

vitality which corresponds in Nietzsche's scheme to the Dionysian, with its associations of exuberance, intoxication and unrestricted emotion. This Nietzsche takes to be "the eternal and original artistic force which in general calls into existence the entire world of phenomena".[24] However, although the Dionysian forces represent the basic emotional impulse of the artistic process, they require the mediating, transforming influence of logical design and form which Nietzsche described as the Apollonian. Nietzsche points out that it is not the existence of one or the other of the two opposing forces that creates a work of art, but the dialectical relationship of the two:

> These so heterogenous tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance, and continually inciting each other to new and more powerful births, to perpetuate in them the strife of this antithesis, which is but seemingly bridged over by their mutual term "Art"; till at last, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic will, they appear paired with each other, and through this pairing eventually generate the equally Dionysian and Apollonian art-work of Attic tragedy.[25]

In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche defines the Apollonian/Dionysian duality by establishing several parallels. In a physiological sense, for instance, the relationship between the two forces is drawn in sexual terms:

> . . . the continuous development of art is bound up with the duplexity of the Apollonian and the Dionysian: in like manner as procreation is dependent on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual conflicts with only periodically intervening reconciliations.[26]

Further analogies are made as Nietzsche describes the two principles as representing respectively the plastic arts and music, dream and intoxication, illusion and reality. In whichever sense we wish to see the duality, however, we must inevitably come to the conclusion that it is the dialectical relationship of these opposites, their conflict and the eventual victory of the form-giving Apollonian over the form-destroying Dionysian, that for Nietzsche creates culture, specifically tragic art. Greek tragedy was in Nietzsche's view sublime because it encompassed the totality and range of feeling inherent in the two forces and was created out of the dynamic struggle between them. Moreover, Greek tragedy was seen by Nietzsche as an attempt to affirm existence through art; to conquer the suffering, cruelty and chaos of nature and history through creation. As Nietzsche writes of the Greeks at the end of The Birth of Tragedy, "What sufferings this people must have undergone, in order to be able to become thus beautiful".[27] Tragedy, then, for Nietzsche, comprises both an aesthetic and a world-view. Both lead to a transcendent affirmation. Tragic art surmounts the pain and contradiction of its subject matter, as well as questions of morality, and moves the reader or audience to a state of pure aesthetic perception in which all opposites are reconciled and harmonized. The value of tragedy for Nietzsche is not to be found in its

characterizations or moral instruction, but purely in its aesthetic effect, which affirms all that has gone before. Similarly, the individual who possesses a tragic world-view is able to transcend the flux and turmoil of life and history and affirm through his joy all of existence. We shall see that this same idea of affirmation through art and a tragic world-view is a strong element in Yeats's work as well.

Yeats's pre-occupation with tragedy seems to have arisen simultaneously with his involvement in the Irish Literary Theatre and later the Abbey, and also during his association with Synge, his time of "theatre business, management of men" ("The Fascination of What's Difficult," CP, p. 104). It was also at this time that Yeats discovered and read Nietzsche closely. During the early part of this century Yeats was committed to producing a theatre that would express, through poetry and symbolic gesture rather than representation and realism, the essence of the heroic attitudes and tragic nobility that he had found in his earlier explorations of Irish myth. The movement from the murky dimness of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics to the clearer, harder light of tragic awareness did not come about instantaneously for Yeats, but it is in this period--from about 1904, the year in which the play The King's Threshold was published, to the publication of Responsibilities in 1914--that the change in attitude can be most clearly noted. A

poem in Responsibilities--the very title of the volume suggests the change in stance that Yeats underwent--"The Hour Before Dawn" (CP, p. 130), marks this final emergence into the light, the decision to face the harder and more tangible truths of the world rather than escape from them into the wistful dreams of a fin-de-siècle melancholy. The poem is not, it should be noted, without its Nietzschean overtones as well. In the poem "a cursing rogue with a merry face/A bundle of rags upon a crutch," stumbling through the dark and cold over a rocky landscape, comes upon "a great lad with a beery face" who has hidden himself in a warm nook in the rock with a "ladle and a tub of beer". He intends to sleep out the winter in a drunken, soporific state of bliss ensconced in his cavern rather than face the harsh atmosphere outside. When the beggar hears this, however, he gives him "a great pummelling",

> But might have pummelled at a stone
> For all the sleeper knew or cared
> And after heaped up stone on stone,
> And then, grown weary, prayed and cursed
> And heaped up stone and stone again,
> And prayed and cursed and cursed and fled
> From Maeve and all that juggling plain,
> Nor gave God thanks till overhead
> The clouds were brightening with the dawn.

The poem is indicative of Yeats's changing attitudes at this time, reflecting his growing public, political and social concerns, but it shows as well a change in his aesthetic and philosophic outlook--from the contemplation

of the vague, frail and other-worldly qualities he had embraced in his youth to a more concrete, masculine stance. In a general sense, this shift in attitude may be seen as part of the movement in English poetry at the beginning of the century toward a renewed Classicism--stronger, sparer and more concrete than the overcharged rhapsodies of late Romantic and Victorian verse. Pound's attempts to revitalize and modernize poetry through concision of imagery and diction and rhythmic innovation were not wholly lost on Yeats. More specifically, however, the change in style in Yeats's poetry was, to a large extent, a result of his ruminations on and experiments in drama. The problem which Yeats confronted was how to overcome what he saw as the basic limitations inherent in naturalistic, representational drama, without relinquishing his belief in the need for drama to remain rooted in life and the world so that it would possess vitality and energy. As with his many other artistic and philosophic concerns, Yeats formulated the problem in dialectical terms. He felt it was necessary to unite formal stillness and passionate gesture, the innate mimetic and pictorial nature of dramatic art and the elusive and unruly but crucial element of emotional intensity. By fusing these two principles, Yeats hoped to create a drama that would transcend the narrow restrictions of realism without lapsing into the vagueness and obscurity of pure

lyricism. The product, he hoped, would have the stillness and clarity of visual form imbued with a strength and vigor conveyed not through wildness of action but through refined and precise gesture. It would be austere but energetic, formal but passionate.

The idea of form containing and directing passion and passion enlivening and stirring form is, as we have seen, very close to Nietzsche's conception of tragic art:

> Thus then the intricate relation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian in tragedy must really be symbolized by a fraternal union of the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; Apollo, however, finally speaks the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and of art in general is attained.[28]

But this stylistic development is evident not only in Yeats's drama. His poetry of this period begins to exhibit these same qualities of austerity and masculinity of diction and imagery. Beauty becomes "like a tightened bow" ("No Second Troy," CP, p. 101) and he emphasizes the nobility of "the lidless eye that loves the sun" ("Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation," CP, p. 106). Eunuchs watching Don Juan ride by "rail and sweat/Staring upon his sinewy thigh" ("On Those that Hated 'The Playboy of the Western World', 1907," CP, p. 124) and, in a phrase that Pound took as a sign that Yeats was now a 'modern' poet, "all my things/Are but a post the passing dogs defile" ("A Coat", CP, p. 142).

The prose of this period, too, is filled with the excitement of this new attitude. In the 1906 volume Discoveries, for instance, Yeats writes:

> Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories and sensations of the body. Its morality is personal, knows little of any general law,. . . seems lighter than a breath and yet is hard and heavy, for if a man is not ready to face toil and risk, and in all gaiety of heart, his body will grow unshapely and his heart lack the wild will that stirs desire.[29]

Here the new direction that Yeats is taking is expressed clearly in Nietzschean terms. The emphasis on understanding the world subjectively and with the entirety of one's being is Blake as well as Nietzsche. But the insistence on the moral relativity of art, gaiety in the face of adversity and danger, the physiological parallel and the stress on "the wild will that stirs desire", all point to the preoccupations of Yeats's later life and are also explicitly Nietzschean in essence.

However, this change in artistic and philosophic direction is marked foremost by Yeats's growing interest in the themes of tragedy and tragic joy. "We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy," he writes in Autobiographies[30] and again in Estrangement:

> Tragedy is passion alone, and rejecting character, it gets form from motives, from the wandering of passion;. . . I think the motives of tragedy are not related to action but to changes of state.[31]

Yeats's major statement on tragedy, however, is to be found in his essay "The Tragic Theatre" (1910). In it he asserts the supremacy of tragedy as an art form: ". . . tragic ecstasy. . . is the best that art--perhaps life--can give".[32] Further, tragedy is always "a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man",[33] and, as Yeats elaborates,

> . . . in mainly tragic art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance;. . . Tragic art, passionate art, the drowner of dykes, the confounder of understanding, moves us by setting us to reverie, by alluring us almost to the intensity of trance.[34]

Again, this is very similar to Nietzsche's conception of tragedy as it is expressed in The Birth of Tragedy, particularly in the insistence on the difference between tragedy and everyday reality, and on essentially mythic, symbolic and non-literal foundation of tragedy. In chapter twenty-four of The Birth of Tragedy we find:

> For the fact that things actually take such a tragic course would least of all explain the

> origin of a form of art; provided that art is not merely an imitation of the reality of nature, but in truth a metaphysical supplement to the reality of nature, placed alongside thereof for its conquest. Tragic myth, in so far as it really belongs to art, also fully participates in this transfiguring metaphysical purpose of art in general.35

But an even closer parallel may be seen in Yeats's and Nietzsche's belief that tragic art expressed universal truths that applied not just to an individual in a specific situation, but to the whole human condition. Nietzsche expresses this idea when he writes of what he sees as the "anti-Dionysiac, anti-mythic" tendency in tragic art since Sophocles:

> The character must no longer be expanded into an eternal type, but, on the contrary, must operate individually through artistic by-traits and shadings, through the nicest precision of all lines, in such a manner that the spectator is in general no longer conscious of the myth, but of the mighty nature-myth and the imitative power of the artist. Here also we observe the victory of the phenomenon over the Universal, and the delight in the particular quasi-anatomical preparation; we actually breathe the air of a theoretical world, in which scientific knowledge is valued more highly than the artistic reflection of a universal law.[36]

Edward Engelberg has noted the probable influence here of Nietzsche's thoughts on Yeats's distinction between Character and Personality.[37] The rejection of Character as unsuitable and inferior to the tragic mode and as being more suitable to comedy was based, as it was for Nietzsche, on Yeats's

antipathy toward realism in art. A character who was rooted in a specific social and historical locus and who possessed his own personal, individual traits and habits of mind could not express the essential, eternal and mythic elements inherent in human nature. These elements could only be brought out by mythic and symbolic structures. Thus, the tragic hero, who was Personality rather than Character, united all men because he possessed only those qualities which were eternal and universal: "A poet creates tragedy from his own soul, that soul which is alike in all men."[38] In short, Character, being realistic and localized, depicted and represented; Personality, being stylized and ahistorical, evoked and symbolized.

Tragedy, then, for Yeats, was the art form that could best accommodate his own conditions for artistic perfection: the harmonious balance of passion and formal stasis, of energy and artifice. As he wrote in the essay "Poetry and Tradition" (1907):

> . . . the nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of contraries, the perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy, the marmorean stillness; and its red rose opens at the meeting of the two beams of the cross, and at the trysting-place of mortal and immortal, time and eternity.[39]

However, just as tragic art led to a final, transcendent synthesis of antinomies, an equipoise of passionate energy and formal mastery, so the tragic view of life led to its

own kind of transcendent affirmation, the condition of tragic joy. It is with this theme, so closely related to the ideas of style, tragedy and strength, that Yeats probably comes closest to Nietzsche. Two essays from this period reflect the deep enthusiasm and sense of urgency with which Yeats embraced the idea. In "Poetry and Tradition" (1907) we find:

> Certainly we could not delight in that so courtly thing, the poetry of light love, if it were sad; for only when we are gay over a thing, and can play with it, do we show ourselvesits master, and have minds clear enough for strength. The raging fire and the destructive sword are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man, wrote Blake, and it is only before such things, before a love like that of Tristan and Iseult, before noble or ennobled death, that the free mind permits itself aught but brief sorrow. That we may be free from all the rest, sullen anger, solemn virtue, calculating anxiety, gloomy suspicion, prevaricating hope, we should be reborn in gaiety. Because there is submission in pure sorrow, we should sorrow alone over what is greater than ourselves, nor too soon admit that greatness, but all that is less than we are should stir us to some joy, for pure joy masters and impregnates; and so to world end, strength shall laugh and wisdom mourn.40

There are obvious echoes of Castiglione and the notion of sprezzatura here, and again the omnipresent figure of Blake is invoked, but the informing voice is that of Nietzsche. The emphasis on the "mastery" of joy, "minds clear enough for strength", the vision of eternity "too great for the eye of man", the disdain for the negative

virtues of solemnity, submission and hope, the masculine imagery and the equation of strength with laughter--all have their precise equivalents in the Nietzschean concepts of morality, eternal recurrence, ressentiment and the Superman. It is the joyful individuals, those who have faced the deepest sorrow as well as the greatest ecstasy, who possess "the lidless eye that loves the sun" ("Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation," CP, p. 106) who accept fully the totality of existence, it is these individuals who possess the shaping powers of art, who can assemble all the vast contradictions and ranges of feeling and reconcile them in a single, transcendent, aesthetic vision of life.

The second important prose statement from this period that focuses on the idea of tragic joy is the essay "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time" (1910). In it Yeats wrote:

> 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 with all other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock, in the terror or sweetness of our exaltation, at death and oblivion.[40]

Tragic joy is the philosophic counterpart to the aesthetic of tragedy as expressed by Yeats and Nietzsche. Just as the art of tragedy moves through conflict and inner opposition to a final transcendence in which the horror and

contradictions are subsumed and reconciled by the balance and harmony of the overall design and vision, so the absurdities and vagaries of existence may be transcended and ultimately affirmed through the individual's joy. And, as this passage from Yeats points out, death is as much a part of the overall design of the individual's life as the rest of his existence. Death, for Yeats and Nietzsche, was not an event outside life, but an integral part of an individual's existence. The joyful individual, the hero or creator, affirms even death because it is only through a triumphant, joyous death that life is properly and heroically completed and "perfection of personality" is achieved. The individual who rejoices in the face of death not only affirms the tragic reality of his existence but proves his heroic stature. Yeats's finest poetic expression of this theme is in "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death":

> Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
> Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
> A lonely impulse of delight
> Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
> I balanced all, brought all to mind,
> The years to come seemed waste of breath,
> A waste of breath the years behind
> In balance with this life, this death.
>
> (CP, p. 152)

The hero, the joyful individual, dies not out of any sense of public or social obligation ("Nor law, nor duty bade me fight") but out of a "lonely impulse of delight", a passionate conviction in the perfection and completion of a created life. As Richard Ellmann has remarked on this point, the "hero is

one who sacrifices nothing of the ideal he has imagined for himself, death can do nothing but confirm his integrity".[42] Therefore, death is not seen as a random and wholly indomitable force to the hero. He chooses death freely and deliberately, with the total vision of his life always before him, having "balanced all, brought all to mind". This element of a 'free' death is paralleled closely in Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra, in the chapter entitled "Of Voluntary Death":

> The consummating death I show unto you, which becometh a stimulus and a promise to the living.
>
> His death, dieth the consummating one triumphantly, surrounded by hoping and promising ones.
>
> Thus should one learn to die; and there should be no festival at which such a dying one doth not consecrate the oaths of the living!. . .
>
> My death, praise I unto you, the voluntary death which cometh to me because I want it.[43]

The laughter in Yeats's work, too, has about it a very Nietzschean sound. It is always a heroic laughter, raised by the individual in confrontation with tragedy, most often death. Yeats first used the motif of laughter in his play The King's Threshold (1904). In the speech of Seanchan the poet as he is about to die, we find:

> I need no help.
> He needs no help that joy has lifted up
> Like some miraculous beast out of Ezekiel.
> The man that dies has the chief part in the story,
> And I will mock and mock that image yonder,
> That evil picture in the sky--no, no!

> I have all my strength again, I will outface it.
> O, look upon the moon that's standing there
> In the blue daylight--take note of the complexion,
> Because it is the white of leprosy
> And the contagion that afflicts mankind
> Falls from the moon. When I and these are dead
> We should be carried to some windy hill
> To lie there with uncovered face awhile
> That mankind and that leper there may know
> Dead faces laugh.[44]

This would seem to be pure, almost too obvious Nietzsche (the play was written just after Yeats's initial and enthusiastic discovery of the philosopher's work): the idea of life as a "story", a created artifact, and more particularly the strong, creative individual who, through joy, is capable of, as Yeats would later write, "transfiguring all that dread" ("Lapis Lazuli," CP, p. 338) and triumphing over death, a triumph which his laughter signifies. Further examples of Yeats's interest in this theme may be found in the poetry. In "Upon A Dying Lady" (CP, p. 177) he writes:

> . . . Achilles, Timor, Babar, Barhaim, all
> Who have lived in joy and laughed into the face of
> Death.

and again:

> What if a laughing eye
> Have looked into your face?
> It is about to die.

In "Vacillation" Yeats vows to "Test every work of intellect or faith" and everything that he himself has created and to

> . . . call those works extravagance of breath
> That are not suited for such men as come
> Proud, open-eyed and laughing to the tomb.
> (CP, p. 282)

Laughter in Yeats is equated with the joyousness of the heroic individual in his confrontation with the tragic reality of existence, as it is for Nietzsche when he writes in Thus Spake Zarathustra, "courage. . . wanteth to laugh".[45]

Death, however, is not the supreme challenge to the heroic individual. Once the hero has affirmed the totality of experience, including death, he must be willing to accept, "in all gaiety of heart", an eternity of such life. This is the ultimate heroic gesture. "Joys all want eternity," Nietzsche proclaims in Thus Spake Zarathustra[46] and, in The Joyful Wisdom in a section entitled "The Heaviest Burden":

> What if a demon crept after thee into thy loneliest loneliness some day or night, and said to thee: "This life, as thou livest it at present, and hast lived it, thou must live it once more, and also innumerable times; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh, and all the unspeakable small and great in thy life must come to thee again, and all in the same series and sequence--and similarly this spider and this moonlight among the trees and similarly this moment, and I myself. The eternal sand-glass of existence will ever be turned once more and thou with it, thou speck of dust!"--Wouldst thou not throw thyself down and gnash thy teeth, and curse the demon that so spoke? Or hast though once experienced a tremendous moment in which thou wouldst answer him: "Thou art a God and never did I hear anything so divine!" If that thought acquired power over thee as thou art, it would transform thee; the question with regard to all and everything: "Dost thou want this once more, and also for innumerable times?" would lie as the heaviest burden upon thy activity! Or, how wouldst thou have to become favourably inclined to thyself and to life, so as to long for nothing more ardently than for this eternal sanctioning and sealing?[47]

The heroic individual, the joyful man, who has climbed to a higher plane, can see from his lofty vantage point the vast pattern of life and history, the toil and boredom as well as the beauty and bliss. And because he exalts all of life and desires the totality of it, he can withstand and indeed desires the eternity of such an experience. This is Nietzsche's desire when he writes "for I love thee, O Eternity"[48] and it is Yeats's desire, too, when he writes that he is "content to live it all again/And yet again", even

> . . . if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch
> A blind man battering blind men;. . .
> ("A Dialogue of Self and Soul," CP, p. 265)

Like Carlyle's Everlasting Yea,[49] the hero's affirmation is not an easy optimism, but is based on a knowledge of the darkness as well as the joy of existence. Yeats knew well that the condition of joy was not easily attainable, but, like the style that one created for oneself through self-mastery and discipline, was something that had to be won through struggle: "Joy is of the will which labours, which overcomes obstacles, which knows triumph".[50] Just as joy was for Nietzsche the antidote to the "Spirit of Gravity", the debilitating sobriety and pessimism that he saw at the root of the Teutonic sensibility, so Yeats exalted the joyful as a necessary counteractive to the crippling, destructive forces of remorse, solemnity and resignation. But also for Yeats, the condition of joy represented intensity of vision;

it was the moment when an individual in the wholeness of his being came to comprehend the true nature of his life and the world, and could affirm the tragic reality of his existence.

There is in Yeats's and Nietzsche's views of tragedy and tragic joy an implicit hierarchy of felt life; that is, the belief in a select group of higher individuals who possess a strength and nobility of mind and action and a capacity for profound thought and feeling beyond that of the majority of human beings. This is, generally speaking, the main plank in the platform of those who accuse Yeats and Nietzsche of fascist leanings. However, this so-called 'aristocratic' ideal is best examined not against strictly political analogues, but within the context of Yeats's and Nietzsche's conceptions of strength and power and their relation to morality, the last point I wish to discuss before looking closely at Yeats's Last Poems.

(iii) Strength and Power

We have already noted the movement in Yeats's sensibility from the passive, delicate aesthetic of the 1890s to a greater preoccupation with the concrete, physical and passionate aspects of existence. This might be defined again as a movement toward a stronger sense of reality. This is not to say that Yeats totally rejected his earlier metaphysical ideas in favour of a cut-and-dried empiricism--forsaking

Plato and Berkeley in favour of Locke--for Yeats always required the tension and conflict of opposites in his life and work. But in the progression of his ideas and poetry there is an increasing tendency (especially pronounced in his later years) to side with the fury and mire of human veins rather than the pure condition of the soul purged in fire. "Homer. . and his unchristened heart" ("Vacillation," CP, p. 282) becomes Yeats's example as he, in the joy that reconciles the tragic nature of existence, embraces life itself and celebrates the "heart" rather than the "soul". As "Tom the Lunatic" declares, whatever

> Stands in God's unchanging eye
> In all the vigour of its blood,
> In that faith I live or die.
> (CP, p. 305)

This increasing concern with the realities of human experience, "sinking the shafts of his mines more deeply in the earth", in Ellmann's phrase,[51] is concomitant with Yeats's view of strength and power. In one sense this is linked to Yeats's earlier commitment to the values he had found in the Irish folk tradition, a belief that everything of lasting importance took its strength from ancient principles rooted in a natural, organic (in an imaginative as well as literal sense) source:

> John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought
> All that we did, all that we said or sang
> Must come from contact with the soil, from that
> Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.
> ("The Municipal Gallery Revisited," CP, p. 368)

The "noble and the beggar-man" to whom he refers in that poem were for Yeats among the highest types to be found in a culture because, like Nietzsche's conception of the child, they were free of the bonds of self-consciousness and conformity, and because they had not relinquished their affinity with a past that gave them their natural ease and dignity, their instinctive and passionate attitudes toward life. In an earlier context Yeats had elaborated on this:

> Three types of men have made all beautiful things. Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life, and the countrymen have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness. All these look backward to a long tradition, for, being without fear, they have held to whatever pleased them. The others, being always anxious, have come to possess little that is good in itself, . . . It seems to them that those who have been freed by position, by poverty, or by the traditions of art, have something terrible about them, a light that is unendurable to the eye-sight.[52]

The guiding principle behind this aristocratic vision of Yeats is the sense of vitality, energy and strength that is embodied in his elect trinity. Moreover, it is their strength and energy alone that justify their stature. Although Yeats's higher individuals are courteous, generous and well-versed in matters of ceremony and tradition, they share little with the Victorian idea of the social saviour. The higher individual, the hero, was not to be defined in

relation to conventional morality, but to his own capacity for passionate life and creation. "People much occupied with morality always lose heroic ecstasy", he wrote to Dorothy Wellesley (July 6, 1935).[53] And because the hero is a creator, whether of values, stories or "all the rest", he must have strength, for it requires strength to harbor great creative energies, to sublimate and discipline such energies, and to use them to open up new territories for the imagination and continually to "remake" oneself and one's world. "All creators. . . are hard", Nietzsche writes in Thus Spake Zarathustra,[54] and Yeats, echoing this belief, writes again in the letter to Dorothy Wellesley:

> When there is despair, public or private, when settled order seems lost, people look for strength within or without. Auden, Spender, all that seem the new movement, look for strength in Marxian Socialism or in Major Douglas; they want marching feet. The lasting expression of our time is not this obvious choice but in the sense of something steel-like and cold within the will, something passionate and cold.[55]

Strength must come from within the individual, not from a system of abstractions constructed for political or social purposes. Morality, in the common sense of 'good' and 'bad', is itself an abstraction and has no meaning for the creative individual whose sole passion exists in establishing truth through the expression and example of his own life and art and who has only himself to answer to. For Yeats, as for Nietzsche, the aesthetic realm superseded the

moral, and the work of art, and the perfection of an individual's life, possessed its own moral justification.

In Nietzsche we find a similar expression of a morality rooted in a deep sense of strength and power. As with Yeats, it is the strong individual who can take on the weight of his own uniqueness and create his own values in transcending conventional morality:

> Behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? Him who breaketh up their table of values, the breaker, the law-breaker:--he, however, is the creator.[56]

Just as, in Yeats's view, all "minds that have a wisdom come of tragic reality seem morbid to those that are accustomed to writers who have not faced reality at all",[57] so Nietzsche's creator is both feared and hated by those who have not the strength to give style to their personalities, master their baser impulses and affirm life through a passionate joy. "A trouble and a terror is the hero to them," Nietzsche writes.[58]

However, strength is not an end in itself for Nietzsche. Like the Dionysian impulse, strength too must be mastered and controlled in order for it to be of value. Otherwise, it becomes merely animal brawn and is used to enslave and subjugate. Such is the essence of political power for Nietzsche. A far greater and more refined power is required to master oneself rather than others. It is this element of self-mastery that proves an individual's greatness. This is why the most powerful, and

therefore the best, human specimens were, for Nietzsche, the artist, the saint and the philosopher. It was they who, through their strength of vision, had created their own lives and also created new values for life and cultures. Weakness, for Nietzsche, was exhibited both by those who could not master the crude power of their will (tyrants and dictators) and by those who did not possess the strength that required mastering (slaves and "the good and the just"). To be good simply because one is incapable--whether through weakness, fear or hypocrisy--of acting in any other way is no virtue for Nietzsche. The good only has meaning when the individual has the power to do harm but does not use that power. This idea is expressed most clearly in Thus Spake Zarathustra, when Nietzsche writes;

> All evil do I accredit thee: therefore do I desire of thee the good.
> Verily, I have laughed at the weaklings, who think themselves good because they have crippled paws!59

This same relation of power to morality is given by Yeats in the third section of "The Tower" when the poet praises

> The pride of people that were
> Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
> Neither to slaves that were spat on,
> Nor to the tyrants that spat,. . .
> (CP, p. 218)

It is in the light of this relation that one should understand both Nietzsche's and Yeats's alleged celebration of violence and totalitarian politics. To begin with Nietzsche, it must

be stressed that his use of the word "war", as in the chapter "Of War and Warriors" in Thus Spake Zarathustra, is clearly metaphorical. He does not mean war in a literal way, but something closer to Blake's "Mental Fight". Nietzsche's "war" is a fight for truth and the battleground is the individual's mind and spirit. Peace comes to signify, as "Reason" and "Heaven" do for Blake, security, complacency, abstraction and lack of creative energy. War for Nietzsche is the individual's struggle to overcome himself, the perpetual struggle that man must undergo in his quest for wholeness and perfection. The warlike man struggles with internal contradictions and, indeed, creates his own contradictions, for struggle is necessary for any victory:

> And if ye cannot be saints of knowledge, then, I pray you, be at least its warriors. They are the companions and forerunners of such saintship.
>
> I see many soldiers; could I but see many warriors! . . .
>
> Ye shall be those whose eyes ever seek for an enemy, for your enemy. . . .
>
> Your enemy shall ye seek; your war shall ye wage, and for the sake of your thoughts! And if your thoughts succumb, your uprightness shall still shout triumph thereby!
>
> Ye shall love peace as a means to new wars--and the short peace more than the long.
>
> You I advise not to work, but to fight. You I advise not to peace, but to victory. Let your work be a fight, let your peace be a victory.[60]

The warrior is clearly another of Nietzsche's descriptions of the noble individual. Like the saint, the artist and the philosopher, who are all warlike in this sense, Nietzsche's warrior is one who attempts to master himself, who deliberately

takes on the constraints of self-discipline in order to create:

> Resistance--that is the distinction of the slave. Let your distinction be obedience. Let your commanding itself be an obeying![61]

A further repudiation of these charges of violence and fascistic tendencies may be found in Nietzsche's comments on the idea of the state. In the section of Zarathustra entitled "The New Idol", which must stand as Nietzsche's foremost indictment of the modern state, we read:

> A state, is called the coldest of all cold monsters. Coldly it lieth also; and this lie creepeth from its mouth: "I, the state, am the people."
>
> It is a lie! Creators were they who created peoples, and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life.[62]

The basis of Nietzsche's rejection of such concepts as Nation, State and Politics was his belief, consistent throughout his live and work, that existence must be understood on the plane of the individual. Political configurations were, really, for Nietzsche, attempts to force the individual to conform to imposed standards of mediocrity. In this way the State denies or stands in opposition to existence and the individual's attempt to transform, shape and perfect his life. This is, it should be mentioned, partly the reason for Nietzsche's repudiation of Christianity, although he always had more sympathy for the religious impulse than the political.

The accent in Yeats's later work on violence, arrogance and conflict should be seen in a similar light as well. "My

poetry all comes from rage or lust", he wrote to Dorothy Wellesley (December 4, 1936),[63] and indeed, it would be difficult to deny completely that Yeats's last work at times verges on the shrill and unpleasant. However, if this is so, it is because the work bears out a commitment to truth at the cost of seeming brutal and arrogant. In a very illuminating passage from a letter to Ethel Mannin (December 17, 1937), Yeats wrote:

> I must lay aside the pleasant paths I have built up for years and seek the brutality, the ill breeding, the barbarism of truth.[64]

It is this authentic quest for and confrontation with truth, the attempt to do away with self-deception at the expense of contentment and pleasure that is at the heart of Yeats's later thought and work. Like Nietzsche and Blake, who saw passivity and resignation as destructive forces, Yeats viewed life as essentially a process of becoming, in which the individual continually attempted to "remake" himself through inner quarrels and contradictions. While not always as strictly metaphorical as Nietzsche's notion of war, Yeats's violence is intended to signify the energy necessary for creation and passionate life. Violence becomes for Yeats the correlative of the intensity required for the creation of art and individual life. Further, Yeats's more virulent remarks are often cited out of context, without noting that they are expressions of his anti-self, deliberately established

as part of his aesthetic scheme to create the necessary tension and opposition which formed the basis of his art.

As for Yeats's political leanings, his statements on this subject are sufficiently contradictory to refute any charge of Fascism in a strict political sense. For instance, in a letter to Ethel Mannin (February 11, 1937), written after Yeats's earlier association with General O'Duffy and the Dublin Blueshirts, and during the height of the Spanish Civil War, we find:

> I am an old Fenian and I think the old Fenian in me would rejoice if a fascist nation or government controlled Spain, because that would weaken the British empire, force England to be civil to the Indians, perhaps to set them free and loosen the hand of English finance in the far East of which I hear occasionally. But this is mere instinct. A thing I would never act on. Then I have a horror of modern politics--I see nothing but the manipulation of popular enthusiasm by false news. . . I do the old work of the poets but I will defend no cause. Get out of the thing, look on with sardonic laughter. . . . When the rivers are poisoned, take to the mountain well; or go with Dante into exile--'Cannot I everywhere look upon the stars and think the sweet thoughts of philosophy.'[65]

At bottom, Yeats's concerns were not with Fascism or any other ideology but with his art, "the old work of the poets". Even if his political pronouncements were not as startlingly naive and eccentric as they often seem, one would be hard put to find any deep-rooted conviction in them. The brief attraction that Fascism held for Yeats was undoubtedly that it was a political system supposedly committed to the old ideals of strength, heroism and hierarchical order that Yeats

felt had been lost in his time. It took a personal involvement on his part before he could discover how fundamentally shallow and misleading that system was.

However, it is also important to note, as Denis Donoghue has observed, that Yeats "derived a politics from an aesthetic" and that he "did not approach politics in its own terms".[66] This is not to dismiss the problem simply by saying that Yeats did not know what he was doing by endorsing Fascism, but to suggest that the extra-literary affairs of a writer of Yeats's vision and power cannot be understood properly apart from his artistic and philosophic concerns. A last letter (April 8, 1936) dealing with this issue may be quoted as a final example of Yeats's unequivocal rejection of politics and his ultimate belief in the power of art and a vision freed from tendentiousness and abstraction. He writes:

> Do not try to make a politician of me, even in Ireland I shall never be that again--as my sense of reality deepens, and I think it does with age, my horror at the cruelty of governments grows greater, and if I did what you want, I would seem to hold one form of government more responsible than any other, and that would betray my convictions. Communist, Fascist, nationalist, clerical, anti-clerical, are all responsible according to the number of their victims. I have not been silent; I have used the only vehicle I possess--verse. If you have my poems by you, look up a poem call "The Second Coming". It was written some sixteen or seventeen years ago and foretold what is happening. I have written of the same thing again and again since. . .[67]

The aristocratic hero that Yeats imagined and admired was no more a fascist tyrant than Nietzsche's Superman was a

Nazi hooligan. Rather, their parallels might be more accurately seen in the figures of Castiglione's Courtier and Aristotle's "Great-Souled Man". The mistake is to attempt to understand such concepts in purely biological and political terms (as Nazi intellectuals did Nietzsche, taking what they wanted and ignoring the rest) rather than in an aesthetic sense. The essence of both Yeats's and Nietzsche's conceptions of strength and power may be best summed up in Nietzsche's words from the chapter "Of the Sublime Men" in Thus Spake Zarathustra:

> When power becometh gracious and descendeth into the visible--I call such condescension, beauty.
>
> And from no one do I want beauty so much as from thee, thou powerful one: let thy goodness be thy last self-conquest.[68]

To reiterate briefly, then, the three major nexuses that link Yeats and Nietzsche in thought, attitude and conviction are the conception of life as an aesthetic phenomenon, with its notion of style and its emphasis on self-mastery and discipline; the theme of tragic joy with its dialectical design leading to transcendence; and the idea of strength or power that acts as the basis for their concepts of morality and the heroic individual. It is with these three central themes in mind that we will examine Yeats's Last Poems in order to discover the vital importance of the Nietzschean voice within the specific context of Yeats's art.

Chapter Two

Such is the peculiar surface tenor of Yeats's Last Poems[1] that in a discussion of the volume one feels almost instinctively the need to defend it. The last stage of Yeats's life and work, compared with the rest of the canon, is so compounded of strident excitement, violent gesture and, at times, an apparent moral obtuseness, that one is, if not repelled altogether by the inelegant contours of thought and feeling, apt to search for excuses in an attempt at apology. The focus of so much Yeatsian criticism on the "lust and rage" of the final poems has also not helped, having made the collection something of a 'black book' notable primarily for its harshness, anger and the aged poet's obsession with sex, and in the process having obscured some of the more fundamental philosophic issues at work in the poems.

Yet one need not apologize. Taken alone, Last Poems is certainly not the crowning achievement of Yeats's life, and only a handful of the poems might be said to stand with Yeats's best work. But to read Last Poems alone is, in a sense, to misread the volume. Yeats's work, as T.R. Henn has suggested,[2] and as Yeats himself desired, should be read as a unified whole: a sustained, if constantly shifting and modulating attempt to achieve, through continual re-assessment

and experiment, a complete vision of human life, the "profane perfection of mankind" ("Under Ben Bulben," CP, p. 397). As we have seen, Yeats sought to make his entire life a created work, so that all facets and outgrowths of his life, including his poetry, would seem the natural unfolding and expression of an integrated, completed personality. It is in this light that his work should always be considered. Last Poems does not mark a particular divergence of thought and theme for Yeats; rather, it represents a final and powerful (if at times anguished and desperate) attempt to restate and re-affirm the beliefs and values out of which he created the imaginative art of his life. Keeping this principle of totality in view, then, this chapter will attempt to show how the three themes delineated in the first chapter, themes that Yeats shared with Nietzsche, form a crucial philosophic and thematic basis of Last Poems.

As previously demonstrated, Nietzsche remained a figure of vital interest to Yeats throughout his career, and the Nietzschean voice may be heard at many different points in Yeats's work. However, it is in his later writings, especially Last Poems, that it seems to surface most often and ring most clearly. Several conditions no doubt contributed to this resurgence of interest in Nietzschean themes. Initially, the decline of Yeats's health in his later years led him to strike out against bodily decrepitude and celebrate physical strength and exuberance. Clearly, such an attitude

would have found abundant support and consolation in Nietzsche's frequent citations of health and masculinity. "Hearken", Zarathustra says,

> to the voice of the healthy body; it is a more upright and pure voice.
> More uprightly and purely speaketh the healthy body, perfect and square-built; and it speaketh of the meaning of the earth.[3]

The emphasis on bodily health and vigour is expressed most acutely through the sexual motif in Last Poems. To say, as Vivienne Koch has, that Yeats's last work is "sex-obsessed",[4] is to overstep the mark somewhat, but it must be conceded that the sexual theme is an important one in Last Poems. However, it is also important to see that particular motif in its fullest sense. Sex functions symbolically in Last Poems, and should be seen as one part of the larger themes of energy, vitality or strength and tragic joy, which had always held a prominent place in Yeats's thought but which were now asserting themselves even more strongly in his mind. The lust of Last Poems is not simply lust in a conventional sense, but might be more profitably understood in the Nietzschean sense of the German lust with its emphasis on the "joy which exults in the face of suffering".[5] While Miss Koch is wrong in attributing too much significance to the sexual elements in Last Poems, she is nevertheless correct in pointing out that there is a great deal of suffering, born of both physical and mental anxieties, in the collection. It is the function of the sexual motif to act

as an emblem of the affirmation and joy that the poet possesses and maintains even in confrontation with this suffering; a joy that exults both in the face of a nihilistic, declining civilization as well as the personal absurdities of age and death.

Just as the sexual theme is not unique to Last Poems, but is perhaps given a more prominent and sustained role than in previous volumes, so, too, the apocalyptic vision, clearly present throughout Yeats's work, finds more intensified expression in Last Poems. The Irish Civil War of 1922-23, the death of Lady Gregory in 1932, and the impending threat of European war must have all combined to confirm what Yeats had known earlier, that "Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare/Rides upon sleep" ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," CP, p. 232) and that "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,. . ." ("The Second Coming," CP, p. 210). In a letter to Ethel Mannin (April 8, 1936), Yeats wrote, quoting himself, that "every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe, 'the ceremony of innocence is drowned'".[6] As in his preoccupation with the vitality of the body, Yeats could have found a similar apocalyptic outlook in Nietzsche's work. In the famous passage from The Joyful Wisdom in which the madman announces the "death of God", Nietzsche writes:

> Whither do we move? Away from all suns?
> Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards,

> sideways, forewards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through an infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker?[7]

In On the Boiler, published after Yeats's death, but written between 1937 and 1939, the connection with Nietzsche's apocalyptic outlook is made explicit:

> When a civilisation ends, task having led to task until everyone was bored, the whole turns bottom upwards, Nietzsche's 'transvaluation of all values'.[8]

In addition to the apocalyptic note, another indication of Yeats's attitude in this period may be seen in the introduction to his controversial edition of The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, undertaken in 1935. There, he wrote, explaining his omission of certain war poets from the anthology:

> . . . passive suffering is not a theme for poetry. In all great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies.[9]

A further example of Yeats's philosophic stance in old age can be found in his essay "Modern Poetry" (1936). In it, Yeats writes of what we have seen as his deepening sense of reality and his concern with fundamental, existential issues in a manner very close to Nietzsche:

> I think profound philosophy must come from terror. An abyss opens under our feet; inherited convictions, the pre-suppositions of our thoughts, those Fathers of the Church Lionel Johnson expounded, drop into the abyss. Whether we will or no we must ask the ancient questions: Is there reality anywhere? Is there a God? Is there a soul? We cry with the Indian Sacred Book: 'They

> have put a golden stopper into the neck of the bottle; pull it! Let out reality![10]

This is very similar to Nietzsche's insistence that an argument or belief based on unquestioned premises (Church dogma, for example) is unworthy of an individual's convictions. All beliefs and accepted premises--even one's own--had to be challenged, to be tested and attacked, so that one might determine their true value. The reference here to the Indian Sacred Book points up the renewed interest in Eastern religions and philosophy that had begun for Yeats in the early 1930s (although he had, from the beginning of his poetic career, been interested in this area of thought) and culminated in his work on a translation of the Upanishads with Shri Purohit in 1935. However, Yeats was never fully reconciled to an Eastern philosophy of art and existence, always holding it in balance with his firm attachments to the traditions of European culture. He remarked in the essay "The Holy Mountain" (1934) that "whenever I have been tempted to go to Japan, China, or India for my philosophy, Balzac has brought me back, reminded me of my preoccupation with national, social, personal problems, convinced me that I cannot escape from our Comédie humaine".[11] Although Yeats admired Eastern culture for its sense of spirituality, decorum and quietude, he felt it lacked the important qualities of form, strength, assertiveness and intellect that were the trademarks of

Western civilization. In addition to this, and perhaps more important within the context of Yeats's last years and work, the East lacked a sense of tragedy which was for Yeats so necessary to his ideas of style, heroism and life. This would lead him to write in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley (July 6, 1935) that

> . . . the east has its solutions always
> and therefore knows nothing of tragedy.
> It is we, not the east, that must raise
> the heroic cry.[12]

To a large extent, Last Poems reflects this tension between Eastern and Western ideas and values.

All of these themes must have, in some measure, rekindled Yeats's interest in Nietzsche in the late 1930s, a rekindling that Donoghue has noted.[13] The concern with physical vitality, the premonitions of apocalypse, joy in the face of suffering, and the East-West opposition, are all prominent themes in Nietzsche's writings.

It is the apocalyptic note that first confronts us in Last Poems. "The Gyres" (CP, p. 337) restates the familiar nightmare imagery of earlier apocalyptic poems, such as "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "The Second Coming." The response to the chaos and violence that is engulfing the modern world and the collapse of the old aristocratic values is not, however, one of articulated horror and pessimism, but of tragic joy. Like the Shakespearean heroes, who, as Yeats wrote in "A General Introduction for My Work", "convey

to us through their looks, or through the metaphorical patterns of their speech, the sudden enlargement of their vision, their ecstasy at the approach of death",[14] Yeats here conveys to the reader the enlargement of his vision at the approach of the collapse of civilized order: that although "Irrational streams of blood are staining the earth" and "Conduct and work grow coarse", he will "Heave no sigh, let no tear drop", because he knows that civilization runs in gyres, that an antithetical gyre will come to replace the culture now devolving into anarchy, and the "workman, noble and saint" shall once again assume their proper place in a unified, integrated civilization. This knowledge is the source of the poet's joy, a joy in which all contradictions and antinomies are finally reconciled. More precisely, they are reconciled because they are all joyously affirmed. Yeats's detachment here should not be read as a passive resignation to the inevitability of cyclical repetition, but an active exultation in the face of it. Joy in the face of tragedy, whether one's death or the demise of civilization, gives meaning and dignity to an otherwise meaningless circumstance. To succumb to despair and pessimism is, for both Yeats and Nietzsche, both a sign of weakness and a concession to the disorder and chaos of existence. To be joyous, however, to affirm life even though one knows that it must inevitably end in dissolution and decay, is a mark of strength. Thus Yeats asks rhetorically, "What matter?" "A greater, a more

gracious time has gone", but another will take its place. In this sense, joy is the hero's victory. It shows his power over his world and himself. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley (July 26, 1935) written shortly before the composition of "The Gyres", Yeats wrote, "To me the supreme aim is an act of faith and reason to make one rejoice in the midst of tragedy".[15] It is undoubtedly the aim of "The Gyres" and Last Poems as a whole to bear out this contention.

In the chapter "Of Reading and Writing" in Thus Spake Zarathustra, Nietzsche wrote, "He who climbeth on the highest mountains, laugheth at all tragic plays and tragic realities."[16] This would seem to provide an accurate description of the position Yeats had come to at the time of Last Poems, in terms not only of his stage of life, but of his stature as a poet and his philosophical outlook. Certainly "The Gyres" reflects this attitude, with its explicit emphasis on tragic joy, but an even closer relationship exists between this particular philosophical position and the poem "Lapis Lazuli".

Generally speaking, "Lapis Lazuli" (CP, p. 338) represents an aesthetic justification of tragic joy or "gaiety", whereas "The Gyres" approaches the theme on a more directly philosophical level. The opening of the poem states the charge against "poets that are always gay", that in times of extreme social and political pressures and the threat of destruction, no one can rightly absolve himself of social duties and responsibilities. Yeats responds by citing examples

of characters who have remained gay in the face of tragedy: Hamlet, Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia. Those who play such parts,

> If worthy of their prominent part in the play,
> Do not break up their lines to weep.
> They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
> Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.

The tragedies at which the average individual (the "hysterical women" of the opening stanza) might weep, from the pain and horror they engender, are faced with joy by the tragic hero, for he possesses a "wisdom come of tragic reality". He can see the individual tragedy within a larger, universal context, as part of the vast, cyclical pattern of life and civilization--in other words, within an aesthetic design. It is this aesthetic sense of life, derived from a tragic conception of reality, that provides the power to transfigure dread. The characters that Yeats cites have achieved this knowledge and transfiguring power in the most intense moment of their tragic vision ("Heaven blazing into the head:/Tragedy wrought to its uttermost").

This aesthetic underpinning of the notion of tragic joy is continued in the third stanza. Like the "Old civilisations put to the sword", the inevitable pattern of destruction and creation, the artist creates his own works knowing that it is part of the tragic nature of life that they will disappear or be destroyed, but assured that in the perpetual cycle of history and civilization, they will be created again.

"All things fall and are built again,/And those that build them are gay." In the sonnet "Meru" (CP, p. 383), which immediately precedes Last Poems, the vision of existence as an abyss of meaninglessly repetitive cycles is accepted by the "Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest." Similarly, in "Lapis Lazuli", the destruction and creation of forms and ideals is "transfigured" through the artist's joy and wisdom. The artist becomes master over all that he has made, maintaining his gaiety in the face of defeat. There is a striking parallel to this idea in The Birth of Tragedy, where Nietzsche writes of the necessity to "go beyond" the surface facts of tragedy and find the deeper reality that causes us to delight in the tragic moment:

> That striving for the infinite, the pinion-flapping of longing, accompanying the highest delight in the clearly-perceived reality, remind one that in both states we have to recognise a Dionysian phenomenon, which again and again reveals to us anew the playful upbuilding and demolishing of the world of individuals as the efflux of a primitive delight, in like manner as when Heraclitus the Obscure compares the world-building power to a playing child which places stones here and there and builds sandhills only to overthrow them again.[17]

This element of playfulness and ease that Nietzsche finds at the centre of the creative act recalls Yeats's words from "Poetry and Tradition" cited earlier, that it is "only when we are gay over a thing, and can play with it, do we show ourselves its master, and have minds clear enough for strength."[18]

The fourth stanza, in addition to being a brief description of the object which occasioned the poem, the medallion of lapis lazuli on which is carved the scene of the two Chinamen and their servant climbing a mountain, acts as an introduction to the final verse in which the poet imagines the inner attitudes of the figures carved in stone. The figures are no longer merely in relief on the medallion, but have been brought to an imaginative life by the poet who delights

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

Sculptural qualities serve to accentuate perfectly the sense of dignity and formal stasis that truly define the moment of tragic joy and the phrase "accomplished fingers", too, suggests discipline and precise style. Yeats here manages a final reconciliation of the Eastern view that "knows nothing of tragedy" and "the heroic cry in the midst of despair" that the West must raise. The dramatic, momentary intensity of the Western response to the tragic ("Heaven blazing into the head") is united with the Eastern sense of natural ease and contemplative serenity ("mournful melodies", "ancient, glittering eyes") to create the supreme moment of joy in the face of tragedy, experienced by the one who, in

Nietzsche's words, "climbeth on the highest mountains" and "laugheth at all tragic plays and tragic realities."

Although implicit in the idea of tragic joy is a transcendent motion, much of Yeats's later life and work is, as I have suggested, characterized by a downward, earthbound sense of reality, a concentration on the physical aspects of life. The image of the dance, Yeats's way of rendering symbolically and concretely the essentially metaphysical qualities of beauty, unity of being and a reconciliation of opposites, is given another dimension in the later poetry by functioning as the physical correlative to the sense of newness and innocence that accompany the joyous state:

> A most astonishing thing--
> Seventy years have I lived:
>
> (Hurrah for the flowers of Spring,
> For Spring is here again.)
>
> Seventy years have I lived
> No ragged beggar-man,
> Seventy years have I lived,
> Seventy years man and boy,
> And never have I danced for joy.
> ("Imitated From the Japanese", CP, p. 340)

"Sweet Dancer" elaborates further on the image and relates the physical exuberance of the dance to joy in a more explicitly Nietzschean sense:

> The girl goes dancing there
> On the leaf-sown, new-mown, smooth
> Grass plot of the garden;
> Escaped from bitter youth,
> Escaped out of her crowd,

> Or out of her black cloud.
> Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer!
> (CP, p. 340)

The same emphasis on newness is present here, but the image of the dance represents also an escape from the destructive forces of bitterness, the masses and solemnity. The verse seems to echo a passage from Thus Spake Zarathustra in which Nietzsche writes:

> I no longer feel in common with you; the very cloud which I see beneath me, the blackness and heaviness at which I laugh--that is your thunder-cloud.[19]

"A Crazed Girl" (CP, p. 348) also makes use of the dance image and, while the poem is closely linked to "Sweet Dancer", it is more complex in attitude and shares something as well with "Lapis Lazuli". The poem refers to "Beautiful Lofty Things" (CP, p. 348), which precedes it in Last Poems. The "crazed girl improvising her music,/Her poetry, dancing upon the shore," Yeats declares to be, along with John O'Leary, his father, Standish O'Grady, Lady Gregory and Maud Gonne, whom he had cited in the previous poem, "A beautiful lofty thing." These are the people Yeats has known who have embodied the virtues of bravery, nobility and strength, virtues that set them above the masses and endow them with beauty. The figure in "A Crazed Girl" (Margot Ruddock, whom Yeats knew) represents this uncommon type, for "No matter what disaster occurred/ She stood in desperate music wound, . . ." Her madness, which in Yeatsian terms indicates the uniqueness of an

inspired, irrational wisdom, as in the "delirium of the brave" ("September 1913", CP, P. 120) of the Irish heroes or as in "Crazy Jane" (CP, p. 290), serves to elevate her to this higher plane of understanding beyond "common intelligible" meaning where she exists as an image of her own making, "a thing/Heroically lost, heroically found". The reference here to "Lapis Lazuli"--"All men have aimed at, found and lost"--indicates her peculiarly tragic-heroic status, for she maintains her gaiety or joy, represented by her dancing, in the face of tragedy (in the real case of Margot Ruddock, in the face of death) and affirms life through her art.

The image of the dance, then, in Last Poems, takes on a meaning slightly modified from its usual symbolic implications in Yeats's work. Like the idea of the mask, Yeats's use of the dance image probably owes something to the tradition of Romantic literature, in which it was often used, as well as to the vogue it enjoyed in the 1890s through such works as Wilde's Salome. The dance image forms a central motif too in Thus Spake Zarathustra. Just as the dance image in Last Poems reflects Yeats's growing concern with physical exuberance and ecstasy and the state of tragic joy, Nietzsche makes similar use of the image several times in his major work. "I should only believe in a God that would know how to dance,"[20] he writes, in a passage that would indicate,

as Kaufmann suggests,[21] a certain affinity with the Indian idea of the dancing god, the Oriental equivalent of Dionysus, the Siva Nataraja. Elsewhere in the book in a chapter entitled "The Dance Song", Nietzsche writes, when Zarathustra and his disciples happen upon a group of girls dancing in a meadow:

> Cease not your dancing, ye lovely maidens! No game-spoiler hath come to you with an evil eye, no enemy of maidens.
>
> God's advocate am I with the devil: he, however, is the spirit of gravity. How could I, ye light-footed ones, be hostile to divine dances? Or to maidens' feet with fine ankles?[22]

The most revealing parallel with Yeats's idea of the dance, however, is to be found in the passage from "The Funeral Song" quoted earlier in the first chapter: "I know how to speak the parable of the highest things only in the dance. . . ."[23] Certainly this is a major impulse also behind Yeats's use of the dance as a symbol: the expression of an ineffable condition. Although the symbol of the dance undergoes various changes and possesses numerous shades of meaning in Yeats's work, ultimately it represents just this "parable of the highest things." And in Last Poems it is the parable of tragic joy and the individual's perfection in that state that the dance signifies.

Yeats's efforts to "remain true to the earth",[24] in Nietzsche's phrase, can also be seen in his strong interest in the ballad form in Last Poems. He had been attracted to the ballad early in his career but did not come to incorporate

fully and exploit its peculiar rhythmic and verbal qualities until Words for Music Perhaps (1933), A Full Moon in March (1935) and Last Poems (1936-1939). The simplicity and vigour of the ballad form, as well as its associations with folk tradition and idiom, appealed to Yeats and suited perfectly his newly adopted style. The return to the ballad was an attempt to re-affirm his belief in the vitality of the physical world that had been growing within him since the early 1930s. The ballad form became a means of further purging his art of abstraction through the simplicity of image and physical rhythm of that style, as well as providing a vehicle through which he could directly approach and express the wisdom to be found in the vitality of an earthly existence.

Although the theme of tragic joy, with its connotations of repose and serene exultation, forms a central theme in Last Poems, Yeats, as he himself says, is "not content" ("Are You Content?," CP, p. 370). The transcendence and detachment that in part define the condition of tragic joy, as we have seen it described in "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli", seem to imply a note of finality and rest, something Yeats had always been loth to accept. This discontent arose partly out of a concern for his art, for Yeats, as we have seen, felt conflict and tension necessary to artistic development. Calm and passivity were anathema to the creative spirit. In a larger sense, however, Yeats felt that man's condition was essentially one of becoming and striving. Consciousness was

conflict and without struggle there could be no victory, no art, and no meaningful life. Here Yeats is at one with Nietzsche:

> What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal: what is lovable in man is that he is an over-going and a down-going.[25]

It is this struggle against finality and tranquility that acts as the basis for "An Acre of Grass" (CP, p. 346). As an old man "at life's end" who has attained comfort and security, Yeats realizes that it is this very condition of placidity and complacency that he must guard against. In order to "make the truth known" he requires "an old man's frenzy", the inspiration of poetic wisdom and strength. He therefore must "remake" himself, as he has done throughout his life--that is, continually forge his personality through a deliberately willed style and conscious design. It is only by possessing this frenzy that the poet can, like Timon, Lear or Blake, discover truth, having a mind that, like Michelangelo's, "can pierce the clouds" or "shake the dead in their shrouds". Like Nietzsche, Yeats saw the process of life as one of continual becoming and renewal, and he maintained this sense of creative struggle and urgency until his death.

Yeats had always possessed a keen sense of lineage and dynasty, both with regard to his art and his personal life. As early as 1893 he had declared that he

> would accounted be
> True brother of a company

> That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
> Ballad and story, rann and song;. . .

and that he might "be counted one/With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson" ("To Ireland in the Coming Times," CP, p. 56). This sense of belonging to a special, dignified tradition, both in a national and familial context and also within the tradition of intellectual and poetic history, runs throughout Yeats's verse and is inextricably bound up with his aristocratic vision of culture and civilization. Yeats firmly believed in the necessity and rightness of a select group of higher individuals. While this theme had always figured in Yeats's work, it is restated in Last Poems with a new vigour and resonance. In his final volume of verse Yeats seems particularly interested in citing those individuals who exemplify his ideals of human achievement and behaviour. We have already seen examples of this in Yeats's use of figures from tragic literature in "Lapis Lazuli" and the personages singled out for praise in "Beautiful Lofty Things". In "Are You Content?" (CP, p. 370) the poet calls "on those that call me son/Grandson or great-grandson," "Half legendary men," to "judge what I have done". And in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" the paintings of Irish historical, political and artistic figures are seen not solely as individual portraits of people and random events but, like the men in "Easter 1916" (CP, p. 202) who are transformed into heroic images, as a larger, envisioned whole in which all of the subjects have their proper

place in "an Ireland/The poets have imagined, terrible and gay."

However, a richer and more arresting use of this theme can be seen in the superb shorter poem "Long-Legged Fly" (CP, p. 381). Moving away from friends and acquaintances whom he has deemed noble and great, Yeats takes his examples in this poem from the broader setting of Western civilization and mythology. Caesar, Helen and Michelangelo represent for Yeats the strength and intensity of vision and insight that great individuals, those who have the capacity to alter civilization, possess. All are aware of their roles in the larger scheme of which they are a part, whether it be history, mythology or art. And, able to see the whole design and vast implications of their lives, they can still maintain a quiet strength of mind in fulfilling this design. Like the long-legged fly who moves silently upon the stream, the three individuals in their moment of creative reverie unite with the "stream" of civilization and the human mind in order that they might complete their actions and perfect their destinies. The trance-like state in which the actions of their minds are completed conceals the immense significance of their respective choices and seems inconsequential to the outside observer; Caesar's "eyes fixed upon nothing", Helen practising "a tinker shuffle/Picked up on a street", Michelangelo's hand moving "with no more sound than the mice make". In fact, they are, in their creative moments, elevated above

the sublunary state of daily life and history and enter the realm of the "anima mundi". It is through this union with the "anima mundi" that the individuals can carry out their creative roles and in so doing transcend the contingency and flux of experience and attain the purity of a created image.

The poem is also constructed upon the deliberate irony of the creative act entailing a destructive or violent element. The trance-like state that Yeats describes is like the calm before the storm: Caesar's military conquests, the Trojan wars, the disruption and violence of sexual awareness. Creation and violence are inextricably linked in Yeats's view because creation can arise only out of the intensity of struggle in which certain principles and truths are destroyed. But the crucial aspect of the poem is the portrayal of the three individuals as having transcended, through their creative moment and contact with the "anima mundi", their purely historical condition. We shall see presently how this idea corresponds to Yeats's and Nietzsche's conception of history.

"Long-Legged Fly" hearkens back to the conclusion reached in "Lapis Lazuli": the sense of strength, repose, and the clarity and largeness of vision in joy. However, the dissatisfaction and vacillation that led Yeats to "remake" himself in "An Acre of Grass" and to declare his discontent in "What Then?" (CP, p. 347) and "Are You Content?" comes to

haunt him in other poems too. The Wild Old Wicked Man (CP, p. 356) might confidently assert his still active, passionate, poetic nature and choose to forget suffering "awhile/Upon a woman's breast", but the spectre of death was never far away from Yeats himself and he found himself constantly forced to confront it:

> When a man grows old his joy
> Grows more deep day after day,
> His empty heart is full at length,
> But he has need of all that strength
> Because of the increasing night
> That opens her mystery and fright.
> ("The Apparitions", CP, p. 386)

The equation of joy and strength and the poet's belief in the necessity of joy as a means of confronting death are typical of Yeats's attitude in this period of his work. Poems such as the epigrammatic "The Great Day", "Parnell", "What Was Lost" and "The Spur", as well as the longer "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?" and "The Statesman's Holiday", attempt to obviate the inevitability of physical decline and the dread of death through an assertion of the old arrogance, scorn, laughter and passion. But, as Denis Donoghue remarks, such an attempt "hardly conceals despair".[26] The pressure of death weighs to some degree on all of Last Poems and not in every instance does the joy Yeats espouses seem sufficient to counter the darkness of personal extinction.

We have seen that the disillusionment and discontent that emerge at different points in Last Poems are appropriate to Yeats's conception of life as antithesis. In a letter to

Ethel Mannin (October 20, 1938) Yeats wrote, "to me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each others' life, live each other's death".[27] Yeats could not find complete satisfaction in a final, ultimate state. He had necessarily to seek out conflict and energy so that he could continue, as Blake had done, to "beat upon the wall/Till Truth obeyed his call."(CP, p. 347) Yeats found himself in his old age caught between the desire for completion and perfection and the fear of complacency and inactivity. The sense of conflict that he sought is established with renewed vigour in "The Statues" (CP, p.375), which takes for its central dialectic the opposition of East and West. Unlike "Lapis Lazuli", however, Yeats here finds no reconciliation between the two opposites. Pythagoras, whose system of mathematical measurements provided the basis of Greek sculpture, the epitome of Western form, is accused of having occasioned an art that, although formally perfect, "lacked character". But Yeats responds by saying that the character of the statues is found in the passion of the "boys and girls, pale from imagined love" whom the statues inspire, just as in "Long-Legged Fly" Michelangelo's work causes "girls at puberty" to find "The first Adam in their thought." The completion of Pythagoras' plan lies in the mixture of formal perfection and inspired sensuality ("Live lips upon a plummet-measured face").

But even greater than Pythagoras, Yeats continues, are the artists themselves who have given concrete reality to Pythagoras' abstract scheme. It is they who in fact defeated the "Asiatic vague immensities" by creating works of enduring form and lasting sensual appeal--"Phidias/Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass"--from which European culture would develop. The third stanza emphasizes further the essential differences between East and West. Hamlet, "thin from eating flies", represents the West in its turbulence and anxiety brought about through its search for meaning and self-knowledge. The East is represented by "Buddha's emptiness", the realization that "knowledge increases unreality, that/Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show", beyond passion, intellect and selfhood. In the final stanza Yeats turns to the notion of the hero, and specifically to the heroic tradition he knows best, that of Ireland. Of the two possibilities of cultural definition presented to us in the earlier stanzas, "Asiatic vague immensities" and the "plummet-measured face", Yeats states that it is the latter, the Western-Hellenic tradition, that is more appropriate to the hero's condition. The Irish, Yeats feels, are part of that "ancient sect" who knew the virtues of form, restrained passion and heroism, but who have been "wrecked" by the modern world which, in its "formless spawning fury", has taken on Asiatic tendencies. Pearse's summoning of Cuchulain is the hero's invocation of the Western virtues of intellect, self,

strength and discipline. The modern world lacks these virtues, but by adhering to such ideals the Irish will continue to climb to their "proper dark" in order to recreate these old values by tracing the "lineaments of a plummet-measured face".

"The Statues" seems to bear out Yeats's insistence that it is the West, "not the east, that must raise the heroic cry", and in this there is a decidedly Nietzschean attitude. Nietzsche, like Yeats, saw the East as representing traits of formlessness and chaos, although he contintually stressed the importance of Oriental civilization as the matrix of Western culture. It was the fragmented, multifarious nature of Eastern civilization that in fact helped to define the ideals of the West, for it was against the chaos of Oriental religions and concepts that the Greeks exerted their Apollonian powers of intellect, discipline and formal knowledge. Civilizations, like great individuals, must master and organize the chaotic impulses of which they are made. As Yeats wrote in Book V of A Vision:

> A civilisation is a struggle to keep self-control, and in this it is like some great tragic person, some Niobe who must display an almost superhuman will or the cry will not touch our sympathy.[28]

This is the conclusion that Yeats reaches in "The Statues". The heroic tradition that runs from Cuchulain to Pearse is seen to be characterized and linked by the ancient virtues of order, form, and style that are constantly in

opposition to the fundamentally Asiatic traits of vagueness and immensity.

One must always bear in mind when dealing with such terms as East and West, or Asiatic and European, that both Yeats and Nietzsche viewed world developments and the progress of civilizations from a supra-historical standpoint. That is to say, history was not so much a series of literal facts in time, but was to be understood allegorically or symbolically so that certain themes true to the human spirit might be discovered. Nietzsche wrote that the true value of history lay not in objectively recording the data surrounding events and persons, but in "inventing ingenious variations on a probably commonplace theme, in raising the popular melody to a universal symbol and showing what a world of depth, power and beauty exists in it."[29] Yeats's conception of East and West should really be seen as another facet of his general philosophy concerning the dialectical movement of life. In this way it corresponds to other sets of opposites within Yeats's theory of life and civilization, such as objective and subjective, contemplation and action, self-annihilation and creation of self. Yeats's use of the antithesis of East and West, like his system of antithetical gyres, was an attempt to intensify history and historical developments "into a universal symbol" just as Nietzsche had intended his theory of the Dionysian and the Apollonian to represent eternal forces that exist in all civilizations

and individuals and which, through their conflict and interaction, create elements of culture. Similarly, those individuals whom Yeats and Nietzsche cite as higher men are those who have transcended, through style, control and aesthetic vision, the empirical, temporal framework of the historical condition, and have taken on the intensity of symbols or images and thus exist supra-historically. It is, for instance, in the supra-historical sense that Caesar, Helen and Michelangelo in "Long-Legged Fly" and the figures cited in "Beautiful Lofty Things" are portrayed.

As we saw earlier with regard to the question of individual existence, history for Yeats and Nietzsche is also understood and justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. Like the chaos of an individual's passions and impulses, the raw material of historical fact must be shaped, organized and intensified to the level of a work of art, for it is only by endowing and infusing historical events with aesthetic and symbolic significance that the historical becomes the supra-historical and finds its justification. This is quite clearly in opposition to the general trend of nineteenth-century historical thought, as represented by Hegel and Darwin, which held that art was merely an incidental aspect of the larger and immutable onward march of the historical and evolutionary process. Yeats and Nietzsche, both rooted firmly in an aesthetic sense of life, saw art as part of history only insofar as it was the record of a human act at a particular time. But because

art, once created, outlasted man and time, it was also seen as existing outside of and above history, a category unto itself, to which even history, dependent on art for its justification, was subservient.

This supra-historical outlook is, I think, vital to an understanding of much of Last Poems, particularly such key poems as "The Gyres", "Lapis Lazuli", "The Statues" and "Under Ben Bulben". Of these, nowhere is the supra-historical standpoint more expressly central and nowhere do all of the various Nietzschean motifs we have discussed merge more clearly than in "Under Ben Bulben" (CP, p. 397). Although the poem is not in a chronological sense Yeats's last poem (both "Cuchulain Comforted" and "The Black Tower" postdate it, although Yeats continued to correct proofs of the poem until three days before his death), it may be read as Yeats's final poetic testament. It restates and amplifies what was set down earlier in Section III of "The Tower":

> It is time that I wrote my will;
> I choose upstanding men
> That climb the streams until
> The fountain leap, and at dawn
> Drop their cast at the side
> Of dripping stone; I declare
> They shall inherit my pride,
> The pride of people that were
> Bound neither to Cause nor State,
> Neither to slaves that were spat on,
> Nor to the tyrants that spat,. . .
> Death and life were not
> Till man made up the whole
> Made lock, stock and barrel
> Out of his bitter soul,. . .
>
> (CP, p. 218)

In the first section of "Under Ben Bulben" Yeats states his faith in the eternal truths expressed in supernatural and mantic traditions. But by referring specifically to the Irish legend of the Sidhe (the fairy horsemen who ride at night under Ben Bulben) Yeats not only returns us to one of his original principles, but establishes the central motif of the poem. As T.R. Henn has pointed out,[30] the figure of the horseman plays a key role in Yeats's work. Briefly, the equestrian image may be said to connote strength and nobility of spirit as well as passion, graciousness and intellect. These were the virtues that were embodied and epitomized, for instance, in the person of Robert Gregory, "Our Sidney and our perfect man/. . . Soldier, scholar, horseman he" ("In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," CP, p. 148). Like the "Lovers of horses and of women" who, in "The Gyres", (CP, p. 337) are emblematic of "A greater, a more gracious time," the supernatural horsemen of the opening section of "Under Ben Bulben" are intended to invoke not only a mystical but an aristocratic tradition. The connection is solidified when Yeats states that the horsemen had "won" their special position through "Completeness of their passions", just as the heroes of Irish myth and the "beautiful lofty things" that had influenced Yeats's personal life had transcended their sublunary condition and raised themselves to an artistic, symbolic status through their heroic actions and the completion of their lives.

The second section of the poem re-affirms the belief that Yeats had professed earlier in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul", (CP, p. 265) that he is "content to live it all again/ And yet again", and reflects clearly the poet's idea of immortality. The awareness that

> Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
> Sharp their spades, their muscles strong
> They but thrust their buried men
> Back in the human mind again

is a result of the knowledge that "All things fall and are built again." Death is really illusory for man's spirit is eternal, a part of the timeless realm of the "human mind", the Amima Mundi. For the man who possesses this knowledge, death provides no greater fear than "A brief parting from those dear," and becomes, as it did for Robert Gregory, nothing more than a "discourtesy". "A great man in his pride", Yeats had written earlier, "Casts derision upon/ Supersession of breath" for "Man has created death" ("Death," CP, p. 264). It is the measure of the heroic individual to have complete control over his existence so that he may live and die freely, facing death bravely and willingly accepting the consequences of eternity, to be "content to live it all again."

Although Yeats drew most heavily from occult and mystical sources in the formulation of his ideas of reincarnation and eternity, his attitude, especially as it is expressed in Last Poems, seems to coincide with Nietzsche's.

Toward the end of A Vision we are given a hint of this coincidence:

> Certain men have sought to express the new emotion through the Creative Mind, though fit instruments of expression do not yet exist, and so to establish, in the midst of our ever more abundant primary information, antithetical wisdom; but such men, Blake, Coventry Patmore at moments, Nietzsche, are full of morbid excitement and few in number, unlike those who, from Richardson to Tolstoi, from Hobbes down to Spencer, have grown in number and serenity. They were begotten in the Sistine Chapel and still dream that all can be transformed if they be but emphatic; yet Nietzsche, when the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence drifts before his eyes, knows for an instant that nothing can be so transformed and is almost of the next gyre.[31]

Just as Yeats's attempt to establish the spiritual, aesthetic and subjective values inherent in an antithetical view of the world against the increasingly factual, empirical and scientific primary modern age led to the antithetical knowledge of the cyclical pattern of civilizations, so Nietzsche came to an antithetical wisdom in conceiving his idea of Eternal Recurrence and accepting it with joy.

The third section takes up Yeats's idea of conflict as essential to creativity and self-knowledge. By quoting from the Irish patriot John Mitchel's Jail Journal ("'Send war in our time, O Lord!'"), Yeats equates the moment of vision, when man "completes his partial mind", with violence, because creative vision, like violence, requires energy, is intense, and is both creative and destructive at the same time. It is only through the intensity of this kind of vision

that man is able to "accomplish fate", that is, to bring to perfection and wholeness his life and work.

In the next section of the poem Yeats transfers this idea of the violence of the creative vision directly into the artistic sphere. Where the third section dealt with the need for strength and conflict in the individual's attempt to shape and create his life through style, the subsequent section commands "Poet and Sculptor" to "do the work" of creating proper and masterful images that will "Bring the soul of man to God." As in "The Statues", Yeats here emphasizes the necessity for strict form--"Measurement began our might"--in creating any great work of art. Like Pythagoras' mathematical concepts which the artists used to fashion images that could inspire sensuality, so Michelangelo's Adam in the Sistine Chapel here has the ability to "disturb globe-trotting Madam/Till her bowels are in heat," proving that the purpose of all art is the equipoise of form and passion, the "Profane perfection of mankind."

However, as Yeats reminds us, "Gyres run on", and although certain artists, notably Calvert, Wilson, Blake and Claude, tried to perpetuate the ideals and traditions of the Quattrocento ("that greater dream"), inevitably "confusion fell upon our thought." It is to this confusion of modern times and the artist's response to it that Yeats turns in the fifth section. The "filthy modern tide", with its "formless spawning fury" that Yeats decried in "The Gyres", has produced

"the sort now growing up/All out of shape from toe to top." Yeats therefore instructs Irish poets to turn from the drab, formless abstraction of the modern world and reflect upon the ancient traditions and values, "whatever is well made," in order to find the proper themes for poetry:

> Sing the peasantry, and then
> Hard-riding country gentlemen,
> The holiness of monks, and after
> Porter drinkers' randy laughter;
> Sing the lords and ladies gay
> That were beaten into the clay
> Through seven heroic centuries;. . .

As in "The Statues", where Yeats sees the classical virtues and models as lying within the heroic, aristocratic traditions of the Irish race, the poet's final instructions here are to

> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry.

The final section of "Under Ben Bulben" reveals Yeats's conception of life as drama, as a consciously designed and completed aesthetic whole. The decision to be buried in the land of his childhood and his ancestors, "Under bare Ben Bulben's head/In Drumcliff chruchyard," is Yeats's deliberate attempt to bring his life to a perfect close, as a well-constructed work of art is completed. That a man be firmly in control of his life and destiny was, as we have seen, of paramount importance for Yeats, and it is this assumption that "Under Ben Bulben" bears out.

Yeats attempted throughout his life to live according to this principle and, by doing so, to bring dignity, meaning and worth to his existence. He is, in this regard, very much like a heroic individual, in his own and in Nietzsche's sense of the term. It is the triumph of Last Poems that they testify, with great steadiness of nerve and in full awareness of the dark outrage of impending death, to this unflinching vision of life.

Conclusion

In his essay "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Recent History", the German novelist Thomas Mann makes an important observation regarding Nietzsche's attitude toward Socrates.[1] He states that while Nietzsche rejected Socrates' thought as initiating the divorce of philosophy from life, rendering it purely abstract, systematic and passive, Nietzsche was nonetheless drawn to Socrates in a specific way. What drew Nietzsche to the Greek philosopher, Mann contends, was the cup of hemlock. It was for a similar reason, we are also told, that Nietzsche could reject Christianity and exalt the figure of Christ. It was the crucifixion, that emblem with which Nietzsche, at the end of his life, would have such a deep and tragic identification, that made Christ a symbol of strength and tragic beauty worthy of reverence. Mann here, it seems, holds the key to Nietzsche's philosophy. Even more than philosophy or art, the example of one's life was, for Nietzsche, the most important consideration in determining the value and stature of an individual. To complete one's life, to perfect it, to bring it to the level of an image or symbol, in short, to live a heroic life, was the highest accomplishment possible for man. Thus in Schopenhauer as Educator, Nietzsche writes:

> I get profit from a philosopher, just so far as he can be an example to me. There is no doubt that a man can draw whole nations after him by his example;. . . But this example must exist in his outward life, not merely in his books; it must follow the way of the Grecian philosophers, whose doctrine was in their dress and bearing and general manner of life rather than in their speech or writing.[2]

Clearly, this is a very radical and uncompromising sort of aestheticism. Mann tends to see it in part as an example of the late nineteenth-century assault upon bourgeois morality and hypocritical Victorian conventions. He cites Oscar Wilde as another example of the same trend. This is, to a certain extent, valid. There are clear similarities in Nietzsche's and Wilde's attitudes. But Nietzsche's aestheticism was not a pose intended to shock or amuse and stood clearly in opposition to the cultivated decadence and modish ennui of the 1890s. It was a heroic, vitalistic aestheticism based on the principles of strength, control and largeness and clarity of vision. Nietzsche took his aesthetic tenets from classical tragic art, realizing that if an aesthetic is to endure it must have the qualities of passion and hardness. As Yeats would later express the same notion, "Ancient salt is best packing".[3]

In Yeats, we find a similar kind of aesthetic stance. Yeats sought to break away from the delicate, effeminate emotions of his 'twilight' poetry by creating a new style which maintained passion and sensuality, but infused them with a sense of strength and power. Yeats played many roles in his life--aesthete, patriot, public man--but as he threw

away old masks and assumed new ones, the direction of his attitude remained clear. He sought a sense of solidity, permanence and rootedness; a life that encompassed all of the various potentialities of the human spirit and held them together in a single, unified vision. Yeats felt this attitude to be so important that he celebrated the power required for its existence even though it might engender--indeed, would necessarily engender--violence and conflict. This is the underlying impulse of the Last Poems: it is better to live heroically and perhaps violently than never to risk violence and suffering and submit to passivity and mediocrity. It was the idea of the heroic life, the life of gesture, drama and symbol, that supplied Yeats with the material for this belief. It is this close relation between art and life (the life lived and completed as an aesthetic phenomenon) that links Yeats and Nietzsche. Nietzsche has often been described rightly as the philosopher of life. Yeats, I think it may be said, is a poet of the same type.

What one receives then, and what should have emerged from the foregoing discussion, is a sense of artistic and philosophic kinship between Yeats and Nietzsche, a sense of their sharing a way of seeing and understanding the world. Describing certain aspects of Yeats's work as 'Nietzschean' is, of course, only a provisional sort of nomenclature, for Yeats's work is nothing if not thoroughly and indelibly his own. But the link between the two writers is important if one

wishes to understand the specific tradition of writers to which Yeats belongs and in which he should be seen: visionary and vitalist. A writer in this tradition stands, as Yeats and Nietzsche did, for the fundamental integrity and dignity of man's spirit and imagination against the constant threat of chaos and life-denying abstractions, a threat that in their time and in ours was becoming a grim and palpable reality. The criticisms of both these writers--their arrogance, lack of compassion and occasional celebration of the will over reason--are not smaller things because of this, but perhaps they might be more accurately applied if those enjoining such criticisms considered them with respect to the principles and values of this tradition.

In an age of conformity, spiritual vacuity and the triumph of mediocrity, Yeats and Nietzsche represent a belief in the greatness and nobility of man. In an age which increasingly effects, through conscious effort or subconscious impulse, to separate man from the earth and ignore or distort the condition of the flesh-and-blood individual, Yeats and Nietzsche represent a belief in those values that are understood not in the mind alone, but with the whole being. In The Tragic Sense of Life, a book Yeats read and admired, the Spanish philosopher Unamuno writes:

> There are, in fact, people who appear to think only with the brain, or with whatever may be the specific thinking organ; while others think with all the body and all the soul, with the blood,

> with the marrow of the bones, with the
> heart, with the lungs, with the belly,
> with the life.[4]

Yeats, from the vantage point of old age, refusing to wither into the aridity of a purely cerebral existence, could echo this belief with masterful honesty and lucidity:

> God guard me from those thoughts men think
> In the mind alone;
> He that sings a lasting song
> Thinks in a morrow-bone.
>
> ("A Prayer for Old Age", CP, p. 326)

Finally, it is just this element of the "marrow-bone", the mark of the individual who not only knows his life and art and destiny, but has felt it with his whole being, that links Yeats and Nietzsche and which has made their work "a lasting song".

NOTES

Introduction

[1]The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 392. All subsequent quotations from Yeats's poetry are from this edition, abbreviated as CP and followed by the page reference, and indicated in the body of the thesis.

[2]Denis Donoghue, Yeats (London: Fontana, 1971), p. 19.

[3]The Letters of W.B. Yeats, Allan Wade, ed. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 379, hereafter cited as Letters.

[4]Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 130.

[5]"Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", Selected Poems of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 74.

[6]David S. Thatcher, Nietzsche in England 1890-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

[7]Letters, p. 403.

[8]Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), pp.474-475.

[9]Complete Works, Oscar Levy, ed., 18 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), XI, 27.

[10]A Vision (New York: Collier, 1966), p. 127. 1937 edition with author's final revisions.

[11]Complete Works, XI, 6.

[12]Erich Heller, "Yeats and Nietzsche: Reflections on a Poet's Marginal Notes" in The Disinherited Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1975), p. 331.

Chapter One

[1]Complete Works, I, 50.

[2]Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 509.

[3]Complete Works, XI, 43.

[4]Ibid., X, 223.

[5]Essays and Introductions, p. 226.

[6]Complete Works, XVI, 109.

[7]Letters, p. 922.

[8]Essays and Introductions, p. 510.

[9]Autobiographies, p. 461.

[10]Essays and Introductions, p. 509.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 522.

[13]Letters, p. 402.

[14]Intentions (London: Unicorn Press, 1945), pp. 171-199.

[15]Ibid., pp. 9-47.

[16]A. Norman Jeffares, "Yeats's Mask", in The Circus Animals (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 5.

[17]Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 93-94.

[18]Patrick Bridgwater, "The Strong Enchanter: W.B. Yeats and Nietzsche" in Affinities: Essays in German and English Literature, R.W. Last, ed. (London: Wolff, 1971), pp. 68-87.

[19]Complete Works, XII, 54-55.

[20]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961). In section 6.522, for example, Wittgenstein writes, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical."

[21]Complete Works, XI, 133.

[22]Ibid., XII, 55-56.

[23]Ibid., X, 224.

[24]Ibid., I, 186.

[25]Ibid., 21-22.

[26]Ibid., 21.

[27]Ibid., 187.

[28]Ibid., 167.

[29]Essays and Introductions, pp. 292-293.

[30]Autobiographies, p. 189.

[31]Ibid., pp. 470-471.

[32]Essays and Introductions, p. 239.

[33]Ibid., p. 241.

[34]Ibid., p. 243.

[35]Complete Works, I, 182.

[36]Ibid., 133-134.

[37]Edward Engelberg, The Vast Design (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 92.

[38]Autobiographies, p. 471.

[39]Essays and Introductions, p. 255.

[40]Ibid., pp. 252-253.

[41]Ibid., p. 322.

[42]Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, p. 11.

[43]Complete Works, XI, 82.

[44]The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 141.

[45]Complete Works, XI, 44.

[46]Ibid., p. 280.

[47]Ibid., X, 270-271.

[48]Ibid., XI, p. 280.

[49]Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1964), pp. 138-149.

[50]Autobiographies, p. 471.

[51]Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, p. 180.

[52]Essays and Introductions, pp. 251-252.

[53]Letters, p. 836.

[54]Complete Works, XI, 105.

[55]Letters, p. 836.

[56]Complete Works, XI, 20.

[57]Essays and Introductions, p. 322.

[58]Complete Works, XI, 49.

[59]Ibid., 141.

[60]Ibid., 52.

[61]Ibid., 53.

[62]Ibid., 54.

[63]Letters, p. 871.

[64]Ibid., p. 903.

[65]Ibid., pp. 881-882.

[66]Donoghue, Yeats, p. 120.

[67]Letters, pp. 850-851.

[68]Complete Works, XI, 141.

Chapter Two

[1]Before we continue with an examination of Last Poems, it might be helpful to clarify some of the textual problems surrounding Yeats's final poems; to establish exactly which poems belong to this phase of his work.

In May, 1938, Yeats published his New Poems. This volume contained all the poems from and including "The Gyres"

up to and including "Are You Content?" that are found under the heading Last Poems in the Macmillan edition of the collected poetry. Strictly speaking, Yeats's 'last' poems are the ones he wrote in the final year of his life after the publication of New Poems. These would include "Under Ben Bulben" and all of the poems that follow "Are You Content?" in the Macmillan collection. These were published along with the plays Purgatory and The Death of Cuchulain and Last Poems and Two Plays by Cuala Press in July of 1939 after Yeats's death. However, when Macmillan brought out Last Poems and Plays in 1940, they chose to include in the volume the poems which had been published earlier as New Poems. Curtis Bradford, in his essay, "On Yeats's Last Poems," in Yeats: Last Poems, Jon Stallworthy, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1968), has made a good case for studying Last Poems and Two Plays by itself, claiming that the combination of this volume with New Poems has "obscured the grimness of Yeats's last phase" and that the alteration of the original ordering of the poems has undermined the carefully planned thematic links between the poems as well as the musicality of the volume as a whole. While this is no doubt true, it is nonetheless demonstrable that the poems originally collected under the title New Poems share many of the same thematic and philosophic concerns found in Last Poems and Two Plays. As valuable as Bradford's insights into the correct ordering of the poems are, this question is not vitally germane to our intentions here. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine Nietzschean elements and motifs in the last phase of Yeats's work by looking at specific poems of the period 1936-1939 (when Yeats's interest in Nietzsche was renewed) and for such a specific and comparative intention, the strictures that Prof. Bradford insists upon are not necessary here. It is for this reason and merely for matters of simplification that I have decided to use the composite Last Poems as it stands in the Macmillan edition of Yeats's verse.

[2]T.R. Henn, "The Accent of Yeats's Last Poems" in Yeats: Last Poems, ed. Joh Stallworthy (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 135.

[3]Complete Works, XI, 35.

[4]Vivienne Koch, W.B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 17.

[5]Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 272-273.

[6]Letters, p. 851.

[7]Complete Works, X, 168.

[8]*Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 433.

[9]*The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. W.B. Yeats (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. xxxiv.

[10]*Essays and Introductions*, pp. 502-503.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 448.

[12]*Letters*, p. 837.

[13]Donoghue, *Yeats*, p. 118.

[14]*Essays and Introductions*, pp. 522-523.

[15]*Letters*, p. 838.

[16]*Complete Works*, XI, 44.

[17]*Ibid.*, I, 183-184.

[18]*Essays and Introductions*, p. 252.

[19]*Complete Works*, XI, 44.

[20]*Ibid.*, 45.

[21]Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, p. 323.

[22]*Complete Works*, XI, 127.

[23]*Ibid.*, 133.

[24]*Ibid.*, 7.

[25]*Ibid.*, 9.

[26]Donoghue, *Yeats*, p. 117.

[27]*Letters*, p. 918.

[28]*A Vision*, p. 268.

[29]*Complete Works*, V, 53-54.

[30]T.R. Henn,"'Horseman, Pass By!'" in *Yeats: Last Poems*, ed. Jon Stallworthy, pp. 115-121.

[31]*A Vision*, p. 299.

Conclusion

[1]Thomas Mann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Recent History" in Last Essays (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 158.

[2]Complete Works, V, 118.

[3]Essays and Introductions, p. 522.

[4]Miguel de Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life (New York: Dover, 1954), p. 14.

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