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THE INFLUENCE OF HIS FATHER
ON THE MATURE POETRY OF W. B. YEATS

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF HIS FATHER
ON THE MATURE POETRY OF W. B. YEATS

Iris Martin

A new maturity is shown in the poetry of William Butler Yeats (1865-1938) after the revelation to him in 1917 of a system of poetic belief, allegedly by supernatural agencies. The system which the poet later delineated in the prose work, A-Vision, was in fact a crystallization of Yeats' thought developed throughout his life. That thought, in turn, can be seen as a system of poetic philosophy consisting of three interacting elements, antinomy, emotional conviction, and scepticism which Yeats was taught by his artist father, J. B. Yeats. This thesis argues that the 'new maturity' in poetry and the system of A Vision which made it possible were in their basic essentials the direct outcome of the paternal influence.

Preface

So much has already been written about Yeats and his poetry that there is an almost inexhaustible reservoir from which to draw support for a new thesis. Indeed, an attempt with the limited scope of this one could be entirely devoted to recounting and reorganizing existing commentary but, doing so, would neglect its own purpose which is to contribute, if possible, to an ongoing discussion. The thesis, therefore, builds on, rather than rebuilds, well-known scholarship as a foundation and assumes in both reader and writer a familiarity with Yeats' poetry, with A Vision's main outlines, with the critical 'facts' of the poet's biography, and with the relevant and prominent commentary thereon. It would probably be preferable, in every sense except the immediately practicable, to make no assumptions, to fully explain every allusion and reference, as in dealing with the newly discovered manuscripts of an unknown writer, if only on account of the thoroughness necessary to such an endeavour. On a higher level of investigation than this, to ignore existing commentary is perhaps to avoid its mistakes and illuminate its blind spots. However, an effort limited in space and in scholarship as this is, would, given tabula rasa, only repeat (or begin to repeat) the obvious.

The other compelling reason that the thesis must take a great deal 'as read' is that when dealing with a writer such as Yeats whose poetical and prose works and life are so richly interconnected (some say to form a discernible unity), it is impossible to discuss

one entity, in any depth, without either assuming or explicating a broad knowledge of related works, dominant themes, and surrounding circumstances. Some of Yeats' poems are best understood in the light of the prose rendition which usually preceded 'translation' into verse; knowledge of one poem sometimes adds greatly to appreciation of others; changes in style and preoccupation are often explained in contemporaneously written prose works; symbols gather significance from poem to poem; and, finally, much of Yeats' work can be only partially understood without knowledge of the facts of his life. Generally speaking, in short, one can say very little about one part without (implicit or explicit) reference to the whole. It may be possible to take, say, a single poem and follow every thread of reference made to its extreme end, but in a thesis which necessarily touches, as this one does, on changes in the poetry, on prose works concerning poetry, on developments of the poet's thought and attitudes, and on biographical data, the 'groundwork' cannot and should not be reconstructed.

The pages which follow, therefore, take much for granted. Precise references are given only where quotations are made, controversy is involved, or relatively obscure information is used. The bibliography, however, includes sufficient sources for the general knowledge assumed in the thesis.

Perhaps some mention of dates associated with A Vision should be made, here. Notwithstanding that the prose work was published only in 1925 and later revised considerably, beginning in 1929, the significant year for the purpose of this thesis is much earlier. The system's first disclosure occurred during Yeats' honeymoon in 1917. Whatever

the means of the revelation, supernatural or voluntary, that is the date on which Yeats 'accepted' the system, adopting it as a world view. It is therefore from that time that the system would become the framework for Yeats' perception of things, for his experience and for his poetry.

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Introduction

The central question which this thesis will attempt to answer is: Why, as W. B. Yeats himself claimed, did his poetry "gain in self-possession and power" ¹ with the writing of A Vision? Clearly, such a thesis assumes a general consensus among readers and critics of Yeats' poetry that some felicitous change or development did indeed take place, that it was concomitant with the crystallization of his view of life as set down in A Vision and that, therefore, it is explicable in terms of the prose work, either because A Vision's system was fundamental to that development or because the two had common origins external to Yeats' written prose or poetry. Both lines of explanation are pursued in the following pages.

The obvious reason for 'improvement' in the later poetry is that A Vision provided a systematised design of the eternal cosmos from which 'metaphors for poetry' could be drawn, much as are labelled distillations, essences, from an apothecary's shelf. Like a careful alchemist (or even a magician) Yeats had arranged his laboratory of ideas with the minutest organization - all his mystical learning, imaginings, visions, illusions, dreams, memories, notions, superstitions, were collected into a coherent 'system'. It seems obvious that simply to reach for symbols clearly labelled and neatly arranged in proper

¹ W.B. Yeats, A Packet for Ezra Pound, (Dublin, 1929), p.11.

relationship one to the other is vastly more efficient than groping aimlessly about in the dark clutter of memory confused by the dust of the moment's mundane preoccupation. To have said 'This is how I view the universe and its history, by these mere twenty-eight categories I distribute and describe this earth's millions; each of these individuals is composed of only four essential faculties' - it was a triumph of tidiness. With a nice turn of phrase and some imagination, even a mediocre poet would improve. We could expect a new perspective on life as viewed from a higher level of generality, character vividly portrayed with a surer hand, even the ordinary made transcendent, but scarcely "self-possession and power".

The bulk of critical commentary on Yeats' later poetry has concentrated on tracing all the diverse elements of his knowledge back to their origins, on showing how A Vision brought them together, and on the fusion of Yeats' perceptions of the real and the imagined. Most importantly, the critics have explained how the content of 'the system' provided the powerful metaphors with which Yeats illuminated, in his mature poetry, his own experience. Whenever, after A Vision, Yeats refers to historical or literary events or personalities, we must view them, not with just the qualities and circumstances ascribed by common knowledge, but also as imbued with the characteristics of (and often representing) the Phases of the system to which they belong. Moreover, ordinary everyday things such as swans, staircases, and birthpangs, being symbols of supernatural and eternal referents, are enhanced with a significance far beyond that of their immediate existence. There is much more, of course, and certainly there is wide scope for investiga-

tion of the particulars of A Vision; the cross-references between 'the system' and the current and subsequent poetry are virtually inexhaustible. The particulars of A Vision, although rich material for discussion of 'development' of the poetry, are not, however, the primary concern of this thesis. Here, I intend to discuss the more general and fundamental aspects of Yeats' thought, how they are largely derived from his father's teaching, and how they, forming the framework of the system, solve for Yeats the conflicts which had themselves been created (or, at least, intensified) by J. B. Yeats' peculiar form of education. "Self-possession and power" are the very stuff of the poet's Being, as elusive as the formula for transmutation of lead into gold is for the alchemist. They could not be achieved by merely rearranging the symbolic universe in a geometric pattern. Indeed, Yeats was not greatly preoccupied with the mechanics of poetry, neither with its prosody, as Robert Beum has lamented ², nor with anything like efficiency. As A.G. Stock tells us, Yeats despised mechanization. ³ It is unlikely that such a man would offer to devote the remainder of his life to making poetry more scientific.

Yeats' preoccupation - and a nobler one - was with the poet's relationship to the experience which is portrayed (and even recreated)

² Robert Beum, The Poetic Art of William Butler Yeats, (New York, 1969), p. 55.

³ A.G. Stock, W.B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought, (Cambridge, 1964) p. 148.

in poetry. If we are to explain an improvement in that relationship we must find a resolution more fundamental than is afforded by a mere categorization of matter and symbol. Such a resolution seems to have taken place around the time of A Vision's appearance with regard to those problems of experience which Yeats had inherited from his father. If, for clarity's sake, one makes a rough classification, thus:

Experience —————> Poet —————> Poem

mere metaphors for poetry, although perhaps derived from past experience, are devices which come actively into play only between Poet and Poem. Self-possession and power, however, operate from the Poet outwards conditioning experience as well as the writing of poetry. To explain the emergence of these qualities as associated with the setting down of "the system", we must first understand what A Vision meant to Yeats. We must 'suspend disbelief' and consider the work to be, if not universally, at least personally for Yeats, a great deal more than just a collection of metaphors. Specifically, we must look at A Vision's manner of dealing with Yeats' own experience. To attenuate the proposition, we must ask how A Vision solves the problems which had been preventing a fifty year old man, some thirty years a poet, from attaining self-possession and power.

It may be necessary, at this stage, to list the preoccupations of the thesis, not because they are discrete and unconnected but, on the contrary, because their interconnections are too complex for one well-integrated statement. Indeed, it is difficult to treat Yeats and his work fairly on a straight line, at all, and, in trying, one begins to understand the poet's temptation to diagrams. Briefly then, the thesis

discusses: firstly, what A Vision was for its author, identifying it as 'a system of poetic belief', as previously defined by J. B. Yeats; secondly, the conflicts inherent in the young Yeats' life and the way in which his father's teaching intensified them; thirdly, the survival of the main elements of the paternal influence (antinomy, conviction by the emotions, and scepticism) as the framework of A Vision, particularly in the Four Faculties; fourthly, the comparability of the "systems" of the son and the father; next, the way in which A Vision solves and justifies internal conflict in the individual; next, Yeats' initial attempts to confront reality as they are disclosed in his poetry written immediately before the revelation of the system; next, the Easter Rising of 1916 as a turning-point in Yeats' life precipitating the final stage of his reconciliation with 'circumstance', his marriage, and the writing of A Vision itself; and, finally, how the new maturity, adumbrated by the formation of the system, shows in the poetry written afterwards.

The argument is that although A Vision's actual content is mainly derived from Yeats' mystical knowledge, the fundamental divisions and pattern of the thought and even the intellectual and emotional necessities answered by the system were all inherited from his father; and, further, that even the mystical content, having been pursued in defiance of his father's scepticism, was therefore, also, largely determined (albeit negatively) by the paternal influence. In other words, if the poetic philosophy which underlies A Vision brought about Yeats' new maturity, then J. B. Yeats indeed had realized his ambition: he had taught his son to write poetry.

The idea is not, as it might appear from this bold statement, that Yeats was a mere puppet, a creature of his father. Obviously, he had, at least, considerable talent. The thesis also recognizes the powerful influence on Yeats of other figures, contemporary and historical, notably Shelley, Blake, Browning, Swift, Pater, Wilde, AE, the nationalistic Irish poets, Pound, O'Leary, Maud Gonne, Parnell, Lady Gregory, Madame Blavatsky, MacGregor Mathers - the list is endless. Yeats' father, however, laid the deepest discernible foundations of his thought to which were adapted the gleanings from other influences: No matter how ivied-over, later, with fresh, and sometimes strange, growth, the basic shape and structure of his philosophy were well-established before he began to write poetry. The dominance of the antinomies, an unreality rivalling reality, the flexibility of belief to the requirements of art, the supremacy of the emotions, harmony coming out of conflict, Unity of Being, the scepticism of the intellect standing apart - all these ideas were originally the father's and, significantly, his prerequisites for the creation of poetry. They were not just mentioned in passing; they were forcefully inculcated into the child from his tenth year and were reiterated and embellished, particularly in letters, until J. B. Yeats' death in 1922. These ideas never ceased to be the main elements of Yeats' perception of life, his handling of experience and his portrayal of it in poetry. The personal and artistic conflicts created (or intensified) by the coexistence of these ideas were finally made manageable for Yeats only by the setting-down of the system which is, basically, an arrangement of these ideas, themselves; the culmination of his father's influence as well as of the poet's defiance of that influence.

Many critics, notably A. Norman Jeffares, Richard Ellman, and Joseph Ronsley, have drawn attention to discrete similarities between the ideas of Yeats and those of his father. I have not yet discovered, however, a comparison of the mature philosophies of the two men - not even a partial one such as is attempted, here. Given the apparent "divorce" from his father's ideas by Yeats' thirty-years venture in mysticism, most critics have assumed a complete break. I take that departure to have been relatively superficial, such as might occur if a miller's son, inheriting his father's equipment, would take to grinding some conventionally despised grain instead of wheat. What I regard as more fundamental than it is conventionally held to be is the type of development in poetic power adumbrated by "the system." This thesis, in other words, begins its speculation from two related departure points: that A Vision, in its basics, is less mystical and more J. B. Yeatsian than has generally been supposed.

Chapter 1

Yeats' Belief in 'The System'

The Experience - Poet - Poem continuum may seem overly simplistic but it does provide, and not coincidentally, a framework for illumination of much of the critical commentary surrounding the nature of Yeats' belief in A Vision. Every critic who discusses this most controversial of Yeats' prose works tries to unravel the poet's own equivocation about his belief in the mysterious communicators. Yeats refused to commit himself:

Some will ask if I believe all that this book contains and I will not know how to answer. Does the word belief, used as they will use it, belong to our age...? ⁴

Yeats seems to be suggesting that it is appropriate to an age of scepticism, such as his own, to have an inferior sort of belief, one which must be willed and probably only by those who, like himself, are born 'out of phase'. The notion that quality of faith and understanding fluctuates over time with the condition of a people is basic to the changing form, from one era to another, of the teaching of some esoteric Buddhist philosophies. Yeats was probably familiar with this rather convenient variation. There is, however, some prevarication in his statement. How, if belief, as they mean it, does not belong

⁴ Yeats, A Packet for Ezra Pound, p. 32.

to the questioners' age, can they even conceive of it? Why would they bother to ask the question? It seems almost too convenient to propound a philosophy of historical phases during a phase to which belief does not happen to belong. Whatever - Yeats at least willed the adoption of a kind of belief. He goes on to say:

I will never think any thoughts but these: when
I write prose or verse they must be somewhere
present...; they must affect my judgment of friends
and events. ⁵

Even if he did not "believe" in any absolute sense; if he thought, for example, that the system was simply collected ideas and images from his own knowledge returned by some tidy-minded spirit guides, he clearly intended to behave as one would expect of a believer. This would be true, also, if the whole tale, the automatic writing and the rest, were mere invention - perhaps to cover the crassness of mechanization of thought and imagination. Yeats had good, immediate reason to mechanize. He and his poetry were already immersed in a plethora of highly personalized or at least obscure symbolism, but he wanted to write 'public poetry'. The expanding allusive power of his verse would negate its purpose if it merely turned in on itself becoming progressively more accessible to Yeats and less accessible to his readers. He needed a "system", a comprehensive network map, which would not only detail precise relationships between symbol and substance, but which

⁵ Ibid.

would also relate one symbol to another. A Vision is, among other things, a Baedaker, a handy (or not so handy) guide for the reader travelling in Yeats' symbolic world. The notion that the whole tale could be an invention is not as outrageous as it first appears. Yeats' fabrication, and later withdrawal, of the Arabian traveller story makes him seem less than a reliable witness, although it may indeed be true, as he said, that his wife, Georgie Hyde Lees, did not wish (and perhaps wisely) to be associated with the revelation. ⁶

At the other extreme on the scale of belief, there is the possibility that Yeats, although half-afraid to admit it openly, actually regarded the disclosure of the "system" as a mystical revelation of ultimate truth. He did look for corroboration of the "system" in correspondances between his own historical cycles and those of the allegedly respectable Spengler; he did offer to dedicate the remainder of his life to understanding the messages of the communicators; and he did write (to Ezra Pound) that the book would "proclaim a new divinity". ⁷

From such declarations we would assume that its influence would extend even beyond the coolly stated "judgment of friends and events". Since A Vision purports to explain, elucidate, and thus offer advice on every imaginable human conflict (indeed, in all the problems of human experience), a firm belief in it implies well-defined approaches to life and, since phases and the personalities within them differ so

⁶ Ibid. p. 25.

⁷ Ibid. p. 35.

remarkably, to any individual life, including Yeats'. The philosophy thus declared and embraced would affect, not only Yeats' portrayal of experience in poetry, but the experience itself.

The question of whether or not he believed absolutely in A Vision yields, as is characteristic in discussions of Yeats, a 'both and neither' sort of answer. His many remarks and evasions on the subject show that Yeats' belief in his own system over the years was a shifting, changing, inconsistent thing. It answers perfectly to the description of the type of belief which Yeats' father thought to be the poet's privilege: "A poet should feel quite free to say in the morning that he believes in (anything) and in the evening that he no longer believes in (it)".⁸

It may well be that Yeats' belief in A Vision was subject to the state of his emotions or even to the waxing and the waning of the moon, but its level never seemed to fall below that which would affect the conduct of his life. At the very least, the content of A Vision influenced Yeats' outlook on life and thus, while providing "metaphors for poetry" to alter directly the right-hand side of the continuum (Experience - Poet - Poem), it also had powerful impact on the poet's experience.

We started this discussion of the nature of Yeats' belief in his system as a partial answer to the question: What did A Vision mean to

⁸ J. B. Yeats, as quoted in: Richard Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, (New York, 1948), p. 18.

Yeats? Of course, there are other ways in which a philosophy or a cosmogony has meaning for its creator or even an adherent. Yeats, clearly, wanted to believe in A Vision and presumably because it answered to the current necessities of his life as a man and a poet. To see how a man could create a design of the universe which (while retaining some appearance of objectivity and generalizing wonderfully) would not only justify his past but provide a map for his future, it is necessary to ask what the work itself actually is.

A Vision has been called everything from a private mythology to a universal philosophy but, whatever its definition, the work is usually found wanting. It seems to have been tempting to strike a judgemental attitude and to show how, in one or another respect, it fails to answer some purpose, usually of the critic's own devising. Louis Macneice, for example, charged that Yeats, in hatred of scientific rationalism, had produced "a blueprint for reality" which was "scientifically irrational."⁹ Such an approach, although it offers wide scope for indignant eloquence, is time-wasting. The possibilities for elucidation of what something is not are (albeit countably) infinite. More relevant, there is a definition of A Vision which, while very simple, solves a number of complex problems.

It just so happens that J.B. Yeats, the poet's father, in a letter to his son, had demanded "a system of poetic belief":

⁹ Louis Macneice, The Poetry of W.B. Yeats, (London, 1941), p. 124.

(It) comes when the man within has found some method or manner of thinking or arrangement of fact (such as is only possible in dreams) by which to express and embody an absolute freedom such that his whole inner and outer self can expand in a full satisfaction. ¹⁰

Regarding A Vision as a "system of poetic belief" rather than as simply a system of absolute belief resolves the conundrum of the nature of Yeats' belief in the work itself. A cosmogony which is also a system of poetic belief allows a poet to view and portray the mundane world as part of a glorious and eternal cosmos. More simply, it is something which Yeats as poet could affirm but which Yeats, as a man going about his daily business - in houses, on streets, in shops, on trains, in the senate - where that cosmos is not necessarily obtrusive could, as he chose, affirm or deny. Such a definition, although not much grander, subsumes his own of "metaphors for poetry." Metaphors are, after all, poetic beliefs. When a writer uses a simile, he merely says one thing is like another; when he uses a metaphor, he says one thing is another. He invites us to 'suspend the disbelief' dictated by the analytical intellect and imagine for a moment that there are mysterious deep interconnections between the substance and the symbol which make them identical.

The reader is asked to imagine this identity for only a moment. The poet, however, must sustain the poetic belief from experience through to writing if there is not to be a jarring artificial or

¹⁰ Lennox Robinson, ed., Excerpts from Further Letters of J.B. Yeats, (Dundrum, Eire, 1920), p. 22.

arbitrary note. If Yeats could feel and portray the presence of a cosmos where even the meanest object, event or personality in "real" life has deep association with a supernatural counterpart, each being symbolic of the other, the ordinary world would become imbued with significance, a sense of wonder and, most importantly, would be worth writing about. Metaphors, where there is a system of poetic belief, become statements of truth, and the poet becomes a philosopher and even a mathematician. It is not just flippant to say so. A poet who embraces an innovative view of the universe and presumes to propound it in a geometry and astronomy, considerably at variance with contemporary scientific usage, can impose on it, even whimsically, his own "natural" laws.

Of course, it would be insufficiently convincing to compare what may have been a chance remark of father to son in an old letter with a simple definition of A Vision and suppose, from this, that the prose work is, indirectly, the outcome of the father's influence. To draw a convincing correspondence, one must look carefully at the main elements of J.B. Yeats' influence on his son, how it operated in the poet's life, and how A Vision reconciles and utilizes the components of that influence.

Before we embark on a lengthy discussion of the correspondences between J. B. Yeats' ideas and those contained in A Vision, it is perhaps appropriate to mention critical opinion on the extent of the paternal influence. Among critics of W. B. Yeats' poetry, A. Norman Jeffares probably knows most about the life and philosophy of the poet's father. In W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet, published in 1949,

Jeffares says of the poet's first book which appeared in 1886, "This beginning of a long series of books approximately coincides with the end of J. B. Yeats' influence upon his ideas." ¹¹ In a later essay, "John Butler Yeats, Anglo Irishman", written many years later, the same critic says:

It is a commonplace that the painter's influence over his poet son ceased when the latter began to develop his interest in mysticism... The question of J. B. Yeats' influence on his son needs fresh exploration. It extended further than the early period of W.B. Yeats' life, though less directly. ¹²

This apparent change of mind is really a development typical of critical opinion which has previously concentrated on 'fresh influences' encountered by the poet as he matured. Jeffares' second observation is recognition that Yeats never lost what his father had inculcated. J. B. Yeats' influence was too early learnt and possibly too intrinsically attractive to be entirely erased, even when his son ventured into alien realms of thought. It is worth noting, for example, that the major direct effect on Yeats' poetry of the influence of Ezra Pound was the attempted elimination of 'abstractions' which J. B. Yeats had taught his son to hate. Yeats actually asked Pound, around 1914, to go through his poetry underlining every abstract word as he came to it.

¹¹ A. Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet, (New York, 1949), p. 30.

¹² A. Norman Jeffares and Cross, K. G. W., eds., In Excited Reverie, (New York, 1971), p. 40.

Of the earlier critics, Richard Ellman seems to ascribe most to the paternal influence. Speaking of the poet's Reveries over Childhood and Youth, he says: "...the theme that forces its way through the fragmentary pictures is his dependence on his father and his constant efforts to escape that dependence." ¹³ Ellman is also one of the few who see Yeats' father's teaching as extending into the poet's maturity; he pointed out that Yeats, who was not in the habit of agreeing with his father, was all of forty-three years old when he wrote to him that he realized, "with some surprise, how fully my philosophy of life has been inherited from you in all but its details and applications." ¹⁴

¹³ Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 14.

Chapter 2

Problems Endowed and Solutions Provided by J. B. Yeats

To return to those problems which had been preventing a fifty-year old man from attaining 'self-possession and power': Yeats, himself, in the introduction to A Vision, referred to "... a distinction between the perfection that is from a man's combat with himself and that which is from a combat with circumstance."¹⁵ On the scale of human suffering, these hardly seem severe problems but when articulated by a poet who vacillated between trying to achieve 'perfection of the life' and 'perfection of the work', they must be taken seriously. Also, we will be forced, as we unravel the complex antinomies faced by Yeats, to recognize that some 'combats with circumstance'; if intensified and internalized, eventually become 'combats with the self.' For the purpose of our discussion of J. B. Yeats' influence on his son, we must refine the above categories and deal with:

- combats with circumstance
- combats with the father - as circumstance
- combats with the father - as self.

and finally, combats with the self.

When we begin to discuss combats with circumstance, there immediately appears a possible division between genetic inheritance and

¹⁵ W. B. Yeats, A Vision, (New York, 1938), p. 8.

environment, but it seems best to avoid Psychology's great debate between the 'innate' and the 'learned' and accept that Yeats' was a complex childhood. In his own household, religious observance lived more or less peacefully with atheism, Unionism with Irish nationalism, sophistication in art with folk-fable, aristocratic with peasant culture. If we look a little outside his immediate environment, we find Protestantism, whether devoted or atheistic, a minority within the larger fact of Irish Catholicism and that, if identified with nationalism, in uneasy peace with the containing British Empire, also Protestant.

The young Yeats, with his compatriots of the Anglo-Protestant ascendancy, could be described as standing at the centre of many concentric circles; of wheels within wheels. He could not venture far without stepping on boundaries between opposing views on religion, politics, art, and culture. Inevitably, at these psychological thresholds, one is pulled both ways. In Yeats' case, it may be possible, but it is unnecessary, to build a sophisticated paradigm. It is enough to show that the circumstances of Yeats' early life, even if never interrelated, were uncommonly antinomous. They produced conflicting ideas which, far from giving rise to 'combats with circumstance' as poverty or sickness would do, actually demonstrate that peaceful co-existence of dramatically opposing views is possible. From the Autobiographies, it is clear that the young Yeats did not see the need to align himself with this or that view, in effect, to take up 'combats with circumstance', until he felt it necessary to defy the representative (sometimes of both sides) of many questions, his father.

The question of the poet's relationship with J. B. Yeats is extre-

mely complex but worth investigating if one is to understand how the 'given' antinomies operated in the adult poet's mind and also how there arose those combats with both the self and circumstance which were resolved, although never directly addressed, by A Vision. To follow this argument, it must be accepted that a father is part of 'self' and also part of 'circumstance.' He is part of 'self' insofar as some idea of continuous being of the father and the son is recognized. Richard Ellman has pointed out that some such idea, manifested as a need to come to terms with the father, was prominent in the late nineteenth century, particularly so in Ireland, that it appears as a "leit-motif throughout the literature of the period" and that Yeats addressed the problem repeatedly during his adult life.¹⁶ The type of inner struggle involved in coming to terms with the father is probably most explicitly expressed in James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, perhaps indicating that such tension in the filial relationship continued, at least in Ireland, beyond the height of the Victorian period. There is no need to dwell, here, on the difficulties of a young man trying to reach his apotheosis by rebelling against an already rebellious father - or a young artist defying an already self-doubting pre-Raphaelite. Clearly, a new view of things is difficult to oppose without falling back on conservatism.

The problem for Yeats seems greatly complicated when one takes into account the father as an individual, i.e., as part of 'circumstance'.

¹⁶ Ellman, pp. 21-22.

J. B. Yeats' view of things was not only a new one - it was well-nigh all-encompassing. There seems to be general agreement that it was a profound influence on Yeats, and in a myriad of ways, but three aspects of it are particularly relevant to the development of conflict in his life and work. These must have found their way to the son's mind if not subliminally at an early age, certainly later in the education undertaken forcefully by the father in Yeats' tenth year. Firstly, there is his dichotomous habit of thought which delighted in logical and legalistic balancing of questions - progressively dividing and subdividing the universe into 'things' and their opposites.¹⁷ The circumstantial antinomies immanent in the child's world (already discussed) must have provided a solid foundation of examples on which to exercise this binary system of thought. (It could be suggested that this binary mode is essential to all human thought and that the father simply reinforced it but, if so, the argument is unaffected.) The idea of it, however, was not to settle on one or another intellectual conviction - the sceptic (and his son after him) abhorred these.

The reason that division of the universe into opposing forces did not facilitate choice of object for intellectual conviction or, for that matter, lead to non-involvement, either of which might be expected, can be explained if we go further than Ellman's suggestion. J. B. Yeats saw emotions, states of being and ways of viewing life as potentially containing and emerging from their own opposites and, moreover, he regarded the tension created by these antinomies as the

¹⁷ Ibid.

mainspring for artistic expression. His letters to his poet son are replete with reminders of the power of these pairs of mutually-generating, opposing, forces: "Sympathy", he noted, "also has its selfishness." ¹⁸ and: "The never dying aches of the probe of pain are in every bosom... the poets let these work, finding in them the root of happiness, the only sort which, though it be twin with sorrow, is without a fleck on its purity." ¹⁹ J. B. Yeats even goes so far as to suggest that nothing can exist without the presence of its opposite. "There is no beauty", says he, "unless we can discover some flaw or weakness." ²⁰ which perhaps explains what otherwise looks like carping in his son's lines to Maud Gonne in the poem "Broken Dreams":

And yet your body had a flaw
Your small hands were not beautiful. ²¹

In discerning the unbeautiful within beauty, Yeats was perhaps playing safe.

Indeed the way in which he should deal with and use life's polarisations was largely dictated by his father and is a combination of the second and third aspects to be considered: emotion and scepticism. Emotional convictions for J. B. Yeats were the only 'profound', 'true'-

¹⁸ Ezra Pound, ed., Passages from the Letters of John Butler Yeats, (Dundrum, Eire, 1917), p. 51.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 9.

²¹ A. Norman Jeffares, ed., W.B. Yeats: Selected Poetry, (London, 1970), p. 76.

authentic - notions worthy of commitment of the self. The intellect should be subject to the harmoniously vibrating chords of the 'feelings'.²² Sceptis, which effectively undermines the full potential of the intellect, fits very well with this elevation of the emotional personality. It is not so much a philosophy as a method of procedure by the philosophical doubt. By its very nature, it demands that reaction against it obey its own tenets and makes any intellectual conviction - even in that reaction - look like a gaffe.

It would seem that there are two discrete, but not mutually exclusive, ways of living within this system: either the intellect simply plays the advocate and draws on prejudice or conviction to justify the emotional conviction of the moment - as the elder Yeats seems to have done²³; or the emotion is actually subjected to the honest scrutiny of the intellect. The division of the 'self' seems more complete in the second but, either way, it is demanded that the intellect stand coolly back and regard a proper passion with something like indifference.

If the split between feelings and intellect is important for the man, it is essential for 'the most human of all', the artist - and for what reason other than to invest the expressive powers? J. B. Yeats abhorred the abstract language of journalism which achieves intellectual distance by lack of emotional involvement as much as he despised 'egotistical' personal utterance in poetry. Immediately it becomes

²²See Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats 1965-1939, (New York, 1943), p. 48.

²³ Ellman, p. 15.

clear that, for the artist and the poet faced with dichotomous choices, there is yet another way of obeying the system - exaggerate or even invent the emotion which the sceptical intellect can best portray. That we are never sure which is going on in Yeats' poetry is a measure of the genius of his craft and, perhaps, of the success of his father's teaching.

The teaching, of course, was specifically for a poet and the three ideas: antinomy, emotion, and scepticism, are, at least implicitly, embodied in the elder Yeats' description of poetic belief: "A poet should feel quite free to say in the morning that he believes in (anything) and in the evening that he no longer believes in (it)." It is hard to imagine a better design by which Life could be made to serve Art. Perfection of the poet's work may be achieved by the intellect's refusal - but keen awareness of - "A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark."²⁴ It demands a sort of reserved fanaticism - enough feeling to empower the expressive faculty but not enough to escape the harnessing intellect. The impression from the poetry reminds one of nothing so much as the (co-incidentally?) peculiarly Irish art of training a horse's high spirit without breaking it. It is important to say 'impression' because, as already observed, we cannot assume consistency of the quality of sincerity of Yeats' emotional convictions. It is permissible to use the 'harness' metaphor because the intellect, while inferior to 'feeling', as the bridle to the horse, is what

²⁴ Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 153.

directs it to the poetry.

Such a type of poetic belief was also a particularly convenient one for artistic expression of the emotions in an era of scepticism. The poet could make point-by-point and hour-by-hour decisions. Without committing his intellect in a credulous fashion unsuited to his time he could, in the artistic tradition, give free reign to his fancy.

To sum up the problem of 'coming to terms' with J. B. Yeats as father: of the three aspects of his individual influence the first, dichotomous thought, seems to have remained the fundamental framework, surviving all philosophies and modes of expression in his son's poetry; the young man who tried to portray his view of life in 1889 in the songs of the sad and happy shepherds still has the same preoccupations when, fifty years later, he argues with himself in "The Man and the Echo." The protagonist is unified and the struggle internalized - the old man's echo gives back no more than it is given - but the dichotomous problems, such as imagination and reality, action and passivity, remain, and are even intensified.

The supremacy of the emotions - at least in theory - was never to be questioned; but the third, perhaps because of opposing personality characteristics, scepticism, seems to have become the focus of the son's defiance. The younger Yeats appears to have cast about for any possible escape route. It is appropriate that he settled first on religion which attempts to synthesize the emotional and the intellectual - a conviction of the feelings answerable to some or another proof of the thought - at least temporarily. Religion eventually gave way to scientific rationalism which he ended by hating - and probably for its

destruction of established church as a possible refuge. In poetry, he vacillated about trying to find something exceptional, something outside the domain of his father's scepticism. His admiration of Shelley provided example for his first sustained efforts. Romanticism, as C. Day Lewis has pointed out, may be "what happens when the heroic begins to doubt itself."²⁵ It may also be what happens before the heroic has become sure of itself. *

True doubt, of course, is accessible only to believers but we must view Yeats at this period of his life as actively striving to adopt belief but helplessly assailed, at every turn, by scepticism. Rather than being provided, in the traditional way, with a stable set of beliefs against which to try his maturing intellect, he was bequeathed only the ability to doubt, and he did so, prematurely, before he ever believed. A Romantic state, if seen as the unsure heroic, would therefore be appropriate to Yeats in his early adulthood.

Besides nationalism and Maud Gonne (which we will shortly discuss as aspects of Mask) Yeats pursued other and stranger things. He says in the Autobiographies: "It was only when I began to study psychical research and mystical philosophy that I broke away from my father's influence."²⁶ This makes a change which was incomplete - and actually took about thirty years - seem definitive and abrupt. His

²⁵ Stephen Gwynn, ed., W. B. Yeats: Essays in Tribute, from "Yeats and the Aristocratic Tradition", by C. D. Lewis, (New York, 1965), p. 171.

²⁶ W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies, (London, 1955), p. 89.

thorough investigations of the 'other' - in an attempt to escape the realm of his father's scepticism while incorporating its method - were a constant preoccupation. At the same time, as we have seen, his father's influence had demanded finding intense emotional commitment in a dichotomous world, turning mere circumstantial antinomies into deep conflicts with the self. In some senses, A Vision represents a victory in both struggles; it is the culmination of his defiance of the father and justification for inner conflict.

The manner in which A Vision overcomes the father consists to some extent in its internal specifics but much more importantly in what it actually is. To recall what J. B. Yeats had written to his young son of the poetic belief:

(It) comes when the man within has found some method or manner of thinking or arrangement of fact (such as is only possible in dreams) by which to express and embody an absolute freedom such that his whole inner and outer self can expand in a full satisfaction.

A Vision is all that - and more - because, despite its title and the poet's equivocation about the nature of his belief in it, it is clearly just such an "arrangement of fact" and certainly more than a dream. The defiance of the paternal scepticism lay in the presentation and publication of these "metaphors for poetry" as something which might possibly have a real basis in "arrangement of fact."

Chapter 3

Mask

No matter how mystical was the revelation of the system, its basis was a product of Yeats' own mind and knowledge:

The unknown writer took his theme at first from my just published 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae'. I had made a distinction ... and upon this simple distinction he built up an elaborate classification of men... 27

The arrangement and vitalization of the antinomies did not come upon him in a blinding flash, but were the product of a long slow struggle, perhaps the most intense of the combats with the self. For this reason we should not think of A Vision as representing a sudden enlightenment but rather as the culmination of a gradual process.

The most fundamental metaphor - of the gyre - or the pern was present in the poetry as far back as the writing of "The Wild Swans at Coole" where he visualizes the swans:

All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in broken rings 28

The images of the self-creating spiral had impressed him when a mere child at Sligo where he was told that "pern" was another name for spool,

27 W. B. Yeats, A Packet for Ezra Pound, p. 12.

28 Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 64.

as I was accustomed to call it, on which thread was wound." 29

The doctrine of the Mask, the only really 'strange' one of the Four Faculties, was even longer in creation than the gyres. From his early days, Yeats had sought such a collection of ideal images. In Reveries over Childhood and Youth, he says:

I didn't care for mere reality and believed that
creation should be conscious and yet I could only
imitate my father. 30

Yeats was dissatisfied when he first began to write because he could not find within himself the authentic emotional commitment (concerning the real world) which his father demanded. If he was to write poetry with any intensity of feeling, he was forced to look for worthy subjects above and beyond reality, or else to transmute that reality by imagining it associated with and part of the ideal. His second temptation (as is generally shown by his attraction to Irish mythology) was to reach back into the past. The seeming contradiction in the lines:

When my arms wrap you round I press
My heart upon the loveliness
That has long faded from the world 31

shows the beginning of Yeats' devotion to ideal images from the past and his association of them with present reality.

29 W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 54

30 W. B. Yeats, Reveries over Childhood and Youth, (Dundrum, Eire, 1915), p. 95.

31 Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 29.

Agonising over the problem of finding emotional commitment where the intellect dictates unbelief, he wrote in his diary:

Thus one must continually feel and believe what one's reason denies. I am so unfortunate that I can only conceive of this as a kind of playacting. 32

He came only slowly to the idea of donning a disguise and striving from inside it to fill out the created image: he sought to bring the real into integrity with the ideal as if lead dipped in gold would alter from within to take on not only the appearance but the qualities of the precious metal.

The first direct mention of the power of the ideal disguise appears in The Green Helmet in a poem, itself called "The Mask":

It was the mask engaged your mind
And after set your heart to beat
Not what's behind. 33

The Mask, of course, was not seen as merely an alternative face but rather as a complete disguise to be symbolized in other aspects of costume. In the poem "A Coat", Yeats looks back somewhat regretfully on his revival of Irish myth as an attempt to cover the nakedness of his young imagination:

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies. 34

32 W. B. Yeats, Reveries, p. 26.

33 Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 46.

34 Ibid. p. 63.

By 1910 the notion of the Mask was a full fledged 'idée fixe' - not just a metaphor from an imaginary and ideal existence to be applied in writing, but something perceived as operating in actual present reality. With some confidence, he wrote:

I see always this one thing, that in practical life...
Mask is more than face.³⁵

Fully two years before the system with the formalized Mask itself began to unfold, "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1915) gave Ille seeking an image:

The most unlike, being my anti-self³⁶
the last word in a debate with Hic who seeks merely his natural self
in the real world.

The main elements of Yeats' personal Mask - the ideal images which he built in the context of a mythical past and which he actively pursued throughout the first half of his adult life - were of himself as lover of Maud Gonne and Ireland. The two loves are quite inextricably intertwined each generating the other and both are subject to the same kind of scepticism. Influenced by O'Leary, one of the founders of the Fenian movement of whom Yeats said: "He had the moral genius that moves all young people",³⁷ the young poet threw himself into expression of the "hidden forces of the land." As long as Ireland could be "invisibly peopled" by such as Cuchulain and the Wandering

³⁵ A.G. Stock, p. 38.

³⁶ Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 77.

³⁷ W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 95.

Aengus it could remain a fit subject for poetry. As long as Maud could be Pallas Athene, Helen of Troy, and especially Cathleen ni Houlihan, representing Ireland itself, her lover could idealize himself. Indeed, Yeats' anxiety to idealize reality is perhaps best seen in his deliberate casting of Maud, with whom he was thoroughly stricken, as the heroine of Irish myth; he wrote The Countess Cathleen for her and produced the play only on condition that she would perform in the title role. His purpose in writing such plays and indeed in helping to found the Abbey Theatre was to offer a Mask, a collection of ideal images from their past, to the Irish public. By so doing, he hoped to bring about a renaissance in Irish cultural, philosophical, and political life such as had taken place for Europe some three centuries earlier with the unearthing of Graeco-Roman splendour. The Dublin theatre audience, however, seemed less receptive than Yeats would have wished. Speaking of The Countess Cathleen, he noted:

the one defect was that the mild humour of the part before Cathleen came in kept them in such delighted laughter that it took them some little while to realize the tragic meaning of Cathleen's part though Maud Gonne played it magnificently and with weird power. I should have struck a tragic note at the start. 38

The audience's light attitude, with similar disappointments, undermined Yeats' hope of fusing ancient and noble Irish myth with contemporary Irish reality. He would probably have discontinued his active involvement with theatrical production if he had not been

38 Ibid., p. 450.

introduced by Ezra Pound to the techniques of Noh drama, which offered scope for further exploration of the power of the Mask. The Japanese Noh drama, and Yeats' Irish version of it, attempts to create dramatic action as far distant as possible from reality: the actors, masked and elaborately costumed, are depersonalized, the scenery, from a ghostly suggestion, is almost entirely imagined by the audience. Indeed, although Yeats' involvement in the theatre caused a lengthy absence from the "craft of verse", it was itself merely another approach to creating poetry through idealizing reality.

Yeats' drawing back from the all-too-lifelike crowd and from Maud Gonne's active dedication to the cause was in obedience to his father's design. No one can take part in a bloody political campaign and be free to change his beliefs between night and morning. There are, however, other ways to influence people: it is interesting to note that Yeats' father, long before the poet's involvement with drama, had written to him:

I want to say that I believe poets will ultimately find their salvation in writing plays for the public theatre.³⁹

³⁹ Hone, W. B. Yeats 1865-1939, p. 35.

Chapter 4

Will and Creative Mind

The Mask, of course, could not exist without being imagined and sought by the Will, the primitive conscious energy borrowed from the eternal soul for the span of an incarnated life. The idea of the Will, although it came to Yeats' knowledge as one of the prime elements of the soul in Eastern philosophy and religion, must have seemed an echo of J. B. Yeats' notion of 'emotional conviction.' As Joseph Ronsley puts it:

Yeats inherited his attitudes toward personality in large measure from his father. As both saw it, personality was not merely the individual's complex of distinguishing external characteristics and mannerisms but was more comprehensively a bundle or mass of instincts, appetites, longings, psychical intuitions resting on a firm basis of the five senses. Intellect served only to harmonize these ordinarily anarchic elements into a total personality; emotion was the common denominator among them.⁴⁰

The images which make up the Mask are perceived as ideal not by force of intellectual conviction but out of the emotional and sensual (even sexual) experience of the soul derived in previous lives. The Will perceives, and pursues the Mask only because it (the Mask) reflects the experience supplied to it by Passionate Body, its counterpart, one of the soul's Four Principles which exist in the 'other' world.

⁴⁰ Joseph Ronsley, Yeats' Autobiography, (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 38.

In the subjective first half of the moon's complete cycle and, correspondingly during the first thirteen phases of an individual's earthly life, the intellect, as in J. B. Yeats' implicit system, is active but secondary. The intellect's main use, particularly for the artist, is to portray the passionate experience of the self driven by Will towards its own, ideal, opposite, the Mask. Speaking of Shakespeare, Yeats wrote:

... he created the most passionate art that exists.
 He was the greatest of modern poets... partly because...
 creating always from Mask and Creative Mind, never from
 situation alone, never from Body of Fate alone. ⁴¹

Creative Mind is simply the active intellect which comes into its own in the second, objective, half of the Moon's circular progress. However, even in the first half, it functions and grows gradually stronger, its purpose being to understand Body of Fate, or circumstance, and to distinguish that from the Mask or ideal. Creative Mind is a conglomerate of ideal ideas or notions gathered by Spirit (its eternal counterpart) from the experience of previous lives and transmitted during an incarnation as a kind of inherited body of knowledge with which the self negotiates its way in the real world. Creative Mind, for all that its name connotes a constructive power, is confined in the first fifteen phases (or first half of the moon's cycle) to a doubting function. Its role is to prevent the self (the incarnate being) from foolishly mistaking mere reality, Body of Fate, for its proper object.

⁴¹ A. G. Stock, p. 128.

Mask. As such, Creative Mind would seem to have the exactly opposite function to that of scepticism which, cautiously doubting, distinguishes the real, the true, from mere illusion, as the wheat from the chaff. Now, if that is not too trite an antinomy, it is an interesting one. How better to defy J. B. Yeats' scepticism and yet encompass it than by applying it faithfully to the opposite of its declared function? (The poisoner's apprentice son turned physician.) We do know that although Yeats struggled against the confines of scepticism, he could never quite free himself from that approach. Even in those mystical zones, chosen at least partly for his father's ignorance of them, Yeats, says one critic, "rarely ceased to be in all matters of philosophical importance a very wise sceptic." Of oriental mysticism, Yeats himself says:

I was always longing for evidence but ashamed to admit my longing and having read in Silbey's Astrology if you burn a flower to ashes and then put the ashes under a glass bell in the moonlight...⁴²

The basic notion, however, of Creative Mind was not at all at odds with Yeats' father's teaching. Influenced by Arnold and Pater, J. B. Yeats had synthesized a secular religion from what could be regarded as a conglomerate of ideas out of the past. An atheist, he had adopted an ethic based on humanism in art and literature as a response to and acceptance of Darwinism, positivism, Mill's rationalism, etc. His son, however, could find in such cold reasoned doctrines nothing

⁴² M. I. Seiden, W. B. Yeats: The Poet as Mythmaker, (New York, 1975), p. 27.

sufficiently divine for commitment of his whole being. He sought something in which he could passionately believe with both his heart and his mind. In Autobiographies, he recalls:

My father's unbelief had set me thinking about the evidence of religion and I weighed the matter perpetually with great anxiety for I did not think that I could live without religion. ⁴³

Incredibly, he managed "to weigh the matter." Rather than exclude the "thinking" component from his system and thus leave it as an external enemy doubting his new religion, Yeats incorporates the intellect (turned on the side obverse from scepticism) as a functioning constructive faculty itself within and supporting the system. Having said all that, it is comforting indeed to find an accredited critic writing:

Yeats turned to the supernatural for a variety of reasons. He wanted to rationalize his dreams until they became a comforting faith, to rebel against his father and against his father's religious scepticism, and above all to establish for himself a religious or quasi-religious mythology by which he might consecrate his imaginative life.⁴⁴

⁴³ W. B. Yeats, Reveries, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Seiden, p. 31.

Chapter 5

The Remodelled System

If, as is suggested by A Vision, we imagine an individual life as passing through the same twenty-eight phases as the moon itself, the first half (Phases 1 to 14) seems a reproduction of J. B. Yeats' design for the life of a poet. Mask is simply a collection of the ideal images which, in the painter's implicit system, are the objects of a poet's passionate belief; Will is the emotional energy dedicated to these images; Creative Mind is the intellectual faculty which, discriminating between the true and the false, directs the committed emotions towards the creation of art; Body of Fate (which anyone can contemplate) is simply the set of dichotomy-bearing circumstances which surrounds an earthly life. Yeats' conception of this system, however, is more schematic, more dynamic and 'deeper' than his father's. The faculties in the poet's system are precisely interrelated, their action being represented in a three dimensional geometric pattern of two interlocking spirals, each one forming as the other diminishes. The faculties are identified as having a supernatural source and significance, their movements being only minute replicas of the growing and dying gyres of cultural and cosmic history. For J. B. Yeats, although paradoxically he seemed more convinced of the validity of what he says, the faculties are relatively vague and obscurely interrelated and certainly are not imbued with otherworldly aura.

It is not surprising that there should be the 'organizational'

difference. J. B. Yeats was just as disorganized, disinterested, and feckless as an Irish gentleman artist ought to be; his son, however, had early shown a penchant for making systems. The first book which he planned was to trace the changes in some small animal 'through a twelvemonth.'⁴⁵ The most profound difference, indeed, between the two systems, is Yeats' idea of development, of well-ordered change with time. The elder Yeats was preoccupied to some extent with the artist's relationship to circumstances as they change with time. The poet's habit of continually revising his poetry (of remaking himself, as he put it) had its counterpart in his father's constant painting over landscapes, to reflect the changing seasons, and over portraits, to reflect the changing personality: J. B. Yeats died with a much-revised self-portrait still on the easel. While the elder Yeats clearly responded to change, he seems not to have felt the need (or the power) to explain its origins or regularize its manifestations. Particularly, he accepted the emergence of one side of an antinomy out of its opposite with no particular separation in time and with no special relevance to the stage of life of an individual experiencing that antinomy. The "arrangement of fact", which he regarded as essential to the poetic belief, he thought to be possible and appropriate only in dreams. Generally, he despised explicit systems, particularly the mystical or religious ones such as those of Blake and Aeschylus, as being

⁴⁵ Hone, p. 33.

merely the machinery of poetry. ⁴⁶

In his own, implicit system, the emotions dominant over the intellect, as is Will over Creative Mind (in Phases 1 to 14), may be committed, at any given moment, to an object of belief and, at any other time, to its opposite. Since he does not conceive of a predestined, regularly-phased Body of Fate, he can envision the one-hundred-and-eighty degree shift of attitude as occurring haphazardly, according to whatever is presented, apparently at random, by circumstance. Yeats, by contrast, sees Will and Creative Mind as each gaining, then losing significance in a smooth exchange of dominance, therefore continuously co-existing and warring with each other in differing proportionate shares of power. Will begins in strength and gradually, as its gyre narrows and dies out, weakens. Simultaneously, Creative Mind, beginning weak, gathers strength as its gyre grows and widens. It is the equilibrium maintained between Will and Creative Mind, which empowers creative activity. His father saw that tension as coming from the abrupt and random changes of object of emotional dedication and the inevitable wrenching back and forth of the intellect to justify and portray those conflicting feelings. Poetry was possible, he said, only when "the personality is knit and the man at peace with himself... and there is a truce among the warring elements." ⁴⁷ It might be said that while the father recognized and cherished moments of poetic

⁴⁶ Pound, ed., Letters of John Butler Yeats, p. 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 24.

power, Yeats, in a bold move, mapped out for himself an endless succession of such moments, creating a poetic existence of what remained of his life. Wherever the Will would induce optimism, courage, love, or (perhaps most importantly) credulity, Creative Mind, by definition, would counsel the opposite, pessimism, fear, hatred, or scepticism, respectively. The poet, thus self-endowed, has an inexhaustible store of naturally-occurring 'conflict with the self' as material. Moreover, notwithstanding the conflict or conviction of the moment, he has the larger truth, the covering law of the system itself, in which to believe.

The application of the system to history such that a society could also be viewed as passing through phases fraught with conflict was convenient for Yeats in explaining the imperfections of his Body of Fate which happened to be travelling through Phase 22. The predication of past and future greatness left room for interpretation of Ireland's less than glorious condition as merely temporary and transient; it also allowed for Yeats' anomalous birth. It is surely only those who are born out-of-phase who could be the transmitters of such other-worldly wisdom.

There is no doubt that the writing of A Vision does represent an interlocking of Yeats' own past experience of earthly life with a synthesis of selections from his varied mystical and mythological notions. Yeats had indeed, with Will, created a Mask (himself as lover of Maude and Ireland being its main elements) and striven towards it and away from his Body of Fate, his Creative Mind all the time 'sceptically at work trying to distinguish the true ideal from the false.

It looks very much as if A Vision may have begun as a statement of personal history and philosophy and, being empowered by knowledge of mysticism, generalized out to apply to other individuals, cultures, nations, and the cosmos itself. This basic particularity of A Vision, suspected but rarely explicated, is perhaps what prevents the work from being subjected to serious philosophical, historical or even astrological analysis. Gerald Levin, in a fairly convincing, if brief, analysis, has confirmed Yeats' implicit categorization of himself as a man of Phase 17 (i.e., a man born into the 17th of the 26 possible incarnations).⁴⁸

The interesting point (which Levin does not mention) is that if one were to begin with one's own earthly life as a pattern, a model, one could create one's own system. No doubt it is possible to see oneself as having gone, and about to go, through certain phases; if one were to number these phases and describe each with some continuity between them; and if one were then to imagine these as also identical to a series of one's own soul's incarnations, one would have invented a system for classifying all human beings, as well as oneself, as belonging to one phase or another. One would quite naturally choose for oneself a phase in which one's present problems would be solved by its virtually automatic unfolding. If one were a poet attempting to renounce passionate devotion to unattainable images and striving for

⁴⁸ Gerald Levin, The Yeats of the Autobiographies: A Man of Phase 17, Texas Series on Language and Literature, Vol. VI, pp. 398-405.

Unity of Being in reconciliation with the real world one would choose something like Phase 17 where "a man... must be ready to see fate snatch away the objects of these passions, and, if true to phase, turn his loss into poetry." ⁴⁹ One would, in those circumstances, choose Phase 17 because it is the incarnation which comes closest in actual life to achievement of Unity of Being but achieves it only in creative art - "perfection of the work" - and then only if in a certain phase of the historical cycle. Yeats is not only born at a time when absolute belief in his own "system" is virtually impossible (as mentioned earlier); he is born into a phase where Unity of Being even in creative art is out of reach, although he, being of Phase 17, is as close to that as any living being. Thus he could abnegate absolute belief and also absolve himself of failure to achieve Unity of Being in life and also (just in case the system itself failed) in art. The conveniently fabricated nature of A Vision is brought into focus by J. B. Yeats who hated the whole business. He said, with what in hindsight looks like venom, "A mystic is a man who believes what he likes to believe and makes a system of it and plumes himself on doing so." ⁵⁰

It is worth noting, perhaps, that a being of Phase 17 "has for its supreme aim ... to hide from itself and others ... separation and disorder concealing them under a Mask of simplicity that is also

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 402.

⁵⁰ Pound, ed., p. 16.

intensity. The Mask may represent intellectual or sexual passion." 51
Such an intellectual passion could be the formation and explication of
a brand new cosmology.

Yeats' categorization of himself as of Phase 17, however, was never
emphasized. Indeed, he seemed a little confused on that particular
point. We can see more profoundly the relevance of A Vision to Yeats'
own life in the larger context of the system, particularly in the way
it justifies inner conflict (for any phase). Indeed, it makes conflict
during an earthly life the norm; it is only in the phantom first and
fifteenth phases, where choice and chance are one, that conflict does
not exist. The element of determinism (incomplete but still powerful),
preassigns a person's Body of Fate and its antithesis, Mask. Inevitably,
one's emotional Will struggles towards the Mask at the same time as
one's intellectual Creative Mind reaches for Body of Fate, thus creating
deep inner conflict. The feelings and the intellect are continuously at
war, creating what we might call the 'primary' combat with the self.
If Body of Fate or circumstance constantly presents dichotomous
choices, such as Protestantism versus Catholicism, Theism versus Atheism,
Nationalism versus Unionism, Romantic Nationalism versus Inter-
nationalism, Realism versus Idealism, Artifice versus Nature, Action
versus Words, all of which were faced by Yeats, that 'primary' conflict
obviously proliferates.

What may seem strange but is paradoxically or antinomously

51 Levin, p. 402.

appropriate, A Vision does not try to weaken or diffuse these combats. An eschatology minimizes the problems experienced in an earthly life by viewing that as only one of a series of reincarnations, mere interruptions in the higher life of the soul, but by the same token intensifies the problems, enhancing them with a supernatural significance. This is especially true for the man predestined to create art, who from 'the combats with the self' would write poetry.

What has been emphasized above is the action of Yeats' own Will in the creation of A Vision itself. The appropriateness of the timing of its revelation will emerge from the discussion of the development of his life and poetry in later chapters of this thesis. None of this argues that he therefore did not believe. Indeed it would be entirely compatible with the nature of the inherited 'system' and Yeats' need to defy the scepticism contained in it for him to both develop and believe in such an "arrangement of fact." The need for the rather ponderous discussion of the nature of Yeats' belief in A Vision (at the beginning of this paper) should now be clear. Yeats could turn his 'quarrels with the self' to poesy only in so far as he believed in the essentials of his strange poetic philosophy. Without belief, the system could be just a collection of metaphors and would need no deeper examination than any device for writing poetry. With belief, it becomes a reflection of reality which would profoundly affect his experience.

Chapter 6

Confronting Body of Fate

Yeats' poetry of a few years prior to the revelation of the system (in 1917) was already undergoing a change in preoccupation and style: he had begun to confront Body of Fate, to face contemporary reality. The cataclysm of the Easter Rising in 1916, his marriage, and the 'appearance' of A Vision did not begin a new departure but rather caused a leap forward in completion of a progress already begun. By January 1914, when he wrote Introductory Rhymes for group of poems called Responsibilities, Yeats was severely castigating himself for failure to come to terms with real life, to achieve the usual concrete things. He begs his forefathers:

Pardon that for a barren passion's sake
 Although I have come close on forty-nine
 I have no child, I have nothing but a book
 Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine. 52

In another significant sense these rhymes indicate the beginning of a reconciliation with Body of Fate; for the first time, he addresses individuals who, although 'passed away', exist within living memory: he mentions actual names and thus, in a departure from his usual habit, confronts personalities of this world. It is true that he had talked of, and to, Maud Gonne in 'many an impassioned rhyme' but she is never

52 Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 49.

named or defined; she is not even distinguishable from any other love goddess until the previous group of poems, The Green Helmet, where he refers to their political differences.

In "The Grey Rock" Yeats speaks to other, but probably better remembered, dead, his erstwhile fellow poets such as Dowson and Johnson. Again he is underlining forcefully his relationship with them, his ineluctable connection with present or recent reality:

Poets with whom I learned my trade
Companions of the Chesire Cheese
Here's an old story I've remade. 53

The 'old story' is a revival of an Irish myth, typical of Yeats' earlier poetry but it is rather differently told. Its gods are quite homely,

... sitting at the board
In their great house at Slievenamon
They sang a drowsy song or snored
For they were full of wine and meat. 54

and there is a flippant, self-deprecatory line:

Is not that how good stories run? 55

In telling this rather earthy tale Yeats twice shifts back to addressing the poets, and as he does so, he carries through the thought, the theme of the myth:

53 Ibid. p. 50.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

Since tavern comrades, you have died,
 Maybe your images have stood
 Mere bone and muscle thrown aside,
 Before that roomful or as good. 56

Clearly, in imagining his old friends in company with the gods, Yeats is trying to build connections between this world and the other. He may even have thought that he could 'make contact.' Certainly by 1914, Yeats believed in reincarnation, the eternal soul, and communication with the dead. It is interesting that, although a tribute, the poem is far from being an eulogy; again, he confronts the less than heroic reality:

You had to face your ends when young
 'T was wine, women or some curse
 But never made a poorer song
 That you might have a heavier purse. 57

In the poem with the long title "To a Wealthy Man who Promised..." written in December, 1912, Yeats does something entirely new. In taking up a public quarrel about the responsibility for financial support of a municipal art gallery, he was embroiling himself and his poetry, no less, in the life of the community. Moreover, for the first time, he was addressing a living, breathing individual, unnamed but unmistakable, and leaves no doubt about which side in the quarrel he favours: for once, Yeats was with 'the people'.

The new preoccupation with 'the real' continues throughout

56 Ibid. p. 51.

57 Ibid.

Responsibilities. It shows in a wry, half-mocking mention of mundane things like money. Even in a poem addressed to the ghost of Parnell there is such an intrusion, albeit in parentheses:

If you have revisited the town, thin shade
Whether to look upon your monument
(I wonder if the builder has been paid) 58

There is also a concentration on the 'unfortunates' of this world in the 'beggar' poems, "The Hours Before Dawn", "Beggar to Beggar Cried", and "The Three Hermits", with much talk of rags, dirt, hair and fleas.

In another poem of the same group, "Friends", Yeats recalls and celebrates the influence of three important women in his life: Olivia Shakespeare, Lady Gregory, last but not least, Maud Gonne. The mood is elderly, the tone one normally used for a last tribute in farewell:

Now must I these three praise
Three women that have wrought
What joy is in my days: 59

He seems at the end of something, 'tidying up' as if he were dying or at least leaving the country. Adding up the score, assessing the worth of these friends, is another way of coming to terms with reality. Facing the pain with the pleasure, he does not neglect to mention the bitter side of his association with Maud:

58 Ibid. p. 57.

59 Ibid. p. 61.

And what of her that took
 All till my youth was gone
 With scarce a pitying look? 60

Indeed, when the poems of Responsibilities are grouped, we find that Yeats has examined and assessed all his vital worldly connections: his recent forefathers, his fellow poets, his heroes, O'Leary and Parnell, the patrons of art, the women in his life; all, that is, except his father. Surely, unless Yeats had not yet managed to sum up the paternal influence, the elder deserved some mention.

Coming to terms with reality and being able to portray it in poetry was the realization of a long-standing goal for Yeats. In Estrangement, of 1909, he wrote:

All my life I have been haunted with the idea that the poet should know all classes of men as one of themselves, that he should combine the greatest possible personal realization with the greatest possible knowledge of the speech and circumstances of the world. 61

Yeats had already spent some two-and-a-half decades attempting to realize his personality in association with 'the other' and the past but in so doing had neglected to develop an understanding and sympathy with the world: he had failed to make himself an active part of it and thus to portray it in poetry.

Responsibilities is a summing-up, almost an inventory, of Yeats' abstract but worldly possession, the meagre count of his relationships

60 Ibid.

61 W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 470.

with his fellows. As such, it is his first attempt to deal with present reality.

Although representing a conclusion, Responsibilities also contains the glimmer of a new beginning - a typical Yeatsian antinomy. It is in "The Magi" that we find the first allusion to Yeats' dawning belief in historical cycles to be explained in A Vision: he sees the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ being repeated:

And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor 62

In a later group of poems, The Wild Swans at Coole, we find further developments in Yeats' progress toward the real: renewed attempts to confront experience of this world. We find, particularly, an active empathy, an attempt to put himself in another's place. In "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death", the poet imagines his compatriot (Robert Gregory) fighting a battle that is really England's (and in so doing comes perilously close to a political statement):

Those that I fight I do not hate
Those that I guard I do not love 63

And in To a Young Girl, he says:

62 Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 63.

63 Ibid. p. 69.

My dear, my dear, I know
 More than another
 What makes your heart beat so 64

The departure here, although it may not seem very dramatic, is significant. Never in Yeats' previous poetry would we find an attempt to directly express the emotions of a living being other than the poet himself. The new empathy is important because it corresponds with and anticipates an idea of A Vision: daimons seek to know one another through the medium of meeting in earthly life.

Looking upon the actual brings soon the reward of closely observed detail. Although, in "The Fisherman", Yeats is writing of 'A man who does not exist', the lines:

Where stone is dark under froth
 And the down-turn of the wrist 65

show that he has indeed actually watched a fisherman cast, has noted the carefully chosen location and the characteristic but 'never so well-expressed' movement of the hand. This development takes the work a long way from the abstract language of journalism towards 'public poetry.' Appropriately, at this time, Yeats begins (or tries) to use, as symbols, the common currency of everyday experience. In "Her Praise" he invites us to see him consumed with restless passionate love, pacing the stairway, "As a man does who has published a new book." 66

64 Ibid. p. 70.

65 Ibid. p. 72.

66 Ibid. p. 72.

Now, that is a very affecting image but surely directly so only for the small portion of his readership who have indeed ever submitted a manuscript. As if he realizes the elitist and restrictive nature of the simile, in the next line, he expands it to take in 'the people':

Or a young girl dressed out in her new gown 67

which is better for being commoner but, being dilute, lacks force. He cannot really mean that the tumult of his love resembles the half-fearful silly pride of an adolescent in a new dress. The problem, of course, is that an ultimate passion cannot be compared to any actual, and by definition, meaner emotion without itself seeming diminished. Yeats, in using real life images, was trying to convey something which existed on the threshold between the actual and ideal, which is, of course, impossible without fusion of the two in his own perceptions. That fusion would be the major reconciliation achieved by the system and was not possible until later when he had 'accepted' A Vision.

Yeats' first entry into the real, however, did present him with a new poetic universe scarcely less rich and diverse than the mystical and mythological ones which had held his attention for so long. In exploring his own feelings about real people whom he knew (or at least knew of) and about contemporary immediate situations which were public knowledge, his poetry began to speak for an entity larger than himself and therefore to a wider audience. His new use of ordinary, everyday symbols not only broadened his subject matter but deepened his

communication with his readers, striking common chords in their personalities. The delineation of detail is important because it is what any artist gives unselfishly, and often with great labour, to his public. By filling-in the fine details which are not central to a larger scene, and which are therefore noticed only subconsciously by most, the artist truly recreates and shares experience. Approaching the 'real', Yeats was able to make his poetry somewhat more 'public.' Although (in Responsibilities and The Wild Swans at Coole) he was portraying intensified personal experience, it was, paradoxically enough, of a type which was or could be shared by others, so that the poems are less subjective, less personal, and more widely relevant than his earlier work. Confronting Body of Fate or circumstance was not only the attainment of an ambition of Yeats' own: it also met an oft-repeated specific demand of his father. Using 'spheres' to apply to fields of endeavour in this life, he wrote to his son:

the poet must seek and find luminous truth, and must seek it by the ordinary mental processes employed in all other spheres. 68

Chapter 7

The Turning Point

We have seen then that, for the few years prior to A Vision's 'revelation', Yeats was attempting to confront reality and to portray it in poetry. He assessed himself and his achievements, his forefathers, colleagues and friends; he versified on the subject of a public debate; he talked of unsavoury and unprepossessing 'real' things; he attended to detail in the ordinary; he contrived to don another's Mask, to get into someone else's act; and he tried to speak to his public in terms which might be drawn from their own lives. All these developments adumbrate Yeats' incipient reconciliation with his Body of Fate, with the circumstances which surrounded him. He was forced to come to terms with reality because, at fifty years old, he was dissatisfied with both his life and his poetry. He had the courage to do so because the synthesizing thought behind A Vision, which would make the conflicts involved tolerable, had begun to take shape in his mind. Per Amica Silentiae Lunae, which introduces (as mentioned earlier) the fundamental dichotomy to be resolved in 'the system', was written at roughly the same time as those poems of Responsibilities and The Wild Swans at Coole which have just been discussed. The latter group also includes "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "The Phases of the Moon", which very explicitly address the same problems and present the same solution as does A Vision itself.

The years 1916-1917 can be seen as a fulcrum point in the life of

Yeats. In this brief span, his Body of Fate presented him with extraordinary crises precipitating, from his discontent, new solutions to old problems, political, personal, and poetical. Ireland was thrown into revolution; Yeats finally 'lost' Maud Gonne and married another; the disclosure of 'the system' which would explain and justify all began through his new bride's 'automatic writing.' Indeed, this 'turning point' in Yeats' life should probably be first explained in the basic terms of the system which allegedly the communicators began to reveal.

It would appear that if Yeats was prepared to devote the rest of his days to taking down the communicators' messages, he must have regarded them essentially as a belated endowment from his own (and perhaps his wife's) soul's Spirit, the eternal reservoir from which, for each incarnation, the daimon chooses a Creative Mind. What seems stranger still, he could have seen the system's revelation as a sort of bonus, almost a child of the marriage, a spiritual Gestalt. Thus, speaking of the communicators, he says:

And again and again they have insisted that the whole system is the creation of my wife's daimon and of mine, and that it is as startling to them as to us. ⁶⁹

This would imply that Creative Mind had gained new strength and that Will, giving place to it, would begin to relinquish the Mask. Maud Gonne's recent 'final' refusal to marry Yeats, and his apparent acceptance of it in taking another wife, would support the idea that his

⁶⁹ W. B. Yeats, A Packet for Ezra Pound, p. 30.

new marriage and the appearance of A Vision's system represent that mid-way juncture of the opposing gyres. The whole honeymoon scene is replete with suggestions of reconciliation and almost implies the poet's deliberate design: Miss Hyde-Lees from the world of mysticism was, nevertheless, "a comfortable wife"; marriage to her provides the breadth and stability which had eluded his life and poetry; she offers hope of a solution to his regretted childless state; perhaps marriage itself represents a culmination of his manhood and, even thus, comes to terms with the father.

To further support the idea that A Vision's appearance represents the 'take over' by Creative Mind, we must examine what happens around this time to the other main element of Yeats' personal Mask (although it is scarcely separable from his love for Maud Gonne), his romantic nationalism. Yeats, prior to the great event of the Easter Rising in 1916, had mainly "complained of the people." He had shunned the 'blood and thunder' of the armed liberation movement because he did not see in it the noble redeeming spirit of O'Leary's romantic and his own mythological nationalism. He had kept his ideal Ireland pure by participating only in a token fashion in the popular active struggle. Indeed, one of the bitter 'combats with the self' was 'action versus advice.'

At times he was confident that his work lay in creating a spiritual and aesthetic independence for his country rather than in armed insurrection. In "To Ireland in the Coming Times", he says:

I cast my heart into my rhymes
 That you, in the dim coming times
 May know how my heart went with them
 After the red-rose-bordered hem. 70

He sometimes thought, however, that words must seem to such fiery activists as Maud Gonne, a pallid substitute for action. In Words, he says:

My darling cannot understand
 What I have done, or what would do
 In this blind bitter land. 71

"The seeming needs of my fool-driven land", he says later, do not succeed in tempting him from the "accustomed toil" of poetry, whereas he declares that, when a young man admiring Davis, Magnan, and Ferguson, the strongly nationalistic poets:

I had not given a penny for a song
 Did not the poet sing it with such airs
 That one believed he had a sword upstairs 72

Action and words had become in his near maturity separate because for the poet to dabble in the first would imply that the real contemporary Ireland and its people were somehow allied to the glorious past. In A Vision's terms, such action on behalf of Body of Fate would have compromised the integrity of Will striving toward the ideal Mask. It is probably in the poem "September 1913" that Yeats' profound contempt

70 Jeffares ed., Selected Poetry, p. 22.

71 Ibid. p. 44.

72 Ibid. p. 48.

for the real, living Irish is best expressed:

What need you, being come to sense
But fumble in a greasy till ...

... Yet they were of a different kind
The names that stilled your childish play ...

... Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide ...

... Romantic Ireland's dead and gone
It's with O'Leary in the grave. 73

Yeats lived to regret this attitude. The events of 1916 and the way in which the consequences were borne by the rebels threw him into unalloyed astonished admiration of the people he had virtually despised. In Easter 1916, Yeats almost achieves 'simplicity that is also intensity' - "the heroic blending realism and romanticism." Of the formerly ordinary-seeming people, he says:

I have passed with a nod of the head
Or polite meaningless words ...

... And thought before I had done
Of a mocking tale or a gibe ...

... Being certain that they and I
But lived where motley is worn

... This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vainglorious lout ...

Yet I number him in the song
He too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy
He, too, has been changed in his turn

73 Ibid. pp. 55-56.

... MacDonagh and MacBride
 And Connolly and Pearse
 Now and in time to be,
 Wherever green is worn,
 Are changed, changed utterly:
 A terrible beauty is born ⁷⁴

It is almost 'simplicity that is also intensity' but not quite. The jarring note within this passionate verse is the sceptical (and treacherous) wondering, "Was it needless death after all? For England may keep faith." ⁷⁵ The sceptical intellect is not yet quite subjected to 'the harmoniously vibrating chords of the feelings.' However, 1916 had brought for Yeats the first, real, non-mythical event which truly and deeply impressed him. Right there, in the Post Office on O'Connell Street in Dublin, enacted by the living Irish, something heroic and glorious, rivalling and copying his old myths, had occurred. The Mask was perhaps not eternally dominant over Body of Fate. Real life with all its greasy circumstance was part of the cosmos and worthy of a poet's attention. Although it is true that Yeats was not active in the rising - indeed, he was a little peeved to have been entirely excluded - it was certainly for him a very profound experience, unquestionably part of his Body of Fate. Within the larger irony that his much demeaned Irish had risen to unexpected heroism, there were other ironies in this event for Yeats. Not the least was that, as he later suspected, his play The Countess Cathleen may have been

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 93-95.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 95.

partly responsible for the groundswell of nationalistic feeling which made the Easter Rising not only possible but inevitable. Later, he would ask, with some anguish, and perhaps also, pride:

Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot? 76

Maud Gonne, at least, was willing to give him the credit. In her terms, a national bard did not serve his country by endowing some abstract aesthetic freedom but by rousing men - and women - to action. Since Maud Gonne herself had played Cathleen ni Houlihan, perhaps (in her essay in tribute) she was giving Yeats more than his due of praise or blame.

The other irony of the rising concerned the same lady. Her husband John MacBride, the 'drunken vainglorious lout' of the poem, was one of the leaders executed. Although 'estranged' from MacBride, Maud Gonne, as a convert to Irish Catholicism, would probably never have divorced him. MacBride's death set Maud free, if she wished, to marry and of course, precipitated a renewal of Yeats' oft-repeated proposal. The ironical thing is that, since she simply renewed and made final her refusal, her husband's death and therefore the Easter Rising, had put Maud forever out of reach. The crisis had passed; Yeats could continue to see himself as lover of the unattainable; that aspect of the Mask survived intact. Later in "The Tower", Yeats was to make clear what had been only hinted at before: he had never wanted

Maud to become real for him:

Does the imagination dwell the most
 Upon a woman won or woman lost?
 If on the lost, admit you turned aside
 From a great labyrinth out of pride
 Cowardice, some silly over-subtle thought
 Or anything called conscience once
 And that if memory recur, the sun's
 Under eclipse and the day blotted out. 77

Both events, the loss of Maud and the gaining of Ireland, helped to turn Yeats' attention to immediate circumstance, but in different ways. The realization that Maud would never be part of his everyday life left room and gave urgency to the search for a real wife, Georgie Hyde-Lees; to be the consort of Maud was irrevocably part of his Mask; to be husband of Georgie, so his Creative Mind discerned, was his Body of Fate. He was reconciled to the real living Ireland and to life itself by its newly demonstrated potential for drama and even tragedy. This 'pragmatical pig of a world' whether he eulogized it, raged at it, wondered at or despised it would henceforth be the main subject of his poetry. His creative Mind, even if it did not adore Body of Fate as Will did Mask, would nevertheless strive to understand it.

The state which Yeats experienced as he set his mind to eulogizing the martyred leaders of the rising and to finding a wife is very much like what he described, using his father's phrase, as Unity of Being, or that nearest approach to it, the condition of a man in Phase 17 where "the mind tries to achieve as harmonious a synthesis as it can of

the now scattering images - by focusing them in some intellectual or sexual passion." 78 It is difficult to divide the intellectual and sexual in the mind of Yeats. Perhaps the strangest definition of A Vision is as "a sublimation of sexual passion" but that seems less strange and the corresponding reconciliations in his love life, more significant, when we find Yeats himself saying:

The marriage bed is the symbol of the solved
antimony. 79

If we take this quite seriously, then indeed Yeats would not only be born in his seventeenth incarnation, he would marry and produce a synthesis of his ideas and a reconciliation of his conflicts in Phase 17 of his own life, thus getting as close to Unity of Being as possible. Around this time Yeats did see himself as a personality existing near the full of the moon but whose Will was focused on the Dark of the moon, or on the blinding light of the sun. In "Lines Written in Dejection" (in 1916), he complains:

When have I last looked on
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
Of the dark leopards of the moon?

... I have nothing but the embittered sun

... And now I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun 80

78. Levin, p. 402.

79. Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, p. 221.

80. Norman A. Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats, (Stanford, Cal., 1968), p. 177.

It may also be worthwhile (if somewhat facetious) to note that if one divides Yeats' age, fifty-one, at this time, by seventeen, one gets, as a result, the magic number, three.

Chapter 8

Self-Possession and Power

The events described in the preceding chapter constitute what might be called a composite crisis for Yeats. He was forced to relinquish active pursuit of the two main aspects of his Mask: of Maud because she became ultimately unattainable and because the sheer pressure of advancing years forced him to make a life without her; and of romantic nationalism because, paradoxically, by the Easter Rising, it showed itself more worthily pursued by others and therefore unworthy as an ideal for Yeats. The resolution of the deep 'combats with the self' among which were those involved in the devotion to 'that woman' and to an idealized Ireland was, in effect, a coming-to-terms with his father whose influence had made inner conflicts out of mere circumstantial antinomies. Just as he accepted the changes in his life in a fashion implicitly demanded by the 'system', he openly acknowledged the system itself. The acceptance of the system which had been growing in his mind for thirty years was the ultimate defiance of his father, especially given the alleged manner of its revelation, through 'automatic writing.' At the same time, since it answered fully the paternal demand for a 'system of poetic belief', it was a synthesis and extension of J. B. Yeats' ideas on the philosophy of poetry.

This may be a suitable juncture at which to introduce further speculation on the significance of the system of A Vision in Yeats' development. It is just possible that Yeats saw the Easter Rising

and Maud Gonne's final refusal as the invalidation of romantic nationalism and romance as worthy ideals, as proper aspects of Mask. Since, given the slow evolution of the system, he was forced, in any case, to choose his Mask retrospectively, he could, with hindsight on his three decades research, have chosen the achievement of the system itself. This would imply that after much vacillation, and since 'perfection of the life' seemed unattainable, he had opted for 'perfection of the work', or indeed for a system of poetic belief over a system of absolute belief. Having refused, and been refused, the active part, he chose to remember and to perpetuate his devotion to words and images. The interpretation of the system itself as Mask would be compatible with Yeats' sustained eclectic quest for something in which to believe. If we consider that the system, besides being a collection of ideal images out of the past, was also a collection of ideal ideas, also out of the past, it can be said to embody Creative Mind as well as Mask. Yeats did, in fact, on the inspiration of the communicators' messages, devote many years to the study of philosophy, or in other words, he set his Creative Mind to seek out truth in Body of Fate. The appearance of the system, on Yeats' honeymoon no less, thus seems to represent the moment of perfect poise, the coincidence of Chance and Choice at the meeting and crossing of the opposing gyres. If Yeats were aiming at such a perfect coincidence, he could not do better than allow the outcome of the chain of circumstances beginning with the Easter Rising (Chance) to merge with the outcome of his Choice of w i e - and for that merging to produce 'the system' which would explain the whole process.

The foregoing would seem to betray an obsession (which I hope is Yeats' and not mine) with solution of antinomies but it must be remembered that the process itself could have been much more spontaneous and less tortuous than the attempt to analyse it. Whether or not such speculation could be satisfied by further research, it should not delay the discussion, here. The assumption of a 'turning point' described in the preceding chapter is already amply justified by well-documented solutions and resolutions.

Now, how would such a fundamental change affect the poetry? Embarking on a description of the revelation of the system, Yeats himself says:

... I put 'The Tower' and 'The Winding Stair' into evidence to show that my poetry has gained in self-possession and power. I owe this change to an incredible experience. 81

He does not suggest by this only metaphorical power which might be called 'possession of his material.' Yeats means, exactly, 'self-possession', a new confidence, a new maturity. He was not, by any means, alone in discerning it. T. R. Henn calls it a "mature and certain accent", "a new dignity and restraint." 82 Richard Ellman says that: "A newly acquired sense of strength enabled him now to write lyric after lyric in which he spoke, with fresh confidence, in

81 W. B. Yeats, A Packet for Ezra Pound, p. 11.

82 T. R. Henn, The Lonely Tower, (London, 1969), p. 122.

his own person." ⁸³ Another critic sees the new quality as a "peculiar intellectual hardness, that austerity of emotion and exquisite economy of phrase, so violent a contrast to his earlier style." ⁸⁴ Unterecker sees the new power manifest even before The Tower in the group of poems Michal Robartes and the Dancer which spans the critical period during which the Easter Rising and Yeats' marriage took place. The book is made up of two clearly differentiable sets of poems: one dealing with the consequences of the Irish troubles (and including "Easter 1916" itself); and thus grounded in the real; and another alluding to the gyres of history and to A Vision's character types and thus depending on the system's supernatural aspect. Although the two 'worlds' are still portrayed in separate poems, there is some measure of their merging. There is, however, a less obvious but more deeply etched pattern in the series, that of the general political and social disorder in Ireland and the real world, contrasted with "what Yeats saw as a developing personal maturity" ⁸⁵, contained within but emerging out of that disorder. The famous lines of "A Second Coming":

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned; ⁸⁶

⁸³ Ellman, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, p. 221.

⁸⁴ J. H. Pollock, William Butler Yeats, (London, 1938), p. 58.

⁸⁵ John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats, (New York, 1971), p. 157.

⁸⁶ Jeffares, ed., Selected Poetry, p. 99.

are echoed and defied in the last stanza of "A Prayer for my Daughter":

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
 Where all's accustomed ceremonious ...
 ... How but in custom and in ceremony
 Are innocence and beauty born. ⁸⁷

The antinomy of growing personal peace and joy within an atmosphere of intensifying public strife was a precious one for Yeats to be explored and preserved in his later poetry. He owed this comforting perception of things at least partly to the revelation and affirmation of the system, which allows the co-existence of such opposites as 'mere anarchy' and 'high ceremony.' More importantly, the system depicts Yeats himself as a near-unified man of Phase 17 existing anomalously in the disintegrating era of Phase 22. By the revelation Yeats, as far as he believed in it, was favoured, blessed, singled-out as a centre of relative calm within the surrounding chaos.

Without the organization of the combats with self and circumstance, Yeats had been forced to approach the actual world in fragments: even the reality-seeking poems of 1912-1916 concern isolated events, individual persons, one-sided dialogues. There is no overall pattern, no unity, such as is found in the subsequent poetry. Not until after "seeing" A Vision could he view reality as a neatly patterned whole embracing both the natural and the supernatural and be able to plan his work appropriately to represent it. It is almost as if the Easter Rising elevated 'the actual' into coherence with Yeats' beloved

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 100.

supernatural to create a unity which in turn demanded of the poet a corresponding unification of his perceptions of the real and the ideal. This unification, at the same time, explained and justified human conflict by positing as appropriate the co-existence of opposing pulls between the emotions (by Will) and the intellect (by Creative Mind) and by judging natural the changes in these and their relative dominance with time. Thus Yeats could see a thought or emotion of the moment in context not only of the Phases of his own life but also of the whole cosmic system with its natural and supernatural components. He need not have been consumed or overwhelmed by the immediate as a drowning man screaming frenziedly for help - which his father would have denigrated as 'excitement'; nor need he deny participation by trying to make 'reportage' of his keenly felt emotion; his intellect could stand apart and turn the emotion of the moment to poetry.

The unification was not, as Yeats himself suggested, complete until The Tower which has a clear definitive structure especially if viewed in combination with The Winding Stair with which it is counterpoised not only in the obvious masculine/feminine symbolism denoted by the titles but in actual content and mood. The first was written in bitterness, or manly disgust caused by Yeats' personal illness and by the Irish troubles; the second, in the relative contentment of recovery abroad. In contrast to the previous group of poems, Michael Robartes and the Dancer, where the structure was achieved by arranging the poems after they were written, The Tower has a pre-planned deliberate pattern of concerns which is clearly set-out in the opening poem

"Sailing to Byzantium." Although The Winding Stair was planned separately and written later, the structure of The Tower is extended into this second group, each of the concerns being readdressed from the new point of view. The eleven poems of A Woman Young and Old which 'balance' their counterparts in A Man Young and Old, thus rendering the other side of the male/female antinomy were, apparently by accident, left out of The Tower. The oversight may have been a fortunate one in inducing Yeats to create the overall feminine pattern of The Winding Stair to balance the masculine imagery of the first group. The composition of these two interlinked groups of poems show Yeats able to encompass male with female, life with death, youth with age, anger with joy, violence with peace, light with darkness, but, most importantly, the real with the ideal; the 'tower' and 'winding stair' symbols refer as much to the otherworldly gyres as to the actual Thoor Ballylea with its inner staircase which Yeats chose as home for himself and his wife.

The virtuoso sweep of the two groups of poems not only takes in all of a human life; it also illustrates, and rests upon, the intricate otherworldly framework of A Vision (which was published previously). The two realms converge in the famous reverberating symbols, tower, stairway, bird, swan, shadow, tree, and dancer. The confluence of the actual and the ideal is subtly present, moreover, in such lines as:

I walk through the long schoolroom questioning ⁸⁸,

where the circumstances described are ordinary, the manner of

88 Ibid. p. 127.

expression, simple and direct but the whole tone of the declaration paradoxically connotes some ancient and dignified imperial progress, an important personage on a tour of inspection, which, of course, is precisely what Yeats wished to convey. The mundane business of school inspection is immeasurably ennobled by subtle association with an ideal image out of the past.

Having reconciled the cosmos of his imagination with the 'actual' Yeats had not only found a new poetic world. Simultaneously, he was able to locate his own place within it and from which to view it. Something of the same kind happens when consulting a map; we find the landmarks but also our own location in relation to them. Yeats' dimensions, of course, were psychic. What he had needed to settle in his mind was 'emotional distance', 'intellectual distance', his 'point of view' when regarding the mystically enhanced landscape around him. Before A Vision, Yeats had kept the real world at arm's length because it seemed both mean and, given his father's influence, intensely conflict-ridden. Emotionally and intellectually, he had virtually ignored the world around him. The synthesis of A Vision allowed him to deal with the inherent conflicts, permitting emotional involvement in them such as would not overwhelm the intellect's power to understand and portray them in poetry. Even when experiencing a powerful momentary passion, Yeats could view it as involved in the harmony of the emotions to which the intellect could respond.

Before he had thus 'controlled' conflict, Yeats' approach to the real was not only fragmented; it was also irresolute. There were many cleverly-handled, but nevertheless persistent, problems associated

with 'point-of-view.' In the earlier poetry, there are often strange shifts in tense as if Yeats is unsure whether an emotion can be best portrayed (or indeed experienced) as belonging to the past, the present, or the future. In the poem "Words", which, in just the first three lines, involves us in the attempted realization of four different points in time: the present in which the poet speaks; the past moment when, apparently, he conceived the 'thought'; the time-periods before and after that, during which he would have acted, Yeats declaims:

I had this thought a while ago
 My darling cannot understand
 What I have done, or what would do
 In this blind bitter land. ⁸⁹

The prose version (in a diary) reads: "Today the thought came to me..." ⁹⁰ He goes on to describe the almost immediate change in his point-of-view from an anguished despairing regret that he is not understood where he most wishes to be, to the felicitous, convenient, even expedient thought that, if well-understood, he would have no impetus to write poetry. This is a typical antinomy and was probably experienced in a time no longer than it takes to write an entry in a diary. If he had been sure of his stance and attitude he could have encompassed both the anguish and the redeeming opposing 'convenience' which emerges from within it. As it was, Yeats had not yet accepted the near-simultaneous existence of two opposing emotions (as he had not

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 44

⁹⁰ Jeffares, A Commentary, p. 102.

yet welcomed conflict in general, as natural). So he views them as necessarily separate and therefore artificially lengthens out the time elapsing between their respective occurrences; so that the second stanza begins:

And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again 91

Later, in The Tower, when he can face the dual truth of the conflicting but complementary thoughts, he can portray the moment of perfect poise between bitterness and its consolation, in only one-and-a-half lines:

... only an aching heart
Conceives a changeless work of art. 92

This is not just a dimly remembered shrinking personal notion, dependent on the powers of understanding (or lack of them) in the speaker's 'darling'; it is, within the poet's system, a universal truth which, because eternally recurring, can be strongly stated in the 'present continuous' to cover the past, the present, and the future.

This contrast focusses, incidentally, on another distinct change due to A Vision. In the first poem, Words, Yeats was attempting to express only a personal problem, a train of thought and emotion peculiar to himself. It is not until he has seen that 'problem' in the context of the system, to be the typical anguish and saviour

91 Jeffares ed., Selected Poetry, p. 44.

92 Ibid. p. 115.

of the artist that he can speak the general truth: that it is as a solitary soul that the artist best creates. A Vision allowed Yeats to distinguish between those truths which were essential, eternal, and therefore universal antinomies and those which were personal and momentary or, in other words, between what could be experienced by any person in any Phase and what would be peculiar to the particular state of the Four Faculties manifested in a moment of his own existence. That distinction allowed Yeats to choose the better mode of expression according to the kind of truth which he wished to convey. Abstruse philosophical ideas, such as the antinomy of art and anguish, came to be expressed in the most direct fashion possible, the third person, present continuous. His own personal truths of the moment came also to be portrayed in their most direct appropriate manner, in the first person present definitive, bringing the emotion and its utterance as close together as possible. Contrast, for example, the relatively weak:

And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this 93

of "The Cold Heaven" in Responsibilities with the first person, present and direct:

And thereupon my heart is driven wild 94

of "Among School Children" in The Tower. Of the earlier lines, one is

93 Ibid. p. 62.

94 Ibid. p. 127

inclined to ask: "Whose heart? When? Has the speaker embellished or exaggerated the passion, in memory? Was there one Yeats who experienced that turmoil and another watchful Yeats regarding, for the record, the effect on his mental processes?" We cannot, however, similarly question the pure undistanced, unqualified second statement because there is no discernible gap in time, and none in attitude, for possible dislocation between the experience and its expression. He gives the flavour of the passionate moment in the freest and fullest possible way so that it enriches and perhaps even validates his readers' own similar experiences. In this way, Yeats paradoxically makes 'public poetry' of his private passions.

The system's distinction between subjective and objective truths allowed Yeats to finally make passage through the seemingly impossible and contradictory demands of his father: to abrogate, on the one hand, the abstractions of journalism and to avoid, on the other hand, the egotism of personal utterance. Both arise, if they do where they should not, from confusion about whether an emotion is more 'true', and therefore communicable in poetry, in the personal or in the general sense. Abstraction is not journalism if it deals in immutable ineluctable laws such as the antinomic emergence of art out of pain (if we accept this, within the system, to be the case); equally, personal utterance is not egotism if it freely shares the poet's experience in a manner which does not pretend to objectivity.

Uncertain stance in time and vacillation between objectivity and subjectivity betrayed a generalized unsureness which also manifested itself in the lack of planned unity of some of Yeats' poetry of before.

A Vision. The thought and the feeling sometimes wander off to end with matter not especially related to the poem's initial concern. Consider, for example, "To a Young Beauty", written before A Vision. The first two and half stanzas are quite properly devoted to praise of and advice concerning the young lady's superior sort of beauty. The last four lines:

Yes praise the winters gone
 There is not a fool can call me friend
 And I may dine at journey's end
 With Landor and with Donne 95

however, dangle on the tenuously connecting thread of the theme of advisable associates and deals, of course, with the poet's own life. He, no doubt, found his own case more compelling and illustrative of the theme but allowing its dominance, especially until the poem's completion, betrays a shift of point-of-view, a failure to sustain the initial attitude. There is a similar problem with the poem "Friends" of Responsibilities. Yeats begins by stating his intention of honouring 'three women' and ends, not with a summing-up of their value in his life but with an expression of all-consuming fervor for one of them. It was the thought of Maud Gonne which made the poet "shake from head to foot." Indeed, he devotes to her memory twice the number of lines which he spends on each of the other two. Not only does he forget his stated purpose; his whole tone, from being quietly considering and complimentary, praising the mind of one and the

strength of the other, changes to one of adulation for the third woman.

We cannot say categorically that such dislocations cease entirely with the realization of the system of A Vision. They do, however, become less frequent and certainly less obtrusive. We can say that the need for them was obviated. By achieving a sustainable stance from which to view the conjoined worldly and otherworldly, Yeats provided himself with eternal and supernatural referents of, and therefore metaphors for, his ordinary, immediate personal events. When, in a later poem, he deals with the same theme of choice of companions as in "To a Young Beauty", he does not require to resort to 'the egotism of personal utterance' to intensify its portrayal. By the time he came to write "A Prayer for my Daughter", he was able to compare her future situation with those of Helen of Troy and Aphrodite because in his mind all three inhabited the same territory.

The problems just discussed could be summarized as associated with 'time', 'attitude', and 'form.' It is fairly evident that unmanageable conflict would interfere with the sure handling of any one of them. If a poet is indeterminate about where and when he stands in relation to a situation and if he does not see whole a drama, with its inherent antinomies, inevitably, in the portrayal of that dramatic situation, there will be intrusion, tense shifts and lack of form. The acceptance of conflict, the willingness to encompass both sides of a dichotomous situation within a single poem, or, alternatively, to accept and portray emotional commitment to one side, allows a confident stance in time and psychic "space." The major function of A Vision was a blueprint for solution of these problems

by the reconciliation of the actual and supernatural worlds and the taming of the conflicts in both.

To illustrate more specifically the new "self-possession and power" gained from A Vision, there follows an examination and comparison of two relatively unadorned and obscure poems, one of before and the other of after the writing of the prose work. To recall this paper's opening remarks, there would be little use (as illustration of the present thesis) in referring to well-known masterpieces which draw on the rich store of interrelated metaphors in A Vision. That aspect of the poet's new-found virtuosity is not in dispute. In order to analyse the new "self-possession and power", we must look at the poetry resulting from the poet's confrontation with the actual and ordinary where there is no direct help from analogues, supernatural, historical, mythical, or mythological.

"Her Praise", of which the manuscript is dated 1915, is a dramatic monologue on the poet's uncontainable admiration for Maud Gonne. It has the first irresistible line in two persons singular (which seems to be Browning's bequest to modernism) engaged together in a relationship. The relationship, however, is incompletely disclosed because the manner in which 'She' receives and does - or does not - return the speaker's praise is unknown and remains so throughout the poem. Indeed, the poem, although occupied with the feelings of several people, is spoken entirely from one point-of-view. The protagonist is, if possible, less interested in the woman's 'new tale' than she is in the praise of his love. The completeness of his obsession (or passion, depending on the reader's point-of-view) is marred, however, by one line:

As though some other name ran in his head.

This is the hint from the watchful intellect which sees the situation from a higher level of generality than a lover does. Of course, it is cleverly ambivalent but the fact that it is 'some other name' and not just 'some other thing' is clear admission of the possibility of other loves and thus an intrusion of the sceptical intellect on portrayal of the emotion. Immediately, perhaps to compensate for the lapse, he repeats the first line and renews his theme:

She is foremost of those that I would hear praised,
 which, incidentally, being out of the rhyme sequence (abab cdcd etc), operates almost like an explanatory sub-title in both its occurrences. There is a suggestion of unsureness, of the speaker going slightly rabid and 'protesting too much' when the language which has been spare, beautiful, harmonious, in the last three lines, turns awkward, repetitive, and unmetrical. The final lack of resolution is, obviously, that there is no denouement. We, as readers, or the speaker, never find the unfortunate beggar or the confirmation of the poet's love which he appears to require. 96

"Father and Child" is the first poem of the Series A Woman Young and Old and was probably written in 1926. Again, we have the immediately engaging first line but, this time, both participants

in the relationship are present: without background, scenery, props, prologue, or character-description, we have a dramatic situation - and all the more so by the whole action taking place in the present tense. The 'matter' is disclosed as the drama unfolds, each line answering the question of the one before: the second tells us why he is striking the board; the third, which ban; the fourth, why she is under the ban; the fifth, which man; the three last, her completely unexpected response to the father's bluff indignation. The poet seems to have positioned himself perfectly to be able to portray both sides of the question without intruding personally on either. Doing so, he achieves what Pater, his early mentor, demanded of the "architectural conception" of a literary work, where the last sentence answers to the first and the whole grown organically. The reply is the one from the ideal, completely ingenuous girl (the answer to Yeats' "A Prayer for my Daughter"):

That his hair is beautiful
Cold as the March wind his eyes.

It is the finest argument under heaven and sweeps all petty morality before it, confronting the reader with a confounded, silenced Father who had seemed so grand in his table-thumping anger. The poem is 'whole' in every sense that "Her Praise" is incomplete. Both sides of the antinomy are fully realized rather than just one, with the other shyly hinted. The father and the daughter are each emotionally committed but the poet stays completely, and properly, outside the drama. The organization and vitalization of A Vision's antinomies and the poet's intimate experience of at least this one of life's

situations are implicit in this poem. Antinomy and emotion have found their proper place and scepticism subdued to the mechanics of the work. ⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 167.

Conclusion

Yeats' father's influence dictated: firstly, that a dichotomous habit of thought should intensify the 'given' antinomies of circumstance; secondly, that embracing one or another side of an antinomial question should be by conviction of the emotions; and thirdly, that the intellect should not be engaged in that conviction but should take the agnostic's position. The split in the self which such a set of rules dictates - between the intellect and the emotions - makes any two-sided question a potential source of deep personal conflict, a 'combat with the self.' Yeats, obeying the scepticism in his father's system, could not find in any accepted religious or philosophical world view a way of dealing with the unusually intensified antinomies around him. For almost forty years following the beginning of the father's teaching, Yeats virtually ignored the problem of conflict in his life. In so doing, he abrogated the real world itself, avoiding choice of religion, philosophy, political affiliation, home, and wife. He devoted his poetry to Maud Gonne and Irish Nationalism, in only their 'otherworldly' and apparently unattainable character. His profession, as poet, and dramatist, was scarcely a matter of choice. Even had his inherited system not been specifically one of poetic belief, there were relatively few occupations for which he was thus fitted. The engineer cannot function if he entertains either scepticism or emotional conviction concerning the strength of pre-stressed concrete. The

clergyman cannot change dogma from one day to the next.

Yeats' peregrinations in the world of mysticism and psychic phenomena can be seen as partially an escape from the conflict-ridden real, but, more importantly, as constituting a search for ideas which, never having been subjected to J. B.'s sceptical examination, were still possible sources of a truth to which both intellect and emotions could be dedicated. The poet son was looking for a larger truth which would enclose and explain the tensions inherent in his father's system, the same being his only possible guide.

His experience in theatre management, and his patently obvious lack of progress in the usual, ordinary, things of life before 1916, forced Yeats finally into tentative contact with this real world but it was the Easter Rising of that year which shocked him, awed him, to finally attempt a synthesis of the actual and the other. By 1917, he had settled with a wife, a home, and an all-embracing philosophy.

What the poetry gains by A Vision, in addition to its symbolic power, is a disciplining, arranging of the antinomies in a manner which justifies his emotional feelings about them and, at the same time, an escape from the father's intellectual dominance by going outside the realms of his scepticism to the mystical to "realize" something, which his father had thought unreal, a system of poetic belief.

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