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WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS: THE MATURE STYLE

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CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF A STYLE

    The element which in men of action corresponds to
style in literature is the moral element. . . . The
self-conquest of a writer who is not a man of action
is style.[1]

    It is a curiosity of Shakespearean scholarship that

after three hundred years, it has only in the twentieth

century taken Shakespeare's style as a subject for concen-

trated attention. A pattern would seem to be evident here,

when one remembers how late or seldom the style of many major

poets has been taken as an area for examination. It is

presently the case with Yeats as formerly with Shakespeare

that every critic speaks of his style, usually with praise,

but none discusses it except in passing, or discusses it in

terms of diction and imagery only. As these are the most

immediately ponderable features of a poem, it is to be

expected that they should be most often treated, but the

assumption has seemed to be that once diction and imagery are

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[1]W. B. Yeats, _Autobiographies_ (London: Macmillan and
Co., 1955), pp. 515-16.

described, the technique has been considered. The result of this assumption, or perhaps it is only a preoccupation, is that to balance a large body of scholarship not concerned with style at all, but rather devoted to Yeats's ideas, especially with reference to A Vision (in which studies there may be some treatment of imagery, taking A Vision as its major source), there is a growing body of criticism devoted wholly to imagery and symbol, from the point of view either of its sources in folklore or occult philosophy, or of its recurrence in patterned motifs throughout the poetry. Each of these approaches, if we include biographical studies in the first, is indispensable, and all of our constantly increasing fund of knowledge about the poetry has been made possible by one or the other of them, a fund upon which every succeeding writer on Yeats must draw. Nevertheless, it is obvious that style per se is something different from a poet's biography or controlling ideas, and something more complex than the use of a particular diction or symbolic vocabulary, although these are contributory features. For this reason, and especially at this stage in Yeats studies, an examination of the style is worth attempting, even at the risk of being elementary. It cannot hope to be definitive—— a book on every aspect of the style is required for that—— but if it succeeds in being descriptive of a number of stylistic devices usually ignored, it will serve to direct attention to essential elements in Yeats's poetry which the

other approaches, directed by valuable but different aims, have considered only partially or not at all.

Any discussion of Yeats's style may legitimately raise two questions, the first a general one of definition, "What is meant by style?" and the second a specific one of clarification, "Which of Yeats's styles is to be studied?" In answer to the first, there are as many definitions of style as of poetry, but few which are satisfactory. Swift's famous phrase, "proper words in proper places," while it suggests the writer's respect for his material which organic form requires, also assumes a mutual understanding between writer and audience of what propriety, in all its senses, is, and this is an understanding which it is perhaps no longer possible for a writer to assume. A remark by T. E. Hulme, "All styles are only means of subduing the reader,"[1] is interesting for its revelation of a point of view, in striking contrast to Swift's, which subordinates or disregards the contract between writer and audience which the eighteenth century took for granted. Likewise, the comment on style which introduces this chapter shows a different but also characteristically modern emphasis in its focus of subjectivity. Both Hulme and Yeats use curiously militant metaphors, one directed at the reader, the other at the poet's self, and both

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[1] T. E. Hulme, Notes on Language and Style ("University of Washington Chapbooks," No. 25; Seattle: University of Washington Bookstore, 1930), p. 1.

lacking the balanced coolness of Swift's phrase. All provoke speculation upon social and literary tendencies; like Longinus' "Excellence of style is the concomitant of a great soul," they stimulate us by their tacit assumptions to measure the changing conditions of the literary imagination. But for the purposes of a technical study of style, less brilliantly provocative but more useful definitions of style may be drawn from others.

Middleton Murry's definition has the defect of being pedestrian, but the merit of being, at least in part, workable. He suggests that the word style may be used in three senses, not necessarily mutually exclusive.[1] First, style is simply the fluent control of language for clear and pleasing expression; in this sense, many persons may be said to have a "good style," whether consciously achieved or not. Secondly, and more specifically, style is the set of linguistic habits, personal and idiosyncratic, peculiar to a certain writer or school; in this sense, we may speak of Shakespearean lines in Donne, or of a Miltonic passage in Wordsworth, knowing that the adjective connotes a range of distinctive features to anyone familiar with Shakespeare or Milton. Thirdly, style is that use of language which shows a perfect union of subjective and objective elements, a fusion of the writer's personality with the impersonal form he has

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[1]J. Middleton Murry, The Problem of Style (London: Oxford University Press, 1922), Chapter I.

chosen for its expression. Murry does not explore the
implications of this third sense of style, and the practicing
critic must find it correct as a general observation but
vague as a critical tool.

We may, however, accept Murry's second sense of style
as defined, and use it in this study of Yeats to signify one
area of interest; for one object of this study is to clarify
more explicitly what critics mean by "the Yeatsian style,"
as this implies an individualized idiom. It is this sense
of style as the formal reflection of personality which Buffon
meant in his pronouncement, "le style est l'homme même," and
no definition which omits it can be complete. For this
reason, in the chapters which follow, consistent attention
will be given to those features of Yeats's writing which
contribute to its distinctively personal idiom.

But personality alone does not constitute style, and
simply to say that it is a _formal_ reflection of personality
implies the presence of an impersonal element which is
essential to its very nature. Murry's third sense includes
this impersonal element, but as his definition lacks the
precision and fullness necessary for technical application,
it may be set aside in favor of another which, while based
upon the same premises as Murry's, is more amenable to
demonstration. This is R. P. Blackmur's definition of poetry
as gesture: the total unity of stylistic devices in

simultaneous movement.[1] Blackmur's theory, though it is not novel, illuminates essential points which the critical theory of others often blurs, and it furnishes a formal principle which can be applied in a technical study of style.

Most readers of poetry can sense that the effect of a line or stanza, or of a complete poem or play, arises from a combination of forces acting in unity, so that it is impossible to say which one--the ideas expressed, or the sound, or the phrasing of the words--is most important. Ideally, a reader reacts equally to all combined, if the poem is good and he himself is aesthetically responsive. Following Blackmur we may call this energizing action of all the parts of the poem toward an effect the gesture of the poem--a term which, despite its air of flamboyance, defines the essential quality of movement in poetry. In his essay, Blackmur explains his title-phrase in terms of the dynamic interplay it suggests:

> Gesture, in language, is the outward and dramatic play of inward and imaged meaning. It is that play of meaningfulness among words which cannot be defined in the formulas in the dictionary, but which is defined in their use together; gesture is that meaningfulness which is moving, in every sense of that word: what moves the words and what moves us.[2]

Blackmur points out that in any passage, the words,

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[1]A full discussion of this appears in R. P. Blackmur, "Language as Gesture," Language as Gesture (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), pp. 3-24.

[2]Ibid., p. 6.

their sounds and meaning, symbols, rhyme, meter, refrain,
all contribute to this "dramatic play" and that the gesture
which they may be said to create "constitutes the revelation
of the <u>sum</u> or <u>product</u> of all the meanings possible" [1] in their
interaction. This term is a very useful one, and as it
suggests so provocatively what, in addition to "the man," is
involved in style, we may borrow the phrase for the purposes
at hand and say, "Style is language as gesture," taking
this as a fundamental principle of approach.

The validity, even inevitability, of such a principle
can be briefly demonstrated. It has been remarked above that
diction and imagery are the features of Yeats's style most
often treated. Some general observations about diction, then
imagery, considered as aspects of style, will amplify the
conception of "language as gesture" and show its function
as a critical principle. In the matter of diction, it is
widely recognized that one of the hallmarks of Yeats's
mature style is his use of colloquial words; yet, "the grand
style" is also a term applied to his work, and a reading of
the poems supports the truth of both observations. Edmund
Wilson has said that the grand style in Yeats "is achieved
through sheer intensity without rhetorical heightening,"[2]
but this is a form of nonsense, and assumes that the greater

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[1] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 19.

[2] Edmund Wilson, <u>Axel's Castle</u> (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1936), <u>p. 37.</u>

the intensity of the poet, the grander the style of the
poem--that technique is beside the point. A critic of the
style should rather ask if there is some relation between this
grandness of style and the colloquialisms so often noted by
readers, and this despite their apparent incompatibility;
for though the two features do not always appear together,
they often do, as in "The Tower," one of Yeats's greatest
poems. If there is a relation between them, this is the kind
of clarification we should expect a study of style to make,
and it should properly be included under diction. Yet one
will not have followed the inquiry far before he will realize
that the grandness of tone which readers sense is the result
of a certain rhythm as much as of certain words, and thus
inevitably of syntax (that is, "rhetorical heightening"),
since syntax helps to create the rhythm of the lines; and
that all of these things in any given poem invite equal
examination as causal factors, even, if it were possible,
simultaneous examination. This can be seen in more specific
terms if one examines any of the long meditative poems which
Yeats wrote, where the nobility and loftiness of tone is often
combined with extremely colloquial diction. The two things
can be seen interacting upon each other in section III of
"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," but it is also evident in
that poem that the rhythm, with its alternating long and short
lines, founded upon an involved syntax, establishes a certain
measured cadence which alters and controls the connotational

range of the colloquial words, and that the tight verse

form and the careful repetitions of words also act to

formalize the setting of those colloquialisms, so that they

are absorbed into a kind of loftiness which outside the

poem they would not have. By the time the reader reaches

the concluding and climactic line of the section, "Learn

that we were crack-pated when we dreamed," he has been

prepared to accept this as the proper culmination, despite

its vigorous colloquialism, of a "lofty" meditation upon the

temporal fall of spiritual valor. To say why is to become

involved with a great many more things than simply diction,

or simply "sheer intensity."

In considering imagery as an aspect of style, the

same dramatic play between elements should be expected and,

as with diction, this can be briefly demonstrated. It will

be found that Yeats's use of images depends upon the kind of

poem he is writing, and that there are two distinct types

of poetry in his work, toward either of which extreme all of

the poems in greater or lesser degree approximate.[1] One of

these types can be represented, in an almost absolute

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[1]In an essay on Yeats, F. O. Matthiessen made the
casual remark, not elaborated, that Yeats wrote both direct
and oblique poems. It is probable that the types I am
describing are what he had in mind; his terms, taken I presume
from Tillyard, are apt, and I have made use of them in my
discussion. Matthiessen's essay, "Yeats: the Crooked Road,"
appears in The Responsibilities of the Critic (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 25-40.

fulfillment of the conditions of the type, by "Byzantium,"
an oblique, non-discursive poem which works toward its effect
through image and symbol; the other may be represented most
obviously by the political ballads, but also by such a lyric
as "Speech After Long Silence," which, though richly compressed,
is a discursive poem in which the controlling structural
principle is the logic of syntax rather than the logic of
image (or, to use Crane's phrase, the logic of metaphor). A
poem such as "The Tower" partakes of features of both types,
as it well can do by virtue of its length and the structural
choices made available by length, and, as will be shown in
a later chapter, it manifests certain characteristics of the
oblique, certain of the direct, poem. Part of the difficulty
met by critics in dealing with "The Tower" is in fact
traceable to this, for the poem escapes analysis if considered
as the expression of either type alone. It imposes perplexing
conditions for the reader because it fuses two modes of
speech he is accustomed to find separated, or to find in a
ratio of dominance and subordination which has here
disappeared because the two terms of the ratio have become
one. As imagery is thus interactive with the structure of
the poem, so is it also with the prosody, for, parallel to
the two general types of poems mentioned above (and the
many variant types which stand in ranged degrees between the
two), Yeats varies the kind of prosody he uses with the kind
of poem he is writing, and the prosody is vitally linked to

the imagery, both being functions of the same structural principle. Thus, if the structural principle is logic of metaphor--that is, if the poem is oblique in expression-- the poem will usually work through a rhythm of stresses, is indeed often compelled to, when, as in "Byzantium," the obliquity consists in the disordering or omission of normal (spatially ordered, grammatically ordered) units of speech, and in the use of images to "stand for" what has been disordered or omitted. Under this kind of pressure poetic language moves almost necessarily in stresses. If, however, the structural principle is that of logical syntax and the poem approximates to the discursive norm, as in "Speech After Long Silence," then the prosody of the poem can be based on the more traditional rhythms ("meters" in the conventional sense), although these may be varied with so much subtlety that they approach the freedom of stressed verse--a device common in poems which, though dominantly discursive, approach the limit of the oblique, or take some of its features.

These cursory remarks indicate the organic inter-relation of all the aspects of style, and show the cogency of Blackmur's view of poetry as a simultaneous movement of many forces. We may return for a moment to the earlier sense of style as the reflection of personality--style as the gesture of the man--and add that it is also the gesture of language, being a simultaneous movement of personality

and form, the unique and the traditional, in meaningful
harmony. The later discussions of the different aspects of
Yeats's work will be concerned to show both of these elements
interacting in the achievement of style, and to show the
means and the effect of their fusion.

This brings us to the other question, "Which style
is meant by the Yeatsian style?" for the distinction between
"early Yeats" and "late Yeats" is by now a cliché of
criticism; indeed, as long ago as 1929, Edmund Wilson refined
upon it and distinguished three periods or styles in Yeats's
work, a division followed by O'Donnell in 1939, and still
accepted by some critics.[1] It is inevitable that the work
of a man who was active in the production of poetry for fifty
years, and at his death was ranked by the only living poet
nearly his equal as "the greatest poet of our time,"[2] should
show a changing and developing style (the motto on his book-
plate was Je me trouve). The distinction drawn between the
early and late poetry is valid, although the transitional
date may be variously assigned. But there is no question as

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[1]Wilson first made this division in "William Butler
Yeats," New Republic, LX (1929), 141-48; he used it again
in his chapter on Yeats in Axel's Castle. J. P. O'Donnell's
book is Sailing to Byzantium (Cambridge: Harvard University
Press, 1939).

[2]T. S. Eliot, "The Poetry of W. B. Yeats," The First
Annual Yeats Lecture, delivered to the Friends of the Irish
Academy at the Abbey Theatre, June, 1940. This lecture is
reprinted by James Hall and Martin Steinmann (eds.), The
Permanence of Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1950),
pp. 331-43.

to which style has made Yeats famous, which one gained him
the superior rank which Eliot asserted he had achieved.
Eliot's speech itself is probably the most concise statement
of the reason for the superiority of the later style: it is
the difference between writing in a style common to a school
or period, as Yeats was doing at the turn of the century,
and creating a style at once traditional and individual, as
he had done by the time he died. In treating only the so-
called later style, or as it may be better termed, the
mature style, I have taken 1914, the date of the publication
of Responsibilities, as the initial point, and 1939, the
year of Yeats's death, as the terminal point of the work
to be considered. When Responsibilities appeared, certain
of the older critics lamented Yeats's departure from the
minor but well-established tradition of late-Victorian verse,
while the younger ones, particularly Ezra Pound, praised
his new and "modern" idiom. Reactions varied, but all
testified to a new phase in Yeats's work.

The new phase did not begin suddenly in 1914;
evidences of it had appeared some ten years earlier. "Adam's
Curse" and "The Folly of Being Comforted," included in the
volume In the Seven Woods, 1904, show Yeats experimenting in
a sharper, more clearly defined medium, and seeking a dramatic
element by the use of dialogue and setting, devices which
might objectify inner experience, make it available to sight
as a dramatic scene, and to hearing as the natural speech

of people in conversation. By 1910 this style had gained
strength, and a number of poems in The Green Helmet are what
we now call "typical Yeats" in their expression. These
include "No Second Troy"; "The Mask"--a tightly controlled,
mature version of a theme treated sentimentally six years
previously, in typical early style, in "Never Give All the
Heart"; and "The Fascination of What's Difficult," a poem
which could stand as the most striking example in The Green
Helmet of the new idiom: direct, colloquial, self-
dramatizing. The choice of Responsibilities as the dividing
point between early and late periods is based on the fact
that it was the first volume to contain a preponderance of
poems in the distinctive Yeats style, and represents his
first full commitment to it.[1]

As its terminal date indicates, the present study
assumes that Yeats's mature style, gradually arrived at through
ten years of experimentation, was not afterwards essentially
altered, although its possibilities were constantly developed
and with varying emphases. The tripartite division of the
poetry made by Wilson and O'Donnell tends to falsify the

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[1]Thomas Parkinson, in W. B. Yeats Self-Critic: A Study
of His Early Verse (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1951), has traced the development of the early verse, defined
its qualities, and suggested causes of the transition,
particularly Yeats's work in the Abbey Theatre, and the resulting
influence of the stage upon his diction and his sense of the
dramatic potentialities of poetry. Parkinson's is a valuable
book, and has cleared the way for full attention to the mature
work.

direct line of growth, and to obscure the most remarkable feat of Yeats's career, his exhaustive exploration of all the facets of the style he had chosen. Evidence for the validity of assuming a consistent style after 1914 must rest upon the study itself, in which both "middle" and "late" poems will be used to illustrate characteristic devices of Yeats's style.

With this drawing of chronological limits for the subject to be studied, something remains to be said about its organization. If Blackmur's view of poetry as a simultaneous movement of many forces within language has shown the usefulness for this study of a critical approach founded upon that view, it will also have prepared the reader to regret the arbitrary language-divisions which the chapters establish. Admittedly, these divisions limit the mobility of approach, and among various disadvantages impose a very serious one in the constant risk of over-simplification, a vice which categories encourage. However, they greatly facilitate the arrangement of material, and whatever limitations are inherent in the organization should be partially balanced by the final chapter, which is intended as a reunification of categories, combining the single approaches of the earlier chapters into a full-scale stylistic examination of two major poems.

CHAPTER II

DICTION

Almost ten years ago, a comparison of the variant

printed versions of a small number of Yeats poems revealed

that the revisions which appeared in each successive version

of any poem were most frequently revisions of diction.[1] The

recent Variorum Edition of the lyric poetry[2] makes available

for comparison all the printed versions, early to late, of

every poem, and its evidence supports the observation that

diction was a major field of experimentation in Yeats's

progress toward more perfect expression. This suggests its

importance to Yeats as a part of the style of his poetry,

and makes diction the natural concern of a study designed to

illuminate various facets of the total style. In discussing

Yeats's diction, I will concentrate on special aspects of

the words he uses--names, descriptive words, verbs and

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[1]Marion Witt, "A Competition for Eternity: Yeats's
Revision of His Later Poems," PMLA, LXIV (1949), 40-58.

[2]Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (eds.), The
Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York:
The Macmillan Co., 1957).

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verb forms, qualifying phrases--in order to show the relation
of his techniques of word-choice both to his highly
personalized idiom and to the significant form of his poetry:
to style in its largest sense.

A discussion of the nominal aspect of Yeats's diction
is most easily initiated by a consideration of his use of
proper names, a distinguishing feature of his mature style,
and, to some readers, a forbidding feature. The names include
those of mythological characters, historical persons of the
past, contemporaries and friends of Yeats, and fictional
characters created by him. A reader may have difficulty with
the occasional appearance of names from Celtic mythology,
such as Cuchulain, Goban, Niamh, and so on, and with allusions
to Irish historical figures and events, but this background
is easily available from standard extrinsic sources (or from
Yeats's earlier work) and is readily acquired; its acquisition
is certainly not an unfair burden imposed by the poet. It
is in addition true that the poetry after Responsibilities
makes relatively few allusions to Celtic mythology when
compared with the early verse, which abounds in such allusions,
or when compared with the plays, many of which are based on
Celtic myth. The only important later poem by Yeats which
depends on a Celtic background is "Cuchulain Comforted"; the
name appears only in the title, and is there to signalize
for the reader the background from which the poem is taken.
Yeats's use of classical mythology, notably the allusions to

Helen of Troy which dominate so much of the later verse,

draws upon the traditionally known features of that mythology

and certainly creates no obscurity.

Likewise, no difficulty is presented by the names of

figures within literary or historical tradition--Blake, Burke,

Dante, Keats, Lear, Solomon and Sheba, Swift--for the range

of these references is clear; but the reader will find that

some of these figures are interpreted for him in a very

special way, and with connotations, imposed by Yeats, not

necessarily true to tradition or fact. In becoming familiar

with their recurrence throughout the verse, one becomes

familiar also with certain of Yeats's points of view which

the names are intended to embody, or ideals which they

symbolize. The context determines the interpretation we take,

as in this stanza which encloses a description of Blake:

> Grant me an old man's frenzy,
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till Truth obeyed his call;
> ("An Acre of Grass," 299)[1]

Hazard Adams has said that "that William Blake" is purely

Yeats's creation, a Blake whom Yeats has "erroneously but

revealingly" endowed with his own characteristics, and not

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[1]All page references following quotations from the
poetry are to The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (Definitive
Edition; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956).

at all consistent with the historical person.[1] We can see

the same transformation at work in Yeats's poetic use of

Swift, for Swift becomes, like Blake, Michelangelo, Lear,

the Irish patriots, and the "I" of the verse, a type of the

violent, bitter, passionate man who most fascinated Yeats,

and most appealed to his love of dramatic gesture. The

translation of Swift into Yeatsian terms is illustrated in

"The Seven Sages," where Swift is grouped with the saint and

the drunkard (for Yeats, types of intuitive natural wisdom)

against all who have the "levelling, rancorous, rational

sort of mind" which Yeats calls Whiggery. Both Blake and

Swift were projected symbols of one aspect of Yeats's self

(or, more accurately, of his anti-self), and their names are

always set in a context.charged with the passion which Yeats

felt they had themselves contained, as in the description

of Blake in frenzy for truth, or in the image of

        Swift beating on his breast in sibylline frenzy blind
        Because the heart in his blood-sodden breast had dragged
                                him down into mankind . . .
                                ("Blood and the Moon," II, 233)[2]

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[1]Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision
(Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 113.

[2]In a letter to Joseph Hone, who was preparing an
edition of Swift, Yeats made a characteristic observation on
Hone's approach: "It is not my Swift though it is part of
the truth. . . . There was something not himself that Swift
served. He called it 'freedom' but never defined it and
thus has passion. Passion is to me the essential." The
Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert
Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 791. Hereafter, this edition will be
referred to as Letters.

Yet the appearance of these names out of the past also allows
Yeats a manipulation of time, a device for superimposing
the present upon the past, to show the participation of
certain men or events in the larger pattern of history. In
"Parnell's Funeral" there is within the body of the poem no
allusion to Swift, yet in the final two lines Yeats says of
Parnell,

> Through Jonathan Swift's dark grove he passed, and there
> Plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.
> ("Parnell's Funeral," 276)

This is an excellent instance of economy of poetic means.
By the use of the name, Yeats is able to move Parnell into
historical perspective and show him as another in a line of
Irish political martyr-heroes, and thus suggest a great deal
about Irish history; and he is also able, by invoking Swift's
shadow behind the figure of the modern man, to reveal beyond
the repetitive cycle of history the community of tragic
knowledge which all great men share, a revelation which has
been prepared for by the description of pagan death-rituals
in the earlier stanzas.

This is only one of the effects which the use of
names can achieve, but one of the most important; one might
compare it to Eliot's use of quotations from past literature,
except that Yeats is more often concerned to elevate the
present to the heroic, not denigrate it, by the device of
juxtaposing past and present. Yeats's method is nearer in
intention and tone to Milton's use of the same technique with

names, bringing their range of connotational power into
context to achieve greater force for the given poetic situation,
somewhat as the chosen second term of a metaphor extends and
vitalizes the given term. The use of historical names from
the past may thus allow Yeats either to objectify through
the name some aspect of himself or of an ideal and thus
solidify the content of the poem, or it may serve the specifi-
cally technical purpose of extending connotational range
backward into history or beyond history into some universal
pattern--as the last quoted allusion to Swift suggests an
archetypal, ceremonial initiation into knowledge (the
possessive case implying that such tragic knowledge is
peculiarly Swift's property), into wisdom which is "plucked"
like the ancient apple or the heart of the dying god. The
use of names may do both things at once, of course, contribute
to both content and texture, as it does in one of Yeats's
finest poems, "Long-Legged Fly," and there the names serve
yet another use in that they form the structural loci upon
which the poem is built. In the second stanza, Helen is
not directly named, but the allusion is clear, and she forms
with Caesar and Michelangelo a series of symbols of creative
activity: war, love, and art. Ranged in that order, they
imply successive levels of creation, and the scene given to
each is thus characteristic: Caesar, active mind and stilled
body; Helen, dancing body and vacant mind; Michelangelo, active
mind and straining body. Here the names symbolize the matter

of the poem, extend its temporal and connotational range through history to myth, and form the basis for its structural units.

Something rather different is achieved, as it would have to be, through Yeats's use of historical names which have no established range of connotations for the reader, such as the names of his own ancestors, the Pollexfens and Middletons, which appear again and again in the verse. One should group with these the names of friends and contemporaries of Yeats who were not famous, as Macgregor Mathers and Florence Emery, or who were not known widely beyond Ireland, as the patriots Connelly, Pearse, and others. The use of these esoteric, at least highly personal, allusions is a device characteristic of the mature verse only and first appears, rather appropriately, in the dedicatory verse of Responsibilities, initiating what is Yeats's most personally distinctive use of names as a part of poetic vocabulary. The poems which time may prove his most permanent productions, the long meditative poems, make such recurrent use of these names that the verse has the lineaments of a personal mythology. Peter Ure, in his study of Yeats, was one of the first to discuss this now well-recognized feature of the poetry, the transformation of friends into mythological types which fuse the dramatic and the unique in a single personality; Ure cites "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" as the best

example of this mythologizing process at work.[1] This poem
appeared in 1919; twenty years later the technique was used
again in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," and many famous
examples of it may be found in the volumes of the middle
period of Yeats's production, The Tower and The Winding Stair.

The term mythologizing is a very good one for
describing the calculated process by which Yeats enlarged
these figures to heroic, symbolic proportions, but in terms
of the style of the poetry it is not so descriptive as others
might be. It does not indicate, for example, the strongly
pictorial quality which much of this verse has. Relevant
to this, Yeats made a significant remark in his autobiography
about his early training in art:

> I could not compose anything but a portrait and even
> today I constantly see people as a portrait-painter,
> posing them in the mind's eye before such-and-such a
> background.[2]

By calling the verse pictorial, I do not mean to imply that
it is descriptive of physical features, for no presentation
of Synge or George Pollexfen or the others gives specific
details of outward appearance; rather, the reader is given
a portrait of each which by highly selective details draws
the lines of his personality, these details being always

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[1]Peter Ure, Towards a Mythology: Studies in the
Poetry of W. B. Yeats (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.,
1946), p. 36 ff.

[2]Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 83.

enumerations of motivating passions. In a sense it is more precise to speak of the effect as like that of a masque, for the figures are like characters in a half-drama, half-pageant. They are seen in characteristic dramatic moments, but they do not <u>act</u>; and they are at the same time symbols, masked figures who perform their function in the total pattern of the poem, lacking both the roundedness of true dramatic personae, and the physical individuality of portraits. The processional effect derives from the fact that they are most often invoked; in "All Souls' Night" this is appropriate to the magical incantation which the poem dramatizes, but figures are "invoked" also in "The Tower" and "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," ritually summoned into the memory of the poet and presented to the reader one after another:

> Lionel Johnson comes the first to mind,
> That loved his learning better than mankind,
> Though courteous to the worst; much falling he
> Brooded upon sanctity
> Till all his Greek and Latin learning seemed
> A long blast upon the horn that brought
> A little nearer to his thought
> A measureless consummation that he dreamed.
> ("In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," 130)

"The Municipal Gallery Revisited" is the only poem of this kind in which the figures are actually perceived visually, and this is probably a result of the fact that Yeats is describing actual portraits:

> Around me the images of thirty years:
> An ambush; pilgrims at the water-side;
> Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,
> Guarded; Griffith staring in hysterical pride;
> Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears
> A gentle questioning look . . .
> ("The Municipal Gallery Revisited," 316)

Here the rapidity and sweep of the catalogue prevents the
measured stateliness of rhythm found in the other poems,
and the masque-like effect is totally absent, for the
individuality of the figures is emphasized at the expense
of the symbolic mask. It is also important that here, in
this late poem, Yeats is depending upon the reader to summon
and assemble the background out of all that he knows of
these men from the rest of the poetry; in the earlier poems,
Yeats is creating the background and the connotations as we
follow the meditative words which describe the characters of
the men.

A reader of the total body of Yeats's verse becomes
as familiar with these figures as with characters in a play,
and associates them, as Yeats has conditioned him to do,
with a certain way of life, code of values or passions, so
that when the poet gradually comes with a magnificent
casualness to allude to them without naming them (as in "The
Tower" Raftery is only "the man who made the song," and
elsewhere Maud Gonne is only "a Ledaean body"), the reader
brings to them the proper names and associations as he should.
This serves to make the reader himself a part of the intimate
circle, so that a technique which at first seems to bar him
from the poetic experience serves to admit him most closely
to it. The technique, needless to say, demands for its
success an initially sympathetic reader who considers the
circle worth joining at all, but as Yeats said once of Synge's
work,

> . . . the core is always as in all great art, an
> overpowering vision of certain virtues, and
> our capacity for sharing in that vision is
> the measure of our delight . . .[1]

Another aspect of Yeats's use of names in his verse is his creation of fictional characters who appear under the same name in more than one poem and achieve a consistent poetic life: Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne, Crazy Jane, Jack the Journeyman, Tom the Lunatic, Ribh. The treatment differs considerably from that of the other named figures in the poetry, for these, unlike the others, are given dialogue to speak accompanied by no editorial commentary by the poet. This serves to dramatize them in a more genuine way and make them more formally objectified creations. Crazy Jane is more immediately meaningful to a reader than George Pollexfen, partly because she is presented by this impersonal dramatic technique, partly because she is, more than a real person however mythologized could be, luminous with simplicity; her character has an absolute purity of outline. The case is somewhat different with Robartes and Aherne, and they are in fact the least interesting of the creations for they are mouthpieces only of two aspects of Yeats's personality. Their presence in the verse is thus only vocal, and has no more genuine dramatic element than does the Body-Soul dichotomy presented in medieval débats.

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[1]"J. M. Synge and Ireland," Essays (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), p. 420.

There is no reason for Yeats to have given them denomi-
nations more specifically individualized than the Hic and
Ille (or Hic and Willie, as Pound called them) of "Ego
Dominus Tuus," for the Latin pronouns perform the differen-
tiation quite as well and without pretending to a nominal
significance which they do not have. In yet another poem,
"The Self" and "The Soul" perform this differentiation. Of
the poems in which Robartes and Aherne appear, Yeats later
said, "To some extent I wrote these poems as a text for
exposition."[1] He had used the names first in stories, and
later in the poem "The Phases of the Moon," which prefaced
the first edition of A Vision. When carried over into the
verse the names set off two conflicting sides of human
personality (subjective and objective, mystical and practical,
and so on) but have no meaning beyond this. Their signifi-
cance as masks of Yeats has been adequately treated by a
number of critics, and does not concern us here.

Crazy Jane, as I have suggested, is a persona in a much
truer sense, and undoubtedly the finest of the fictional
creations. To say that she is a persona is not to deny that
she is a type-character, for it is precisely this which
allows the purity of line with which Yeats presents her. Her
name helps to establish the type.[2] She is one of a long line

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[1] Notes to The Collected Poems, p. 453.

[2] She was originally called "Cracked Mary," after the
peasant woman who served as the model for the character;
Yeats changed the name later: to avoid offending the peasant

of characters familiar in literature and most vividly
realized in Shakespeare's plays, the lunatic gifted with
wisdom; and she is the simple intuitive peasant whose senses
are the "chief inlets of Soul." The best description of her
type is to be found implicit in the ideal human being
imagined by Blake in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," for
two of the premises upon which her life is instinctively
founded are that man has no body distinct from his soul, and
that everything that lives is holy. Her simplicity of
character determines the form of the lyrics in which she
appears; they are masterpieces of economy, everything non-
essential refined away for the presentation of the single
human voice, itself often counterpointed or supported by a
refrain.

As Crazy Jane is a distinct type, so is her lover,
whose name places him in character, Jack the Journeyman, and
her enemy, the Bishop, whose professional title labels him
as the symbol of social and moral restraints against which
Crazy Jane is pitted. More significant than either Jack or
the Bishop is Tom the Lunatic, the male counterpart of Crazy
Jane, although they are not allied in a dramatic series. He
is one of the beggar-types which recur in the poetry, but
is also in the tradition of the fool, and fuses two types.
He shares Crazy Jane's instinctive physical response to life,

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friend, according to Jeffares; to avoid "invidious religious
complications," according to Ellmann.

and the poetry given to him is, like hers, made of brief

symbolic lyrics which present ideas in an image or series

of images--poems like condensed myths--of which this is

typical:

> On Cruachan's plain slept he
> That must sing in a rhyme
> What most could shake his soul:
> 'The stallion Eternity
> Mounted the mare of Time,
> 'Gat the foal of the world.'
> ("Tom at Cruachan," 264)

The title, with its use of his name, is like the titles of

the Crazy Jane poems, which place her in a scene before

which she reacts ("Crazy Jane Grown Old Looks at the

Dancers") or in a meditation in which she gives a characteristic

expression of her views ("Crazy Jane on God"). Like her, Tom

is also a Blakean figure of affirmative life, and his view

of the world finds its natural expression in sexual metaphors

as does hers.

At the other extreme of type-characters is Ribh,

the aged intellectual-ascetic who is speaker in the series of

"Supernatural Songs" included in A Full Moon in March; yet

despite his withdrawal from participation in life, he expresses

the same view of it as holy, and asserts this view most

characteristically in sexual imagery. Like Crazy Jane in

this, he is also like her in being set off against an

opponent (St. Patrick) who represents a more orthodox

asceticism. Ribh is regarded by most critics as being what

Virginia Moore calls "Yeats' Druid-Christian mouthpiece,"[1] and his age and opinions make him more recognizably a mask for the poet than the other fictional creations are. His name itself suggests a more sophisticated figure, at least a more exotic one, and this is supported by the verses given to him, which are complex and often obscure in ideas, intricate and various in their technical forms. However, the name lacks the qualitative extension which the adjective and appositive give to Crazy Jane and Tom the Lunatic, and in itself only contributes a vague aura of the uncommon or exotic, appropriate to the poems.

There are other "characters" who appear in the verse without being given full status as personae, such as the lady, the lover, and the chambermaid, in "The Three Bushes," and the numerous beggars and dancers throughout the poetry. But these are types only, lacking the solidity, however slight, which Crazy Jane achieves by virtue of being named. All of these draw upon the general connotations which class-names or generic names have. There are obvious standard connotations for "chambermaid," modified but still standard when allied with the contrasting word "lady"; likewise the term "beggar" elicits a certain stock response. Yeats depends upon these and uses them for his purpose.

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[1] Virginia Moore, The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 288.

Besides generic names, there are many nouns repeated throughout the verse with enough regularity to establish a characteristic vocabulary. One need not count them in order to be aware of this; perhaps any reader of Yeats automatically associates with his verse certain objects which are named again and again: swans, towers, thorn-trees. This is so common an association that any later poet who uses dolphins or dancers in his verse is immediately assumed to have been "influenced" by Yeats. This suggests the essential importance of nouns in creating the distinctive marks of a man's style. Some years ago Gertrude Stein announced, in her own repetitive fashion, that poetry was in fact based on nouns:

> Poetry has to do with vocabulary just as prose has not.
> So you see prose and poetry are not at all alike. They are completely different.
> Poetry is I say essentially a vocabulary just as prose is essentially not.
> And what is the vocabulary of which poetry absolutely is. It is a vocabulary entirely based on the noun as prose is essentially and determinately and vigorously not based on the noun.[1]

Stein's view of poetry has been called by Josephine Miles a simplified version of the representative modern view, a conclusion based on work which Miss Miles has done on the language of modern poets.[2] Her survey of these poets, Yeats

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[1] Gertrude Stein, "Poetry and Grammar," Lectures in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 230-31. This volume of lectures was first published in 1935.

[2] Josephine Miles, The Primary Language of Poetry in the 1940's (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

included, shows that the strongest use of verbs is by the
older poets--Frost, for example--and the strongest use of
nouns is by younger poets in the Pound tradition. Yeats
represents a balance between the two extremes, as might be
expected from the traditional aspects of his style.

This traditionalism in Yeats's poetry has been
spoken of before and will concern us later in the discussion
of his verse forms; it is not always a traditionalism of
subject matter, for although he celebrates tradition in
itself, the values of a classed society, the heroism of the
past, still the unorthodoxy of much of his thought prevents
the assumption that it is what Yeats says that makes him
traditional.[1] If we consider nouns and adjectives together
in order to examine some of his phrasing, the number of
times Yeats uses conventional language--that is, stock
phrases or at least ones made standard in verse in the
nineteenth century or earlier--the number is astounding, in
view of the high degree of poetic success he so consistently
achieves. My earlier remarks about his dependence on stock
responses in using generic nouns is relevant here, but the
use of convention is even more evident in phrasing. Take,
for example, the opening stanzas of one of his finest
poems, "Among School Children." Here the scene of the poem

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[1]This is evident to most readers, and has recently
been given very concise expression by A. Alvarez, who
contrasts Eliot, orthodox in thought but original in
technique, with Yeats, unorthodox in his thought but traditional
in technique. See "Eliot and Yeats: Orthodoxy and Tradition,"
Twentieth Century, CLXII (1957), 224-34.

is being set, a preliminary sketching of the particular
external situation before the poem moves its action into
the imagination of the poet; this is a typical method,
movement from the external to the internal scene, an outward
event or group of objects stimulating a meditation which
is the poem's essence. The poem as a whole is so successful
that a reader is seldom aware of the conventionalities used
in setting the scene: "a kind old nun in a white hood"
makes use of a standard connotation, indeed plays for a stock
response; the "children's eyes in momentary wonder stare . . ."
creates an accurate, visualizable picture and admits a
glimpse of that impersonal curiosity of children which is
part of the atmosphere motivating the meditation upon age;
but in its language it is not a remarkable line, and contains
no arresting word. This is perhaps one of the reasons why
critics occasionally speak of the absence of visual
particularity in Yeats's work, for he often depends on just
such generalized phrases; yet he is not lacking in visual
particularity, as other poems (or parts of this one) will
show. The explanation for this kind of diction lies rather
in what the whole poem does.

In "Among School Children" there is enough precision
of diction later in the poem, in its significant crises, to
modify the potential triteness of the quoted phrases; and
it becomes clear that such phrases as those I have quoted are
used precisely because they _are_ general. The kind old nun

and the children are not _in_ _themselves_ important, and are
therefore not particularized in language; for they enter the
consciousness of the poet only as generalized types--as he
himself is presumed to enter their consciousness only as
"A sixty-year-old smiling public man." These figures are
part of a preliminary scene, a backdrop created in large
general strokes, which, once set, can recede before the
procession of figures in the poet's mind, themselves much
more vivid because, paradoxically, more real. (It will be
noted that this makes the total structure itself, in its
implications, a statement of the theme of the poem.) We
may, at the end of the poem, move back in rumination to the
kind old nun, and wonder if she, like the other aged figures
in the poet's mind, hides tragic beauty beneath her
conventional appearance; we may in afterthought place her
among the comfortable scarecrows, but the poem does not
demand this because after the first notation of her appearance
she is not important.

Yet one should observe the descriptive words which
bring before us the remembered woman--rich, arresting words,
for she, unlike the nun, is important within the emotional
complications of the poem which draw toward crisis. As the
poem moves out of its "situation," out of the briefly-sketched
limits of time and place into the realm of meditation and
reverie, the language becomes charged with complex and
foliated meanings: the "Ledaean body" of the woman; nature

as a "spume" playing upon a "ghostly paradigm"; "honey of generation"; the child a "shape" upon the mother's lap; labor as "blossoming or dancing"; and the "body swayed to music" of the dancer, which is set in implicit comparison with the blossoming tree swaying in wind. Even the brief phrase, "brightening glance," has expanding power, referring not only to the effect of the dancer's face upon a watcher but also to the dynamic transfiguration of the face itself as joy or fulfillment moves behind the features, like light behind translucent glass.

This kind of precision is a far way from "a kind old nun" and yet it is probably safe to say that Yeats would not have dared the carefully prosaic, "non-directional" conventionality of the first if he had not been able also to command the precision of the rest. In fact, if we may judge by a comment he made in his autobiography, the range from the one to the other was highly calculated:

> In dream poetry, in Kubla Khan, in The Stream's Secret, every line, every word, can carry its unanalysable, rich associations; but if we dramatize some possible singer or speaker we remember that he is moved by one thing at a time, certain words must be dull and numb. Here and there in correcting my early poems I have introduced such numbness and dullness, turned, for instance, "the curd-pale moon" into the "brilliant moon," that all might seem, as it were, remembered with indifference, except some one vivid image.[1]

We can see this sort of modulation operating in many of the poems. Matthiessen has said of "Speech After Long Silence"

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[1] Yeats, Autobiographies, pp. 434-35.

that no other modern poet could combine such plainness of
diction with such words as "descant" and "decrepitude," or
climax the whole poem with so simple a final line.[1] One
might easily point to conventionalities of phrasing in that
poem also, "the supreme theme of Art and Song," "unfriendly
night," and so on, but the precise placing of the unusual
words magnetizes the others. Like Matthiessen, Blackmur is
a critic sensitive to the power of individual words and
lines, and his remarks on one of Yeats's poems deserve
quotation both as an example of the ideally alert reaction
of a reader and as a demonstration of Yeats's habit of
energizing the diction of a poem by placing an unusual word
in the context of conventional ones:

> It is a dialogue between lovers in three quatrains and
> a distich called "Parting," and the first ten lines in
> which the two argue in traditional language whether dawn
> requires the lover to leave, are an indifferent competent
> ad libbing to prepare for the end. . . .
>> She. That light is from the moon.
>> He. That bird . . .
>> She.   Let him sing on,
>> I offer to love's play
>> My dark declivities.
>
> Declivities--my dark downward slopes--seems immediately
> the word that clinches the poem and delivers it out of
> the amorphous into form, and does so as a relatively
> abstract word acting in the guise of a focus for the
> concrete, delicately in syllable but with a richness of
> impact that develops and trembles, a veritable tumescence
> in itself of the emotion wanted.[2]

Another example of this technique, even more striking than

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[1]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 32.

[2]Blackmur, "W. B. Yeats: Between Myth and Philosophy,"
Language as Gesture, pp. 119-20.

the one Blackmur quotes, is to be found in a poem in the series entitled "The Three Bushes." The lady speaks to the chambermaid who regularly acts as her proxy in the lover's bed:

> When you and my true lover meet
> And he plays tunes between your feet,
> Speak no evil of the soul,
> Nor think that body is the whole,
> For I that am his daylight lady
> Know worse evil of the body;
> But in honour split his love
> Till either neither have enough,
> That I may hear if we should kiss
> A contrapuntal serpent hiss,
> You, should hand explore a thigh,
> All the labouring heavens sigh.
> ("The Lady's Third Song," 297)

This is an excellent traditional poem which, up to the last four lines, might have been written by a Renaissance or seventeenth-century lyric poet; it gets an Elizabethan effect from the use of conventional love-imagery brought into careful manipulation, and its charm resides in the delicate grace with which the bawdiness and seriousness are combined. But the last four lines add a brilliance of precision that lifts the poem out of any school or period, focussing in the phrase, "contrapuntal serpent," and expanding through the total balance of the four lines. One can call to mind many such sudden triumphs of word choice which enrich or illuminate stanzas otherwise conventional or, on occasion, in danger of sentimental vagueness: "delirium of the brave" in "Easter 1916," "giddy with his hundredth year" in "The Three Hermits," "mummy truths" in

"All Souls' Night."

Yet not all of Yeats's poems contain this alternation
of "numb" and brilliant words; some poems have the appearance
of being completely conventional throughout, some of being
startlingly unconventional throughout, in the language
chosen. With the former, we may include some of the poems
which are not successful, usually through an absence of formal
strictness behind the language which might endow its
conventionality with interest; for I think it will be seen
later that conventional diction per se does not make a poem
fail--most modern poetic theory to the contrary. A number
of the Maud Gonne poems are weak not because they lack
emotional intensity or because the intensity does not create
a striking diction for its expression, but because it has
no composing form within which to stabilize itself. Many
of these, for example, "Broken Dreams," may be moving to a
reader familiar with Yeats's biography, but their moving
power in that case is extra-poetic, and does not save the
poem. In "Broken Dreams" there are devices intended to
unify the poem--the theme of the woman's beauty young and
old, the repetition of words, and so on--but no enclosing
form which might create tension by forcing the material to
move within its limits. The poem has an abundance of
conventional romantic phrasing, but we notice it so much
because it is not subsumed into a total structure, and are
deceived when we impute the failure of the poem to its diction

alone. Set by the side of this another Maud Gonne poem on
the memories of a rejected lover, itself a collection of
unstartling phrases, and the difference is immediately
apparent:

> Others because you did not keep
> That deep-sworn vow have been friends of mine;
> Yet always when I look death in the face,
> When I clamber to the heights of sleep,
> Or when I grow excited with wine,
> Suddenly I meet your face.
> ("A Deep-Sworn Vow," 152)

There is no particularly vital word in the whole poem except
"clamber," which suggests the willed struggle to get above,
out of daylight experience; and yet the poem succeeds,
because it is composed. It has the grammatical unity of a
single sentence using parallel constructions, and a
psychological unity derived from presenting certain
emotional situations similar both in their basic qualities
and in their final effect of bringing the loved one into
painful nearness within the, temporarily uncensored,
consciousness of the speaker. Not diction, but structure,
composition, makes it an exciting poem as not diction, but
failure of structure, makes "Broken Dreams" an embarrassing
poem; the subject of both, fortunately for such analysis, is
enough the same to illuminate the differences of execution.

These remarks on the relative importance of diction
and structure in certain poems will hold true for the Crazy
Jane poems, passages in the meditative poems, the short
lyric "To A Child Dancing in the Wind," and the universally

admired "The Wild Swans at Coole." In all of these, and others like them, the composition of total form endows the language with power which it may not in itself have. In <u>composition</u> I include of course the gradual creation of symbol through repetitive structure, or effects gained through contrasts of images, as the swan in the last-named poem is "composed" visually and symbolically, as in a painting, against the stones. It will be noted that "swans" and "stones" are a rhyme-pair, and the only slant rhymes in the poem, a way of juxtaposing them for our attention. Their implicit contrast is part of the structure of the poem: the stones white but fixed, the swans white and mobile, both committed to the "brimming water," but the swans retaining freedom even though at the moment of rest upon water they have a similar serenity of white stillness; likewise, the "great broken rings" of the swans' wheeling movement in the sky repeat and magnify the broken rings their movement has made on the water. Numerous other structural or compositional devices (the term from painting is helpful here) give depth and reverberative meaning to the language which, though not prosaic, is distinctly muted, simple, what might be called low-pressured.

It was remarked earlier that as some poems have this appearance of being completely conventional in language, others have a highly charged, original diction. The quotation from Yeats's autobiography in which he speaks of

"dream poetry," in which every word carries rich associations, would appear to denote the same kind of verse. In such poems words are given as much energy as they can bear, and as a result convey an intensity of power which a reader instantly feels without at first (or sometimes ever) knowing why, or even without knowing what the poem is about, in any intellectual sense. This is an effect when the imagistic quality of words is made paramount, preventing the thought-sequence of the reader which normally moves through phrases themselves "transparent."[1] That is, the words are, by their esoteric nature, or their overpowering sensuous energy, or their startling juxtapositions, rendered opaque, however intensely they suggest their emotional power, and make logical progression through them a useless endeavor. The "kind old nun" is here again left far behind, and the reader is in another linguistic world where diction expands into symbol, being not an agent for moving the reader through thought but for containing it sensuously. Where this is so, the choice of words is of ultimate importance in a way it is not in "The Wild Swans at Coole." There are a number of such poems in Yeats's work: "Byzantium," "Vacillations" II, "Her Vision in the Wood," and a number of the epigram-poems. Almost all of these have been labelled obscure, some with more reason than others. "Vacillations" II and "Her Vision

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[1]"Transparent" is a term taken from Susanne Langer's discussion of language in Philosophy in a New Key (New York: The New American Library, 1948).

in the Wood" are not obscure if their basis in fertility
myths is recognized, for then they are seen as reinterpre-
tations or modifications of the myths for the immediate needs
of the poem, but the language retains even after this
recognition its rich aura of strangeness. To take another
example of the type, "On a Picture of a Black Centaur" is
puzzling after a first reading (or several) because everything
is implicit, despite the show of explicitness in colloquial
sentence structure and in the dramatic monologue form in
which it is cast, and every word demands attention. It is
inaccurate to say that this poem is richer or more significant
in its esoteric way than "The Wild Swans at Coole," but at
first it appears to be, simply because, like a dream, it does
not yield up any significance at all beyond an emotional
meaning ineffable for most readers. However, its significance
is differently conveyed, being not so much behind the words
as concentrated in them and the poem lacks the surface
simplicity which makes "The Wild Swans" immediately meaningful
at least on c̕ ҆ clear level. In the latter poem, "autumn
beauty" and "October twilight," and the swan itself, are all
traditional enough terms to be absorbed at once; but "mummy
wheat" and "mad abstract dark" and the green parrots require
re-reading, pondering, exfoliation. It is a curious truth
that they are difficult not because they depend upon
something outside the poem which we are not given (as some
critics feel) but because they depend on the other words in

the poem and on nothing else; whereas "The Wild Swans,"
though we do not normally think of it in this way, does
depend on our bringing associations and meanings to it from
outside the poem, however traditional these may be. Most
importantly "The Wild Swans" uses structural qualities, like
design in painting, which are not paramount in "On a Picture
of a Black Centaur," where words, like colors in painting,
order the meaning.

"On a Picture of a Black Centaur," and others like
it, is perhaps what Louis MacNeice had in mind when he called
Yeats an exotic poet.[1] The use of the centaur and the green
birds helps to create the exotic effect of this poem, and
it will be observed that the appearance of fabulous or
exotic animals throughout much of Yeats's verse is a striking
feature of it. Besides the parrots and centaurs, there are
dolphins, unicorns, tortoise-shell butterflies, swans,
peacocks and birds of all kinds, and, at a homelier level,
moorhens and weasels and hounds and hares.[2] The more exotic

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[1]Louis MacNeice, The Poetry of W. B. Yeats (London:
Oxford University Press, 1941).

[2]The birds have, from the very first, exerted the
greatest fascination for Yeats's critics, an interest perhaps
stimulated the more after Frank O'Connor remarked, in a
memoir of Yeats, that the poet had always reminded him, by
the quickness of his gestures, and his enigmatic qualities,
of a bird. See Frank O'Connor, "Two Friends: Yeats and
A. E.," Yale Review, XXIX (1939), 60-88. A scholarly and
helpful discussion of the birds in Yeats's verse will be
found in Sister Bernetta Quinn's chapter on Yeats in The
Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry (Brunswick, N. J.:
Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 207-36. Far and away
the most amusing discussion is Arland Ussher's essay,
"W. B. Yeats: Man into Bird," Three Great Irishmen (New York:
The Devin-Adair Co., 1953), pp. 63-113.

of these may give an effect of "dream poetry" as in "On a Picture of a Black Centaur," or may serve to introduce into the human world of the poem the marvellous or the supernatural. "Leda and the Swan" is the most famous instance of this, but one should compare the cry of the peacock in "Meditations in Time of Civil War" III, and the unspecified "rough beast" of "The Second Coming." In other instances, the naming of animals gives an effect as of heraldic images, suggesting a hard, intricate, involved design of birds or beasts, symbolic figures out of the Middle Ages or an ancient culture (like the "bodies from a picture or a coin" in "Her Vision in The Wood"). In relation to this, it will be noted how often, particularly in the later poetry, Yeats uses a conjunction of "bird, beast, and man," the generic names emphasizing their emblematic or heraldic quality; and how often, also, he uses the term emblem, which unlike its general synonym symbol, connotes a society or group unified in beliefs and attitudes and maintaining the devices of an ancient tradition.

This discussion of nouns and phrases characteristic of the verse has included adjectives in its range, but certain observations can be made about special effects achieved by adjectives. A recent critic, himself a poet, has drawn up a fairly representative list of words from the mature poetry of Yeats to show its divergence from a list of words characteristic of the early verse (murmuring, weary,

mournful, lonely, dreaming, and so on):

> The reader may want to compare with these the words that
> occur most frequently in Yeats's late poetry: foul,
> passionate, ignorant . . . abstract, crazy, lunatic, mad,
> bitter, famous, frenzy, violent . . . fantasy, rage,
> daemonic, horrible, furious, bloody, triumphant, insolent,
> arrogant . . . mockery, murderous, bone . . . stone,
> malice, sensual, fanatic, intellect, shriek, rascal,
> knave, rogue, fool. . . . The words are full of violence,
> of toughness and strength; some have a rhetorical
> magnificence, others a sensual colloquial sharpness. This
> list is the antithesis of the other; one needs only to
> read the two to realize how completely Yeats's poetry had
> changed.[1]

It is true that most of these words are characteristic of

his mature work and do not often appear, if ever, in the

early verse; but more words from the early work are retained

in the mature style than Jarrell admits here. As has been

already suggested, one finds in much of the later poetry the

use of generalized, conventional phrasing, and a part of this

is of course the adjectival element, words like beautiful,

sweet, lonely, grey, dreaming, gentle, noble, and so on.

They are less often noticed in the late verse because the

relatively greater violence and vigor of the "new" words

overshadow and balance them. But we have here, as in the case

of nouns and phrases discussed earlier, the strong conventional

strain in Yeats's work.

Adjectives are used with considerable prodigality in

all of the poems, and with great force. They are sometimes

doubled for an effect of weight and power, and when this

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[1]Randall Jarrell, "The Development of Yeats's Sense
of Reality," Southern Review, VII (1941-42), 662.

effect is desired, alliteration may be added, as in "fabulous formless darkness," and "stupid straw-pale locks." Doubling also performs in certain lines the rhythmic function of cluster- ing stresses: "rich dark nothing" in "Parnell's Funeral," by setting three stresses in succession, slows the line and sets in relief the whole phrase. In "Her Triumph," the doubling in "miraculous strange bird" is a doubling in thought as well as in number of adjectives and serves as a form of amplification as well as of rhythmic emphasis. To achieve another effect, in "Leda and the Swan" the phrase, "terrified vague fingers," neatly juxtaposes cause and effect in the two adjectives, and also enables Yeats to vary the pattern of phrasing in a poem in which almost every major noun is preceded by a single adjective. This poem well exemplifies Yeats's tendency to use adjectives rather profusely in poems using a pentameter or longer line; in the short-line poems, adjectives are cut away to give these poems the bare, sculptured quality which is their hallmark.

Yeats shows a noticeable predilection for participial adjectives. The effect he wished to achieve with these is obviously that of movement, and the sense of an immediate present action: the participle in "In pity for man's darkening thought" (italics mine) gives the line a rich ambivalence, making the thought darken--obscure or stain-- whatever it touches, but also showing that thought itself in the progressive action of becoming obscure or tragically

burdened. The same sense of immediate and continuing action
is in "formless spawning fury"; in "this winding, gyring,
spiring treadmill of a stair" the participial adjectives
serve to vitalize the stair itself into the motion for which
it is an instrument. In "Those dancing days are gone" the
adjective focusses ambivalence (as does "darkening" in the
example above): days for dancing (youth) and days which
themselves danced (swiftness of time). Here the movement is
part of the connotation of vitality; in "Leda and the Swan"
the participles convey a chaotic, struggling swiftness of
movement: beating, staggering, loosening, burning; and they
intensify the immediacy of the action for the reader who is
also the observer.

As a major function of such adjectives is to convey
movement, so the verbs which Yeats chooses are selected for
the same power to vitalize a given scene and set it in motion
before the reader. It is very rarely that he uses verbs of
being or of stasis. In "Among School Children" the use of
the progressive present tense in "Labor is blossoming or
dancing" expresses the dynamic presentness of creativity.
Dancing, which is probably the most recurrent action described
in the poetry, as the reconciliation within balanced pattern
of varied or conflicting movements, represents an ideal of
ordered movement. Other verbs may reflect the same ideal,
as sailing in "Sailing to Byzantium" and in one of Tom the
Lunatic's songs beginning, "Things out of perfection sail."

Yeats's translation of Swift's epitaph gave this verb to
the statement of his death: "Swift has sailed into his rest."
This verb, like dancing, connotes ordered movement, but
more particularly the movement of quest, movement undertaken
as a deliberate discipline--the process of "making the soul,"
to use a favorite phrase of Yeats. "Sailing to Byzantium"
is the classic example of the verb in this sense, and there
are parallels to it in other related verbs. In "The Tower"
the movement of the swan, riding out upon the reaches of the
stream "to sing his last song," is a parallel action, as is
the swimming of Plotinus to the Blessed Isles in "The
Delphic Oracle upon Plotinus," and the movement of another
swan, in "Coole Park and Ballylee," when "like the soul, it
sails into the sight and in the morning's gone. . . ."

In contrast to these, other verbs show movement out
of pattern, reflecting chaos or violence: the rough beast
"slouches" toward Bethlehem to be born, in "The Second
Coming," as above him the desert birds "reel" and the falcon
turns and turns in an uncontrolled gyre of flight. Other
characteristic verbs are rend, stumble, stagger, fumble,
break, beat, batter. In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen"
Yeats in a violent pun says "the nightmare rides upon sleep,"
a description of Ireland at war; this is intended to be
remembered and counterpointed in the third section of the
poem when the swan, an image of the soul, may "ride those
winds that clamour of approaching night." The violence of

the verb in its first use, however, is recapitulated in a synonymous verb in the final section of the poem when the war's violence upon the roads is described, and "There lurches past" the fiend on horseback, Robert Artisson. The whole poem is thus framed in violent action, and the triumphant movement of the swan occurs only within the futile dream of the imagination.

Yet, despite the abundance of verbs suggesting movement, either ordered or violent, and the relative rareness of those suggesting stasis, it is a curious fact that one of the impressions one receives from much of the verse is that it is "statuesque," that it has the qualities of stillness, pause. It can be, on occasion, an effect of verbs actually denoting pause: "I dream of a Ledaean body . . . ," "I meditate upon a swallow's flight. . . ." When the effect of verbs, it is most often achieved by static verbs, notably stand or stare or both in conjunction, giving the sense of hiatus in natural events or consciousness ("I saw a staring virgin stand") or of a sudden cessation of movement by a mood of profound abstraction ("I pace upon the battlements and stare"). However, the quality of stasis is not primarily achieved by verbs, but by images, particularly of stone, statuary, rock, all those things which "keep a marble or a bronze repose," (the word image itself is recurrent in the poetry); and by rhythmic variations, the alternation of rapidity and pause. Such effects will be treated more fully in later chapters, and are introduced here only to point out

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that the movement achieved by the most characteristic verbs
is qualified by other features in the verse of quite another
kind.

Certain grammatical habits peculiar to Yeats's verse
must be included in an examination of his style. Some of
these have already been noted by Ellmann: the use of that
as a relative pronoun instead of who, the older form being
favored perhaps for its emphatic sound; the use of had for
would have; the occasional use of formalisms like as it were.[1]
These, however, are habits which have little or no influence
upon poetic meaning, and can be regarded as less important
than another device which Ellmann notes, that of "subtle,
complex qualifications":

> In the climax of "The Cold Heaven" he alludes to what "the
> /_holy_/ books say" with respect but not absolute credulity;
> in "A Prayer for My Son" he refers to an episode of
> Christ's life with the remark, "Unless the Holy Writings
> lie"; in "All Souls' Night" heaven is "the whole / Immense
> miraculous house / The Bible promised us"; and in "On
> Woman" the prediction of rebirth is restrained by the
> reminder, "If the tale's true." This sense of a point
> beyond which assertions may not be made is one of the
> most contemporary aspects of Yeats's mind.[2]

To these should be added the recurrent use of the verb seem,
and the cautious insertion of maybe or it may be in many
lines--often in moments of considerable intensity--to qualify
an assertion. Of course, qualification of this kind is a
device of long standing in rhetoric, and this should be

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[1]Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (London:
Macmillan and Co., 1954), pp. 135-40.

[2]Ibid., p. 144.

remembered at the same time that we see it as a reflection
of "the most contemporary aspects of Yeats's mind." However,
Ellmann is correct, I think, in emphasizing qualification as
a key to Yeats's own mental attitudes. The conversational
turn which such phrases add to the poetry is also important;
the use of maybe and of some ("Some Platonist affirms . . .")
are devices, like the parenthetical remarks and the
contractions of his verse, which can be used to suggest the
off-handedness and casual gesture of actual speech.

The use of clauses and of participial phrases to
interrupt the flow of action between subject and verb, in
order to simulate the diversion of conversation into side-
issues or to mirror the elaborations of a meditating mind, is
a very important stylistic trait which may be discussed with
more relevance as a part of syntax, and will be postponed to
a later chapter. There remains for discussion here one of
Yeats's most characteristic grammatical habits, one having
poetic functions of an important kind, the use of the
demonstrative adjective. Ellmann, who glances briefly at
this habit, comments that "it implicates the reader in a
common awareness of what the poet is talking about, as if the
poet's world contained only objects which were readily
recognizable."[1] This is certainly one of its major effects,
and should be compared to what was said earlier about the
use of contemporary figures, or allusions to them, to make

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[1] Ibid., p. 138.

the reader a part of an intimate circle. By the device of
the demonstrative, the same inclusion of reader is made,
either into a circle of acquaintances or into a circle of
mutual knowledge and experience:

> While that great Queen, that rose out of
> the spray . . .
> ("Prayer for My Daughter," 186)

> Somewhere beyond the curtain
> Of distorting days
> Lives that lonely thing . . .
> ("Quarrel in Old Age," 248)

> An abstract Greek absurdity has crazed the man--
> Recall that masculine Trinity.
> ("Ribh Denounces Patrick," 283)

These lines have been selected for their use of the adjective
most favored by Yeats, that, but other forms of the
demonstrative appear and with similar effect. The demonstra-
tive adjective may also serve in certain instances to give
the reader a kind of voucher for the continuity or fullness
of an experience of which he sees only a part. A line like,
"And here's John Synge himself, that rooted man," draws
upon other allusions to Synge in the poetry, but both poet
and reader know that the poet's knowledge of Synge, being
fuller, gives a special sense to rooted; the word that
emphasizes the quality and makes the whole phrase synecdochic
for the experience behind it (accurate knowledge of Synge's
character) which the reader accepts on faith. At other
times the demonstrative function of the adjective is paramount,

and makes both poet and reader spectators of a scene. If we should alter the following lines,

> How can those terrified vague fingers push
> The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
> ("Leda and the Swan," 211)

to read "her terrified vague fingers," or alter the later phrase, "that white rush," to "a white rush," we should take poet and reader further away from the immediate observed scene, and make the question only philosophical which is here both philosophical and immediate, concerned with the physical actuality being witnessed. In each proposed alteration we would also be weakening the rhythm, for the strong monosyllables of the demonstratives give a stress which <u>her</u> or <u>a</u> cannot impose; and this fact demonstrates once again the interrelation of diction with the other aspects of style.

Any analysis of the diction of Yeats's poetry--the words which name, describe, qualify, and give action to his poetic world--reveals the presence in it of a number of disparate and apparently inharmonious elements: the conventional, the exotic, the colloquial. Yet a reading of the poetry gives a consistent impression of artistic wholeness, for the most notable virtue of Yeats's diction is the breadth and variety of its range, within which he is able to move now with massive power, now with a loose colloquial casualness, now with precision and subtlety, creating according to need a language appropriate to his experience. In its largest function, diction names the world of the poet, and it is this

function which leads us inevitably to a consideration of imagery, the aspect of style to which it is most immediately and vitally related.

CHAPTER III

IMAGERY

At the same time that the Imagists were seeking to escape abstractions by investing poetry with the sensuous particularity which they felt their predecessors had denied it, Yeats was attempting an escape from the same abstractions. He found it by a different route, and, in view of subsequent literary history, a route of richer possibilities for poetry than that taken by the Imagist movement. The deliberate struggle by which Yeats moved his poetry out of the Celtic twilight into the "cold light" of his later style is recorded in his autobiography; the prose explains what the poetry demonstrates, that Yeats's movement toward solidity and particularity was not through the objective rendering of things in themselves, but through the dramatization of self, the personalizing of poetry.

The history of the image in Yeats's poetic is really another story, and belongs to the history of his ideas; for his theory of the image developed from his theories of magic and of the Great Memory into, finally, his theory of the Mask. The ramifications of this may be traced in

A Vision; and to readers familiar with that work, all of the occult and psychological notions there related to the image are operative wherever Yeats uses the term _image_ in his poetry. When _Ille_ in "Ego Dominus Tuus" says, "I seek an image, not a book," when the "I" of "Meditations in Time of Civil War" concludes that "The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images, / Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy," readers of _A Vision_ know, and others sense, that not just a poetic device is sought in the first case or is found sufficient in the second, but something much more philosophically significant. Thus _image_ in Yeats's use is a word of ideational complications which extend far beyond Pound's famous definition of the word; when one discusses it in Yeats's work he must distinguish between Yeats's sense of it (magical, psychological, philosophical), and the more narrowly technical senses which are assumed when we speak of imagery as an aspect of style. For this study, where the importance of the image lies only in what it does to style and in the variations it may undergo according to its function, it requires definition in its technical senses only.

It is commonly agreed that an image names something which has sensuous particularity and which is therefore essentially different from an abstraction in its mode of appeal: _blossoming_ presents an image in that it names something perceptible to the senses at the same time as it

represents an intellectual concept, but <u>growth</u> names a process
not perceptible to them, or so little so as to be almost
wholly an intellectual concept. The particularity of imagery
was once regarded as essentially visual, but this is a
limitation that cannot properly be attributed to it, as careful
consideration has revealed. In fact, as sight is the least
intense of the senses, the visual quality of an image is
often the least intense of its properties, and poets who
depend upon an imagery dominantly visual may give an impression
of less sensuous concreteness than those who exploit other
facets; an obvious contrast is between Shelley and Keats.
Thus we are safer to regard an image as not necessarily
visual, but rather as capable of various kinds of sensuous
particularity, the only requirement being that it must have
some kind of such concreteness. If this is agreed upon,
certain distinctions can be made concerning the function of
images and their various contributions to a poem.

The use of an image within a poem determines, and
is also determined by, the degree to which its metaphorical
potentialities are exploited; every image is a potential
metaphor as it is a potential symbol. However, it need be
neither to function poetically: if an image is used to set
the scene of an action, or simply to describe, its meta-
phorical potentialities may be left untapped either directly
by the poet or indirectly by the images set in juxtaposition
to it. The eschewing of metaphorical images is more rare in

poetry than in prose, for when effects within a poem must be gained with the utmost economy, metaphor is the major means of such economy, whereas in prose other devices may serve. In Yeats, the instances in which an image is allowed to function only descriptively are rare; however, there are numerous poems in which the images are used to set tone and atmosphere (that is, are more than descriptive in function) but are yet only half-metaphorical, if they can be said to be that; that is, they are used for their suggestive overtones in poems where Yeats is not concerned to develop these overtones into realized metaphor.

When Yeats speaks in his autobiography of the conscious re-shaping of his style, he says that he "deliberately sought out an impression as of cold light and tumbling clouds."[1] One thinks immediately of the many thorn-trees and rocks, bare hills and windy light which form the poetic landscape of so much of the verse, and which are used to set the poems in a place, to give them the bareness, the "stern color and delicate line" which Yeats elsewhere called the artist's discipline. The effect desired is not the creation of a symbolic or metaphorical meaning (Yeats's word impression is significant here), but the creation of tone. It will be observed that in the images of thorn-trees and rocks in such poems as "Her Praise" or "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing," the primary effect is visual, and this is

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[1] Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 74.

appropriate to their function of making perceptible the
world of the poems. We may say that their function is like
that of props in a play which allow the action to be placed
and "toned," but which do not serve any further function--
although any one or all of them could, at the poet's decision,
be exploited for symbolic values.[1]

Distinguishing tonal images from metaphorical ones
is not difficult for a reader, although in theory it might
seem to be, for the context of a poem will make clear any
emergent metaphorical significance. Yeats often explicitly
draws the two terms of a metaphorical image, as in the
"unfriendly lamplight" of "Speech After Long Silence," and
in the following simile:

> She seemed to have grown strong and sweet
> Like any rock-bred, sea-borne bird.
>   ("On a Political Prisoner," 181)

In each of these examples the metaphorical implication is
obvious because explicit. These examples allow us to see
very clearly their difference from images used only for
tone or description, and to observe that once imagery is

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[1]One vice of the New Criticism, avoided by its more
intelligent practitioners, was and is a tendency to overlook
the tonal or impressionistic function of some images in
certain types of poems, and to insist that all images must
carry meaning of a metaphorical or symbolic kind. This can
be true only in certain kinds of poems, not all, and the
attempt to make every image a metaphor leads to the over-
reading for which extreme New Critics are justly lampooned.
Consider, for example, what such a critic might do with the
"long schoolroom" of "Among School Children," which could be
seen as fraught with metaphorical implications of many
kinds--but only if one assumes it must be.

significantly weighted as metaphor, it becomes directly

functional in carrying the themes of the poem. If we turn

to a shorter poem which can be quoted in full, the thematic

use of imagery will be clearer:

> One had a lovely face,
> And two or three had charm,
> But charm and face were in vain
> Because the mountain grass
> Cannot but keep the form
> Where the mountain hare has lain.
>   ("Memory," 147)

The thematic use of the image is clear in this example

because it is absolute: the poem is brief and its whole

theme resides in the image of the mountain hare. The

metaphor is considerably more subtle than is the phrase,

"unfriendly light," and more complex than the simile of woman

to bird, and as a metaphor with multiple terms, it achieves

the status of symbol. When image becomes symbol it is

capable of carrying the major burden of meaning, not just

an aspect of it, and may even, as here, contain within itself

the whole theme. As this symbolic function of imagery is of

the greatest importance, it will be returned to later in the

chapter and treated at length.

It is more difficult to distinguish between meta-

phorical and symbolic images than between tonal and meta-

phorical ones; but the distinction is not really crucial for

it is only between degrees of complexity. Yeats is able

with considerable ease to use images in any of these three

ways, whether simply to set tone; or to animate and clarify

meaning by metaphor; or to symbolize meaning. As an extreme development of the third method he is also able, as the previous chapters have suggested, to build a whole poem upon a structure of images so overpowering in their sensuous solidity that all meaning is absorbed into them. However, a much more conventional poetic method should be emphasized at present, that of stating both terms of a metaphor (the woman and bird, the unfriendly light) or of making both terms clearly deducible from the poem (as "two or three" and "charm and face" prepare for the human term in the metaphor of the hare). Yeats is surprisingly consistent in the care with which he points his significances. That the swallows in "Coole Park, 1929" are images of men is explicitly asserted. In "Prayer for My Daughter" the major symbols of the poem are developed with almost editorial explanations; in fact, that poem very neatly illustrates its own progress from tonal image to metaphor to symbol. In the poems of Words for Music Perhaps and later volumes, the refrain is often a metaphor or simile ("Love is like the lion's tooth") in which both terms of the metaphor are presented for our contemplation. An excellent example of Yeats's method of pointing significances as he creates them is found in the sixth section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War"; the first stanza of the section shows the method:

> The bees build in the crevices
> Of loosening masonry, and there
> The mother birds bring grubs and flies.

> My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.
> ("The Stare's Nest by My Window," 202)

It would be impossible, I think, to find another modern poet
who operates so consistently in this method, and without
impressing a reader as obvious or condescending.[1] Yeats is
reputed to be a difficult, even an obscure, poet and certainly
he can on occasion be both; yet these examples represent the
large number of instances in which his technique is, in the
best sense, conventional, and designed to give the greatest
possible clarity to a movement of thought.

As images may contribute to tone by importing a
certain aura into the poem, or to meaning by acting as meta-
phors or symbols which embody theme, they may also contribute
to structure.[2] A number of poems are constructed upon a
counterpoint of images. In "The Wild Swans at Coole" the
contrast of swans and stones, although only one of several
structural elements, is a means of setting up a play of
opposed meanings which, as the poem is a dramatic monologue,
may be regarded as only half-conscious in the mind of the
speaker. In "Sailing to Byzantium" the counterpointed
imagery is consciously and explicitly arranged by the speaker

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[1] Cf. Rosemond Tuve: "Yeats's images are often more
traditional than other modern poets' in method, as though in
spite of his Symbolist alignments he felt the need of pointing
a reader toward the significance 'meant to be seen'--but
few modern poets quite like to do this." Elizabethan and
Metaphysical Imagery (University of Chicago Press, 1947),
p. 177n.

[2] An image may do all three at once, of course, as the
bird images do in "Sailing to Byzantium," and the animal images
in "The Second Coming."

and set in a strict logic of ratio: sensual music to soul-
music, natural bird to golden bird, lovers to sages; and
the poem turns upon these contrasts structurally as well as
thematically. One of Yeats's favorite image-combinations,
that of stone and water, metaphorically rich in its implicit
qualitative contrasts, contributes to the structure of
several poems. In "Men Improve with the Years" this image-
contrast, taking its form as the marble triton in the stream,
is the enclosing frame of the poem. In "Easter 1916" the
similar contrast of "a stone / To trouble the living stream"
is the structural basis of one of the stanzas, although not
of the whole poem. The image combination takes yet another
form in "The Statues," a much more complex poem than the
ones mentioned above; despite its many-faceted surface
the poem founds its structure upon a contrast between the
marble and bronze statues and the water imagery of "many-
headed foam," "modern tide," "formless spawning fury."[1]

Yet another use of imagery for structural purposes
is found in the device of repetition. This is a simple device,
but an essential one in certain types of poetry. All of
Yeats's long meditative poems depend heavily on it as a means
of linking their separate sections (each an individual poem)
into a cohesive unity. In "Vacillation," the imagery of tree

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[1] Cf. the contrast in "The Living Beauty" between the
images of wick and oil, channels of the blood, and the bronze
and marble statues. One should also note in this connection
the consistency with which the stone tower is always specified
against the stream which flows past it.

and fire recurs in varying forms throughout the first six sections of the poem, the two images counterpointed in all except the second section, which conjoins them in the tree which is half flame, half green leaves. The tower is of course a repeated image in a number of the long poems. In "Meditations in Time of Civil War" it is one of a series of house-images, forming a link between the ancestral houses of the first section and the roofless ruin foreseen in the fourth section; it also parallels the "empty house of the stare" in the sixth section. In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" the image of horses links the first and last sections, is related to the dragon image in the first and second sections, and is set in contrast to the swan riding the winds in the second section; likewise, the image of dancers in the second section of this poem is picked up again in the image of Herodias' daughters in the final stanza of the poem. Since many of these long poems seem labyrinthine in the complexity of their movement from subject to subject, a movement dictated by apparently free associations of reverie, the recurrence of images is an essential structural method for clarifying the recurrence of motifs, moods, themes: the images are the continuously perceived thread. In a discussion of the Noh plays of Japan, Yeats called this technique of repeated images a "rhythm of metaphor,"[1] an

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[1] Yeats, "Certain Noble Plays of Japan," Essays, p. 290.

excellent phrase for suggesting its contribution to the movement of the poem. Even in poem-groups not intended to form a single work but rather a sequence loosely related by the experiences presented, such as "A Man Young and Old," the device of repeated images serves to link the poems into a recognizable series.

Some of the observations made above have anticipated another structural use of imagery, namely the creation of setting when setting is not simply a visualized place for the action but is also important in adding meaning to the poem. The difference between the two kinds of setting may be analogized if one considers the difference between a backdrop or group of stage properties in front of which an action occurs, and a carefully composed stage setting which determines the perspective in which we see the action. Thus the tower, the setting of a number of poems, creates the perspective of those poems by being placed in and above a natural setting of river, trees and hills; from this tower the poet looks out upon the natural world which furnishes materials for his meditation. But within the tower itself are significant images of artifice and civilization, equally the materials of his meditation: candles and books, a great lectern, and most important of all, Sato's sword in its sheath of embroidered silk. Not only is the tower part of the visualized setting; the poet and we as readers are placed within it, from which, Janus-like, we look upon two

worlds. The tower is a symbol of many things and its significance varies with different poems, but this peculiar perspective it affords as a mediating locus between two worlds is constant; contrast it, for example, with the setting of "Byzantium" where one world is shown in isolation, in the dimensions of a dream. The tower is also one of many important house-images which stand as symbols of an aristocratic way of life; all of the great houses, Coole Park being the most famous, are important as images which enclose within their range objects of both the natural and the artificial world brought into harmonious unity: "gardens where the peacock strays / With delicate feet upon old terraces."

With these general observations on the various uses which imagery may serve, we may return now and enlarge upon those images which serve perhaps the most complex function of all, symbolic images. These can best be illuminated by attention to those which appear and reappear in the verse with a consistently rich range of symbolic meaning. It was remarked in the previous chapter that Yeats is associated in the public mind with a certain vocabulary, and that the dancer, for example, is now regarded as somehow Yeats's peculiar poetic property. In that connection it was suggested that the significance of the dance as a reconciling movement accounted for the attraction it held for Yeats, and determined the symbolic uses he made of it. If we look at other images

of this sort, "dominants" in the poetry as Henn has called

them,[1] we can observe the way in which Yeats transforms

images into symbols, and the effects of the symbolic method

on his style.

One group of images which has received considerable

attention from scholars and critics is that of birds,

although critical approaches and conclusions vary widely.

Arland Ussher finds in the increasing dominance of such images

an illustration of Yeats's increasingly dehumanized

personality. Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, pointing out that

bird symbols are a major motif in Celtic mythology, regards

this as ample justification for Yeats's use of them, and is

therefore not concerned with them as revelations of his

psyche. Hazard Adams, interested in the philosophical back-

grounds of the poetry, relates the symbols to Blakean

thought and assumes this relation as their explanation. All

of these approaches afford help in reading the poems, although

some have little relevance to the problem of style. A

consideration of the bird symbol as it appears in the

poetry reveals that it is almost always employed from strong

traditional bases of meaning. The Christian symbolism of

Holy Spirit as dove, the Greek symbolism of Zeus as Swan,

give traditional sanction to Yeats's use of birds as symbols

of the supernatural, of annunciation or revelation, and to

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[1]T. R. Henn, The Lonely Tower (London: Methuen,
1950), p. 124.

this tradition we may add what Sister M. Bernetta Quinn and Birgit Bjersby have told us of the Morrigu, a Celtic bird-goddess. The swan is also a traditional symbol for the poet, particularly since the nineteenth century, as indeed any birds which sing may be symbolic of the poet. Likewise Yeats's use of the hawk as a symbol of instinctive, dominating power does not really need a gloss, although we may learn from Yeats's note to "Meditations in Time of Civil War" that the hawk had for him a rather specific symbolism ("the straight road of logic"). Similarly, when the eagle is set in contrast with the butterfly, the symbolic significance of each is made clear enough by the contrast; Yeats's note that to him the butterfly represents "the crooked road of intuition" can only specify one meaning which the symbol already has, and by specifying no other, perhaps narrow the suggestibility of the symbol.[1]

If Yeats almost always uses the traditional bases of connotation for his chosen symbols, he does not always leave these connotations unmodified; rather they are developed and altered from poem to poem, according to the needs of theme. In "Sailing to Byzantium" the golden nightingale (if it is a nightingale) is an exotic and Yeatsian transformation of a conventional symbol, the singing bird as a type of the poet.

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[1]These remarks appear in the Notes appended to the Collected Poems. One should observe, however, that in a note to Calvary Yeats claims a different symbolism for such birds as the hawk.

By modifying the symbol, changing it from living bird to
metal bird, Yeats is able to complicate its significance into
a double symbol, that of the poet and that of the created
art-work itself. A similar doubling of meaning, without
the exoticism, occurs in the use of the swan in "Nineteen
Hundred and Nineteen," where Yeats fuses its traditional
significance as a symbol of the poet (a symbolism
not made explicit in the poem) with its stated significance
as a type of lonely heroism ("Some moralist or mythological
poet / Compares the solitary soul to a swan . . .") and
transforms the swan into a symbol of the poet as hero. An
equally original use of established connotations may be
observed in "Solomon and the Witch," where the bird of
annunciation is not swan or dove, but a cockerel which

> Crew from a blossoming apple bough
> Three hundred years before the Fall,
> And never crew again till now,

whose cry announces the unity of being which is achieved in
the bridal bed by Solomon and Sheba:

> . . . he thought,
> Chance being at one with Choice at last,
> All that the brigand apple brought
> And this foul world were dead at last.
> He that crowed out eternity
> Thought to have crowed it in again.
> ("Solomon and the Witch," 175)

In this poem sexual motifs combine with those of mythology
and folklore in the cockerel symbol, which is then set
against the background of the Fall, a story unrelated
traditionally to such a symbol but here appropriated to it

in a striking way.

Another kind of imagery whose use shows the same modifications of meaning from poem to poem is the imagery of stone and rock. T. R. Henn has noted in the Last Poems a preoccupation with statuary;[1] this is in fact an image-pattern that had long engaged Yeats's attention and is closely related to the imagery of stone and rock. The first dominant appearance of the stone image was in Responsibilities, and from this volume to the final one, it remains a permanent motif. In its simplest metaphorical use it helps to create a poetic landscape, for as Yeats remarked, "It is a natural conviction for a painter's son to believe that there may be a landscape that is symbolical of some spiritual condition. . . ."[2] An excellent example of this is to be found in the "cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn" of Yeats's elegy for Robert Gregory; the landscape is there symbolic of the discipline of the artist, and of art itself when it displays the strict, intense, linear design which Gregory, like Calvert and Palmer to whom he is compared, created in painting. The images also suggest, in the loneliness and wildness of the scene they draw, the qualities of a passionate art. Related to this use of stone imagery

[1]T. R. Henn, "The Accent of Yeats' Last Poems," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, IX (1956), 56-72.

[2]Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 74.

for metaphorical or symbolic setting, one should note the
surprisingly large number of poems set at tombs; the setting
of "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" on the great grey
rock of Cashel; and the famous stone tower itself with its
"acre of stony ground"; all are "symbolical of some
spiritual condition."

This spiritual condition may differ widely in
different contexts, although taking the same symbol. Often
the spiritual condition which stone-imagery symbolizes is
that of desolation, as in the "wind-beaten, stone-grey, / And
desolate Three Rock" of "The Peacock," or the rock and
"desolate source" of the heart in "His Confidence." A fine
and subtly proliferated imagery of death-like desolation
pervades "The Magi," where the figures have faces like "rain-
beaten stones"; this image of hard coldness is supported by
others: the helms of silver and the stiff painted clothes
which the Magi wear. All of the images in combination
suggest heaviness, constriction, the rigid mechanical move-
ment of automatons who cannot will their acts. Having the
same negative emotional tone is the image of the marble
triton among the streams in "Men Improve with the Years,"
and the stone in the living stream of "Easter 1916." Both
suggest an incapacity for change, death in the midst of
flowing life, the fixity which comes from loss of vital
sympathy ("Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the
heart"). Yeats can use the Galway rock to symbolize an ideal

of life and art, the stone in the living stream to symbolize spiritual death; these examples set against each other show that the stone-image is not constant in its associations, for in every poem the context alters them.

This is nowhere so evident as in the closely-related imagery of statuary. Since all the poems which contain it, with only a few exceptions, introduce the art theme and use statuary as symbols of art, the accompanying images against which they are set determine the attitude toward art presented in any poem. In a relatively early poem (1919), "The Living Beauty," beauty in art is opposed to beauty in life, particularly the beauty which may be directly and physically enjoyed in sex; determining the choice is the poet's old age, and here we have in miniature the linked themes of many of the later and more ambitious poems: art, love, old age. The note of poignant loss is clearly sounded in the early poem; the statues are chosen because their beauty is permanently available, unchanging and still, and does not require the "tribute" of physical worship which the old cannot pay; yet the statues are "indifferent to our solitude." One should contrast with this the more famous poem which treats the same themes, "Among School Children," to observe how the images which there "keep a marble or a bronze repose" (like the statues in the earlier poem, "they too break hearts") are rejected in an exultant affirmation of life and growth, where becoming is exalted above being as

the ultimate beauty and mystery. "Sailing to Byzantium"
is well enough known not to require extended comment here as
another treatment of the art-nature duality, the metallic
bird being the same kind of image as the marble icon or
the bronze statue; yet it shows the tonal quality of the
image altered yet again by a different determining context.
A late poem, "The Statues," is unusual in containing imagery
of statuary which is resolved with, not counterpointed to,
imagery of human life; for in that poem art and life are not
in conflict; rather two kinds of life, art the symbol and
accompaniment of one of them, are set in tension. This poem,
although not widely known because its difficulty discourages
anthologists, is one of Yeats's most profound treatments of
the art theme.

The widely recognized qualities of hardness and
coldness in Yeats's verse--qualities consciously sought, as
all of his remarks on his style make clear--derive primarily
from the stone-rock-statuary images which dominate so much
of the work, and which give to it also its curious
conjunctions of the static and the turbulent, an effect
beautifully illustrated in "The Statues." One might group
with them the relatively minor but persistent motif of
bone-images. It is interesting to find that Yeats once
commented upon the recurrence of this image in all modern
poetry.[1] His own work shows a predilection for it which can

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[1] Introduction, The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,
1892-1935 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936).

be seen in "Three Things," a poem in which the bone "wave-
whitened and dried in the wind" is a symbol of loss. More
often, however, where this image appears its primary contri-
bution to the poetry is sensuous rather than symbolic, giving
the visual and tactile effect of a white sculpture (similar
to the effect of the phrase, "ivory image," in "Crazy Jane
Grown Old Looks at the Dancers"). It has been said that
Yeats's early verse resembles tapestry more than anything
else.[1] This is a well-justified analogy, and allows one to
see in a concrete illustration the differences (in tone,
texture, and effect) between that verse and the later verse
so strongly influenced by statuary.

The category of images which has received a larger
share of critical attention than any other is that which
includes images of the circle, although some of these are
often discussed in isolation, such as the moon symbol, which
has long exercised critics not always concerned with its
similarity to other images in Yeats. The symbols of the moon
and the gyre have been the particular concern of scholars
and critics who take Yeats's philosophy as their subject.
Obviously the symbol of the circle in whatever variant form
it takes is related to Yeats's ideas: reincarnation, history
as cyclical, unity of being as the perfection of experience,
and so on; all such ideas find their natural symbol in a

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[1]Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, pp. 20-23.

circular figure. "The Gyres," and one of the Supernatural Songs, "There," may be taken to illustrate very clearly this use of the circle image to convey philosophical concepts. The first poem describes human experience in its cycles as moving upon gyres, the second describes eternity in a series of circle images. Neither of these poems is obscure, and both uses of the symbol are in fact established conventions, although in the two poems they convey two different kinds of reality, the temporal and the eternal.

A man so obsessed with the idea and symbol of cyclicality as to have observed that "The Primum Mobile that fashioned us / Has made the very owls in circles move," might be expected to use it as a controlling symbol in his art.[1] The dance image itself is a variant of it; the winding stair is another. The Horn of Plenty, a recurring minor image in Yeats, is a variant of the gyre, as the Zodiac is another form of the circle. Of all of these and others, the one most dominating, at least in the poetry of Yeats which has become well known, is the moon symbol. It has special connotations not operative in the use of the other circle images, and although these are certainly not unusual connotations, they deserve some consideration, if only to justify the remark that they are not unusual.

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[1]Cf. the number of Yeats's verbs and participles which express circular movement: wind, unwind, whirl, spin, turn, spire, and perne, an Irish dialect noun converted to a verb.

When one sets out to discuss the moon symbol in Yeats's poetry, A Vision, which can generally be left in abeyance in a discussion of technique, poses itself squarely in the foreground for consideration, to be discounted or to be used as the critic thinks necessary. However, it comes into question not, I think, because it is really an essential part of the problem of Yeats's poetic symbolism, but because it appears to be essential, and nowhere so apparently essential as in this symbolism of the moon, for the moon is the fundamental symbol of A Vision. Insofar as this book may be seen as a storehouse of Yeats's ideas on many things, I incline to agree with Virginia Moore, who has traced the sources of Yeats's system more thoroughly than anyone else, that "Knowledge of his system is not necessary to an understanding of his poetry, but it greatly deepens the understanding."[1] It may be claimed further that the reading of A Vision is a delight to be valued in its own right, for-- the solemnity of its critics notwithstanding--it is a rather remarkable creation of the comic spirit. But a premise which this study of the poetry assumes is that there is no poem, with the exception of the three which Yeats admittedly wrote as "a text for exposition," which requires knowledge of A Vision for its comprehensibility. Some poems are perhaps made more quickly comprehensible by such a

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[1] Virginia Moore, The Unicorn, p. 285.

knowledge, but they are usually as adequately (often more adequately) glossed by other Yeats poems. This is especially true in the case of the moon symbol in the poetry; that it is a symbol of the subjective imagination, as opposed to the practical or abstract intellect symbolized by the sun, is something which is more clearly deduced from attentive reading of the poems than from the reading of A Vision; for in the latter book, the moon is so much more complex and intricate a symbol than the poetry gives any inkling of, that attempts to use the system as a machine for explication only hinder poetic lucidity.[1]

The subjective-objective dichotomy of the intellect symbolized by moon and sun is quite clearly illustrated, without any need of the system for help, in a poem whose title, "Lines Written in Dejection," deliberately invites recollection of Coleridge's Ode, and thus obliquely states its own theme: the loss of creative imagination. In Yeats's poem, the "heroic mother moon" is clearly a symbol of the fostering imagination, now lost, and the "embittered . . . timid sun" a symbol of the noncreative intellect which remains to the poet. This symbolism is certainly not esoteric; the moon is an appropriate symbol (and an ancient one) for that which invests with beauty, heightens values

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[1]It is significant that the moon first appeared as a dominant image in Yeats's poetry in 1904 (star-imagery dominates the earlier volumes, but disappears after 1904). This was thirteen years before Yeats married and received the system through his wife's automatic writing, and twenty-one years before the first edition of A Vision.

as it changes and softens appearances; the sun an appropriate
symbol for that which shows the world in its harshest and
most "realistic" light.

As the association of the moon with subjective life
and imagination is one which draws upon traditional, almost
instinctive, associations for that symbol, so in other poems
Yeats associates the moon in conventional fashion with love,
as in "A Memory of Youth," in which the "marvellous moon"
is regarded as the property of love. More specifically in
other poems the moon is associated with sexual experience,
as in "Under the Round Tower," where the sun and moon take
the form of the golden king and silver lady in their dance;
and in "He and She," where the movement of sun and moon
is again used as a metaphor for sexual attraction and flight.
A particularly noteworthy use of the moon symbol in sexual
terms is found in "The Crazed Moon." This poem is another
example of modification by combination of symbols: the
moon is a symbol of the ideal, but this conventional figure
is altered by Yeats's device of superimposing upon it the
moon as a symbol of changeability, specifically the Elizabethan
notion of the moon as a strumpet. The poem, a compressed
lyric on the corruption of the ideal by the destructive touch
of men, is a rather remarkable, if minor, tour de force in
symbolic transformation.

These two symbolic aspects of the moon, the ideal and
the changeable, fused in "The Crazed Moon," appear separately

in two of the major poems. The following passage is from
the third section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War"; it
describes Sato's sword:

> In Sato's house
> Curved like new moon, moon-luminous,
> It lay five hundred years.
> Yet if no change appears
> No moon; only an aching heart
> Conceives a changeless work of art.
> ("My Table," 200)

Here the moon, introduced at first only as a simile for the
appearance of the curved sword, expands, because of its
sudden appropriateness to the meditating mind, into a symbol
of that mutability which the sword's history illustrates.
By the fifth line of the passage the moon has become in its
expanding significance a major symbol counterposed to the
sword, for change is the essence of the moon in an organic
way not true of the sword (although true of its human owners),
which is, by comparison, permanent, unchanging through the
mutations of time, as the moon and the "aching heart"--which
the moon also expands to symbolize--cannot be. This organic
growth of the symbol makes possible the concluding
generalization, that the mutability of human experience is
the motive compelling the creation of art. One sees here
an image in actual growth from line to line, from simile to
comprehensive symbol, and this at the same time that the
moon-image itself performs a guiding function through the
logical stages of the thought. This is truly to make an image
serve manifold purposes at once; to describe the economy and

intricacy of movement in such a passage, only Eliot's metaphor of the poem as a dance is adequate.

If we turn from this symbolism of mutability to a poem entitled "Blood and the Moon," we can see that Yeats has again altered the symbol for his purpose. The last two sections of the poem present the moon as a symbol of the ideal, never corrupted because never attained except by the innocent, and eternal in permanence behind the waxing and waning of its manifest image. Here the moon is counterposed not to an image of art, but to the imagery of blood and violence, against which its own qualities, "the purity of the unclouded moon," may be emphasized. The context of other images also aids in this modification of the symbol from the mutable to the permanent. I have insisted upon this technique of constant modification of symbols because a good deal of Yeats criticism tends to present the major symbols in his work as static emblems, as if, for example, the moon always equals subjective imagination, wherever it appears in Yeats, or the tower always equals the aristocratic ideal and so on. Where this assumption of permanent equivalences is made, it is almost always the result of taking literally what Yeats has some-where said in his prose, without considering the numerous contradictions between statements made at different times and for different purposes. Yeats's prose is almost as easy to quote for the critic's purpose as Scripture for the devil's, and in particular Yeats's extra-poetic interpretations

of symbols must be used with care, for they show considerable discrepancy.

Certain other images, although not forming general categories or groups, may be briefly pointed out as important through repetition in the poetry. Sexual imagery has been mentioned in several different image groups throughout the chapter, but not discussed as a single category because so many kinds of images may serve this symbolism. Images of generation and the natural world, the dance, the sphere, the tower itself are all at different times used as sexual symbols, and the image of oil and wick is a recurrent one in the poems of the middle period. Yeats's increasing preoccupation with sex in the later poetry has drawn considerable attention.[1] In the Last Poems almost any image may become a sexual image, and grouping them into categories serves little purpose. One of the best of these poems, and one illustrative of Yeats's mastery of connotative image, is "News for the Delphic Oracle."

Water imagery is sometimes used in this connection, as in the last named poem, but is more often used, like the circle which can also be a sexual image, to symbolize philosophical concepts, as the stormy sea in "A Prayer for My Daughter" and the sea in "To a Child Dancing in the Wind"

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[1] T. R. Henn recently made a well-justified objection to the growing view of the last poems as the product of sexual psychopathology ("The Accent of Yeats' Last Poems," loc. cit., 56-72). His essay is an intelligent balance to the approach of Vivienne Koch and others, whose work is not so much overemphasis as unintelligent emphasis of the sexual themes.

symbolize the totality of forces operative in human experience, terrifying in their destructive power. The young girl dancing on the shore symbolizes poised and joyous innocence at the edge of experience, unaware of tragedy; at the moment of the poem, she can still tumble out her hair "that the salt drops have wet," indifferent to the "water's roar." In "The Three Hermits," the setting of that poem at the edge of "a cold and desolate sea" uses the sea as a symbol of death to which each of the aged hermits reacts in a characteristic way: the first, trying to pray, feels remorse for sin and fear of death; the second, rummaging for fleas and mocking the first, looks complacently forward to rebirth; the third (a Yeatsian hero) simply sings. In other instances, water symbolizes the flow and change of human life, as in "Easter 1916," or the soul itself in its movement, as in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," where the symbolism of the underground river which rises and disappears is made explicit: "What's water but the generated soul?" It is important to observe that even when not explicit, as in this quoted line, Yeats is careful in all of the poems to make clear the range and meaning of the water symbol, for like most such vast natural symbols (the moon is another), it can connote quite contradictory things.

Water is occasionally, not always, identified with another recurrent image in Yeats, that of the mirror. In "The Wild Swans at Coole," when "the water / Mirrors a still

sky," the mirror image is not so clearly a symbol (although
elsewhere the mirror is usually a symbol of self-absorption
or self-knowledge) as it is a part of the series of images
designed to give a duplicating structure to the poem. The
whole poem is, in a number of senses, a double image, and the
word mirrors in the opening stanza specifies and focusses
this duplication.[1] Other things than water may serve as
mirrors: in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" the sword blade
is "like a looking-glass"; later in this poem the "mirror
of malicious eyes" presents a different symbol for self-
measurement, and both images may be taken to represent two
means of identity between which a man must choose. In its
effect the mirror is related also to the imagery of hardness
and glittering light which characterizes so much of the mature
poetry. In Yeats's early verse, everything "glimmers," but
in the mature verse, "glitters."

One group of images has a special status in Yeats's
work. This is the imagery of fishermen and of "men who ride
upon horses." The emphasis upon the horseman is based upon
his traditional status in aristocratic society, and upon the
connotations of strength, masculinity, and authority, which
the man on horseback has always had.[2] Often associated with

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[1] In connection with the mirror image, and water-as-
mirror, the cover design by Sturge Moore of the first edition
of The Tower shows the tower perfectly reflected in the water
at its base, a graphic and symbolic index to the poems in the
volume.

[2] See T. R. Henn, "W. B. Yeats and the Irish Background,"
Yale Review, XLII (1953), 351-64, for a discussion of the

the horseman is the imagery of the hunt, one of the rituals

of aristocratic life as well as a parable of the acting will.

The horseman is an appropriate figure to embody the Yeatsian

ideal of the dominating passionate man, "the swordsman" whom

Yeats said half of his verse celebrated. But the image of

the fisherman has rather different connotations.[1] In its

most typical symbolic use, it is associated with qualities

of pride, quietness, loneliness. As early as 1919, Yeats

drew his image of the fisherman as the ideal audience to

whom his mature work would be addressed:

> Maybe a twelvemonth since
> Suddenly I began,
> In scorn of this audience,
> Imagining a man,
> And his sun-freckled face,
> And grey Connemara cloth,
> Climbing up to a place
> Where stone is dark under froth,
> And the down-turn of his wrist
> When the flies drop in the stream;
> A man who does not exist,
> A man who is but a dream;
> And cried, 'Before I am old
> I shall have written him one
> Poem maybe as cold
> And passionate as the dawn.'
> ("The Fisherman," 146)

It will be remembered that the fisherman is a major symbol

in "The Tower" and has there the same connotations of pride

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horseman in Yeats. It was a symbol which strongly appealed
to Yeats's Irish audience, if one may judge by Oliver
St. John Gogarty's comments (As I Was Going Down Sackville
Street; London: Penguin Books, 1954, p. 95 and p. 123).

[1]Like the imagery of the hunt, the fisherman-image
may be used for sexual themes. See, for example, the lines
about "the warty fisher-lads" in "The Wild Old Wicked Man."

and solitude. In his acts, appearance, loneliness, he is the human counterpart of the poetic landscape of Gregory's elegy, for the fisherman belongs to "cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn," to the bare hills and the high streams. There is a striking parallel between this symbol and that of the shepherd in Wordsworth; in both poets, the symbolic type, fisherman or shepherd, has identical qualities of integrity, solitude, harmonious unity of being with nature. To both poets, the characteristic life of his symbolic man is an epiphany from which the poetic imagination draws motive and power.[1]

The word *image*, like the words *symbol* and *emblem*, appears in many of Yeats's major poems: "Byzantium," "Among School Children," "Meditations in Time of Civil War," and "The Tower," to name only a few. The meaning of the term varies, but as I have pointed out earlier in the chapter, it often carries with it a train of occult and philosophical associations. However, in one very important late poem Yeats uses the term *image* more nearly as it has been used in this study, to mean the sensuous embodiment or symbol of

[1]Cf. the description of the shepherd in The Prelude, Book VIII, 1.222ff. There are a number of parallels between Yeats and Wordsworth, some of which I am sure Yeats was himself aware of, and has indicated by allusions in his poetry. These are not pointed out by critics, perhaps because the reinstatement of Wordsworth in critical favor in America is only beginning. One of the most interesting passages in Wordsworth in this connection is that on imagination in Book XIV of The Prelude, with its symbol of the moon, "emblem of a mind that feeds upon infinity." Other imagery in this book suggests parallels in Yeats.

emotions and ideas. In the poem, Yeats symbolizes such

symbols themselves, calling them his "circus animals," and

describes the distancing of life which the images of art

have made possible, admitting that his absorption in the

act of creation has led him to accept the emblems of life

in the stead of life:

> It was the dream itself enchanted me. . . .
> Players and painted stage took all my love,
> And not those things that they were emblems of.
> ("The Circus Animals' Desertion," 336)

The detached, self-critical history of his poetical career

is an exploration of the psychology of poetic creation,

from the poet's point of view; but it is also, particularly

in the last stanza, a symbolic statement of the image-making,

symbol-making process itself:

> Those masterful images because complete
> Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
> I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

This stanza implies the capacity of images to expand, by

the poet's power of "pure mind," into metaphor and symbol,

to change their connotations as he determines, to be

modified, combined, transformed into something quite other

than what their sources--"a mound of refuse or the sweepings

of a street"--would have seemed to promise. If the imagery

of the quoted stanza suggests the undifferentiated world of

the unconscious, and its sordidness, it also emphasizes that

such signs of the chaotic underworld of the mind may become "masterful images," symbols whose meanings are consciously defined and controlled by the poet. It is only when the poet fails to be a poet, when his "ladder"--the ability to create--is gone, that he must "lie down" in the world from which his images come. As long as the image-transforming power remains to him, the ladder of transcending remains to him. The poem is thus a parable of the power of imagination, and reminds us again that the root of the word imagination holds its essential significance and defines the instrument of creative power.

CHAPTER IV

VERSIFICATION

As diction and imagery are important aspects of
poetic technique, and the most strikingly emergent features
of it, they customarily receive prior attention from critics.
But versification is an equally important, though less
obvious and more problematical, area of study, and indeed
may be seen as most important of all, in that it is a
uniquely poetic device as diction and imagery are not. Yet
versification is without question the least discussed aspect
of Yeats's work.[1] This is an imbalance which will certainly
be corrected in the process of time; but a subject so large
and, in its highest reaches, so finely technical, can only
be explored with gradual accretions of knowledge and with
the contributions of many scholars. What will be done here

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[1]Many critics have commented on Yeats's use of the
refrain, and on his off-rhymes, but this is almost the extent
of work on his versification, with the notable exception of:
Marilyn J. Denton, "The Form of Yeats' Lyric Poetry"
(Unpublished Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1957).
I am much indebted to Miss Denton's exhaustive classification
of stanzaic forms found in the poetry; as she eschews any
discussion of meter or line rhythms, her study is an incomplete
survey of versification, but is excellent in what it does
cover.

in an area so challenging is only a modest beginning: the
presentation of certain basic facts about Yeats's versifi-
cation, and of tentative suggestions which may be found to
illuminate, beyond the verifiable facts, paths for future
exploration. My concern will be with both stanzaic and
rhythmic patterns, as these constitute the external structure
and the informing shape of the poems.[1]

Yeats's disdain of free verse--he called it "the
American vice"--and his preference for whatever was inherited
from the past and hallowed by association with the passions
of men (whether a sword, a country house, or a poetic form)
united with his temperamental dependence upon system to make
inevitable and natural his creation of a poetry out of
traditional forms. This traditionalism has its most marked
manifestation in his almost total reliance upon rhyme; he
wrote no poems in free verse, and relatively few in blank
verse. Of the few in blank verse, "Ego Dominus Tuus" and
"The Second Coming" are unquestionably the best, and both are
remarkable accomplishments; but one will notice that in both,
Yeats depends heavily upon the repetition of identical
words as a substitute for rhyme. This is strongest in
"Ego Dominus Tuus," the longer of the two poems, where the
inability to use end-rhymes for so extended a length of time
is compensated by the chiming of certain key words (not

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[1] I have used the term _versification_ to include both
of these; _prosody_ is a term more often restricted to rhythmic
pattern only, in which sense I will use it in this chapter.

necessarily end words) again and again: image, book, stream, face.[1]   This device gives the poem a pervasive illusion of rhyme, an illusion intensified by the near-rhymes of a number of end-words: mind/hand; brush/abashed; bough/knew.   The blank verse of "Ego Dominus Tuus" is a triumph, but the rather delicate balance of the triumph suggests that it could not be repeated often.   Rhyme remained to the end of Yeats's career his natural poetic medium, and the one which he used most consistently with ease and power.

If one momentarily disregards the evidence of his final volume of verse, the development of Yeats's use of rhyme might be described as a parabola of increasing variety.   In the early volumes of his mature career, Responsibilities (1914) and The Wild Swans at Coole (1919), the dominant pattern is of simple stanzaic forms using alternate rhymes.   However, the elegy for Robert Gregory in the latter volume anticipates a more intricate use of rhyme.   Its scheme, aabbcddc, is imitated from Cowley's "On the Death of William Hervey," and Yeats's stanza uses varying line lengths as Cowley's does. This scheme became a favorite one of Yeats, and appeared in his next volume, Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921), in "A Prayer for My Daughter."   His interest in more complex schemes of rhymes and in traditional stanza forms shows an

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[1]It is interesting to observe that Eliot uses the same device (cf. the repetition of kingdom and eyes in "The Hollow Men"), and much more consistently than Yeats.   In fact, it is a hallmark of Eliot's unrhymed or irregularly-rhymed verse.   This tendency finds its perfect culmination-- one could almost have predicted it before the fact--in the sestina in the Four Quartets ("Dry Salvages" II).

increase in each successive volume and reaches a climax in his work of the middle period in The Tower (1928) and The Winding Stair (1933). "Sailing to Byzantium," the opening poem of The Tower, is in ottava rima, as is "Among School Children" in the same volume. "Leda and the Swan," one of Yeats's few sonnets, and the most accomplished of them, appears in this volume. "Meditations in Time of Civil War" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," long poems made up of sections using different rhyme schemes, employ their rhymes, with few exceptions, in relatively elaborate and intricately patterned schemes. The Winding Stair shows the same versatility in forms, containing, as well as more complicated stanzas, a number of epigram-poems. This form, although not requiring an elaborate system of rhyme, does require a mastery of rhyme for its concentrated precision of thought and word, and it is a form which Yeats used with increasing power. Elsewhere in this volume there are further examples of ottava rima in "Coole Park, 1929" and "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931." "Byzantium" uses again the Cowley stanza which had first appeared in the Gregory elegy; "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" bases its stanza on the sonnet octave, abbacddc. "Blood and the Moon" and "Vacillation," like the long meditative poems of The Tower, use rhyme schemes which vary from section to section, and each long poem in its totality testifies to a wide range of power in versification.

These two volumes represent the height of the parabolic

curve. In the immediately succeeding volumes there is not again quite the wide variety of forms, although Yeats continued to use tightly-controlled patterns of rhyme. In Words for Music Perhaps a number of the Crazy Jane poems have very close-knit rhyme schemes combined with refrains, and this habit continues in A Woman Young and Old. In the latter volume, Yeats's discipline within a close rhyme-pattern is well illustrated in "Chosen," which uses the stanza of Donne's "Nocturnall upon St. Lucies Day," a poem Yeats had complimented in a letter to H. J. C. Grierson.[1] There is also in this volume a new poem in ottava rima, "Her Vision in the Wood," but in general the variety of fixed stanzaic forms has decreased. In the volume of poems which followed this, A Full Moon in March (1935), the rhyme schemes have become simpler and less varied in type. There is much use of the couplet; and the ballad, as in the Last Poems, is a form which receives increasing attention.

However, this decrease in range and complexity of forms does not imply a decrease in power. This is evident from two things. One is the appropriateness as well as the mastery of form which is apparent in any type which Yeats turned to in the last decade of his career. For example, the couplet used in some of the "Supernatural Songs" and elsewhere was chosen because so perfect a vehicle for the

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[1] Yeats, Letters, p. 710. In this letter Yeats remarks that he has used Donne's rhyme scheme for "a poem of my own, just finished."

Blake-like apothegms and crystallized philosophical notions
of this period. Likewise the ballad was a natural and
fitting form for the expression of Yeats's political ideas,
and for his use of peasant-spokesmen to voice his patriotic
but often bitter views of the Irish political scene. But
the even more obvious proof that Yeats did not lose his
command of complex forms lies in the fact that the final
volume of his career, Last Poems (1939), although dominated
by many ballads, gives expression once more to almost every
major poetic type Yeats had used. There is a veritable
harvest of poems in ottava rima: "The Gyres," "The Municipal
Gallery Revisited," "The Statues," and "The Circus Animals'
Desertion." There are couplets in pentameters and hexa-
meters, ballads and drinking songs in various rhyme patterns,
epigram-poems in quatrains, besides numerous unnamed
stanzas in different schemes. Most remarkable of all is
the appearance in this last volume of two traditional forms
which Yeats had never used before: rime royal in "Hound
Voice" and "A Bronze Head," and terza rima in "Cuchulain
Comforted." It is as if Yeats, at the limit of his life and
career, poised at the edge of death, marshalled all his
powers into play for the pure joy of power, of testing his
strength and showing his farthest reach. This magnificent
display of expertise in his final poems recalls a passage
which Yeats had written over thirty years before, in which
he defined style itself as just this joy in controlled power:

> In life courtesy and self-possession, and in the arts
> style, are the sensible impressions of the free mind,
> for both arise out of a deliberate shaping of all things,
> and from never being swept away, whatever the emotion,
> into confusion or dullness. . . .and though a writer,
> who has to withdraw so much of his thought out of his
> life that he may learn his craft, may find many his
> betters in daily courtesy, he should never be without
> style. . . .
> . . . Who should be free if he were not? for none
> other has a continual deliberate self-delighting
> happiness—style, 'the only thing that is immortal in
> literature,' as Sainte-Beuve has said, a still unexpended
> energy, after all that the argument or the story needs,
> a still unbroken pleasure after the immediate end has
> been accomplished—and builds this up into a most
> personal and wilful fire, transfiguring words and sounds
> and events. It is the playing of strength when the day's
> work is done, a secret between a craftsman and his craft,
> and is so inseparate in his nature, that he has it most
> of all amid overwhelming emotion, and in the face of
> death.[1]

This general summary of Yeats's development in the
use of varied verse forms, although necessarily brief, gives
a required perspective to the introductory remarks which I
have made concerning his traditionalism in the use of rhyme.
Simply the fact that he was never impelled to experiment in
non-rhyming poetry (except for occasional blank verse), in
a period of the century when his own formation of a style was
coeval with experiments in free verse, sets him apart from

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[1] "Poetry and Tradition," (1907), Essays, pp. 313-14.
Professor Raines has pointed out to me the striking parallel
between Yeats's equation of style and morality (quoted at the
beginning of Chapter I), and Whitehead's equation of these
qualities in the title essay of The Aims of Education, 1929
(New York: New American Library, 1949). The passage from
Yeats quoted above is also echoed in Whitehead, p. 24 passim:
"The love of a subject in itself and for itself . . . is the
love of style. . . . Style is the fashioning of power, the
restraining of power . . . the exclusive privilege of the
expert."

many modern poets, as does the fact that, having chosen to
work in rhyme, he restricted himself to conventional
variations of quatrains and couplets, or later, to tested
and standard forms which he inherited from his own English
tradition.[1] Yet Yeats appears to be a "modern" in his style,
in the tone and texture of his verse, and strikes us as so
largely because he mastered a number of devices which would
allow him to exploit traditional forms at the same time as
he varied from them. As with all major poets, his style is
the result of his own personality playing against the
patterns and limits of an established norm, approximating
formal conventions to his own distinctive and personal
gesture, effecting the delicate compromise of the impersonal
and the personal which is the hallmark of an achieved poetic
style. This may be seen more clearly if we examine some of
Yeats's poems in fixed or traditional forms, in order to
trace the interactions between his personality and themes and
the forms chosen to express them, interactions which result
in his characteristic style.

One of the most widely-recognized traits of Yeats's
verse is his use of off-rhyme or slant rhyme, a device which
gives him considerable freedom within formal rhyme schemes,
and often in a first reading veils the fact that a strict

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[1]Contrast Yeats's practice with that of a large number
of modern poets who have worked with French or Italian forms
not yet Anglicized by long use in English poetry.

form is being used. It gives, as well as freedom, a characteristic pattern of sound to his poetry, the subtle variations of key which all readers have noticed. Yet to assume that Yeats uses off-rhyme only to give himself more freedom of movement, or to achieve a certain sound effect-- although this effect is important--would be inaccurate. The technique can serve thematic as well as technical functions. For example, the sixth stanza of "Among School Children," the stanza which discusses the contributions of the great philosophers, uses off-rhyme to help establish a casual, ironic nonchalance of tone.[1] Nowhere else in the poem, although other off-rhymes occur, is an ironic use made of them, and the effect is carefully calculated. The off-rhyme of plays/taws/Pythagoras is supported by the ironic triplet of rhymes in things/kings/strings, for although the latter are not false rhymes, they serve (like Eliot's rhyme of ices/crisis in "Prufrock") the ironic tone being created. The off-rhyming words give a delicate dissonance of sound which underscores the dissonance of connotation; the effect is light, but telling. In view of the ironic effect, and the immediate comparison with Eliot--a master of such effects-- which it suggests, one is tempted to call the stanza an example of Yeats's modernism in a traditional form; but it is salutary to remember that the form itself is one associated

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. [1]A number of factors contribute to the ironic non- chalance of the stanza, of course: diction, rhythm, images; and the rhyme pattern is only one of a number of contributing features.

with an earlier master of ironic rhyme. Of course, the
tone of Byron's ottava rima is quite different from this,
for Byron's intention is often burlesque, and he consequently
aims for a broad comic effect of a kind that would completely
destroy the encompassing gravity of Yeats's poem. Here the
play of irony is meant to be unmistakable but delicate,
only a nuance of tone. Nowhere in his use of ottava rima
does Yeats approach the impudence and anarchy of Byron's
rhymes, although the ones in "The Circus Animals' Desertion"
(especially the rhyme of chariot with Lord knows what) suggest
Byron more strongly perhaps than those of any other Yeats
poem.[1] In that poem also, as in the stanza of "Among School
Children," off-rhymes are deliberately used for the
creation of an ironic, lightly mocking tone.[2]

The effect of off-rhyme or of unusual rhyme pairs
is not always ironic. The striking prevalence of unorthodox
rhyme in the Last Poems can be accounted for, I think, by
the complete freedom within forms which decades of practice
had given to Yeats; sometimes the device seems almost
thoughtless, an habitual easy movement which has become
second nature and which no longer requires a specific purpose

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[1]Miss Denton has suggested, however, that the strong
colloquial drive of Byron's ottava rima was perhaps consciously
imitated by Yeats in his work in that form. One may doubt a
strong direct influence, and still be struck by numerous
similarities.

[2]Other elements of the rhyme-pattern contribute to the
mocking tone in "The Circus Animals' Desertion." Note, for
example, the flippancy created by the use of a triplet of double-
rhymes: save it/gave it/enslave it.

for its sanction, being a mark of the freedom which, in
the essay quoted above, Yeats had said was the privilege of
a master of style.[1] Yet, whether it had a specific purpose
or not, it often creates a specific effect. In the later
poems, the most noticeable effect is that of rapidity, for
there are often not enough true rhymes to give a strong sense
of line-ends, and the flow of the verse is proportionally
increased, as is its colloquial approximation to speech.
Both "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli" illustrate this rapid,
colloquial flow of language. The effect of speed is
inextricably bound up with line rhythms, of course, which
form a major part of the effect, but the off-rhymes are
contributory to it.

"News for the Delphic Oracle," another poem in the
same volume with "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli," achieves a
very different effect through its use of rhyme. In the first
two stanzas rhymed lines appear alternated with unrhymed
lines in a scheme of xaxaxbxbxcxc; none of the unrhymed line-
ends approximate each other in sound. The first stanza
presents a relatively generalized picture of a paradise--the
Isle of the Blessed--peopled by Niamh, Oisin, Pythagoras,
Plotinus: a pagan afterlife of ease and idleness, the
atmosphere of which is established in the opening line:
"There all the golden codgers lay. . . ." The second stanza

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[1]Cf. for example the rhyme-words in "The Statues":
Salamis/immensities; Phidias/looking-glass.

shifts the focus of attention from the island to the shore
where more souls of the newly dead are arriving and where
dolphins and humans sport and tumble in the waves. The
third and final stanza of the poem suddenly narrows and
stabilizes the perspective of the reader's vision by pre-
senting a static tableau of Peleus and Thetis, after which
the earlier paradisal scene is moved again into the fore-
ground, now fully symbolic, as it is triumphantly explicit,
in its significance:

> Slim adolescence that a nymph has stripped,
> Peleus on Thetis stares.
> Her limbs are delicate as an eyelid,
> Love has blinded him with tears;
> But Thetis' belly listens.
> Down the mountain walls
> From where Pan's cavern is
> Intolerable music falls.
> Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,
> Belly, shoulder, bum,
> Flash fishlike; nymphs and satyrs
> Copulate in the foam.
> ("News for the Delphic Oracle," 324)

Here in this stanza, as the sexual theme of the poem becomes
dominant and explicit, and the paradise-descriptions of the
earlier stanzas are brought into their total significance,
the alternate lines which in earlier stanzas had remained
unrhymed are brought into a slant rhyme, so approximate as
not to destroy the pre-established scheme of the poem
(stripped/eyelid; listens/cavern is; appear/satyrs), but
insistent enough in their consonant and vowel echoes to
pull the final stanza of the poem into a much tighter, more
enclosed unity than the other sections have. This effect of

rhyme is by far the subtlest which Yeats achieved. It is both a technical and a psychological device, for it brings the poem--which, in a sense, like the paradise it describes, has no end--into the technical resolution of a conclusion; and it gathers, discreetly, imperceptibly, the reader's attention to what is being revealed, a Joycean epiphany.

The variation of a fixed scheme by off-rhyme or ironic and unexpected rhyme is one means of modifying a chosen form to meet the demands of theme and personal expression. Another is by modifying the traditional use to which an older form has been put, modifying the pattern which readers have come to expect in a given form inherited from the past. This is well illustrated in the two most successful examples of Yeats's work, in the sonnet, "Leda and the Swan" and "Meru."[1] The Leda sonnet, the earlier of the two, uses a scheme which is a combination of both the Italian and English forms: <u>ababcdcdefgefg</u>. It can be seen from the scheme that the two quatrains taken from the English form may easily approximate the octave of the Italian, while the last six rhymes are themselves a common form of the Italian sestet. When one looks at the poem, it is clear that this

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[1] There are by now a number of discussions of the Leda sonnet. Of these, the best are two recent and very excellent analyses of its structure and themes: Leo Spitzer, "On Yeats's Poem, 'Leda and the Swan,'" MP, LI (1954), 271-76; and Joseph Margolis, "Yeats' Leda and the Swan," Expl., XIII (April, 1955), Item 34. I have tried to avoid duplicating their observations, but their influence is inevitable.

scheme served very conveniently for Yeats's purpose. The first two quatrains, while affording the easier rhyming pattern of the English sonnet, yet perform the function of the traditional Italian octave, by constituting a single unit of action against which the sestet may be set as a concluding or answering unit. Thus the first two quatrains, using present tense, describe the observed specific action occurring in the immediacy of the present. The sestet, by contrast, first shifts the time-sense to the future (present tense is used in the first line of the sestet with an understood future sense: "A shudder in the loins engenders there / The broken wall . . ."), in order to anticipate the consequences of the action described in the "octave"; then shifts backward in time to the past, employing past tense to pose the final philosophical question: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power . . . ?" Thus the poem uses for its structural needs the traditional schematic division of the Italian sonnet while exploiting technical features of the English. One may notice also, that by the typography of the stanzaic and line-division which breaks the sestet on the page (line 11), Yeats has made the last three and a half lines of the sestet a separable unit within the larger six-line unit, and has thus made more immediately apparent the temporal units of the poem and the progressive stages of awareness in the speaker's mind.

When we turn to the much later sonnet, "Meru," we find Yeats again moulding a traditional form to his own

capacities; here the rhyme scheme is that of a perfect
English sonnet, but the movement of thought within the poem
is again that which we associate with the Italian, the
first eight lines forming one unit, the last six an answering
one. Reversing the specific-to-general movement of thought
in the Leda sonnet, Yeats presents in the "octave" of
"Meru" a general truth--that although civilization is sus-
tained by illusion, man is impelled to search for reality
and consequent destruction--which the "sestet" completes in
the specific illustration of the hermits upon Mt. Meru who,
in the bitter winter night, know "the desolation of reality"
which man's nature dooms him to seek. It would seem that,
at least in this instance, Yeats needed the less demanding
scheme of the English form but preferred at the same time
the simpler balance of the Italian thought-units, and so
attempted to keep both. I think that "Meru" is a successful
sonnet, but Yeats's curious technique here of moving the
thought across the grain of the rhyme scheme he had chosen
may be seen to illustrate a tendency Miss Denton noted when
she remarked that Yeats probably did not write more sonnets
than he did because his rhetoric seemed always to move against
the sonnet form, rather than harmoniously within it.[1]

If the small number of Yeats's sonnets testifies to
a contest between his temperament and that form, it is
interesting to observe by contrast that his brief work in a

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[1]Denton, op. cit., p. 160.

form which he attempted only twice and then late in his life, rime royal, cannot be taken as evidence of any lack of ease in that form. Of the two, "Hound Voice" appears the better poem but perhaps only because of its more overpowering imagery; both poems show a remarkable control of the new form. This is the more astonishing since the poems employ the same stanza in such different ways and for such different effects. "A Bronze Head" is a meditative poem, and, as is customary in Yeats's poems of this type, begins with a brief placing of the scene. A setting is established, and an object described which sets the meditation into movement:

> Here at right of the entrance this bronze head,
> Human, superhuman, a bird's round eye,
> Everything else withered and mummy-dead.
> ("A Bronze Head," 328)

As the object provokes manifold reactions and memories which the poet's mind proceeds to consider questioningly and tentatively, the poem is punctuated by rhetorical questions and reveries into the past. The appropriate tempo of such a poem is slow, and Yeats has used many devices for this purpose: numerous and shifting caesuras; many compound words and successive monosyllables which brake the movement of the lines ("bird's round eye," "On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry"); and certain trisyllabic rhymes (emptiness, composite, supernatural) which give to the lines a hesitant, falling cadence appropriate to the mood of the poem. The thought moves easily within the frame of its scheme, and the poem as a whole gives an impression

of perfect suitability of form to theme and mood.

"Hound Voice," in rime royal as is "A Bronze Head,"
is so different in tempo and mood as to seem cast in a
different form itself. The lines, rarely using caesuras
within them, move with a sweep and rapidity which are accele-
rated by the repetition of identical words and by parallel
constructions. Partly as a result of these syntactical
devices, partly as a result of the imagery, the poem has an
incantatory quality which is felt most strongly in the last
stanza:

> Some day we shall get up before the dawn
> And find our ancient hounds before the door,
> And wide awake know that the hunt is on;
> Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,
> Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore;
> Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,
> And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.
> ("Hound Voice," 331)

The parallelisms of And . . . And . . . Then . . . Then . . . ,
and of the present participle constructions contribute to
the measured incantatory surge of the lines, and the
monosyllabic rhymes keep the rhythm firm, allowing none of
the hesitant fading of stress at line-ends which was
deliberately used in "A Bronze Head" to establish the mood
of tentative irresolution. In "Hound Voice" all is declara-
tive, annunciatory, affirmative, a celebration of controlled
wildness. Despite its differences of mood and purpose, one
can see that this poem is as careful an exploration of the
new form as the other. Examined together, the two poems
present an instructive example of Yeats's versatility and

imagination in the moulding of a traditional form to his own needs.

This versatility and imagination are even more evident in Yeats's use of ottava rima, a stanza which, in view of the consistency with which he turned to it when a high theme impelled him, was peculiarly suited to his temperament. It became a favored stanza for poems which were philosophical or meditative in tone, and the list of his poems in this form includes some of the most brilliant he wrote: "Sailing to Byzantium," "Among School Children," "The Statues," "The Circus Animals' Desertion," and the introductory sections to both "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "Meditations in Time of Civil War." Miss Denton has praised the high level of Yeats's poems in this form:

> Especially by his ottava rima poems we are reminded that, though Yeats was not a classicist by temperament or training, he valued decorum. Born later than the generation of ode-writers, he nevertheless regarded the work of the poet much as they had, and, more than any other twentieth-century poet, wrote in the high style.[1]

What is here called the decorum of Yeats's work, and what—to go beyond purely technical considerations—may also be called its inherent dignity, could be demonstrated from any of his poems in ottava rima, but is perhaps more usefully considered in a poem which has received less attention than, say, "Among School Children" or "Sailing to Byzantium."

The opening poem of "Meditations in Time of Civil War," entitled "Ancestral Houses," is as suitable as any to

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[1]Denton, op. cit., p. 162.

serve as an example of what Yeats accomplished in ottava
rima. A poem in measured, slow cadence, it takes its
imaginative impetus from the setting, real or imagined, of
a house and gardens representative of wealthy, traditional
life. It is this setting with its symbolic values which
stirs the poet into the meditation and reverie of the poem,
a meditation encompassing past, present, and future in its
range but finding its particular concern with the past. It
is appropriate that Yeats should have begun his long poem in
praise of tradition with a traditional poetic form handed
down from centuries past, and the form itself is an
objective correlative for the theme it encloses. Related
to this, one may observe within the poem a persistent linking
of the traditions of art and those of social life. The most
obvious of these correlatives is the central symbol of the
house itself and the elegance of its artifacts: escutcheoned
doors, sculpted urns, formal gardens. Another such link is
made in the allusion to Homer, whose status as a court poet
is intended to be a primary connotation here. But the most
interesting of all is the device of personification in the
last lines of the penultimate stanza:

> O what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways
> Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease
> And Childhood a delight for every sense,
> But take our greatness with our violence?
> ("Ancestral Houses," 198-99)

These lines and their personified nouns, capitalized in the
fashion of eighteenth-century meditative poetry, are meant

to evoke by recollection the settings of both the poetry and
the actual social life of that age. The lines also make
explicit an affinity which Yeats's own poem has to the topo-
graphical poems of the late eighteenth century, which, like
his, take some scene or "prospect" as the initiating object
of meditation. Without wishing to press the analogy too far,
one might think of the poetic form itself as one of the
"ancestral houses" within which the values of cultivated
and traditional life are celebrated and perpetuated.[1]

A brief glance at the rhymes in "Ancestral Houses"
reveals a rather large number of triple rhymes--mechanical,
terraces, deities, violence, ancestors, bitterness--whose
effect is the same which was noted in "A Bronze Head": the
hesitant fading of the line to suggest the irresolutions of
meditation. This recalls the numerous references in
Yeats's prose to what he called "hesitant" or "faint" or
"loosened" rhythms, which he rightly felt he had mastered:
"If there should be a subtle hesitating rhythm I can make it."[2]
Other than triple rhymes, there are few in the poem which are

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[1]Note that ottava rima is used again in Section IV,
"My Descendants," when the poet asserts his determination to
bequeath his own house, despite the certainty of its ruin,
as a monument of his race and his values.

[2]Yeats, Letters, p. 846. The achievement of Yeats's
triple rhyme is appreciable if one considers the potential
dangerousness of triple rhymes, especially in large proportion
within one poem. Many poets avoid them completely for fear
of an unintended comic or burlesque effect. Cf. Coleridge's
warning about this effect (Biogr. Liter., Chap. XVIII) and
his exemplary limerick.

unusual, for the occasional false rhymes (<u>lawns/pains</u>; <u>ways/ease</u>) hardly call attention to themselves. However, there is one notable exception in the unexpected rhyme of <u>mouse</u> (with <u>house</u>) in the third stanza, and in the last line of the stanza--a position in which it is forced upon the reader's attention. This detail, although minor, is a good example of a certain technical impudence which is characteristic of Yeats and which gives perpetual vitality to his style. The use of <u>mouse</u> as a final rhyme in the stanza is a function of tone, a deliberate impulse toward the bathetic to mirror a sudden dismay, a moment of irritation, amused contempt, and despair.[1] To say too much of so minor a touch is to overburden it, but it deserves comment as an example. A recent critic has said that in his later poems Yeats was "a Michelangelo turned miniaturist,"[2] but he had been both for a long time.

Ottava rima, among traditional schemes, is one of the relatively simple ones. A man who had trained himself, as Yeats had, in schemes of alternate rhymes and of couplets would find the transition to ottava rima neither difficult nor restraining, for it was a larger and more versatile medium

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[1] Eliot has used this rhyme pair also, and in an equally serious poem ("Little Gidding," II), but in a context which absorbs the rhyme without any ironic tremor or bathos; Eliot's rhythm there (of rhymed proverbs, or nursery-rhymes) is a conditioning factor in the apparent "naturalness" of the words.

[2] Arland Ussher, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 84.

similar in kind to what he had used before. In addition,
it lends itself particularly well to the flow of contemplative
speech, the couplet acting as a device for spacing or pausing,
or as a vehicle for a resolving generalization. As a fixed
form, it gives a maximum of freedom within restraint; and we
have seen how Yeats could, when he chose, exercise his
freedom further by the use of off-rhymes. Thus, in many ways,
ottava rima was an ideal stanza for his use.

When he wished, however, Yeats could show his strength
in tighter and more demanding forms, and this is most evident
in poems which use intricate rhyme schemes combined with
varying line lengths. If we look further in "Meditations in
Time of Civil War," such a form can be seen in section II,
which employs a stanza invented by Yeats: abcabcdeed. Lines
1, 2, 4, 5, and 10 are long lines having a norm of five
stresses; lines 3, 6, 7, 8, and 9 are shortened to three
stresses. This regular variation of line lengths within a
strict rhyme scheme creates a difficult but beautifully
patterned stanza; it appears again in the second and third
sections of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." The Hervey
stanza which Yeats borrowed from Cowley is similar in
employing strictly varied line-lengths within a tight rhyme
scheme; its long lines allow for the playing out of
comparatively free rhythms which are regularly reined by the
alternating short lines. In the elegy, "In Memory of Major
Robert Gregory," this formal feature of the stanza is well

suited to express the two impulses of that poem, one toward
meditation, the other toward ritualization. Sometimes a
relatively simple stanza may be complicated by the use of
a refrain as one of the rhyming lines. To return again to
"Meditations in Time of Civil War"--like all the long poems,
it is a showcase of verse forms--the sixth section, rhyming
abaaB, illustrates the complicating effect of a refrain when
it is made to operate within the rhyme pattern, and shows
the discipline which it may impose upon an otherwise simple
form.

Yeats's use of the refrain increased toward the end
of his career. It had been used earlier but not with marked
prevalence; beginning with Words for Music Perhaps it became
a major feature of his verse. This was a natural concomitant,
I think, of Yeats's movement away from a multiplicity of
complex forms, and toward a simpler and more crystallized
medium; for the refrain is a useful device for retaining
regularity within relatively free forms. But it has other
functions as well. One scholar has commented that traditionally
the refrain in English poetry has been used to give rhythmical
variety, often being only a nonsense line; or to unify and
intensify the subject matter; or to supply a background or
setting to the action of the poem; and that in Yeats the
refrain often fulfills these different functions at once.[1]

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[1]Theodore Spencer, "The Later Poetry of W. B. Yeats,"
in Zabel (ed.), Literary Opinion in America (New York: Harper
and Brothers, 1951), pp. 270-81. This essay first appeared
in The Hound and Horn in 1933, when much of Yeats's most

Probably in all uses of the refrain, except the pure nonsense line, numerous functions are operating at once, and multiple effects created. In fact, even "nonsense" refrains are sometimes more than nonsense: the Fol de rol, fol de rol of "Crazy Jane Reproved" is really an expression of attitude important in clarifying the poem's meaning. But of the possibilities which Spencer suggests, the second--the refrain as a device for unifying and intensifying subject matter-- is by far the most interesting, and indeed has a purlieu so large that it will include almost all of Yeats's perpetually changing uses of the refrain. With varying emphases, the intensification of subject matter is almost always his primary consideration.

The attraction of the refrain for a poet is that it is an apparently simple, primitive device which may serve the most sophisticated purposes. As it occurs most naturally in songs or ballads, it affords the poet a means of deepening and complicating, psychologically or thematically, the material of forms which are themselves necessarily slight and straightforward. Thus in Yeats, the refrain often functions to suggest profundities, delicately, obliquely, without burdening the stanzaic form itself with more weight than it can carry. I have suggested that the complication of the material may be psychological; it will be noticed that

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characteristic work with the refrain had not yet been published, but its general suggestions remain valid for the later work.

often in the later poems the refrain is not a part of the
rhyme pattern of the stanza proper, and thus stands outside
the stanza in a technical sense, seeming to present "another
voice" which extends the meaning of the stanza. This can
sometimes give a rather eerie effect of disjunction, or of
second sight, as if the refrain suddenly plunged an apparently
artless song into unforeseen depths. This may be seen in
the refrain to "Three Songs to the One Burden," which seems
at first to have no connection to the songs themselves, or
in the strangely ambiguous refrain of "Colonel Martin."
The unambiguous but sudden ironic expansion of meaning which
is achieved by the refrain of "What Then?" is another
example of this doubling technique: we see in another
perspective what the poem proper has presented in a relatively
simple perspective. With many such refrains, it often
happens that they appear weightless at first but take on
increased significance as the poem progresses; this is an
effect in "What Then?" and in the repetition of _The Lord have
mercy upon us_ in "The Lady's Second Song," both of which
progressively deepen the poignancy of the poems in which
they occur. Such refrains as these have a strongly psycho-
logical function even when they do not supernaturalize the
poem, for all are powerfully evocative of strong emotion,
although they may not themselves express it. When they do
express emotion, they are similar to the chorus of a drama,
which gives formal expression to the emotion of the spectator,

as _Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer!_ in the brief lyric
describing the dance of a crazed girl is the expression of
the "ideal spectator" of the scene.

The refrain may not always be psychological in its
function and effect. In "The Long-Legged Fly" it is primarily
important as the only thematic statement of the poem,
presenting in an image an interpretation and evaluation of
the three scenes which have been described. Likewise, many
of the refrains in the Crazy Jane poems are generalizing
statements which lift a specific incident to the level of a
universal truth, as _Love is like the lion's tooth,_ and _All
things remain in God._ The simplicity of these is a major
element in their effect, a liberation from the time-bound
world of the poem. A very large body of the refrains in
Yeats's work combine both functions, psychological and
thematic, in their work of intensification, as we can see
in such a refrain as the following:

> _Fifteen apparitions have I seen;_
> _The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger._
> ("The Apparitions," 332)

We have so far considered versification only in its
external structures of rhyme schemes, number and length of
lines, and refrains. But the internal structure of any
stanza is a decisive feature of its form, as some of the
earlier observations on verse forms have implied. In speaking
of Yeats's two poems in rime royal, I emphasized that the
different tempos of the poems gave to them such different

tones that the stanzaic structure itself seemed different.

What this implies is of major importance in a study of

style, and forces us to see the rhythm of any poem as an

overriding consideration in the appearance and effect of its

form. And this brings us to the most controversial subject

in modern poetics, prosody.

Without attempting a history of the various controversies

which have marked the study of prosody, I think it necessary

to observe that these controversies, far from approaching

any resolution, have increased in the fervor of their

dissensions with every decade of the twentieth century.

Beginning with the inherited musical scansion theory, and

the two new and quite different approaches of Robert Bridges

and T. S. Omond, then complicated by the publication of

Hopkins' manuscripts, this subject has been made, if possible,

more labyrinthine than ever by the recent advance of

linguistics into the field of prosody.[1] It is interesting to

note that Northrop Frye, in a recent book of general

criticism, has also brushed the field, and in passing has

contributed yet another viewpoint to the many now current on

the basic principles of English poetic rhythm.[2] Needless to

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[1]For a brief annotated survey of the field, see Karl
Shapiro, A Bibliography of Modern Prosody (Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins Press, 1948). The linguistic analyses postdate this
book; it can be supplemented in part by the series of
articles on linguistic prosody which appeared in The Kenyon
Review, XVIII (1956), 411-77.

[2]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 251.

say, what these basic principles are, is just the point of contention.

Ideally the poets themselves should be of help here, but relatively few of them have been concerned to give an account of their own prosody, and those few are often more confused and confusing than the theoretical prosodists themselves.[1] This is perfectly understandable since a poet's business is to use his ear, not necessarily to analyze the implications of its promptings. The poet's attitude is perfectly illustrated in one of Yeats's remarks, "You will notice how bothered I am when I get to prosody--because it is the most certain of my instincts, it is the subject of which I am most ignorant,"[2] an admission made late in his career when his reading of Hopkins and other modern poets had made him conscious of prosody. When, with his characteristic seriousness of craft, Yeats thought of

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Strictly speaking, Frye's is not a new viewpoint--these rarely exist in prosodic theory--but a new emphasis.

[1]Gascoigne may be said to have initiated the discussion of prosody in English poetry by his "Certayne Notes of Instruction in English Verse" (1575); his misunderstanding of it is perhaps archetypal of all those to follow when poets have theorized about their rhythm. Hopkins, the most acute and brilliantly trained of these, did not escape confusion.

[2]Yeats, Letters, p. 896. Cf. Eliot's recent discussion of the relative ineptness of poets in any technical considera- tion of prosodic principles, a technical ineptness which does not greatly worry him (". . . a study of anatomy will not teach you how to make a hen lay eggs"), since he considers prosody the special domain of the scholar. See "The Music of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), p. 16 ff.

attempting to experiment in sprung verse, he totally misunderstood the principle of it, having misunderstood Hopkins' theory and use, as the parenthetical "explanation" in the following statement reveals: "I think of writing for the first time in sprung verse (four stresses) with a certain amount of rhyme. . . ."[1] One modern poet and critic has said that almost all poets are "conventional prosodists," and he uses this apparent truth to support the view that the conventional meters are the proper description of all verse, and that poets always more or less consciously write to the pattern of these meters.[2] But I think that Eliot's comments, and Yeats's remark about the certainty of his instincts and his ignorance of prosodic principles, point us to a more realistic understanding of the truth: if most poets tacitly accept a conventional theory of prosody (as Gascoigne in his time did) which they understand to a greater or lesser degree, they accept it because they have never felt the need or impulse to construct a new one, never

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[1] Yeats, Letters, p. 844. Yeats's misunderstanding of sprung verse is also evident from his remarks in his Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936).

[2] John Crowe Ransom, "A Note on Meter," Kenyon Review, XVIII (1956), 451-60. The limitations of Ransom's argument (post hoc, ergo propter hoc) are quite evident within his paper, and indeed he admits them himself at indefensible points. By conventional prosody he means, and it is generally meant by all who use the term, the analysis of verse as accentual-syllabic, each line having a fixed number of syllables and a regular pattern of alternating stress and unstress. This is the prosody whose history Saintsbury traced, and whose universal validity for post-Renaissance English poetry he refused to question.

having written poetry to a theory anyway.[1] The ear is the adequate, indeed infallible, guiding principle of a good poet; after his work has been created by this certainty of instinct, the a posteriori question of what in any highly technical sense its rhythmic principle is perhaps never occurs to him at all. As Eliot has said, the problem is strictly the scholar's.

I do not intend to devote a great deal of space here to the presentation (and the necessary defense) of a theory of prosody. But one cannot make any comments about prosody at all, the rhythm of a single poem or of poetry in general, without a commitment to certain assumptions about the nature of poetic rhythm.[2] For this reason, some general remarks must be made by way of introduction to my comments on Yeats's rhythm. For the simplicity of these assumptions I will not apologize--prosodic theory being in all instances so liable to confusion, simplicity is nearly a virtue; but for their generality I must ask indulgence until they can be tested against specific poems of Yeats. What is required at present is a set of workable principles which, once clarified, will

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[1]Hopkins is, of course, the major example of a poet who did question conventional prosodic theory; he did not deny its validity for much poetry, but insisted that some poetry diverged from it and required a different descriptive theory.

[2]It will be evident that my own theory of rhythm is eclectic. Although the history of prosodic systems has evolved no single one which is "correct," there are very few which do not contain some insights or principles which are valuable, and I have accepted these wherever I found them.

allow us to describe the rhythmic pattern of Yeats's poems;
as this pattern appears to be not always the same kind, those
principles must be broad enough to suggest the underlying
norm in all rhythm from which variants arise and against
which they can be measured.

Conventional prosody, which can describe many English
verse-rhythms, is nevertheless inadequate to describe all of
them, at least without a desperate and jerrybuilt structure
of exceptions so numerous that the original metrical scheme
being claimed for the poem is finally made unrecognizable.
But little purpose is served by using a system in which
exceptions multiply to a point at which the norm disappears.
It is much simpler and more reasonable to accept what the
conventional prosodic system can do as description when
natural variations are allowed within it; and to admit also
that it cannot describe some rhythms without allowing unnatural
or self-defeating exceptions; and when this is so, to
supplement it by other prosodic analyses. One may devise,
according to what he regards as the controlling principle
of the non-conventional rhythm, a descriptive pattern such
as Bridges' stress-prosody ("accentual verse" rather than
accentual-syllabic) or Hopkins' sprung verse, or one may
simply make a large general distinction between "count of
eye" or conventional verse, and "count of ear" or the other
verse, as Shapiro does in his Essay on Rime. But the danger
is that the "other pattern" one arrives at may be as limited

as the conventional one. I think it is unquestionable that there is conventional verse based upon meters, and there is "other verse," call it what you will. For convenience, we may call it non-metered verse, to include its large range of variant types. The most significant primary problem is not what makes one kind different from the other, but what makes both kinds of verse rhythmic.

Rhythm is fundamentally, essentially, a disposition of time. In poetry this disposition is made by the arrangement of speech-sounds and of pause within units which repeat each other in recurrent structures of durations. Although we speak of rhythm in sculpture or painting, it is never confused with the rhythm of poetry, because the plastic arts are a disposition of space-units; but music and poetry are continually being confused because they both create their structures from temporal elements. This is why, from the eighteenth century onward, there have been persistent (and largely misguided) attempts to scan poetry with musical notes, and in fact to equate the rhythm of the two arts on the fallacious notion that as their rhythmic principle is the same, they must use it in the same way and be amenable to the same kind of analysis.[1] This is why, also, there

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[1]One of the latest of musical-scansion theories may be found, with some new twists, in Evelyn H. Scholl, "English Metre Once More," PMLA, LXIII (1948), 293-326. Katharine M. Wilson has been the modern prosodist most active in this cause. The most famous, although not the first, of musical prosodists is of course Lanier. Hopkins' knowledge of music was important in his theory of sprung verse, and

are always appearing in the history of poetry vague claims
for "quantity" in English verse, claims which are usually
strongly opposed because the classical term is misapplied to
English rhythm (quantity in the classical sense being only
a minor feature of time in English verse), and needlessly
confuses the unclarified belief which is behind many of these
claims, the belief that time is somehow an important
consideration in our rhythm. When one becomes aware of this
consideration, Yeats's casual remark that he had "the
poet's exact time sense" has a far-reaching significance.[1]

Language in poetry--that is, the alternation of sound
and pause which points the time, establishes it in objectively
perceptible units--must always be in recognizable pattern,
giving the reader or hearer a sense of recurrent structure
which regulates both the material of the poem and his own
emotional response to it. Although there are a number of
possible regulating patterns (rhyme, imagery, and so on) the
one essential for poetry is rhythm, at once the most abstract
and the most concrete of poetic devices. As rhythm is
essential, all poets must be gifted with the ability to
create it--to control and articulate time through language;
but they may do this in many different ways--that is, by

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may be said to have been a basic source of confusion in that
theory, for it led him to insist that all verse-feet begin,
or at least must be scanned as beginning, as the bar does,
with a stress.

[1]Yeats, "Commentary on 'The Great Clock Tower,'"
The King of the Great Clock Tower, Commentaries and Poems
(New York: The Macmillan Co., 1935), p. 18.

different prosodic principles. One poet may use the principles of metered verse, letting a predisposed pattern (in number of syllables and in placement of stresses within each line) establish his temporal structure, a pattern which he learns to alter with minor variations and modulations without destroying the structure. Or he may choose to use the principles of non-metered verse, in which case many different kinds of temporal units are open to his choice-- phrasal units as in free verse, or free-syllabled intervals controlled by stress and pause, or various dispositions within the line itself taken as a unit instead of the foot. The one essential thing, whatever his choice, is that his units must echo one another consistently enough, despite deliberate variations, to give the illusion of repeated equivalences.[1] The variations themselves are essential to make the dominant equivalences more effectively recognized, and to break the rigidity of fixed pattern, which is mechanical, and deadens rather than vitalizes the material of the poem.

It is often remarked that Shakespeare's mature verse and that of the Jacobeans who succeeded him push variations and irregularities within conventional prosody to a point at which poetry almost breaks down into prose. What

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[1] It must be emphasized that this is an illusion: true equivalences do not exist in poetry. By using the plural, equivalences, I have meant to imply that every unit of a poem need not be equivalent to every other one, even in illusion. This will be discussed in more detail later.

happens--in some of Pericles' speeches, for example--is that
metered rhythm is pushing against its own limits into the
freedom of non-metered rhythm; but as the verse is acquiring
new time patterns as it abandons the meters which
conventionally would have pointed the time, it remains
poetry. In some Jacobean verse, in the hands of less
skillful poets, when this impulse toward freedom occurs, the
abandoned meter is not replaced by another temporal control,
and the poetry can be said to break down into prose. Non-
metered poetry, poetry which depends upon the poet's "exact
time sense" more than upon a predisposed pattern such as
conventional meters afford, always risks this break-down,
because it is precariously dependent upon the poet's
rhythmic sensitivity. If he lacks a time-sense precise
enough to impose a saving regularity upon verse which he has
freed from the conventional pattern of syllables in stressed-
unstressed alternations, then his verse loosens into prose
or slipshod free verse. It may be that with the decadence
of Jacobean poetry and the disappearance of poets whose
materials and abilities found best expression in non-metered
rhythms, poetry instinctively moved, in Dryden and Pope,
toward a dominance of conventional prosodic patterns as a
way of restoring a regularity which was not apparently possible
in the unconventional prosody of the preceding period.
Poetry constantly seeks the means of its own self-preservation,
and alters these means as its evolution demands; in the

eighteenth century, it was revitalized by the poets' deliberate
return to strictly metered verse, and their careful method
of making the stress pattern of natural speech coincident
with an artificial metrical pattern. This kind of poetry
requires impeccable taste in diction and an imaginative use
of the strictly limiting syllabic line, but it does not
primarily require, though all good metered verse is served
by it, the sharpened time sense which is all-important to
a poet in non-metered verse; for the artificial pattern
itself disposes the time. A really first-rate poet like
Pope will vary the pattern and give, by his choice of words
to fill the units and by his variations of those units
themselves, different illusions of time within the uniform
pattern of syllables. But the important point is that the
time units are already there to be filled. Metered rhythm
serves beautifully for poetry which seeks the cadence and
quality of music, as in much lyric poetry written in
conventional feet, and for poetry which seeks the euphonious,
lightly repetitive pattern of cultivated speech.

Non-metered verse, on the other hand, abandons the
meter and takes the line itself, or an interval or phrase,
as a basic time unit. Within this unit the poet has great
freedom to place his stresses as he wishes, and to cluster
stressed or unstressed syllables in ways not allowed in
conventional prosody (except by the Procrustean system of
exceptions). This freedom of stresses has led many people

to think that such verse is a product of stresses only, with the unstressed syllables simply a "cushion" for them. This is an easy and natural assumption to make if one takes Anglo-Saxon verse as the single archetype of non-metered verse; but when, as in Eliot, a line of four stresses may be followed by one of five, that by one of three, the next by one of four, and so on, this presents a problem hard for stress-as-rhythm prosodists to deal with satisfactorily. However, if it is understood that the rhythm in non-metered verse is not dependent upon stresses alone, but upon a combination of various time-consuming elements (length of words and sounds, juxtaposition of words, and pause--a major element often overlooked) disposed in various ways within large recurrent units, then the number of stresses in the line ceases to be the uniquely important element or even the major element, unless, as some poets intentionally have arranged, the lines keep an identical number of stresses (as Anglo-Saxon verse does, and as Yeats thought sprung verse was intended to do).

Obviously, the number of syllables is not a controlling principle,[1] although it may happen that successive

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[1]There have been attempts to write non-metered verse which tries to establish regularity of pattern by using a fixed number of syllables to a line, with no regard for stress and pause as part of the pattern. This is called isosyllabic verse and has never, to my knowledge, been successful when adhering strictly to its syllabic principle and nothing else, largely because time cannot be controlled in that method; only typographical pattern is the result. See Yvor Winters,

lines have the same or nearly the same number of syllables

simply because their approximate natural equivalence makes

this a probability when the line itself is taken as the

controlling time-unit. It should be emphasized again,

however, that the equivalence of units is illusory; exact

equivalence is patently impossible and in fact undesirable.

What the poet desires is the sense of recurring units falling

into a recognizable controlled pattern; the units are units

only by virtue of this apparent equivalence. Nor should

one assume that lines in a poem must have identical apparent

equivalences, for many effects require that they should

not have; but only that if both long and short lines occur

within the poem, they will do so in a perceptible pattern--[1]

one may even call it a pattern of time-ratios, understanding

that this is not meant in a precise or scientific sense.

If non-metered rhythm appears in principle anarchic--

that is, no rhythm at all--it can only be said that it may

be, and as metered verse always risks the vice of sing-song

"The Influence of Meter on Poetic Convention," in
Primitivism and Decadence (New York: Arrow Editions, 1937),
pp. 93-143, for examples of this kind of verse. Mr. Winters
likes it.

[1]See for example the opening lyric in "Burnt Norton"
IV, of Eliot's Quartets. This is an excellent example of non-
metered verse which uses the line as its controlling
temporal unit; the longest line has fourteen syllables, the
shortest only one, and the poem moves in a controlled pattern
through progressively shortening lines toward the single-
syllable line, then outward again to lines of the same
approximate length as the first ones. The temporal (rhythmic)
pattern is a reflection of the wheel-still point pattern of
the theme.

dullness, so non-metered verse risks the vice of prose lined as poetry. Done badly, there is not much to choose between either of them; done well, they are not competitive but complementary kinds of poetry, each with its own individual strengths. What these strengths are will become more evident in an examination of Yeats's work in both types of prosody.

Many of Yeats's poems can be scanned by conventional methods to show a basic pattern of traditional metrical schemes. These schemes are always of course used with variations within the pattern, and indeed it is just the precise "rightness" of the deliberate variations which assures the beauty of many of the poems. The poem which is his most nearly flawless technical achievement is in meters, and it affords an instructive example of what Yeats could do in conventional rhythm:

> Beloved, may your sleep be sound
> That have found it where you fed.
> What were all the world's alarms
> To mighty Paris when he found
> Sleep upon a golden bed
> That first dawn in Helen's arms?
>
> Sleep, beloved, such a sleep
> As did that wild Tristram know
> When, the potion's work being done,
> Roe could run or doe could leap
> Under oak and beechen bough,
> Roe could leap or doe could run;
>
> Such a sleep and sound as fell
> Upon Eurotas' grassy bank
> When the holy bird, that there
> Accomplished his predestined will,
> From the limbs of Leda sank
> But not from her protecting care.
>   ("Lullaby," 259)

Here a really astonishing control of language has made the
pattern of natural speech-accent almost perfectly coincident
with the pattern of metrical accent. The only variations
of the iambic norm appear in the trochees which introduce
some of the lines, and in the slightly shifted balance of
"As did that wild Tristram know," where the particular
juxtaposition of words necessitates a secondary or nearly
full stress on both that and wild followed by a full stress
on the first syllable of Tristram: a delicate ruffling of
the rhythmic flow which the strongly regular metrical
context absorbs with perfect ease. The rhythm is an effect
of more than the matching of speech accent with metrical
accent; the control of language referred to above is a
major rhythmic factor and it includes the diction, with
its large proportion of l's and r's, the tasteful use of
alliteration, and the song-like repetition of phrases
(which never become full refrains) as part of its harmonies.
Another poem in which the coincidence of natural and
metrical stress patterns is very close, and which shows
similar variations in its reversed feet, is "A Last
Confession." As in "Lullaby," none of the variations is
marked enough to break the firm metrical structure, and its
lovely singing quality is an effect of delicate modulations
made upon a strong and regular rhythmic line. These two
poems present excellent examples of relatively strict
adherence to a metrical norm, and the deliberate approximation

of natural and metrical stress in a single pattern.

There are other poems in which the metrical pattern
is not so firmly adhered to but which show, despite more
striking variations than we have seen in the poems above,
a metrical norm which is still easily recognizable. In
"A Prayer for Old Age," a poem in three quatrains with lines
of alternating tetrameter and trimeter, six of the twelve
lines of the poem are in perfect unvaried iambics; the other
six show variation which approaches counterpoint--that is,
upon the "understood" base of iambic rhythm Yeats has
established a counter rhythm, largely through the juxta-
posing of stresses: "God guard me from those thoughts men
think / In the mind alone." Another poem, "The Man and the
Echo," begins in marked obedience to the metrical pattern
of heavy alternate stresses, the natural speech pattern
coinciding with it; but these patterns are made subtly
divergent as the poem proceeds. The metrical scheme continues
to require markedly strong metrical stresses, and these are
made to play against and compromise with the natural speech
stresses. This compromise of stressing gives the poem a
peculiar tension and an illusion of high pitch, which work
very well within the dramatic structure of the poem's action:
a man shouting his secret guilts to a stone, and hearing the
echo come back to mock him. Likewise, "The Circus Animals'
Desertion" has a recognizable metrical scheme, here of iambic
pentameter, upon which the speech pattern plays so freely--

by means of caesuras, clustered stresses, and so on--that
there is little sense of a fixed metrical pattern; yet it
is there, behind and secondary to the strong speech pattern
which, though counterpointing it, never moves completely
away from the metrical norm. Yet another example of a basic
metrical norm against which the speech pattern of natural
stresses makes a counterpoint is the opening poem of
"Vacillation." The lines alternate six syllables with four
syllables up to the last two lines, which alternate five
and three. The poem can be scanned, with considerable
violence to the logical pattern, in a conventional iambic
rhythm, but when read with logical or natural stress, the
high incidence of trochaic feet in so brief a poem makes
the poem noticeably irregular within its scheme. The
uniformity of syllables to line, and the "submerged" iambic
pattern, however, stabilize the lines and indicate the basic
time being counterpointed.

The variation of a metrical pattern is inevitable
and desirable; counterpoint, which is a deliberate and
repeated use of variation ending in the creation of a counter
or "other" rhythm to move upon the formal metrical rhythm
which is the norm, is also a natural poetic device, and may
be favored to a greater or lesser degree by a poet, according
to his own temperament and material. But counterpoint used
consistently and deliberately within a poem may, as Hopkins
saw, end in the creation of a completely new rhythm which

becomes absolute within the poem. The rhythm which is then created Hopkins called "sprung verse," and said it would always be a falling rhythm (on the principle that there was an iambic norm from which the poem moved).[1] Hopkins was much concerned to scan this new rhythm in meters, and resuscitated some classical feet not usually used in the analysis of English verse in order to do so. But the extreme of counterpoint really destroys meters rather than simply reversing or altering them; and as the new rhythm may itself be a rising one, it is better to dispense with the term "falling rhythm" as a synonym for it. In addition, as a rhythm freed from meters may occur in a poem from the first line, and thus have no metrical norm implicit to move against, it is better also to dispense with the term counterpoint (and with the conventional prosody of which counterpoint is the feature) precisely at the moment when the poem becomes, or is from the beginning, unscannable in meters.

One can see in a number of Yeats's poems an impulse away from metered rhythm, and where this occurs it is usually in a poem of intense emotional energy or at moments of agitation within a meditative progression of moods. This is very clearly illustrated in the third section of "Blood and the Moon," which begins with a fairly regular metrical pattern which is then gradually submerged as the emotional

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[1] "Author's Preface," Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W. H. Gardner (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

intensity of the poem rises. This is a typical movement in many passages to be found in Yeats, and should be seen as what I have called an impulse away from, rather than a complete abandonment of, metrically controlled lines. It should be noted, for example, that despite the freedom in placement of stressed and unstressed syllables, these lines retain with very few exceptions a fixed number of syllables, and this itself is a restraining influence upon the impulse to break through the formal pattern. Exactly the same thing is true of "Leda and the Swan," a poem whose line rhythms approach great freedom in their disposition of stresses, but which are yet contained within the ten-syllable limit of the lines.

A movement opposite to that observable in "Blood and the Moon" appears in the final section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War." This poem begins in non-metered rhythm, in long, apparently free lines which express the mood of the poem.[1]

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.

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[1] In the scansion of poems, I have used the acute accent for stress and the grave accent for secondary stress. The breve accent designates an unstressed syllable.

/ �‿ ˿ / ˿ / ˿ ˿ ˿ / ˿ /
Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;

/ ˿ ˿ / ˿ ˿ / ˿ ˿ / ˿ ˿ / /
Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

                    ("I See Phantoms of Hatred . . . ," 203)

Here the principle of rhythm is not the metrical unit, for
the lines cannot be scanned in meters with any justice to
their actual sound, but phrasal units which recur with enough
regularity to point the time, and to give an underlying
sense of rhythmical pattern to a stanza which has abandoned
the conventional rhythmical structure. One feature of the
stanza will be noticed at once, its tendency to cluster
stresses, and, a concomitant of this, to suspend numerous
unstressed syllables between the temporal points which the
stresses mark. This gives an effect of surge and pause, of
movement and stasis, or, to speak more accurately, the sense
of static points breaking and riding the movement of the
verse, then falling into movement again. The stanza which
follows the one quoted above makes use of many compound words
to cluster the stresses, and of repeated words and phrases
(a characteristic of most non-metered verse) which serve to
unify the lines in a linked pattern, for the repeated word
assures the repeated time-interval. This non-metered rhythm
dominates the early stanzas, but is altered and resolved
into meters in the last stanza of the poem to mirror the
progression of mood. For the last stanza records, after the
hallucinatory visions of the earlier ones, the poet's
acceptance, however bitterly tinged, of his own isolation,

an acceptance symbolized by his turning away from the observed
scene and into the tower. With this acceptance, the poem
moves into a rhythm of meters, and into lines of precisely
twelve syllables. There are variations of reversed feet within
the lines, but an overriding regularity of metrical pattern,
and the last line of the stanza is in perfect iambic feet.

These observations suggest the peculiar appropriateness
of non-metered rhythm to a certain kind of material; and one
may, incidentally, relate this to the appearance of non-
metered verse in Jacobean drama. In Yeats's verse there
sometimes appears a curious combination of emotional tensions
that can almost be described as hysteria, or perhaps it is
better to use for it a term which Yeats occasionally used
and appeared to favor, hysterica passio, for it introduces
a relevant dramatic and specifically Shakespearean connotation.
When this upsurge of passion occurs, it is always expressed
through non-metered rhythm, and naturally so, for that is a
rhythm flexible enough to move poetry toward the pitch of
excited speech, or toward a kind of chant, according as the
tempo is accelerated or slowed.[1] The simulation of excited
speech is an effect in "The Gyres," where the rhythm is
appropriate to the content of the poem: a catalog of evils
followed by a rather strident assertion of "tragic joy" in
the face of evil and death. Some readers have found this,

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[1]Non-metered rhythm is not per se frenzied or high-
pressured, as much of Eliot's verse shows; syntax, diction,
theme are all conditioning factors in its emotional tone.

and similar Yeats poems, unconvincing in its frenetic
affirmation; but the rhythm suits the material, and is indeed
one of the clues by which we sense the undertone of the
frenetic. If we question what is being said, it is probably
because the rhythm prompts us to, just as we know from the
rhythms of Lear's speeches (even before we attend to the
logical-illogical thought of them) that he is approaching
madness. This note of frenzy which rhythm can convey is
familiar enough in Shakespeare, and one can be fairly certain,
I think, that Yeats wished exactly that note, with all its
Shakespearean echoes.

By suggesting that non-metered rhythm in Yeats is
often used for articulating nervous tensions approaching
madness, I do not mean to imply, of course, that Yeats was
mad, though I have met some who thought so (and were a little
suspicious of Shakespeare), but only that the range of his
material, and his romantic interest in the presentation of
a personality in emotional crisis, make such a rhythm
appropriate, for, by abandoning the regularity of meters,
it can simulate states of frenzy or disorganization while
still retaining a formal pattern, that is, still remaining
poetry. Likewise, as I have suggested above, it is
appropriate for poems whose emotional intensity proceeds from
something like a condition of vision and moves the poetry
toward incantation. "Byzantium" is the key example here,
but one may see the same kind of thing in "All Souls' Night,"

a poem which records an experiment in psychical research.
Its opening stanza, quoted below, establishes a non-metered
rhythm which alters to a conventional rhythm of meters in
the more relaxed and conversational middle stanzas, but then
returns again to the freer movement of non-metered verse
at the visionary climax of the poem.

> Midnight has come, and the great Christ Church Bell
> And many a lesser bell sound through the room;
> And it is All Souls' Night,
> And two long glasses brimmed with muscatel
> Bubble upon the table. A ghost may come;
> For it is a ghost's right,
> His element is so fine
> Being sharpened by his death,
> To drink from the wine-breath
> While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.
> ("All Souls' Night," 224)

Here, as in the earlier passage from "Meditations in Time of
Civil War," the rhythm is marked by clustered stresses, and
by the suspension of unstressed syllables between points of
emphasis. It will be observed that while the lines cannot
be scanned in conventional meters, they will, if scanned
according to the actual sound of the verse which the placement
of words determines, show a pattern of echoing temporal
units. Notice, for example, how the phrase, "And two long
glasses brimmed," is echoed later in "While our gross
palates drink"; how "Midnight has come" is echoed in the next

line by "sound through the room"; and how the suspension of
unstressed syllables between stresses is given the same
temporal measure in both "His element is so fine" and the
succeeding line, "Being sharpened by his death." In addition,
one may observe, by glancing at the scansion, or by carefully
listening to the poem read aloud, that the phrases in which
stresses are clustered are ones of importance for thematic
emphases and contrasts: "great Christ Church Bell," "All
Souls' Night," "two long glasses brimmed," "ghost's right,"
"our gross palates." The whole effect of the stanza is one
of a measured, solemn cadence, more obviously a "rhythm"
than that in "Meditations" or in "The Gyres," but based
upon the same principle of stress and suspension rather than
of regularly alternating stress and unstress as in
conventional verse, and using phrases rather than meters as
the unit of duration.

Most of Yeats's poems can be ranged somewhere
between the two norms, or extremes, of strictly metered
verse such as we have seen in "Lullaby," and the non-metered
verse, freed from accentual-syllabic regularity, of "All
Souls' Night." As I have pointed out earlier, Yeats sometimes
moves between these two norms within a single poem, and
often does so in the long poems composed of sections.
Wherever he alters the norm of his rhythm, he does so to
allow the exploration of a different kind of material. His
meditative verse, in many ways his most characteristic, is

usually a mean between them, achieved by the use of a ground
rhythm of meters upon which many variations and degrees
of counterpoint are set; a mean from which movement toward
either norm, as occasion demands, can easily be made. This
characteristic rhythm takes part of its quality from the
involved, winding syntax of the lines, a syntax in which
dependent clause is linked to dependent clause to form a
series of logical and rhythmical units suspended between one
grammatical point and another. As this is a rhetorical
device, and as much an element of syntax as a factor in
rhythm, it will be discussed in detail in the following
chapter.

Yeats's versification--both his verse forms and his
prosody--reveals what we have had occasion to observe before
in his use of imagery, a strong traditional base. Yet, as
we have seen in his handling of verse-forms and of rhythm,
he received his tradition with the freedom and imagination
of a first-rank poet and, as we should expect such a poet
to do, modified it with new material and the energy of his
own personality. This combination of the traditional and
the original will be seen yet again in those aspects of style
to be considered next, syntax and structure.

CHAPTER V

SYNTAX AND STRUCTURE

Although verse and stanza are the artificial structural
units of a poem, any consideration of the total effect of a
poem or poetic style requires that we attend also to the
arrangement of logical and grammatical units in the poem--
that is, to syntax. In poetry, syntactical units may, but
usually do not, coincide with line divisions. In Yeats, they
rarely do, for his characteristic syntax is a complicated
articulation of thought through long and varied grammatical
constructions which overflow line-units, although one can
find in his work occasional examples of a syntax which is
direct and simple. This simplified syntax may be found in
a number of the ballads, in poems of an epigrammatic nature
such as "Parnell" or "The Great Day," and in poems taking the
form of gnomic riddles, as "The Nativity," which is a series
of questions and answers arranged in alternating lines.
Certain of the Crazy Jane poems and other songs are fairly
straightforward in their syntactical arrangement, but more
often than one might suspect, even these "artless" poems
contain relatively complicated constructions, as "Crazy Jane

Grown Old Looks at the Dancers" will show.

It will be helpful to glance at one of Yeats's more simply constructed poems, in order to show, for purposes of contrast, a syntax relatively untypical of his work:

> What if I bade you leave
> The cavern of the mind?
> There's better exercise
> In the sunlight and wind.
>
> I never bade you go
> To Moscow or to Rome.
> Renounce that drudgery,
> Call the Muses home.
>
> Seek those images
> That constitute the wild,
> The lion and the virgin,
> The harlot and the child.
>
> Find in middle air
> An eagle on the wing,
> Recognize the five
> That make the Muses sing.
>   ("Those Images," 316)

The shortness of the sentences, and their tendency to fall into successive two-line units, give the poem its simplicity of arrangement. Thematically the poem is Blakean, and it may be that Yeats chose a syntax which would be closer to that of Blake's lyrics, in order to strengthen the oblique allusions to Blake poems which are in the imagery of this poem. There are a few grammatical complications: a relative clause, a series of nouns in apposition, a shift from interrogative to declarative to imperative mood; but as a whole the poem is simple and direct in its syntactical con-structions. This type of poem is one of a minority in Yeats, as I have said; one sentence from "Solomon and the Witch,"

although perhaps an example from the opposite extreme, is

useful for illustrating a more typical mode of construction:

> For though love has a spider's eye
> To find out some appropriate pain--
> Aye, though all passion's in the glance--
> For every nerve, and tests a lover
> With cruelties of Choice and Chance;
> And when at last that murder's over
> Maybe the bride-bed brings despair,
> For each an imagined image brings
> And finds a real image there;
> Yet the world ends when these two things,
> Though several, are a single light,
> When oil and wick are burned in one:
> Therefore a blessed moon last night
> Gave Sheba to her Solomon.
> ("Solomon and the Witch," 175)

This is not one of Yeats's most brilliant sentences,

but as it has many typical features, it is instructive.

The most striking of these features is its periodic structure:

the postponement of the main clause while a series of

dependent clauses are unwound; and one will observe that

this dependent series itself is interrupted by a parenthetical

remark. One need not call this distinctively Yeatsian

syntax, certainly, since it is an old enough kind of construction

to defy personal ownership; but it is one of his most

characteristic forms of construction, and recurs, with many

variations, throughout all of his work. There are certain

notable accompaniments of it here which will also be seen in

other passages: the repetition of words and of ideas as an

aid to continuity and clarity--for the sentence itself is

something of a labyrinth--and the use of a direct, summary

generalization at the end which pulls to a conclusion the

conditional elaborative strands of thought which have led off from as well as up to the main clause. Not all of these devices are always used by Yeats, and others occur elsewhere which are not present here; but this sentence, in a relatively early poem (1921), indicates the cast of Yeats's most consistent style.

Periodic structure may be based upon a principle of postponement, in which less important and grammatically dependent elements lead to a main clause, as in the lines, "In Sato's house, / Curved like new moon, moon-luminous, / It lay five hundred years." Or it may be based upon a principle of suspension, in which one major grammatical element is introduced, but separated from its completing elements by interrupting phrases or clauses, as in each of the following passages:

> He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
> Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
> From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
> Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
> On master-work of intellect or hand,
> No honour leave its mighty monument,
> Has but one comfort left: all triumph would
> But break upon his ghostly solitude.
> ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," I, 205)

> For the most rich inheritor,
> Knowing that none could pass Heaven's door
> That loved inferior art,
> Had such an aching heart
> That he, although a country's talk
> For silken clothes and stately walk,
> Had waking wits; it seemed
> Juno's peacock screamed.
> ("My Table," 200)

In both of these passages the direct logical and grammatical

line is interrupted by grammatically dependent elements which amplify, explore, comment upon the main line itself. Although both principles, that of postponement and that of suspension, appear in Yeats, by far the more distinctive is the second, and as its essence is the use of interrupting elements, we may profitably look more closely at what these are.

The interruption of the main line of thought may be a result of various constructions. Yeats's fondness for adjective clauses, which was remarked in Chapter II, appears in the recurrence of such constructions to separate major sentence elements, most often subject from verb:

> No handiwork of Callimachus,
> Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
> Made draperies that seemed to rise
> When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
> ("Lapis Lazuli," 292)

As well as adjective clauses, participial phrases may serve to separate a subject from its verb:

> I, proclaiming that there is
> Among birds or beasts or men,
> One that is perfect or at peace,
> Danced on Cruachan's windy plain . . .
> ("The Dancer at Cruachan," 263)

It is easy enough to recall many other interrupting devices between subject and verb, if one recalls lines from his best-known poetry: "And I though never of Ledaean kind / Had pretty plumage once. . . ." Here it is an elliptical adverbial clause; elsewhere, it may be an appositive: "Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it, / Five hundred years ago. . . ."

Any of these constructions may serve also to separate
a verb from its object or complement, as the participial
phrase does in this passage:

> I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
> That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind
> All those that manhood tried. . . .
> ("In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," 133)

The well-known description of Keats in "Ego Dominus Tuus" is
a brilliant example of the interrupted line, two participial
phrases and an appositive falling between verb and object,
and setting into high relief that object when it comes at the
end of the line:

> I see a schoolboy when I think of him,
> With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,
> For certainly he sank into his grave
> His senses and his heart unsatisfied,
> And made--being poor, ailing and ignorant,
> Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
> The coarse-bred son of a livery-stable keeper--
> Luxuriant song.
> ("Ego Dominus Tuus," 159)

Yeats will also occasionally divide a verb itself, separating
an auxiliary from its main verb by some phrase or clause.
This is something of a mannerism, and one of the devices
which, when Yeats comes under the hand of a really skillful
parodist, will be a telling point of mimicry. The most
familiar example is probably that in the following lines
but others may be found.

> I must recall a man that neither love
> Nor music nor an enemy's clipped ear
> Could, he was so harried, cheer;
> ("The Tower," 194)

As these examples suggest, the form of interruption

varies from poem to poem, being sometimes only a brief
phrasal interpolation, more often a longer construction of
a clause or even several linked clauses which in turn carry
their own inner interruptions of movement. The importance
of Yeats's grammar for this study lies only in its effect
upon his style, and in particular this syntactical exploita-
tion of suspended or interrupted movement is important. If
one thinks of the progression of logical thought as linear,
articulated through one grammatical point to another (the
elements of the main clause), then the constructions which
interrupt this movement, as they are themselves meaningful,
may be seen as movement of another kind. It is helpful to
use the analogy of spirals to describe their impulse away
from the main linear base of movement, from which they depart
and to which they finally return when the logical thought is
resolved in the completed grammatical structure. Such an
analogy is helpful in suggesting the relation of two kinds
of thought-movement; the interruptions do not further, but
they enlarge the area of significance of, the main logical
line, and this extension of significant area outward as well
as forward is precisely the effect of Yeats's characteristic
syntax. The appropriateness of such syntax for meditative
verse is clear; and a remark by Susanne Langer which
describes the "occurrence of a thought" in poetry is really
a description of meditative verse as Yeats has written it:

> The occurrence of a thought is an event in a thinker's
> personal history, and has as distinct a qualitative
> character as an adventure, a sight, or a human contact;
> it is not a proposition, but the entertainment of one,
> which necessarily involves vital tensions, feelings, the
> imminence of other thoughts, and the echoes of past
> thinking. Poetic reflections, therefore, are not
> essentially trains of logical reasoning, though they
> may incorporate fragments, at least, of discursive
> argument. Essentially they create the <u>semblance</u> of
> reasoning; of the seriousness, strain and progress, the
> sense of growing knowledge, growing clearness, conviction
> and acceptance--the whole experience of philosophical
> thinking.[1]

Any one who tests Yeats's characteristic syntax by this

passage will find, I think, that the "semblance of reasoning

. . . the sense of growing knowledge, growing clearness," is

exactly its effect, and that Miss Langer has very concisely

described the sense of an organic growth of thought which

his syntax conveys. The reader moves with the poet through

the explorations of his thought, follows with him its

momentary impulses away from and back to the main line and

to its final resolution, by indirections finding direction

out. To borrow Miss Langer's terms again, Yeats's meditative

verse does not present propositions, it entertains them; and

his syntax mirrors this experience. This is perhaps why

Yeats, for all the philosophical implications of his

meditative poems, rarely seems to be a didactic poet.

Another characteristic of Yeats's sentence structure

is the high incidence of repetition in it. In the largest

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[1]Susanne K. Langer, <u>Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art</u>
(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 219.

syntactical or structural sense, the parallel constructions
he uses are a form of repetition. These give to his verse
generally a rhetorical quality, the effect of well-wrought
speech, although they may also serve other particular
effects. In the second section of "Vacillation" the use of
parallel structures joined by <u>and</u> gives the poem speed and
a closely repetitive form which contribute to its cryptic,
excited air:

> A tree there is that from its topmost bough
> Is half all glittering flame and half all green
> Abounding foliage moistened with the dew;
> And half is half and yet is all the scene;
> And half and half consume what they renew,
> And he that Attis' image hangs between
> That staring fury and the blind lush leaf
> May know not what he knows, but knows not grief.
> ("Vacillation," 245)

In the opening stanza of "Dialogue of Self and Soul," the
use of parallel prepositional phrases serves to hammer out
an emphatic injunction, a command to focus attention:

> I summon to the winding ancient stair;
> Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
> Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
> Upon the breathless starlit air,
> Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
> Fix every wandering thought upon
> That quarter where all thought is done:
> ("A Dialogue of Self and Soul," 230)

One may observe also in this last passage the three instances
of double adjectives before a noun, a minor form of repetitive
structure.

Verbal repetition is often an inevitable feature of
parallelism, as the use of <u>and</u> in the passage from
"Vacillation" illustrates; but Yeats characteristically takes

such repetition even further by using more than once some

words which are not necessary to establish the parallel

structures, such as <u>half</u> in that same passage. We have had

occasion in different chapters to observe Yeats's dependence

upon repetition as a poetic device, and later in a

consideration of structure it will be shown to be an archi-

tectonic device also, using phrases, images, and themes as

its material. We can see a good example of his verbal

repetition in the following lines:

> A sudden blast of dusty wind and after
> Thunder of feet, tumult of images,
> Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind;
> And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter
> All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,
> According to the wind, for all are blind.
> But now wind drops, dust settles. . . .
> ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," VI, 208)

The echoing of <u>dust</u>, <u>all</u>, <u>cries</u>, and the four instances of

<u>wind</u>, are repetitions which, in reading, we are not perhaps

fully conscious of, but they form a means of pulling all

the threads of the passage taut. Examples of this technique

could be multiplied at random from many different poems,

although the reasons for its use vary with different poems,

as does the effect. Sometimes it is used as an aid to

movement through a sentence whose length and complexity

require the kind of bell-signal of guidance which repetitions

provide; at other times its effect is more clearly psychological

than structural (if the two can be analytically separated),

and the repeated words create an intensity of mood which is

necessary to the poem, as in "All Souls! Night." Although

repetition in itself can be used to hide a poet's weakness as well as to give his verse strength, there is almost no instance when Yeats uses it to a marked degree which cannot be amply justified. And it is important to observe that he very rarely repeats rhyme-words, something to be considered when determining whether a poet's repetitions hide weakness or give strength.

Closely related to the use of structural and verbal repetition is Yeats's use of catalogue sentences. The extreme example of this technique is the poem, "Beautiful Lofty Things," a list of remembered incidents which, as the title suggests, have taken on symbolic value as images of a nobility of gesture or personality.[1] Here the catalogue is a list of individual things which all represent the same general qualities. In other poems the catalogue serves a similar purpose as a representative list, all the items summing to some abstraction which they illustrate. A passage in "The Fisherman" lists the particulars of an abstraction called reality; it builds carefully toward a climactic line, and in its diction recalls Hamlet's catalogue of the slings and arrows of fortune:

> All day I'd looked in the face
> What I had hoped 'twould be
> To write for my own race
> And the reality;

---

[1] It hardly needs to be said that Yeats's verse technique of calling up friends by name, and describing their characters, is simply the catalogue technique writ large.

> The living men that I hate,
> The dead man that I loved,
> The craven man in his seat,
> The insolent unreproved,
> And no knave brought to book
> Who has won a drunken cheer,
> The witty man and his joke
> Aimed at the commonest ear,
> The clever man who cries
> The catch-cries of the clown,
> The beating down of the wise
> And great Art beaten down.
>   ("The Fisherman," 146)

One might also compare, as a representative list, Yeats's

mocking catalogue of old themes in "The Circus Animals'

Desertion," and the much more delicately-weighted irony of

the catalogue in this passage:

> We too had many pretty toys when young:
> A law indifferent to blame or praise,
> To bribe or threat; habits that made old wrong
> Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's rays;
> Public opinion ripening for so long
> We thought it would outlive all future days.
> O what fine thought we had because we thought
> That the worst rogues and rascals had died out.
>   ("Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," I, 204)

These are uses of the catalogue for the representative

value of the items listed. Sometimes the device serves a

narrative or structural purpose as well. In "Easter 1916"

Yeats uses a catalogue of unnamed friends, with a brief

notation of their altered characters, in order to sketch in

very rapidly and efficiently the background of the Easter

Rebellion, so that the present political reality will have

more significance. It serves as a kind of plot-synopsis as

well as a list representative of the Irish rebels. In the

second section of "Meditations in Time of Civil War," the

catalogue which lists the properties of the tower and its

setting serves primarily a symbolic rather than a representa-

tive purpose, for each item has its own symbolic weight,

although taken together they also form a representative list.

The reader will also recall the catalogues in "The Tower,"

which we will examine in some detail in the next chapter.

The catalogue technique is inevitably associated with

Whitman, but there is only one instance in Yeats's use of

it which has a marked similarity to Whitman's use. This

appears in the special technique of catalogue in the opening

stanza of the following poem:

> That crazed girl improvising her music,
> Her poetry, dancing upon the shore,
> Her soul in division from itself
> Climbing, falling she knew not where,
> Hiding amid the cargo of a steamship,
> Her knee-cap broken, that girl I declare
> A beautiful lofty thing, or a thing
> Heroically lost, heroically found.
>
> No matter what disaster occurred
> She stood in desperate music wound,
> Wound, wound, and she made in her triumph
> Where the bales and the baskets lay
> No common intelligible sound
> But sang, 'O sea-starved, hungry sea.'
> ("A Crazed Girl," 301)

I have spoken of the first stanza as a special technique

of the catalogue because, instead of being a list of separate

items, usually nouns, as the catalogue most often is, it is

a succession of adjective phrases and clauses which give

cumulative information about the girl, who is introduced in

the first line, each successive line adding to our knowledge

of what she has done and what she is. This use of the catalogue

for amplification and extension from a single noun is
recurrent in Whitman, and Yeats's final assertive declaration
in the first stanza is also very Whitmanesque in tone, the
climax of a long parallel structure. The remainder of the
poem, however, is pure Yeats.

One other feature of Yeats's sentence construction
is of primary importance, his use of questions. This habit
is very much of a piece with a poetic attitude which we have
observed in many contexts. We have seen in his diction a
constant use of qualifying words and phrases to soften his
assertions, and to suggest the uncertainty of absolute con-
clusions. In an examination of his versification, we
found specific techniques of rhyme and rhythm designed to
give his lines a subtle, hesitating cadence. The prevalence
of rhetorical questions, and of what are really unanswerable
questions, is another aspect of the poetic attitude that
diction and rhythm express in their own ways, an attitude
which "entertains propositions" more often than it asserts
them. This is true despite the appearance of an assertive,
positive tone in Yeats's poetry; for this tone is modified
for a reader observant of all its various qualifications.
If one calls to mind the best-known of Yeats's poems, he
will realize immediately the strong interrogative impulse
of them. "The Second Coming," "Leda and the Swan," and
"Among School Children" conclude with questions. "The Tower"
opens with a very personal question, and takes its meditative

direction from that same question enlarged to a universal
one, which the poem as a whole then seeks to answer. It is
interesting to note that although Yeats never ceased to use
the question as a characteristic feature of his verse, it is
used most persistently in the volumes of the middle period,
those which contain the bulk of his great meditative verse.
That verse takes much of its power from the posing of
universal questions and the expression of universal
uncertainties. In part it is this admission of uncertainty
which gives so modern a tone to Yeats's traditional verse.
It should be added, also, that Yeats is the chief of the
modern poets who have insisted, against the opposition of
the logical positivists, upon a mystery beyond knowledge.

Most of the syntactical features which have been
mentioned--long periodic sentences, parallel structures,
parenthetical or interrupting elements, heavy verbal
repetition, and the use of questions--may be found in
different proportions in most of Yeats's poems. All are
present in a number of poems; "The Second Coming" is notable
for employing within a short poem all the devices we have
discussed, and each of the long poems displays them all.
The nature of modern poetic syntax has been examined by
Donald Davie in a very interesting recent book, in which he
concludes that the absence of syntax as grammarians and
logicians understand it is the distinctive mark of modern
poetry, and that

> . . . the break with the past is at bottom a change
> of attitude toward poetic syntax. It is from that point
> of view, in respect of syntax, that modern poetry, so
> diverse in all other ways, is seen as one. And we can
> define it thus: What is common to all modern poetry is
> the assertion or the assumption (most often the latter)
> that syntax in poetry is wholly different from syntax
> as understood by logicians and grammarians.[1]

Davie's further conclusion as to the significance of this--
that it mirrors "a loss of faith in conceptual thought"[2]--
may or may not be valid; but his original observation shows
valuable insights. It leads to many considerations that
cannot be followed out here; but Davie's passing remark that
Yeats stands almost alone in post-symbolist poetry as loyal
to authentic syntax[3]--that is, to syntax as understood by
logicians and grammarians--deserves closer examination. We
have seen enough examples of Yeats's meditative verse, and
the features of its characteristic syntax, to find in them
ample support for Davie's observation, which is fundamentally
a claim for the traditionalism of Yeats's poetry. But as we
have seen in other chapters, that traditionalism is not
without exception in Yeats's work. In syntax, as in rhythm
and diction, we can find him diverging from traditional
methods; and Davie's view of Yeats's syntax, insofar as it
ignores this divergence, is not totally accurate.

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[1] Donald Davie, Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 148.

[2] Ibid., p. 151.

[3] Ibid.

I must refer once again to an earlier remark about
the use of language which is opaque rather than transparent,
in order to suggest that Yeats sometimes, although by no
means characteristically, abandons authentic syntax--
transparent structures of thought--for imagistic language.
Where this occurs, his language ceases to be a movement of
thought through grammatical structures which chart the
progressions of it, but is rather an infusion of thought into
images which dominate the poem and contain its meaning.
The images may or may not distort the verbal and grammatical
structures of the poem; in "Byzantium" such distortion of
syntax does occur, in "The Statues" it does not. But even
when those structures remain intact, the images have
disengaged logical relationships to which we are accustomed
in authentic syntax--the syntax of prose language, and of
all discursive language in poetry or prose. The language
of such poems cannot mirror conceptual thought, as Davie
says grammatical syntax must do, but can mirror (as such
syntax cannot) a dream experience or a visionary experience
in which thought is embedded in images. Because the image
is the vehicle of meaning, interpretation of the poem must
concentrate on the image, not on the syntax (that is, the
logical, discursive structure) of the lines. This means
that the importance of syntax in any Yeats poem is determined
by the way in which the poem is constructed, and the relative
importance given to the image. This will be clarified if

we consider the various structural modes to be found in the
poetry.

Yeats's construction of poems can be seen most easily
in terms of what is done with the image as a structural
principle. There are relatively few poems in which there
is no key image to aid in the clarification of ideas. The
excellent brief poem quoted below is unusual for its paucity
of imagery, and its almost total discursiveness of manner:

> Nor dread nor hope attend
> A dying animal;
> A man awaits his end
> Dreading and hoping all;
> Many times he died,
> Many times rose again.
> A great man in his pride
> Confronting murderous men
> Casts derision upon
> Supersession of breath;
> He knows death to the bone--
> Man has created death.
>   ("Death," 230)

Although this poem lacks the logical strictness of a true
syllogism, it is like a syllogism in the clarity and neatness
of its logical progression. It sets out three different
attitudes toward death, and although there is germinal drama
in "A great man in his pride / Confronting murderous men" the
poem does not develop this, and it remains the only impulse
toward visual immediacy which the poem contains. All else
is the language of discursive thought; the words are signs
of concepts--dread, death, hope, pride--and Yeats has made
the most striking word of the poem a completely abstract
one, supersession. It is to be noted that this poem has no

place, no scene or setting, and that it has no action or dramatization of ideas beyond the germinal drama noted above. Related to this lack of any spatial dimension is its lack of time, for as a statement of propositions in the semblance of syllogism it lacks both those dimensions of a perceptible world.

"Death" is unusual in its dependence upon abstractions. One can find similar poems in a dominantly discursive mode which use images of a very conventional kind:

> Much did I rage when young,
> Being by the world oppressed,
> But now with flattering tongue
> It speeds the parting guest.
> ("Youth and Age," 208)

This epigram-poem uses a personification of the world as a supercilious host, but the image is less important than the idea, being only a vehicle for clarifying the idea, or a filter through which the idea is seen in an intended color. Another example of a poem tending strongly to the discursive norm, and using conventional imagery as its vehicle is "The Wheel":

> Through winter-time we call on spring,
> And through the spring on summer call,
> And when abounding hedges ring
> Declare that winter's best of all;
> And after that there's nothing good
> Because the spring-time has not come--
> Nor know that what disturbs our blood
> Is but its longing for the tomb.
> ("The Wheel," 208)

Again, as in the other poems, all is aimed at the presentation of an idea, and the conventional analogy makes possible,

although not inevitable, the generalization at the end, which to an extent the poet hands us with no further warrant than the analogy has furnished. This is a less successful poem than "Death" because rather than a willing abandonment of the image it is a juxtaposition of idea and image, not a fusion of them. If we turn from this to a poem depending more organically upon its images, "Another Song of a Fool," we can see a more successful fusion of idea and image, and can note the relatively vital function which the image has gained as a consequence:

> This great purple butterfly,
> In the prison of my hands,
> Has a learning in his eye
> Not a poor fool understands.
>
> Once he lived a schoolmaster
> With a stark, denying look;
> A string of scholars went in fear
> Of his great birch and his great book.
>
> Like the clangour of a bell,
> Sweet and harsh, harsh and sweet,
> That is how he learnt so well
> To take the roses for his meat.
> ("Another Song of a Fool," 167)

There is in this poem a free use of direct statement, of an authentic syntax "as the logicians and grammarians understand it," but the poem could not exist without its major image; here, image and syntax are complementary principles of structure and meaning.

One should rightly speak of a poem's tendency in one direction or another, the discursive and abstract or the imagistic and sensuous, for there are relative degrees of

image-power. By their very nature, poems require a solidity

which the image can give; it is never typical for a good

poet to compose consistently in a discursive, relatively

imageless mode, just as, before the twentieth century,

it was rarely typical of a poet to write poems so totally

dominated by the image as to become oblique. "Another Song

of a Fool" is closer to the mean between these two extremes

than the other poems we have just considered. As such, it

belongs to the largest and most characteristic body of

Yeats's poems, those which use the image as an organic

structural principle and combine it in harmonious balance

with the discursive structure of syntax, and with devices

for dramatizing the ideas and emotional states of the poem:

the use of a setting, and of characters or at least of a

significant speaker. When dramatic devices form a part in

the construction of a poem, the use of imagery is an essential

concomitant principle, for it must contribute to the creation

of scene, of the emotional speech inevitable to a dramatized

speaker, and of the ideas themselves as they are made a

part of this total structure. We may see this method at its

simplest in such a well-known poem as "Speech After Long

Silence" and at its most masterful in "Among School Children,"

both of which use, with different degrees of complexity,

the elements of drama, the elements of discursive thought,

and images as their structural principles. In such a method

of construction Yeats can give free rein to his predilection

for direct or general statements, for they may grow naturally out of the given material, and take on vital immediacy because they are organic within a human, dramatic, sensibly perceptible world. In the first poem of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," we are prepared to accept the simplicity of so direct a generalization as

> Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
> What more is there to say?

because it comes at the climax of a poem in which language, images, the dramatized mood of the speaker himself, have given solidity to a created world in which such a generalization seems natural and indeed inevitable. The poet has earned the right to make such a comment, and it is received for its full significance, not as a counter or a truism.

In Yeats's major meditative poems, most of which are constructed upon this mean between discursive and imagistic, there is usually a strong sense of drama, a visual scene, and temporal progression. In "Among School Children," for example, there is the schoolroom setting, within which we witness a present action, while within the mind of the speaker we traverse past and future, as is the proper experience of meditation, which is neither pure syllogism nor pure vision. However, Yeats's long poems, those composed of sections, although showing all the structural features of his shorter meditative verse, nevertheless have a poetic range beyond that of the short poems, and pose special structural problems not found, say, in "Among School Children." But as the

imagistic mode is a part of these long poems, we have now

come full circle to a necessary consideration of it.

"The Statues" will serve very well for this

consideration, for it is an excellent poem in the imagistic

mode, although lacking the extreme obliquity of "Byzantium."

> Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
> His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
> In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
> But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
> Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
> That passion could bring character enough,
> And pressed at midnight in some public place
> Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.
>
> No! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men
> That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
> Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
> All Asiatic vague immensities,
> And not the banks of oars that swam upon
> The many-headed foam at Salamis.
> Europe put off that foam when Phidias
> Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.
>
> One image crossed the many-headed, sat
> Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,
> No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
> Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eyeballs knew
> That knowledge increases unreality, that
> Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.
> When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
> Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.
>
> When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
> What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
> What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
> We Irish, born into that ancient sect
> But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
> And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
> Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
> The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.
>
> ("The Statues," 322)

There are many apparently direct, straightforward statements

here; the problem posed by the poem is that these statements

communicate nothing as discursive clarifications, although

they appear to do so. The syntax, in Davie's sense, is not
authentic. But this is not to say that the poem communicates
nothing; only that its communication is made not through
logical syntax, but by a different means, that of imagery,
in which all the meaning of the poem resides. This meaning
is involved in the contrast between two image patterns, that
of marble and bronze statuary, and that of water. Concentrated
within the statuary images are concepts and ideational
realities (measurement, intellect, calculation, order, unity)
which are associated with the West (Pythagoras, Europe,
Phidias, Hamlet, Pearse, Cuchulain, We Irish), and set
against antithetical concepts embodied in the water images
(Asiatic vague immensities, many-headed foam, Buddha's
emptiness, filthy modern tide, formless spawning fury). But
as we should expect, within these nodes of imagery are
implicit many more complications of meaning than this simple
contrast suggests. The statuary images introduce an art
theme; "the men / That with a mallet or a chisel modelled"
the Greek statues won a victory greater than that of Greek
warriors at Salamis, those at "the banks of oars" in battle.
Contained also in the imagery is a concept of art as
energy and beauty within restraint which stir passion in the
living, both the erotic passion which finds its ideal
realized in the "casual flesh" of the statues, and the
heroic passion which finds its ideal realized in the discipline
such art reflects and symbolizes: the "plummet-measured face"

creates and answers both kinds of passion.

In a larger sense, as I have said, the statuary represents a western civilization, a way of life, which is opposed to its eastern antithesis, unity against multiplicity, measurement and calculation against vagueness, active against passive. This general contrast is clearest in the first, second, and fourth stanzas, where the continuity of the conflict is measured between Pythagoras and Pearse, between Salamis and modern Dublin. The most difficult stanza in the poem is the third, which presents a condensed historical survey of time between the battle of the Greeks at Salamis and that of the Irish in Dublin in 1916; it juxtaposes such unlikely figures as Hamlet and Buddha, and introduces an enigmatic figure--"a fat / Dreamer of the Middle Ages"-- whose placement in the imagistic pattern is made so rapidly that it is at first confusing. The emphasis of the stanza is upon the permanence of all that is implied by "Asiatic vague immensities," a permanence remaining constant under the transformations of its manifest images. It is significant that the image of the dreamer, which merges with that of Buddha at the same time as it is intended to suggest the medieval monk, has itself the qualities of a statue, as we associate Buddha with the static idol-figure. This subtle junction of two contrasted patterns of imagery suggests that in the infiltration of eastern ideas (Christianity, for example), those ideas have taken on certain features of the

western imago; but they retain their permanent nature, as
the statue of Buddha remains significantly different from
the Greek ones. The Greek statues appear to lack character,
but "passion could bring character enough"; the Buddha-idol
also has an apparent emptiness, but this emptiness is real
as well as superficial (a vague immensity) and cannot be
filled, for it stirs no human passion. The active and passive
distinction between statue and idol is implicit in the image
of the mirror: Phidias gave women dreams through art;
Buddha himself is the dreamer. For the western world the
mirror of art is of dreams but also of reality, as the Hamlet
allusion signifies, and the mirror itself is a means to
knowledge. For the eastern world, the "mirror on mirror
mirrored" is an image of the illusory and the multiple
(compare "the many-headed foam," a parallel image), for
"knowledge increases unreality." The passive idol, with its
empty eyeballs, is untouched by live lips, neither containing
nor stirring the passionate energy of a Hamlet or a Pearse.

The chronological and geographical range of the
imagery extends the implied meanings of the poem into
history, art, philosophy, while it suggests the perpetual
continuity of a certain kind of human ideal and its antithesis.
The complexity of the images, their compression and, in the
third stanza, their apparent or partial fusion, all move the
poem beyond any discursive mode of presentation and, for
the reader, make a fully logical understanding of the poem

impossible even when emotional comprehension brings a sense
of completeness and satisfaction. That this is not a fault
in the poem, one hardly needs to say, I think; if its
meanings had all been available to the discursive
intelligence, they would not have taken their form as an
imagistic poem. What the critic can do in discussing such
a poem is simply to show the directions of the poem,
tracing the radius of significance for those images which
control it and contain its meanings.

The relevance of this poetic technique to Yeats's
long poems has already been mentioned, and it will be
clarified if one considers for a moment the possible
structures of the long poem as such. Eliot has spoken of the
musical structure of poems, and emphasized that this is a
"music of imagery" as well as of sound.[1] We can see in
Yeats's long poems, as in Eliot's, a very careful statement
and re-statement of images analogous to that of motifs in
varying musical contexts of a single work. In the largest
sense, such a poem is never the sum of all its unitary
parts, for the cumulative development of images is something
occurring beyond the unit of any single poem within the total
structure; and an interpretation of the whole poem must take
into account the interrelations of these images as well as
any explicit logical development which may appear in the
structure of individual parts. This is not a revolutionary

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[1] "The Music of Poetry," loc. cit., p. 30.

kind of structure, certainly; Paradise Lost and The Ring and
the Book afford excellent examples of this kind of musical
structure. But there are significant differences between
these earlier poems and the modern long poem, which does
not usually have an equivalent narrative or discursive line,
and thus lacks the pure logical structure which a reader may
trace in Milton or Browning with aesthetic enjoyment whether
he attends to the musical structure or not. Such poems as
The Bridge and The Waste Land have abandoned not only
narrative in the traditional sense, but all semblance of
logical structure, substituting for it a totally imagistic
structure which, while not appealing to the generality of
readers as the earlier poems could do, nevertheless is
available to comprehension for readers trained to follow its
obliquities. Between these two possibilities, represented
by Milton and Browning on the one hand, and by Eliot and
Crane on the other, Yeats stands in a curious position.
Such a poem as "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" has neither
so direct a logical or discursive structure as to be sufficient
in itself for coherence and meaning, as in Paradise Lost;
nor so strong and complex an imagistic structure as to carry,
in the absence of the other, the whole poem, as in The
Waste Land. One knows, in the case of Milton or of Eliot,
how he must read, for the first five or ten lines on the
page will tell him. But the individual sections of any long
poem by Yeats have normally so strong a discursive pattern

that a reader may be led to attend to this primarily, until
he has finished the whole poem and finds that the discursive
lines do not give the poem an organic significance. Nor
does the imagistic pattern alone give it total meaning, but
an interaction between the two must be seen, for each is
essential to the other. In Milton, imagery dramatizes and
makes concrete the themes which are made explicit in the
logical, discursive structure of the poem; in Eliot, imagery
carries implicit within it the themes of the poem, for which
no logical structure exists; in Yeats, there is a fusion of
both kinds of poetic method, with the result that his long
poems have no meaning at all in any profound or interesting
sense unless the reader is aware of both patterns of structure
and uses each to complement the other.

What I am suggesting is certainly not very startling;
but it is easy to mistake Yeats's method simply because of
the large incidence of traditional features, of authentic
syntax and discursive elements, in it. Eliot's much more
striking obliquity is immediately recognized, whereas, because
the logical surfaces in Yeats are comparatively easy to
follow, the reader may be insensible to the other, oblique,
structures of meaning, until at the end of the total poem he
asks himself precisely where he has come within the poem
and what its summed meaning is. Images must then be seen
to show relations which syntax has not articulated, to embody
interrelated significances which no individual section of the

poem has made explicit. This dual structure is aided, not
confused, by the fact that often within the series of
individual sections, one poem in a completely oblique mode
will appear to break the discursive pattern, and thus force
images upon the immediate attention.

The method described above can be traced in
"Meditations in Time of Civil War," one of the great trilogy
of long poems which appeared in The Tower in 1928.[1] It is
in seven sections, each of which bears a title and each of
which has enough logical coherence to stand as a single poem.
None of the sections has a strongly marked obliquity of the
kind which appears in parts of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,"
with the exception of Section III, "My Table," whose
compression and narrow focus upon a small group of images
move that poem toward obliquity of expression. The comple-
mentary structures of the whole poem will be clarified most
easily by looking first at its logical development, for this
is the more readily apparent structure, and then at its
images.

The opening section, "Ancestral Houses," was discussed
in the previous chapter as a formal structure in ottava rima.

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[1]One of the three, "The Tower," will be discussed in
detail in Chapter VI, and since the other, "Nineteen Hundred
and Nineteen," has recently been analyzed very perceptively
by Thomas Parkinson, I have chosen to concentrate on
"Meditations." Surprisingly little work has been done on any
of these poems. Parkinson's article, "The World of Yeats'
'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,'" appears in The Image of the
Work: Essays in Criticism (University of California Publi-
cations: English Studies No. 11; Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1955), pp. 211-27.

It is a meditation upon traditional, leisurely, wealthy
life, and it associates this life with the artist, who
creates the settings and adornments of such a life. But
this section ends with a question: What if these things,
the blessings and beauties of such a life, "But take our
greatness with our violence, . . . our bitterness?" This
question includes politics, morality, and art within its
range, and poses the major themes which the succeeding sections
are to explore. The second poem, "My House," follows
naturally from the first, both by reason of its title and
major symbol, and of its content. It is a simple, brief
description of the landscape and the tower, and concludes with
an allusion to the two men who have made this place their
home: a man at arms of an earlier century, who commanded the
tower as a military fortification, and the poet himself.
As this poem has been a description of the tower, the next
poem has obvious links to it, for it describes one feature
of the poet's house, the table, upon which lie Sato's sword
and his own pen and paper. The poem associates the sword
with the moon, which it resembles in its crescent curve,
and with art; thus this poem restates a theme of the first
section, the relation of art and tradition, for the sword
represents a society and an age in which

> A marvellous accomplishment,
> In painting or in pottery, went
> From father unto son
> And through the centuries ran
> And seemed unchanging like the sword.
>   ("My Table," 200)

Some of the symbolic complexities of this section were analyzed in Chapter III, in a discussion of imagery. Their appearance alters the movement of the progressing discursive patterns, for they force the reader to comprehend in a rather different way. Seen in the context of the preceding sections, the sword has obvious affinities to the house of I, handed down from father to son, and to the war-theme not yet directly introduced except in the allusion to the first founder in the tower. What all of these relationships are cannot yet be clarified, for they are still, at this point, in process of growth; the clearest relation-ship here is that drawn between the sword and the moon and the art-theme. By reason of the compression of the poem, there are certain ambiguities not found in the other sections. For example, "the most rich inheritor" may mean generally the inheritor of an artistic tradition, or specifically, the inheritor of the sword; in either case, that person may be some Japanese from legend or life, or Yeats himself, and it is impossible to determine within the limits of the poem which is the correct reading. One may feel, as I do, that a choice of readings is not necessary, but the ambiguity remains. Likewise, the final lines of the poem, "it seemed / Juno's peacock screamed," are cryptic, for the peacock may refer to the inheritor himself, with his "silken clothes and stately walk" or it may be a symbol outside the world of the poem as so far presented.

The fourth poem of the series, "My Descendants,"
returns to the theme of family tradition, with the house
again a symbol. As this is the poet's house, the tower
described in the second poem, and the subject is the bequest
of it to future members of the poet's line, this section
moves forward thematically and chronologically from the first
two sections, to which it has obvious and direct logical
relationships, as it does to the theme of the third poem,
that of the treasured thing handed down from generation to
generation. The fifth poem, "The Road at My Door," is an
equally clear discursive statement, and is the first direct
introduction of the civil war theme, as the soldiers are
described visiting the tower during their patrols. The poet's
envy of them is an envy of their youth and ease in the
world of action, and this also is a new theme: his turning
away from the soldiers to withdraw to his chamber symbolizes
the withdrawal of the poet. Thus this section carries for-
ward the art theme of the earlier sections, but with an
amplified significance, while the war theme that is introduced
here prepares for the following section, "The Stare's Nest
by My Window."

Art is not a directly stated theme of this sixth
poem; rather the poem describes the various incidents of war
which have occurred in the countryside, and indicates the
spreading disintegration of society in the division of
political hatreds. This theme of immediate social

disintegration is carried into the final section of the
poem, where it is enlarged to a universal level in the poet's
vision of "the coming emptiness." This section has certain
obliquities by virtue of its heavy dependence upon imagery;
the second vision of the poet, that of the ladies and
unicorns, a vision of stillness and loveliness, is not clear
within the discursive pattern, and seems to be an irrelevance,
although we will see later that it is an organic part of the
imagistic structure of the poem. After the visions of the
poet, the poem ends with his withdrawal from the world of
chaos and action, as a poet committed instead to "The half-
read wisdom of daemonic images."

This brief summary of the logical development of the
poem reveals its temporal range through a consideration of
past, present, and future, and delineates its thematic
concerns: the values of tradition; the nature of art and
the artist, and his relation to tradition; the brutality and
disintegration of modern society in war. What it does not
and cannot reveal is what the logical structure itself cannot
reveal, the organic interrelation of these themes and the
ultimate meaning of the poem. The logical structure serves
to state major themes, move them through a progressive
development and modification, and to draw ideational links
between all of the different poems or "meditations."
Obviously from this logical structure, the poem is "about"
certain things, but these things can only be known in full

significance when the image-structure is seen to complement
the discursive.

There is a fairly constant symbolic center in the
poem, and this is the tower itself. The "ancestral houses"
of the opening poem anticipate it, and in the second poem
and thereafter the tower functions in every poem as both
setting and symbol. But the tower differs from the ancestral
houses despite their common bond of age and tradition. This
difference is apparent from the descriptions of the first two
poems which show us two different houses and landscapes;
their imagistic contrasts carry thematic meanings which are
never made explicit in the poem. The first poem describes
a "rich man's flowering lawns," terraced gardens, sculpted
urns, and gravelled ways leading to a great house of
escutcheoned doors, great chambers and long galleries. The
second poem describes "An acre of stony ground" by a stream,
with water-hens, splashing cows, old thorn-trees, the
setting of a tower and its adjoining farm-house. Within the
tower all is simple and bare, a stone-arched chamber with
"candle and written page," a winding stair; for the tower
is a converted fortification. When these contrasts are
borne in mind, the titles of the two sections take on more
than a signalizing function; and the comparison of the poet's
room to that of "Il Penseroso's Platonist" underscores
the difference of the second house, its asceticism, isolation,
and intellectual dedication. The poem ends with the

declaration that the poet has founded here in order to
leave behind him "To exalt a lonely mind, / Befitting emblems
of adversity," and the images alone give the clear significance
of the declaration. Thus, as shown by images, the relation
of the artist to wealthy, traditional society has been
sharply altered from I, a description of the past, to II, a
description of the present, and the generalization of the
third poem, "only an aching heart / Conceives a changeless
work of art," is seen as an organic and inevitable conclusion
from what has gone before, although the logical steps to
this conclusion are absent from the poem: we have arrived
here by what the images have suggested. In addition, we
can look forward and see that the withdrawal-motif first made
explicit in "The Road at My Door" has been implicit in the
earlier sections, and can look backward and see that the
question which concludes the opening section of the poem
is directly concerned with the isolation and "adversity" of
the artist as the necessary grounds of his creativity.

In the second section, "My House," the acre of stony
ground "Where the symbolic rose can break in flower" is, in
a symbolic sense, the adversity from which beauty grows; when,
in section IV, the flower-image appears again, as a symbol
of the mortality and brevity of life's "glory," the tower
itself as a symbol of artistic achievement ("this laborious
stair and this stark tower") is set against it as an image
of permanence. The image of the flower draws other relations:

the "glory" of the flower which may be lost by the poet's descendants through folly recalls not only the symbolic rose of II, but the "flowering lawns" of I and the "inherited glory" of the rich which may be lost by some great-grandson who is "but a mouse." This interrelation of images draws clearer the art-wealth-inherited tradition themes, and points their contrasts as well as their similarities; for the bequest of the artist is not that of the man of wealth, although both inheritances signify a form of glory, and both perpetuate certain common values.

In section V, the soldiers who visit the tower and, by their vigor and nonchalance as professional men of action, stir the poet's envy, are re-statements of the image of the Elizabethan man at arms, first founder of the tower, that earlier soldier who survived through "long wars and sudden night alarms"--another kind of adversity from the poet's, though having the same conditions. The symbolic turning inward to the tower which occurs at the end of section V is taken another step in VI where we see the poet from within the tower look out through the window at the stare's nest. If one considers the tower in its symbolic sense, as the poet's home in art and his isolation in art, the description of the surrounding chaotic countryside is a statement of the insecurity of art in a time of social disintegration. The "loosening masonry" and the weakening, loosening of the walls is the weakening of the poet's willed isolation. The lines,

> My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
> Come build in the empty house of the stare.
> > ("The Stare's Nest by My Window," 202)

are a plea for safety, the safety of the artistic imagination,
in chaos, for preservation from divisive hatred and
sterility. Bees are traditional symbols of industry and
fertility; they are also legendarily the "Muse's birds" and
thus are an appropriate symbol in the poet's plea for
artistic stability. There is also implicit throughout this
poem the scriptural symbolism, which is often alluded to by
Yeats, of the lion and the honeycomb: from strength shall
come forth sweetness. Once this association is made,
Swift's use of the bee-symbol is an inevitable analogue, and
the image also obliquely anticipates the lines in the
seventh section of the poem,

> Nothing but stillness can remain when hearts are full
> Of their own sweetness . . .
> > ("I See Phantoms of Hatred . . . ," 203)

The final section of the poem presents something like
a vision or waking dream, heavily imagistic in its presen-
tation; the conditioning symbols of the vision are important.
It occurs, as the poet watches, in a "mist that is like
blown snow" (an echo of "the cold snows of a dream" in V),
under the light of "a moon . . . that seems unchangeable"
and which is compared to "a glittering sword out of the east"--
two symbols linked in section III with art. Within this
phantom-raising mist "Monstrous familiar images swim to the
mind's eye," and this term echoes the first use of it in

section II, in the allusion to the Platonist (who shadowed
forth how the "daemonic rage / Imagined everything"), and
anticipates the climactic use of it in the last lines of the
poem, where the poet accepts the "daemonic images." The
vision includes first a scene from the actual past, which
in all its chaos resembles the present civil strife; then
a vision of a timeless world of art, still, lovely, a
world of pure imagination; then, last, the vision of "brazen
hawks" whose clanging wings have "put out the moon,"
symbolizing the violence and hatred which threaten the creation
of art. It is at this climactic point of the poem that the
poet once more turns away, physically and symbolically, from
the world of destruction into the world of his creativity--
not without misgiving, for the world of destruction is
after all a field of action also, and one in which worth can
be proved which "all others understand or share." He
accepts the world of images, the act of imagining, as his
proper sphere, and accepts his isolation as a condition of this
world. The last lines, with their oblique glance at
Wordsworth in the words, "Suffice the ageing man as once the
growing boy," define most delicately the poet's own sense
of loss even while they assert his choice.

This has not been a complete examination of the image
pattern of the "Meditations," but enough has been traced to
indicate the necessity of following this pattern as well as
the discursive one, if the total complexity of the poem is to

be known, and its basic concern--not with civil war, except
as a condition, and perhaps a symbol of an inner state, but
with the role of the artist in the modern world. One of the
most profound features of its complexity (and its honesty)
is its emphasis upon the simultaneous vocation and guilt of
the modern poet. Its images and symbols contain within
themselves complications of the discursively articulated themes
of art, tradition, and war; of these the tower itself is
central, holding within itself all three of these themes, as
does the sword, although both are the major symbols of art.
That the tower is an ivory one, is precisely the subject of
meditation.

It should be noted that the arrangement of the sections
of the poem itself is an encompassing dynamic image. The
inner chamber of the tower is its central point, and the poem
moves, like a camera moving toward a close-up, from the
prototypal ancestral house to the landscape around the tower,
then into the tower, and into the chamber. The third
section of the poem is the minute central focus to which this
movement leads: the poet's table, with its sword, pen and
paper, the emblems of art. It will be recalled that this
section is also the most concentratedly oblique, the node of
the total imagistic structure. From it the movement is
outward again, both mentally and physically, through the
consideration of descendants, of the civil war in the country-
side, and ending on the tower-top from which the poet looks

outward upon his visions and from which he turns back, in the last stanza, to the tower, shutting his door on the world he has renounced. One should note that this total architectonic image which the structure makes is strikingly like the gyre or double-cone image which appears as the central symbol of A Vision. Likewise, the chronological movement of the poem is from past to immediate present to a consideration of the future, and in this movement also the poet and his tower are the central point between a past seen in perspective and a future opening its vistas to meditation. I have suggested the gyre image not for what it means in A Vision, for it means little there that is not also implicit within this poem, but for the illumination of theme which the image makes: the isolated artist is at the center. This apparent paradox is related to a dominant tendency in all the images of the poem, the fusion of opposites--ancient and present, static and moving, permanent and changing. The tower is at the center of them all.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACHIEVED STYLE

In the opening chapter of this study, I emphasized the
interrelation of all the aspects of style, borrowing Blackmur's
term _gesture_ to suggest the meaningful movement of language
within any poem which such interrelation creates. The separate
approaches which the earlier chapters have made, treating first
diction, then imagery, and so on, should be balanced by the
examination within a single poem of all its stylistic elements:
diction, rhythm, imagery, syntax, structure. For this purpose
I have chosen "Byzantium" and "The Tower." These seem appro-
priate poems for such an examination, both because their richness
illuminates the achievement of style, and because their diffi-
culties have made them problematical for critics. As the
previous chapter indicated, many of their difficulties are ones
inherent in their types, that of the short imagistic poem, and
that of the long poem combining discursive and imagistic modes.
"Byzantium" and "The Tower," as the most famous examples of
these types in Yeats, deserve special attention.[1]

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[1] "Byzantium" appears on pp. 243-44, "The Tower" on
pp. 192-97, of _The Collected Poems._

"Byzantium," in addition to the difficulties posed by its technique, presents special problems because of its apparent dependence upon the system expounded in A Vision. Of the many critics of the poem--and there are by now a large number--few assume that they can treat the poem without at least a bow in the direction of the system. This cautious habit of reference is retained to disarm opposition as much as to explain the poem, for in addition to the internal evidence of obscurity which makes the poem seem private or esoteric, there is some external evidence for Yeats's use of A Vision in the poem, and a critic who appears not to know this weakens the authority of his interpretation. It is also probable that critics have been working, consciously or unconsciously, under the shadow of Cleanth Brooks's early explication of the poem, which was a very strict reading based upon the system and containing almost allegorical equations.[1] For what it may be worth, all the evidence surrounding the creation of the poem should be reviewed before we examine the text itself; however, the full relevance of this external evidence can be judged only after the poem itself is studied.

In the first edition of A Vision (1925), Yeats made an observation on Byzantine civilization which has since been widely quoted as relevant to both of his Byzantium poems:

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[1] Cleanth Brooks, "Yeats: The Poet as Mythmaker," Modern Poetry and the Tradition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), pp. 173-202.

I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato. I think I could find in some little wine shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the super-natural descending nearer to him than to Plotinus even, for the pride of his delicate skill would make what was an instrument of power to Princes and Clerics and a murderous madness in the mob, show as a lovely inflexible presence like that of a perfect human body. I think that in early Byzantium, and maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, and that architect and artificers-- though not, it may be poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract-- spoke to the multitude and the few alike.[1]

In the following year Yeats wrote "Sailing to Byzantium," which

appeared in The Tower in 1928. Sturge Moore, who designed

the cover for this volume, wrote to Yeats on April 16th, 1930:

> Your Sailing to Byzantium, magnificent as the first three stanzas are, lets me down in the fourth, as such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as a man's body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies.[2]

That this criticism impressed Yeats, his later reply to it

will indicate. In the interim, on April 30th, fourteen days

after Moore had written, Yeats made an entry in one of his

diaries:

> Subject for a Poem. April 30th. . . . Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first

---

[1] Yeats, A Vision (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1925), p. 191. This passage was retained in the 1938 edition, where it appears on p. 279.

[2] Ursula Bridge (ed.), W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901-1937 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 162.

Christian millenium. A walking mummy. Flames at the
street corners where the soul is purified, birds of
hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbour,
offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may
carry them to paradise.[1]

In the fall of this same year, 1930, Yeats wrote to Moore to
arrange a design for the cover of a new volume which was to
be entitled Byzantium (finally published as The Winding
Stair). Yeats's letter is important for clarifying the genetic
relationships between the two Byzantium poems.

> Yes, I have decided to call the book Byzantium. I
> enclose the poem, from which the name is taken, hoping
> that it may suggest symbolism for the cover. The poem
> originates from a criticism of yours. You objected to
> the last verse of Sailing to Byzantium because a bird
> made by a goldsmith was just as natural as anything else.
> That showed me that the idea needed exposition. Gongs
> were used in the Byzantine church.
>
> <div align="right">Yours ever
W. B. Yeats</div>

> I wrote the poem last spring: the first thing I wrote
> after my illness.[2]

Two more letters on the poem were exchanged between them,
Moore finding some of Yeats's words illegible and asking for
clarification of them. He also asked, apropos of the design
he was preparing, "Is your dolphin to be so large that the
whole of humanity can ride on its back?"[3] Yeats answered,
"One dolphin, one man. Do you know Raphael's statue of the

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[1] W. B. Yeats, Pages From a Diary Written in Nineteen
Hundred and Thirty (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1944), p. 2.

[2] Bridge, op. cit., p. 164.

[3] Ibid.

Dolphin carrying one of the Holy Innocents to Heaven?"[1]
This was the conclusion of their discussion of the poem.
Moore's design, when it appeared, used major symbols from
"Byzantium": a singing bird, dancing flames, and a dolphin
bearing a man on his back through the waves.

What all of this evidence implies should be considered.
First, as the quotation from A Vision makes clear, Yeats
viewed Byzantium as an ideal civilization, by extension a
symbol of art in an ideal age and setting. His statements
describing Byzantium emphasize the unity of being in its
culture (including the interpenetration of the natural and
supernatural in its life), and the superiority of its art
as a result of this. In this sense, Byzantium is a public
symbol analogous to Athens or Rome, and poses no difficulty
in "Sailing to Byzantium" where Yeats first used it. But
Moore's criticism of the poem focussed on the bird-symbol;
Moore implied that Yeats had set up a false contrast by
using a symbol for art which was itself a natural symbol
("is as much nature as a man's body") and had failed to
elevate art to a genuine status because the bird's song was
only an entertainment of little consequence to its audience
("especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare
of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies.").
The last phrase of Moore's remark carries the weight of
critical significance. We can see by the evidence of the

[1]Ibid., p. 165.

diary that Yeats, in thinking of a new version, returned to the symbol of Byzantium itself as the controlling symbol rather than that of the bird; and in order to separate it completely from the world of nature he imagined it "as it is in the system," a dramatic vision of a place and time in which, to use his own words, the supernatural descended nearer to the artist than ever before or since. To avoid any failure of distinction between the natural and the artistic, Yeats chose to employ supernatural overtones to support the artistic, a practice certainly not contrary to his own beliefs and interests. This suggests that the use of A Vision was, in a very real sense, technical and germinative; but it does not suggest that the themes of "Byzantium" are necessarily those of A Vision nor dependent on them.

One other kind of external evidence is relevant to the genesis of "Byzantium," if not to its ultimate meaning. In an early typescript draft of "Sailing to Byzantium" there are two very interesting and potentially rich stanzas which were later abandoned in Yeats's progress toward the final version of that poem:

> I therefore travel towards Byzantium
> Among these sun-brown pleasant mariners
> Another dozen days and we shall come
> Under the jetty and the marble stair
>
> But now these pleasant dark-skinned mariners
> Carry me towards that great Byzantium
> Where all is ancient, singing at the oars
> That I may look in the great churches dome

> On gold-embedded saints and emperors
> After the mirroring waters and the foam
> Where the dark drowsy fins a moment rise
> Of fish that carry souls to Paradise.[1]

These stanzas are strikingly like "Byzantium," not in theme
(the quest is that of the first poem) but in imagery; although
describing a daylight rather than a night experience. This
imagery is rich and sensuous, containing much that never
appeared in the first poem but that is of major importance in
the later one: the marble stair, the great church dome, the
arrival of souls upon the water, and the drowsy fins of fish
which became the dolphins of the later poem. This is
significant, I think, as a clue that Yeats had in his mind a
certain train of very fine poetic imagery which, not used in the
first poem, remained with him. Consequently, when Moore criti-
cized the poem he had written, Yeats already had the materials
of a new but closely related poem, and may indeed have been
pleased at the fortuitous criticism which forced these
materials forward again into consciousness and gave them a
potential use. For the imagery of the rejected stanzas,
as one can see, was too good to abandon completely.

Having seen as much of the provenance of "Byzantium" as
external evidence affords, we can now look at the poem itself.
Its imagery is the most striking feature of it, but I will
postpone a discussion of this until the last, as it is the

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[1] The draft in which these stanzas appear is in the
possession of Mrs. Yeats, and was exhibited in the Trinity
College Exhibition of Yeats's books and manuscripts in 1956.

central element of the poem and is best prepared for by an
acquaintance with its other features. In diction, "Byzantium"
is one of Yeats's exotic poems, using a number of words
which are the signs of things beyond the range of prosaic
or natural experience: Hades' bobbin, gong-tormented sea,
dolphins, spirits in the form of flames, and so on. These
help to create the unreal, fabulous quality of the experience
described in the poem, and take it as far as possible from
the setting used in the earlier poem, that of an Emperor's
garden in which real lords and ladies are presumed to be
present. As well as exotic, the diction is rich and formal,
lacking the colloquialisms we are accustomed to find in much
of Yeats's work. Disdains and recede in the first stanza
are typical of the level of language in the whole poem.
In the first printing of this poem, disdains appeared as
distains.[1] It is impossible to know if Yeats intended this
blend-word; if he did, he evidently thought better of it
later, for he altered it to the proper form in all later
printings. But it is an interesting word, error or not,
suggesting a fusion of concepts which we shall see operative
in other ways in the poem, and multiplying the range of the
term to mean both "disdains" and "disdains the stain of" man's
complexity, as well as perhaps "unstains" or "cleanses" man

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[1]"Byzantium" first appeared in Words For Music Perhaps
(Dublin: Cuala Press, 1932). The Variorum Edition indicates
that distains did not appear in any other printings of the
poem.

of complexity. In addition, the original blend-word, by incorporating stain, strengthens the submerged Shelley allusion which has been reversed in this poem: in Adonais, life is the dome of multiplicity which stains eternity; in "Byzantium," the dome of eternity (or art) scorns the stain of such complexity.

The large number of compound words which appear in the poem, like the original distains, suggest the meeting of worlds and the fusion of concepts which take place both in the poem and in the experience it describes. Of these, the most striking are those of the final line in the second stanza (the allusion to the Coleridgean duality of life and death, which meet in eternity or art), and those of the final line of the poem. The compound adjectives of the final line are the culmination of an astonishing series of adjectival words within the poem. Yeats's dependence upon adjectives has been mentioned in an earlier chapter; it can be clearly observed in the prominence which they are given in this poem: embittered, changeless, drunken, and so on. Some of these adjectives are repeated within the poem; however, the greatest number of repetitions is of nouns: image, bird, man, mire, fury, flame, complexity. These repetitions support the ritualistic quality which the meaning of the poem itself creates, and they give to the poem an assertive, positive tone which is necessary to offset the large number of qualifying and tentative statements within it; the repetitions

balance these and help to keep the poem taut. The ambiguity
of the poem comes in part from these qualifications, and
they are a necessary element in the unreality Yeats wishes
to achieve. The recurrence of or ("starlit or a moonlit,"
"man or shade," "bird or golden handiwork") will be noted,
particularly in the central stanza, in which it appears four
times. Ambiguity is, of course, also a result of syntax and
imagery, as we shall see, and is present in the poem at
numerous levels.

For the form of his poem, Yeats chose a very close
rhyme scheme, that of Cowley's Hervey stanza: aabbcddc, and
as in Cowley's stanza the lines are in varying lengths.
Cowley's are iambic pentameter varied with tetrameter;
Yeats's lines defy metrical scansion, and thus cannot be
called pentameter or tetrameter, but he follows Cowley in
the general pattern of length, using a long line having a
norm of ten syllables, and a short line varying between
four and eight syllables and having a norm of six. Within
these lines the stress is disposed quite freely, and the
time-pattern is established by the repetition throughout the
poem of similar rhythmic intervals or phrases, facilitated
by the high incidence of repeated phrases which make rhythmic
echoing an inevitability. The method can be observed in any
of the stanzas:

> Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
> More miracle than bird or handiwork,

Planted on the star-lit golden bough,

Can like the cocks of Hades crow,

Or by the moon, embittered, scorn aloud,

In glory of changeless metal

Common bird or petal

And all complexities of mire or blood.

The stress marks indicate the absence of any formal meter,
and the underlined phrases point up the echoing of temporal
units from line to line (not usually within lines, though
it may exist there) which establishes the pattern, and
makes it felt by the reader or listener. It can be seen that
Yeats gets a maximum of freedom within the strict stanza he
has chosen, partly by freeing his rhythm from any predisposed
pattern except what each line establishes as a precedent and
is in turn determined by; and partly by his use of false
rhymes: recede/abed; cloth/path; aloud/blood; flame/come.
Contrary to his usual practice, Yeats in this poem twice
repeats a rhyme word: shade/shade, and handiwork/handiwork.
This is done, I think, as a part of the repetitive pattern
observed before, to contribute to the ritual quality
(cf. magical formulas) and also to support the rhythmical
phrasing being established as a ground pattern.

The sound pattern of the poem is rather remarkable,
an effect of tension combined with sonority, achieved partly
by establishing a base of hard consonantal sounds (g and b,
d and k) which liquid consonantal sounds (m, l, n, r) balance

and bridge. The vowel echoes from line to line (<u>or</u>-<u>scorn</u>-<u>glory</u>-<u>or</u>) and the variety of vowel modulations within single lines create a pattern of line-variety and stanza-unity of sound, like an intricate cross-weaving. Again, repetitions of words aid this effect. The careful use of sound patterns may be seen in such a line as "After great cathedral gong," in which the stressed vowels rise progressively from back and middle positions to high in <u>cathedral</u>, then are dropped suddenly for the onomatopoeia of <u>gong</u>. There is the same careful attention to sound in the final line of the poem, where the two <u>that</u>'s echo each other, the vowel in <u>dolphin</u> is repeated in <u>gong</u>, and the vowel in <u>torn</u> is repeated in <u>tormented</u>. The whole line is like a verbal echo of the gong and its receding waves of sound, or like the falling and receding waves of the sea itself.

The analogy of the wave has some validity also beyond this; the poem begins from a moment of rest, stasis, silence or receding sound, and moves with increasing momentum and intensity to the climax of the action, the dance, which is both movement and stasis ("an agony of trance"). It is the dance which evokes the exclamatory, exultant declaration of the final stanza, the highest point of the structural wave of the poem. The syntax of the poem reflects this movement. Every stanza is a complete sentence except the last, which is punctuated by two exclamatory fragments. The first stanza is actually four sentences in one, giving four discrete

though related impressions; this stanza is the clearest,
almost the only, discursive passage in the poem, and uses an
authentic syntax. The second stanza likewise has four
statements within its one-sentence structure, but it is
syntactically a much more complex stanza, partly because
of the use of qualifications, partly because individual words
have taken on ambiguities of meaning which make them nodes
rather than vehicles of thought: they impede rather than
further the logical movement of the lines. Is the "mouth"
that of the "image, man or shade," or that of the poet?
Does "breathless" mean bodiless, signifying a spirit, or
does it mean astonished, excited, as it may if it refers to
the poet himself, the observer of this vision? The syntactical
complexity of the poem increases with each stanza until, in
the final stanza of the poem, even apparent syntax breaks
into ejaculation, and the logical pattern disappears into
the emotional. The final declaration of the poem is
ambiguous because of its syntax: images may be in apposition
to Marbles, or to furies, and this reference is completely
dependent on the reading of the poem one has made up to
this point. A less critical ambiguity is found in stanza 4,
line 5: is "leave" an intransitive verb, having complexities
as its subject, or is it a transitive verb having spirits
as its subject and complexities as its object? I raise these
problems not to confuse an issue already complex enough, but
to emphasize that the syntax of the poem is a decisive element

in its apparent obscurity, just as it is in "The Windhover."[1]
Syntactical ambiguities result in "Byzantium" not only from
the placing of phrases in medial positions where their
reference may go two ways; but also from the omission of
articles before many of the nouns, which serves to strip
them of conventional relations and isolate them the more as
images.

It is finally the image-pattern itself which must be
seen as the key to the poem, for discourse in any logical
sense disappears after the first stanza, and in the progressive
complication of syntax and word-reference, all continuity of
communication must be found in the images themselves. They
are images of duality, of opposites, as in "Sailing to
Byzantium," but much more complex than those, because here
they are dual or opposite images in the process of fusing
into each other. This is at once the experience and the
meaning of the poem, which may be regarded as a symbolic
figure for the creation of a poem, or as a dramatization of
the effect of a poem or of art in general. As such, it has
the necessity of showing a partial world complemented or
replaced by a complete and significant one, every image

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[1] It is also true of both "The Windhover" and "Byzantium"
that many different and consistent readings may be made, but
that any reader must, once committed to one interpretation,
carry it through the poem without admitting other possibilities
for the images he is interpreting in a certain way. This does
not mean that other interpretations will not be equally valid
and cannot be made in turn until all of the meanings of the
poem are exhausted. Such conditions of interpretation apply
only to a certain type of poem, of which these are especially
famous examples.

reconciled to its opposite as the moonlit dome in its
circling purity transcends the "fury and mire" of multiplicity,
or as the dance resolves the bitter furies. The dominant
pattern of imagery is that of the circle: the dome itself,
and the cathedral gong, Hades' bobbin and the winding path,
the moon, the dance, the movement of the poem itself which
describes a circle from the world of experience through art
and back to the world of experience. The circle-image has
been observed in other poems, and the dance has been related
to it as an image of reconciling forces or movements. In
this sense, the circle is repeated also in the image which
is summoned, and which is hailed as "death-in-life and
life-in-death," an image of reconciliation and harmony of
opposites as eternity is, and as art is. Likewise, the
image of blood-begotten spirits dying into "An agony of flame
that cannot singe a sleeve," is an image of resolved dualities,
both in its juxtaposition of blood and fire, and in its
flame that burns and does not burn. The dance itself, as I
have commented earlier, is both movement and stasis, the
climactic one in a series of dualities in the poem which are
shown resolved by art as by eternity, two conditions which,
in terms of the imagery of this poem, are the same.

This fusion of art-eternity or artistic-supernatural
or artistic-religious imagery has led many critics to read
the poem as a description of soul-states equivalent to those
described in A Vision. This is hardly necessary, I think.

One of the points of the poem is that art is the intersection of the human and the superhuman, that it is from the one and becomes the other, as the great church dome is at once a monument of eternity and art. This is not a surprising theme, for it is the controlling theme of "Sailing to Byzantium" and can be found in various forms in other Yeats poems. The special problems posed by "Byzantium" arise from the necessity Yeats had of dramatizing the condition or state of mind which exists when the poet has left "that country" of the earlier poem and has taken Byzantium, the absolute, for his setting and material. Yeats's description of this absolute condition of reality takes the form of religious as well as artistic imagery--indeed this is another of the fusions within the poem. The artistic _image_ is also the supernatural _shade_, the _miracle_ is a _golden handiwork_.

This pattern, as well as the other dualities coming to resolution, will be clarified if we look at the movement of image patterns through the poem from first stanza to last. The opening stanza sets the scene and initiates the counter-pointed pattern: the _unpurged_ images are related to "all that man is," to complexity, fury, mire, the totality of human experience, and set against the "starlit or a moonlit dome," the image of art, completion, eternity, and purity. In the first stanza we move from day-experience to night-experience, from the conscious to the unconscious, from the rational to the intuitional, and this division is marked by

the "great cathedral gong," symbol and signal of the two

worlds. After its sound, other sounds of the day-world,

the unpurged world, recede, and in the second stanza the

predominant sense is of silence, stasis, the "breathless"

moment when vision or creation begins. The "image" which

appears is at once an emblem of the supernatural, the

superhuman as the poet hails it, and an emblem of art, the

generating image of creation. The "Hades' bobbin" of this

stanza may be the poet himself, who unwinds the mummy-

cloth of rationalizing and inhibiting day-life and traces

the winding path of experience or intuition (night-knowledge,

in the Jungian sense) until finally he becomes the dancer,

the spontaneous creator. It is more likely, in view of later

developments of the imagery, that "Hades' bobbin" is the

image itself (which has appeared before the speaker in the

preceding line) personalized as a figure ("image, man or

shade, / Shade more than man, more image than a shade")

which in art or in vision clarifies the path of human

experience, strips it or untangles it for revelation, and,

being an image, is a speaker or a mouth "that has no moisture

and no breath." Further, this image-figure is death-in-life--

the "mummification of experience," if you will, in art; and

life-in-death--the dynamic creation within the formal stasis of

the art object itself. This may be made clearer by an analogy;

a sculptor casts his imitation of life into inorganic marble

and may be said to "deaden" life within fixity; but at the

same time he gives vitality to the inanimate and movement to

the static, as Browning speaks of the artist as an Elisha
who breathes life into death: "Mimic creation, galvanism
for life." This image hailed by the poet as superhuman may
summon others, as one image begets another in artistic
creation; and, as an image, it may also summon the "breathless
mouths" of those who experience it, witness it, and like the
poet hail it.

The third stanza takes this image further toward the
explicit, first calling it a "miracle," as the preceding
stanza called it superhuman, then calling it "bird or golden
handiwork." Here we have the image which was climactic in
"Sailing to Byzantium," and to which Moore objected; Yeats
has made the image only one of many in the later poem, and
not the central one, unless one reads the golden bird as
the poet-speaker himself, a possibility I will discuss later.
The function of the bird is annunciatory, and, as the context
of the poem has emphasized the supernatural, the golden
bough it sings from is not simply an artificial tree in an
Emperor's garden, but has more specifically its connotations
from ancient mythology as a talisman or guide to the under-
world; in this poem, it is a talisman of the underworld as
a synonym for both the supernatural and the unconscious of
the psyche. This association which the golden-bough image
makes, and the fact that the bird crows at midnight to summon
the spirits, make him a "cock of Hades," and he becomes
one of the means or agents for the junction of worlds which

is accomplished within the poem. As such, he can summon
such images from the supernatural or superhuman world as the
poem has already shown. The bird's song stands in implicit
contrast to the "night-walkers' song" of the opening
stanza, the song of the unpurged day-world of human experience
not given form or meaning in art, and, like the dome, the
bird can scorn the complexities of such experience, having
transcended them. The phrase, "by the moon embittered," has
confused many readers because they have assumed that the
moon must be a symbol of art, and understanding it so, they
do not see why the bird, also an art symbol, should be
embittered by it. But this confusion does not arise if one
does not make the a priori equation of moon and art, but
simply takes the moon in its oldest and most traditional
symbolism, that of mutability, a significance which seems to
be underscored by the following line which describes the
bird as singing "In glory of changeless metal" his scorn of
that which changes, common bird or petal.

The bird symbol, as well as representing art, which
is beyond change and which summons both images and witnesses
of art, is, as I have suggested earlier, the traditional
witchcraft symbol whose cry announces and closes the spirit-
hour, and thus this symbol functions as another of the
duality-resolving images. He announces midnight, the midpoint
of the night, and the coming of spirits who purge themselves
in flame--another image combining the supernatural and the

artistic themes--in the final dance. These spirit-flames
"flit," being disembodied, neither dead nor alive, and their
dance is the breaking of their "furies of complexity" upon
the marbles of the dancing floor: the breaking up and
resolution of fragmentary experience into the forms of art,
and the purgation of "blood-begotten spirits" into "flames
begotten of flame." Both for the artist and for the witness
of art, these images beget new images, which themselves come
from the sea of experience, as souls come to paradise, and
are purged into the condition of art.

The final stanza of the poem introduces for the first
time the image of water, although it has been anticipated
earlier in the line, "Before me _floats_ an image . . . " which,
in retrospect, suggests that the source of the image is the
"sea" of experience, just as _floats_ is a part of the imagery
of silence and indrawn suspense in that stanza. In this
last stanza the phrase, "the dolphin's mire and blood,"
suggests not only the dolphin's place in the natural world
and his absorption of that world into himself (he contains
"mire and blood"), but also that the mire and blood which he
possesses is specifically the sea itself, through which he
travels. In this latter sense, the whole phrase may be
taken as a kenning for the sea; and, again by retrospect,
this reading relates the "mire and blood" of the earlier
stanzas to the "sea" as being the same, and symbolizing
in totality all of sensuous and mutable human experience,

the "flood" which must be broken and re-formed upon the "golden smithies," as Blake pictures the artist hammering form out of chaos at a great anvil. The golden smithies are equivalent to, or are the same as, the marbles of the dancing floor, upon which images are purged of their complexity; both the smithies and the marbles are images set against that of the "dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea," which symbolizes the divisive and temporal nature of experience before it takes the form of art. We have again here the contrast of stone and water--fixity and flux-- which has been remarked in a number of other Yeats poems. It is also possible to read the final reference to the sea as a description of the movement of the purgatorial dance itself, which resembles the movement of the sea, as art resembles life, though becoming essentially a different thing, flame not water.

It is interesting to observe that all of the four elements figure in the imagery of the poem, implying the essential and fundamental nature of the reality envisioned. Of these, the light imagery of the poem grows progressively deeper, from stanza to stanza, moving from "starlit" and "moonlit" to the "golden handiwork" and "golden bough," then to the "flames" themselves, as the vision of the poem intensifies and moves toward the darkest and deepest plumbing of the night-experience. I have commented on the use of sound in the first stanza, followed by silence in the second,

a silence broken at the medial point of the poem by the annunciatory bird-cry which introduces the active drama of purgation. The poem ends with a reference to the gong-tormented sea; if one applies to this the first of the two readings suggested above, then this ending of the poem suggests the cyclically recurrent nature of the experience recorded in the poem: fresh images will continually come from the gong-tormented sea into the timeless fire of art, and as continually as they are broken and reformed, will beget others, for the process of art is continuous, dynamic, eternal.

I have recommended that "Byzantium" be read as a parable or dramatization of the creative experience itself, or as a dramatization of the aesthetic experience of the beholder. I am convinced that the art-theme should be the fundamental thesis of interpretation, although upon it many different interpretations can be founded.[1] In my discussion, I have tried to suggest the various possibilities of meaning for certain images which appear in the poem, for different possibilities show the many ways in which the poem can be read. One can, after considering all the various possibilities,

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[1]Ellmann, for example, insists on the machinery of A Vision in his interpretation, but he sees the art-theme as basic: ". . . 'Byzantium' was primarily a description of the act of making a poem." (Yeats: The Man and the Masks, London: Macmillan and Co., 1949, p. 274.) The best discussion of "Byzantium" which I know of completely ignores the system and regards the work as a poem about the writing of poetry. See Robert M. Adams, "Now That My Ladder's Gone--Yeats Without Myth," Accent, XIII (1953), 140-52.

choose to read the poem through on a single level, accepting that one for the moment and rejecting others for the sake of consistency, and in fact this is what the mind does in a reading of the poem, although each later reading may be made at a different level. If one links "Byzantium" closely to "Sailing to Byzantium," and sees these poems as forming a sequence, he may wish to see the "miracle, bird or golden handiwork" of the later poem as the concrete form of the poet himself (in accordance with the choice made at the end of the earlier poem). In this reading, all of "Byzantium" may be read at a single level as the speech or "song" of the bird, before whom the "image" of stanza 2 floats, and who summons all the other images ("spirits" or "flames") into the dance of creation. This comprehensive reading has the advantage of making the poet-symbol central in the poem, both structurally (since the first self-reference would be made in the central stanza) and thematically, and of emphasizing his invocational power. This reading also makes the bird in "Byzantium" a very neat answer to Moore's criticism of the one in "Sailing to Byzantium."

A reader who finds such an interpretation too bizarre, or who objects to its dependence on a knowledge of the earlier poem, may wish to naturalize the poem in some way. He may see the spirit-flames as not existing either in an actual other world or in the consciousness of the poet, but rather, as G. S. Fraser has suggested, may see them simply as

representations on the mosaic floor of the pavement which
the speaker, in a kind of trance, studies.[1] This reading
has no strong objection to it that I can see, and it has the
virtue of adding another to the static-dynamic images in
the poem, for the stilled figures in the mosaic are imagined
to move into life as one looks at them. One could take
another direction in this naturalization of the poem and see
the images which move into dance within the poem as statues
which surround the pavement and which, in the moonlit darkness
and to the rapt gaze, seem to move into life, symbolically
if not physically: a dramatization of the life inherent in
their deadness of marble, the statues being figures <u>like</u>
life though their mouths "have no moisture and no breath,"
and though they are "superhuman" in their permanence and
formal simplicity. Neither of these attempts to naturalize
the poem, however, can escape the fact that it remains a
visionary experience, whatever explanations one may make of
the source of the vision. But such readings do serve to
indicate the various levels at which the poem can be satis-
factorily read. Its essential meaning will remain the same,
I think, through all readings, for the images retain their
contrasts and fusions in any interpretation, and these are
fundamental to any meaning one sees within the poem.

We may return momentarily to the external evidence

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[1]This suggestion was made in a discussion of "Byzantium"
on the BBC Third Programme, in April, 1956.

with which we began, and try to weigh its relevance. It
seems to me much more important to know that Yeats wrote the
poem to answer Moore's objection to "Sailing to Byzantium"
(although this knowledge itself is not essential), than to
know that in A Vision Yeats describes flames, mummies,
purification, the phases of the moon as related to the rise
and fall of artistic epochs, and so on. That Yeats depended
on his system, on many ideas already articulated in it, in
order to write "Byzantium" is obvious; that the reader need
depend on them is quite another question. If the poem is
complete within itself, as I think it is beyond dispute, then
what winding paths Yeats took to its creation are not
essentially relevant, although this kind of information is,
of course, always valuable to anyone interested in how
poetry gets written. Yeats was himself aware of the basic
irrelevance of his system to the reader's understanding of
his poems, and his assessment of its importance to the reader
was fundamentally sensible and accurate: "The young men I
write for may not read my Vision--they may care too much for
my poetry--but they will be pleased that it exists. Even my
simplest poems will be the better for it."[1]

The genesis of "The Tower" was not so complex as that
of "Byzantium," nor has its interpretation been so fraught
with controversy. On the other hand, "The Tower" has received
surprisingly little critical attention despite the high regard

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[1]Yeats, Letters, p. 781. This remark was made in 1931.

in which it is held by most readers and the problems it poses
for interpretation. I suspect this is a result of the
relatively clear discursive line of the poem, which suggests
the presence of a complete and coherent logical structure
articulating all its themes, and which makes the problems of
the poem much less obvious than those of "Byzantium."
However, the preceding chapter has indicated the peculiar nature
of Yeats's structural technique in the long poems, and a
reading of "The Tower" will reveal to anyone concerned with
its thematic statements that the logical structure is only
apparently, not really, complete. Like the other long poems,
it uses the structural features of its type, being a series
of discursive sections unified and completed by image-patterns
which create a second and complementing structure for the
articulation of themes; and like all of Yeats's meditative
poems, it has dramatic elements. "The Tower" is the meditation
of a dramatized speaker whose sense of frustrated old age is
the initiating impulse of the poem; it has its setting in
the visual scene of the tower and its surrounding landscape,
which symbolize emotional conditions of the speaker as well
as create the physical place; and it contains within it a
number of small dramatic vignettes, which have other
characters than the speaker and which serve, like the device
of a play-within-a-play, to comment on the major poetic
action in which the speaker's role is central. Showing the
features of both the long poem and the meditative poem, it

contains many of Yeats's most characteristic stylistic devices.

In diction, "The Tower" ranges from highly colloquial words and phrases ("a sort of battered kettle," "his dog's day," "lock, stock, and barrel") to highly formal ones ("necessitous," "unforeknown," "translunar," "sedentary," "decrepitude"), creating an effect of easy but well-wrought speech which answers to the varying moods of the dramatized speaker. The poem contains an Irish dialect word ("bawn") and a term from Yeats's system ("the Great Memory"). The first is similar in sound to a cognate in standard English, "barn," and gives no difficulty; the second has adequate general connotations (particularly since the popularization of Jung), as well as a specific place in a poetic pattern of allusions to memory, to make its meaning clear without the importation of specific material from the system. One other word in the poem calls attention to itself, the pun in "Mrs. French, gifted with so fine an ear," for Yeats is not usually given to puns and this one is rather startling. It serves, however, to distance the grotesquerie of the incident to which it refers, and more importantly, relates the incident to others in the poem by means of the musical meaning of _ear_ which the pun brings to attention.

Another feature of the diction in "The Tower" is its heavy dependence upon proper names. This has been commented on in an earlier chapter as part of the portraiture-technique

which Yeats uses in many of his meditative poems, and some
of the figures in this poem have appeared in other works by
Yeats. In addition to the described characters such as
Hanrahan and Mrs. French, who are presented in characteristic
scenes, there are allusions to a number of other characters,
named and unnamed. Yeats has furnished a note to "The Tower"
which clarifies such figures as Mrs. French, Raftery, and
the former "ancient master" of the tower. It is difficult
for a reader familiar with the poem to judge how necessary
such a note is; and Yeats's volunteered information is always
interesting whether relevant or not. Certainly to a reader
who does not know much of Yeats's work, such identifications
are helpful; but the stories of Raftery and Mary Hynes,
of Hanrahan and the card game, are available from other Yeats
poems and stories, and Mrs. French and the bankrupt master
are given a clear enough symbolic function within this poem
that their historical identity is unimportant. There are
other allusions besides these relatively esoteric ones:
Burke and Grattan, Plato and Plotinus, Homer and Helen;
all are important, as we shall see later, in the development
of themes within the poem.

As in most Yeats poems, there is a very strong
dependence upon adjectives. One can see this in any passage
in the poem; it is particularly noticeable in the catalogue
early in section III, where every noun is preceded by an
adjective: "headlong light," "fabulous horn," "sudden shower,"

"fading gleam"; and later, "bitter soul," "proud stones,"
"Translunar Paradise," and so on. There are a few instances
of a double adjective ("ancient, bankrupt master," "learned
Italian things"), and one of three adjectives ("Excited,
passionate, fantastical imagination"). This reflects a
dominant interest in the quality of things; indeed, it has
been criticized as a tendency to the hyperbolic, as an over-
inflation of qualities.[1] But every use of the adjective,
particularly the doubling of adjectives which forces them
upon the attention, is done for functional purposes. That
the former master of the tower was both ancient and bankrupt
is very important to his place in the thematic development
of the poem, and the juxtaposition of qualities indicates
their importance. Likewise, what seems an inconsequence in
the addition of "ear and eye," a phrase added twice in I as
an appositive or adjunct to "imagination," disappears in II,
where these two words are made good, so to speak, by their
development into the motifs of music and blindness, and
related very significantly to the concept of the imagination.
This is a part of the imagistic pattern of the poem to be
traced presently, but we can observe also the repetition of
words not themselves images. The most strikingly recurrent

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[1]D. S. Savage, "The Aestheticism of W. B. Yeats,"
Kenyon Review, VII (1945), 131. Although Mr. Savage does not
care much for any of Yeats's work, he is particularly
unresponsive to "The Tower," which he describes as written in
"a reminiscential, rambling, inconsequent manner" and "only
held together by the poet's rhythmical and rhetorical skill."
This last was, I think, intended as a condemnation of trickery.

word is <u>imagination</u> itself, and variants of it such as <u>images</u> and <u>imaginings</u>; related to this is the repetition of two other abstract words, <u>memory</u> and <u>pride</u>, the latter appearing late in the poem but given much emphasis in III. These words function as logical loci in the development of the poem, and point to the thought-pattern which is in movement through it, although their full relations to each other are never clarified within that logical pattern, as we shall see.

The versification, like the diction, of "The Tower" is quite different from that of "Byzantium," despite the fact that its second section uses the same rhyme scheme as "Byzantium." We should expect this in view of the great difference between the worlds of the two poems, and the emotional attitudes which bring them into being. The rhythm of "Byzantium" moves upon another principle than that of meter, and in its creation of a magical enclosed world, uses repetition of words and of rhythmic intervals almost as an hypnotic formula does. "The Tower," being the expression of a conscious mind in varying moods, alternating between tension and reverie, lightness and seriousness, takes the form of speech rather than of incantation, and is based upon the traditional meters of verse, although it varies these with all the freedom which we have observed in Yeats's most characteristic poems.

The opening section of the poem uses a scheme of alternate-rhyming quatrains (<u>ababcdcd</u>---) which, however, do

not retain their cohesive unity as quatrains, for the thought
flows freely over the divisions to make the sixteen lines
seem a single unit rather than four discrete ones. Within
these lines, the norm of the rhythm is iambic, although
counterpointed with such consistency that only one or two
lines can be scanned as unvaried iambic (for example, "It
seems that I must bid the Muse go pack"). The conversational
movement of the lines necessitates such counterpoint, for the
semblance of conversation must occasionally juxtapose stresses
and otherwise break metrical patterns in order to reflect
different moods, as here the agitation of the poet's mind:

> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail?
>   Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible.

However, it will be noted that only one of the lines in this
first section of the poem does not have ten syllables, and
this, as we have seen in other poems such as "Leda and the
Swan," is a means of giving a sense of regulated units
despite the strong variations of meters within them. This
variation is often such that those lines which move against
the iambic norm carry only four actual stresses upon the
understood five-stress base, as in

> A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

This allows for more unstressed syllables to fall in the one line and give a clearer simulation of speech, which often blurs or hurries over some sounds as the voice moves to its points of emphasis.

The same counterpoint appears in section II, with even more irregularities, which are allowable because the much stricter rhyme scheme--that of Cowley's <u>Hervey</u> stanza-- can contain them without any danger of the reader's losing a sense of pattern in the lines. The conversational rhythm can be heard in the opening line of this section, which would be scanned metrically as

    ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ /
I pace upon the battlements and stare

but is rhythmically much closer to

    / / ᴗ ᴗ ᴗ / ᴗ ᴗ ᴗ /
I pace upon the battlements and stare.

This is a good example of a four-stress conversational rhythm mounted upon an understood five-stress metrical rhythm, and many such lines occur within the section.

In this second section of the poem, the long lines of the stanza have a norm of ten syllables, and a metrical pattern of five stresses, although, as we have seen, the counterpoint often makes them four- or six-stress lines in actual reading. Likewise, the short lines, which have a norm of eight syllables and four metrical stresses, show considerable variation in actual speech stresses, occasionally having only two ("Images and memories") and quite often having three ("For the prosaic light of day"). There are

fewer normative or unvaried lines in this section, although
some appear ("When mocking Muses chose the country wench")
and enough approximate it closely ("Old lecher with a love
on every wind") to keep the radically counterpointed lines
within an encompassing pattern. The rhyme scheme, as I sug-
gested earlier, is important in creating a sense of enclosing
pattern.

The final section of the poem returns to the looser
rhyme scheme of the quatrain seen in I, and again uses lines
which flow over the quatrain divisions. However, instead
of the pentameter lines of I, these are shorter, varying
between five and eight syllables in length. Their pattern
is achieved by a predominance of lines having three stresses.
The overwhelming rhythmic effect in this final section,
especially in its first half or more, is of a heavy, taut
regularity. The shortness of the lines would make this a
sing-song effect, were it not for the variations which Yeats
is careful to make, using occasional two-stress lines ("Poet's
imaginings") and four-stress lines ("Last reach of glittering
stream") to break the rigidity of the triple beats. The
sudden tightening of the pattern, which the short lines with
their three heavy stresses create, reflects the determined,
decisive tone of this section of the poem. It is in strong
contrast to the alternate agitation and reverie of the
earlier sections and mirrors the emotional and logical condition
reached by the poet after the end of section II. The device

remarked earlier of using so many adjective-noun pairs in
this last section also adds to the strong sound of patterned
time-units.

At the end of the decisive, heavily-stressed
"declaration of faith," the short stanza on the daw's nest
has a subtly different and more hesitant rhythm, whose
contrasts are evident both to the ear and in scansion-schemes,
if one looks first at some of the earlier lines,

I mock Plotinus' thought

And cry in Plato's teeth,

Death and life were not

Till man made up the whole,

Made lock, stock, and barrel

Out of his bitter soul,

and then at the later passage,

As at the loophole there

The daws chatter and scream,

And drop twigs layer upon layer.

When they have mounted up,

The mother bird will rest

On their hollow top,

And so warm her wild nest.

The alteration in rhythm is partly a result of breaking the
unstress-stress regularity of the earlier lines and introducing
more unstressed syllables in succession, and partly a result
of the different consonants used: the hard, explosive

consonants dominant in the first passage give way to a
predominance of m's, r's, and l's which soften the sound.
The same softening and loosening of the rhythm occurs in the
final four lines of the poem; following the tightened rhythms
of the last catalogue, the addition of syllables in the
last four lines, particularly the addition of dactyls, gives
to these lines a certain "dying fall" which is appropriate
to the fall of emotional intensity and to the distancing
and remoteness of the images. An incalculable element in
this effect is, of course, the meaning of the words themselves
and their connotations: fades, sleepy, deepening.

The rhythm of "The Tower," with its qualities of
dramatic speech (the first section is very much like a
soliloquy in Elizabethan or Jacobean drama), is a result of
what Yeats, in a different connection, called "the natural
momentum of the syntax."[1] The use of long and involved
constructions, the playing of thought through dependent
clauses, the sudden parenthetical interruptions and ejaculations,
all contribute to its speech rhythms, and to the creation of
that semblance of reasoning which is an essential feature
of Yeat's meditative verse. The dramatization of a mind in
movement is evident from the first lines of the poem, which
are broken in two by the poet's despairing address to his

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[1]Yeats, Letters, p. 710. He applied the term in praise
of Byron and the Jacobean poets. Yeats himself most resembles
the Jacobeans in that feature of his verse.

heart; this interruption, as well as the question posed, sets
the tone of the poem. In this question, there is a certain
flamboyance in the piling up of synonymous figures ("this
absurdity," "this caricature") which lead to the climactic
revelation of his problem, "decrepit age," and such
flamboyance is appropriate to what the poet tells us of his
own imagination: that it is excited, passionate, fantastical.
Throughout the poem we will find this mirrored in syntax,
as well as in imagery and thought. It appears again in
section II, in the poet's interrupted description of
Hanrahan's search:

> Hanrahan rose in frenzy there
> And followed up those baying creatures towards--
>
> O towards I have forgotten what---enough!

The abrupt, violent, revealing gesture of the syntax
dramatizes an incipient burst of hysteria which is caught and
stifled. The line which immediately follows this ("I must
recall a man that neither love") is one of the few in this
section containing nearly perfect iambs, and it reflects
the reining in of the mind which is instantly made, as does
the verb, must. This passage is an excellent example of the
dramatic element in Yeats's poetry and of the "natural
momentum" of its syntax. Its power lies in suggesting more
meanings than it says, for the "I" of the poem has been drawn
toward his momentary loss of control by what Hanrahan's
search, if followed up, would symbolize fully: the "horrible
splendour of desire" that finds no fulfillment. But to

consider this in its full implications is at the moment too
much, and the poet veers away from it by denying the meaning
of the search (" O towards I have forgotten what") until he
can regain control.

This control is shown as achieved in the subsequent
catalogue, orderly and contained, of persons to be invoked
and questioned. Once the poet has attained this control,
and has posed the question of age to this group of persons
and then dismissed them, he can recall Hanrahan and face
with more composure the issue he had evaded. The use of
the catalogue to suggest the ordering of things and the
mastery of them, the putting of things into their proper
places, is a striking feature of the final section of the
poem, which contains a series of catalogues: the poet's
discussion of pride; the declaration of faith which lists
the articles of his faith; and the final grim catalogue of
the "gifts reserved for age," which the poet names, accepts,
and places in perspective.[1]

I have spoken of the length and complexity of
sentences in "The Tower." Most of the stanzas of the poem
are sentences in themselves, and a few are run-on stanzas,
carrying their thought logically and grammatically into the
next stanzaic unit. Although present throughout the poem,
the complexity of sentence structure is most immediately

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[1] I use Eliot's ironic phrase from "Little Gidding."
There are many parallels between Yeats's catalogue and that
of Eliot.

evident in the final section of the poem, whose first sentence runs through twenty-four lines, and includes, as well as many parenthetical and dependent clauses, the long catalogue of natural symbols of pride. Likewise, the final stanza of the poem, with a catalogue and a parenthetical appositive phrase within it, is one complete sentence. Despite the length of this final section of the poem, it contains only six independent sentences, and this syntactical structure reflects, as do the catalogues used here, the gathering and arranging of thoughts which the poet's resolution of his problems has made possible.

Precisely what these problems are in all of their implications, and the means of their resolution, remains to be traced, and here our concern must be with the structures of imagery and of discourse, as those balance and complement each other in the unfolding of the poem. I will discuss these structures in turn, since attempting to trace them simultaneously is futile, the significance of every step in the poem not being fully evident without a continual looking before and after. A discussion of the imagery may appear at first to be confusing, since the threads of imagery are not tied into place except by the discursive structure to be discussed later, and I must ask the reader's indulgence until the end, when he will find the interrelations of both patterns falling into their significant and proper unity.

Images serve to dramatize and explore many themes

which the poet introduces first in discursive terms, as
"decrepit age" announces a theme which the imagery of the
poem proceeds to explore; or, to speak more accurately,
the poet explores the theme emotionally and therefore through
the language of images. This is done in various ways and
with curious cross-references and obliquities which simulate
the mind in meditative, only half-logical movement. The
opening figure of the poem, that of the poet in old age
compared to a dog with a can tied to his tail, is repeated
in the last line of the first section, where the submerged
metaphor of the opening lines is made explicit. The poet's
self-mocking view of his own ludicrous situation is additionally
emphasized by the introduction of _battered_ to describe the
condition of the poet as well as of the kettle metaphorically
tied to him.

There is evidence in a diary entry that "The Tower"
began in this or a similar image, although not finally
developed into a poem until five years later. The diary entry,
a very personal one, makes unmistakable the phallic signi-
ficance of the originating image:

> What shall I do with this absurd toy which they have given
> me, this grotesque rattle. O heart O nerves, you are as
> vigorous as ever, you still hunger for the whole world,
> & they have given you this toy.[1]

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[1]Quoted in Denton, op. cit., p. 206. Miss Denton
observes that although this entry is not marked "Subject for
a Poem," as is usual in such entries, "it clearly anticipates
the beginning of 'The Tower.'" (p. 205).

When the poem finally came to be written, Yeats altered the
phallic image here (while retaining the associations of
the absurd and the grotesque: "this absurdity," "this
caricature") to that of the can tied to the dog's tail,
and by so doing submerged the phallic symbolism into a more
general image of ludicrous futility and frustration. This
enabled him to introduce the old-age theme in its largest
and most general terms, while at the same time suggesting
its particular sexual terms which were to be developed by
implication in the second section. Thus the theme of old
age is from the first set against that of imagination as
the apparent opposites which must be reconciled, for to have
set only the one aspect of age, sexual frustration, against
the theme of imagination would have limited the potentialities
of the poem. The image of the poet as dog is obliquely
repeated in the second section, in reference to the former
master of the tower who left no record of when he finished
"his dog's day," and the sexual implications of the image
are given a primary place in the symbol of the pack of hounds
which Hanrahan tries to follow.

We may see other images in this first section which
operate in later sections of the poem. I have mentioned the
ear and eye reference in this section which is transmuted
in the second section to the motifs of music and blindness,
and thus related more specifically to the theme of
imagination. The characters called up in the second section

are selected for their emotional kinship to the poet;
because, like him, they are all gifted with an "Excited,
passionate, fantastical imagination," it is of them in
particular that the poet must ask his question. The vignettes
show them manifesting both the passionate and the fantastic
nature of their imaginations, Mrs. French being the most
obvious candidate for first place. She, though not an
artist, is set in a context of rich, aristocratic surroundings
which mark her as within the tradition which Yeats respected
as akin to that of the artist:

> Three types of men have made all beautiful things.
> Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their
> place in the world puts them above the fear of life,
> and the countrymen have made beautiful stories and
> beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not
> fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because
> Providence has filled them with recklessness. All these
> look backward to a long tradition, for, being without
> fear, they have held to whatever pleased them.[1]

We may question Mrs. French's beautiful manners, but not that
she held to whatever pleased her, and the grotesque incident
highlights the fantastic imaginative gifts of the woman; the
pun given to her later, although half-humorous, is intended
as a half-serious transformation of her imaginative quality
into an aesthetic quality, and this is supported by the
placement of her in a setting of tasteful elegance and custom.

The theme of the eye's function in imagination is
developed in the story of Mary Hynes, the peasant girl
commended by the blind poet Raftery's song; here one kind

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[1] W. B. Yeats, "Poetry and Tradition," Essays, p. 310.

of blindness, that of the drunken admirers who are betrayed
by an illusion, is set against the poet's actual blindness,
which is safe from such betrayal. "Music had driven their
wits astray," says the poet of the drunken peasants, but
the man who made the music remains the imaginative creator
who, though blind, sees by both lights, sun and moon. In
the allusion to Homer, the poet calls this condition of
things a "tragedy," for "Helen has all living hearts
betrayed," as the ideal image of the peasant girl has
betrayed the drunken admirers, who "mistook the brightness
of the moon for the prosaic light of day." These images,
of eye, ear, sun, and moon, introduce the theme of art's
relation to reality, and the relation of reality to the
ideal. They introduce as well the theme of madness, both
that of the creator and that of his listeners; all of these
images form a complex in which various themes are articulated.

The imagery of ear and eye has other and equally
oblique developments: Hanrahan's frenzy is the result of
his being bewitched in sight--the pack of cards is transformed
to a pack of hounds by an "ancient ruffian" who is a
magician as the artist is. The former master of the tower
has presumably heard the "loud cry" of dead soldiers when
"their great wooden dice beat on the board," and thus has
affinities with the poet and with the other figures whose
heightened sensibilities have made them fantastical of
imagination. Hanrahan is again associated with the image

of sight in the final stanzas of section II which describe

his plunge into the labyrinth of sexual love as the effect

of "a softening eye" (both the woman's and his own), and

this is a minor but important detail which is to be contrasted

with the "fixed" eye of the swan who sails out alone to

sing his last song, in section III of the poem, and the

blindness of Homer and Raftery earlier in II. The two

senses of sight and hearing appear again at the end of the

poem in the two images which close the poem: the sight of

clouds at evening, and the bird's sleepy cry from the

shadows.

Before leaving the opening section of the poem,

which starts into movement so many significant images

beneath its discursive surface, we should note one other

important image, that of the poet, when young, climbing

Ben Bulben to fish. The image of the fisherman reappears with

great emphasis in the final section of the poem, when the

poet bequeaths his faith and pride to the young upstanding

men who fish in the high streams under "bursting dawn."

As a fertility symbol, its significance is obvious, but we

will find that this symbolic meaning is implicated with

other thematic and imagistic lines within the poem which

considerably enrich its range of significance. At this

early point in the poem, the image suggests both physical

and imaginative fertility, and is intended as a contrast to

the aged man, who, having lost the vigor of his body, yet

retains an imagination as vigorous as that of the boy.
Thus the image serves to emphasize the problem of old age
which is introduced as the major theme of the section, and
is set against the apparent opposite of vital imagination.

The opening lines of section II introduce the tower
as the setting of the poetic action: "I pace upon the
battlements and stare. . . ." It is from this vantage
point that the poet looks out upon the surrounding country-
side and sends his imagination forth, invoking men and
women who have been closely associated with this setting,
one living "beyond that ridge," another "somewhere upon
that rocky place," another in "the neighbouring cottages."
Thus the tower acts as the central locus from which the
poet's meditation moves out upon people associated in one
way or another with the setting of his own house. We may
say that this is a logical relation, and it is also a
narrative relation, and explains in part why the poet selects
the particular persons he does for his questioning: all
have been a part of the geographical world of this particular
place.

It is a curious thing that the tower is not introduced
at all until this section of the poem, that it is then made
the setting of a meditation in which the poet refers to it
directly only once to "place" the action; and that it appears
only twice again, then in the most casual references, the
first in relation to the dead soldiers who climbed its narrow

stair, the second in relation to the daws who build their nest "at the loophole there." But the title of the poem is "The Tower," and it gave its title to the volume in which it first appeared; and this strange absence of the tower from the poem in any explicit or obvious way is precisely one of the problems which the poem makes for an interpreter. For the tower is its major symbol, and is so by virtue of implication and by the sum of all the other images in the poem, not by virtue of its own explicit function. Indeed, its symbolic importance is as great within this poem as we have seen it is in "Meditations in Time of Civil War," with the difference that in that poem the tower is everywhere evident as image and setting, while in "The Tower" it is everywhere assumed and seldom evident.

That the tower is generally in literature a phallic symbol is important in its symbolism here; as such, it has relations to other images of fertility within the poem, to the fishermen, to the image of the mother bird, and relations to a major theme of the poem, that of physical decay in age. That the tower in actuality is a ruin is suggested in the line which follows a discussion of the ancient bankrupt master of the house and his decline; "Before that ruin came . . . " refers both to the ruin of the old master and that of the ancient tower. The poet himself is hypersensitive to the idea of ruin, and this is dramatically evident in the opening stanza of II in which he notes "the foundations of a house" and a "Tree" which by the end of the stanza are

described as "ruin" and "ancient trees," as the details
of his visible real world become implicated in his mental
world. What I am suggesting is that the tower as a phallic
symbol, insofar as it becomes subtly identified with the
physical condition of the poet himself, is a phallic symbol
manqué. This may explain the small part it plays explicitly
in the poem, and it certainly explains the nature of its
symbolic relations to other images, and to the ultimate
meaning of the poem. And, as hardly needs to be said,
as a phallic symbol its reference is not only to the
obvious sexual theme of the poem but also to that of the
creative imagination. The dual nature of this symbolism
becomes extremely important in revealing the position at
which the poet finally arrives, and this will be clearer as
the discussion proceeds.

Section II also introduces the images of sun and moon,
whose part in the complex of art-imagination-reality themes
has already been mentioned. They appear in the middle of
section II, in the story of the drunken admirers who "mistook
the brightness of the moon / For the prosaic light of day,"
and again at the end of II when the sun recurs as an image,
and finally in one brief allusion in III: "Aye, sun and
moon and star, all." They are used in their traditional
associations in all of these passages; the sun, as that which
makes the real world evident, is a metaphor for pragmatic
visible reality (a significance reinforced by Yeats's pointing

of it in the word prosaic); it is opposed to the moon, which

has its traditional connotations as the softening, idealizing

light. This has relations to the theme of imagination, its

power and its effects, and the theme of the discrepancy

between the actual and the ideal. As this discrepancy may

be tragic if not properly understood, these images link

also with the madness theme ("Music had driven their wits

astray"), for music, an instrument of the creative imagination,

has "maddened" the peasant men into mistaking the two worlds

represented by sun and moon. This is why the poet, after

speaking of Raftery and Homer as creators of images which

have "maddened" and "betrayed" men, says,

> O may the moon and sunlight seem
> One inextricable beam,
> For if I triumph I must make men mad.

For art, which depends upon the fusion (though not the

mistaking) of both worlds, the real and the ideal, must

inevitably "make men mad" who do not see both constitutive

elements. When the admirers try to "test their fancy by

their sight," they become lost; conversely, the creation of

beauty does not depend on sight, as the poet realizes when

he considers the blindness of Raftery and Homer. This

establishes the difference between two kinds of imaginative

power, the passive which is "betrayed" and which may be

called "fancy," and the active, which is more nearly a pure

imagination not dependent on the power of sight. It suggests,

by extension, that the creator has a safety from his own

creation (and from betrayal) which no one else can have.

The images of the two women, the peasant girl and
Helen, carry forward the theme of sexual frustration which is
dramatized more clearly in the story of Hanrahan, and which
is climaxed in the final question posed to Hanrahan at the
end of section II, where the loss of a desired woman is
related to the activity of the imagination and the memory.
There the image of the sun is again introduced, for
imagination and memory dwelling upon a lost ideal image
blot out the "sun" of the real image and eclipse the
"prosaic light" of the present. The imagery here, that of
eclipse, also suggests a kind of blindness which occurs to
the poet remembering both beauty and its loss, and relates
him to Raftery and Homer as a poet who creates from
imagination, not from actual physical reality which has been
experienced. It is important that the imagination here is
seen as an active function which blots out the sun, not
as a passive reaction which ends in a mistaking of two lights.

In the poet's address to Hanrahan, the application
to the desired woman of the labyrinth-image restates two
themes. That of sexual experience is the more obvious one:

> For it is certain that you have
> Reckoned up every unforeknown, unseeing
> Plunge, lured by a softening eye,
> Or by a touch or a sigh,
> Into the labyrinth of another's being . . .

With the knowledge of earlier image-patterns which have been
traced, it is easy to understand the "unseeing Plunge" into the

"labyrinth," a metaphor for the sexual act, as a metaphor
also for the plunge into experience which is reality; for we
remember that the blinded "unseeing" admirers earlier made
this plunge "And one was drowned in the great bog of Cloone."
That the labyrinth (as well as the bog) is an image for the
complexity of total human experience relates this passage
more closely to the expanding significance of the question
which immediately follows: "Does the imagination dwell
the most / Upon a woman won or a woman lost?" For the
answer implied, that loss is the generating impulse of
the imagination, develops the theme of the poet's blindness
(and thus isolation from real images) which we have traced
earlier and which recurs in the eclipse image. The impli-
cation is that imagination and memory, its instrument, are
most poetically creative upon those images which have never
been known in real experience, and must thus be created
out of the materials of the imagination. This clarifies the
relationships between this last stanza of section II and the
abrupt shift in attitude and tone in III, for which the
logical structure of the poem does not prepare us at all; in
the discursive development of the poem there is a hiatus
between II and III which is impossible to explain without
recourse to the imagistic development of the poem. I have
suggested the relation of this last part of II to the blindness
images, and it should be pointed out that the final images
of the poem, in which the sight and sound of the actual world

have become distanced, remote, is a natural and culminating development of this pattern, for at that point the poet has come to understand the relation of the actual world to the creative imagination (and thus the relation of his own physical decay to his art), and knows that in more senses than one man "makes up" the world in which he lives. It is important to remember, and so I shall emphasize it again, that within the poem there are two kinds of blindness, as there are two kinds of imagination: it is the blinded admirer of the girl, not the blind Raftery, who is drowned in the great bog of Cloone.

The final section of the poem introduces an abundance of nature imagery which is not prevalent in the earlier sections, but which has been anticipated by the allusion in the opening section to the poet's habit of climbing the mountain to fish. This image returns in that of the young upstanding men who fish in the mountain streams. These images, of fishing, of natural surroundings, and of dawn, are associated with the ideal men to whom the poet leaves his pride, and by extension with the national ideal of the independent proud hero represented by Burke and Grattan. Pride is then given a series of analogical figures taken from nature: the fullness of dawn light, the horn of plenty, the sudden rainshower, the swan singing in his last hour before death: all images of fullness and creative plenitude, of that which is given freely without motive or thought of

requital. Like the image compressed into the line, "The
fountain leap," they counter the images of ruin and ancient
trees which introduced the poem, and prepare for the
defiant affirmation which follows. That affirmation itself
repeats a number of the images which have appeared before:
sun and moon, new art images in "learned Italian things" and
"the proud stones of Greece," as well as abstract words
which have appeared before, imaginings, memories. It
introduces also a new image, that of the mirror-resembling
dream of art. The image of the mirror is double: it
mirrors life, because the ideal or "dream" must take its
images from reality; and it mirrors the self, as art is
for the creator a means of identity--one of the particular
problems of old age. But the dream of art is "mirror-
resembling" and "superhuman," and this is an important
qualification, as the moon and the sunlight can only seem
an "inextricable beam."

The sudden introduction of the image of the daw's
nest at the end of this declaration has startled at least
one very perceptive critic, whose remarks on it clarify more
than a single difficulty of the whole poem:

> Yeats merely juxtaposes it beside his list of the learned
> Italian things, the Grecian stones, the poet's imaginings
> and the memories, out of which 'Man makes a superhuman /
> Mirror-resembling dream,' just as the twigs of the nest
> are dropped layer upon layer. This last is one of the
> logical indications which helps us, and as a likeness
> is clear enough; yet it leads only dimly to the more
> obscure relation between man and
> > The mother bird ⌐who ⌐ will rest
> > On their hollow top,
> > And so warm her wild nest.

> Most readers will play the mind over all the overt and
> suggested details of such an image, making their own
> logical connections between this wild nest and man's
> predicament in the world, between the whole passage and
> the previous declaration that man 'made up the whole, /
> Made lock, stock, and barrel / Out of his bitter soul.'
> But few readers would dare claim that they surely read
> what Yeats surely wrote; more than that, these connections
> are seldom the same in two consecutive readings by the
> same reader. A great many connections are possible, and
> not any are surely indicated.[1]

This is a very astute presentation of the problems involved

in the passage in question, and indeed in Yeats's long

poems in general, and I must repeat what I have suggested

about the duality of structure in such poems. Miss Tuve

is looking for logical connections, and assumes that the

reader will do so also; she finds some, as when she remarks

that the nest is built of twigs, layer upon layer, as man's

dream is built of discrete human realities. This logical

connection is, as she says, "clear enough," but it obviously

does not satisfy her own sense of the importance of the

image. I do not dare claim that I "surely read what Yeats

surely wrote," but it seems to me that beyond this logical

relation which is immediately evident, the image is best

understood in terms of the imagistic structure of the whole

poem, which operates behind and makes transitions between

the logical loci of structure. The dominant imagistic motif

of the whole poem is that of upward movement. In the first

section, the boy climbs Ben Bulben at dawn "expecting the

impossible"; in the second section the boy grown to a man

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[1] Rosemond Tuve, op. cit., p. 270.

and poet climbs at evening the man-made tower to "send
imagination forth"; in the third section, the poet makes
his bequest to men "That climb the streams until / The
fountain leap," and the poet declares his faith that "being
dead, we rise, / Dream and so create. . . ." At this point
the image of the daws building their nests layer upon layer,
and of the mother bird who "will rest / On their hollow top, /
And so warm her wild nest" is an organic development of the
upward movement which the whole poem has described, both
in images and in its emotional curve, as well as a function
of the images of creativity which we have seen in earlier
art images and in the natural images of plenitude earlier
in this section. And, as in many of the earlier images, the
notions of creativity and of upward movement are linked in
the passage. That the twigs of the nest are like the materials
of actual experience which the poet uses in art is a "logical
connection" already noted, and to it must be added the
emotional connection (at least oblique connection) that the
material in itself, actual experience, may be shabby or
fragmentary, in itself of little significance, until used in
the act of creation. That the nest is a wild one, and hollow,
that it must be warmed, suggest thematic proliferations which
are finally perhaps ineffable, but include something of the
loneliness of the creative act; its isolation above the
"chatter and scream" which surrounds the making of its
materials; and its generosity, which acts without motive

beyond its own release, as the shower and the horn overflow their plenitude. This passage is followed in turn by a repetition of the earlier image of the fisherman, in the bequest of "both faith and pride / To young upstanding man / Climbing the mountain-side," who, under "bursting dawn," cast for fish in the high streams.

The fisherman image is a part of both those images of upward movement and those of creativity, and the imagery associated with him--"fountain," "dripping stone," "bursting dawn"--suggest the fullness of fertility which is the opposite pole of contrast to the decrepit age of the meditating poet. Considering the imagery of upward movement associated with him, we remember that given to both the drunken admirers and Hanrahan, who are deceived by an ideal that cannot be fulfilled: the drunken men "Rose from the table and declared it right / To test their fancy by their sight," and Hanrahan, when the pack of cards was transformed, "rose in frenzy there / And followed up those baying creatures. . . ." In both of these instances the movement is frenetic, and aimed at an object which is not able to fulfill desire, for it is illusory, and the result is betrayal. But the fisherman's climbing of the mountainside, the mother bird's mounting up to the nest, are images of determined, lonely, quiet action (neither a plunge into a labyrinth or a bog, and creative as the others are not) which seeks its fulfillment not in another but in the expression of the self.

It is important that these two qualities, loneliness
and creativity, are associated finally with one kind of person
epitomized in the fisherman, who stands in implicit contrast
to the persons invoked in section II, for they, although they
share with the poet his fantastical imagination and are
indeed invoked for this kinship, are yet fundamentally
different. None of them, save Hanrahan, is creative, and it
is significant that he is the one called back at the last.
All the others have used imagination to gain something from
the actual world, as do Mrs. French and the admirers who set
out to find the peasant girl; or are imaginative without
creation and so are mistaken and betrayed, as the admirers
are; or are not creative at all, as the "harried" former
master of the tower, who had "neither love nor music nor an
enemy's clipped ear" to assuage his ancient bankrupt life.
It is also interesting to note that most of these figures
are pictured sitting at table, and that the word "upstanding"
is repeatedly used to describe the fisherman-hero. Their
sitting at table perhaps further suggests a communal life
(for the peasants, a very convivial one) which is again in
contrast to the loneliness of the fisherman.

With this drawing of the patterns which images set
into being within the poem, we have a means for better under-
standing the logical structure of the poem, and its ultimate
significance. At the risk of repeating some of what has
already been said, this logical structure should be traced.
The opening section of the poem states its immediate problem,

the old age of the poet, which seems to him a ludicrous
and absurd burden, and the more so because his imagination
is still young and vital. Having set these two things into
a contrast (which is a false one, though he does not yet
know it), he assumes that he must surrender his art, for as
it depends upon physical, sensuous experience, it must "go
pack" when the creator himself is no longer capable of such
experience, and in its stead must be placed Plato, Plotinus,
"abstract things." But having set up these alternatives,
the poet does not yet bid the Muse away, for his meditation
in II is itself an act of the imagination, which is sent
forth to consider not abstract things, but the minute
particulars of various lives, in order to know if others
have raged, as he is now doing, against their own physical
decay. At the end of the first section, the poem is still
an immediately personal thing, and bound up with a specific
and concrete personal problem. As we have seen from its
images, however, a number of themes are sounded here which
will be developed later.

The second section of the poem is concerned with the
past, as the first section is concerned with the present,
and the last section with the future. Its action occurs under
"day's declining beam," an analogue of the poet's own life,
and consists of his calling up "images and memories." At
this point the major themes of the poem begin to make their
formal development in images, which, as we have seen, increase
in interrelations and complications as the section progresses.

The theme of imagination is presented in the vignette of
Mrs. French, and in the tale of the peasant girl whose
commendation in a song brought her such ardent admirers.
The development of themes is given a modified direction
when the poet muses upon the implications of one of his
memories: the man who made the song was blind. This intro-
duces the question of the power of imagination when cut off
from the sense-world, or partially isolated from it, in
blindness; and the oblique reference which this may have
for the speaker is now a new theme to be traced. The effect
of imagination is also one of the themes here, since "the
tragedy" of art is that its images may break hearts (as in
"Among School Children") by setting before man an idealized
image in the form of a real one, a "dream" which reality can
only belie. For the artist, this fact is a condition of art:
he must fuse the ideal and the real by the power of his
imagination ("O may the moon and sunlight seem / One
inextricable beam"), but for his audience it is a potential
tragedy, if they fail to understand the distinction between
sun and moon, actual and imagined, real and ideal: ". . . if
I triumph I must make men mad," as Raftery's music maddened
the peasants. There is a related analogue of this in the
story of the ancient juggler whose transformation of the
cards bewitches Hanrahan: the tragedy is Hanrahan's, not the
juggler's who creates but does not follow the illusion he
creates.

After the poet's reference to Raftery and Homer, he announces, "And I myself created Hanrahan," which allows us to rank him with the makers of illusion, for the others so far mentioned have not been creative but passive in their imaginations. Hanrahan himself is a figure who fuses both kinds of person, for he is both a victim and, in his function as poet, a maker of illusion; and his sexual vitality makes him the figure most interesting of all to the poet, whose sexual frustrations are one motif of his meditation. The poet's first refusal to admit the full implications of this has been observed earlier in the comment on the syntax of the passage, and the poet's sudden shift of direction to a "neutral" figure, that of the ancient bankrupt master of the house, whose similarity to the poet is more general, being a common bond of age and harassment. This image, as it relates to the history of his own house, then recalls those of the dead soldiers, who represent another and more general kind of masculine vitality. The poet has by now come full circle to the question: did all of these people, so like and so unlike each other, rage against their own decay? When the implied answer is made, all are dismissed but Hanrahan, and he is retained for his "mighty memories."

The last two stanzas of section II, the poet's address to Hanrahan, are extremely important for the transition which is completed within them from rage to acceptance: they are the link between the agitated, despairing poet of I and II

and the defiant, affirmative poet of III. Hanrahan is called
back not for qualities he shares with others (participation
in life, betrayal by an illusion, a kind of madness), but
for what he has "reckoned up," a knowledge which makes him
particularly kin to the poet. For Hanrahan is a "great
songmaker," as Yeats calls him in the early stories, and
as such, he fulfills two roles. He is the full man, a
"lecher with a love on every wind," and he is a poet; he is
thus an alter ego, a mirror for the speaker, and indeed the
poet asks his question of Hanrahan and then gives the
answer himself, for Hanrahan's answer is already known to
him. As the poet knows ("And I myself created Hanrahan . . ."),
he has won and lost women, but in his "deep considering mind"
knows that the imagination dwells the most "upon the lost."
The reasons for loss may be various: pride, cowardice,
"anything called conscience," but the effect of loss is
constant: the memory retains the ideal image never measured
by reality, and this image assumes in the proportions of the
imagination a brilliance (as the moon eclipses the sun, or
the ideal the real) which makes the known, achieved, experienced
reality unimportant: the day is "blotted out." As this is
understood and admitted by the poet, through Hanrahan as
alter ego, we see in retrospect that the poet has been moving
to this conclusion from the moment his consideration of
Raftery and Homer found their blindness "nothing strange."
Their creation did not depend upon the experience of their

sight, if imagination and memory served them, and indeed, those who had the fullness of their senses were the ones betrayed, not the poets, whose protection lay in blindness as the poet's may now lie in his own sterile body. With the imagistic background of this address to Hanrahan, we see that Hanrahan's own participation in life, his plunge into the labyrinth, is like the fall into the bog's mire: it is a commitment to experience which is the condition of man; but for the artist, loss of such experience is not important, and may in fact be a condition of his fullest creation. All that this implies about the relationship between loneliness and creativity, between man's "bitter soul" and his "super-human / Mirror-resembling dream," is precisely the subject of the final section of the poem, and is the ground upon which the poet can finally accept his own loss of physical powers, for he has learned (or had confirmed) from Hanrahan that imagination is fed by what it does not have. The tower itself, which is one of the symbols of that which is <u>above</u> the level of common activity and life, and that which encloses and isolates the poet from the world of clouds, birds, women (as blindness isolated Raftery and Homer), is thus still the creative symbol for the poet, though it cannot be any longer the symbol of the man, and the loss and the gain are both contained within it.

The terms given to Hanrahan's motive for turning aside from "the great labyrinth" on those occasions when he did are

interesting. They may be taken as separate and optional
reasons, and understood in their most usual senses are all
possible motives; cowardice and conscience (so called) are
common enough motives for the denial of experience, and pride
may be seen as a refusal to commit the self to another. In
this reading, the passage "means what it says" at the simplest
level, and the poet allows us to choose what motive we wish
to impute to Hanrahan. But all of these things may also be
understood together as a single motive related to art: a
refusal to "plunge" into the labyrinth which is made for the
sake of something finally more important, a refusal to submit
the ideal image to the proof of a reality which would destroy
it. In this sense, the turning aside may in no pejorative
sense be understood as all three, cowardice, conscience, and
pride; being a fear of losing the ideal, and a moral determina-
tion not to lose it, and an artistic necessity not to lose
it. Whichever way one chooses to define these nouns, singly
or as a unit, is not, I think, extremely important, for the
significance of the passage does not lie in what motives
Hanrahan may have had but in the effect of his turning aside.
The poet is enabled to realize that artistic creation does
not depend directly upon sensuous experience but upon imagina-
tion and memory, that the apparent choice between age and
artistic creation (predetermined for him by his own age) was
a false one. Although the man may lament the loss of the
world, the labyrinth,--and indeed, the sense of his human loss

is part of the knowledge which deepens and complicates the poet's defiant affirmation--the poet survives it, for his materials lie within him so long as he can remember what has been and imagine what has never been. Thus, though the tower is lost in its specific sexual sense--he can no longer plunge into the labyrinth--it is retained in its fullest creative sense, for he does not need to; and the question which began the poem, What shall I do with my own absurdity?, ceases to be a question, for there is no absurdity. The sense of dignity which he did not have, but needed, has been achieved, and he can, in full understanding of its source, make his last will and testament and "die to the world."

It is only at this point, but inevitably now, that the poet can write his will (in both senses of the word), and the final section of the poem reflects, in its rhythms, imagery and syntax, the resolution of will which can at last be made. It is only now that he can bequeath his pride, for he has only now achieved it, or declare his faith, for he has only now come to it with full certainty. Having arrived at this point, his legacy is to those who in their creative loneliness should now be most truly his kin, all those epitomized in the climbing, lonely fisherman who has the pride of all natural and self-sufficient things which over-flow from their own fullness. But the self-sufficiency of the fisherman-hero, his youth, and the serenity he has as a natural endowment, remain qualities which the poet as we

have seen him has not had, and the significance of the poet's acceptance is involved in his own awareness of this, for he has chosen as his ideal and inheritor a man who is what he cannot be, and who is therefore, like the "woman lost," a generating image for art. This awareness by the poet of the sources of his victory is part of the poignancy of his affirmation, for the poet's triumph is raised upon the man's defeat. The knowledge of this is in fact the motivation and meaning of his defiant declaration of faith, when he asserts that the dream of art is founded upon the inadequacies and incompletenesses of human experience, that reality is "made up" by man (both completed and created) out of his "bitter soul." His defiant cry that "being dead, we rise, / Dream and so create / Translunar Paradise," has specific significance as a description of his own death to the world as a man, and his rebirth as a poet; and universal significance as a description of the creative imagination, which survives and is in fact generated by human defeat and loss. Having measured the meaning of his own loss, he can accept it and accept "what worse evil come," secure in the tower of his imagination.

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