Chapter Two

*The Wild Swans at Coole and Michael Robartes and The Dancer*

There were, in fact, two *Wild Swans* volumes: a Cuala edition of twenty nine poems and the play *At the Hawk's well*, published on 17 November 1917; and a Macmillan edition of forty six poems published on 11 March 1919- this now appears dated 1919, in *Collected Poems*—and in both volumes Yeats took trouble about the selection and order of the poems. “With the publication of the second version of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, Macmillan edition of forty six poems in 1919, deliberately, ‘different’ Yeats presented himself to his public”. (Donoghue and Murlyne, 55). He had married, and been found by the Instructors of *A Vision*. Marriage, to so occultizing a temperament as Yeats’s had to represent sea-change, but his poetry did not change as much as the man did, or felt he did. There is, first, the personal story of Yeats’s relationship during the wild swans’ period. After being rejected by Maud Gonne twice Yeats eventually married Miss Georgie Hyde Lees in October 1917. “Whom he first met in 1911, and with whom, as he says in *Under Saturn*, he was to be very happy .His attempts to formulate his astrological and occult speculations into a ‘system’ also date from this time, for his wife had the gift of ‘Automatic writing’ a fact delighted Yeats”.(Cowell,Raymond, 53). Poems of this volume reflect all these situations.

Ageing is a theme common to many of these poems but in each group the stress is very different. In most poems to Maud the fact of age means a loyalty sustained, a hard victory over time and change, in those to Iseult it means lost vitality, shrinking horizons, the pain of accepting these .The title poem, *The Wild Swans at Coole* dated October 1916, rises from the complex mood in which Yeats began what
was to be his last solitary year of bachelorhood. As Jeffares, indicates, “The poem’s dominant emotion is not frustrated longing for Maud Gonne, but sorrow that the poet’s passion for her is dead”. (Jeffares, commentary 154). A man of fifty one looks upon the same scene he saw at thirty two. He comes to the scene again after having proposed marriage again to the same woman as nineteen years before, and after being refused, yet again. But his primary awareness is not of a dismal, almost ridiculous continuity, between an earlier and a later self. Discontinuity dominates, for the depression of nineteen years before was at the refusal, but the depression of 1916 is for not feeling depression at the continued refusal. His heart has grown old, and to soreness is that it should have aged. Though written during the transition of the poet’s style, it already anticipates the theme of ageing in *The Wild Swans at Coole*.

Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquests, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

In *The Wild Swans at Coole*, Yeats recalls, it for deliberate contrast, for his depression and apparent loss is that he no longer shares this vision of the relation between poet and swan. Yeats too sees in the swans his antithetical quest fulfilled, but his regret is that for him the passionate or outward-bound aspect of the quest is forever over (Bloom, 191-192).

It is of considerable critical importance that the stanza acknowledging this now the fourth of five in the poem, was in the poem’s first appearance the final stanza, so that the plangency of accepted defeat ended the poem. Yeats chose at first to put his emphasis here, upon his ancient love for Maud, the central passion of his life, being extinct and placed it last altering absolutely the poem’s significance.
Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquests, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.

Evidently, Yeats chose at first to put his emphasis here, upon his ancient love for Maud, the central passion of his life, being extinct. In revision, he took the poem’s central stanza, and placed it last, altering absolutely the poem’s significance.

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what rushes will they build,
Delight men’s eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

Ellmann speculates that, by putting this stanza at the end, “Yeats made it possible to read it symbolically so that his awakening would be his death.” (Ellmann, Identity, 253) This is possible, but unnecessarily stretched. Awakening here is not death but the end of antithetical consciousness, the complete breaking with the Shelleyan influence. The prophecy was not fulfilled, perhaps because such an awakening would have been a death in life for Yeats, even after love was dead.

It is in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, that we witness Irish landscape transmuted into poetry of a high order. Applied to this poem, the following judgment by John Middleton Murray is certainly ungrounded:
“... The Wild Swans at Coole, is indeed a swan song. It is eloquent of final defeat; the
following of a lonely path has ended in the poet’s sinking exhausted in a wilderness of
gray... He is empty, now. He has the apparatus of enchantment, but no potency in his
soul.” (Murray, 77-78). Built upon Irish scenery, it transcends the merely local. The
first stanza anchors the poem in a particular setting:

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine —and —fifty swans. (Collected poems, 147)

The actual description of Coole lends concreteness to the scene, a scene that
exists in the world. The swans, which Yeats had seen during his stay at Coole, offer
him symbols that unite time with the timeless.

Moving on in a tone that verges on the conversational, the second stanza
contains the whole difference between the quality of casual conversation and the
quality of great poetry:

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings. (Collected Poems, 147)

Making use of and transforming Irish landscape, the poet re-creates with
precision, poise and economy scenes before which the drama of his inner world is
played out. The success Yeats achieved here foreshadowed the upsurge of his creative vitality in the years to come. Integrated with the scene that has particularity and precision is the theme of age, so effortlessly introduced in the second stanza with a skillful transition from the present to past tense. At the thought of approaching age, the poet feels a sense of regret, which is aggravated by the sight of ‘brilliant creatures’:

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All’s changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread. (Collected Poems, 147).

In the following stanza, the passage of time is contrasted with timeless nature, here symbolized by the swans. His soul’s weariness, resulting from his long drawn-out love affair with Maud Gonne, is juxtaposed with the swan’s unwariedness:

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old (Collected Poems, 147)

Making the poet feel more acutely and painfully the gap opening up between himself and timeless nature, the swans ascend to the level of emblems. By now, they have come to stand for passion and vitality:

Passion or conquests, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.
At another level, the swans also stand for inspiration and the poet’s creative relationship with nature. With the fear that one day they will have gone, the poem closes, first turning the swans into some primeval pattern:

But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful . . .

Then rising to a question which, although in some degree wistful, is very penetrating in its expression of Yeats’s awareness of time and process:

Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake’s edge or pool
Delight men’s eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?

It is one of the first poems in which Irish landscape offers the poet the warp into which he weaves his personal drama and the universal theme of time and age. The ‘trees’, the woodland paths’, ‘the brimming water among the stones’, the ‘nine and fifty swans’ all give the poem a particularity that embodies the universal.

With the title poem, discussion naturally turns on the meaning of the symbolic swans (Donoghue, Denis and Murlyne, J.R. 61-62) this finally, can only be decided by their relationship to the poem as a whole which at least offers one a reasonably secure line of interpretation. The poem’s speaker (the’ I’ is usual, dramatic, not biographical) calls the swans ‘lovers’ upon whom ‘passion or conquest attend’ and describes them as explosively vigorous, at one with the physical universe of water and air. To the speaker, the swans are also, his youth, and the annual counting rite amounts to a familiar kind of magic which keeps him in illusory contact with it.

When the swans lift from the lake they establish their independence of this personal meaning and two recognitions
then follow: 1) that he must soon lose his present slight hold
over “passion or conquest” but that (2) the swans will still
delight other men will nest and build in other lakes .In
following their imaginary flight into a future which excludes
him the speaker thus begins to transcend his own nostalgia and
despair.(Donoghue, Denis and Muryne,J.R.62).The action of
the poem embodies his discovery that far from commanding the
swans he is commanded by them and must resign himself to the
situation they represent: physical emotional life as an order of
transcendence.

The Gregory poems which consist of the group of poems. Yeats wrote on
Major Robert Gregory’s death: In Memory of Major Robert Gregory, An Irish Airman
Foresees his Death, Shepherd and Goatherd bring us to this main preoccupation of
the poet in the poetry of his later years. Yeats’s treatment of the theme of death and
symbols in these poems as well as in other poems is certainly an important topic to be
explored in connection with the study of his major themes and symbols in the later
poetry of W.B. Yeats.

In Memory of Major Robert Gregory is a great elegiac poem, “something new
and important in the history of English poetry, because it never loses the personal note
of a man speaking about his personal friends in a particular setting, and the people in
the poem do not disappear as people as they do, for example, in Shelley’s Adonais
(Auden, W.H., Permanence, 313) At the same time, Yeats raises the tragic death of
Robert Gregory to a level of universality by extending his subject, by seeing his hero
as the ideal man, and by lamenting the death of the young hero who is the “emblem
for the immense defeated possibility of war slaughtered youth.” (Untrecker, 133) This
elegy is unique in the English language by the conspicuous omission of a characteristic common to all other well known elegies that preceded it. Other poets like Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson conclude the poetic lament with a note of consolation which often comes from the comforting hope and belief that the soul of the dead finds infinite peace and joy in the world beyond grave. An extreme example of this can be seen in *In Memoriam* which ends with the happy peal of wedding bells. Even Shelley, who was branded an atheist, devoted the last section of *Adonais* to the reflection of the ‘white radiance of eternity’. Yeats, on the other hand, deviates from that usual practice, as a result of which there is in his elegy no mention of an after-life to relieve his sorrow. This is so not because he had no faith in a life after death, but perhaps because he thought that his belief in the cycle of reincarnation could not provide him with any kind of comfort as the Christian heaven or Neo-Platonic immortality did for Tennyson and Shelley. Hence, in the last stanza of the Yeatsian elegy we still hear ‘the bitter wind that shakes the shutter’ (*Collected Poems*, 151). And see the poet standing there struck dumb by sorrow. The last line of the poem, ‘but a thought/of that late death took all my heart for speech’ (*Collected Poems*, 152) as Kermode remarks, “has a heavily retarded monosyllabic movement with the clustered consonants grievously impeding utterance”. (Kemode, Frank 39)

In the poems related to Major Robert Gregory we see for the first time Irish scenery, people and events acting upon one another, finally coalescing into a rich and complex whole. There are further examples to illustrate how Yeats’s association with the Irish supplied him with themes that fired his imagination, giving its poetry depth and sincerity. Apotheosized by Yeats as one of the most celebrated Irishmen, Major Robert Gregory, the hero of these poems, is Lady Gregory’s son. He was killed in action on the Italian front on January 23, 1918. The death of such a talented young
man, whose mother was the poet’s close friend, naturally elicited much genuine and profound emotion. And it is this sort of emotion that gives *In Memory of Robert Gregory*, its impact. The poem in Frank Kermode’s words is

Yeats’s first full statement of what he took to be a complex and tragic situation; the position of artistes and contemplatives in a world built for action, and their chances of escape . . . After it, for twenty years, Yeats’s poems, whenever he is using his whole range, are identifiable as the work of the master of the Gregory elegy. (Kermode, 30)

His success in writing such a great elegy is primarily due to the ‘complex and tragic situation the death of Robert Gregory offered him. Yeats thinks of Gregory first as an artist, and then of his uniquely varied powers, which suggest the simultaneous possession of both action and contemplation’:

> When with the Galway foxhound he would ride
> From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side
> Or Esserkelly plain, few kept his pace;
> At Mooneen he had leaped a place
> So perilous that half the astonished meet
> Had shut their eyes; and where was it
> He rode a race without a bit?
> And yet his mind outran the horses’ feet. (Variorum, 326)

Enumerating Robert Gregory’s facts, putting them in an Irish setting, the poet goes on to create a symbol of a man who embodies the ideal of the Renaissance. The man of action and intellect ceases to be a particular person. He is mythologized, embodying Unity of Being and the aristocratic ideal, a man who is able to live life
whole, and see vision whole, encompassing all that Lionel Johnson, John Synge and Pollex fen saw:

We dreamed that a great painter had been born
To cold Clare rock and Galway rock and thorn,
To that stern colour and that delicate line
That are our secret discipline
Wherein the gazing heart doubles her might.
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And yet he had the intensity
To have published all to be a world’s delight. (Variorum, 327)

Like, Sidney, he is conceived as a young aristocrat who achieved in a very brief life span a unique versatility and fulfillment, and so established a pattern by which human perfection might be recognized.

Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
And all he did done perfectly
As though he had but that one trade alone.
Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,
As ‘twere all life’s epitome.

Having opened at the personal level and risen above the personal, the poem finally closes with a personal note:

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind
All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved
Or boyish intellect approved
With some appropriate commentary on each;
Until imagination brought
A fitter welcome, but a thought
Of that late death took all my heart for speech.(Variorum, 328)

It is, as Auden has remarked, “something new and important in the history of English poetry. It never loses the personal note of a man speaking about his personal friends in a particular setting . . . and at the same time the occasion and characters acquire a symbolic public significance”.(Permanence, 313)

In next poem, An Irish Airman Foresees his Death, the moment of death is the moment of insight, the unique instant of epiphany; in other words, it is the moment of completeness, of Unity of Being. The airman, Gregory, did not die for Ireland, neither law nor duty bade him fight, but he rushed to his own end in the delight of heroism, which was his own choice and which alone renders a futile war meaningful. At the time of his death he attains that singular moment of perception that balances all, past and future, life and death:

A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.(variorum 328)

This balancing all, life and death, anticipates what Yeats later wrote of his own death, ‘Cast a cold eye on life and death’ (Under Ben Bulben). While it is hard to see any clearly definable philosophical treatise on the theme of death in these poems, one can discern the poet’s own attitude towards death as he was approaching his end.
He saw as a part of the heroic ritual, and life becomes complete only when it willingly embraces death. Just before his death in 1939, Yeats wrote to Lady Elizabeth Pelham: “It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put into a phrase I say, ‘Man can embody truth but he cannot know it.’ I must embody it in the completion of my life”. (Wade, Allen, 922)

Since Yeats was aware of the truth that he embodied and which he could not know, one would expect that part of that unknowable truth is his poetry which in turn was the meaningful part of his life. Perhaps, in exceptional moments of perception or epiphany, as in the final moments in the life of the Irish airman, one gets a rare glimpse of that incommunicable knowledge. It may be that Yeats implies that any attempt at communicating that knowledge through philosophical reflection on the theme of life and death and the truth embodied in these facts would be futile.

Also, drawing upon that the tragic situation of Robert Gregory is *An Irish Airman Foresees his death*, having been celebrated in the elegy, the man of action is now presented in another perspective, which emphasizes his lonely impulse of delight. Above politics and in pursuit of the pleasures of action, the hero ascends to a moment perception when nothing else matters.

I balanced all, brought all to mind,

The years to come seemed waste of breath,

A wasted of breath the years behind

In balance with this life, this death. (328)

How the death of an Irishman widens the range and increases the complexity of Yeats’s poetry can be seen by looking at all the poems related to Robert Gregory. While *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory, An Irishman foresees his death*, and *Shepherd and Goatherd* celebrate the hero, mythologizing him as a symbol of the
perfect man, the renaissance ideal, man of action with a lonely impulse. The poem
Reprisals explores the tragic situation from a different angle by commenting on the
futility of Gregory’s death:

Some nineteen German planes, they say,
You had brought down before you died.
You called it a good death. Today
Can ghost or man be satisfied? (Varorium,791)

The poet’s attitude to the hero’s sacrifice differs from that in the elegy or
Shepherd and Goatherd, in which the hero is glorified and exalted. Here, however, he
is described as one serves no purpose; for violence, atrocities and murder still
continue:

Half drunk or whole mad solidery
Are murdering your tenants there.
Men that revere your father yet
Are shot at on the open plain.
Where may new-married woman sat
And suckle children now? Armed men
May murder them in passing by
Nor law nor parliament takes heed. (Varorium, 791)

In the four poems which are discussed, Yeats succeeds in achieving
multiplicity of expression. Apparently, incompatible attitudes get their proper
treatment: one taking the form of a great human monologue, another looking at death
from the airman’s stoic point of view, the third discussing it in a pastoral dialogue
strangely wedded to theosophical beliefs, the last attacking the hypocrisy of the
British. These distinct modes of rendering experience, the different attitudes
expressed, through multiple dramatic techniques that may, on the surface, be contradictory are made compactable in his comprehensive dramaturgy. Though he is treating the same subject, each poem places the poet at a different distance from it, and at a different point of view—from the personal reminiscence and self-dramatizing of *In Memory of Major Robert Gregory*, to austere dramatis persona of *An Irish Airman foresees his Death*. They suggest the range, the comprehensiveness of his mature poetics. “Yet, this ‘classic locus’, as Thomas Parkinson puts it, is the result of the death of an Irishman (whom he knew and admired warmly), an event that deeply touched him”. (Parkinson, 17).

However, while holding this conception of life and death, Yeats tried to explore the theme of death in some of his works. *Shepherd and Goatherd* is another one of the Gregory poems in which the shepherd portrays Gregory’s life while the goatherd traces the soul’s progression after death. In a language appropriate to each of the two characters, the young shepherd and the old goatherd, Yeats presents a moving and witty dialogue in which he speaks both as a young romantic and as a hardened realist. The young shepherd ‘sings always of the natural life’ whereas the goatherd sings of the supernatural, of ‘the road that soul treads/when it vanished from our natural eyes’, and, what is more, he has ‘talked with apparitions’. The song of the goatherd is concerned, in Yeatsian terminology, with the dreaming back. According to his conception, death is nothing but an unwinding of the spool. The last of the Gregory poems, *Reprisals*, can hardly be called a poem on the theme of death. Presumably it deals with the death of Robert Gregory, but his death, is only a peg on which the poet hangs his fury at the Black and Tans who were ravaging his estate and ill-treating the peasantry. Addressed to Gregory, it is an angry poem in which Yeats makes powerful use of the ghost rather than the soul of the dead man. The poem
concludes by urging the dead hero to ‘close your ears with dust and lie/ among the other cheated dead’. In short, it is a poem proclaiming the futility of death. As Ellmann says, “The poet, a Buddhist one moment, a stoic the next, and a spiritual the next, can look at death as well as other images with changing eyes”. (Identity of Yeats, 232)

In the Gregory poems, to sum up, Yeats looks at death not from a well thought out and coherent philosophical or religious position but from shifting points of view that suits the occasion and emotional context of the poem. If in one he idealizes the perfect man—the synthesis of all that is best, ‘Soldier, scholar, horseman’—in true elegiac fashion, in the next he sees death as the moment of perception as well as of perfection of life. While in one poem he talks of the immortality of the soul and its cycles of incarnations, in another he affirms the futility of death, and urges the soul of man to lie still in its tomb and be utterly dead. Further evidence of the poet’s shifting positions regarding death can be seen in certain other poems, too.

For instance, In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen another elegy in the Volume The Wild Swans at Coole concludes with the dominant symbol of the “visionary white sea-bird” crying out against the very fact of mortality, ‘Lamenting that a man should die; And with the cry I have raised my cry’. (Collected Poems,177).` While the concept of death as an inevitable completion of life is acceptable to Yeats, he often cries out as in this poem against the very idea of the mortality of man. He admires people who defeat death by living in joy and laughing into the face of Death. Mabel Beardsley was one of those who, like the Irish mythological heroine Grania, Achilles, Timor, Baber and Barhaim, lived in joy and when death came laughed in its face and died in a graceful and meaningful way. Upon a Dying Lady is a tribute to this woman who lives her life as a play which does not end with physical death but has a soul that
will fly to ‘the predestined dancing place’. She believes in the immortality of the soul and hence she courageously stares at approaching death with the confident hope that she will triumph:

    She would not have us sad because she is lying there,
    And when she meets our gaze her eyes are laughter-lit,
    Her speech a wicked tale that we may vie with her,
    Matching our broken-hearted wit against her wit,
    Thinking of saints and of Petronius Arbiter. (Collected. Poems, 177)

Mabel was very religious, strictly Christian in Faith. In a letter (January 8, 1913), which reveals the genesis of the poem, Yeats reports a conversation he had with her. *Upon a Dying Lady* was has written between 1912 and 1914 about Mabel Beardsley, the sister of one of the most extremes aesthetes of the Nineties, who was dying of cancer.

As pointed by Raymond Cowell,

    Yeats speaks of her and her brother’s ‘Passion for reality’, a passion achieved through the intensity of art. In the face of death, through art, not conventional religion, Mabel Beardsley is able to face up to reality gaily. Her artist friends surround her with drawings, dolls and happiness, and though, in the third section, the priest has his day on a religious festival, she takes most joy in the artists and their dolls. Having ‘lived in joy’ she, the poet says in the sixth section, will be able to laugh into the face of Death. (Cowell, 61)

and in the final section the poet addresses Death directly:

    Pardon, great enemy,
Without an angry thought
We’ve carried in our tree,
And here and there have brought
Till all the boughs are gay,
And she may look from the bed
On pretty things that may
Please a fantastic head.
Give her a little grace,
What if a laughing eye
Have looked into your face?
It is about to die.

Here the human relevance of art and literature as Yeats conceived of them is being made explicit: their intensity gives a human being a standpoint from which some degree of control over life is possible; through art and literature man can make himself more than the trembling victim of incomprehensible forces such as age and death. But if literature is to have this value, it is clear that it must be more than the mere reflection of human joy or sorrow; it must be a conscious refashioning of experience. This question of whether literature is a direct reflection of life or not is the subject of this elegy although a new form of tribute is shown by Yeats in this poem.

As, pointed out by Raymond Cowell, Yeats formulation of these attitudes was helped by his marriage, from which arose a stronger sense of the distinctive value of feminine qualities. “This fact is reflected in the increasingly, important part played by woman in his poetry of the next twenty years: Sheba and Crazy Jane, Mabel Beardsley, Iseult, Constance Markiewicz-apart from Lady Gregory and Maud Gonne-occur, some frequently, in his poetry”. (Cowell, 59) The evolution of this positive
attitude to life, which Yeats was continuing in this volume, necessarily involves for a poet as conscious of his audience as he was, constant changes his relation to this audience and in *The Fisherman* he presents the kind of man who, he thinks, would appreciate the intense, unadorned poetry he is trying to write:

May be 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 recognition that this man does not exist is a brave one, for Yeats is desperate to find an alternative audience to ‘the living men that I hate’. What this imaginary fisherman symbolizes is an apparently detached intensity; fishing is an activity of quiet concentration, the absolute antithesis of the favorite pastime of Yeats’s rejected audience, politics. The apparent paradox of the fisherman’s intense
detachment is paralleled by the cold passion of the poetry. Yeats hopes to write for him and his kind.

In the poem *The fisherman* as, Raymond Cowell has pointed out that,

He had explicitly, abandoned the idea of writing for his own race, but here, recalling his fierce arguments with Maud about the people, he goes a long way towards suggesting that his own detached analytical attitude to the people is inferior to the emotional, uncomplaining, realistic love that Maud feels for them. (Cowell, 60).

Yeats’s argument with himself on this question of his relation to the people is to recur later in such a poem as *Meditations in Time of Civil war*. Having turned his hopes to despair, Irish disputes added to his style a Swiftian breadth and energy, opening his eyes to the vast difference between his ideals and reality:

The living man 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 result is a more resigned attitude to his audience, a wish to write for

A man who does not exist,
A man who is but a dream.
At the same time, his aristocratic awareness of his own singularity gives sap to the conception of the fisherman, a lonely figure:

Although I can see him still,

The freckled man who goes

To a grey Connemara cloth…

To call up to the eyes

This wise and simple man (variorum 347-348)

Besides representing isolation, self containment, natural life, as opposed to social squabbling, the fisherman also stands for the race the poet could have wished to write for. Accompanying the change in tone, there is a corresponding change in style. The last two lines of the poem describe the kind of poetry Yeats wanted to write: ‘Cold/and passionate as the dawn’ (Collected Poems, 167). *The fisherman* is exactly a poem of this kind. It is, as Unterecker has remarked, “no more sentimental moonlit verse”. (Unterecker, 140)

The theme of such a poem, coupled with the melancholy and resignation as mentioned, could well have led Yeats back to the dream-like poetry of his youth. Yet, clearly this does not happen. In its own way, *The Fisherman* poem and others like it are as far from the lush, decorative writing of his youth as anything in his previous period of controversy.

What Yeats considers to be cold is, in fact, the increased poise and discipline he has attained. Likewise, the passionate quality he aimed at is manifested in the poem. The short end-stopped lines with their sledge-hammer repetitions, reinforced by the complete absence of internal pauses, fall in a mounting barrage of indictment. The metrics and the verbal pattern make the emotion both exact and alive. The central
section powerfully suggests a systematic “beating down”, rising inexorably to its embittered climax:

The beating down of the wise
And great Art beaten down.

The only poem he wrote about war is *On Being asked for a War Poem*, which is negligible when compared with *Easter 1916*.

I think it better that in times like these
A poet’s mouth be silent, for in truth
We have no gift to set a statesman right;
He has had enough of meddling who can please
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,
Or an old man upon a winter’s night.

It has strictly speaking, nothing whatever to do with war. It is perfunctory and, as Hazard Adams says, just “an Irishman’s oblique answer to an Englishman’s request”. (Adams, 173) Yeats was not interested in the war, that the war did not affect his poetry, is at once clear in his reply to Henry James in 1915.

“It is the only thing I have written of the war or will write, so I hope it may not seem unfitting. I shall keep the neighborhood of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, hoping to catch their comfortable snores till bloody frivolity is over”. (Letters by Allen Wade, 607)

In the poem *Ego Dominus Tuus* as Raymond Cowell points out that this is a dialogue poem where ‘Hic’, the defender of the subjectivity of art, is opposed by ‘Ille’ who declares that literature should be independent of the artist’s personal life, indeed the antithesis of it. Great literature, ’Ille’ says, is impersonal reflecting the
great poet’s desire to hammer out for himself an imaginative, as opposed to his, often unsatisfactory, personal identity:

*By the help of an image*

*I call to my own opposite, summon all*

*That I have handled least, least looked upon.*

The poem’s theme, like treatise, is mastery; of what sort is the poet’s and how does he attain to it? The strength of *Ego Dominus Tuus* is that Yeats evades the constriction of his still rudimentary doctrine. Hic, the primary, objective soul or Owen Aherne figure is allowed something of the common sense of his stance. Ille, who has inherited the magic book of Michael Robartes, does not deny that he is ‘enthralled by the unconquerable delusion/Magical shapes’ (Collected Poems, 180). This may echo Arnold’s *Scholar Gypsy*, urged by the poet to ‘keep thy solitude’ while ‘still nursing the unconquerable hope Yet ‘delusions magical’ are cast on Cuchulian, the aim and result being his fight with the sea. Yeats could have chosen ‘unconquerable illusion’ as with the ‘manifold illusion’ that hoops civilization together in the late poem, *Meru*. But here, in *Ego Dominus Tuus*, “he allows without argument, the antithetical quest to be termed delusion. Even, Ille, just before the final invocation of his anti-self, permits an objectivity to destroy the possibility of his writing another book like that of Robartes”. (Bloom, 197-198):

Because I seek an image, not a book.

Those men that in their writings is most wise

Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts (Collected poems, 182)

Ille’s admission is ironic, for the wisdom he acknowledges is blind and stupefied, or so he would believe, or have us believe. It is the wisdom presumably of nineteenth-century liberal humanism, of those who would find themselves and not an
image, and so have lost all conviction. The subjective Ille again echoes *The Scholar Gypsy* when he attacks the ‘modern hope’ of self-discovery and self-expression:

That is our modern hope, and by its light
We have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind
And lost the old nonchalance of the hand;
Whether we have chosen chisel, pen or brush,
We are but critics, or but half create,
Timid, entangled, empty and abashed,
Lacking the countenance of our friends. (Collected Poems, 180).

This is a profound complaint, and a reader of the earlier section of the *Autobiographies* of Yeats will hear the personal reference in the last two lines. Essentially, “Yeats is rejecting the Wordsworthianism that was a powerful element in Victorian literary culture, with its champions in figures as great as John Stuart Mill and George Elliot. Hence, the echo deliberate or not, of the striking phrase ‘halcreate’ from *Tintern Abbey*” (Bloom, 199)

Early in 1916, Yeats read or re-read most of Wordsworth’s major poetry, reaching conclusions upon it striking like those of Hallam in his Tennyson essay that had so influenced the young Yeats. The conclusions are guarded, but severe:

He strikes me as always destroying his poetic experience, which was of course of incomparable value, by his reflective power. His intellect was commonplace, and unfortunately he had been taught to respect nothing else. He thinks of his poetic experience not as incomparable in itself but as an engine that may be yoked to his intellect. He is full so a sort of utilitarianism and that is perhaps the reason why in later life he
is continually looking back upon a lost vision, a lost happiness.

(Letters to J.B. Yeats, in Hone, Joseph, 295)

Yeats, in *Ego Dominus Tuus*, explicitly opposes a lost sprezzatura, ‘the old nonchalance of the hand’, and implicitly chooses Shelley’s ‘subtler language’. In the 1925 *A Vision*, Robartes traced these characters on the sands of Arabia, and the 1923 poem, *The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid*, was printed in the first *A Vision* under the title of Desert Geometry. The source in Yeats is in his first Shelley essay, back in 1900, where the examination of Shelley’s ‘ruling symbols’ begins with the image of Cynthna, archetype of Maud Gonne, tracing antithetical in the sands:

“At a comparatively early time Shelley made his ‘imprisoned Cythna’ become wise in all human through the contemplation of her own mind, and write out this wisdom upon the sands in “signs” that were clear elemental shapes, whose smallest change ‘made a subtler language within language….’” (Essays and Introduction, 78)

When Yeats knew how he misrepresented Shelley scarcely matters. These are the ‘misrepresentations’ of poetic influence, instances of the clinamen or creative swerves. The source-passage in The Revolt of Islam presents a very different subjectivity than Ille pursues. “Shelley’s vision rising here from the wreck of hope is of the mind in its own place, unconquerable and unassailable, because its calm reflects all the reality, including sympathy, justice, truth, and other ideal goals”.

(Essays and Introduction, 78) Yeats takes from Shelley, as always only what he needs, to employ against the nineteenth century poetic humanism Yeats seeks to overturn. Hic, inadequately embodies, justly linked Wordsworth and Shelley in his regard. But what Hallam and Yeats found in Shelley is there, poetry of sensation conceptual images. Yeats divides, as always the means of Shelley’s poetry, from its revolutionary and humanistic ends. Ille’s attack upon the modern artists who ‘are critics, or but half
create’. The kernel of the poem is Ille’s ‘by the help of an image’, Yeats is caustic in calling this ‘a sort of utilitarianism’, and perhaps it was, but utilitarianism of the spirit. Hic does not argue, at this point, the case for the nineteenth century poetry. He will do that later in the poem, presenting the natural humanism of Keats. More cunningly, he puts forward “the chief imagination of Christendom’, Dante who in A Vision will occupy the most fortunate of phases for a poet, phase 17, where Unity of Being is most possible, where the other major poets in residence are Shelley and Yeats himself. Dante is supremely relevant partly because his Convivio is one of the apt models for both Per Amica and AVision, but mostly because the Comedy can be thought of as an utter self finding. Ille’s answer is as unsatisfying as Yeats’s account of Dante in Per Amica is. The Dante of the poem is a ‘spectral image’, opposite in being to the natural man Dante. Though the example is unconvincing, the principle Ille extracts is expressed with Yeats’s most majestic and unanswerable rhetorical authority:

The rhetorician would deceive his neighbours,
The sentimentalist himself; while art  
Is but a vision of reality.  
What portion in the world can the artist have  
Who has awakened from the common dream  
But dissipation and despair?(Collected Poems,182)

Yet Ille’s rhetoric is too strong for our skepticism; our struggle against it is ‘the struggle of the fly in marmalade’ (Collected Poems,181). What has begun in Yeats is that marvelous style one fights in vain, for it can make any conviction, every opinion even, formidable out of all proportion to its actual imaginative validity. Thus, Hic, offers Keats, with his love of the world, his deliberate happiness, as being
rhetorician nor sentimentalist, Ille, Yeats replies with a wholly inadequate Victorian misrepresentation of Keats, in no sense even a creative misinterpretation, but the verbal gesture remains convincing. We know as Yeats hardly cared to know, that Keats was not an ‘ignorant’, man who made ‘luxuriant song’, but Yeats makes it difficult for anyone to see his nonsense as being just that here nonsense. What saves _Ego Dominus Tuus_ from its own unfairness of judgment is more than powerful rhetoric however, for the final exchange between Hic and Ille concerns what matters most in the poem: the value of the antithetical image. Hic speaks the conventional wisdom of Poetic influence, but not the truer wisdom one must grant Yeats as having learned:

A style is found by sedentary toil

And by the imitation of great masters.

Ille knows the esoteric truth of Poetic Influence that a style finds a strong new poet not by imitation but by antithetical swerve, which for Ille leads to the mysterious one, the antiself. The poem has come full circle, returning to the magical shapes of a doctrine of visionary images, to the emblems of tower, lamp, open book, moonlight, and the grey sand by a shallow stream.

For instance, the traditional Christian Eucharist symbol, ‘bread’, associated with Dante in _Ego Dominus Tuus_.

Derided and deriding, driven out

To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread (Collected poems, 180)

The last few poems in _The Wild Swans at Coole_ are recognizable as poetic expositions of his private philosophy outlined in _PerAmica_ and; later in _A Vision_. The dominant and recurring symbolism in these poems are the Tower and the Dancer which loom large in the verse of Yeats. Also, there are symbols drawn from
Christianity which, in a lesser way, serve to tie together in several poems. Aherne implies that Yeats who seeks the bread of truth in book or manuscript will never find it in his life, and so, urges Robartes for whom the truth is his daily bread, to speak just enough to disillusion the poet. While the bread imagery has some of the Christian spiritual tone, it is used more as a poetic metaphor than a religious symbol.

Just truth enough to show that his whole life
Will scarcely find for him a broken crust
Of all those truths that are your daily bread. (Collected Poems, 184)

Aherne and Robartes, in the poem, are tiresome properties, easy ironies by which the poet may mock himself. Robartes expresses contempt for poets in general, as well as Yeats; they have found “mere images.” Yet the irony is as much bent against the occult Robartes; they sought only images, and the ‘true song, though speech’ the occultist chants is the huge, mere image of the Great Wheel. Critics, rightly focus upon cryptic account Robartes gives of Phase 27, the Saint because there is a hint of escape from the Wheel’s turnings here:

Hunchback and Saint and Fool are the last crescents.
The burning bow that once could shoot an arrow
Out of the up and down, the wagon wheel
Of beauty’s cruelty and wisdom’s chatter-
Out of that raving tide—is drawn betwixt
Deformity of body and of mind. (Collected Poems, 187)

In Blake’s Milton, one finds the fullest and likeliest source for Yeats’s twenty phases, in the twenty eight churches that mark off the divisions of fallen human history. In less schematic form, this Blakean Wheel or Circle of Destiny is presented in The Mental Traveler, cited by Yeats as a prime source for A Vision. When Blake’s
Milton the archetypal poet, resolves to descend again into history and nature. He is compelled to put on the Shadow or Covering Cherub, a twenty-seven-fold darkness under which we dwell. The Twenty-seventh-Church is called “Luther” the Protestant phase of Blake’s own time, and equivalent to Yeats’s Phase 27, or the Saint. For both Blake and Yeats the twenty-seventh fold of the Shadow offers the possibility of release, but Blake passionately means it, while for Yeats it is only another irony. For Blake, the twenty-eighth Church is Apocalypse; else the Circle must turn around again always, so Phase 28 is the Fool, deformity of mind, a last waning before the darkness of terrible god, Phase 1. This is complex irony of the close of The Phases of the Moon. The laughter of Aherne, at the expense of Yeats, is hollowness, for the finder of mere images, the poet, never expects to find anything but endless cycle, the spinning of the Great Wheel by the Gnostic composite god of history, deity of a meaningless death and an absurd life.

As Raymond Cowell points out that, The Phases of the moon written in 1918, what he later called “a text for exposition” This poem provide opportunity for the exposition of his ‘system’, Yeats imagines a quarrel between himself and his creations, Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne. Thus the situation of the poem is that Robartes and Aherne, seeing the poet labouring at his poetry in the tower, mock his efforts to transcend the inescapable cycles of life.

Robartes explains to Aherne that life can be described in terms of twenty-eight lunar phases. Roughly speaking in the first fourteen phase’s soul seeks subjective self-fulfillment, particularly after Phase Eight, and in the second fourteen seeks social integration, particularly after phase Twenty-two.

(Cowell, 62)
The division between these two movements is the full moon:

Before the full

It sought itself and afterwards the world.

Although the fifteenth phase, in its balance of the subjective and objective forces, gives a hint of possible perfection, this balance cannot be maintained, Robartes says, and so poet is wasting his time in his efforts to create some kind of permanent beauty. It is saved from mediocrity by the conclusion, when the power of the poet is dramatically demonstrated. These creatures were created by the poet, and they are visible only by the light from the tower window. At the end of the poem they are dismissed by the poet, as he finishes his labours: “The light in the tower window was put out” Read in conjunction with *Ego Dominus Tuus*, this poem is an assertion that through a poetic image of ‘anti-self’ the poet can achieve a victory over the apparently meaningless cycles of life. In great poetry, the poet achieves, permanently, that balance of personal emotion and artistic control, of the antithetical and primary impulses, that the fifteenth phase of the moon hints at. Thus the expositions of his system, *The phases of the moon* complement each other and assert the supreme power and relevance of literature and art.

As pointed out by Raymond Cowell, The kind of poetic image that can help the poet to achieve this stability and equilibrium is presented in the final poem of the volume; *The Double vision of Michael Robartes* of 1919. “It is in many ways a triumphant poem, celebrating the poet’s resolution, through the poetic image of the dancer, of the conflict between intellect, as represented by the sphinx, and heart, as represented by the Buddha”(Cowell,63). Explaining this poem in *A Vision*, Yeats says these figures represent ,respectively : ‘the mind’s self begotten unity, an intellectual excitement’, and ‘the outward looking mind, love and its lure.’ Going on, he says they
stand so to speak, like heraldic supporters guarding the mystery of the fifteenth phase’. At the start of the poem, Robartes is torn by these conflicting forces, but the dancer, symbolizing a fusion of intellect and heart, spirit and body, gives a glimpse of the unity of being of the fifteenth phase which mitigates his agony:

O little did they care who danced between,
And little did she shy by whom her dance was seen
So she had out danced thought.
Body perfection brought,
For what but eye and ear silence the mind
With the minute particulars of mankind?
Mind moved yet seemed to stop
As’twere a spinning-top. (Collected poems, 193)

The opposites are here resolved into a unified activity, where each receives it due, without being allowed to predominate over the other. After seeing this vision, Robartes no longer feels the helpless pawn of unknown faces but is elated by this poetic reconciliation of ‘the commonness of thought and images/That have frenzy of our western seas’(Collected Poems,194). This poem is Robartes’s ‘arrangement’ of his vision into a ‘song’ of gratitude; the sceptical Robartes is now finally converted by the poet. Once again, then, a volume of Yeats’s poetry ends on a note of optimism and assurance; the questions are answered, and the conflicts resolved, for the moment at least.

Yeats can be seen progressing from a fear of age and death and a pervasive feeling of inadequacy and helplessness, to a sense of the irrelevance of age and death and a conviction of the power of his poetic art. Of course, there is no complacency about these attitudes, for the poet recognizes the tendency to accept life negatively, to
submit to the cycles of existence, and also sees the immense difficulty of achieving a reconciliation of the warring forces within the human personality. This volume shows that the poet’s struggle for meaning is no different from the ordinary person’s struggle for identity, so that the relevance of literature becomes very obvious. The greatness of this Volume The Wild Swans at Coole is that “it presents the doubts and obstacles of the struggle without negative pessimism, and the ultimate triumph without arrogance or complacency”. (Cowell, 64-65)

In the Volume, Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921) embodies an equally remarkable achievement, It centers on a set of political poem Easter 1916. As pointed out by Harold Bloom,

It is placed in Yeats’ career between two much richer Volumes The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) and The Tower (1928), this would be a justly neglected book if it were not for the fame of Easter 1916 and poems like The Demon and Beast and A Prayer for My Daughter which serve as ironic prologue and tendentious epilogue for The Second Coming, while the other lyrics largely fail, whether as political poetry or as explorations of the poet’s vision of Daimonic love. (Bloom, 313)

The Volume begins with the title poem, The Michael Robartes and the Dancer. In this poem, Yeats touches upon the possibility that even the dancer may be contaminated by abstract intellectualism. In this poem the dancer’s symbolic qualities are more specifically described as feminine qualities, women being more capable than men of uniting mind and body:

Live in uncomposite blessedness,

And lead us to the like-if they
Will banish every thought, unless
The lineaments that please their view
When the long looking-glass is full,
Even from the foot-sole think it. (Collected Poems, 198)

The poem is a dialogue poem between Robartes and the dancer, and the dancer is not entirely convinced at the end of the poem that Robartes’ views on woman are valid. “This first poem, then, is one of threat to the qualities through which Yeats had achieved confidence and balance in the previous Volume”. (Cowell, 65). This poem enacts a dialogue between Michael Robartes and a woman whose occupation as a dancer constitutes a significant detail. Because dance makes art literally from the human body, Yeats saw dancers as emblems of the unity of body and soul associated with Phase 15. Here, Robartes contends that woman fulfill their destinies when they reject ugly opinions and thus make their bodies into beautiful vessels for supernatural wisdom. In achieving ‘uncomposite blessedness’ they lead to the like. This isn’t quite the same as suggesting that woman should be dumb and good-looking, but it comes uncomfortable close. Two things preserve the poem from an utterly devastating feminist critique. As pointed out by, David Holdmann, first it affirms the human body in terms that avoid the usual implication that women’s bodies are less pure than men’s: the Renaissance paintings and sculptures praised by Robartes honor both male and female sinew. Second, it dramatizes the dancer getting the better of Robartes at every stage of his argument. When he asserts an elaborate allegorical interpretation of a painted altar-piece, she deflates him in one line. By the end,

Her witty objections have so agitated him that he finds himself
in the ironic position of supporting his criticisms of learning
with citations from learned texts. The poem creates a real
dialogue, in which the poet pits a represented of one part of his mind against a female antagonist who appears well up to the challenge. (David Holdmann, 76).

As Cowell says, “this Volume, however, goes on to show how beautiful women may lead men to new levels of intensity and insight through sexual union, and Solomon and Sheba and An Image from a past life records such moments of sexual intensity and their significance”. (Cowell, 65).

In the next poem, Solomon and the Witch, this presents another verbal sparring match between male and female interlocutors. “Solomon half jokingly tells Sheba that sexual intercourse can spark the end of the world if the lovers perfectly unite. Sheba deftly replies that she’s willing to give it a try” (David Holdmann, 76). In Solomon and the Witch (1918) there seemed an acceptance and contentment; he had forgotten his worries over the possibility that he had hurt both Maud and Isuelt and had found tranquility:

May be the bride –bed brings despair,

For each an imagined image brings

And finds a real image there (Collected Poems, 199).

The fine poem, Under Saturn’ being addressed to his wife, continues this theme of female wisdom while also pointing in new directions. Explaining his saturnine mood to his wife, the poet says that it is caused not by sad memories of lost love and youth, but by his sense of having betrayed an early vow to serve, in some way, his native region of Sligo, and implicitly, Ireland. This poem with its nationalist hints, which was written in November 1918, prepares the reader for the explicitly political poem, Easter 1916, written between May and September 1916.
In the next poem, *An Image of the Past*, Yeats might seem to imply that, his still his imagined image in mind and that Mrs. Yeats was disturbed by this when He hears. This is again a dialogue poem between *He* and *She*. The language of this poem reverts to the romantic and languorous ethos of the early love poetry written to Maud Gonne and Diana Vernon.

As, Cowell writes in the Poem *Easter 1916* a note of self criticism which prevails in *Under Saturn* is again conspicuous in this poem, for he begins by saying that he has been guilty of complacent detachment in his attitude towards him and his fellow Irishmen. The poem is a Political poem which discusses war. As David Holdmann says, Ireland had already been convulsed by violent exchanges between the Irish Republican Army and ill-disciplined British forces who often targeted civilians in retaliation for guerrilla attacks. *Easter 1916* opens by recalling Dublin before the Rising as a spiritless, disunited city that found its fitting emblem in the mottled grab of a fool. There, the routines of modern commerce ‘among grey /Eighteenth century houses’ had so camouflaged the ‘vivid faces’ of the Rising’s future leaders that the poet remembers greeting them with ‘polite meaningless words’ even while thinking ‘Of a mocking tale or a gibe / To please a companion /, Around the fire at the club’. (Collected Poems,203). Now, after the Rising, everthing has changed: it no longer matters that the poet’s old friend Constance Markievicz has traded her youthful beauty for shrill-voiced activism that Patrick Pearse and Thomas Macdonough might have mastered poetry’s ‘winged horse’ or even that John MacBride ‘had done most bitter wrong/ To some who are near my heart.’ (Collected Poems,203). In sacrificing themselves all of the Rising’s leaders have resigned their parts in the ‘casual comedy’ of the nation’s former life. Yet their transformation has produced both beauty and terror, a mystery the poet contemplates by means of the third stanza’s symbolic
landscape. In contrast to the more static, two-dimensional descriptions characteristic of Yeats’ earlier verse, this stanza creates a fluid virtual space that draws us deep into its interior. Using the intersection of the ‘living stream’ and the crossing road to evoke a two – dimensional plane, it lifts our vision up and down the third dimension occupied by the horse and rider, the birds, and the shadowing cloud, depicting all of these as moving. It thus not only invites us into a beautiful landscape but also brings home the contrast between the living, moving world and the unchanging stone that symbolizes the hearts of the fallen rebels. This stone gives the world a new center, a permanent locus of meaning and interconnection.

The concluding stanza dramatizes the poet’s struggle to face the implications of this insight. No English language poet surpasses Yeats when it comes to building up a stanza’s power by shaping its grammar, imagery, and argument into a single unfaltering current. Here, however, he employs an unusually halting moment to express his anguished uncertainty. After daring to imply some blame for the fallen heroes; he quickly falls back on one of the polite, meaningless conventions elegies usually employ. “For anyone who believes that artists have an obligation to model complex responses to complex events even when the audiences clamor for simple reassurance, Easter 1916, surely must stand as one of Yeats’s finest achievements”. (David Holdeman,73-74).

The next poem, On a Political Prisoner a work inspired by Constance Markievicz, the rebel officer reproached for shrillness in Easter1916. Constance and her sister Eva Gore Booth hailed from a landed Anglo-Irish family based in County Sligo, and Yeats had known them since his youth. He came to regard both sisters as exemplars of an Anglo-Irish gentry that had increasingly neglected its duty to mask Ireland’s peasant energies with upper-class refinements. The sisters’ rejection of
conventional gender roles added to their fascination. Eva campaigned for women’s rights and also wrote poems. Constance played such a key part in rebellion that only her status as a woman saved her from the firing squad. *On a Political Prisoner* begins by picturing her in a prison cell. Like *Easter 1916* it climaxes in a description of a three dimensional scene centering on a symbol: a ‘rock–bred’ bird ‘balanced on the air’ at the moment of its first flight. “The poem associates this bird with the harmony Markievicz realized between her individual and group identities when her ‘youth’s lonely wildness’ upheld the traditions of her class by to stone, Yeats wonders if she can recover her innocence” (David Holdmann, 74-75). It contrasts her imprisonment with her former freedom, and asserts that she foolishly sacrificed this former freedom, and asserts that she has foolishly sacrificed this freedom for the sake of mere abstract theories. The poem is a superb piece of technical achievement. “The starting point, the symbol of the grey gull which came to the prisoner, is used to illustrate the change which had come upon the life of the Countess”. (Jeffares, Norman, 189). The use of the adjective ‘grey’ suggests the monotony of the prison, yet the gull is in the poet’s mind a means of returning to the contrast of her youth.

At first it may not seem especially problematic: nothing in its critique of Markievicz’s activism explicitly blames her for violating gender norms. *The Leaders of the Crowd*, applies similar criticisms to others whose sex remains unspecified. The hatred of abstract fanaticism is the central theme of this poem He says that, the demagogic leaders lack, the self–knowledge produced partly by solitary study, which is necessary in political leaders. The lamp of self-knowledge, ‘the student’s lamp’ is contrasted with the false misleading light of rhetoric and fanaticism that these leaders hold before the people: ‘that lamp is from the tomb’. (Collected Poems, 208).
In the poem *Demon and Beast*, Yeats’ persuasive suspicion of facility, of intellectual or emotional short-cuts, is present in his self-analyses as well as in his attitudes to others, as is shown in this poem. The poem describes how the artist is momentarily seduced by the beauty and profusion of nature into relinquishing his proper task. He is suddenly abandoned by the passions that ensured his subjectivity and his power to create; he grows objective his mind becomes a vessel, instead of a vortex of energy, the fountain’s basin instead of its abundant jet. According to Harold Bloom, *Demon and Beast*, has a deliberate homeliness, and a cunning clumsiness about it. After so many heraldic birds swans, herons, and hawks peacocks – a non–symbolic gull and a mere duck charm readers.

To watch a white gull take

A bit of bread thrown up into the air;

Now gyring down and perning there

He splashed where an absurd

Portly green- pated bird

Shook off the water from his back (Collected Poems, 209-210).

In the poem *Second Coming*, of January 1919, Yeats again expresses his suspicion of political fanaticism:

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity. (Collected Poems, 211).

January 1919 was the month in which the Irish constituent Assembly, comprising the elected Irish M.Ps from Westminster met independently, in defiance of England, to declare its Republican sympathies, an act which provoked the formation of an English security force, the Black and Tans, which was to be responsible for the ‘terrors’ of the next two years. As pointed out by Cowell, thus the
prophetic, apocalyptic tone of the poem was justified by subsequent events. In the poem Yeats expresses his theories on the rise and fall of civilization in the terms later propounded in *A Vision*.

A civilization begins with a moment of inspiration or revelation, such as the birth of Christ, and its progress is like the unwinding, or ‘perning’ to use the dialect word Yeats was fond of, of thread wound on a cone or ‘gyre’. Thus, at first a civilization is very narrow and intense, like the apex of a cone, but it gradually loses its impetus, broadens, so dissipates its energies. As this happens, an opposite inspiration, which has been gaining strength from an initial state of inactivity and almost powerlessness, which is represented by a cone whose apex is at the centre of the base of the other cone, takes over and begins a new civilization, one inspired by an antithetically different force from the civilization it is succeeding. (Cowell, 69).

Surveying the contemporary anarchy in Ireland and indeed throughout Europe, Yeats feels that the forces of Christian love are almost spent, and that a new, more brutal, force is about to take over:

And what rough beast, its hour came round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born. (Collected Poems,211).

The terrifying cosmic nature of this vision of impending brutality is, in itself, a justification of Yeats’s efforts in writing *A Vision*, as is the superb opening image in which the diminishing impetus of Christianity is conveyed through the idea that...
Christianity is like a falcon that has lost touch with the falconer, and is thus lost and directionless:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre,

The falcon cannot hear the falconer. (Collected Poems, 211).

This sense of impending anarchy is never far beneath the surface of Yeats’s poems in this period. In the Second Coming he had seen ‘the ceremony of innocence’ being drowned by ‘the blood dimmed tide’. Poetically, all the meaning of the poem is in the calculated collision in the last line of the words ‘slouches’ and ‘Bethlehem’.

A Prayer for My Daughter is a poem on Yeats’s daughter. The same vision, presented apocalyptically there, is presented with magnificent humanity and paternal concern. Yeats’s first child Anne Butler was born in February 1919 and this poem was written between February and June of that year, when the Black and Tans were beginning to make their presence felt in Ireland. In the poem, he considers what the future might hold for his baby daughter, immensely vulnerable as she is:

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream …
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea. (Collected Poems, 211-212).

This evocation of danger and threatening unknown forces is particularly impressive because it is so obviously written by a worried man; in such a place, his daughter could align herself with life-giving forces, making herself independent of sterile political debate. The comfort Yeats gains from this thought is reflected in the casualness of the contractions and the confidence of this as compared with the
opening stanzas. This poem is probably Yeats’ most convincing presentation of the values of the Anglo-Irish tradition, for when this tradition recurs after this he is very conscious that it is threatened by forces that might soon overwhelm it. Actually behind the details of this prayer for his daughter, of course, are his memories of Maud Gonne, who comes to symbolize in Yeats’ poetry the tragedy of beauty and grace distorted by politics, arrogance and intellectual hatred.
Work Cited


