# THE SPIRING TREADMILL AND THE PREPOSTEROUS PIG: THE ACCOMMODATION OF SCIENCE IN THE OCCULT, POLITICAL AND POETIC DEVELOPMENT OF W B YEATS, 1885-1905

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## ABSTRACT

Johnson defined metaphysical poetry as a violent yoking together of heterogeneous ideas. Such a process, I suggest, is developed in Yeats's work. The early desire to "hammer" his conflicting "thoughts into unity" bears fruit in the mature verse. The "thoughts long knitted into a single thought" of 'Coole Park, 1929' are echoed, for instance, by the overwhelming desire in 'The Tower' to make the "moon and sunlight seem/One inextricable beam". The argument continues, as in 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul', say, or the seventh section of 'Vacillation', but it is played out against a long history of reconciliation. We remember the Irish airman who "balanced all, brought all to mind" in 1919. Clearly a prerequisite is a flexible attitude to Truth, and this thesis examines ways in which such flexibility is expressed in Yeats's occult and political theory, and in the development of his poetic.

It begins with an introductory account of Yeats's early scientific reading, the deliberalizing implications of that material, and the debt to it of proto-fascist and, later, fascist theorists. The first chapter considers fascism generally, and examines aspects of Yeats's early work that seem to indicate the later politics. The second chapter returns to the nineteenth century intellectual climate - to the interaction of the new science and the established church, on the one hand, and the occult revival on the other. Yeats's occult development is considered against this background and shown to be empirical. Each step is dictated by a rationale that is aware of the fundamental importance of logic.

To walk the narrow path between Grey Truth and Secret Rose, between science and spirituality, requires poise. Chapters four and five consider

the nature of 'balance' and the evil of obsession in the early work, concentrating in particular on three poems Yeats was later to cast away - 'Mosada', 'Time and the Witch Vivien' and 'The Seeker'. The thesis is concluded with a consideration of anarchy as the result of the perpetual balance of irreconcilables - "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" - and suggests ways in which the material presented might be used in a reassessment of Yeats's later work.

Yeats's knowledge of science, coupled with his refusal to reject any aspect of the truth, however "grey", suggested a world-picture that nourished, and to some extent prefigured the later politics.

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My chief debt, however, is to Warwick Gould who has been a patient and enlightening teacher throughout. I myself can confidently claim responsibility for all lapses of scholarship, critical acuity and taste.

CONTENTS

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Au | W B Yeats: | Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955) |
| AV(A) | W B Yeats: | A Critical Edition of Yeats's 'A Vision' (1925) (eds) George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood (London: Macmillan, 1978) |
| AV(B) | W B Yeats: | A Vision (London: Macmillan, 1962) |
| CE | T H Huxley: | Collected Essays (London: Macmillan) 9 volumes, 1894-1908 |
| CLQ | | Colby Library Quarterly (Waterville, Maine: Volume XV, Number 2, June 1979) |
| DM 1&2 | Charles Darwin: | The Descent of Man (2 Volumes, London: John Murray, 1871) |
| E&I | W B Yeats: | Essays and Introductions (London and New York: Macmillan, 1961) |
| Ex | W B Yeats: | Explorations sel Mrs W B Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1962) |
| Gwynn | | Scattering Branches (ed) Stephen Gwynn (London: Macmillan, 1940) |
| HC 1&2 | Ernst Haeckel: | The History of Creation (translated E Ray Lankester, 2 Volumes, London: Henry S King & Co., 1876) |
| Hone | Joseph Hone: | W B Yeats (1943), (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971) |
| HWP | Bertrand Russell: | History of Western Philosophy (1946), (second edition, George Allen & Unwin, 1961) |
| IER | | In Excited Reverie (eds) A Norman Jeffares and K G W Cross (London: Macmillan, 1965) |
| IY | Richard Ellmann: | The Identity of Yeats (1954), (London: Faber and Faber, 1964) |
| IU | H P Blavatsky: | Isis Unveiled (2 Volumes, 2nd edition, New York: J W Bolton, 1877) |
| L | | The Letters of W B Yeats, (ed) Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954) |
| LNI | | Letters to the New Island, (ed) Horace Reynolds (London: Oxford University Press, 1934) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| LTSM | | W B Yeats and T Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901-1937 (ed.) Ursula Bridge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953) |
| MM | Richard Ellmann: | Yeats: The Man and the Masks (1948), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) |
| Mem | | Memoirs, (ed) Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972) |
| Myth | W B Yeats: | Mythologies (London: Macmillan, 1959) |
| OS | Charles Darwin: | On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection (London: John Murray, 1859) |
| SB | W B Yeats: | The Speckled Bird, (ed) W H O'Donnell, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) |
| SD | H P Blavatsky: | The Secret Doctrine (1888), (3rd and revised edition, London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893) |
| SS | | The Senate Speeches of W B Yeats (ed) D R Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960) |
| UP 1&2 | | Uncollected Prose by W B Yeats (Vol 1 ed J P Frayne - London: Macmillan, 1970. Vol 2 eds J P Frayne and Colton Johnson - London: Macmillan, 1976) |
| VP | | The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W B Yeats, (eds) Peter Allt and Russell K Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1957) |
| VP1 | | The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W B Yeats, (ed) Russell K Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966) |
| VSR | | The Secret Rose: stories by Yeats; A Variorum Edition, (eds) Phillip L Marcus, Warwick Gould and Michael J Sidnell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) |

# INTRODUCTION

The young Yeats was a "rabid" Darwinian. The recollections of Charles Johnston are crucial to our perception of Yeats's early scientific fervour:

> I knew W B Yeats before he had discovered in himself the divine faculty of verse, though his life was already full of vision. In those early days his tendency was towards science, and we carried out together a number of more or less ingenious and unsuccessful experiments in physics, chemistry, and electricity, with home-made contrivances often destined for quite other uses. Our researches soon took a different field, which, I have always thought, was of high importance for Yeats's poetry. He was a rabid Darwinian, and, like all new proselytes, longed for a convert; and I, as his school chum, was the natural prey. So Yeats spent the hours that should have gone to Homer and Horace in pursuit of test cases and missing links, with which I was in due time to be belabored; and many a delightful afternoon we spent roaming over the Dublin hills, or the cliffs of Howth, Yeats holding forth on evolutionary botany, while I listened, commented, and at the end of ends, declared myself still unconvinced. Unconvinced of the materialism that so often goes with Darwinism, that is; though accepting the idea of growth and development.
>
> Then came the first poems. And I remember some, never so far published, I believe, which filled my imagination with a large and sombre magnificence, and had in many ways a broader sweep, a larger handling than any of his later works.[1]

Evidence supportive of this statement is not substantial in volume, but it is authoritative. Johnston's claim that Yeats's devotion to Darwin was of "high importance" to his poetry is critically acute and demands fuller consideration.

The anonymous article that appeared in T P's Weekly (June 7th, 1912) includes a further reference to Yeats's adolescent enthusiasm:

> Yeats was a most ardent entomologist..... He always carried in his pockets..... several little cardboard boxes and pill-boxes, filled with his victims, (Mikhail op.cit.p2).

For a long period of his youth a "favourite book", the "account of the strange sea creatures the man of science had discovered among the rocks at Howth or dredged out of Dublin Bay" (Au 32), was a treasured text that seemed to carry the full weight of Victorian scientific wisdom.[2]

Yeats projected his own account of the yearly cycle of the "creatures of some hole in the rock", propounded an individual theory of sea-anemone coloration (Au 59-60) and, though he was an inattentive scholar, his progress through schools was eased by his reputation as a keen lepidopterist who got "into no worse mischief than hiding now and again an old tailless white rat in my coat-pocket or my desk" (Au 41). Yeats embarked on expeditions with "the athlete" in pursuit of rare beetles (Au 48), or alone to monitor the dawn chorus (Au 72). School became merely an interruption of Yeats's prolonged biological investigations, (Au 56).[3]

After the turn of the century Mathers's Golden Dawn began to disintegrate. One faction, led by Yeats, demanded that 'magic' continue to inspirit the organisation (see Is the Order of RR and AC to Remain a Magical Order?, 1901). Another, led by A E Waite, sought a more 'mystical' expression of the doctrine. In The Occult Review of January 1905 (ed Ralph Shirley, 1:1) Waite published an article, entitled 'The Life of the Mystic', in which he explained what he considered the difference between 'mysticism' and 'magic'. His analysis should be considered in the context of the recent Golden Dawn schism, for, clearly, he has Yeats in mind. For Waite, the occultist is

> the disciple of one or all of the secret sciences; the student, that is to say, of alchemy, astrology, the forms and methods of divination, and of the mysteries which used to be included under the generic description of magic, (p29).

The mystic on the other hand,

> has no concern as such with the study of the secret sciences; he does not work on materials or investigate forces which exist outside himself, (ibid.p29-30).

Waite crystallises the distinction thus:

> the distinction between the occultist and the mystic, however much the representative of physical science at the present day might be

> disposed to resent the imputation, is therefore, loosely speaking, and at least from one point of view, the distinction between the man of science and the man of introspection..... the occultist is concerned with "transcendental physics, and is of the intellectual, belonging to science," while the mystic "deals with transcendental metaphysics, and is of the spiritual, belonging to religion"..... Thus, on the one hand, there are the phenomena of the transcendental produced on the external plane, capable of verification and analysis, up to a certain point; and, on the other, there is the transcendental life. (ibid.p30).[4]

As Charles Johnston and A E Waite detected in Yeats's poetic and his occultism, respectively, a scientific influence, Conor Cruise O'Brien indicated, much later (IER 207-78), a strong element of calculation in his political stance. The purpose of this thesis is to test the legitimacy of these suggestions, and to explore their implications. It is, in part, a development of the speculations towards the end of my review of Cairns Craig's Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry, reproduced here from Yeats Annual (1984) as Appendix 1.

I want to show in this introduction a connection between Yeats's early scientific reading and the rise of fascism as a political ideology. It is not to suggest that Yeats was a proto-fascist during his adolescence, merely to demonstrate that he was open to influences that, firstly, had inherently deliberalizing social and racial implications and, secondly, were used by later fascist propagandists as the principal intellectual struts of the ideology.

This introduction falls into three parts. In the first I assemble the works of those scientists we know Yeats to have read, that were published or translated into English during or before Yeats's eighteenth year. In the second part I examine the social and political conclusions inherent in those works; and thirdly I show how those conclusions manifest in later

anti-democratic movements - notably Social-Darwinism and National Socialism. It is inevitable that whilst I discuss an intellectual tradition that I show to be crucial to our understanding of Yeats's development, but in which he played no direct part, his position will seem a little unclear. I focus on Yeats only after I have defined the intellectual background of his occult, political and poetic development, and have traced its evolution.

Yeats's own account of the period indicates something deeper than adolescent sentiment:

> after much hesitation, trouble and bewilderment, I was hot for argument in refutation of Adam and Noah and the Seven Days. I had read Darwin and Wallace, Huxley and Haeckel..... (Au 60). I began occasionally telling people that one should believe whatever had been believed in all countries and periods, and only reject any part of it after much evidence, instead of starting all over afresh and only believing what one could prove. But I was always ready to deny or turn into joke what was for all that my secret fanaticism. When I had read Darwin and Huxley and believed as they did, I had wanted, because an established authority was upon my side, to argue with everybody, (Au 78-9).

We have it on Yeats's authority that he read Darwin and Wallace, Huxley and Haeckel. We know, too, (see Mikhail op.cit.p7) that Yeats read at least some of the works of the evolutionists Edward Clodd (probably The Childhood of the World, 1873, The Childhood of Religious, 1875, and The Story of Creation, 1888) and Grant Allen (Vignettes from Nature and The Evolutionist at Large, 1881, and Charles Darwin, 1885). Clodd was a keen admirer of Huxley (see, for example, his Thomas Henry Huxley, 1902, and his introductions to Huxley's Twelve Lectures and Essays and Man's Place in Nature, 1908). We should infer also, both from

Johnston's remarks and from Yeats's persistent denigration of John Tyndall in Autobiographies, that his scientific concerns were not restricted to purely biological speculation. Since Yeats was participating in experiments in physics, chemistry and electricity it is likely that he had read Tyndall's popular expositions of mid-century scientific research. Although Tyndall was professor of natural history at the Royal Institution in 1853 his lectures and publications were almost exclusively concerned with the non-chemical properties of matter and energy - the discipline that has become the science of physics.[5] If, as Yeats claims (Au 32), considerably more obscure scientific treatises were to be found in his father's library,[6] he would certainly have had access to the publications for which Tyndall is now most famed - The Constitution of the Universe (1865), Natural Philosophy (1869), and Fragments of Science (1871). There is little chemistry in these works and, in the later, two chapters are devoted to the relation of science and religion, and two short appendices to miracles and spiritualism. Tyndall's primary concern, however, was with the laws of physics rather than of biology and this detracts significantly from the tempting view of Yeats as typically adolescent in his obsession with natural history. Yeats's interests were scientific rather than biological.

Amongst the scientists we know Yeats to have read, Tyndall is unique in his concern for the specific political development of Irish republicanism.[7] The others he comes to reject, in varying degree, on the grounds of their opposition to 'spirit'. In 1876 The History of Creation, Ernst Haeckel's important history of evolutionary theory and comprehensive investigation

of the scientific status of Darwinism, was translated into English by Professor E Ray Lankester. If Yeats was still a "rabid" evolutionist when he encountered this lengthy, uncompromisingly 'scientific', and exhaustive examination of the theory of descent, the transmutation theory and the doctrine of filiation, he may have been partly discouraged by Haeckel's slightly equivocal attitude to 'matter'. While demanding adherence to "the stern commands of inexorable logic" (HC1 7), and roundly denigrating the notion of 'faith':

> Faith has its origin in the poetic imagination; knowledge, on the other hand, originates in the reasoning intelligence of man[8]

- claiming that "where faith commences, science ends" (ibid.), Haeckel intimates that science is, after all, applicable to 'spirit'. Writing of the human soul, he proposes that

> here, as everywhere, the only way to arrive at a knowledge of natural truth is to compare kindred phenomena, and investigate their development, (HC2 362).

Haeckel goes on to make a point of repudiating 'materialism':

> much as we may value [the] influence of modern science upon practical life, still it must, estimated from a higher and more general point of view, stand most assuredly below the enormous influence which the theoretical progress of modern science will have on the entire range of human knowledge, on our conception of the universe, and on the perfecting of man's culture (HC1 2).

Haeckel's new philosophy was 'Monism'. It was derived from his devotion to Darwinism for, through evolution, Haeckel discovered the world to be an organised and consistent whole (HC1 22-3). He emphatically rejected Creationism, benevolent or otherwise, but adopted

> the view of the universe which is called the mechanical or causal. It may also be called the monistic, or single-principle theory, as opposed to the two-fold principle, or dualistic theory, which is necessarily implied in the teleological conception of the universe, (HC1 20).

'Dualism' Haeckel condemned with contempt for distinguishing between matter and spirit, between man and nature. Monism was to be regarded as applicable to all aspects of human experience and development:

> its application to practical human life must open up a new road towards moral perfection. By its aid we shall at last begin to raise ourselves out of the state of social barbarism in which..... we are still plunged..... It is above all things necessary to make a complete and honest return to Nature and to natural relations..... [Then Man] will come to arrange his life with his fellow-creatures - that is, the family and the state - not according to the laws of distant centuries, but according to the rational principles deduced from knowledge of nature. Politics, morals, and the principles of justice,..... will have to be formed in accordance with natural laws only (HC2 367-8).

This broad hint at the implications of Haeckel's speculations, and of the laws of evolution in general, for the progress of human society is, as we shall see, taken up in later applications of Haeckelism to human socio-political systems.

In 1879 two further studies by Haeckel were translated into English - Freedom in Science and Teaching, and The Evolution of Man. It is also possible that, in spite of the fact that the scientific fervour testified to by Yeats, and by his friends, had waned by 1883, he may, encouraged by Haeckel's execration of materialism, have read the translation of his A Visit to Ceylon which appeared in that year. He would have been perturbed, however, by Haeckel's massive endorsement of British imperialism:

> it appears to me that they the [English] should be hailed with satisfaction, alike on the grounds of common humanity and on those of rational political action.....
> .....The empire is in itself an object worthy of admiration, for the English are undoubtedly gifted beyond any other nation with the genius for founding and governing colonies. The opportunities afforded me during my journey - first in Bombay and afterwards in Ceylon - for observing the English colonial system, raised it infinitely in my estimation. It can only be because England governs her immense Indian possessions with as much tact as judgement, that she is able to keep her hold upon them with a relatively small official staff.

> Instead, then, of watching the extension and consolidation of English power with grudging and envious eyes, we should do better to study the political skill which brings progress and benefit to the whole human race, (A Visit to Ceylon, p335-6).

Popular Darwinism, particularly in the works of Haeckel and Huxley, thus presented moral and philosophical conclusions that were seen to be a direct response to Darwin's strictly scientific hypothesis.

Alfred Russell Wallace's earliest publications were also discursive travelogues - descriptions of life in South America (A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro, 1853) and South-east Asia (The Malay Archipelago, 1869). Wallace had arrived independently at a theory of natural selection similar to Darwin's whilst in the Moluccas. Unlike Darwin, though, he was unable to discount the possibility of the existence of other worlds on planes unattainable to insensitive humanity. Like Haeckel (and Charles Johnston), Wallace was uncomfortable with the materialism of popular Darwinism, and he closes The Malay Archipelago, written after his discovery of natural selection, with an acrimonious assault on the civilized world, accusing it of "barbarism", materialism, and an unacceptable devotion to bureaucracy (II p458-64).[9] As a consequence Wallace tried, as the theosophists were later to try, to apply evolutionary science to the spirit world:

> The organic world has been carried on to a high state of development, and has been ever kept in harmony with the forces of external nature, by the grand law of 'survival of the fittest' acting upon ever varying organisations. In the spiritual world, the law of the 'progression of the fittest' takes its place, and carries on in unbroken continuity the development of the human mind which has been commenced here, (On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism, 1875, p109).

Wallace went on to claim, again as many Victorian occultists were to claim, that

> the so-called supernatural, as developed in the phenomena of animal magnetism, clairvoyance, and modern Spiritualism, is an experimental science, the study of which must add greatly to our knowledge of man's true nature and highest interests, (ibid p118).

When Yeats found the contrary to be true it affected, as we shall see,[10] his spiritual and philosophical development, and he consistently sought systems which both encouraged, and were a product of scientific discipline.

The two Juggernauts of Victorian science were Darwin's The Origin of Species and The Descent of Man. The later book is an application of the theories propounded in The Origin to the development of man, and to the practicalities of human society, (a connection already made, incidentally, by Huxley in 1863 - see Evidences of Man's Place in Nature). Although Yeats would have found the comparison of Celt and Saxon unpalatable, he would have found it appropriate to his personal experience and to the history of his own family. Darwin agreed with Greg that:

> the careless, squalid, unaspiring Irishman multiplies like rabbits: the frugal, foreseeing, self-respecting, ambitious Scot, stern in his morality, spiritual in his faith, sagacious and disciplined in his intelligence, passes his best years in struggle and in celibacy, marries late, and leaves few behind him. Given a land originally peopled by a thousand Saxons and a thousand Celts - and in a dozen generations five-sixths of the population would be Celts, but five-sixths of the property, of the power, of the intellect, would belong to the one-sixth of Saxons that remained. In the eternal 'struggle for existence', it would be the inferior and less favoured race that had prevailed - and prevailed by virtue not of its good qualities but of its faults, (DM1 174).

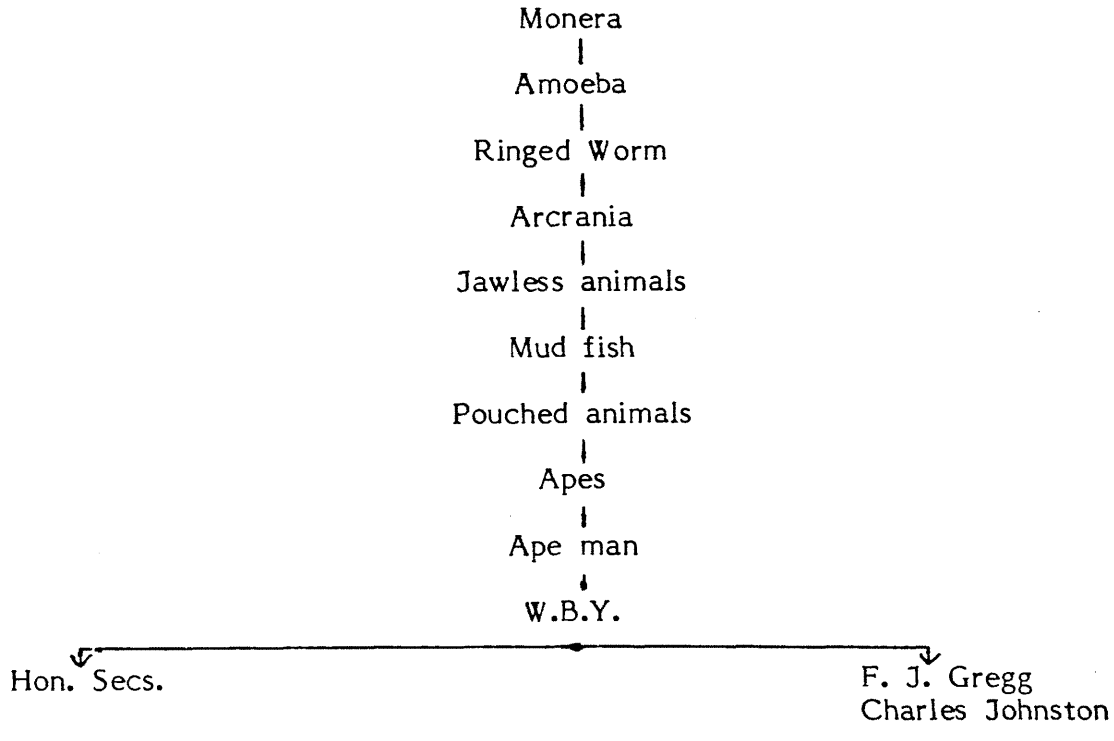
Darwin found his strongest ally in Thomas Huxley who, whilst inveighing against 'materialism' -

> I, individually, am no materialist, but, on the contrary, believe materialism to involve grave philosophical error, (Protoplasm: The Physical Basis of Life, 1869, p12)

- gave, by his uncompromising empiricism, massive impetus to that movement. Science came to seem increasingly superior because of his ability to transmit his contempt for religion and superstition without

rancour or hyperbole. This was in significant contrast to the absurd invective of the majority of clerics and occultists who opposed him. His paper delivered to the Metaphysical Society (The Evidence of the Miracle of the Resurrection, 1876), for example, is no less devastating to the Christian rationale for being a polite and restrained demolition of one particular miracle.

It would be wrong to assume that Yeats's adolescent interests were exclusively scientific. We know, for instance, that he read Blake and Rossetti in his mid-teens (Au 114), and it is clear that his interest in science and his interest in poetry were concurrent for a period. An album of drafts and copies of early poems in the National Library, Dublin (undated, but clearly pre-dating his friendship with Laura Armstrong), contains an immature and highly 'Romantic' treatment of the Cathleen ni Houlihan legend. This is followed immediately by a table demonstrating rather sketchily the development of animal life:



This is a clear demonstration that for a period his interest in poetry and his interest in science were felt to be compatible. The table confirms that Yeats had read Haeckel by this stage. Haeckel divides the development of animal life into twenty-two stages (see, eg., HC2 278-94), and the reference to 'Monera' indicates an awareness of Haeckel's hypothetical simplest protozoa.11

We know from Autobiographies that Yeats had read Darwin and Wallace, Huxley and Haeckel (and presumably Tyndall) during the period of his scientific enthusiasm. The conclusions he would have drawn from that material are likely, as I shall now show, to have been hostile to democracy. Darwinism promoted three vitally important non-scientific intellectual movements - the reaction from revealed religion, and from Christianity in particular, the rapid development of 'rational' occultism, and massive deliberalization, the emphasis on the rights of the community rather than on those of the individual. Yeats, as we shall see, reacted to Darwinism in precisely this sequence during his first thirty years, but as a preliminary it would be as well to examine briefly the specific conclusions he would have been likely to draw from his early reading of the five scientists mentioned in Autobiographies. In this first section of the Introduction I have mentioned those scientists' most important pre-1883 publications. I have not yet detailed Thomas Huxley's works because his contributions to the debate were mainly disseminated in pamphlet and essay, and the more significant of these will emerge in the subsequent discussion. It is remarkable how similar are the attitudes of these scientists, varying considerably in background, temperament and beliefs, and united only in their devotion to scientific principles, to matters of race and class.

One of the more striking features of Darwinism is that, according to its Victorian proponents, some races should be seen as inherently 'better' than others. Huxley claimed in 1865 that

> no rational man, cognisant of the facts, believes that the average negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the average white man, (CE III p66-7 - 1865).

Haeckel, similarly, regarded Africans as constituting the "lowest races of men" (HC2 301). These 'lower' species of men are characterised by their 'woolly-hair' and dark colour:

> they are on the whole at a much lower stage of development, and more like apes, than most of the Lissotrichi, or straight-haired men. The Ulotrichi [being the four species of woolly-haired men] are incapable of a true inner culture and of a higher mental development, even under the favourable conditions of adaptation now offered to them in the United States of North America. No woolly-haired nation has ever had an important 'history', (HC2 307-10).

Of the thirteen races Haeckel includes in these 'lowest' four species, nine are variations of the African negro and four are Australasian negroes. That these conclusions were prompted by what were felt to be purely scientific considerations, and <u>not</u> by mere prejudice against all coloured races, is clearly evinced by his account of travel in Ceylon. Haeckel was impressed by the beauty of the Singhalese (<u>A Visit to Ceylon</u>, transl. Clara Bell, 1883, p253, 283-5), and he regarded them as "happy children of nature" enjoying their paradise where "the struggle for existence seemed to have ceased" (ibid. p170-1). He approved generally of Indian races, especially of the Parsis and their religion (Zoroastrianism):

> I have never looked on at the religious exercises of any nation with deeper sympathy than at those of these sun and fire worshippers. For we, the students of nature, who duly recognise the light and warmth of the sun as the source and origin of all the glorious organic life on our globe, are also, in point of fact, nothing else than sun-worshippers! (ibid.p53).

He goes on to make what was, for Haeckel, the supreme concession. The sophisticated German 'Waldeinsamkeit', the solitude of nature, is nothing

compared to the "real and immeasurable solitude which reigns in [the] primaeval wilderness of the Cinghalese highlands", (ibid.p307). This unbounded appreciation for a non-Nordic race puts Haeckel's contempt for negro races into perspective. He regarded their inferiority as scientifically demonstrable, and he did not hesitate to commit his belief to print.

Wallace too, though not a supporter of slavery,[12] regarded negroes as largely despicable, as of "low" civilization (ibid.p122-4). The natives of the Malay Archipelago, similarly, failed to impress him:

> the intellect of the Malay race seems rather deficient. They are incapable of anything beyond the simplest combinations of ideas, and have little taste or energy for the acquirement of knowledge, (The Malay Archipelago, 1869, II p444).

In fact, negroid races, according to Victorian Darwinists, are not merely inferior. Man's simian origins are testified to by the presence on this planet of creatures which purport to be men, but which are in reality closer to the higher animals. Throughout The Descent of Man Darwin uses savage, or semi-civilized races and tribes as a clue to the ape-like progenitor of mankind, (see, eg., DM2 382-4). It is clear that he regarded such races and tribes as lower, in terms of evolution, than the rest of mankind. There is no direct statement to this effect in The Descent of Man, but Haeckel, in following Darwin, would tolerate no such delicacy:

> the wildest tribes in southern Asia and eastern Africa have no trace whatever of the first foundations of all human civilization, of family life, and marriage. They live together in herds, like apes, generally climbing on trees and eating fruits; they do not know of fire, and use stones and clubs as weapons, just like the higher apes. All attempts to introduce civilization among these, and many of the other tribes of the lowest species, have hitherto been of no avail; it is impossible to implant human culture where the requisite soil, namely, the perfecting of the brain, is wanting. Not one of these tribes has ever been ennobled by civilization; it rather accelerates their extinction. They have barely risen above the lowest stage of transition from man-like apes to ape-like men, (HC2 363-4).

Haeckel compares the "lowest and most ape-like men" with the most highly developed animals (apes, dogs and elephants) and the most highly developed men (Aristotle, Spinoza, Newton, Kant, Lamarck and Goethe), and finds that if a "sharp boundary" must be drawn, it should be between Aristotle et al and the "rudest savage":

> the latter have to be classed with the animals. This is, in fact, the opinion of many travellers, who have long watched the lowest human races in their native countries. Thus, for example, a great English traveller, who lived for a considerable time on the west coast of Africa, says: "I consider the negro to be a lower species of man, and cannot make up my mind to look upon him as 'a man and a brother', for the gorilla would then also have to be admitted into the family". Even many Christian missionaries, who, after long years of fruitless endeavours to civilize these lowest races, have abandoned the attempt, express the same harsh judgement, and maintain that it would be easier to train the most intelligent domestic animals to a moral and civilized life, than these unreasoning brute-like men. For instance, the able Austrian missionary Morlang, who tried for many years without the slightest success to civilize the ape-like negro tribes on the Upper Nile, expressly says: "that any mission to such savages is absolutely useless. They stand far below unreasoning animals; the latter at least show signs of affection towards those who are kind towards them, whereas these brutal natives are utterly incapable of any feeling of gratitude," (HC2 365-6).

Wallace took an equally dim view of negro intellect:

> the mental requirements of savages, and the faculties actually exercised by them, are very little above those of animals, (Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection, 1870, p356).

Indeed, he considered the brain of the negro

> an organ quite disproportionate to his actual requirements..... A brain slightly larger than that of the gorilla would..... have sufficed for the limited mental development of the savage, (ibid.p343).

Huxley agreed with Wallace that

> the lowest savages are not raised 'many grades above the elephant and the ape', (More Criticisms on Darwin, and Administrative Nihilism, 1872, p48).

Of the twelve races isolated by Haeckel only one, he feels, Homo Mediterraneus, because "the most highly developed and perfect", has "had an actual history..... [and]attained to that degree of civilization which

seems to raise man above the rest of nature" (HC2 321). The expansion of the civilized world into the territory of the 'lower' races, and the subjugation or extermination of those races is justified in Darwinian terms:

> the relative number of the twelve species fluctuates..... according to the law developed by Darwin, that in the struggle for life the more highly developed, the more favoured and larger groups of forms, possess the positive inclination and the certain tendency to spread more and more at the expense of the lower, more backward, and smaller groups, (HC2 324).

Huxley also justified the expansionism of white races on purely humanitarian grounds:

> the doctrine of equal natural rights may be an illogical delusion; emancipation may convert the slave from a well-fed animal into a pauperised man, (CEIII (1865) p67).[13]

The logic of this whole argument is, of course, quite perverse, but to nineteenth century scientists the rationale seemed entirely legitimate. It confirmed the political and cultural domination of the "civilized" world as naturally ordained, and the inevitable outcome of their logic would appear to have been less ugly to them than it is to us. It <u>was</u>, however, inevitable - to Haeckel:

> other races..... will sooner or later completely succumb in the struggle for existence to the superiority of the Meditarranean races, (HC2 324-5)

to Huxley:

> it is simply incredible that..... he [the negro] will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller-jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried on by thoughts and not by bites, (CEIII p67)

to Darwin:

> when one of two adjoining tribes becomes more numberous and powerful than the other, the contest is soon settled by war, slaughter, cannibalism, slavery, and absorption. Even when a weaker tribe is not thus abruptly swept away, if it once begins to decrease, it generally goes on decreasing until it is extinct.
>
> When civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race, (DM1 238)

and to Wallace:

> the better and higher specimens of our race would..... increase and spread, the lower and more brutal would give way and successively die out, and that rapid advancement of mental organization would occur, which has raised the very lowest races of man so far above the brutes (although differing so little from some of them in physical structure)..... It is the same great law of 'the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life', which leads to the inevitable extinction of all those low and mentally underdeveloped populations with which Europeans come in contact. The red Indian in North America, and in Brazil; the Tasmanian, Australian, and New Zealander in the southern hemisphere, die out, not from any one special cause, but from the inevitable effects of an unequal mental and physical struggle. The intellectual and moral, as well as the physical, qualities of the European are superior; the same powers and capacities which have made him rise in a few centuries from the condition of the wandering savage with a scanty and stationary population, to his present state of culture and advancement, with a greater average longevity, a greater average strength, and a capacity of more rapid increase, - enable him when in contact with the savage man, to conquer in the struggle for existence, and to increase at his expense, just as the better adapted, increase at the expense of the less adapted varieties in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, - just as the weeds of Europe overrun North America and Australia, extinguishing native productions by the inherent vigour of their organization, and by their greater capacity for existence and multiplication, (Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection, p317-9).

The conclusion is inevitable. "The higher - the more intellectual and moral - must displace the lower and more degraded races", (ibid. p329).[14]

I am quoting in this chapter only from works that had been published, or translated, before Yeats's interest in science had waned, (which I would date as the period of 'Time and the Witch Vivien', written late in 1883). In the preceding pages I have tried to show that the overwhelming impression that Yeats would have gained is that, for these leading Darwinists, as far as race is concerned, all men were not born equal. When the same hypothesis was applied to questions of class these scientists, as we shall now see, reached precisely the same conclusions.

The Origin of Species had impressed Karl Marx, and Marx later requested Darwin's permission to dedicate Das Kapital to him. Darwin turned down the offer, but George Lichtheim claims (A Short History of Socialism, 1970, p174) that Marx was "clearly influenced" by Darwin, and socialists, generally, were keen to associate the two doctrines.[15] Such associations were made, however, as soon as the two theories were published, largely because, as F L Bender suggests, Darwin and Marx shared many enemies during the 1860s, and partly because the theory of evolution is developmental, and is thus superficially similar to Marx's historical approach. Professor Rudolph Virchow, in his address to the 50th meeting of German Naturalists and Physicians at Munich in September 1877, had attacked Haeckel for encouraging socialism. This drew an astonished response:

> "What in the world has the doctrine of descent to do with socialism?"..... these two theories are about as compatible as fire and water..... The theory of descent proclaims more clearly than any other scientific theory, that that equality of individuals which socialism strives after is an impossibility, that it stands, in fact, in irreconcilable contradiction to the inevitable inequality of individuals which actually and everywhere subsists. Socialism demands equal rights, equal duties, equal possessions, equal enjoyments for every citizen alike; the theory of descent proves, in exact opposition to this, that the realisation of this demand is a pure impossibility, and that in the constitutionally organised communities of men, as of the lower animals, neither rights nor duties, neither possessions nor enjoyments have ever been equal for all the members alike nor ever can be, (Freedom in Science and Teaching, 1879, p90-1).

Huxley, who wrote a preface for the English translation of this work, was equally amazed that anyone, Virchow in particular, could perceive a bond linking "evolution with revolution" (ibid. pxix). Tyndall had already pointed out in his Inaugural Address at the Birmingham and Midland Institute that

> Nature..... secures advance, not by the reduction of all to a common level, but by the encouragement and conservation of what is best, (On Science and Man, 1877, p26).

If anything the theory of natural selection is 'aristocratic':

> If this English hypothesis is to be compared to any definite political tendency - as is, no doubt, possible - that tendency can only be aristocratic, certainly not democratic, and least of all socialist. The theory of selection teaches that in human life, as in animal and plant life everywhere, and at all times, only a small and chosen minority can exist and flourish, while the enormous majority starve and perish miserably and more or less prematurely..... The selection, the picking out of these 'chosen ones', is inevitably connected with the arrest and destruction of the remaining majority. Another English naturalist, therefore, designates the kernel of Darwinism very frankly as the 'survival of the fittest', as the victory of the best', (Freedom in Science and Teaching, p92-3).

This view of the primacy of the aristocracy is sanctioned by Darwin. In The Descent of Man he writes that

> the presence of a body of well-instructed men, who have not to labour for their daily bread, is important to a degree which cannot be over-estimated; as all high intellectual work is carried on by them, and on such work material progress of all kinds mainly depends, not to mention other and higher advantages, (DM1 169).16

The 'better' classes self-perpetuate according to the laws of evolution:

> the men who are rich through primogeniture are able to select generation after generation the more beautiful and charming women; and these must generally be healthy in body and active in mind..... (DM1 170)
> the members of our aristocracy..... from having chosen during many generations from all classes the more beautiful women as their wives, have become handsomer, according to the European standard of beauty, than the middle classes, (DM2 356).

For Haeckel, a hereditary aristocracy, and a hereditary monarchy, both "virtues", are to be "traced to the notion of..... a transmission of special excellencies", (HC1 180).

There can be no doubt that Darwinism was felt to be inimical to equality. The application of evolutionary theories to human society bolstered the immense divisions between classes, and the even greater divisions between nations and races. The scientists Yeats read during his teens - Wallace, Haeckel, Huxley, Tyndall and Darwin - were not unwilling to face the implications of such an application.

Before turning to Yeats it would be as well to examine, briefly, the social and political manifestiations of those implications. The period of Yeats's life coincided almost exactly with the development of 'pure' Darwinism into Social-Darwinism, and thence into the flourishing of fascist theory. 'Illiberal' attitudes to race and class predominated, of course, even before Darwin and his popularizers, but the new science rendered them virtually impregnable amongst the non-clerical, educated classes. Those who adapted the science to human communities, the 'Social-Darwinists', were aware of the power of the doctrine that seemed to contradict the central tenets of socialism:

> the central thesis of Darwin appeared as nothing less than a culminating scientific condemnation of all the labour programmes of the West conceived in a spirit of socialism,

wrote Benjamin Kidd (The Science of Power, 1918, p46). Indeed Britain's first socialist Prime Minister considered that Marx would have been wiser to come to terms with Darwin rather than with Hegel, (J Ramsay MacDonald: Socialism and Society, 1905, p.102-4). Another leading Social-Darwinist, Karl Pearson, also opposed Marxism because in a socialist state there would be "nothing to check the fertility of the inferior stock", and the "relentless law of heredity" would not be controlled by natural selection. This would result inevitably, he claimed, in famine and the stagnation of man.[17] Fascist propagandists, as we shall see, were quick to capitalise on the elitism they perceived in Darwinism. It was, likewise, seen to support an entirely capitalist economy, as Brecht noticed.[18] William Graham Sumner in the United States, for instance, regarded millionaires as "the products of natural selection", a notion that apparently appealed to Andrew Carnegie, this being a justification for the concentration of wealth, and a massive repudiation of Marxist economics.[19]

John Burrow points out, in the introduction to his edition of The Origin of Species (1968, p45), that "the survival of the fittest" in a human context could be all things to all men. It particularly suited, however, the various theories of race, class, economics, nationalism, and human progress that eventually cohered as the loose confection of ideologies that is fascism. In a specifically Irish context, for instance, Darwinian hypotheses were quick to take socio-political effect:

> an adverse development in the English image of Ireland can certainly be discerned by the 1870s. The cartoon depiction of the Irishman had moved firmly away from that of the amiable if contemptible peasant buffoon towards that of the dangerous terrorist ape-man..... The simianizing of the Irish cartoon image was linked to the popularization of Darwinian theories, and expressed the English view of the Irish as at a primitive stage in the evolution of man, (Patrick O'Farrell: England and Ireland since 1800, 1975, p38-9).

Yeats took great exception to such cartoons in Punch (L 335-6)[20] and Conor Cruise O'Brien (IER 226-7) makes the point that Irish sensitivity to self-portraits that are not comprehensively flattering is not entirely inexplicable. The Synge and O'Casey controversies should be seen against this history of unwarranted brutalization.

Elements of what came to be known as Social-Darwinism did actually antedate popular evolutionary theory. Semmel isolates a number of mid-Victorian opponents of political economy, for instance, including Kingsley, Carlyle and Dickens, who objected to the stern Radical individualism that had, they felt, dehumanized the British working man, but who were at the same time utterly contemptuous of supposedly inferior non-white races, and indifferent to the injustices those races suffered.[21]

Fierce opposition to liberalism was beginning to flourish some time before the publication of The Origin, but, arguably quite unwittingly, Darwin

significantly invigorated anti-liberal morale. Darwin did not endorse the application of his biological hypotheses to socio-political environments but, as Burrow says (op.cit.p45), Darwinism as popularly interpreted "provided a kind of crucible into which the fears and hatreds of the age could be dipped and come out coated with an aura of scientific authority". The seeds of fascist theories of racial superiority and expansionism are easily detected in Darwin's analysis of Natural Selection - in the belief, for example, that "the larger genera..... tend to become larger; and throughout nature the forms of life which are now dominant tend to become still more dominant", that those species will survive and procreate that have natural advantages, that no modification in the structure of a species can work to its disadvantage, and that non-indigeneous forms must be regarded as a serious threat in any given locale. In any country a

> change in the numerical proportions of some of the inhabitants..... would most seriously affect many of the others. If the country were open on its borders, new forms would certainly immigrate, and this also would seriously disturb the relations of some of the former inhabitants..... But in the case of an island, or of a country partly surrounded by barriers, into which new and better adapted forms could not freely enter, we should then have places in the economy of nature which would assuredly be better filled up, if some of the original inhabitants were in some manner modified; for, had the area been open to immigration, these same places would have been seized on by intruders, (OS 59, 81-2).

This would be regarded by Social Darwinists as irrefutable scientific endosrement of an uncompromising nationalism. The relationship of an organism and its functions and environment is central to the evolutionary hypothesis. Life processes modify the form to allow it to adapt to its environment, continuing the struggle for existence. When the structure becomes ill-adapted the fitness of the organism to compete with rivals will be quickly challenged and, should the discrepancy between form and environment become too great, it will eventually be eliminated.

Huxley explicitly repudiated the application of Darwin's hypothesis to human society, and claimed that the Social-Darwinists had misunderstood the 'survival of the fittest' to mean the 'survival of the best':

> In cosmic nature, however, what is 'fittest' depends upon the conditions, (CEIX (1893) p80).

This may seem a fatuous response to the problem of Social-Darwinism, but we should remember that in 1893 Social-Darwinism was hardly a problem. In spite of Huxley's renunciation of the application of Darwinism to socio-political structures, however, it is quite clear that the principle Social-Darwinist contention, that "if man had evolved from the ape he might be improved progressively until 'homo superior' was as far removed from the puny creature of the present day as 'homo sapiens' from his ignoble ancestor", (James Webb: The Occult Establishment, 1976, p16), is no different from Huxley's comparison of present man, when stood against his vastly superior descendants, to the 'black-beetle'. (See below p101). For the materialistic evolutionist notions of human social progress seem to lead inevitably to theories of race. The discovery that the animal world and man derive from the same primordial cell once accepted, Social-Darwinists did not find the transférence of natural selection to political systems and racial interconnection 'unwarrantable', (John Lewis: Anthropology, 1969, p36).

The social science that developed from such applications of Darwinism to society was Eugenics - a term first proposed by Francis Galton in his 1883 publication, Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development. Writing under the influence of Darwin on race control, he considers the sentiment against "the gradual extinction of an inferior race" to be "unreasonable" (p308). The debate developed rapidly. In Natural Inheritance (1889), Galton writes that we must consider "Fraternities and

large Populations rather than..... individuals, and must treat them as units".[22] In 1890 Havelock Ellis, whom Yeats knew well, published The New Spirit, a study of various contemporary writers that is introduced by an application of science to social problems that is typical of the period. Havelock Ellis accords Darwin the "chief place of honour in the triumph of a movement which began with Aristotle" (p5), and announces his desire to "search out the facts of things, and to found life upon them," (p8, my italics). The belief that "social rather than theological questions seem to be the legitimate outcome of the scientific spirit" (ibid. p12) is a contemporary confirmation that during the second half of the nineteenth century, once the debate over Genesis had been won by the loose coalition of Darwinists, 'Materialists' and Agnostics, it was considered reasonable for society to be rearranged in the context of the new discoveries.[23] Before we assume that Yeats quickly forgot Darwin, Huxley and Haeckel, or that he did not enter into the debate on the application of their research to political societies, we should compare the extract from The Descent of Man (below p32-33) that refers to the character and pedigree of man's "horses, cattle and dogs" with Yeats's long quotation from Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy (I.ii.II.iv), in On the Boiler (1939, p15-16), which he takes as a text for the comments that follow.

Later Social-Darwinists - Houston Chamberlain, Karl Pearson and Benjamin Kidd, in particular - were, however, by far the most influential promulgators of the new, fiercely logical, 'scientific' racism. These proto-fascist authorities[24] avoided the problem of having to adapt Darwin's biological hypothesis to human socio-political systems by claiming that Darwin had been prompted to his theory of the origin of species by

consideration of human population, (Kidd: Social Evolution, 1894, p31-2 and note), and by quoting both his belief that "the whole subject is beyond the scope of man's intellect, but man can do his duty", and his confident assertion that "man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he now is", (Karl Pearson: Charles Darwin, 1923, p27)[25] Pearson went on to explain man's Darwinian "duty":

> I think we can interpret the phrase by his own doctrine. Man is governed primarily by heredity and by the facts of variation. Nature has driven him harshly forward on the path towards being a more perfect creature, by the extermination of the physically and mentally less fit. Is it not the duty of man to accelerate Nature's progress? For if there be that First Cause, which gave natural laws to the universe for its development, then these indicate the purpose of its creator, and the interests as well as the duty of man are to hasten the process of evolution..... it is the religious duty of man to see that man is better and better born.[26]

Darwinism consequently becomes quickly constricted to the urgent need for state control of the fertility of inferior stocks, (Pearson: National Life etc, p61-2).

British Social-Darwinists were regarded as respectable authorities by German National Socialist ideologists. Although the notion of progress through the survival of the fittest was peculiarly germane to the traditional German celebration of the Volk[27] - Nietzsche, for instance, claimed that "without Hegel there would have been no Darwin"[28] - Darwin stimulated a gradual German desertion of metaphysics in favour of the cult of instinct and racial heritage. Fascist theorists were quick to reduce race, and the breeding of a superior Volk, to "empirical knowledge of breeding birds, dogs, butterflies, etc".[29] Fascist regimes depended ultimately on the notion that man, as a mere biological organism, was no more than what Carr calls "an expendable unit in a collective entity (op.cit. p113), and to a considerable extent the inexorable descent to

selective sterilisation, euthanasia, territorial expansion at the expense of 'unfit' neighbours, eugenics, and the extermination of social undesirables had been signposted by Darwin. Those who claim that there is no sanction in Darwin's works for the extremities of Social-Darwinist and fascist philosophies have overlooked some broad hints in The Descent of Man. If

> various checks..... do not prevent the reckless, the vicious and otherwise inferior members of society from increasing at a quicker rate than the better class of men, the nation will retrograde, (DM1 177).

Such a retrogression is, perhaps, inevitable:

> we must bear without complaining the undoubtedly bad effects of the weak surviving and propagating their kind; but there appears to be at least one check in steady action, namely the weaker and inferior members of society not marrying so freely as the sound; and this check might be indefinitely increased, though this is more to be hoped for than expected, by the weak in body or mind refraining from marriage, (DM1 169).

Even 'inferior' negro tribes had discovered the importance of eugenics, and Darwin writes with approval of a particular tribe that sold its ugliest women as slaves to preserve the beauty of the stock.[30] The relation of the improvement of human stocks to animal husbandry, however, is specifically authorised in two crucial passages towards the end of The Descent of Man:

> Man scans with scrupulous care the character and pedigree of his horses, cattle, and dogs before he matches them; but when he comes to his own marriage he rarely, or never, takes any such care. He is impelled by nearly the same motives as are the lower animals when left to their own free choice, though he is so far superior to them that he highly values mental charms and virtues. On the other hand he is strongly attracted by mere wealth or rank. Yet he might by selection do something not only for the bodily constitution and frame of his offspring, but for their intellectual and moral qualities. Both sexes ought to refrain from marriage if in any marked degree inferior in body or mind; but such hopes are Utopian and will never be even partially realised until the laws of inheritance are thoroughly known. All do good service who aid towards this end. When the principles of breeding and of inheritance are better understood, we shall not hear ignorant members of the legislature rejecting with scorn a plan for ascertaining by an easy method whether or not consanguineous marriages are injurious to man.....

> Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication; and if he is to advance still higher he must remain subject to a severe struggle. Otherwise he would soon sink into indolence, and the more highly-gifted men would not be more successful in the battle of life than the less gifted. Hence our natural rate of increase..... must not be greatly diminished by any means. There should be open competition for all men; and the most able should not be prevented by laws or customs from succeeding best and rearing the largest number of offspring, (DM2 402-4, my italics).

This point was anticipated by Francis Galton who regarded it as "practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men" by following the principles of horse and dog breeding, (Hereditary Genius, 1869, p1). In the light of the lines I have italicized Karl Pearson's interpretation of man's "Darwinian duty" seems less extravagant. The dominant scientific ideas of the day were translated into political terms, racism being an integral outgrowth of the Darwinian revolution. An ideal type was stipulated, and the state would ensure that the best specimens of that type reproduced.[31]

Such theories were based on the 'Darwinian' inequalities of man. Bertrand Russell makes the point that an evolutionist who is also an egalitarian must find himself in the ridiculous position of being unable to argue against a campaign in favour of "Votes for Oysters", (HWP 697-8). Julian Huxley was later to claim that since man's equality is a 'fable', utterly disproved by biology, eugenics "must take possession" of anyone who has fully grasped the facts of evolution, (The Stream of Life, 1926, p13, 50-6). Clearly, although Darwin was himself a liberal, the implications of his theories seriously contradicted traditional liberal assumptions. To take just one example, the movement for women's suffrage can hardly have been assisted by Darwin's assertion that:

> the chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shewn by man attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes

> up, than woman can attain - whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands..... We may also infer, from the law of the deviation of averages,..... that if men are capable of decided eminence over women in many subjects, the average standard of mental power in man must be above that of woman, (DM2 327).[32]

As Russell says

> the doctrine that all men are born equal, and that the differences between adults are due wholly to education, was incompatible with his emphasis on congenital differences between members of the same species..... the congenital differences between men acquire fundamental importance, (HWP 697).

Fascist authorities seized on these differences and insisted on the urgency of eradicating whatever deviated from racial and social norms, and on the direct interference with normal procreative patterns by the implementation of state controlled breeding programmes. The public health service should not, for instance, prolong or 'encourage' lives that have "little or no social value"; crippled children are better dead because to allow weaklings to survive is to encourage the weakening of the stock; the insane must be strictly segregated, and doctors must encourage fit patients whilst 'discouraging' the unfit, being those who suffer from hereditary deformities and diseases, or from the effects of "special environments", alcohol, syphilis, tubercolosis, and other "racial defects".[33] Full state control of all aspects of racial improvement was, however, recognised as impossible, and much of the responsibility was seen to lie with the population itself, ultimately with the education system. "Is it possible", asked Pearson, "to arouse a consciousness in the folk that the parentage of the next generation is not a personal but a national problem? - that a nation which has ceased to insure that its better elements have a dominant fertility has destroyed itself far more effectually than its foes could ever hope to destroy it in the battlefield?"

(National Life, etc., p.viii). One need read only Gregor Ziemer's horrifying Education for Death to understand that the answers to Pearson's questions are resoundingly affirmative.[34] The need to breed a dominant native race and to expand and subjugate neighbouring 'inferior' cultures (Pearson, National Life, etc., p45-6) found full expression in the comprehensive National Socialist and Mosleyite regeneration programmes. Fascism teaches men and women to "live like athletes" so as to be of maximum service to the state, and the task of German fascism, for instance, was to purge the country of parasitic elements.[35]

As Joachim C Fest says (The Face of the Third Reich, transl. Michael Bullock, 1972, p154), the belief that the race was collapsing through interbreeding with subnormal races led to the establishment of a

> catalogue of 'positive' curative measures: racial hygiene, eugenic choice of marriage partners, the breeding of human beings by the methods of selection on the one hand and extirpation on the other. The guiding aide of the 'race-attached soul' made all cultural and creative achievements dependent on external appearance and at the same time linked the ability and hence the right to found states and empires with biological preconditions.

The origin of all this is to be found in Darwin.[36]

I have introduced this 'later' material not to show some link between practical fascism and Yeats's political stance, even in the later years, but to demonstrate the political potential of the intellectual hostility to democracy of Victorian scientific research. Inherent in the works of the scientists Yeats encountered was a scientific opposition to the principles of equality that could be capitalised on and put into political practice. Fascist propagandists, for instance, regarded the father of their science as Ernst Haeckel. It has recently been demonstrated that the standard view of German youth movements as a revolt against Haeckelian materialism is SUBSTANTIALLY WIDE OF THE MARK, AND THAT, IN FACT, HAECKEL AND THE MONIST LEAGUE

League in general were central to the formation of the 'wandervogel'.[37] Supporters disseminated Haeckelian ideology throughout the movement, in which Haeckel was presented as "the romantic prophet of nature worship" (ibid.p155). German youth was aware of the nature of Haeckel's Social-Darwinism, and of his demand that Germanic peoples return to natural and instinctive patterns of behaviour, and become subservient to natural laws alone. The seminal impulse in Haeckel's social and scientific enquiries, the deification of natural order, was picked up by Hitler (ibid.p160-70), and the science of National Socialist Germany was, similarly, drawn from Haeckelian natural history, and from the research of his Monist popularizers. Third Reich scientists were instructed to stress heavily the 'spiritual' aspects of science, rather than the materialism - to "subordinate scientific investigations to the 'greater mystery', which is one of the spirit", (Mosse, op.cit.p201-5). "As for the why of these laws," wrote Hitler (Hitler's Secret Conversations, p5, quoted in Gasman op.cit.p162), "we shall never know anything about it. A thing is so, and our understanding cannot conceive of other schemes". The similarity between this comment and the definition of science proposed by Thomas, and later by Julian Huxley,[38] is striking. As the novelist T. H. White was quick to realise, the works of H. G. Wells, Huxley and Darwin constituted an unconscious blueprint for dictatorship and tyranny, (The Master, 1957, p103, 165, 233). Huxley's Superman, whose arrival would cause Homo Sapiens to seem a 'black-beetle', had, for Haeckel and for Hitler, already arrived in the regenerating Nordic states:

> the difference between the reason of a Goethe, a Kant, a Lamarck, or a Darwin, and that of the lowest savage..... is much greater than the graduated differences between the reason of the latter and that of the most "rational" mammals, (Ernst Haeckel, The Riddle of the Universe, translated by Joseph McCabe, 1900, p127)

reasoned Haeckel. For Hitler there was "less difference between the man-ape and the ordinary man" than between 'ordinary' man and "a man like Schopenhauer", (Hitler's Secret Conversations, p71, see Gasman op.cit.p164).[39] Unquestionably, there is a link between fascist ideology and the Social-Darwinism that was itself an outgrowth of the Darwinian revolution. The elimination of biologically unfit units, as a tribute to natural order, was to be a preoccupation of National Socialism as it had been of Haeckel's Monist League.

In this third section of the introduction I have tried to show how theories of human society that were inherent, implicit, or clearly stated in the works of the scientists Yeats read, were put into political and ideological practice. The three sections trace the rapid development from pure science to unabashed realpolitik, through the late Victorian sociologists who applied the biology to society.

My purpose in all this has been to demonstrate that Yeats's early scientific interests led him to a body of literature that was in itself essentially scientific, but which incorporated, at the same time, assumptions about human society that were irrefutably hostile to liberalism, and that were later expanded by proto-fascist and fascist theorists. There can be no doubt that the socialists were well beaten in the race for Darwin by capitalists and proto-fascists. Yeats's brief flirtation with socialism should be seen as a response to William Morris's style and personality (Au 146, Mem 20, see below p77-80), rather than as a result of any genuine sympathy with the underprivileged classes. These he frankly disliked even in 1888 (Mem 21). Darwin's entire hypothesis was founded on a generous allowance of geological time:

> it is hardly possible for me even to recall to the reader, who may not be a practical geologist, the facts leading the mind feebly to comprehend the lapse of time. He who can read Sir Charles Lyell's grand work on the Principles of Geology, which the future historian will recognise as having produced a revolution in natural science, yet does not admit how incomprehensibly vast have been the past periods of time, may at once close this volume. (OS 282).

With this in mind we should recall Yeats's final quarrel with the socialists, his statement of a position so fundamentally incompatible with theirs that it resulted in his withdrawl from their society:

> what was the use of talking about some new revolution putting all things right, when the change must come, if come it did, with astronomical slowness, like the cooling of the sun, or it may have been like the drying of the moon? (Au 148-9).

Yeats used the fundamental assumption behind Darwinism to repudiate socialism. This is the passage in Autobiographies that is most crucial to our understanding of the poet's early development.

1) Charles Johnston: 'Personal Impressions of W. B. Yeats', in Harper's Weekly, (48:2461), 20th February, 1904, p.291. Reproduced in E.H. Mikhail (ed.): W. B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections, 1977, Vol.I, p.13-14. See also p.6-9.

2) William Murphy has suggested tentatively to me, in a letter, that the donor may perhaps have come from the Purser family.

3) The period of his scientific interests can be dated as the years spent at the Godolphin School, Hammersmith (1877-1880, MM26), and the first three years of the 1880s, until he was "rescued" from them by Laura Armstrong (see below p.125) - the important and formative years between eleven and seventeen.

4) This article is reproduced almost verbatim as an introduction to Waite's lengthy analysis of mysticism, Studies in Mysticism, published in the following year. I am immensely grateful to Warwick Gould for pointing me in the direction of this material, and much else besides.

5) see, e.g., Heat Considered as a Mode of Motion (1863), On Radiation (1865), On Sound (1867), On Light (1869), Contributions to Molecular Physics (1872), Lectures on Light (1873), Floating Matter in the Air (1881).

6) It is worth remembering that, as William Murphy says (Prodigal Father, 1978, p.110),

> In the spirit of Comte, Mill, Spencer, Darwin, and Huxley, John Butler Yeats educated his son not that he might follow a particular trade but that he might understand the world about him.

7) see appendix 2.

8) HC1 9. This is not unlike Hazlitt's differentiation between 'Imagination' and 'Understanding', (Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, 1817, p.70-71).

9) Wallace declared himself, incidentally, at the same time wholly opposed to the divisions of wealth and class in the western world, and was thus one of the few exponents of natural selection from whom socialists were able to derive any succour. Darwinists were adamant that their theories and those of the socialists were utterly irreconcilable. See above p.24-25.

Wallace was also unusual in being at once a successful scientist and a committed spiritualist who did not hesitate to publish his opposition to the materialism of Huxley and the scientific establishment. His statements on spiritualism were reported extensively in The Spiritual Magazine (see, e.g. March 1872, p.112-29; April 1872, p.145-51 and Newton Crosland's intelligent letter, p.192; May 1872, p.231; June 1874, p.241-44; July 1874, p.289-99). Yeats would have found Wallace's position helpful in the endeavour to balance the scientific and religious impulses that I describe below.

10) see below p.126-7, 133-4.

11) see also the letter of 1887 to Frederick Grigg - L31.

12) see, e.g. A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro, 1853, p.119-22.

13) see also 'On the Natural Inequality of Men' (1890), CE I p.290-335.

14) Wallace had previously cited a specific instance from his travels in the Far East - see The Malay Archipelago II p.458.

15) the most far-reaching being that of G.V. Plekhanov, the founder of Russian Social Democracy - see Lionel Stevenson: Darwin Among the Poets, 1932, p.42, and F.L. Bender: The Betrayal of Marx, p.111-5.

16) one need merely open Memoirs, almost at random, to appreciate how very 'Yeatsian' an idea this is.

17) Karl Pearson: National Life from the Standpoint of Science, 1905, p.26-7. But see also his opposition to class distinction, (ibid. p.53-4).

18) Bertolt Brecht: Threepenny Novel (translated by Desmond I. Vesey, 1961, p.283, 353-65).

19) W.G. Summer: Social Darwinism (eds. William E. Leuchtenburg and Bernard Wishy, 1963, p.70-97, 150-7).

20) see Punch, March 14th, 1900 (Vol.118), p.194.

21) Bernard Semmel: Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914, 1960, p.30-1. For pre-Darwinian racism in the USA see Reginald Horsman: Race and Manifest Destiny, 1981.

22) p.35. See also his Eugenics in Sociological Papers (1905 and 1906), and note George Bernard Shaw's enthusiastic response to Galton's lecture (ibid. I (1905), p.74-5).

23) see also his The Task of Social Hygiene, 1912, and R.K.R. Thornton: The Decadent Dilemma, 1983, p.11-12.

24) for Chamberlain see, e.g. G.F. Kneller: The Educational Philosophy of National Socialism, (1941), p.113-9; William L. Shirer: The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, (1959), 1960, p.103-9; Rohan D'O. Butler: The Roots of National Socialism, 1783-1933, (1941), p.167-74, 223-4; W. Carr: Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics, (1978), p.113-5; Geoffrey G. Field: Evangelist of Race: The Germanic Vision of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, (1981).

25) Pearson quotes from Darwin's Life and Letters (ed. Francis Darwin, 1888), I p.312, and 307.

26) ibid. Pearson, predictably, has it triumphantly both ways. He disliked Kidd, partly because Kidd was a devout Christian - see Paul Hayes: Fascism, 1973, p.24.

27) see, e.g. John Dewey: German Philosophy and Politics, 1915, p.112-5. See also Noël O'Sullivan: Fascism, 1983, p.66.

28) Friedrich Nietzsche: The Joyful Wisdom, Vol. 10 of The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. Oscar Levy, p.306.

29) G.L. Mosse: Nazi Culture, 1966, p.227-34.

30) DM2 357-8, and see, e.g. The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication, 1868, I p.207, for the principles of animal (pigeon) breeding from which such speculations developed. Yeats did not forget the application of bird breeding techniques to problems of human society - see L685-6.

31) see Hitler's speech, quoted in Carr op.cit. p.113-4, and see Adolf Hitler: Mein Kampf, 1969, p.258-63.

32) Darwin quotes approvingly from Galton's Hereditary Genius. See also CE III (1893) p.71-2 (1865).

33) Pearson: National Life etc., p.13-23, 30 and Darwinism, Medical Progress, and Eugenics, 1912, p.2,4,16,28. See also Kidd: Social Evolution, p.39-40, 308-10.

34) Education for Death: the Making of the Nazi, 1942, p.21-49, 114-35.

35) see The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939, ed. Norman H. Baynes, I p.121, and Mein Kampf, p.272-96. See also Oswald Mosley: Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered, 1932.

36) see above p.31-33.

37) Daniel Gasman: The Scientific Origins of National Socialism, 1971.

38) see Julian Huxley op.cit. p.22 and T.H. Huxley Lectures and Essays (1903), p.17.

39) For Hitler's debt to Darwin see Werner Maser: Hitler's Mein Kampf: An Analysis, (1966) transl. R.H. Barry, 1970. p.77.

# CHAPTER I

A mystic mind, an age apart,
A man who wished to be a work of art;
An ageing man, a life become a word,
A desire to be an eternal golden bird.

A fear of what confronts one in the glass,
A fear, therefore, of self not soul;
An inability to comprehend the mass,
A false idea of the poetic role.

(Alan Bold: 'An Epitaph for W. B. Yeats', from Society Inebrious, 1965, p29).

Few would claim that this exceptionally undistinguished poem by the socialist Alan Bold merits serious literary attention. What is interesting about it is the revelation that the entire thrust of Yeats's poetic is unacceptable to the socialist, and not merely because of the "autocratic writings" that so impressed Joyce (Finnegans Wake, 1939, p303). There can be little doubt that Yeats was a fascist in his declining years, and I intend, in this chapter, to show the development of Yeats's social theories that emerge as more or less 'classic' fascist traits in the '30s. I begin with a brief examination of Yeats's later fascism - fuller treatment is beyond the scope of this thesis - and continue to discuss, and trace to the outset of his career, his theories on race and racial character, the primary constituents of the race (being the aristocracy and the peasantry) and the land they depend upon, and the middle-class 'mob' and its environment, the city, and its philosophy, democracy. I hope to show that attitudes to race that are typical of later fascist ideologies are anticipated in Yeats's earliest writings.

In the second section of the chapter I show that Yeats had, very early in his career, a developed sense of racial identity. I show that he considered some races to be inherently 'better' in various respects, than

others, and that he perceived a spirituality about the Celtic race that is reminiscent of the Haeckelian speculation upon which much fascist ideology was dependent. I continue in the third section to isolate the constituents of the race that Yeats considered worthy of encouragement, and show that the consequence of his particular social breakdown of the race is profoundly hostile to democracy.

In spite of occasional dissenting voices (most recently, Bernard G. Krimm in his book, W. B. Yeats and the Irish Free State: Living in the Explosion, 1981), recent studies[1] have established Yeats's later fascism beyond doubt. On the Boiler is a frankly fascist document in which he claims to have stated "for the first time..... what I believe about Irish and European politics" (L 910). Autobiographies ends on an anti-democratic note, however, and as early as February 1924 the interview with the Irish Times ('From Democracy to Authority') gives a clear indication of the development of Yeats's political consciousness. "Authoritative government is certainly coming", and the modern state "must find some kind of expert government - a government firm enough, tyrannical enough..... to spend years in carrying out its plans" (UP2 435). In Ireland Yeats perceived "the same tendency..... towards authoritative government" and asked

> what else can chaos produce even though our chaos has been a very small thing compared with the chaos in Central Europe? The question in Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, is whether the authoritative government which we see emerging is the short reaction that comes at the end of every disturbance, lasting ten or fifteen years, or whether it is, as I think, a part of a reaction that will last one hundred or one hundred and fifty years..... a steady movement towards the creation of a nation controlled by highly trained intellects,[2]

as dreamt of in 'The Bounty of Sweden' (Au 546), and in the projected Castle of Heroes scheme of the 1890s.

The inevitability of such reactions and counter-reactions, the "centrifugal movement" which must give way to a "new centripetal movement" (UP2 434) recalls the speculation that culminated in A Vision.[3] From all the "murder and rapine" of the civil war, at any rate, would emerge "not a demagogic but an authoritative government" (L 682). His belief in 1922 that "democracy is dead and force claims its ancient right" (L 695), that the Senate, as a "distinguished body", should as a consequence have reinforced power (L 694), and that he "always knew" (L 690, my italics) that the drift towards 'Autocracy' would come, was confirmed, during the period of comparative stability that followed the war, by his reading of Gentile whom Yeats admired, according to Hone, for his "concentrated logic".[4] By the 1930s the fascist movements of Europe had gathered impetus, and Yeats hoped that its manifestation in Ireland would obliterate the communism he despised:

> what I want is that Ireland be kept from giving itself (under the influence of its lunatic faculty of going against everything which it believes England to affirm) to Marxian revolution or Marxian definitions of value in any form, (L 656).

This perceived impulse in 1919 was, fourteen years later, to be arrested by dictatorship:

> I am trying in association with [an] ex-cabinet minister, an eminent lawyer, and a philosopher, to work out a social theory which can be used against Communism in Ireland - what looks like emerging is Fascism modified by religion. This country is exciting, (L 808-9).

It was exciting because fascism was causing politics to grow "heroic" (L 811) once more, and Yeats found himself "constantly urging the despotic rule of the educated classes as the only end to our troubles" (L 811-2) - precisely the solution, as we shall see, proferred by the theosophists,[5] and by many of the 'materialist' authorities he encountered

in the '80s. The focal point of Irish fascist speculation was Eoin O'Duffy's Blueshirt movement. The style and model of this organisation was indicated by Yeats in the series of letters written to Olivia Shakespear during the summer of 1933:

> there is so little in our stocking that we are ready at any moment to turn it inside out, and how can we not feel emulous when we see Hitler juggling with his sausage of stocking. Our chosen colour is blue, and blue shirts are marching about all over the country..... ..... a convention of blue-shirts - "National Guards" - have received their new leader with the Fascist salute and the new leader announces reform of Parliament as his business, (L 812).

Joseph Hone writes:

> My memory boes back to a morning in Rome spent in searching the book-shops with Mrs. Yeats for works dealing with the spiritual antecedents of the Fascist revolution, an event which Yeats considered (justly as events have shown) as at least equal in importance to the proletarian conquest of Russia..... As he could not read Italian, his wife made summaries for him of this [Gentile's La Riforma dell'Educazione] and other examples of fascist literature for his easy reference, (Hone 372).

In view of this testament to the extent of Yeats's acquaintance with European political and philosophical speculation during this period, Arland Ussher's claim seems unconvincing:

> "I am told there is a law in Germany" he [Yeats] remarked in 1935 "by which noblemen can be given back their hereditary castles" - and that was all he knew about the obscene demagogy which priced Einstein's head like a criminal.[6]

Liberals' embarrassment for Yeats's fascism causes them to offer defences of the poet that seek to mitigate the extent or nature of his reactionary politics. As O'Brien says, such critics and readers fall into one of two schools - those who believe that the fascist Yeats is somehow not the 'true' Yeats, and those who insist that his fascism was not 'true'

fascism.[7] Implicit in Ussher's claim is the notion that Yeats had no conception of the nature of the organisation with which he had associated. Peter Dale writes of John Bayley's ability to glory in Yeats's poetry whilst withholding "almost all assent from his attitudes" as a "typically modern, but uncomfortably schizophrenic state to be in" (Agenda, 9:4, Autumn-Winter 1971-2, p4). This diminishes art, for bad politics do not necessarily make bad art.[8] There is no reason to assume that no reasonable man could possibly associate himself with a pre-war fascist party. Indeed T S Eliot noted the relative reason of fascism:

> I confess to a preference for fascism in practice, which I dare say most of my readers share; and I will not admit this preference is itself wholly irrational. I believe that the fascist form of unreason is less remote from my own than is that of the communists, (Criterion 8:33, July 1929, p690-1).

Yeats himself, in spite of Hazlitt's precisely contrary claim, (op.cit.p70), agreed with Shelley that "the extremes of luxury and want..... The rich have become richer, the poor have become poorer,..... such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" (E&I 68-1900). It cannot be stressed too heavily that before the ideology was tainted with its politicization towards the end of the '30s it was an accepted and respectable aspect of European political life.[9] The Blueshirts were, in many (though not all) respects, 'classic' fascists, as Maurice Manning shows (Who Were The Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism, ed. S U Larsen, B Hagtvet, J P Myklebust, 1980, p557-67, and see The Blueshirts, 1970). They originated from a nucleus of discontented ex-soldiers, who were unhappy with the developing political situation, impatient with parliamentary democracy, and obsessed with an exaggerated notion of the threat of communism. They were contemptuous of the political parties that constituted government. Finally, they were infatuated with corporate ideas, emphasising youth,

renewal and the urgent need for strong leadership. There can be little doubt that some, if not all, of these ideals and resentments would have emerged during Yeats's encounter with O'Duffy. O'Brien suggests that 'The Ghost of Roger Casement' might have been as politically explosive as Cathleen ni Houlihan had been (IER 267), and, pace Krimm (op.cit. p153), there is little question that it could have been regarded as a rallying cry for Irish fascists hoping for the annihilation of British interests in the coming world war.10

The depth of Yeats's commitment to the politics of reaction has recently been confirmed by Cairns Craig in his study of Yeats's poetic, Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry. Craig demonstrates forcibly that Yeats's aesthetic was Associationist, and therefore retrospective, and that it would have had a reactionary, and generally deliberalizing effect on his political stance. 'Fascism', however, is a technical term that requires careful handling. Partly we are, as Craig suggests (p262), so horrified by the brutal excesses of inter-war fascist machines that there is a feeling that to treat the subject as suitable for scholarly analysis is to invite its reappearance in the political arena. Partly, too, the prevalence of Marxist critiques of modern political history has debased the term 'fascist'. The inability of Marxists to assimilate into the system a proletarian-based revolution that is, ideologically at least, the antithesis of Marxism has caused them to view fascism as no more than paramilitary capitalism. According to R. Palme Dutt, for instance (Fascism and Social Revolution, 1934, p181), fascism "represents in reality no new ideology distinct from the general ideology of capitalism". Since, for the Marxist, there is no specific ideology of fascism, it is dismissed as irrelevant. The term itself, however, because shrouded in the smoke

of the death camps, is retained, and under it are collected all those organisations that are 'capitalistic' - i.e. not Marxist-Leninist. As A James Gregor says (The Ideology of Fascism, 1969, p23), the term has become a "meaningless rubric", because it is virtually all-inclusive - "business institutes, church groups, patriotic clubs, chambers of commerce, veterans' organisations..... and Boy Scouts". The list is endless. The police, law professions, army, civil service, academic institutions may all be 'fascist' in the current nebulous usage of that term. Craig's examination of various different attitudes to, and definitions of, fascism focuses, perhaps inevitably, on an aspect of the ideology that is particularly germane to his thesis, but hardly the whole story. Certainly, fascism was, and is, a movement that combines, paradoxically, extreme reaction with revolutionary 'progress', committed to continual renewal and to continual preservation, fusing past and future. Another way of putting it is that it is, as Stanislav Andreski has recently demonstrated (Larsen et al op.cit. p52), both the "extremism of the centre" and the "centrism of the extremists", and although it undoubtedly is a movement that Paul Hayes (op.cit. p119) describes as a "bizarre and horrendous combination of constructive and destructive forces in society", those forces are, if occasionally a little indistinct, clearly classifiable. Fascism, as an ideology, is founded on a strong sense of racial and national identity, an urgent militarism that expands that racism and nationalism into foreign relations, a violent antipathy to socialism (though not to a number of significant aspects of socialist theory), and a clearly defined ruling elite supporting a charismatic leader whose presidency over a totalitarian state is uninterrupted. If we are to refer to the latter part of Yeats's life as a 'fascist' period, it is to such matters that we must address ourselves.

Most of these have been covered by those writers on Yeats's politics that I have cited previously, but the bulk of this chapter concentrates on Yeats's race-consciousness and national identity and traces it back to a period not normally regarded as being a part of Yeats's 'fascist' period. Before leaving the narrower definition of fascism, however, it is worth pointing out that although Craig does not account adequately for the entire fascist phenomena, his point, that there is a link between Yeats's poetic and the ideologies of extreme reaction, because both seek progress and reaction, is important. Both incorporated:

> a radical and dynamic movement towards the future, under the control of the desire to retain the traditional values of the past that contributed to national greatness and a healthy community; both saw the linchpin through which past and future could be connected as the irrational motivation of men through images, an irrational motivation that put the poet at the very crux of historical process. And at the centre of this shared nexus of ideas is the associationist aesthetic which performs in itself precisely the same relation between past and future that Fascism adopts: it moves forward into the openness of the reader's associations, into the future, only to reach deeper back into the past, and recalls the past only to set loose the uncontrollable flow of images into the future. Like Fascism, the associationist aesthetic inevitably demanded an authoritarian hierarchy to control the dynamic of the powerful irrationalities it unleashed, an authoritarian hierarchy so that the dynamic could be allowed to continue, (op.cit.p275).

This is an insight to be valued. Clearly since the associations necessary to art demand leisure, the survival of art demands a society dominated by the leisured classes. As Craig says (p71), the open poem, the modernist art of Yeats, Eliot and Pound, "demanded as its counterbalance the closed society". Craig argues that some of Yeats's earliest poems ('The Madness of King Goll', for instance, and 'Fergus and the Druid') betray an Associationist rationale and thus, arguably, gesture towards the later politics. Such a response to Yeats's poetic is ultimately unconvincing, however, because it is based on the aesthetic of eighteenth century philosophers, notably Archibald Alison, that Yeats had not at that stage

encountered. If we see the seeds of Yeats's later hostility to democracy as the notions of class and race that are essentially Social-Darwinist, however, I believe that it is possible to show that they were sown long before his public commitment to a fascist organisation, and that the first shoots are clearly discernible by the turn of the twentieth century.

Race-consciousness is, as we have seen, absolutely central to fascist ideology. Race theory is not 'le vice allemand' - by the middle of the nineteenth century the notion of racial superiority was well established in the cultural traditions of most European 'races'. It was derived from excessive nationalism and militarism, a warped conception of Darwin's research, and from the Romanticism that had been so successful during the first half of the century.[11] A race, according to fascists, is "a group of people possessing an identical hereditary endowment" (Mosse op.cit. p62-3), and it is but a short step from here to the conclusion that since not all "hereditary endowments" are the same (as Haeckel's Monists never tired of insisting[12]), not all races are equal in the advance of civilisation. History seemed to throw up an endless supply of material to confirm the validity of an anti-democratic and race-orientated world-picture. The principle that

> the physical development and racial improvement of the people form the necessary basis of lasting progress,[13]

once accepted, reactionaries found it easy to believe that unlimited progress implied unlimited expansion. The German militarist, Friedrich von Bernhardi, thus insisted that

> War is a biological necessity of the first importance, a regulative element in the life of mankind which cannot be dispensed with, since without it an unhealthy development will follow, which excludes every advancement of the race, and therefore all real civilisation, (Germany and the Next War, translated by Allen H Powles, 1912, p10).

This confirms Pearson's apprehensions about the Boer War (National Life etc, p10-27) and anticipates Yeats's similar statement in A Vision:

> Dear predatory birds, prepare for war, prepare your children and all that you can reach, for how can a nation or a kindred without war become that "bright particular star" of Shakespeare, that lit the roads in boyhood?..... Love war because of its horror, that belief may be changed, civilisation renewed (AV(B) 52-3).

Yeats clearly came to relish the prospect of a "bloody, arrogant power" rising out of the race, "Uttering, mastering it" (VP 480) but by 1928 what even Nietzsche regarded as the "mendacious race-swindle" (see Butler op.cit.p163) had become an integral and familiar constituent of European socio-political theory. In 1915 Yeats believed in a 'spiritual' race, in the collective memory of the race (Mem 125), but race-consciousness can be traced to the earliest writings. In 1909 he made an emphatic demand for a physical manifestation of the soul of the race to act as a focus for national endeavour:

> there is a dying-out of national feeling very simple in its origin. You cannot keep the idea of a nation alive where there are no national institutions to reverence, no national success to admire, without a model of it in the mind of the people..... You can only create a model of a race to inspire the action of that race as a whole, apart from exceptional individuals, when you and it share the same simple moral understanding of life.....
> ..... the need of a model of the nation, of some moral diagram, is as great as in the early nineteenth century, when national feeling was losing itself in a religious feud over tithes and emancipation. Neither the grammars of the Gaelic League nor the industrialism of the Leader, nor the Sinn Fein attacks upon the Irish Party, give sensible images to the affections, (Au 493-4, and see 194-5).

He goes on to commend to those hoping to "create a historical and literary nationalism" his own works and those of Synge, O'Grady, Johnson and Augusta Gregory (Katharine Tynan is included in the earlier draft - Mem 183-5). Yeats, quite rightly, feels that the notion of race is inherent in his pre-Journal writing. Indeed his analysis of the urgent need of the Celts for something manifestly and physically Celtic is little more than a restatement of the artistic xenophobia of 'Ireland and the Arts', written in 1901:

> I am yet jealous for Cuchulain, and for Baile and Aillinn, and for those grey mountains that still are lacking their celebration. I sometimes reproach myself because I cannot admire Mr. Hughes' beautiful, piteous Orpheus and Eurydice with an unquestioning mind. I say with my lips, "The Spirit made it, for it is beautiful, and the Spirit bloweth where it listeth," but I say in my heart, "Aengus and Edain would have served its turn"; but one cannot, perhaps, love or believe at all if one does not love or believe a little too much, (E&I 209).

The cause of the debasement of the race, exemplified by Orpheus and Eurydice, is precisely that which had occasioned the downfall of specifically English literature:

> I can never get out of my head that no man, even though he be Shakespeare, can write perfectly when his web is woven of threads that have been spun in many lands. And yet, could those foreign tales have come in if the great famine, the sinking down of popular imagination, the dying out of traditional fantasy, the ebbing out of the energy of the race, had not made them necessary? (E&I, p109-10 - 1901).

"The ebbing out of the energy of the race", as native characteristics are gradually superceded by alien influences - there are few more explicitly Social-Darwinist statements than this even in the later works. Yeats here applies the notion that units are in perpetual conflict, and that when one becomes decadent it becomes "necessary" that another expand to fill the gap,[14] to the character of society. It may be worth pointing out, too, that this passage anticipates the central Heraclitean preoccupation of A Vision, perpetual discord (see AV(B) 67-8).

Yeats was, in fact, aware of the existence of a specifically 'Irish' race as early as 1886 (UP1 95), possibly even earlier (Au 31), and the "national fire" so urgently required in 1891 (UP1 209), could be kindled only by devotion of the imagination to "some national purpose" (LNI 74): "creative work has always a fatherland". Yeats's claim in 1892 that the Irish

> must know and feel our national faults and limitations no less than our national virtues, and care for things Gaelic and Irish, not because we hold them better than things Saxon and English, but

> because they belong to us, and because our lives are to be spent among them, whether they be good or evil, (UP1 250)

implying, as it does, no superiority of Celtic racial characteristics, merely difference, is put into perspective by the much earlier assessment of Todhunter's Celticism:

> the Saxon is not sympathetic or self-abnegating; he has conquered the world by quite different powers. He is full of self-brooding. Like his own Wordsworth, most English of poets, he finds his image in every lake and puddle. He has to burthen the skylark with his cares before he can celebrate it. He is always a lens coloured by self. But these [Todhunter's] poems are altogether different with their simplicity and tenderness. They rise from the same source as the courtesy of the Irish peasant; and because there is no egotism in them there is no gloom. Their sadness is nature's not man's - a limpid melancholy. It is the sentiment that fills morning's twilight. They are Greek-like and young - as young as nature, (LN1 190-1).

In 1891 he writes approvingly of Oscar Wilde's "extravagant crusade against Anglo-Saxon stupidity" (UP1 203-4). Clearly Yeats felt that racial differences assumed cultural and aesthetic importance, and that the translation of those differences into aesthetics provided the yardstick by which the relative superiority or inferiority of races could be judged.

A sense of Irish racial characteristics, of the "new kind of racial character" (UP1 275) with a "mastery over the picturesque" (LN1 152) peculiar to it, was focused for Yeats by J S Stuart-Glennie's introduction to Greek Folk Poesy translated by Lucy Garnett in 1896:

> for the accepted theories of a spontaneous development of civilisation out of savagery he [Stuart-Glennie] substitutes what he calls "the general conflict theory", and suggests and "civilised" or "progressive communities" began when a race of superior intellectual power compelled or persuaded a race of lesser intellectual power to feed it and house it, in return for the religion and science which it had thus found the leisure to make, and to pass on from generation to generation in always growing complexity. This contest, the contest of subtlety against force, the subtlety often of a very few against the force of a multitude, gradually changed from a contest between men of different races to a compact between men of different classes, and so created the modern world..... I find this theory, which affirms the supremacy of the intellect, much more plausible than any of those theories which

> imply the origin by a vague process which no-one has explained, of the most exquisite inventions of folk-lore and mythology from the imaginations of everybody and nobody..... I am..... convinced that some such theory will be established in the long run; being no democrat in intellectual things, and altogether persuaded that elaborate beauty has never come but from the mind of a deliberate artist writing at leisure and in peace, (UP1 409-10).

The contest of subtlety against force, few against multitude, inevitably recalls Darwin's remarks on the Celt and the Scot (above p16), and Huxley's prediction of the negro's demise in a contest of brains rather than jaws (above p22). Yeats recognised in 1896 that the aristocratic and Social-Darwinist theories of Stuart-Glennie[15] which "mastered" him with a "strong curiosity" (UP1 409), and his own race-consciousness, were inimical to egalitarianism. Certainly, as Frayne says (ibid.), such theories supported Yeats's "aristocratic ideals", but, more significantly, they confirmed for him the possibility of superior cultures. In view of this, the rest of his statements on race towards the end of the '90s seem a little shadowed. During this period Yeats became increasingly politically motivated, increasingly nationalistic, but race precedes nation (UP2 49 and 154), and the prejudices and apprehensions that attach to it lie behind all nationalistic activity. The Celtic race, in particular, was, for Yeats, more firmly rooted in 'spirit' (see above p53), and since spirit and art are inextricable (see below p127-130), Celts are more genuinely 'poetic'. O'Leary's autobiography, for instance, although a poor book,

> is a new example of that sense of abstract ideas, of abstract law, which I believe the Celtic peoples have preserved, together with a capacity for abstract emotion, longer than more successful and practical races, (UP2 37).

The Celts hold the "keys of those gates of the primeval world, which shut behind more successful races, when they plunged into material progress" (UP2 45). Because of this, because the Celts are not materialists, they are a superior race. In 1897 Yeats broadly accepts the glorification of the Celtic spirit, promoted by Renan and Arnold:

> I must repeat the well-known sentences: "No race communed so intimately as the Celtic race with the lower creation, or believed it to have so big a share of moral life". The Celtic race had "a realistic naturalism", "a love of Nature for herself, a vivid feeling for her magic, commingled with the melancholy a man knows when he is face to face with her, and thinks he hears her communing with him about his origin and his destiny"..... Matthew Arnold, in The Study of Celtic Literature, has accepted this passion for Nature, this imaginativeness, this melancholy, as Celtic characteristics, but has described them more elaborately. The Celtic passion for Nature comes almost more from a sense of her 'mystery' than of her 'beauty', and it adds "charm and magic" to Nature, and the Celtic imaginativeness and melancholy are alike "a passionate, turbulent, indomitable reaction against the despotism of fact". The Celt is..... melancholy..... because of something about him "unaccountable, defiant and titanic" (E&I 173-4).16

It is possible that Yeats had such remarks at least half in mind when writing the fifth section of 'Under Ben Bulben'.17 If the Celtic race is indeed better equipped, in some supernatural way, to advance civilisation, we might expect, in conformity with the dictates of this sort of Darwin-inspired race-consciousness, some suggestion that the Celts should be recognised as being among the front-runners of civilisation. The vehicle for this statement was the 1897 article on A E, Lionel Johnson, and Nora Hopper:

> It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the spiritual history of the world has been the history of conquered races. Those learned in the traditions of many lands, understand that it is almost always some defeated or perhaps dwindling tribe hidden among the hills or in the forests, that is most famous for the understanding of charms and the reading of dreams, and the seeing of visions. And has not our Christianity come to us from defeated and captive Judea? The influence of the Celt, too, has been a spiritual influence, and men are beginning to understand how great it has been..... Until our day the Celt has dreamed half the dreams of Europe..... [the new Irish poets] are spiritual, not because they are religious, in the dogmatic sense of the word, but because they touch our deepest and most delicate feelings, and believe that a beauty, not a worldly beauty, lives in worldly things..... This new school, and the ever increasing knowledge of the old poetry in Gaelic, must in time make many strong and delicate minds spend themselves in the service of Ireland that would else have spent themselves in alien causes, and Ireland may become again a spiritual influence in the world, (UP2 70-3).

The culmination of all this is the desire for a seasonal "great racial gathering, drawing enthusiasts from far scattered towns and hill-sides as by a triple evocation" (UP2 163). Since race preceded nationality, for the proto-fascist it is but a short step from the elevation of Beltaine, or of its equivalent, to the deification of the race. It is a commonplace of political history that antagonists claim divine sanction for acts of diplomatic, social or military agression. Haeckel was quick to appropriate God for the German Volk (see below p95-97), and the Third Reich propagandists that followed him recognised the value of disguising an act of political opportunism as a skirmish in a Holy War.[18]

The similarities between some of Yeats's early statements and later fascist propaganda should not tempt us to make a direct comparison, as Malcolm Cowley was tempted:

> His [Yeats's] mystical nationalism, with its talk of the Irish racial spirit and the Irish oversoul, could be used by some of Hitler's court and barrack-room philosophers, (Think Back on Us, 1967, p327).

It is as much as we can say that the proto-fascist, Social-Darwinist impulses that had so profound an effect on later fascist theory, appear to have had also an effect on Yeats's own. There is, however, an important distinction to be made between proto-fascism and Social-Darwinism. Proto-fascism, by definition, anticipates the malevolent regimes that swept Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. It incorporates the primitive manifestations of those attitudes to race and class on which fascist theories depended. Social-Darwinists, on the other hand, could justifiably argue that the racial expansion that they were committed to was inevitably beneficial for all those 'inferior' races that were affected by it. Social-Darwinism was not necessarily proto-fascist

but, for the most part, the distinction is academic. The majority of Social-Darwinists would have accepted the development of their theories into the political theory of fascism, if not the practice. When considering what may seem to be Yeats's rather Haeckelian insistence on the holiness of the national cause, therefore, we must be careful to remember that if it anticipates the propaganda of the Third Reich, it is also a socio-political convention and is not necessarily 'proto-fascist'.

Mark Ryan quotes Yeats's emotive and uncompromising speech at the Centenary meeting on 20 March 1898:

> Last year the English people thought they could solve the Irish question by providing a royal residence. We have enough of royal residences in Ireland in the poorhouses and prisons. Our people now hold as firmly as ever to their national demand, and they will not relinquish that demand until they have achieved it. This year the Irish people will not celebrate, as England did last year, the establishment of an empire that has been built on the rapine of the world. We are not celebrating a Cause that is brag and materialism, but a high and a holy Cause, (Fenian Memories, 1945, p185-6).

This elevation of sporadic sectarian and tribalist collisions to the glamour and medieval mystique of a Holy War (a hyperbole repeated in 'The Rose of Battle') would not have been unpopular in Fenian quarters. Yeats carefully distances himself from English Social-Darwinism, but at the same time we are clearly to infer that whilst the endeavours of one race to fulfil its preordained destiny is 'holy', that of its 'oppressor', striving to fulfil its own in Social-Darwinist terms, is not.

Some three weeks later, at the inaugural banquet of the '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France, Yeats attempted to substantiate and localise his elevation of separatism:

> Ireland has taken sides forever with the poor in spirit who shall inherit the earth (cheers). It is because of these things that I have faith in Ireland. We are building up a nation which shall be moved

> by noble purposes and to noble ends. A day will come for her, though not, perhaps, in our day. There is an old story that tells how sometimes when a ship is beaten by storm and almost upon the rocks, a mysterious figure appears and lays its hand upon the tiller. It is Mannanan, the son of Lir, the old god of the waters. So it is with nations, a flaming hand is laid suddenly upon the tiller (loud applause).19

Yeats clearly believed as early as 1893, however, that it was the sacred duty of Irishmen to engage in rebellion. The story that appeared in the National Observer of 5 August, 'The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows', clearly aligns the spirit world with the rebels. The fate of the five troopers who chase the messengers is a fulfilment of the dying Prior's prophetic curse:

> Woe unto all those who smite those who dwell within the Light of the Lord for they shall wander among the ungovernable shadows, and follow the ungovernable fires! (VSR 41-2v).

This sop to the Church, however, does not carry the fundamental point of the tale. The Irish gods do not punish the appalling sacrilege in the Abbey of the White Friars. The man chiefly responsible for this outrage, Sir Frederick Hamilton, does not lead his men over the Stranger's Leap. The spirits act only to protect and ensure the successful mission of the messengers of national insurrection. 'The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows', seeming as it does to avenge an unforgivable attack on the Church, would inevitably have found favour with the clerical establishment. In fact, its underlying claim of divine approbation of Fenianism contradicted entirely the Church's official line. Prelates, obsessed with the status quo in Ireland, had all but anathematized Fenianism.20 By 1895, as he recalls in the first draft of the autobiography, the association of national and spiritual feeling was becoming clearer to Yeats. His belief that Castle Rock could be an "Irish Eleusis or Samothrace" became obsessive:

> an obsession more constant than anything but my love itself was the need of mystical rites - a ritual system of evocation and meditation - to reunite the perception of the spirit, of the divine, with natural beauty. I believed that instead of thinking of Judea as holy we should [think] our own land holy, and most holy where most beautiful. Commerce and manufacture had made the world ugly; the death of pagan nature-worship had robbed visible beauty of its inviolate sanctity. I was convinced that all lonely and lovely places were crowded with invisible beings and that it would be possible to commicate with them. I meant to initiate young men and women in this worship, which would unite the radical truths of Christianity to those of a more ancient world, and to use the Castle Rock for their occasional retirement from the world, (Mem 123-4).

This, as we shall see (below p95-97), is very Haeckelian. Autobiographies is more so:

> All my religious emotions were..... connected with clouds and cloudy glimpses of luminous sky..... I can remember the sight moving me to tears, (Au 26).[21]

Haeckel's precise influence is impossible to gauge, but we should register the similarity.

The importance of 'soul' to the national impulse is confirmed in the 'Journal' of 1910:

> The unifying principle must come from and perpetually appeal to what is deepest, and it must enclose the entire lives of all within its circle. Without that, it will be a convention in the colloquial sense of the word, a mere formalism or a mob tyranny; the soul will be in perpetual revolt. Young Irelandism, because a condescension, a conscious simplification, could only perish or create a tyrrany. No sacrifice for a cause necessarily ennobles the soul unless the soul is a part of the cause, (Mem 250-1).

Necessarily so, but Yeats was conscious that the soil of Ireland was too thin to support so elaborate a graft. Some fifteen months earlier his diary entry is a reflection on the difficulty of rendering the nation 'holy' in any sense more profound than that imagined by the Church (Mem 184-5). This speculation was not intended for publication, but in the 1896 dedication of The Secret Rose to A E Yeats makes a tentative association:

> So far..... as this book is visionary it is Irish; for Ireland, which is still predominantly Celtic, has preserved with some less excellent things a gift of vision, which has died out among more hurried and more successful nations: no shining candelabra have prevented us from looking into the darkness, and when one looks into the darkness there is always something there, (VSR 233).

It is pertinent, too, that he should acknowledge, in the 1925 dedication of the American edition of Early Poems and Stories to Ashe King, the influence of John O'Leary on stories so mystical and abstruse, (VSR 235).

Two essays written just after the turn of the century confirm this sacredness of the nation. The Irish painter or sculptor

> will find churches awaiting his hand everywhere, and if he follows the masters of his craft our other passion will come into his work also, for he will show his Holy Family winding among hills like those of Ireland, and his Bearer of the Cross among faces copied from the faces of his own town, (E&I 205 - 1901).

Yeats demanded of Irish artists that they master Irish legend and history. They must

> fix upon their memory the appearance of mountains and rivers and make it all visible again in their arts, so that Irishmen, even though they had gone thousands of miles away, would still be in their own country. Whether they chose for the subject the carrying off of the Brown Bull of the coming of Patrick, or the political struggle of later times, the other world comes so much into it all that their love of it would move in their hands also, and as much, it may be, as in the hands of the Greek craftsmen, (E&I 205-6).

This course would result in the Celts becoming "a chosen race, one of the pillars that uphold the world" (E&I 210 - my italics), for among the Irish mountains

> Christ has walked upon the roads, bringing the needy to some warm fireside, and sending one of His Saints to annoint the dying.[22]

To some extent this may have been influenced by Maud Gonne who believed nations to be holy, that "the People" are "the first person of the National Trinity", and that contact with the "hidden forces of the land" would give the strength needed to free Ireland (Gwynn 26-7, 22). It is

clear, however, that Ireland was for Maud Gonne the conventional Mother, whereas for Yeats, even in the early years, Ireland was a subject for worship (Gwynn 20), though whether the Castle of Heroes scheme was a consequence of his collaboration with Maud Gonne,[23] or of Mathers with his wife, Moina,[24] remains unclear.

My intention in the preceding pages has been to demonstrate that Yeats acquired and expressed an acute sense of racial identity before the turn of the twentieth century - that is, long before his supposedly 'fascist' phase. I do not wish to risk prolepsis and in itself, this is not, of course, proto-fascist, nor is it necessarily Social-Darwinist. The belief in the superiority of certain races, in the quasi-divinity of races, and in the right of races to fulfil their 'destinies' regardless of social, political or human expense is, however, consistent with those applications of the new science to human socio-political systems with which he was familiar. It is not Yeats's faith in race, however, but his analysis of race that gives rise to suspicions that a Social-Darwinist, and arguably a proto-fascist (see Craig op.cit.), tendency is detectable in his earliest political and cultural speculations.

Yeats considered the primary constituents of the "chosen race" to be the "peasantry and...../Hard-riding country gentlemen" (VP 639). Yeats idealised, as fascists were later to idealise, the peasant stock. Their forebears had

> lived in a beautiful if somewhat inhospitable world, where little had changed since Adam delved and Eve span. Everything was so old that it was steeped in the heart, and every powerful emotion found at once noble types and symbols for its expression, (UP1 295).

The modern peasant was the inheritor of this almost prelapsarian state of grace. As a consequence the peasantry became the core of Irish

civilisation, as it had been of the Greek civilisation, and as it was to become the ethnic core of the German Volk. The peasants had evolved, indeed, into

> a community bound together by imaginative possessions, by stories and poems which have grown out of its own life, and by a past of great passions which can still waken the heart to imaginative action (E&I 213 - 1903).

Any country, including England, that

> takes its tunes from the great cities..... and not from old custom may have a mob, but it cannot have a people, (ibid.)

The asceticism made necessary by extreme poverty afforded access to aspects of reality that were closed to the well-fed and the comfortably housed. The vision that is prompted by starvation (as considered in The Speckled Bird, for instance) allowed the peasantry to emerge from its experience as a crypto-priesthood:

> the common people wherever civilisation has not driven its plough too deep, keep a watch over the roots of all religion and all romance. Their poetry trembles upon the verge of incoherence with a pasion all but unknown among modern poets, and their sense of beauty exhausts itself in countless legends and in metaphors that seem to mirror the energies of nature, (UP2 188, and see L304).

The difference between Yeats's elitism and that of T. S. Eliot, for instance, is measured in the contrast of Yeats's unsentimental apotheosis of the peasantry (see UP1 138-9), and Eliot's embarrassing condescension in 'A Game of Chess'. Yeats and Lady Gregory progressed from folk research towards a less academic attempt to reach the 'peasant imagination'.[25] In so doing they discovered what they regarded as the heart of heroic poetry, the root of all national literature (see e.g. Gwynn 164, 188-9).

The peasants, because of the hardship of their existence, enjoyed a closer communion with nature than did the rest of society, and it was within nature that God was to be found. Certainly, Yeats's early religious experiences were pantheistic (Au 26), and mystical atonement with nature occasioned apprehensions of the presence of God that are strongly reminiscent of Haeckel's. The "secret of the world", for instance, could be expressed easily "on a blade of grass with the juice of a berry" (Mem 127). In a state of trance Yeats came

> into a different relation to the trees and to the grass and the sky, and to living things. It was as though he had escaped for a little while from their merely human associations and looked at them as they might have looked at one another.[26]

Indeed, "the death of pagan nature-worship had robbed visible beauty of its inviolable sanctity" (Mem 124). The peasant mentality was closer to this antique vision and, since it was closer to God, it was inevitably closer to the fount of all poetry. Poetry, being still "a living voice" among the peasantry (LNI 73), depended for its survival on the "awakening of interest in the wisdom and ways of the poor" (UP1 326), those whom the academic classes had scorned (UP2 152). The beauty and spontaneity of peasant thought and idiom (Au 472) required translation into a dramatic and urgent national literature:

> I love all the arts that can still remind me of their origin among the common people, and my ears are only comfortable when the singer sings as if mere speech had taken fire, when he appears to have passed into song almost imperceptibly, (E&I 223 - 1916).

The national drama should be drawn directly from study of peasant environments in which national characteristics are preserved in their least adulterated forms (Ex 222), and it should be written with a peasant audience at least half in mind. Yeats approved of Augusta Gregory's Aristotelian maxim: "To think like a wise man, but to express oneself like the common people" (Au 395), for "a good writer should be so simple that he has no faults, only sins" (Au 527). Certainly it is difficult, as Malcolm Brown has suggested (The Politics of Irish Literature, 1972, p316), to disagree with Russell's contention that it is to this peasant simplicity that we should attribute Yeats's 'twilight hue' and 'vowel music', rather than to pre-Raphaelitism. To a large extent the poet must identify himself with the peasant (UP1 295), and the idealised countryman of 'The Fisherman',

> A man who does not exist,
> A man who is but a dream, (VP 348)

is an outgrowth of Yeats's self-image as fisher-artist, Bressel (VP 146), and fisher-lover, Aengus (VP 149). The ideal, but inevitably non-existent, peasant would combine the qualities of artist and God.

The country "helps one to think" (L51). If the peasant impulse is to direct poetry, it must also, by necessity, direct political developments.[27] In The Countess Cathleen Ireland, represented by Cathleen, seeks direction of the peasants (VP1 17-19), the 'brave hillside men', and she eventually comes to identify her own well-being, indeed her entire raison d'etre, with theirs:

> the earth burns my feet
> Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
> That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
> May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come
> Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.
> From this day out I have nothing of my own (VP1 79).[28]

The claim that "this land where your fathers lived proudly and finely should be dear and dear and again dear"[29] is an elevation of the rustic environment to a kind of Holy Land that we should regard as a political gesture.

Inseparable from love of peasantry is commitment to 'earth'. Yeats developed early in life (Mem 153-4, Au 31, L49) a love of earth, and this gradually matured into the notion that the root of the race is in the earth with which it has always been associated: "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" (Au 194, and see UP1 405). He demanded in a deliberate metaphor, that scholars of Greek and German civilisation, for instance,

> leave that work of theirs which will never lack hands, and begin to dig in Ireland the garden of the future, understanding that here in Ireland the spirit of man may be about to wed the soil of the world, (E&I 209-210 - 1901).

Inevitably earth becomes a sacred symbol, and eventually popular poetry

> made love of the earth of Ireland so much a part of her literature that it should not be a hard thing to fill it with the holiness of places, (UP2 196, and see 127).

By 1898 sacred Irish earth had become necessary for Celtic Mysitcal Order evocation (L295). The extension of earth as symbol to Mother Earth as myth (and arguably, it seems, as reality), and thence to an aspect of the White Woman symbol in Yeats's verse (as considered in A. R. Grossman's Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats, 1969) requires fuller examination, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is sufficient for present purposes to indicate a possible joint source in Haeckel (see Gasman op.cit. p120-1) for Yeats's, and fascist propagandists' earth-love. It is not a coincidence that Yeats admired Healy's "good earth power" (L35), nor that the tinker-peasant Charlie Ward helps Paul Ruttledge, in Where There Is Nothing, in the rebel's quest for the "favour of my hard mother, Earth" (VP1 1149). Later, in Yeats's fascist period, he demonstrated an awareness of the political importance of land (Ex 312-3).[30]

If, however, poetry is to appeal and draw from the earth tradition, from peasant imagination, it must balance this with an equally immediate appeal to the aristocracy. The effect must be an expression of civilisation's great triumvirate.[31] By the time Lady Gregory introduced Yeats to The Courtier in 1907, he was well prepared for Castiglione's apotheosis of the aristocracy.[32] We should bear in mind that in some respects, as Trotsky suggested,[33] the entire ideological basis of fascism is founded on just such a combination of the lowest and highest classes in society.

"The attitude of mind and the style in Yeats's poetry", wrote C Day Lewis (Gwynn 159), "are aristocratic, and..... we feel that no poet will be able to write after that manner again". World views that are hostile to democracy have fallen into considerable disrepute during the twentieth century, and it is unlikely, as Day Lewis suggests, that writers will ever again be able to place their confidence so completely in the aristocracy, and to deride the 'mob' so explicitly as did Yeats. Day Lewis is also correct to trace Yeats's faith in the aristocracy to his childhood, (Gwynn 160-3), for it is clear that he developed an early awareness of, and respect for class strata (Mem 77, 101-2). In the later poems the aristocratic 'virtues' of pride, independence, ceremony and courtesy are the qualities most frequently held up for admiration. In the prose of Autobiographies, similarly, and in the later essays, the ideals of the great house are confirmed as having a salutary influence on culture and on morals. Yeats had mythologized the aristocracy, however, long before the civil war by drawing it firmly into the literary tradition. He regarded the improvement of abstractions crucial to the resurgence of the race - culture, wisdom, morals - as inextricably linked to the social prominence of the aristocratic families. Conscious, formal art, as opposed to peasant, 'folk' art, in particular, is the province of the nobility alone. Art is, at the very least, reliant on the unconscious patronage of the high-born families - the bestowal of a richer sustenance than mere finance. The nobility

> creates the fine life which we look at with affectionate eyes out of our garret windows. We must not leave our garrets, but we could not write well but for what we see from the windows.[34]

Leisure, wealth, and privilege were created specifically for the "most living" (Mem 209), and it was the responsibility of the creative intellect to foster and preserve these aristocratic virtues (see Au 522). Art was

repaid as the nobility saved Ireland from abstraction (Au 545), although the country had nevertheless grown "sterile" as power passed gradually, during the transition from feudalism to democracy,

> to men who lack the training which requires a certain amount of wealth to ensure continuity from generation to generation, and to free the mind in part from other tasks. A gentleman is for one thing a man whose principal ideas are not connected with his personal needs and his personal success, (Mem 178).

The quality of Irish art could still be maintained, however, so long as the unlanded were prevented from association with it:

> I have been reading Taylor's Owen Roe O'Neill, an able historical book, very interesting to me because I think I find in Owen Roe that directness and simplicity of mind which is today Protestant and Ascendancy, and in his now opponents, now allies, of the Kilkenny Council that slackness and vagueness which is today Catholic, (Mem 195).

Ascendancy directness and simplicity were necessary to Irish arts. With these, however, the aristocracy brought also isolation and elitism. A great lady might well be as simple as a good poet (Mem 140), but both must be inaccessible to detrimental influences. In 1916 Yeats wrote of his new invention, "an aristocratic form" of drama, that it was purely for "a few score people of good taste" (E&I 221-2), a small number of "cultivated people who understand the literary and mythological allusions and the ancient lyrics quoted in speech or chorus, their discipline, a part of their breeding" (E&I 229 - 1916, and see 250 - 1907). The acquisition of such 'discipline' depends on leisure, freedom from all financial restraint, and such a response to art presupposes the greatest possible inequalities in the division of labour and capital. The nobility was worth writing for because it had access to traditional wisdom (for there can be no wisdom without indolence - Mem 168), being a superior caste because not dependent on labour,[35] and consequently being the guardians of the most valuable ethical codes available to society (Mem 181).

The identification of poet and aristocrat is thus completed in their synthesis as a Janus-like Wisdom-figure in the 1909 Journal:

> Newman defines culture as wise receptivity, though I do not think he uses these words. Culture of this kind produces its most perfect flowers in a few high-bred women. It gives to its sons an exquisite delicacy, (Mem 160).

The atmosphere at Coole (Mem 155-6), however, and Augusta Gregory's "inherited sense of caste" (Au 456), her "steadfast nobility" (Au 478), did no more than confirm long-held suspicions. Yeats's newly acquired notoriety in the '90s strengthened, as George Bornstein suggests,[36] an already deeply-felt conviction that formal art and the consciousness of the masses were irreconcilable. It would be consistent with Yeats's developing belief in an art for the 'few' if the limited editions of the Dun Emer Press, founded in 1903, were deliberately priced out of the range of the masses as a reflection of this confirmation. Yeats was clearly thinking of the best, rather than the widest audience in 1896 (UP1 404), and claimed a year later that "an honest attempt towards that aristocratic esoteric Irish literature..... has been my chief ambition" (L286, my italics). It would appear that the desire that poetry be "made by the few for the few" (UP1 271 - 1893) had long been a fundamental Yeatsian tenet. In 'Reveries Over Childhood and Youth' he notes that even as a student he had been convinced that the popular poets had failed to touch Ireland's heart, that "her poetry when it comes will be distinguished and lonely".[37]

As the gentry are absorbed into the literary tradition history becomes theatre:

> I, with my perhaps too literary eyes, read history, and turn all into a kind of theatre where the proud walk clad in cloth of gold, and display their passionate hearts, that the groundlings may feel their souls wax the greater, (L219).

Yeats's later belief that nature mocks equality (Au 547), a statement that almost certainly recalls his early scientific reading, and that the tiers of quality are not only natural but welcome in Ireland ("no country could have a more natural distaste for equality" - Au 231), is confirmed by the turn of the century.[38] Eglinton saw Yeats as an "aristocractic craftsman" by 1898 (UP2 130, and see Mem 156nl), and Yeats did not reject the assessment. Indeed he clearly made a conscious and deliberate attempt to translate this hostility to democracy into art. The aristocratic tone is established in the poetry long before the turn of the century. David Daiches notes (IER 60-1) the use of the word 'high' in 'The Sad Shepherd' (first published in 1885) and, certainly, the combination of pride and isolation, passion and coldness, that Yeats associated with aristocratic manners is frequently alluded to in the earliest verse - an "immortal passion" that "breathes in mortal clay" (VP 172), the "lonely, magestical multitude" (VP 158) and "high lonely mysteries" (VP 156),[39] the "proud and apart" (VP 91), and, most explicitly perhaps, in the celebration of Maeve's faded beauty:

> Though now in her old age, in her young age
> She had been beautiful in that old way
> That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone,
> And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
> But soft beauty and indolent desire, (VP 180-1).

As Day Lewis says, Yeats is, throughout, "the aristocratic poet who feels a passionate love for the Cause but also a certain impatience and contempt for the human instruments with which he has to work" (Gwynn 178). Yeats's love of proud and lonely things (Au 171), and his belief that the coldness of great art is almost palpable (E&I 339 - 1910), caused those artists who, like Blake and Synge, were themselves proud and lonely (Au 508, UP1 400-1), or, like Ferguson, possessed of an "antique coldness"

(UP1 159), or Lionel Johnson's "hieratic" elegance (Mem 35 and 96), to become talismans. The artist becomes, like the aristocrat, one of the great solitaries (Mem 50, 154, Au 171). The proud and careless notes (VP 213) that Edward Malins claims Yeats later came to associate with the aristocracy (A Preface to Yeats, 1974, p82) are, in fact, clearly designed to recall, in the context of his earlier publications, the established Irish hierarchy. By 1916 the solitary artist-figure (Yeats sees the artist as fisherman in 'The Fish') has combined the 'aristocratic' virtues of wisdom and simplicity which would be best expressed in a poem "maybe as cold/And passionate as the dawn" (VP 347-8). Yeats seeks, in 'The Fisherman', to write for his own race, and the combination of qualities that he alights on, passion and coldness, is precisely that considered most crucial to later fascist racism (see e.g. Mosse op.cit. p69-70). It is a combination that characterised, for Yeats, the heroic Parnell (Au 232).

The aristocrats and the peasants were, in their different ways, the lords of the land, and at the end of his life Yeats was still urging Irish poets to "Sing the peasantry, and then/Hard-riding country gentlemen" (VP 639). They had access to, and were touched by, the sacred earth, and the gulf between them as classes was bridged by that shared privilege and by the artist, who drew from both, and synthesised their virtues. These classes were interdependent, culturally as well as materially, and together the aristocrat and the peasant furnish the nation's art with its images. It is in this interaction that Cairns Craig sees the nub of Yeats's fascism:

> Only an aristocracy, accumulating riches through generations, and a peasantry, living in the same place generation after generation, can provide the appropriate kind of memory for the poet: that social configuration informs Yeats's..... political discussions throughout [his career] and is the pattern [his] revolution is intended to re-establish, (Craig op.cit. p256).

Fascist propaganda of the 1920s and '30s certainly focused on such a combination.

As the isolated countryman was set against the urban masses, the land, a powerful racial symbol, was set squarely against the evil of the city. We should regard the execration of London in the early letters to Katharine Tynan[40] as the natural prejudice of exile, and particularly, perhaps, from traditional Irish values. Patrick Kavanagh, for one, found that "after the chaste paganism of Ireland London's materialist immorality terrified me".[41] There is also a political point to be made. London is, after all, "the capitol of the enemy" (LNI 153). Even in these early letters, however, a more general disgust is apparent. Dublin itself, had been "a little too populous" (L43) he recalls in 1887, and a visit in the mid-'90s left him tired and glad to leave (L237). These remarks put the political suggestions into context and develop a point first considered in the second part of the 1886 Ferguson essay:

> When the world was fresh [the poets] gave us a clear glass to see the world through, but slowly, as nature lost her newness, or they began more and more to live in cities or for some other cause, the glass was dyed with ever deepening colours, and now we scarcely see what lies beyond because of the pictures that are painted all over it, (UPI 103).

The Blakean echo here[42] is confirmed by his 1899 remarks on 'The Theatre':

> Blake has said that all art is a labour to bring again the Golden Age, and all culture is certainly a labour to bring again the simplicity of the first ages, with knowledge of good and evil added to it. The drama has need of cities that it may find men in sufficient numbers, and cities destroy the emotions to which it appeals, and therefore the days of the drama are brief and come but seldom, (E&I 167).

In The Speckled Bird Maclagan's apotheosis of rusticity is picked up by the Yeats persona, Michael Hearne, and it would appear that Yeats

agreed with those peasants who considered beauty "a mark of holiness or divinity" (SB 99 and see 20). Recalling the London of the '80s in Autobiographies, his hatred of the city, the "miles and miles of stone and brick all round me" (Au 154), is fleshed out by his hatred of its middle class inhabitants:

> certain old women's faces filled me with horror, faces that are no longer there, or if they are pass before me unnoticed: the fat, blotched faces, rising above double chins, of women who have drunk too much beer and eaten much meat. In Dublin I had often seen old women walking with erect heads and gaunt bodies, talking to themselves with loud voices, mad with drink and poverty, but they were different, they belonged to romance. Da Vinci had drawn women who looked so, and so carried their bodies, (Au 155).

The juxtaposition of these images of Falstaffian vulgarity and romantic nobility is deliberate and telling. It is not designed to make a nationalistic point, but to isolate the mob once more from the triumvirate of privileged classes - being the 'aristocratic' (erect and gaunt), the poor, and the artists (da Vinci) - in precisely the way he had isolated it in the 1907 essay, 'Poetry and Tradition'. Yeats goes on to consider the middle classes and their pernicious influence:

> being always anxious [they] have come to possess little that is good in itself, and are always changing from thing to thing, for whatever they do or have must be a means to something else, and they have so little belief that anything can be an end in itself that they cannot understand you if you say, 'All the most valuable things are useless'. They prefer the stalk to the flower, and believe that poetry and painting exist that there may be instruction, and love that there may be children, and theatres that busy men may rest, and holidays that busy men may go on being busy. At all times they fear and even hate the things that have worth in themselves, for that worth may suddenly, as it were a fire, consume their Book of Life, where the world is represented by ciphers and symbols; and before all else, they fear irreverent joy and unserviceable sorrow. 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 eyesight. They complain much of that commandment that we can do almost what we will, if we do it gaily, and think that freedom is but a trifling with the world, (E&I 251-2, and see 7).

Yeats's recollection of Maud Gonne in the '90s, that her

> power over crowds was at its height, and some portion of the power came because she could still, even when pushing an abstract

> principle to what seemed to me an absurdity, keep her own mind free, and so when men and women did her bidding they did it not only because she was beautiful, but because that beauty suggested joy and freedom, (Au 364)

is put into perspective by her own account of the period:

> Yeats's aloofness and his intolerance of mediocrity, a spiritual pride which is dangerous, tended to keep him apart from the first person of the National Trinity, the People. He hated crowds, I loved them.[43]

In his declining years Yeats was repelled by democracy and the prospect of socialist revolution. It is clear, however, that this is rooted in a much earlier contempt for the middle-class mob, and its characteristic thirst for rhetoric. Yeats, as we have seen, was impressed by Henley's aristocratic mien, "his hatred of the crowd and of that logical realism which is but popular oratory" (Mem 39). Yeats began this first draft of the autobiography in 1915, and it is possible that his account is coloured by the hatred of the crowd's obsessions that had deepened discernibly during the years since the early association with Henley. It appears, however, that Yeats admired Henley's derision and daily flouting of the "common rout" (Au 126) as much as his powerful, if not altogether attractive, personality.

At least one of the 'Momentary Thoughts' (the lyric later renamed 'These are the Clouds') of the 1910 collection, The Green Helmet, is anything but momentary. Its long gestation begins perhaps in Yeats's adolescence, certainly by the mid-'90s:

> The weak lay hand on what the strong had done,
> Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
> And discord follow upon unison,
> And all things at one common level lie, (VP 265).

The antagonism between artist, in this case Augusta Gregory, and 'crowd' is a recurrent theme in the 1910 'Journal', where a draft of this poem first appears, (Mem 259-60). Sunk deep in hatred, and intellectually castrated by it, the crowd contemplates "all creative power as the eunuchs contemplate Don Juan as he passes through Hell on the white horse" (Mem 176). Yeats enlarges on several reasons for this antagonism, and the roots of all are discernible in the '90s. The first and most obvious point is that "the mob of casual men" (Mem 251, and see 270) Yeats comes to hate is simply too large for the individual creative talent to operate within. The artist is loth to bow to the multitude (UP1 248 - 1892), but he feels always its "weight and pressure" (Ex 26). Yeats detested crowds as early as 1887 (L43). Furthermore, the ugliness of the crowd's business, "commerce and manufacture" (Mem 124), itself destroys art,[44] and leads to two distinct traits which are inimical to the intellectual sensitivity necessary to artistic processes. The first is, paradoxically, virtue:

> The poet's enemies are those industries that make a good citizen. A poet is a good citizen turned inside out, (Mem 140-1).

'Virtue' had killed the poetic instinct of Richard le Gallienne, and by 1909 Yeats was becoming concerned that it might have destroyed his own "lyric faculty" (Mem 171-2). The 'good citizen' was motivated by the "sordid compromise of success", by comfort and safety and he had prevailed:

> when the valleys and the hills had almost become clay and stone, the good citizens plucked up their heart and took possession of the world and filled it with their little compact thoughts; and romance fled to more and more remote fairylands, and forgot that it was ever more than an old tale which nobody believes, (UP2 194).

Secondly, the crowd had been successful because it had been ruthless in the pursuit of its own interests. Self-interest had occasioned in society an ill-breeding and vulgarity that was even more difficult for the artist to confront than the stolid stupidity of the 'good citizen':

> to oppose the new ill-breeding of Ireland, which may in a few years destroy all that has given Ireland a distinguished name in the world..... I can only set up a secondary or interior personality created by me out of the tradition of myself, and this personality (alas, to me only possible in my writings) must be always gracious and simple. It must have that slight separation from immediate interests which makes charm possible, while remaining near enough for fire..... So much of the world as is dominated by the contest of interests is a mechanism. The newspaper is the roar of the machine. Argument, the moment acknowledged victory is sought, becomes a clash of interest, (Mem 142).

The new ill-breeding was to be resisted by the artist.[45] This, however, is a formidable task, since, although ignorant ('vacant' and 'uninstructed'), the crowd attacks the individual with a powerful combination of logic and rhetoric. Disliking "all individual eminence",

> this feeling is increased when it recognizes in that individual the free mind, the mind that plays with life and expresses great things lightly. It distrusts all that is not plainly organized and determined, all that is not plainly logical work..... It likes to see the railway tracks of thought. It is afraid of the wilderness..... It loves rhetoric because rhetoric is impersonal and predetermined, and it hates poetry whose suggestiveness cannot be foreseen, (Mem 169).

The crowd's remorseless logic is flawed (Mem 207), but its rhetorical skill (UP2 34 - 1897) forces it into the belief that truth is an opinion (Mem 169). 'Opinion' is vulgar, and intolerable for the artist "because it arms his uninspired moment against his inspiration" (Mem 170). The artist vulgarises himself "the moment his systematized thought passes out of his passion as from under a fiery cloud" (ibid). If the artist is to be 'better' than the mediocre crowd (UP1 249 - 1892), he must initiate by slow degrees (Mem 170), must, by eradicating opinion, become as invisible as God (ibid). Artistic progress can be seen, then, as a kind of mini-evolution.

In the 'Journal' Yeats goes on to make the important point that what seems to him to be true of individuals (that mechanical thought destroys the suggestiveness that leads to nobler creations) might also be true of nations:

> perhaps a great popular thinker, a Rousseau, a Voltaire, a Wesley is a misfortune. He is too clever, too logical, too definite. He enables the little to believe themselves great, to believe they understand, till they muddy all the fountains of truth, (ibid).

This is the first formulation of Yeats's belief that the philosophy of the crowd is democracy, and that the philosophy is fundamentally wrong. It had been suggested, however, as early as 1890, in his review of Sophie Bryant's Celtic Ireland:

> Ireland was above all things democratic and communistic - all lands belonging to the tribe. It was just such a system that a sociable people full of restless energies would make themselves; and, as might be said of Greece, it turned out good for the world, bad for the nation. When other countries were bowed under military despotism, missions poured forth over Europe from the schools of Ireland, but when the day of battle came she could not combine against the invader, (UPI 165).

By 1890 then Yeats had certainly not forgotten the early scientific influences. In the Darwinian struggle between nations democracy and communism are fatal because they encourage the weak rather than the strong to flourish. Yeats decided very early that freedom, even, is not necessarily the greatest good; less so, for instance, than discipline:

> I have preferred to talk of greater things than freedom. In our day every idler, every trifler, every bungler, cries out for his freedom; but the busy, and weighty minded, and skilful handed, meditate more upon the bonds that they gladly accept, than upon the freedom that has never meant more in their eyes than right to choose the bonds that have made them faithful servants of law, (Is the order of RR & AC to remain a magical order?, 1901, p29)

Yeats was keen, later, to translate Balzac's literary Darwinism into socio-political ideology in the search for a "logical unity" (Ex 268-70):

> the more noble and stable qualities, those that are spread through the personality, and not isolated in a faculty, are the results of victory in the family struggle, while those qualities of logic and of

> will, all those qualities of toil rather than of power, belong most to the individual struggle, (Ex 270).

Either way, strength is born of struggle and "victory".

There can be no doubt that William Morris, "poet, Socialist, romance writer, artist and upholsterer" (UP1 183), and seemingly all these equally, influenced Yeats profoundly. That influence was not diminished by his discovery of Morris's creative limitations. In 1927 he was still Yeats's "chief of men" (L724), and in 1938, clearly moved by Morris's memory rather than by what is a rather mediocre poem, he wrote to Vernon Watkins of Idris Davies's 'William Morris' that

> if I were a millionaire I would pay somebody to set it to music and whenever I was visited by any person who knew Morris I would pay somebody to sing it to us, (L908).

Indeed, the recognition that Morris was perhaps not the greatest poet of his time (UP1 419, and Au 141) did not occasion any reduction in his response to Morris's poetry. In 1933, reading Sigurd to his family, Yeats could hardly read for tears (L816). It was Morris's personality and physical presence, however, that drew the young Yeats. As a boy he had read Morris, but with no great enthusiasm (except for The Man Who Never Laughed Again), and the prose romances that so entranced Yeats had not at that time been written. It was "Morris himself" who enchanted him, his "spontaneity and joy" (Au 141). The Watts portrait recalled the man:

> grave wide-open eyes, like the eyes of some dreaming beast, remind me of the open eyes of Titian's Ariosto, while the broad vigorous body suggests a mind that has no need of the intellect to remain sane, though it give itself to every fantasy.....
> His intellect, unexhausted by speculation or casuistry, was wholly at the service of hand and eye, and whatever he pleased he did with an unheard-of ease and simplicity..... a never idle man of great physical strength and extremely irrascible..... a man more joyous than any intellectual man of our world, (Au 141-2).

That Morris was "unexhausted by speculation" was precisely what puzzled A E:

> I find it curious that Yeats, who so often speaks of passionate literature when he is generalising, loves in fact the romances of William Morris, the least passionate inventions in English literature, more perhaps than any other imaginative works. He himself is endlessly speculative, while the works of Morris are without speculation..... I suppose an intellect which is so restless must be envious of a spirit so content with its vision.[46]

A E's explanation is not as convincing as Yeats's own. Morris's irresistible persona drew Yeats as inexorably into unlikely political as literary predilections. Yeats joined the socialist circle at Kelmscott House, but he was never a true socialist, nor could he be, having been vulnerable to the crude social implications of the new science, and having taken his first occult steps with A. P. Sinnett as his guide. Morris was a man of genuine but Utopian vision:

> to others beauty was a solitary vision, a gift coming from God they knew not how; but to him it was always some golden fleece or happy island, some well at the world's end, found after many perils and many labours in the world, and in all his later books, at any rate, found for the world's sake. Almost alone among the dreamers of our time, he accepted life and called it good; and because almost alone among them he saw, amid its incompleteness and triviality, the Earthly Paradise that shall blossom at the end of the ages, (UP1 419).

As Yeats's interests became increasingly unified he came to regard socialism and democracy with profound suspicion, and eventually with hatred. During the Kelmscott period socialism is little more than an elaborate whimsy, a vehicle on which to approach the heroic Morris. Indeed, in the 1890 review of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition, "Socialism for the poor" and "Eutopia" (sic) are synonymous (UP1 183). Morris was, himself, not the most tactful of egalitarians: Yeats was doubtless even less so (see Au 143). His preoccupation with 'good breeding' would have distanced him significantly from the average socialist:

> one always met certain more or less educated workmen, rough of speech and manner, with a conviction to meet every turn. I was told by one of them, on a night when I had done perhaps more than my share of the talking, that I had talked more nonsense in one evening than he had heard in the whole course of his past life. I had merely preferred Parnell, then at the height of his career, to

> Michael Davitt, who had wrecked his Irish influence by international politics, (Au 140).

The 'workman' would almost certainly have encountered Parnellites more entrenched and better informed than Yeats, whose Parnell-worship did not develop until some time after 1891. It is likely that Yeats entirely misinterpreted the cause of the workman's contempt. Yeats's monologue would have revealed both his disparagement of the ill-bred, and his extremely unsure grasp of the fundamental tenets of socialism. The unspoken sneer of Yeats's account of the "young workman who was educating himself between Morris and Karl Marx" (Au 148) indicates that by his early twenties Yeats held views that are quite contrary to traditional liberal assumptions.[47] Working class socialists were bigoted (Mem 23), almost caricatures:

> I disliked the working-men revolutionists, their perpetual overstatement and above all their attacks on religion, and at last I ceased to attend the debates and lectures after a speech as exaggerated as any of their own on the slowness of change and the dependence of all ideas of equality of wealth on Christianity, (Mem 21).

We should remember that the "good citizen" had the priest in his pocket (UP2 195). Yeats associated himself with socialism partly to learn the art of public speaking (Mem 21), but mainly to associate himself with Morris. In 'Four Years' he confesses that it was not socialist economics but Morris's publications that drew him to Kelmscott House (Au 146).

Yeats's claim that he withdrew from the circle because of its irreligion is disingenuous. His innate quasi-aristocratic impulse precluded genuine sympathy with the most vital tenets of socialism. He needed Morris as an artistic mentor, but his philosophy of life he found "altogether alien" as early as the summer of 1887, (L44). By 1896 he had recognised the distance between his own vision and Morris's "fierce anger against most

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things that we delight to honour" (UP1 420). Furthermore, the almost antithetical influence of John O'Leary would have drawn Yeats rapidly from the egalitarianism he despised. Indeed, O'Leary, in moving Yeats from socialism to nationalism, and not merely by his personal rejection of democracy, stimulated a revolt in the poet against the indiscipline he perceived in democratic principles. His initial attraction to nationalism centred on his belief that it offered control and direction:

> there is no accepted authority to explain why the more difficult pleasure is the nobler pleasure. The fascination of the national movement for me in my youth was, I think, that it seemed to be an image of a social ideal which could give fine life and fine art authority, (Mem 180).[48]

Yeats's 'fascination' began in 1886. It is startling to note how early the seeds of reaction were sown. Yeats's contempt for the crowd and for its philosophy, democracy, is proto-fascist.[49]

At the end of the introduction to this thesis I tried to demonstrate that Yeats's rejection of socialism can be seen as a direct response to Lyell and Darwin. I have tried to balance that suggestion in this chapter by showing that Yeats's attitudes to race and to class are consistent with the 'findings' of those who applied Darwinism to human society, and are inevitably hostile to democracy. By the 1920s Yeats's fascism is confirmed. Donald R Pearce, in his edition of The Senate Speeches of W B Yeats (1960), comments revealingly on Yeats's later reaction to democracy:

> Democracy seemed to him a crude middle-class mechanism by which power and leadership were systematically passed from the mediocre to the incompetent, until the national heritage lay wasted:
>
> > And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the State a tree,
> > That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century after century,
> > Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality.

> Attached to the tree, the leaves were formal individuals in a living three-dimensional world; on the ground, they were two dimensional objects in the prostrate world of Euclidian space. He came to hate democracy with an aristocratic hate, and to yearn for strong, but enlightened, political controls. But his authoritarianism, though emphatic and at times exasperated, was never cynical or merely truculent; it was not the authoritarianism of a system, but the authority of the individual, in the face of, or in defiance of, all system, (p16-17, and see Ex 412-28).

The desire that the best rather than the most representative Senators preside over the House is reflected in the speeches of December 12th, 1922 and July 18th, 1928 (SS 30-1, 151-2, and see 76-7). That Yeats's fascism was never cynical or truculent is precisely what distinguishes his ideology from inter-war fascist political practice. Fascism is not Nazism. However much we abhor the theory we should not approach it with our minds clouded by the horrors of one particular application of that theory. Pearce's point, however, that Yeats desired to replace the system not with another system but with the Darwinian competition of the strongest individuals, is suggestive. It is a notion that finds imaginative expression in the appeals for raw and unrestrained life that punctuate Yeats's early writing.

The purpose of this chapter has been to measure Yeats's early sense of race and caste. I have shown that Yeats believed the differences between races to be of great importance, and that he considered the Celtic race more 'spiritual', and thence more 'poetic', and thence 'holier' than the Anglo-Saxon race with which it was in conflict. This quasi-divinity should be expected, he felt, to inform the nationalist (i.e. political) struggle. Having established Yeats's sense of race I have followed his systematisation of the Celtic race, the break-down into classes (to be encouraged) which carry the racial heritage, and those (to be discouraged) which work directly against that heritage, and shown it to

be profoundly hostile to democratic systems of government and social organisation. My intention has been to demonstrate that certain attitudes to race and to society that are, firstly, crucial to later fascist ideologies, and secondly, consistent with the statements of Yeats's own 'fascist' period, are discernible in his work from the very outset of his career. These attitudes are essentially Social-Darwinist, though tinged with a (quite unwarranted) sense of belonging to a superior caste.

The argument of this thesis is that Yeats never forgot the scientific influences of his adolescence, and that it is these, more perhaps than any other combination of influences, that directed his early intellectual development. In the context of this argument his long and continuous association with the most seemingly non-scientific of fringe religions will require some explanation. In fact, careful reassessment of Yeats's spiritual development confirms, as I shall show in Chapter 3, that the scientific spirit is at the very heart of his religious consciousness. Firstly, however, it will be necessary to return to the nineteenth century intellectual climate, briefly, to examine the context of Yeats's spiritual conflict. The following chapter is an account of the relationship between the new science and the established Church, on the one hand, and the occult fringe on the other.

1) see, in particular Elizabeth Cullingford: Yeats, Ireland and Fascism (1981), and Cairns Craig: Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry (1982). See also, Alastair Hamilton: The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1918-1945, (1971), p276-80, John R. Harrison: The Reactionaries (1966), p39-73, Conor Cruise O'Brien, IER 207-78.

2) ibid. See also Sean O'Casey: Rose and Crown (1952), p141-44.

3) It is interesting to note that Sturge Moore pencilled into his copy of that book (now in the Stirling Library, Senate House, London) the suggestion, "and perhaps Hitler", after Yeats's description of 'primary' men,

> whose hatreds are impersonal [and who] are violent in their intellect but gentle in themselves, as doubtless Robespierre was gentle, (AV(B) 85, and see 81n).

We should remember that Yeats began thinking of the 'Vision' theories in 1918, and that the work, although not published until 1925, was substantially complete by 1923-4.

4) Hone 372. See Donald T. Torchiana in IER 132-7, and SS 173, Ex 354.

5) see below p105-10.

6) Three Great Irishmen, (1952), p91. Ussher acknowledges Cecil Salkeld as the source of this anecdote. See particularly Hone 471-2 and IER 245n3 and 253n2 - O'Brien calls other remarks in Ussher's book into some doubt.

7) IER 258-63, and see Craig op.cit. p.10-14.

8) see, e.g. George Steiner: In Bluebeard's Castle, (1971), p.62-4.

9) see, e.g. Richard Griffiths: Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-39, 1980.

10) But see O'Brien's article, 'Why Machiavelli and I are Sordid', Observer, 29th January, 1984 and Warwick Gould's reply, Observer, 5th February, 1984.

11) see, e.g. HWP 658-9. Russell's remarks consistute an admirable gloss on the second part of 'Parnell's Funeral'.

12) see Gasman op.cit. p.39-44. For an account of the background to the racism of fascist Italy see Gregor op.cit. p241-82.

13) Vidkun Quisling: Russia and Ourselves, quoted in Hayes op.cit.p20.

14) see above p28.

15) see, e.g. John S. Stuart-Glennie: The New Theory of History (1876), p27, 49-55. In his 'Sociological Studies' (Sociological Papers: 1905, Vol.II, 1906) he writes that the science of sociology reveals 'facts' that

will certainly modify, if not revolutionise, many current conceptions - that, for instance, as to equality - and hence, as to what is justice. For, if the capacities of human races and sexes differ, then duties differ, and with duties rights, (p254).

See also p.260-2. See also Lucy M.J. Garnett: Greek Folk Poesy, ed. J.S. Stuart-Glennie, 1896, p.xvi-xvii, xxvii-xxviii, xxxv, and in particular p.1-15. Stuart-Glennie insists on the

correlative moral and intellectual differences between the Higher White Race and the Lower Coloured and Black Races as to make the rule of the White Colonists and the obedience of the Coloured or Black Natives possible, (p.9-10).

16) see also James Webb: The Flight from Reason (1971), p.216, and Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater: Man: Whence, How and Wither (1913), p.315.

17) The endnote to Mythologies in the 1932 page proofs of Volume II of the never published Edition de Luxe (p479-80 in Michael Yeats's collection) roughly corresponds to the note on p.1 of Mythologies (1959). The chief difference is the passage which ends with a firm distinction between nationalistic and racial initiatives:

they rang down the curtain so far as I was concerned on what was called 'The Celtic Movement'. An 'Irish Movement' took its place - 1931, (Ex 72)

The fifth section of 'Under Ben Bulben' is a reminder that the Irish dramatic renaissance did not destroy the racial impulse.

18) e.g. Mosse op.cit. p.233-4, 241-2, 250-61.

19) '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France: Report of Speeches delivered at the Inaugural Banquet, (1898), p.9-10.

20) see, e.g., F.S.L. Lyons: Ireland Since the Famine, (1973, revised edition), p.21. See also Sean O'Faolain: The Irish (1969, revised edition), p.104-21.

21) These passages illustrate an element of ritualistic earth-worship to which I will return. A methodological problem will be evident here. The necessity of keeping aspects of my argument in context has rendered a certain amount of 'flashing forward' unavoidable. At the same time a certain achronology must be allowed if themes rather than periods are to be kept in view.

22) E&I 212 - 1903. See also Webb: The Flight from Reason, p.211-2, 219, and M.J. Sidnell: 'A Daintical pair of accomplasses: Joyce and Yeats' in Litters from Aloft (1971), eds. Ronald Bates and Harry J. Pollock, p.63.

23) Gwynn 23. See also MEM 123, L295. Au 253-5.

24) see, e.g. Ithell Colquhoun: Sword of Wisdom, (1975), p.56, 106, 174-5 and the reproduction of the diagrams of Celtic Divinities in Mathers's hand, p.192-3. Lucy S. Kalogera, in her thesis, Yeats's Celtic Mysteries (The Florida State University, PhD, 1977), is confident that the primary impulse was Yeats's. See also L.W. Fennelly: S.L. Macgregor Mathers and the Fiction of W.B. Yeats (The Florida State University, PhD, 1973).

25) see '"The Noble and the Beggar-Man": Yeats and Literary Nationalism' by Ann Saddlemeyer, in The World of W.B. Yeats (1965), eds. Robin Skelton and Ann Saddlemeyer, p.22-39.

26) The Speckled Bird (1976) ed. William H. O'Donnell, p.31.

27) for the identification of poet and politician see below p.127-33.

28) I think that these lines are designed to recall Tennyson's familiar evolution poem ('In Memoriam A.H.H.', LVI):

> Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine, shrieked against his creed, (The Poems of Tennyson, 1969, ed. Christopher Ricks, p.912).

The political point is clear. Cathleen, a personification of Ireland, represents man's 'spirituality' in setting herself so firmly against those who apply natural laws to human society, Darwinist 'Materialists', England.

29) Ex 29. For a less romantic view of the history of the Irish peasantry see O'Faolain op.cit. p.74-85.

30) see also T.S. Eliot in Criterion 11:42 (October 1931), p.72.

31) see, e.g. E&I 251, and E.R. Walsh's reminiscences quoted in Hone 234-5. See below p.72.

32) see, e.g. Corinna Salvadori: Yeats and Castiglione (1965).

33) Leon Trotsky: Fascism (1944), p.11.

34) Mem 146. See also 155, 210, LNI 129, Ex 20-22.

35) Mem 226. "The seer" is "the most 'aristocratic' of men" (UP2 131). We might note also the 'ecstasy' of 'dignity' (VP 253-4).

36) 'Yeats's Romantic Dante' in CLQ 99. See also Au 323-6.

37) Au 101. We should remember that it was Henley's "aristocratic attitudes" that attracted Yeats (Mem 39), and that his early 'socialism' was Morris's 'aristocratic' brand (Au 143). See also E&I 250.

38) see, e.g. UP2 238, and address of 17th October, 1900, to the Gaelic League quoted G.W.L. Telfer: Yeats's Idea of the Gael (1965), p.93-4. In the late '90s Yeats desired that the control of the administration be in the hands of "some few men" (Au 362). See also SB 52.

39) Yeats's 'loneliness' is not, as A.G. Stock points out, Shelley's state of misery, but "a high condition to which none but the fearless may attain" (W.B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought, 1964, p.52). 'To His Heart, Bidding it Have No Fear' is an adequate illustration of this. The great adept, Yeats claimed in 1901 (Is the Order of R.R. and A.C. ro remain a magical order?, p.27),

> goes his way to supreme Adeptship,..... absolutely alone, for men attain to the supreme wisdom in a loneliness that is like the loneliness of death.

40) L34,35,43,81-2, and see 62,94-5, Mem 31, Au 191. In a letter of May 1890, only partly reproduced by Wade (L152-3), Yeats describes London as a "detestable cauldron of a place". I am grateful to Warwick Gould for access to the unpublished letters manuscripts.

41) The Green Fool (1938), p.349. Yeats and Kavanagh shared a love of the loneliness enforced by their lives in London, (ibid. and L34).

42) see, e.g. Blake's 'London'.

43) Gwynn 27. Maud Gonne's influence on Yeats can be measured by a letter written by O'Grady in 1890 rebuking him for his crowd-love, (Letters to W.B. Yeats, 1977, eds. Richard J. Finneran, George Mills Harper and William M. Murphy, I p.76-7. It is worth noting that Sean O'Casey, for one, had little respect for Maud Gonne's love of crowds, (Inishfallen, Fare Thee Well, 1949, p.189).

44) LNI 214 (1892), and UP1 268 (1893). This, incidentally, suggests that Conor Cruise O'Brien's assertion that Yeats's hatred of the 'base' began only some time after 1903 (IER 225) is at least a decade wide of the mark. Yeats might even have inherited it from his father - see John Hearne's desire to undermine middle-class authority in SB 3-4.

45 Mem 169. It should be remembered that Yeats had long sensed the vulgarity of the crowd - see, e.g. UP2 129 (1898), 154 (1899), and LNI 206 (1890).

46) quoted in Peter Faulkner: William Morris and W.B. Yeats (1962), p.14.

47) It should be pointed out, however, that the testament of Autobiographies ought to be approached carefully. The preparation of that document was, of course, a revisionary exercise.

48) see also the call, in 1891, for restraint and responsibility, UP1 201-2.

49) see, e.g. Walter C. Langer: The Mind of Adolf Hitler, 1972 (1973), p.64, 163. See also Joachim Fest: Hitler (1973), transl. Richard and Clara Winston, 1974, p.54.

# CHAPTER II

This chapter accounts, briefly, for the context of Yeats's spiritual development. The first part deals with the various responses of the Church to the newly revealed body of scientific information that seemed to contradict the great myths upon which she was founded, and looks, in particular, at the relationship with orthodox religion of some of the scientists we know Yeats to have read. The second part examines the occult response to the same information, particularly as evinced by A P Sinnett and H P Balvatsky.

The Darwinist-Creationist debate is not yet concluded, although it is not nowadays conducted with the same vigour as in the second half of the nineteenth century. Orthodox Christian authorities, when faced with the hostile rationalism of anti-Design neo-Darwinism, retreat typically behind seemingly impregnable biblical texts.[1] In so doing they reinforce the conflict, essential to their credibility, between the 'how?' and the 'why?' of man's genesis. In recent years some scientists have sought to depolarise the debate by causing the results of scientific research to seem less significant than hitherto,[2] but although modern evolutionists seem less dogmatic than the Victorian pioneers, for the most part science remains as confident as ever in refined Darwinism. Indeed, it can now claim to be closing the 'how?-why?' gap, consistently reaffirmed by Christian and occultist alike, to the entire exclusion of Design.[3] The manufacture of protoplasm is, understandably, regarded by the anti-Design lobby as the key issue.[4]

The reconciliation of these polarised disciplines remains perhaps the greatest intellectual challenge to face man. As Shaw says in Everybody's Political What's What?, 1944, (p362-3), both our science and our religion are "gravely wrong", but they are not all wrong, and to synthesise them is man's most urgent obligation. Imaginative attempts to meet this challenge (in which we might include, for example, the works of Herbert Spencer and, perhaps, Matthew Arnold's Literature and Dogma, 1873 - the two men Yeats once considered alone capable of writing an essay - MM 32, and see Mikhail op.cit. p5) are, however, greatly outweighed by the popular evangelistic pulp that characterises modern explanations of Christian doctrine.

The apparently irresistible logic of the anit-Creationist rationale is blocked, as Huxley discovered, by platitudinous bibliolatry (CE IV p.ix), or it is simply ignored. Popular Christianity depends on popular, and popularly presented, literary exposition, and in refusing to consider the consequences for the average worshipper of the results of scientific research (the essential point being that science = knowledge, is not the proper province of biblical exegesis) its characteristic stance has been pre-Copernican. Christianity has been forced to make room for science, but, unwilling to chance direct conflict with it, it has argued, accordingly, that the two disciplines perform different, complementary tasks. Typically it has adopted a disarming formula that is repeated with some success in the body of popular literary evangelism. An authority will be quick to claim that the Church cannot side-step or disregard science, but will make little or no attempt in the subsequent discussion to explain or counter it. An example is the Reverend R.F. Tafel's Huxley and Swedenborg (1889). He establishes with considerable perspicacity that

> there was..... a time when there were no human beings in this world; and again, there was a time when human beings first came into existence in this world (p7-8).

How man evolved, or was created, is beyond the scope of Tafel's thesis at this stage, but we are assured that the problem "naturally" comes up in the second lecture. The full extent of Tafel's 'explanation' of man's genesis in that lecture is

> Yea, the very existence of man is a wonder - a miracle, to every thoughtful person, (ibid. p54).

Tafel's response is typical. Unable to fight Darwin's hypothesis, he must seem to contradict it, whilst carefully avoiding it. The obvious upshot of Christians' reluctance to conflict directly with science has been a massive reduction of their reliance on historical biblical matter, and a corresponding affirmation of faith. The truism that 'faith is caught not taught' is as relevant now as in Huxley's age. Yeats was himself quick to learn this lesson. Mohini Chatterji claimed to have had a happy childhood because he had thought that

> truth was something that could be conveyed from one man's mind to another. I now know that it is a state of mind, (Au 464).[5]

In a 1894 review of AE's Homeward Songs by the Way, Yeats writes that

> all ideas fade or change in passing from one mind to another, and that what we call 'truth' is but one of our illusions, a perishing embodiment of a bodiless essence, (UP1 338).

Huxley has proved a discerning prophet in all this. In 1890 he predicted that man would eventually separate faith from the supposed facts of scriptural narrative, so that

> no longer in contact with fact of any kind, Faith stands now and for ever proudly inaccessible to the attacks of the infidel.[6]

This prediction is less prophesy, however, than an inescapable consequence of the logical empiricism that had brought Huxley into conflict with the

Church in the first place. The Origin of Species precipitated an immeasurable crisis in Victorian philosophical speculation, and its publication brought to a conclusion the destruction of the foundations of the orthodox religious establishment that had included Shelleyan atheism, utilitarianism, Malthus's population theories, positivitism, and the rationalistic exegesis of Renan and Strauss. Sean O'Casey rightly notes that "Darwin's flame of thought had burned away a lot of the sacred straw and stubble" (Drums Under the Windows, 1945, p26, and see p92-6), but it had been smouldering for some time. The Church, still reeling from Hume's demolition of the logical basis of Creation, was inevitably fiercely hostile to what appeared to be another strictly anti-Design hypothesis. Certainly, The Origin of Species seemed to refute benevolent Design,[7] but Darwin was careful not to publically refute the entire notion of Design. He makes a point of firmly denying the possibility of the creation of individual species (OS 194, 395-6, 435ff, 478ff), but is not ipso facto anti-Creator (OS 484). Indeed, he closes The Origin of Species with a reasonably commonplace expression of awe in the face of Creation (OS 489-90). Much of the clerical, and scientific, hostility Darwin endured was, as Burrow says,[8] founded on falsified accounts of the text, and deliberately misleading and prejudicial reviews. Darwin was not responsible for critics' wilful misuse and misrepresentation of the hypothesis, nor for the activities of self-appointed disciples. As Renan said of Christ,

> on the whole, the character of Jesus, far from having been embellished by his biographers, has been lowered by them, (Ernest Renan: Life of Jesus, 1864, p306).

Darwin suffered as much from ignorant support, as from ignorant vilification.

The attitude of the Church to science in the nineteenth century was founded on the avoidance of direct conflict. Most polemical tracts, biblical exegeses and general Christian commentary bypassed the possibility of confontation by concentrating solely on internal doctrinal dispute. Christians studiously steered clear of the controversial no-man's-land across which Darwin and Darwinists (who did not necessarily stand for the same things) had irreverently tramped, and adhered strictly to the teachings of the early Church and to traditional ecclesiasticism. There were ingenious attempts to meet the challenge of post-Darwinian agnosticism. Alexander Allen, for instance, in 1884, used Darwin as the key to the reality of the apprehensions of Goethe, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Blake and Shelley. Science had revealed the mystery they had hovered around, and it proved to be

> no other than the divine immanence in nature as revealed in the forces whose activity is everywhere governed by eternal, immutable law.[9]

This is not far removed from the modified pantheism of Ernst Haeckel, or even of Bishop Frederick Temple, an unusually radical cleric who came to regard 'Matter' as the unaided evolver of all cosmic phenomena once it had had bestowed upon it its "original impress" (Religion and Science, 1884, p115, 161-7). More typical attempts to deflect the onslaught of evolutionary theories, however, as we have seen, appeared to reconcile the disciplines without ever meeting the specific challenge.

The alternative to reconciliation, and by far the most characteristic clerical reaction, was unqualified rejection of Darwin's speculations. The Church maintained that the discoveries of science, such as they were, were much too incomplete to constitute a threat to clear-minded Christians. The majority of these, J W Thomas insisted,

> believe that God created the world, and placed life upon it; but it is an open secret, if it be a secret at all, that the theory of evolution is gaining a firmer hold upon all sections of the community. Not because the truth of the theory is self-evident, for it is not, but because the spirit of the age is characterized by a free, unsparing, and somewhat unrestrained use of the anatomical knife. If we follow men of science into the mazes of the primordial atom..... we almost invariably find that God is left out of consideration, (Spiritual Law in the Natural World, 1894, p107).

Those who admitted the qualified validity of any aspect of Darwin's hypothesis were frequently subjected to as much Christian ridicule as were the original promulgators of the theory.[10] Behind the reverberating warning that to be an evolutionist is to abjure God lies the great fear of careful, objective and detailed criticism - "the anatomical knife". In spite of this it was a climate in which Huxley's Agnosticism flourished. As Burrow points out (op.cit. p40), clerical resignations, as a result of earlier geological findings that utterly repudiated Genesis, were commonplace before the publication of The Origin of Species. Darwinism, as popularly conceived, sent Christianity staggering back to faith with fewer and fewer contemptuous bursts of righteous episcopalian indignation. As Thomas predicted, God was beginning to be left out of account as younger pro-Darwinist scientists were incorporated into the scientific establishment during the second half of the century, and the body of non-clerical opinion became increasingly distanced from the traditional tenets of the Church. Man was once more prostrating himself before the altar of the Unknown God (Acts 17:23).

That this was in no small measure due to the lectures and publications of Thomas Huxley is beyond dispute. Huxley insisted that he was

> not aware that there is any sect of Agnostics; and if there be, I am not its acknowledged prophet or pope, (CE V p210-11, 1889)

but the term was his own, and he persistently defended the 'scientific' principles of Agnosticism. In an autobiographical sketch published in 1902 he confessed to an "untiring opposition to that ecclesiastical spirit, that clericalism, which..... is the deadly enemy of science" (CE I p16-17). His stance on religious matters was founded on his conviction that

> it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty, (CE V P310, 1889).

Supported by this principle, and his irresistible logic, Huxley's dissection of the matter upon which clerical dogma was founded, and his derision of the Church for its inability to compete with the logic and objectivism of science, was highly persuasive. His work bears out his boast that

> sober and well-founded physical and literary criticism plays..... havoc with the doctrine that the canonical scriptures of the New Testament "declare incontrovertibly the actual historical truth in all records" (CE V p36, 1892).

There is no reason to consider this a 'pose',[11] and every reason to see it as a sincere investigation in accordance with Darwin's dictum that "without doubting there can be no progress" (DM1 179). Huxley led the attack of scientific 'materialism' and Agnosticism on the mechanics of traditional Christian worship, but he received widespread and substantial intellectual support, from Tyndall and Haeckel in particular.

John Tyndall was a fierce opponent of all forms of superstition. He was entirely unable to accept non-empirical dogma, whether Christian or 'Spiritualist'. Huxley, while taking time to ridicule spiritualism in 'Agnosticism and Christianity', does conclude that it is preferable to revealed religion insofar as it offers more scientifically assessable evidence (CE V p340-2, 1889, but see, e.g. I p164, 1868). Tyndall's

experience did not accord with this. His attempt to verify spirit phenomena left him with a "feeling of despair as regards the prospects of humanity never before experienced" (Fragments of Science, 1871, p434), and this in spite of beginning the investigation with interest and an open mind (ibid p427). Having satisfied himself of the falseness of the phenomena, Tyndall encountered precisely the retreat into 'faith' that characterises beseiged Christians:

> The victims [of spiritualism] like to believe, and they do not like to be undeceived. Science is perfectly powerless in the presence of this frame of mind. It is, moreover, a state perfectly compatible with extreme intellectual subtlety and a capacity for devising hypotheses which only require the hardihood engendered by strong conviction, or by callous mendacity, to render them impregnable, (ibid. p435).[12]

Tyndall was fascinated by the power of the Church, however, by

> the hold which theology has taken of the human mind,..... which enables it to survive the ruin of what was long deemed essential to its stability.[13]

It should be pointed out though that he was not so vituperative as many of his colleagues, nor so confident in the displacement of the Church by science.

Ernst Haeckel, on the other hand, fulminated against the Church, but did not set himself entirely against all religious spirit. As we have seen, (above p12-14), this is rather confusing. Daniel Gasman has examined Haeckel's association with orthodox religion in his careful study of early fascist theory, The Scientific Origins of National Socialism. Briefly, both Haeckel and the Monist League took every opportunity to denounce the clergy, and established religion in general,[14] but proposed in its stead a specifically German form of pantheism. The Monists saw Haeckel as having freed

> by his forthright and courageous action..... the spirituality of mankind from the chains of dogmatic religion.[15]

As Gasman points out, Haeckel

> admitted to no half-way measures, no compromise with the old faith, no Germanic Christianity. Only a new religion of nature would suffice. Christianity, by inverting the natural hierarchy of the world with its doctrines of equality, submission, and weakness had led the Germans to the brink of biological collapse, (Gasman op.cit. p60).

Yeats makes precisely the same complaint, as we shall see, in 'The Wanderings of Oisin'.

Haeckel was a committed Darwinist. Any new 'religion', therefore, would of necessity be derived from perceived phenomena only, and would be directly answerable to natural laws as revealed by physicists and biologists. Monists were to find salvation in atonement with nature and its laws (The Riddle of the Universe, 1900, p345), which would give the German people both a satisfying and harmonious physical relationship with its environment and a spiritual Germanic impulse. Combined, these would prove culturally and politically irresistible. Within the Monist structure, however, Haeckel seems to have oscillated between the absolute pantheism of the belief that everything there is is God (incorporating rejection of artificiality, of merely human morality, and of any restriction of natural instinct - the ethos of Black or Lawrence, for instance, perhaps even of Yeats,16) and the subtler modified pantheism of the belief that God is the reality, or principle, behind nature (the acceptance of an underlying universal moral, or progressive principle - the ethos of a more obviously 'materialist' code, such as that of Marx, say or Nietzsche). As Gasman says, Haeckel's natural philosophy

> contained a great many idealist and vitalist assumptions which quite obviously transcended his materialism, (op.cit. p64).

To the non-Monist rationale the conflict of interests, and the philosophical contradictions, seem irreconcilable. On the one hand Haeckel demanded faith in German Monism, but on the other he denigrated all faith and, as a scientist, demanded that the "irrational superstition" of belief be purged from the Volk consciousness. It is at least questionable how empirical a religion can claim to be that admits to a controlling spirit, nationalist or otherwise, manipulating unseen the artefacts of the faith in the temple of natural phenomena. To the Monists, however, and to pro-Haeckelian materialists, the inconsistency seems to have been neither self-evident nor significant, and it is reasonable to assume that, through the "Alles ist Natur, Natur ist Alles" doctrine, Haeckel was indeed exposing his

> most deeply felt belief when he proposed that Germany could literally save itself by religious devotion to nature and to natural law, (Gasman op.cit. p63).

The Monists' religious and political ideals could thus be accomplished by the abolition of Christianity, and by the establishment in its place of a deified state. Nationalism and morality thus became synthesised. Haeckel had rooted one Monist at least, Eugen Wolfsdorf,

> once again in the soil of my homeland and thereby establishing for me my moral existence (ibid).

The new notion of deity was in no way diminished by the vilification of established religions:

> God is almighty; He is the single Creator, the single Cause of all things..... God is absolute perfection..... God is the sum of all energy and matter, (Haeckel: General Morphology, 1866, II p451-2, quoted in Gasman op.cit. p65).

But, paradoxically, God's sphere of influence was to be narrowly restricted to close localisation in the "green woods, on the blue sea, and on the snowy summits" of Germany (The Riddle of the Universe, p345).

Haeckel's 'nature' was evidently 'holy German nature'[17] for, the fallacious Christian God once removed, the true deity could exist only in Germany.

Scientifically, too, Haeckel's theories did not facilitate 'orthodox' materialism. He did not believe, for instance, in the distinction between organic and inorganic matter (HC1 22) and, whilst regarding as naive the strange syntheses of science and religion towards the end of the nineteenth century (The Riddle of the Universe), p330-31), his belief that "desire and dislike, lust and antipathy, attraction and repulsion, are common to all atoms" (Gasman op.cit. p64-5), and that atoms have souls, notions that would have outraged Huxley, differs in no substantial way from orthodox theosophy. The official Monist dictum, that the natural threads that "bind us to the infinite cosmos" are "innumerable and inseparable" (ibid. p66), would have been acceptable even to HPB, whose contempt for Haeckelism was supreme.[18]

The clash between evolutionists and the Church promoted atheism and the less absolute, but no less committed, Agnosticism, on the one hand, and a sudden and massive upsurge of interest in the occult on the other. Simple 'faith', as Yeats found, no longer sufficed for the body of post-Darwinian intellectuals. Faced with what it, justifiably, regarded as the more serious threat of biological science, the Church was relatively relaxed in its response to the challenge of theosophy and spiritualism. To some extent it was even willing to incorporate allegedly 'occult' phenomena into the body of revealed doctrine.[19] Such generosity did not eradicate, however, spiritualists' sense of persecution, and one, at least, claimed to have been

> denounced by each and every section of the Christian Church, as Satanic..... evil..... and utterly subversive of the old and cherished faith of Christendom, (John S Farmer: Spiritualism as a New Basis of Belief, 1880, p25).

That the Church took seriously the challenge of occultism is clearly evinced by the apparent readiness of the clergy to contradict the strictest possible Mosaic dicta.[20] The Church had fulminated lenthily, but its attempts to repel the Darwinist challenge had revealed an essential impotence, and the clergy was naturally unwilling to risk further ridicule by betraying an even great inflexibility in its response to the occult revival. The authorities differed on minor points of emphasis (see, e.g. Thomas op.cit. p277-8), but agreed in principle that

> it is folly to ignore the fact, or to deride at those who believe in the reality of the occult endowment, (ibid. p277).

Christians were urged to lose no opportunity to expose "the humbug connected with hypnogeny", but were required, at the same time, to take care not to "underrate the responsibilities of those who possess hypnotic endowments" (ibid. p283).

Occultists, however, were, perhaps surprisingly, less eager than orthodox Christians to join this proposed theocratic coalition. A P Sinnett, for instance, in The Growth of the Soul (1896), the sequel to the highly successful Esoteric Buddhism, insisted that although theosophists had no quarrel with the Church, and that occult doctrine was not based on any "Godless or Atheistic system of thought" (p33), this did not prevent theosophy from drawing a considerable number of recruits from Agnostic, or even atheistic ranks, from those who had been repelled by the "unsatisfactory creeds" of revealed religion. The Blavatsky doctrine was designed to satisfy the educated minority who were not prepared to reject scientific advance, but who wished at the same time to retain the mysteries of faith. Yeats, for a short time, fell into this category.

The new occultism had the dual advantage of being the only viable alternative to revealed religion, now for the first time challenged to its limits, and of being seen to be not incompatible with the scientific advances that had furthered the disintegration of the Church. The occult seemed both comprehensive and flexible, a valuable combination:

> the esoteric doctrine finds itself under no obligation to keep its science and religion in separate water-tight compartments. Its theory of physics and its theory of spirituality are not only reconcilable with each other, they are intimately blended together and interdependent.[21]

In 1876 Epes Sargent published a long list of (now forgotten) scientists who accepted or actively promulgated occult doctrine, (Does Matter do it All?, 1876, p4-5). For the most part, however, scientists were as doubtful of occult as of 'revealed' phenomena (miracles, Transubstantiation, the Virgin Birth, God),[22] and even amongst occultists some voices were raised to dissent from the association of their beliefs with science.[23] In general, however, Victorian occultists were anxious to be seen to concede the fundamental truths of science, and to be establishing with scientists some form of coherent collective philosophy.[24] J.M. Peebles savaged materialistic Darwinism (The Conflict between Darwinianism and Spiritualism, 1876, p15-16), but concluded that "evolution is true" because "as a theory, [it] is logical. Facts support it", and consequently "there is no conflict between evolution and Spiritualism". Occultists accepted evolution gladly, for the most part, but were unanimous in their claim that it was but half of the solution to a problem they had themselves solved long ago. Annie Besant claimed, for instance, that HPB had "prophesied of scientific discoveries twenty years before they were made" (Theosophy and the Theosophical Society, 1913,

p41). Madame Blavatsky herself quotes (SD III 296) Sir William Drummond's assertion (in Oedipus Judaicus) that

> the truths of science were the arcana of the priests because these truths were the foundations of religion.[25]

It is one of the first principles of occultism that

> Man is in process of evolving from comparative imperfection to much higher states of physical and spiritual existence.[26]

Krishnamurti, in his classic theosophical statement, At the Feet of the Master (1910), demands that the neophyte learn to be "a force in the direction of evolution" (p43). He measures HPB's confusion by the clarity of his injunctions:

> the really important thing is..... knowledge - the knowledge of God's plan for men. For God has a plan, and that plan is evolution, (ibid. p7).

Darwin's evolutionary system, however, was but one of two, that of form. Nearly half a century after Scott's Outline Colin Wilson takes up the point:

> while admitting that a non-purposive science may discover many valuable truths, we may still point out that there is still no sound scientific reason for actually outlawing the idea of purpose, (The Occult, p125).

The occult rationale, like the Christian, has not developed substantially in over a hundred years. This is inevitable. It is essential, indeed, that both be seen not to develop since both depend for their credibility on the belief that whilst science is continually progressing and developing in the direction of truth, Christians and occultists have long been party to the 'Truth'. Any modification can, therefore, be in presentation only, following the desire to make the 'Truth' more comprehensible to an increasingly materialistic world. Yeats himself knew well that compromise is "impossible in..... matters of faith" (L310). So, whilst

desperately needing the authority of science,[27] occultists were generally contemptuous of its achievements. Annie Besant, for instance, in Esoteric Christianity (1905), is subtly condescending. Perhaps with Huxley's complacent "J'y suis, et j'y reste" (CE V p230, 1889) ringing in her ears, she points out that it is remarkable that on one occasion he approached something like a truth, albeit in a left-handed manner:

> Professor Huxley, in a remarkable passage, has imagined the possibility of the existence of beings rising higher and higher in intelligence, the consciousness ever expanding, and the reaching of a stage as much above the human as the human is above that of the blackbeetle. That is not a flight of the scientific imagination, but a description of a fact.[28]

The foundations of popular Victorian theosophy were laid by A.P. Sinnett, whose works Yeats began to read in 1885. The willingness to accommodate science is nowhere more evident than in Sinnett's accounts.[29] In The Growth of the Soul evolution is used to explain the existence of "the elder brethren of humanity" in much the same way as it had earlier been used to illustrate the doctrine of reincarnation, (Ch.III, and p293-321). Sinnett claims that individual units of the human family have outstripped the normal course of evolution, and have attained at a relatively early period

> the spiritual faculties belonging to the higher levels of progress which the race, as a whole, can only ascend at a very remote period in the future, (ibid. p293).

In 'The Origin of Life' (Occult Essays, 1905, p215-26) Sinnett admits the validity of much Darwinian hypothesis, and even of the systematic logic of Huxley and the post-Darwinian rationalists, but he once again stresses the inadequacy of their attempts to explain beyond the first individual species, or the primordial cell, (ibid. p225-6). The difference between the dead and the living body, and other such mysteries

> lie outside the domain of physical science. Workers in that field are no more to be blamed for not penetrating the mysteries of life than a painter of pictures is to be blamed for not understanding how to make a watch, (Nature's Mysteries, 1901, p12).

Theosophy, as he says in the preface to the 1903 Annotated Edition of Esoteric Buddhism (p.ix), "completes and spiritualizes the ordinary notions of physical evolution" which, without theosophy, are "barren and miserable". By stressing the dual nature of evolution Sinnett sought, as do virtually all occultists, to close the gap between science and revealed religion, and by so doing, to render both impotent.[30] The only solutions, he felt, to the problems raised by the attack of the new science on revealed religion were theosophical. Sinnett pointed out that Tyndall had observed of the intervention of 'Special Providences' in human affairs that they are something between an abnormal occurrence and a miracle:

> in fact, a special Providence was only a special Providence as long as we do not absolutely know that it was a special Providence. If this became certain, it ceased to be a special Providence, and became a miracle. So between the banter of the scientific world and the ignorance of theologians, the part played in human affairs by superior unseen influences came to be regarded..... as a species of primitive foolishness from which advancing civilisation would certainly disentangle itself more and more completely, (Occult Essays, p134-5).

It is worth pointing out however that Tyndall never had any real hope that man would abjure the supernatural: "It is good for man to form for himself a theology if only to keep him quiet"[31] This would have confirmed Marx's darkest suspicions.[32]

Although occultists were generally keen to present their doctrines as compatible with the new science, Sinnett was atypical amongst non-materialist authorities in his willingness to tack his theories onto the most recent, and most complex atomic research - the manufacture of synthetic helium, for instance, and the discovery of the Rontgen Ray. In

Nature's Mysteries he examines the range and limitations of physical science - the limitations being founded, as ever, in the 'how?-why?' conflict - and makes the point that we can use forces such as the brain, gravity and electricity without entirely understanding them, (p9-19).[33] The constructive use of then inexplicable phenomena by scientists was clearly a boost for occultists.

Sinnett's concessions to science, and his attempts to incorporate the results of biological and atomic research into the body of theosophical doctrine, brought him into conflict with his theosophical mentor, Madame Blavatsky herself. Sinnett had paid considerable tribute to HPB in The Occult World (see p42-60), compliments she graciously returned; but unlike Sinnett's hers is not unqualified praise. Esoteric Buddism had been an "excellent book", but it had "too pronounced a bias toward materialistic science".[34] She makes a point of specifically disagreeing with Sinnett's allegation that theosophy supports the "wild theories of the present Darwinists", but softens the rebuke by hinting that those theosophists who thought that Sinnett had been in agreement with Darwin were greatly mistaken (SD I 209-10). In the same chapter, however, she mentions the development of "worlds above" in strictly Darwinian terminology, the "struggle for life" and the "survival of the fittest" (SD I 224). As early as 1877, however, with the publication of Isis Unveiled, a major statement of theosophical doctrine, a confusion is evident. She insists that there is no new science, that, for instance, Darwin's theories are included in the first six chapters of Genesis (I 303) - there would undoubtedly have been some recriminations in clerical circles for missing that one - that the hypothesis of evolution was of "antediluvian origin" (I 238), that Hermes and the Ancients had anticipated it (I 257-8, and see II 260-1), and that,

consequently, the logical extension of Darwinism is Hermeticism (I 429). This is a familiar occult claim.[35] It is certainly true that early Greek philosophers had been aware of evolution. Anaximander had argued that early organisms originally sprang from the sea and evolved into land creatures, and Aristotle anticipated dualistic evolution in his claim (in Physics and Natural History of Animals) that nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection as the soul advances towards the knowledge of transcendent reality.[36] Huxley himself confessed that

> theories of the universe, in which the conception of evolution plays a leading part, were extant at least six centuries before our era, (CE IX p53 (1893) and see p69-78).

HPB, however, whilst claiming that the new science was basically irrelevant, seemed willing to concede the "greatness" of Victorian scientific advances (Isis Unveiled I p40, 152-3). On the one hand she seems to praise Darwin's "vision" (though never that of Huxley, Tyndall or Haeckel)[37] - she writes of his "adventurous pangenensis" and his ability to soar "into the infinite"[38] - on the other hand Darwin reversed 'true' evolution, and gave rise to a school of thought stunted by ignorance and dogma.[39] The confusion extends into The Secret Doctrine, but the later book does clarify the general attitude for occultists to adopt towards science, being little more than an elaborate restatement of old concessions, and even older rejections.[40] The outcome is the characteristic occult compromise. Theosophy was the "hyphen of reconciliation" between "official Science" and "orthodox Theology" (SD III 1, II 91, 727-8). Such a synthesis has inspired a large body of occult speculation ever since.

HPB's system depends ultimately on a complex theory of non-physical evolution - I cannot see her justification for splitting this into "spiritual" and "psychic" evolution (SD II 115-6) - and on the hope that man might begin to concentrate on the previously neglected 'spiritual' aspects of his development:

> as a further development of physical organisation beyond the human is highly improbable,[41] it is to psychical indications in man that we have to look for the field of future evolution. Darwinism has thus dealt with but one half of the task prescribed by the doctrine of evolution; to solve the other, the abnormal function of the human psyche must be drawn into consideration.[42]

The occult market rapidly became flooded with syntheses of traditional esoteric lore and both Darwinism and non-Darwinian science. Theosophy swallowed all science.

Before moving on to consider, in the next chapter, Yeats's response to all this, it might be worth noting the political conclusions drawn by many occultists from the same stock of scientific information, and in so doing to isolate one more likely source of Yeats's early hostility to democracy.

The new waves of reaction and of occultism depended to a considerable extent on Darwin, although Darwin himself would not, of course, have sanctioned either. Social-Darwinists and theosophists were, in many respects, in total accord. In Occult Essays Sinnett claimed that

> the real reason why it is absurd to suppose that artificial rules and regulations [of socialism] could establish equality of welfare among all members of the community is to be found in the fundamental truth [of occultism] that there is no real natural equality pervading all members of the human family, in the way the socialist takes for granted..... [The notion that all men are born equal] has been somehow developed in the Western world through the stupidity of Christian theologians during the last dozen or so centuries, (p173).

We should remember 'Oisin' in the context of this statement of theosophical doctrine.[43] A R Wallace, unusual in being both evolutionist and spiritualist, posited the resolution, inevitable with this combination, of Yeats's "but dimly foreshadowed" struggle of "labor and capital, or mysticism and science" (LNI 212-3), in his agreement with the trance-medium, Mrs. Hardinge Britten that in the spirit world

> there is an aristocracy, and even royal rank and varying degree, but the aristocracy is one of merit, and the royalty of soul. It is only the truly wise who govern, and as the wisest soul is he that is best, as the truest wisdom is the highest love, so the royalty of soul is truth and love,

and concluding from this that it would be impossible for "the philosopher or the man of science [to] picture to himself a more perfect ideal of a future state than this"( On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism, 1875, p110-11). The negro, for example, was regarded by Social-Darwinists, by fascists, and by A P Sinnett as demonstrably 'inferior' in Darwinian terms:

> Those who understand the scheme of evolution..... know that the improvement of any one individual negro means his birth next time in a superior race, where he will find free scope for further improvement. The grand climax of negro evolution will be reached when there are no more negroes left on earth at all, when all shall have passed on into higher races.[44]

Theosophists used 'spiritual' evolution as fascists were later to use 'social' evolution to discount the equality of individuals and races. The denigration of socialism, a lynchpin of fascist dogma, was similarly central to Sinnett's thesis:

> the vast differences in human capacities ensure the triumph of the selfishness which is most intelligent. The freedom of all enables those who can to get the better of their neighbours, and in truth, "the slavery of the many for the comfort and enjoyment of the few" is the ultimate product of leaving the many in control of their own affairs.[45]

The contrast of wealth and poverty

> will readily be discerned in the laws of Nature by the occult student. Inequalities of condition are as naturally ordained as inequalities of climate, and when in communities like ours they are sometimes grotesquely exaggerated, that has been the direct outcome of human folly mismanaging its own freedom. For the occult student the hope of the future resides entirely in the growth of that wisdom already dawning amongst the few, and in the absolute and unreserved abandonment of the socialist's fantastic dream![46]

Sinnett was extremely concerned not to be associated with a "commonplace understanding" of the occult, with the "great philosophy of the common-place" (The Occult World, p23), and he was particularly disgusted with the notion of the T S as a brotherhood:

> The gross democratic meaning attached to the term 'brotherhood' is an insult to theosophical teaching. The consciousness which expands into perfected humanity is, no doubt, in a subtle metaphysical sense identical in its nature with the consciousness, not merely of the humbler classes in civilized countries, but with that also of the crocodile, the dog, the Australian savage, and the Master of Wisdom. But this does not mean that all manifested consciousness..... is, therefore, invested with equal claims on our respect..... [Sinnett's italics]. If the sheep and the guinea-pig are included in the universal brotherhood, well and good, but we do not ask the sheep and the guinea-pig to contribute their opinions to discussions of the suffrage question, for example..... Theosophical teaching concerning human evolution shows us the human family at present at very different stages of development. It rescues us from the old-fashioned blunder - arising from the ignorant delusion that each new child is a new creation - to the effect that all have equal rights. According to a phrase classical in political writing, all are equally entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", but with very varied claims on the privilege of shaping laws providing for the fulfilment of that fundamental idea.
>
> Thus, to let the formula in which the objects of the Theosophical Society are generally expressed distort the purpose of the movement to suit the purpose of any mundane theory of social reform is a very grievous blunder, (Collected Fruits of Occult Teaching, p263-4).

I have quoted this lengthy passage because it illustrates several crucial points. The sections I have italicised reveal Sinnett as conscious of qualitative discrepancies between classes in civilized countries and between various races, and of the apparent absurdity of socialism to the ultra-logical post-Darwinian rationale, anticipating Russell's "Votes for

Oysters!" jibe at democrats (HWP 698) by nearly thirty years. More importantly, however, it demonstrates that a proto-fascist theosophy was not Sinnett's invention, that it was an accepted socio-political extension of the funadmental tenets of the faith. Inequality was a cornerstone of the theosophical ethic:

> half the energy of human life is expended by men trying to persuade themselves that they are the equals of others in all respects, and by coercing themselves into methods of action quite foreign to their natures, (Walter R Old: What is Theosophy?, 1891, p71).

Even if Yeats had missed the profoundly anti-democratic thrust of Sinnett's philosophy, and failed to notice that it sprang from the same source as his own, he would not have been able to escape the general influence of theosophical doctrine. Evolution teaches inequality, and theosophy "has its application in the law of universal progress" (ibid. p65). In June 1882 Sinnett asked the Mahatma K H about the spiritual development of "the superior classes of civilized countries" and of Australian aborigines, and wondered if "all seventh ring people" are born in "the superior classes", or if some may "be found among the poor". The assumption that "poor" and "inferior" are synonymous is evidently by prior agreement. K H replies:

> take a seventh ring African or a fifth ring Mongolian and you can educate him - if taken from the cradle - save his physical appearance, and transform him into the most brilliant and accomplished English lord. Yet he will still remain but an outwardly intellectual parrot, (The Mahatma Letters to A P Sinnett, 1923, p118).

This class consciousness preaches firmly against democracy which, according to Besant and Leadbeater, is the "nadir of political life, as the occult system is its zenith" (Man: Whence, How and Wither, p139n). As a consequence theosophists regarded it as vital that occult wisdom should not be transferred to "unworthy hands":

> not unworthy merely because of caste inferiority, but because of the moral inferiority which they conceived to be introduced into the occult freaternity, together with brothers of low birth..... To that end it is necessary..... to take no candidates except from the class which,..... by reason of its hereditary advantages, is likely to be the best nursery of fit candidates, (Esoteric Buddism, 1883, p150).

In view of this procedure it is unlikely that Yeats encountered much concession to egalitarianism in theosophical circles.[47] The concept of race is crucial to theosophy:

> the highest people now on earth (spiritually) belong to the first sub-race of the fifth root race, and those are the Aryan Asiatics, the highest race (physical intellectuality) is the last sub-race of the fifth - yourselves, the white conquerors. The majority of mankind belongs to the seventh sub-race of the fourth root race - the above-mentioned Chinamen and their offshoots and branchlets (Malayans, Mongolians, Tibetans, Javanese, etc., etc.) - with remnants of other sub-races of the fourth and seventh sub-race of the third race.

Sinnett's Mahatma does not hesitate to describe these oriental races as "fallen, degraded semblances of humanity" (Esoteric Buddhism, 1883, p58).

Incipient reaction is not confined to theosophy however. Sinnett quotes the nineteenth century Qabalist, Eliphas Levi, on the poles of good and evil between which "vegetate and die without remembrance the useless portion of mankind" (ibid. p129). Besant and Leadbeater trace the issue back to ancient times and the split between Arab and Jew over the question of the morality and wisdom of intermarriage with negro races.[48] Yeats would not have found the philosophy more tolerant when he turned to the Western tradition under the aegis of MacGregor Mathers. The military historian, Major-General J F C Fuller, a fascist and early biographer of Aleister Crowley (Star in the West, 1907), betrayed a similar class consciousness in his exposition of the Qabalistic mysteries, and goes on to firmly equate unintelligence with Satanic influences, (The Secret Wisdom of the Qabalah, 1937, p186-7). The consequence of this sort of theory is inescapable:

> few people will deny that the best imaginable government..... would be that of a perfectly wise and benevolent despot, (A P Sinnett, Occult Essays, p180).

Sinnett suggests that government should be in the hands of the few, occultists, (ibid. p184). Yeats, as we shall see in the next chapter, translates this belief in government by the enlightened few into a personal statement of hostility to democracy by linking it with art.

1) Psalms 8,19 and John I 1-5, for instance.

2) most recently in the 'transformed Cladist' controversy - see Nature 294: 5837-40. See also Francis Crick: Life Itself: Its Origins and Nature (1981). Not all Victoriam scientists, however, were convinced of the legitimacy of Darwin's hypotheses, see Peter J. Bowler: The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900, 1983.

3) see, e.g. John Hospers: An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis (1956), 2nd edition, 1967, p.457-8.

4) see T.H. Huxley: Protoplasm: The Physical Basis of Life (1869), and Bertrand Russell: Why I am not a Christian (1927), p.14-16, 29-30 and What I Believe (1925), p.9-25.

5) Yeats goes on to quote Coventry Patmore and Edward Evans on the same subject, Au 484.

6) CE IV 238 (1890). As George Steiner points out (In Bluebeard's Castle (1971), 1974, p.93), Matthew Arnold foretold that the facts of religion would be replaced by its poetry.

7) Hospers op.cit. p.458.

8) The Origin of Species, ed. John Burrow, 1968, p.41.

9) Alexander V.G. Allen: The Continuity of Christian Thought: A Study of Modern Theology in the Light of its History, (1884), p.406.

10) see,e.g. 'Capys': Criticisms on Darwin's, Wallace's and Haeckel's Evolution Theories, 1897.

11) see Colin Wilson: The Occult, 1971, p.124.

12) We might remember that Yeats, for one, would have been greatly "put out" to discover that HPB's miraculous cuckoo clock was a fake, (Au 174).

13) John Tyndall: The Sabbath (Presidential Address to the Glasgow Sunday Society, October 25th, 1880), p.31.

14) see Alois Wiesinger: Occult Phenomena in the Light of Theology (transl. Brian Battershaw, 1957), p.207.

15) Breitenbach - quoted in Gasman op.cit. p.57.

16) VSR 33,35,133-4. 'The Moods' (1895), E&I 195. These are later translated into the belief that "We are blest by everything,/Everything we look upon is blest" (VP 479).

17) letters to Hermann Allmers, 1860. Quoted in Gasman op.cit. p.63-4.

18) see, e.g. SD II 160,688,708. Yeats notes (Au 175) that her hatred of scientific materialism caused her to lose her customary good humour, and become "harsh".

19) see, e.g. Thomas op.cit. p.162,232-47,396, and Reverend Haweis's letter to the Graphic, quoted by HPB in Studies in Occultism, 1946, p.49-54.

20) Exodus 22:18; and see Letviticus 19:26,31 and 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; I Samuel 28:3,9; Isaiah 47:9.

21) Esoteric Buddhism (1883), p.29. See also W.S. Urquhart: Theosophy and Christian Thought (1922), p.120-22, and C.W. Leadbeater: Textbook of Theosophy (1912), p.10-11.

22) Farmer op.cit. p.21. Tyndall: Fragments of Science, p.427-35. Darwin: Life and letters III p.186-8. W.B. Carpeneter: Mesmerism, Spiritualism etc. (1877) and Nature and Man (1888). Edward Cox: Spiritualism answered by Science (1871).

23) see, e.g. Reverend F.G. Lee: Glimpses in the Twilight (1885) p.15-20 and Sight and Shadows (1894), p.3-20.

24) The Spiritual Magazine (no.209, May 1877), for instance, reproduced a lecture by Tyndall on the physics of heat that betrays no concession to spiritualism. The editor explains that he includes the article because it assists "to illustrate the Ethereal or Soul-power in the Universe" (225-6).

25) see also Peebles op.cit. p.21-23.

26) Cyril Scott: An Outline of Modern Occultism, 1935, p.11. See also Besant and Leadbeater: Man: Whence, How and Wither, 1913, p.1-16.

27) see, e.g. John Ashburner: Notes and Studies in the Philosophy of Animal Magnetism and Spiritualism etc., 1867, and William F. Barrett: On the Threshold of the Unseen, 1917, p.5-8, 112-4 etc.

28) p.282. She refers to, and typically misrepresents, Huxley's Essays upon some Controverted Questions, 1892, p.36 (CE V 39-40). See also B. Stewart and P.G. Tait: The Unseen Universe, 1875, p.135-9, and see p.63-4.

29) Esoteric Buddhism (1903, annotated edition), p.ix-xi, Esoteric Buddhism (1883), p.29-37,108-21,199-200,205. Chapter 8 concerns 'The Progress of Humanity' - the "survival of the fittest", the "subsidence of the unfit" and the "destiny of failures" - in its occult context. See also The Occult World, 1881, p.2,7,128-34,138, and Collected Fruits of Occult Teaching, 1919, p.272-90.

30) Occult Essays, p.174-5. See also Annie Besant: Evolution and Occultism (1913), p.1-63, Evolution and Man's Destiny (1924), passim., Esoteric Christianity p.282-3. See also Farmer op.cit. p.18. His plea for "rational faith" is a peculiarly Haeckelian oxymoron.

31) quoted in Farmer op.cit. p.6n.

32) see Karl Marx: Kritik Des Hegelschen Staatsrechts (1844), transl. A. Jolin and J. O'Malley (1970), p.131-2. Yeats's response to Marx can be found in Explorations:

> Science, separated from philosophy, is the opium of the suburbs, (Ex 340 - 1930),
>
> and,
>
> Should H.G. Wells afflict you,
> Put whitewash in a pail;
> Paint: 'Science - opium of the suburbs'
> On some waste wall, (Ex 377 - 1934).

But see Mem 89.

33) and see the re-written chapter for the 1912 edition of Nature's Mysteries, p.1-13.

34) SD I 184. Ithell Colquhoun (The Sword of Wisdom, 1975, p.168) claims that relations between Sinnett and HPB were always uneasy, but her account is frequently unreliable, and The Letters of H.P. Blavatsky to A.P. Sinnett, ed. A.T. Barker, 1925, reveal a bond of mutual affection.

35) see, e.g. Annie Besant: Evolution and Occultism, p.147.

36) see also Rev. Haweis's letter (above p.112n19), and Isis Unveiled I p.154. See also Stevenson op.cit. p.19.

37) IU I 14-15,152-4,285,336-40,397,418-21.

38) IU I 14, and Letters (ed. Barker op.cit.) p.244-8 for an explanation of the application of 'race' to the 'infinite'.

39) IU I 154,278,403-4,501-2, and II 637-9. SD II 167,178-80,200,301. See also 'Black Magic in Science' in Studies in Occultism p.41-57.

40) SD II 115-6,125-6,161-2,167,174,195,200,701-3,708, and IU I 152-4,285,295,329-30,352, and II 467.

41) du Prel refers us to Wallace's Contributions to Natural Selection, but see Besant above p.101.

42) Carl du Prel: The Philosophy of Mysticism, transl. C.C. Massey, 1889, II p.119.

43) see below p.121-23.

44) Occult Essays p.160. See 'The Management of Mankind', p.155-61.

45) ibid. p.183. Sinnett quotes from Jane Hume Clapperton's socialist tract, A Vision of the Future.

46) ibid. p.184. See 'Socialism in the Light of Occult Science', p.170-84.

47) see, e.g. Besant and Leadbeater op.cit. p.335-6,460-2,487, and P.G. Bowen: The Sayings of the Ancient One, 1935, p.91. It should be pointed out, however, that HPB herself, although firmly opposed to socialism because of what she regarded as its materialism (see, e.g. Lucifer, November 1887, Vol.I, p.161-9), nonetheless embraced a 'spiritual' socialism and could in no way be described as reactionary. See Katherine A. Beechey: 'H.P.B.'s Attitude Toward Social Reform' in H.P. Blatavsky and 'The Secret Doctrine', ed. Virginia Hanson, 1971, p.140-53. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's characterisation of theosophy is pertinent: it was an

> integrated view of the world, in which the present was understood in terms of a remote past. The past, albeit imaginary, legitimated a variety of social, political and cultural ideals, such as racism, hierophantic elitism and magical powers of initiates, which were contradictions of the modern world..... it was a legitimation which included the apparently scientific findings of the present; a sense of meaning in society and history; and supernatural references, (The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1890-1935: Reactionary Political Fantasy in Relation to Social Anxiety, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1982, p.92-3). Warren S. Smith (The London Heretics, 1870-1914, 1967, p.142) regards theosophy as a "heresy of the right".

48) Besant and Leadbeater op.cit. p.288-9. Chapters 14-23 discuss various racial stocks from the occult viewpoint.

# CHAPTER III

The need to incorporate what he learned from Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel, Tyndall and Wallace into his philosophical and religious speculation is the key to understanding Yeats's occult development. In one sense he would become what Bertrand Russell regarded as the best sort of philosopher:

> Metaphysics, or the attempt to conceive the world as a whole by means of thought, has been developed from the first by the union and conflict of two very different human impulses, the one urging men towards mysticism, the other urging them towards science. Some men have achieved greatness through one of these impulses alone, others through the other alone: in Hume, for example, the scientific impulse reigns quite unchecked, while in Blake a strong hostility to science co-exists with profound mystic insight. But the greatest men who have been philosophers have felt the need both of science and of mysticism; the attempt to harmonize the two was what made their life. (Bertrand Russell 'Mysticism and logic' in The Hibbert Journal XII: 4, July 1914, p780)

I intend to demonstrate in this chapter that Yeats was such a thinker. By tracing the development of his occult involvement it will be possible to detect and measure the effect of the scientific rationale on Yeats's spiritual activities.

In the very throes of his "secret fanaticism" Yeats was unable to escape the early fascination of scientific observation. He had been deprived of the blind belief of childhood by the Ugly Sisters of Autobiographies, Huxley and Tyndall. He detested them,[1] however, not merely because they had incapacitated the ordinary Protestant worship of his early years, but also because they had contrived to destroy the climate of abstraction within which he was able to function most comfortably. As Hazard Adams says,

> he was struggling against an influence in modern life which had tried to destroy the categories of poetic thought and thus had negated that thought.[2]

That abstraction, however, was also a thing to be fiercely opposed. In June 1885 Yeats presided over the first meeting of the Dublin Hermetic Society, a product, in part, of the growing interest in the occultism of A.P. Sinnett, where Yeats discovered "the beginnings of an answer to his father and his father's world" (MM 43). T.S. Eliot noted (The Egoist, IV, July 1917, p90) that J.B. Yeats was "quite literal" when he wrote to his son that "In every great poet is a Herbert Spencer", and "the poet does not seek to be original, but the truth...". I intend to show in this chapter that Yeats's father's world remained with him throughout his occult development.

One passage in particular springs from his enthusiastic, if inflated, opening address to the Hermetic students as an early indication of this duality:

> on the road to truth lurks many a dragon and goblin of mischief in wait for the soul. Miracle hunger is one of them. The dragon of the abstract is another, devouring for ever the freedom and the pride of life, (quoted MM42).

Ellmann's remarks on this passage are worth repeating. He warns us not to be deceived into thinking that Yeats is sceptical as his father had been sceptical, for he is "thoroughly convinced that science has failed and hopeful that another way of discovering truth exists" (ibid.). As we shall see, Yeats certainly did not believe that science held all the answers, but he did place tremendous faith in scientific methodology.[3] Ellmann, perhaps unconsciously, makes the point: "though he waits for proof, he waits impatiently and with a certain amount of deliberate credulity" (ibid.). He waits for proof, certainly but this chapter will, I believe, make clear that credulity, deliberate or otherwise, is alien to his nature.

We are told that insularity will cripple the intellect, but the dragon nevertheless had periods of ascendency. By February 1888 Yeats was writing to Katharine Tynan that he had become

> anxious to look about me and become passive for a while too. I have woven about me a web of thoughts. I wish to break through it, to see the world again, (L58).

The inescapable and persuasive Huxleyan logic was bolstered by J.B. Yeats's scepticism, his belief that "ideals make the blood thin, and take the human nature out of people" (Au58). Yeats was forced gradually to abjure the uncomplicated beliefs of infancy, but was unable to throw off belief altogether:

> my father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidences of religion and I weighed the matter perpetually with great anxiety, for I did not think I could live without religion, (Au 25-6).

Religion had to conform, however, to Yeats's view of the evidential. His delight at the birth of a calf was more than childish sentiment , it was a "decisive argument for belief" (Au 26). It removed, for a short while, the personal argument, the misery that was "a part of my own mind" (Au 11), that was to become a thoroughly Hamletesque battle (Au 47). Yeats's adolescent struggle to reconcile opposites clearly worried his father. In a passage deleted from the first draft of the autobiography he wrote, "I imagine that he feared for my sanity. Everything had become abstract to me" (Mem 19n3). In spite of this drift to abstraction he still "had begun to overvalue moral zeal and exhortation" (Mem 20), and he was a "romantic in all" (Mem 19).

The combined influence of JBY, the materialistic "bundle of old twigs", and the more strictly scientific speculations of Darwin demanded that the crucial problem for Yeats be that of the "evidences" of religion. In 1885

Yeats met Mohini Chatterji who left, as G.M. Harper says, "an ineradicable imprint on the life and art" of Yeats and of AE (Yeats's Golden Dawn 1974, p3). Chatterji, the guise of the chila of Mahatma K H, had come to the west to "explain to the London Theosophists of the Secret Section every or nearly every mooted point".[4] It is clear that Yeats sought from him some doctrine more substantial than that offered by the Dublin Hermetic Society. Yeats learned from Chatterji that

> everything we perceive, including so-called illusions, exists in the external world; that this is a stream which flows on, out of human control; that we are nothing but a mirror and that deliverance consists in turning the mirror away so that it reflects nothing, (Hone 48).

The specific instruction that appears in 'Kanva on Himself' is simple:

> one should say before sleeping: - 'I have lived many lives, It may be that I have been a slave and a prince. Many a beloved has sat upon my knees, and I have sat upon the knees of many a beloved. Everything that has been shall be again.[5]

Yeats turns this into mawkish meditation:

> Hast thou not sat of yore upon the knees
> Of myriads of beloveds, and on thine
> Have not a myriad swayed below strange trees
> In other lives? (VP 724).

It is quite wrong to contend, as does Thomas L. Byrd Jnr., for instance,[6] that Kanva's lines could easily have been spoken by Fergus. Kanva is the Seeker at a more primitive stage, having not yet discovered the responsibility that is associated with wisdom, and he is able to find consolation in the perpetual defeat of Time at the hands of Art:

> Then wherefore fear the usury of Time,
> Or Death that cometh with the next life-key?
> Nay, rise and flatter her with golden rhyme,
> For as things were so shall things ever be. (VP 724).

This is a theme already touched upon in 'In a Drawing-Room', where sculpted beauties quietly mock their mortal counterparts:

> Around, the twitter of the lips of dust
> A tossing laugh between their red abides;
> With patient beauty yonder Attic bust
> In the deep alcove's dimness smiles and hides, (VP 735).

Kanva does not possess Fergus's depth of knowledge, and his meditation is no more than a shield to protect the Self from the destructive effects of fear of the inevitable. Fergus, on the other hand, accepts his responsibilities with no flippant quietism:

> I have been many things:
> A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
> Upon a sword, a fir tree on a hill,
> An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
> A king sitting upon a chair of gold;
> And all these things were wonderful and great.
> But now I have grown nothing, being all:
> The sorrows of the world bow down my head,
> And in my heart the daemons and the gods
> Wage an eternal battle, and I feel
> The pain of wounds, the labour of the spear,
> But have no share in loss or victory, (VP 104v).[7]

Yeats's individual vision asserts itself forty years later, and he adds the commentary to Chatterji's doctrine, answering for himself with "western energy" (IY 46). As Marion Witt says, the commentary reflects the events of the early part of the twentieth century - the simple but forceful images of war and the reappearance of the theory of historical cycles ("Birth-hour and death-hour meet"), though she does not add that such an image had been suggested as early as 1888 in 'The Phantom Ship', where the "slow heaving ocean" is the "mumbling mother of the dead" (VP 719).[8] Yeats's 1928 commentary is considerably more complex and elusive than Chatterji's simple dictum, and we should infer that in 1886 Yeats had been intimidated by the oriental power and had not yet entirely comprehended either the depths or the limitations of the philosophy. This lack of vision is reflected in the derivative and unconvincing Kanva poem. However neither Ellmann nor Witt point out that Yeats echoed Chatterji with "western energy" in 1892. By the time he came to write 'Fergus and the Druid' he had clearly encountered early Celtic poetry, presumably in D W Nash's 'Taliesin'.[9] It is difficult to

sympathise with F A C Wilson's insistence that Yeats did not take metempsychosis seriously, and that

> 'Fergus and the Druid' is hardly evidence to the contrary; he uses the theory there because it is ornamental and 'mystical', (Yeats's Iconography, 1960, p255).

Since the doctrine is so crucial to Celtic legend[10] there is every reason to suppose that Yeats took with intense seriousness its frequent repetitions throughout early Celtic literature:

> I have been in many shapes,
> Before I attained a congenial form.
> I have been a narrow blade of a sword.....
> I have been a drop in the air.
> I have been a shining star.
> I have been a word in a book.
> I have been a book originally.
> I have been a light in a lantern.....
> I have been a sword in the hand.....
> I have been a tree in a covert, ('Cad Goddeu' - 'The Battle of the Trees', Nash op.cit. p227-8)

The doctrine is mentioned in John Rhys's Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by Celtic Heathendom 1888 (see, e.g. p549), which Yeats seems to have read, along with de Jubainville, by 1889.[11] It is likely, however, that Yeats's knowledge of Celtic theories of metempsychosis was stirred into poetry by Matthew Arnold's essay 'On the Study of Celtic Literature'. Arnold gives a prose version of the beginning of 'The Battle of the Trees', and makes the point that the lines have

> an inwardness, a severity of form, a solemnity of tone, which indicates the still reverberating echo of a profound doctrine and discipline, such as was Druidism.[12]

Robert Graves's gloss of 'The Battle of the Trees' is an indication of the extent of the westernization of Yeats's occultism during the seven years that separate Kanva and Fergus, and of the deepending of his philosophy under HPB and Mathers:

> The primitive belief is plainly not in individual metempsychosis of the vulgar Indian sort - at one time a bluebottle, at the next a flower, at the next perhaps a Brahmini bull or a woman, according to one's merit. The 'I' is the Apollo-like god on whose behalf the inspired poet sings, not the poet himself. Sometimes the god may be referring mythically to his daily cycle as the Sun from dawn to dawn; sometimes to his yearly cycle from winter solstice to winter solstice with the months as stations of his progress; perhaps sometimes even to his grand cycle of 25,800 years around the Zodiac. All these cycles are types of one another, (The White Goddess, 1961, p100).

'Fergus and the Druid' is thus not only the climax of Yeats's rejection of orientalism, but also the first steps towards the familiar cyclic theories of later collections and of A Vision.[13]

Other conflicts were not resolved so easily as that of east and west. Their physical manifestiation was a struggle between asceticism and sensuality:

> I knew Blake thoroughly, I had read much Swedenborg, had only ceased my study of Boehme for fear I might do nothing else, had added a second fanaticism to my first. My isolation from ordinary men and women was increased by an asceticism destructive of mind and body, combined with an adoration of physical beauty that made it meaningless, (LNI xi-xii).

- and between man and nature, the domestic and the wild, human and fairy, temporal and changeless, familiar and remote, modern and ancient. As David Daiches says (IER 48-60), what he calls the two-term dialectic is strikingly prominent in the earliest collections. Daiches is content, however, merely to isolate the "mutations of the two-term dialectic". He does not point out that all these conflicts spring from the single battle between two fundamentally opposed views of the world, that of science and that of religion.

The contest is fully delineated in 'The Wanderings of Oisin' in which Oisin himself is presented as a Darwinian archetype. "Wars shadowy, vast, exultant" (VP 29) are not only glorious, and essential to man's happiness -

When once beside the shore I stood,
A sea-worn waif came floating by.
I drew it forth; the staff of wood,
It was of some dead warrior's lance.
I turned it in my hands; the stains
Of war were on it, and I wept,
Remembering how along the plains,
Equal to good or evil chance
In war, the noble Fenians stept, (VP 24v.).

- they are a biological necessity. Man must struggle, like Oisin, for survival, and he must seek out fear and combat on the Island of Victories. At the end of his life Yeats restates this belief, and reaffirms the doctrine with intellectual vigour:

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard,
'Send war in our time, O Lord!'
Know that when all words are said
And a man is fighting mad,
Something drops from eyes long blind,
He completes his partial mind,
For an instant stands at ease,
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace.
Even the wisest man grows tense
With some sort of violence
Before he can accomplish fate,
Know his work or choose his mate, (VP 638).

War balances the psyche. It is essential to the completion of man's greatest tasks, individual fate and the advance of the species. In 'Oisin' man cannot avoid the daily battle for existence unless he become immortal - that is, not man - the alternative to war is an "unhuman sleep" (VP 50-1). In these thoroughly Darwinian wars only the strongest survive:

We will tear out the red flaming stones, and will batter the gateway of brass
And enter, and none sayeth 'nay' when there enters the strongly armed guest, (VP 62v).

Against this cruel but absolute law Christianity has established a web of "dreams" (VP 61). The Church seeks to elevate the very weakest members of society:

we sang beside the deep
The spacious loves, the anger without sleep
Of ancient warriors, the labours of the strong.
Patrick, before thy craft dies each old song.
Liar and flatterer of the weak, in what strange clime
Shall they turn wroth or pluck the wings of Time?
Hopeless for ever, they alone shall seek
And never find, though ye in music speak, (VP 42v.).

There is a suggestion, in 'The Wanderings of Oisin', that the whole Victorian controversy between the Church and the forces of rational materialism had been played out before in a primitive, but equally bitter power struggle. The Church had once before destroyed man's joy in his natural Darwinian functions, and had promoted in its place a useless and unnatural democracy, though it should be added that Yeats regarded some aspects of medieval monsticsim with favour. Before leaving this aspect of 'Oisin' we should remember that during Yeats's teens Louis Lambert, a book that expounded "destiny with such a mysterious authority that [it furnishes] texts for pious meditation", was a sacred book (E & I 438) Louis Lambert made possible the Comedie Humaine in which, according to Yeats, "society is seen as a struggle for survival, each character an expression of will, the struggle Darwin was to describe a few years later", (E&I 444). It does not seem unreasonable to assume that Yeats would wish to reflect what had so recently been "sacred" to him in his first poem of any substance.

I am trying to establish, in these pages, the intellectual context of Yeats's first occult steps. The effect of the clash between the 'rational' and the 'mystic' on Yeats's poetic I will discuss later. In the 1889 Oisin collection he betrays an ambivalent attitude to 'truth'. Human passions are continually presented in natural environments, suggesting that

humanity is bound by natural laws, but at the same time man is alienated from nature, not a part of evolutionary processes, and his response to the world is, as a consequence, dislocated, as in 'Miserrimus'. In 'The Song of the Last Arcadian' evolution, in the guise of "objective,..... naive materialism, of measurable reality"[14] is accepted as a 'Truth', albeit a grey one:

> Grey Truth is now her painted toy;
> Yet still she turns her restless head.
> But oh, sick children of the world,
> Of all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the old cracked tune that Chronos sings,
> Words alone are certain good, (VP 65v).[15]

Indeed,

> The very earth itself may be
> Only a sudden flaming word,
> 'Mid clanging space a moment heard
> In the universe's reverie, (ibid.).

It is interesting to note that Yeats did not always regard this truth as 'grey'. In an 'Oisin MS Book' dated October 1886, a year <u>after</u> the poem's first publication, in the National Library, Dublin (Ms 3726), it is not qualified as a 'grey' truth. There is, however, another side to this 'truth':

> Then nowise worship dusty deeds,
> Nor seek - for this is also sooth -
> To hunger fiercely after truth,
> Lest all thy toiling only breeds
> New dreams, new dreams; there is not truth
> Saving in thine own heart. Seek, then,
> No learning from the starry men,
> Who follow with the optic glass
> The whirling ways of stars that pass -
> Seek then, for this is also sooth,
> No word of theirs - the cold star-bane
> Has torn and rent their hearts in twain,
> And dead is all their human truth, (VP 65-6v).

The effect of this rather Sidneyan statement[16] is to split 'truth' into two equally valid, but interdependent components. As Hazard Adams says

> Yeats did not deny the efficacy or the value of the scientific vision. He did not even deny its truth - if we define scientific truth as a half-truth or one side of a dialectical opposition. But he denied its truth as soon as it negated the countertruth represented by another way of seeing reality, (Criticism op.cit. p188).

In fact, Yeats's distrust of complete ideas caused him to be suspicious of science. He felt its attraction through his life, however, and he never rejected scientific investigative procedure. As Geoffrey Thurley says (The Turbulent Dream: Passion and Politics in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats, 1983, p38),

> for Yeats the ultimate aim of all consciousness was to know: not to feel, or to sympathize, but to know.

The movement from Chatterji's quietism to HPB's more active philosophy, dramatised, as M.C. Flannery shows (Yeats and Magic, 1977, p30),[17] in 'Anashuya and Vijaya', was a consequence of his continued demand for occult evidence. We should bear in mind precisely what Chatterji's philosophy offered. Looking back from the beginning of the new century Yeats recalls, firstly, that Chatterji "helped to give our vague thoughts a shape",[18] and secondly, that the shaping process was guided by the discipline of the rational mind:

> when I try to remember his philosophy as a whole I cannot separate it from what I myself have built about it..... but it seemed then that he taught us by what seemed an invincible logic, (ibid.)

Chatterji provided Yeats with a system in which to order various experiences which were inconsistent both with Christian orthodoxy, from which he had been torn by his father and the early scientific interests, and with contemporary science, from the "metallic sleep" of which he had been awoken by Laura Armstrong (L117). In other words, it was the

characteristic 'hyphen of reconciliation' between the warring disciplines Yeats found equally undeniable.

Yeats initially resisted theosophy. He refused in 1886, for example, to join Johnston's Dublin Lodge:

> [Johnston] was vexed now at my lack of zeal, for I had stayed somewhere between..... [Renan's Life of Christ and Esoteric Buddhism], held there perhaps by my father's scepticism, (Au 91).

and perhaps by the lingering influence of Mohini Chatterji. Chatterji's was not the substantial philosophy that Yeats demanded, however, and when he moved with his family in May 1887 to London, where HPB had recently formed a lodge, he began to throw off the oriental influences that had directed his earliest development. We can disregard Yeats's claim that his initial attraction to theosophy was

> because they had affirmed the real existence of the Jew, or of his like, and..... I saw nothing against his reality, (Au 173).[19]

What Yeats encountered for the first time amongst the theosophists was a religion that claimed to be empirical.[20] HPB failed entirely to prove the existence of Ahasuerus (Au 180), and, above all else, albeit shamefully (Mem 23), Yeats was still preoccupied with the "evidences". He had been visiting HPB every six weeks, and his passion for arcane knowledge was beginning to outstrip the facilities she then afforded her students. Though she discouraged neophytes from attending seances, Yeats accompanied Katharine Tynan to such a meeting, and temporarily lost control of himself (unpublished letter referred to in MM 63). HPB abused him (L 56-7),[21] but nevertheless invited him to join the Esoteric Section, then but recently formed for only the most devout students to study "tables of oriental symbolism" and live "in perpetual discussion" (Mem 23). The ES was, once again, a response to Yeats's demand for an increasingly

empirical occultism, inter-relating "parts of the body, the seasons, colors, elements, and the like, giving the naked universe a garment at once mystical and personal" (MM 64). HPB's admonitions failed to cow Yeats, and his demand for proof led ultimately to the experiments with the colour attributes of the seven principles and with the burnt flowers that resulted in his expulsion from the lodge in 1890 (Mem 23-4). Because unsupported by proven fact he had come to regard dogma with suspicion, as his ES Journal of October 1889 demonstrates (Mem 281-2). As Harper says (Yeats's Golden Dawn, p5), it is quite clear that Yeats was becoming a leader rather than a disciple. There is something increasingly Agnostic (Huxleyan) in his approach to theosophy during the last few months of membership. He wrote to John O'Leary that

> they wanted me to promise to criticise them never again in same fashion. I refused because I looked upon request as undue claim to control right of individual to think as best pleased him..... I told them they were turning a good philosophy into a bad religion, (L160).

Such a statement is not consistent with Ellmann's assessment of Yeats's "deliberate credulity". The split with the Theosophical Society was a continuation of Yeats's battle with the dragon of abstraction:

> by teaching an abstract system without experiment or evidence you are making your pupils dogmatic and you are taking them out of life, (Mem 24).[22]

Though Yeats possessed an emotional impulse to the noumenal his intellect was not easily convinced.

Before tracing the development of Yeats's move from theosophy to Mathers's more obviously 'Western' teaching, we should examine his adaptation of some of the theosophists' political ideals. As we have seen, Sinnett demanded government by the 'enlightened' minority of occultists.

Yeats was sensitive to this and, having come across the notion of poet-sage in Blake (UP1 401), in Shelley (E & I 67), in Ferguson (UP1 91), in O'Shaughnessy and Wilde,[23] and in theosophy,[24] he adapted it to his own individual vision of the artist as wisdom figure, and by extension as law-giver. Although, as he points out in the 'Journal' (Mem 144), the highest political motive does not confer artistic sensitivity, the converse does not hold. Ultimate legislative power should be in the hands of artistic authorities. The conflation of artist (particularly of poet) and occultist, a druidic tradition,[25] is a commonplace of Yeats's early work, and although it is clear that Yeats saw the poet-occultist as in direct conflict with the Church, and with revealed religion in general - largely because Christians are slaves to "rule and custom" (VSR 127) - it is equally clear that he saw 'art' as the true religion:

> supreme art is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius but never abandoned, (Mem 179-80).[26]

In 'The Crucifixion of the Outcast' Yeats writes of the

> cowardly and tyrannous race of monks, persecutors of the bard and the gleeman, haters of life and joy! O race that does not draw the sword and tell the truth! O race that melts the bones of the people with cowardice and with deceit! (VSR 9).

This clearly refers to what Yeats regarded as a contemporary theocracy. The monks are set in direct contrast with the almost deified O'Leary, whose religion was, in a metaphor too similar for the comparison to be accidental, "to pull the bow and tell the truth" (Au 211).[27] The Church enjoys the maximum political power. Yeats objects to this <u>not</u> because religion should not be political, but because the <u>wrong</u> religion has the power. The true religion, art, should be the most powerful influence in the state.

Yeats would have agreed with Robert Graves that the function of the poet is "truth, whereas the scholar's is fact", and that the "function of poetry is the religious invocation of the Muse" (The White Goddess, p224, 14). Specifically, it is the "harvest of the Lord" (Mem 181), and it will fail to reach and influence the mass of people until it once more becomes "the garment of religion as in old times" (E&I 163 - 1900). It is doubtless because art is "sanctity's scapegrace brother" (E&I 350 - 1913) that the demon-merchants of 'The Countess Cathleen' are unable to dominate the soul of Aleel the Poet (VP1 23-5), for as Michael Hearne saw, art is a way of saving one's soul (SB 48). The belief that the work of the poet is revelation (UP1 345, 2 131), that art must "reflect the face of God" (E & I 208 - 1901) - and so must identify itself, as saints need not, with the soul of the world (E&I 286 - 1906) - and that the religious and the artistic life are identical quests for the same perfection (E&I 207-8 - 1901), became quickly translated into the imaginative literature:

> I think that religion should have all art to express it - every kind of music, and every kind of painting..... I sometimes think that the only proof of a man being near to paradise is his power of saying, doing, or making something great and beautiful, (SB 26).

Similarly,

> everything that had entered into the arts..... should be accepted as a right expression of a religious spirit (SB 76).

This association of poet and sage is inescapable in the early verse. As Stock says, his very rhythms are "half entranced, like a man walking alone in a train of visionary thought, or incantatory, as if he thought of poetry as a priestly vocation" (op.cit. p40). A wise ruler would imitate the king who took poets for council, and appointed them to positions of

the highest authority, the Chief Poet becoming the supreme ruler after the death of the king (VSR 27-28). The association of poet and occultist becomes clearer towards the end of 'The Wisdom of the King'. The feathered king bitterly rebukes the poets for allowing him to

> sin against the secrecy of wisdom, for the law was made by man for the welfare of man, but wisdom the gods have made, (VSR 33).

Similarly, in the Hanrahan cycle the hero is both poet (the "great songmaker") and occultist:

> she did not well understand what he was saying, but as far as she could hear, it had the sound of poetry though it was not rhymed, and this is what she heard him say: 'The sun and the moon are the man and the girl, they are my life and your life, they are travelling and ever travelling through the skies as if under the one hood', (VSR 97-8).

This is evidently invocation.[28] In his introduction to Augusta Gregory's Cuchulain of Muirthemne Yeats writes that ancient bards had a

> supernatural sanction, for a chief poet had to understand not only innumerable kinds of poetry, but how to keep himself for nine days in a trance, (Ex 7).

He was impressed with The Vision of MacConglinne (UP1 261-3), the story of a medieval artist who triumphs over his monastic tormentors to become the king's great friend and confidant. Yeats twists this story into a celebration of the Artist as Martyr in 'The Crucifixion of the Outcast'.

Poetry and occultism are interdependent, and the government of occultists that Yeats found endorsed by Sinnett in particular, evolves into the government of poets. This potential political stature of the poet-occultist is broadly hinted at in The Speckled Bird:

> Pope or king, painter or musician, all had almost the same interest, (SB 25).

These figures are carefully chosen to associate are with the maximum spiritual and temporal power. The poet's viceregal role is confirmed in 1904 by the symbolic positioning of Seanchan on the step below King Guaire - the poet lying as a hyphen between ruler and ruled on the King's threshold (VPl 257). In the world of theosophy, as in that of ancient religions, guardians prevent man from taking to himself more occult knowledge than he is capable of assimilating, as, for instance, the kings of the "far-wandering shadows" come and go about Maeve's threshold, "to counsel and to help" (VP 183). Yeats believed in the political efficacy of art. In The Speckled Bird Michael tells Margaret Henderson that he will

> make a little kingdom, a part of the great kingdom to come, and I will ask you to sit beside me as its queen. We will only make a beginning, but centuries after we are dead cities shall be overthrown, it may be, because of an air that we have hummed or because of a curtain full of meaning that we have hung upon a wall, (SB 53).

He believed, too, in the political efficacy of occultism:

> They would make a prince decay
> With light images of clay
> Planted in the running wave;
> Or, for many shapes they have,
> They would change them into hounds
> Until he had died of his wounds,
> Though the change were but a whim, (VP 775).

'Against Witchcraft' should be read in context of Maclagan's assertion in The Speckled Bird that "great disturbances" would be the consequence of his meeting with Michael:

> You and I shall see the streets run with blood, for no great spiritual change comes without political change too, (SB58).

The social role of the poet-sage is clear. Yeats longed for the time when poets had been the most powerful influences in the land, when "all

manner of superstitious reverence environed them round" (UP1 163). Certainly, the ancient Celtic bards had been a privileged class, and the master-poet sat next to the king, only himself and the queen being permitted to wear six colours in their clothing.[29] The Irish belief in the occult power of the poet has persisted,[30] and Yeats makes no attempt to conceal his desire that civilisation return to the age of primitive bardolatry:

> One king being asked for his eye by a bard in quest of an excuse for rousing the people against him plucked it out and gave it. Their rule was one of fear as much as love. A poem and an incantation were almost the same, (UP1 164).

Yeats would remember HPB's claim that 'Serpents' was the name given to ancient Initiates (The Voice of the Silence, 1889, p.vi), and it is perhaps to this that he refers (and possibly to the Caduceus of the Qabalists) in 'Discoveries': "The poet had made his home in the serpent's mouth" (E & I 288). If a "great community" is to be recreated ("and what other game is so worth the labour?"), traditional values need to be rediscovered and adhered to: "We must recreate the old foundations of life" (Ex 28). These foundations are the "high wasteful virtues" of the aristocracy and the "finest minds". (Ex 27-8).

Direct political statements that "literature is almost the most profound influence that ever comes into a nation" (UP1 340, and see L239), are closely reflected in the imaginative literature. Aleel, for instance, claims that "they who have sent me walk invisible",[31] and Mary accepts the authority of the artist:

> When those that have read books,
> And seen the seven wonders of the world,
> Fear what's above or what's below the ground,
> It's time that poverty should bolt the door, (VP1 27).

Yeats would have been well aware of Mallarmé's belief that magic is the special concern of the poets, that poetry is indeed 'sorcery'.[32] It is typical that of all Johnson's imaginery conversations with Cardinal Newman Yeats would remember only Newman's claim that he had "always considered the profession of a man of letters a third order of the priesthood" (Au 305). To some extent, then, the elitism inherent in Sinnett's theosophy is reflected in this single aspect of Yeats's thought. Sinnett's ideal government of the occult elect is identical to Yeats's demand for traditional bardic authority. In his letter to The Bookman of November 1892 he writes approvingly of the time when "the proud walk clad in cloth of gold, and display their passionate hearts, that the groundlings may feel their souls wax the greater" (L219). This is the raising of the race by the aggrandisement of the strong.

The much vaunted empiricism of theosophy failed to satisfy Yeats's thirst for evidence. It is clear that in refusing to allow Yeats to experiment with occult forces HPB was undermining principles fundamental to the faith, not merely in its proud association with science, but in its very philosophy. Mead was later to point out that "the ground on which the philosophy of theosophy..... rests, is the reasonable interpretation of experience. Insofar as it sets forth a philosophy of life, it must base itself on experience", (G.R.S. Mead: Concerning Theosophy, 1908, p8).[33] Mabel Collins, in the highly influential theosophical guide Light on the Path, insisted that "the way" must be sought by

> testing all experience, by utilizing the senses in order to understand the growth and meaning of individuality, and the beauty and obscurity of those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side with you, and form the race to which you belong. Seek it by study of the laws of being, the laws of nature, (Light on the Path, 1885, p.10-11).[34]

"True occultism", claimed Bowen, plagiarizing HPB,

> is the Science of Life, through which comes mastery of the Art of Living. Without scientific knowledge the Aspirant..... is always liable to be swung away from the strait (sic) Path into one or other of the twin whirlpools, the Scylla of Psychism or the Charybdis of Mysticism, (The Occult Way, p141).35

Even the matter of sacred texts should be judged, according to Krishnamurti, individually whether it be 'reasonable' or not, since superstition is "one of the greatest evils in the world" (At the Feet of the Master, p21, and see p68). It was one of HPB's personal rules, indeed, that "thou shalt not let thy senses make a playground of thy mind", (The Voice of the Silence p49), and in this context her injunction to neophytes to

> help Nature and work on with her; and Nature will regard thee as one of her creators and make obeisance, (ibid. p14).

seems a little sinister if we recall Pearson's disturbingly similar remarks on man's 'Darwinian' duty (above p31). Sinnett, too, demanded that theosophists free themselves from dogma, superstition, and deception:

> Mystery can only have been loved by charlatans who wished to mystify, (The Occult World, p2).

Yeats was drawn to theosophy because it promised to reconcile science and religion. He left when he discovered that it patently did not. We shall now see that even the considerably deeper immersion in the occult that followed his expulsion from the TS was controlled by the intellectual discipline of reason. His early scientific training led Yeats to the most seemingly 'reasonable' esotericism available, and tempered his involvement with the occult throughout his life.

Autobiographies is not a haphazard collection of anecdotes and speculation. It is a careful reconstruction of Yeats's intellectual development.36 Yeats refers to the logical progression of Four Years, for

instance, in a letter to A.E. of 1921 (L665). With this in mind we should examine his own presentation of the transference of occult allegiance. His response to the failure of the theosophists to accommodate his magical experiments is charted by the reduction of Madame Blavatsky's "humour and audacious power" (Au 173) to "that old woman" (Au 182). His attitude in this is entirely Huxleyan: if theosophy shows itself unwilling to submit its doctrine to the unromantic gaze of physical experiment, the much feared "anatomical knife", it can only properly elicit agnosticism:

> I knew the doctrine, and it made me wonder why that old woman, or the 'Masters' from whom, whatever they were or were not, her genius had come, insisted upon it; for influx of some kind there must always be. Did they dread heresy, or had they no purpose but the greatest possible immediate effect? (Au 182).[37]

Spiritually unsure, doubting even the foundations of HPB's authority, Yeats bumps immediately into the arresting figure of MacGregor Mathers. The contrasts are deliberate and striking. Yeats, an embodiment of wavering uncertainty, stares across the chasm of doubt at the "resolute face" of Mathers. An old woman approaching death is contrasted with a man in his prime, her "plain loose dark dress" (Au 173) with his smart "brown velveteen coat" and "athletic body" (Au 182). Even before their introduction Mathers had struck Yeats as a figure of intense 'romance' (Au 183). More appositely, however, where HPB and the theosophists had failed to establish to Yeats's satisfaction the existence of Ahasuerus, association with Mathers would render the quest irrelevant. He was living proof of the old Jew, virtually his incarnation (Au 183).[38]

The juxtaposition of the two images is designed to reflect the natural progression, seemingly divinely authorised, from Eastern to Western Esoteric tradition, from utterly played out decrepitude and exhaustion to

the strength and solidity that would bear the full weight of Yeats's inquiries. Although the theosophists had looked to Ireland for some "great spiritual teaching" (L57), it is clear, as Harper says, that Yeats sought a

> revitalisation of the Western religious tradition, whereas Sinnett and his followers were denying its validity, (Yeats's Golden Dawn, p5-6).

The gods, it appeared, had rewarded his admirable empiricism with this apparently chance, but actually fated encounter, in the British Museum, with the one man capable of directing the studies and experiments which were to convince him "that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory" (Au 183), who could train his racial memory. In The Speckled Bird there is a hint that Yeats regarded their meeting as divinely ordained. Maclagan says to Michael Hearne,

> it was unnecessary to write to me. We were bound to meet, they that have inspired the work see to all that, (SB 57-8).

Mathers offered a way to the truth (Au 576), but it is doubtful if Yeats would have so idolized Mathers were it not for the fact that "in body and in voice..... he was perfect" (Au 187):

> His mind in those early days did not belie his face and body..... for he kept a proud head amid great poverty, (Au 183)

and as Maclagan he had "heroic eyes" (SB 107). In this he is a typical Yeatsian hero, taking his place with Parnell as noble stag (Au 316), Olivia Shakespear's face of "perfectly Greek regularity" (Mem 72), Lionel Johnson's "small distinguished head so like a certain archaistic Greek head" (Mem 96), the "pleasant memory" of C.H. Oldham's "vigorous and rather handsome head" (Mem 56), T.W. Rolleston's "courteous manners and..... beautiful classic face" (Mem 82) and "physical beauty, as of a

Greek statue" (Mem 51, and see Au 170), Eva Gore-Booth's "gazelle" (VP 475), William Morris's "grave wide-open eyes" and "broad vigorous body" (Au 141), O'Leary's head "worthy of a Roman coin" (Mem 42, and see 52), and Maud Gonne as Pallas Athene, a divine form with the step of a goddess (Mem 40), "great stature" and "the face of some Greek statue" (Au 364). This preoccupation with classic form stayed with Yeats. In A Vision we are reminded of Dante's comparison of beauty to a perfectly proportioned human being (AV(B) 82), and in 'Under Ben Bulben' Irish poets are urged to "sing whatever is well made" and to

> Scorn the sort now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top, (VP 639).

Yeats was ever keen to associate Celtic society and literature with Greek civilisation,[39] and in 1909 he proposed a kind of artistic 'eugenics'. Greek art, had it

> gone to its logical conclusion, would have led to the creation of one single type of man, and one single type of woman, in whom would have been concentrated, however, by a kind of deification, the capacity for all energy and all passtion, a Krishna, a Christ, a Dionysus, or a drawing of all into a single mind as at the end of the cycles, (Mem 188).

Physically Mathers was equal to Yeats's other heroes (see, e.g. Colquhoun op.cit. p40-2), and was as preoccupied as Yeats with the classical physique:

> Then he went into the Greek Room and, standing in front of a statue of an athlete, he held out his arms and got Michael to feel their muscle and compare them with the muscles of the athlete..... he spoke of the contrast between the form of Greek statues and the men and women who were looking at them. He said, "Men were once like that and now they are getting more and more miserable looking", (SB 59-60).[40]

The young Yeats seems to have agreed with Spenser that "a beautiful soul, unless for some stubbornness in the ground, makes for itself a beautiful body" (Ex 366). This attraction to perfect Greek regularity, shared incidentally by later fascist ideologists,[41] naturally works both

ways. The despised J.F. Taylor, for instance, was noticeably "ungainly" (Mem 52) with "coarse red hair" and "stiff movements as of a Dutch doll" (Au 99). George Moore, similarly, was "more mob than man" (Au 431).

Yeats was quick to spot Mathers's martial nature (Au 183). He had joined the First Hampshire Infantry Volunteers and was sufficiently competent and enthusiastic a recruit to translate from the French a military manual and adapt it to British requirements. It is unlikely that he ever became an officer, but Crowley, for one, noticed that he "had the habit of command", and his photograph was taken in the uniform of a lieutenant.[42] Ithell Colquhoun, in an often unreliable biography of Mathers contends that boxing and fencing provided a more or less harmless outlet for his aggression, and possibly some exhibition fees (op.cit. p71-4). Yeats, however, noticed more sinister manifestations of his martial instinct. During his association with Yeats Mathers became involved with what Howe refers to as the "Celtic lunatic fringe", of which Yeats himself was plainly a member. Mathers adopted the title of Count of Glenstrae, and Yeats recalled that at night he would dress and dance as a highlander and brood "upon the ramifications of clans and tartans" (Au 335-6, and see Mem 106). He confided to Yeats that when dressed as a highlander, "with several knives in his stocking", he felt "like a walking flame" (Au 338-9). Yeats also notes Mathers's fanatical devotion to Macpherson's 'Ossian' (Au 335), and his collection of poems, The Fall of Granada and other Poems (1885), contains an Ossianic apostrophe which is an interesting prophetic commentary on his subsequent career,

> Come ye dim ghosts of my fathers, and behold my deeds in war / I may fall; but I will be renowned like the race of the echoing Morven! (p81).

The domination of Mars in Mathers's horoscope (Colquhoun op.cit. p64-5), and Crowley's remark that "the troubles of Mathers were due to his excessive devotion to Mars" (ibid.), add a certain piquancy to Yeats's story of the devoted sheep (Au 185). Annie Horniman was also deeply disturbed by his "continual glorification of the Mars forces" in relation to politics (Howe op.cit. p112).

It is clear that this aspect of Mathers's personality had some effect on Yeats. He recalls that

> one day a week he and his wife were shut up together evoking, trying to influence the politics of the world, I believe now, rearranging nations according to his own grandiose phantasy, (Mem 73).

This was before the "decay of his character that came later" (ibid.) had set in. There is a flippancy about Yeats's response to Mathers's political magic, but it is clear that he found the powerful image of chaos appealing:

> the war would fulfil the prophets and especially a prophetic vision I had long ago with the Mathers's, and so far be for the glory of God, but was a dusk of the nations it would be! for surely it would drag in half the world..... Could you come and see me on Monday and have tea and perhaps divine for armageddon?[43]

The account intended for publication is softened. Mathers is presented as clairvoyant rather than black magician - "he began to foresee changes in the world" (see Au 336-7). The original account in The Trembling of the Veil is much harsher:

> war was to bring, or be brought by, anarchy, but that would be a passing stage, he declared, for his dreams were all Napoleonic. He certainly foresaw some great role that he could play, had made himself an acknowledged master of the war-game..... He was to die of melancholia, and was perhaps already made at certain moments or upon certain topics.[44]

Yeats's sense of Mathers's bellicosity is not merely the wisdom of hindsight. He had noticed by 1900 that Mathers, though in a slightly different context, was a natural despot (L340). He had established himself as dictator of Isis-Urania by not replacing Woodman and Westcott of the original triumvirate. In spite of this, Yeats was drawn to Mathers and tacitly acknowledges the influence in his recollection that it might have been some talk of his that caused Yeats to write the poem on the Valley of the Black Pig (VP 161), an integral part of the Celtic Mysteries that Mathers was researching so diligently in Paris (Au 336, L297-8). It is likely, similarly, that nowhere but in Paris with the Napoleonic Mathers would Yeats have been so interested in an obscure battle of the Spanish-American War (Au 338).[45]

It is clear that Mathers had impressed Yeats politically some time before their collaboration on the Celtic Mysteries in the late '90s. Correspondence in the summer of 1892 with John O'Leary, not a man to suffer gladly an idle association with an occultist, contains references to Mathers's "usefulness", and his willingness to offer specialist advice to advanced nationalists suggests some sort of projected para-military pan-Celticism (L208-10). The overall effect of Mathers's political influence on Yeats would not have been to temper the drift to reaction that had been fostered by Darwin et al, and nourished by Sinnett.

Mathers taught Yeats the Qabalah.[46] Qabalists seek to categorise, in a 'scientific' way, all spiritual and occult experience. Aleister Crowley's brilliant definition indicates the attitude of Qabailists to their 'scientific' occultism. Those who object to the system, he suggests, must find themselves in the position, so codified and systematic is it, of having to

object to the technical terminology of chemistry, to a lexicon, or a treatise on comparative religion, to algebraic symbols, to physiology, to the "mnemonic value of arabic modifications of roots", and to the use of square roots, (see Aleister Crowley: 777, (1909) 1977, p125-6). Qabalism is based, to a large extent, on the scientific, or agnostic, principle of doubt. The Qabalah asks the question:

> how can God, who is presumably perfect and changeless, have got mixed up in the creation of the world? and answers that He put forth ten 'emanations'..... who actually did the work of creation, (Colin Wilson: The Occult, 1971, p103).

This neatly bypasses the problem of a Creator, if not of Creation itself. Yeats's 'Occult Diary and Notebook' of 1889 clearly indicates that his occultism was becoming increasingly 'scientific' towards the end of his association with the theosophists. His methodical tabling of occult data - Zodiacal signs, elemental attributes and symbols, the Four Triplicities, planterary qualities, their relation to days, metals, parts of the body, colours, seasons, moods and archangels - is followed by lists of states of consciousness, a breakdown of the lore of Simon Magus and various diagrams, and a note on the resolutions debated by the Esoteric Section in October 1889 relating to HPB's Mahatmas: "I as yet refuse to decide between these..... alternatives, having too few facts to go on".[47] This thoroughly Huxleyan independence is confirmed by a note on Esoteric Section propaganda of 20th December, 1889 - "NB keep out of propaganda not my work".[48] The theosophists' refusal or inability accommodate Yeats's doubts forced him towards the more systematised occultism of the Qabalah, and it is clear, as Ian Fletcher says, that

> the transition from Ely Place to the Isis-Urania temple of the Rosicrucian Golden Dawn..... represented a move to a more elaborate, but more pragmatic mode of mysticism (sic.)..... The Golden Dawn provided a more propitious context for experimental magic.[49]

Yeats knew that his rational mind devalued occult experience, as the doctor in The Speckled Bird, who "studies with a rationalism which had an element of fanaticism", condemned fasting and visions as unhealthy (SB 17-18). Yeats therefore needed, as Blake had needed (see Yeats Studies op.cit. p48), an ordered symbology, "a little irresponsible experimentation" (L293). Above all, he needed the proof that such experimentation would bring: "My object was to find actual experience of the supernatural" (Au 400, and see 330). Yeats certainly did value the supernatural because "it gave evidence of possibilities of feeling unavailable to him as a natural man",[50] but we should be careful not to underestimate his sense of the importance of "natural man". Natural man features significantly in the notes Yeats and Annie Horniman made for the rituals of the Celtic Mystical Order in 1898-99. In an initiation ceremony The Guide leads in his blindfold pupil, who carries a staff, to represent objective, logical thought:

> he tries everything timidly with his staff, tapping a little to right and a little to left and a little in front of him, and going timidly one step at a time, (NLD Ms. 13,568).

In another ritual The Guide brings in the Pupil and announces,

> here is one who is weary of the daylight and of the swift perishing thoughts of daylight, (ibid.),

the daylight being yet another symbol of objective thought, the clarity of the rational mind. This leads to the Ceremony of the 'House of the Howl' ('Bowl' in Yeats's original):

| | |
|---|---|
| The Teacher: | I hold up before you the lamp of the Moon, the unwearying maker of images, the passionless giver, that you may come often to the rich quiet waters and be filled with their peace. |
| The Guide: | I lift up before you the lamp of the Morning and Evening Star, the maker of all desire, the ever faltering flying one, that you may climb to the high springs of the hurrying rivers and be filled with their joy.[51] |

By the late 1890s Yeats had come to realise that the great Finn's "music of what happens" must include everything, that there can be no Teacher without Pupil, no initiation without neophyte, and no progress, as Blake saw, without contrareities. Reason, the scientific mode of intellectual evolution, cannot be discarded without rejecting life itself, because it is, as we shall see, a full half of the whole. The Qabalah incorporated, unlike theosophy, "no abstraction to deaden the nerves of the soul" (Mem 27), and Yeats began to pray that his

> imagination might somehow be rescued from abstraction and become as preoccupied with life as had been the imagination of Chaucer, (Au 188).

Yeats was later to claim that it was his father's influence that forced him from 'speculation' to 'experience' (AV(B)12), but though 'intensity' was JBY's "chief word of praise" (Au 62), Yeats's newly discovered will to "intensity of personal life" (E&I 265 - 1906), was in fact a natural artistic and occult development, being to a large extent the move from "the cold cup of the moon's intoxication" to "the hot cup of the sun" (Ex 26), from Anashuya and Vijaya sporting when "the sun has laid his chin on the grey wood" (VP 72) to the Golden Dawn. It would seem that Mathers taught Yeats to balance the sun and the moon in his occultism, although, as we shall see, the need to defend the self against any obsession is perhaps the earliest theme to emerge in Yeats's work.

The battle between objective and subjective perception is an aspect of the substantially documented body-soul conflict which is usually illustrated from Yeats's later publications.[52] The Seekers, however - Goll, Mongan, Oisin et al - waver between a belief that ecstasy is a product of self-absorption in a world of abstraction and spirituality, and a desire to envelop the self in physical consciousness of, and active and continued

participation in, a reality common to their fellows, achieving self-knowledge by commitment to this world. By no means an innovative question this, but no more easily resolved for being a poetic convention:

> I count those feathered balls of soot
> The moor-hen guides upon the stream,
> To silence the envy in my thought, (VP 424)

an envy provoked by the presence of a man pledged to activity in this world:

> I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
> Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
> In something that all others understand or share, (VP 427).

Such a presence might also provoke shame, as indicated in the closing lines of 'The People'. The answer must be neither (idealised spirituality or mundanity), or both - but thoughtful man can make no choice and must come to terms with, and attempt to reconcile the oppositions. They will not meet easily. The struggle is symbolised in 'The Grey Rock' as the clash of horn and steel, the mighty King Eochaid's battle with the supernatural stag. The result of overbalance is profound sorrow:

> a cry
> So mournful that it seemed the cry of one
> Who had lost some unimaginable treasure
> Wandered between the blue and the green leaf
> And climbed into the air, (VP 278).

Such a conflict is the essence of the quarrel in the hole in the hillside in 'The Hour before Dawn' (VP 302-7), and it is the difference between valley and mountain, as execmplified by the shepherd's song and the goatherd's song, (VP 338-43). The care of added responsibilities contained in the Druid's "small slate-coloured thing" (VP 104) precludes wholehearted acceptance of the spiritual life (as indicated by 'The Tables of the Law', for instance, and later by the Fool who so feels the weight of his responsibilities that he prays to God to ease them - VP 380). On the

other hand, the bitterness and what seemed to Yeats the harsh meaninglessness of purely physical existence precludes an entire commitment to physical reality. It is the familiar dichotomy of heart and intellect, summed up by the old Mother as the problem of matching ribbons for bosom and head (VP 152). One aspect of this is sexual love. It is impossible to judge whether Yeats's "unquiet heart" could distinguish between Maud Gonne and an idealized youthful Queen Maeve, though inability to distinguish between divinity and beloved is, of course, no disgrace - Yeats speaks approvingly of Horton whose "mind's eye,/When upward turned, on one sole image fell", (VP 471). The conflict can be fully illustrated, however, from the earlier works, though in 1889 he seemed contemptuous of it (LN1 74).

For Yeats's art the history of the conflict begins with the desire to turn from what he came to regard as the elaborate whimsy of his pre-'90s publications to "the strength, the essential moment of a man who would be exciting in the market or at the dispensary door":

> an exciting person..... will display the greatest volume of personal energy, and this energy must seem to come out of the body as out of the mind. We must say to ourselves continually when we imagine a character: 'Have I given him the roots, as it were, of all faculties necessary for life?' (E&I 265-6 - 1906).[53]

This inevitably develops into the desire to express the spirit of a place for the people of that place:

> I have a conviction, which indeed I have still, that one's verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colours of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportion, (E&I 5 - 1901).

If the poet is to begin to move people he must "reintegrate the human spirit" in the imagination, and to do this he must

> know all classes of men as one of themselves, that he should combine the greatest possible personal realization with the greatest possible knowledge of the speech and circumstance of the world, (Mem 152).

It is the poet's primary function to hunt truth "into its thicket" by keeping close to "the impressions of sense, to common daily life" (Au 471).[54] If, Yeats claimed, the poet is to give breath to the simple rhythms of common physical humanity, "that forgotten thing" (Mem 181), to "normal mankind and general law..... The landscape of the world" (Mem 167), he must absorb himself in the world of action. It is clear that Yeats responded early in his poetic career to that moment when body and soul become inseparable.[55]

The gradual balancing of objective and subjective thought under Mathers's tuition, of 'reason' and 'emotion' or 'instinct', is a vital aspect of this wider conflict. Yeats considered himself a participant in "the revolt of the soul against the intellect" (L211, and see UP2 92). Science had to a large extent served its purpose, though it had been a valuable asset to civilisation, (UP1 323). There was room for some realism in the theatre at least, and for scientific discipline in all the arts (UP2 156, and L278). Intellect, though not the Sibyl, "clears the rubbish from the mouth of the sybil's (sic) cave" (L262), and Yeats quarrelled with A.E. over what Arnold regarded as the "despotism of fact" (UP2 91):

> he [A E] saw constantly before him in vision an extraordinary world, the nature spirits as he believed, and I wished him to record all as Swedenborg had recorded, and submit his clairvoyance to certain tests. This seemed to him an impiety, and perhaps the turning towards it of the analytic intellect checked his gift, and he became extremely angry, (Mem 130).

His "analytic intellect" (a confession repeated in 'The People', VP 353) was what separated him from the mystics of the Russell-theosophical school. He might well have quarrelled, similarly, with Maud Gonne over her excess of pragmatism had he not recognised his own considerable need for precisely the qualities he was so busily denigrating:

> my own seership was, I thought, inadequate; it was to be Maud Gonne's work and mine. Perhaps that was why we had been thrown together. Were there not strange harmonies amid discord? My outer nature was passive - but for her I should never perhaps have left my desk - but I knew my spiritual nature was passionate, even violent. In her all this was reversed, for it was her spirit only that was gentle and passive and full of charming fantasy, as though it touched the world only with the point of its finger..... I, who could not influence her actions, could dominate her inner being, (Mem 124, and see 128).

He needed to be touched by the pragmatism that balanced her:

> one night when I was going to sleep I had seen suddenly a thimble, and a shapeless white mass that puzzled me. The next day on passing a tobacconist's I saw that it was a lump of meerschaum not yet made into a pipe. She was complete; I was not, (Mem 63).

I think that in this Yeats comes close to Keats's opinion that the information essential to a poem is "the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade" (The Letters of John Keats ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 1958, II, 360). As W.H. O'Donnell says, in seeking the physical correlative of adeptship Yeats recognised the artistic limitations of spirituality, and his work after the 1890s is a reasonably consistent endorsement of the physical.[56] Yeats agonised over the choice of portraits for his 1908 Collected Works, and Elizabeth W. Bergmann concludes from this that in deciding to represent all the "different personages that I have dreamt of being but have never had the time for" (L502), he

> surely recognized that it put him back in the 90s faced not merely with a fragmented self, but with a fragmented vision of what the self would like to be, ('Yeats's Gallery' in CLQ 130).

Her reduction of the most important reference in this sequence of letters - "I also want Augustus John's emphasis to be balanced by emphasis in other directions" (L506) - to a footnote is consistent with her misperception of Yeats's sense of unity as a "fragmented vision" rather than as a compartmentalised but comprehensive whole. Yeats clearly states that

> I want those portraits together because it is the logical thing - they do not belong to one part of a book more than another, or to

> one volume more than another; because if one puts portraits all together it is obviously for comparison and completeness, (L506).

Had the various portraits been attached to different literary personae Yeats's self-awareness might legitimately be described as fragmented. That balance, comparison and completeness should be uppermost in his mind is the clearest possible indication that the thought-hammering process was well under way.

It is doubtful whether this would have been so without Mathers's influence. In the Theosophical Society Yeats's desire for experimental verification of occult doctrine, his will to empiricism, had been frustrated and subdued by his surrender to their abstraction:

> after I had been moved by ritual, I formed plans for deeds of all kinds I wished to return to Ireland to find there some public work; whereas when I had returned from meetings of the Esoteric Section I had no desire but for more thought, more discussion, (Mem 27).

In this, too, the theosophists had flouted their own doctrine. HPB had herself indicated the danger of abstraction:

> if thou art taught that sin is born of action and bliss of absolute inaction, then tell them that they err..... Believe thou not that sitting in dark forests, in proud seclusion and apart from men..... will lead thee to the goal of final liberation..... Shalt thou abstain from action?..... Not so shall gain thy soul her freedom, (The Voice of the Silence, p.28-31).

It should be added, though, that in this, as in all else, the theosophists were unable to agree a coherent philosophy. Mabel Collins, in what is perhaps the first of the 'theosophical classics', Light on the Path, had already enjoined students to "stand alone and isolated..... because only so can you commence the science of self-knowledge" (p6).[57] P.G. Bowen claimed that only those of no intelligence "anchor themselves to the dead letter of HPB's teachings",[58] but one might legitimately wonder how we are to regard Madame Blavatsky as the fount of all theosophical wisdom

and accept that parts of her teaching might be "dead". Part of the problem, as Edward Evans pointed out to Yeats, was that the theosophists were "all self, all presumption..... The whole world is vivid to us [Christians] . They are all self, and so they despise the foundation" (Mem 164)[59] The philosophy of the Dublin theosophists was a "milk diet" (Au 468). As late as 1894 Yeats seems to have sensed that occult knowledge leads to passivity, and is in inverse proportion to the possessor's participation in the ordinary affairs of men. Maurteen scoffs,

> My grandfather would mutter just such things,
> And he was no judge of a dog or a horse,
> And any idle boy could blarney him, (VP1 184).

The source of Yeats's essential dissatisfaction with theosophy, however, was its concentration on a body of lore drawn from a tradition outside his own. Mathers offered an alternative:

> western civilization, religion and magic alike insist on power and therefore body and these three doctrines - efficient rule, the Incarnation, and thaumaturgy. Eastern asceticism answers these with indifference to rule, scorn of the flesh, contemplation of the formless. Western minds who follow the Eastern way become weak and vapoury, (Mem 166).[60]

Ireland had been "ruined by abstraction". The Rhymers' Club, for instance, as John Davidson saw, lacked "blood and guts" (Au 317). Mathers rescued Yeats from this abstraction. Under the new western influence Yeats became bent on quickly proving himself a "man of action" (Au 454), ruffling in a manly pose at Coole, (Au 457, VP 489). Much later, in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', he suggested that only the Sage and the Saint can turn profitably from experience (Myth 340). Following Blake, he sought precision (UP1 343, and n.9).

Yeats continued to seek 'system' within the Golden Dawn structure. Details of a vision in his notes on Irish Gods and Legends in the National Library, Dublin, confirm that this was becoming something of a preoccupation:

> a woman gathering shells..... woman is stooping a child walking with her. It seems as if it is impossible for her to stand upright and look round. Collecting things without much system. An intellectual that prefers to pick up knowledge rather than piece it together. Love of detail for its own sake. The sun set and a splendid storm goes on around her but her whole attention is fixed on the pretty little shells. The child is happy in her presence feels great gladness and light. The hungry people are coming and are delighted with the shells; she is popular and looked upon as a great genius, (Ms. 13,574).

This vision is preceded by two others, one of a hermit, and one of an artist-lover, and Yeats's synthesis of the three is incontrovertibly a statement of his belief in the need to balance opposites, and of the relative equality of opposing impulses:

> The Artist-lover feels contempt for the woman but the Hermit of Wisdom feels compassion for her has passed beyond them both and knows both are necessary.

If the Golden Dawn hierarchy regarded Yeats as a rebel, and Ithell Colquhoun is not an authority to be trusted (op.cit. p20), it is doubtless this relentless quest for system that caused their unease. When he did finally discover a comprehensive system he dedicated it to Moina Mathers as 'Vestigia' (Nulla Retrorsum - I never retrace my steps), and indeed saw it as "plain" that "I must dedicate my book to you" (AV(A), ix).

This book, A Vision, was, as Harper says, "an attempt to use the methods of empirical science to explain 'The Way of the Soul between the Sun and the Moon'" (ibid. x). The desire to bring all occult phenomena within the

discipline and framework of a system is the legacy of Yeats's early scientific interests and the inevitable conclusion of his entire occult development. The system itself is sufficient evidence of this, but it is confirmed by his account of Phases 21 and 22. The French biologist and botanist, Jean Baptiste Lamarck, from whom Darwin took the theory of the transmissibility of acquired characteristics, is placed with Shaw, Wells and George Moore in Phase 21. Darwin himself is in what Yeats would have regarded as the considerably more elevated company of Flaubert, Herbert Spencer, Swedenborg and Dostoyevsky, and it is significant that 'Will' in this phase is "balance between ambition and contemplation", and that the true 'Creative Mind' is 'Amalgamation'. In Phase 22 the

> synthesis will be more complete, and the sense of identity between the individual and his thought, between his desire and his synthesis will be closer, (ibid. 91).

The importance of Phase 22 to Yeats is measured by the tentative association of his own personality with the impulse of the phase:

> it has become abstract, and the more it has sought the whole of natural fact, the more abstract it has become. One thinks of some spilt liquid which grows thinner the wider it spreads till at last it is but a film, (ibid. 92).

This inevitably recalls the poem, 'Spilt Milk':

> We that have done and thought,
> That have thought and done,
> Must ramble, and thin out
> Like milk spilt on a stone, (VP 484).[61]

Certainly, Phase 22 is the phase of Yeats's lifetime, and of A Vision itself (AV(B)299), not merely historically, but in the very desire to systematise:

> A man of Phase 22 will commonly not only systematise, to the exhaustion of his will, but discover this exhaustion of will in all that he studies..... [Darwin's] theory of development by the survival of fortunate accidental varieties seems to express this exhaustion. The man himself is never weak, never vague or fluctuating in his thought, for if he brings all to silence, it is a silence that results from tension, and till the moment of balance, nothing interests him that is not wrought up to the greatest effort of which it is capable, (AV(A)93).

In Chapters IV and V I hope to demonstrate that this 'Darwinian' tension and balance is a preoccupation of the very earliest verse.

Whatever Yeats's personal association with Phase 22 it is clear that he regarded it as crucially important (Au 293). It is, for instance, one of only four phases to last a full month. It is the phase where absolute realism becomes possible (AV(A)97), and general thought is ready for its expression (AV(B)297). Above all, however, it is a phase of revolution (ibid. 205). The being of this phase, with his desire for the death of the intellect (AV(A)92), his "strange, far-reaching, impartial gaze" (ibid. 94), is likely to produce a system to be "an instrument of destruction and of persecution in the hands of others" (ibid. 95). With quite remarkable foresight Yeats links the "hard, cold and invulnerable" being, the mirror of unbreakable steel (ibid. 94) to an "epoch of victory and defeat" (AV(B)271-2). Darwin is thus a pivotal figure in Yeats's intellectual and spiritual system over half a century after the 'rabid' Darwinism had supposedly evaporated before his role as one of the last Romantics. Clearly, in 1937, he could relish the prospect of history fulfilling its cyclic purpose in Nazi Germany's misappropriation of Darwin's system.

In this chapter I have tried to do two things. I have argued that Yeats was drawn to theosophy because it seemed to reconcile science and religion, and that he left the society when he discovered that it patently did not. In his quest for a more codified occult system he came under the inspiring tutelage of MacGregor Mathers. His entire occult development was controlled by the problem that had troubled him as a child, the "evidences of religion". Yeats was <u>not</u> prepared to deny the

validity of scientific methodology. At the same time I have tried to indicate that an affirmation of the role of the 'rational' mind would have established internal psychological and external philosophical contradictions (exemplified, for instance, by the East-West conflict) that demanded reconciliation, and would have encouraged any hostility to democracy derived from the scientific materialists and from Sinnett. All this would be of only incidental value, however, were it not possible to demonstrate that the intellectual discipline of reason that led him to the most seemingly 'reasonable' esotericism available, and tempered his involvement with the occult throughout his life, played a significant role in his response to art, and in his poetic development. In Chapter IV I will address myself to this problem with reference to Yeats's early verse, generally, before continuing, in Chapter V, to examine in detail three poems not normally covered in such analyses.

1) Au 115,125,157,168,173,190,279. Their artistic counterparts he considered to be the 'realist' painters Jules Bastien-Lepage and Carolus Duran. Although the works of these artists are indeed 'realistic' they labour under a heavy-handed sentimentality that is not commensurate with the scientific investigations of Huxley and Tyndall. Bastien-Lepage's 'Les Foins', 'Le Colporteur', and 'Jeanne d'Arc' are typical. They are stylistically realistic (photographic), but they are absurdly unrealistic in tone, and Yeats was unfair in his persistent comparison. See Andre Theuriet: Jules Bastien-Lepage and his Art, a Memoir, 1892 (containing Sickert's attack on Bastien-Lepage), Julia Cartwright: Jules Bastien-Lepage, 1894, L. de Fourcaud: Bastien-Lepage: Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres, 1885, and M. de Lescure: Marie Stuart: Dix Compositions par M. Carolus Duran, 1872.

2) 'Yeats, Dialectic and Criticism', Criticism 10:3, Summer 1968, p.194.

3) His later researches for the Society for Psychical Research and his brief governance of the Golden Dawn are a demonstration of this. His excitement and potential credulity are always tempered by a vitiating dubiety - see Arnold Goldman: 'Yeats, Spiritualism, and Psychical Research', George Mills Harper and John S. Kelly: 'Preliminary Examination of the Script of E[lizabeth] R[adcliffe]', and George Mills Harper: '"A Subject of Investigation": Miracle at Mirebeau' in Yeats and the Occult (ed. G.M. Harper), p.108-189. See also Is the order of R.R. & A.C. to remain a Magical Order? Paradoxically Yeats seems to have been, as a follower, eager to believe, but as a leader, a sceptic.

4) Personal Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky, ed. Mary K. Neff, 1937, p.295.

5) The Speaker, April 14th, 1900, p.40, later reprinted as 'The Pathway' in Collected Works (1908), vol.VIII.

6) The Early Poetry of W.B. Yeats: The Poetic Quest, 1978, p.80.

7) see also 'He thinks of his Past Greatness when a Part of the Constellations of Heaven', VP 177.

8) "Yeats's 'Monini Chatterji'," in The Explicator, 4:8, June 1946.

9) D.W. Nash: Taliesin, 1858.

10) see, e.g. M.H. D'Arbois de Jubainville: The Irish Mythological Cycle, transl. R.I. Best, 1903.

11) UPI 137, although de Jubainville's Irish Mythological Cycle was not translated into English until 1903. The seriousness with which Yeats took the doctrine of metempsychosis can be measured by the letter of October 17th, 1918, to his father, L652-3.

12) The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold, ed. R.H. Super, Vol, III (1962), p.326.

13) W. Emmett Small's contention (Hanson op.cit. p.111) in his utterly valueless essay, 'H.P. Blavatsky's Influence on Ireland's Literary Renaissance', that the Irish mind was ready for theosophy,

> conditioned by a background of closeness to the gods and a natural pantheism which saw all things in nature infilled with divinity, which set up no physical barrier between unseen and seen but saw Man as Hero, the Cuchullain of the Spirit, shouting with the Sons of God, marching ever toward Lugh the Sunbright in war against Matter and the joyous conviction of eventual victory of Spirit,

is not endorsed by Yeats's desire to balance rather than reject materialism, nor by his rapid rejection of theosophy for precisely the tradition here recalled.

14) Hazard Adams, Criticism op.cit. p.185.

15) Hugh Kenner (A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers, 1983, p.95) writes of this poem:

> "Words alone are certain good", sings the Happy Shepherd, since Truth, being "grey", inheres in a "painted toy" (made in Germany) sick children might play with: a wheel kept spinning by a thumb-driven plunger, a little tin wheel on which seven colors blur before your eyes into grey as Newton prescribed. That was Truth. Color is but a local event in the eye. Fuse the "objective" colors and it vanishes.

Professor Kenner has pointed out to me in a letter that Yeats is probably also thinking of the work of the philosophers of the Locke tradition, and their belief that colour is not an objective reality, but a creation of the observing mind. The truth is without colour (grey). All this is pure speculation for which Professor Kenner offers up no evidence. It is interesting, however, in view of Cairns Craig's identification of Yeats's philosophical debt to Locke and other unlikely eighteenth century thinkers.

16) 'Astrophel and Stella', I.

17) see also George Mills Harper: Yeats's Golden Dawn, p.11.

18) The Speaker op.cit. By 1908, when this essay was reprinted, Yeats is "certain" that Chatterji taught by logic, (Collected Works, 1908, Vol.VIII, p.195-6).

19) The Jew in question is Shelley's Ahasuerus.

20) Yeats read, besides Sinnett, Reichenbach during this period (Au 90). Reichenbach places heavy emphasis on the scientific investigation of phenomena, (see, e.g. Letters on Od and Magnetism, 1852, translated F.D. O'Byrne, 1926, p.14-16).

21) The mahatmas taught that only "suicides and shells" could be attracted to a seance, (see The Mahatma Letters of A.P. Sinnett op.cit. p.132). See also UP1 132.

22) see also Au 181-2.

23) see Phillip L. Marcus: 'Artificers of the Great Moment: An Essay on Yeats and National Literature', CLQ 72-8.

24) Bowen, for instance, in The Occult Way, 1938, p.128, makes the point that spiritual illumination and poetic genius are identical.

25) see 'The Song of Amergin' in Graves: The White Goddess, p.206, 216 and Nash op.cit. p.14-15.

26) and see Mem 124. See also UP1 266, E&I 193,285,293-5,353.

27) This neatly points the extent of both Yeats's personal, and the Fenians' general quarrel with the Church - O'Leary being the embodiment of all the finest ideals. The stranglehold of the Church on the Fenian movement is demonstrated with immense feeling by Sean O'Casey in his chapter, 'Lost Leader', on the unfortunate Dr. Michael O'Hickey, Drums Under the Windows, p.151-65.

28) see, e.g., Bowen: The Occult Way p.128-30.

29) see Graves: The White Goddess p.21-2,80,234.

30) see, e.g., Patrick Kavanagh: The Green Fool p.326-8 and VSR 100.

31) VP1 83, lines 455-67.

32) 'Magic', National Observer 10:3 (Jan.28th, 1885).

33) although Yeats had scant regard for Mead's intellect - Mem 282.

34) see Krishnamurti: At the Feet of the Master p.16 and Bowen: The Occult Way p.60-2.

35) see also W.S. Urquhart: Theosophy and Christian Thought p.120-22.

36) see, e.g. Ian Fletcher: 'Rhythm and Pattern in Autobiographies' in An Honoured Guest, ed. Denis Donoghue and J.R. Mulryne, 1965, p.165-89, and Krimm op.cit. p.87-91.

37) Yeats refers to the doctrine of the anticipated century of spiritual stagnation.

38) Mathers was born in 1854 and Yeats correctly estimated (Au 182) that he was in his mid-thirties when they met, but as Maclagan in The Speckled Bird his age and nationality appear to have been incalculable, (SB 19).

39) see UP2, 58,119-20,154,190 and Ex 320-1.

40) The Speckled Bird is, of course, essentially a fiction, but I am treating it as a semi-autobiographical document in which the protagonists' characters, temperaments and predilections, if not the details of their activities, have some correlation with those of their models.

41) see, e.g. Hermann Glaser: The Cultural Roots of National Socialism, transl. E.A. Menze, 1978, p.47-8, and Gasman op.cit. p.151.

42) reproduced in Ellic Howe: The Magicians of the Golden Dawn, 1972, p.148-9.

43) L259-60, and see below p.249-56.

44) The Trembling of the Veil, 1922, p.212. The observation that Mathers had acquired a sabre wound on his wrist during a student riot he had mistaken for the beginning of war is, similarly, deleted from later editions, (ibid. p.211).

45) probably 30th April, 1898. Unpublished letter to T.F. Unwin for access to which I am grateful to Warwick Gould.

46) I have adopted this spelling in preference to Yeats's because it is that ordinarily used by modern commentators, and it is closer to the original QBLH.

47) National Library, Dublin, Ms. 13, 570 - my italics. Yeats carefully tabulates the relations of the Irish gods to the Zodiac, and to the Qabalah (e.g. Mananan = Kether, Lug = Tiphareth), and draws elaborate and extensive genealogical trees.

48) part of this is reproduced in Mem 281-2.

49) Ian Fletcher: 'Poet and Designer: W.B. Yeats and Althea Gyles' in Yeats Studies, 1, ('Yeats and the 1890s'), ed. Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds, 1971, p.46-7.

50) Grossman op.cit. p.68.

51) This early juxtaposition of Sun and Moon, of subjective and objective thought, is important:

> Death and life were not
> Till man made up the whole
> Made lock stock and barrel
> Out of his bitter soul,
> Aye, sun and moon and star, all..... (VP 415).

52) see, e.g. Raymond Lister: Beulah to Byzantium: A Study of Parallels in the Works of W.B. Yeats, William Blake, Samuel Palmer and Edward Calvert (1965), p.55-64, G.M. Harper: Yeats's Quest for Eden, 1965, p.324-7. See also Harper's introduction to A Vision (1925), AV(A) xiv-xv.

53) perhaps even earlier - see LI80.

54) to some extent this measures the influence of his rationalist father, see above p.116.

55) see also Byrd op.cit. p.41,75-7, IER 48-60, Grossman op.cit. p.3-27. I will be dealing with this matter at greater length in subsequent chapters.

56) W.H. O'Donnell: 'Yeats as Adept and Artist' in Yeats and the Occult, 1975, ed. G.M. Harper, p.59-61. I will argue in the following chapters that this need for balance is evident during and before the 1890s.

57) see also Old op.cit. p.65.

58) Bowen: The Occult Way, p.194.

59) Blake, too, disliked abstraction, Au 474.

60) we might note in passing the implicit association of "efficient rule" with "power". This was written early in 1909.

61) see The Diary of Virginia Woolf Vol. III: 1925-1930, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (1980), p.330-1 and note. See also IV (1982) p.256 for confirmation that Yeats felt that the occult in some way synthesised religion and science.

# CHAPTER IV

I intend to demonstrate, in this chapter, that Yeats recognised the importance of balance very early in his poetic career. Obsession emerges, in the earliest verse, as the greatest evil, and the realisation that commitment to this world and to an unspecified spiritual world[1] must be equal required Yeats to attempt to come to terms with that part of the mind that is preoccupied by reason and logic.

The poems of Yeats's maturity impress with a seemingly effortless[2] poise. Oppositions that appear long since measured and reconciled are integrated into a sustaining vision, and the calculation subsumes even the most awesome manifestiations of that vision - "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor", for instance, the "terrible beauty", "rough beast" and heart-snatching virgin of renaissance, the "feathered glory" of God's incarnation as swan, and the "dragon-ridden" and nightmare-fraught days that characterise a modern crucifixion. 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', for instance, closes with an image that is as brutal and startling as is that of 'The Second Coming', but the voice of veiled recognition is in fact the voice of awareness and precognition. The mindless outrage Yeats appears to condemn in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' he actually celebrates. The vision offers no cause for despair because such dismemberment is inevitable. As Yeats himself asks, "Are not those who travel in the whirling dust also in the Platonic Year?" (VP 433). To deny the night that "can sweat with terror" would be to overturn a lesson mastered at least thirty years earlier, that Demon est Deus Inversus, that the obverse of Sephiroth is Qlippoth. Consciousness and reconciliation of opposites contributes significantly to the balance of the poem. Physical

and metaphysical are integrated, and man's reflection is detected in the macrocosm, just as isolated national horrors presage international upheaval as the unavoidable earthly manifestation of the Platonic Year that

> Whirls out new right and wrong,
> Whirls in the old instead, (VP 430).

A G Stock correctly points out that Yeats reads "in the face of Ireland..... the defeat of two thousand years of human endeavour" (op.cit. p180), but quotes the one stanza of the poem (lines 33-40) that least illustrate the point, being to some extent a qualification of the poet's thesis in its offer of certain comfort to the wise:

> all triumph would
> But break upon his ghostly solitude, (VP 429).

This recalls the lines from 'The Tower':

> O may the moon and sunlight seem
> One inextricable beam,
> For if I triumph I must make men mad, (VP 411)

and Goll, the royal artist and Yeats persona,[3] tormented into insanity by triumph and vision. Stock's point, however, that

> his philosophy did not break down in the face of experience, nor prevaricate nor muffle the intensity of loss; only it gave him a kind of rooted steadfastness,

is clearly illustrated by the poem. Yeats recognises the inappropriateness of bardic outrage in the teeth of divine purpose, for Robert Artisson is as divinely ordained a presence in this world as are Cuchullain and Oisin and Maeve.

My intention is to show that the reason Yeats's philosophy did not disintegrate in the face of experience is that it incorporated experience. Experience common to all, specifically that rooted in Ireland, is the only foundation upon which macrocosmic speculation, and hence poetry, can be established. The balance that animates and controls 'Nineteen Hundred

and Nineteen' is what makes it a substantially greater poetic achievement than 'The Phases of the Moon', say, or 'A Dialogue of Self and Soul'. The identification of image and actuality that closes 'Among School Children' is not threatened by resignation to the fact that "man is in love and loves what vanishes" (VP 429). We have heard this before: Aoife complains, in 'The Grey Rock', "Why must the lasting love what passes.....?", (VP 275). To accept image and actuality as indistinguishable is a sacred duty:

> intellect no longer knows
> Is from the Ought, or Knower from the Known -
> That is to say, ascends to Heaven, (VP 478),

just as the fact that

> nothing that we love over-much
> Is ponderable to our touch, (VP 399)

is a sacred law. So when Yeats asks "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (VP 446) it is rhetoric. The question has already been answered - there is no distinction, "All men are dancers" (VP 430), and their step is preordained and universal. My task here is to show that such syntheses have a long history.

Mathers's personality and magical practice affected Yeats's philosophy by affording a substantial impetus to his empirical occultism. Ithell Colquhoun (op.cit. p148), though not a reliable authority, rightly described the western tradition as "experiment on a scientific basis", and it is clear that Mathers encouraged his pupil's demand for "proof". Yeats was not easily convinced of supernatural phenomena. In 'Magic', written in 1901, he admits that "it was long before I myself would admit an inherent power in symbols" (E & I 48), and his "critical mind" mocked the tale of the Arab scholar's alchemical gold ring (though the Autobiographies

version is not so sceptical),[4] as it doubted the testament of Leo Africanus, who rebuked him for his subservience to materialistic science.[5] His "sceptical intelligence" balked, similarly, at Russell's encouraging account of reincarnation shortly after the death of Maud Gonne's child (Mem 48).

Association with Mathers led to experiments with symbol and trance.[6] His desire to spend a night in the allegedly haunted house in Baggot Street (Mem 185) is typical of his almost Huxleyan insistence that evidence precede conjecture. The extent of his concern for 'scientific' psychic research can be measured, perhaps, by his willingness to quarrel over it with even his closest friends (Mem 130), and to perform for, or with, almost any interested party. Yeats did not confine experiment to the comparative safety of personal favourites - Maud Gonne, AE, Florence Farr, William Sharp and George Pollexfen - but risked anticipating the ridicule he was later to attract during the collapse of Isis-Urania by seemingly impromptu performances with strangers whose sincerity he could not possibly have established - the young doctor of Memoirs (p70), for instance, Dr. Everard Field, President of the S.P.R.,[7] and the sceptical Wilfrid Scawen Blunt who describes a magical experiment on himself, and gives details which appear fairly conclusive but which nevertheless prompt him to regard the whole affair as "very imperfect, not to say null".[8] Allen Upward records (in Some Personalities, 1921, p57-8) a (failed) attempt to communicate telepathically with Yeats across Dublin, and Sime and Nicholson recall some of Yeats's early psychic experiments which also failed, although they were repeated later, apparently with more success.[9]

The whole question of 'belief' is a complex one in Yeats studies.[10] There is a sense, as Warwick Gould points out, in which we can "formulate Yeats's beliefs" (op.cit. p206), but the problem of faith remains. Ellmann's assessment, that

> to hold certain ideas as 'beliefs' would give them a sort of autonomy; the mind, whose independence Yeats demanded, would become subservient to them, instead of their being necessary expressions of it, (IY 39)

is certainly born out, for instance, by Yeats's attitude to the Irish Catholic Church. His telling remarks during the divorce debate of June 1925 reveal that what Yeats most detested about the Church was its imprisonment of the critical and imaginative faculties in the cage of dogma (SS 89-102). Amos N. Wilder's claim that surrender to von Hügel, even, would mean that Yeats could thenceforth

> cast only a casual eye upon that whole tangle of human nostalgias, memories and passions which was the man Yeats and the poet Yeats, a legacy of a lifetime of pursuits, an identity shaped by decades of noble but pagan complacencies, a tangle of sentiment and outlook of which he was a prisoner, (The Spiritual Aspects of the New Poetry, 1940, p199),

is an outrageous and unwarranted overturning of the facts.[11] Yeats's dismissal of von Hügel in 'Vacillation' is accompanied by an explanation that his participation in the poetic tradition has committed him to sensitive unbelief. Frederick J. Hoffman was probably as close as is likely to a resolution of this problem in his contention that "Yeats did not wish to destroy faith, but he honestly thought belief to be difficult if not impossible in our age" (The Imagination's New Beginning, 1967, p13). Certainly, by the time he came to write A Vision the problem had resolved itself into a characteristic paradox: "We desire belief and lack it. Belief comes from shock and is not desired", (AV(B)53). The Haeckelian denigration of faith, however, did not preclude a search for evidence on

which to base enlightened speculation. As Sherman Yellen says, in an otherwise inconsequential sketch of Yeats's occultism, "it was Yeats's fundamental honesty, rather than his poetic fancy, that led him to psychic research" (Tomorrow, 10:1, Winter 1962, p101), and although he hints in Autobiographies (p187) that the Qabalists were to some extent on the trail of a "fixed law" it is almost certain that the most Yeats expected from experiment was personal revelation, proof for the seer himself, the establishment of a body of material

> as yet too little classified, too little analysed, to convince the stranger, but..... proof enough for those they have happened to, proof that there is a memory of Nature that reveals events and symbols of distant centuries, (E&I 46).

Yeats was prepared to write off lightly what was, in reality, his secret passion (Mem 81) because he was aware of modern man's insatiable thirst for objective proof, and of his own inability to provide it. Unfortunately, because it is publically unaccountable, such experience tends to foster naive and illogical credulity (E&I 51), but Yeats came to believe only through experience. Had he not sought data by constant experimentation the belief that comes of 'proof' would have been unattainable, proof being Yeats's private Grail. His object was to find "actual experience of the supernatural" (Au 400),[12] because no evidence other than the immediately personal would suffice. He rejected quasi-sacred texts, and was driven solely by "all my proof" (Au 330). It was not until 1912 that he finally "proved spirit identity" to his own satisfaction (Mem 266), and began the new tasks of unravelling the profundities of spirit communication (or, initially, addressing himself to the reasons for the absence of profundity - ibid.), and of forcing philosophical speculation from experiment (Au 486-7).

His "fundamental honesty" demanded that he seek, whatever the consequences, the experience, no matter how "naked, unarmed, timid", with which to contest the advance of "generalized thought" (Mem 258).[13] Throughout his life Yeats studied the influence of the supernatural "as it were in the laboratory" (Ex 279).

Alex Comfort contends that

> in the past, the choice of art or science, presented as antipodal, and hence of a training in one or the other, has depended on the chooser's personality, and the two figures of the weather-house have been forbidden, and structurally unable, to come out together, (Darwin and the Naked Lady, 1961, p21).

From the beginning of his career, however, Yeats addressed himself to the problem of interfering with this structure and forcing both figures to emerge together into the harsh light of criticism. They were linked by occultism, the fountain head of his verse, and the need to keep the figures in view together, for balanced vision, is a preoccupation from the earliest verse.

Following Blake's belief that there can be no progress without contraries Yeats attempts to resolve the conflict in the familiar theory of opposites, the constitution of the "heroic whole". Thus in 1929 he writes to Sturge Moore that

> Science is the criticism of Myth. There would be no Darwin had there been no Book of Genesis, no electron but for the Greek atomic myth[14].

A balance must be struck, and a link found between opposing forces, for to deny the efficacy of either hemisphere is to destroy the globe. Yeats's vision of Adam is an expression of this tension:

> I saw Adam numbering the creatures of Eden; soft and terrible, foul and fair, they all went before him. That, I thought, is the man of science, naming and numbering, for our understanding, everything in the world. But then, I thought, we writers, do we

> not also number and describe, though with a difference? You are busy with the exterior world, and we with the interior. Science understands that everything must be known in the world our eyes look at; there is nothing too obscure, too common, too vile, to be the subject of knowledge..... It is your pride that in you the human race contemplates all things with so pure, so disinterested, an eyesight that it forgets its own necessities and infirmities, all its hopes and fears, in the contemplation of truth for the sake of truth, reality for the sake of reality.
>
> We, on the other hand,..... must name and number the passions and motives of men. There, too, everything must be known, everything understood, everything expressed; there, also, there is nothing common, nothing unclean; every motive must be followed through all the obscure mystery of its logic. Mankind must be seen and understood in every possible circumstance, in every conceivable situation, (Ex 242-3).

As early as 1904 Yeats could claim (Ex 147) that in Ireland at least, "everything calls up its contrary, unreality calls up reality", and his finest poetry evokes the tension between opposed perceptions of reality. C Day Lewis notes Yeats's success in 'Easter 1916' in "the seemingly impossible task of blending realism and romanticism into a heroic whole" (Gwynn 175). M J Sidnell contends that

> if the realist is never asleep in Yeats after 1914, the visionary light is not out. Realist and visionary work together through the double vision of the dialogue poems to send forth the "inextricable beam" of perception which informs Yeats's greatest works, (Litters from Aloft, op.cit. p67),

and J I M Stewart noticed that Yeats was "at least as shrewd as he was mystical" (Eight Modern Writers, 1963, p326). It is clear, however, that the realist had not been asleep at any time since the heady days on Howth cliffs, but was merely travelling incognito whilst Yeats established an alternative, and to some extent, antithetical public poetic persona. I hope to show in the rest of this thesis that Yeats was working toward this balanced 'double vision' from the very outset of his career.

Charles I Glicksberg's claim that

> by taking refuge in ancient occult doctrines and by lending his unquestioning faith to the god of mystery, Yeats tried to safeguard himself against the steady and triumphant advance of science,15

is clearly illegitimate. Yeats's faith was neither unquestioning, nor was it a shield, but rather a direct response to scientific developments. Ursula Bridge noted that Sturge Moore considered Yeats "essentially scientific in spirit",[16] and it is difficult to disagree with Malcolm Cowley's argument (op.cit. p339) that "each new stage in his thinking was a logical and almost necessary development out of his past". Yeats's 1921 note, on 'The Second Coming', is the clearest possible confimation of this:

> Robartes copied out and gave to Aherne several mathematical diagrams from the Speculum, squares and spheres, cones made up of revolving gyres intersecting each other at various angles, figures sometimes of great complexity. His explanation of these, obtained invariably from the followers of Kusta-ben-Luki, is founded upon a single fundamental thought. The mind, whether expressed in history or in the individual life, has a precise movement, which can be quickened or slackened but cannot be fundamentally altered, and this movement can be expressed by a mathematical form. A plant or an animal has an order of development peculiar to it, a bamboo will not develop evenly like a willow, nor a willow from joint to joint, and both have branches, that lessen and grow more light as they rise, and no characteristic of the soil can alter these things. A poor soil may indeed check or stop the movement and a rich prolong and quicken it. Mendel has shown that his sweet-peas bred long and short, white and pink varieties in certain mathematical proportions, suggesting a mathematical law governing the transmission of parental characteristics. To the Judwalis, as interpreted by Michael Roberts, all living mind has likewise a fundamental mathematical movement, however adapted in plant, or animal, or man to particular circumstance; and when you have found this movement and calculated its relations, you can foretell the entire future of that mind, (VP 823-4).

Not only does Yeats insist on fixed mathematical laws for his philosophical speculation, but the justification of those laws is the painstakingly detailed scientific research of Gregor Mendel, a nineteenth century Moravian biologist who established the mathematical rules that underlie the inheritance of characteristics. We should remember that neither Charles Johnston (Mikhail op.cit. p6) nor John Eglinton (ibid. p3,5), could agree with the anonymous classmate who recalled that Yeats was "particularly" poor at mathematics, (ibid. p.1-2). On the contrary, they

claimed that he "actually liked geometry and algebra", that he was "strong in algebra and Euclid", and that he had a complementary "gift for chemistry".

Literature, for Yeats, depended on nationalism[17] and the occult. It was necessary to him, however, that neither became pre-eminent or obsessive concerns. Political obsession had deprived Ireland of much genius. As Frayne says, he "mourned the loss of Hyde as another Irish sacrifice of genius to politics" (UP1 186), and politics had made the players and the management of the Abbey "sterile" (Mem 144). These, and others, including much closer friends (Maud Gonne and Constance Markiewicz), had displayed "exceedingly great" patriotism but "they were by that undone, driven to form opinions on matters beyond their experience. One is not always at one's best when one says, 'I must consider the reputation of my country'," (Mem 57)[18]. Yeats's own political obsession, though eventually overcome, had been debilitating. Obsession with the occult, similarly, was as dangerous to art as to life. HPB had discouraged the sort of spiritual fanaticism that inevitably springs up around celebrated teachers (Mem 25),[19] and during the collaboration with Edwin Ellis on the Blake manuscripts Yeats himself witnessed the consequences of such an obsession (L164-5). Certainly he took seriously Olivia Shakespear's observation, got from a trance, that he was

> too much under solar influence. He is to live near water and to avoid woods, which concentrate the solar power, (Mem 100).[20]

Under Mathers's tuition Yeats learned that the 'unbalanced' is the Qabalistic definition of evil (L256), that the Qabalah, illustrates the same principles as the Indian gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, with whose history he was already familiar, that life is

> a balanced mixture of the builder and destroyer, active and passive, male and female, centrifugal and centripetal, positive and negative, (R G Torrens: The Golden Dawn: The Inner Teachings, 1969, p17)

the governing principle being the Hermetic rule, 'As above, so below'. In 1901 Yeats wrote that

> Fratres and Sorores, who..... hide their perhaps ill-balanced ideas from one another and from the Order as a whole,..... escape from that criticism which is the essence of all collective life, and of nearly all sane life, (Is the Order of R.R. and A.C. to remain a magical Order?, p13).

He would, then, have heeded the solemn warning in the Golden Dawn manuscripts -

> Obsession always entereth through a cutting off of a Higher from the Lower Will, and it is ordinarily first induced by a Thought-Ray of the Spiritual Consciousness (whence one danger of evil thoughts ill-governed, penetrating the sphere of Sensation and admitting another potency, either human embodied, or human disembodied, elemental or demonic) -21

but he would have been aware of the Qabalistic notion of balance from his work on Blake:

> Joy and woe are woven fine,
> A clothing for the soul divine;
> Under every grief and pine
> Runs a joy with silken twine.
> It is right it should be so;
> Man was made for joy and woe;
> And, when this we rightly know,
> Safely through the world we go,
> (The Works of William Blake, ed. Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats, 1893, Vol III, p78-9).

Blake's statement, in 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', that

> without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence, (ibid. 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', p3)22

reinforced Yeats's belief, in 1909, that

> all empty souls tend to extreme opinions. It is only in those who have built up a rich world of memories and habits of thought that extreme opinions affront the sense of probability. All propositions, for instance, which set all the truth upon one side can only enter rich minds to dislocate and strain, if they can enter at all, and sooner or later the mind expels them by instinct, (Mem 151).

Later he saw that even the richest minds might be unable to resist obsession. He lamented of Lionel Johnson that

> in him more than all others one can study the tragedy of that generation. When the soul turns from practical ends and becomes contemplative, when it ceases to be a wheel spun by the whole machine, it is responsible for itself, an unendurable burden, (Mem 96-7)

Like the Wise King of 'The Secret Rose' man has to discover "distinctions between things long held the same, resemblance of things long held different" (VSR 29), to find a "musical relation" of "sound, and colour, and form", a

> beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion, (E & I 157).

By 1916 obsession is a form of living death:

> Hearts with one purpose alone
> Through summer and winter seem
> Enchanted to a stone
> To trouble the living stream, (VP 393),[23]

and, as we shall see (below Ch.IV p184), Yeats came to greatly regret Pound's "nervous obsession".

A specific example of Yeats's need to reconcile opposites is his notion of Ireland as essentially a combination of politics and the occult, "love of the Unseen Life and love of country" (E & I 204), "the sternness of battle and the sadness of parting and death" (E & I 212). This leads inevitably to a demand that artists, if they are to express the fulness of the Irish spirit, shape themselves to communicate this combination (see UP2 196):

> whether they chose for the subject the carrying off of the Brown Bull or the coming of Patrick, or the political struggle of later times, the other world comes so much into it all that their love of it would move in their hands also, (E & I 206).

Such artists

> would give Ireland more than they received from her, for they would make love of the unseen more unshakable, more ready to plunge deep into the abyss, and they would make love of country more fruitful in the mind, more a part of daily life, (E & I 210).

The linked occult and political impulse receives full expression in The Secret Rose. In 'The Curse of the Fires and of the Shadows', for instance, the Rebels (Irish nationalists), as we have seen, have the spirit world fighting with them, and Hanrahan has a vision of the punishment meted out to those who lack patriotism, who accept, as did Dermot and Dervagilla, the presence of alien armies in Ireland (VSR 116). Hanrahan is clearly himself a Yeats persona in his combination of nationalism and occultism (VSR 97-8, 102-5). It is interesting to note that what may at first seem an apolitical collection of stories was written under the influence of John O'Leary, who had little enough patience with the occult, (VSR 235).[24] As the 'good' politicians had on their side the 'good' spirits, Yeats noted as early as June 1889 that the converse held. The leprechaun, for instance,

> wears the uniform of some British infantry regiment, a red coat and white breeches, and a broad-brimmed, high pointed hat, (LN1 195).

Once discovered, Yeats never broke this link between political and spiritual activity (see, e.g., SS11).

In attempting to link politics and religion, however,[25] and in seeking an idiom equally expressive of both, Yeats was treading a dangerous path. In 'Red Hanrahan' (VSR 83-95) the consequence of failure, a two-fold loss, is worked out - obsession with the occult depriving him of Maud Gonne, and obsession with politics depriving him of the fruits of the occult. Hanrahan is anxious to reach his sweetheart, Mary Lavelle, and he refuses to be detained by any temptation. The power of the occult, however, is

irresistible and the old man who had been quietly turning his cards (which have tarot significances - VSR 84), forces him to stay, bewitches him, and causes him to lose Mary Lavelle during a year of amnesiac wandering. It is his lack of commitment to the occult, however, the weakness and fear of his mortality, that causes him to fail the test of the "four grey old women" (VSR 90-2).

Yeats's occultism, as his nationalism, had developed by 1888 in accordance with his desire for more active participation in Irish affairs, and a more direct influence over them. It is quite wrong to contend, as does Ellmann for instance (MM 99), that his nationalism and his occultism were "to his mind so separate..... as at times to seem almost the work of another man". By 1888 he was aware of the need to balance and harness his major concerns and to direct them towards a single clearly defined end. He had determined not to fall into the same trap as Allingham who had seen

> neither the great unities of God or of man, of his own spiritual life or of the life of the nation about him, but looked at all through a kaleidoscope full of charming accidents and momentary occurences. In greater poets everything has relation to the national life or to profound feeling; nothing is an isolated artistic moment; there is a unity everywhere, everything fulfils a purpose that is not its own; the hailstone is a journeyman of God, and the grass blade carries the universe upon its point, (UP1 260, my italics)[26]

whereas previously the "great unities" had been "the relations of man to man, and all to the serious life of the world" (UP1 212), with no question of the necessity of spiritual awareness, merely an expansion of Yeats's earlier statement that "the poetry of action..... alone can arouse the whole nature of man" (UP1 84). This is, of course, inconsistent with the "wise things" uttered by the priest in 'The Priest and the Fairy':

the only good is musing mild
And evil still is action's child.

With action all the world is vexed, (VP 728),[27]

but, as we have seen, occult authorities did not agree in their emphasis of quietism. The balance Yeats sought required him to rearrange his response to the demands of reason. This aspect of his philosophy needs some reassessment.

Yeats turned rapidly from Huxley and Tyndall, and claims to have come to detest science with a "monkish hate" (Au 82), insisting in a rather self-conscious 'Axëlism' that he "did not care for mere reality" (Au 83). It is clear, however, that Yeats was unable to avoid the influence of science. By his own admission he had failed to escape the "fascination of what I loathed" (Au 88). Charles I. Glicksberg, (op.cit. p29-36), claims that Yeats despised Ibsen and Shaw because they embodied Huxley, Tyndall, realism and the death of poetry, beauty, suggestiveness, romance, mystery and magic. He thus misses the essential emphasis of Autobiographies. Yeats certainly regarded Ibsen as "Tyndall and Huxley all over again", but he balanced this with the admission that neither he nor his generation could escape him (Au 279), and he took as a travelling companion a collection of Ibsen's works (Au 279-80).[28] Similarly, although Shaw gazes fondly at his reflection in a signal-box "at a railway junction, where goods and travellers pass perpetually upon their logical glittering road" (Au 294), inextricably mixed with contempt for this approach is admiration - admiration for the "most formidable man in modern letters", for his "athletic wit" (Au 281-2). Though repelled by Shaw's realism Yeats "delighted" in him, and "stood aghast" before the energy of Arms and the Man. Paradoxically Shaw was a sewing-machine,

functional and utilitarian, yet possessed at the same time of a unique charm, powerful and irresistible (Au 283).[29] It is quite remarkable how similar are Yeats's descriptions of Shaw, and Huxley's description of a man of "liberal education":

> That man, I think, has had a liberal education, who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, ('A Liberal Education', 1868, in CE III p86).

Yeats claims that it was to be some time before he resolved this conflict (Au 284), but in 1936 he wrote that, whilst disliking Eliot's realism, he was "forced to admit its satiric intensity" (E & I 499). Yeats admired Wilde, similarly, in spite of what Johnson regarded as his "cold scientific intellect" (Au 285).[30] There is some substance to Glicksberg's contention that since Yeats was interested in vision rather than theory he remained hostile to science, but we should bear constantly in mind his inability, and what he regarded as the inability of his age, to avoid its influence. He felt that literature, like occultism, should learn from science and demand "the same right of exploration of all that passes before the mind's eye" (Au 326). The need for disinterested examination leads to a corresponding denial of 'impulse', which he considered a peculiarly Irish problem (see LNI 130, for instance).

For Yeats the sole reason for casting out scientific opinion from art (E&I 163) is simply <u>because</u> it had become so irresistible a force in modern life. As Lionel Stevenson points out (op.cit. p17, 54), Victorian poets perceived the intellectual and spiritual challenges posed to man by contemporary science, and by evolution in particular, and consistently sought to incorporate it in their art. Yeats undoubtedly felt that the poetic nature

allows access to fountains of inspiration that are sealed to the scientist, but the conclusion that he eschewed the discipline of science (Glicksberg op.cit. p30) is illegitimate. Science was a stepping stone to an increasingly empirical occultism and a colder, harder and less sentimental poetic. Truth may be grey, perhaps inconsequential in some circumstances, but it is no less 'truth' for that. As Allt says, the opening lines of 'The Song of the Last Arcadian' do deplore "the rationalism of the post-Cartesian world" (Theology, 42:248, Feb. 1941, p82), but in the acceptance of 'truth' and its juxtaposition with 'dreaming' they present an aesthetic, rather than a moral or spiritual complaint. Yeats, as Donald Davie demonstrates,[31] was an aesthete rather than a moralist - hence, for instance, his celebration of Easter 1916 as a "terrible beauty" rather than a "terrible virtue". The important point is that rationalism is deplored, but not negated. Yeats damned science:

> every century a new little boat of science starts and is shipwrecked; and yet again another puts forth, gaily laughing at its predecessors, (LN1 204),

and the "muddy torrent of shallow realism" (LN1 176) in the theatre.[32] He preferred, similarly, 'heart', which he equated with poetry, to 'head', which produced merely "prose and discord" (L32). The method of scientific investigation, however, he considered an important and necessary contribution to civilisation. In 1888 he desired himself to become "mechanical" (L96). He was wrong, as we have seen, to interpret the upsurge of interest in psychic reseach as a reaction from Victorian science (Au 89), and he partly admits this in his recollection that Eastern mysticism offered a philosophy that confirmed his "vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless" (Au 92). It was the generalisations

of popular science, rather than the spirit of genuine scientific research (the difference to a large extent between Darwin and Huxley - Yeats never denigrates Darwin) that "cowed" his boyhood (Au 143). All that Yeats desired, he recalls towards the end of his life, was "a philosophy that satisfied the intellect" (E & I 429). This, I think, is the context of his early poetic and occult development.

Although only saints and sages can abjure experience (Myth 340), Yeats's struggle with an aspect of the scientific experience, logic, continued throughout his life. Michael Sheehy is right to assert that Yeats became increasingly suspicious of 'reason', the abstractions of which he considered "an enemy of a vital and creative awareness", (Is Ireland Dying? Culture and the Church in Modern Ireland, 1968, p121). Sheehy quotes the first stanza of 'A Prayer for Old Age':

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

The final stanza of this poem, however, to which Sheehy does not refer, quietly but deliberately shifts the emphasis:

> I pray - for fashion's word is out
> And prayer comes round again -
> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man. (VP 553).

There is no reason, metaphysical or metrical, why Yeats should wish to seem, rather than be, foolish and passionate.[33] The perpetuation of the Romantic myth demanded that Yeats subdue the public expression of 'reason'. Thus, Lady Gregory's unpublished diaries reveal Yeats as entirely preoccupied with a self-dramatising denigration of science. During an argument between Yeats and Flora Shaw, Lady Gregory noticed that he was

> excited by Miss Shaw's dogmatic commonplace ultra English mind - & let off fireworks all the evening - declaiming against men of science - they are poor & paltry on every other subject, they are but a man in their own discoveries - A man of letters like Goethe, of all embracing wisdom so different.[34]

The public anti-rationalist protestations are not consistent with the private and poetic philosophical enquiries. Similarly, we should dissociate stories such as that of the absurd flying coat-hanger (related by Cecil Roberts)[35] from the serious psychic and spiritual research. To his dismay he was shackled by a Huxleyan, because Agnostic, requirement:

> I can see now how I lost myself. 'I have been trying to re-create in myself the passions,' I wrote, or some such words. Yes, but for me they must flow from reason itself, (Mem 258).

In August 1910 he petitioned the gods for confidence in his own reason:

> I can never believe in anything else now, for I have accused the impulses of too many sins, (Mem 254).

The "blasphemy" of reason was inescapable. He had written plaintively to Augusta Gregory during the early years of their friendship that he had

> reasoned myself out of the instincts and rules by which one mostly surrounds oneself. I have nothing but reason to trust to, and so am in continual doubt about simple things, (Au 408).

This was a sufficiently apposite statement of attitude to be recalled in Autobiographies. Christ, Buddha, and Socrates did not write books, but Yeats did, precisely because he had exchanged life for a logical process.[36]

> But I, whose virtues are the definitions
> Of the analytic mind, can neither close
> The eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech, (VP 353).

This was certainly the case in 1903 when he deliberately excluded himself, in his introduction to Augusta Gregory's Gods and Fighting Men, from the company of those men "who live primitive lives where instinct does the work of reason", for they "are fully conscious of many things that we cannot perceive at all" (Ex 17). Even if Yeats had been able to

act consistently according to impulse, he would have been unable to escape, for the passion must itself flow from reason: "the passionate man must believe he obeys his reason" (Mem 254).

Yeats continued to rail against logic and reason, but with progressively less conviction. In 1907, for instance, reason is the enemy of poetry (E & I 288), and yet without the arbitrary, got by reason, "there cannot be religion..... because there cannot be the last sacrifice, that of the spirit", (Mem 17). Art, on the other hand, closely linked to religion, if not itself religion (Mem 179-80, E & I 293-5), is sensuous, "all art out of the body". All good art, Yeats claimed in 1910, is "experience; all popular bad art generalization" (Mem 258). But

> water is experience, immediate sensation, and wine is emotion, and it is with the intellect, as distinguished from imagination, that we enlarge the bounds of experience and separate it from all but itself, from illusion, from memory, and create among other things science and good journalism, (E & I 284).

We must reconcile this with his statement that

> Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematical form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sansetions of the body, (E & I 292-3).

Art shrinks from science, abstraction and the impersonal. On the other hand Art is perhaps the greatest embodiment of impersonality (Au 332) and of abstraction:

> violent energy..... is useless in the arts. Our fire must burn slowly, and we must constantly turn away to think, constantly analyse what we have done, be content even to have little life outside our work, to show perhaps, to other men, as little as the watch-mender shows, his magnifying-glass caught in his screwed-up eye. Only then do we learn to conserve our vitality, to keep our mind enough under control and to make our technique sufficiently flexible for expression of the emotions of life as they arise, (Au 318).

Read in the context of A P Sinnett's watch-maker analogy in Nature's Mysteries (1913, p4 - see above p102-2) this amounts to a direct statement that the artist must approach life as the scientist approaches it - constant analysis, the "screwed-up eye", "control". By 1910 he accepted that "the fascination of what's difficult" had

> dried the sap out of my veins, and rent
> Spontaneous joy and natural content
> Out of my heart, (VP 260).

Certainly by 1925 he concedes that although

> unhappy when I find myself among abstract things,..... yet I need them to set my experience in order, (AV(A) 129).

Yeats's dilemma, and the whole confusion that it wrought, is caught in the essay, 'Personality and the Intellectual Essences'. The ambivalent attitude to the 'impersonal' (science) in art, the appeal at once to "vigorous and simple" men (E & I 265) and to the few who delight in "essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily in elaborate music" (E & I 266), is a direct response to civilisation's loss of "the whole man - blood, imagination, intellect, running together" (ibid.).

The confusion is even more apparent in the application of such theories to politics and society. 'Logic' is not only a barrier between man and supreme artistic achievement, but also a severe impediment to significant spiritual and political progress. 'Desire', so characteristic of the 'people', is the spiritual root of what Yeats regarded as at best a political irrelevance, at worst an evil demanding urgent eradication. Since 'desire' rests on 'logic' (Mem 210), the logical conclusion would be that democracy is a consequence of logic, and, indeed, the "machine-shop of the realists" (E & I 267) turns out thought "with the mark upon it of its wholesale origin" (Mem 139, and see 178). Yeats's laboured hatred of

logic and reason, which was not, I think, instinctive, caused him to associate it with the political creed he most detested (Mem 209). This was entirely without justification in view of the politicization of Victorian scientific materialism and its ultra-logical rationale. The fact that the entire thrust of Yeats's political and spiritual development is both 'logical' and leads to an antithetical doctrine - that, for instance, elsewhere he agrees with Shelley that extremes of wealth and poverty "are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" (E&I 68) - does not further confuse the issue, but highlights the extent to which Yeats was prepared to disguise his rational intellect as 'Romanticism'. The "old version" of Lady Gregory's Kincora "pleased the half-educated because of its rhetoric; the new displeases becauses of its literature" (Mem 167), but he is prey to the very rhetoric he professes to despise. There is nothing

> more really ridiculous than our desire to convince where conviction is unnecessary. I often think it is the speaker in me; I want to convince instead of being satisfied to be obeyed. I would really rather be disobeyed than not convince, (ibid.).

His distrust of "complete ideas" (Mem 165) caused him to approach the 'truth', in the company of all thinkers, he felt, "full of hesitation and doubt, the timidity of the laboratory" (Mem 139). His soul, starved by "the absence of self-evident truth" (Mem 211), is trapped by reason. To illustrate this I shall quote at length from the entry numbered 219 in Yeats's 'Journal' written in August 1910, and addressed to Robert Gregory, because I consider it has an unquestionably sincere and revelatory tone:

> My dear Robert: I want you to understand that I have no instincts in personal life. I have reasoned them all away, and reason acts very slowly and with difficulty and has to exhaust every side of the subject. Above all, I have destroyed in myself, by analysis, instinctive indignation. When I was twenty or a little more, I was shocked by the conversation at Henley's. One day I resolved if the conversation was as bad again, I would walk out. I did not do so, and next day I reasoned over the thing and persuaded myself that I

had thought of walking out from vanity and did not do so from fear. As I look back, I see occasion after occasion on which I have been prevented from doing what was a natural and sometimes the right thing either because analysis of the emotion or action of another, or self-distrustful analysis of my own emotion destroyed impulse. I cannot conceive the impulse, unless it was so sudden that I had to act at once, that could urge me into action at all if it affected personal life. All last week the moment that my impulse told me I should demand with indignation an apology from Gosse, my analysis said, "You think that from vanity. You want to do a passionate thing because it stirs your pride."

I was once told by a relation that my father had done some disgraceful thing - of course it was absurd and untrue - and I found with amused horror that I was coldly arguing over the probabilities and explaining (to myself, I am glad to say) why it could not be true..... I even do my writing by self-distrustful reasons. I thought to write this note in the same way as I write the others. And then I said, "I am really explaining myself to Robert Gregory. I am afraid to write to him directly or speak to him directly, and so I am writing this note thinking that some chance may show it to him. So I will write it as if to him." Since then, while writing it, I have thought this an insincerity, for I have understood that I am trying to put myself right with myself even more than with you.

I want you to understand that once one makes a thing subject to reason as distinguished from impulse, one plays with it even if it is a very serious thing. I am more ashamed because of the things I have played with in life than of any other thing.

All my moral endeavour for many years has been an attempt to re-create practical instinct in myself. I can only conceive of it as of a kind of acting, (Mem 252-3, my italics).

This very puzzling passage raises questions which are unanswerable within the context of this thesis. It is impossible, for instance, to evaluate the precise biographical element and our perception of Yeats's relationship with Robert and Augusta Gregory is as yet insufficiently complete for us to pronounce with any real certainty on this passage. Taken at face value though, it seems to confirm, and particularly in the final paragraph, that the reason for Yeats's constant reaffirmation of impulse, instinct and similar 'Romantic' qualities, was to conceal from the world, and perhaps from himself, the degree of calculation and rationality imposing on his own intellect. It puts into perspective his claim to have been one of the

last romantics. One cannot claim to have responded fully to the entire Romantic tradition, or to be one of the last and greatest exponents of that tradition, if one's approach to the infinite, one's unleashing of the imagination, and the expression of one's impulses and instincts are as firmly controlled by reason and logic as this address to Robert Gregory reveals Yeats's to have been. It is a cold eye that we are urged to cast on life and death in 'Under Ben Bulben'.[37] I do not suggest that Yeats was a 'Classicist', merely that such concessions to the rational mind tell against his commitment to Romantic principles. The ideal is formulated in 1910 as a combination of "passion and precision" (VP 264, and see L837).

That the "cold eye" we are to pass over life and death is the outcome of the most careful measurement is made explicit at the close of 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death':

> 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, (VP 328).

Calculation and measurement (themselves 'Classical' notions) are the cornerstones of Yeats's art. "Measurement", after all, "began our might" (VP 638). The second stanza of 'The Statues' describes a beauty which, as Ellmann says (IY 188), was itself "not an emotional outpouring but the result of passion bounded by the most careful calculation..... The analogy to Yeats's own work was clear: it too concentrated system and number into what seemed like casual flesh".[38] Full discussion of the role of measurement and the "plummet-measured face" (VP 610) in Yeats's work is entirely beyond the scope of this thesis. I do, however, wish to show how measurement became a part of the fibre of Yeats's poetic.

Cairns Craig (op.cit. passim.) has established that the great moderns, Yeats, Pound and Eliot, share a debt to the Associationist tradition, that they wrote 'open' poems in pursuit of an Associationist end, and that those 'open' poems demanded, for a full response, a 'closed' ('fascist') society.[39] Yeats could not have written the Cantos or 'The Waste Land', though, and it is clear that, whatever the nature of the society demanded by the 'open' poem, not all 'open' poems are the same. Ezra Pound noted in a review of Responsibilities (Poetry 4:11, May 1914) that since The Green Helmet and Other Poems Yeats's work became "gaunter, seeking greater hardness of outline..... one is about ready for hard light".[40] The poems written after 1910, however, could no more have been written by Pound or Eliot than those written in the 1890s. The crucial difference, as I see it, is one of syntax. As Rosemund Tuve says, "there are few difficult images in Yeats in which the syntax does not repay study; syntax is the most unobtrusive of all methods of clarification, the closest one can come to the paradox of saying something tacitly" (Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, 1947, p177), and as Donald Davie points out in his study of syntax, Articulate Energy (1976, p129), it is difficult not to agree with Yeats "that the abandonment of syntax testifies to the failure of the poet's nerve, a loss of confidence in the intelligible structure of the conscious mind, and the validity of its activity".[41] We should note, for instance, Yeats's selections from Eliot and Pound for The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, and we might recall Pound's denigration of those translators of Homer who had been "deaved with syntax" (Pound op. cit. p273), his plea for "more sense and less syntax" (ibid.). In his introduction to that selection Yeats writes of Pound that

> plot, characterization, logical discourse, seem to him abstractions unsuitable to a man of his generation, (p.xxiii-xxiv),

that, indeed, his style is

> constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its direct opposite, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion; he is an economist, poet, politician, raging at malignants with inexplicable characters and motives, grotesque figures out of a child's book of beasts. This loss of self-control..... is rare..... among men of Ezra Pound's culture and erudition. Style and its opposite can alternate, but form must be full, sphere-like, single. Even where there is no interruption he is often content, if certain verses and lines have style, to leave unbridged transitions, unexplained ejaculations, that make his meaning unintelligible, (p.xxv).

This clear call for logical, systematic literary structures, for "logical discourse", "self-control" and "full, sphere-like, single" form, indicates that the consistent railing atainst 'logical' literature, science, realism, the impositions of the rational mind, is part of the Mask. To deny the rational mind would be to cut the sphere in half, to become obsessed. The remainder of this thesis is a demonstration that obsession with one or other hemisphere is the major single preoccupation of the early verse.

By the end of 1888 Yeats had collected the poems for the publication of The Wanderings of Oisin in 1889. He had been aware of the need to "hammer" his diverse thoughts into some sort of "unity" since November 1886 at least (UP1 104), but its relation to Irish civilisation is perhaps best expressed in United Ireland, in October 1892, where he considers his hopes and fears for Irish literature, and bemoans the Irish absorption in living - the "limitations of the dawn" - contrasting it with Verlaine's "school of sunset", both, in Yeats's opinion, equally useless. The ideal is to hold life and art in balance, to grow into the "broad noon" (UP1 250). The first collection of poems reveals that his sense of the necessity of balance was deeper than the desire to reconcile apparently conflicting pursuits. Not only must nationalism, art and the occult be channelled into a single direction, but each must individually be regulated to the

concerns of ordinary life. It is only by rooting oneself in the ordinary that one can avoid pedantry and fanaticism. Thus warriors, kings and smiths strive "to bring something out of the world of thoughts into the world of deeds" (UP1 164). Writing to Father Matthew Russell to request him to make a point of mentioning the authorship of John Sherman and Dhoya, recently published by Fisher Unwin under the pseudonym 'Ganconagh' (= love-talker), Yeats explains his dislike of his popular image as exponent of the "fantastic" only, and his desire to counteract it by rooting himself in "very ordinary persons and events" (L180).

The greatest evil to emerge from The Wanderings of Oisin is not action, but obsession.[42] "Passion" wears "wandering hearts" (VP80). By 1893 Yeats had received a vision of the peril, and the Dantesque tableau of the Ring of the Fanatic, in 'The Eaters of Precious Stones', is the natural epilogue to many of the poems of the Oisin collection, which consider the consequence of obsession to the point of death only.[43] As early as January 1886 he had expressed the need for self-restraint:

> Long thou for nothing, neither sad nor gay;
> Long thou for nothing, neither night nor day;
> Not even 'I long to see thy longing over,'
> To thy ever-longing and mournful spirit say, (VP 734),

even though it be a hopeless task. In The Wanderings of Oisin the problems of obsession with the hemisphere of actuality, and with the hemisphere of spirituality, are fully worked out.

The plea against obsession is set in a ritual scene in 'The Fairy Pedant' (VP 706-8) - "A circle of Druidic stones" - announcing from the outset that it is to attack the sort of mysticism that has no reference to ordinary society. The fairies (society) are preoccupied with daily realities;

Come away while the moon's in the woodland,
We'll dance and then feast in a dairy.

The fairy pedant (the mystic who is obsessed with theory and has no practical judgement) is concerned only to ponder "the history here in the stone" and longs, as she should not, for "aery/Wild wisdoms of spirit and tongue".[44] She meditates alone,

Where the roses in scarlet are heavy
And dream of the end of their days.

The roses are not preoccupied with thoughts of their own decay. They are less death-obsessed than yearning (as, indeed, they should not), like the Second Fairy, for the completion of their earthly cycle. She has been bound and imprisoned by the "tenderest roses" (magic), and no matter how beautiful the dominion of which she dreams, its hold is relentless and she is beginning to lose her specifically 'fairy' characteristics (see lines 29-36), those attributes that allow her to be incorporated into society, as a result of her fanatical chase after arcane knowledge.

To balance this, 'How Ferencz Renyi Kept Silent' announces immediately its specifically political theme:

We, too, have seen our bravest and our best
To prisons go, and mossy ruin rest
Where homes once whitened vale and mountain crest;
Therefore, O nation of the bleeding breast,
Libations, from the Hungary of the West, (VP709).

This is so far from being good poetry, it is not even good rhetoric. It does have the merit, however, of placing the poem firmly in its allegorical context. The source of this poem is an obituary article in the Pall Mall Gazette of 17th September, 1886.[45] 1848 was a great year in European history, but it is likely that the title of the article, 'A Hungarian Hero of '48', caught Yeats's attention because of the symbolic

significance of 1848 in specifically Irish history. The significance of a date so closely associated with the sequence of crop failures, the new spirit of rebellion it provoked, and the Young Ireland movement would not be lost on an audience seeking a statement of republican doctrine. The brave, if worthless, invocation that begins the poem, however, does not prepare us for the tepid political artlessness that follows. The imperialist, Haynau (representing England) is famous, triumphant and bound by formality: Renyi (typifying Ireland) is, on the other hand, a scholar, a visionary and an artist ("Schoolmaster he, a dreamer, fiddler, first/In every dance")[46] who deliberately turns his back on peace and order. He rejects the doves, the bees and their hives, the currant bushes and the farmhouse with its apple and cherry bushes, for a strictly political end, the protection of anti-imperialist rebels. The invading Austrian force seeks to use Hungary in much the same way as it was (erroneously) felt by many Irish people that England had attempted to use Ireland in the middle years of the century:

> Restless Haynau's fingers tapping go.
> This sullen peasant spoils the good sunshine,
> This sullen peasant spoils the good red wine.[47]

The upshot of Renyi's intractability is the immediate destruction of all he loves, and his own seemingly irredeemable insanity.[48] As Patty Gurd pointed out in an early critique of the poem (The Early Poetry of W.B. Yeats, 1916, p33), Yeats follows the example of Davis in 'How Ferencz Renyi Kept Silent', and writes quite as badly as Davis at his worst. Behind the propaganda, however, Yeats attempts to comment, as Davis did not, on the fruits of obsessive political activism. The fates of Douglas Hyde, Maud Gonne, and Constance Markiewicz were subsequently to confirm this apprehension, though none of these would have accepted it thus.

'A Legend' to an extent brings these considerations together, and expands them into a plea against bigotry and odium theologicum in all its manifestiations. God sits under a market-cross - a cross, therefore, of the people, a presence in daily commerce and not merely a Christian or occult emblem - and is successively scorned by the representatives of Education, Politics, and Religion. The "grey professor" (perpetuator, no doubt, of the "Grey Truth" of the 'Song of the Last Arcadian') seeks to complicate what is essentially simple in order that religion be accessible only to the trained intellect. Yeats despised pure scholarship, and his familiar derogation in 'The Scholars' is preceded by a string of complaints about "that Death whose most manifest expression in this country is Trinity College" (UP2 243), the "logic mill" (UP1 233) entirely without "cultivation" (UP2 151), which, perversely,

> has set herself against the national genius, and taught her children to imitate alien styles and choose out alien themes.[49]

It was the symbolic value of Trinity that occasioned the familiar vituperative denigrations. TCD stood for all the "glacial weight" and "deadly sleep of scholasticism (sic)" (UP1 232, and see 2 150). The academic spirit had crushed the life out of Dublin (UP1 349), out of its heritage of Irish history and legend (UP1 350, 359), and by "that eternal war which it wages on the creative spirit" (UP1 353) it had all but destroyed "imagination and character..... the mover and sustainer of manhood", "enthusiasm" (and Irish enthusiasm in particular), and the very foundations of "the thoughts and the traditions of the Irish poor".[50]

Regarding himself with pride as the voice of "a greater renaissance - the revolt of the soul against the intellect" (L211), and believing firmly that imagination rather than learning is the "centre of life" (UP1 208), he had

no cause to appeal to the "professorial classes" (UP1 104). Rolleston's appeal to precisely that audience during the planning of the New Irish Library angered Yeats considerably (Mem 51). He complained to O'Leary that

> Irish literature has been far too much in the hands of the men of learning who cannot write..... The man of learning who has no literature is my natural enemy, (L201).

In 'A Legend' politicians are, similarly, deaf to commitments not their own. They seek to label, repress and final destroy them:

> The mayor came, leaning his deaf ear -
> There was some talking of the poor -
> And to himself cried, 'Communist!'
> And hurried to the guard-house door, (VP 725).

The Church takes a similar attitude. That the bishop should come face to face with his God and yet fail to recognise Him is a great irony. Orthodox religion is, indeed, the most flagrantly anti-God of the entire establishment triumvirate:

> The bishop murmured, 'Atheist!'
> How sinfully the wicked scoff!
> And sent the old men on their way,
> And drove the boys and women off.

Yeats remarks frequently in his early works on the inability of the Church to respond to the needs of the people, to popular movements, and on its tendency to actually drive the people away from God. Vacated by people and by God, the market-place is overlooked by an old horse, designed to recall Swift's Houyhnhnms, and thus to emphasise the comparative unwisdom of humanity. The arrival of a cock signifies the betrayal (as in the Monk's song in 'Mosada'), and presages supernatural disaster. God's sorrow is destructive and, as in biblical legend, results in an overwhelming flood that engulfs society. This poem should be read alongside the play, Where There is Nothing, which I discuss in the final

chapter, for it is frustration with the seemingly consummate stupidity of the establishment that sparks off the anarchy there espoused. Obsession with narrow principles, a refusal to accommodate the full sphere, by destroying natural balance, disrupts the individual psyche and brings about the disintegration of society.

Most of the poems that I am considering in these pages as illustrative of 'obsession' as a major Yeatsian preoccupation Yeats did not reprint. I do this because these works are normally overlooked, and because in the context of a discussion of obsession they provide the most comprehensive illustration. The poems that were retained emerged very largely as the collection that came to be known as 'Crossways'. The overall message of the retained poems is that sorrow is the inevitable consequence of passion, however it manifests. We are urged not to "hunger fiercely after truth" (VP 66), and obsession with the self brings sorrow in 'Miserrimus' (VP 67-9),[51] although the case is stated more memorably in the lines rejected from 'Ephemera':

> The innumerable reeds
> I know the word they cry, "Eternity!"
> And sing from shore to shore, and every year
> They pine away and yellow and wear out,
> And ah, they know not, as they pine and cease,
> Not they are the eternal - 'tis the cry, (VP 81v.).

Vijaya's obsession with the occult (Amrita) will occasion the "Sorrow of all sorrows!" (VP 71), just as obsession with physical love, with the actual, brings in its wake decay and sadness in 'Falling of the Leaves' (VP 79), 'Ephemera' (VP 79-81), and 'An Old Song Re-Sung' ('Down by the Salley Gardens'). A consuming thirst for success in the actual world brings insanity in 'King Goll', and weeping in 'The Stolen Child' and 'The Meditation of the Old Fisherman'. In 'The Ballad of the Foxhunter', a

poem not included in 'The Wanderings of Oisin' but first published in the same year as that collection, the old man dies contented because, in spite of his physical commitment to, and enjoyment of, this world, he has retained his ability to live on a non-physical plane:

> His eyelids droop, his head falls low,
> His old eyes cloud with dreams, (VP 98).

It would appear that Yeats sees himself at the 'crossways' where the straight road of logic and reason crosses the crooked path of intuition and unreason. 'The Rose', then, is a public statement of his resolution of the dilemma - he asserts his conviction that the path of mysticism and imagination is the surest and quickest route to the goal of 'truth'. I think I have demonstrated, in this chapter, that this public confidence is merely public, and bears no relation to the ongoing quarrel with himself. I do not think that, intellectually, Yeats ever left the Crossways.

It has been my intention to demonstrate, in this chapter, that Yeats's response to the problem of 'belief' was to accept its validity, but to demand that it be controlled by reason. His devotion to balance - which I have indicated as a major concern of the early poems, and which I will discuss more fully in the next chapter - forced him to accommodate 'reason' and the 'actual' world. This affected both his style and his poetic material, but he subdued it because of a public, and perhaps personal, commitment to Romantic paradigms.

I referred at the beginning of this chapter to some of the poems of Yeats's maturity, and behind the questions, the vacillation, and the specious self-doubting of these there lies the belief that matters could not have turned out otherwise. No passivity is implied by this. Yeats

ranged continually from phenomenal to noumenal speculation, but in the most powerful and successful mature poems a balance is struck. It is delicate, but strong enough to undermine a tendency to arid occult speculations on the one hand, and to the inflated rhetoric of some of his more directly political poems (from 'Mourn - and then Onward!' to the later marching songs) and some of Crazy Jane's physical obsessions on the other. This equilibrium was not easily achieved and the Oisin collection, for instance, whilst pronouncing firmly against the obsessive pursuit of any object, is generally more reflective of Yeats's interest in the occult and in folklore than of his developing nationalism, although it is rarely possible to make such a distinction. As yet, however, his conception of 'fairy' is confusing. In January 1889, for instance, he writes of the 'Fairy Doctor' that he

> can make the fairies give up people they have carried off, and is in every way the opposite of the witch, (UP1 132).

In the same month The Wanderings of Oisin was published containing the recently revised poem, 'The Fairy Doctor', who has

> many a herb and many a spell
> For hurts and ails and lover's moan -
> For all save him who pining fell,
> Glamoured by fairies for their own, (VP717).

Later, Golden Dawn ritual were to afford him a startling and convincing vision of 'fairy' (see, e.g. UP1 245-7), and in view of these it is not surprising that the bulk of the crass[52] early fairy poems were not reprinted. The answer to Yeats's question in 'The Priest and the Fairy',

> Now, what has a fairy to do with a priest
> Who is six feet high in his socks at least? (VP 729)

is to be found in 'Mosada'.

1) manifesting as the clash between, and the attempts to reconcile, his nationalism and his occultism.

2) but see 'Adam's Curse'.

3) see, e.g. Grossman op.cit. p.37, 219n15 and illustration facing p.71.

4) Myth 367 and Au 347. See also Au 340-1, L161-2, Virginia Moore: The Unicorn, 1954, p.233.

5) Moore op.cit. p.236-7.

6) see, e.g. Au 185-7,258-69,371-5 and 576-80, Mem 27-8,70-1,124-5,128-31.

7) Moore op.cit. p.232.

8) My Diaries, 1914, I p.358-9.

9) Georgina Sime and Frank Nicholson: Brave Spirits, 1952, p.64-68. See also Arthur H. Nethercot: The First Five Lives of Annie Besant, 1961, p.314-8.

10) see, e.g. IY 39-43, and Warwick Gould: 'W.B. Yeats's dramatic imagination' in Themes in Drama 3, 1980, p.203-6.

11) paralleled only by R. Hayes's ridiculous essay, 'W.B. Yeats, A Catholic Poet?' in Irish Monthly 56:658, April 1928, p.179-86.

12) see, e.g., Moore op.cit. p.218-55. The folklore research is evidence of this. In his introduction to 'The Cat and the Moon' Yeats recalls that he

> began taking notes, piecing together a philosophy resembling that of the villages and of certain passages in the Spiritual Diary and Heaven and Hell of Swedenborg, and to study natures that seemed upon the edge of the myth-haunted semi-somnambulism of Kagawa's first period. Perhaps now that the abstract intellect has split the mind into categories, the body into cubes, we may be about to turn back towards the unconscious, the whole, the miraculous; according to a Chinese sage darkness begins at midday. Perhaps in my search, as in the first search with Lady Gregory among the cottages, I but showed a first effect of that slight darkening, (Ex 404).

Of his own Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (1888) he writes that

> As to my own part in this book..... I seek for shelter to the words of Socrates..... The wise are doubtful, and I should not be singular if, like them, I also doubted, (p.xvi-xviii).

In pursuit of this he takes Sophie Bryant (and Hyde - UPl 358-9) to task for accepting myth as historical fact (UPl 164). He harangues D R McAnally for the inaccuracy of his folklore (UPl 138-41), and bemoans the fact that the Wilde collection had not been treated "more scientifically" (UPl 170), noting the need to balance science and 'character' in the quest for true accuracy:

> I object to the "honest folk-lorist", not because his versions are accurate, but because they are inaccurate, or rather incomplete, (UPl 174, and see 188).

Dr. John Kelly's discovery of an uncollected 1891 review by Yeats of Charles Leland's Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling (to be published in Yeats Annual 3, 1984) confirms this interest. As Dr. Kelly points out, the chapter of the book that most interested Yeats is that which seeks to relate 'Gypsy Witchcraft' to psychology and physiology.

13) this is, of course, incompatible with F.A.C. Wilson's assertion in Yeats's Iconography (p.20) that Yeats "believed easily".

14) W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901-1937, (ed.) Ursula Bridge, 1953, p.154.

15) 'William Butler Yeats and the Hatred of Science' in Prairie Schooner 27:1, Spring 1953, p.32.

16) LTSM xviii.

17) see, e.g. the essays on Ferguson, UP1 82-104.

18) Yeats is clearly thinking of O'Leary, Au 213.

19) see also Bowen: The Occult Way, p.91-114.

20) see also Au 372-5,576-9, Myth 340.

21) Torrens op.cit. p.85-6. Torrens's reliability might be in question but the point is that obsession has clearly been a continuous occult preoccupation. See the advice to W.T. Horton on 'The Banishing Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram' (sic) L260-1 and Israel Regardie: The Golden Dawn (3rd revised edition, 1970) I p.106-9.

22) we might note in passing that even Blake saw 'reason' as an essential and integral part of the human psyche: "Good is the passive that obeys reason" (ibid.).

23) see Mem 178, and the accompanying description of MacDonagh. This passage from the 1909 'Journal' indicates that Yeats had this image in mind at least seven years before publication of 'Easter 1916'.

24) see also the dedication to AE, p.233.

25) see, e.g., Ex 263-4.

26) Frayne remarks that this comment on Allingham reflects Yeats's exhaustive study of Blake (UP1 258). He does not add that the passage was lifted almost verbatim from the Allingham article in the Providence Sunday Journal (LN1 174), written before Yeats's collaboration with Edwin Ellis had properly begun.

27) it is quite plain, however, that Yeats had some sympathy with the view that to appreciate the supernatural man has to stand apart from life, restricting himself to an austere diet, and being in all things passive - see, e.g., UP1 132, SB 13-17,70, VP1 1127,1130.

28) reviewers of Where There Is Nothing were quick to note, and usually condemn, Ibsen's influence on Yeats. See, e.g., The Pilot (19th September, 1903), The Academy and Literature (13th December, 1902), Robert Lynd in To-Day (24th June, 1903). See also Emma Goldman: The Social Significance of the Modern Drama, 1914, p.251. See UP1 344-6, UP2 127-9,155,163-4.

29) and see Mem 228-9. See also Stephen Gwynn: Experiences of a Literary Man, 1926, p.159, for Wells's view of Yeats ("Yeats doesn't like science"), and Yeats's reply ("That man [Wells] has a mind like a sewing machine").

30) and see UP1 205.

31) The Shaping of Modern Ireland, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (1960), 1970, p.140-43.

32) for which he predicted a speedy demise, LNI 218.

33) see also VP 344. He would rather than will be "Ignorant and wanton as the dawn".

34) entry for 15th December, 1897. I am grateful to Warwick Gould for access to this material.

35) The Bright Twenties, 1970, p.35. This episode is also mentioned in Virginia Woolf's Diaries (op.cit. IV p.256).

36) Au 461 - though not without a struggle, Mem 178-9.

37) see 'The Meaning of the "Cold Eye" in Yeats's Epitaph' by Joseph M. Hassett (Eire-Ireland 18:1, Spring 1983, p.61-79).

38) see On the Boiler p.37.

39) I have discussed Craig's book in more detail elsewhere - see Appendix 1.

40) reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, 1954, p.378-81.

41) see also Geoffrey Hill's demanding essay, '"The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure": A Debate', in Agenda 9:4 - 10:1, Autumn-Winter 1971-72, p.14-23.

42) Geoffrey Thurley makes a cursory concession to the theme of obsession in The Wanderings of Oisin in his recent study, The Turbulent Dream: Passion and Politics in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats, 1983.

43) as M.C. Flannery says, the hashish experience reinforced his belief that to lose consciousness to politics or to mysticism would be disasterous to his art - Yeats and Magic p.99.

44) Had her companions had access to Yeats's 'Quatrains and Aphorisms' they would have understood the futility of their entreaties to her to cease "longing".

45) see Ferenc A. Molnar: 'The Legend of Ferenc Renyi, a Hungarian Hero of Freedom, in English, Finnish, Irish, and Polish Literature', in Acta Litteraria Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 21, 1979, p.143-59. See also Warwick Gould: 'How Ferenc Renyi spoke up, part two', Yeats Annual 3 (1984).

46) the ten lines that Yeats introduced into the Oisin version (from the second hemistitch of line 29 to the second hemistitch of line 39) entirely contradict these lines and are a clear indication that Yeats felt little for the material. The poem is no more than an exercise prompted by the ironical link of two oppressed cultures through a single date. It is more literary opportunism along the lines of 'Mourn - and Then Onward!'

47) see O'Farrell op.cit. p.6.

48) the original Ferenc Renyi was committed to a lunatic asylum after this incident, and remained there for the rest of his life. The obituary article and Yeats's poem differ in no significant detail, except that the real Renyi did not escape, as does Yeats's, but is imprisoned after the tragedy and then later released.

49) A Book of Irish Verse, 1895, p.xxv.

50) UP2 152. See also LN1 154-5, and Au 91. See Blake's 'The Schoolboy', a poem that Yeats almost certainly recalls in the second section of 'Owen Aherne and his Dancers'.

51) more gently satirised in 'Kanva, the Indian, on God' (VP 76-7).

52) see, e.g., 'The Priest and the Fairy', VP 728-9, lines 17-36.

# CHAPTER V

I intend in this chapter to examine in detail the notion of obsession and the demand for balance as they appear in three poems that Yeats "cast away" (VP 779). I trifle with Yeats's curse not because these poems receive little critical attention, but because they are extended treatments of these themes and, as such, are peculiarly illustrative of my argument. The reason for their abandonment, I suggest, is that they are, as we shall see, victims of the very failing they seek to condemn. The fact that Yeats abandoned the three poems I consider in this chapter adds some force to my thesis. 'Mosada', 'The Seeker' and 'Time and the Witch Vivien' are to a large extent self-dramatisations. Yeats demonstrates in these poems that the inevitable result of any obsession is spiritual and physical disintegration. The poems themselves, however, do not enact dramas that are appropriate to full participation in the physical world. Because concerned with but one aspect of man's existence, his spirituality, they fail to make the transition from fable, or legend, to myth. Whatever their poetic failings, however, they are vitally important as the precursors of the great poetic narratives and extended lyrics of the early period (see below, Chapter VI).

Yeats described 'Mosada' as "quite passionless" (L88), and by 1901 he regarded it as a "bad early play" (L362). It was not reprinted in his lifetime. The poem begins unpromisingly with a pretentious and cryptic epigraph. It would seem to refer to Gomez-Ebremar's amorous encounters, but it adds nothing to our understanding of them. The epigraph does indicate, however, that we are to read the poem in its late medieval context.[1] "Strange days" alludes to a trait in Mosada's character that is not confirmed by the body of the poem. The assocation

of 'strange' woman and whore was a late medieval convention,[2] and Yeats was not averse to such archaisms,[3] but as there is no corroboration of this suggestion in 'Mosada' the reference is redundant.

During the late Middle Ages the conflict between Moor and Christian was at its height in Spain, but the battle that follows the epigraph is not merely between politicized creeds; it entails also considerable psychological and spiritual rupture. The first scene opens in Mosada's room and, as in 'Time and the Witch Vivien', the primary symbol of invocation and power is situated in the centre of the room - a chafing-dish in which she burns "precious herbs" (VP 691). In a manuscript partly reproduced as a preface by the Cuala Press in 1943 (Mosada), dated June 7th, 1886, the chafing-dish is stood upon a tripod to reinforce the symbolism. Such a scene was sufficient evidence of magic for the soldiers of the Inquisition. Like Vivien, Mosada meditates alone:

> Three times the roses have grown less and less,
> And thrice the peaches flushed upon the walls,
> And thrice the corn around the sickles flamed,
> Since 'mong my people, tented on the hills,
> Where they all summer feed their wandering flocks,
> He stood a messenger.

It is autumn - fading roses, ripened peaches, the corn harvested, the flocks well-fed (and see VP 690v.) - and it is three years since Gomez left Azubia. The corn in 'The Wanderings of Oisin' is awoken in spring, along with the lapwings, ferns and the "young kid", by Joy (VP 18), and since Mosada's corn is being reaped we might reasonably infer that it is Sorrow that wields the sickles. In many myths corn is associated with life and rebirth,[4] but ripened corn normally signifies death,[5] and here Mosada anticipates her own fate. Gomez had arrived in the spring, with its attendant conventional symbols, the swallows, which reappear towards

the end of the poem in their more familiar Keatsian role. At this stage, though, the birds represent the hopeful dawn of love, both sexual and religious, for Mosada becomes enraptured by "dark Gomez", the Christian missionary, who gives himself some six months to convert the local Moors before passing on, a failure. He departs to the heroine's intense chagrin:

> In autumn, when far down the moutain slopes
> The heavy clusters of the grapes were full,
> I saw him sigh and turn and pass away;
> For I and all my people were accurst
> Of his sad God; and down among the grass
> Hiding my face, I cried long, bitterly.

This is the sole direct qualititive assessment of Christianity in the entire poem - the God of Gomez is "sad". The Holy Office, which terrorised Europe and was not abolished in Spain until 1820, emphasised the joyless aspects of Christian worship, and the severe intolerance of Roman Chatholic orthodoxy.[6] It is conceivable that as early as 1886 Yeats was aware of a conflict between the directives of the Church and the need for social and political progress.

Gomez departs in autumn, and in the <u>evening</u> of an autumn day when "the cricket nation sang" and

> all was dimness, till a dying leaf
> Slid circling down and softly touched my lips
> With dew, as though 'twere sealing them for death.

This is prophetic. Like the swallows, the dew and the leaf reappear to decorate Mosada's death at the end of the poem. Here, however, the Redemption of love, both sacred and erotic ('dew' and 'death' are loaded by the poem's medieval context), has deserted her - presaging spiritual and emotional collapse. As it is evening,[7] and a moment of crisis for the heroine, we should expect supernatural forces to manifest a message, and, indeed, her acolyte, Azolar, foresees that Gomez and she will meet

once again when the stars are identically positioned. It is now an autumn evening three years later, in "the hour of incantation", and her invocation, and justification to the convert Cola, begins:

> This is no sin.
> No sin to see in coil on coil of azure
> Pictured, where wander the beloved feet
> Whose footfall I have longed for, three sad summers.

Gomez has returned as the "great monk", Ebremar, and has severely denounced magic and invocation. Cola, deeply affected by his new faith, is a lonely and sad young visionary. His sadness ("mournful child") is not emphasised in the earlier version, but in 1888 he is made to conform to the type exemplified by the "sad God" and the "great monk". Wisdom, loneliness and the burden of sorrow were inseparable to Yeats. The possessor of knowledge does not escape into tranquility (though in the earliest poetry Yeats had not understood this - Kanva, for instance, and Mosada's father), and when a mortal

> goes his way to supreme Adeptship, he will go absolutely alone, for men attain to the supreme wisdom in a loneliness that is like the loneliness of death.[8]

In his review of Richard Garnett's William Blake (Bookman, April 1896) he describes Blake's spirit as "proud and lonely" (UP1 400-1) for, as Wilde says, Wisdom "loves the lonely worshipper" ('The Young King'). Yeats seems at first to have been confused by the association of wisdom and loneliness. 'Miserrimus' and 'On Mr. Nettleship's Picture at the Royal Hibernian Academy', both published within five months of 'Mosada', make the connection, but the sad and lonely Cola is balanced by at least two relatively content wisdom-figures. By 1893, though, he had realised that "the doom of loneliness..... ever falls upon the wise" (VSR 35v.), and in 'The Wisdom of the King' the heart of the feathered king is described as

wandering, "lost and futile, amid throngs of masterful thoughts and dreams, shuddering at its own consuming solitude" (VSR 30v.). This burden is incommunicable. His wisdom in a later version of the story, "made all kindly joys and traffic between man and man as nothing", and "numbers of the young" who came into contact with him "went different ways, but all into vague regret", seeking "impossible joys" and growing unhappy (VSR 30 and v.). In 'The Tables of the Law' Owen Aherne is made to cry out bitterly that he has

> a leprosy that even eternity cannot cure. I have seen the whole, and how can I come again to believe that a part is the whole? I have lost my soul because I have looked out of the eyes of the angels, (VSR 163).

Owen Aherne had been obsessed (VSR 158), and his fate is the consequence of his fanaticism. Desire for such a vision of the 'whole' is the inspiration of his pleas against obsession in the early works. "In dreams begins responsibility" (VP 269), he claimed in 1914, but eighteen years previously access to vision had caused him to pass "into this Loneliness which all the multitudes desire without ceasing" (VSR 136v.) and it is clear that by the end of the '90s the association of wisdom, loneliness and sorrow was confirmed. Yeats would have agreed with Landor that wisdom

> Whether in early season or in late
> It always comes high priced, ('Pentameron and Pentalogia', 1837)

Cola, however, with all the sorrow conferred by knowledge, is set against the image of a happy wisdom-figure. His Christian resolution sustains his refusal to assist Mosada's conjuring, and her reply, a tripartite apologia for magic,[9] offers him firstly the peace that passeth all understanding as the reward of occultism. She repeats, "'tis no sin",

> My father taught it me.
> He was a man most learned and most mild,
> Who, dreaming to a wondrous age, lived on,

Tending the roses round his lattice door.
For years his days had dawned and faded thus
Among the plants; the flowery silence fell
Deep in his soul, like rain upon a soil
Worn by the solstice fierce, and made it pure.
Would he teach any sin?

Mosada's father had discovered the "rosy peace,/... of Heaven with Hell", the balance, later struck by Michael and by God himself in 'The Rose of Peace' (VP 112-3), and had passed on his gift to his daughter. The rose of occultism purifies, refreshes and brings peace to the soul, protecting it from the consequences of excessive commitment to objective thought, "the solstice fierce". His mildness has taken him well outside the Quester class. Unlike Vivien, for instance, or the Old Knight of 'The Seeker', his mission has been an entire success. His self-knowledge is so complete that the responsibility felt even by Fergus (VP 104), for example, does not seem to affect him. Unaccountably Mosada's brilliant manoeuvre fails, although Cola's petulant response ("Gaze in the cloud/Yourself") indicates a brief temptation, and heralds the whining paranoia that immediately polarises the two conceptions of divinity. Against the gentle and peaceful old man, master of "flowery silence", of occultism, is set the bitterness of a crippled and repellent Christianity:

I am all ugliness; lame-footed
I am; one shoulder turned awry - why then
Should I be good? But you are beautiful.....
The beetles, and the bats,
And spiders are my friends; I'm theirs, and they are
Not good; but you are like the butterflies.

The butterfly is a traditional occult symbol, but it is emblematic, also, of attraction to the light (see, e.g. VSR 159), and Mosada's occultism should be seen as largely intuitive. It is for this reason that her occultism is, as we shall see, considerably more successful than that of Vivien, for instance, and the Old Knight. Cola's remark is not ironic. The butterfly

(or moth) represented, for Yeats, "wisdom", the "crooked road of intuition", the opposite of the hawk's "gloomy" and mechanical logic (VP 337-8). Like the hare and the cat it is the property of the Wise Fool, and although he cannot fully understand its message he can hold it in the prison of his hands (VP 381), in much the same way as Teigue the Fool holds the white butterfly that had been the Wise Man's soul in 'The Hour-glass' (VP1 639). Butterflies cling to the windows of Yeats's great tower in 'Blood and the Moon'. Cola is quite right to count on Mosada's innate wisdom, the power that is drawn from succumbing to intuition, rather than to intellect or to sense.

The juxtaposition of the two images is crude, but it is palliated by Mosada's gentle humility. Cola seems tempted by the offer of peace, but rejects it, and Mosada patiently points out the second advantage of co-operation - power, kudos:

> you
> Shall see a thing to talk on when you're old,
> Under a lemon tree beside your door;
> And all the elders sitting in the sun
> Will wondering listen, and this tale shall ease
> for long the burthen of their talking griefs.

Thirdly, she offers Cola an experience of inexplicable beauty:

> many a man grew hushed
> In his own house or 'mong the merchants grey,
> Hearing the far-off singing guile, and groaned.

Mosada's occultism, then, is presented as an attractive, daylit package. The punishment meted out by Ebremar does not seem commensurate with the crime, but she is, strictly speaking, culpable. This needs to be stressed if we are to appreciate the extent of Ebremar's obsession.

The spirit Mosada seeks to invoke will return to her the lover she has lost. It is the spirit of the lily who has dwelt on a "tree-wrapt island" and who has, like a Siren, lured many to their deaths by the beauty of her voice. Roses and lilies are important occult symbols - Cairns Craig points out, in a memorable phrase, that the rose is "a kind of transcendental vacuum cleaner" (op.cit. p109) - but they need not detain us here. We should note, however, that in her invocation of a lily-spirit Mosada seeks an almost cerebral love, rather than earthly passion, and implicitly claims that her love is pure, untainted by ego. By the end of her apologia she has slipped into invocation, and Cola becomes redundant.[10] The spirit enters, like the Sidhe, in its traditional guise of the wind, disturbing the Aeolian Harp as it comes through the window, as the reed of the Druid's body was blown by the wind of Wisdom (VP 103).[11] Mosada invokes a single spirit ("now I wave her hither to my side"), but she is not surprised to welcome a number of phantoms. They are familiar companions that replace her in the Oriental tradition of her magic, and her breast "heaves with joy". As she begins to deploy the spirits to penetrate Ebremar's religious zeal, and give him thoughts of love once more, the Officers of the Inquisition burst in and arrest her "in magic". As Othello found, to the unstable Christian 'Moorish' and magic are synonymous (I.iii.60-4, 104-6). The Second Inquisitor (who emerges, in the second scene, as a considerably more brutal zealot than his companion) anticipates Mosada's death at the stake: Cola has been tricked into betrayal, "Ye said that ye would fright her from her sin". The scene ends with an emphasis of the original comparison of the occult and the Church, dwelling now on the cruelty and duplicity of the one compared with the wisdom and loving forgiveness of the other.

In the second scene the vicious Second Inquisitor and Second Monk are played against the almost entirely sympathetic musical First Monk and his counterpart, the less obsessed First Inquisitor. In fact, though, the First Monk is less Christian than Artist. He is more concerned to broadcast a recent composition than with either the Inquisitorial purge, or the merciful treatment of penitent sinners. On the other hand the First Inquisitor is committed to the practical dispensation of mercy:

> Will he not spare her life? How could one matter
> When there are many?

It is predictable that this naive casuistry be disregarded. The Second Monk is resolute:

> Ebremar will stamp
> This heathen horde away. You need not hope.

In denying hope the First Monk denies one of the great tenets of the Christian faith. This stems from obsessive self-righteousness and spiritual inflexibility, but it anticipates later developments:

> And know you not she kissed that pious child
> With poisonous lips, and he is pining since?

At the end of the poem Mosada commits suicide by poison. To the militant Christian, magic is an almost infectious disease.

Believing that "there is a unity everywhere" (UP1 260) Yeats followed the western esoteric tradition[12] and, in particular, Blake (E & I 112-3). "God", he concluded, "is a circle whose centre is everywhere" (E & I 287). Thus all mythologies are equally useful (E &I 114-5), if regarded as tools. Kanva's discovery that all religions and myths are one (VP 76-7)[13] is confirmed in 'The Wanderings of Oisin'. Patrick and Oisin respond differently to the gathering storm - for Patrick the skies

> Darken; Heaven is angry.....
> God shakes the world with restless hands,

but Oisin hears

> amid the thunder
> The horses of the Fenians - tearing asunder
> Of armour - laughter and cries - the armies' shock, (VP 42-3v.).[14]

The First Monk represents Art's indifference to religious system, and its impatience with religious whim: "You're full of wordiness. Come, hear my song." The imagination that is obsessed with the Soldier-of-Christ self-image is equally indifferent to Art, and the Monk's words are ignored. Like the medieval Fool,[15] however, he is allowed his say. The importance of the First Monk's song is overlooked. In the early versions the Monk claims that his tale is of Russian origin, but in accordance with his new impulse to Irishness Yeats changed it to an "Irish tale" on finding that the myth was common to Irish legend.[16] The song concerns human frailty and fear, and suggests that the Church is wrong to teach that the consequence of ignorance, or denial, of orthodox Christian worship is eternal damnation:

> I saw a stranger tap and wait
> By the door of Peter's gate,
> Then he shouted, "Open wide
> Thy sacred door;" but Peter cried,
> "No, thy home is deepest hell,
> Deeper than the deepest well."
> Then the stranger softly crew -
> "Cock-a-doodle-doodle-do!"
> Answered Peter: "Enter in,
> Friend; but 'twere a deadly sin
> Ever more to speak a word
> Of any unblessed earthly bird."[17]

The monk, in seeking the same end as the First Inquisitor (who makes a direct political plea - "My suit to you"), anticipates the personal conflict Yeats faced, particularly during the '90s, the problem of presenting artistically an immediate political statement.

Ebremar enters

> bright-eyed, and hollow-cheeked
> From fasting - see, the red light slanting down
> From the great painted window wraps his brow,
> As with an aureole.

These lines are a tour de force. The prevalent religious intolerance requires that everything (including nature -natural light) be filtered by St. James of Spain.[18] The world is tried in the light of his image. St. James, the great hope of crusading Christianity, approves Ebremar's militant zeal, and canonizes him - his aureole comes directly from the saint's image in the stained window, and it commends his fanaticism. Ebremar's obsession blinds him to aspects of the Christian ethos that conflict with his rigorous pursuit of the first commandment, and he rejects the First Inquisitor's suit without hearing it:

> I will not hear; the Moorish girl must die.
> I will burn heresy from this mad earth.

God's disappointment, as we saw in 'A Legend', is destructive. The plea for mercy is met with the automatic repetition of a biblical formula, "the wages of sin is death". The expression of Ebremar's intolerance, however, transcends mere eradication of heretics and pagans. His is a mission that precludes conversation with non-Christians, unless they be at the point of death. For a missionary who has recently spent time in Moorish territory, with at least one success (Cola), this is a remarkable and inconsistent omission. His limited vision results in errors both earthly (he unwittingly destroys his lover) and spiritual (his faith is shaken by that destruction). At this stage, however, his commitment and sincerity are not in question. He seeks the "burthen" of God's truth, and delights in the responsibility of his mission:

> Reach down Thy hands
> And fill me with Thy rage, that I may bruise
> The heathen. Yea, and shake the sullen kings

Upon their thrones. The lives of men shall flow
As quiet as the little rivulets
Beneath the sheltering shadow of Thy Church;
And Thou shalt bend, enduring God, the knees
Of the great warriors whose names have sung
The world to its fierce infancy again.

He rounds off his tirade with an explicit statement that the Church must control social and political developments. This inevitably recalls St. Patrick's collision with the unrepentent Oisin, who demands to know where the great warriors of his youth have disappeared to and, finding that they are watched over by a self-satisfied God whilst they are scourged by demons, seeks them by chanting the "war-songs that roused them of old" in the hope that they will rise "innumerable, singing, exultant" (VP 61). Yeats once again points to the desire of the Church to control political institutions and movements.

The final scene opens with what might at first seem symbols of hope and regeneration - it is dawn, there are stars still shining, and the swallows that had accompanied Gomez in the "velvet vale" have reappeared. The stars are gradually fading, however, and the swallows are gathering, like Keats's, preparatory to the flight south, and consequently herald the onset of the dark months, the death of the year.[19] It is, in fact, the morning of Mosada's execution. The suggestions of redemption and the continuance of life are therefore ironic. The point is emphasised -

how silent all will be!
But no, in this warm weather, 'mong the hills,
Will be the faint far thunder-sound, as though
The world were dreaming in its summer sleep.

Emblematic storms lurk. Mosada calls to the swallows to witness her own migration from this world and, like Cleopatra, another forlorn lover condemned to a humiliating fate, decides to poison herself. Within

seconds of sucking the poison from her ring she grows "weak and tottering", and it is to this that we must attribute much of her subsequent behaviour.

Settling down to watch the stars as she dies, she notices the leaf that had signified the death of her relations with Gomez, and of her potential relations with Christ, reappear in another guise:

> Yonder a leaf
> Of apple-blossom circles in the gloom,
> Floating from yon barred window. Small new-comer,
> Thou'rt welcome. Lie there close against my fingers.
> I wonder which is whitest, they or thou.
> 'Tis thou, for they've grown blue around the nails.
> My blossom, I am dying.

This passage is very confusing. The scene is set in autumn (the reeds are yellow, the swallows are preparing to depart, she imagines Gomez shuffling through dead leaves), though she thinks of the gathering storm as if "the world were dreaming in its summer sleep", and the fragment of apple-blossom we can only associate with spring. The traditional association of apple-blossom with brides is ironic in 'Mosada'.[20] Given that the sorceress is delirious from poison it is still unlikely that she would mistake a dry, discoloured autumn leaf for falling blossom. (The faint but horrible possibility that she has mistaken a piece of ash from the stake in the square for the blossom is not lessened by the marcarbre reference to the increasing blueness of her nails.) Her delirium does not account for Yeats's aesthetic error, which serves only to introduce the comparison of Mosada's fingers with the blossom, a preoccupation with the hands which, as we shall see, proves fatal to Vivien. The blatant Cleopatran echo ("My blossom, I am dying")[21] links this absurd passage with a meditation on the stars. One wonders if Katharine Tynan had actually read this scene when she wrote that Yeats's voice in 'Mosada'

was new and unique (Irish Monthly, 15:165, 1887, p166-7). Even Hopkins, whose judgement can be measured by his praise of 'The Two Titans', could not praise 'Mosada'.[22]

The seven stars dwindle to two, "side by side", and Mosada recognises the formation that heralds her reunion with Gomez. The four walls of her cell comprise her world, her vision of the future is represented by the seven stars that dwindle, and that vision is crossed by three bars - these are numbers that consistently recur in Yeats's work, and throughout traditional occult literature. Yeats was wrong, in my view, to delete the tripod from the original manuscript scene setting: it recalls that the reason Mosada finds herself behind bars is her occultism. The bars do not only prevent her from regaining her physical freedom, they also block the laws of suprnatural order from the four walls of her world. Gomez and his zealots are obsessed with Vatican dogma, but Mosada, too, must fail because of her own infatuation with Gomez. He blocks her comprehension of spiritual synthesis.[23] Mosada, at any rate, misunderstands the message of the stars in assuming that it is at the point of death that her soul shall touch Gomez's "and the two flames/Be one". In fact, the reunion is to be a more physical reality than she anticipates. The bombastic Ebremar,

> Young Moorish girl, thy final hour is here;
> Cast off thy heresies, and save thy soul
> From the undying worm,

metamorphoses into the gentle lover, Gomez:

> Be not so pale, dear love.
> Oh, can my kisses bring a flush no more
> Upon thy face? How heavily thy head
> Hangs on my breast! Listen, we shall be safe.
> We'll fly from this before the morning star.....
> Once in thy nation none shall know that I
> Was Ebremar, whose thoughts were fixed on God,
> And heaven, and holiness.

The change, in a single line, from a religious fanatic to an impassioned lover prepared to sacrifice entirely his Christian ethos and, implicitly, the prospect of a triumphant afterlife, for a merely mortal future with Mosada, with no indication of self-doubt or awareness of the momentousness of the experience, does not convince. Ebremar need not have lost his faith - the poet as Archangel in 'The Rose of Peace', does not lose his faith when he loses interest in the conflict of heaven and hell whilst weaving a chaplet for Maud Gonne's head - but the severe blow to it (the full significance of the First Monk's song is only now brought out), and the remarkably swift recovery of that faith after Mosada's death, require, to be credible, more explanation than Yeats provides.

Mosada's rapid decline is measured by the deterioration of her sensual perception. Though it is still very early morning she is experiencing an evening more "marvellous still" than she has ever known. Within five lines it is the "darkest evening I ever knew", and within eleven it is, for her, already night: "I never knew a night so honey-sweet". Her perspiration is the dew (that had sealed her lips when Gomez left her), "I never knew a night so dew-bedrowned". Her final hallucination is of Gomez amongst the dead leaves "like happy thoughts grown sad in evil days". In The Celtic Twilight Yeats points out that the soul is dependent to a large extent on sorrow (Myth 70-1), and the consequent association of sorrow and joy in the balanced soul recurs throughout the early verse. In 1886 he announces that

> Two spirit things a man hath for his friends:
> Sorrow that gives for guerdon liberty,
> And joy, the touching of whose finger lends
> To lightest of light things all sanctity, (VP 734v.).[24]

Before Mosada's vision fails and Ebremar "fades among the mists" her last perception of the world is tactile:

> it is cold.
> I never knew a night so bitter cold.

She dies drawing her cloak around her.

The final sequence with the First Monk and the First Inquisitor suggests that Ebremar has lost something that is fundamental to his psyche:

> The flame that shone within his eyes but now
> Has flickered and gone out.

Something has died, certainly, but that it is not his devotion to a Christian life is evinced by his immediate return to the Inquisitorial routine. The human experience has balanced the obsessive asceticism, but only, it seems, for the duration of that experience. At what is, presumably, the most critical moment of Ebremar's devotional career he is concerned for the appearance of his disciples, with the earthly and material, therefore, rather than the spiritual image:

> Your hood is threadbare - see that it be changed
> Before we take our seats above the crowd.

It seems, also, to be with some pride that he contemplates taking his seat not with, but above the crowd. This final scene can be seen as an attempt to create an atmosphere of 'tragic joy', and the Cleopatran echo[25] would appear to confirm this. There can be little doubt that 'Mosada' is designed to recall Antony and Cleopatra but the Browningesque pathos with which the scene is concluded[26] suggests a parting gibe at the Church. It cannot really be both, and in the context of the entire poem the leading note would appear to be the latter.

'Mosada' is an inferior, and derivative poem, and its third scene is its most disappointing. The vision that seeks to sustain it is inchoate and unconvincing. It merits serious critical attention, however, insofar as it demonstrates that failure is the inevitable consequence of obsession. To argue for an effect that approaches catharsis is to cut across the entire theme of the poem, which is an examination of Gomez-Ebremar's imbalance. He fails to establish an earthly relationship with Mosada because of his religious zeal, and he fails in his spiritual quest precisely because of the potential for just such a relationship. He fails because neither aspect of his psyche is allowed to develop under the control of the other. The poem clearly reflects Yeats's belief in the need for a flexible response to 'truth'. As Owen Aherne later found, commitment to a part of the whole is spiritual (and potentially physical - Constance Markiewicz, Maud Gonne) suicide. 'Mosada' is not an isolated or freak treatment of the notion of obsession. Two other early dramatic poems, 'The Seeker' and 'Time and the Witch Vivien', are similar statements against obsession.

'The Seeker' is the earliest of these. The Old Knight of this poem, on the one hand, stands as a committed Quester in the traditon of Oisin, Goll, Aengus and Fergus. The "motionless figure", on the other hand, is, as Grossman says, "the Wisdom figure in one of its primitive negative transformations" (op.cit. p160), anticipating a major preoccupation of The Wind Among the Reeds. In the three years between the poem's first publication and the Oisin reprint Yeats came to regard it with pride as "the only readable result" (L88), with 'Oisin', of his early poetic development. This approval measures the commitment to the national

literary consciousness, for in April 1888 he was willing to drop 'The Seeker'along with 'Ferencz Renyi', to preserve the Irish dimension of the Oisin collection (L66). The lyrics of that collection, however, regularly reproduce classical and exotic environments that are inconsistent with the professed ideal - 'The Song of the Last Arcadian', 'Jealousy', 'Mosada', 'The Island of Statues' (which Yeats regretted being unable to reproduce in its entirety - L112), Kanva's Indian poems, and 'Ferencz Renyi', for instance, far outweigh, if we exclude 'Oisin' itself, the handful of specifically Irish poems.

The scene of 'The Seeker' is immediately pastoral - "A woodland valley at evening. Around a wood fire sit three Shepherds."[27] That the drama is to have a supernatural axis is indicated by its twilight setting. The association of twilight, as dusk and dawn, with the appearance of supernatural phenomena, and with heightened sensitivity to such manifestations, both in traditional mysticism and occultism, and specifically in Yeats's work, cannot be overstated. Man's soul responds to the half light:

> When the breath of twilight blows to flame the misty skies,
> All its vaporous sapphire, violet glow and silver gleam,
> With their magic flood me through the gateway of the eyes;
> I am one with the twilight's dream.[28]

The twilight prepares us for the transcendental developments. The opening speech is a strange mixture of pastoral and exotic:

> Heavy with wool the sheep are gathered in,
> And through the mansion of the spirit rove
> My dreams round thoughts of plenty, as in gloom
> Of desert-caves the red-eyed panthers rove
> And rove unceasing round their dreadful brood.

There is more than a suggestion of melodrama about this characterisation of dreams as marauding red-eyed panthers, but Yeats does convey, in a

rather heavy-handed way, the sense of brooding activity in the First Shepherd that accords with such character development as is possible in thirty-five lines. For Yeats, the panther combined the exotic and dangerous occult power.[29] The connection between the First Shepherd and so powerful a source of power becomes more significant as 'The Seeker' develops. It is he who owns and plays the normally happy ("It is the voice of all our hearts that laugh") flute, and he is clearly the Artist-figure for it is he who first notices that the flute has been suddenly possessed, and that the voice of that possession is an omen. The flute is yet another symbol of occult presence.[30] It is the First Shepherd, again, who questions the Old Knight's origins, and who guides him to his inevitable destiny. Finally, it is he who expressed the premonition of his fellows that those who enter the wood are quickly rendered "ashes/Before the wind". The First Shepherd is an early index to some of the roles Yeats expected the artist to fulfil. These roles are expanded and more clearly defined during the '90s, but even as articulated in 'The Seeker' they indicate his sense of the power of Art. I think that Yeats would have agreed with Carlyle that

> the Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher; - in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these, (On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, 1841, p127).

One contemporary, at least, Robert Reilly, was aware as early as May 1889 of Yeats's desire to transcend a merely 'poetic' framework.[31]

The panther image that begins the characterisation of the Artist in 'The Seeker' is applicable to the First Shepherd's dreams, the panther's brood to his thoughts, as in Christ's protection of his children from evil.[32] The

relation of dream to intellect is therefore that of protector. The dream is essential to the imagination, to the very survival of the Artist. But the thoughts, in this instance, are purely material ("thoughts of plenty").

The Artist meditates on the worldly prosperity that Yeats considered irreconcilable with Imagination, and as a consequence antagonistic to 'Romantic' art. Writing of the Oisin collection in 1888 he confesses himself

> not very hopeful about the book. Somewhat inarticulate have I been, I fear. Something I had to say. Don't know that I have said it. All seems confused, incoherent, inarticulate. Yet this I know, I am no idle poetaster. My life has been in my poems. To make them I have broken my life in a mortar, as it were. I have brayed in it youth and fellowship, peace and worldly hopes. I have seen others enjoying, while I stood alone with myself - commenting, commenting - a mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves. I have buried my youth and raised over it a cairn - of clouds. Some day I shall be articulate, perhaps, (L84).

There is a sense in which this letter, I feel, opens up 'The Seeker' to us. Yeats's failure in life has been his willingness to remain, like the Old Knight himself (see below p224), a "mere dead mirror on which things reflect themselves", and this has rendered his art incomplete. His participation in the reality of his fellows has been too insubstantial.[33] The First Shepherd is a prototype of the balance that was becoming Yeats's most urgent preoccupation. Hence the secondary image in this first speech of 'The Seeker' of the panther as something dangerous and wholly single-minded, quintessentially territorial, obsessed in fact with physical survival. This is an instance where it is possible to detect what Yeats "had to say". The image is confused and inarticulate, but ultimately penetrable. The second fundamental message of the poem is allied to the first, a warning of the necessity of dreams to the artistic sensibility, and of the danger to it of excessive worldliness. The warning

emerges, however, only through the poet's recognition in his own artistic persona of the materialistic panther.

The Second Shepherd recognises the signs of an aggressive and obsessive pursuit of prosperity, and seeks to allay it by music. He finds, however, that on this occasion the organ of the First Shepherd's art is not controlled by the player, but has been taken over by some unseen force that causes it to emit a "piercing cry", a slight variation on the aeolian harp that is played by unnatural winds in 'Mosada'. The First Shepherd points out that the flute is possessed, and the Second Shepherd that its note is prophetic.[34]

The Third Shepherd attempts to play the possessed flute, but its voice becomes "still more mournful". The "piercing cry", "prophesying voice", "creeping horror" and mournful "omen" introduce the Old Knight. The poem, at this point, becomes more confusing still. The shepherds are bewildered and frightened, and, believing the Old Knight to be a spirit ("He was a spirit, brother"), they cast themselves before him. The reader, too, has been led to expect the arrival of a spirit. The flute has not played itself, but on both occasions needed to be put to the lips of a shepherd before sounding its warning. Clearly then, the occult force is lodged within the animate agent rather than the inanimate tool, and the evening gathering represents an unconscious invocation. The figure that now confronts them, however, is in fact as human as are they. Both shepherd and reader have been misled into expecting a manifestation, rather than merely another tool of the controlling supernatural forces. The shepherds' misunderstanding is, perhaps, no more than peasant fear of the Sidhe: the reader's is a result of the poet's own confusion.

The Knight has erred, unlike the First Shepherd, on the spiritual rather than the material side of the mortal equation. His account of his travels is revealing:

> Shepherds, I came this morning to your land
> From threescore years of dream-led wandering
> Where spice-isles nestle on the star-trod seas,
> And where the polar winds and waters wrestle
> In endless dark, and by weedy marge
> Of Asian rivers, rolling on in light.

The references are not geographical, but indicate rather a spiritual voyage. His wandering has been "dream-led", in darkness and in light, and has taken him to "isles..... star-trod seas..... polar winds and waters", that is, Earth, Fire, Air and Water. If he was not already acquainted with it in 1885, by the time Yeats came to revise the poem for collection he would almost certainly have been familiar with the section on the discerning of spirits in Kingsford and Maitland's The Perfect Way (1882, p65-95), and its breakdown of the astral body into four states which correspond to the Four Elements. The Seeker's journey is evidently a voyage through the astral. The "weedy marge/Of Asian rivers" carries Qabalistic as well as Oriental significance,[35] the Assiatic being the lowest and most material of the Four Worlds of Qabalism.[36] In 'The Seeker', then, geographical actuality is reduced to a minimum compatible with the journey allegory.

Yeats introduces at this point a further confusion. The Knight appears to have learned little from his spiritual adventures, and he needs the shepherds to point out to him the magical valley to which he only has been summoned. It is unclear what advantages he has gained from the meditation of sixty years. The shepherds' apprehensions, on the other hand, are perfectly clear: the "sullen wood" is not natural. The snakes

there are "goblin snakes" that sing, and ordinary nature (primitive man, for instance, and squirrels) cannot survive there.[37] The Satanic imagery of the First Shepherd's directions further emphasise the evil of the magic wood:

> Within yon sunless valley,
> Between the hornèd hills.

The Seeker departs entranced ("Saw you his eyes a-glitter?/His body shake?") to the wonder and consternation of the shepherds who accurately predict his demise (he soon will be "Ashes/Before the wind"). The Second Shepherd's description of the trembling Knight adds perhaps the most confusing development of the entire poem:

> quivering as yon smoke
> That from the fire is ever pouring up
> Among the boughs, blue as the halcyon's wing,
> Star-envious.

Since the Knight is a Quester, rather than a spirit, it would seem that the spiritual element of the poem is to be found in the unnaturally blue smoke. The distancing effect of "yon", and the shepherd's detection of the smoke as it curls among the boughs, suggest that the fire is not their own, that it burns in fact in the very wood occupied by the dread Figure. Certainly, there is a broad hint that the fire is to some extent magical. It burns constantly ("ever"), for instance, and the line, "Among the boughs, blue as the halcyon's wing", altered from the earlier "Within the woodways, blue.....", and further indicative of distance, gives the passage a more deliberately occult tone. The blue smoke confirms the fire's magical properties.[38] The smoke is "star-envious" (a symbol that carries much weight in early Yeatsian iconography), but by now it has become difficult to regard the shepherd's remarks as more than redundant poeticisms. Certainly they can no longer refer to the Knight.[39] The real problem though is the position of the fire. There is no mention in

the second scene of 'Infamy' tending a fire, and we must conclude that, in spite of the suggestion of the Second Shepherd's remarks, the fire referred to is their own. Since it is evidently a magical fire it clearly calls into doubt their purely pastoral role as more or less passive spectators. We recall the unconscious invocation of the first few lines, and the implication in the Knight's account of his travels that the world inhabited by the shepherds is as spiritually orientated as his own. At the height of this confusion and contradiction the shepherds disappear from the drama and are not again referred to.

The second scene develops the Seeker's character amongst sinister Gothic props, "A ruined palace in the forest. Away in the depth of the shadow of the pillars a motionless Figure". Like the little boy of the "perfectly detestable" Sycamore poem (L390), the Old Knight meets the weaver of his destiny in the middle of a wood (although in traditional Irish folklore a man is safe from Death at the heart of a wood - see E & I 179, and VSR 100). He immediately indicates a willing acceptance of Death:

> Behold, I bend before thee to the ground
> Until my beard is in the twisted leaves
> That with their fiery ruin fill the hall,
> As words of thine through fourscore years have filled
> My echoing heart.

Perhaps the most conspicuous iterative image in Yeats's early verse is the association of leaves with death, decrepitude and decay.[40] The Old Knight submits gratefully to death, sacrificing not only his physical but also his spiritual life, offering his beard, a traditional emblem of occult power,[41] the symbol and store of such power as he possesses, to Death.

The palace of Infamy is paradoxically both ruined and inhabited by Death, and we should conclude that the motionless Figure is a manifestation of

inglorious death. The voice is therefore Death's voice. As Death has inhabited and ruined the palace, Death's voice has preoccupied the Knight since childhood. His heart echoes because it is hollow, a chamber empty of normal human passions and concerns, containing nothing but the reflection of his obsession. Such emptiness is dangerous:

> All empty souls tend to extreme opinions. It is only in those who have built up a rich world of memories and habits of thought that extreme opinions affront the sense of probability. All propositions, for instance, which set all the truth upon one side can only enter rich minds to dislocate and strain, if they can enter at all, and sooner or later the mind expels them by instinct, (Mem 151).

The Old Knight does not possess such a "rich" mind. It is once again obsession that causes this Seeker's abject failure, his inability to live a balanced life. In spite of sixty years' meditation, and the calling of eighty years, the Knight cannot understand the voice in his heart. The Figure must speak to him, affect his intellect and his senses alike since, unlike Mosada, his intuition has been numbed by his obsession. The obsessed Ebremar intuitively knew that this approach to this particular heretic was unwise, but obsession causes him to reject intuition:

> I speak alone with servants of the Cross
> And dying men - and yet - But no, farewell.

Vivien too, as we shall see, fails to respond to her intuitive perception of an immensely powerful presence when it is not confirmed by intellectual and sensual information. The Seeker, though, has little intuition to reject. The fact that his heart has been stolen by spirits has necessitated his rejection of the dance (of life, humanity). He has failed, for instance, in his military calling - a Knight, yet a "coward in the field". He has been destroyed spiritually and physically by his obsession with the world of spirit.

The reference to the Old Knight as "the Knight of the waterfall" to some extent identifies him with Yeats who had counted the waterfall on Ben Bulben so dear during his childhood. In particular, the early recognition that its essence was unreachable (see 'Towards Break of Day', VP 398-9), though an intellectually and sensually powerful presence, allows us to see 'The Seeker' as a personal as well as a public warning. The Knight is the other half of a persona we first encounter in the First Shepherd. Neither devotion to the phenomenal or the noumenal will allow him to be, and hence to recreate, the whole man, and the two must constantly watch and control the other, as the hero of 'Rosa Alchemica', who finds that

> even in my most perfect moment I would be two selves, the one watching with heavy eyes the other's moment of content, (VSR 128).

The Knight's changeling heart is that of a hare, and he timidly welcomes the decay of his natural humanity in exchange for a wisdom that he fails ultimately to acquire. He must come face to face with his fate before he intuits it ("I..... am near/To Death"), but he must receive all knowledge through the filters of intellect and of sense, and he demands once more that the Figure speak, though recognition of his position is beginning to glimmer:

> Were all my wandering days of no avail,
> Untouched of human joy or human love?

He gathers up the leaves, emblematic of his death, and applies them symbolically to the source of his obsession, his hollow heart, in much the same way as the woman of 'Ephemera' gathers them up and applies them to the physical symbol of her love as it expires, her bosom and hair. His

accompanying gesture - a move to "touch/Thy garments' hem" - is equally symbolic.[42]

The sudden illumination of the Figure reveals a form of unexpected hideousness:

> A bearded witch, her sluggish head low bent
> On her broad breast! Beneath her withered brows
> Shine dull unmoving eyes. What thing art thou?
> I sought thee not.

The God of the mystics is typically androgynous, and the beard and the broad breast of the witch suggest a hermaphrodite. According to Blake,

> When weary man enters his cave,
> He meets his Saviour in the grave.
> Some find a female garment there,
> And some a male, woven with care,
> Lest the sexual garments sweet
> Should grow a devouring winding-sheet.[43]

Clearly an extension of the Hermetic axiom, 'As above, so below', the notion of androgyne is another example of the Qabalists' thirst for 'balance' that so impressed Yeats.[44]

Even now the Old Knight is unaware of the meaning of his experience, and he fails to recognise the Figure although, significantly, she is an abstraction (of Death) and cannot know herself: "Men call me Infamy./I know not what I am". The implication is that she is something other, or considerably more, than Infamy. As Frayne points out, Yeats was fond of the phrase, "Men have named", and uses it to cast an element of doubt over their definitions.[45] In 'The Seeker', however, Yeats confuses the role of the Figure merely to increase her mystery, and the poem descends from this even further into the melodramatic, though the inflated Marlovian rhetoric,

> Her lips are glued, with quivering touch,
> To mine, and he is slowly sucking forth
> My soul. His darkness and his chill I feel,

of the 1885 version is dropped in the reprinted poem, partly because it is derivative and melodramatic and partly, I should think, because it makes a nonsense of the final lines. The point is that true knowledge is discernible within the Self, and the Figure holds up a mirror before him so that as he dies he may comprehend this at least. In the mirror "the face and the form of the Knight are shadowed". As we have seen, the mirror should reflect with absolute precision, but the Seeker is forced to contemplate an image that is shadowed by his failure to take account of, and contribute to, developing human concerns. Dragged, not unwillingly, from the dance, he has nevertheless been inadequate for the Quest, unequal to his desire for occult power because of a deep, personal imbalance. He has been no more than a shadow of normal human existence and he dies an unsatisfied failure, unable to become one with his vision before death:

> What, lover, die before our lips have met?

- and seemingly filled with horror at the prospect of that union. His dying words suggest that the Voice has been urging him to a physical communion with the world throughout his life, and that although he hears the sound, he does not understand the words. The sudden acquisition of wisdom is suggested by an erotic union with Death that the Old Knight fails to achieve. Byrd, in contending that the

> ambiguous figure, the witch who calls him 'lover', does not know who she is - it is men who have named her Infamy. Knowledge of self rather than malignant evil seems to be the direct cause of death, (op.cit. p78)

misses the point. The Knight sees merely the reflection of his failure and, unlike Vivien, for instance, who does achieve a sexual union with her vision at death and so completes her Self (no Ledaean questions for Yeats here), he dies with no real comprehension of his experience. He is thus

the precise opposite of the Old Knight of 'Out of the Rose' who dies "filled with a great joy" (VSR 24).

The message of 'The Seeker' is, once again, that the result of obsession is failure and unhappiness in both spiritual and physical worlds, that no knowledge, vision or success worth having comes from total abandonment of the physical (Fergus and the Old Knight for example) or the spiritual (Ferencz Renyi, Maud Gonne, Douglas Hyde), in the reckless and single-minded pursuit of its opposite.

'Time and the Witch Vivien' is the third and last of the dramatic poems to be excluded from Poems (1895). It was completed in the mid-'80s, though it was not published until it appeared in the Oisin collection. Writing in September 1888 to Katharine Tynan Yeats recalls that he

> was then living a quite harmonious poetic life. Never thinking out of my depth. Always harmonious, narrow, calm. Taking small interest in people but most ardently moved by the more minute kinds of natural beauty. 'Mosada' was then written and a poem called 'Time and Vivien'..... Everything done then was quite passionless, (L88).

The poem is thus dismissed, although some four months later Yeats wrote to an unnamed correspondent that his

> liking for 'Time and Vivien' pleases me, the substance of it was written before anything else in the book, and like most things old has pleasant associations gathered about it, (L103).

One would not wish to quibble with Yeats's earlier assessment. The poem is passionless and, as with 'The Seeker', one senses no depth of vision or any real commitment to the material. It merits attention as a further statement against obsession.

Once again the scene anticipates the action, "A marble-flagged, pillared room. Magical instruments in one corner. A fountain in the centre".[46] Vivien surrounds herself with symbols of maximum spiritual power. This may seem ironic in view of her occult failure, but her gestures, as we shall see, show her inability to draw from the sources. This inability indicates not only Vivien's spiritual immaturity, but also Time's immense power. As HPB points out

> not one will escape the scythe of Time! Praise the God or Gods, or flout one or both, that scythe will not tremble one millionth of a second in its ascending or descending course, (SD I 451, and see 496).

Vivien is a more successful Quester than the Old Knight. Her death is ultimately a consequence of hubris and vanity (obsession with the Self), his of imbalance and timidity. The scene opens with the witch desultorily embroidering the 'Mirror, mirror, on the wall' text:

> Vivien (looking down into the fountain): Where moves there any
> beautiful as I,
> Save, with the little golden greedy carp,
> Gold unto gold, a gleam in its long hair,
> My image yonder?

This tableau is clearly designed to recall Narcissus who pined away after being caused by Echo to fall in love with his own reflection (Ovid: Metamorphoses, 3: 339-510). This context is important, for the narcissist is not merely a lover of the Self, but of "extensions or representations of himself in the world",[47] and Vivien's 'children', as we shall see, are her "roseate fingers". So deep is her knowledge of the occult that it has affected her physically. This is not inconsistent with her fate. Knowledge and the ability to use knowledge are, as Yeats knew, two separate accomplishments. Vivien is sufficiently skilled a mistress of the arcane rites to be able to contemplate her own image reflected in the

Cosmic Centre. Unlike the Old Knight, who collapses at an identical experience, and the parrot, for instance, which reacts with the violence of the primeval when confronted by its own image (VP 77), Vivien is adept enough to draw strength from the fountain, and to believe that she controls it. Although Chatterji had taught that deliverance "consists in turning the mirror away so that it reflects nothing" (Hone 48), spiritual perfection in Yeats's work is normally mirrored by beauty.[48] Aengus and his followers share an immortal beauty that is

> like a hollow dream,
> Mirrored in streams that neither hail nor rain
> Nor the cold North has troubled, (VP 184),

and the quest for spiritual perfection will not be reflected by physical perfection until the quest is complete:

> If I make the lashes dark
> And the eyes more bright
> And the lips more scarlet,
> Or ask if all be right
> From mirror after mirror,
> No vanity's displayed:
> I'm looking for the face I had
> Before the world was made, (VP 531-2).

This accords with traditional lore,[49] and Yeats was aware of the doctrine of God as a mirror (see UP2 144). The difference between 'A Woman Young and Old', for instance, or the old men who admire themselves in the water (VP 208), and Vivien is that, whereas these are still engaged in an honourable quest, the witch believes, erroneously it transpires, that she has completed hers, that she is, indeed, her own god. Her controlled gesture, "spreading her hand over the water", is a deliberate echo of the creative spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters of Genesis. Her "roseate fingers" spread in hubristic and blasphemous gesture recalled some years later in 'The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland' (VP 128). By her gesture her power and self-awareness do, however, seem to increase:

Ah, my beautiful,
What roseate fingers! (Turning away) No; nor is there one
Of equal power in spells and secret rites.
The proudest or most coy of spirit things,
Hide where he will, in wave or wrinkled moon,
Obeys.

In fact she is blinded by hubris and vanity to the full significance of her revelation, and she recognises it only at the point of death. Her deep love of her "roseate fingers" is important. It shows, firstly, that she has taken on some of the attributes and powers of her material. More importantly, however, within the proud celebration is lodged an unspecified question, an unarticulated self-doubt, to which the answer is "No; nor is there one/Of equal power", as she turns her back on the source of vision (all Vivien's gestures are dramatic and profoundly symbolic). Having turned from the fountain of knowledge her self-confidence is, paradoxically, restored and she asserts her dominance of all matters spiritual with an unconscious irony. The spirits she claims to control are protected by elements that are unaffected by the predatory "fierce magician" - the waves and their mistress, the "wrinkled moon", natural flux.

Intuitively Vivien recognises the proximity of an immensely powerful force:

Some fierce magician flies or walks
Beyond the gateway - by the sentries now -
Close and more close - I feel him in my heart -
Some great one.

This rather breathless panic, her ability to feel with her heart, underlines her spiritual superiority to the Old Knight, whose heart was merely Death's echo chamber. Like the Seeker and Gomez, however, she must have sensual and intellectual confirmation of her apprehensions before she

commits herself to them. The repeated "No" is part of the forumula to dispel self-doubt, a banishing ritual, and having satisfied herself that the presence is decrepit, and therefore powerless, she returns to the ritual, spreading her hands across the water, and once again commending to herself her beautiful hands. Previously this invoked self-doubt. This mood now takes physical shape and Vivien's vanity invokes Time.

Time enters with traditional impedimenta - scythe,[50] hour-glass[51] and black bag. By setting the hour-glass on its side Vivien seeks to suspend the process of inversion, essential to a philosophy that demands progress by oppositions, and therefore of life itself. This act, if allowed to stand, would constitute her greatest victory since it would lead to the inevitable death of Time. Addressing him with unconsious irony[52] as "father" she derides him:

> Ha, ha! ha, ha, ha!
> The wrinkled squanderer of human wealth,
> Come here. Be seated now; I'd buy of you.

The reference to Time's wrinkles ironically recalls the "wrinkled moon" which she claims to control. Vivien exposes her quest by demanding to know the contents of Time's bag. It anticipates by several years the bag containing the "great webs of sorrow" given to Fergus by the Druid (VP 104), which devolves the immense responsibilities of the world onto his shoulders.[53] This notion of the bag as the container of a fatal gift (as, for instance, that which contains the contrary winds, given by Aeolus to Odysseus) is fully brought out in Time's revelation of the contents of his bag as "Grey hairs and crutches", and by the fact that its colour suggests mourning and death. Vivien does not understand the significance of these symbols of age because they represent reconciliation to the tragedy of

the human condition and, as we have already seen, the witch regards herself as functioning outside the sphere of human activity ("wrinkled squanderer of human wealth"). The gap between Vivien and the rest of humanity is more fully developed in an unpublished manuscript of the play, 'Vivien and Time':

> I'd lose myself
> Outgrowing human sense and human thought
> As I have pity for the fleeting race
> Or men who bend to every sudden blast
> Of Joy or grief or scorn and as they bend
> Say it is human thus to bend, well then
> So much less human I who shall not bend
> Until upon the steeps the fountains rest
> And 'fore the sun the flower lips are closed, (quoted in MM 34-5).

The "Mansions of memories and mellow thoughts/Where dwell the minds of old men having peace" can be inhabited only by those who, like Mosada's father, are aware of the implications of mortality. Vivien, however, is once more intuitively disturbed, and she lays the hour-glass on its side, a symbolic gesture designed not only to halt the progress of Time by inducing a state of absolute stasis, but also to establish against him, and implicitly against Death, the occult symbol of Life, and the Holy Spirit, ∞. The figure of eight in a horizontal position is symbolic of eternity.[54] Vivien intuited Time's power before he manifested, and since she cannot control the tools that afford him that power (by his own admission he would be a "sorry clown" without them), she seeks to take them from him. His refusal to accept the Life symbol forces the witch to recognise her inability to control the hour-glass, and so great is her desire for control that she prepares to sacrifice her own magical instruments for it. By the time she has lost these at dice,[55] and begun a game of chess for even higher stakes, she has come to fear and respect Time's instruments:

The passing of those little grains is snow
Upon my soul, old Time.

She lays the hour-glass on its side in one more defiant, but useless gesture. Chess is symbolic of the great oppositions - spiritual powers battling for domination of the world, the pull of negative and positive (in the black and white squares), of sun and moon, light and darkness, male and female.[56] Time plays with unbeatable skill because he is atoned - at one with the cosmos, a representative of it. In playing against Time Vivien sets herself against universal order. Her misguided belief that she might beat Time is a consequence of her inability to recognise that, as in classical antiquity, Time manifests in two aspects - the Eternal, which she faces, and the fleeting moment, represented by Chance, or Opportunity. It is only in her final utterance that she recognises that she has confronted both the Eternal and Chance. It is "Chance" and not "Time" that "hath a skill".

After laying the hour-glass on its side once more there is an indication that she is obsessed with the acquisition of power, "Should my plots fail I'd die". This lust for dominance is more clearly articulated in the earlier play:

Only one wild word, one wild word
Power, power outspeeding envy self
The only drink for my unceasing thirst
O word as the song of the sea to streams
Art thou to me, in thee I'd lose myself, (MM 34).

This is prophetic, of course, but also ironically retrospective. She has already lost her 'Self' in the obsessive slaking of her thirst. The game follows a pattern of human and occult progress:

Thus play we first with pawns, poor things and weak;
And then the great ones come, and last the king.
So men in life and I in magic play;
First dreams, and goblins, and the lesser sprites,
And now with Father Time I'm face to face.

Pride yet prevents any display of respect, nor does Vivien respond to Time's increasingly obvious superiority:

> I am dull to-day, or you were now all lost.
> Chance, and not skill, has favoured you, old father!

When Time has checked her twice her perception is crowded by transcendental noises off:

> Ah! how bright your eyes. How swift your moves.
> How still it is! I hear the carp go splash,
> And now and then a bubble rise. I hear
> A bird walk on the doorstep.

Vivien's death is forecast by the bird on the threshold. In the world of spiritualism, as in that of ancient religion,[57] guardians prevent man from taking upon himself more occult knowledge than he is capable of assimilating, much as the kings of the "far-wandering shadows" came and went about Maeve's threshold "to counsel and to help" (VP 183). The bird that Vivien hears arrives to assist her transition to a new state of existence. In the last moments before Vivien's attention is recalled by the splashing carp to the fountain at the centre of her room. Her reflection has been replaced by rising bubbles, emblematic of the futility of her struggle.[58] Seconds before death Vivien penetrates the emptiness and insubstantiality of her aspirations. Her failure is not that of the Old Knight's, however, for she achieves in death a union with her vision. Her response is one of mild surprise, but she has overcome fear:

> Time: Mate thus.
> Vivien: Already?
> Chance hath a skill!

She becomes one with her adversary. The sexuality of chess was not lost on Eliot, whose 'A Game of Chess' culminates in the sordid 'mate' of 'The Fire Sermon', nor was it lost on Yeats.[59] We might have been prepared for a hint at a sexual union between Time and Vivien by the carefully structured setting. The pillar is phallic, the traditional symbol

of the male principle, and the fountain is emblematic of feminine influence, the mother-source. Vivien, like Crede, the daughter of King Guare of Aidne,[60] mates with death, and her fate, as a consequence, is marginally less wretched than the Old Knight's or Mosada's.

Even if we read this poem, as we should, as a psychomachia, it remains a confused and immature work. It labours, firstly, under a series of distracting cliches - Time entering as an "old pedlar, with a scythe, an hour-glass, and a black bag" and the improbable stage-laugh that greets him, the loaded dice he always plays with. More importantly, however, Yeats deliberately sidesteps several problems. Why, for instance, does Time come at all? Vivien is a young girl, and must therefore have invoked him. There is no suggestion that her failings, primarily vanity and hubris, are recent or uncharacteristic. Time enters at the repetition of an invocatory formula, certainly, but his response seems unfitting. We should conclude that, however improbable, the whole encounter is a mere coincidence. Would Time have robbed her of life had she refused to deal with him, if her wisdom had been equal to her skill and beauty? Does she regard herself as non-human, exercising her power outside all normal spheres of human activity? She regards herself as cunning, and yet has a pathological disregard for normal values. Her inversion of the stakes, for instance, indicates instability - she recognises that it is crucial that she control the hourglass, the power house of Time, and yet stakes her life not for that control, but for success in her various plots. The poem is incoherent and pretentious, and Yeats was right to abandon it. Insofar as it shares a theme with the other poems considered in this chapter, however, it merits consideration. Vivien's flaw

is obsession with the Self, with self-image (the "roseate fingers"), and it is the expression of that flaw that occasions her downfall.

'Mosada', 'The Seeker' and 'Time and the Witch Vivien' are statements, as are many of the other poems in the Oisin collection, against devotion to only one side of the 'truth'. The psyche must be balanced, and the two hemispheres of the Self constantly interact, if man is to complete his quest. The unbalanced is, as the Qabalists taught, evil, and evil is death. Mosada's obsession with Ebremar causes her death; Ebremar's obsession with purging heretics, with Papal dogma, causes his spiritual death; the Old Knight's obsession with passive occultism (mysticism) is the cause of his spiritual and physical failure; and Vivien's obsession with active occultism (magic) is the cause of hers. Together they are a powerful indictment of monomania.

1) the source of this poem is as yet untraced.

2) see, e.g., Sir Thomas Wyatt: 'They flee from me, that sometime did me seek'.

3) see, e.g., the "brown study" complaint - L164 and VP1 1085.

4) see, e.g., the Empress Trump in the Waite tarot, and Lewis Spence: The Mysteries of Egypt, 1929, p.227-8.

5) Sir J.G. Frazer: The Golden Bough, 3rd edition, 1911, 4:248, 5:233, 6:89-90.

6) but see Montague Summers's attempt to mitigate the Spanish activities of this brutal organisation, Witchcraft and Black Magic (1946), 1974, p.44-6.

7) see below p.236-7n28.

8) Is the Order of R.R. & A.C. to remain a magical order? p.27. See also VSR 129-30, and A.P. Sinnett: The Occult World p.34. One wonders if Sinnett perhaps inspired 'Mosada' - see p.99. See also the final two lines of Lionel Johnson's 'The Dark Angel' (from Plotinus's Enneads - see Select Works of Plotinus, ed. G.R.S. Mead, 1895, p.322), E&I 306, and AV(A) 226.

9) as in the temptation scene in The Countess Kathleen - see J.J.Ll. Cribb: 'Yeats, Blake and The Countess Kathleen' in Irish University Review (11:2), Autumn 1981, p.171.

10) Mosada manages the spell without Cola's assistance, and he is powerless to stop her. Except as a Judas-figure Cola is an irrelevant intrusion into Mosada's story. Her professed dependence on him does not in any way hinder her invocation of the "great enchantress".

11) see also VP 58, 715-6; VP1 194-5; SB 30-1; VSR 12, 145-6. For a discussion of wind symbolism in early Yeats see Grossman op.cit. p.44-62.

12) see, e.g., A.E. Waite: The Holy Kabbalah, 1929, p.371-2.

13) and see VSR 29, 133-4.

14) In 'The Old Men of the Twilight' the enchanted heron tells Michael Bruen that the Druids had often told the men of learning of a "new Druid Patrick; and most among them were angry with him, while a few thought his doctrine merely their own doctrine set out in new images" (VSR 57). See also VP1 33.

15) The Fool is, for Yeats, a wisdom-figure - see, e.g., UP1 192-3, VP1 133, and Myth 112-6. The association of Fool and Artist, heavily implied in the First Monk, is confirmed in 'The Countess Cathleen' (VP1 25), and in the 1907 essay, 'Poetry and Tradition' (E&I 253). See also VP1 584.

16) the evidence of the poem is at variance with Yeats's recollections in the 1898 letter to Standish O'Grady (L307-8). See also UP1 310-17.

17) The cock, traditionally a sun symbol representing rebirth and resurrection, as in 'The Adoration of the Magi' (VSR 168, and see Graves: The White Goddess, p.249), is, paradoxically, also a great death symbol, (see, e.g. UP1 172, UP2 100; VP1 148; VP 725; VSR 20-24, 168; E&I 338, 347. See also Summers op.cit. p.197).

18) His reputation grew enormously in the Iberian peninsula between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries on the strength of his powerful defence of Christianity against the Moors.

19) the swallow represents, for Yeats, imminent departure, or change - see, e.g. VP1 163.

20) Yeats was not averse to overturning natural laws for his own purposes, and natural history was not his strong subject, in spite of his keen adolescent interest. At least one reviewer of The Wanderings of Oisin was disturbed by what he felt to be a lack of sympathy with nature, citing the dancing peahens in particular (see L109). He might have added that the bittern the woodman believes he hears towards the close of 'The Priest and the Fairy' neither dances, nor inhabits springs where "spear-grass brittle grows (see also L32, 108). Perhaps Yeats was confused by seasonal change. It is interesting to note that Yeats's lifelong association of apple blossom with Maud Gonne (Mem 40-43) was similarly capricious since they first met in the dead of winter (L106).

21) see Antony and Cleopatra IV. xv. 18.

22) Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. C.C. Abbott, 1938, p.225-6.

23) see, e.g. HPB: SD III 181-3, 193-7, 475-7, 493-4, 543-6.
The Voice of the Silence p.9-10,22,47-8.
A.P. Sinnett: Esoteric Buddhism (1883) p.18-28,47,67 and see 1903 Annotated edition p.20, 34-7.

24) and within two years the association is even closer - see, e.g. VP 733,735.

25) Antony and Cleopatra V.ii. 317-8.

26) cf. Browning's 'My Last Duchess'.

27) the confusing addition, "... without a curve rises the smoke", of the earlier version, implying that the scene is unaffected by either the ordinary forces of nature or supernatural agencies (the incidence of association of wind with occult power is high in Yeats's work), is dropped by 1888. There are several such improving alterations.

28) AE: 'By the Margin of the Great Deep'. See also "Fiona Macleod" (William Sharp): The Immortal Hour, Althea Gyles's 'Dew-time' in Pall Mall Gazette IV, October 1894, p.161 and Allingham's 'Twilight

Voices', a poem that Yeats admired greatly (UP1 212). See also VP 8,25,72,76,102,132-3,136,140v,141,148,653,728,736. It is, of course, the "hour of incantation" for another enchantress, Mosada. The reference to the hour of gentleness in 'Ephemera' is not an accidental pun. See also UP1 173, VSR 55, 132 and Summers op.cit. p.282. Yeats goes some way towards explaining the power of twilight in his essay on Gods and Fighting Men (Ex 24-6). Twilight is the balance of sun and moon.

Four or five of the Seven Lights of the projected Celtic Mystical Order were at their most powerful at twilight (NLD Ms.13,568). The notion of the Celtic Twilight is not an aesthete's trivial poeticism. It is an attempt to associate Ireland specifically with the time of greatest power. As he writes in his introduction Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (1888), 1973, p.7, "the innermost heart of the Celt" is expressed when "cushioning himself about with dreams, and hearing fairy-songs in the twilight, he ponders on the soul and on the dead". We might learn from Aleel's experience of evening to anticipate unnatural events, VP1 155.

29) In 'The Island of Statues' Almintor plucks a flower and become stone like many before him. The Enchantress speaks over him lines that seem to owe not a little to Blake's 'Tyger Tyger':

Sleeping lord of archery,
No more a-roving shalt thou see
The panther with her yellow hide,
Of all the forests all the pride,
Or her ever burning eyes,
When she in a cavern lies,
Watching o'er her awful young,
Where their sinewy might is strung
In the never-lifting dark.
No! Thou standest still and stark,
That of old wert moving ever,
But a mother panther never
O'er her young so eagerly
Did her lonely watching take
As I my watching lest you wake,
Sleeping lord of archery, (VP 658).

Her worst fears are realised after she is tricked by Naschina, and her death is that of the mother panther that has failed her brood:

never any more the wide-eyed bands
Of the pied panther-kittens from my hands
Shall feed, (VP 674).

See also VP 71; LNI 116; UP1 319. See also Frazer op.cit. 3:219, and H. Bayley: The Lost Language of Symbolism, 1912, I p.85.

30) To Indians, in whose philosophy Yeats was then steeped, the sound of Krishna's flute is the magical cause of the birth of the world. See also W.S. Fox: The Mythology of all Races: Greek and Roman (Vol.1), 1916, p.34, 171.

31) 'To W.B. Yeats', Irish Monthly, 17:190, p.277.

32) the panther is a Christ image in traditional mysticism.

33) see the remarks on Flaubert (AV(A) 94), a man, like Darwin, of Phase 22 - see also AV(A) xvii-xix. This brings to mind the 1896 story, 'Rosa Alchemica' (see VSR 127-8, 134-5). This story concerns the nature of the two parts of the spiritual whole - material gold and immaterial ecstasy (VSR 129) - and the need to harmonise these, as does, indeed, though in a more philosophical way, the late essay on 'Louis Lambert', (E&I 438-47).

34) these words ("A prophesying voice") are missing from the 1885 version and, since Yeats agreed with Blake that "poetry admits not a letter that is insignificant" (UP1 265), we must assume that Yeats considered it necessary to emphasise the conjunction of Artist and Prophet.

35) particularly since Yeats carefully altered to "Asian" the considerably more precise "India's" of the earlier version.

36) see, e.g. Gareth Knight: A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism, 1965, I p.32, and A.E. Waite: The Holy Kabbalah p.611.

37) The deadly power of the wood is emphasised by the inability of even squirrels to exist there. In Yeats's work, generally, squirrels are unaffected by laws natural or supernatural, in much the same way as the squirrel, traditionally, runs up and down the Tree of Life (E&I 175). The implication in 'The Shadowy Waters' is that this freedom is unaffected by the passage of time (see VP 217). See also VP 674, 145-6. In view of this uncommon immunity the power of the Seeker's Grail appears all the more awesome.

38) cf. Mosada's "coil on coil of azure", VP 691.

39) unless the shepherd is still describing the Knight's eyes - the development of the simile is unclear.

40) In 'The Countess Cathleen', for instance, the demon-merchants remember Mary's curse:

> You shall at last dry like dry leaves, and hang
> Nailed like dead vermin on the doors of God, (VP1 38)

and fling it back at the starving peasants:

> Here throng they; since the drouth they go in throngs,
> Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds, (VP1 126).

The early development of the symbol can be monitored from 'The Song of the Fairies', for instance, in which the soulless fairy is compared to a "leaf that is old, and withered, and cold" (VP 643), to Mosada's death and the death of her relationship with Gomez (though not of her love), to Goll's mental decay, to Oisin's mortality (VP 17,21,56). See also VP 79-81,120,278, and VP1 209-10. It is to some extent a poeticism - see, e.g. Thomas Moore's 'Oft, in the stilly night'.

41) see, e.g., Frazer op.cit. 3:260; J.A. MacCulloch: The Mythology of All Races: Celtic and Slavic (Vol.3), 1918, p.153,158,185; A.E. Waite: The Holy Kabbalah p.531-2; Judges 16: 4-20. For Yeats's response see L145,162; AV(B) 23; SB 12; VP 55, 721, 747. The association of beards and leaves is not unique to 'The Seeker' - see VP 169.

42) see, e.g., VP 15-16, 139; VP1 602; E&I 151; VSR 15. The symbolism of the gesture has perhaps, a biblical provenance - see Matthew 9:21, Mark 5: 25-29, Luke 8: 43-4.

43) Blake op.cit. III p.62-3. See also Simeon Solomon: A Mystery of Love in Sleep, 1871, p.2-5; HPB: SD II 131-43; A.E. Waite: The Holy Kabbalah p.595; Knight op.cit. I p.74,166,174, II p.7,12,204-5.

44) UP2 60 and Mem 127.

45) UP1 245n, and see VP 169.

46) We naturally associate marble, pillars and fountains in Yeats's verse with the supernatural - e.g. VP 70-5,162-3,463,680 and see VSR 37, 145-6 and CLQ 148. In 'Jealousy' Amrita is not the name of a secret lover, but of the cosmic fountain in Hindu mythology. The focus of Vijaya's meditation is sacred rather than erotic. That a priestess of a temple should be unaware of this is, of course, ridiculous. Patty Gurd was probably right to think that Yeats became familiar with the Vivien legend through Tennyson, Malory and Lady Charlotte Guest's Mabinogion (op.cit. p.35-6, but see E&I 484-5), but wrong to ascribe the fountain symbol solely to the influence of Shelley. He certainly did encounter the symbol in Shelley (E&I 80-6), as in Porphyry and Blake (E&I 78, 136), but the traditional associations with an outflow of spiritual life is widespread enough to need no precise literary source.

47) children, for instance, - see R.S. Lee: Freud and Christianity (1948), 1967, p.101.

48) see, e.g., VSR 143 - though the mirror itself, of course, as in 'Time and the Witch Vivien', can be associated with imperfection - see, e.g., 'Hanrahan's Vision', VSR 115.

49) see Graves: The White Goddess p.395, Summers op.cit. p.104-5, and Oscar Wilde's story, 'The Fisherman and His Soul'. See also 'The Looking Glass', E&I 269-70.

50) The traditional association of the scythe with the moon in Druidic ceremony is reflected in Thernot's song in 'The Island of Statues' (VP 648), and in Yeats's poem on Nettleship's picture (VP 688). It quietly deepens the irony of Vivien's claim to dominate "wave or wrinkled moon".

51) According to the teaching handed down to Mathers by the "Hidden and Secret Chiefs", the hourglass symbolises the connection between the Malkuth of the Yetziratic plane and the Kether of the Assiatic (Torrens op.cit. p.180). As it appears in this poem, however, it anticipates Yeats's later theories of the cyclic recurrence of life and death, the interplay of opposites - as, for example, in 'The Two Trees' - one quality giving rise to its opposite. As early as 1904 (Ex 147) Yeats relates the concept of inversion specifically to Ireland where "everything calls up its contrary, unreality calls up reality", though he would have been familiar with the theory since his study of Blake. The paradox implicit in inversion would have pleased Yeats - Blake's identification of the Virgin Mary, for instance, as both "sin and 'the Law'," (L324) and his "old thought"

that "sexual love is founded upon spiritual hate" (L758). Yeats's GD motto is a typical expression of paradoxical inversion, as is his contention that in the kingdom of poetry there is "no battle that does not give life instead of death" (VP 847).

52) Chronos devoured his own children - see Robert Graves: The Greek Myths (1955) 1960 I p.39-40.

53) Mohini Chatterji had arrived in Dublin with a symbolic "little bag" - The Speaker op.cit. p.40.

54) see, e.g., the Golden Dawn tarot trumps, Strength and the Magician. Modern sources are, of course, highly suspect but they are an index to traditional western esoteric symbolism. See also the Strength and Magician trumps and the Two of Pentacles in the Waite tarot.

55) Dice is a game traditionally associated with Fortune and her fickleness. Death and Death-in-Life, for instance, dice for the fortune of the Ancient Mariner's vessel in Coleridge's poem.

56) The chess board figured largely in Yeats's notes on the projected Celtic Mystical Order, and in a manuscript in the National Library, Dublin (Ms. 13,568), he writes that "the chess board was undoubtedly of great mystical importance in ancient times". He would have been aware of this from the various treatments of the Deirdre legend (see UP1 93), and, indeed, the game of chess is a crucial feature of Yeats's own 'Deirdre'. Yeats's recollections in Autobiographies (Au 39) indicate a personal as well as mythological significance. 'Enochian' chess was an aspect of Golden Dawn ritual - see Hone 107 and Israel Regardie: The Golden Dawn, IV, p.346-68.

57) see, e.g., E. Westermarck: History of Human Marriage (5th ed., 1921, Vol.II, p.531-38). For Yeats himself the threshold was a powerful boundary - see e.g. VP 85, 97v, 583; Myth 333. These developed into more powerful, all-embracing threshold-keepers, Au 272-5.

58) bubbles, like the hourglass, are often to be found in 'Vanitas' paintings which allegorize death or illustrate the brevity of mortal existence, often accompanied by the inscription, 'Homo bulla est'.

59) see also The Tempest V.i. and MacCulloch op.cit. p.81.

60) see, e.g., Alfred Perceval Graves's 'The Song of Crede'.

## CHAPTER VI

The poems I have examined in Chapter V were discarded by Yeats after 1889. I suggested at the beginning of the chapter that they were not reprinted during Yeats's lifetime because, although lucid exposees of the problem of obsession, they concern themselves with only one aspect of the human experience. They are themselves 'obsessed'. In the poems that Yeats retained, however, obsession is a major preoccupation. Goll's insanity is induced by obsession with power and conquest; Fergus's sorrow results from his obsession with the acquisition of wisdom; 'The Man who Dreamed of Faeryland' is tortured by his obsession with his own mortality. In 'The Secret Rose' obsessed characters come in rapid succession to mind:

> Thy great leaves enfold
> The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and gold
> Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose eyes
> Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of elder rise
> In Druid vapour and make the torches dim;
> Till vain frenzy awoke and he died; and him
> Who met Fand walking among flaming dew
> By a grey shore where the wind never blew,
> And lost the world and Emer for a kiss;
> And him who drove the gods out of their liss,
> And till a hundred morns had flowered red
> Feasted, and wept the barrows of his dead;
> And the proud dreaming king who flung the crown
> And sorrow away, and calling bard and clown
> Dwelt among wine-stained wanderers in deep woods;
> And him who sold tillage, and house, and goods,
> And sought through lands and islands numberless years,
> Until he found, with laughter and with tears,
> A woman of so shining loveliness
> That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,
> A little stolen tress. (VP 169-70).

Geoffrey Thurley is quite right to point out, in his discussion of 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea' (op.cit. p16), that Yeats was not interested in "the Knutish vanity" (sic) or the "Sisyphean exasperation of the labour", but "it was the obsessedness that fascinated him". It is surprising, then, that Thurley fails to refer us to 'The Wanderings of

Oisin'. This poem is an expression of a man obsessed, and also a containment of that obsession. Reason plays no part in Oisin's obsession, and yet he arrives at a kind of mature wisdom because he has lived long enough and has surrendered completely enough to work out that obsession. The chief protagonists are essentially monomaniacal - Niamh is obsessed with Oisin:

> I loved no man, though kings besought,
> Until the Danaan poets brought
> Rhyme that rhymed upon Oisin's name,
> And now I am dizzy with the thought
> Of all that wisdom and the fame
> Of battles broken by his hands,
> Of stories builded by his words
> That are like coloured Asian birds
> At evening in their rainless lands, (VP 7).

The guiding principle of her entire kingdom, however, is obsessive. For the fairies "joy is God and God is joy" (VP 19), and this preoccupation has freed them from the constraining effects of God, ethics, and

> Unchainable as the dim tide,
> With hearts that know nor law nor rule,
> And hands that hold no wearisome tool, (VP 22)

they have achieved unparalleled happiness. Like Vivien (see also VP 23v.) they mock Death and Time, Change, Fate and Chance (VP 19-20), and they have concluded that since Joy is God its antithesis must be demonic:

> things that have grown sad are wicked,
> And things that fear the dawn of the morrow
> Or the grey wandering osprey Sorrow, (VP 20).

This bravado is transparent. They cannot tolerate the presence of Sorrow and when Oisin sings "of human joy",

> they wept,
> Until one came, a tearful boy;
> 'A sadder creature never stept
> Than this strange human bard,' he cried;
> And caught the silver harp away,
> And, weeping over the white strings, hurled
> It down in a leaf-hid, hollow place
> That kept dim waters from the sky;
> And each one said, with a long, long sigh,
> 'O saddest harp in all the world,
> Sleep there till the moon and the stars die!' (VP 17).

Into this world of obsessives, where Aengus "dreams, from sun to sun,/A Druid dream of the end of days" (VP 16), Oisin is thrust by Niamh's magic (VP 9). He is possessed by the concerns of his Fenian youth, but overcomes the obsessions by submitting to them more completely than any mortal ever could. Each time he is recalled, however, by intimations of the mortality he has spurned - by Finn's beard, the Fenians' dwellings of wattle, Conan's "slanderous tongue" (VP 55), by "white-haired Finn/Under a beech at Almhuin" (VP 44), and on the shore of the Island of Hunting Oisin found

> in the forgetfulness
> Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
> From some dead warrior's broken lance:
> I turned it in my hands; the stains
> Of war were on it, and I wept,
> Remembering how the Fenians stept
> Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
> Equal to good or grievous chance, (VP 24).

This acceptance of the role of Chance is what separates Oisin and the Fenians from Niamh and the Immortals. The fairies consider Sorrow to be a demonic influence, but Oisin recognises it as an integral aspect of experience. In a sense seemingly not envisaged by Ellmann, then, (see MM 51-2) Oisin is a Yeats persona. If Demon est Deus Inversus, in an Ossianic context Joy and Sorrow are interdependent (see, e.g. Is the Order of R.R. & A.C. to remain a Magical Order? p22-23). Yeats was acutely conscious, as we have seen, of the equal claims of antithetical impulses and of the need to balance those impulses. He appears to be identifying with Oisin as an obsessed character who is painfully aware of the danger of obsession. 'The Wanderings of Oisin', then, looks back to 'Time and the Witch Vivien', 'Mosada', and 'The Seeker', and forms part of a chain of self-dramatisation through myth that develops through 'Baile and Aillinn' and 'The Old Age of Queen Maeve' to the great narrative poems

of Responsibilities. By remaking old stories (VP 270) Yeats adds gradually to a self-dramatisation that begins in 1885, and the poetry of his maturity evolves from these earlier recreations of the self rather than from the poetic cul-de-sac of The Wind Among the Reeds.

If obsession is 'evil', balance is, of course, 'good'. I intend to demonstrate, in this concluding chapter, that Yeats's response to 'balance' was positive, and not merely a negative reaction to obsession. I will go on to argue, however, that Yeats believed that the constant quarrel with oneself can lead to a personal instability. 'The Two Trees' is the poem I have chosen to illustrate the first contention, and for the second I will explore the play Where There Is Nothing beyond its role as Nietzschean ventriloquism.

Following Blake's belief that religion and politics are the same thing[1] Yeats, in this poem, blends socio-political theme with occult matter. Trees were sacred to the ancient Celts[2] and the two trees of Yeats's poem are, I believe, more representative of this tradition, being dual aspects of a single tree, than of the two Qabalistic trees (Of Life, and Of Good and Evil), though to some extent the figurative branches of these are inseparable:

> certainly we have here [in tragic art] the Tree of Life and that of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which is rooted in our interests, and if we have forgotten their differing virtues it is surely because we have taken delight in a confusion of crossing branches, (E & I 245, and see The Poems of William Blake, ed. W.B. Yeats, 1893, p229).

Whatever the precise nature of the tree, it is plainly a Qabalisation of Celtic tradition, a mystical gloss on a sinister vision, offering an "elaborately learned"[3] exposition of Qabailistic lore, explanation of which

has tended to overshadow the poem's politico-romantic provenance.[4] The first stanza is a description of

> the religious discipline of 'joy', of subjective thought where the 'intellect' does not operate alone but is co-ordinated with other faculties into 'imagination'; the process by which God may be discerned as present within the human personality, (ibid. p251)

recalling if not the first sonnet of Sidney's 'Astrophel and Stella', then at least the apprehensions of the happy shepherd: "there is no truth/Saving in thine own heart" (VP 66). The tree of the first stanza is similar to Rossetti's "living mystic tree"

> Within whose secret growth the Dove
> Is sometimes felt to be,
> While every leaf that His plumes touch
> Saith His Name audibly, ('The Blessed Damozel').

It is also the tree of Blake's song 'Love and harmony combine', of 'In a Myrtle Shade', and of 'The ~~Mental Traveller~~ Human Abstract'. Indeed, the entire poem can be read as a gloss of Blake's 'The Human Abstract'.[5] Blake's poem incorporates imagery too similar to that of 'The Two Trees' for the resemblances to be coincidental:

> Pity would be no more
> If we did not make somebody poor,
> And Mercy no more could be
> If all were as happy as we.
>
> And mutual fear brings Peace,
> Till the selfish loves increase;
> Then Cruelty knits a snare,
> And spreads his baits with care.
>
> He sits down with holy fears,
> And waters the ground with tears;
> Then Humility takes its root
> Underneath his foot.
>
> Soon spreads the dismal shade
> Of Mystery over his head,
> And the caterpillar and fly
> Feed on the Mystery.
>
> And it bears the fruit of Deceit,
> Ruddy and sweet to eat,
> And the raven his nest has made
> In its thickest shade.

The gods of the earth and sea
Sought through nature to find this tree,
But their search was all in vain:
There grows one in the human Brain.

The bitter irony of this poem launches a direct attack on eighteenth century rationalist dogma, positing in the first six lines, an argument defensible in strictly rationalist terms, and then demolishing it in the rest of the poem by demonstrating how it gives rise, of necessity, to cruelty and the hypocrisy of false humility. But, as Gillham points out,

> Blake does not, in this poem or elsewhere, deny the truth of the rationalist doctrine he examines..... On the contrary, it is only too true for too many men, (D.G. Gillham: William Blake , 1973, p86).

Yeats does not believe, however, that "this corrupt frame of mind", in which "selfishness and cruelty flourish and are dignified under false names" (C.M. Bowra: The Romantic Imagination, 1950, p40), is a proper reflection of Maud Gonne's nature, and he hangs his plea on the branches of the "holy tree" that grows from her heart. Were she to allow herself a moment of subjective contemplation she would discover, Yeats insists, the balanced purpose of her existence, being committed and passionate involvement with Yeats, and with Yeats's particular (balanced) approach to nationalism. By succumbing to the "gentle strife" (the pun on 'gentle' is again important), and through expression of that revised commitment, Yeats and Maud Gonne would proceed to an unspecified zone of erotic immortality, "the flaming circle of our life". The second stanza is a vision of this spirit of holy potential as it is affected by the constant and bitter materialism of political campaigning. The framework is again Qabalistic and Blakean, but Wilson's contention - that Yeats

> represents the Qlippoth naively as 'demons', and shows them holding up a magic looking-glass of the kind familiar from many fairy stories..... where the Tree of Life presents a distorted and misshapen reflection, (op.cit. p253)

- is misleading. Yeats follows Mathers in representing the Qlippoth as 'demons' on several occasions in Kabbala Denudata:

> The fourth is the Asiatic world, OVLM Ho-ShIH, Olahm Ha-Asiah, the world of action, called also the world of shells, OVLM HQLIPUTh, Olahm Ha-Qliphoth, which is the world of matter, made up of the grosser elements of the other three. In it is also the abode of the evil spirits, which are called "the shells" by the Qabalah, QLIPVTH, Qliphoth, material shells. The devils are also divided into ten classes, and have suitable habitations... The tree which is mitigated (that is, the path of the kingdom or Schechinah, which is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which in itself existeth from the judgements, but is mitigated by the bridegroom through the influx of mercies) resideth within (within the shells; because the kingdom hath its dominion over all things, and its feet descend into death). In its branches (in the inferior worlds) the birds lodge and build their nests (the souls and the angels have their place).[6]

Readers who had penetrated the Qabalisation of the first stanza would have been aware from the beginning of the second that the world referred to was that of 'action', and the reference to 'demons' (shell imagery would not have been appropriate to the Tree allegory), far from being naive, is at once authentic Qabalism and a subtle reminder of the provenance of the poem, an echo ("subtle guile") of the treacherous demon that had warred with Oisin (VP 35v.). The demons, then, are the spirits that stimulate Maud Gonne's increasingly hostile political war with England, and far from presenting a "distorted and misshapen reflection" of the Tree, they expose the normally concealed desolation that naturally balances it:

> With broken boughs and blackened leaves
> And roots half hidden under snows
> Driven by a storm that ever grieves.

The birds of the first stanza, for instance,

> through bewildered branches, go
> Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
> Tossing and tossing to and fro
> The flaming circle of our life,

are balanced by their sinister cousins from the world of Assiah:

> There, through the broken branches, go
> The ravens of unresting thought;
> Peering and flying to and fro,
> To see men's souls bartered and bought.

The full repellence of this image - the "cruel claw and hungry throat", the "ragged wings", and the gruesome anthropomorphism of ravens that stand and sniff the wind - only emerging in revision. The verbal echoes are not accidental. The balance is maintained in a linguistic as well as a mystagogic manner. Nor is the restatement of previous political gestures coincidental. The birds, for example, that seek to destroy Maud Gonne seek also to destroy love, and hence, by implication, Yeats himself. At the close the 'The Binding of the Hair' the poet Aodh, decapitated in battle, still manages to sing his love until birds similar to the "ravens of unresting thought" appear:

> And then a troop of crows, heavy like fragments of that sleep older than the world, swept out of the darkness, and, as they passed, smote those ecstatic lips with the points of their wings; and the head fell from the bush and rolled over at the feet of the queen, (VSR 181).

Similarly, the demons that peer and fly "to and fro,/To see men's souls bartered and bought", though later revised out, clearly represent the merchant-devils that had operated in The Countess Kathleen. That this suggestion was dropped suggests that Yeats saw Maud Gonne as succumbing to Qlippothic pressure for reasons that were not holy, with the consequence that salvation is slipping inexorably from her grasp. Maud Gonne had sold her soul to Satan in 1886, (the year of her father's death - Mem 132-3). Her commitment to the materialism of politics, warping her personality, is demanded by the ravens which have been sent to ensure the damnation[7] that could be avoided only by recantation, and a more wholehearted engagement in non-materialistic (that is, Yeatsian) nationalist activity. Before the vision is fully revealed Yeats is sensitive to the power of her combative instinct, "Or only gaze a little while". But with the recognition that the loss is greater than that of mere

earthly beauty the qualification fades, and the poem ends with a reiteration of a line that bristles with solemn urgency, the three heavily stressed syllables, a sudden departure from the easy iambs into which the poem has slipped, accentuate the imperative:

> Thy tender eyes grow all unkind:-
> Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

The poem is at once an explication of the Qabalistic notion of balance, and a lucid socio-political critique, a clear statement that the darker aspects of human nature are exposed by intense political activity, just as the three dramatic poems discussed in the previous chapter demonstrate the consequence of occult obsession. Yeats makes a similar plea in 'The White Birds', and his commitment to balance can be measured by these poems. During the period that is generally regarded as the most intensely 'occult' of his life (the '90s) Yeats claimed that

> a weariness comes from those dreamers, dew dabbled,
> the lily and rose,
> Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the
> meteor that goes,
> Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low
> in the fall of the dew:
> For I would we were changed to white birds on the
> wandering foam - I and you, (VP 122v. - Oisin version).

This is a clear indication that Yeats never lost sight of the fact that human nature, at its highest point, denies no aspect of 'truth'.

The constant strain of reconciling irreconcilables, however, can lead to a desire for the breakdown of all system. The attempt to force the two figures of the weather house (above p.165) to emerge together breaks the mechanism that allows either to appear. There can be no doubt that the apolcalyptic nihilism of 'Where There Is Nothing' owes much, as Harper says (CLQ 114-25),[8] to the "Dionysiac enthusiasm" of Nietzsche's Zarathustra (L402). Paul Ruttledge is, to a large extent, an amalgam of

the Nietzschean conceptions of Christ and St. Paul.[9] It is important, however, not to overstress Nietzsche's role in the development of 'Where There is Nothing', though we should accept his pre-eminence in the characterisation of Ruttlege's exuberant anarchy. Emma Goldman, a great exponent of "anarchism" (see, for instance, Anarchism and other Essays, 1910, p53-73), celebrated the play as an embodiment of

> the spirit of revolt itself, of that most constructive revolt which begins with the destruction of every obstacle in the path of the new life that is to grow on the debris of the old, when the paralyzing yoke of institutionalism shall have been broken, and man left free to enjoy Life and Laughter, (The Social Significance of the Modern Drama, 1914, p260).

Ruttledge has perceived an obsession in society. Civilisation, as he sees it, is preoccupied with systems, institutions, establishments, buildings, and he has discovered, through vision (VP1 1071,1131), that nihilism is the only way to counteract this obsession, and bring society back to the true religion, man back to divinity. The Fall is reversible, man can be restored to prelapsarian felicity, through the earthbound, the law of gravity:

> I am among those who think that sin and death came into the world the day Newton ate the apple..... I know you are going to tell me he only saw it fall. Never mind, it is all the same thing, (VP1 1084).

Seeing that there is "too much building" (VP1 1068v.) Paul seeks to become 'irresponsible', like Christ (VP1 1119) and the Saints (VP1 1161), with the tinkers,[10] and to tear down the edifices, whether physical or metaphysical, that have been established against God. The play is the first shot in the battle to render the theatre "joyful, fantastic, extravagant, whimsical, beautiful, resonant, and altogether reckless" (Ex 169). It is no coincidence that after escaping the structured society of his friends and family he joins the tinkers against a "wall of unmortared stone" (VP1 1087), and that after his expulsion from the monastery he and

his apostles settle in "Ecclesiastical ruins" (VP1 1144). Paul, having destroyed his own house (VP1 1142), sets out with his disciples to annihilate Jerome's "rules" (VP1 1132), to obliterate town and Church alike (VP1 1138), to nullify all laws, which were "the first sin" (VP1 1137), and finally to pull down the world (VP1 1071,1140,1142). This nihilism, prompted by the question, "Why should the world go on?" (VP1 1112), is the dark that wipes out all distinction:

> The dark, where there is nothing that is anything, and nobody that is anybody; one can be free there, where there is nothing (VP1 1091).

This darkness is a divine gift, or at the very least the inescapable consequence of a true and committed worship of God. In exchanging clothes with Charlie Ward and commencing the processes of anarchy Ruttledge begins also the "regeneration" of his soul (VP1 1081-2). The necessity for "absolute rebellion" emerges fully in the discarded earlier versions of the play in which Ruttledge claims that his orders come from a higher source than the Superior (VP1 1125v.), and that in the course of following them he "seemed to rise above law and number", and was thus united to the "lawless unity" (ibid.). In the final version the full significance of Ruttledge's lesson surfaces - he had learned it

> from Jesus Christ, who made a terrible joy, and sent it to overturn governments, and all settled order, (VP1 1140).

Ruttledge urges the Friars to

> Lay down your palm branches before this altar; you have brought them as a sign that the walls are beginning to be broken up, that we are going back to the joy of the green earth, (VP1 1135).

That joy is, specifically, the "Love of God, and..... the Will of God" (VP1 1136). It finds its primary earthly form in the strictly social anarchy that Ruttledge encourages in the drunkenness of the villages, and in the

role-reversing mock-trial that echoes Lear's. But that physical drunkenness is merely the gross material body of the joyful spiritual drunkenness presaged in the twenty-third Psalm, welcomed ecstatically by Ruttledge:

> Give me wine out of thy pitchers; oh, God,
> how splendid is my cup of drunkenness, (VP1 1139),

and inducing a vertigo that is inimical to all natural structure:

> We must become blind, and deaf, and dizzy. We must get rid of everything that is not measureless eternal life. We must put out hope as I put out this candle, (ibid.).

To serve God man must become as irresponsible as a child, a crow or a witch, "drunk with the wind" (VP1 1145v.). Clearly then, man is incapable of approaching God as long as he is obsessed with the notions of order and structure, with defining the imponderable. The spiritual drunkenness[11] is God's gift to man:

> We have rolled a great barrel out of a cellar that is under the earth. We have rolled it right into the midst of them..... It's heavy, and when they have drunk what is in it, I would like to see the man that would be their master, (VP1 1151).

This gift affords access to Joy:

> O plunge me into the wine barrel, into the wine barrel of God, (VP1 1164).

God's Joy, however, brought to man by Christ, is terrible and destructive:

> I saw a great many angels riding upon unicorns, white angels on white unicorns. They stood all round me, and they cried out, 'Brother Paul, go and preach; get up and preach, Brother Paul.' And then they laughed aloud, and the unicorns trampled the ground as though the world were already falling in pieces, (VP1 1132).

'Laughter', a wild beast with iron claws, wings of brass, eyes like sapphires (VP1 1158,1099), and a face "smoky from the eternal fires" (VP1 1102), is at once a creation of God's (and a direct consequence of correct worship of Him) and the "mightiest of the enemies of God" (VP1 1099). It promotes a Joy that causes the world to shudder (VP1 1082) because it

is an experience that is the antithesis of society. Stemming from total breakdown it is a restoration of the "old joyful, dangerous, individual life" (VP1 1157, and see 1145v.). It is individual because it pits man against himself, and celebrates the evolution from the struggle of an exalted spirit that is capable of understanding and participating in the ways of God, and of explaining them to man. In an early review 'J.T.G.' complained that the play's doctrine "might be considered pernicious. It depicts, after all, the evolution of a mania".[12] It is clear, however, that the play depicted for Yeats the evolution of purer spirit through the battle of spirits to balance, as theosophists and other occultists had always claimed it balanced, the Darwinian evolution of matter:

> These men fight in their way as your saints fought, for their hand is against the world. I want the happiness of men who fight, who are hit and hit back, not the fighting of men in red coats, that formal, soon-finished fighting, but the endless battle, the endless battle.....
> ..... the music I have heard sometimes is made of the continual clashing of swords. It comes rejoicing from Paradise, (VP1 1097-8, and see 1126v.).[13]

Spiritual battle and destruction (see, e.g., VP1 1144v.) leads to the "harsh merriment" (VP1 1145v.) of spiritual perfection. The constant celebration of the clashing of swords is reminiscent of the celebration of the evolutionary principles of survival through battle in 'The Wanderings of Oisin'. It is important to remember that the message of those who have transcended mortality in that poem is that "joy is God and God is joy" (VP 19),[14] just as Ruttledge, who has himself seen beyond mortality, announces that "God is joy, and will accomplish all joyful things" (VP1 1126v). Death, of course, because the final destruction, is the most perfect joy, the

> last adventure, the first perfect joy, for at death the soul comes into possession of itself, and returns to the joy that made it, (VP1 1160).

Since God made Death an integral part of man's communion with Him it would be blasphemous for Ruttledge, who is ready for such a communion, to deny it, (see also Mem 231-2). Chesterton is quite wrong, therefore, to claim that Yeats missed a great opportunity in not having Ruttledge cry out at the last that his murderers are right to destroy him, that "the mob of rioters was an army of saints. If Nothing is God all murderers should have haloes. But it isn't." Chesterton's argument, that "where there is anything there is God" (my italics) is a neat rhetorical flourish, but it misses Yeats's point that only those who are as spiritually evolved as Paul Ruttledge are capable of facing the nothingness that is God. Ruttledge dismisses the other Friars because they would not have seen the glory of God, but the emptiness that confronts the Seeker.

The life that comes of a correct 'spiritual' understanding of evolution, the paradox of a life attainable only by death (a paradox that I think W.H. Auden refers to when he writes, in 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', of his "rapture of distress"), is the crux of this matter.[15] In 'Where There Is Nothing' the point of the drama is carried by the potent unicorn symbol which is, as Brenda Webster herself avers, both "strong and phallic" and "virginal and pure" (ibid. p82).[16] In the act of giving life, they destroy it, and in this respect they are an expression of pre-Nietzschean influences. Harper rightly stresses Nietzsche as the main philosophical thrust behind the play - clearly it could not have been written as it was but for that influence - but Yeats would have encountered philosophical nihilism long before the turn of the century in esoteric Buddhism, as some early reviewers suggested, and in Blake.[17] Indeed Ruttledge quotes Blake to justify the social anarchy caused by his distribution of free alcohol:

> There is not one of those people outside but thinks that he is a king, that he is riding the wind. There is not one of them that would not hit the world a slap in the face. Some poet has written that exuberance is beauty, and that the roadway of excess leads to the palace of wisdom, (VP1 1110-1111)

and to justify the spiritual anarchy caused by his preaching in the monastery:

> God put holiness into everything that lives, for everything that desires is full of His Will, and everything that is beautiful is full of His Love, (VP1 1138).[18]

The paradox of 'Laughter' being both creation and enemy of God is an expression of the Qabalistic belief that the Satanic impulse is an aspect of divinity. As Blake put it in 'Ideas of Good and Evil':

> God appears, and God is light
> To those poor souls who dwell in night,
> But doth a human form display
> To those who dwell in realms of day, (Blake op.cit.III p79).

This is strictly Qabalistic,[19] and Qabalistic doctrine is suggested in Yeats's play partly by the simple tinker, Tommy the Song, an artist-visionary who carries a hazel wand and has banished spirits with it (VP1 1099),[20] but who finally submits to vision:

> I believe he heard something one night beside an old thorn tree, some sort of a voice it was, (VP1 1156)

both blackthorn and hawthorn being unlucky trees in Celtic tradition.[21] Tommy is the tarot Fool: "He who knew nothing may have seen all" (VP1 1156, and see Mem 78-9). The Qabalism of the play is more evident in the discarded versions:

> First, the circle of the moon, then the circle of Mercury, then the circle of Venus. But it's not till we get beyond Jupiter that we get beyond law and number. Ah! there is Cassiel, the angel of Saturn; how cold his hand is..... Cassiel, I will not go out beyond the fixed stars to that dark nothing. I will go into the sun, for God is in the heart of it, where the flame burns up everything, (VP1 1163-4v.).[22]

This rather confusing climax has Ruttledge absurdly rejecting the final denial, refusing to transcend the fixed stars and enter into the final nothingness of the Veils of Ain. It was rightly discarded for the final text.

The play, then, if it has a Nietzschean impulse, has at least in part a Blakean and Celto-Qabalistic provenance.[23] The anarchic influence of MacGregor Mathers had been felt long before Yeats discovered Nietzsche. Maclagan, in The Speckled Bird, says to Michael,

> "I shall live to see the commonplace people who think so much of themselves, the people who make the factories and the streets and laws, humble enough. Things are going very quickly in the world in our times, and you and I may see the streets and the factories burning. Then we who have seen the truth [?] will be listened to. We will reshape the world."....
>
> Michael felt as it he had always thought in just this way also, and he said, "It will not be long before we will remake it nearer to the heart's desire" (SB 22).

Yeats did indeed live to see such times, and to perceive in them a kind of perfection:

> there has been..... disorder over the greater part of Ireland. A trumpery dispute about an acre of land can rouse our people to monstrous savagery, and if in their war with the English auxiliary police they were shown no mercy, they showed none: murder answered murder. Yet their ignorance and violence can remember the noblest beauty, (Au 561).

That the prevailing anarchy is as much occult as Nietzschean is clearly evinced by the 1897 'Rosa Alchemica', in which Yeats describes an alchemical process. The writer sympathises

> with the consuming thirst for destruction which made the alchemist veil under his symbols of lions and dragons, of eagles and ravens, of dew and of nitre, a search for an essence which would dissolve all mortal things, (VSR 129).[24]

It is an alchemical fire in Ruttledge's heart that "will make it as bare as the wilderness" (VP1 1141). Chesterton follows ignorant critics of alchemy in corporealising this spiritual weariness and quite reverses Yeats's point. Deploring the fact that Yeats sets up Ruttledge's 'boredom' in the first act as an attitude to be commended and emulated he complains that

> weariness is the most pardonable of faults. But it is the most unpardonable of virtues, (Chesterton op.cit.),

and he relates the boredom of a bored man to the blindness of a blind man. The point, of course, is that the society Ruttledge rejects is blind, in the Blakean sense:

> We are led to believe a lie
> When we see with not through the eye, (Blake op.cit.III p79).

Perfect joy arises from the anarchy of battle. After 1902 this message is conveyed in increasingly Nietzschean tones.[25] In the 1903 introduction to Augusta Gregory's Gods and Fighting Men he claims that

> in supreme art or in supreme life there is the influence of the sun too, and the sun brings with it, as old writers tell us, not merely discipline but joy..... the expression of the individual soul turning itself into a pure fire and imposing its own pattern, its own music, upon the heaviness and the dumbness that is in others and in itself, (Ex 26).

This is the genesis of a question asked in 1910:

> How should the world be luckier if this house,
> Where passion and precision have been one
> Time out of mind, become too ruinous
> To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun?
> And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow
> Where wings have memory of wings, and all
> That comes of the best knit to the best? (VP 264).

The sun breeds the "lidless eye", but that eye is nourished by perpetual battle.[26] Yeats's ironical characterisation of the eagle thoughts as "sweet" and "laughing" is the feature that most distances the subject of

this poem from the mass of common humanity, which is overcome by sentiment and self-pity at the prospect of death by battle. As Oisin's fenians exulted in war from which only the best emerged, so we are urged in 1910 to cast an unblinking, detatched eye at the purifying fire that destroys the dross. In a speech to the British Association, part of which is reproduced in 'Samhain: 1908', Yeats encourages us to "rejoice in battle", and to find "the sweetest of all music to be the stroke of a sword" (Ex 243). The doctrine emerges more fully in the 1907 essay, 'Poetry and Tradition':

> we were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end re-establish the old, confident, joyous world.....
> 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 a 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, (E & I 249, 252-3).

Filled with the "most personal and wilful fire" Shakespeare's characters, for instance,

> speak out of an ecstasy that is one-half the self-surrender of sorrow, and one-half the last playing and mockery of the victorious sword before the defeated world, (E & I 254).

This joy has shaped and ennobled the arts (E & I 254-6), and in a letter of 1903 or 1904, to AE, Yeats demands that they have "no emotions, however absurd, in which there is not an athletic joy" (NLD Ms 15,600). He reaffirms this in a letter of 1929 to Sturge Moore:

> the one heroic sanction is that of the last battle of the Norse Gods, of a gay struggle without hope. Long ago I used to puzzle Maud Gonne by always avowing ultimate defeat as a test. Our literary movement would be worthless but for its defeat, (LTSM 154).[27]

His reading of Nietzsche confirmed Darwinian apprehensions of the necessity of struggle: it did not subsume it, and it did not take him in a new metaphysical direction. Clearly Yeats's belief in the value of war, and in the joy of those who labour to overcome obstacles and know triumph (Au 471),[28] predates his acquaintance with Nietzsche's works. In 'Rosa Alchemica' he writes of a vision:

> I was possessed with the phantasy that the sea, which kept covering it [the Temple of the Alchemical Rose] with showers of white foam, was claiming it as part of some indefinite and passionate life, which had begun to war upon our orderly and careful days, and was about to plunge the world into a night as obscure as that which followed the downfall of the classical world. One part of my mind mocked this phantastic terror, but the other, the part that still lay half plunged in vision, listened to the clash of unknown armies, and shuddered at unimaginable fanaticisms, that hung in those grey leaping waves, (VSR 138).[29]

This vision, peculiarly remisicent of Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach', anticipates a fundamental conclusion of A Vision by over thirty years:

> after an age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace, comes an age of freedom, fiction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war. Has our age burned to the socket? (AV(B) 52, and 17).

The passionate celebration of violence in 1930 -

> those invisible beings I have learned to trust would turn me from all that is not conflict, that is not from sword in hand..... I cannot discover truth by logic unless that logic serve passion, and only then if the logic be ready to cut its own throat, tear out its own eyes, (Ex 301),

- is an expression of a bargain made half a century previously with a scientific mode of thought that made irresistible demands.

My purpose in this chapter has been to examine the nature of the balance prescribed by the poems that attack obsession. The message of 'The Two Trees' is that for every Sephirothic virtue there is a Qlippothic vice, a restatement of the fundamental Hermetic axiom, and that because such balance is beyond nature, is divinely ordained, it should be expressed as

much in the world of Assiah, of action, as in any of the other, more spiritual world. Political ends are unattainable if insufficient care is taken of the spiritual dimension, but the spiritual dimension is only a dimension, and man must retain, or recapture a multi-dimensional perspective. To keep these facets of the human experience equally in view man requires, of course, an unusual objectivity. The "lidless eye that loves the sun" is bred where "passion and precision have been one", and the sole value of Randolph Stow's poem, 'Anarchy' (published by Cross and Jeffares in IER 279), is its recognition that a cold sanity balances and nourishes Yeats's romantic 'madness'. The anarchy of 'Where There Is Nothing' is a by-product of the resultant tensions. If man is to approach his condition with the necessary balance he must dislodge all his preconceptions, and the physical manifestation of those preconceptions, social order, must be destroyed. The purging fire of the play is alchemical, and a similar play could well have been written without Nietzsche's heavy-handed assistance.

This thesis begins with an account of the early scientific influences on Yeats, and examines the implications of nineteenth century scientific research for the established Church, for the burgeoning fringe religions, and for the socio-political organisation of civilisation. Yeats's speculations on these matters, poetic and philosophical, are seen to be

consistent with a thorough understanding of the scientific rationale, and a willingness or, more correctly, a need to apply that rationale to his metaphysic. The poetic expression of this is, stylistically, a logical syntax and a progressively 'harder' poetic, and thematically, a series of persistent statements against obsession. My purpose in all this has been to show firstly that Yeats, contrary to traditional critical assumptions, did accept science, and secondly, why he had to accept science. To reject one aspect of the 'truth' would entail obsession with the other. Yeats perceived a kind of truth in logic and its creation, science, and consequently he was forced to recognise its value, even though it cut across his much vaunted romanticism. Science, separated from philosophy, might well be "the opium of the suburbs" (Ex 340), but no philosophy was tenable for Yeats that did not accommodate logical, empirical structures. The spiring treadmill, so essential to the imagination, which Yeats is forced to ascend has its foundations securely lodged in that "impossible plaything of practical men",[30] Berkeley's "pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world".

At the beginning of this thesis I referred to A.E. Waite's distinction between the mystic and the occultist. The mystic, Waite considered, is not only untouched by the 'science' of the occult, he stands apart from any scientific evaluation of occult system. The occultist, on the other hand, is a 'student': he studies materials and forces that exist outside himself, and he does so with a scientific discipline. In 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae' Yeats turns, without acknowledgement, to this distinction. The best sort of mystic becomes the 'saint', and the best sort of occultist becomes the 'sage' or 'hero', two types of the same Quester:

> the desire that is satisfied is not a great desire, nor has the shoulder used all its might that an unbreakable gate has never

> strained. The saint alone is not deceived, neither thrusting with his shoulder nor holding out unsatisfied hands. He would climb without wandering to the antithetical self of the world, the Indian narrowing his thought in meditation or driving it away in contemplation, the Christian copying Christ, the antithetical self of the classical world, (Myth 337).

The hero, on the other hand, "loves the world till it breaks him" (ibid.). Saint and hero, those most perfectly developed, and most perfectly suited to the Quest,

> cannot be content to pass at moments to that hollow image and after become their heterogeneous selves, but would always, if they could, resemble the antithetical self, (Myth 333).

This is important, because

> the other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self..... comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality, (Myth 331, my italics).

They are not deceived because they can objectively assess the whole man. Perfection consists in atonement with the anti-self: failure is "false faith", which arises from "hiding from our thoughts the causes of doubt" (Myth 332). Yeats elevates the faith that is born of questioning and evaluation to the highest condition of those who, like himself, seek atonement:

> I call to the mysterious one who yet
> Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
> And look most like me, being indeed my double,
> And prove of all imaginable things
> The most unlike, being my anti-self, (VP 371).

In 'The Seven Sages' the Sixth Sage accepts the ugliness of the rational anti-self, but nevertheless distances himself from the mystic's stance:

> A levelling, rancorous, rational sort of mind
> That never looked out of the eye of a saint, (VP 486).

Yeats's point is that as there are two conceptions of reality, so there are two states of reality,

> the terrestrial and the condition of fire. All power is from the terrestrial condition, for there all opposites meet and there only is the extreme of choice possible, full freedom. And there the heterogeneous is, and evil, for evil is the strain one upon another of opposites; but in the condition of fire is all music and all rest, (Myth 356-7).

The condition of fire is that proposed in the play, 'Where There Is Nothing'. The Nietzschean celebration of Armageddon is designed to mask the implications of the purifying flame, for "all music and all rest" would destroy "full freedom". That flame establishes a state

> where emotion is not brought to any sudden stop, where there is neither wall nor gate, that we would rise..... We may pray to that last condition by any name so long as we do not pray to it as a thing or a thought, and most prayers call it man or woman or child:-
>
> For Mercy has a human heart,
> Pity a human face.
>
> Within ourselves Reason and Will, who are the man and woman, hold out towards a hidden altar a laughing or crying child, (Myth 364).[31]

'Reason', once again. Not merely a concession to reason this, but a characterisation of 'Reason' as an impregnating potency, the man, without which the child can have no existence. "Reason and Will" combine to bring forth the child in the condition of fire that inspires the anarchy of 'Where There Is Nothing'. It is important that we emphasise that the force that powers the destructuring is the thrust of the rational mind.

The final stanza of 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931' is a resounding fanfare:

> We were the last romantics - chose for theme
> Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
> Whatever's written in what poets name

The book of the people; whatever most can bless
The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood, (VP 491-2).

This stanza fails to chill - and I think it is intended to chill - not because of the inflated rhetoric of its close, but because of its deceiving opening. We sense Yeats hurriedly pulling on the mask as the curtain rises for his great oration. But what sort of romanticism is Yeats's? Is, perhaps, the "elevation" of "a rhyme" more important to him than the "mind of man?" How can we trust an assertion, however, loudly proclaimed, that is so deeply undermined by the entire thrust of his philosophical speculation? How can so calculated a poetic convince us of a vision of the sublime except by reason? Warwick Gould points out that "in Drumcliff churchyard there sleeps an untested skull" (op.cit. p220, see p203). I would suggest that until critical authorities begin to clear some of the romantic detritus from the churchyard gate, there is every possibility that the skull will remain untested.

1) see Harper: Yeats's Golden Dawn, p.84.

2) Graves: The White Goddess, passim.

3) F.A.C. Wilson: Yeats's Iconography, p.254.

4) ibid. p.251-4, and see Helge Normann Nilsen: '"The Two Trees" by William Butler Yeats: The Symbolism of the Poem and Its Relation to Northrop Frye's Theory of Apocalyptic and Demonic Imagery' in Orbis Litterarum, 24:1, 1969, p.72-6.

5) regarded as a perfect lyric by Swinburne (William Blake: A Critical Essay, 1886, p.120), and Rossetti (The Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. W.M. Rossetti, 1886, I p.460.).

6) S.L. Mathers: Kabbala Denudata: The Kabbalah Unveiled, 1887, p.29-30,103-4. John Unterecker sees this book as the basic source of the poem, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats, 1959, p.85.

7) as the crows are sent, in 'The Binding of the Hair', to destroy a spiritual devotion to Ireland.

8) see also Leonard E. Nathan: The Tragic Drama of William Butler Yeats: Figures in a Dance, 1965, p.91-3 and Lorna Reynolds: 'Collective Intellect: Yeats, Synge and Nietzsche' in Essays and Studies, XXVI, 1973, ed. John Lawlor, p.83-98. See also Otto Bohlmann: Yeats and Nietzsche: An Exploration of Major Nietzschean Echoes in the Writings of William Butler Yeats, 1981, p.59-62.

9) and later, perhaps, Martin Luther. Patricia Ann McFate and William E. Doherty argue ('W.B. Yeats's Where There Is Nothing: Theme and Symbolism' in Irish University Review 2:2, Autumn 1972, p.149-63) altogether unconvincingly that the character is based on George Moore.

10) VP1 1081. The authority of Yeats's tinker research is called into doubt by the testament of a 'genuine' tinker in William Bulfin's Rambles in Eirinn, 1907, p.296-8.

11) see, e.g. VP1 1071-2,1106 and VP 486.

12) Sunday Times, July 3rd, 1904. Reviews of the play were largely unfavourable. Most complained that the philosophy was unacceptable, that it was "subversive and revolutionary" (The Academy, December 13th, 1902), for instance, and that it was the "enemy of mankind. It is the philosophy of a fighting pessimism, of pulling things down, of destruction for destruction's sake..... the doctrine of the devil" (G.K. Chesterton in the London Daily News, July 2nd, 1904). Chesterton considered it a good play, but a vehicle of a "thoroughly detestable philosophy" (ibid). Many reviewers also noted what 'J.T.G.' here claims to have perceived, that, in Francis Thompson's words,

> the hero, designed for an iconoclastic genius, comes but as a bundle of eccentricities. He does not live. He is thinking as a madman rather than as a genius..... the character is a mere congeries of petty revolts, a bundle of minor iconoclasms, rather than a man, (The Academy, July 4th, 1903).

It is, of course, contrary to the entire evolutionary hypothesis that a "mania" should "evolve". See also Robert Lynd in To-Day, June 24th, 1903 and Nathan op.cit. p.101.

13) see also W.E. Henley: 'The Song of the Sword', 1890, The Works of W.E. Henley (1908), I p.49-56.

14) a line that is clearly designed to recall the message of another group of immortals, those who love and dance in perpetuity around Keats's Grecian Urn.

15) Brenda S. Webster, who sees this play as in part a depiction of Oedipal desire, but mainly of "desire for satisfaction at the breast and concommitant rage against sibling rivals and the mother herself when she fails to satisfy" (Yeats: A Psychoanalytic Study, (1973) 1974, p.71), sees one of the major themes of the play as ambivalence (ibid. p.79). The major expression of that ambivalence is the "terrible laughing beast" that Ruttledge seeks:

> the beast is at first identified with Paul and expresses Paul's destructive urges towards his mother, father, brothers, rivals, and the world. When the beast is externalised and attacks the hero, it represents the castrating, devouring mother who arises in retaliation for the child's sadistic urges.

The value of this sort of psychoanalytic critique is extremely doubtful. What is certain is that this desire to perceive in Yeats's psyche oppositions, rather than balance and reconciliation, blunts sensitivity to his poetic.

16) see McFate and Doherty op.cit. and Giorgio Melchiori: The Whole Mystery of Art, 1960, p.43-72.

17) as Harper himself suggests, CLQ 114-6, and Yeats's Quest for Eden, 1965, p.312.

18) see also Mem 158 where Yeats uses both Blake and Nietzsche to explain his belief in "unrestrained life".

19) see, e.g. Waite: The Holy Kabbalah p.371-2.

20) in Celtic lore the hazel is the tree of wisdom and of the poet - the name of the god MacCool means Son of Hazel - see Graves: The White Goddess, p.181-2.

21) ibid. p.174-6,245-6. The notion that the wise detect God in the unity of all things is inherent in ancient Celtic belief - see, e.g. the great Fionn's music of "what happens". Egan O'Rahilly wrote, in 'Inis Fal', that "Nothing is whole that could be broke": Yeats characteristically twists this into its paradoxical antithesis in 'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop'.

22) see also VSR 49. The 'nothingness' of God emerges in 'The Hour Glass' (VP1 634) and, of course, in 'The Unicorn from the Stars'.

23) perhaps even a political one. O'Leary had warned that although no gentleman might ever be a socialist, he could be an anarchist - Au 211.

24) the play also has clear affinities with the 1896 story, 'Where There is Nothing, There is God'.

25) or Heraclitean - Mem 216.

26) as in 'The Wanderings of Oisin', Book II.

27) perhaps this is an imaginative redefinition of a childhood fantasy - Au 14.

28) "is victorious" in Mem 152. See also Fahmy Farag: The Opposing Virtues, 1978, p.8-12. Farag demonstrates that Yeats's attitude to war was nurtured by Blake and by the occult tuition of HPB and Mathers. See also Barton R. Friedman: 'Yeats, Johnson, and Ireland's Heroic Dead' in Eire-Ireland, 7:4, 1972, p.32-47, for Yeats's "creative misinterpretation" of Johnson's 'Ways of War' in 'Poetry and Tradition'.

29) see also L259, and we should remember that even in the post-Nietzsche 'Poetry and Tradition' Yeats is writing of the '90s. See also VP 43 (l.209-13), and 244 (l.459).

30) Donald T. Torchiana: W.B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland, 1966, p.236-7.

31) an image that is, I think, deliberately designed to recall a specific Tarot trump, the Last Judgement (Card XX). The spiritual significance of this card is Fire, and its esoteric title the 'Spirit of the Primal Fire'. Gareth Knight writes of it that

> this Path is said to regulate the motions of the Sun and Moon, the supreme symbols of radiation and receptivity. In man this is the relationship between Individuality and Personality, and also..... the relationship between leader and led, for on this Path are the analogues of the first struggles towards the nation, (op.cit. II p.30, and see p.29-37).

I mention this to show that Yeats once again has in mind a path between objective and subjective thought. "Ultimately", Knight continues, "there is no contradiction between individual and corporate free-will, which does not imply the entire subjugation of one by the other, but simply a true appreciation of unity" (p.31).

## Appendix 1

Cairns Craigs: Yeats, Eliot and Pound and the Politics of Poetry: Richest to the Richest (London: Croom Helm; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), pp.323.
Reproduced from Yeats Annual 3 (1984), ed. Warwick Gould

Cairns Craig has ably demonstrated in this study that "the open poem demanded as its counterbalance the closed society." Yeats's belief that poetry "cannot be understood without a rich memory" ('Certain Noble Plays of Japan') is a justification for reworking, and to some extent recreating, Celtic legendary material. At the same time it emphasises the heroic stature of the bard: "The power of memory was also a memory of power". The point, though a little glib, is taken, but we should remember that at least one Yeats persona, Paul Ruttledge, comes out strongly against memory in that anarchic early play, 'Where There Is Nothing' - along with "hope" and "thought" it is no part of the "measureless eternal life" (VP1 1139). The power, then, is in the hands of those who possess the longest memories - being the custodians of the folk tradition, the peasantry, and the makers of history, the aristocracy. These classes were interdependent, culturally as well as economically, and together the aristocrat and the peasant furnish the nation's art with its images. The middle class, because devoid of tradition, or of the memory of tradition, is excluded and cannot contribute to the aesthetic growth of the race. Craig sees Yeats as coming to hate democracy, mass education and industry because they are hostile to the notion of "richest to the richest", and therefore to memory and to Associationist art. These are the bones of Craig's argument.

The imagination, Hazlitt claimed in his essay on 'Coriolanus', is

> an exaggerating and calculating faculty; it takes from one thing to add to another; it accumulates circumstances together to give the greatest possible effect to a favourable object. The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty: it judges of things not according to their immediate impression on the mind, but according to their relations to one another, (quoted Craig p.23).

The assumption that poetry springs from such an imagination is at the root of Hazlitt's belief that poetry is necessarily a "very anti-levelling principle", actively promoting "inequality and disproportion". Inherent in the neo-classical doctrine of Associationism, however, is just such a taking and adding, an accumulation of circumstances, and if the discovery of Yeats's poetic as a modern translation of this pre-Romantic doctrine is unexpected, it is largely because Associationism seems a most 'democratic' rationale. It argues that all intellects begin, equally, as non-associative, and that they develop according to conditioning, according, as Locke puts it in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, to "Education, Custom, and the constant din of their Party" (2.33.18). Does not Hallam himself, whose Tennyson essay Yeats read and admired (and which Craig makes the sole link between Yeats's poetic and eighteenth century psychological speculation), claim that complete identification with the artist's "leading sentiment" is "never physically impossible, because nature has placed in every man the simple elements, of which art is the sublimation"?[1] The discovery of an affinity between Yeats and the Associationists is unexpected, too, because it involves one of the last Romantics in a doctrinal split from one of the first.

By failing to account for the dichotomy of neo-classical and Romantic impulses in the tradition, and by choosing to compare Yeats's philosophy with that of a relatively obscure Scottish Associationist, Archibald Alison, whose work Yeats patently had not encountered, Craig blunts the point of the comparison. The connection between eighteenth century criticism and psychology and Yeats's poetic, via the slender reed of Hallam's essay, is implausible. There is no evidence to suggest that Yeats was interested in, or even aware of such a tradition, particularly at the outset of his

career when he was supposedly already writing "Associationist" verse ('The Madness of King Goll', 'Fergus and the Druid'), or that he saw Hallam as that tradtion's heir. Craig, unaccountably, fails to deal adequately with Coleridge, however. Yeats knew of Coleridge's relationship with the mechanistic theories of the eighteenth century (Au 358), and it is likely that what he knew of Associationism came from Coleridge rather than from Hallam's rather nebulous account. It may well be that further examination of the chronology of Yeats's acquaintance with Coleridge would result in some reassessment of their poetic relationship. If 'Frost at Midnight' is an "Associationist" poem, then so is 'A Prayer for My Daughter'. It would seem that Craig has exaggerated Hallam's importance as Yeats's stepping-stone to the eighteenth century. A rigorous investigation of Coleridge's role might have rendered Craig's thesis more credible.

On Yeats himself, however, Craig is considerably more compelling. It is clear that the poet's "psychological empiricism" is more than an accidental throwback to Associationism, for his poetic is intensely associative. Craig quotes from 'The Symbolism of Poetry' to illustrate a Romantic (Wordsworthian) impulse that sets in motion Yeats's accumulation of images:

> If I watch a rushy pool in the moonlight, my emotion at its beauty is mixed with memories of the man I have seen ploughing by its margin, or the lovers I saw there a night ago; but if I look at the moon herself and remember any of her ancient names and meanings, I move among divine people, and things that have shaken off our mortality, the tower of ivory, the queen of water...,

and in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' Yeats explains that those processes bring him from Shelley's debt to Porphyry to Oisin's vision of the hound and the deer, to the woman with the golden apple, to Niamh,

and finally to a friend's vision of 'The Meeting of the Suns'. As Craig says, Yeats experiences Shelley's imagery not so much as Shelley's, but in the context of his own "associational potentialities" (p.39), and some of the tensions of the earliest verse are explained by that context. Fergus and Goll, for instance, seek to express a Romantic conception of nature but are trapped within Time as an associational model:

> The romantic demand that art, through the spiritual power of the imagination, should save us from the world of time is undone by the knowledge that art works only through memory and is devoted to the endless recall of the events of time (p.82).

The great value of this book is that it once again puts into perspective Yeats's claim to be one of the last Romantics, his commitment to Romantic models. Craig begins by accepting, with some justification, Hartley's attribution of mechanical psychological associationism to Locke's account of the irrational linkage of otherwise unrelated ideas and sensations. To Locke the association of ideas was a madness, because in "opposition to Reason" (op.cit. 2.33.3-4), and correspondences were due solely to "Chance and Custom" (ibid.5). The "error" of this "unreasonableness" merely gave rise to trivial associations that should be regarded as little more than pleasant oddities - the inability of a certain man, for instance, to dance in a room that does not contain a trunk at its centre, because of the circumstances and irresistible conditioning of his early dance lessons (ibid.16). The associations, for Locke, since not fixed by a rational structure, were inconsequential. Certainly, as both Coleridge and Hartley noted, the notion of association long preceded Locke, but since it was he who first used the word in "the particular Sense here affixed to it",[2] and since eighteenth century Associationists generally regarded Locke as the father of their doctrine, his examination of the "unnatural" linkage of ideas is as good a place as any to begin.

We should perhaps remind ourselves, however, that half a century earlier, Thomas Hobbes had demonstrated the principles of contiguity and causality, had applied the psychology critically, had regarded associational modes of thinking as entirely rational and natural (unlike Locke), and had insisted on the importance of memory. Indeed, since memory is to play so vital a role in Craig's thesis it is surprising that he ignores Hobbes's confirmation by the theory of the perception of the Ancients, that "memory" is the "Mother of the Muses".[3]

Hume's rejection of Locke's ultrarational psychology, his normalisation of the associative rationale, is clearly, as Craig suggests, a complete reversal of Locke's metaphysic, but it is a reversal that stretches back to Hobbes (and arguably to Aristotle), and it can be seen as an aspect of a distinct pro-associative tradition. Hume's observation is his Treatise of Human Nature ('Of Knowledge and Probability') that the definition of cause and effect is empirical, rather than rational or reflective, is picked up in the (still) mechanical associations of David Hartley. Craig contracts the genesis of the Associationist theory of Art, however, by attributing it to Hume's reversal of Locke, and in seeing the crowning glory of associative art criticism in the Humeian tenets of Archibald Alison. At this point Yeats intrudes like an embarrassed gatecrasher, and we should regard the long comparison of Yeats with Alison, since it is closed with the announcement that, of course, Yeats had not read Alison, as something of an irrelevance. Yeats did come to read Berkeley, who promoted an associationist theory of language in the introduction to his Principles of Human Knowledge, but that hardly explains the "Associationism" of the poems on Fergus and Goll. We might conclude that Yeats was an independent Associationist, in spite of, and not because

of the eighteenth century. This does not remove, however, the problem of Yeats's Associationism, and in spite of certain proto-Romantic elements in the tradition the application of psychology to critical theory inevitably carries the burden of the neo-classical rationale. For Associationists the systemisation of the psychology, and the analysis of the aesthetic were governed by the mechanics of reason. Craig's study serves to distance Yeats a little from the Romantic reaction that sought to overthrow such devotion to the rational mind.

It is in the attempt to relate the aesthetic to fascist political practice that this study begins to falter seriously. The connection, for Craig, swings on the conviction that both Fascism and Yeats's poetic depend on the irrational response of the multitude to specific images. This leads Craig to the assumption that "Yeats's turning to Fascism... is the result of his bitter realisation that the Anglo-Irish aristocracy was being destroyed as the peasants had been" (p.197). It is a rather brittle argument. Craig demonstrates forcibly that Yeats's Associationist aesthetic was retrospective, and that it would have had a reactionary, and generally deliberalizing effect on his political stance. Fascism, however, is a technical terms that requires careful handling. Partly we are, as Craig suggests, so horrified by the brutal excesses of inter-war Fascist machines that there is a feeling that to treat the subject as suitable for serious scholarly debate is to invite its reappearance in the political arena. Partly also, the prevalence of Marxist critiques of modern political history has debased the term. The problem of assimilating into the Marxist system a proletarian based revolution that, ideologically at least, is the antithesis of that system has resulted in the reduction of

Fascism to little more than paramilitary capitalism. Because of its disturbing associations the terms is retained, but its all-inclusiveness has rendered it virtually meaningless.[4] Fascism is not easily isolated, and Craig's examination of various different attitudes to, and definitions of the ideology is interesting. As it develops into a personal statement, however, his analysis focuses, perhaps inevitably, on an aspect that is particularly germane to his thesis, but hardly the whole story. Without doubt Fascism was, and is, a movement that combines, paradoxically, extreme reaction with revolutionary "progress". Ideologically Fascism is committed to continual renewal and to continual preservation, fusing past and future, (another way of putting it is that it is, as Stanislav Andreski has demonstrated, both the "extremism of the centre" and the "centrism of the extremists"[5]). Although it <u>is</u> a "bizarre and horrendous combination of constructive and destructive forces"[6] those forces are, however, clearly classifiable. Fascism is founded on a strong sense of racial and national identity, an urgent militarism that expands that racism and nationalism into foreign affairs, a violent antipathy to socialism (though not, as Craig points out, to a number of significant socialist principles), and a clearly defined ruling elite, supporting a charismatic leader, whose presidency over a totalitarian state is uninterrupted.

Although Craig does not account for Yeats's relation to the entire Fascist phenomenon, or to the Associationist tradition, his point stands. There is a link between the <u>poetics</u> of Yeats, Eliot and Pound and the ideologies of extreme reaction, because both seek progress in a radical way that is firmly controlled by events and images of the past, and both seek this paradoxically dynamic stasis in the irrational motivation of men through

images. Such a motivation is at the heart of the Associationist aesthetic, and Craig's perception of a link is an insight to be valued.

It may be possible to go further than Craig is prepared to go, and direct comparison of the three poets - of which there is surprisingly little in this account - is revealing. Yeats could not have written 'The Waste Land' or the 'Cantos' and, clearly, whatever the nature of the society demanded by the open poem, not all "open" poems are the same. It is a question of syntax, and in a study of poetics more attention should perhaps have been paid to this. As Rosemund Tuve has said, "there are few difficult images in Yeats in which the syntax does not repay study; syntax is the most unobtrusive of all methods of clarification, the closest one can come to the paradox of saying something tacitly".[7] It is difficult, as Donald Davie points out in Articulate Energy, "not to agree with Yeats that the abandonment of syntax testifies to the failure of the poet's nerve, a loss of confidence in the intelligible structure of the conscious mind, and the validity of its activity".[8]

This, of course, did not worry Pound. We might recall, for instance, his denigration of those translators of Homer who were "deaved with syntax"[9] (Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.273). It was of some concern, however, to Yeats. In his introduction to the Oxford Book of Modern Verse (and we might note, in passing, his selections from Pound and Eliot) he writes of Pound that

> plot, characterization, logical discourse, seem to him abstractions unsuitable to a man of his generation, (p.xxiii-xxiv)

that, indeed, his style is

> constantly interrupted, broken, twisted into nothing by its direct opposite, nervous obsession, nightmare, stammering confusion; he is

> an economist, poet, politician, raging at malignants with inexplicable characters and motives, grotesque figures out of a child's book of beasts. This loss of self-control..... is rare..... among men of Ezra Pound's culture and erudition. Style and its opposite can alternate, but form must be full, sphere-like, single. Even where there is no interruption he is often content, if certain verses and lines have style, to leave unbridged transitions, unexplained ejaculations, that make his meaning unintelligible, (p.xxv).

This clear call for logical, systematic literary structures, for "self-control", may seem strange coming from Yeats. Does he not, after all, consistently rail against 'logical' literature, science, realism? It would seem that Yeats's attitude to these needs some reassessment, for the railing is part of the mask. When Yeats turned from Huxley and Tyndall, insisting in a rather self-conscious 'Axëlism' that he "did not care for mere reality" (Au 82-3), he was nevertheless unable to escape the influence of the scientific rationale. By his own admission he had failed to avoid the fascination of what he loathed (Au 88). If we regard Yeats as merely contemptuous of Huxley and Tyndall, and their irrepressible logic, we miss the essential emphasis of Autobiographies. Neither they, nor their literary representatives, Ibsen and Shaw, are rejected without qualification. Ibsen's influence was inescapable, and Yeats travelled with his works (Au 279). Shaw's "athletic wit" had made him "the most formidable man in modern letters", and, although repelled by Shaw's realism, Yeats "delighted" in him, and "stood aghast" before the energy of 'Arms and the Man' (Au 281-3). Paradoxically Shaw was a sewing-machine, functional and utilitarian, yet possessed at the same time of a unique charm, powerful and irresistible. It is quite remarkable how similar are Yeats's description of Shaw and Huxley's description of a man of "liberal education":

> so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism,

> it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, ('A Liberal Education', 1868).

Yeats admired Wilde, similarly, in spite of what Lionel Johnson regarded as his "cold scientific intellect" (Au 285) and, whilst disliking Eliot's realism, he was "forced to admit its satiric intensity" (E&I 499). Yeats could not avoid science and logic, so he demanded that literature learn from them and expect the same "right of exploration of all that passes before the mind's eye" (Au 326). Rationalism is deplored but its value is not denied, and it was the generalisations of popular science rather than the spirit of genuine scientific research that "cowed [his] boyhood" (Au 143). The expression of that spirit as precise syntax is a stepping-stone to a colder, harder and less sentimental poetic. J.I.M. Stewart considered Yeats to be "at least as shrewd as he was mystical"[10] and it would appear that what Conor Cruise O'Brien referred to as "cunning", the quality that I think is implied in Hazlitt's "understanding", can be as anti-levelling a principle as the notoriously imperious imagination. Yeats knew this well, and in his essay on 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' he agrees that "the rich have become richer, the poor have become poorer,... such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty" (E&I 68). One wonders if Yeats ever really recovered from his deep immersion in the works of Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, Haeckel and Wallace during his formative years.

Cairns Craig has produced a curious, provocative and demanding book. He does not demonstrate a credible connection between Yeats and Associationism, or between Yeats and Fascism, a great deal of the information is marginal to an interest in Yeats, and at the end one is

left wondering if the argument might have been extended, and its implications pursued more rigorously. In spite of this much of the material is useful and suggestive, attesting to a degree of calculation that we may not normally associate with Yeats. Finally, though, the crucial question might not be so much Craig's - "how are we to read a poetry that tells us we ourselves are the destroyers of culture, part of the philistine modern world, 'Base-born products of base beds'?" (p.5) - as that of how we are to respond to, say, the Irish Airman's "lonely impulse of delight" when we know that it is in his nature, in so un-Romantic a way, to have "measured all, brought all to mind", and to have balanced so very carefully life and death.

1 Isobel Armstrong (ed), Victorian Scrutinies, (London: Athlone, 1972), p.89.

2 David Hartley, Observations on Man, (London: 1749), I, p.65.

3 Thomas Hobbes, English Works, ed. Molesworth, (London: 1839 etc.), IV, p.449. See also Myth 342 for Yeats's quotation of Landor on the same point.

4 A. James Gregor, The Ideology of Fascism, (N.Y.: Freeborn: London: Collier Macmillan, 1969), p.23.

5 S.U. Larsen (ed). Who were the Fascists? p.52-55.

6 Paul Hayes, Fascism, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), p.119.

7 Rosemund Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, (Chicago: Chigao U.P., 1961), p.177.

8 Davie, op.cit., (London: R & KP, 1955), p.129. See also Geoffrey Hill, "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure': A Debate" in Agenda, 9:4, (Autumn-Winter, 1971-2).

9 Ezra Pound Literary Essays, ed. with an intro. by T.S. Eliot, (London: Faber, 1954, rptd 1960), p.273.

10 J.I.M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers, (Oxford, Clarendon Hist. of English Literature, 12, 1963), p.326.

## Appendix 2

Yeats's attitude to Tyndall requires some reassessment. Although Tyndall did discuss religion and the supernatural (see above p.93-4), he was considerably less of a philosopher and cleric-baiter than the majority of his peers in the scientific establishment. He closes The Constitution of the Universe', for instance, not with a demand that 'spirit' be abolished, as did more zealous colleagues, but with a plea that the impulses of the heart be tempered by an appreciation of the legitimate claims of 'reason', that

> our spiritual authorities..... devise a form in which the heart might express itself without putting the intellect to shame,

and, in so doing, to

> utilise a power which they now waste, and make prayer, instead of a butt to the scorner, the potent inner supplement of noble outward life, (p.32).

It is possible that in his fervour Yeats took exception to such concessions to 'spirit'. It is considerably more likely, however, that the poet was repelled by the scientist for reasons that had no connection with the conflict of spirit and matter. Both were Irish:

> I was born under a modest Irish roof, and..... for the first twenty years of my life, I lived in Ireland in intense sympathy with the Irish people, (Professor Tyndall's Belfast Speech, 28th Jan., 1890, p.3).

Tyndall became a committed Unionist and Imperialist, however, and was fiercely contemptuous of republicanism. During the period of Yeats's first reaction from science Tyndall published a series of attacks on Irish nationalist activities, and British Liberalism, that possibly overshadowed for Yeats, Tyndall's relatively conciliatory approach to matters spiritual. Tyndall's attitude to Parnell was clearly indicated in his published response to an invitation in 1885 by the Pollockshield's Conservative Association to stand as their candidate for East Renfrewshire:

> [Parnell] accepts and assimilates the sops offered by the Imperial Government, and in return smites that Government with recruited strength. Give him more and he will do the same. For, be assured of it, the end and aim of Mr. Parnell is to break up an empire which he hates, and which he has taught his followers to regard as a curse to humanity, (Professor Tyndall on Party Politics, 1885, p.8).

Tyndall wrote this before Herbert Gladstone's 'Hawarden Kite' which indicated in December 1885 that the leader of the Liberal Party was becoming attracted to Home Rule (Leeds Mercury and London Standard, 17th February, 1885). He was not sympathetic to Parnell before the Irish Nationalist alliance with the Liberals, and he deplored Gladstone's continuing association with the Home Rule cause. By 1887 he regarded Parnell as

> a calamity to Britain, and, through her, to the cause of ordered freedom throughout the world, (Mr. Gladstone and Home Rule, 1887, p.5)

his followers as not only a disgrace to their Young Ireland predecessors (ibid. p.4), but also as

> 'specks' of contagium, which have already spread so far, [that they] will continue to spread, to the destruction of all social order in the land, (ibid. p.4)

and the entire thrust of his cause as an evil that will expose England to the "'burglars' of the world" (ibid. p.5).

Tyndall confessed a hostility to Gladstone that rendered the lines of his attack a little indistinct:

> it is hard to speak of him in measured language when one thinks of the wellnigh irreparable mischief he has done, (ibid. p.9)

and throughout this bitter pamphlet it is difficult to distinguish what Tyndall believes to be the precise extent and nature of Gladstone's culpability. It is unclear whether he regards the leader of the Liberals as a purely malign influence:

> in relation to Ireland, he has proved an evil-doer and a false prophet throughout, (ibid. p.5)

or as merely easily deceived, perhaps to the point of insanity:

> at his birth, or before it, the Power that made him wrote upon his brain, 'Given over to strong delusion, that he should believe a lie', (ibid. p.9)

or as something between the two, as a "prince of sophists" who dislodges truth "by untruth, and straightforwardness by double-dealing" (ibid. p.7).

By 1890, with Parnell in rapid political decline, Tyndall had clarified his position:

> by his mismanagement, cowardice, and vacillation, Gladstone is the wickedest man of our day and generation, (Professor Tyndall's Belfast Speech, p.6. See also Mr. Gladstone's Sudden Reversal of Polarity, 1890)

and he goes on to ask, a little irresponsibly in view of the serious rioting in Belfast during the debating of the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, if Belfast was

> to be placed under the control of Archbishop Croke and his myrmidons, backed by the ignorant and excitable peasants of the South, (ibid. p.8-9)

urging northern loyalists, as Lord Randolph Churchill had urged them in 1886 (see F.S.L. Lyons: Ireland since the Famine, (1971), 1973, p.292) to use force to resist sedition.

Yeats was not a confirmed Parnellite in the 1880s. Two vital influences - his father and John O'Leary - would have disapproved. Indeed his tentative applause for Parnell's progress as late as 1891 is the result of a negative response to other factions rather than of a sudden recognition of Parnell's virtue:

> my father is bitterly opposed to Parnell on the ground chiefly, now, of his attacks on his followers. To me, if all other reasons were absent, it would seem plain that a combination of priests with the 'Sullivan gang' is not likely to have on its side in political matters divine justice, (L163-4).

Yeats's facile and trivial response to Parnell's death, Mourn - And Then Onward!, is, as Conor Cruise O'Brien demonstrates (IER 216-20), no more than literary opportunism. His delight at the "insincerities" that had been "driven up into dust and vacuum" (Letter to O'Leary, quoted in MM100) by the O'Shea divorce is ironic in view of this poem. Yeats could scarcely have written a less sincere elegy. By the early 1920s, however, when Yeats came to write 'The Trembling of the Veil' Parnell was formally established in the Yeatsian pantheon. It may well be that the persistent vilification of Tyndall in that collection of memoirs has little to do with his stance as one of the more conspicuous exponents of 'matter', and a good deal to do with his unconscious alliance with the 'Sullivan gang' as a bitter and vociferous opponent of Parnell.

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