CHAPTER II

YEATS'S THEORY OF POETIC DRAMA
W.B. Yeats was one of the two greatest innovators of poetic drama in English in the twentieth century. The other was T.S. Eliot who, evincing a deep awareness of his predecessor's achievement, exhorted his fellow dramatic poets "to hold fast to certain principles" advocated by Yeats throughout his poetic/dramatic career. These principles are embodied in a complex of reflections upon thematic and formal aspects of poetic drama. Keeping in view its coherence, it is not wrong to call this complex as The Poetics of W.B. Yeats.

This Poetics provides an image of poetic drama, the following aspects of which are extremely important:

i) His definition of poetic drama and the world-vision "which satisfies the whole being"*

ii) His concern with theme as shown by the rejection of mood reflected by Maeterlinck's drama

iii) His plea for the observance of
   a) Rhythm
   b) Balance
   c) Pattern
   d) Imagery

iv) His emphasis upon stylisation through

a) Ritual  
b) Mask  
c) Music  
d) Dance

v) His concern with stage-craft as expressed through his emphasis upon
   a) Symbolical stage  
   b) Un-Stanislavskian actors

vi) His rejection of
   a) Realistic portrayal  
   b) Allegorical abstraction  
   c) Maeterlinkean statis

vii) His emphasis upon articulation through
   a) Lyric mode  
   b) Tragic tone

viii) His definition of tragic pleasure as
   a) Reverie  
   b) Joy  
   c) Ecstasy  
   d) Gaiety

ix) His acceptance of the Noh play of Japan as a model for his dramatic art.

As is evident from the above synopsis, The Poetics of W.B. Yeats is organically related to his world-vision in spite of the fact that Yeats sometimes denies that a philosophy of life helps in creating a work of art or literature. Even though at one place he quotes Goethe to the effect that "a poet needs all philosophy but he must keep it out of his work", he wants the creative process to have a philosophical matrix. "All writers", says Yeats,

"all artists of any kind, in so far as they have had any philosophical or critical power, perhaps in just so far
as they have been deliberate artists at all, have had some philosophy, some criticism of their art; and it has often been this philosophy ... that has evoked his most startling inspiration, calling from outer life, some portion of the divine life, or of the buried reality, which could alone what extinguish in the emotions their philosophy or their criticism would extinguish in the intellect."

Though pontifical this statement does not subordinate his Poetics to his world-vision but only creates a nexus between the two. As a result, a study of his world-vision becomes imperative for the grasp of his Poetics.

II

The philosophy that evoked Yeats's inspiration can best be studied in such prose-writings of his as Per Amica Silentia's Lunae, The Letters and above all A Vision. There is much that is esoteric in these texts along with historical and aesthetic elements. These elements do not form "a disturbing mixture" as Eric Heller has alleged, but offer a coherent pattern, a common matrix. It is, again, not mystical heterodoxy as F.A.C. Wilson has averred nor the creative process as Helen Vendler has tried to establish. Mystical and aesthetic proportions it definitely

1. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 P.154
2. Eric Heller, 'Yeats and Nietzsche', Encounter, December 1969 P.68
has, but it cannot be said to grow from them. It imbibes their influence no doubt, but if at all it grows from anything it is Yeats's awareness of the human situation which he regards as "subjective dialogue" with history through "elliptical counterpoint."

In trying to be historical it seeks the help of philosophical reflections, and in trying to be philosophical it runs after historical substance. But actually neither his philosophy becomes historical nor history gets identified with philosophy. Rather, as happens in Vico, Nietzsche and Spengler, history is reduced to "a mystical thing, part mythology, part zodiac" and philosophy with all its proportions, is brought to the level of alchemy.

The Zodiac and alchemy are valid in magical lore because the former seeks to negate time and history by imposing upon reality an inviolable rhythm of unvarying repetition and the latter tries to destroy praxis or nexus of thought and action by aiming at an immediate identification with the cosmic forces. Their possibility can only be contemplated in magic, "the three doctrines" of which according to Yeats are:

i) that the borders of our mind are ever-shifting and that many minds can overflow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind or single energy.

ii) That the borders of our memories are ever-shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

iii) That the great mind and memory can be evoked by symbols.

1. Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, Chapel Hill 1964 PP.8, 6
2. T.W. Adorno, 'Was Spengler right?', Encounter, 1966 P.28
3. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 P.28
These three doctrines form the mode through which Yeats enters into subjective dialogue with his zodiac-like concept of history. It immediately leads him to a simultaneous study of two areas, the macrocosm and the microcosm — beyond the human mind and within it respectively. While studying the macrocosm, he tries to determine its structure in which space is a primary and time a secondary factor. This determination takes him to the analysis of its substance wherein he tries to ascertain the extent to which it is immanent or transcendent or both at the same time. While studying the microcosm he determines its microstructure and reflects upon its ontological situation. Further, he ponders over the meta-psychic change produced in the macrocosm by the gyral change and the extent to which it can comprehend and recreate reality.

Yeats envisions the macrocosm as the Zodiac or the Great Wheel which instead of being a time-space continuum, is a meta-structure. It is all the time permeated by two types of motions, the gyral and the circular, which mark respectively its interior and exterior. The gyral motion shows how its interior configurates itself as a structure comprising two contrapuntal systems alternately becoming primary and antithetical through the recurrence of the interpenetrating but contrary gyres. The circular motion shows how the exterior goes on adjusting itself to the change emanating from the interior.

For Yeats the concept of the gyral motion owes its origin to Swedenborg's notion that the forms of geometry can have symbolic relation with the macrocosmic reality. Though mentioned in the mystical discourses of Alemon, Aquinas and Macrobius, the forms of geometry referred to
above, are the double cones of Swedenborg. Combining lines with planes, they interpenetrate, the apex of each vortex in the middle of the other's base. As one cone increases its sphere, the other decreases it — one within the other always.

Yeats adopts the double cone system of Swedenborg but to make it fully relevant to his vision he makes it the system of what Melchiori has called "the double gyre". A cone is two-dimensional but a gyre is three-dimensional. As a result of the reproduction of the third dimension, it becomes "a movement along a spiral drawn on the surface of a cone — a circular movement starting at the base and narrowing till it reaches the point, or starting from the point and widening all the way to the base." Significantly "at the end of the movement there is a sudden prodigious and terrifying change: the base becomes the point and the point the base." Consequently the double gyre does not remain a schematic system denoting change in the appearance only but becomes a vital pattern symbolising change in the whole of life. Thereby Yeats imparts plurisignificance to the double gyre as a result of which it becomes a symbol of change at the level of civilisation as well as that of the individual. As Yeats has disclosed to Ethel Mannin, he sees things "double, doubled in history, world history, personal history," owing this doubling no doubt to the pattern of the contrary but inter-penetrating gyres. According to Northrop Frye's exploration man-woman relationship also comes within the signifying power of this gyral

pattern because "the gyre is, of course, also a sexual symbol, male on the outside and female on the inside." In this way Yeats makes Swedenborg's cones three-dimensional and polyvalent which then become capable of symbolising reality simultaneously at the impersonal, the inter-personal and the intra-personal levels.

Corresponding to its three-dimensional and polyvalent structure, the double gyre is a mode of operation that Yeats devises on the testimony of Empedocles, Heraclitus, Blake and Nietzsche. According to Yeats the broad scheme of its operation is according to the vision of Empedocles, i.e., "When Discord — has fallen into the lowest depth of the vortex — Concord has reached the centre, into it do all things come together so as to be only one, not all at once but gradually from different quarters, and as they come Discord retires to the extreme boundary — in proportion as it runs out, Concord in a soft immortal stream runs in."

As it is, this mode of operation is inanimate, insubstantial and abstract. To make it animate, substantial and concrete, he turns to Heraclitus, Blake and Nietzsche. Heraclitus makes the Empedoclean mode animate by reading into it the significance of the vision: "Dying each other's life, living each other's death." Yeats correlates the

3. Ibid

According to Ettore Bignone, Empedocles (Turin 1916 P.548) Empedocles conceives of the alternate supremacy of these two opposing principles by naming them as philia and neikos.

3. Ibid
Heraclitean vision to the operation of the double gyre as a result of which it becomes apocalyptic and "the purpose of an apocalypse" as Harold Bloom has observed, "is to reveal the truth." To make it substantial and thereby further revelative of truth, Yeats brings it near to Blake's principle of the contraries according to which there is no progression without the contraries. To make it relevant to his vision, Yeats emphasises the identity of the gyres with contraries and ignores the significance of the dialectic as implicit in Progression. Thus while making use of Blake's notion, Yeats salvages it of its dialectic and makes it circular to enable it to accord fully with his concept of the zodiac or the Great Wheel. Showing himself to be quite discerning on one hand but non-dialectical on the other, he interprets dialectical figure as though it were cyclic in comparison with Blake who is completely dialectical. Not satisfied with its apocalyptic, substantial and cyclical operation, he tries to integrate into it the immanence of Nietzsche's vision:

"All things pass, all things return, eternally turns the wheel of Being .... In each Now, Being begins; round each Here turns the sphere of There. The centre is everywhere. Bent is the path of eternity."

Nietzsche's immanence does impart concreteness to the gyral vision of Yeats but it does not render it immanent. So Yeats's three-dimensional and polyvalent gyral vision becomes apocalyptic substantial, substantial and cyclical.

cyclical and concrete but not historically immanent. It is because it
dispenses with the dialectic which alone is capable of rendering a vision
immanent and historical at the same time. This lack of immanence is
attested to by the fact that beyond the conflicting and contradictory
vortices of gyres, Yeats looks to the possibility when "The Zodiac is
changed into a sphere."  

The sphere is associated in Yeats's terminology "with something
that precedes and transcends the temporal movement of the gyres." In
his creative writings Yeats denotes it by the Mundane Egg, and in
A Vision by the Thirteenth Cone. Miss Virginia Moore calls the
transcendence of the Zodiac into the sphere as contradictory because the
sphere represents a condition beyond conflict and beyond time and there
can be "no degrees of wholeness, nor sequences in timeliness." Her
objection is valid so far as the sequential structure of the Thirteenth
Cone is concerned but there is nothing contradictory in its turning
into a timeless sphere beyond the Great Wheel. All the same the
prefunctory way in which Yeats has envisioned it, reveals that it is
fundamentally distinct from Transcendence found in the religion and
philosophy of the Orient. There it is Nirvana or beatific vision that
is at the centre of life while in Yeats it is life itself that is the
centre and the apocalypse or the beatific vision is only a distinct

1950 P.311


3. Virginia Moore, The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats's Search for Reality,
New York 1954 PP.366-367
horizon beyond it. Naturally, his world-vision deals with "conflict tension, immersion and process" rather than with "release from time" except in so far as this release may be implicit in immersion.

The gyral pattern into which Yeats fits reality, history and life, tends to make his vision deterministic though not so rigorously and thoroughly as the biological vision of Vico and the organismic vision of Spengler. It is only partially deterministic and its saving grace lies in the cyclical motion that creates the scope where "the acceptance of history may become one with freedom and creativity." The cyclical motion circumscribes the gyral motion and is subject to influence from it and in turn influences it. The cyclical motion divides the Great Wheel into twenty eight phases of the moon, the first and the fifteenth phases being abstractions because they stand for complete objectivity and complete subjectivity. As it proceeds from the first phase to the fifteenth, the impersonal, inter-personal and intra-personal levels of life imbibe the factors of discord and as it progresses from phase fifteen to phase twenty eight, the factors of discord are replaced by those of concord.

Oscillating thus between the primary and the antithetical phases, the circular motion does correspond with the gyral motion but in no way does it become a secondary surrogate of it. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it makes imperative the genesis of divinities. The cyclical motion circumscribes the gyral motion and at the time of transition of the gyres to the cycle individuals in tune with the

1. Frank Lentricchia, *The Gaiety of Language*, Berkley 1968 P.75
ascendant gyre cannot surge out into the world, but delve deep
into themselves in search of their Daimon. Daimon is the ultimate self
of man and man's pursuit of it through such psycho-metaphysical categories
as Body of Mate, Mask, Will and Creative Mind, bestows a Unity of Being
on the divinities. Since Unity of Being can flourish only in Unity of
Culture which is next to impossible, the divinities in "most effective
moments" or "peak experiences" articulate the antithetical or primary
transition occurring in reality and through their articulations
transfigure their distinctive and dignified lives into eternal gestures.

When the divinity has transfigured himself thus, he attains
correspondence with Anima Mundi or Spiritus Mundi which in substance
and function is similar to the Collective Unconscious of Jung. As Denis
Donoghue has observed it is "the subjective equivalent of history, a
nation's life in symbols." Though not the creation of an individual,
it responds to his call because it is the vortex containing as images
all that the gyral and circular motions have brought into existence.
When an individual becomes a divinity and attains correspondence with
the Anima Mundi, he attains a vision that transcends the boundaries of
history. Seeing through its incompleteness, he tries to reach out into
eternity. The distinction between history and myth is blurred with
history becoming what Croce has called "anterior history." Actually

3. Denis Donoghue, Yeats, Fontana London 1971 P.73
4. Bendetto Croce, History (translated by Douglas Ainslie), New York
   1960 P.25

As Joseph Hone in W.B.Yeats, 1865-1939 (PP.393-394) and
Thomas R.Whitaker in Swan and Shadow (PP.79-80) make explicit
Yeats exulted over Croce's ideas which the poet came across
anterior history is the "spiritual which is detaching itself from the temporal and distinguishing itself as autonomous of the latter." In other words, it is a diaspora of the interior of a divinity, taking actual history as a point of departure for its articulation.

The flourishing of anterior history upon the terrain of actual history makes Yeats's world-vision overwhelmingly spatial. Though the exterior space of history is the origin of the interior space of myth, it is ultimately myth that transfigures history. So time pervades it in the spatialized form, in the exterior as chronological time denoting the duration of the gyral and the circular motion, and in the interior as vertical time but reduced to a transfigured moment that resists the onrush of the chronological time.

(III)

Upon the basis of the above explication, Yeats's world-vision tends primarily to be (a) anti-historical, (b) magical, (c) spatial, (d) folkloric, (e) individualistic. Corresponding to it is his concept of the poetic drama that has as its essential aspects (a) the unity of contraries, (b) the polyvalent symbolism, (c) the emotion of the multitude, (d) the racial aspect of tradition, (e) the anthropological and ontological protagonist. The contraries, of which unity is achieved in poetic drama,

"divide roughly into the active and the contemplative,

the expanding and the contracting, the surge of the experiential world swept back, like a tide by the containment of form; or say Becoming, the Heraclitean flux checked by Plato's philosophy of Being — Each pairing suggests the rough and moving world of men and actions set against the quiet, intensive, ascetic world of discipline and containment."

These contraries prevail at all levels of life. They can be hammered into a unity through the use of the polyvalent symbol rather than that of the architectural ensemble which is apt to crowd it with large casts of characters, a variety of plots and a multitude of ideas and emotions. The polyvalent symbol is exfoliative and capable of evoking a multiplicity of meanings indicative of the wheel-within-wheel nature of the reality of Yeats's world-vision.

The polyvalent symbol is the masterful image that grows in the human mind due to its correspondence with the Anima Mundi. It can be "inherent" as well as "arbitrary". When it is inherent, naturally and spontaneously, it evokes a multiplicity of meanings, but when arbitrary it subsumes so much of experimental awareness that it becomes universal like the masterful image. In this way a symbol becomes polyvalent in either way, by evoking from the Great Mind and Memory response to the call of the human mind, or by drawing so much intensity from the human mind and memory that it becomes plurisignificant like the masterful images whose power Yeats exults as under:

1. Edward Engelberg, The Vast Design, Toronto 1965
2. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961
Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?¹

Anima Mundi has its spiritual analogue in "the emotion of the multitude" that reverberates in the polyvalent symbol hammering the multiple contraries into a unity. The emotion of the multitude is not a multitude of emotions that may be evoked by an architectural pattern. Instead, it is a multitudinous emotion arising with primordial power from the depths of the Great Mind and Memory.

According to Yeats, the emotion of the multitude, reverberates from the Greek as well as the Shakespearean drama. In the Greek drama, this reverberation is created through the chorus which apparently may seem to be a gathering of people on the stage but are essentially a device for articulating the suspicions and apprehensions of the autochthonous community. In the Shakespearean drama this reverberation is created in a subtler way through the use of the sub-plot which frequently copies the main plot "much as a shadow upon the wall copies one's body in the fire-light." Weaving itself into the main plot sometimes in an obvious and sometimes in a subtle way, it becomes "the main plot working itself out in more ordinary men and women, and so doubly calling before us the image of the multitude." In drama according to the Poetics of Yeats, reverberation can be created through the use of symbols, a preliminary use of which is to be seen in the

2. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 P.216
plays of Ibsen and Maeterlinck. The symbols set the mind wandering from idea to idea and feeling to feeling provided they are polyvalent and plurisignificant like the masterful images.

For the articulation of the emotion of the multitude, the dramatic poet has to enlist the aid of tradition. In Yeats' tradition is unique in two ways: firstly, it respects "only race and has little care for society"; secondly it is "oral, the continuity of voice from generation to generation". Owing to this racial and oral uniqueness, tradition, for Yeats, embraces the whole of national life, and, seeking articulation through heroic legends, half-mythological stories and half-philosophical folk-beliefs, reverberates in the minds of the people irrespective of their caste, class and character. In other words, it requires the people to form an undifferentiated humanity with a universal folk-soul and thus blurs the distinction between myth and history. In Yeats's sense of the word a traditional writing, and for that matter poetic drama, is a revelation of "great and complicated inheritance of images which written literature has substituted for the greater and more complex inheritance of the spoken tradition." At its most poetic level, it adds to this inheritance "some new heraldic images gathered from the lips of the common people."

The dramatic poet cannot, however, use this inheritance in an antiquarian way. It requires to be transmuted through his personal vision which should be perceptual and conceptual at the same time,

1. Denis Donoghue, Yeats, Fontana London 1971 PP. 28, 27
turning inward to the realm of the subjective (fancies and preconscious images) and replacing observation by vision, analysis by synthesis and reality by super-reality; and expanding outward to explore legends, folktales and mythological stories. Ultimately, the internal necessity of perception becomes parallel with the external necessity of conception, creating a poetic drama that is heraldic and bound to tradition, and enables the inflow of the Great Mind and Memory into the human mind and memory.

In this poetic drama the past becomes alive so as to cause time to become spatial and space to become interior. Not observing the growth of past-present-future, time becomes past-centred into which the present and the future are almost annihilated. Evidently, its pattern does not attain an apocalyptic ending by starting on an incipient note but has the incipient note inherent in the apocalyptic ending. Since its beginning is in its ending, it does not have much exterior space for horizontal complexity to show itself through the events of dramatic action. In other words, vertical time in it does not confront horizontal time, it only tries to gain a moment of simultaneity with it. Thus this drama configurates the past and reads authentic significance into the present and the future only if the past submerges them apocalyptically into itself.

Due to the primacy of the past, character in this drama does not realize its identity through a change developing from its thought and action. It is iconic instead, and tries to identify itself with its anthropological archetype and cultural prototype. In a way its
identity and role correspond with those of man in the world-vision of Yeats where man is a dimension of history as history is a dimension of the universe. Evidently, man in it is not a historical being but is partly ontological and partly an anthropological being. Similar is the state of characters, especially the divinities who, as harlots, fools, blind men, warriors, saints and swordmen live in the past and have no resilience against the present and the future. As is told in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', all reduce themselves to:

"Character isolated by a deed
To engross the present and dominate memory."

IV

Being overwhelmingly spatial, this drama pivots itself singularly on dramatic conflict. Yet it does not regard conflict as the centre of dramatic movement, which it reduces to a singular unity depriving the dramatic pattern of the movement that is otherwise integral to it. Naturally, Yeats seems to uphold for drama what Wagner has called "a supreme moment of action" in which all motives "are to be condensed and absorbed into one." Most probably Wagner had borrowed


The warrior and the swordman are no less iconic and spatial because by engrossing the present they also fall to create the future. Yeats's exclamation, "the swordman throughout repudiates the saint, but not without vacillation" (W.B.Yeats quoted by Harold Bloom, P.394) does not alter this observation. Essentially Yeats thinks of them as Rilke does according to whom "......the Hero's strangely akin to the youthfully dead. Continuance doesn't concern him." (Duino Elegies, P.55).

this notion from Lessing who finds that "when Laocoon sighs, the imagination can hear him shriek but if she shrieks, she cannot mount a step higher." Thus the sigh of Laocoon reverberates through space and lends it intensity. So Yeats expects poetic drama in its moment of supreme action to reverberate with a spatial intensity.

Yeats does not regard the supreme moment of action as one of creative evolution which according to Bergson implies "a continual recording of duration, a persistence of the past in the present, and so an appearance ---- of organic memory." According to Yeats the present is a dimension of the past that can be brought to bear upon human awareness, but not through mémoire involonataire which is a creative analogue of the Time-philosophy of Bergson. Yeats regards mémoire involonataire as reduction that reduces a work of literature (for that matter poetic drama) to a texture of reminiscence, a Penelope's tapestry of man's memory. Instead, Yeats affirms mémoire volontaire which because it is symbolical is the creative analogue of Jung's depth psychology and achieves the inflow of the Great Mind and Memory into human mind and memory.

Apparently multitudinous, this inflow is essentially controllable. In fact, the supreme moment of action arouses some basic passions which hold in tension the associative passions termed by Yeats "important or harmonious". Their symbiosis makes the dramatic pattern

2. Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, London 1960 P.120
symmetrical cancelling out all those passions that are apt to make it asymmetrical. The emergent pattern has unity, but not immanence and the way in which it is achieved, is described by Yeats with reference to painting as under:

All sounds, all colours, all forms —— evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions or —— call down among us certain disembodied powers —— we call emotions, and when sound and colour and form are in a musical relation —— to one another, they become as it were one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. The same relation exists between all portions of every work of art.¹

This unity is distinct from the abstract and cumulative unity of the allegorical and the representational pattern. As explained by him in his essays, 'The Philosophy of Shelley', 'Spenser' and 'William Blake and his Illustrations to The Divine Comedy', the allegorical form comes to the fore when the multiple unity of a work of art (of poetic drama as a corollary) becomes surfacial. Almost inevitably characters become ephemeral and the pattern loses its strength to echo the multitudinous emotion.

In the representational form the passions are usually not hammered into a unity that may assume "the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, the perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy and

¹ W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 PP.156-157
marmorean stillness." Accordingly, it is "superficial or deliberately argumentative." It gives the impression of being impassioned only when a character is "gushing and sentimental". Mostly this happens in a thesis-play for "where there is a thesis, people can grow hot in argument."

Yeats's critique of the representational technique is fully applicable only to the naturalistic form though he has extended it to the realistic form in general. Thus he fails to view the dimensions added to it by expressionism and surrealism, etc. However, he leans too much to the other side while conceding to Synge more greatness than he actually deserves when he affirms that Synge masters the representational technique in such a way that it transcends its inherent limitations and his drama becomes something higher than an imitation of life.

As in his evaluation of Synge, Yeats seems to exaggerate the importance of lyricism in poetic drama. Lyrical statis and marmorean stillness are basic to poetic drama but they are not its singular facets. In an intra-structural way he equates them with overflowing turbulent energy that effects an organic fusion of statis and movement. In this respect Yeats's concept is parallel to Nietzsche's concept of "the Apollonian" and "the Dionysiac" and Spengler's concept of "the Apollonian" and "the Faustian". According to Nietzsche "Dionysos speaks the language of Apollo, but Apollo, finally, the language of Dionysos." Similarly, for Spengler the Apollonian and the Faustian are to each other as "body

---

2. Friederich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (translated by Francis Golffing), New York 1956, P.131
and space, instant and history, foreground and background — proportion
and relation.* Yeats is however of this view in the middle period of
his creative writing and critical reflection. In the beginning he looks
at them only as identifying epipsychical abstractions*, and towards the
end as the contrary but frozen aspects of sculpture. Nevertheless, the
fusion of stillness and movement can be called the core of Yeats's drama
because the earlier and later changes imparted to by him are its
variations only.

On account of this fusion, this kind of poetic drama does not
uphold dramatic action to the extent to which it is upheld in the Greek
and the Shakespearean drama. It makes use of action, not for communicating
dramatic experience, but for accentuating the interior variety of dramatic
articulation. Interior variety can remain tense only if it is not
overwhelmed with the external bulk of dramatic action. So action in this
drama is required to be symbolical and allusive and not mimetic and
illusive. It is further required to comprise significant movements
because only they can communicate interior variety without waste and emphasis.

Naturally Yeats is responsive to the immobile and mobile drama
of Maeterlinck and Wagner. He approves the slowing up of dramatic action

1. Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West (abridged edition), London
   1961 PP.145,148
2. George Bornstein, Yeats and Shelley, Chicago 1970 P.156

The fusion of lyrical static and dramatic movement has been
thoroughly discussed in three books: Donald A.Stauffer's
W.E.Yeats:Self-Critic (University of California Press, 1951)
and Edward Engelberg's The Vast Design (Toronto 1965). While
Stauffer holds lyrical static to be primary in the sensibility
of Yeats, Parkinson and Engelberg bring out the fusion that
it attains with dramatic movement.
in Maeterlinck but disapproves of his characters which, fixed in time as persons fixed in photographs, look like "faint souls, naked and pathetic shadows already half vapour and sighing to one another upon the border of the last abyss." Similarly, he believes with Wagner that drama must project "image of all man's energy ... a strengthening of a moment of action," but he does not feel that this kind of mobility can be achieved by becoming a word-tone-poet as Wagner excels in becoming. He feels that it can better be achieved by a lyrical dramatic poet who does not place drama at the mercy of myth, music, dance, sculpture and mask though he recommends their use for intensifying its poetic and dramatic potential.

V

Moment of supreme action and fusion of motion and stillness bring myth, ritual, rhythm, mask, music, dance and sculpture integrally into the pattern of poetic drama. Holding to Jung's concept of the myth, Yeats feels that arising from primordial archetypes, it transcends the bounds of space and time and takes "the whole mankind into its naked arms." He expresses a similar belief when in an exclamatory tone he remarks, "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill!"

1. W.B. Yeats, Selected Criticism, New York 1964, P.39
4. Ibid, P.10
However, the poetic drama of Yeats's concept does not require myth with its whole movement. Rather it concerns itself with the moment of supreme action, not bothering for the total movement that may flow from that moment. What it requires most is a mythical situation acquired through the ritual that makes the human mind place total emphasis on character and situation. Then "the character, who delights us, may commit murder like Macbeth, or fly the battlefield as did Antony, or betray his country like Coriolanus, and yet we will rejoice in every happiness that comes to him and sorrow at his death as if it were our own."

Ritualistic significance can be created by restoring to words their ancient sovereignty in which state they grow "extravagant, vehement, impetuous —— beating against the walls of the world." Yeats's emphasis upon extravagance, vehemence and impetuousness does not mean verbal cumulation and effusion. It only expresses his opposition to the reduction of language to the conceptual level because such a reduction renders sensuous images fragmentary, fleeting, uncertain and fantastic. To keep them at the passionate level it is essential to cultivate the linear, the concrete, the particular and the symbolic qualities of words because then only can the dramatic poet communicate his vision at the highest level of intensity.

Owing to his fondness for these qualities, Yeats becomes an opponent of the grand style contraposing it with what he himself has called "passionate art." Grand style emerges when a balance is achieved

1. W.B. Yeats, Plays and Controversies, London 1923 P.104
2. Ibid P.153
3. Essays and Introductions, London 1961 P.245
between the mimesis and the ideal. Invariably it is a configuration of the classical language that "is always reducible to a persuasive continuum." In other words, it configures a real language "photographed in one abstract moment in the form of grammar." As against it, passionate art is "the drowner of dykes and the confounder of understanding." It touches the world only here and there and into the places left empty it summons" rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times --- all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance."

As Raymond Bayer has pointed out, rhythm is "both perceptible and inward. It, undoubtedly, participates in duration, as this is incorporated in the movements of consciousness, but it can also be perceived as a scansion of space." It is born when the interior domain intersects the realm of things, i.e., when the metrical arrangement accords with the natural flow of language. Thus it wants syntax to be taken from a language that unites literature to all people. In other words, rhythmical syntax is required to be "abundant, resonant, beautiful, laughing, living" as Yeats finds it in the writings of Shakespeare and Blake.

From this it need not be inferred that, like Wordsworth, Yeats

---

3. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, London 1961 PP.245,243
4. Raymond Bayer, 'Essence of Rhythm' included in Reflection on Art (edited by Susan K.Langer), Baltimore 1958 P.193
advocates the simple language of the countryside. In fact, he advocates passionate language that does develop from contact with the soil but does not remain confined to autochthonous culture. In this context it is important to note that Yeats accorded forceful approval to Synge who went to the Aran islands to cultivate passionate syntax. Synge "made word and phrase dance to a very strange rhythm --- and it perfectly fits the drifting emotion, the dreaminess, the vague measureless desire for which Synge would create a dramatic form." From contact with the Aran islands, he imparted a passionate rhythm to the language of his characters but in itself it was not the language of these islands. As Yeats has very perceptively pointed out, "No Irish countryman had ever that exact rhythm in his voice but certainly if Mr Synge had been born a countryman, he would have spoken like that."

In poetic drama the characters speak passionate and rhythmical words because they are free from the limiting environment on the one side, and temperamental idiosyncrasy, on the other. While creating them, the dramatic poet is required to concentrate not upon the delineating of some habit of mind or body but upon the gathering up of all energy and passion into one human image. In short, the characters are icons or prototypes and only by being so can they withstand the onrush of environment and temperament.

To make characters icons or prototypes, it is necessary to array them in a symbolic phantasmagoria, and that can best be accomplished

1. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 PP. 301,299,300
through the mask whose epiphanic deadness transports them to a region where they look prominent and distinguished, and toned down and faded out at the same time. The mask helps them rise from the social and the psychological level to the ontological and anthropological one. Thus shaped, they exist at a level oscillating between lyrical statis and dramatic motion between marmorean stillness and overflowing turbulent energy.

The masked characters become iconic further through dance and sculpture. The essential factor of dance is intrinsic time and aesthetically it balances fluidity with unity as philosophically it parallels the whirling gyres with the Heraclitean flux of time. In this kind of drama it has neither the formal beauty of a mathematical problem nor the incongruous beauty of a cubist picture but has the irreducible beauty of "sensual metaphysic within the physical body." The inviolable unity that it brings about between the physical and the metaphysical proportions is exultantly expressed by Yeats himself as under:

0 body swayed to music, 0 brightening glance
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

These swaying movements of the dance are paralleled by the frozen pattern of sculpture which with its extrinsic time binds the intrinsic time of the dance into a sculptured gesture. Now in gesture,

1. Denis Donoghue, Yeats, Fontana London 1971 P.75

To date, the most impressive work upon the dance-image in Yeats is that of Frank Kermode in The Romantic Image (London, 1957) who has studied this image exclusively as an aspect of Yeats's creative sensibility. He has not studied it as an aspect of Yeats's dramatic form; all the same his study provides guidelines in this direction as well.

there is no distinction between content and form; gesture is the dance of attitude." So, being a sculptured gesture, it naturally becomes the slow but concrete dance of the vision of the dramatic poet. Since it is swayed by music and music has boundaries bound of silence, so sculptural and gestural nature of this poetic drama becomes polyvalent along with.

Like dance music is also required to be simple and natural in this kind of poetic drama. Though responsive to the Wagnerian music for its role in the dramatic pattern, Yeats does not want music to dominate words. He wants it to work underneath the dramatic pattern to the extent to which it creates the feeling that "mere speech has taken fire." To guard against such domination as that of the Wagnerian music, Yeats disapproves the use of high-sounding musical instruments. He feels that the human voice "can become louder by becoming less articulate, by discovering some new musical roar or scream." He regards it as harmful for the human voice to enter into a competition with high-sounding musical instruments because in this competition "the lowest instrument has always survived." So to avoid this competition, "the voice should seek the accompaniment of small-sized instruments." They are heard "at their best when we are close to them."

To all intents and purposes, this music is village-music as this dance is village-dance, but shorn of all its incoherent and inconsequential elements. Old-fashioned, naive, unsophisticated, it aims

---

1. Denis Donoghue, Yeats, Fontana London 1971 P.27
2. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 P.223
at a "unitary style" as all village-music does, with different levels congruously fitting into a monody. Corresponding to this music and dance are the mythical situations, the legendary figures and the polyvalent symbols, thanks to which this drama emerges of the super-country, becoming a moment of eternity rather than a moment of humanity.

VI

To achieve a moment of eternity this drama tries to communicate passion rather than delineate character. Concretely speaking, passion and character are inevitable concomitants. Instead of being a passively or actively subjective emotionality in Croce's sense of the word, passion is "the active centre of human life." It is "a strongly felt internalised commitment to an objective goal" and as such it cannot exist without character. However, Yeats envisions it in its pristine form as transcending character. Character is historical and if Yeats were to identify passion with character, he would not be able to blur the distinction between myth and history and between symbol and reality. Since it is his constant effort to reduce history to myth and reality to symbol, Yeats contraposes passion and character, regarding passion as the eternal essence of humanity and character as a transitory phenomenon.

Substantially, in this contraposition Yeats associates passion with tragedy and character with comedy, thereby forwarding the implication that the poetic drama of his concept will essentially be tragedy. He

divides the whole of dramatic literature into three categories, comedy, 
tragi-comedy and tragedy. He feels that comedy can completely define 
itself by having character as its core. He sees tragi-comedy also 
hinging upon character though it is "only in the moments of comedy that 
character is defined" in it. Elaborating this point further, he 
oberves that Shakespeare is always a writer of tragi-comedy, who reveals 
character in comic and passion in tragic moments. As against it the 
drama "of Corneille, that of Racine, that of Greece and Rome", is in 
the tragic genre because it configures "passions and motives, one 
person being jealous, another full of love or remorse or pride or anger."

When the tragic sense is supreme, the comic sense can also be 
a dimension of it, though in itself it is not of much value. Basically, 
it is the tragic sense that is for Yeats the source of poetic reverberation. 
When the tragic sense and poetic reverberation coincide, they impart an 
aesthetic experience, denoted by Yeats at different times as reverie, 
joy, ecstasy and gaiety. All these words have distinctly different 
notations though he sometimes juxtaposes them together to mean almost 
the same thing. Reverie denotes philosophical contemplation of the human 
mind over tragic action. Since passion alone is not tragedy, it is 
"passion enobled by intensity, by endurance and by wisdom", so reverie 
conveys only a partial aspect of the aesthetic experience generated by 
poetic drama.

What remains beyond the scope of this word is the feeling of

1. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions, New York 1961 P.240
expansion that results from "the contemplation of things vaster than the individual" and accompanies inevitably the poetic reverberation of tragic action. Yeats names it as the experience of ecstasy: "the soul knows it's changes of state alone, and --- the motives of tragedy are not related to action but to changes of state." Accompanying it is the metaphorical assertion that affirms to him the fact of ecstasy being "some fulfilment of the soul in itself, some slow or sudden expansion of it like an overflowing well."

To Yeats the word joy sometimes conveys more than ecstasy and he finds the whole content of the poetic reverberation of tragic action latent in it. It happens especially when he tries to raise a strong mental defence against the onrush of melancholy. At places echoing Schiller's 'Ode to Joy', he feels that man should have no emotion in which there is no athletic joy. It is particularly in old age that reacting against his youthful sentimentality, decadence and subjectivity, he demands passionately "the pure energy of the spirit" so that he may be able to clear away the vapours which kill spirit and will, "ecstasy and joy."

Ultimately it is the word gaiety that wins his total approval. Too long a contemplation makes him feel that as a tragic emotion joy is contradictory and ecstasy too static to contain its full content. He finds them to be incapable of communicating the assertive aspect of the tragic experience according to which

1. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies, New York 1953
"All things fall and are built again,
And those that build them again are gay."

Gaeity seems to him to include austerity, impersonality, and felicity, etc. It delivers the human mind from its fixity to a particular character or situation. It fuses the comic sense into the tragic, absolves the human mind and memory from dread and terror and creates their correspondence with the Great Mind and Memory. Thus transformed, the poetic experience reverberates with the emotion of the multitude and shows divine comedy to be a distant horizon of the design of human life, a distant possibility for poetic reverberation. The poetic drama of Yeats's concept, therefore, remains exclusively concerned with the tragic sense of life.

VII

In correspondence with this poetic drama, is the symbolical theatre that does not aim at the creation of visual illusion. Thus Yeats holds realistic background to be superfluous and suggests that

"The background should be of as little importance as the background of a portrait-group, and it should when possible, be of one tint, that the persons on the stage, whenever they stand may harmonize with it or contrast with it and preoccupy our attention."

2. Ibid Samhain 1902 P.20
Though relevant to plays written in both poetic and prose medium, monochrome background suits poetic plays more because they can have more of symbolical meaning. Regarding this Yeats has observed:

"We should be content to suggest a scene upon a canvas, whose vertical flatness we accept and use, as the decorator of pottery accepts the roundness of the bowl or a jug. Having chosen the distance from naturalism, which will keep one’s composition from competing with the actor who belongs to a world with depth as well as height and breadth, one must keep this distance from flinching. The distance will vary according to the distance the playwright has chosen and especially in poetry, which is more remote and idealistic than prose, one will insist on schemes of colour and simplicity of form, for every sign of deliberate order gives remoteness and ideality."

A stage with such a background produces a stage that liberates the imagination of the audience without conjuring before it the barrenness of the Elizabethan stage. Not required to evoke a picture such as a painter might have painted, it creates the feeling of meditation undissipated by decoration and suggestion. To the stage with such background Yeats has given the name of "the theatre of beauty" which has qualities that easel-painting lacks, i.e., "it has real light and shade, it has real perspective and it has the action of the actor." With these

1. W.B. Yeats, 'Samhain', 1904
qualities, 'the theatre of beauty' does not need scene-painting for a realistic simulation of reality. The stage provides reality and the painting creates only an illusion of it. It would be harmful and unaesthetic of course to impose illusion on reality.

Yeats has a similar symbolical attitude towards the use of light. He is of the opinion that when light is to be shed upon the stage, it should be shed "as Nature does; from a single point". Then the light diffuses over the whole stage and creates precisely natural shades. He does not want that the bare wall should give a monotonous look. For this purpose he wants it to be particularised, not with windows but with "a shaft of light across it."

Yeats is equally fascinated with curved dome-effects. If the stage is flooded with colour-lights, the curved-dome effects give it the impression of a cathedral where the curve eliminates the necessity of creating the sense of the continuous, for the flood of coloured lights imparts symbolical spaciousness to it. Eulogising Reinhardt and Fortuny in this context Yeats observes "They use a great hood of canvas, a half-dome, that curves from one side of the proscenium to the other, and from the back of the stage to the proscenium arch. Nothing is visible but a great curved surface, much like the dome of the sky, upon which light in colour may be thrown." He believes that these effects neither negate nor corrupt nature-effects. Instead, the curves give a "beautiful realistic effect, reproducing as exactly as possible the sense of the open air", and creating a semblance of the Japanese theatre in which
"the interior will be exactly represented — but an exterior is only suggested."

The Theatre of Beauty requires an actor who does not require Stanislavsky's psycho-physico techniques for evoking a creative state of mind. Stanislavsky believes that "a second rate actor can imitate an image but a true talent can become an image." So a true talent must have some sort of spiritual training before enacting a role on the stage. As a realist, Stanislavsky recommends this preparation in the form of such psycho-physical disciplines as solicitude, serenity, fearlessness, and imaginativeness. He does not reject intuition altogether but he does not much depend upon its potentiality in that mode.

In 'The Theatre of Beauty' on the other hand, the actor depends entirely upon his intuition. His Daimon makes his voice sound deeper, thicker, thinner, higher and lower as need be. For exteriorising his interior, he resorts to significant movements only. Even when he has been a professional previously, he has now to become an amateur because the facets which basically define his creative power are cultural consciousness and contemplation. Nothing can be substitute for them — not even "the rhetoric of Irving or the half-animal nobility of Salvini."

The 'Theatre of Beauty' does not admit people of all types and classes to the audience hall. It needs only an elitist audience of

2. Stanislavsky, Life in Art, Moscow (Year of publication not mentioned) P.167
aristocratic persons having Unity of Being fostered in Unity of Culture. Preserving the pristine purity of the life of the super-country, they try to keep it intact from "the proliferating complexities" of the life of the city. Their pattern of living is based upon a social code that suggests their harmonious relationship with the community. Reflecting the emotion of the multitude at their polished, cultured and urbane level, they have "a sense of feudal responsibility, a feeling for custom and ceremony, an emotional reticence, an active-intellectual life, and even a kind of physical perfection" like that of a perfect proportioned human body. When they have lost the feelings of cordiality for the community, they begin to lead a self-sufficient life hermetically sealed from the vulgarity and corruption of the surroundings. Living in near-seclusion, they observe a heroic code in public in the hope that it may some day regain its lost social significance. Indeed they learn from this theatre the simplicity of the first ages with knowledge of "Good and Evil" added to it. Thus nurtured, 'The Theatre of Beauty' reflects a social consciousness that has throughout been at the centre of Yeats's dramatic career.

VIII

The form that the Poetics of Yeats ultimately comes to impart to poetic drama is parallel to that of the Noh Play of Japan. This parallelism is implicit from the very beginning; it becomes explicit

1. Alex Zwerdling, *Yeats and the Heroic Ideal*, London 1966 PP.78,81
when People's phase of the theatre of beauty changes into that of the anti-people. As long as Yeats remains attached to the notion of the people's theatre, he keeps on believing that it welds disparate groups into a well-knit community where the individual has Unity of Being and the community has Unity of Culture. Only after its failure to realise its ideal in the first phase, does Yeats turn to the second phase in which the theatre is put at the disposal of the elitist audience. Accordingly, he turns from what is Shakespearean and Maeterlinkean in the first phase to what becomes in the second phase an accidental surrogate of the NOH Play of Japan.

The NOH Play is the most lyrical of all the oriental forms of drama. In plot and action, it is least dramatic because it grows from the Buddhist ritual, having even less momentum than the Christian ritual. However, it makes a sensitive and subtle use of musical and choreographic elements which compensates for this dramatic lack. Working through identification, repetition, interlacing, overlapping and interpolation in accompaniment with dual, triple, multiple and choral articulation, the poetic modes accentuate the process of dramatic communication, making it a symbolical gesture with universal proportions. As Fenollosa has explained it,

"The beauty and power of NOH lie in the concentration. All elements --- costume, motion, verse and music --- unite to produce a single clarified impression. Each drama embodies some primary human relation or emotion, and the poetic sweetness or poignancy of this is
carried to its highest degree by carefully excluding all such obstrusive elements as a mimetic realism or vulgar realism might demand —— Now it is brotherly love, now love to a parent, now loyalty to a master, love of husband and wife, or mother for a dead child, or of jealousy or anger of self-mastery in battle, clinging of a ghost to the scene of its sin, of the infinite compassion of a Budha, of the sorrow of unrequitted love. Some one of these intense emotions is chosen for a piece, and in it, elevated to the plane of universality by the intensity and purity of treatment."

Without plot and action in the conventional sense, the Nō play is yet divided into two parts. In the first part, a person, in his humble manifestation, is presented as a peasant, ghost, spirit etc. In the second part, the same person is presented in a sublime manifestation as a hero, god or historical figure of great stature. Interfusing human motive which is well illusion, the second manifestation has a Divine (Buddhist) Motive behind it, and is thus the true reality. Illustrating this point, Yeats writes of a suffering girl in a Japanese play:

"I think of a girl in a Japanese play whose ghost tells a priest of a slight sin, if indeed it was sin, which seems great because of her exaggerated conscience. She is surrounded by flames, and though the priest explains that if she ceased to believe in those flames they would

cease to exist, believe she must, and the play ends in an elaborate dance of her agony."

Corresponding to these two manifestations, are the two events of the play; the remembered event that acts as the matrix of the play and the lived event which is its configuration. To raise this configuration to the level of creative consummation, the writer of the NoH employs esoteric symbols which award primacy to dance and mime rather than to poetry.

In the dance-drama of Yeats, on the other hand, human reality corresponds with Divine Reality because in his vision the human motive is as valid as the Divine Motive. Parallel in intention and execution as it is with the NoH play, it is not identical with the latter because it employs a single episode in which a lived event becomes a generalised human situation.

As Denis Donoghue has observed it "might be an extension of se'ance" because in se'ance nothing is illusory and supernatural, what actually is illusory is as real as the natural reality. So, instead of esoteric symbols, Yeats's drama employs archetypes and their poetic use awards to its poetry primacy over dance, music and mime without in any way attenuating their dramatic importance. Thus Yeats moulds the NoH form to ontological/anthropological purpose as later on Brecht has

2. The most impressive work upon this parallelism is that of Miss Hiro Ishabashi in W.B.Yeats and the NoH (Keio University Japan 1956) which being unprinted, could not be made use of. I have satisfied myself with only her short comments noted at a few places by F.A.C.Wilson in W.B.Yeats and Tradition.
moulded it to a dialectical/historical and Becket to an existential/
phenomenological purpose.

With his deep understanding of all the facets of the NoH, Yeats is able to create dance-drama that is essentially an occidental surrogate of this dramatic form of the orient. According to V. Raghavan, only the ancient heroic type of play, such as the Indian Nataka, might have served his purpose. This is a facile generalisation because the Indian Nataka cultivates Rasa that conforms with the collective consciousness while the dance-drama developed from the NoH aims at the inflow of the Great Mind and Memory into the human mind and memory in its elitist manifestation. No wonder, of all the oriental dramatic forms — including even the Kabuki form of Japanese drama — only the NoH play has elicited creative involvement from Yeats resulting in the most elitist form of drama in English in the twentieth century.

1. 'The Aesthetics of the Ancient Indian Drama' in World Theatre V.2, Spring 1956, P.105