Chapter Five

A Full Moon in March and The Last Poems

This chapter deals with the themes and symbols of the Collection of poems called The Full Moon in March (1935) and The Last Poems (1936-1939). It seems useful to treat Yeats’s later poems all written during 1933 to 1939 together, almost as if they had appeared in a single volume of poetry. The final sweep of his work is represented in two volumes published during his lifetime, The Full Moon in March (1935) and The Last poems (1936-1939). The first one, The Full Moon in March collection contains a quite small selection of verse under the title Parnell’s Funeral and for the sequence of ten poems of Supernatural Songs. The Last Poems is a wide ranging Volume focusing largely on sexual and political motifs and on growing old. The theme of old age is being discussed in several poems of this phase.

Yeats writes about political figures like Parnell. He writes three poems about him, one is Parnell’s Funeral other two poems are in The Last Poems. A succession of Political poems, sometimes violently nationalistic, sometimes revolted by violence, and sometimes tough m indebly satirical appears in this volume. The title poem Parnell’s Funeral is a vehement attack on what Yeats saw as the betrayal of Parnell by a craven, bigoted, and misled Irish public. The poem opens with a mystical scene of ritual sacrifice. In it a miraculous boy who might have wrought wonders is killed and his heart cut out. Thus it was Parnell, whose downfall is seen as the everlasting shame of the nation.

An age is the reversal of an age:

When strangers murdered Emmet, Fitzgerald, Tone,

We lived like men that watch a painted stage.
What matter for the scene, the scene once gone. (Collected Poems, 319).

This is the best passage in the poem, which goes on to say that political leaders of a later age would have been able to prevent Civil War and to act more nobly if only they could have ‘eaten Parnell’s heart’ and thus partaken of his courage and wisdom. This poem does several things at the same time. Of primary importance is the apotheosis of the national leader. The cosmic change accompanying Parnell’s death heightens the presentation of the event and belittles the ‘frenzied crowd’ whose depravity is relentless assailed. The image of the hound dragging a stag down brings one more charge against the Irish people and culminates in an open indictment.

All that was sung,

All that was said in Ireland is a lie

Bred out of the contagion of the throng, (Collected Poems, 320).

Yet the poem, in a sense, reads better as it stands on its own feet in the Collected Poems. Yeats was trying to synthesize events and literary movements into a coherent, unified, symbolic interpretation of his country’s history. This poem is written in two parts. Part first of the poem was finished after his return from America and ended the poetic silence he had endured since Lady Gregory’s death. In April 1933 Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespeare: “I have been in a dream finishing a poem, the first I have done since Lady Gregory’s death. American lectures and so on filled up my time”. (Letters, 808) Clearly, it draws on the thoughts of the lecture and translates them into a complex poem, integrating a number of previously-used symbolic details. The five stanzas catch the funeral scene in a moment of mythic illumination, forcefully emphasizing the significance of the moment as an ‘accepted sacrifice’. The other emphases are on the real nature of the event as opposed to
ritualism, the guilt of Parnell’s own people; the suggestion that the sacrifice was completed by the eating of the slain King’s heart; and the willed desolation of an onlooker like Yeats, thirsting for accusation to be turned on himself and his bare soul. The next poem, in this volume is *Three Songs to the same Tune*, in this poem the exaltation in tragedy and defeat which Yeats had found in the Rising, the event had lost the greater part of its epic quality by the 1930’s and its appeal to Yeats was diminishing. Instead of plunging him into bogs of mixed feelings and doubts as in *Easter 1916*, it revealed itself from a longer distance. By now, the heroes have been gathered into the national ritual. Taking their place are heroes of past, his friends and other contemporaries. ‘Those renowned generations’ have now come to dominate the scene:

> Justify all those renowned generations;
> They left their bodies to fatten the wolves,
> They left their homesteads to fatten the foxes,
> Fled to far countries, or sheltered themselves
> In cavern, crevice, hole,
> Defending Ireland’s soul. (Collected Poems, 322).

As, pointed out by Cowell,

> The volume begins with a series of poems, that prove “Yeats’s continuing political passions, and then comes a poem that illustrates very well the unique defiance of Yeats’s poetic old age, *A Prayer for Old Age.*” It begins with monosyllabic passion, deliberately exploiting the spluttering awkwardness of the first two words. (Cowell, 112).
God guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone. (Collected Poems, 326).

The poem must be the most outspoken statement of aestheticism ever. He says that great poetry is written only by those who think in a marrow bone, who experience life with their whole being, and so, he prays that he may be spared the conventional virtues preclude conflict, and without conflict there can be no poetry. He knows that he will seem foolish to others, but that is negligible price to pay for the continuing ability to write poetry:

O What am I that should not seem
For the song’s sake a fool? (Collected Poems, 326).

Here Yeats’ conception of poetry is shaping his life, but only because of his conviction that great poetry is the product of a great life. Here is one of Yeats’ most convincing demonstrations of his refusal to separate life and art. He could not face the prospect of writing poetry which was not backed up by a full life.

The heart of this Volume is Supernatural Songs, written in the summer of 1934. These songs are a sequence of ten poems divided between sexually saturated mystical philosophizing and a more straightforward lyricism. The Title is, of course, partly ironic, for the very idea of the supernatural was anathema to Yeats. Professor Ellmann has expressed the central theme of these poems very effectively: “Where Crazy Jane usually maintains that there is a spiritual aspect to physical delight, Ribh defends the converse”(Cowell,113).Ribh, an Irish hermit, is presented by Yeats as an example of very early Christian thought, which still retains traces of Pre-Christian mythology and robustness, and he is set over against St.Patrick, representing the kind of other-worldly, completely unphysical, Christianity that Yeats hated”. Ribh, the hermit, then is the possessor of a Christianity which sees so- called supernatural
events in human terms, showing that there is a physical aspect to spiritual delight. Thus, in *Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillin* Ribh celebrates the passion of the pagan lovers who, on being falsely told of each other’s death, had died of broken hearts. Their love is now spiritual:

Though somewhat broken by the leaves, that light

Lies in a circle on the grass; therein

I turn the pages of my holy book. (Collected Poems, 328).

Perhaps the supreme stroke is the suggestion of a complaint: the light is somewhat broken by the leaves! Ribh, in fact has a proper grasp of the relation between the supernatural and the natural, and is thus appalled by the doctrine he hears from Patrick of an all-male Trinity. This, he says, is not supernatural, but unnatural:

Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed.
As, man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets, Godhead begets Godhead (Collected Poem, 328)

On this point of doctrine, Ribh clearly prefers his pre-Christian theology. Proceeding with his criticism of Christianity, Ribh says, in *Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient*, that Christian love can too easily degenerate into sentimentality. Man should be capable of feeling every emotion towards God, even hatred. Only thus can he achieve a complete relationship, a complete absorption in God such as is described in the last stanza. An ecstatic experience of God is one which involves the whole man, including every aspect of his body and mind, and in this sense it ‘cannot endure/ A bodily or mental furniture’. Ribh expresses this ecstatic absorption in God thus:
What can she take until her Master give!
Where can she look until He make the show!
What can she know until He bid her know!
How can she live till in her blood He live! (Collected Poems, 330).

God can become real for man only when he is treated as real, and thus, paradoxically, ‘Hatred of God may bring the soul to God’. Pre-eminently then, Ribh’s view of the supernatural is a common-sense one. He has a proper respect for the human as well as the superhuman.

It is clear that the driving force behind these poems is Yeats’s continuing search for an all-inclusive reality. The last poem in volume, *Meru* which is named after India’s Holy Mountain, expresses Yeats’ sense that this search must be an unending and continuing one, each age undoing what a previous age has done. In spite of the apparent hopelessness of the search, every individual is committed to it, and though he may never know the truth, he may embody it:

But man’s life is thought,
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease Ravening through centaury after centaury
Ravening, raging, uprooting that he may come
Into the desolation of reality. (Collected Poems, 333).

*Meru* is the concluding section of the *Supernatural Songs* in which Ribh, an imaginary critic of St. Patrick, is introduced as the speaker. He is supposed to be Yeats’s image of an orthodox Christian. But we have to bear in mind that what is orthodox to Yeats may be heterodox to others. However, in a note to the poem Yeats says: “I would consider Ribh, were it not for his ideas about the Trinity, an orthodox man. (Variorum, 837-838). The final section of the poem, *Meru* supports the
proposition that Yeats is moving closer to the Indian view of life. According to this poem, civilization is hooped together by ‘manifold illusion’ or Maya; man’s life itself is nothing but illusion, and he ‘despite his terror, cannot cease /Ravening through century after century and comes into the desolation of reality’. The poet bids farewell to Egypt, Greece and Rome, for none of these can lead him to that final perception that comes alone to the Indian ‘Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest.’ The Hindu ascetic, who is ‘caverened in might under the drifted snow’ and is beaten by winter’s dreadful blast’, is the one who attains that mystical vision of the cyclical activity of life and who alone can see with dispassionate eyes through the meaninglessness of life. These hermits of Mount Meru know ‘That day brings round the night,thar before dawn/His glory and his monuments are gone’ (Collected Poems,334). It is not known, whether this cyclical idea was suggested to the poet by the well-known Indian image of the serpent with its tail in its mouth. Ribh’s Christianity comes from Egypt, and it must have retained the characteristics of older faiths. This was the kind of Christianity which St.Patrick must have found in Ireland, and Yeats associates that early Christian Ireland with India.

Hermit Ribh, as presented in the first section of the poem, sits in ‘the pitch dark night’ reading his holy book by the light of the sexual intercourse of two angels, ‘For the intercourse of angels is a light’. Yeats might have drawn this idea from Swedenborg, who had spoken of angelic intercourse as a union of the whole body which seems from far off incandescence. The image of the spirits of the two lovers enjoying physical delights is derived from the swedenborgian theory of correspondence. Like most of Yeats’s later poetry, this poem about lovers is shot through and through with a vibrant sexuality, and Rajan is right in pointing out that “Ribh complements Crazy Jane by representing the sexuality of spirit rather than the
spirituality of sex”. (Rajan, 152-153). And ironically enough, these angels which Yeats’s orthodox Christian Ribh sees are the pagan lovers Baile and Aillin. It is above the Christian symbolic trees of the apple and yew. “In Christian symbolism yew leaves express the idea of immortality that the spirits of these unchristian lovers meets, ‘purified by tragedy’”. (Webber, 221).

Thus, at the outset, Yeats shows the scene and atmosphere transfused with Christian Ribh, Holy book, Apple and Yew as well as pagan Baile and Aillinn images.

Then comes, in Ribh Denounces Patrick Yeats’s blasphemous view of the Christian Trinity voiced by Ribh;

An abstract Greek absurdity has crazed the man—

Recall the masculine Trinity. Man, woman, child (a daughter or a son).

(Collected Poems, 328).

That’s how all natural or supernatural stories run. The ‘masculine Trinity’ of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost which Patrick worships seems to Ribh ‘an abstract Greek absurdity’. All other natural and supernatural Trinities are composed of a father, a mother and a son or a daughter. Mary’s virginity makes the Christian Trinity an unnatural absurdity. Ribh believes with Swedenborg and ‘The Great Smaragdine Tablet’ that heavenly things correspond to natural ones, ‘For things below are copies’. The only difference between divine and human love is that god is only three, whereas human beings go on begetting because of the incompleteness of our love (Letters to Olivia Shakespeare, 823-25).
It is common place in Christianity that woman attains her salvation through man and that the marriage of man and woman is an image of the union of Christ and the Church. Metaphysical poetry bears out this idea by its copious imagery based on sexual analogue for divine love. However, Yeats’s celebration of passionate sexual love is more akin to Hinduism than to Christianity.

In the fifth section, begins with the poem Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient, the hermit speaks of his peculiar religion which is based as much on hatred as on love of God. He thinks that it is futile to ‘seek for love or study it’ for ‘It is of God and passes human wit’. Therefore he studies ‘hatred with great diligence’ with the hope and belief that hatred ‘can clear the soul’ and “Hatred of God may bring the soul to God’. Yeats has written elsewhere about hatred: ‘My hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate’, and this he calls ‘Irish hatred …, the hatred of human life that made Swift write Gulliver and the epitaph upon his tomb,…and also he accuses himself for not having given his hatred adequate expression in the same essay Yeats says that the opposite of hatred ‘fills the light ,all I can do to bring it nearer is to intensify my hatred’ (General Introduction to my work in Essays and Introductions, p-519-526). The poet's idea of love and hatred is in conformity with his concept of the gyring antinomies, and, also, it reminds us of poems of Crazy Jane’s paradoxical ‘fair needs foul’ Implied in this poem is the idea that ‘soul has to enter into a personal and individual relation with God through enmity if necessary ,to escape mere credulity or religiosity.

As one proceeds through the various sections of the Supernatural Songs it seems that Yeats is moving farther away from Christianity and is coming closer to Eastern thought. In The Four Ages of Man one can see the well- known Indian concept of the four Ashramas. It is a procession of man’s life through four stages
(Brahmacharya, Greshasthashrama, Vanaprastha, and Sanyasa) culminating in the union of the soul with the Indefinite: ‘At stroke of midnight God shall win’. While the idea of man warring upon God as a condition of his nature is more Christian than Indian, the idea of the hopeful prospect of God’s winning in all cases is closer to Indian thought than to the rather pessimistic war of the Christian soul for salvation saddled as it is with the burden of original sin. As Ellmann pointed out, “All that is known fights with all that is unknown; God is Himself man’s opponent and the final struggle is with Him, whether He keeps His own shape or takes that of death or destiny. As Yeats wrote in this little poem, called *The Four Ages of Man*” (Ellmann, 288):

> He with body waged a fight,
> But body won; it walks upright
> Now his wars on God begin,
> At stroke of midnight God shall win. (Collected Poem, 332).

The war on God is the ultimate heroism, and like all heroism in Yeats ends in defeat.

Now, looking back to the first section of *Supernatural Songs*, we see that the scene is set at a low place beneath the symbolic apple and Yew trees and in one of the middle sections we pass through a forest and finally climb the snow capped Mount Everest, the summit of which is the highest point on earth. This is the symbolic spot from where one could possibly view all of the earth, see the entire life of humanity wholly and steadily, and arrive at the profound philosophical truth expressed in the last lines of the poem. The cold, snowy peak of the *Meru* is the symbol of detachment.

In 1930s, Yeats collaborated with an Indian philosopher, Sri Purohit Swami, on a translation of *The Upanishads* and other Indian writings. Volume *The Last
Poems begins with The Gyres which is in effect an injunction to the poet himself to look out the whole of human life, and its prevailing desolation, and to rejoice. As pointed out by Raymond Cowell, Once again, “Yeats tests the validity of his poetic imagination by making it look at life and its suffering. His response this time seems at first almost callous, ‘We that look on but laugh in tragic joy’. This joy arises not from the callousness or insouciance but from an awareness of the permanence of the best aspects of humanity, inspite of their apparent destruction”. Expressing this awareness in his own terms, Yeats says that the gyres of history will disinter nobility, beauty, and tradition again because these are not qualities of a particular age, but permanent, indestructaible qualities of the human mind. The poet too has suffered, so that he is now ‘old rocky face’. His joy has behind it the sanction of personal experience, but his memories are not bitter. Now that he trusts in the future course of history he need no longer rage against the destroyers of what he values, nor shout the praises of those he loves, and this new control and confidence are reflected in such a line as ‘Hector is dead and there’s light in Troy’ (Collected Poemss, 337) which suggests his almost matter-of-fact acceptance of destruction as one necessary part of the cycles of civilization. “This is something new in Yeats. The sentiment, ‘Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul,/What matter?’ though recognizable for the most part as a characteristically Yeatsian sentiment would not have been expressed with such assurance in Yeats’ earlier work”. (Cowell,119).

As Ellmann says, The Gyres, on the other hand, stand for the world of appearance, a world in which, as he says, ‘Consciousness is conflict’. Wedded in antagonism, they symbolize any of the opposing elements that make up existence, such as sun and moon, day and night, life and death,
love and hate, man and God, man and woman, man and beast,
man and his spiritual counterpart or diamon on a mere abstract
level they are permanence and change, the one and the many,
objectivity and subjectivity, the natural and supernatural

With the gyres Yeats had a more excited and interesting picture of the
universal conflict than, for example, two armies drawn up against one another would
have afforded him; for the point of one gyre was in the other’s base, as if a fifth
column were operating in the very head quarters of the enemy. He was further,
confirmed in his symbol by the fact that it applied to his verse, which he realized with
increasing clarity was guided by the principle of the containment of the utmost
passion by the utmost control.

Like the sphere, the gyres are not often explicitly mentioned in his poems;
they occupy a place equivalent to that of the cross in his early work, which appeared
rarely, because the opposition might be put less formally.

The gyres! the gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth;
Things thought too long can be no longer thought,
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out. (Collected Poems, 337).

*The Gyres* is not paralleled in those comfortless poems. It cannot be too much
emphasized that he modified the symbols to suit the states of mind, irrespective of
their consistency with *A Vision*.

The gyres are his servants, not his masters. In the same way he treats
Empedocles and Troy with a fine casualness as symbols of the present scene rather
than as allusions to the past. All ages are equally present to his prophetic eye. Every
element in the poem has appeared in his work before, but recast to jibe with the Dionysian, ecstatic quality which he imparts by the exclamatory phrase, rare for him:

The gyres! The gyres! And the repeated rhetorical question,
‘What matter?’ these interjections mitigate the oracular tome of many of the statements and are the main force in the confrontation of past, present, and future. With fire and skill Yeats succeeds in transforming one’s horror at the indifferent survival of evil as well as good into delight that good must survive as well as evil. (Ellmann, Identity, 155).

The next poem in this Volume, is *Lapis Lazuli* of July 1936, presents the same theme, but in more specifically aesthetic terms. Tragic gaiety is set over against the hysteria of women’s speculation amount the future war, again Yeats surveys past civilizations, finding a constant pattern of construction and destruction:

All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay.(Collected Poems,339).

This tragic gaiety, then, is not a static attitude; it carries within itself the impetus to reconstruct what it has seen destroyed .The final section of the poem expresses Yeats’ viewpoint symbolically. A Chinese carving in *Lapis Lazuli* presents two Chinamen and a serving man viewing dispassionately the ruin that surrounds them. No doubt, Yeats implies, when the carving was first made they were surrounded by a more congenial scene, but time has ravaged the inessential aspects of the carving:

Every discoloration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows. (Collected Poems, 339).
In *Lapis Lazuli*, too Yeats introduces the image of the mountain from the dizzy heights of which one could stare at all the tragedies of life enacted below on the plains:

> Or lofty slope where it still snows…
> Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
> Delight to imagine them seated there;
> There, on the mountain and the sky,
> On all the tragic scene they stare…
> Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
> Their ancient, glittering eyes are gay. (Collected Poems, 339).

Yeats in his last years, was reaching out for this vision of the seers of the ancient east. The ascent of the mountain is symbolic of the attainment of that mystical vision; but once it is within reach, one should look at life not in terms of philosophical abstractions, but of art. Yeats indirectly insists that life should be lived in the spirit of art, and that one should live experiencing the ‘tragic gaiety’, and laughing always ‘in tragic joy’ as he says in *The Gyres* But only creative artists can enjoy that gaiety: All things fall and are built again./And those that build them again are gay.

Whether or not one agrees that a *Last poems* deserves a high estimate, there are points of strength in the Volume. *The Gyres* and *Lapis Lazuli* are fine poems in Yeats’s more traditional manner, and *The Municipal Gallery Revisited* should convince readers skeptical about the sincerity of his backward-looking, vindicating manner. But by a stroke of genius, the last two poems together sum up the theme of the Volume. The greatest temptation was to sink, surfeited with emotion; the challenge was to confront life as it offered up its models of excellence to oblivion. Yeats accepted the challenge, prayed for ‘an old man’s frenzy’, sang of heroism, gaiety
and wildness and rejected the temptation of mere ‘good company’. The title of the last poem, *Are you content* echoes other questions of the Volume—*What then?* Sang Plato’s ghost. *What then?* and the refrain to *The O’Rahilly*, *How goes the weather* such questions are unanswerable but— one year before his death—Yeats would not agree to becoming ‘An old hunter talking with Gods’

- Infirm and aged I might stay
- In some good company,
- I who have always hated work,
- But I am not content. (Collected Poems, 370).

In the next two poems, *Imitated from the Japanese* and *Sweet Dancer*, as pointed out by Raymond Cowell,

- Yeats returns to one of his favourite symbols, that of the dancer, and gives it extra layer of meaning that makes it fit into the context of this Volume. Like the men in the *Lapis Lazuli* carving, the dancer achieves a stasis and equilibrium which go beyond suffering, make her I a sense impregnable, and so the second poem finishes as her happiness is not that of craziness but of tragic joy. (Cowell, 120):

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If strange men come from the house
To lead her away, do not say
That she is happy being crazy;
Let her finish her dance,
Let her finish her dance.
Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer!.(Collected Poems 340).
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But this tragic joy and gaiety can come only to those who have experienced the whole of life, so the next poem, *The three Bushes* is in a sense a cautionary tale about those who shrink from the total involvement in life. “It begins with a brilliantly lucid narrative of a plan conceived by a lady to save herself from what she considers would be the degradation of sexual love with the man she claims to love. The plan is to substitute her maid for herself in her lover’s bed at night and this plan seems to work up to a point. (Cowell 120-121). However, when her lover is accidentally killed hurrying to join her, as he thinks she dies of remorse ‘for she /Loved him with her soul’ (Collected Poems, 342). The logic of the poem requires of course, that the chambermaid’s love should be seen as genuine, and this proves to be the case, for when she confesses to a priest her part in the plan, he recognizes her genuine emotions, and on her death has her buried alongside the graves of her former mistress and her lover. Each grave has a –bush planted on it, and in time the three bushes intermingle:

And now none living can

When they have plucked a rose there,

Know where its roots began. (Collected Poems, 343).

After death the three people achieve union of a kind that was denied them, through the lady’s folly, during their lives. Thus the heart of the poem is *The Lady’s Second Song*, one of six songs that follow the actual narrative. The Lady expresses her misguided views to the maid in these ominous terms:

He shall love my soul as though

Body were not at all,

He shall love your body

Untroubled by the soul,
Love cram love’s two divisions
Yet keep his substance whole. (Collected Poems, 344).

In poems, *The Three Bushes, The Lady’s first song, The Lady’s second song, The Lady’s Third Song*, till *The Chambermaids Second song* in all these six poems, one is led to wonder whether the critical silence is one of embarrassment for the openly sexual themes and imagery of these poems. It is as if it were felt that they were an awkward mistake on the part of the old poet, who for every other poem of the same period is accorded superlatives. The sequence shows Yeats trying to explore the sexual paradox within the limits of a dramatic fable even narrower than those of his plays, and thus producing a greater intensity in the poetry. By keeping to a dramatic fiction, he freed to employ the three separate voices of the Lady, the Chambermaid and the Lover in the ‘Songs’ and the forth choric voice of a narrator.

The first mention of the poems comes in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley of July 1936, which suggests Yeats has been at the project for a time: ‘I now like my long ballad of *The Three Bushes* again. I have written two other poems on the same theme. . . I think them among my best things’. As pointed out by, Vivienne Koch,

The narrative line of the sequence is simple: a Lady who loves a poet, and wisely recognizes that love needs to be fed, at the same time wishes to preserve her chastity. She asks her chambermaid to lie with her lover in her stead. She is pleased with herself for her strategy but nevertheless has faint regrets when the Chambermaid ‘looked half asleep all day’. These six lyrics, all short purport to be spoken by the Lady (three); by the Lover (one, and significantly, the paltriest) and by the
Chambermaid whose last song ends this sequence of six poems.

(Vivienne Koch, 132-133).

The narrative technique is that of the flashback, for the three personae have already been disposed of in the introductory poem. But in the songs the psychological facets of their roles in the drama are explored by each in turn. *The Lady’s First Song* tells of her ‘shame’ because she is in love and ‘No better than a beast /upon all fours’ (Collected Poems, 344). It describes her ambivalence toward the sexual union she appears to shun and shows the degradation she attaches to what she carves. *The Lady’s Second Song* advises the maid to prepare herself for the Lover, who will love the maid’s body but love the Lady’s soul. It is considerably more complex in tone than her first song, and closes with a paradox:

If soul may look and body touch
Which is the more blest? (Collected Poems, 344).

*The Lady’s Third Song* is even more subtle in diction and meaning. It presents a quite involved rationale of the Lady’s stratagem which puts her motives for not sleeping with her lover in a more generous light. She says she wishes her maid to share with her the aspect of love which bodily union does not touch, just as she participates vicariously in the bodily union which her lover enjoys with the maid. *The Lover’s Song* simplest of all has the least ‘colour’ The Lover is almost a blind force seeking to discharge its burden of necessity in much the same instinctual way that, the mind is pacified by being rid of the burden imposed on it by the body. *The chambermaid’s songs* are strange, bold descriptions of sexual intercourse and its aftermath. The metre of both short lyrics is that of a Lullaby, the tone infinitely tender, even maternal:
God’s love has hidden him
Out of all harm. (Collected Poems, 346).

The second song of the maid, which we at first may take as a low pitched one. The narrative thus outlined, we are faced with a question: Is there a split in the ‘story’ summarized by the objective introductory poem, the ‘story’ as revealed by the individual characters who later speak their part in it?. We know that the end of the total story is positive and happy: all three lovers are united in death by the symbolic merging of the bushes into a single organism. The incompleteness of their relationships in life are seen to supplement one another in the longer view. Body, and soul, as the lady suspected, but could not risk proving, are, in the end, one.

In Come Gather Round Me, Parnellites the poet re-creates with realistic strokes a popular national hero by juxtaposing his achievements with his private life. The casual, conversational ‘And here’s another reason’ almost trips up the reader by surprise. Still praising Parnell’s pride, the poem rolls on in rollicking rhythm, integrating levity with seriousness:

And Parnell loved his country,
And Parnell loved his less (Collected Poems, 356).

In Parnell, Yeats expresses in two powerful lines his cyclical attitude to the new form of government:

Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man:
‘Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone. (Collected Poems, 359).

There is grim humour as well as bitterness. Parnell here is not so much a hero as a mouthpiece through which Yeats expresses his view on Irish politics. By choosing Parnell, who was paid with ingratitude for his efforts in bringing the Irish people
freedom, Yeats makes the ‘cheering man’ look all the more foolish and naive. Portrayed in a manner no less impressive are his friends, ancestors, and contemporaries other than the 1916 martyrs. In his early poems, he drew on Irish mythology and painted legendary heroes, Gods, and demigods. Now he could dispense with them, for his friends, ancestors and contemporaries had themselves become ‘Olympians’. In the poem of his last period, they are depicted with economy and bold, clear strokes. Unnecessary details are pared away with only the essentials left behind:

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 ;(Collected Poem, 368).

There is something noble, dignified and statue like about such people as O’Leary, O’Grady, Lady Gregory and Maud Gonne, with Yeats’ high sense of his own dignity adding to the dignity of these ‘Olympians’. Because of this, the carriage of Lady Gregory in the following lines is unlike that of an ordinary mortal: She is arrested in a stasis and gathered into eternity, as it were:

Augusta Gregory seated at her great ormolu table,

Her eightieth winter approaching:’yesterday he threatened my life,

I told him that nightly from six to seven I sat at this table (Collected Poems, 348).

Apparently at the end of his life, Yeats seemed to be creating mythological figures once again, just as he had done at the beginning of his career and had come back to the starting point. But, as a matter of fact, there is much difference between early and later modes of ‘myth making’ By, now he was no more dependent upon
Celtic legends, for he had contemporary Irish personalities to draw on. Graham Hough is certainly right when he says that “no poet in our day has written more about his family and his friends than Yeats, and no one has been more successful in enlarging them to heroic proportions” (Hough, 233).

Yet despite the predominance of Parnell and Yeats’ friends and contemporaries in poems of the last period. Cuchulian, the Celtic hero, is still retained. It is in Cuhulian Comforted, however, that the hero appears with his full gradeur. A prophetic poem on the famous Irish legendary hero, who is ‘creative joy separated from fear’ it describes his entrance to the Kingdom of the dead, with memories of Dante cutting across Celtic legend.

A man that had six mortal wounds, a man

Violent and famous, strode among the dead;

Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone. (Collected Poems, 395).

Dorothy Wellesley, in her account of Yeats’s last days, gives ‘the prose theme’ of Cuchulian Comforted, as Yeats read it aloud to her. In it one of the shades says: “…You will like to know who we are. We are the people who run away from the battles. Some of us have been put to death as cowards, but others have hidden, and some even died without people knowing they were cowards…” (Letters on Poetry, 193).

The great puzzle of this very authoritative poem, as pointed out by Bloom,

One of the most inevitable that Yeats wrote is why Cuchulian the hero finds himself among the cowards in the after-life. Part of the clue may be in the omitted group of ‘the prose theme’. Is Yeats not, in this poem, facing his own, his human death,
thinking that he will die, with some personal cowardice unknown? (Bloom, 462).

Yet this is the poet who stirringly asked the massive rhetorical question: “Why should we honor those that die upon the field of battle? And added the magnificence explanation ‘A man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself.’” (Ellmann. The Man and Masks, 6). Cuchulian Comforted will always have the authority of mystery about it; Yeats chose to write it in his hieratic mode, and he found for it a tone of revelation imperfectly apprehended, a half-light that darkens into religion. What compels many readers of the poem is a sense of Yeats’s own involvement here in The Last Things. Now, they seem to say, he enters into the abyss of himself. There is no sense at the close of Cuchulian Comforted that the cowards have been defeated, either in this life or in the after-world. We are given instead an obscure sense of appropriateness, and we do not feel the hero dishonored when he ends surrounded by a choir of his contraries, and presumably becomes identical with them. The appropriateness is presented as an enigma, the formal equivalent in the poem of Yeats’s own doubts about the hero, and perhaps also about his own potential for heroism.

Cuhulain, in the poem, exchanges an individual meditation on wounds and blood for a sharing in a communal activity of stitching and of singing a communal song. The quick of Yeats’ invention is in this, in a movement against his own deepest convictions.

Finally, he is welcomed by the souls in the country of the Blessed. Cuchulian Comforted has a special significance. To Yeats, Cuchulian is a figure that stands for loneliness, exaltation and defeat, a figure that draws his strength from many heroic ages; he is the Achilles of the Irish saga with the qualities that Yeats admired. By
writing such a poem sometime before his death, the poet is identifying himself, at
least unconsciously, with Cuchulian. His admission to the country of the Blessed,
therefore can be regarded as a fitting comment on his own life. In many of these
poems from The Last Poems, theme of death and old age is discussed again and again
as in songs of this Volume sex is discussed as a theme.

In Curse of Cromwell he attacks the English ‘Lenin as an embittered Irishman.
And in his dispute with the English over the forged Casement diaries, his
identification with Ireland is most obvious. To incriminate Roger Casement and bring
about his execution, the English had forged diaries purporting to be written by him.
When depravity was discovered, Yeats lashed out at them in two poems. Roger
Casement and The Ghost of Roger Casement. The first poem opens with a direct and
forcible declaration:

I say that Roger Casement
Did what he had to do.
He died upon the gallow,
But that is nothing new. (Collected Poems, 351).

Gradually exposing the perjurer’s trick he pours out his disgust in simple but
passionate verse. There is bitter irony in the second line relentlessly arraigning the
English for their injustice and inhumanity. Finally he pays tribute to the hero, which
he rarely did in his poems earlier. Hero here symbolizes Parnell. These two poems
were dedicated to Parnell. Straightened by a refrain, The Ghost of Roger Casement
brings another charge against England:

Upon the British Empire,
Upon the Church of Christ.
The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door. (Collected Poems, 353).
By referring to “the church of Christ’ and the ‘trust’ all must hang upon the British Empire, Yeats shows up the egregiousness of Britain’s crime. The refrain, in which Roger Casement is beating on the door, grows more insistent and strident as the verse moves on. It indirectly yet forcibly points an accusing finger at Britain: the grievance must be redressed. But with the degenerate behavior of the British: the grievance must be redressed.

The poem steadily rises and finally bursts with overwhelming refrain, which because of the gradual building up of emotion, increases in Volume stanza after stanza. It is an instance in which says Joseph Hone, “Yeats felt confident of his powers to introduce into his poetry the deep -seated nationalistic prejudice”. (Hone, 453).to acknowledge its flaws and accept them for better or worse.

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. (Collected Poems, 376).

The vocabulary –‘filthy modern tide’,’ formless spawning fury’ –is no doubt,still loaded with bitterness ,but the first person plural ‘we’ is an unmistakable sign of the poet’s alignment with the Irish race.

Being one of the makers of modern Ireland, he felt that he had been responsible somehow for the course it had taken. Consequently, his contemplation of the past and his commitment to the nationalist cause gave rise to misgivings and doubts in The Man and the Echo. By recalling Easter 1916 and Coole Park, he feels that his fate is inextricably woven into that of his country.

Then next poem is Under Ben Bulben the identification is given in full expression .As he is about to make his soul, the poem is therefore, his last word
handed down to the next generation. He is now speaking almost as the patriarch of his race. Still believing in the profane perfection of mankind, arising from the ‘the secret working mind’ he admonishes Irish poet to learn their trade:

Sing whatever is well made
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base –born products of base beds (Collected Poem, 400).

Finally, he brings his poem to a close, using the horsemanship as the unifying symbol of many aspects of the Irish tradition:

Under bare Ben Bulben’s head
In drum cliff churchyard Yeats is lead.
Cast a cold eye
On life, on death
Horsem an, pass by! (Collected Poems, 401).

According to T.R.Henn,

The word ‘horseman’ in Irish idiom has certain overtones: it carries a note of respect, even awe; the rider has something of Hebraic strength and mystery or of the symbolic strength and wisdom that produced the holy centaurs of the hills. The horseman belongs to aristocracy, he symbolizes possessions, breeding, strength, virility and a certain ‘wildness of sorrow’.

(Henn, 336).

It also suggests death. In view of all these associations, the mention of the horseman becomes a fitting comment on Yeats’s long and fruitful poetic development, which is unequalled in the twentieth century.
Work Cited


