Contextualising the Autobiographies

The Romantic period rejoiced in the celebration of the self. Romanticism saw the rise of autobiographical writings in the form of letters, journals and even poems. Wordsworth became the pioneer of this form by writing his autobiography in the form of a long poem, The Prelude. The Romantics rejoiced in the Rousseauan rebirth of man. Wordsworth announced to this effect that a poet was not someone special, but "a man speaking to men." In other words, a poet should concern himself with the ordinary man's joys and sorrows and express these in simple language.

There was, however, a major change from Rousseau's egotistical response of "I" to everything -- in Wordsworth, it became more of an interaction between the subject and his relationship with the others. William Wordsworth wrote The Prelude at a time when art was freeing itself from the bonds of religion or religiously inspired myth and the process of discovering the self was thought to be a spiritual act.

Wordsworth's experimentation with the idea of projecting one's self faced some problems in penning down its philosophical and compositional aspects. He saw the limitations of representing the self in the existing
biographical and historical mode and questioned these limitations in an implicit manner.

The autobiographers after him, like Carlyle, sought to go beyond these boundaries and based their work on the assumption that the present written mode cannot capture the past self successfully. However, they consented with his opinion, that the writer's past contains the power to liberate him and by writing one's lifework -- one can transform oneself. Carlyle also projects the idea in Sartor Resartus that the self is not a "homogenous little figure" that can be "tightly articulated" in a biographical narrative.

Peckham in his book, Beyond the Tragic Vision explains the idea of self in the nineteenth century. He says:

In the nineteenth century it was above all religious tools that had worn out, and the rationalist-empiricist tools of the Enlightenment. Now we can penetrate the mystery of the title (Sartor Resartus — "The Tailor Retailored"). Man's clothes are symbols. In creating those clothes, he is a tailor. But his clothes wear out. He must, therefore, retailor himself, make himself new clothes. At certain periods in history his most important clothes, the ones he sews to symbolize the self, are in rags. Such a period was the nineteenth century.

In the twentieth century, however, a new concept of the autobiographic mode came into being. The basic principles of the autobiographic genre were transgressed. Robert Elbaz speaks of Malraux's Anti-memories, that, "he
postulates a redefinition of selfhood which negates the concepts of truth and veracity by abolishing the distinction between reality and fiction, and which promotes the fictional dimension of the self.\textsuperscript{4}

Yeats's Autobiographies too, written in the twentieth century, is a mixture of reality and fiction. It is not a story of life, nor does it follow the historical order chronologically. The Autobiographies, however, follows a different path from the autobiographical tradition in the past and comes to the conclusion that the self cannot be defined and, therefore, it is impossible to try to portray it. Elbaz remarks about this concept in an autobiography:

> It constitutes an ongoing process of redefinition dependent upon the transcendental-historical phenomena which shape it. And autobiography, the story of the self, will therefore have to be the story of the phenomena which continually give birth to that self.\textsuperscript{5}

Sartor Resartus only asserts the creative nature of autobiography whereas Joyce and Yeats make full use of it as a methodology. Their autobiographies make use of chronological narration similar to Wordsworth but the text is intermixed with fiction to present an artistic world-view. Yeats's Autobiographies, thus is quite different in its portrayal of the self from that of its Romantic precursor.
Yeats does not base his Autobiographies on factual experience alone. He blends the experience of life with art. Yeats sought to hammer his thoughts into unity, seeking a synthesis which reflected every aspect of life in literature. As Ellmann remarks:

This sense of an ulterior responsibility drove him to seek always for patterns and pictures, and to hack and hew at his life until it reached the parabolical meaningfulness he found necessary. He must speak for his generation as well as for himself, and reveal the truth about both.  

Thus, Yeats believed that "the artist's destiny in autobiography and poetry is to go further than the ordinary mortal's. It is both to live the life and to embrace the wholeness of that life as his daimon and to embrace it again in his creation." Yeats himself, made this clear in a statement, "We artists are the servants not of any cause but of mere naked life, and above all of that life in its nobler forms, where joy and sorrow are one, Artificers of the Great Moment." He reaffirms this idea when he says in the preface to "The Trembling of the Veil" that his friends consisted of "artists and writers and certain among them men of genius, and the life of a man of genius, because of his greater sincerity, is often an experiment that needs analysis and record." In other words, the artist should take care not to project his life as mere chronicle, but it should be informed by symbolic imagination, for it to have
any meaning. Yeats also resorted to different means, such as myth making, posing and attitudinizing in his Autobiographies, to understand the meaning of his experiences. He wanted to project his autobiography as a philosophical treatise of the artist's experiment in living.

Yeats achieved this by using memory for artistic and universalizing ends. As Stephen Spender says in his essay on "Confessions and Autobiography":

The autobiographical is transformed. It is no longer the writer's own experience: it becomes everyone's. He is no longer writing about himself: he is writing about life. He creates it, not as an object that is already familiar and observed, as he is observed by others, but as a new and revealing object, growing out of and beyond observation.10

Yeats himself, wished to be thought of not as the "bundle of accidents" that sits down to the breakfast table but as something "intended, complete."11 Yeats tried to represent himself and the events in his life according to his understanding of them and this is important in the long run to our comprehension of the mysteries of the creative process.

So, a work of art, may rather embody the dream of an author than his actual life or as in Yeats's case, it may be the mask or anti-self behind which the real person is hiding. He saw his life differently in terms of his art, viewing actual experience to its use in literature, and so shaped his experiences of life. In doing so, he focussed
all attention on the process of the act itself by using nominalizations and passive sentences in which no agent is specified. He does not stress his individual responsibility by selecting performative nouns such as narrator. He says in his Autobiographies, "It seems as if time had not yet been created, for all thoughts connected with emotion, and place are without sequence" (Autobiographies, p. 5). Memory is made simultaneous by the dissolution through the intervening years of the sequential order: "I do not know how old I was (for all these events seem at the same distance) when I was made drunk" (Autobiographies, p. 18), and "At Ballisodare, an event happened that brought me back to the superstitions of my childhood. I do not know when it was, for the events of this period have as little sequence as those of childhood" (Autobiographies, p. 76).

Elizabeth Bruss says that there are implications for the status of the act in the very grammatical categories, used by an autobiographer. The choice between performative verbs and other grammatical categories, adjectives, for example, is also a choice about whether to reflect upon the temporal dimensions of the act, to see it as perfective or copresent, as an event or an ongoing process. Because, like the elements man never is, but is always becoming. Similarly, Yeats's evolution is continuous — developing with his metaphor, unlike Mill or Darwin who
claimed to have stopped developing or changing after a certain stage. Thus, Yeats says, "It is even possible that being is only possessed by the dead." This being is of a permanent and everlasting nature. It shores itself against the ravages of time to belong both to the present as well as eternity. This concept of being is found in Yeats's creative and recreative experiencing of his poems and autobiography.

The occasional insertion of verse in the Autobiographies heightens the emotional intensity. Yeats also resorts to conversation or dialogue to disperse the monotony of the narrative. This monotony is also relieved by his dramatic shifts from past to present tense. MacNeice writes that Yeats was at his best in "Dramatis Personae" where, "in the carefree tones of a clubman, he pours out personal gossip and generalizations about life and art in Ireland with equal ease and point." He chooses to treat the audience as agents of the act of reading and also gives an extended commentary on the way his readers should be performing their own parts in the autobiographical act -- by perceiving his attempts to blend his life and his art into a single image.

Yeats strives to achieve a philosophical design in his Autobiographies by the selection and arrangement of his material. He has based his autobiography partly on an image -- that is, subjective patterning of experience and other parts upon the facts themselves. Though Yeats's methods
changed as he wrote and as the material changed, but while putting down his experiences in poetry or prose, he gave them a symbolic power.

By doing so, he tried to achieve in his writings Unity of Being and Unity of Culture which provided his work with an overall unity and justified his alteration of the title -- in the last edition published before his death from Autobiographies to Autobiography. It is a goal towards which his experience was consistently and consciously directed. However, it is not only to be seen as actuality, but is expressed in terms of his life. This could be achieved only if he arranged his life into patterns of experience and not recounted it candidly. Consequently, he eliminated some parts of his life as they were too intimate and others because they were irrelevant. He says that the poet "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast, he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete. A novelist might describe his accidence, his incoherence, he must not; he is more type than man, more passion than type." 15

Yeats also communicates to us an experience of self which tries to resolve the various conflicts present in the self. This experience includes and transcends the two contradictory impulses in man -- the rational on the one hand and the purely spiritual on the other. The terms that

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he found to convey both these partials of human experience together in a portrait of whole oneness were myths, or to put it slightly differently, metaphors. He believed the mythic statements to be true facts which are continually repeated and can be observed in man over and over again. His ghostly instructors who gave to him the substance of A Vision from the Great Mind and collective unconscious told him that they had come to give him metaphors for poetry. And as Yeats says, it is "All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all."16

Directly related to this was Yeats's belief that the individual is separated from the Anima Mundi by the temporal world in which he lives. Except for the instincts with which man is endowed at birth, he cannot directly share in the wisdom and experience accumulated in the great memory throughout the ages. All images of godhead reside there, of Christ and of the Antichrist that "slouches towards Bethlehem to be born," (SP, p. 100) as well as the images of our true, inner selves. As a result, the Anima Mundi includes all images of all minds.

But the individual cannot penetrate the Anima Mundi, and so, begins his life in a fragmented condition. The individual as well as nation can achieve unity only by seeking a confrontation with its anti-self. The very idea of denial, however, contradicts the idea of becoming one with the mask or blending the self with the mask. Yeats
uses the term in a different manner as restraining from asserting the primary self. The artist creates a true image of his antithetical self and is likely to achieve unity or get a glimpse of the hidden reality by finding inspiration in the relationship of his primary to his antithetical self. No fulfillment of the potential genius is possible — consequently, no union of primary and antithetical selves, until passion and intellect together are stretched to their utmost capacities. Then only, life will arrive at the dramatic crisis wherein it is possible for the "invisible gates" to open.

In "Hodos Chameliontos" Yeats gives a sense of the antithetical artist's crisis as he attempts to recreate reality, "we gaze at such men in awe, because we gaze not at a work of art, but at the re-creation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and, it may even seem that the hairs of our heads stand up because that birth, that re-creation is from terror." (Autobiographies, p. 273).

Yeats was more concerned with the 'effect' he produced in his autobiography rather than narration of mere events. In a letter to his American friend John Quinn, he remarks of the historical value of Lady Gregory's memoirs, but then says that they are "the reverse of my memoirs in every way, for I could not have quoted a letter or diary
In another letter to John Quinn on Aug 1, 1916, he says, "I will lay many ghosts, or rather I will purify my own imagination by setting the past in order." 

Furthermore, he saw his autobiography as an attempt to live his life with style and then to describe the stylized life as a part of the truth his life tried to embody. In his attempt to portray his past, Yeats resorts to the art of dramatization or giving an effect to his past. He wrote to Olvia Shakespeare in 1934:

I do nothing all day long but think of the drama I am building up in my Lady Gregory. I have drawn Martyn and his house, Lady Gregory and hers, have brought George Moore upon the scene, finished a long analysis of him, which pictures for the first time this preposterous person ... I am just beginning on Woburn Buildings, building up the scene there ... It is curious how one's life falls into definite sections -- in 1897 a new scene was set, new actors appeared.

When Yeats changed the title from "Lady Gregory" to "Dramatis Personae," it signified the change of visualising his life as that of a player upon a stage. Though Yeats takes excerpts from letters and his diaries in certain later parts of his Autobiographies, they are used in a way to become a part of the whole philosophical design. The selection and arrangement of this material was done in such a way as to provide symbolic power in his prose and poems.

Another feature of the modern autobiography that Yeats employs like Joyce, is the discursive mode. He does
not narrate his life story historically, but mixes fact and fiction to give it a symbolic pattern. Through this pattern, we come to know Yeats in his Autobiographies in a way that is strikingly analogous to the way in which we know ourselves -- what we experience in his Autobiographies is like our own experience of the inner processes that go to make the self. In fact, we could say that the subject in his Autobiographies is this process of the self -- inconsistent but evolutionary and striving to reach some sort of perfection from moment to moment. All these partials merge to make up Yeats's portrait and are important in establishing a pattern which tells us more about his evolution as a poet.

Yeats is not presented to us as a fully developed character, instead his Autobiographies reveals to us his mind in operation viewing life as a whole pattern, a self-in-becoming -- all of which we come to realize for ourselves and hence identify with it. This is true of his poetry too.

Poetic Evolution of Yeats

If we look at Yeats's poetry and autobiography, we get to see how he consistently reshaped his world through his ever changing self. The various themes that preoccupied him during his various phases in life i.e. occultism, personality and nationality can be seen if one views his work sequentially. But, every phase is not separated -- rather, it is a fragment of a large tapestry.
Like the romantic poets, Blake and Coleridge, Yeats also believed in the doctrine of "the thinking of the body." He believed that both intellect and emotion combined to give an individual whole personality. Intellect alone is not sufficient to develop an individual's personality. He wrote in his diary to this effect, "We taste and feel and see the truth. We do not reason ourselves into it." Elsewhere, he elaborates on the same theme, "We only believe in those thoughts which have been conceived not in the brain but in the whole body." He tried to evolve a philosophy out of the combination of intellect and emotion. This union could make the individual reach nearer the goal of Unity of Being. His philosophy of Unity of Being had to be at the same time "logical and boundless."

Yeats believed that both the individual and the race possessed this unity. He learnt the term from his father who compared it to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string, all the strings murmur faintly. But Yeats used the term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the Convito to a perfectly proportioned human body. He declares his faith in this unity by saying:

I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it. My Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of St. Patrick as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's 'Imagination', what the Upanishads have named 'self'; nor is this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but imminent, differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt and toe of frog'.

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That is why, he tried to give a universal meaning to his experiences. He tried to achieve some kind of moral radiance by combining intellect and emotion. In 1910, when he was involved in a quarrel between Lady Gregory and Edmund Gosse, he wrote in his diary on Aug 8:

"Why do I write all this? I suppose that I may learn at last to keep to my own in every situation in life. To discover and create in myself as I grow old that thing which is to life what style is to letters, moral radiance, a personal quality of universal meaning in action and in thought." 23

By universalizing his personal experience, he succeeded in giving an objective outlook to his emotions. In other words, he could look at his own personal image from the outside. This gave rise to his Doctrine of the Mask -- which was a product of occultism and popular psychology. Contrary to Browning's theory which presumed two-soul-sides, one to face the world with and one to show the beloved, Yeats's doctrine assumes that one faces the world and the beloved with a mask. In brief, one looks at oneself as if one were somebody else. Thus, Yeats understood reality as something born out of the struggle between the buried self and the mask or the anti-self. According to him, all creative men must feel the need to recognize their own masks, ideal opposites, and in trying to become those nearly impossible other selves create the dramatic tension from which art arises. Yeats remarks in this connection, "style, personality -- deliberately adopted
and therefore a mask -- is the only escape from the hot­faced bargainers and the money-changers” (Autobiographies, p. 461).

According to him, even though style formed a basic part of the writer's life, yet it had to be carefully developed as it was an aspect of the anti-self. Style was a direct indication of the writer's personality and not something which could be studied in purely linguistic or literary terms. In his poetry too, style mirrors the moral element in his life and acts as a seismograph to record the nuances of the changes in his personality. In this way, through the changes in his style, the reader can note the changes in his beliefs, convictions, philosophical concerns and vice-versa. He even put forth his concept of the right aesthetic distance in terms of his theory of personality, "An art may become impersonal because it has too much circumstance or too little, because the world is too little or too much with it, because it is too near the ground or too far up among the branches."24

In the same way, style was a direct outcome of the writer's mood. If the writer wanted to be affirmative or negative, modern or archaistic, cautious or brazen -- his style and choice of words, would consequently be dependent on this. If the writer wanted to achieve perfection or self-conquest, it could be done through perfection of his
style. In his case also, self-conquest did not come easily, but was a slow and painful task. He says in his Autobiographies:

It was many years before I understood that I had surrendered myself to the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil. Metrical composition is always very difficult to me, nothing is done upon the first day, not one rhyme is in its place; and when at last the rhymes begin to come, the first rough draft of a six-line stanza takes the whole day. At that time, I had not formed a style, and sometimes a six-line would take several days and not seem finished even then. (Autobiographies, p. 202).

In other words, style was an essential part of understanding the self. So, poetry or creative writing was an outcome of this, as the self was the core of reality. He elaborates this point in his essay "First Principles":

in the end the creative energy of men depends on their believing that they have within themselves something immortal and imperishable, and that all else is but an image in a looking glass. So long as that belief is not a formal thing a man will create out of a joyful energy, seeking little for any external test of an impulse that may be sacred and looking for no foundation outside life itself.25

Further on, he says that if one deviates from his self or personality, he goes away from reality and becomes impersonal and abstract in his writings, as he has turned the table of values upside down. Later on, in the same essay he makes his point more clear, "We, who are believers, cannot see reality anywhere but in the soul itself, and seeing it there we cannot do other than rejoice in every energy, whether of gesture, or of action, or of speech, coming out of the personality, the soul's image."26
Yeats's personality was deeply influenced by his friends. He wrote poems based on his association with his friends like Augusta Gregory, Maud Gonne, John Synge and so on. He gathered images from the dramatic qualities of men's lives. To him, John Synge was a proud, literary genius; George Pollexfen -- an introverted mystic; Maud Gonne -- an intense, passionate nationalist. These images acquired universal meaning in his poetry, no longer retaining only their personal element. However, they remained rooted in the personality of the individual.

Apart from his contemporaries, Yeats also resorted to mythology and history. He found his images of the other self from mythology and history. In the poetry of Yeats, we find familiar figures from Irish and Greek literature -- that of Cuchulain, Aoife, Leda, Byzantium. He found his anti-self in these images and this made him wonder afterwards if he had not written poetry to find a cure for his own ailment, as constipated cats do when they eat valerain (Autobiographies, p. 74). He felt humiliated and so wrote always of proud, confident men and women.

There arose a conflict in his mind because of his attempt to come to terms with his anti-self. Out of this conflict, he tries to find the ultimate reality. As he says, "Why should we honour only those who die upon the field of battle? A man may show as desperate courage in venturing
into the abyss of himself."

Rajan comments on this to say that, "Man's mind is a battlefield also, and to face and define the desolation of reality, one needs an honesty that is not more frequent than courage."

Yeats delved deeply into the mind's battlefield to search for the truth. What he discovered was a great universal memory, independent of individual memory but containing the accumulation of all their images and thoughts. It formed the basis of all his theories, as it helped him towards his goal of Unity of Being. He termed this memory as Anima Mundi and explained about it:

Today I add to that first conviction, to that first desire for unity, this other conviction, long a mere opinion vaguely or intermittently apprehended: Nations, races and individual men are unified by an image, or bundle of related images, symbolical or evocative of the state of mind which is, of all states of mind not impossible, the most difficult to that man, race or nation; because only the greatest obstacle that can be contemplated without despair rouses the will to full intensity.

... I had seen Ireland in my own turn from the bragging rhetoric and gregarious humour of O'Connell's generation and school, and offer herself to a solitary and proud Parnell as to her anti-self, buskin following hard on sock and I had begun to hope or to half-hope that we might be the first in Europe to seek unity as deliberately as it had been sought by theologian, poet, sculptor, architect, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century (Autobiographies, pp.194-95).

Related to this was the concept of the daimon and man's union with his daimon was equivalent to that of the ultimate divine union. If one became one with his daimon, complete wholeness and power in work is possible. This idea
does find its strain sometimes in Yeats's work when he discards his generally dominant dualism for a monoism, however momentary. In the poem "The Tower," everything is created from man's soul and also in "Two Songs from a Play," the darkness disappears with the light from man's heart.

Yeats realized, during his life-time that the oneness of self evolves out of the balance of opposites, of thought working against and with emotion. As Olney remarks, one could consider psychologically the great paired opposites of consciousness and unconsciousness and philosophically speaking they are individuality and humanity. Yeats realizes both these extremes in his poetry:

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man
In a crowded London Shop
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.
While on the shop and street
I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed,
And twenty minutes more or less.
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless (SP, pp. 156-57)

The above lines show how Yeats could achieve rare moments of self-realization -- rising out of his deep unconscious memory into his conscious self. "I am awake and asleep, at my moment of revelation, self-possessed in self-surrender."30

It was his life-long endeavours to make it possible to transcend the antimonies of life and to reconcile the
clash of contraries, of body and soul, of sexuality and spirituality, of intellect and emotion, of death and eternity. He viewed this life as a conflict of opposites. He tried to resolve this conflict in his art by writing about Byzantium -- a city in which the Byzantine culture had succeeded in fusing life and art, and thus achieving Unity of Being. He also tries the great contraries of youth and age, life and death, change and the changeless and nature and art by depending on the other for completion. He realized that an understanding of the self could lead to an understanding of God and his universe and consequently the laws of the natural world. The self lies at the centre of things and one must come back to it. He delves deep into the Anima Hominis so that he might understand his self as a part of the Anima Mundi. He declares his faith in the self, "I begin to study the only self that I can know myself, and to wind the thread upon the pern again."  

By studying his self, he meant that an individual could choose a pattern of life -- by following the dictates of his self. Although, at times, it may become difficult to separate this realization from the pattern realized by the person. This leads him to ask rhetorically, "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (SP, P. 130). Life requires both equally, the creative image of dancer and the dance. Experience and meaning do not lie separate and the
individual, by following the path he has chosen can become both the image and the meaning he had beheld.

The dancer is the image of unified body and soul, the perfect type fitting into Yeats's system in the Fifteenth Phase where:

All thought becomes an image and the soul Becomes a body (SP, p. 82).

For Yeats, both the pleasure of the soul and the bruising of the body was an inevitable part of the life process. He does not condemn or glorify life, but offers a response that seems to justify the life we are leading. He believed that without contraries there can be no life, the opposite elements of youth and age, art and reality, are all interdependent. He was aware that truth cannot be known, but lived.

The reason for this is that the visible world is but a reflection of the reality and not the reality or true image. Yeats judged his work and found that he had confronted his mask and delved into the reality of Anima Mundi. As he says:

I call to the mysterious one who yet Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream And look most like me, being indeed my double, And prove of all imaginable things The most unlike being my anti-self, And, standing by these characters, disclose All that I seek (SP, p. 79).
Development of the Self

Yeats's poetry and his development of the self are inextricably interwoven. Right from the beginning, he realized the influence of the personal element. He remarks in "Reveries":

We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend. We should not disguise them in any way; for our lives give them force as the lives of people in plays give force to their words ... If I can be sincere and make my language natural, and without becoming discursive, like a novelist, and so indiscreet and prosaic. I said to myself 'I shall, if good luck or bad luck make my life interesting, be a great poet; for it will be no longer a matter of literature at all' (Autobiographies, pp.102-103).

So, in making his art mirror his life, it was inevitable that his passionate relationships with men, women and places were depicted in his work. His friends and relatives and Ireland nourished his soul and shaped his vision of life. His poetry was prompted by his beliefs and opinions and social prejudices. After some time he came under the influence of Madame Blavatsky and started studying psychical research and philosophy. Magic had an intense effect upon him. It seemed to him a key to understanding the meaning of life. Through magic, he tried to find a system that would help him to find truth. This relentless search for reality throughout his life enriched his personality and influenced many of his poems. Graham Hough says that Yeats firmly believed that, "the poet's experience is closely
allied to the mystic's, that it may give direct access to a really existing spiritual world, and that this unseen world can make irruptions of various kinds into the world of everyday. "32

He presented his beliefs in a forceful manner with the help of symbols. Through symbolism, he hoped to reach back to the primitive beliefs and passions and gain touch with the spiritual world. In his essay, "Magic," he states his beliefs:

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth, in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed. 33

Influenced by magic and occultism, he brought forth a new philosophy, a vision of life as described in his book, A Vision. This enabled him "to hold in a single thought reality and justice" and at the same time it provided him with "metaphors for poetry."

Olney explains how essential these metaphors are for the autobiographer to explain the concept of self in his work. He says:

These highest peaks of the self, when the largest areas of the vague unconscious are brought to an intensity of consciousness, when the whole potential of humanity seems realized in the individual, cannot be analyzed or explained but only experienced and, if the artist's faith is justified, perhaps re-experienced in metaphors and symbols in autobiography and poetry. 34
These varied pursuits of magic and occultism were pursued by Yeats to search for some philosophic idea, some tradition or belief which would help him find the pattern of life. In his search for his self, he created a new religion. He wrote in his Autobiographies that his new religion is one:

of a poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians (Autobiographies, p.116).

What Yeats is in effect doing, is to find as Stephen Dedalus puts it, "in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible."35 His search led him to believe in myths and fables. He tells us in "Reveries," "I did not believe with my intellect that you could be carried away body and soul, but the belief of the country people made that easy" (Autobiographies, p.78). This belief helped him to write literature based on folk-tales and also develop his notion of Unity of Being. He hoped to bring unity to the nation through such literature, "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?" (Autobiographies, p.194).

He did not see himself aloof from his country -- but as a part and parcel of the culture and heritage inherited from Ireland. So, he saw himself as a symbol of
Ireland. His memoirs and autobiography were not written or published from the personal view-point, but he viewed them as blended with the Irish culture. He viewed the works of other Irish artists also in the same light and said so in a letter to Lady Gregory on Nov 25, 1914, while "Reveries" was in progress:

I think, we shall live as a generation as the Young Irelanders did. We shall not be detached figures. I think it is partly with that motive I am trying for instance to improve my sister's embroidery and publish my father's letters. Your biography when it comes will complete the image.36

Yeats realized that the full significance of the national spirit could only be projected through individual persons and their works, and not in a general manner. Regarding this approach, he wrote to John Quinn on June 5, 1922:

I have always been convinced that memoirs were of great importance to our movement here. When I was 20 years old we all read Gavan Duffy's Young Ireland, and then read the Young Ireland poets it had introduced to us. Hyde, Russell, Lady Gregory, my father, myself, will all be vivid to young Irish students a generation hence because of the memoirs we are writing now.37

This was one of the reasons why he wanted to write his autobiography. He did not see himself in isolation, but as a whole -- unified with the Irish culture, as part of the historical process, as symbolized in Anima Mundi. In this way, his personality would be reflected in his autobiography as a composite whole -- a blend of the individual and the national shaped by the historical and cultural factors.
His contact with Synge proved to be very fruitful. Synge's love for "all that has edge, all that is salt in the mouth, all that is rough to the hand" was contagious. Synge discovered in Aran Islands what Yeats always thought of, but could never achieve. The Playboy of the Western World is unlike anything Yeats ever wrote or could write, but it certainly fulfilled a need in him. He wrote in "Reveries," "It is so many years before one can believe enough in what one feels even to know what the feeling is" (Autobiographies, p.103). He could discover his own feelings through Synge.

This relationship with Synge brought about a change in his poetry too. He moved away both from the doctrines of Pater and the Aesthetes and from the Romantic model. By 1906, he had revised his opinions considerably. He mentions this change very clearly in "Reveries":

Years afterwards when I had finished The Wanderings of Oisin, dissatisfied with its yellow and its dull green, with all that overcharged colour inherited from the romantic movement, I deliberately sought out an impression as of cold light and trembling clouds. I cast off traditional metaphors and loosened my rhythm, and recognizing that all the criticism of life known to me was alien and English, became as emotional as possible but with an emotion which I described to myself as cold (Autobiographies, p.74).

At first, Yeats professed that unlike Shakespeare who took themes from Plutarch and translated them into the common language so that ordinary people could understand
them, he took his themes from Celtic legend and deliberately kept them caviare to the general. Later on, he revised his opinion and said that imagination must be rescued from abstraction and brought nearer reality by focussing attention on the contemporary issues. This is one of the reasons why he decided to take to the theatre. He changed his views about the function of an artist. If, in the past, he thought that an artist need not allow his work to be conditioned by the oppressive burden of the age, he now thought that poetry must look at and accept the ugliness and actuality of life. It was only proper that poetry should grow out of what happened around us. At last, his imagination was saved from innane abstractions and he learnt to weave poetry out of his love for Ireland, out of Ireland's political misfortunes, out of his experience in the theatre, fierce public controversies and his personal frustrations. The change in outlook is apparent in the poem, "A Coat":

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes
As though they'd wrought it
Song, let them take it,
For there's more enterprise
In walking naked (SP, p. 63).

The poem is a piece of searching self criticism and at the same time, the declaration of a new art which would
no longer evade realities. For ultimately Yeats realized, that it was necessary to explore man's inner life and discover its beauty. While analysing himself, he realized that one is in conflict with himself -- so he calls to his own opposite, which is the acceptance of a mask:

Ille : By the help of an image
      I call to my own opposite,
      summon all
      That I have handled least,
      Least looked upon.

Hic : And I would find myself
      and not an image (SP, p. 77).

The acceptance of the combat with oneself was something good and not a necessary evil, according to him. He says of his instructors in A Vision, "It was part of their purpose to affirm that all the gains of man come from conflict with the opposite of his true being." He thought of life as impossible without strife and said that poetry is the result of a "quarrel with ourselves."

The conflict with oneself comes to the fore when one strives to know one's self. And this is what Yeats was trying to do in his poetry and autobiography. As he says:

I was interested in nothing but states of mind, lyrical moments, intellectual essences. ... Without knowing it, I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. ... Then one day I understood quite suddenly, as the way is, that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always outside myself, a stone or an Elixir that was always out of reach, and that I myself was the fleeting thing that held out its hand. ... Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of
love or bitterness thrown up to it by the events of life. ... To put it otherwise, we should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market-place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole.39

Now, it is realized by him that one must learn to look at and also accept the ugliness of actuality and eventually grow out of this reality. This development in his self is evident in his later poems contained in the volumes, "Michael Robartes And The Dancer," "The Tower," "The Winding Stair" and "Last Poems." In these poems, Yeats depicts his vision of life and shifts the focus to himself vis-a-vis the current happenings and his reaction to them.

Even the landscape that he depicts becomes personal. Though he mentions Thoor Ballylee, Coole Park, they come forth more as symbols, as a source of meaning than as mere objects in places. He sees the image of his self in the objects around him. Rajan says:

The 'rooting of mythology in the earth' is Yeats's description of his art to Sturje Moore and his poetry exemplifies this precept, making familiar woods and rivers fade into symbol, obliterating the boundary between the legendary and the actual, mixing daylight and moonlight in one inextricable beam. ... It is, as the subsequent images make clear, an elan that is unattached, an effervescence of nature, the rejoicing of the life-force in itself.40

Yeats evolved his own system of belief. Like Blake, he thought of progress as a result of conflicting
contraries and like him, protested against the rationalistic world-view that had been created by Post-Renaissance science. He wrote in his Autobiographies, "I am very religious and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I made a new religion almost an infallible church of poetic tradition" (Autobiographies, pp.115-16).

He saw no relief from the sufferings of humanity in religion. He even studied the Hindu religion under Mohini Chatterjee to find a cure for the ailing society. He saw history moving in a circle -- a civilization rises only to sink back into its womb again. The same thoughts can be seen in a verse from his play Resurrection, where he visualises the Magnus Annus or the Great Year, in which the whole cycle is completed:

I saw a staring virgin stand
Where holy Dionysus died,
And tear the heart out of his side,
And lay the heart upon her hand,
And bear that beating heart away;
And then did all the Muses sing
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,
As though God's death were but a play.41

The Magnus Annus completes the circle again and again, bringing a new cycle with the end of the old one. Sometimes the new civilization might be a violent, bestial and infact, anti-civilization which is the opposite of the present world's gyre. This image is brought out of the
Spiritus Mundi since history repeats the same pre-destined cycles. As before, the new anti-era is heralded by an incarnation:

Somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (SP, p. 100).

With the "Second Coming" the "blood-dimmed tide" is loosed and it has managed to drown the qualities of "the ceremony of innocence" which made life valuable under the dying aristocratic tradition. "The Second Coming" can be avoided or overcome if one lives in or according to the aristocratic traditions and ideals. These ideals can be the only hope in the disorder of the contemporary civilization.

The disorder which Yeats saw had the aftermath of the First World War. Both the poems were written after the First World War. Stallworthy also makes a mention of this fact:

Only two or three months elapsed, between the writing of 'The Second Coming' and 'A Prayer for my Daughter', and not for nothing did Yeats have them printed next to each other. Both, it will be seen, stem from a mood of depression brought on by the First World War, although, in both, references to the conflict are made less explicit in the manuscript drafts. The two poems have also a 'cradle' and a theme, in common. 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned' is an idea explored at greater length in 'A Prayer for my Daughter'.

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The First World War had just finished and Yeats was much troubled by the senseless violence which was rocking Ireland. The after effects of the War had been imprinted on the hearts and minds of the people. People had become used to seeing death occur frequently in the form of massacres and brutal killings of innocent people. Yeats was much disturbed and wondered about a solution to this senseless violence. His disturbed state becomes all the more evident, while studying the rough drafts of the poem:

The world fell while its masters
had gone wild

and

Not by that storm am I perplexed
But by the storm that seems to
shake mankind.43

But he abandons these lines as it takes him away from the central theme. Though, in doing so, he is not able to shake off the gloom which pervades the entire poem. The dark and sombre mood of the poet emanates from his concern of the violence bordering on self-destruction in the entire world. Consequently, he is concerned about the fate of his daughter who will have to fend for herself in these perilous times.

The eternal conflict present in Yeats's mind was trying to find the truth in life. This can be seen here as he contrasts the images of tranquility and violence against each other. "The haystack and roof-levelling wind" is
contrasted with "Gregory's wood" and "one bare hill." There is also a sharp contrast between the blissful unconcern of the sleeping child and the storm raging outside and the reader also questions himself about the reason of this unnecessary violence which has always been prevalent in the world. The "haystack-and-roof-levelling wind," bred on the Atlantic, screaming upon the towers, reminds one of the Biblical flood and imminent inundation. It foreshadows the sorrows and vicissitudes of the real world and also symbolizes the turbulence in the poet's own mind. The only hope, in the disorder of the contemporary civilization is the poet's reaffirmation in the aristocratic ideals and values. The tree is a symbol of self-fulfilment of inner life which in turn, is secured from constancy and tradition, as is symbolized in these lines:

How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

(SP, p. 103)

Yeats's life and art -- both were a result of the conflict inside him. As Rajan says:

Yeats's poetry achieves the self-conquest which he himself called style by a sensitive engaging of extremities, in which commitment to either extremity is avoided and the poem grows out of the creative tension between them. His poetry succeeds, in other words, because it is securely the poetry of the mainstream.44

This conflict arose out of his involvement with life and history. Even though history is a failure, he
strives for an alternate synthesis in his poetry and life. He looked upon art as the only form of abstraction that did not demand the rejection of the physical world and had a high opinion about the role of art in life. All art, according to him sprang from life. So, in one sense, one can say, art is inferior to life as it is inanimate and can only mirror life at its best and can never possess the vitality, richness and pulsation of life. On the other hand, art could crystallize the thought of permanence in a world of mutuality, as it does in Byzantium. The image of "The Young, In one another's arms" (SP, p. 104), freezes for all time to come the exciting moment of the young lovers. The achievement of art in Byzantium meant to him the embodiment of long striving after mathematical perfection of form which had contact with God and thus surpassed the beauty of the "Grecian Urn."

Yeats also thought of Byzantium as a symbol of Unity of Being in all aspects of life. He wrote in A Vision that in Byzantium, history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one. This idea perhaps had its origin in Synge's remark to him which is quoted in his Autobiographies, "We should unite stoicism, asceticism and ecstasy. Two of them have often come together, but the three never" (Autobiographies, p.509). Therefore, Byzantium symbolized to Yeats the ideal state in the development of
civilization. The great contraries of youth and age, life and death, mutuability and permanence, nature and art depend on each other for completion. The conflict is resolved partially in his search for a solution where one achieves Unity of Being. He confirms this view in a passage which he wrote for a broadcast over the B.B.C., Belfast on 8 September, 1931:

Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul and some of my thoughts upon that subject, I have put into a poem called 'Sailing to Byzantium'. When Irishmen were illuminating the Book of Kells and making the jewelled croziers in the National Museum, Byzantium was the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy so I symbolize the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city.

The poem is also concerned with his response to old age. The image of old age contrasts with the intensely sensual images in the opening stanza. The sensual music of the youth is reflected in the soul which sings to redeem its tattered body. Standing in the holy fires of reality, the sages incarnate both energy and stillness. The old men appeal to these sages to purge away the last remnants of sensuality as the old man cannot be a singer of the sensuous world without appearing ridiculous:

0 sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul (SP, p.104).

The image of the sensuous old man has its roots in the heroic proportions of William Pollexfen -- Yeats's
grandfather. He was an abiding influence on Yeats and is rooted in Yeats's memory as a semi-legendary figure. He wonders in "Reveries" if the delight manifest in passionate men in his plays has its origin in the memory of his grandfather. Again, he mentions in "The Trembling of the Veil" that he sought out William Morris as a friend because of his resemblance to his "old grandfather in Sligo" (Autobiographies, p.9 & p.141).

The physiological process of becoming old in Yeats's mind conjoins with the everlasting conflict in him between natural and the supernatural manifesting itself in his Byzantine poems. Thus the state of soul which is represented by Byzantium is also conflicting in nature -- it attracts as well as offers resistance. Byzantium is a symbol of unity and it corresponds to that state in which man, by fully accepting his mask, strives to attain a unity anti-thetical of natural life:

Before me floats an image,  
man or shade,  
Shade more than man, more image  
than a shade,  
For Hades' bobbin bound in  
mummy-cloth  
May unwind the winding path;  
A mouth that has no moisture  
and no breath  
Breathless mouths may summon;  
I hail the superhuman;  
I call it death-in-life and  

The conflict is apparent through out in Yeats's
Autobiographies. At the heart of individual experience, there lies a conflicting dilemma which can be resolved only through the symbolic experience as in Byzantium. Olney talks of Yeats's symbolizm:

The symbolizing process is of such a nature that it includes consciousness of itself within its operation. This, Yeats would say, is the artist's way -- not out of the circle, for that is no longer necessary, but an infinite expansion outward of the circumference of the circle to include in reference the entire phenomenal world and a concentration of the circle to a point of infinite profundity and of life-giving and life-directing significance."

He achieved self-realization by surrendering to the pattern and called it completion or ecstasy or tragic joy.

Yeats also tried to evolve a meaningful pattern out of history. According to him, the present condition of human existence is the product of centuries of evolution from the dark and unconscious. Like the human body given to us at birth to be lived into, the psyche has changed and adapted and evolved to the present human state. So, at any given point of psychic evolution, man is the sum total of his own collective effort to become aware of himself in his search for a pattern encompassing this life. Individually man has nothing, but these terms to start from and to evolve a meaningful pattern from these terms. Every individual tries to do this -- change his inheritance to his living experience.

In "The Tower," Yeats responds to the felt,
experienced condition of humanity, of being a composite of body and soul, of being man and this man. Like Plato and Plotinus, he has his own response to life. Through this response, he seeks a metaphor for his experience. This state can only be known individually and in the present moment. And, according to the sufficiency of his metaphor, everyone is equally right in his response:

And I declare my faith
I mock Plotinus' thought
And cry in Plato's teeth,
Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise
Dream and so create
Translunar Paradise (SP, p. 110).

It was his life-long desire to come nearer to this truth, and he kept on moving towards this goal in his poetry as well as autobiography. He remarks to this effect, in his Autobiographies, "that all joyous or creative life is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed" (Autobiographies, p. 503).

He constructs a startling edifice instead of shoring the fragments and asserts his view in the reaffirmation of life. The artist does not lament but rejoices in the face of irrational streams of blood as he can envision the rise of the new gyres. He says in his
diary:

Every day I notice some new analogy between the long-established life of the well-born and the artist's life. We come from the permanent things and create them, and instead of old blood we have old emotions and we carry in our heads always that form of society aristocracies create now and again for some brief moment at Urbino or Versailles (Autobiographies, pp. 473-74).

It is this permanent value of art and philosophy which gives the artist power to face death with gay and glittering eyes. The roles of Hamlet, Lear and the old man were taken up by him as he felt that the characters in literature are complete, whereas, in life, we are an artifice or an incompletely arc. The tragic artist conceived by Yeats is one who contemplates dispassionately the pain and suffering of life. He does not withdraw, but recognizes the tragedy through disengagement.

Out of Cavern comes a voice,
And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice'! (SP, p.180).

In "The Gyres," it is tragic joy which informs the artist whereas in "Lapis Lazuli," it is "Gaiety transfiguring all that dread." The difference is between apocalyptic and aesthetic, according to Rajan. We also realize that tragic sense can offer no solution but rather the kind of response that makes reality meaningful in the absence of a solution.47

The reader also gains an understanding of his self through the poet's response, as in his revisions, Yeats
often removed the direct personal statement and contrived to generalize the experience. This necessitated the wearing of the mask. In "The Death of Synge", Yeats says that happiness, "depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self, that all joyous or creative life, is a rebirth as something not oneself, something which has no memory and is created in a moment and perpetually renewed" (Autobiographies, p.503).

This something was called image by Yeats as it came free from the burden of personal and racial memories, while symbol, on the other hand, associated with it a number of previously linked meanings. Yeats further elaborated on the source of the energy which turns passion into power. He writes in "The Trembling of the Veil," "Every passionate man (I have nothing to do with mechanist, or philanthropist, or man whose eyes have no preference) is, as it were, linked with another age, historical or imaginary, where alone he finds images that rouse his energy" (Autobiographies, p.152).

This tells a man where to seek his opposite. The mind acts in conflict looking for its antithetical image. This is implicit in Yeats's poetry too. He holds one side of a question as right for some time, but sooner or later, conflict sets in his mind and many of his earlier poems are soul poems, scorning the possession of a body. But, later on, he finds his philosophy in the Irish folk-lore
and believes that all power is from the whole body. In "The Cutting of an Agate," he writes that:

Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrink from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories and sensations of the body.  

This feeling of a divided self was not unique to Yeats alone. It can be seen in many of Yeats’s more sensitive contemporaries. Towards the end of nineteenth century, there was a slight change in the literary concept. This is evident if one compares Byron at the beginning of the century to Wilde at the end of the century. Whereas Byron's hero rebelled against society, Wilde's hero rebelled against life. Instead of being passionate, Wilde's hero was sensitive in an abstract and contemplative manner whose passions had been tempered and refined into another self, which is consciously fabricated and posed. Ellmann remarks that the Aesthetes' conception of the artistic personality is that a man is really two men. He specifies the split personality in literature at the end of the century in two books, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1885), and The Picture of Dorian Gray, published in magazine form in 1890.  

Apart from these, the end of the nineteenth century is full of personalities like Aubrey Beardsley, Lionel Johnson, George Russell, William Sharp who believed in the duality of the self. Even James Joyce in this company
remarked that he felt compelled to cultivate the enigma of a manner. Most of these authors felt the need to adopt a pseudonym which symbolized the duality that resulted from the disassociation of the personality. George Russell adopted the initials A.E. denoting the word Aeon which came to him in a vision and it symbolized a heavenly man to whose state he aspired. Yeats writes in "Dramatis Personae":

A writer must die every day he lives, be reborn, as it is said in the Burial Service, an incorruptible self, that self opposite of all that he has named 'himself' ... and have I not sung in describing guests at Coole -- 'There one that ruffled in a manly pose, For all his timid heart' -- that one myself? Synge was a sick man picturing energy, a doomed man picturing gaiety; Lady Gregory, in her life much artifice, in her nature much pride, was born to see the glory of the world in a peasant mirror (Autobiographies, p.457).

By the end of the nineteenth century, Yeats had already published under the pseudonym Ganconagh -- his autobiographical novel. Yeats cuts himself into two parts -- dreamy nature symbolized by Sherman and in contrast to this, his counterpart, the energetic Reverend William Howard. The next time however, Yeats separates himself into two parts, he calls them Michael Roberts and Owen Atherne. These two symbolic personalities feature occasionally in his writings. He describes Robartes as having a face that is "more like a mask than a face." His features are described as "something between those of a debauchee, a saint and a peasant." These conflicting aspects symbolize the different interests in Yeats's life at that time -- his love affair with Diana
Vernon, his occultism and his affection for the simple life of Sligo. Henn remarks in this context that Yeats's personality oscillated between two poles of opposing aspects of personality; one the seeming, the present, the other he wished for. He could be a romantic lover in the great medieval tradition of Dante, and like him, present the paradox of high constancy and sin. According to Henn:

He could exploit the image of the swordsman, and take fencing lessons, and justify the opposition, in himself, of the swordsman and the saint. He could be the man of action, whose word had sent out an army, or the scholar-saint in the lonely tower that Palmer had drawn in his illustration for Il Penseroso; something of a pastoral recluse in the manner of Calvert or Morris; a politician, the 'sixty-year-old smiling public man'.

Yeats says in his Autobiographies that the poet should know all classes of men. With this thought in mind, he sometimes thought of disguising himself as a peasant or a sailor and coming into direct contact with the people. He says:

The artist grows more and more distinct, more and more a being in his own right as it were, but more and more loses grasp of the always more complex world. Some day setting out to find knowledge, like some pilgrim to the Holy Land, he will become the most romantic of characters. He will play with all masks (Autobiographies, p.470).

Yeats tried to model himself on the literary figures of Blake, Spenser, Dante, Nietzsche, Ibsen. However, he did not do this blindly. He studied their ideas well, before he adopted them as his own. He took only those ideas
which blended with his ideas of self. He followed Blake's fidelity to outline, from Nietzsche — he inherited the conflicting movements of the soul, from Dante — Unity of Being and so on.

It is clear that Yeats modelled his personality on some qualities of previous poets, politicians and philosophers. But, even finding kinship with Dante, Donne, Swift, Berkley was not sufficient for Yeats — he needed something more. And that was the invention of some puppet figures that might deceive the reader into thinking of them as real beings. He could express all his thoughts and rationalize himself through the figures of Michael Robartes, Owen Atherne, Kusta-Ben-Luka.

But, reality was also to be found somewhere between these assumed personalities. The conflict is there — the internal conflict in himself of which poetry is made and the external conflict with circumstances, the Body of Fate, to progress, towards perfection of knowledge. Due to this conflict, the poet assumes the mask — to keep the poetic personality intact and so creates puppet figures.

Yeats resolved this conflict by always searching for unity — "No sooner had he pulled himself into two parts and set them at odds than he wanted to make peace between them, seeking the centre that he fled from in a continual competition with himself." He consciously worked towards maintaining unity in everything he did. His poetry is like
a tree, ever changing but remaining the same, like his
growth of the self. To put it in his own words, "though
leaves are many, the root is one." He does not obliterate
the personal element altogether, but by sharing the
experience with others, he gives it a universal appeal. The
reader, too, subconsciously identifies himself with the "we"
pronoun.

This identification with the reader came after
repeated revisions and re-writings of his poems.
Stallworthy notes in this respect, "An important and
consistent feature of Yeats's revision is his tendency to
cut the material with which he begins; seldom to add to it.
He works inwards towards a centre, rather than outwards and
away from it."52

These revisions or prunings reveal to the reader
that Yeats was always sharpening his pruning knife, used
with utmost care on "any dead wood and inessential detail:
they show that of all the tools in the poet's workshop the
most important is a razor-sharp-self-critical faculty."53

This self-critical faculty is revealed throughout
his Autobiographies. It was this philosophical treatise
which gave his work a kind of immortality. As his father
said to him, "You would be a philosopher and are really a
poet" (Autobiographies, p.45). Wisdom abounds in his work
-- not passive, serene wisdom but passionate and active
wisdom. It is active because he was aware of the shortcomings and failures of the society he lived in. And, it was not possible for him to find any solution to it. As a result, it gave rise to an anger which is evident in his later works:

Grant me an old man's frenzy,
Myself I must remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till Truth obeyed his call (SP, p. 183).

This wisdom or anger in Yeats accumulated over the years. It is not evident in his earlier poetry which leans towards Celtic twilight and Romanticism. It built up slowly over the years with the changes in the structure and nature of the society which was not very pleasant.

It was not possible for anyone to adapt himself to the changes completely and Yeats still had his roots in the nineteenth century. That is why, perhaps, he is called "the last romantic." He also compares his present self with the past self:

You think it horrible that
lust and rage
Should dance attendance upon my
old age;
They were not such a plague
When I was young;
What else have I to spur
me into song? (SP, p. 190).

He peeps into his own experiences, which he concludes originated in "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" and out of this tension and conflict emerged his
creative element. As Rajan says, "Yeats's interest is less in knowledge than in how man lives his knowledge. 'Man can embody truth but he cannot know it' is his closing conviction stated in the last of his letters. His poetry is the record of that embodiment."54 His last poem "Under Ben Bulben" also embodies his philosophy of life in his poetry. According to Stallworthy, the poem:

is a fitting conclusion to the life and work of a poet whose life long concern was to 'hammer (his) thoughts into unity'. It brings full circle the poetic career of one for whom the circle was a dominant symbol. The themes and interests of his early manhood -- Irish folk-lore and history, the occult, Shelley, Blake and the English Romantic painters of the late nineteenth century fit like tessaræ into the mosaic pattern of his later 'system'. As Michael Angelo though dead, continues to influence the living with heroic images 'On the Sistine Chapel Roof', so Yeats still speaks from 'Under Ben Bulben'.55

The poem is a climax of the earlier thoughts and meditations. It presents the multi-faceted personality of Yeats -- his desire to understand life through mysticism and his belief in the mask. He believed that every man is equipped with double consciousness. As he said in a letter to Ethel Mannin, written only three months before his death, "To me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other's life live each other's death. This is true of life and death themselves."56

He approaches death fearlessly as he approached life throughout -- with the cold dispassion of high
breeding. In Irish idiom, the horseman belongs to aristocracy and symbolizes breeding, strength and virility. The epitaph also sums up the life of Yeats -- the life he had visualised would make him a great man.

Reviewing his work, one is left with a feeling that he dramatized his life openly in his works in the manner of Dante, Donne and Blake. He achieved this, not by describing the events in his life -- but, in such a way that his general personality and the total weight of his work would get into people's minds. To realize this, he constantly revised and improved his poems and plays, so that he could capture his self, however momentary and elusive in his works. He wrote in 1909 in his diary, "Whatever happens, I must go on that there may be a man behind the lines already written; I cast the die long ago and must be true to the cast" (Autobiographies, p.485).

This makes Yeats and his books consubstantial. His life was inseparable from his lifework -- that is, his poetry as well as prose. His entire work -- especially his poetry and his Autobiographies is the expression of his inner development, for it was his commitment to the contention of his unconscious which formed Yeats the person and also produced these changes in him. Personal experience and development lie cheek by jowl with his theory of poetry and act as an excellent guide in demonstrating the source of his ideas and how they develop. The various phases in his poetry can be regarded as stations along the journey of
his life towards reaching the final goal of Unity of Being. Yeats's achievement in his Autobiographies lies in the true representation of his quest and this is also seen clearly in the stylistic verve in his poetry which exactly mirrors the process of becoming in his Autobiographies. We see Yeats completing himself in the completion of his portrait -- both in his life and his work. The two move hand in hand -- the man becoming complete as the metaphor describes and defines him; the poetry developing till it comes to its richest maturity. In the end we have both the fact of existence and the metaphor -- a double creation. His poetry becomes an expressive vehicle of his experience which enriches his life with a meaning.

Poetry was Yeats's raison d'être and he devoted himself to his art with a wholeheartedness few have been capable of. Sometimes, naturally, he was not very sure about his art, but one thing is very sure about him -- that he kept on growing, gaining in strength right till the end. In fact, his later work represents the consummation of a long and fruitful poetic career and shows us how a poet can and should develop. T.S. Eliot paid a handsome tribute to Yeats on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. He wrote in a commentary in "The Criterion":

I can think of no poet, not even among the greatest, who has shown a longer period of development than Yeats. ... Development to his extent is not merely genius, it is character, and it sets a standard which his juniors should seek to emulate without hoping to equal.57
NOTES


5. Ibid., p. 120.


15. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, p. 509.

16. W.B. Yeats, Selected Poetry, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan Books, 1974), p. 200. All subsequent quotations from the book are from this edition and will be indicated by the initials SP and a page number in parentheses.


22. W.B. Yeats, *Selected Criticism*, p. 263.
28. Ibid., p. 16.
35. Ibid., p. 12.


43. Ibid., p.32.

44. Balachandra Rajan, p.124.


47. Balachandra Rajan, p.176.


53. Ibid., p.253.


