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W.B. Yeats and the Visual Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

W. B. Yeats and the Visual Arts

Leila Heather Bryce

The visual arts play an important role in the poetry and thought of W. B. Yeats. Yeats's interest in spirituality and the creative process is evident in early lyrical works in which his approach to his visionary symbolism and ethereal visual images shows the influence of nineteenth-century artists such as William Blake, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and William Morris. In the early 1900s, his work in theatre, dance, and in Irish nationalist literature and politics helped his poetry to evolve into one that involves imagery from both imaginative and real worlds, and that brings together aesthetic and moral issues. By 1925, Yeats published A Vision, his theory of cyclic history in which works of art figure prominently as indicators of the degree of a civilization's development or decay. Yeats also names Greek and Renaissance art and artists in his later poetry, in order to monumentalize what he saw as high points of spiritual, intellectual, and artistic achievements, and to highlight the heroic and humanistic goals of his own art.

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List of Abbreviations

The titles of these works by W. B. Yeats have been abbreviated as follows:

<u>Autobiographies</u>	<u>Au</u>
<u>A Vision</u>	<u>AV</u>
<u>Essays and Introductions</u>	<u>E&I</u>
<u>Explorations</u>	<u>Ex</u>
<u>Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley</u>	<u>DWL</u>
<u>Memoirs</u>	<u>Mem</u>
<u>Mythologies</u>	<u>Myth</u>
<u>The Letters of W.B. Yeats</u>	<u>L</u>
<u>Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats, Vols. 1 and 2</u>	<u>UP</u>
<u>The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats</u>	<u>VP</u>
<u>The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats</u>	<u>Pl</u>

INTRODUCTION

For William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), born into a family whose members were distinguished by their heightened artistic vision and by a sense of their own personal as well as familial consequence, it probably is not surprising that the Irish poet should not only have been influenced by visual art, but have a conviction of his own eminent place in the world. Yeats's grandfather, after whom he was named, was Church of Ireland (Anglican) Rector of Tullylish in Co. Down, and according to his son John Butler Yeats, passed on certain qualities which he would, in turn, encourage in his own poet son:

It was my father who made me the artist I am, and kindled the sort of ambition I have transmitted to my sons. . . . To be with him was to be caught up into a web of visionary hopefulness. (John Butler Yeats, Early Memories: some chapters in autobiography, 1923, 35. Quoted in Pyle 9.)

Yeats's father John Butler Yeats followed his own optimistic though unpractical vision when he quit a legal career to become a professional artist. He became best known as a portrait painter, but in his first years

spent pursuing a new and impecunious artistic life, he formed a brotherhood with three other men including John Nettleship and Edwin Ellis, and followed Pre-Raphaelite principles in his work. W.B. Yeats himself went to the Metropolitan School of Art from 1884 to 1886, where he met his friend George Russell, who painted mysterious figures and scenes which he had "seen" in visions. Yeats's younger brother, Jack Yeats (1871-1957), was a painter who shared his belief in a balance between artistic images created through keen observation of the outside world, and memory, filtered through the mind's eye.

As he matured, Yeats's views on art, politics, and Irish mythology became fused in his writings. His interest in Irish politics originated from going with his father to meetings of the Contemporary Club in Dublin. The Club members met to discuss social, political, and literary issues (Jeffares, W.B. Yeats A New Biography 2). Among the Dublin intellectuals he met through the Club was John O'Leary, a former Fenian leader who was interested in Irish literature, and was well respected in Dublin. Yeats also met William Morris at the Contemporary Club, and when he lived in London, he continued to visit Morris at Kelmscott House in Hammersmith, where he attended the debates of the Socialist League (Jeffares, W.B. Yeats A New Biography 42). Morris's ideas regarding the integration of art into life were ones that Yeats developed for his own ideal Irish society. Irish mythology was another primary concern for Yeats, because of his involvement in a literary nationalism, such as when he compiled Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry (1888), and also because he related his own journey through life to the mythical life of the warrior hero Cuchulain. He increasingly became interested in Greek myth and art, furthermore, because of their correspondences with Irish myth, in which the boundaries between the divine and the human tend to be ambiguous. Jack Yeats,

somewhat tongue-in-cheek perhaps, attributed to himself and his family a semi-mythological status when he traced his mother's family (Pollexfen) origins back to the Greeks:

As in a dream--I remembered that Uncle Fred Pollexfen said that the original Pollexfens were flying tin men from Phoenicia. He was satisfied. I don't know how. But I, at once, began a search up in the bight of the Mediterranean for any name that would suggest Pollexfen, and in a moment I had it--Helen must be our grand, grand, grand, grand aunt for we must be descended from her brother Pollux so that giving us Leda and the Swan for grand, grand, grand, grand parents that ought to be good enough for any man. (Unpublished letter to W. B. Yeats. Quoted in Pyle 3-4.)

Because of his background and his attraction to the visual arts, it is natural that art should play a role in Yeats's own verbal art. Chapter One of this thesis will look at how Yeats responded to Pre-Raphaelite art and principles, and the ways in which his editorial collaboration with Edwin Ellis on their three-volume The Works of William Blake affected his own poetry. Visual and verbal art as the embodiment of truth and beauty, and especially of tragic joy, is also explored as Yeats's youthful writings evolve corresponding to his consideration of his own literary work as a way of countering political violence. Images of art objects and mythological transformational figures are intermingled throughout his earlier and later work.

In Chapter Two, the parallels which Yeats saw between Irish and Greek myth and art are highlighted, especially focussing on his 1923 poem "Leda and the Swan" and its connections to the work of Michelangelo. The focus in Chapter Three is on Yeats's theory of history in his prose work, A Vision, and

how art and history are linked and examined in such late poems as "The Statues," "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," and "Under Ben Bulbin." Like his mythological shapeshifting counterpart Cuchulain, Yeats throughout his essays, autobiographies, letters, plays, and poems transforms his visionary images and explores new ways to potentially reshape both his art, and by example, his entire Irish society.

CHAPTER ONE

W. B. Yeats and the Visual Arts--An Affinitive Vision, or a Visionary Affinity?

Those images that yet
Fresh images beget . . .
W. B. Yeats, "Byzantium"

Artistic creativity and its spiritual nature is a theme which runs consistently throughout the poetry of W. B. Yeats, from his early writings in the 1880s, to the work preceding his death in 1939. He derives and reinforces many of the images integral to this theme from works of visual art, particularly from the Pre-Raphaelites and William Blake, whose visionary works suggested to Yeats sensory experiences of things, personages, or events not existing outside of the mind. He read a relationship between spirituality and creativity into these images throughout his artistic life, but as he matured aesthetically and aged physically, his own evocation and interpretation of them evolved from relatively dream-like, vague, and insubstantial forms, to "tangible" delineated ones. Correspondingly, his view of the artist's role developed from that of a seer who is distanced from this world, to one who incorporates intense earthly experiences as directly as possible into works of art. By looking at visual art as analogous to poetry, Yeats came to present and to understand the nature of artistic creativity in terms of almost

physical birth and death--and to attempt to understand physical life and death through the eternalizing artifice of poetry and visual art.

Visionary imagery is important to much of Yeats's work because he was concerned with visions as manifestations of the imagination, and by extension, of what he called *Spiritus Mundi*, the universal subconscious of the human race. He therefore wished to depict these momentary experiences as a means of providing others with revelations of the "essences of things" which comprise the opposing forces in life, some of them being life and death, waking and sleeping, reality and dreams, impermanence and permanence, and sensuality and spirituality (E&I 193). Yeats also saw revelation, and the moment of artistic creation itself, as occurring during a state of trance-like consciousness, in which the writer is both asleep and awake (E&I 159, 524). Because of this parallel, he rated the act of creation very highly as a spiritual experience.

Why the poet should look to the visual arts as in many ways the definitive model for his own visionary works is because of the quality of stillness which is a peculiar characteristic of physically solid art pieces. Stillness and silence are among the components which, to Yeats, enable art to contain the many opposing life forces. In 1907 he wrote,

. . . the nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of
contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy,
perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender,
overflowing turbulent energy, and marmorean stillness.

(E&I 255)

He strove consistently for this balance between complementary polarities throughout his oeuvre, especially that of energy and stillness. His earlier approach to visual sources involved striving for a rhythm in his poems that is

analogous to pattern in works of art. Rhythm or pattern to Yeats should be a product of a trance-like state of mind in the creator, and induce the same or a similar state of mind in the viewer. From a comparatively vague and indirect concept of visionary experience grew Yeats's more "rooted" approach, which by analogy is more sculpture-based in terms of its concrete immediacy and tangibility. But what unifies his poetry and his system of thought is the frozen vitality of the figures in his poems, and the stillness of the figures in the works of visual art he was looking at. Such trance-like stillness, he believed, embodies universal truths in human experience, and is the element which eternalizes what would otherwise be intense but fleeting moments of experience.

Yeats developed this philosophy through Walter Pater, whose book The Renaissance (1873) influenced the poet throughout his career, but was particularly crucial to the philosophy and analogies he drew from sculpture in his later years. Spirituality and stillness are integrally linked in Pater's definition of sculpture as a medium capable of transcending the mundane, and capturing what is universal and eternal in humankind:

[Sculpture] unveils man in the repose of his unchanging characteristics. . . . [and] reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the tranquil godship in him, as opposed to the restless accidents of life. (Pater, The Renaissance 170)

"Repose," then, is what Yeats saw as the definitive characteristic needed for an artistic work to contain the "divine essences" of the opposing forces of life (E and I 120).

In his early work, this premise of stillness as an entity which simultaneously pacifies and strengthens the human figure was related to

pattern as a trance-inducing agent (North, "Ambiguity" 381). His long narrative poem "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1886-88) involves figures who are travelling on horseback, and so are in motion; yet there is an unreality and even stasis in its vagueness of time, place, or space. Besides the dream-like imagery, what causes this ambiguity between movement and stillness are the flowing rhythms in which these images are presented:

Oisín. We galloped over the glossy sea:
 I know not if days passed or hours,
 And Niamh sang continually
 Danaan songs, and their dewy showers
 Of pensive laughter, unhuman sound,
 Lulled weariness, and softly round
 My human sorrow her white arms wound.
 We galloped; now a hornless deer
 Passed by us, chased by a phantom hound
 All pearly white, save one red ear;
 And now a lady rode like the wind
 With an apple of gold in her tossing hand;
 And a beautiful young man followed behind
 With quenchless gaze and fluttering hair.

(VP 11-12, 132-145)

Like a repeated organic visual form, the soft "s" sounds throughout this passage--"glossy sea," "days passed," "songs," "showers," "weariness," "softly," "sorrow," "tossing," and so on, create a soothing somnambulist rhythmic movement which is countered, although not dominated by, the clearly delineated "white arms," the "apple of gold," or the "pearly white" hound

with its "one red ear." These images surface out of the aural pattern in such a way that it is as if the speaker, the mythological Oisín, is himself standing still in the midst of the flux around him, even while he repeats the phrase, "[w]e galloped." While the various creatures from the songs materialize around him and pass him, the centre from which all the other images emanate, and even revolve concentrically around, occurs when "Niamh sang . . . and softly round / My human sorrow her white arms wound." Yeats creates the sense of physical stillness of a contemplative visionary seer, then, through the "lulling" rhythm of repeated sounds, intended to suggest and induce a trance-like state in the writer and reader. He concentrates on the two interconnected figures to show that through Niamh's songs, Oisín is focussing both internally ("[his] human sorrow") and outwardly ("Niamh sang"), and so the two are themselves collectively conjuring up the images around them.

Yeats admired the figurative art of the Pre-Raphaelites in which the patterning of repeated forms, energized by clear and distinct images, aid in underlining a visionary reading of the pictures. Richard Ellmann has suggested that in the 1880s and 1890s Yeats was looking at his poems as analogous to William Morris's tapestries (Ellmann 20-23). Building on this idea, Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux points out that there is a correspondence between the two-dimensionality of Pre-Raphaelite art and Yeats's own treatment of landscape and figures. For example, during the period in which Yeats was most closely acquainted with William Morris, the latter was producing such tapestries as The Orchard (1890), which combined pattern and outline in a manner typical of Morris's tapestries at that time (Loizeaux 58). The two-dimensionality of the picture plane in this tapestry is played upon by the

flatness of the interwoven pattern of the boughs of the fruit trees and vines, creating a "flat backdrop" for the four female figures (Loizeaux 58). Without a sense of receding space behind them, the figures themselves become the focus rather than the landscape as a "real" entity in itself. The vegetative motifs create the repeated pattern, and the four figures who are similar to one another, and are standing and yet are nonetheless languid, seem both to come from and form a visionary image in this work. Yeats's interest in art at this stage, therefore, lies in the analogies he drew between his own verbal approach and a decorative visual approach to figures and landscapes that allow for a symbolic interpretation of this subject matter (Loizeaux 58).

While in "The Wanderings of Oisín" Yeats uses rhythm to suggest a visionary trance connected with artistic creativity, he also uses Niamh's otherworldly songs intertwining with the earthly sorrow of Oisín to depict symbolically the nature of creation and of art itself. The motion of Niamh who "round / My human sorrow her white arms wound" is an image which suggests her metaphorically winding his "human sorrow" into a skein from which she then spins the figures that subsequently appear. What suggests a circularity in their motion is the fact that Niamh is conjuring them up at the same time that she is "winding;" this creates a sense that they are part of the same process. While the reader retains throughout the stanza this visual image of winding and circling, Oisín and Niamh "[w]rapped in each other's arms" together present a serpentine image of still intensity from which all else is emanating (Yeats, P1 44). It is "still" in that all the motion is internal: although they are galloping, Oisín and Niamh do not seem to actually move through space. On the other hand, the other characters "pass by" one after the other --"now a hornless deer / passed by us;" "now a lady rode" [emphasis added]; "a

beautiful young man followed behind" as if following a chronological time line. In the same way Morris arranges figures in The Orchard so that they and the picture will be read like a line in a book, from left to right. The horizontal scrolls of poetry the figures are holding also encourage us to read across the inscribed words and the tapestry itself in this order (Loizeaux 59). The result is that while there is an implication of passing time in both Morris's tapestry and in Yeats's poem, there is, by means of repeated pattern or rhythm, a paradoxical sense in each work that everything is contained in a timeless moment.

Yeats's belief that line and form repeated in space to create visual pattern was related to rhythm and repeated sounds in literature was common in his time (Loizeaux 63). For instance, Laurence Binyon, who was a friend of Yeats and was in charge of prints and drawings at the British Museum, said in a 1918 lecture:

The unifying principle of all the arts is rhythm; for the movement of life, unimpeded by circumstances, is naturally rhythmical, and art expresses life at its fullest and most intense.¹

For Yeats, the "fullest and most intense" moments in life were those involving spirituality and artistic creation, and during the 1880s and '90s he saw them as moments in which the artist or poet, in a state of distanced trance, can perceive the symbolic significance of earthly life. In his own essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1899), Yeats considered the potential of hypnotic rhythm and pattern as catalysts for perceiving visionary images:

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with

an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols. If certain sensitive persons listen persistently to the ticking of a watch, or gaze persistently on the monotonous flashing of a light, they fall into the hypnotic trance; and rhythm is but the ticking of a watch made softer, that one must needs listen, and various, that one may not be swept beyond memory or grow weary of listening; while the patterns of the artist are but the monotonous flash woven to take the eyes in a subtler enchantment. (E&I 159)

In Morris's "woven" tapestries, then, such as The Orchard, there are analogies between Yeats's own views of rhythm and pattern as integral to the revelation of vision, especially a symbolic vision.

Other aspects of Pre-Raphaelitism which he saw as related to the symbolic implications of visionary seeing also attracted Yeats. In striving for "emotional sincerity," the original Pre-Raphaelite group, which included Dante Gabriel Rossetti, adhered to a "return to nature" as a form of realism intended not to record simply what they saw in the physical world, but also to express the spiritual and emotional world, or, in their own words, "the intimate intertexture of a spiritual sense with a material form; small actualities made vocal of lofty meanings."² In the 1880s and 1890s, Yeats interpreted this to mean that they were "creators of dream worlds that transported viewers far from the ugliness . . . [and] materialism of Victorian life" (Loizeaux 13). What he and the intellectual circle to which he belonged in 1890s London saw as the Pre-Raphaelite "triumph of spirit and imagination" over mundane subject matter, though, was also part of the "spiritualized

sensuousness" (which he saw in Rossetti's paintings in particular), because incorporating sensuous details into depictions of dream-like worlds was an essential element of Yeats's definition of vision (Loizeaux 19).

He approached the beginnings of such vision in one of his earliest poems based on a picture by his father's friend John Nettleship called, "On Mr. Nettleship's Picture at the Royal Hibernian Academy," published in April 1886 by Dublin University Review:

Yonder the sickle of the moon sails on,
 But here the Lioness licks her soft cub
 Tender and fearless on her funeral pyre;
 Above, saliva dripping from his jaws,
 The Lion, the world's great solitary, bends
 Lowly the head of his magnificence
 And roars, mad with the touch of the unknown,
 Not as he shakes the forest; but a cry
 Low, long and musical. A dew-drop hung
 Bright on a grass blade's under side, might hear
 Nor tremble to its fall. The fire sweeps round
 Re-shining in his eyes. So ever moves
 The flaming circle of the outer Law,
 Nor heeds the old, dim protest and the cry
 The orb of the most inner living heart
 Gives forth. He, the Eternal, works His will.

(VP 688-89)

In this poem Yeats is already dealing with moments of intense experience suspended in a visionary revelation. He uses small details such as the dew

drop or the saliva dripping from the lion's jaw to keep the image as an earthly one, but also as a way of countering time. While time continues to move around them--"[y]onder the . . . moon sails on"--the animals are caught in a moment, surrounded by the "flaming circle of the outer Law." The apocalyptic image of the lion which, "mad with the touch of the unknown" and the reflection of the circle of fire "[r]e-shining in his eyes," is a figure like that of the speaker in "The Wanderings of Oisín" in that he is in a sense both the creator and receiver of a revelation. The lion becomes a part of "the Eternal" in his "cry / Low, long and musical" that holds a dew-drop suspended on a blade of grass, but unlike the passage from "Oisín," the deity behind the forces that surround him here is ultimately in control. How much of this detail and tone Yeats derived from the original picture by Nettleship is difficult to pinpoint, but the difference between this poem based on a picture, and "The Wanderings of Oisín" a few years later, is the greater sense of control which Yeats depicts the poem's speaker and/or subject having over the visionary images evolving around him--which suggest that at this stage the poet's sense of his own powers of "vision" were not as strong.

Seeing art as a vehicle in which to transcend this world and escape to a higher one of the imagination, Yeats and his colleagues in the Rhymers' Club in the 1890s were especially interested in Rossetti's paintings for their "spiritualized sensuousness" (Loizeaux 19). Rossetti's Venus Verticordia (1864-1868) and Monna Vanna (1866) represented to them "life at its most intense and, hence, art at its most beautiful," and it was in particular the idealized beauty of the Pre-Raphaelite woman that attracted them: "Woman herself was still in our eyes . . . romantic and mysterious, still the priestess of her shrine, our emotions remembering the Lilith and the Sibylla

Palmifera of Rossetti," as Yeats wrote later (Loizeaux 19, Au 302). Rossetti accompanied these latter two works with the poems "Soul's Beauty," which is represented by Sibylla Palmifera, and "Body's Beauty," represented by Lilith, to emphasize the "dual nature" of his subject (Loizeaux 25). Even without these literary adjuncts, the women's "expressions of rapture" and "the sensuous details pictured the refined senses' ecstasy" (Loizeaux 19). Yeats thus saw the passionate and spiritual co-existing in Rossetti's works, a quality he himself strove for in his work: "Rossetti, drunken with natural beauty, saw the supernatural beauty, the impossible beauty, in his frenzy" (E&I 64). In his own description of the female figure in "The Wanderings of Oisín," Yeats also strove to combine "natural" and "supernatural" beauty:

And [he] found on the dove-grey edge of the sea
 A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode
 On a horse with bridle of findrinny;
 And like a sunset were her lips,
 A stormy sunset on doomed ships;
 A citron colour gloomed in her hair,
 But down to her feet white vesture flowed,
 And with the glimmering crimson glowed
 Of many a figured embroidery;
 And it was bound with a pearl-pale shell
 That wavered like the summer streams,
 As her soft bosom rose and fell.

(VP 3-4, 19-30)

As with Rossetti's women who are "alluring" but "unattainable," the figure is distanced from the reader/viewer by the fact that she is very much an

artificial component in a work of art (Loizeaux 27). The way Yeats carefully constructs the materials and colours in which she is adorned--"dove-grey," "citron," "glimmering crimson," "pearl-pale shell," and "figured embroidery" is similar in technique to Rossetti's attention to texture, and his use of intense colours. The distanced beauty of the resulting icon in Yeats and Rossetti is not only an image of intensity, but of a simultaneous calm stillness as well.

Yeats, like Rossetti, could also see such beauty in real people. When Yeats went to Sweden in 1923 to receive the Nobel Prize, he saw a living example of an artistic ideal in the face of Princess Margaretha (North 380), whom he described as

full of subtle beauty, emotional and precise, and impassive with a still intensity suggesting that final consummate strength which rounds the spiral of a shell. One finds a similar beauty in wooden busts taken from Egyptian tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty and not again until Gainsborough paints. (Au 328)

This description in prose is a more distilled view of visionary beauty than the decorative figures of Yeats's early poetry, or those of Rossetti or Morris, but what it shares with them is the serene calmness and stillness that sublimates sensual elements and ultimately makes them part of a frozen eternalized moment (North, "Ambiguity" 381). Yeats defined visionary beauty in the case of the princess, Egyptian art, and in Gainsborough portraits as not only visual, but being integrally wound up in "still intensity;" a combination of serenity and stiffness inherent in royal public art and the royal human figures themselves (North 381).

Yeats later came to the specific understanding of why he sought visionary images for his subject matter--namely, his own religious temperament. In 1913 he wrote, "I have always loved those pictures where I meet persons associated with the poems or the religious ideas that have most moved me" (E&I 347). He turned to visionary art and poetry as a replacement for Christianity, when he found he could no longer support such beliefs:

I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of 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. (Au 115-16)

Yeats admired works such as Rossetti's Proserpine, which he had seen at William Morris's house, for what he saw as the religious/revelatory nature of its subject and depiction. The picture of the woman holding a half-eaten pomegranate was to Yeats a representation of a moment of poetic and spiritual transcendence, as her incomplete act parallels the visionary artist's journey for the acquisition of spiritual knowledge, which, in earthly life, can only be partial (Loizeaux 13).

In his poem "The Song of Wandering Aengus," Yeats also explores the theme of artistic creativity as the pursuit of wisdom, but he presents this idea by using a shape-shifter from Irish mythology. Yeats published "The Song of Wandering Aengus" in 1899, just a few years after he had collaborated from 1889 to 1893 with Edwin Ellis on The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical. The parallels he perceived between the shape-shifting stories

of Irish folklore and his own works reflect his Blakean belief that "man achieves the greatest imaginative vision when he finally apprehends unity by seeing that all things are analogies of all other things . . . and by understanding all the steps through which the world must move before man may communally see this vision" (Adams, Blake and Yeats 4-5). Therefore, having made Blake's pictures and poetry his "particular study" during the 1880s and 1890s when he was writing "Wandering Aengus," there are some correspondences in their approach to their visionary images (E&I vii). In his poem, Yeats uses a female figure whose transforming capabilities associate her with the Irish "Race of the Gods of Dana" (Tuath de Danaan), who, he wrote in his explanatory notes for "The Wanderings of Oisín," were the powers of light, life, and warmth (VP 796). "Wandering Aengus" follows the mythological figure of Aengus--god of youth, beauty, and poetry--on a voyage of poetical/spiritual discovery (VP 794):

I went out to the hazel wood,
 Because a fire was in my head,
 And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
 And hooked a berry to a thread;
 And when white moths were on the wing,
 And moth-like stars were flickering out,
 I dropped the berry in a stream
 And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
 I went to blow the fire aflame,
 But something rustled on the floor,

And some one called me by my name:
 It had become a glimmering girl
 With apple blossom in her hair
 Who called me by my name and ran
 And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
 Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
 I will find out where she has gone,
 And kiss her lips and take her hands; 20
 And walk among long dappled grass,
 And pluck till time and times are done
 The silver apples of the moon,
 The golden apples of the sun.

(VP 149-50)

In his symbolic treatment of the theme of the creative process, Yeats creates a division between the opposites of the conscious and subconscious minds in this poem. It follows a diurnal cycle to represent how inspiration, the "fire" in the poet's head, progresses to its realization as a poem, which is a culmination of both subconscious and conscious ideas. Aengus (the poet) initially is in the realm of the subconscious; that is, in darkness, associated with the birth and development of ideas, and in a hazel wood. Yeats described the hazel tree as "the Irish tree of Life or Knowledge, and in Ireland it was doubtless, as elsewhere, the tree of the heavens" (VP 177). This wood could therefore be seen as a direct representation of Spiritus Mundi, from which all ideas come, and which must be returned to as the source.

Corresponding to the growth of the idea in the poem is the increase of light; light traditionally being thought of as a creative force and also equated with the spirit. Thus it can be inferred that a new idea (for a poem) is forming and strengthening proportionately to the increasing illumination and size of each metamorphosing form: from "white" moths; to "flickering" stars; to a "silver" trout, emanating or reflecting a lunar glow. The placement of the trout at the very end of the first eight lines draws attention to this creature as the last stage before the stage of transition. It is important as a nighttime image suggestive of the subconscious and of subjectivity, and because it lives in moving water, which suggests renovation and regeneration. The image of aesthetic fishing becomes equated with the drawing out of unconscious ideas from the poet's deep-lying wisdom. Since the moon is also associated traditionally with the powers of the imagination, and the "glimmering girl" fades in the golden daylight, which represents conscious and intellectual thinking, Yeats is presenting the two thought processes as separate forces.

The motif of metamorphosis is a vision-like one reinforced by the image of the moth, which is metamorphic, and by the shape-shifter girl as well. But the most significant cyclic metamorphosing is occurring within the poet who is depicted as always trying to delve into the imagination in order to create a poetry which encompasses spiritual experience. This is evident in the "dappled" grass at the end, which gives an impression of darkness and light intermingling, and suggests the poet is returning to the subconscious imagination as his source. That the poem should also end with the image of the apple, a symbol of totality and of knowledge, enhances the concept of joining subconscious (silver) and conscious (gold) ideas. The moon is also

generally associated with the powers of the imagination, and therefore "the glimmering girl" (13) who is the instinctual equivalent of the fish or wisdom symbol (Grossman 180) fades in the golden daylight which in turn symbolically represents conscious and intellectual thinking. Although he in fact "caught" the trout and was undertaking preparations to eat it by blowing on the fire, this metaphoric attainment of knowledge is not realized because "wisdom," Yeats wrote in a late poem, "Blood and the Moon" (1933), "is the property of the dead, / A something incompatible with life" (VP 482).

The motif of metamorphosis suggests ephemerality and reinforces the futility of the speaker's quest through the images of the moth, which is a metamorphic creature; by the shape-shifter girl; and because in the myths even Angus's kisses are transformed into birds. The shift in temporal perspective in the poem also underlines the impossibility of the poet's ever completely attaining his goal, as the poem moves from the speaker performing simple worldly tasks in stanza one, anchored by using the past tense, to a world of conjecture and myth in stanza three, which moves between present and future when he says: "I am old . . . I will find out" (Morgan 133).

The formal parallels between the two contrasting worlds are established by the strings of verbs in each of the two stanzas: "And cut and peeled. . . And hooked . . . And caught" (stanza one), and "I will find out. . . And kiss and take her hands / And walk . . . And pluck" (stanza three). There is also a sense of capture at the end of stanzas one and three: the catching of the silver trout and the plucking of the gold and silver apples. The central stanza, then, provides the vital moment of transition from reality to myth. The scene in stanza two shifts from landscape to interior (before passing on to the mythical landscape of stanza three) and yet somehow manages to suggest

both the interior and the world beyond when the visionary girl fades through "the brightening air," an element common to both spheres (Morgan 134).

The central stanza stands apart from the first and last and is "pivotal" in that not only does it depict the moment of transformation, but accompanies this moment with the most intense brightness which brings in at least by allusion the three sources of light from each stage of the changing vision-- "the fire aflame . . . glimmering . . . the brightening air." There are three main kinds of supernatural creatures in Irish mythology: angels who tend to inhabit broad daylight; ghosts, who inhabit the night; and fairies who inhabit the twilight (Foster 209). It is evident that the world of the fairies is the one to which his vision of the girl belongs, as she is the transformed result of the initial "fire" in his head, or as Yeats phrased it elsewhere: "Black out; Heaven blazing into the head" (VP 566). Light in the natural world does not bring permanent enlightenment--he must therefore depend on ghosts from the darkness of Spiritus Mundi and the "fantastic and capricious" amoral kingdom of ever-changing shapes to which the Irish folk mind is drawn, or, as Yeats wrote, "the power of imagination" (Myth 37, Foster 209, Gregory 303).

Because of their correspondences in pictorial imagery, Yeats may have been looking to Blake as inspiration for the various changing visions that are evoked throughout "Wandering Aengus." Plates 13 and 14 of Blake's illustrated poem Jerusalem, The Emanation of the Giant Albion could be illustrations to Yeats's poem, even in terms of the nocturnal imagery. As in "Wandering Aengus," there is a play between darkness and oncoming light. The figure of Los reclining in a pensive posture resembles the figure of Aengus as he is surrounded by a changing night sky, and a winged female figure is suspended in the sky as if her presence is precariously depending upon the ruminations of

Los, and on the changing sky, especially if they are interpreted in terms of the parallels between spirituality and artistic creation. Certainly Blake presented his story as a metamorphosis in epic religious terms, an energy Yeats would have found fitting for the religiosity he himself transferred to symbolic visionary works of art. The four chapters of Jerusalem are divided into Creation, Redemption, Judgment, and Regeneration, each referring to "states through which individuals pass" and is "the story of a paradox" (Ellis, The Works of William Blake II 176). Yeats and Ellis summarized the narrative in the larger-than-life poem as follows:

Man, called Albion, . . . sleeping, or falling under the delusions known as common sense, becomes the prey of death through seeking virtue in the restrictions of morality, not in the expansion of sympathy, and truth, in the comparisons and recollections of reason, not in the impulses of creative imagination. Thus he imputes righteousness and sin to Individuals and not to States, and distributes approval and disapproval, not forgiveness, which is the foundation of sympathy as sympathy is of love. In the end he awakes. He perceives his error. He loves; he lives; and through him love, which is also called Liberty, and Jerusalem, also enter into eternal life free from the accidents of time and the delusions of approval and disapproval. (Ellis, The Works of William Blake II 176)

The imagery and ideas which would have attracted Yeats to this story, besides the parallels between light and dark, and the conscious and unconscious, would have been the elements of love and beauty as they operate in the creative spiritual process. In his essay "William Blake and the Imagination" (1897),

Yeats quotes Blake as stating, "Passions, because most living, are most holy . . . and man shall enter eternity borne upon their wings" (E&I 113). Hence, Yeats ends "Wandering Aengus" with "I will . . . kiss her lips and take her hands" as an image of a moment of passionate intensity, eternalized by art and the creative process--that is, plucking "silver apples of the moon" and "golden apples of the sun."

The difference between Blake and Yeats in their visionary thinking, however, lies in Yeats's approach to vision as something induced and aesthetic in nature, as religion for him has to do with beauty, love, and art. For Blake, on the other hand, visions generate themselves, and from them he creates simultaneous verse and art that are concerned with divine glory. Aligning himself with the Pre-Raphaelite sensibility, Yeats said that "Blake made, in a blind, hopeless way something of the same protest made afterwards by the Pre-Raphaelites with more success. They saw nothing but an artistic issue and were at peace; whereas he saw in every issue the whole contest of light and darkness and found no peace."³ Yeats felt that the

limitation of [Blake's] view was from the very intensity of his vision; he was a too literal realist of imagination, as others are of nature; and because he believed that the figures seen by the mind's eye, when exalted by inspiration, were 'eternal existences,' symbols of divine essences, he hated every grace of style that might obscure their lineaments. (E&I 119-120)

Yeats himself came to an analogous verbal compromise between Pre-Raphaelite visionary talismanic forms wrapped in "light and shadows, [and] in iridescent or glowing colour," and the Blakean "doctrine of fidelity to outline, to the 'hard and wiry line'" (Henn 38, E&I 120). In his poetry of the 1890s, he

creates visionary images by using aural patterns that are lulling and evocative of dream-like visions, from which clearly delineated forms or figures arise at rhythmical intervals.

The next decade opened up a turning point, however, in Yeats's approach to visions. With the advent of World War I and another revolutionary period in Irish history, his work became less introverted as he pulled away from the Romanticism which was previously colouring the musings of many of the solitary individuals he depicted in his verses. William T. Horton's The Magi of 1898 is an interesting point of comparison for Yeats's poem of the same name, from 1914. Yeats wrote an introduction to Horton's A Book of Images in 1898, as his attraction to the artist's work was the fact that the latter worked from vision. Not long after, however, he became disenchanted with Horton's pictures, because he felt that Horton was too "systematic" a mystic, and that visionary artists in general should derive their images as much from a study of nature as from visions conjured up from "lunar and saturnine shadows." He advised Horton to imagine himself "bathed in sunlight" in order to create his own visions that are based more on tangible experience.⁴ Yeats's version of the subject, his poem "The Magi," metamorphoses this Christian icon from a Pre-Raphaelite dream-like image into a harsh vision which conflates Christ's birth, normally a symbol of optimistic salvation, with a premonition of anarchy to come:

Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side,

And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more
 Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
 The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

(VP 318)

As if he were following his own advice to Horton, Yeats treats the images in the first half of the poem as distanced otherworldly figures, and then rejects this imagery as unsuited to the irrationality of the chaotic, and as he saw it, apocalyptic world as it was intruding on his and his whole country's existence.

The results of his ruminations on aesthetics and the world itself are evident when he again uses the image of an imaginary figure in his later poem, "On Looking at a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac" (1922). The centaur is not, however, the shape or form which explicitly changes in the poem, as in "The Song of Wandering Aengus," but rather it represents an embodiment of intellectual and physical forces which inspire art, and shows how Yeats's aesthetic philosophy had itself metamorphosed by 1922:

Your hooves have stamped at the black margin of the wood,
 Even where horrible green parrots call and swing.
 My works are all stamped down into the sultry mud.
 I knew that horse-play, knew it for a murderous thing.
 What wholesome sun has ripened is wholesome food to eat,
 And that alone; yet I, being driven half insane
 Because of some green wing, gathered old mummy wheat
 In the mad abstract dark and ground it grain by grain
 And after baked it slowly in an oven; but now
 I bring full-flavoured wine out of a barrel found

Where seven Ephesian topers slept and never knew
 When Alexander's empire passed, they slept so sound.
 Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep;
 I have loved you better than my soul for all my words,
 And there is none so fit to keep a watch and keep
 Unwearied eyes upon those horrible green birds.

The subject of this poem is again an "inspirational beast" and focusses on "the imagination itself, the origin and elaboration of images [and ideas] in the poet's mind" (Albright 666, 453) as manifested in the speaker's poems. The centaur emblemizes the artistic synthesizing of the forces of the physical strength of a horse, and the wisdom of a man, thereby fusing the worlds of nature and of culture (White 93). In 1922, Yeats published "The Trembling of the Veil" in which he wrote, "I thought that all art should be a Centaur finding in the popular lore its back and its strong legs" (Au 191). By referring to Edmund Dulac's illustration called "The Good Chiron Taught his Pupils how to play Upon the Harp" (1918) (from Hawthorne's Tanglewood Tales), which may have been the initial inspiration for the poem, Yeats highlights not just the creature itself but Dulac's stylized rendition of it (Albright 666). As an embodied union of mind and body, the centaur is an image of Unity of Being but the way it has been rendered in the picture is a reminder it is "a being imagined by the artist" and "that when the poet says 'My works are all stamped down into the sultry mud,' it is the centaur that has done the stamping and therefore has "assumed an independent, violent, physical life of its own" (Loizeaux 141). "The black margin of the wood / Even where horrible green parrots call and swing" is evidently the place the poet sees as the initial source for his own works, the parrots seeming to represent "mimetic

art . . . that copies reality instead of creating it" (Albright 666). The artist describes his poetic process in terms of a kind of culinary workshop in which perhaps in reaction to the destructive, abstract politics of his time, he turns to traditional folklore as a poetic escape from the real world. While it still has a life of its own, because "mummy wheat" is the wheat found in Egyptian tombs that is able to sprout even after thousands of years, nonetheless it is a poetry that needs to be fermented and reshaped by the earthiness of "real" experience which is "concrete, sensuous, bodily" (Albright 666, AV 214). Neither is this the kind of experience that is rooted in dry, laborious, and therefore lifeless intellectual abstractions that, as Yeats wrote, ultimately hold out nothing but "sun-dried skeletons of birds" (AV 214). Instead, it is worldliness that has been allowed to age in the "mysterious deeps of the sleeping mind" (Loizeaux 142).

The seven Ephesian topers were Christian martyrs of the third century AD, who were shut up in a cave and who slept for two hundred years until the cave was reopened. Evidently Yeats saw this occurrence as an appropriate alternative to "mad abstract darkness." In 1915 he said that he "intended to write no more poetry on the Great War and would "keep the neighbourhood of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, hoping to catch their comfortable snores till bloody frivolity is over" (L 600). He recommends his fellow artists, in the collective form of the centaur, to do the same, when he advises them, or the centaur, to "Stretch out your limbs and sleep a long Saturnian sleep." In other words, the Roman god Saturn who presided over the Golden Age of peace and plenty, is, in a Romantic reversal "For this" and "for everything out of tune" (William Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much with Us; Late and Soon" 8). He should, then, sleep until he can be restored to an antithetical age

which is appropriate to him. Yeats proclaims himself as the figure whose art is the most "fit" to provide a guiding force for his time, as he has assimilated in his poetry a variety of experiences and, therefore, truths. In both "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (1897) and "On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac" (1922), Yeats evokes a sense that his art is metamorphosing in response to the forces of good and evil, light and dark, achieving a balance, in a way, between the figurative influence of the Danaan and Fomorian divinities of Irish mythology. As he wrote in 1922, "I have said all the good I know and all the evil: I have kept nothing back necessary to understanding" (Au 109).

As Yeats moved away from the "world of his youthful Celtic twilight . . . into the clear air of real Celtic life" and correspondingly from the remote visions of idealized beauty and sensual details to "real" and not necessarily beautiful physical experiences, the apocalyptic significance of the turbulence of war increasingly underlies a great deal of Yeats's imagery (Collingwood 120). At the same time, he was also developing a sense of his own physical ageing. As he had observed while discussing William Blake's principles, "love and old age and death are first among the arts. . . . True art is the flame of the Last Day, which begins for every man when he is first moved by beauty and which seeks to burn all things until they become 'infinite and holy'" (E&I 139-40). Consequently, the melancholy escape from the everyday world of his visionary characters in early poems gave way to another interpretation of visual images for Yeats: he began to see the loneliness of the creative process as analogous to the isolation of the individual human being, especially when facing death. As his work progressed, Yeats's awareness of death, the spirit, and the symbolic possibilities of the

mythological shape-shifters become increasingly important in illuminating the role of visual art in his poetry, his thought, and in the apocalyptic world in general. As he aged, he frequently seemed to be increasingly guided by the Fomorian "powers of death, . . . dismay, . . . cold, . . . and darkness" (VP 808). In her review of Yeats's collection of poems, The Tower (1928), Virginia Woolf noted that

Instead of the acquiescence of old age we have the self-tormenting mood of a man who resents and fights old age, and instead of yielding to it supinely is spurred by it to greater animation than before (Woolf 544).

In "The Tower," Yeats himself wrote

Did all old men and women, rich and poor,
Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,
Whether in public or in secret rage
As I do now against old age?

(VP 413, 97-100)

Like the figure of Cuchulain, the warrior whom he saw as his counterpart in Irish mythology, Yeats too was engaged in a futile battle against the sea, or the "drifting indefinite bitterness of life" (VP 808). Yeats also describes Cuchulain himself when "the battle fury was still on him" as "the sun pursuing clouds, or cold, or darkness" (VP 807). Throughout his poetic works, therefore, the process of reaching for wisdom involves pursuing both light and darkness. The closest form in which it can be manifested in this life is through the kind of experience so intense that it leaves the body behind and becomes spiritual experience. "[John] Donne . . . was never tempted to linger, or rather, to pretend that we can linger, between spirit and sense,"

Yeats wrote in 1922. "How often had I heard men of my time talk of the meeting of spirit and sense, yet there is no meeting but only change upon the instant, and it is by the perception of a change, like the sudden 'blacking out' of the lights of the stage, that passion creates its most violent sensation" (*Autobiography* 218). Yeats proposes that such experiences are a microcosmic foreshadowing of the Day of Judgement, and while it is more than natural that he should rage against the dying of the light in his physical old age, it is ironic that he believed that only on black Judgement Day would spiritual antinomies finally be resolved. He described this kind of an apocalyptic vision in "The Valley of the Black Pig" (1896), named after the site of a mythological battle at which, in the shape of a pig, the evil spirit of cold winter would battle with the fruit and leaves of summer--and here, "for the purposes of poetry," Yeats uses the Black Pig to signify the "darkness that will at last destroy the gods and the world" (*VP* 809):

The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
We who still labour by the cromlech on the shore,
The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,
Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you,
Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.

(*VP* 161)

While this early poem, like "The Song of Wandering Aengus," presents Yeats's belief that full realization--or resolution--of knowledge cannot be achieved in this world, he nonetheless pursued it as best he could among what he called

"the kingdoms of poetry, where there is no peace that is not joyous, no battle that does not give life instead of death" (VP 847).

Achieving a sense of "tragic joy," therefore, was what Yeats would ultimately define as his goal in life and art. His own life experience, he believed, was not to be escaped from, but to be synthesized into his identity as an individual and as part of the world at large. Yeats's use of the motif of transformation thereby reflects his concern with the meaning of his journey through life, and the role of his art both in that search and in the corresponding degree to which the individual and artist can aspire to immortality. Although he believed that "wisdom is the property of the dead, / A something incompatible with life" (VP 482), Yeats constantly strove to come to a realization of joy by re-creating himself imaginatively through art; and while he did see this pursuit as futile in the face of death, he admired the heroism of defying despair by continuing to search actively for truth and even beauty.

"Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", from The Tower (1928) collection, is one of Yeats's more bleak explorations of the relationship between art and life in the quest for knowledge, in a time when the world had reached a peak of chaos. The first title under which this poem was published was "Thoughts upon the Present State of the World." The retitling underlines the importance of 1919, the year that Ireland's War of Independence became intensified when the Black and Tans, who consisted mainly of British officers demobilized from World War I, were to oppose the Rebel Irish Republican Army with new "ferocity" (Albright 651). In a letter dated 9 April 1921, Yeats described The Tower collection as "not philosophical but simple and passionate, a lamentation over lost peace and lost hope. My own philosophy does not make

brighter the prospect" (L 668). The images from the start of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" correspondingly express the mutability of what he in "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927), by contrast, deems "[m]onuments of unageing intellect" in which are embodied "the artifice of eternity" (VP 407: 8, 24):

Many ingenious lovely things are gone
 That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
 Protected from the circle of the moon
 That pitches common things about. There stood
 Amid the ornamental bronze and stone
 An ancient image made of olive wood--
 And gone are Phidias' famous ivories
 And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

(VP 428 1-8)

In another draft for "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," lines 3 - 4 describe the "lovely things," that "seemed sheer miracle," as "Changeless and deathless; above the murdering moon / Above the insolence of the sun" (Albright 651). Right at the beginning of this poem, therefore, Yeats rejects the idea that art is eternal, in that even a sense of the value of ingenuity and loveliness has been lost because they have been pitched about in the company of "common things" in the turbulence of the era. This is a drastic statement for Yeats, since the works of the fifth century B.C. sculptor Phidias were to him the definitive images of order, and the ones with which civilization could counter the unbridled frenzy of World War I and the Irish War of Independence, 1919-1921. The "ancient image made of olive wood" (6) probably refers to the image of Athena "carved of olive wood [that] was kept in the Erechtheum on the Acropolis of Athens" (Albright 652). As the goddess of wisdom, fertility, the

useful arts, and prudent warfare, she is evidently lost in the anarchy of war. So, too, is Phidias himself, who built a monumental statue of Athena in the Parthenon (Albright 652). In A Vision, Yeats describes Phidian art as an example of the highest and most complete integration of art and culture, in which "all is transformed by the full-moon, and all abounds and flows;" in other words, Phidias is an artist working at "maximum imaginative synthesis" (AV 270, Albright 652). Through his statues, he imposes a visual order on the shape of the organic human body and its disorderly passions, and in this way brings together life and art, and the emotional and intellectual forces that guide human beings and artists alike.

The Athenian "lost peace and lost hope" for which Yeats laments is thus also a lost sense of the usefulness of art in the face of passionate and irrational anarchy. He dismisses his own and others' youthful idealistic views of achieving peace through revolution as "pretty toys" (9) which have turned out to be based on ill-founded complacency and optimism. The rejection of his former naive views would also have been for Yeats a rejection of the poetry which expressed his ideas: nothing served to stave off the "nightmare" that now "[r]ides upon sleep" (26): "a drunken soldier / Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, / To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free" (126-28). The ability of art to act as a guide by which society is to be transformed is here denounced as impotent.

. . . is there any comfort to be found?

Man is in love and loves what vanishes,

What more is there to say? That country round

None dared admit, if such a thought were his,

Incendiary or bigot could be found

To burn that stump on the Acropolis,
 Or break in bits the famous ivories
 Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.

(VP 429-30, 41-48)

As easily, then, as even the most "lasting" art is destroyed, as religious orders are overthrown, or as when Athena's sacred olive tree on the Acropolis is burned (46), is the unavoidable truth that "Everything that man esteems / Endures a moment" (VP 438, Albright 653). Surprisingly, though, it is this very transitoriness that Yeats moves on to celebrate in stanza II:

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
 A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
 It seemed that a dragon of air
 Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
 Or hurried them off on its own furious path;
 So the Platonic Year
 Whirls out new right and wrong,
 Whirls in the old instead;
 All men are dancers and their tread
 Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong. (49-58)

The evanescent quality of the dance in this stanza is an integral part of its nature and its beauty. In the midst of the poem's general "bewilderment," it provides "an instant of aesthetic relief" (Albright 655). The speaker describes the dance as symbolic of the greater spinning of the cycles of time in which the dancers themselves are so caught up by the one unified force of the dance that it seems to have a life of its own; the dance transforms in the poet's imagination from the specific dancer (Loie Fuller), to the general

dance, to become simultaneously subject to the whirlwind of the forces of time, and to become the whirlwind itself. By becoming one with their art and so losing their individuality, the "dancers" are transfigured into a part of Spiritus Mundi, and so definitively symbolize Yeats's notion of Unity of Being--or, in the words of the rhetorical question with which he concludes his poem "Among School Children" (1928), "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (VP 446).

The dance/whirlwind also reinforces the idea of the link between wisdom, eternity, and death. "[R]emember," Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley, "that the dead move in a whirl of wind in, I think, all folk lore" (DWL 95). In Irish mythology, the Sidhe (whose name in Gaelic means wind) "journey in whirling winds, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages, Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old goddess. When the country people see the leaves whirling on the road they bless themselves, because they believe the Sidhe to be passing by" (VP 800). Even in stanza II of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," therefore, there is an ambiguity created by the beauty of the sense of ordered unity and eternity, paired with the menacing threat of death, that is confirmed in the apocalyptic "barbarous clangour of a gong" (58).

From the visionary moment described in stanza II, the poem moves into a figurative comparison of the individual's soul to a swan which looks at itself through the "troubled mirror" (62) of "historical change" (Albright 654), to reveal only that subjective "brief gleam of its life . . . / An image of its state" (63-64), and then

The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:

That image can bring wildness, bring a rage

To end all things, to end
 What my laborious life imagined, even
 The half-imagined, the half-written page . . . (79-83).

This painful vision leads to a desire to reject everything, including his art, because it is incomplete in its "half-imagined" state, just as the "wisdom of daemonic images" is for him only "half-read" (Brunner 120; VP 427, 39).

By stanza IV, the poet's soul has turned into the "puny, vicious" form of a weasel (Albright 655):

We, who seven years ago
 Talked of honour and of truth,
 Shriek with pleasure if we show
 The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth. (89-92)

In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" Yeats asks if it is possible for a man to escape "That defiling and disfigured shape / [That] [t]he mirror of malicious eyes / Casts upon his eyes until at last / He thinks that shape must be his shape" (Albright 655; II 11-14), but in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," the despair in himself and his own art is doubly underscored by the fact that the speaker creates his own limited and inescapable self images. This animalistic image also contrasts with the early image of the shape-shifting Druid in "Fergus and the Druid" (1893), whose metamorphoses at least hold a hope for the possibility of aspiring to his "dreaming wisdom:"

. . . you have changed and flowed from shape to shape,
 First as a raven on whose ancient wings
 Scarcely a feather lingered, then you seemed a weasel moving on
 from stone to stone,
 And now at last you wear a human shape,

A thin grey man half lost in gathering night. (VP 102, 1-7)

Here, the sense of growth associated with imaginative transformation is very much at odds with that of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen;" in fact, this later poem towards the end states simply, "[E]vil gathers head" (117). At the end of the historical cycle, then, he saw little of truth and beauty to be gained from either life or art.

This lack of a sense of "subjective self-sufficiency," however, was an unusual poetic state for Yeats (Brunner 70). Just as he uses a tree as a symbol of unified wholeness in "Among School Children"-- "O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer, / Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?" (VP 446)--in "Colonus' Praise" (1928), he evokes a scene where

. . . yonder in the gymnasts' garden thrives
The self-sown, self-begotten shape that gives
Athenian intellect its mastery,
Even the grey-leaved olive tree
Miracle-bred out of the living stone;
Nor accident of peace nor war
Shall wither that old marvel. . . . (9-16)

Since its shape is self-begotten, the tree symbolizes the intellectual power to draw forth "life-giving strength" from the figurative "bitterness and hardship" of the stone out of which it grows (Brunner 70). "[W]illful transcendence" is an essential part of tragic joy: "[t]his image of human balance, harmony, and inner completeness is a complete transformation of all that ordinary man perceives himself to be" (Brunner 71). It is the courageous process of striving for Unity of Being that especially characterizes joy. In

"To a Child Dancing in the Wind" (1914), Yeats addresses the kind of uncomplicated happiness that only children can experience:

Dance there upon the shore;
 What need have you to care
 For wind or water's roar?
 And tumble out your hair
 That the salt drops have wet;
 Being young you have not known
 The fool's triumph, nor yet
 Love lost as soon as won,
 Nor the best labourer dead
 And all the sheaves to bind.
 What need have you to dread
 The monstrous crying of wind? (VP 312)

The child, whose prelapsarian state of what "Hamlet calls bestial oblivion, lives in the immortality of the moment" (Calderwood 6). This state is distinguished, of course, from the experience whereby adults transform the mind's operations of memory and conscience into joy (Albright 729). At times for Yeats this experience occurred in the form of unpredictable epiphanies in which,

At certain moments, always unforeseen, I become happy, most commonly when at hazard I have opened some book of verse. Sometimes it is my own verse when, instead of discovering new technical flaws, I read with all the excitement of the first writing. Perhaps I am sitting in some crowded restaurant, the open book beside me, or closed, my excitement having overbrimmed

the page. I look at the strangers near as if I had known them all my life, and it seems strange that I cannot speak to them: everything fills me with affection, I have no longer any fears or any needs; I do not even remember that this happy mood must come to an end. It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from Anima Mundi . . . would . . . burn up time. (Myth 364-65)

While here Yeats describes the potential role that art can play in an apocalyptic vision of transcendence to a state of love, nonetheless art is "but a vision of reality" (VP 369, 48), and by contrast, the other side of experience for the artist, as he wrote in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1919), is "dissipation and despair" (VP 369, 51). By the time Yeats wrote his last play, The Death of Cuchulain (1938-39), not long before his own death, there is a sense that his faith in the powers of his imagination to sustain his own heroism in the face of death has evidently declined, as has his optimistic belief in Ireland's ability to grow and rise above its cycle of political violence. Yeats had explored the same theme in "The Statues" (written in 1938) also as a point of comparison for integrity now lost, but with more optimism towards the potential of the Irish people to reform themselves again according to a former heroic ideal that would ultimately lead to peace. In his poem "Cuchulain Comforted" (January 13, 1939), Cuchulain as the definitive embodiment of the noble virtues, of courage which opposes futility, ends in this poem as a convicted coward "left to die in fear" (VP 634-35, 21-22). At the end of the poem, he, along with others from whom he is indistinguishable,

. . . sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,
Though all was in common as before;

They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds.

(VP 635, 23-25)

In a draft for the play The Death of Cuchulain, an attendant sings, "Four & twenty black birds -- the pie -- the six pence -- / the ry [sic] & the pocket -- nothing to do with each other / an untrue song & yet immortal" as Cuchulain dies (DC 93, 6-8). Therefore, while he wrote in a letter that the "abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence," what Yeats here nonetheless pronounces to be nonsense is the wisdom that he had always anticipated as being the "property of the dead"--"Man can embody truth but he cannot know it" (L 922).

Yeats had a long held belief that dead souls became unified with others in the nonmaterial realms of Spiritus Mundi:

Hitherto shade has communicated with shade in moments of common memory that recur like the figures of a dance in terror or in joy, but now they run together like to like, and their covens and fleets have rhythm and pattern. This running together . . . and yet without loss of identity, has been prepared for by their exploration of their moral life, . . . and all their thoughts have moulded the vehicle and become event and circumstance (Myth 356).

Through death, regardless of his former active heroic life, Cuchulain becomes transformed into a bird, the same shape and substance as the others. In this poem is a dual sense that Yeats, having identified with Cuchulain through much of his life, feels despair in there being meaning or least a long term effect as a result of his own works. As Cuchulain is a symbol for his country, Yeats is also expressing despair in the integrity and ability of his fellow Irish to

sustain the spirit of Cuchulain, that in a previous age of heroism was exemplified by the suppressed Easter Rising of 1916 in Dublin. In The Death of Cuchulain, he writes,

What stood in the Post Office
 With Pearse and Connolly?
 What comes out of the mountain
 Where men first shed their blood?
 Who thought Cuchullain till it seemed
 He stood where they had stood.

No body like his body
 Has modern woman borne,
 But an old man looking back on life
 Imagines it in scorn
 A statue's there to mark the place
 By Oliver Sheppard done
 So ends the tale that the harlot
 Sang to the beggarman. (DC 180, 214-27)

Oliver Sheppard's bronze statue depicts the dead hero in full battle dress with sword and shield, tied to a rock so that, according to the story, he would be standing upright when he met death. The modern figures worthy of "scorn," by contrast to the legend, are not, or can not, follow even the spirit of courage that Sheppard's statue was to commemorate and immortalize, and it is left to the marginal figures of the "harlot" and the "beggarman," rather than the government or the majority of the population, to remember former heroism.

With his own death imminent, Yeats may well have perceived only despair in there being meaning in his own achievements; yet the very fact that he continued to write suggests the value he could not help himself from positing in it. Even in spite of himself and his fate, he finally asserts the worth of his own art and life, and therefore also, for him, the inherent spirituality of his work and thought. As Yeats once wrote, his poetry was shaped from the influences of mythology, religion, and nature, and by what he called

a subtlety of desire, an emotion of sacrifice, a delight in order . . .
and myths and images that mirror the energies of woods and streams, and
of their wild creatures. Has any part of that majestic heraldry of the
poets had a very difficult fountain? Is it not the ritual of the
marriage of heaven and earth? (VP 847)

Notes

¹ English Poetry and Its Relation to Painting and the Other Arts (London: Oxford University Press, n.d.; reprinted from the Proceedings of the British Academy, vol.8, 1918, 381-402), 3. Quoted in Loizeaux 205-06, note 30.

² The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, The Germ: Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature, and Art, 1850. Quoted in Sambrook 1, 3.

³ W. B. Yeats, "Introduction," in The Poems of William Blake, reprinted in Nineteenth Century Accounts of William Blake, ed. Joseph Anthony Wittreich, (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1970), 283-284. Quoted in Loizeaux 32.

⁴ Yeats to W.T. Horton, 15 July 1900; manuscript at the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Quoted in Loizeaux 85.

CHAPTER TWO

The Art of Transformation

[T]o me drama . . . has been the search for more of manful energy, more of cheerful acceptance of whatever arises out of the logic of events, and for clean outline, instead of those outlines of lyric poetry that are blurred with desire and vague regret.

(W. B. Yeats, Preface to "Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea")¹

W. B. Yeats's lyric poetry of the 1880s and '90s became inadequate for his poetic goals as he grew increasingly interested in Irish politics and in his own role as one who could potentially influence thought and attitudes in his country. Throughout his life, he consistently retained a belief that visions, in the form of mental pictures as much as perceptions of the corporeal eye--and therefore "both the source and result" of poems--provided a way to the revelation of wisdom (Loizeaux 43). The main form in which Yeats chose to work in the early 1900s to evoke "visions of truth in the depths of the mind" was the theatre (E&I 28). Working in a dramatic form proved to be a catalyst for Yeats, because his later poetry and images, with which he hoped to create a new world and culture (rather than simply to escape from the present unsatisfactory world) are characterized by a clarity and directness of expression, and a tangibility rather than a dreamlike, ephemeral vagueness. By 1903, his hopes to reshape his visionary art into one that involved more concrete experience was evident when he wrote, "[T]he first shape of [On Baile's Strand] came to me in a dream, but it changed much in the making,

foreshadowing, it may be, a change that may bring a less dream-burdened will into my verses" (L 67). Already, in his 1901 essay "What is 'Popular Poetry'?", Yeats wrote that rather than turning exclusively to lyricism in order to create "popular poetry," he should have stayed in the "Dublin art schools . . . drawing from the round" (E&I 3). His attempt to create an all-encompassing form for his art, one that would ultimately contribute to the "reformation of society" and the "regeneration of the hearts of men" was connected to his attempt to create a standard of taste in the theatre audience (E&I 69). For instance, in "At the Abbey Theatre" (1912), he compares the theatre audience to Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea in Greek mythology who could assume any shape, and asks, "Is there a bridle for this Proteus / That turns and changes likes his draughty seas?" (VP 265, 11-12), and in his autobiography, Yeats describes the Irish as a whole as "soft wax" that could potentially be reshaped into a state of higher consciousness (Au 199, Albright 514).

Symbolic images were to play a large part in Yeats's reshaped work and his attempt to "reshape" his readers' and theatre audience's openness to vision. Although he did not see the goal of art to be the imitation of nature, he nevertheless believed that symbolic art should draw on nature as its source and as a means of discovering the best expression and evocation of a vision:

It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings . . . that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness and shallowness of a too conscious arrangement, into the abundance and depth of nature. (E&I 87)

The issue of subjective versus objective perceptions in art and in political thought was related to Yeats's concern with abstract images versus symbolic images. The profound symbolism derived from nature that he sought for his work was therefore a move from subjectivity towards a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. In 1914 he optimistically saw this gravitation as a general one for modern poetry: "The whole movement of poetry is toward pictures, sensuous images, away from rhetoric, from the abstract, toward humility" (UP2:414). As much as he valued the mystical art of Blake and Rossetti, Yeats ranked these painters as "not the greatest of artists" because "so august a beauty moves before the mind that they forget the things which move before the eyes" (E&I 150). He wrote in a letter to the visual artist William T. Horton in August 1901:

Like most visionary and imaginative artists your difficulty is to force yourself to study not the visionary truth but the form and methods by which it has to be expressed in the world. . . . It is quite certain to me that you should force yourself to study from life and from nature in every form.²

Looking at the development of his own poetry, Yeats in 1906 made a similar observation about his own beginnings:

. . . I was interested in nothing but states of mind, lyrical moments, intellectual essences. . . . I had not learned what sweetness, what rhythmic movement, there is in those who have become the joy that is themselves. Without knowing it, I had come to care for nothing but impersonal beauty. I had set out on life with the thought of putting my very self into poetry, and had understood this as a representation of my own visions and an

attempt to cut away the non-essential, but as I imagined the visions outside myself my imagination became full of decorative landscape and of still life. I thought of myself as something unmoving and silent, living in the middle of my own mind and body, a grain of sand in Bloomsbury or in Connacht that Satan's watch-fiends cannot find. 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. The more I tried to make my art deliberately beautiful, the more did I follow the opposite of myself. (E&I 271)

For Yeats's goals, therefore, the mystic artist must paradoxically keep in contact with the outside world in order to potentially express and understand eternity and the world of the spirit.

Because stylization aided in the visionary effect of a work, Yeats approved of stylized figurative and natural forms; yet he did not include cubism and abstract art in his ideal of art, nor did he look at abstract art as an appropriate or useful analogous model in content or form for his own work. Abstract art, he believed, had come about as a reaction to the Impressionist movement, and he felt that Impressionist representations of nature lacked rhythm and were "crude and raw," rather than stylized in order to become both more subjective and symbolic of meanings beyond the literal subject matter (Melchiori 271). The reason for this crudeness of execution was that the Impressionist artist's arrangement of subject matter on the canvas was done unconsciously and instinctively (L 608). On the other hand, he nonetheless could not sympathize with the Cubists' "austere conception of

stylization . . . [which] made no concession to subject matter" (Melchiori 271). In a letter to his father on March 14, 1916, he wrote that the Cubists were "right" to arrange their subject consciously, and to use pattern as a predominant element, but they were "wrong in substituting abstract scientific thought for conscious feeling:"

I feel in Wyndham Lewis's Cubist pictures an element corresponding to rhetoric arising from his confusion of the abstract with the rhythmical. Rhythm implies a living body, a breast to rise and fall, or limbs that dance, while the abstract is incompatible with life. The Cubist is abstract. (L 608)

In the same letter, Yeats goes on to praise Japanese painting which to him achieves a balance between recognizable subject matter from the natural world and the use of pattern or rhythm, "rhythm" here meaning to Yeats "the sinuous fluency of the outlines" (Melchiori 271)--the element missing in

Impressionism:

I have just been turning over a book of Japanese paintings. Everywhere . . . there is delight in form, repeated yet varied, in curious patterns of lines, but these lines are all an ordering of natural objects though they are certainly not imitation. In every case the artist one feels has had to consciously and deliberately arrange his subject. (L 608)

Yeats was considering these artistic principles at the time when his play At the Hawk's Well, which was the first to be written in the style based on the Japanese Noh, was being rehearsed. The imitation of nature versus abstraction was an issue he had considered in a previous letter to his father on March 5, 1916:

To me it seems that [art] often uses the outer world as a symbolism to express subjective moods. The greater the subjectivity, the less the imitation. Though perhaps there is always some imitation. . . . The element of pattern in every art is, I think, the part that is not imitative, for in the last analysis there will always be somewhere an intensity of pattern that we have never seen with our eyes. In fact, imitation seems to me to create a language in which we say things which are not imitation. (L 607)

As Yeats incorporated pattern in his work with symbols that were increasingly both intellectual and emotional, and therefore as much universal as individual, his approach to the nature and presentation of images evolved, and he began to emphasize the symbolic possibilities of the human figure. Because he felt his early poems were too distanced from the real world, one of his concerns as a producer of plays was the effective manipulation of "the perceived distance between the audience and the world on stage" (Loizeaux 88). The human figure as a visionary symbol became more important to Yeats as he worked with actors who carried almost the sole responsibility of expression in the play. Correspondingly, the issue of aesthetic distance was related to the physical presence of the actors; and visions that would be called up to the mind's eye in poetry were supplemented on the stage by what was seen by the physical eye (Loizeaux 90). Yeats, therefore, found himself

in the paradoxical position of desiring a stage picture that seemed remote enough to suggest to the audience the world of imagination, but "near" enough to have dramatic effect--otherworldly, but full of the pressure of reality. . . . He

needed the distance that resulted from imaginative vision and the "closeness" that came from the observation of life. (Loizeaux 90)

After some trial and error, Yeats concluded that background scenery should not be conceived as a landscape, but as if it were "the background of a portrait" (Ex 109). Decorativeness in a set would make the stage picture seem more remote: "I have noticed the more obviously decorative is the scene and costuming of any play, the more it is lifted out of time and place, and the nearer to faeryland do we carry it" (P1 454).

Turning away from realism in his set design was also a rejection on Yeats's part of the conventional theatre of his time, which, in 1897, when he entered the theatre world, was generally involved in the pursuit of illusion. Like his poetry which had also been evolving according to a similar Blakean visual analogy, he wished to create theatrical backdrops that would match his visionary approach to drama, in his continued pursuit of Blake's idea that "the more distinct, sharp and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art" (E&I 120):

We must have a new kind of scenic art [for drama]. . . . Ever since the last remnant of the old platform disappeared, and the proscenium grew into the frame of a picture, the actors have been turned into a picturesque group in the foreground of a meretricious landscape-painting. The background should be of as little importance as the background of a portrait-group, and it should, when possible, be of one colour or of one tint, that the persons on the stage, wherever they stand, may harmonise with it or contrast with it and preoccupy our attention. Their outline should be clear and not broken up into the outline of windows and wainscoting, or lost into the edges of colours.

. . . [A] landscape painted in the ordinary way will always be meretricious and vulgar. It will always be an attempt to do something which cannot be done successfully except in easel painting, and the moment an actor stands near to your mountain, or your forest, one will perceive that he is standing against a flat surface. Illusion, therefore, is impossible, and should not be attempted. (Ex 177-78)

While it went against the objective of traditional drama, acknowledging the two-dimensionality of his theatrical backdrops was for Yeats a development of his earlier Pre-Raphaelite and Morris-influenced approach to pattern. What he wanted for his verbal and visual endeavours in drama was, again, very similar to the allied artistic and moral goals of Blake whom Yeats quoted in his essay, "Ideas of Good and Evil" (1924):

How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding outline [--the line that divides a form not from its background but from surrounding space--] and its infinite inflections and movements. What is it that builds a house and plants a garden, but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intuitions? Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the Almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist. (E&I 120)

Yeats's theory of the mask, as manifested in the concrete masks used in his later plays, also reflects the Blakean ideal of the "bounding outline and its infinite inflections and movements." The masks, for instance, that Yeats commissioned from the French illustrator Edmund Dulac for his Noh play At the

Hawk's Well were designed according to the theories of stylization that Yeats had been devising. Dulac's work in general was similar to Beardsley, Burne-Jones, Puvis, and Moreau, and his use of "clear" colour was specifically Pre-Raphaelite in quality (Loizeaux 111). Yeats, not surprisingly, was also drawn to Dulac's interest in symbolism and in creating "dream worlds;" furthermore, the artist's designs, characterized by flat colours and patterned surfaces which reflect his attraction to Eastern art, parallel Yeats's interest in the corresponding qualities in Pre-Raphaelite art (Loizeaux 112). Dulac designed the masks and costumes for some of the characters in At the Hawk's Well (1916): the Old Man, Cuchulain, and the costume for the Guardian. The costumes and features of the mask faces are simplified into stylized lines and repeated forms to create an hypnotic effect (Loizeaux 112). When he had viewed one of the masks, Yeats said, "I am writing with my imagination stirred by a visit to the studio of Mr. Dulac, the distinguished illustrator of the Arabian Nights. I saw there the mask and head-dress to be worn in a play of mine by the player who will speak the part of Cuchulain, and who, wearing this noble, half-Greek, half-Asiatic face, will appear perhaps like an image seen in reverie by some Orphic worshipper" (E&I 221).

The masks capture in distilled form in Yeats's symbolic "spiritual drama" "the principals to some essential and intense quality defined by the fate that formulates itself in . . . [a] tragic moment of choice" (Nathan 153). The clearly defined lines and shapes on each mask therefore are required to embody a permanent truth as experienced by the tragic hero Cuchulain, a moment which is a "still point where the most fundamental human passions merge into a timeless gesture of dispassionate acceptance" (Moore x). In other words, in a "poetic tragedy," for Yeats "the supreme moments come

when character gives way to 'tragic reverie' and 'all is lyricism, unmixed passion, the integrity of fire'" (Moore 3). At such moments, any realistic mimetic depiction of an individual's character is supplanted by the evocation of a greater universal experience that transcends time and space; according to Yeats, a member of the audience who has been transported into this reverie would not say

"How well that man is realised! I should know him were I to meet him in the street," for it is always ourselves that we see upon the stage, and should it be a tragedy of love, we renew, it may be, some loyalty of our youth, and go from the theatre with our eyes dim for an old love's sake. (E&I 240-241)

Yeats's theory of the mask, therefore, is that it works as a metaphor on many levels. The mask operates as an "anti-self" which exists on a plane apart from mundane existence and is an image which unites the divisive and opposing characteristics of human nature, as well as the even larger forces of "nature and supernature, the visible and the invisible" (Moore 5). His own art was itself also a mask: "If we are painters [/poets] we shall express personal emotion through ideal form, a symbolism kindled by the generations, a mask from whose eyes the disembodied looks" (E&I 243). As John Rees Moore has pointed out, the primitivism that became the mode after Yeats's time was derived from cultures "brought to light by anthropologists in the later nineteenth century and since," cultures in which,

[i]n rites of initiation, for instance, the mask can represent the longed for future state of the wearer. More than that, it can help the wearer transform himself from one state to another.
(Moore 6)

For Yeats's hero, Cuchulain, who appears repeatedly in the poet's verse as well as his drama, the metamorphic applications and implications of the mask are particularly apt, since he is a character in Irish mythology who can literally be transformed by emotions such as rage. As a symbol for Ireland, Cuchulain was useful as an embodiment of the "noble virtues" which Yeats recognized, at least in potential, in his fellow countrymen. Looking at real experience and mythology through the metaphorical and analogous possibilities of the mask thereby allowed Yeats's perceptions of the world to come from a perspective much larger and more truthful to him than a literal point of view, for "whenever a myth has been taken literally the sense has been perverted; but also . . . whenever it has been dismissed as a mere priestly fraud or sign of inferior intelligence, truth has slipped out the other door" (Campbell 27).

Yeats continued his search for an "image" that would be an appropriate model after which the Irish could form themselves. His early plays had not achieved either mass commercial success or a unification of the populace, and by the time he turned to the exotic and avant garde Noh theatre, he had concluded that political progress towards peace could probably only be attained through more autocratic guidance of "the average man" by an enlightened elite:

. . . the need of a model of the nation, of some moral diagram, is as great as in the early nineteenth century, when national feeling was losing itself in a religious feud over tithes and emancipation. Neither the grammars of the Gaelic League nor the industrialism of the Leader, nor the Sinn Fein attacks upon the Irish Party, give sensible images to the affections. Yet in the work of Lady Gregory, of Synge, of O'Grady, of Lionel Johnson, in

my own work, a school of journalists with simple moral ideas could find right building material to create an historical and literary nationalism as powerful as the old and nobler. That done, they could bid the people love and not hate. (Au 334-36)

Yeats himself turned to "complex" images (Au 334) from the myth of Leda and the Swan when in 1923 George Russell asked him to write a poem for the political review, the Irish Statesman. Two of the artists' works which helped to make a "composite picture" for Yeats's poem were Michelangelo and the French symbolist painter Gustave Moreau (Melchiori 156). Yeats regarded Moreau as being "at all times," among the "great myth-makers and mask-makers, the men of aristocratic mind" (Au 550). Yeats evidently admired the painter's work to the end of his own life, because as late as 1936 he had a reproduction of Moreau's Women and Unicorns (Les Licornes) on his wall, a painting whose central female figure in a reclining pose echoes the posture of Leda in other of Moreau's works (DWL 100). Her languidity gives credence to Moreau's own explanation of his portrayal of the scene, with which Yeats agreed, as symbolic of "mystery" (Melchiori 157). The emphasis in the French artist's version of the myth is therefore on a deified experience. Moreau, like other of the artists whom Yeats admired, was influenced by Michelangelo, and Yeats himself had a coloured reproduction of Michelangelo's image of Leda and the Swan on his desk, including the period in which he wrote his own "Leda and the Swan" (Jeffares, W. B. Yeats, Man and Poet 202). He was also familiar with Michelangelo's Ganymede and the Eagle which corresponds to Yeats's portrayal of the bird and human figure in the way the wings are beating at "full strength," and because of the way the bird's "head and neck press upon the breast of the boy" as they do in Yeats's poem (Melchiori 155). The figure of

Leda appears languid but latently strong, rather than helpless, in the visual work--a languidity which sublimates and retains Yeats's emphasis on the dual nature of the experience as he represents it.

In response to George Russell's request for a political poem, Yeats wrote in 1924 that what came first to his mind was that,

'After the individualist, demagogic movement, founded by Hobbes and popularized by the Encyclopaedists and the French Revolution, we have a soil so exhausted that it cannot grow that crop again for centuries.' Then I thought, 'Nothing is now possible but some movement from above preceded by some violent annunciation.' My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor, and I began this poem; but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it, and my friend tells me that his 'conservative readers would misunderstand the poem.' (VP 828)

National or even international politics, then, Yeats saw in a larger and more objective context of historical cycles. The next age of terror would be antithetical to the "impoverished and impoverishing idea-world of empiricist philosophy" and also of democracy: "Everything seems to show that the centrifugal movement which began with the Encyclopaedists and produced the French Revolution, and the democratic views of men like Mill, has worked itself out to the end. Now we are at the beginning of a new centripetal movement [towards Mussolini and authoritarian government]" (Albright 664, UP2:434). In "Leda and the Swan" he creates a vision which begins with a violent experience but is supplanted by a larger experience of physical and mental knowledge that exceeds the normal subjective, individual human realm.

The shock tactics Yeats uses to describe the scene of mythic brutality in his poem resembles his approach to theatre in which, as James W. Flannery phrases it, he sought to "jolt" the spectator/reader "out of unexamined attitudes by evoking an altered state of mind akin to terror" (Flannery 97). Yeats considered hopefully that the political wars could be the means of, yet be given over for, a greater reality beyond subjective feelings:

I think profound philosophy must come from terror. An abyss opens under our feet; inherited convictions, the pre-suppositions of our thoughts, those Fathers of the Church Lionel Johnson expounded, drop into the abyss. Whether we will or no we must ask the ancient questions: Is there reality anywhere? Is there a God? Is there a Soul?" (E&I 502-03)

This passage from 1936 is in a way a rewriting in prose of "Leda and the Swan," in which terror itself is part of contact with God and superhuman knowledge. In the poem, the question, "Did she put on his knowledge with his power . . . ?" is implicitly answered by the structure of the poem, which moves from the individual human being's experience of terror to, in the last half, a consideration of the myth inclusive of both individual and universal history. A figure able to "see" beyond immediate terror or rage and to accept it as a way of enlarging his or her larger vision is how Yeats presents Leda and her possible future outlook on her fate. She becomes emblematic in a sense of Ireland as a whole, a country which could, potentially, grow into a greater and peaceful state--one that could perhaps stem the tide of violence and reshape destiny, as he would later explore in his poem "The Statues."

Complementary images of Leda as capable of accepting her own fate, and thereby having the ability to transform both herself and history, are used in

other of Yeats's poems such as "The Adoration of the Magi" to which, in 1925, he added a passage prophesying the transformation of the world when "another Leda," accepting her role in this transformation, "would open her knees to the swan, another Achilles beleaguer Troy" (Myth 310). In the last stanza of "Lullaby" (1931), both Leda and the swan are transformed into a state of peacefulness for the world to "begin again" (L 761):

Such a sleep and sound as fell
 Upon Eurotas' grassy bank
 When the holy bird, that there
 Accomplished his predestined will,
 From the limbs of Leda sank
 But not from her protecting care.

(VP 522, 11.13-18)

The ensuing languidity of both figures here links Yeats more immediately to Moreau's or Michelangelo's visual works. In Moreau's versions, the otherworldly nature of Leda's experience is emphasized, while the swan is a powerful and large bird, relative to Michelangelo's version in which the swan is diminished in size, and the reclining attitude of Leda's powerful figure makes their encounter appear erotic. Interestingly, in Les Licornes where Moreau used a pose for the central female figure lounging with a mythological animal (the unicorn), similar to a pose he used in one of his Ledas, Michelangelo's Leda echoes the figure of Night (1524-34) on his Tomb of Giuliano de'Medici in the Medici Chapel. However, Night's position is curled-up and self-enclosing; her head is lowered, expressing grief in "defeat" for her "lost children," in contrast to the upright carved figure of the Madonna (1521) in the chapel, who holds her divine Child (Hartt 549, 551). According

The desire for "more of manful energy" (VP 849) Yeats found in Michelangelo's rendering of, and in the muscular androgynous forms themselves, was also what drew him to the Renaissance sculptor's "art of the body" (Loizeaux 155). In 1924 Yeats wrote a manifesto for a group of writers and artists, asserting the value of art "founded in physical life" (Loizeaux 155):

We are Catholics, but of the school of Pope Julius the Second and of the Medician Popes, who ordered Michelangelo and Raphael to paint upon the walls of the Vatican, and upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the doctrine of the Platonic Academy of Florence, the reconciliation of Galilee and Parnassus. We proclaim Michelangelo the most orthodox of men, because he set upon the tomb of the Medici "Dawn" and "Night," vast forms shadowing the strength of antediluvian Patriarchs and the lust of the goat, the whole handwork of God, even the abounding horn. (UP2:438)

Yeats's Leda in "Leda and the Swan" is, therefore, a composite image. Visual renditions of the myth that he had seen vary in their interpretations: Michelangelo's erotic sculpture in which the swan is smaller, yet has "supernatural" implications through Leda's connections with the Night statue, is another side to Moreau's versions in which the swan looms as a menacing force while the figure of Leda is caught up in "mystery," as Moreau defined it. Yeats's idea that terror, hatred, or pain can potentially give rise to other forms of godly knowledge is further evident when, for instance, in notes to Part III of his poem "The Tower" (1926) Yeats writes that he himself "unconsciously echoed one of the loveliest lyrics of our time--Mr. Sturge Moore's Dying Swan," a poem in which the godlike swan demonstrates the

reciprocal solicitude, forgiveness, and acceptance of fateful destiny that Yeats's Leda demonstrates in "Lullaby:"

"The Dying Swan"

O silver-throated Swan
 Struck, struck! A golden dart
 Clean through thy breast has gone
 Home to thy heart.
 Thrill, thrill, O silver throat!
 O silver trumpet, pour
 Love for defiance back
 On him who smote!
 And brim, brim o'er
 With love; and ruby-dye thy track
 Down thy last living reach
 Of river, sail the golden light--
 Enter the sun's heart--even teach,
 O wondrous-gifted Pain, teach thou
 The god to love, let him learn how.

(VP 826)

Therefore, the swan, too, becomes for Yeats symbolic of the connection between love and knowledge, albeit knowledge that comes as a paradoxical result of pain. He emphasizes the physicality of the encounter between the bird and human being in "Leda and the Swan," yet he wishes to express that it is the contact with deity that makes possible her putting on his knowledge, as Ireland could potentially gain knowledge from its experience, and create a new heroic age. In notes to "Meditations in Time of Civil War" in 1928, also in

The Tower collection, Yeats comments, "A cry for vengeance because of the murder of the Grand Master of the Templars seems to me a fit symbol for those who labour for hatred, and so for sterility in various kinds. . . .: 'For wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey.'" (VP 827, 338).

"Lapis Lazuli" (1938) is another work which combines the elements of transformation and a visual work of art to explore the theme of tragic joy. It starts with a description of his country in a state of political turmoil, but ends with the affirmation of gaiety and life as the closest embodiment of truth that is possible to achieve in this life. The poem itself also echoes the state of the speaker's mind as it moves from chaos in the first stanza to joy in the concluding stanza.

I have heard that hysterical women say
 They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow,
 Of poets that are always gay,
 For everybody knows or else should know
 That if nothing drastic is done
 Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
 Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
 Until the town lie beaten flat.

(VP 565, 1-9)

In stanza one, the "hysterical women" who are "sick" of art, music, and poetry are actually sick of poetic optimism which allows artists to continue their own work, despite the prospect of political or sectarian warfare in Ireland. The implication is that, by some views, artists are not being productive in a practical or constructive way. Already in this first stanza, though, the "odd jocularity" of "Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in / Until the town lie

beaten flat" indicates the poet's wish nevertheless to "be gay despite all of war's horrors" (Albright 774).

By stanza two, the perspective of the poem shifts a little--it does not turn from the "real world," but instead conflates it with the world of the stage, so that the "ordinary passersby" (Albright 754) become consciously or unconsciously part of a Shakespearean tragedy when:

All perform their tragic play,
 There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
 That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
 Yet they, should the last scene be there,
 The great stage curtain about to drop,
 If worthy their prominent part in the play,
 Do not break up their lines to weep.
 They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
 Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.
 All men have aimed at, found and lost;
 Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
 Tragedy wrought to its uttermost.
 Though Hamlet rambles and Lear rages,
 And all the drop-scenes drop at once
 Upon a hundred thousand stages,
 It cannot grow by an inch or an ounce.

(VP 565-66, 9-24)

Yeats describes life, therefore, as a tragic play in which people all play certain roles. While Hamlet suffers "all men's fate," each person suffers Hamlet's fate just by confronting death (E&I 255, Albright 774). To achieve

Lear's state of mind was, to Yeats, to come as close to attaining wisdom before death as is possible. He identifies himself with Lear's tragic vision in "An Acre of Grass:"

Grant me an old man's frenzy
 Myself must I remake
 Till I am Timon and Lear
 Or that William Blake
 Who beat upon the wall
 Till truth obeyed his call

(VP 576, 13-18)

Remaking himself, in fact, becoming "self-begotten," and being able to subject a vision of truth to his own intellectual control is the result of tragic heroic experience; he achieves unity of being in this self-mastered union of intellect and emotion (Brunner 63).

He envisioned the same goal for those acting the roles of Cordelia or Ophelia. After profound suffering and pain, these tragic characters, like Hamlet or Lear, reach a state of serenity and security because, from having endured so much, they can never be touched again by tragedy. In this way, tragic sorrow belongs to a realm much greater than the personal:

Because there is submission in a pure sorrow, we should sorrow alone over what is greater than ourselves, nor too soon admit that greatness, but all that is less than we are should stir us to some joy, for pure joy masters and impregnates; and so to world end, strength shall laugh and wisdom mourn. (E&I 252-53)

Hence, the actresses "[d]o not break up their lines to weep;" it must be "[g]aiety" that transfigures "all that dread" of a fast-approaching apocalypse (17-18).

There is, furthermore, a joy in identifying oneself with the whole human race or with something impersonal and superhuman (Albright 769). Yeats wrote in "The Tragic Theatre" that while "character is continuously present in comedy alone . . . tragedy must always be a drowning and breaking of the dykes that separate man from man;" in other words, tragic sorrow destroys individual personality rather than affirming it (E&I 240-41). Shakespeare's heroes, therefore, express a universal experience, and they "move us because their sorrow is not their own at tomb or asp, but for all men's fate. That shaping joy has kept the sorrow pure, as it had kept . . . the emotion love or hate, for the nobleness of the arts is in the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender" (Albright 769-70); E&I 255). The nature of tragic joy is epiphanic: "Black out; Heaven blazing into the head: Tragedy wrought to its uttermost." The gaiety that the "hysterical women" of the first stanza of "Lapis Lazuli" define in terms of "frivolity, irresponsibility, and obtuseness," is really a much larger "[a]rtistic gaiety" (Brunner 89). The impending onslaught of zeppelins is small and local compared to greater all-encompassing death itself. Therefore, because drama/art itself is a death-defying agent, Yeats here asserts against hysteria the integration of art with life, so that life itself in a sense will become a play.

The lapis lazuli artifact after which Yeats named his poem represents a scene from which he derived his last two stanzas. As a sculpture, "willed into being by the thrust of creative gaiety," it has a life of its own, but in

his response and contemplation of it, Yeats himself re-creates the object in his poem (Brunner 910). He first described it in a letter as

a great piece [of lapis lazuli] carved by some Chinese sculptor
into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths, and an
ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain. Ascetic, pupil,
hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in
the midst of despair. (DWL 8-9)

When Yeats rewrites this first prose description into poetry, the scene becomes a backdrop for a symbolic journey through time and space:

Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
Are carved in lapis lazuli,
Over them flies a long-legged bird,
A symbol of longevity;
The third, doubtless a serving-man,
Carries a musical instrument.

Every discolouration of the stone,
Every accidental crack or dent,
Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
Or lofty slope where it still snows
Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
Sweetens the little half-way house
Those Chinamen climb towards, and I
Delight to imagine them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare,

One asks for mournful melodies;
 Accomplished fingers begin to play.
 Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
 Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.

(37-56)

The figures' climb in the present tense is the way the speaker physically sees them on the carving: equally, their present awareness of tragedy is evident through the description of the stone from which they are carved as discoloured, cracked, and dented. The long-legged bird correspondingly symbolizes "not immortality, [or] an escape from tragedy, but only longevity, endurance in tragedy" (Brunner 92). Like the golden artificial bird into which the speaker of "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928) wishes to transform, the long-legged bird also is proclaimed to be part "Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (32). Yeats himself helps to create their future when he delights to imagine them seated at the half-way house, staring "on the mountain and the sky, / On all the tragic scene" (48-52). Not only are the figures aware of tragedy, however, but they accept it--"One asks for mournful melodies" (53)--and are heroically transformed as a result: "Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes, / Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay" (55-56). Similarly, Shakespeare's Hamlet faces and accepts death when he says,

If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be
 now; if it be not now, yet it will come.

(V.iii.209-11)

In "Lapis Lazuli," Yeats uses this idea of acceptance of inevitability and futility--"[a]ll men have aimed at, found and lost" (18)--to paradoxically affirm life through art by highlighting the beauty of heroic courage. He also

affirms art itself as part of the ceremony necessary to counter tragic despair: while "the ceremony in which the Chinamen engage is certainly tragic, . . . it is [nonetheless] ceremony still--ordered, finite, and self-produced" (Brunner 93).

For Yeats, then, the "art" of transformation involves multiple elements, and is exemplified on more than one level in "Lapis Lazuli." While in "Leda and the Swan" the composite image he creates is built on references to works of art that lie beneath the surface of the poem, he describes directly in "Lapis Lazuli" a sculpture whose subject matter and style correspond to his own goal of creating images that capture a sense of tragic joy. In these poems, an affirmation of the truth contained in the experience of tragic joy is what transcends the element of personal despair present in his Cuchulainn works, and forms the basis for his public art and his theory of historical cycles explored in such poems as "The Statues." His attraction to the concrete tangibility of art and its stylistic analogies with writing was nonetheless subjective and emotional, because Blake's "'great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, . . . that the more distinct, sharp and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism and bungling'"³ had greater appeal to Yeats in his later life, as he was increasingly drawn to the eternalizing artifice of physical works of art as an alternative to the existence of his soul "sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal / It knows not what it is" (VP 408):

And as I look backward upon my own writing, I take pleasure alone
in those verses where it seems to me I have found something hard

and cold, some articulation of the Image, which is the opposite of all that I am in my daily life. . . . (Au 274)

By focusing on various works of visual art throughout his career, Yeats was able to supplement and reinforce his approach to vision, and complement the subjective with the objective, and the inner world with the outer world. It is both his aesthetic and physical maturation, along with the political anarchy that surrounded him in the outside world, that enabled him to develop his spiritual and visionary images and philosophy as they corresponded to the other arts.

Notes

¹ VP 849

² Yeats to W.T. Horton, dated Aug. 11, 1901; manuscript with typescript at the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Quoted in Loizeaux 85.

³ From Yeats's essay, "William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy" in The Savoy, July, +[August, September] 1896, 49. Quoted in Loizeaux 29.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Statues" and "Under Ben Bulbin:" Yeats's Verbal Expression of Visual Measurement

Only an aching heart
Conceives a changeless work of art.
(W. B. Yeats, "The Tower")

W. B. Yeats saw his poetry as a poetry of vision. As a consequence, the relationship of vision to the spiritual nature of artistic creativity is a theme which is evident throughout his oeuvre, and is one that evolves according to the varying degrees in which Yeats incorporates his immediate aesthetic, political, and life experiences in general into his poetic and prose works. He develops his "vision" initially by analogizing and deriving both his process and product from that of visual artists such as William Morris, D. G. Rossetti, and William Blake, whose works collectively encompassed the characteristics he himself was striving for in his own visionary images. Such images, he believed, were to be perceived by means of hypnotic pattern in visual works such as Morris's tapestries' pattern which corresponds to the trance-inducing rhythm Yeats employed in his early poems. This rhythm in turn complemented his comparatively dreamlike, physically insubstantial images, whose forms he frequently described in terms of Pre-Raphaelite iridescent or glowing colour. At the same time he also analogously incorporated Blake's visually-applied principle of the "hard and wiry"

outline; his verbal compromise between these approaches was to use lulling aural patterns that evoke dreamlike visions, from which clearly delineated forms, especially figures, arise at rhythmical intervals. For his depictions of female figures Yeats also was influenced by a Rossettian "spiritualized sensuousness" (Loizeaux 19). Sensual details derived from the physical world, but used to express the spiritual and emotional world, were to him a vital component in his definition of vision as experienced and expressed in art and poetry.

The aesthetic side of Yeats's work came from the Rhymers' Club to which he belonged in his early years. The Rhymers had a rather vague wish to "create once more the pure work" which would supplant the moral enthusiasm of the Victorian poets who had allowed the "impurities" of politics, science, religion, and history to infiltrate their verse (Houghton 757). The essays of Arthur Symonds, who wrote The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899) introduced Yeats and his group to this French literary notion of "poesie pure" in which he said that poetry "should be a miracle; not a hymn to beauty, nor a description of beauty, nor beauty's mirror; but beauty itself, the colour, fragrance, and form of the imagined flower, as it blossoms again out of the page" (Houghton 757). The Rhymers felt that art itself should be "a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual" (Houghton 757). Yeats himself certainly saw visionary art and poetry as a substitute for traditional religion, and the moments of artistic creation being characterized by a state of trance-like consciousness akin to that needed to perceive momentary revelations of the "essences of things" in which the seer is both asleep and awake (E&I 193). Yeats also endorsed the idea that literature and art act together as a guide in the quest for truth that he

himself was involved in. As he wrote, "Nor had we better warrant to separate one art from another, for there has been no age before our own wherein the arts have been other than a single authority, a Holy Church of Romance, the might of all lying behind all, a circle of cliffs, a wilderness where every cry has its echoes" (E&I 353).

As he matured, his poetry of vision as revelation also became increasingly concerned with articulating "the nature of the real:" looking to the external world as a source of revelation, both emotional and intellectual, to some extent took over from the sense of relatively introverted, internally conceived, "visions" of embodiments of essences of his early aesthetic poetry (Armstrong 39). As cataclysmic political events became more important to him, the visionary forms in his "dim lands of peace" evolved into "palpable" forms derived from more direct experience of the external world as a whole, not just from sensory details (North, "The Paradox of the Mausoleum" 221). In the face of his own physical ageing and illness, Yeats's concept of his poetry's connections to life and to physical works of art which alternatively embodied the "artifice of eternity" was also evolving, as was his symbolic method. Where earlier he turned to a work of visual art as an analogous influence on his symbolic method or style, or as the "spark" from which he would derive an image, he began to cite by name works of art and artists themselves as monuments of not just his own private, artistic experience, but of the Irish experience, and of the experience of humanity in general (Melchiori 225). Naming actual artists such as William Blake or Michelangelo, and frequently, political figures, such as Kevin O'Higgins, gave him a means of monumentalizing himself and his own poems, and of perceiving them like works of visual art which belong to and exist in the public domain.

The idea of unity among the arts that he took from William Morris he now translated into his more general philosophy of unity of art with culture, a unity which rejected the Aesthetic aspect of Pre-Raphaelitism. In his 1913 essay "Art and Ideas", Yeats set out this reevaluation of Rossetti et al. as a "more profound Pre-Raphaelitism" in which are included "elements from the general thought" (E&I 355, 347). This philosophy had already manifested itself in verse form when Yeats found inspiration for his poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (1888) not in a beautiful work of art or in an ephemeral vision, but in an everyday image he encountered unexpectedly in a busy thoroughfare in London. As he related the incident in prose,

I had still the ambition, formed in Sligo in my teens, of living in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree, a little island in Lough Gill, and when walking through Fleet Street very homesick I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window which balanced a little ball upon its jet, and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem Innisfree, my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music. I had begun to loosen rhythm as an escape from rhetoric and from that emotion of the crowd that rhetoric brings, but I only understood vaguely and occasionally that I must for my special purpose use nothing but the common syntax. (Au 153)

Interestingly and paradoxically, Yeats's translating the image of a trivial kitsch object into an emotional and aesthetic experience looked ahead to his late poems in which contemplating objects of high art would act as a similar trigger for apprehending poetry's place within the larger culture. Here in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," however, he realizes his "special purpose" of

bringing together art and life by transforming mundanity into the realm of "vision," thus making vision itself a part of day-to-day life:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
 And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
 Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
 And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
 Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
 There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
 And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
 I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
 While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
 I hear it in the deep heart's core. (VP 117)

The lulling rhythm of the poem, and assonance of the liquid "l"'s in "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore" particularly bring out the hypnotic qualities he originally sought for his visionary verse, but because it is such a banal source that brings on the chords that ring "always . . . in the deep heart's core," and because he can "see" and "hear" the water while in the midst of a busy thoroughfare, this poem is already close to rejecting the "mirror on mirror mirrored" approach to art that he later described in "The Statues" as inappropriate for his poetic goals.

Integrating all aspects of life and thought had also been one of the ideals Walter Pater had advocated, and Yeats ends his "Art and Ideas" essay with an assertion of this ideal:

Shall we be rid of the pride of intellect, of sedentary meditation, of emotion that leaves us when the book is closed or the picture seen no more; and live amid the thoughts that can go with us by steamboat and railway as once upon horseback, or camel-back, rediscovering, by our reintegration of the mind, our more profound Pre-Raphaelitism, the old abounding, nonchalant reverie?

(E&I 355)

In working towards a communal vision in which the arts play an integral role, Yeats was in a sense endorsing the very idea that he had rejected in his aesthetically-minded views--the idea that art and poetry should be an instructive guiding force for the whole of society. The Victorian John Ruskin also set out a theory of ennobling art in Modern Painters (1856) which had to do with imagination (which "by intuition and intensity of gaze" can reach "a more essential truth than is at the surface of things"),¹ and the idea that poetry and art should inspire the "noble emotions" (rather than instruct explicitly) for the "noblest purposes."² Ruskin saw the Byzantine era as one which produced such an art by studying classical works:

. . .that [Byzantine] school brought to the art-scholars of the thirteenth century, laws which had been serviceable to Phidias, and symbols which had been beautiful to Homer. And methods and habits of pictorial scholarship, which gave a refinement of manner to the work of the simplest craftsman, and became an education to the higher artists which no discipline of literature can now

bestow, developed themselves in the effort to decipher, and the impulse to re-interpret, the Eleusinian divinity of Byzantium tradition.³

While Yeats differed from Ruskin in that he also saw the Renaissance as a highlight in artistic history, which Ruskin rejected for its emphasis on science and, by implication, its mechanization and neglect of the imagination, Yeats saw as high points the eras whose art not only achieved maximum beauty, but which best typified the elevating influence of the collaborative arts on the rest of culture, such as the turning point of Greco/Roman civilization, and most particularly, the Justinian age as exemplified in the city of Byzantium.

Although he viewed firsthand the mosaics in the church of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna on a trip to Italy in 1907, and the Byzantine mosaics in Sicily in 1925, Yeats's description and concept of Byzantine art nonetheless owe a great deal to Ruskin's descriptions of the Byzantine St. Mark's in The Stones of Venice (1851-53) (Loizeaux 133, Levine 25-34). Yeats saw the mosaics as representative of an ideal state where "perfect beauty expressed in the arts corresponded to a perfect condition of life--natural and supernatural" (Melchiori 225), an idea developed in his prose work A Vision, in which he wrote:

Could any visionary [in the days of Byzantium] passing through the church named with so un-theological a grace 'The Holy Wisdom', can even a visionary of today wandering among the mosaics of Rome and Sicily, fail to recognize some one image seen under his closed eyelids? To me it seems that He, who among the first Christian communities was little but a ghostly exorcist, had in His assent

to a full Divinity made possible this sinking-in upon a supernatural splendour, these walls with their little glimmering cubes of blue and green and gold. (AV 280-281)

The art of the city of Byzantium therefore represented a state in which religious and artistic vision were one, and could even in modern times still act as a pictorial guide to a higher truth and beauty. Because of this it became for Yeats the definitive symbol of art and society inextricably connected:

I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers --though not, it may be, poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract--spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. They could copy out of old Gospel books those pictures that seemed as sacred as the text, and yet weave all into a vast design, the work of many that seemed the work of one, that made building, picture, pattern, metal-work of rail and lamp, seem but a single image; and this vision, this proclamation of their invisible master, had the Greek nobility, Satan always the still half-divine Serpent, never the horned scarecrow of the didactic Middle Ages. (AV 280)

The ideal role of art and poetry, then, is to weave a "vast design" in visual/verbal forms which encompass a spiritual truth. Such a truth also incorporates Blakean complementary forces (the "half-divine Serpent") in turn akin to Ruskin's advocating the "refinement" of insight which lies behind the idea of "Eleusinian divinity" as an appropriate model for Christian images. Yeats explored the roles of poetry and art in a variety of ways, however. In his poem "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), Yeats uses the "holy sages" on the wall not only as a symbol of the integration of the artist with religion and culture, but as symbolic of a state of permanence which opposes and ameliorates his own personal physical mutability. Additionally, in other poems, while holding up works of art or specific artists as figures to be revered, and as those who set a certain standard or measure by which the rest of society can be guided, Yeats was evaluating his own worth as a verbal purveyor of "permanent" truth or wisdom.

"The Municipal Gallery Revisited" (1937) is an example of the poet's ruminations over the question of which medium gives the clearer and more truthful image--the apparently permanent plastic portraits hanging in the art gallery, or his own verbal, but ephemeral, renditions of spirit (as opposed to appearance). Where in "Sailing to Byzantium", he reacts on an emotional level to his "heart . . . sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal / It knows not what it is," and is drawn to the secure alternative of the "artifice of eternity" in which the figures in a Byzantine mosaic exist, in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" Yeats betrays an ambivalence towards visual art. Here he raises the issue of the relative permanence of the visual and verbal arts by first delineating his own intellectual and emotional experiences as he views these monuments of active and unageing patriotism. "Around me the

images of thirty years" introduces his seeing, through art, images of people he admired and/or knew in his past, an experience which involves being overwhelmed by memory, which in fact surpasses the visual images themselves in "truth": "Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears / A gentle questioning look that cannot hide / A soul incapable of remorse or rest" (I, 5-7). It is not so much a matter of the painting capturing both the external countenance and what is hidden behind it, as what Yeats the poet/viewer brings to it:

Heart smitten with emotion I sink down,
My heart recovering with covered eyes;
Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
My permanent or impermanent images (VP 602, III, 1-4).

In the portrait of Lady Gregory, there is no ambiguity as to the artist's relative inability to capture the sitter's inner spirit and character; it is Yeats's own "image" that is evoked and which enables him to truly remember and see his friend:

Mancini's portrait of Augusta Gregory,
'Greatest since Rembrandt,' according to John Synge;
A great ebullient portrait certainly;
But where is the brush that could show anything
Of all that pride and that humility,
And I am in despair that time may bring
Approved patterns of women or of men
But not that selfsame excellence again. (IV, 1-8)

Connected to the issue of which art best envisions and "shows" truth is the additional question of the degree of "excellence," and corresponding longevity, of Yeats's own contributions to his society. By naming O'Higgins

the revolutionary soldier, or Gregory, who was a patron of poets and playwrights supporting Irish independence, Yeats brings out an insecurity about his own active part in public life. He faces the question again in "Man and the Echo" (1938), where he wonders

Did that play of mine send out
 Certain men the English shot?
 Did words of mine put too great strain
 On that woman's reeling brain?
 Could my spoken words have checked
 That whereby a house lay wrecked? (11-16)

Yeats's speculation in this poem as to whether his ephemeral vision had actually come to a glorious concretization by inspiring people to revolutionary action also troubles him--if he did indeed inspire such action, has all that he has expressed poetically given rise to nothing but "passionate intensities," resulting in a set of violent and ugly public events? For either positive or negative outcome, what is consistent is the amount of power, potential or otherwise, that the poet posits in his own craft. In "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," the relative ability to monumentalize retrospectively noble virtues in visual form, as opposed to inciting noble actions through words, is an issue which allows Yeats to place himself in the position of being potentially both an active participant in and a guide for the rest of his society.

The desire to see himself in the larger picture lies behind his "reading" of history through art in the "Dove or Swan" section of A Vision: formulating an artistic theory around cycles of history was another one of the ways in which Yeats objectified his vision (Loizeaux 124). Between 1910 and

1914 Yeats's involvement in the occult and his experiments in automatic writing provided the material on which was based the first version of A Vision (1925). A Vision contains Yeats's theory of cyclic history, an artistic rather than historical, philosophical, or theological view of the rise and fall of civilizations. During these same years, Yeats was working on his collection of poetry entitled Responsibilities (1914), in which he was citing art and artists explicitly as subjects in his poems. Part of the significance of many of these figures and their works is connected with their positions in the lunar system of A Vision. By the time he completed A Vision in 1925, the subjects in his poems included not only Byzantine mosaics, but Phidias and Michelangelo.

A Vision also gave him a theoretical basis from which to shift the balance of his elitist aesthetic subjectivity to a relatively objective perspective; his emotionalism to intellectualism; the human to the inhuman in his attempt to seek strength outside himself (Griffin 26). A part of this strength came from the idea of mathematically-based form as an artistic ideal from which to draw. Previously, Yeats had "rejected mathematic form" and its implication of "mechanically worked-out pattern;" he had partly followed William Blake in the distinction between living form and mathematical form: "Grecian is Mathematic Form: Gothic is Living Form, Mathematic Form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory: Living Form is Eternal Existence" (Loizeaux 160). Unlike Blake, however, Yeats had thought of Greek art as the embodiment of living form and in 1906, he held it up as an argument against mathematic form when he wrote that

[art could not] move us at all, if our thought did not rush out to the edges of our flesh, and it is so with all good art, whether

the Victory of Samothrace which reminds the soles of our feet of swiftness, or the Odyssey that would send us out under the salt wind, or the young horsemen on the Parthenon, that seem happier than our boyhood ever was, and in our boyhood's way. Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematical 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. (E&I 292-293)

Yeats inherited his fascination with the Elgin marbles in the British Museum as representative of the Greek art of Phidias from the Pre-Raphaelites, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater (Sambrook 83, Loizeaux 127). Like Pater, he saw the strength of Greek religion being its ability to transform itself into this "artistic ideal" so thoroughly, in fact, that "its statues [became] worn with kissing" (Pater, The Renaissance 162-163). Yeats also saw ancient Greece and the Renaissance as eras in which civilization--and art--reached peaks of development: the art of ancient Greece was an art of the body which used "rhythm, an exaltation of the body, uncommitted energy. . . . Those riders upon the Parthenon had all the world's power in their moving bodies" (AV 276, Loizeaux 160). Correspondingly, the figures and forms in the art of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian, (like those in Rossetti's work), "awaken sexual desire," where in the artistic era immediately preceding 1550-1650, "we had not desired to touch the forms of Botticelli or even of da Vinci" (AV 293). Yet later Yeats was drawn to this same ancient art also for its underlying mathematical conceptions of ideal proportion based on Pythagorean theory which, in the form of classical statuary, imposes a visual order on the shape

of the organic human body and its disorderly passions. Yeats's fascination with order and form may have been a reaction on his part to the unbridled frenzy of war, the historical manifestation of passion which lacked any "control of rational order," and, by the early 1920s, may have accounted for his interest in the passages on Pythagoras and numbers in John Burnet's Early Greek Philosophy (Loizeaux 160-61).

Yeats's attempt to explain these historical calamities is partially embodied in "The Second Coming" (1919). The chaotic forces he sets out imagistically in the poem are those which in other poems he counters with images of order in the form of Greek statuary or Renaissance painting:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere 5
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand. 10
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: 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, 15

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, 20
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (VP 401-02)

In its reference to the ancient Egyptian art Yeats deemed "stark" (in "Under Ben Bulbin") in its use of mathematics to create abstract form, the Sphinx-like creature which appears in this poem is linked to his poem "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" (1919). In this latter work, the Sphinx appears as an "emblem of intellect seeking fulfilment outside itself," in opposition to the figure of Buddha, whom Yeats uses as an "emblem of desire seeking fulfilment outside itself" (Albright 601). In "The Second Coming," therefore, the enigmatic Sphinx becomes the visionary embodiment of the destructiveness of "passionate intensity" which in 1919 Ireland Yeats saw as being almost solely fed on intellectual hatred.

The apocalyptic "blood-dimmed tide" and "widening gyre" are also a part of the cyclical historical system which in A Vision is illustrated by geometric cones, the oscillating interlocking forms or "gyres." The birth of the Greco/Roman civilization was, according to Yeats, marked by the union of Leda and the Swan, and the subsequent birth of key figures in Greek civilization. This parallels it with the Christian Annunciation (represented by the "Dove"), which in diagrammatic form is an interconnected alternative cone spiralling in the other direction. Each cycle therefore begins at the cone's point with the union of a god with a human being; as the gyre spirals,

widens, and develops, it also eventually crumbles, and the 2000 year cycle starts again as the antithesis of the one preceding it. The birth of Christ occurs at a moment of confusion as the Eastern civilizations and institutions collapse, along with their "westward-moving" influences in Greek art; with the advent of the twentieth century, Western civilization is thus on its way out.

As he envisioned the next "Nativity" in Responsibilities' "The Magi," the figures of the Magi, "their eyes still fixed," hope "to find once more, / Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied, / The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" (6-8). Yeats quoted this last line in A Vision itself to portray the "spasm of energy" that accompanies the birth of a new deity whose task is to "undo the settled work of the previous age" (Albright 545):

[T]he old realisation of an objective moral law is changed by a subconscious turbulent instinct. The world of rigid custom and law is broken up by 'the uncontrollable mystery upon the bestial floor'. (AV 105)

By contrast, the sense of apocalyptic instability in his poetry is tempered by the way these historical cycles are artistically marked, and defined, by each era's monuments as he described them in A Vision:

Each age unwinds the thread another age had wound, and it amuses one to remember that before Phidias, and his westward-moving art, Persia fell, and that when full moon came round again, amid eastward-moving thought, and brought Byzantine glory, Rome fell; and that at the outset of our westward-moving Renaissance Byzantium fell; all things dying each other's life, living each other's death. (AV 270-71)

This idea of centrifugal and centripetal forces is partially derived from Pater's Greek Studies (Whitaker 86; Pater, Greek Studies 252-253; Loizeaux 127). Yeats's concept of the Ionic "Eastern" style as a manifestation of delicate, graceful, elegant, and stylized Asiatic art (O'Donnell 361, Loizeaux 127) especially in the "light-limbed dandy of the potters, [or] the Parisian-looking young woman of the sculptors, her hair elaborately curled" (AV 270) parallels Pater's description of such art in terms of "freedom and happiness" (Pater, Greek Studies, 252; Loizeaux 127). In the same way, where Pater described the opposing Doric "Western" style as characterized by "severe simplification" (Pater, Greek Studies 253), Yeats similarly wrote that the typical figure of the Doric form was the vigorous, naturalistic "athlete" (O'Donnell 361, AV 270). Where Yeats placed Phidias was the point at which "Ionic and Doric influence unite--one remembers Titian--and all is transformed by the full moon, and all abounds and flows. . . . After Phidias the life of Greece, which . . . had moved slowly and richly . . . comes rapidly to an end" (AV 270, 271). In his poem "The Statues" (1938-1939), Yeats holds up Phidias and Phidian art (at what he called Phase 15 in the repeating gyres of history) as embodiments of examples of integration of art and culture at its highest and most complete (Loizeaux 127). "The Statues" acts as an illustration of A Vision's historiography--bringing together life and art, and positing "truth" in a simultaneously "passionate" and "cold" work of art, and thereby reconciling the emotional and intellectual forces which guide human beings and artists alike:

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
His numbers though they moved or seemed to move
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.

But boys and girls pale from the imagined love
 Of solitary beds knew what they were,
 That passion could bring character enough;
 And pressed at midnight in some public place
 Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

No; greater than Pythagoras, for the men
 That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these 10
 Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
 All Asiatic vague immensities,
 And not the banks of oars that swam upon
 The many-headed foam at Salamis.
 Europe put off that foam when Phidias
 Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

One image crossed the many-headed, sat
 Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,
 No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat
 Dreamer of the Middle-Ages. Empty eye-balls knew 20
 That knowledge increases unreality, that
 Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.
 When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
 Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
 What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,

What calculation, number, measurement, replied?

We Irish, born into that ancient sect

But thrown upon this filthy modern tide

And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked, 30

Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace

The lineaments of a plummet-measured face. (VP 610-11)

Four historical epochs are emblematically represented here, each at a moment of crisis, which compresses and completes the system in the "Dove or Swan" section of A Vision (O'Donnell 170). The statues based on the measurements of Pythagoras (philosopher, mathematician, artist of the sixth century B.C.) have a power which comes from the attraction between the "inhuman and the human, cold form and passionate experience" (Griffin 22). The religious icon as a perfected human form is what draws the "boys and girls"--they themselves complete the statues, in a sense, by bringing their individual "character" in the form of passion to the statues; on the other hand, it is the "planned" measurements in "marble or bronze" that embody the essences/archetypes of existence.

Implicit in this notion of passion is how it both manifests itself in the individual, and how it animates human existence in general. The image of worshippers kissing works of art in public Yeats uses to indicate the idea of their turning to the statues as images of their correct choice in both life and love. The statues have the power of "replenishing . . . [passion-hungry boys and girls with] a sense of life that ensues from the union of man and woman--life, literally and metaphorically" (Engelberg, The Vast Design 198). This is because the whole "origin of civilization . . . exists but to preserve [the family]," and therefore

it seems . . . natural . . . that its ecstatic moment, the sexual choice of man and woman, should be the greater part of all poetry. A single wrong choice may destroy a family, dissipating its tradition . . . and the great sculptors, painters, and poets are there that instinct may find its lamp. When a young man imagines the woman of his hope, shaped for . . . mother and mistress and yet fitted to carry a bow in the wilderness, how little of it all is mere instinct, how much has come from chisel and brush.

(Ex 274)

While Yeats believed that all of life's important choices, including, as he wrote in "Under Ben Bulbin", the choice of "work" or "mate," must be made instinctively and irrationally, he also evidently believed that art as an embodiment of both reason and passion could ultimately serve as a larger guiding image in both these aspects of human thought and feeling (VP 638, 36).

Yeats had considered this idea of apprehending complementary archetypes through art while watching a Japanese dancer (whom he commissioned for one of his own plays) perform in the intimacy of a studio and a drawing-room, without any "studied lighting . . . from the artificial world" (E&I 224). He noted that the dancer was able, through formal gestures,

to recede from us into some more powerful life. Because that separation was achieved by human means alone, he receded but to inhabit as it were the deeps of the mind. One realised anew, at every separating strangeness, that the measure of all arts' greatness can be but in their intimacy. (E&I 224)

Similarly, the impulses of intimacy which guide the youthful figures to the Pythagorean works animate the statues, in a way, but, in turn, the youths' own

"amorphous" passion, "mired in blood" discovers "its necessary [distancing] form in the archetypal image."⁴ When art is shaped by the ideal form of realized numbers, it therefore not only has magnetic qualities, but it exerts a "shaping influence beyond the bedroom, informing the structures of social life" (Griffin 22). According to Yeats, not only did Europe owe its formal strength and sense of cultural identity to Pythagorean numbers realized in stone, but indeed its very birth:

There are moments when I am certain that art must once again accept those Greek proportions which carry into plastic art the Pythagorean numbers, those faces which are divine because all there is empty and measured. Europe was not born when Greek galleys defeated the Persian hordes at Salamis; but when the Doric studios sent out those broad-backed marble statues against the multiform, vague, expressive Asiatic sea, they gave to the sexual instinct of Europe its goal, its fixed type. (Ex 451)

Just as this passage "links sexual passion's discovery of its form with social and cultural manifestations of order," so does it express the idea in stanza two that, while Pythagoras's numbers supply the means of "transition from mind into the world," ultimately it is the artist (Phidias) who creates the transition itself in the visible and tactile ideal form of statues which give "women dreams and dreams their looking-glass" (16) (Griffin 22-23). In the prose draft for "The Statues," this last line reads, "Only they could beat down Nature with their certainty;" in "A General Introduction For My Work" (1937), Yeats correspondingly wrote, "The world knows nothing because it has made nothing, we [artists] know everything because we have made everything" (Archibald 171, E&I 510). To endow the artist with such wisdom and power

suggests that it was indeed Phidias and "his sense of living form" which truly defeated the Persians at Salamis (Archibald 171). Douglas Archibald proposes that the passage "Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down / All Asiatic vague immensities, / And not the banks of oars that swam upon / The many-headed foam at Salamis" has multiple implications. "Put down" in the sense of military defeat is appropriate in this context of the artist's power, just as it additionally indicates "[a]ll Asiatic vague immensities" being "recorded and absorbed" by Pythagorean calculations that in the first two stanzas also "triumphed sexually" (Archibald 171). In his 1930 Diary, Yeats drew a similar analogy in the "struggle" between the artist and the other figures that define cultures and periods in history, (other figures who, in his own case, included philistines characterized by the "pasteboard morality of political Dublin") (Ex 302):

All that our opponent expresses must be shown for a part of our greater expression, that he may become our thrall--be 'enthralled' as they say. Yet our whole is not his whole and he may break away and enthrall us in his turn, and there arise between us a struggle like that of the sexes. All life is such a struggle. (Ex 302)

In the same way, the youths who embrace the Greek statues are not just striving to attain a completeness of self on an individual or even cultural level; they are fulfilling the cycle of the historical gyres. The "Grecian eyes" of the statues as Yeats describes them in A Vision, exemplify a serene vagueness in "gazing at nothing." The "character" the young people bring to the Greek statues signifies the "delineation of character" that Roman sculptors achieved by drilling "a round hole to represent the pupil," brought

about because of their "preoccupation with the glance characteristic of a civilisation in its final phase," and as distinguished from

Byzantine eyes of drilled ivory staring upon a vision, and those eyelids of China and of India, those veiled or half-veiled eyes weary of world and vision alike. (AV 276-277)

The Buddha of stanza three has evolved, then, through the Roman period of individuation which in terms of the inevitable passage of time, complements and completes the art of Phidias. Buddha bears a notable resemblance to Yeats's description of George Frederick Watts's portrait of William Morris, of which he had a reproduction hanging over his mantelpiece along with some other pictures of friends. He described the sitter as an amalgamation of the various "visions" of the preceding ages:

Its grave wide-open eyes, like the eyes of some dreaming beast, remind me of the open eyes of Titian's Ariosto, while the broad vigorous body suggests a mind that has no need of the intellect to remain sane, though it give itself to every fantasy: the dreamer of the Middle Ages. It is 'the fool of Faery . . . wide and wild as a hill', the resolute European image that yet half remembers Buddha's motionless meditation, and has no trait in common with the wavering, lean image of hungry speculation, that cannot but because of certain famous Hamlets of our stage fill the mind's eye. Shakespeare himself foreshadowed a symbolic change, that is a change in the whole temperament of the world, for though he called his Hamlet 'fat' and even 'scant of breath', he thrust between his fingers agile rapier and dagger. (Au 142)

By first likening Buddha/Morris to Titian's Ariosto which, he said, he "loved beyond other portraits" because it had "its grave look, as if waiting for some perfect final event," Yeats links Morris and his respective "vision" to both the Renaissance and to Byzantium as emblematic of the high points of the unity of art and culture, which have drawn on Phidias, "the point at which Ionic and Doric influence unite" (E&I 116). Of course, the event in temporal history which closely follows the pagan Phidian era is the birth of Christ, "the one image that crossed the many-headed," thus ushering in a move away from the completeness that can only be encompassed in complementary forces. Elsewhere Yeats asserted that "a single image, that of Christ, Krishna, or Buddha, [cannot] . . . represent God to the exclusion of other images (E&I 433). Here the "one image," the "dreaming beast" of Buddha who supplants the multiple godlike statues as an image for those of his era to shape themselves upon, does not embrace Phidias's balancing influence, but instead grows away from it, in solitude, to become a "fat / Dreamer of the Middle-Ages."

Correspondingly, Yeats wrote of William Morris as a man out of his time, a man who created a "dream world" which was the antithesis of daily life, and who consequently "knew nothing of intellectual suffering" and was "unexhausted by speculation or casuistry. . . .[being] wholly at the service of hand and eye" (E&I 142). The imbalance of the fat/thin Hamlets he evokes suggests that as time has moved, incompleteness has supplanted not only the ideal Pythagorean proportions which Greek athletes strove for in their gymnasium but Phidian wholeness and harmony of mind and body, both individual and collective (Albright 823). While "emptiness" had its time and place in history, it is not a source for truth in its fullest form; that is, in marble which had "put forth many heads and feet" (Stallworthy 126).

Yeats uses a modern derivative of Hamlet as an intellectual "starving from a diet of abstraction" or insubstantial speculation, a figure inadequate for portraying a state of totality (Albright 825). The medieval Grimalkin representing the intellectual West in the form of a cat, whose species also grows thin from eating flies, according to popular legends (Albright 826), and crawling to the emptiness of the idle and complacent Buddha, ironically foreshadows the epic "rough beast" slouching to Bethlehem, at the point where the world became Christian, 'that fabulous formless darkness', as it seemed to a philosopher of the fourth century, blotted out 'every beautiful thing, not through the conversion of crowds or general change of opinion, . . . but by an act of power. (AV 278)

It is Shakespeare's own Hamlet who is the ideal indirectly invoked in "The Statues." Yeats echoes Hamlet's advice to his actors when he advises the Irish in stanza four to follow a Phidian ideal of art to guide their thoughts and actions: "Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace / The lineaments of a plummet-measured face;" through a "proper" balance between conscious knowledge and "formless" passion, the modern tide of formless violence could be "put down" with an art that reflects an ideal of truth balanced between life and art itself. What Hamlet, whose "hesitations are hesitations of thought . . . [and] outside that he is a mediaeval man of action" (Ex 446), puts forth as the art of the players is also in fact what Yeats himself strives for in his art, in his effort to balance the external world with the internal, and the objective with the subjective. Hamlet tells his players not to create a "mirror on mirror mirrored," but to

[s]uit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature.

For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (Hamlet III, ii, 16-23)

The drive towards "realized perfections of form" (Griffin 21), as exemplified in his own thought and verse and by "intellect, . . . calculation, number, measurement," is what the Irish must follow to counter the "filthy" "blood-dimmed" tide of the modern world--art and life would then become one. "We Irish," Yeats is claiming, have that ancient nobility, but at "the very age and body" of an apocalyptic era, only rigorous intellectual bars will hold the chaos back.

"Under Ben Bulbin" (1939) is another exploration of a vision of completeness. The "two eternities" of man, between which he lives and dies-- "[t]hat of race and that of soul" ((VP 637 II, 1-3), are what the artist and poet must incorporate in their thought and work if they are to bring together subjectivity and objectivity, and thereby encompass artistically both the individual and the race in the temporal cycles:

Though grave-diggers' toil is long,
Sharp their spades, their muscle strong,
They but thrust their buried men
Back in the human mind again. (II, 9-12)

In Explorations, Yeats similarly wrote, "To lunar influence belong all thoughts and emotions that were created by the community, by the common people, by nobody knows who, and to the sun all that came from the high disciplined or individual kingly mind" (Ex 24). Just as he defined

immortality on these terms, that is, that the soul after death simply becomes integrated into the larger, "general" living thought (*Spiritus Mundi*), so did he see poetry and art functioning in a parallel fashion: the "darkness" from which the "vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*" emerges in "The Second Coming" (12, 18), for instance, is the source from which the visionary draws.

Yet the implied contemplative stillness invoked by the idea of tapping into "[t]hat quarter where all thought is done," where darkness is indistinguishable from the soul ("The Dialogue of Self and Soul," 1927), is countered in the next stanza of "Under Ben Bulbin:"

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard
 'Send war in our time, O Lord!'
 Know that when all words are said
 And a man is fighting mad,
 Something drops from eyes long blind,
 He completes his partial mind,
 For an instant stands at ease,
 Laughs aloud, his heart at peace . . . (III, 1-8)

The vision of completeness that Yeats sought for his work involves both these qualities of action and passive, receptive contemplation, just as Phidian art contains both its own "marmorean stillness" and potential "overflowing turbulent energy" (E&I 255). John Mitchel (1815-1875) as an advocate of Irish independence is an appropriate figure to represent such an ideal, he who in his Jail Journal "thundered" for war with England "from his convict hulk . . . Mitchel, by the right of his powerful nature and his penal solitude, communed indeed with the Great Gods" (UP1:361). In his 1936 poem "An Acre of Grass," Yeats brings in this facet of the purer side of the "fury and the mire of

human veins" ("Byzantium," 1930, VP 497, 8) as this side is reflected in the artist and individuals whose passionate energy allows them to reach a higher level of all-encompassing perception of truth:

Grant me an old man's frenzy.

Myself must I remake

Till I am Timon and Lear

Or that William Blake

Who beat upon the wall

Till Truth obeyed his call;

A mind Michael Angelo knew

That can pierce the clouds

Or inspired by frenzy

Shake the dead in their shrouds;

Forgotten else by mankind

An old man's eagle mind. (VP 575-76, 12-24)

As he proclaims in "Under Ben Bulbin," to actively apprehend passion and then be reshaped with the guidance of art and words is really to evolve into a state of peace, and in a sense, the state of tragic joy that characterizes Shakespeare's Lear and Hamlet alike. Where in "Byzantium" Yeats sees a crafted gold Byzantine bird as an alternative to the "bitter furies of complexity," a "[m]iracle, bird or golden handiwork / More miracle than bird or handiwork, / Planted on the starlit golden bough, / Can . . . by the moon embittered, scorn aloud / In glory of changeless metal / Common bird or petal / And all complexities of mire or blood" (37, 17-24), he now uses Lear as a figure who grows from, rather than rejects his experience of the world. In

Michael Angelo left a proof
 On the Sistine Chapel roof,
 Where but half-awakened Adam
 Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
 Till her bowels are in heat,
 Proof that there's a purpose set
 Before the secret working mind:
 Profane perfection of mankind. (IV, 9-16)

In Michelangelo's ceiling fresco, then, executed at one of the peaks in the artistic and historical cycles, Yeats again exemplifies what he sees as the ideal union of disorderly human drives with intellectual sublimation. Like the original forms of Phidias, the idealized human body acts as a measure from which viewers at large can restructure their own thought. In the next stanza, he credits artists of the fifteenth century with depicting the sense of divine presence and beauty that the Byzantines achieved by incorporating art into their culture's vision, not only the art that exists in an exclusively religious, albeit public, setting:

Quattrocento put in paint,
 On backgrounds for a God or Saint,
 Gardens where a soul's at ease;
 Where everything that meets the eye,
 Flowers and grass and cloudless sky,
 Resemble forms that are, or seem,
 When sleepers wake and yet still dream,
 And when it's vanished still declare,
 With only bed and bedstead there,

That Heavens had opened.

Gyres run on;

When that greater dream had gone

Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude,

Prepared a rest for the people of God,

Palmer's phrase, but after that

Confusion fell upon our thought. (IV, 17-31)

While later artists continued to aspire to "[b]ring the soul of man to God" (IV, 4), their vision, Yeats suggests, is more fragile than that of the Italian Renaissance. He described Claude Lorrain's (1600-1682) idyllic landscape in Mill as a pictorial representation of a state in which art and everyday life have been united:

Those dancing country-people, those cowherds, resting after the day's work, and that quiet millrace made one think . . . of a time when men in every land found poetry and imagination in one another's company and in the day's labour. (E&I 377)

He also associated Claude's idyllic scenes and light with his interpretation of a Swedenborgian belief that "the good [exist] . . . amid smooth grass and garden walks and the clear sunlight of Claude Lorrain" (Ex 37, Albright 812). Richard Wilson (1714-1782), who was Claude's first English follower, is named as the next successor of the "greater dream"; just as Edward Calvert (1799-1883) and Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) are successors to Blake, both having been inspired by Blake's illustrations for Thornton's edition of Virgil (Loizeaux 75-76). Yeats likewise saw in their pastoral scenes "the peaceful Swedenborgian heaven" where there are "boys and girls walking or dancing on smooth grass and in golden light" (Ex 44); in the first and second states of

Calvert's woodcut The Ploughman was an inscription which read, "Seen in the kingdom of heaven by vision through Jesus Christ our Saviour."⁵ The "phrase" (IV, 29) of Palmer's refers to his describing Blake's illustrations to Virgil's first eclogue in terms of

a misty and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul and gives complete and unreserved delight, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world. . . . [There is a] drawing aside of the fleshly curtain, and the glimpse which all the most holy, studious saints and sages have enjoyed, of the rest which remains to the people of God. (E&I 125)⁶

Yeats chose all of these artists, therefore, for their visionary serene scenes in which they aspire to achieve an image of God.

But, as the gyre continues to widen and disintegrate, Yeats proposes that he and his fellow Irish can only attain a strong image of truth/divinity for themselves if they reinforce their vision with the "measurement" that "began our might: / Forms a stark Egyptian thought, / Forms that gentler Phidias wrought (IV, 6-8). According to Yeats, Phidian measurement as a "measure" of the "people of God" is thus the only appropriate means with which to face the oncoming chaos of an era which otherwise lacks secure religious faith: ". . . none could pass Heaven's door / That loved inferior art" ("Meditations in Time of Civil War: My Table," 1923, VP 422, 26-27). In the same way, Yeats insists more specifically that "We Irish . . . Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace / The lineaments of a plummet-measured face," in other words, to replace the confusion of the world with an ideal form by internally focussing on a vision which encompasses virtues both universal and Irish. Yet it is an active combination of emotion and intellect that in turn

activates an internal ideal classical measurement--in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," tragic "heroic" joy is the quality that characterizes Yeats's Ireland as he surveys the portraits and busts in the gallery: 'This is not,' I say, / 'The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland / The poets have imagined, terrible and gay' (II, 1-4). While Yeats developed A Vision, therefore, as a means of objectifying both his perspective on the world and on his poetic, prophetic function within the world, he nonetheless ultimately set "We Irish" apart not only from the rest of the world, but potentially apart from requiring any ordering strictures of art--and, accordingly, he ends his series of poetic portraits, and self portraits, by focussing on the Irish human figures themselves as epic manifestations of the divine integrity of measurement and measure when he urges the reader/viewer to

come to this hallowed place

Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;

Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;

Think where man's glory most begins and ends

And say my glory was I had such friends. (VII, 4-8)

Notes

¹ John Ruskin, Modern Painters, from The Works of John Ruskin, M.A., (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company), Vol. II, Pt. III "Of Imagination Penetrative," Sec. ii, Ch. 3, paragraph 29, 442.

² Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. III, Pt. IV, paragraphs 13 and 15; pp. 30, 33.

³ John Ruskin, "The Byzantines", Val d'Arno (1874), III., Paragraph 87, from Selections from the Writings of John Ruskin, Second Series 1860-1888, (London: George Allen, 1894), 44.

4. James Olney, The Rhizome and the Flower: The Parenial Philosophy--Yeats and Jung, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 63. Quoted in Griffin 22).

⁵ Raymond Lister, Edward Calvert, (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1962), 100-101. Quoted in Loizeaux 77.

⁶ Yeats is quoting from A. H. Palmer's The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer 15-16; Albright 813.

CONCLUSION

In 1919, when Yeats was in his fifties, he recalled an occasion when he was about twenty-four years old, in which without his "willing it," a sentence "seemed to form in my head . . . , much as sentences form when we are half-asleep: 'Hammer your thoughts into unity.'" This sentence was the guide by which he evaluated his interest in finding forms of literature and of philosophy which would both complement his "belief in nationality." Visual art became for Yeats one of the means of bringing together these three interests so that they would become one, "or rather all three are a discrete expression of a single conviction" (Ex 263). He achieved this unity of thought by exploring the theme of the spiritual nature of creativity throughout his work, often in terms of visionary imagery that is visual in itself, and also can be likened analogously to the goals and techniques of visual artists. Chapter One of this thesis looks particularly at how Yeats combines Pre-Raphaelite and Blakean subjects and styles in his own verbal art to explore the role of the artist as a seer separate from the world, who expresses otherworldly visions and imaginative experiences. Rhythm versus

visual pattern is an issue which is evident in, for instance, "The Wanderings of Oisín," in its use of repetitious soft rhythm that emulates a Morris style of tapestry. The decorativeness of Yeats's works evolves, however, with the advent of the turbulence of World War I and heightened Irish revolutionary activity, and correspondingly his philosophical and nationalistic concerns also become more involved with the immediate and violent world around him.

Paradoxically, Yeats's interest in Irish mythology as part of his nationalism becomes increasingly political and personal as well, as he identified both his country and himself with the warrior hero Cúchulain. Cúchulain's ability to transform his physical shape was important to Yeats as a symbol of potential regeneration for his country, and for his own work as a kind of "body" which could help to transform his country's destructive thought while itself transforming into an art that was simultaneously concrete in its imagery and spiritually elevating in its goals. Chapter Two explores how Yeats sees parallels between the motif of transformation in Irish mythology and in Greek mythology, especially in "Leda and the Swan," where his country's collective state of mind is presented in terms of its ability to grow from experience of violence and terror, and reshape what Yeats prophetically saw as the oncoming apocalyptic destruction of the next age. Chapter Three looks in more detail at Yeats's theory of cyclic history in A Vision, and at the role of the Irish in future history in "The Statues," in which he presents Greek statuary as the "shape" after which the Irish people should form themselves in a new enlightened age.

Therefore it is his lifelong quest for an art which encompasses human experience, both bodily and spiritual, that caused W. B. Yeats to explore the parallels between poetry and visual art. He saw analogies between the verbal

and the visual in terms of both process and product, especially in what he believed should be their shared goal of creating a visionary art derived from the spirit and from nature. This goal was both aesthetic and moral: Yeats believed in art as a meditational model on which people could reform their own thought and behaviour, particularly in a time of war. His desire to help create spiritual, and even political, peace in his country is reinforced by the images he takes from Irish mythology, which act symbolically in his work as motifs of transformation. The theory of cyclic history Yeats sets out in A Vision uses artists and works of art to evaluate and monumentalize the stages of civilization in their various degrees of unity of culture. In A Vision, Greek art is held up as an indicator of a highlight in cultural history, and it is also presented as a potential mold from which the modern world, particularly Irish society, could form itself. Most of all, however, Yeats presents his own poetry which brings together imagistically and conceptually the visual and verbal as a formulation of tragic joy into high moral thought and aesthetic/spiritual experience for others to follow.

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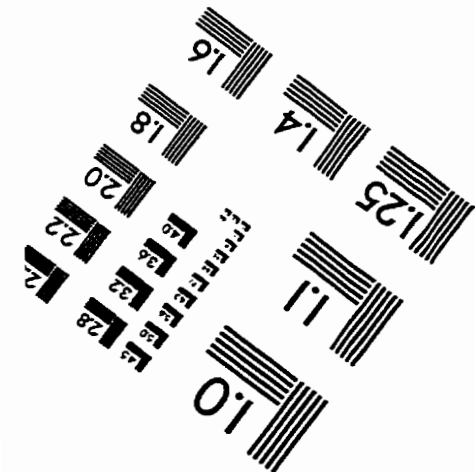
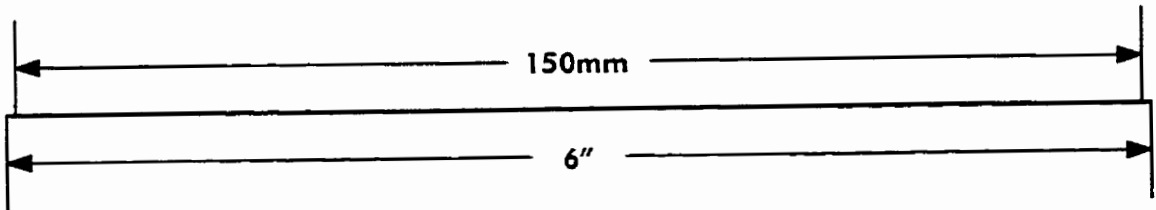
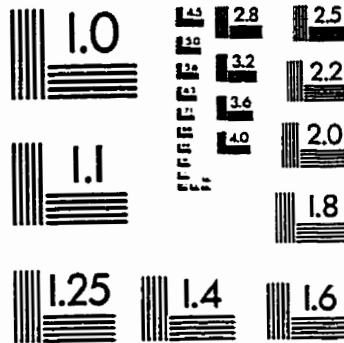
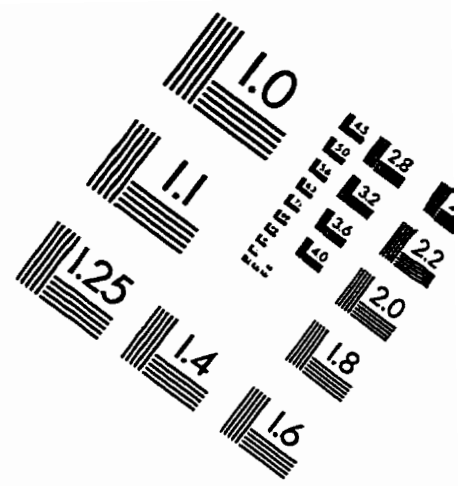
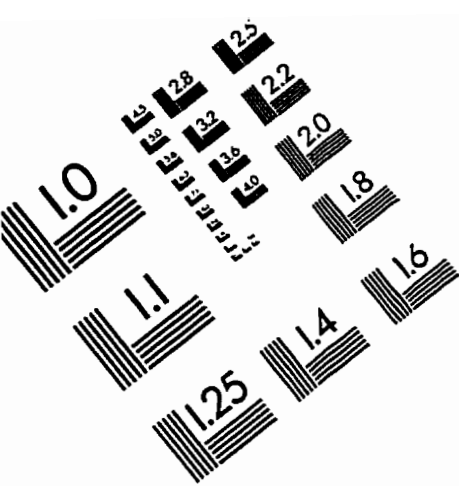
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