METAPHYSICIAN AS DRAMATIST: THE STRUGGLE OF THE
SPIRIT IN THE DRAMA OF W. B. YEATS

by

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Abstract

W. B. Yeats spent a great deal of his life immersing himself in mystical and philosophic studies in order, as he claimed, to devise a personal system of thought "that would leave [his] ... imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of one history, and that the soul's." This study contends that he succeeded in developing a cohesive metaphysics, and that this metaphysics is by and large original, a synthesis only of those traditions which corroborated his own fledgling beliefs. While he set down the ensuing system in a series of philosophical treatises culminating in A Vision and in what is perhaps the most succinct statement of his philosophy, "The Seven Propositions" of 1937, this same system infiltrates, at times overtly, but more often covertly, virtually all of Yeats's plays. Yeats struggled to devise a symbolic framework for his drama that would incorporate its metaphysical base but would supercede it, and constantly revised his plays to eliminate all abstraction. He considered himself primarily a poet and a dramatist, believing in the greater power of age-old symbols to transmit these truths and, in his drama perhaps more than in his poetry, breathed life and meaning into the rather abstruse statements of the philosophical treatises. When studied together with the latter works, the plays begin
to resonate with meaning, and many subtle, even obscure, passages become readily understandable. Studied as a unit, the plays reveal in practice the system that the philosophical works expound in theory. This study will elucidate the underlying system of beliefs in the drama and establish its importance to the aim and execution of the plays, by drawing attention to a few of the central themes, metaphors and symbols through which it is developed in the drama. The manuscript versions and the earliest published versions of the plays are the most useful for this purpose, since they often retain much of the abstract thought which Yeats eliminated from the later versions, and also show the development of the metaphors and images with which Yeats gradually replaced it.

All of Yeats's concerns, whether as poet or magician, dramatist or philosopher, revolved around the soul or spirit; as he once wrote, "My own belief is that we know nothing ... but 'spirits and their relations'." It is therefore not surprising that 'spirits and their relations' are a central preoccupation of the drama, and constitute a major thematic link between the different plays. That men are spirits temporarily residing in a human body is one of the most basic tenets of all the plays. Though they centre on mortal protagonists, the struggles they depict are best understood in the context of a hierarchy of being, since many mortals
in the plays either know, or are told, or remember that they were once discarnate beings, and that their mortal garb will be "but empty cage and tangled wire" when their soul has escaped. This belief in a hierarchy of being proceeding from man to God, or the One, and connecting all beings within creation, permeates the drama. The plays chart the journey of the spirit from creation (the separation of the One into the Many) through endless phases of being, as it acquires more and more layers of differentiation until it achieves the most extreme form of differentiation possible, as a spirit imprisoned in a human body. Each spirit journeys down this hierarchy and then up again, manifesting itself as every link in the chain in order to experience all knowledge, before it can return to the womb from which it was hurled at creation, the One or complete unity of which it is an integral part. Just as reality is a Sphere, though manifested within creation as a gyre, or even part of a gyre, so the reality of the spirit is a whole of which any manifestation, on any level of the hierarchy of being, is but a small part. The diverse struggles of the multifarious spirits in the drama are thus, in the final analysis, the struggles of one spirit, who works, painfully but surely, to reverse the disintegration brought about by creation.
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Chapter 1: The Dramatist as Metaphysician

W. B. Yeats wrote of his first published play that "If I had not made magic my constant study ... The Countess Kathleen could not have ever come to exist" (L 211) and of his last play, The Death of Cuchulain, that "my 'private philosophy' is there but there must be no sign of it; all must be like an old fairy tale" (L 917). Similar references to other plays can be found scattered throughout Yeats's letters, the notes to the plays, and many of his essays. Thus he described The Shadowy Waters in 1897 as "magical and mystical beyond anything I have done" (L 280), while he said of The Herne's Egg in 1935 that "Shri Purohit Swami is with me, and the play is his philosophy in a fable, or mine confirmed by him" (DWL 46), and of Purgatory in 1938 that "'I have put nothing into the play that seemed picturesque; I have put there my own convictions about this world and the next' " (DWL 202). The unicorn, the central symbol of two of Yeats's plays, is "a private symbol belonging to my mystical order" (L 662); The Cat and the Moon is composed of "incidents and metaphors that are related to certain beliefs of mine as are the patterns upon a Persian carpet to some
ancient faith and philosophy" (VP1 805). Moreover, while Yeats struggled for over twenty years to remove philosophical abstractions from The Player Queen, believing that "my philosophical tendency spoils my playwriting" (L 533), he nevertheless wrote rather proudly of The Herne's Egg that it has more "philosophic depth" than the former play (DWL 43).

A study of Yeats's 'private philosophy' as it is developed in the drama is warranted on the basis of these statements alone. The need for such a study is underscored by Yeats's obsession with both orthodox and unorthodox systems of belief throughout his life, an obsession which was strong enough to disrupt the writing of several plays, and which brought his dramatic work to a virtual standstill for long periods of his life. Yeats the dramatist and Yeats the metaphysician are in fact virtually inseparable, as I hope to demonstrate in this thesis. While writing The Player Queen, Yeats developed the theory of opposites which would figure prominently in A Vision; a rehearsal of At the Hawk's Well inspired him to begin his first long philosophical treatise, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae." Conversely, the 'religious' or 'mystical' or 'philosophic' beliefs which Yeats espoused infiltrate, and shape, most of the plays.

The latter is not surprising, given Yeats's understanding
of the necessary relationship between drama and religion which he outlined in his voluminous body of dramatic theory. As is well known, Yeats deplored the widespread acceptance at the end of the nineteenth century of the scientific (rationalistic) explanation of life which negated the spiritual life, not only in other worlds, but in this world, and within man himself. He was especially concerned with the degree to which this world-view had permeated even the arts, and often reiterated his belief that the sterility of modern art in general, and of modern drama in particular, was due to its divorce from myth and religion. Yeats wished to reunite art and religion, and particularly drama and religion, as George M. Harper has noted in his study of Yeats's dramatic theory, "The Mingling of Heaven and Earth":

'The more religious the subject-matter of an art,' he wrote, 'the more will it be as it were, stationary, and the more ancient will be the emotion that it arouses and the circumstance that it calls up before our eyes.' Such arguments for art as religion are the basis of Yeats's symbolic aesthetic.¹

Yeats struggled to develop a form of drama which would best further this goal, and that would incorporate his religious beliefs not only into the words and lyrics, but into the very movement and ritual of the plays. That the form

which thus evolved is strikingly similar to the Japanese Noh drama is almost accidental, a result of their similar worldview. Though the Japanese plays provided Yeats with an established tradition for his own dramatic experiments, and thus gave him greater confidence in them, these plays actually influenced the development of Yeats's drama far less than is often supposed. It can certainly be argued, as Virginia Moore did as early as 1954, that the plays are at least as indebted to the dramatic rituals of magic used by the esoteric order of the Golden Dawn which Yeats joined on March 7, 1890, and to the parallel Druidic rituals which he and a number of Golden Dawn members spent ten years devising around the turn of the century.²

Before studying Yeats's beliefs in the context of the plays, however, some attempt must be made to understand their nature and origin. Yeats often declared that he was molding his beliefs into a coherent system of thought, a system which, though he believed in it as an independent body of knowledge, would also provide the "metaphors for [his] poetry" (AV (B) 8). Yeats alternated between calling this system his 'religious system' and his 'private philosophy'; the terms are interchangeable since for him both

disciplines have in common their central preoccupation with the nature of the soul or spirit. For our purposes it is simplest to label it a metaphysics.

II. The Metaphysician

It was in search of a coherent, but personal, metaphysics that, Yeats tells us, he began his study of esoteric traditions in the 1880's:

Some were looking for spiritual happiness and for some form of unknown power, but I had a practical object. I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of one history, and that the soul's.

(Yeats, 1892, p. 11)

Yeats's youthful fascination with Theosophy and the teachings of Mme Blavatsky, and with Kabbalarian and Rosicrucian philosophies through MacGregor Mathers and others is well-documented, not least in his own writing. That Yeats became a serious student of the occult, and that he pursued this study until late in life, is less well-documented, and was until recently ignored by many Yeats scholars, who preferred to ascribe his seemingly random sampling of various

3 Cf. his autobiographical novel, The Speckled Bird. Writes William Murphy in Yeats and the Occult, ed. G. M. Harper (Toronto: The Bryant Press Ltd., 1975), p. 25: "Readers of...that intense, astonishingly personal autobiographical novel...will understand and appreciate the depth, earnestness and sincerity of the poet's devotion to the occult."
mystical bills-of-fare to youthful dilletantism. 4 However, a number of thorough books tracing Yeats's involvement with the occult have appeared recently, and it is now indisputable that Yeats's interest in the Western magical tradition as well as in mysticism and spiritism never waned. Yeats, it is acknowledged, was an extraordinarily active member of the Theosophical Society and later of the Order of the Golden Dawn and its successor the Order of the Stella Matutina. He belonged to the latter two societies for thirty-two years and, as G. M. Harper documents in his Yeats's Golden Dawn, he held the post of Instructor of Mystical Philosophy for years, and was a key figure in the re-structuring of the order after Mathers' demise in 1900. 5

Yeats took his esoteric studies very seriously. His essay "Magic," an expose of his main convictions on the subject, insists that it is imperative to voice his beliefs while "enduring unbelief and misbelief and ridicule as best one may" (E & I 38). Magic, as Yeats describes it, is

4Harold Bloom's Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) is a good example of works ignoring Yeats's interest in the occult. Writes Harper in Yeats's Golden Dawn (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), p. 157, this "comprehensive study... has no entry for Golden Dawn, Rosicrucianism, or Theosophical Society in the index."

somewhat different from the tricks of illusion many of us associate it with. Yeats is referring to ritual magic, traditionally a rigorously spiritual and scientific discipline espousing a transcendental doctrine which teaches that man is one with nature and one with the gods. Israel Regardie, a fellow member of the Golden Dawn and a prolific demystifier of magic, writes of the magician that,

His is the task...of transforming the universe, and of transmuting the base elements of matter into the substance of the veritable spirit. A constant alchemical operation must the whole of his life become, during which he distills in the alembic of his heart the grossness of the world into the essence of the cloudless skies.6

Yeats used magic in this way, not as a means of acquiring temporal power, but as a key to a higher spiritual life. Traditional magic, along with Theosophy and spiritism, was for him a means of rediscovering the spiritual and imaginative truths which he felt had been understood in ancient times and still were by the uneducated classes such as the Irish peasantry and the servant girls of Soho, but which were largely lost in the modern world through an overemphasis on the mind and the rational faculties. Yeats spent his life trying to understand the nature of the spirit, and welcomed any opportunity to glimpse another facet of it. For this

reason he immersed himself in various studies which, in occult circles, were considered incompatible\(^7\); "I was comparing one form of belief with another, and like Paracelsus, who claimed to have collected his knowledge from midwife and hangman, I was discovering a philosophy" (VB 311).

Yeats studied these disciplines carefully, but he did not swallow all their tenets whole, and could laugh at the follies and excesses of each. While still an active Theosophist, for example, Yeats wrote to K. Tynan about "a sad accident [which] happened at Madame Blavatsky's lately.... A big materialist sat on the astral double of a poor young Indian. It was sitting on a sofa and he was too material to be able to see it. Certainly a sad accident" (L 59). This sense of humour, coupled with a healthy skepticism, is very much in evidence throughout his work, and is an important part even of *A Vision* which, as H. Adams has pointed out, is much more tongue-in-cheek than is generally acknowledged.\(^8\) A balance of belief and skepticism is illustrated even by

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\(^7\) Theosophists consider magic to be fantastic and superstitious, and magicians dismiss spiritism as a passive practice which deals with the lower astral plane, "the region of Qliphotic shells and demons and decaying phantasms of the dead," instead of with higher spiritual forces (Regardie, *Tree of Life*, p. 153).

his earliest prose fiction, much of which has magical practices for its subject matter. The stories "Rosa Alchemica" and "The Tables of the Law" satirize the unbelieving narrator, but they also poke fun at the adepts and their beliefs. This balance is evident in many plays, notably in the highly esoteric, but equally irreverent, The Herne's Egg.

Yeats's ongoing dalliance with various esoteric studies is thus indisputable. Nevertheless, his philosophic and spiritual adherence is in the main considerably more orthodox than this preoccupation with the occult would lead us to believe. To begin with, the Western philosophic tradition has very strong ties with the occult tradition which was resurfacing at the end of the century in Europe, and which Yeats was immersing himself in. As James Olney argues in his study of Yeats and Jung,

the tradition which we call Platonism or Neoplatonism and to which St. Augustine as well as Plotinus contributed richly...lived again in Yeats and Jung; ...this tradition had, as an essential aspect of its makeup, or as a sort of mirror-image of itself, an occult component or esoteric parallel. Going back to Plato himself, and even earlier to Pythagoras and Empedocles, the exoteric tradition had its counterpart in a parallel esoteric tradition; and point by point along their parallel paths the philosophy offered justification for that other darker brother.9

9James Olney, "Yeats and Jung," *Yeats and the Occult*, p. 29.
Yeats's philosophy can in many instances be traced both to occult sources such as Mme Blavatsky's books or Golden Dawn tenets, and to Neoplatonic writers such as Plotinus, as I shall argue through a closer examination of the texts in Chapter II of this study—on many points these traditions are virtually interchangeable.\(^{10}\) In the words of Robert Snukal,

> Once the reader of Yeats's more abstruse prose has some idea of the intellectual antecedents of Yeats's more obscure notions they begin to seem less purely the result of his dabbling in spiritualism and more a continuation, however obscured, of the ideas which were current among the philosophers of the nineteenth century.\(^{11}\)

While Yeats absorbed a great deal of exoteric philosophy, indirectly, through his occult studies and through other poetical writers such as Shelley, Coleridge and Blake, he also devoted a considerable amount of time to the study of Western and Eastern philosophies. He became acquainted with the latter early in life, through his contact with Mohini Chatterjee and his friend AE (George Russell), as well as through the Indian dramatist Tagore, and this interest was

\(^{10}\)Olney, pp. 38-9: Olney points out that "Plotinus, who did not practice magic but who 'Believed in it,' provided the philosophic bridge between Plato and the Neoplatonic theurgists in his explanation of how magic works" in the Fourth Ennead, Tractate 4, no. 40.

rekindled in the last few years of his life by his friendship with the Indian monk Shri Purohit Swami, with whom he translated *The Ten Principal Upanishads*. Yeats's interest in Western philosophy took longer to develop, since he was so skeptical in his youth of the value of logical, abstract thought, equating it, like Blake, with a dearth of holiness (*VB* 20). Nevertheless, following the writing of the first version of *A Vision*, a decidedly abstract work (though Yeats at first tried to clothe it in myth), he began to read Western philosophy seriously, and spent the ten years between 1925 and 1935 studying it "chiefly to test *A Vision*," as Virginia Moore attests. "Having long railed against abstract thought, he fell upon philosophy with wolfish voracity. A poet of concrete mentality needs abstractions, he said, to 'set his experience in order'." Thus, as Yeats explained to T. Sturge Moore in 1926,

> When it [*A Vision*] was written, I started to read. I read for months every day Plato and Plotinus. Then I started on Berkeley and Croce and Gentile. You introduced me to your brother [the realist George Moore]'s work and to Bertrand Russell, and I found Eddington and one or two others for myself. I am still however anything but at my ease with recent philosophy. I find your brother extraordinarily obscure.

(*Y & TSM* 83)

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He persevered, with boundless enthusiasm and increasing confidence, as his long philosophical correspondence with T. S. Moore attests.\(^{14}\) The philosophers who influenced him the most during this period are, according to V. Moore, "Chronologically, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato, Plotinus, Nicholas of Cusa, the Cambridge Platonists, Berkeley, the German and Italian idealists, Whitehead, and McTaggart."\(^{15}\) Most of these men are mentioned repeatedly in the 1937 edition of *A Vision*.

Yeats immersed himself in these diverse schools of thought with a specific purpose in mind: to mold a personal metaphysics, a personal "system of thought." It is my contention that he succeeded in developing a cohesive philosophy, and that this philosophy is by and large original, a synthesis only of those traditions which corroborated his own fledgling beliefs. There is, unfortunately, little support for this conclusion among current studies of Yeats's

\(^{14}\) Besides consistently pointing out flaws in the realist G. Moore's arguments, he also began to rail against Bertrand Russell: "You say Bertrand Russell says Kant smashed his own philosophy, by his doctrine of practical reason. So he does say, and what more can you expect from a man who has been entirely bald during the whole course of his life. He merely repeats a piece of common electioneering nonsense which writer has copied from writer for generations" (124).

\(^{15}\) *The Unicorn*, p. 344.
work, mainly because Yeats's metaphysics has never received the attention it deserves. While a few isolated critics, notably Virginia Moore, to whose book I am greatly indebted for the direction of this study, and, to a certain extent, F.A.C. Wilson, have long argued that Yeats developed a coherent and erudite philosophy of his own out of these disparate sources, most students of Yeats assumed until recently that, whatever his other merits, he was not much of a thinker. This was certainly T. Sturge Moore's opinion, and the editor of their correspondence, Ursula Bridges, seems to agree with Moore's sly remark that not only could Yeats not understand George Moore's philosophy, he probably could not understand his own (Y & TSM xvii). In fact, a careful study of the correspondence reveals that Yeats was easily the more astute of the two. He patiently explained his point of view, and repeated his explanations over and over again when Moore misunderstood him, until finally, though good-humouredly, he stopped trying. Why spend so much time explaining himself to one who could only quibble with words? That Yeats's thought must be taken seriously is argued eloquently by Kathleen Raine in her article, "Hades Wrapped in Cloud." Raine argues not only that Yeats was a competent philosopher,

16 See such letters as number 68, pp. 80-1 in the correspondence.
assimilating a coherent body of thought from various traditions and beliefs, but that his was "the leading thought of his time," and thus misunderstood by his contemporaries.

What seemed to many at the time (comparing Yeats to Eliot) his weakness, his wilful obscurantism, we can now see as a source of his strength and his lucidity in the New Age we are entering. Cultural frontiers are dissolving, and to many the language of Indian metaphysics seems closer to spiritual experience and psychological knowledge than the over-rational theology of the Christian Church.17

Raine recognizes the disparate components which make up Yeats's philosophy, but she does not reduce it to the sum of its parts. The tendency of other studies now appearing which take Yeats's thought seriously is, unfortunately, to trace it to one particular source or another, thus denying Yeats both breadth and originality. This is, of course, the main problem with F. A. C. Wilson's two early studies of Yeats's poems and plays; while his books are scholarly and very useful, Wilson spends too much time tracing every possible Neoplatonic echo in Yeats's work to a specific source in that vast literature. A more recent study, James Olney's essay on Yeats and Jung, convincingly unearths other Platonic and Neoplatonic elements in Yeats's philosophy, particularly in A Vision. However, Olney also displays this propensity to

17K. Raine, "Hades Wrapped in Cloud," Yeats and the Occult, p. 84.
label Yeats's beliefs as narrowly as possible. He calls Yeats's instructors "good Platonists" and even speculates that Plato himself, communicating from another world, was one of the ghostly instructors, for there are a number of significant correspondences between the system of the *Timaeus* and the system of *A Vision*.

Since Olney accepts that Plato worked within the tradition first begun by Heraclitus, Empedocles and Parmenides, why does he not accept that Yeats also thought independently within this tradition?

Similarly, a full-length book on Yeats's philosophical poetry, R. N. Snukal's *High Talk*, rather disconcertingly argues that Yeats is really a Neo-Kantian. Here I must pause to rebut some of Snukal's arguments, since he is examining, and at times distorting, concepts of Yeats's which are important to the present study. Snukal's well-intentioned and intelligent book is badly marred by its wrong-headed premise that Yeats was above all things an idealist, and an idealist not in the school of Plato and Plotinus or even of Berkeley, but in that of Kant and Hegel. Snukal ignores the occult as an influence on Yeats's later work, dismisses the influence of the Platonists, and insists that Yeats "repudiated" Berkeley's thought on the grounds that, in Yeats's

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18 Olney, "Yeats and Jung," *Yeats and the Occult*, p. 46.
words, Berkeley "was idealist and realist alike." This seems a rather shaky premise for dismissing a thinker so often praised by Yeats, particularly since Yeats calls himself, in the correspondence with Moore, also as much a realist as an idealist: "I think that my own position is more realist than idealist. I do not however see any final contradiction" (Y & TSM 99). Snukal thus attributes to Kant's influence alone beliefs which can be traced to other sources.

One example is particularly important. Snukal traces to Kant's influence what is perhaps Yeats's oldest and most firmly held belief, that the mind creates the world, which thus exists only while it is perceived. Writes Snukal,

> With just a slight twist Kant's views can be turned into Yeats's insistence that the world is a product of the human mind. Space, time, the laws of causality, etc., are all forms of thought which create the world. 20

This belief is found in Yeats's earliest writings, as Edward Engelberg has pointed out; the early drama Island of Statues projects "a view of a self-generating and world-creating Imagination which Yeats never entirely abandoned..." 21. This same belief was stressed by the esoteric schools to which Yeats was affiliated at an early age. As Schopenhauer wrote

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20 Snukal, p. 7.
21 "He Too Was in Arcadia," In Excited Reverie, p. 85.
in his essay "The World as Idea," "this truth [that the world is a thought] was recognized by the wise men of India, appearing indeed as the fundamental tenet of the Vedanta philosophy ascribed to Vyasa...", a philosophy to which Theosophy in particular is indebted. Moreover, Yeats credits both Plotinus and Berkeley with furthering his understanding of this belief.

Has not Plotinus written: 'Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky; it is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion—and it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honourable than they, for they gather or dissolve as soul brings them or abandons them, but soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being'?

("Notes," VE 826)

The more specific belief that the mind creates, and therefore can unmake, the world Yeats attributes in "Blood and the Moon" to God-appointed Berkeley that proved all things a dream,
That this pragmatical, preposterous pig of a world, its farrows that so solid seem,
Must vanish in the instant if the mind but change its theme....
(VE 481)

This attribution is corroborated by Schopenhauer, who claims that "Berkeley...was the first who distinctly enunciated it [the concept that 'the world is an idea'], and by this he rendered a permanent service to philosophy.... Kant's primary mistake was the neglect of this principle...".  

I do not deny that Yeats was greatly influenced by Kant, and particularly by Kant's development of the theory of antinomies, but to stress the influence of Kant above all others on Yeats's thought, as Snukal has done, is to court distortion.

What must be stressed is that Yeats was a synthesizer in his reading of philosophy as of anything else. He was not exclusively a Platonist, or a Neoplatonist, or a Neo-Kantian, but took from all philosophers ideas which complemented his own burgeoning system of thought. Yeats welcomed the various traditions that came his way, for he wanted to feel himself in the mainstream of thought: to feel that he was historically right, and not just reacting to a past age. As he wrote to T. Sturge Moore,

I feel that an imaginative writer whose work draws him to philosophy must attach himself to some great historic school. My dreams and much psychic phenomena force me into a certain little-trodden way but

\textsuperscript{23} Schopenhauer, p. 446.
I must not go too far from the main European track....

(Y & TSM 7)

This desire for tradition was fueled not so much by a lack of confidence in his own ideas (though there was an element of that in his early years) as by his belief that if his ideas were true they would not be original to him, but would be received from the world soul, ancient truths enshrined in the oldest religious and philosophic traditions and in the work of the most venerable of poets. This belief is evident even in the more self-serving statements of his later life, such as the following description of the work of many of his contemporaries:

These new men are goldsmiths working with a glass screwed into one eye, while we stride ahead of the crowd, its swordsmen, its jugglers, looking to right and left. "To right and left," by which I mean that we need like Milton, Shakespeare, Shelley, vast sentiments, generalizations supported by tradition.

(DWL 64-5)

Nevertheless, though Yeats took pains to explore all the systems of belief which he came across, there is considerable evidence in his work that he assimilated only those traditions which confirmed and elaborated the beliefs which he intuited as a young man. Yeats claims in his Memoirs that he held his most important ideas by the age of twenty, though he lacked the words and confidence with which to express them, just as, in his essay "The Philosophy of
Shelley's Poetry," he claims the same for Shelley. Speaking of Queen Mab, he wrote that it "was written before he [Shelley] had his deepest thought, or rather perhaps before he had found words to utter it, for I do not think men change much in their deepest thought" (E & I 69). Though Yeats was elated when he found a school or tradition which confirmed one or another of his beliefs, no single one ever changed his work radically. More often than not its tenets are to be found in his writing long before he was exposed to the tradition which supposedly revolutionized his work. Indeed, considering that Yeats devoted so much time to studying the tenets of such diverse traditions, the continuity of thought in his work is quite remarkable.

Long before Yeats encountered structured occult schools he had, as V. Moore argues and the Autobiographies and letters attest, devised his own mysticism. Long before he encountered the Noh drama, he had devised a religious drama with stark settings and supernatural characters, using masks and substituting metaphor and symbol for argument. In the


25 Here again critics are too eager to trace Yeats's work to its 'source'; books are still appearing which judge Yeats's drama by how closely it emulates the Noh. This may be changing, however. B. R. Friedman, in his recent book Adventurers in the Deeps of the Mind (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton
letters to AE of 1903 can be found the nucleus of the theory of historical cycles which Yeats later outlined in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," while in "Per Amica" can be found the nucleus of the argument that Yeats's communicators would elaborate in A Vision. And while "The Seven Propositions" of 1937 indicate, as Richard Ellmann has suggested in a recent article, that "during his last decade he [Yeats] pushed his speculations about final matters even further," the propositions are on most counts an elaboration, or an authoritative restatement, of his long-held beliefs on the nature of being.

In his "Dedication" to the 1925 edition of A Vision, Yeats wrote that this was the system of beliefs that he had long been looking for. But though he claimed that it had only now come to him, "though it may be too late," (AV (A) xi), there is more than enough evidence in the body of his work to support the argument that this system, in its essence

University Press, 1977), p. 18, follows Ann Saddlemyer and E. Engelberg in arguing that "the translations [of Noh plays] of Pound and Fenollosa, far from turning Yeats to a new kind of theatre, confirmed him in directions he had already taken."

if not in its particulars, is present in a cohesive and recognizable form in the earliest works. To begin with, Yeats's work presents a greater continuity of subject matter than has generally been acknowledged. This is the thesis of David Daiches' essay "The Early Poems," in which he argues that "much of what is often regarded as uniquely belonging to the later Yeats can be found struggling to find expression in the earlier and occasionally succeeding." To give one example, Daiches points out, in a discussion of "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland," that

> there is an anticipation here both of Yeats's later conception of Byzantium and of his later use of the idea of the Plotinian dance of life—though it was to be many years before he read the books to which modern scholars have attributed his interest in these ideas.27

This continuity of thought has not always been recognized by critics, most of whom still see Yeats's radical change in style after the turn of the century as a dramatic change in subject matter as well, from other-worldly to more mundane, concrete subjects. The appearance of emphatically occult material in his work several years later is thus seen as a return to, rather than a continuation of, this youthful

27 D. Daiches, "The Early Poems," In Excited Reverie, p. 66.
28 Daiches, p. 59.
preoccupation.

A more reasonable assumption, and one that Daniel Lenoski argues convincingly, is that,

When the change in Yeats' style occurred in the years following the turn of the century, he had not adopted a new metaphysical position, as some critics suggest, nor rejected his earlier commitment to the world of the soul....

This change, he writes,

was not a complete repudiation of the aesthetic theories outlined by the poet in the periodical articles throughout the 'nineties, as many critics have assumed, but merely a commitment to a new poetic practice which would adequately manifest many of his earlier aesthetic / religious aims.

The continuity of subject matter is certainly noticeable in the drama, as I hope to prove in this study. Yeats's earliest plays reveal a system of beliefs very similar to that later set down in *A Vision*. Even the earliest manuscript versions of *The Shadowy Waters*, written in the 1880's, transmit, often with startling clarity, a metaphysics which is consistent with, and even at times sheds light on, that set down in the later treatises. This is stressed by the editors of these manuscript versions, who note that they "reveal another part of the still largely hidden foundation in

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30 Lenoski, p. 21.
mythology and occultism on which rest: the works of the Yeats we know"; here one finds, they continue, "the first appearance of ideas and images which also preoccupy the later Yeats."³¹

III. The Metaphysician versus the Dramatist

Granted, then, that Yeats developed a metaphysics which infiltrates all the work, early as well as late, one to which he draws attention time and time again, we are now faced with the problem of how to study the systematic thought of a man who long railed against abstract thought in general and "complete ideas" (Memoirs 165) in particular, and sought to obscure his system almost as often as he sought to de-mystify it. The problem arises because Yeats seems to have been torn by two conflicting impulses. The first, a product of his skeptical, inquiring mind, was to understand the meaning of existence and the relationship of spirit to matter in a rational way, to devise a system of thought that would be "an ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect" (E & I 428). The second impulse, fed by his revulsion at "an Irish Protestant point of view that suggested

by its blank abstraction chloride of lime" (E & I 428), was to abandon all dogma, all abstraction, and to strive for irrational, unnamable, intuitive 'truth.' His prose writings throughout his career emphasize this need to abandon the speculations of science and metaphysics for passion, for the truth of the heart rather than the intellect (E & I 265).

In this latter impulse Yeats was clearly at the forefront of his time. Introducing what became one of Yeats's favourite books, The Secret of the Golden Flower, C.G. Jung wrote in 1931 that

The reaction which is now beginning in the West against the intellect in favour of feeling, or in favour of intuition, seems to me a mark of cultural advance, a widening of consciousness beyond the too narrow limits of a tyrannical intellect.32

Yeats believed that the poet, and not the philosopher, must now assume the mantle forfeited by an overly rational church. According to Yeats, poetry transforms philosophy, clothing it with flesh and blood and removing it from the deadening level of abstraction:

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

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and sensations of the body.

(E & I 292-3)

At the same time, through symbols, through intuitive flights of the imagination rather than through logically ordered thought, it can reach further, grasp deeper meanings than those available to the intellect. Thus the use of art to transform philosophy is twofold: while it makes the thought more concrete and therefore more accessible, it also frees it from the bonds of reason that keep the spirit from grasping greater truths.

The more a poet rids his verses of heterogeneous knowledge and irrelevant analysis, and purifies his mind with elaborate art, the more does the little ritual of his verse resemble the great ritual of Nature, and becomes mysterious and inscrutable. He becomes, as all the great mystics believed, a vessel of the creative power of God; and whether he be a great poet or a small poet, we can praise the poems, which but seem to be his, with the extremity of praise that we give this great ritual which is but copied from the same eternal model.

(E & I 202)

These were noble sentiments, but very difficult to follow in practice, and increasingly so as Yeats continued to amass 'heterogeneous knowledge.' The religious system had to be mulled over, the revelations exulted over, and it took up an increasingly large portion of Yeats's thoughts. Though he struggled to keep the abstractions of the developing system out of the poetical works, Yeats was not always successful; the abstractions continued to infiltrate the poetic works and
even, as during the writing of The Player Queen, to displace the poetry altogether. Yeats's solution was two-fold: to write down the system separately, as an abstract body of thought, and at the same time to rewrite the poetical works to remove as much of the overt philosophy as possible.

The two versions of A Vision, the philosophical essays such as "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," "The Seven Propositions" and, when they are finally published, Yeats's massive and carefully-kept records of spiritual and occult experiments, all testify to his need to set down, in abstract, rational terms, the system of belief he grappled with all his life. Nevertheless, Yeats continued even in A Vision to argue that life, being irrational, is best described by irrational rather than rational means:

Life is no series of emanations from divine reason such as the Cabalists imagine, but an irrational bitterness, no orderly descent from level to level, no waterfall but a whirlpool, a gyre.

(AV (B) 40)

Yeats felt understandably sheepish about his philosophical output for a time; he played down the importance of the system, brushing it off as "stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi"

33Cf. G. M. Harper's description of these records in his introduction to Yeats and the Occult.
(AV (V) 25). He was a little more honest when addressing his fellow students of the occult in the "Dedication" to the first edition, writing that "if they will master what is most abstract there and make it the foundation of their visions, the curtain may ring up a new era" (AV (A) xii).

In this first edition the poet gamely attempted to follow his own dictum that even philosophers should present their work through "mythology and cycle[s] of legend" (SP 206). He clothed the bare abstractions of the work in a layer of myth, through the story of Michael Robartes, and insisted that he himself was not the author nor even the one who discovered the text; he was merely its second editor, called in only when the first, Owen Aherne, started to botch the job. Yeats soon realized that this layer of myth obscured the purpose of the work, and he dropped it in the second edition. He was still not prepared to acknowledge authorship, however, and presented the book as the communication of spirits through the mouth and pen of his wife. It was only later that he admitted to the possibility that the work might have been created through his subconscious in collaboration.

34 The full passage is of some interest: "Even the speculative writers who would touch the heart should choose their mythology and cycles of legend, for life can only be expressed by life...but not by a doctrine or a speculation or a definition in the reason. These are only useful when they point the way to a sound or an image or an odour or to the experience of the soul when all these become one and nothing."
with that of his wife. Nevertheless, whatever the origin of his beliefs, Yeats began to speak more authoritatively of "my convictions" and "my 'private philosophy' " instead of referring to them as "magical beliefs" or the beliefs of his "mystical order." He acknowledged authorship of what is perhaps the most succinct statement of his philosophy, "The Seven Propositions," which he dictated to his wife in 1937. Together with the earlier work it forms an independent body of thought which, though it has closer ties to the occult tradition of sacred geometry than it does to contemporary philosophy, deserves to be judged on its own merits. Yeats longed for this kind of validation, writing,

> Will some mathematician some day question and understand, and confirm all, or have I also [comparing himself to Plato] dealt in myth?  

(AV (B) 213)

Though this philosophy is central to the poetic works, and in particular to the drama, Yeats laboured to remove all obvious traces of it, constantly revising his plays until, in his words,

> at last the only philosophy audible, if there is even that, is the mere expression of one character to another. When it is completely life it seems to the hasty reader a mere story.35

This is in keeping with the advice that he gave Margot Ruddock

when she was attempting to write a play:

I do not think a play where everyone speaks my thought can be the greatest kind of play no matter how written. Goethe said, 'a philosopher needs all his philosophy but must keep it out of his work' (which he could not do). Take some plot which seeks to express all in the action and where nothing is said about the action; do not speak through the characters, let them speak through you, and you will find that at some moment of crisis they will speak at once passionately and profoundly. (MRL 80)

Yeats struggled to devise a symbolic framework for his drama that would incorporate the metaphysical basis but would supercede it. He believed deeply in the power of symbols, a belief closely resembling Jung's on the subject. This belief was confirmed through his occult studies under MacGregor Mathers, which convinced him that "images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or unconscious memory" (A 183); their meaning remains concealed from the conscious mind of the non-initiated, but not from their unconscious mind. Yeats perfected this use of symbols, many of them eclectic symbols studied with the Order of the Golden Dawn, until he could write after the rehearsals of At The Hawk's Well, "I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic" (E & I 221).

Once he perfected the symbols, Yeats discarded much of the logic until even he, as he wrote of the symbols in The Cat and the Moon, completely forgot (or so he claimed) what they originally stood for:
I have altogether forgotten whether other parts of the fable [on which the play is based] have, as is very likely, a precise meaning, and that is natural, for I generally forget in contemplating my copy of an old Persian carpet that its winding and wandering vine had once that philosophical meaning....

(VP1 805)

Yeats gave this same answer when he was asked the meaning of the fool and the blind man in On Baile's Strand, but though it was a convenient excuse he was only half serious. The copious allusions to the metaphysics behind the drama in his prose writings, and in particular the lengthy prefaces and notes to the plays, not only indicate the extent to which Yeats's beliefs--those beliefs so laboriously set down in the various treatises--inform the work, but also prove that he wanted them to be studied and understood. Yeats certainly hoped that the underlying beliefs would be grasped by the informed, discerning reader of the plays, if not by the larger audience. As he wrote in his poem "To Ireland in the Coming Times":

\[
\text{to him who ponders well,} \\
\text{My rhymes more than their rhyming tell} \\
\text{Of the dim visions old and deep,} \\
\text{That god gives unto man in sleep.} \\
\text{For round about my table go} \\
\text{The magical powers to and fro.} \\
\text{(VE 138)}
\]

Referring to the members of his audience in the notes to The Death of Cuchulain, Yeats wrote that "They can find my words in the book if they are curious, but we will not thrust our secret upon them" (VP1 1010). He left many such words, enough to make possible a far lengthier study of his philosophy
as it is expressed in the drama than his own study of the philosophy which informs Shelley's poetry, an essay which clearly sets a precedent for the present study.

IV. The Metaphysics in the Drama

That the plays and philosophical treatises should have the same basic concerns is not surprising since, as we have seen, Yeats spent his life looking for a system of beliefs that would make all his writing "part of one history, and that the soul's." Drama, according to the definition he presented in The United Irishman, was for him "a picture of the soul of man, and not of his external life," while the original title he gave for the manuscripts which he 'edited' and presented to the world as A Vision is "The Way of the Soul Between the Sun and the Moon" (AV (A) xix). Nevertheless, it might be argued that, while A Vision indubitably attempts a comprehensive study of what Yeats took to be the nature and history of the soul, within and outside creation, and in both incarnate and discarnate states, the plays centre on the plight of human protagonists and thus seem to limit their 'picture' of the soul to its manifestation in the mortal condition.

In fact, however, the plays supply a considerable amount
of information about the totality of the soul's experience, and for a very simple reason. Yeats saw no need to divorce the plight of mortals from that of spirits in any other state. He understood creation to be a whole, populated by souls, or spirits, on innumerable levels of being between man and the gods, and separated one from the other by the thinnest of veils. All spirits, he believed, are equal, for all are a part of the original unity that was shattered at creation into the innumerable components of the universe. Each spirit must pass at some stage of development through all states of being, must be both god and man.

The plays present a bewildering array of gods, discarnate spirits, half-gods and mortals, all of whom interact, and in very significant ways. Most mortal protagonists know themselves to be spirits temporarily residing in human form; many long to shed the mortal body even as some discarnate spirits who were once men lament the loss of theirs. Gods in some plays bend mortals and lesser spirits to their will, while in other plays men, by defying the will of the gods or even, in some cases, by subjugating these gods, become gods themselves. Yeats therefore clearly repudiates in the plays that philosophical position which equates man with his mortal condition and which negates both his connection with all other states of being and his ultimate identification with the
highest God, or the One. The belief in a hierarchy of being proceeding from man to God, and connecting all beings within creation, permeates the drama and is a central tenet of Yeats's metaphysics. Yeats argued, quite seriously, that a major controversy of the time, the contradiction between the realist and idealist philosophical positions, would be solved were other modern philosophers to espouse this doctrine. As he wrote to Joseph Hone,

I think that much of the confusion of modern philosophy, perhaps the whole realism versus idealism quarrel, comes from our renouncing the ancient hierarchy of beings from man up to the One. What I do not see but may see or have seen, is perceived by another being. In other words is part of the fabric of another being. I remember what he forgets, he remembers what I forget. We are in the midst of life and there is nothing but life.

(L 728)

As we noted earlier, Yeats claimed in his correspondence with T. S. Moore to be both a realist and an idealist, giving as his reason that he saw "no final contradiction" (Y & TSM 99) between the two. As Yeats understood it, realists believe that the external world is objective, and therefore permanent, while idealists believe that it is subjective, and therefore only exists or seems to exist while it is being perceived. The difficulty facing the idealists is how to explain the fact that much of this external world can be proven to remain the same no matter when or by whom it is perceived. Berkeley, whom Yeats called "idealist and realist
alike," solved this problem by claiming that not only the
human mind, but God himself continually perceives, and there­
fore creates, a stable universe. T. S. Moore was somewhat
disdainful of this explanation, and dared Yeats to find a
better one:

Berkeley had to resort to God to explain objective
reality; God went on thinking and so his thoughts
remained just as the objective reality does....
You must find a definition that, unlike Berkeley's,
is not merely verbally different from the view
that calls one subjective and the other objective.
(Y & TSM 78-80)

Replied Yeats, "The essential sentence is of course "things
only exist in being perceived," and I can only call percep­
tion God's when I add Blake's 'God only acts or is in exist­
ing beings or men'." Yeats continued this argument in his
essay "Bishop Berkeley," where he states that the Berkeley
of the Commonplace Book seems to posit a hierarchy of being
connecting god's act of creation with that of man:

he thought of God as a pure indivisible act...
which...creates passive 'ideas'--thrusts them as
it were outside itself; and in this act all beings
--from the hierarchy of Heaven to man and woman
and doubtless to all lives--share in the measure
of their worth....

(E & I 408)

What Yeats is arguing is that, since perception is
creation, the external universe is constant as long as it is
perceived by one or another of the beings who make up the
hierarchy between god and man. The question then is not
whether it is man or god who perceives and thus creates the universe; all aspects of the external universe are perceived by beings on different levels of existence at all times during creation. The statement that 'God only acts or is in existing beings or men' adds another dimension to the argument. All beings within creation are separate but equal, and together they form reality. God, or the One, is simply a name for the unity of all things before creation, a complete and undifferentiated unity or emptiness out of which, at creation, stream the spirits who, being separate, perceive each other and thus create 'reality.' The emptiness or unity may be called God, but it is outside creation, and therefore neither 'is' nor 'acts'--this is reserved for the diverse spirits who make up, and therefore in some senses equal, the one God outside time. 36

These beliefs are most succintly, if rather cryptically, expressed in Yeats's "Seven Propositions," in which he

36 Yeats was quite happy to call the One 'God,' and did so quite regularly in his writing. We should not, however, infer from this that Yeats espoused as his own the Christian concept of God, as Virginia Moore does too eagerly in The Unicorn. The critical confusion surrounding Yeats's religious beliefs originates in his willingness to accept all metaphors for reality, for in his view each culture has a legitimate, if different, set of references to describe and understand the same truth. He accepted the religious myths and terminology of the Christians as readily as he did those of the ancient Celtic religion and of the various Eastern religions.
outlined what he understood to be the nature of reality after creation. Since these propositions will be referred to several times during the course of this study, I shall digress from my argument momentarily in order to print them in their entirety:

(I) Reality is a timeless and spaceless community of Spirits which perceive each other. Each Spirit is determined by and determines those it perceives, and each Spirit is unique.

(II) When these Spirits reflect themselves in time and space they still determine each other, and each Spirit sees the others as thoughts, images, objects of sense. Time and space are unreal.

(III) This reflection into time and space is only complete at certain moments of birth, or passivity, which recur many times in each destiny. At these moments the destiny receives its character until the next such moment from those Spirits who constitute the external universe. The horoscope is a set of geometrical relations between the Spirit's reflection and the principal masses in the universe and defines that character.

(IV) The emotional character of a timeless and spaceless Spirit reflects itself as its position in time, its intellectual character as its position in space. The position of a Spirit in space and time therefore defines character.

(V) Human life is either the struggle of a destiny against all other destinies, or a transformation of the character defined in the horoscope into timeless and spaceless existence. The whole passage from birth to birth should be an epitome of the whole passage of the universe through time and back into its timeless and spaceless condition.

(VI) The acts and nature of a Spirit during any one life are a section or abstraction of reality and are unhappy because incomplete. They are a gyre or part of a gyre, whereas reality is a sphere.
Though the Spirits are determined by each other they cannot completely lose their freedom. Every possible statement or perception contains both terms—the self and that which it perceives or states.\footnote{First quoted by Virginia Moore, \textit{The Unicorn}, pp. 378-80.}

In these propositions, Yeats clearly states that human life is only a gyre or a part of a gyre, and therefore incomplete. The external universe cannot then be created solely by the human mind, but is a joint creation of all spirits perceiving each other (the sum total of reality) in unison. This point has generally been misunderstood by critics of Yeats's thought. Snukal, for example, actually states that "In the 'Seven Propositions,' Yeats argues that reality is a function of the human mind."\footnote{Snukal, \textit{High Talk}, p. 41.} Using this as a starting point, Snukal goes on to distinguish between the position of Yeats on the nature of the spirit and that of Plato and Plotinus:

According to both Plato and Plotinus, one could escape from the wheel, could achieve a unity with the one, and thus lose personality and escape rebirth. In Yeats's cosmology, however, there is nothing beyond the human mind. The supra-sensual world is simply the mind, and this mind cannot be confused with another greater mind.\footnote{Snukal, p. 29.}
In fact, as both the philosophical treatises and the plays make abundantly clear, the human spirit is indeed but a fragment of that greater being for Yeats as for Plato and Plotinus. Since separation from the One spells unhappiness, the goal of the spirit (though it often loses sight of this goal when it becomes immersed in any one life) is to journey through the cycles of birth and re-birth, up the hierarchy of being in order to return to Unity of Being, complete unity with the One.

The plays chart the bittersweet, conflict-ridden journey of mortals through human lives; this journey can be a physical one such as Forgael's sea voyage in *The Shadowy Waters*, or a psychical one such as Cuchulain undertakes in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. The Cuchulain cycle as a whole can be understood as a journey from youth to old age, from innocence and foolhardiness to experience and wisdom. Many of Yeats's protagonists, from Forgael and Cuchulain to Paul Rutledge, Martin Hearne, the player Queen Decima, and the stroller in *A Full Moon in March*, are wanderers at heart, longing for

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40The main difference between Yeats and Plato and Plotinus on this point is the importance that Yeats places on the human experience. Though human life is by definition unhappy, it is nevertheless cherished by his protagonists, who are torn between the vague, unsatisfied desires which make them long for an end to separation, and the passions and memories of this life.
voyages and adventures of the type glorified by the Grail legends. In fact, even the most cursory examination of the plays reveals more than superficial parallels between the adventures of Yeats's protagonists and those of the knights of the Holy Grail. The many echoes of the Grail myths in the plays include the deer and hound which appear so frequently in The Shadowy Waters and its companion piece, The Wanderings of Oisin, and the magical ships of The Shadowy Waters and At the Hawk's Well. While The Green Helmet is the play most obviously influenced by the Grail myths, it can be argued that At the Hawk's Well is a failed quest, depicting a callow, vain-glorious hero not yet worthy of seeing the Holy Grail—the similarity between the dry well and the boundless spring which dries up in Lancelot's presence can hardly be accidental.

41 Yeats's symbols are, he wrote, "properly related to the deer and hound that flicker in and out of the various tellings of the Arthurian legends, leading different knights on adventures" (VE 806).

42 Like Yeats's plays, the Grail legends are, argues P.M. Matarasso, derived from "Celtic myth where the rudderless ship, to which the hero entrusts himself, transparently denotes the acceptance of life's adventure and its concomitant perils and rewards. The ships, too, offer passage to the Other World, and it is noteworthy that in the Quest these craft either ferry the emissaries of heaven and hell, or carry the chosen knights on voyages of spiritual discovery"; The Quest of the Holy Grail, trans. P. M. Matarasso (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 289, n. 25.

43 The Quest of the Holy Grail, p. 172.
The various journeys undertaken by Yeats's protagonists have distinctly spiritual overtones—many of these characters echo Paul Ruttledge's sentiment that "as I can't leap from cloud to cloud I want to wander from road to road.... Did you ever think that the roads are the only things that are endless...? They are the serpent of eternity" (VP1 1081). Like the knights of the Holy Grail, Yeats's protagonists are generally spiritual seekers, embarked on an upward or inward journey in which they struggle to escape the bonds of the mortal condition and to regain a higher spiritual existence. Forgael is a magician in some versions of the play, identified, like Cuchulain in the Irish legends, with the Druids; they both strive to become one with the gods while seeking for a knowledge, and a condition, denied to mankind. Whether rebels, saints, poets or lovers, they are all driven by a vague, nameless desire, a desire which, says the Fomorian God Tethra in The Shadowy Waters, was unleashed at creation and cannot be satisfied until the end of creation. They all seek,

44 S. B. Bushrui points out Forgael's role as a magus in Yeats' Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910 (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 9-10; Druidic magic rituals, and particularly their propensity for human sacrifice such as the Fomors demand of Forgael, are described by Charles Squire in Celtic Myth and Legend (Hollywood, Cal.: NewCastle Publishing Co., Ltd., 1975), pp. 36-7. V. Moore quotes from John Rhys, who states that Cuchulain "was educated at the school of which Cathbad a Druid was the master ... who had ... made him a master of inquiry in the arts of the God of Druidism and Magic" in Unicorn, p. 49.
though through different paths, the same unattainable object. The various journeys of the mortal protagonists in the plays are in fact different manifestations of the journey upon which all spirits embark at creation, and which they pursue through all levels of being, seeking to slake a thirst which can only be quenched by the reunification with the true object of desire at the end of separation, the extinction of creation.

However, this journey is "no orderly descent from level to level, no waterfall, but a whirlpool, a gyre," as Yeats wrote of life in A Vision (B 40). The journey is a continuous struggle, and the spirit, immersed in this struggle, keeps losing sight of the ultimate goal, spiritual regeneration. While Yeats's seekers are more aware than their fellow men of this ultimate goal, they too, like Cuchulain in the middle plays, and like Martin Hearne in The Unicorn from the Stars, keep forgetting it. This struggle is fraught with conflict as much as with unsatisfied desires. There is no escape from conflict at any level of creation, since for Yeats creation

45 Here lies one of the significant differences between Where There is Nothing and the play which replaced it and which Yeats greatly preferred, The Unicorn from the Stars. In the former, the protagonist is a saint-like figure who is too often above this struggle; in the latter the protagonist is a flawed mortal who struggles throughout the play to remember what he once knew, and who commits many blunders in the process.
means conflict, through the division of the One into innumerable, separate beings; there will be no resolution of this conflict until the end of time. This conflict is manifested in several ways in the plays, as a conflict among mortals, but also between mortals and discarnate spirits, and even between different discarnate spirits. The most important conflict is perhaps that between man and his "fate," in the battle between free will and determinism which is central to a number of Yeats's plays. But more of this later.

It is unquestionable that Yeats accepted the journey of the spirit along the hierarchy of being as literally true. It is for this reason that, though Yeats's understanding of the history of the soul in its largest context has definite parallels to his understanding of the workings of the individual imagination, this study is concentrating on unravelling only the former. Yeats's pronouncements on the history of the soul have too often been understood only as metaphors for the creative processes of the individual (and in particular the subjective, or antithetical) mind. Helen Vendler's *Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays*, for example, the only book to make a systematic study of the plays in conjunction with the philosophical treatises, reduces Yeats's philosophical beliefs to a system of poetic images. Yeats's "meta-
phors for poetry" become in her book metaphors about poetry and about the creative process of the poet; her central thesis is that *A Vision* is solely "a series of metaphorical statements about poetry, ...the poet's vision in a metaphorical disguise." While Vendler's approach is often useful, it is perforce limited, and she runs into problems when she tries to interpret metaphorically statements which Yeats (or his instructors) meant quite literally.

A case in point is Yeats's understanding of Unity of Being. While he claims that Unity of Being in its largest sense, as the final union of all spirits at which all desire and all separation ceases, can only be achieved at the destruction of creation, he also claims that individual Unity of Being, the union of the creator with the object of his creation, can be achieved by the subjective (*antithetical*) mortal, particularly at Phase 17 of the Great Wheel. The difference is that the desire for Unity of Being is only temporarily assuaged at this phase, since the mortal must experience many subsequent phases of the wheel of life, and cannot be completely satisfied until the spirit joins its true object of desire, of which all objects in an incarnate state are merely a representation, in the final union, the

return to the One. Vendler has some difficulty in understanding the difference between these two concepts, since metaphorically they describe the same process, and is forced into a number of elaborate explanations of Yeats's system:

In some ways, we can regret that Yeats identified the fusion of thought and image by two different symbols... but the seemingly needless duplication was inevitable because he had already split his system in two, into "incarnate life" and "discarnate life," into Faculties and Principles, and therefore he required a symbol of perfection for each half of the system. These are not equal though separate parts of the system, as Vendler suggests; one fits into the other, because incarnate life is only a section of the larger system, which comprises the whole. Vendler also misunderstands the difference between the Faculties and the Principles in Yeats's system: while the Faculties do influence incarnate life, the period from birth to death, the Principles influence both incarnate and discarnate life, or the period from birth to birth (AV (B) 188). Thus the gyre of the Faculties whirls in one-half of the gyre of the Principles (AV (B) 201), just as human life whirls in "a gyre or part of a gyre, whereas reality

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47 Yeats's Great Wheel is clearly explained in A Vision, and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

48 Vendler, p. 69. Vendler refers to Phase 15 rather than 17 because, even though Yeats clearly states that in Phase 15 "there is still separation from the loved one" (AV (B) 136), this phase, being out of the body, is a better symbol than is phase 17.
is a sphere" (Proposition VII). 49

Vendler's book acknowledges only part of Yeats's system, concentrating on the human, and in particular the poet's, condition, and thus excluding the totality of the soul's experience, of which human life and human creations, while real, are also merely symbols. In this study I hope to redress that balance. It is therefore my intention to trace 'the history of the soul' or spirit as it is elucidated through Yeats's plays, while drawing attention, whenever necessary, to the philosophical treatises. Yeats himself would doubtless prefer this approach to a study of the metaphysics on its own. He felt compelled to set down his metaphysics in an abstract and logical manner. Nevertheless, he considered himself primarily a poet and a dramatist, believing in the greater power of age-old symbols to transmit his beliefs, and, in his drama perhaps more than in his poetry, breathed life and meaning into the rather abstruse statements of A Vision and the "Seven Propositions." When studied together with the latter works, the plays begin to resonate with meaning, and many subtle, even obscure, passages become readily understandable.

49 Note the similarity to Plotinus' "Doctrine of the two logical moments" which, J.M. Rist explains, states that "in finite Beings. ...there are aspects of finitude and infinitude. The One, in contrast to this, is infinity itself." Cf. Plotinus : The Road to Reality(Cambridge at the University Press, 1967), p. 31.
I do not pretend to pursue all the ramifications of all the tenets of Yeats's metaphysics, nor can I hope to unearth all the ways in which it infiltrates the drama. I intend only to elucidate the underlying system of beliefs and to establish its relation to the aim and execution of the plays, by drawing attention to a few of the central themes, metaphors and symbols through which it is developed in the drama. I have limited this study to an examination of the verbal content of the plays, though there is no doubt that Yeats's beliefs were equally instrumental in shaping the form and structure of the plays, as even the following cursory look at the evidence reveals.

Yeats's plays, as V. Moore has pointed out, are directly related to the complex religious rituals which he and some friends devised around the turn of the century, while striving to recreate the "Irish Mysteries." These rituals are probably the earliest manifestation of Yeats's religious system. The group hoped to create an Irish religion based on the ancient Druidic faith and closely resembling the Egyptian and Eleusinian Mysteries passed on from ancient times and taught by the Order of the Golden Dawn. Yeats firmly believed that such Irish Mysteries had once existed; as Virginia Moore notes, "Caesar's report as to the length of training pupils--
twenty years—heightened the possibility" for him. Yeats, along with Maud Gonne and members of the Inner Order of the Golden Dawn, spent ten years working feverishly to devise these rituals; though still unpublished, they do exist.51

Based on the dramatic rituals of magic adopted by the Order of the Golden Dawn, these druidic rituals share with Yeats's plays, as the following statement by Moore attests, many of the same assumptions about the intuitive, irrational nature of truth, and about the possibility of evoking it through symbols.

What theory supports ceremonial magic? That sacred words, gestures and admonitions, found esoterically and woven into a homogeneous drama, have greater impact upon the soul than the same things taught intellectually and abstractly; and that this psychic effect, when combined with certain powerful magic formulae, alters the universe and man.52

There are other similarities. The dramatic rituals of magic,

50 V. Moore, The Unicorn, pp. 57-8.

51 Moore describes these rituals on pp. 68-70 of her book, while G. M. Harper, in Yeats's Golden Dawn, p. 165, n. 19, mentions that "these divinations are preserved elsewhere in the Yeats papers, under the heading of 'Visions of Old Irish Mythology'."

52 Moore, The Unicorn, p. 128.
as described by Israel Regardie, consist in the recreation of the deeds and life-cycle of a God or "occasionally the terrestrial cycles of an ideal man or God-man"; each ritual is "marked by the enthusiastic repetition of a series of highly significant incidents in [his] history...". The most obvious parallel in Yeats's drama is the Cuchulain cycle, in which the important events of his life, found in the Irish myths set down by Hyde, Lady Gregory and others, and modified by Yeats, are enacted. MacGregor Mather's description of the setting of these rituals (in his translation of The Key of Solomon, perhaps the most famous text of ritual magic), however, invokes virtually all of Yeats's plays:

The places best fitted for exercising and accomplishing Magic Arts and Operations are those which are concealed, removed, and separated from the habitations of men. Wherefore desolate and uninhabited regions are the most appropriate, such as the borders of lakes, forests, dark and obscure places, old and deserted houses, whither rarely and scarce ever do men come....

The dramatic rituals of magic also resemble these plays in numerous particulars, from the use of musicians to signal the opening of the drama, to the dance as the climax of the


drama, to the masks as the most important adjunct of magical ceremonies. All this supports Michael Sidnell's argument that "In Yeats vision and belief, more than informing the 'content' of the poetry, determine its structural conventions." It seems indisputable, then, that the form and structure, as much as the content of the plays, was tremendously influenced by Yeats's evolving beliefs. Nevertheless, I must leave all further documentation of this argument to another study, and limit this work to the "mere story" of the plays.

I have found the manuscript versions and the earliest published versions of the plays to be the most useful for this purpose, since they often retain much of the abstract thought which Yeats eliminated from the later versions, and also show the development of the metaphors and images with which Yeats gradually replaced it. I have grouped the plays by theme, without very much regard to the chronology except as this was dictated by the themes within the plays themselves. The impossibility of studying the plays in any meaningful chronological way has often been pointed out; Yeats rewrote and revised his plays far too often. As

55Regardie, Tree of Life, pp. 139-173; 223-235.
56M. Sidnell, Yeats and the Occult, p. 225.
S. B. Bushrui notes,

Some critics might even now agree with Ernest Boyd that: "Yeats has so frequently and so materially revised his plays that they may be considered without insistence upon chronological sequence. Radical changes in rewriting deprive many of them of their priority. Title and theme may belong to an early date, but a new edition often means a new play: It would be superfluous to preserve the form of chronology when the essentials are lacking."57

Yeats himself wrote in the "Preface" to Poems: 1899-1905 that,

I have printed the plays and poems in the order of their first publication, but so far as the actual writing of verse is concerned, The Shadowy Waters and On Baile's Strand have been so much rewritten that they are later than The King's Threshold.58

I have also underplayed chronology in this study because my aim has been not so much to emphasize the development of Yeats's ideas as to stress the continuity of thought from one play to another, from the earliest manuscript versions of The Shadowy Waters to The Death of Cuchulain. A close study of the metaphysical basis of Yeats's drama reveals that Yeats had intuited his most profound beliefs about the nature


58 Quoted by Bushrui, Yeats's Verse Plays, pp. xiv-xv.
and history of the spirit at an early age. Studied as a unit, the plays reveal in practice the system that the philosophical treatises expound in theory (indeed, much of the excitement for me has come from seeing, through the plays, just how the system works). The same metaphors and symbols, and even, at times, the same words and phrases are used from one play to another, and all echo the same underlying meaning: for example, images of fire are found in virtually all of Yeats's plays, and are all, ultimately, linked to the end of the soul's journey, spiritual regeneration.

In the next chapters I will chart the journey and struggle of the spirit in the drama. Chapter II begins with the emptiness at the source of creation, then examines Yeats's theory on creation, on the separation of the One from the Many, and on the hierarchy of being and the conflict between the various orders of being, with particular reference to their manifestation in the plays. Chapter III traces the journey of one spirit from creation, through the cycles of birth and rebirth, as it is documented in the plays through the theme of memory, of forgetting, learning and remembering. Chapter IV studies the plight of the soul in the human condition, and its struggle to assert its will in the face of the forces of determinism which seek to control it. The ultimate conclusion of this struggle must be the reconciliation
of chance and choice; the spirit, being "free and yet fast," will "sink into its own delight at last" (CP 258). The circle will thus be complete—by pursuing the struggle through the gyres of incarnate and discarnate lives, of finitude and infinitude, we will inexorably return to the beginning.
Chapter II: The Hierarchy of Being in the Drama

I

And then he laughed to think that what seemed so hard
Should be so simple....
("The Phases of the Moon," VE 377)

We know that Yeats consciously struggled to develop a
cohesive metaphysics that would make all of his writing
"part of one history, and that the soul's." All his con-
cerns, whether as poet or magician, dramatist or philosopher,
revolved around the spirit; as he once wrote, "My own belief
is that we know nothing ... but 'spirits and their relations'"
(Y & TSM 66-7). It is therefore not surprising that 'spirits
and their relations' are a central preoccupation of the drama,
and constitute a major thematic link between the different
plays. However, though the theme of the struggle of the
spirit is very pervasive in Yeats's drama, it is nevertheless
a rather difficult one to assay, since it is inextricably
bound to Yeats's rather personal metaphysics. In order to
discuss the nature, or history, or struggle of the human soul
or spirit as it is developed in the drama, we must first come
to terms with this metaphysics, and specifically with Yeats's
cosmology and ontology.
Yeats had seemingly unorthodox ideas about the origin of the universe (unorthodox for a Christian, certainly), and these ideas dictated the setting of the plays. His plays evolve within the world as we know it, but it is a world defined by its original creation and its ultimate destruction. These boundaries are almost palpable; many of the characters, particularly in the early plays, recall creation vividly and with great sorrow, and long for an end to their suffering and for the destruction of the world. The world of the drama is also sharply defined by its proximity to, but difference from, innumerable other worlds. Yeats's ontology is as unorthodox as is his cosmology, and, as Philip Marcus as noted, is more than a little obscure; it must also be unravelled if we are to understand what Yeats means by the spirit, and to grasp the role and relation of the dizzying number and variety of spirits who appear in the plays.

For Yeats, the universe emerged out of nothing, out of a boundless darkness which existed before generation and which

1Philip L. Marcus, "Myth and Meaning in Yeats's The Death of Cuchulain," IUR, 2, ii (1972), p. 140: "Yeats's thought is unfortunately particularly knotted and obscure both on the subject of "destiny" and on the various types of beings inhabiting the supernatural world."

2The following is a brief summary of the argument which will be developed, with necessary references and proofs, in the rest of the chapter.
continues to surround it. This nothingness can also be defined as complete unity, a Phaseless sphere which is complete and immutable and eternal. At creation a form of energy emanates from the sphere which, being separate from it, begins the process of differentiation by which nothing gives birth to the Many, innumerable spirits who are all equal, and each of whom forms an integral and necessary part of the One or whole. These separate beings are 'spirits' in Yeats's terminology, though they will assume many different identities as they proceed through the realms of creation, both as individual spirits of all descriptions and as the external forces of the universe which impinge upon these individual spirits.  

Immediately following creation, each of these spirits coexists in harmony in that "timeless and spaceless community of Spirits" which Yeats calls Reality in "The Seven Propositions." However, because it was separated from the One and therefore from itself at creation, each of these beings must undertake its journey through creation alone, seeking for the Self which it has lost. This journey will take it down through almost

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Interestingly enough, this theory of creation closely resembles the view of post-Einsteinian physicists, who now posit that all matter, energy and light emerged all at once, out of nothing, and then expanded to become the millions of entities in the universe. The universe is still expanding and dividing, according to this theory, but at some future point it must stop expanding, and then the fields of gravity of the various planetary bodies will attract each other gradually, until all join together and extinguish each other, thus returning to nothing.
endless phases of being, where it acquires more and more layers of individuation which separate it from all other spirits until, as a soul imprisoned in a human body, it attains the most extreme differentiation possible. When its journey on earth reaches an end, the spirit does not cease to be, but simply evolves upward, gradually shedding its layers of differentiation, until it joins its Higher Self, or all the spirits who form the external universe, in the final union which ends differentiation. This is what Yeats postulated in his notes to *The Resurrection*:

> We may come to think that nothing exists but a stream of souls, that all knowledge is biography, and with Plotinus that every soul is unique; that these souls, these eternal archetypes, combine into greater units as days and nights into months, months into years, and at last into the final unit that differs in nothing from that which they were at the beginning: everywhere that antinomy of the One and the Many that Plato thought in his *Parmenides* insoluble, though Blake thought it soluble 'at the bottom of the graves.'

*(VP1 935)*

Spirits live in harmony for a relatively short time following creation, for in Yeats's metaphysics differentiation leads to division and conflict. For Yeats all life can be

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4This is not to denigrate the importance of life. Most of the plays, particularly the later plays, celebrate the importance of this life in the development of the spirit, and stress the passion, the pain and joy of life which the discarnate spirits envy.
defined as conflict; as he explained to Ethel Mannin while discussing *The Death of Cuchulain*:

To me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other's life, live each other's death. That is true of life and death themselves.\(^5\)

Every being within creation is striving, as we have seen, for an end to separation, for a return to the original Unity. This can be achieved only through the struggle with its opposite, since perfection or completion in Yeats's view is not escape from conflict so much as it is a reconciliation of opposing forces; "all the gain of man comes from conflict with the opposite of his being" (*AV* (B) 13). For this reason the spirit is always attracted by its opposite; in the words of Peter, an actor in an early version of *The Player Queen*, "We must always love what we are not: the coward loves courage, the sluggish, energy, the sad, delight, the foolish, wisdom" (*MPQ* 115). Though the reconciliation of opposites is striven for during human incarnations, it is not possible, except at the fleeting moments of ecstacy experienced by lovers, saints and in particular poets, until the spirit passes through its prescribed cycles and returns to the final unity at the end of creation:

We attain it always in the creation or enjoyment of a work of art, but that moment though eternal in the Daimon passes from us because it is not an

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\(^5\) Quoted by Philip Marcus in "Yeats's *The Death of Cuchulain*," p. 139.
attainment of our whole being.\textsuperscript{6}

The struggle of the spirit within creation is therefore constant, heralded by one form of conflict or another, either between spirits at all levels of existence or even within the mind of the individual spirit. Decima understands this when she states, in Drafts 11-12 of The Player Queen, "It is only by continual struggle, continual violence we force the gates of Heaven" (MPQ 132-3).

This, in a nutshell, is Yeats's metaphysics. It will be elaborated, and its unfolding in the various plays documented, in the rest of this chapter.

II. Beyond Unity

The Old Testament begins with creation: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." Yeats begins with the boundless darkness which is the source of creation. This darkness is complete undivided emptiness or fullness, in which all individuation ceases; it is the whole, of which all lives, all souls, all worlds are but a reflection. It is most fully discussed in A Vision which, being essentially a work of sacred geometry, describes it as a 'Phaseless Sphere':

\begin{footnote}{From unpublished notes to A Vision quoted by Helen Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, p. 69.}\end{footnote}
The ultimate reality, because neither one nor many, concord nor discord, is symbolised as a Phaseless Sphere.

*(AV (B) 3)*

Yeats thus goes beyond Plotinus, the first philosopher, as J. M. Rist very convincingly argues, to elaborate on the difference between the One and the Noumenal, or the Many, and who taught that,

The One must be the cause of all finite Beings; it is through the One that such Beings exist. These Beings are not merely more finite examples of unity; they are different in kind from the One, since the One is actually their creator.

Plotinus distinguished between three states or "Authentic Existents," the One, the Many, and the Soul, a differentiation which Yeats endorsed and borrowed to describe his Four Principles:

I identify the Celestial Body (the first principle) with the First Authentic Existent of Plotinus, *Spirit* with his Second Authentic Existent, which holds the First in its moveless circle; the discarnate Daimons, or Ghostly Selves, with his Third Authentic Existent or soul of the world (the Holy Ghost of Christianity) which holds the second in its moving circle.

*(AV (B) 194)*

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7 J. M. Rist, *Plotinus*, pp. 21-37. This book is particularly enlightening in its meticulous discussion of Plotinus' understanding of the One; Rist's argument corroborates on many points the metaphysical basis of the present study.

Nevertheless, though Yeats implies that his Four Principles are reconciled in the Phaseless Sphere, he makes a real distinction between them. "The resolved antinomy appears not in a lofty source [the Celestial Body or the One] but in the whirlpool's motionless centre, or beyond its edge" (AV (B) 195).

A Vision is dominated by the gyres and cones which represent the ceaseless, whirling, ever-changing motion of the cycles of incarnate life rather than by the Sphere because, in Yeats's words,

My instructors, keeping as far as possible to the phenomenal world, have spent little time upon the Sphere, which can be symbolised but cannot be known.

(AV (B) 193)

However, these symbols are, like the fleeting phantoms of desire of Yeats's early works, merely "in themselves pursuit and illusion" (AV (B) 73); like the life within time and space which they represent, they only mirror reality. The Sphere, which Yeats equates with eternity, "the final place of rest" (AV (B) 69), is reality. The Sphere encompasses everything; it is the serpent with its tail in its mouth, the beginning and the end and everything in between. Yeats reiterates this in his "The Seven Propositions," when he states that

The acts and nature of a Spirit during any one life are a section or abstraction of reality and are unhappy
because incomplete. They are a gyre or part of a gyre, whereas reality is a Sphere.

Yeats's understanding of the source and true nature of reality as the Sphere is neither new or original unless, in Kathleen Raine's words, "by original we mean a return to the origins of knowledge which have been discovered and known again and again, and as often lost and forgotten...". It can be traced to such pre-Socratic philosophers as Parmenides and Pythagoras, and pervades Neo-Platonic thought; moreover, it is reiterated in much of the occult and magical literature in which Yeats was thoroughly schooled.

The Sphere, or 'God,' is the complete emptiness out of which everything comes; hence Yeats's stipulation (using


F. A. C. Wilson traces it to Plotinus' essay "The Heavenly Circuit" in his book Yeats and Tradition (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 208: "In this essay Plotinus accounts for the circular rotation of the heavenly bodies by applying his symbol of the perfect circle of which God is the centre."

Cf Mme Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Limited, 1888), p. 11. Mme Blavatsky agrees with Yeats's instructors that there is little to be gained by discussing the Sphere, since it is "An Omni-present, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable PRINCIPLE on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and could only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude" (p. 14). Cf also I. Regardie, The Tree of Life, pp. 45-6.
Blake's phrase) that 'God only acts or is in existing beings or men.' In the plays, Yeats usually calls it 'Nothing' rather than the Sphere, following the explanation which he includes in his short story, "Where There is Nothing," in which a priest describes the universe to a small child as a series of nine crystalline spheres beyond which lies nothing, or God (M 184-5). In his recent essay on George Yeats, R. Ellmann has made much of Yeats's use of the word 'nothing' in his later works, and in particular in the later plays. Writes Ellmann,

In May 1938 he [Yeats] wrote a quatrain for Edith Shackleton Heald in which he offered, as "the explanation of it all," that

From nowhere into nowhere nothing's run.

The same words resound in two of his last plays: the old man in Purgatory says at the end, "Twice a murderer and all for nothing," and the last speech of The Herne's Egg includes the line, "All that trouble and nothing to show for it...." Yet in another late work, the poem entitled "The Gyres," Yeats insisted that out of "any dark rich nothing"

Rist argues that, though Plotinus never actually called the One 'Nothing,' such an attribution is the logical extension of his understanding of the One: "The One then is no particular finite Being. It is, as Plotinus frequently says, 'other than Being.' Since it is not a finite Being, can it be reasonably said that it is 'not-Being beyond Being,' as Porphyry puts it (Sententiae, Ch. 26) or even 'Nothing,' the term ventured later by Scotus Erigena? We can doubtless trace the historical sequence which led to Erigena's suggestion..."; Rist, Plotinus, p. 29.
the whole gazebo would be built up once again. He could conceive of nothing as empty and also as pregnant.\textsuperscript{13}

Exactly. Ellmann proceeds no further with the argument; he seems convinced that this is an undefined new direction that Yeats was taking in his "speculations about final matters" towards the end of his life. In fact, the "rich, dark nothing," and the possibility of destroying creation in order to return to it, is an image Yeats used repeatedly, almost obsessively, in the early plays and in such poems as "He Mourns for the Change that Has Come Upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World":

\begin{center}
I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the West
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.
(VE 153)
\end{center}

In the play \textit{Where There is Nothing} Paul Ruttledge, the protagonist, attempts to destroy the order of the created world, "to light the 'fires of the Last Day',"\textsuperscript{14} in order to restore the original chaos and reachieve nothing, or God. Paul longs to escape the world, for he believes that "at death the soul comes into possession of itself, and returns to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13}R. Ellmann, \textit{New York Review of Books}, May 17, 1979, p. 25.
\item \textsuperscript{14}Warwick Gould, "Lionel Johnson Comes First to Mind: Sources for Owen Aherne," \textit{Yeats and the Occult}, p. 267.
\end{itemize}
joy that made it" (VP1 1160). He understands, however, that death of the body does not mean an end to his soul's wandering; he must destroy all of creation in order to find this 'joy.' At first he exhorts his followers to tear down towns, institutions, and churches, but then he remembers that, because the world is spirit, and imagined by spirits, the destruction must take place within men's minds and souls: "I was forgetting, we cannot destroy the world with armies, it is inside our minds that it must be destroyed, it must be consumed in a moment inside our minds" (VP1 1158). Paul strips himself of all his worldly attachments in order to become nothing, and offers the same to his followers.

Every religious teacher before me has offered something to his followers, but I offer them nothing. My sack is quite empty. I will never dip my hand into nature's full sack of illusions; I am tired of that old conjuring bag. (VP1 1154-5)

Patricia McFate and William Doherty, in their essay on this play, point out the parallel between Paul's conclusions and the conclusion at which the Wise Man arrives at the end of The Hour-Glass when he says, "We sink in on God, we find him in becoming nothing--we perish into reality."15

Martin Hearne in The Unicorn from the Stars, a reworking

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of Where There is Nothing, reaches a similar conclusion at the end of that play:

We must put out the whole world as I put out this candle [puts out another candle.] We must put out the lights of the stars and the light of the sun and the light of the moon [puts out the rest of the candles], till we have brought everything to nothing once again. I saw in a broken vision, but now all is clear to me. Where there is nothing, where there is nothing—there is God! (VP1 709)

In the same way Lazarus in Calvary, who has welcomed death, will not forgive Christ for resurrecting him, for dragging him back to the light and denying him death and the waste spaces "where there is nothing" (VP1 783).

The desire to destroy creation in order to return to the darkness which is nothing is expressed by the protagonists of quite a number of Yeats's early plays. In The Land of Heart's Desire, Mary longs for the destruction of the world, as the following conversation with her husband indicates:

Shaun: Would that the world were mine to give you, And not its quiet hearths alone, but even All that bewilderment of light and freedom, If you would have it.

Mary: I would take the world And break it into pieces in my hands To see you smile watching it crumble away. (VP1 193)

In The Countess Cathleen, the poet Aleel, at the news of Cathleen's death, curses the world and longs for the same destruction:
And I who weep
Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change,
And have no excellent hope but the great hour
When you shall plunge headlong through bottomless space.

(VP1 165)

Forgael, in *The Shadowy Waters*, hopes for a similar destruction, crying, "There is no good hour but the hour when the gods and the stars alike shall perish" (TPBS 44). The editors of the manuscript versions of this play offer a concise explanation of Forgael's desire:

In its essence, Forgael's burden of wisdom is a recognition that the world (...sometimes embracing ... all of creation) has no distinct reality, but consists only of appearances emanating from himself; or in the alternative terms that are also offered, all lives—those of plants, beasts, men and gods alike—are merely a flight from the single great spirit.... Freedom from the burden of living through a succession of delusive lives can come only with the extinction of creation and Forgael's *cri de coeur* is for the great hour when all creation will be quenched.

(DrC 7)

Yeats built both an idealist and a realist view of reality into this play—while the world is a subjective delusion on Forgael's part, a "tower made of polished black stones which each reflect his face" (TPBS 44), it is the joint creation of other spirits as well, and therefore has an objective reality which he cannot destroy merely by wishing it away.

This desire for the destruction of creation is also expressed by many of the discarnate spirits in the plays. "The alliance of the Fomor [the gods of darkness] with
Forgael," write the editors of Druid Craft, "has ... most of its binding power in their common desire to an end to the order of nature" (DrC 8); the Devils in The Countess Cathleen also long for the day when their "master will break up the sun and the moon / And quench the stars in the ancestral night / And overturn the throne (thrones) of God and the angels" (VP1 51). It may well be that the gods of darkness have a vested interest in returning to the ancestral darkness, though it is a darkness that, Yeats writes in the notes to "The Wind Among the Reeds," will destroy all the gods as well as the world (VE 809). More interesting is the gods of Light's desire for this same destruction. In The Shadowy Waters as well as in its companion piece The Wanderings of Oisin, Aengus, who is the loftiest god among Ireland's legendary gods, the Tuatha de Danaan, also longs for the destruction of creation, and even of his own existence. In The Wanderings of Oisin we are told that

Aengus dreams, from sun to sun
A Druid dream of the end of days
When the stars are to wane and the world be done.
(VE 16)

In The Shadowy Waters, Dectora describes the Danaans as waiting,
"trembling with hope,/ The hour when all things shall be

16 Because of its similarities in theme and mood, and because of its greater length, I have found The Wanderings of Oisin to be an indispensable gloss on the early plays, and use it as such throughout this study. In it Yeats tried out many ideas which he later reworked in the plays.
folded up" (TPBS 14). This is more than a little confusing, since the Danaans, and particularly Aengus himself, are depicted as perfected beings, residing, it is implied, beyond the conflict and tumult of creation.

This confusion is evident from one version of The Shadowy Waters to another. In an early manuscript version, the Danaans are clearly the perfected community of spirits which Yeats described in "The Seven Propositions," living in harmony in the 'light' which, as we shall see, is more often than not associated with perfection in Yeats's plays:

O ye bright gods we praise you with our love. You are never lonely for you live in the light of each others faces--your souls are like golden drops of joy.
(DrC 53)

In another version, Forgael describes them in similar terms and implies that they only can pass (and perhaps already have passed) into the nothing beyond creation:

None but the Children of Danu, the white host That moves in music above the elements Have gazed in one another's eyes and passed Beyond the shadow to the shadowless deep.
(DrC 95)

Nevertheless, joyful and serene though they may be, the Danaans in most versions long for their own destruction.

It would appear that this confusion is caused by the clash between Yeats's metaphysics and his dramatic sense.
According to the former it is obvious that the Danaans, however joyous and perfected, are still differentiated beings proceeding from creation: \(^{17}\) while they may be "whatever in that stream \([\text{of souls which Yeats defines as the Many}]\) changes least, and therefore ... all souls that have found an almost changeless rest" \((AV (A) 158)\), \(^{18}\) they are still within creation, since nothing exists outside of it. Moreover, they are associated with light, while nothing, as a number of plays attest, is complete darkness. Forgael implies this when he accuses the Danaans of hiding with their "bewildering lights" \((DrC 81)\) the peace of eternity, while Paul Ruttledge specifically associates nothing with darkness, saying that he wants to escape the light of the world for

The dark. Yes, I think that is what I want. The dark, where there is nothing that is anything, and nobody that is anybody; one can be free there, where there is nothing.

\[(VP1 1091)\]

\(^{17}\)Moreover, conflict, which for Yeats defines creation, is everywhere associated with the Danaans, in the routing of the Fomor from the kingdom of light which is described in a number of Yeats's works.

\(^{18}\)The word "almost" is very important. The Many, no matter how perfected, have still not achieved the complete, changeless, motionless \((AV (B) 211)\) rest of the Phaseless Sphere. This is what R. Snukal does not understand when he states that Yeats, like all neo-Kantians, never makes clear "whether or not the Absolute \([\text{the Ego, or God}]\) has a separate ontological status. It is never clear (for Yeats, as for other neo-Kantians) whether reality is One being, the Absolute, or whether reality is a number of souls, who taken together, are the Absolute" \((High Talk, pp. 14-4)\).
Lazarus accuses Christ in Calvary of having blinded "with light the solitude / That death has made" (VP1 783).

Nevertheless, it is very difficult to dramatize an eternity which is a formless darkness, undifferentiated, unknowable and indescribable. That Yeats should occasionally relent and describe a golden, song-filled paradise is thus understandable. Just as he was to substitute a description of the gyres of life in A Vision for that of the Sphere, the ultimate 'reality,' and just as he would describe the 'community of spirits' rather than this Sphere in "The Seven Propositions," Yeats increasingly substituted a description of the world of the nearly perfected Many, usually the kingdom of light of the Danaans or the Faery Kingdom of the Sidhe, for that of the unknowable Sphere. Though Yeats wavered back and forth in The Shadowy Waters, in the final versions of the play the insistence on a return to "those streams where druids say / Time and the world and all things dwindle out" (DrC 285) is dropped, and Forgael moves instead toward a kingdom "of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived / Before the making of the earth" (VP1 319). Cathleen ascends to a similar kingdom, replete with shining angels, in The Countess Cathleen, while in such plays as Where There is Nothing and The Unicorn from the Stars, paradise is described as a place of perpetual, joyous conflict!
III. Creation

While Yeats's plays focus most explicitly on the desire of the various protagonists to end creation, a number of references to the act of creation, some oblique, others more explicit, are scattered throughout the plays, and from them, in conjunction with his statements in other works, can be pieced together Yeats's theory of creation. Yeats plainly assented to the beliefs on creation that he attributed to Berkeley in his essay "Bishop Berkeley," that "the Seven Days [were] not the creation of sun and moon, beast and man, but their entrance into time, or into human perception, or into that of some spirit..." (E & I 403), and that this creation is the same whether it be conceived by man or by God (since they are essentially the same): "Man in so far as he is himself, in so far as he is a personality, reflects the whole Act of God" (E & I 408, n. 1).

The Shadowy Waters, particularly in its manuscript versions, is the play which dramatizes this belief most explicitly. In several early versions, as the editors of A Tower of Polished Black Stones note, "all the Seabars [Fomorian gods] are created in Forgael's mind..."; "Once formed, these creations of Forgael's mind continue to exist. Forgael lies dead upon the deck, but the Seabar continue to circle around him" (TPBS xii,
Yeats describes in detail Forgael's creation of one such Seabar. When Forgael falls in love with Dectora, his love becomes a separate, living entity, a red Seabar; this same Seabar later becomes white when Forgael's love turns to pity. Explains the white Seabar:

'I was a formless phantom floating in the darkness until he who lies there [Forgael] loved & then I was born but to a crimson shape for I too am one of [the?] gods he has fashioned

... with his thought and his desire.'

(TPBS 24)

Another pre-1896 version completes this argument:

'but now he was white for Forgael was full of pity, and being the spirit of his pity he brought the commandments of pity.'

Forgael the creator "tires of seeing always the same face" (TPBS 24), and thinks he may be able to escape from himself through his love for another, separate being, until, in a number of versions, he realizes that even Dectora is a mere reflection of himself:

... away from me. You too.
You too. Your eyes are but
my eyes, your voice is but my voice

(TPBS 23)

19 That the white Seabar is a Christ figure in the play seems a reasonable assumption to make, first of all because he represents pity, just as Christ represents pity in the Wilde story which Yeats was reading at this period, and which later influenced Calvary. The white Seabar says that, like all other Seabars, "I too am predatory"; the difference is that "my beak tears my own heart alone" (TPBS 24). In this he resembles the Pelican in the Grail legends who stabs its own breast to pour
This argument was more than a little unwieldy, particularly since it proved impossible to subsume entirely in images and symbols. Yeats toyed with other variations of this theme, implying in another version (and thus compounding his problems), that the Seabars were created not by Forgael but by the Danaans, "the gods who had made them in their image" (DrC 20). Yeats finally discarded much of this argument in the final versions of the play. In most other plays, he was content to underplay this theme, and to couch most references to creation in the symbols of the Celtic creation myths. The most succinct account of these myths that I have found, and that which tallies most closely with Yeats's own references to the subject, is found in the chapter "The Celtic Cosmogony" in AE's book *The Candle of Vision*. Since Yeats, as their correspondence makes clear, considered AE an authority on matters of Celtic faith, and since he was very familiar with this book, *The Candle of Vision* is an obvious starting point for unearthing Yeats's references to creation in the drama. AE claims to have written his book following his experiments with Yeats and other members of the Order of the Golden Dawn to re-create the

its blood over its dead young, and dies as they regain life; this pelican, an abbot tells Bors, signifies Christ (Cf *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, pp. 181, 186). In the 1896 manuscript which Yeats sent to Beardsley he wrote that "the scene is set immediately before the birth of Christ" (TPBS 42).
ancient Druidic Mysteries, and his chapter echoes on various points Yeats's description of these experiments in the "stiff-backed notebook" quoted by Virginia Moore.20

AE sets out to describe and explain the Celtic creation myths from which the modern Celtic cosmology has descended. In so doing, he claims to discover significant parallels, not only to ancient philosophies (something which must have pleased Yeats) but also to all sacred literatures, from the Bible to the Upanishads.21 That AE was a Theosophist longer than Yeats may have something to do with the fact that his description also echoes The Secret Doctrine and other magical texts. AE agrees with Mme Blavatsky that the Sphere is "devoid of all attributes"22 and calls it "boundless Lir"

(Candle 153):

We have first of all Lir, an infinite being, neither spirit nor energy nor substance, but rather the spiritual forms of these, in which all the divine powers, raised above themselves, exist in a mystic union or trance.

(Candle 155)

During creation, a trinity of powers emanate from Lir and

20W. Moore, The Unicorn, pp. 68-70.

21AE (George Russell), The Candle Of Vision (1918; rpt. Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1965), p. 163. All subsequent references to this book will be inserted in the text.

together create the universe. They are first of all Manannan, whom AE describes as "the divine imagination" and the "unuttered word" (Candle 155): "He is the root of existence from which springs the Sacred Hazel, the symbol of life ramifying everywhere." Manannan conceives "an image of futurity" and focuses it on Dana, "the Great Mother and Spirit of Nature, [who] grows thirsty to receive its imprint on her bosom, and to bear again her offspring of stars and starry beings" (Candle 154). Creation is completed when a third impulse or power, "love yet unbreathed" who is Aengus the Young, "awakens as the image of the divine imagination is reflected in the being of the Mother, and then rushes forth to embrace it" (Candle 157). Now creation is set in motion: "The Fountain beneath the Hazel is broken. Creation is astir. The Many are proceeding from the One."  

There is much here that needs emphasizing and clarifying in view of Yeats's own use of these figures and images. First

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23 Note the resemblance to Yeats's description of the end of the world for which Forgael is heading, which constitutes the "one single idea" upon which his revised play will revolve (L 454):

'When the world ends
The mind is made unchanging for it finds
Miracle, ecstasy, the impossible joy,
The flagstone under all, the fire of fires,
The root of the world.'

24 The resemblance to Yeats's Four Principles is also worth noting.
of all, it seems that Manannan and Aengus are much more important than their role in popular Irish legends—the legends most used by critics to illuminate Yeats's use of these gods—would lead us to believe. AE points out this seeming disparity and explains that the two images of these gods as the creative powers of the universe and as lesser gods of the Sidhe are indeed connected, "for in the mysteries of Druids all the gods sent bright witnesses of their boundless being, who sat enthroned in the palaces of the Sidhe..."

(Mandle 159). Manannan, in AE's description, is unique and set apart from all other gods, for he "alone of all the gods exists in the inner side" (Candle 156) of Dana, the Spirit of Nature. Yeats's depiction of Manannan in the plays is therefore given more basis in tradition.

Manannan's important role during creation is hinted at in The Wanderings of Oisin, where he is referred to as the god who built the now crumbling palace in the second island (the island of never-ending battle) "with captive demons sent / Out of the sevenfold seas" (the seven streams which issued from the fountain of creation) (VE 38). In an early version of The Only Jealousy of Emer, Manannan appears briefly as an impassive, shadowy figure from the Country-Under-Wave, who plays chess as he rules over the destinies of both men and gods. Fand orders first Cuchulain and then
Bricriu to "stand before our King and face the charge / And take the punishment" (VP1 561). In his reply, Bricriu acknowledges that Manannan has determined his life:

'I'll stand there first,
And tell my story first; and Mananan
Knows that his own harsh sea made my heart cold.'

In The Green Helmet, Manannan once again personifies fate, particularly since Yeats implies that it is he who has appeared in the guise of the Red Man and tampered unmercifully with the minds and lives of Cuchulain's people in order to test Ireland, and specifically to test, and then reward, the courage of its bravest man, Cuchulain (VP1 453).

Aengus is also much more than merely "the golden-haired Angus of the bards" (Candle 159), explains AE; he is "an all-pervading divinity who first connects being with non-being" and as such figures prominently, as we have seen, as the ruler of the kingdom of the Tuatha de Danaan in such works as The Shadowy Waters, The Wanderings of Oisin, The Countess Cathleen and The King of the Great Clock Tower. However, AE identifies Aengus very clearly not only with divine love or joy, but also with the eternal desire which is the reflection of divine love in a fallen world, thus echoing Yeats's own dual depiction of him in the plays.

It is Angus the Young, an eternal joy becoming love, a love changing into desire, and leading onto earthly passion and forgetfulness of its own divinity. The eternal joy becomes love when it has first merged itself in form and images of
a divine beauty dance before it and lure it afar. This is the first manifested world, the Tirnanoge or World of Immortal Youth. The love is changed into desire as it is drawn deeper into nature, and this desire builds up the Mid-World or World of the Waters. And, lastly, as it lays hold of the earthly symbol of its desire it becomes on Earth that passion which is spiritual death.

(Candle 157-8)

Here in capsule form is Yeats's own theory of existence within creation: the spirit forgets its own divinity and journeys down the hierarchy of being in pursuit of false objects of desire. Yeats's plays are filled with these objects of desire, many of which take the form of "divine beauty"; immortal women, from the Witch Vivien in one of the earliest plays, to Niamh in Oisin, to the Hawk woman, to Fand, all lure mortal men with a promise they cannot fulfill. These false objects of desire are perhaps most conspicuous in The Shadowy Waters and The Wanderings of Oisin, where "shadows of unappeasable desire," in the form of the hound with one red ear chasing the hornless deer, or the young man chasing the girl with the golden apple in her hand, are central symbols. These shadows appeared at creation, says the Fomorian god Tethra, and constitute one of the two great sorrows he suffered then (the other being his ejection from paradise); they "signal the beginning of frustration and delusion" (Editors, DrC 20). When Forgael cries, "grant / me ... an hours / refuge from my own spirit that ever /
pursues" (DrC 55), Tethra sends him Doctora, but she too, as even Forgael realizes, is only one of these images:

I am heard
Tethra has bid a sign wake in the shield
The shadows that before the world began
Made him bow down upon his throne and weep
And that are in the waters and the winds always
The shadows of unappeasable desire,
A boy that follows upon flying feet
A girl that has an apple in her hand;
And I am blinded by a foam of dreams.

(TPBS 10-11)

This pursuit is ultimately the desire for the true opposite, the Self from which the individual spirit has been separated by creation.

The fountain of creation at the foot of the Sacred Hazel, a symbol AE makes much of in his book, occurs in various guises in quite a number of Yeats's plays. At creation, writes AE, the Sacred Hazel appears, whose branches are the gods, "and as the mystic night trembles into dawn, its leaves and blossoms and its starry fruit [all spirits] burgeon simultaneously and are shed over the waters of space" (Candle 154).²⁵ AE identifies this fountain as Conna's Well of Celtic legend. The "waters of space" are "the seven streams in the garden of Eden which Yeats also refers to, and what Mme Blavatsky calls "the differentiation of the 'Germ'"

²⁵This is another way of describing the Tree of Life of Kabbalastic and Magical traditions which Yeats made much of in his work.
[Manannan] of the Universe" at creation into the septenary hierarchy of conscious Divine powers, who are the active manifestations of the One Supreme Energy. They are the framers, shapers, and ultimately the creators of all the manifested Universe....

The description of creation as a stream of water flowing from the One is found also in Plotinus; Rist notes that,

we find among the descriptions of the One the statement that it is like a spring which not only never runs dry but always remains exactly as it was despite the stream of water that eternally flows from it.\(^7\)

Fountains and streams are referred to often by Yeats, and quite consciously, if his discussion of William Morris's use of similar symbols is any indication:

I do not think that it was accident ... that made William Morris ... celebrate the Green Tree and the goddess Habundian, and wells and enchanted waters in so many books. In The Well at the World's End green trees and enchanted waters are shown to us as they are understood by old writers, who thought that the generation of all things was through water....

\[(E & I 54)\]

A well or fountain as the source of creation appears in several plays, such as The King's Threshold, where it is specifically located in the garden of Eden at the foot of "old Adam's crab-tree" (VP1 303) and On Baile's Strand, where

\[26\] The Secret Doctrine, pp. 21-2.

Cuchulain uses this symbol to expound on the theory that the spirit weakens as it travels further away from creation:

If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me,
As certainly as if I had a son
And fought with him I should be deadly to him;
For the old fiery fountains are far off
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.  

(VP1 511)

As often as not, however, these symbols are used in reference to the end rather than the beginning of creation, when the seven streams will return to their source, and as such are important symbols of the seekers' quest in the plays. Forgael is seeking the island where the life of the world Leaps upward, as if all the streams o' the world Had run into one fountain.  

(CP 497)

At the end of another version he announces that our sail has passed
Even the wandering islands of the gods
And hears the roar of those streams where druids say
Time and the world and all things dwindle out.  

(DrC 285)

Seanchan, in The King's Threshold, has various visions of the garden of Eden as he nears death, and finally lies down to await death,

rolled up under the ragged thorns
That are upon the edge of those great waters Where all things vanish away.  

(VP1 287)

The Wise Man in The Hour-Glass, though more reluctant to leave this world, realizes that he too will soon die, saying,
The stream of the world has changed its course,
And with the stream my thoughts have run
Into some cloudy thunderous spring
That is its mountain source

(VP1 637)

Another, though more obscure, variation of this symbol occurs in *The Unicorn from the Stars*, where the dying Martin longs to climb the mountain of Abiegnos, which in Rosicrucian lore is the flat-topped mountain at the centre of the world on which is found "the great walled garden of Eden"; "It is a hard climb," says Martin, "Help me up. I must go on. The Mountain of Abiegnos is very high..." (VP1 710).

In yet another variation, the well becomes "St. Colman's well," the "blessed well" of the Druids, where men, seeking to find physical health, may instead find spiritual perfection, as in *The Cat and the Moon*, or where men seek immortal- ity, as in *At the Hawk's Well*. It is certain that all these wells and fountains are connected. In the very early play *Time and the Witch Vivien*, for example, the fountain plays two roles, first as the fountain of youth in which Vivien, who longs to hold onto life, beauty and power, gazes at herself, and then as a symbol of her death, since it is heard bubbling in the background as she loses the game of chance she has been playing and dies (VP1 1279). The well in *At the__

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Hawk's Well is clearly Connla's Well of creation myths; that Cuchulain, like Forgael, is seeking for perfection outside time rather than for immortality within it is more than plausible, particularly in view of his subsequent attempt to escape the confines of this world which is dramatized in The Only Jealousy of Emer.

IV. The Many

The fountain beneath the Hazel has broken.
Creation is astir. The Many are proceeding from the One. An energy or love or eternal desire has gone forth which seeks through a myriad forms of illusion for the infinite being it has left.

(The Candle of Vision 157)

At creation, then, innumerable beings emerge from the original Godhead. These beings are all equal; they are also unique, as Yeats stressed repeatedly in his writing. With words almost identical to those whispered to Michael by the angels in The Speckled Bird (32), Countess Cathleen

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29 On a letter to her from W. B. Yeats referring to the visions of Connla's Well that they experienced together, the clairvoyante Mrs. Hunter notes that "The magic well of Connla lies at the foot of a mountain of ash. Those who gaze therein may, if they can find a guide, be led to the Fount of Perpetual Youth. The ash berries fall into the waters and turn them to fire. Connla, the Druid, is the Guardian of the Well." Printed in Letters, pp. 293-4.
affirms that,

There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love,
Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world.

(VP1 69-71)

Though all emanate from the One, these spirits forget their divinity as they journey further and further away through creation, becoming lesser and lesser spirits until, finally, they forget their divinity entirely and identify themselves completely with the human body.

Each spirit undertakes its search alone, and progresses at its own pace through the cosmos, so that the cosmos becomes populated by an elaborate hierarchy of beings ranging from the One to man. Mme Blavatsky states this theory very succinctly.

The whole Kosmos is guided, controlled and animated by almost endless series of Hierarchies of sentient Beings, each having a mission to perform. They vary infinitely in their respective degrees of consciousness and intelligence; and to call them all pure Spirits is only to indulge in poetical fancy. Each of these Beings either was, or prepares to become, a man, if not in the present, then in a past or coming cycle.30

Spirits on various levels can be differentiated by the degree of materiality which they have achieved, for the journey

downward to humanity is characterized by a gradual acquisition by the spirit of more and more layers. The spirit acquires the most layers when it becomes human, for it adopts not only the grossest of material forms but also a personality which blinds it to its divine nature.

The soul clings to its new acquisitions, but it cannot begin the journey upward until it is willing to shed them, to let them go, as Paul Ruttledge teaches in *Where There is Nothing*. This is what Yeats considered physical death to be, merely a discarding of the form, personality and memories of this life in preparation for succeeding lives. The magician Dunn/MacLagan in *The Speckled Bird* elaborates on this concept when he says that the physical body grows healthier as the spirit weakens, but grows weaker as the spirit gets stronger -- thus the spirit regains its complete strength at death.

... the more we die here, the more we lose what makes up life, the [?] nearer we come to them [disembodied spirits], and ... when they descend to us and are born, they die in their own world. When one thinks deeply about spiritual things, and brings them near to one by accustoming [?] the mind's eye to see them and the mind's ear to hear them, one begins [?] an evocation of the life that prophecies away from this life, not only in the mind, but in the circumstances of life. The circumstances of life are merely thought....

(*The Speckled Bird* 209)

This world, being but a thought, is not real. In Yeats's philosophy none of the levels of existence at which the
A visionary woman once said to me, 'If we could only say to ourselves, with sincerity, "This passing moment is as good as any I shall ever know," we would perish instantly or become united to God.' I suppose because desire would be at an end.

(Memoirs 210)

Nevertheless, most spirits pursue this object first in one form, then another, through one existence, then another, not realizing that what they are seeking is their Higher Self, and that it is within them. But more of this later.

Yeats believed, with Swedenborg, that each level of being melds with the next "as though a hand were thrust within a hundred gloves, one glove outside another, and so there is a continual influx from God to man" (VB II 316). Such a complex hierarchy of being is virtually impossible to catalogue, particularly since Yeats embraced in his philosophy all the worlds described by philosophers, visionaries and magicians, by Thomas More, Swedenborg, Dante, Blake, AE, Irish peasants, all religious texts and the multifarious magical texts turning up in England at that time. Some of these texts, such as The Key of Solomon, which was translated by MacGregor Mathers for use by the Golden Dawn, did
in fact attempt to name and describe all the different types of gods, demons and spirits, and make for highly entertaining reading. As E. M. Butler writes of *The Key of Solomon* in his study, *Ritual Magic*, the author's "highly developed although very confused angelology seems not unlike an attempt to tabulate and describe the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands in Revelations." Nevertheless, since many of these levels are represented in Yeats's drama, some attempt must be made to sort them out.

Yeats was drawn to the ptolemaic cosmology as a metaphor for the universe, and referred to it in a number of plays, notably in *Where There is Nothing*, *The Countess Cathleen* (where the devils claim to be from the ninth, and therefore the highest, sphere of hell), and *The Land of Heart's Desire*. This theory, which divides the cosmos into nine concentric crystalline spheres, beyond which lies nothing, or God, is a useful tool for envisaging Yeats's understanding of the order of being within the cosmos. This world view was adopted by the Western magical tradition, and is described by R. Cavendish in his book, *The Black Arts*:

> In the early centuries after Christ the idea spread through the Mediterranean world that the soul comes originally from God and descends through the nine spheres to earth, where it is

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imprisoned in the human body: The soul longs for reunion with God and can achieve it by climbing back up through the spheres to heaven.\textsuperscript{32}

Yeats elaborates on this cosmology in his short story "Where There is Nothing":

'There are nine crystalline spheres, and on the first the Moon is fastened, on the second the planet Mercury, on the third the planet Venus, on the fourth the Sun, on the fifth the planet Mars, on the sixth the planet Jupiter, on the seventh the planet Saturn; these are the wandering stars; and on the eighth are fastened the fixed stars; but the ninth sphere is a sphere of the substance on which the breath of God moved in the beginning.'

'What is beyond that?' said the child.

'There is nothing beyond that; there is God.'

(M 184-5)

Nothing, or God, is, in Porphyry's terms, "not-being beyond Being."\textsuperscript{33} It is the unknowable Phaseless sphere of A Vision, and as such is referred to, but does not appear, in the plays. In the ninth sphere, "The substance on which the breath of God moved in the beginning," which can be equated with the First Principle or the One, can be placed Dana or Danu who, though she is referred to as the mother of the gods, does not appear in the plays, and Manannan who, as


\textsuperscript{33}Rist, Plotinus, p. 29.
the shadowy personification of fate, does. Other representatives of fate in the plays range from the Christian God, the "Light of Lights" in *The Countess Cathleen* and in *Calvary*, to beasts like the Unicorn and the Great Herne. Yeats deliberately linked the latter two figures to Zeus through the legend of Leda and the swan; the Unicorn is seen begetting with the queen in some versions of *The Player Queen* while, in *The Herne's Egg*, the Herne has sexual relations with his priestess, though he uses for this purpose the bodies of seven men, who mistakenly assume that they are tampering with his divine plan by raping the priestess. The play is, in fact, a bad joke played on the men, and particularly on Congal, by fate, or the elusive Great Herne.

The eighth sphere is the sphere of the "fixed stars"; "the Fixed Stars being the least changing things are the acts of whatever in that stream [of souls which represent reality for Yeats] changes least, and therefore of all souls that have found an almost changeless rest" (AV (A) 158). Here can be placed the perfected community of spirits of which Yeats speaks in his "The Seven Propositions." As we have seen,

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34 Helen Vendler misunderstands this point when she writes that in *The Herne's Egg* "The Otherworld is both omnipotent (the Great Herne's curses are deadly) and absurd--Attracta is raped by seven men, but on the morning after serenely asserts that it never happened, that there is no reality but the Great Herne," in Yeats's "Changing Metaphors for the Otherworld," *MD*, VII (1964), p. 319.
Yeats often described the paradise for which men long not as an undifferentiated unity or chaos, but as the unity-in-multiplicity (concord) which these spirits have achieved. This community, or "heaven," appears in many guises in the drama, but it is usually described with images of light and fire; it is the world of "bewildering lights" which is both the Faery Kingdom in *The Land of Heart's Desire* and the kingdom of Light of the Tuatha de Danaan (DrC 81). That Aengus and the Danaans should thus be separated from the rest of the gods, the wandering stars, and be one step closer to the ninth sphere is particularly appropriate since Aengus is the "divinity who first connects being with non-being" (*The Candle of Vision* 159). Shortly before his death, the Wise Man in *The Hour-Glass* states that "The sand has run out.... For I am going from the country of the seven wandering stars, and going to the country of the fixed stars" (VP1 636).

The wandering stars, the next six spheres (excluding for the moment the first sphere, the physical world), naturally include a great variety of spirits, both good and evil, since for Yeats the levels of spirits become thicker closer to earth. Yeats believed that these spirits, ranging from

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35 The same spirit will be both good and evil at some point, as Tethra declares, announcing that Forgael "shall be a destroying demon a thousand ages and then take on a shape of light" (TPBS 49).
the lowliest shades to the teaching spirits and guides of the universe, are spirits in one or another phase between human incarnations, that is between death and birth. This is the thesis of the "Soul in Judgment" chapter of A Vision, in which Yeats argues that each soul in between human incarnations goes through six different stages in order to shed the memories of one human life and prepare for the next. In the first four states are to be found all manner of ghosts and shades such as those who appear to the mediums in The Words Upon the Window-Pane, to the Young Man in The Dreaming of the Bones and to the Old Man in Purgatory. Once past these four phases, the spirits are freed of their identification with the past. They may remain in the fifth phase for centuries, with no set identity of their own, and take on various roles, as "guardians of wells or temples" (AV (B) 233) such as the Hawk woman in At the Hawk's Well, or as teaching or guiding spirits, such as Bricriu becomes for Emer in The Only Jealousy of Emer, and the Morrígú for Cuchulain in The Death of Cuchulain; they are also the Irish fairies or the Sidhe, the "shape-changers of legend," as Yeats calls them in A Vision, who appear in a number of the plays. In the sixth

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36 This link between the souls of the dead and the fairies is made implicitly in A Vision; it is explicit in Evan Wentz's The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries, (London: Oxford U. Press, 1911), a book which, as Kathleen Raine has noted, was in large part based on evidence provided by Yeats. Writes Wentz, "Fairyland is a state or condition, realm or
phase, they must prepare themselves to re-enter the world and adopt a new personality, and they may try to tamper with their future destiny by manipulating this world, becoming "frustrators" (AV (B) 235). Yeats blamed much of the confusion of A Vision on just such frustrators, while in his early novel, The Speckled Bird, the magician MacLagan scorns séances because of the frustrators' inevitable presence there.

Yeats believed that all these spirits, like the Irish fairies, are plastic and changeable because without a solid body such as man possesses. These spirits can change form and appearance at will, or take on the appearance expected by the viewer. Yeats stated this explicitly in his Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry, when he said, writing of the fairies and lower orders of spirits,

> behind the visible are chains on chains of conscious beings, who are not of heaven but of earth, who have no inherent form but change according to their whim, or the mind that sees them. (FFT 2)

Elsewhere he wrote that "Their world is very different from ours, and they can but appear in forms borrowed from our limited consciousness..."("Invoking the Irish Fairies," Uncollected Prose, I, 247). The forms which they adopt, very much like, if not the same as, that wherein civilized and uncivilized men alike place the souls of the dead, in company with other invisible beings" (Quoted from p. 18 by Raine, Yeats and the Occult, p. 86).
particularly once they had shed the 'husk' of their former self after the fourth phase, is therefore of little significance, which is why it does not much matter that Cuchulain's immortal love keeps changing form. Bricriu appears in the body of Cuchulain, while in The Player Queen the ghost of the Queen's father appears in the living body of a beggar who falls asleep whenever the King takes over. The people threaten to execute the beggar for his antics while under the power of the king, but he only laughs, explaining,

'I laugh because I am breath. You shall be blown away because you are against my daughter. Come on and twist my cloudy neck.'

(MPQ, Draft 16, 235)

Because spirits are so changeable, and also because he accepted everyone's hierarchy of spirits, believing them interchangeable, Yeats often mixed them in his work, as for example in The Countess Cathleen, where in one long scene Cathleen and Aleel argue as to whether he has been visited by Aengus or by some "angelical being." It does not matter, Yeats would say, since for him, as for the Irish peasantry at large, they are alternate metaphors for the same truth: "Christianity and the old nature faith have lain down side by side in the cottages, and I could proclaim that peace as loudly as I can among the kingdoms of poetry, . . ." (VP1 1290).
Yeats was doubtless aware of the confusion that innumerable successions of discarnate spirits would cause his audiences and readers, since the published versions of the plays, while still retaining a number of supernatural characters, contain considerably fewer than do the unpublished versions. This is certainly the case with The Shadowy Waters, most of whose original cast consisted of the mythological gods of darkness, the Seabars or Fomorians; much of the action develops around their fear and hatred of Forgael, who has become their master, and their even stronger hatred of the gods of light. In the published versions all these gods have been eliminated and replaced by grey birds representing the souls of the dead, who lead Forgael to the end of the world. In the case of this play, however, the elimination of the gods was not entirely his own idea, but was urged upon Yeats by George Moore. Moore describes the role he played in Ave, the first volume of his autobiography Hail and Farewell. He explains, in his usual mordant fashion, that in 1899, Yeats had come to Tillyra [home of the dramatist Edward Martyn] from Coole a few days before, and had read us "The Shadowy Waters," a poem that he had been working on for more than seven years, using it as a receptacle or storehouse for all the fancies that had crossed his mind during that time, and these were so numerous that the pirate-ship ranging the Shadowy Waters came to us laden to the gunnel with Fomorians, beaked and unbeaked, spirits of Good and Evil of various repute, and, so far as we could understand the poem, these accompanied a metaphysical pirate of ancient Ireland cruising in the unknown waters of the
North Sea in search of some ultimate kingdom. We admitted to Yeats, Edward and I, that no audience would be able to discover the story of the play, and we confessed ourselves among the baffled that would sit bewildered and go out raging against the poet. Our criticism did not appear to surprise Yeats; he seemed to realize that he had knotted and entangled his skein till no remedy short of breaking some of the threads would avail, and he eagerly accepted my proposal to go over to Coole to talk out the poem with him, and to redeem it, if possible from the Fomorians.  

The editors of the manuscript versions of this play posit that Moore may well have done more harm than good; they argue that by replacing all gods with various types of birds, fate, and other vague symbols Yeats greatly weakened his play (DrC 294). Nevertheless Yeats, though more than a little reluctantly, continued to follow the advice of others, and to reluctantly, continued to follow the advice of others, and to prune from the published versions the profusion of discarnate spirits encountered in the early versions. Thus in the later versions of The Countess Cathleen, while we still are presented with evil spirits such as Orchil who rises out of hell at Cathleen's death along with her "vapoury multitude / Of women alluring devils with soft laughter" (VP1 157), we are spared the thivishes and other damned souls who "whimper and fade" at the edge of life, and at great length at the edges of the play. Yeats explained his reasons for the change;

it seems that my people of the waters and my unhappy dead, in the third act, cannot keep their supernatural essence, but must put on too much of our mortality, in an ordinary theatre. I am told I must abandon a meaning or two and make my merchants carry away the treasure themselves.  

(VP1 1289)

The first sphere is the physical world, a world not nearly so separate from the others as might be supposed. Many of Yeats's protagonists, like Deirdre, Decima, Paul Ruttledge, Cuchulain, Andrew in The Unicorn, Forgael and Oisin, to name but a few, are wanderers, wandering through life because they cannot, in Paul's words, "rise in the darkness under the stars" and "leap from cloud to cloud" (VP1 1080). At his death-bed, freed at last, Paul welcomes the Unicorn who will accompany him on his journey up through the spheres, but then, in an interesting twist, balks at going beyond the seventh sphere of the wandering stars, Saturn:

That is right, that is right, take me up in your brazen claws. But no--no--I will not go out beyond Saturn into the dark. Take me down--down to that field under the earth, under the roots of the grave.

(VP1 1163-4)

That men are spirits temporarily residing in a human body is one of the most basic tenets in all the plays. Thus Deirdre says to Naoise before he goes off to fight Conchubar in Deirdre,
Bend and kiss me now,
For it may be the last before our death.
And when that's over, we'll be different:
Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.38

This is the whole point of The Hour-Glass, and it is something which many characters in the plays take for granted, though for the Wise Man in that play it is a bitter lesson. Nevertheless, some are closer to being free of their bodies than others, for the hierarchy continues within our own world as well.

While it is clear from the outcome of a number of the plays that men may reach perfection, and shed the mortal condition, at any time, Yeats argues in A Vision that most spirits must undergo a minimum of twenty-eight lives on earth, half of them as subjective, or antithetical, men, the other half as objective, or primary, men, in order to savour and assimilate all types of experiences possible before they can begin their journey back up through the spheres to the Phaseless sphere. In a number of plays, particularly in The Only Jealousy of Emer and The Player Queen, Yeats seems to be consciously creating characters who are at different

38That death is transformation and not obliteration is the message of Deirdre and other plays which end in death. That, as Vendler points out in "Changing Metaphors for the Otherworld," p. 309, "the promised land that Forgael is headed for bears suspicious resemblances to death," and that three other early plays end with death may well be significant, but not in the way that Vendler imagines it.
phases on the Lunar Wheel, and critics such as Vendler, Nathan and F. A. C. Wilson have had a field day identifying the phases to which each of the characters belong. The characters who appear most frequently in Yeats's drama, Cuchulain and the fool, are at opposite ends of the Wheel, the former nearing total subjectivity, the latter total objectivity. The fool is the closest of all mortals to discarnate beings (closer than even the saint), for he inhabits the last incarnate phase of the Lunar Wheel, phase 28; in A Vision Yeats says of him that

He is but a straw blown in the wind, with no mind but the wind and no act but a nameless drifting and turning, and is sometimes called "The Child of God." ... at his best he would know all wisdom if he could know anything.  

\[(AV \ (B) \ 182)^{39}\]

This is the role which the fool plays in the drama. In The Hour-Glass, the fool is the only one who knows the truth, but he won't (or can't) speak it. In early drafts of The Player Queen, on the other hand, the fool Mad Michael does speak, but in such a rambling fashion that no one (not even the editor of the play) understands him. The fool sees and understands the world which borders on this one as clearly as

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\(^{39}\) On the Kabbalarian Tree of Life (a favourite symbol of Yeats's), which is made up of 22 paths linking the sephiroth from Malkus (earth) to Kether (not-being beyond Being), the last path before the attainment of the God-Head or Kether is the path of the fool.
he does the physical world, and talks about both inter-changeably; in this he resembles other visionaries in the plays such as the witches in On Baile's Strand, the musicians in the "Noh" plays and the attendants in A Full Moon in March, who seem to know everything that will affect the protagonists of the plays, but are unable to change the outcome. They are in some senses the touchstones of reality in the plays. On one level at least Christ in Calvary and The Resurrection plays the same role. He is the saviour, the embodiment of hope, but is also a victim, because though he understands the truth, and straddles this plane and the next, he cannot really influence either:

One final knot in Yeats's hierarchy of being remains to be untangled before we proceed to study the interaction of the various planes of being in the drama. Since "nothing exists but a stream of souls, [and] ... all knowledge is biography" (VP1 935), it follows that, for Yeats as for Eastern mystics, everything around us, even seemingly inanimate matter, is imbued with a soul and is a part of the hierarchy through which all souls descend and ascend. Yeats refers to this possibility in his poem, "He Thinks of His Past Greatness When a Part of the Constellations of Heaven," in which a Forgael-like character states that, having been "a hazel tree ... hung [with] / The Pilot Star and the Crooked Plough / ... in times out of mind," he later became
"a rush that horse's tread" before becoming a man (VE 177). Though Yeats omits the possibility entirely from his discussion of the soul's multiple phases of being in A Vision, this theme is dramatized most explicitly in The Herne's Egg, where he plays with the belief that, if a man commits a lowly deed, he may be reincarnated as a beast; Congal in this play will be reincarnated as an ass. Obviously Yeats was influenced in this by Shri Purohit Swami, with whom he was spending the winter of 1937 during which he wrote the play, and by his rediscovery in the last two years of his life of The Upanishads (which he helped the Swami translate) and of Eastern thought generally, a rediscovery he made much of in his letters to AE.

Yeats quite willingly integrated this philosophy into his own metaphysics, just as he did so many other religious systems throughout his life. They are all metaphors for a truth we cannot comprehend; little more can be said. It is best to bear in mind Yeats's remorse, expressed in his journal, after he had argued the truth of reincarnation too forcefully to Maud Gonne:

I remember a pang of conscience. Ought I not to say, 'The whole doctrine of the reincarnation of the soul is hypothetical. It is the most plausible of the explanations of the world, but can we say more than that?' or some like sentence. (Memoirs 48)
V. Conflict

Spirits on all levels of existence interact in Yeats's plays, and this interaction manifests itself in various forms of conflict. The strife between immortals is less intense than that between mortals and immortals, since, as Yeats wrote in a paraphrase of Swedenborg, spirits are not "divided from spirit[s] as men are from each other, for they share each other's thoughts and life..." (V & B, I, 316). Thus the conflict of the perfected community of spirits is more like a dance between opposites, a dance which cannot cease until they are joined in the fulness beyond division. In the eyes of several envious mortals in the plays, this divine conflict is a joyous, never-ending battle for which they long. In On Baile's Strand, Cuchulain in disgust compares the warfare between immortals to the petty squabbles of mortality:

though they love to blow a smoking coal
Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
Are full of glory, and heart-uplifting pride,
And not like this.

(VP1 522)

Martin Hearne, in The Unicorn from the Stars, has a vision in which he claims to visit 'Paradise,' and describes it thus:

... I have seen the shining people. They were all doing one thing or another, but not one of them was at work. All that they did was but the overflowing of their idleness, and their days were a dance bred of the secret frenzy of their hearts, or a battle where the sword made a sound that was like laughter.

(VP1 688)
This is the battle of which Paul Ruttledge speaks when he cries that he wants, "not the fighting of men in red coats, that formal, soon-finished fighting, but the endless battle, the endless battle" (VP1 1097).

The battle between mortals and immortals is more bitter, and much more dramatic, since they are opposites in every sense, and "die each other's life, live each other's death." The two worlds, the one visible, the other invisible, are present in most of the plays, and such characters as the fools and the musicians are very much at home in both of them. Their opposition is underscored by a passage purportedly written by a beggar on the walls of Babylon, and quoted by the Wise Man in *The Hour-Glass*:

There are two living countries, the one visible and the one invisible; and when it is winter with us it is summer in that country, and when the November winds are up among us it is lambing-time there.

(VP1 578)

Many of Yeats's plays are actually set on the border between these two worlds, and the encounters between incarnate and discarnate figures take place on these borders. 40

One such border, perhaps Yeats's favourite, is a wind-

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swept shore separating this world from the sea, and is the setting of quite a number of plays, such as *The Golden Helmet*, *On Baile's Strand* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer*. This setting is an integral part of the symbolic structure of these plays, a structure which Yeats was obviously tightening in *The Wanderings of Oisin* when he changed the meeting-place of Oisin and the goddess Niamh from a "vale" to "the dove grey edge of the sea" (VE 2). The sea in Yeats's work has a wide range of meaning, and has thus acquired, in B. Bjersby's words, "a symbolic life as changeable as the sea itself."41 In the drama, however, the sea is a consistent symbol: it is both "Henry More's Anima Mundi, Wordsworth's 'immortal sea which brought us hither'" (M 346), and the home of dis­carnate spirits who are inimical to man; as such it repre­sents the world between lives. The sea is the home of the sea-gods such as the Fomor in *The Shadowy Waters*, the Red Man and Manannan in *The Golden Helmet*, and Fand and Bricriu in *The Only Jealousy*, who are all in perpetual conflict with man. Many mortal protagonists would agree with Conall in *The Green Helmet* that

> we have nothing to fear that has not come up from the tide; The rocks and the bushes cover whoever made that noise, But the land will do us no harm.

(VP1 422-3)

That *The Shadowy Waters* is set on the sea itself is significant in this context. Forgael's voyage has already taken him far from human life; the sea links him with the Fomor and separates him from his human companions, and it is obvious that despite Aibric's urging his fate is sealed; he can no longer return to mortality.

The sea most explicitly represents the world between lives in *The Only Jealousy*. The notes to the play posit that the sea is the "womb" of humanity which has rejected man, and to which he strives to return as he wanders through life, bewildered and alone. The play opens as a solitary seabird is cast out of the sea at daybreak onto the shore; the storm-battered bird's plight resembles "the loneliness of the first crab or crayfish that climbed ashore and turned lizard" (VP1 571) of which Yeats speaks in the notes. The opening lyrics concentrate on the tremendous difference between the sea and the land, and especially on the shock of the bird as it is thrown from one to the other. The bird's helplessness is reminiscent of Cuchulain's impotence in the face of his

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42 I disagree very strongly with Bushruil's assumption that the sea in this play signifies "the material world," in *Verse Plays of W. B. Yeats*, p. 9. Its setting on the sea is in keeping with Yeats's understanding of the play as a dream vision, when he writes that "the whole picture as it were moves together—sky and sea and cloud are as it were actors. It is deliberately without human characters" (L 425).
destiny at the end of the preceding play, *On Baile's Strand*, when he battles vainly but furiously with the sea for three days before falling into a trance.

Other specific borders in the plays include Connla's Well in *At the Hawk's Well* and in *The Cat and the Moon*, which as the well of immortality separates the mortal realm from the immortal one, and is the meeting place of Cuchulain and the Hawk woman, and of the lame and blind men with the Holy Man; the "malevolent woods" of *The Countess Cathleen*, *Deirdre*, and *Land of Heart's Desire*, in which strange and evil beings wander in the fading light of day; the ruined ancestral home in *Purgatory*, Jonathan Swift's home in *Words Upon the Window-Pane*, and the ruined Abbey of Corcomroe in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, where the living meet the ghosts of the dead; and the mountain-top in *The Herne's Egg*, where Congal is finally done in by the Great Herne. In *The Death of Cuchulain* the setting is not specified at the beginning of the play, but we are told that "The scene is set," presumably for his death; Cuchulain chides Eithne as she is mentioning coming dangers, saying,

Spoken too loudly and too near the door;  
Speak low if you would speak about my death,  
Or not in that strange voice exulting in it.  
Who knows what ears listen behind the door?  

(*VP1 1055*)

In other plays no setting is given, but the weary itinerant musicians, who are all-seeing, all-knowing, and yet helpless
to control the action, are clearly travellers along the border, belonging to neither world but commenting on both.

The conflict between mortals and immortals that occurs at these borders can take the form of good against evil, as in The Countess Cathleen and in such simple allegories as The Hour-Glass and The Cat and the Moon; evil in Yeats's terms is nothing more than "the strain one upon another of opposites" (M 357). In The Shadowy Waters, the Fomorians plot to kill Forgael because they resent his mastery, while in The Great Herne, the personification of 'God' or fate easily crushes those who oppose him. In most plays, however, the conflict is between equals, opposites who are drawn to each other out of some unfulfilled need. The ensuing strife usually takes the form either of a war between the sexes, the spiritual being assuming the role of the Beloved and of spiritual temptress, or of a war between man and his guardian angel or daimon, who is his true opposite, that other self which exists in the opposite, or discarnate, state.

Helen Vendler asserts that "the Otherworld [is] seen in the early plays chiefly in relation to sexual love..."^43 Actually, this is true to some extent of most of the plays, because the vague, unspecified desire which is the desire

for Unity of Being takes its first and most obvious form as the desire for union with one's sexual opposite. Immortal women seek out the love of mortal men in such early plays as *Time and the Witch Vivien* and *The Island of Statues*, but already Yeats was wary of the seduction of the other world. In these plays, as in the later *The Wanderings of Oisin*, *At the Hawk’s Well* and *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, immortal women are shown to be as dangerous as they are attractive. Writes E. Engelberg, "*The Island of Statues* makes it very clear that when supernatural creatures intrude into—or are intruded upon by—the mortal world, the result is disastrous..."  

*The Wanderings of Oisin* describes a beautiful goddess from a land "knowing nor tumult nor hate nor strife" (VE 9) who falls in love with Oisin because of the tales of his exploits in battle. With the best of intentions, she persuades him to leave behind this world of pain and strife for her world. The voyage has disastrous results for both Niamh and Oisin, though, as Yeats later explains in "The Circus Animal's Desertion," "What cared I that set him on to ride, / I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride?" (VE 629). The islands to which Niamh leads him are merely worlds of

44 E. Engelberg, "He Too was in Arcadia," *In Excited Reverie*, p. 71.
"Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose" (VE 629), and when Oisin finally shakes her influence and returns to Ireland, breaking her heart in the process, Ireland is as alien to him as were the enchanted islands. Fand's motives for seducing Cuchulain in The Only Jealousy of Emer are rather more selfish. Fand, who too often has been understood as a perfected immortal being, also desires the love of a mortal man and says, "because I long I am not complete." Although she represents on the symbolic level the perfection of beauty not possible in this world, Fand is on the dramatic level an incomplete being who needs Cuchulain in order to complete herself, and thus free herself from the Lunar Wheel. She does not offer Cuchulain completion or perfection, but merely oblivion:

When your mouth and my mouth meet  
All my round shall be complete  
Imagining all its circles run;  
And there shall be oblivion  
Even to quench Cuchulain's drouth,  
Even to still that heart.  

(VP1 555)

Cuchulain's meeting with a goddess in At the Hawk's Well proves no more rewarding. Seduced by the dance of the Hawk-woman, Cuchulain forgets to watch the well of immortality and misses the stream of water that gushes from it. In this play, however, the goddess's motives are not completely selfish. She is also "the guardian of the well"—as the guardian of the threshold of another world, she refused passage to those who, like the young, cocky Cuchulain, have
not proven themselves to be worthy.

It must be emphasized that mortal men desire this union with immortal women just as strongly. However, in Yeats's world view, the hound with the red ear cannot catch up to the white deer until the end of all things, when perfect union will be possible. It follows that once the object of desire has been attained within creation, it is no longer the true object of desire, since it is not a true opposite, and the seeker must now search for its true opposite, or daimon. Yeats makes this particularly clear in The Only Jealousy where, in the notes to the play, he explains why the middle-aged Cuchulain is quite right to reject Fand:

Young, we discover an opposite through our love; old, we discover our love through an opposite neither hate nor despair can destroy, because it is another self, a self that we have fled in vain. (VPI 571)

Now that Fand's love, which Cuchulain has longed for all his life, is within easy reach, he must turn from it and seek his true opposite, who is in the play the deformed Bricriu, the primary hunchback of phase 26 of the Great Wheel who perfectly opposes the antithetical warrior of the middle

45 Note the resemblance to Shelley's Athanase, of which Yeats wrote, "We know too that had Prince Athanase been finished it would have described the finding of Pandemos, the [Morning] Star's Love genius, and the growing weary of her, and the coming of its true genius Urania at the coming of death, as the day finds the Star at evening" (E & I 88).
phases. That Bricriu is Cuchulain's true opposite, his other self, is made dramatically obvious in the play, since Bricriu assumes the comatose body of Cuchulain. The daimon, as Yeats wrote in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," which he finished just before he began The Only Jealousy of Emer, must lead "his victim to whatever among works not impossible is the most difficult" (M 361).

The daimon is not wholly benevolent, as Yeats hastened to add; it also needs completion, which is why it seeks out its mortal opposite: "the Daimon comes not as like to like but seeking its own opposite, for man and Daimon feed the hunger in one another's hearts" (M 335); it is thus fitting that Bricriu, who acts as the daimon of both Cuchulain and Emer in the play, should be the god of discord of Irish mythology,46 and destroys both Cuchulain's chance to escape with Fand and Emer's hope of recovering Cuchulain's love.47 Nevertheless, the daimon is man's guiding spirit, his guardian angel. This is in keeping with the magical tradition espoused

46 Writes V. Moore, "the Celtic evil gods are not absolutely perverse; they combine cruelty with paternity--'one of the strangest and most interesting aspects of the Celtic religion.'" Unicorn, p. 55, quoting from Arbois de Jubainville.

47 For a more complete discussion of the role of the daimon in this play see H. C. Martin, "A Re-Interpretation of The Only Jealousy of Emer by W. B. Yeats," M.A. Thesis (Fredericton, N.B., 1973).
by the Golden Dawn, which teaches that union with his guardian angel is the first and most important of the magician's goals. Writes Israel Regardie,

Hence there is, in reality, one perfect ritual in Magic, one goal which takes precedence over all others: the invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel, union with whom should even precede the invocations of the Gods or the Universal Essences.... The soul seeks first and delivers its life into the governance of its Daimon, under whose guidance the Gods themselves may be supplicated.48

The key to understanding the role of the daimon in the drama is to discover the choices which it is presenting to its mortal opposite in the play, the "hardest work" which it has chosen; it does not matter whether it is motivated by benevolence or by malice.

A case in point is The Death of Cuchulain. In this play Yeats's immortal goddess appears as the Morrigu; though she is still in love with Cuchulain, she has now taken on the role of his daimon to guide him as he approaches death. That the Beloved should become the daimon is given precedence in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," where Yeats writes that

my imagination runs from Daimon to sweetheart, and I divine an analogy that evades the intellect ... it may be 'sexual love,' which is 'founded upon spiritual hate,' is an image of the warfare

of man and Daimon, and I even wonder if there may not be some secret communion, some whispering in the dark between Daimon and sweetheart.

(M 336)

In the 1925 edition of *A Vision* Yeats even claimed, though he later changed his mind, that the daimon is always of the opposite sex, and that therefore the relation of man to daimon "may create a passion like that of sexual love" (*AV* (A) 27). If the Morrigu in this play is understood to be Cuchulain's daimon, and if it is further understood that the daimon can be motivated equally by benevolence and malice, much of the confusion created by her role in the play is easily cleared up.

An essay by Philip Marcus, "Myth and Meaning in *The Death of Cuchulain*," documents the incredible confusion that has ensued from critics' attempts to untangle the Morrigu's motives in the play. But while Marcus argues that the Morrigu is in fact Cuchulain's daimon, he nevertheless falls into the same trap as have the critics to whose interpretations he takes exception. Studying the role of the Morrigu in the play, he first sifts through all the interpretations which claim that she is evil, since she engineers Cuchulain's death. Marcus, citing the authority of the Celticist W. M. Hennessy, argues conclusively that she is in fact "benevolent and protective" towards Cuchulain, and is even, "'Apparently
his tutelary goddess'. What Marcus does not understand is that the Morrigu can be both benevolent and antagonistic at the same time, as Cuchulain's opposite who must lead him to the most difficult of choices. Because he understands her to be friendly towards Cuchulain, Marcus takes this to mean that she must try to dissuade him, however unsuccessfully, from meeting his death. He ends,

Ultimately, however, Cuchulain is not prevented from fighting and dying; and the only thing the Morrigu can do is arrange a dance in which Emer rages against the heads of her husband's slayers....

In fact, the Morrigu knows that for Cuchulain, now an old man, death is timely and fitting. Cuchulain also seems prepared for it, saying at the beginning of the play, though he knows that there is virtually no chance of winning the battle,

I am for the fight,
I and my handful are set upon the fight;
We have faced great odds before, a straw decided.

(VP1 1054)

Once Cuchulain has been led to and has accepted his fate, the

50 Here is another example of a critic who misunderstands the meaning of death for Yeats; Marcus argues that the play "ends on a grim note" (p. 144).
51 Marcus, p. 139.
Morrigu arranges the dance, not because it is the only thing in her power to do, but because it is the fitting thing to do. Cuchulain has not thwarted the Morrigu's designs, as Marcus argues, nor has he been thwarted by her; she guides him to his death, for which he prepares himself by laying to rest all the ghosts of his life as they appear before him, and he goes off to join the spirits on a higher plane of existence who are described in the companion poem "Cuchulain Comforted."

One final type of encounter between mortals and immortals bears some mention, and that is the altercations between the living and the ghosts of the dead in the plays. These dead spirits continue to haunt the scene of their past lives because, for whatever reason, they have not yet been able to let go of the personality and memories adopted in these lives. The ghosts in The Dreaming of the Bones actually need the help of the living in order to expiate their guilt at betraying Ireland to the Normans; they are doomed to wander around Ireland until they are forgiven their crime by a living Irishman. Purgatory adds an interesting twist to the theme of the mutual dependence of the living and the dead. In that play it is hinted that the dead mother will not be able to leave the scene of her crime and rest until her son, who is still living, forgives her her crime.
Such is the relation of mortals and immortals; it follows that the conflict within creation is most intense in the physical world, since mortals are the beings most differentiated, and therefore most separated from each other. The conflict of mortals takes its most exaggerated form in The Player Queen, the play which Yeats was writing at the same time as he devised his theory of the mask. In one version or another, every character is pitted against another diametrically opposed to itself—Septimus against another actor, Peter, in some versions, against the Prime Minister in others; Decima against Septimus on one level, against the real queen on another; the queen against her heroine, the martyr St. Octema, and so on. These opposites must struggle continually; as Septimus says of his relationship with Decima, "there is between her and me a struggle, a trial which of the two is master..." (MPQ, Drafts 8-10, 81). Many of these pairs are on opposite sides of the Lunar Wheel. In other plays, such as On Baile's Strand and The Unicorn From the Stars, the protagonists are subjective, intuitive men who are pitted against objective, rational men such as King Concubar and Thomas, who also represent the repressive forces of the objective era in which the protagonists are living.

The most common form of conflict among mortals, as is to be expected, is sexual love, of which Cuchulain says:
I think that all deep passion is but a kiss
In the mid battle, and a difficult peace
'Twixt oil and water, candles and dark night.
Hill-side and hollow, the hot-footed sun
And the cold sliding slippery-footed moon,
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of his (this) long 'stablished ground.

In draft 16 of The Player Queen, Decima explains why true
love must inevitably result in conflict. She argues that
the quarrels between lovers stem from the realization that,
no matter how close they become, they must always remain
separate beings.

When he and I have quarreled
I dread the very mouse that squeaks under the floor
Yet cannot keep myself from arguing because
As I would have my soul and his soul one
There is no differing thought too slight to seem
As it were a wedge thrust down into the soul.

Septimus shares Decima's feelings. Although she treats him
decidedly badly, and Nona, who also loves him, treats him
extremely well, he chooses Decima over Nona—what matters
is not that love brings tranquillity, but that it kindle a
fire between the lovers (MPQ 213). Even an old woman has
little sympathy for Septimus when she hears that Decima has
broken his heart, for she says,

What is that heartbreak but the fiery nest
(The phoenix nest in life is but born of life)
Where life, the holy phoenix, comes from life?

(MPQ, draft 16, 216).
Many of the plays stress the strength of this mortal passion, a passion which discarnate spirits, whose battles are less fierce, and therefore less passionate and life-giving, both fear and envy. In *The Shadowy Waters* the Fomor become weak in the presence of "hearts that bend to love" (DrC 58-9), and Forgael's love for Decima is a strong enough bond to protect Dectora from their grasp. *Deirdre*, a play mainly about mortal passion, documents the force of mortal love when it becomes hatred. *Deirdre* jilts King Conchubar and runs off with Naoise. The king plots to kill Naoise, and lures the lovers back to his kingdom by promising them clemency. Unhappily, the lovers believe him and return. The play argues that they were foolish to think that a love which had been so strong could diminish in strength when it turned to jealousy and hatred. The king's desire for revenge is so overpowering that it can only be quenched when his rival lies dead at his feet; it completely overshadows all sense of honour and justice. That this death also leads to the death of Deirdre seems of secondary importance to him. Even in his grief at her death, Conchubar asserts that

I, being King, did right
In choosing her most fitting to be Queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway.

*(VP1 388)*
The elaborate hierarchy of being which Yeats believed in, and which is represented by a vast array of spirits in the drama, can be understood as a chain linking the lowest creature in the universe to the highest, in "that universal mind, wherein every mood is a soul and every thought is a body" (Uncollected Prose, I, 247). Each spirit journeys down this chain and back up again, manifesting itself as every link in the chain in order to experience all knowledge, before it can return to the womb from which it was hurled at creation, the One or complete Unity of which it is an integral part.

While undergoing this journey, the spirit is in constant conflict with spirits on all levels of being, for conflict is a manifestation of the division caused by creation, and cannot be overcome until all opposites are reconciled in the final Unity. Conflict is in fact good and necessary, for through the struggle with its opposite/enemy, the spirit can eventually gain the knowledge and self-knowledge with which it will successfully negotiate its journey, and which will result in the elimination of conflict, the removal of desire, and the union with its higher Self.
Though the plays centre on mortal protagonists, the struggles they depict are best understood in the context of this hierarchy of being, since many mortals in the plays either know, are told, or remember that they were once discarnate beings, and that their mortal garb will be "but empty cage and tangled wire" (Deirdre, CP1 202) when their spirit has escaped. Every spirit in the plays is finally both god and man, both mortal and immortal, since its ultimate reality encompasses both. Just as reality is a sphere, though manifested within creation as a gyre, or even part of a gyre, so the reality of the spirit is a whole of which any manifestation, on any level of the hierarchy of being, is but a small part. The diverse struggles of the multifarious spirits in the drama are thus, in the final analysis, the struggles of one spirit, who works, painfully but surely, to reverse the disintegration brought about by creation.

The following chapter will study the theme of memory, of forgetting, learning (acquiring memories) and remembering (dreaming back) in the plays, as it illuminates in more specific terms the journey of one spirit through discarnate and incarnate states of being.
Chapter III: Forgetting, Learning, Remembering
and Forgetting: The Journey of the Spirit
through Discarnate to Incarnate
Life and Back

I

The theme of memory, or more specifically of forgetting, learning (acquiring memories), and remembering (dreaming back), pervades the drama of W. B. Yeats, and is one of Yeats's favourite vehicles for integrating his theories about the nature and history of incarnate and discarnate spirits as unobtrusively as possible into the drama. This theme links a large number of the plays, for it figures prominently in such early works as The Countess Cathleen, The Shadowy Waters and The Wanderings of Oisin, and grows in importance through The Only Jealousy of Emer and all the purgatorial plays right to The Death of Cuchulain. While this theme forms an integral part of many plays, its complete meaning must nevertheless be pieced together through a close collation of Yeats's philosophical treatises and all available early versions of the plays.

According to the philosophy thus pieced together, every spirit within creation goes through an almost interminable
cycle of forgetting, learning, remembering and forgetting, from its first descent into the gyres of time, through its journey around the phases of the Lunar Wheel, until its final return to the Sphere of Eternity. This cycle of forgetting and remembering is first undertaken by the spirit when it leaves the state of unity (innocence in Blakean terms) to journey through disparate experience, sampling separately every type of experience possible before integrating all of it into a greater innocence, a greater unity. This theory is beautifully illustrated in Yeats's poem "Shepherd and Goatherd," which describes the soul of Robert Gregory as it integrates the essence of the experiences of this life and then forgets its vehicle, memory, on its journey back to the beginning:

Jaunting, journeying
To his own dayspring,
He unpacks the loaded pern
Of all 'twas pain or joy to learn,
Of all that he had made.

... Knowledge he shall unwind
Through victories of the mind,
Till, clambering at the cradle side,
He dreams himself his mother's pride,
All knowledge lost in trance
Of sweeter ignorance.

(VE 342-3)

The spirit first forgets its original unity, its complete self, at creation. It is left with a vague longing for unity which it seeks to quench by pursuing first one object of desire and then another down through the hierarchy
of being. As part of this journey most spirits undertake a series of physical incarnations; before birth the spirit chooses—or has imposed on it by its destiny, those spirits who make up the external forces of the universe—the circumstances and personality into which it will be born. During its span on earth this personality accumulates a set of memories, memories that it truly believes in. Because life on earth is bitter, these memories are often painful, a curse as much as they are a blessing, and the soul (that part of the spirit which is incarnated) is torn between a desire to forget them, to shake itself free of these memories and this life, and a desire to cling to them, to believe in them as its sole reality.

Memory itself is specifically linked to mortality in the plays. Human beings have both memories and consciences, while discarnate beings have neither; "there's nothing will stop in their heads, / They've such poor memories, though they weep for it," says Aleel in The Countess Cathleen (VP1 55). Yeats stresses this point in his allegory The Cat and the Moon, in which, as he claimed in the notes, "the blind man was the body, the lame man was the soul" (VP1 807). In the play the blind man, the body, remembers everything: "since I went blind in the tenth year of my age, I have been hearing and remembering the knowledges of the world" (VP1
The lame man, the soul, forgets everything: "Nothing stays in my head, Blind Man" (VP1 797), he laments.

Memory thus constitutes one of the most important differences between incarnate beings and discarnate spirits, and is a major cause of the conflict and rivalry between them. Many mortal protagonists in the plays envy spirits their freedom from sorrow and passion, from the pain and sheer weight of memories, which tie man to the earth perhaps more than anything else. Discarnate spirits, on the other hand, often envy men's memories, their record of actions, loves and passions which the spirits, being without bodies, cannot enjoy: "deprived of the living present by death, they can create nothing, or, in the Indian phrase, can originate no new Karma" (VP1 968). "All power is from the body," Yeats wrote elsewhere, and they have only spirit. The daimons and teaching spirits who guide men through their destinies are said in A Vision to feed literally off men's memories:

We must, however, avoid attributing to them the pure benevolence our exhausted Platonism and Christianity attribute to an angelical being. Our actions, lived in life, or remembered in death, are the food and drink of the Spirits of the Thirteenth Cone [the realm of the daimon in A Vision], that which gives them separation and solidity.

(AF (B) 230)

This is just another facet of the ongoing struggle
between this world and its opposite, the "otherworld," which characterizes Yeats's drama. Here, as always, men and disembodied spirits are living each other's death, dying each other's life. In play after play disembodied spirits, the so-called immortals, are imperfect beings existing at some stage between death and birth in which they have forgotten their old memories and have not yet picked up new ones. They need their opposites, men, and men's memories in order to complete themselves. This is so in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, to give but one example. Fand, so often taken to be a pure spirit who has never lived on earth, implies that she herself has taken bodily form when she talks of being of those spirits who have shed their memories, who "all have washed out of their eyes / Wind-blown dirt of their memories / To improve their sight" (VP1 557). Significantly, it is Cuchulain's attachment to his memories which most infuriates her.

It is at death that the importance of memories becomes truly apparent. The soul must then face its memories, reliving them many times until they are understood and accepted. Only then can it integrate them into a new awareness of itself and thus be freed of them. The importance of this process cannot be overstated:
Nor can there be work so great
As that which cleans man's dirty slate.
While man can still his body keep
Wine or love drug him to sleep,
...
But body gone he sleeps no more,
And till his intellect grows sure
That all's arranged in one clear view,
Pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
Then stands in judgment on his soul,
And, all work done, dismisses all
Out of intellect and sight
And sinks at last into the night.
("The Man and the Echo," (1939), VE 632-3)

The purpose of life is understood in retrospect, after death, when the soul can no longer hide from itself and from its memories in the same way that it could on earth. The spirit relives its memories during purgatory, that state between lives that Yeats dramatized in plays as different as Calvary, The Words Upon the Window Pane, The Dreaming of the Bones and Purgatory—in all these plays the disembodied spirits struggle to free themselves from their mortal ties, with varying degrees of success. Only after they have accepted and discarded their memories can these spirits join the purified spirits beyond purgatory, who are either between lives or who have escaped from the cycles of time entirely. This is the goal of all spirits, whether or not they are aware of it.

"The Spirit is not those changing images ... but the light, and at last draws backward into itself, into its own changeless purity, all it has felt or known" (A Vision (B) 220-1).
According to Yeats there is a possible obstacle in the way of achieving this goal which has nothing to do with the individual spirit—the memory of the living may interfere with the discarding of memory by the dead. In Yeats's world view "every mood is a soul and every thought is a body" (Uncollected Prose, I, 247), and, while the living are plagued by objects of sense, the dead are plagued by thoughts:

The toil of the living is to free themselves from an endless sequence of objects, and that of the dead to free themselves from an endless sequence of thoughts.

(M 353-4)

Because, as Yeats explained in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," all the thoughts of the living take on a reality of their own which transcends time, a dead person may be unable to shake off this world, and its past existence within it, as long as there is someone here who remembers him. Says Yeats, somewhat facetiously, "it is for no other end that, all unknowing, we value posthumous fame..." (M 359-60).

In another twist of his theory of memory, Yeats also believed that the collective memory of a group has as much reality as has the memory of the individual spirit. For this reason he placed great stock in the racial memory of the Irish people. He believed that the modern Irish needed, not to be freed of the memories of their past, but rather to be
ransomed by the memories of their past greatness from their sordid present. He felt that this racial memory could be invoked (since no memory, though discarded by the spirits, is ever lost) and, in the poems and plays based on Irish mythology, actively sought to reawaken this memory in modern Irishmen, as he urged other poets to do:

Irish poets, learn your trade,  
Sing whatever is well made,  
Scorn the sort now growing up  
All out of shape from toe to top,  
Their unremembering hearts and heads  
Base-born products of base beds.  
Sing the peasantry, and then  
Hard-riding country gentlemen,  
The holiness of monks, and after  
Porter-drinkers' randy laughter;  
Sing the lords and ladies gay  
That were beaten into clay  
Through seven heroic centuries;  
Cast your mind on other days  
That we in coming days may be  
Still the indomitable Irishry.  
("Under Ben Bulben," VE 639-40)

II. Forgetting

At creation a community of spirits emerges from the original unity, each of whose members becomes aware of itself as a complete being, separate from and yet determined by the rest. Each spirit must now descend into the gyres or cones of time and space in order to be born. This descent is described more than once in A Vision, and is the central theme of Yeats's poem "Chosen," in which lovers choose first
to descend through the Zodiac (an alternate symbol in Yeats's work for the nine spheres of the ptolemaic cosmology) to be born, and then to return after death to "the miraculous stream / Where--wrote a learned astrologer-- / The Zodiac is changed into a sphere" (YE 535). The learned astrologer is Macrobius, and the passage to which Yeats alludes in the poem is the following:

Since those who are about to descend are yet in Cancer, and have not left the Milky Way, they rank in the order of the gods.... From the con­fine, therefore, in which the zodiac and galaxy touch one another, the soul, descending from a round figure which is the only divine form, is produced into a cone.¹

F. A. C. Wilson explains this passage in his study of "Chosen":

In Platonism, the soul has a pre-natal existence in heaven, after which it descends through a series of stages into the material world, acquiring during its descent the attributes of personality it will have in its future life. The symbol used for the soul's abode before birth, as Yeats knew from Taylor's Porphyry, was the Milky Way. From there, the soul descended, and the Platonist used the signs of the zodiac to symbolise the stages of the descent.²

As the spirit makes its descent through the spheres, or the signs of the zodiac, to be born, it must forget its true nature, its godliness, in order to believe completely in its

personalities in successive lives. This leads to its separation into spirit and matter, or self and soul, or man and daimon, whose unresolvable conflict characterizes life. One of Yeats's favourite symbols for the spirit's first act of forgetting is Porphyry's "intoxicating cold drink of generation," which he explains in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry":

Cold, he [Porphyry] says, causes life in the world, and heat causes life among the gods, and the constellation of the Cup is set in the heavens near the sign of Cancer, because it is there that the souls descending from the Milky Way receive their draught of the intoxicating cold drink of generation.

(E & I 83)

Having drunk from this cup, the spirit loses its pre-natal memory. F. A. C. Wilson argues that A Full Moon in March, through its depiction of the swineherd who cannot remember where he came from, illustrates most clearly how completely the spirit forgets its divinity while in life.

The swineherd has lost his memory; that is, in Platonic terms, he has lost the pre-natal memory, as spirit must do on entering the material universe. He remembers nothing of his existence in the intellectual world before his incarnation; Yeats ironically has him think his origin 'more foul than rag or flesh.'

The symbol of the "cup of Lethe," as Yeats calls it in A Vision (AV (A) 236-7), occurs in different guises in the

Wilson, Yeats and Tradition, p. 88.
drama. Yeats's three early works, The Shadowy Waters, The Wanderings of Oisin and The Countess Cathleen all stress forgetting, but the soul's forgetting of its former unity is emphasized most obviously in The Shadowy Waters. Porphyry's cup of forgetfulness is brought to mind in the play by Forgael's "Harp of Forgetfulness," which he gets in some versions from the Fomor, the gods of darkness, in others from the poet Aleel, and in still others from Aengus, the god of light. The parallel to the cup of Lethe is most explicit when, seeking to destroy Dectora's memories both of her lover Aleel and of Aengus and the gods of light, Forgael plays on the harp and sings,

O love be forgotten as the soul forgets  
The spirit when the body overwhelms it  

and

O bright gods be forgotten as you  
Are forgotten when the soul enters the world.  
(DrC 65)

Forgael is a mortal, though a half-god, who has been deprived of the effect of the cup of forgetfulness by being granted a wisdom generally denied men. This wisdom teaches him two truths that other men blissfully forget when they enter their bodies. The first is that life, as we have seen, constitutes a separation from one's own spirit, and is a mere passing of time until the soul can be reunited with itself. This is the same secret which Owen Aherne learns in
"The Tables of the Law," to his unending despair: "I have seen the whole, and how can I come again to believe that a part is the whole? I have lost my soul because I have looked out of the eyes of the angels" (M 306). Like Aherne, Forgael can find no meaning in life, for, as he understands it, the loves, pains and memories of the world are in vain, for the world was created in vain as an escape from the spirit, and all of life is but a dance to forget the loneliness of the separated spirit. He cries,

The life of man is a mere days flight from his own Spirit, the life of gods is a flight from their own Spirits, ...

... things the mountains and the seas and beasts and the flowers and the fruits with their countless [?] shapes and all the races of men have taken their shapes and their colours and danced their story danced that they might for a moment forget now and again forget the loneliness of Spirit. It was in flight that the world rushed from the protection of the mother or [maker?] of the gods.  

(Tower of Polished Black Stones 21-22)

Forgael has been shown not so much that life is in vain as that it is merely illusion, a series of images which man

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4 There are indeed many similarities between Aherne and Forgael; the former is described in words which perfectly fit the latter: "He had the nature, which is half monk, half soldier of fortune, and must needs turn action into dreaming, and dreaming into action; and for such there is no order, no finality, no contentment in the world" (M 294).
mistakes for the truth; it is the "dream" from which the Wise Man awakens at the end of The Hour-Glass. The second truth revealed to Forgael, which deepens his despair, is that many ages, many successive, interminable lives separate man from the end, and thus from the rest from pursuit.

The Shadowy Waters focuses on waiting, killing time, and forgetting. All the gods and men who surround Forgael engage in various forms of forgetting. The Fomor pass the time by pillaging, and urge Forgael to do the same:

Loosen the grey sails out upon the winds
And overwhelm white cities and forget....

(TPBS 6)

The sailors are lulled to sleep by the harp of forgetfulness, through

A music that can quell all elements
And creatures and make memory lie down
Asleep under a purple coverlet
Of indolent dreams.

(TPBS 13)

Dectora and Aleel pass the time by dreaming and loving (we are reminded of Yeats's statement in "The Man and the Echo" that "While man can still his body keep / Wine or love drug him to sleep" (VE 633)); that their love is just another way of forgetting is signalled by the fact that Aleel in more than one pre-1900 version of the play charms Dectora into loving him by playing three notes on the magic harp (TPBS 12).

The Danaans, who are supposedly above the elements in most of the versions, kill time by dancing: "They still dance upon
the mountain tops / And sing in the deep valley and for­
get...' (DrC 149). Even Aengus himself, in some versions of the play, lulls himself into this same forgetfulness through a series of langourous dreams (DrC 246).

Forgael alone is denied forgetfulness. He can neither hate enough to fight like the Fomor, nor, try as he might, can he believe in his dreams like Aengus. Various early manuscript versions focus on Forgael's elaborate attempts to induce Danaan dreams in himself. In an early pre-1896 version, for example, Forgael orders the Fomor to steal apple blossoms from Aengus's "island of the young" (DrC 80); with them he attempts to induce these dreams of forgetfulness:

(O sweet odour of apple blossoms, that is in my nostrils,
give me some divine passions, some hatred,
some love, that I may forget how many me
ages divide from the white sleep when all things shall have come to an end.
O grant that I may love and hate like the gods before I die. & knew for­getfulness)(sic) (DrC 82)

In other pre-1900 versions he attempts to induce these same dreams by lying on crushed roses which he has stolen from the Island of the Danaans; but, though these dreams "do not awaken desire and unquiet" (DrC 213) in the Danaans, they only arouse "shadows of desire: a pearl white hound" (DrC 142) in Forgael. Even Forgael's courting of Dectora is, at least on one level, merely another attempt to forget ("he
forgets his [loneliness] when he looks at her" [Dectora]), (TPBS 48), and it is only in the final versions, when Yeats was trying to simplify his play, that Forgael's motivation actually becomes a quest for love. It is thus fitting that Forgael should be so obsessed with the destruction of creation, but it should nevertheless be noted that he sails with "The tiller" swaying "listlessly ... / above his head" (DrC 123) towards the end of the world:

his sorrows are as loud
his galley drifts
As any marsh bird, & he heads his (sic)
Among the empty waves where the world ends.
(DrC 87)

The Wanderings of Oisin also focuses on forgetting. Oisin escapes the world, with its memories of sorrow and pain, to follow his ideal love, Niamh, to three different faery worlds. He discovers, not the spiritual paradise he was expecting, but instead three different types of dances that the disembodied spirits engage in to forget. The first island, the Isle of Dancing, is the kingdom of light of the Tuatha de Danaan, the land of perfected spirits who run together and sing together in perfect harmony. But though its inhabitants continually dance and celebrate, there is no discernible motive for their revelry. Indeed, when Oisin picks up a harp to sing of the joys of the human world, they are overcome by intense sorrow and can only rid themselves
of it by taking his harp and throwing it away. "Things that have grown sad are wicked" (VE 20), they cry, and plunge into revelry once more. Aengus exhorts them to be joyful, for "joy is God and God is joy" (VE 19), but he himself dreams and forgets. This world cannot still Oisin's memories for long, and he grows nostalgic for the world of time, as he recounts to St. Patrick:

When one day by the tide I stood,
I found in that forgetfulness
Of dreamy foam a staff of wood
From some dead warrior's broken lance:
I turned it in my hands; the stains
Of war were on it, and I wept,
Remembering how the Fenians stept
Along the blood-bedabbled plains,
Equal to good or grievous chance.
(VE 24)

Niamh now takes him to a world of unending battles, "an island of endless battle for an object never achieved" (VP1 932), but this island is worse still, for it is but a parody of life within creation, with its constant conflict between unreconcilable opposites. Oisin fights for a hundred years with the same god; they fight, the god dies, Oisin rests, the god reappears, and they must begin once again. This episode is in fact reminiscent of The Herne's Egg, also in many ways a parody both of human life and of men's aspirations. The play opens to the sound of fighting; it is the fiftieth battle between King Congal and King Aedh, but they are so evenly matched that they expect to fight fifty more.
Only at the end of the play does Congal realize the utter uselessness of it all, and tells the Fool,

Never be a soldier, Tom;
Though it begins well, is this a life?
If this is a man's life, is there any life
But a dog's life?

(VP1 1038)

The third island, "the Island of Forgetfulness," is the most horrifying of all, for there all pretense is abandoned: it is populated by grotesque beings who sleep away eternity in order to dream and forget. Niamh and Oisin lie down beside them and fall asleep in their turn; says Oisin, "gone like a sea-covered stone / Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow and the memories of all of my mirth..." (VE 52).

As they wander from one island to another, Niamh, though she, unlike Oisin, has no memories with which to contrast these islands, grows gradually more sorrowful, and when Oisin asks her "and which of these / Is the Island of Content?", she weeps and answers, "None know" (VE 46). Far from being the paradise of immortals (though unaccountably understood by many critics as a paradise which Oisin is too grossly mortal to appreciate), these islands are merely variations of mortal life and of the many lives men will have to endure before the end of creation, while the dances of forgetting engaged in by immortals are merely variations of Oisin's own attempts to escape his memories. Yeats even confessed in the notes to
The Resurrection, many years later, "How hard it was to refrain from pointing out that Oisin after old age ... would pass in death over another sea to another island" (VP1 932). Oisin remains in each island one hundred years, and always his memories, though of the sadness of the world, "the ancient sadness of man" (VE 54), call him back, or force him to move on. Finally, he says, "Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in the gates of my heart" (VE 52), and he is compelled to leave Niamh and return to Ireland.

The faery worlds are as riddled with unfulfilled desire as is the mortal world, and Niamh and Oisin constantly encounter "fleeting phantoms of desire," the hound chasing the deer, the young man chasing the woman with a golden apple in her hand. Yeats equates these phantoms with those seen by Rousseau, in Shelley's The Triumph of Life, after the Morning Star gives him the drink of oblivion (the winecup of Lethe once again) which returns him to life: "He drinks and his mind becomes like sand 'or desert Labrador,' marked by the feet of deer and wolf" (E & I 89). Yeats continues,

Because the wolf is but a more violent symbol of longing and desire than the hound, his wolf and deer remind me of the hound and deer that Oisin saw in the Gaelic poem chasing one another. (E & I 89-90)

All that is left once the memory of Self is gone is a vague desire, which defines life; it is a desire for what the spirit lost at creation, but takes on various guises, all
illusion, as the spirit chases it through the realms of time and space.

The longing for immortality, or the desire for the love of immortals which is manifested by Oisin, by Forgael in some versions of The Shadowy Waters, and by Cuchulain, seems a vague memory of man's rightful spiritual condition. This seems to be Yeats's interpretation of desire, which he based on an oft-quoted passage by Leonardo da Vinci:

this longing is in its quintessence the Spirit of the elements, which finding itself imprisoned within the life of the human body desires continually to return to its source....

(Memoirs 88 n. 3)

Cuchulain's meeting with Fand in The Only Jealousy of Emer, at least on one level, certainly backs this interpretation. This meeting, which is set in some region outside time, functions on a number of levels, as proof that Yeats could indeed transmit more of his complex philosophic views through verse and ritual than through abstract thought, and memories of Cuchulain's pre-natal and earthly existences figure prominently in them.

On one level Cuchulain is merely dreaming, but a dream so powerful that his wife Emer can actually visualize it unfolding before her. This is a re-enactment of Yeats's poem "An Image from A Past Life," in which the wife sees the
image-rival which haunts her husband in dreams, though he
forgets the image in his waking state. She cries,

A sweetheart from another life floats there
As though she had been forced to linger
From vague distress
Or arrogant loveliness,

(\textit{VE} 390)\textsuperscript{5}

In \textit{The Only Jealousy} the dream image, Fand, who has haunted
Cuchulain all his life (as can be gathered from Lady
Gregory's \textit{Cuchulain of Muithemne}), is more real to
Cuchulain than either his wife or his mistress; her haunt­
ing may well explain his waking dissatisfaction with mortal
women and thus his roving from one to another. Fand reminds
him of this dissatisfaction, saying,

But what could make you fit to wive
With flesh and blood, being born to live.
Where no one speaks of broken troth.

(\textit{VP1} 557)

As in the poem, Fand may in fact be a lover that
Cuchulain remembers from a past life, for Yeats writes that
dream images, particularly passionate ones, are drawn from
memories of a state before birth, memories that it forgets
in its waking state.

\textsuperscript{5}Yeats accompanied this poem with elaborate notes, in
which he explained that "in moments of excitement images
pass from one mind to another with extraordinary ease, per­
haps most easily from that portion of the mind which for
the time being is outside consciousness" (\textit{VE} 823).
Souls that are once linked by emotion never cease till the last drop of that emotion is exhausted—call it desire, hate or what you will—to affect one another ... this ideal form becomes to the living man an obsession, continually perplexing and frustrating natural instinct.

(VE 822-3)

Though in his dream Cuchulain remembers his spirit-lover, by implication he is also remembering, as must Aengus in his dreams, his other Self before time and separation. There is a parallel situation in The King of the Great Clock Tower where the stroller, though he is encased in a gross bodily form and has forgotten his origin, seeks out the queen from out of time, his Beloved, and demands union with her. When he is decapitated, the queen moves before him in a dance which symbolizes their union, and his soul, reunited with its higher self, begins to sing. Fand's dance before Cuchulain should have the same meaning, except that Cuchulain, because more strongly attached to this world than is the stroller, and because his true opposite or daimon, now that the Beloved is within reach, has become Bricriu, must reject Fand and thus the completion symbolized by the dance.

The image of the "cold intoxicating cup" as a symbol of forgetting recurs in Where There is Nothing and in The

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6 Cf. F. A. C. Wilson's discussion of the play in Yeats and Tradition, pp. 70-1: "The Stroller symbolises spirit in its fallen condition ... but spirit which is nevertheless in love with and beloved by the Mother of the Gods (Yeats's Queen)."
Unicorn From the Stars, through the psalm "'Et calix meus inebrians praeclarus est!' How splendid is the cup of drunkenness" (VP1 1106), which is one of the leitmotifs of the plays. The psalm is first used in Unicorn by Father John in reference to Martin's vision of the otherworld, the first half of which Martin remembers completely. In this vision Martin sees a number of unicorns [the soul, writes Yeats in a letter (L 286)] who begin to trample on grapes, and it is here that his recollection fails him: "I smelt the wine, it was flowing on every side--then everything grew vague. I cannot remember clearly, everything was silent" (CP1 337). Martin slowly recovers his memory of the vision, a little at a time, throughout the play, and finally remembers it in its entirety shortly before his death. It can thus be understood on one level as a symbol of the spirit's loss of memory of its spiritual nature at birth, which it struggles to remember through its cycle on earth. However, in an ironic twist similar to Yeats's use of the creation myths in the plays, the cup of Lethe in these plays much more obviously represents, not the cup of generation, signifying the spirit's entrance into life, but drunkenness, as a means of escaping or forgetting the pain and sorrow of life. Drunkenness is a virtue touted both by Paul Ruttledge and by Martin and Thomas Hearne, for it frees men from their mortal condition, however temporarily, and lifts their hearts "to the stars" (VP1 351).
In fact, the theme of forgetting is linked in most of Yeats's plays, as in *The Wanderings of Oisin*, more to the forgetting of the painful memories of this life, than to the soul's forgetting of its divinity. When his protagonists are not seeking actively to destroy the world and all of creation, they are more often than not seeking to escape, by one means or another, the burden of their mortal memories. This is very obvious in *The Countess Cathleen* which, particularly in the versions of 1895 and after, centres on the theme of forgetting. Memories reinforce the predicament of the incarnate spirit, for it has to balance vague, unspecified longings which cannot be satisfied in this world with its memories, which attach all men, often despite themselves, to the world of conflict, of good and evil. This is stated most explicitly by the Devils in *The Countess Cathleen*, who promise freedom from conflict and from the cares of the world in exchange for the souls of men. They promise

Wine that can hush asleep the petty war
Of good and evil, and awake instead
A scented flame flickering above that peace
The bird of prey knows well in his deep heart.

(*VP1* 37)

In another version their promise is even more appealing, for they contrast the peace that they offer, and that they claim all discarnate spirits, whether good or evil in life, have attained, with the tumult of the world:
Is that peace
Known to the birds of prey so dread a thing?
They, and the souls obedient to our master,
And those who live with that great other Spirit
Have gained an end, a peace, while you but toss
And swing upon a moving balance beam.

(VP1 239, vv. 1895-1908)

The merchants' offer in The Countess Cathleen seems all the more attractive because the burdens of the world are so onerous that everyone, including Cathleen, has been attempting to forget them right from the beginning of the play. When the play opens Cathleen, on her doctor's advice, is retreating from the world to her castle: "I was bid fly the terror of these times / And wrap me round with music and sweet song / Or else pine to my grave" (VP1 21). Her castle seems to offer the peace and forgetfulness that the devils offer the peasants, for it is "A place that's set among impassable walls / As though the world's trouble could not find it out" (VP1 17). Significantly, Cathleen has difficulty in finding her castle, and finds instead famine and fear "Where I had thought I would find nothing changed" (VP1 19).

Cathleen now turns to sleep, to dreams, to the songs offered by the poet Aleel in the search for forgetfulness. When Aleel tells her a story about the troubles of the Sidhe goddess Maeve, Cathleen says, "She'd sleep that trouble away ... / If she had better sense" (VP1 55). Sleep, like
the sleep of forgetfulness of the third island of The Wanderings of Oisin, is constantly brought up in the later versions of this play through Oona, Cathleen's guardian, who urges Cathleen to sleep until the problems are over and is continually grateful for the sleep and forgetfulness of old age. The bard Aleel sets little store by memory, and tries by various means to get Cathleen to forget hers:

What's memory but ash
That chokes our fires that have begun to sink?
And they've [the spirits] a dizzy, everlasting fire. (VP1 57)

In some versions he even has a harp which he uses, as Forgael and Aleel did in The Shadowy Waters, to weave dreams of love and forgetting. Cathleen is almost seduced, and is tempted to escape with him and his harp to Faeryland, to "dwell among the Sidhe / In their old ever-busy honeyed land" (VP1 62). Aleel also offers Cathleen his love, and it is this that tempts her most of all to forget her responsibility to the welfare of the peasants. Nevertheless, she finally chooses to face this responsibility, protesting that she is
tired of tympan and harp
And tired of music that but cries sleep, sleep
Till joy and sorrow and hope and terror are gone. (VP1 53)
III. Learning (Acquiring Memories)

While Cathleen, like Oisin, is sorely tempted by the promise of oblivion, she is also torn by a contrary impulse, to cling even to the more painful aspects of this life. This vacillation, between the desire to escape life, and the knowledge that what men prize the most is part and parcel of the mortal condition, is articulated by two musicians in discarded opening lyrics to *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, a play about life in time. While the first musician feels very deeply the mockery that is time and memory, and longs for the stroke of midnight, a symbol in this play for the end of time, the second musician understands that "All love is shackled to mortality."

First Musician:
I wait until the tower gives forth the chime
And dream of ghosts that have the speech of birds;
Because they have no thoughts they have no words;
No thought because no past or future;
Time comes from the torture of our flesh, and these,
Cast out by death and tethered there by love,
Touch nerve to nerve throughout the sacred grove
And seem a single creature when they please.

Second Musician:
I call to mind the iron of the bell
And get from that my harsher imagery,
All love is shackled to mortality,
Love's image is a man at arms in steel;
Love's image is a woman made of stone;
It dreams of the unborn; all else is nought;
Tomorrow and tomorrow fills its thought;
All tenderness reserves for that alone. 7

The spirit begins to acquire its temporal memories, the record of its actions and passions, as soon as it enters this life, and its main task in this life, and then in the state immediately following it, is to learn from these memories, to accept them fully, and then to release them. As Yeats wrote in the notes to *The Resurrection*,

> even though we think temporal existence illusory it cannot be capricious; it is what Plotinus calls the characteristic act of the soul and must reflect the soul's coherence. *(VP1 934)*

These memories which, as Yeats argues in his more optimistic plays, constitute one of the main reasons for living, figure prominently both as a blessing and as a curse in Yeats's drama. Through them Yeats works into the play what Richard Ellmann describes as

> the two forces he had always seen at work in the world, the one regarding reality as temporary, provisional, tidal, the other regarding it as hive- or nest-like, tenacious lasting. "Let all things pass away," says a world-conqueror in "Vacillation," while in *A Vision* Yeats quotes with approval an impromptu song of Iseult Stuart, "O Lord, let something remain." 8

The memories of life are not altogether despised by even those protagonists who, like Oisin, attempt to escape them; the ties of love, for example, like Dectora's love for Aleel in *The Shadowy Waters*, or Aleel's love for

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Cathleen in The Countess Cathleen, are clung to tenaciously. Though Deirdre says, near the end of her life, that she knows nothing "but this body, nothing / But that old vehement, bewildering kiss" (VPI 376), the first kiss that Naoise gave her, it is enough to have made her tragic life worthwhile. When the musicians speculate that "though you have suffered all for mere love's sake / You'd live your lives again," Deirdre answers, "Even this last hour" (VPI 378). In the same way, Oisin is called back to Ireland not merely by sad memories, but by his love for the Fenians. In the end he even tells St. Patrick that he would renounce heaven rather than be separated from his companions after death.

Discarnate spirits, in envying men their memories, long for what gives men the most pain, perhaps, but also love and passion. With words that could easily be spoken by any of the immortals who are attracted to mortals in the plays, a faery explains to Hanrahan in "The Secret Rose" why she loves him:

I have loved you from the night I saw you lying on the Grey Rath, and saw you turning from side to side, for the fire in your earth would not let you rest. I love you, for you are fierce and passionate and good and bad and not dim and wave-like as are the people of the Sidhe.

In *The Countess Cathleen* there are several references to spirits who envy men their memories, and bewail their own lack of them. Thus we are told the story of Queen Maeve, a goddess of the Sidhe, who mourns every full moon, not for the death of the mortal man she loved nine centuries before, but because she cannot remember his name. "So she loves truly," says Cathleen when she is told the story. Not so, answers Aleel, for she "but wets her cheeks / Lady because she has forgot his name" (VP1 55). In the same play, the souls of the dead who carry off Cathleen's treasure under duress in early versions of the play, mourn that they won't remember tomorrow their bad conscience of today:

1st Spirit: I'll never dance another step, not one.  
2nd Spirit: Are all the thousand years of dancing done?  
3rd Spirit: How can we dance after so great a sorrow?  
4th Spirit: But how shall we remember it tomorrow?  
5th Spirit: To think of all the things that we forget.  
6th Spirit: That's why we groan and why our lids are wet. (VP1 127)

Memory can be understood as a metaphor for life in this world, with its inescapable joy and pain. Many men, Yeats emphasizes, are, unlike the saints and poets of this world, quite satisfied with the "dance" of this life, with the joys of home, hearth and children. Thus Aibric pleads with Forgael to return home to "be some fair woman's friend" and "live like other men" (VP1 321), while in *On Baile's Strand* Cuchulain is urged by his companions to abandon his reckless ways "to live in comfort" (VP1 512), to settle down with
wife and children. The musicians at the end of *At The Hawk's Well* sing,

'\textit{The man that I praise,}'  
\hspace{1em} Cries out the leafless tree,  
'\textit{Has married and stays}'  
\hspace{1em} By an old hearth, and he  
\hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} On naught has set store  
\hspace{1em} But children and dogs on the floor.  
\hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} Who but an idiot would praise  
\hspace{1em} \hspace{1em} A withered tree?  

(VPl 413-4)

The implication is that it is dangerous and foolhardy to attempt a different life from that meant for human beings, to search for a knowledge beyond the realm of mortality. The rewards for those who succeed may be great, but the perils for those who, like the Old Man in *At The Hawk's Well*, do not succeed are even greater.

The man who best exemplifies the acceptance of this life and its memories is Maurteen in *The Land of Heart's Desire* who, by accepting his lot, has prospered, as he himself boasts:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
\textit{have not Fate and Time and Change}  
\textit{Done well for me and for old Bridget here?}  
\textit{This is the best of life; (when we are young}  
\textit{We long to tread a way none trod before,}  
\textit{But find the excellent old way through love,}  
\textit{And through the care of children, to the hour}  
\textit{For bidding Fate and Time and Change good-bye.)}  
\end{center}

(VPl 190)
\end{quote}

The Faery Child explicitly equates his life and memory, saying,
Your memories have made you wise, old father;  
The young must sigh through many a dream and hope,  
But you are wise because your heart is old.  

(FP1 188)

Faeryland is free of memory, says the Child, "For we are but 
obedient to the thoughts / That drift into mind at a wink of 
the eye" (FP1 206). This is what attracts Mary to Faeryland 
for, like Forgael and later Cuchulain, she feels oppressed 
by everything that Maureen's life represents; he has, she 
says, "A kind tongue too full of drowsy love, / Of drowsy 
love and my captivity" (FP1 192). As Mary prepares to leave 
her home and family to journey to Faeryland with the Child, 
her husband Shaun attempts to trap her into staying with the 
bait of their memories together, the same memories for which 
Deirdre would relive her sad life. "Remember when I met you 
by the well," says Shaun, "And took your hand in mine and 
spoke of love" (FP1 208). But this lure is not strong 
enough, and Mary escapes with the Faery Child.

The irony in this play is evident; the world of hearth 
and home, for all that it is recommended for most mortals in 
the plays, is a trap, and its accompanying memories a curse 
that Mary, like the more sensitive mortals, is justified in 
trying to escape. The rebellion against this life and the 
struggle to escape its memories which is dramatized in one 
form or another in most of Yeats's plays is clearly more 
valuable than the simple acceptance of it demonstrated by
Maurteen. This is in keeping with Yeats's continuing insistence that conflict is necessary to life and growth. As he wrote in A Vision,

> My instructors identify consciousness with conflict, not with knowledge [Maurteen's 'wisdom'], substitute for subject and object and their attendant logic a struggle towards harmony, towards Unity of Being.

(AV (B) 214)

Nevertheless, most of Yeats's plays argue that outright escape from the cares of the world is not the answer. Though escape in its many variations, whether in the form of Faeryland, or the love of immortals, or the peace of oblivion, is offered to many of the protagonists in the drama, it is shown to be inadequate in all the plays save perhaps The Land of Heart's Desire.

Those who would escape must accept the consequences of that choice, as is vividly illustrated in The Countess Cathleen by the example of the robbers who die shortly after selling their souls to the devils, and therefore do not reap even a brief temporal reward for their trouble. Those among Yeats's protagonists who attempt to escape this world do so at the risk of gaining, not release, but merely oblivion. This is so for Oisin and for Cathleen; it is equally so for Cuchulain in The Only Jealousy of Emer. On a second level of the play the meeting between Cuchulain and Fand takes place on the border between this world and the otherworld.
The focus on this level is on Fand, on her attempt to complete herself. Cuchulain is very much a mortal, tied to this earth by memories, which he is reluctant to forget. When we first see him, he is crouching on the floor before Fand, and when she asks, "What pulled your hands about your feet, / Pulled down your head upon your knees," he answers, "Old memories" (VP1 551-3). He longs to escape with her and thus escape these memories of the son he has killed, of the woman whose trust he has violated and many more, but he cannot bring himself to do so. Fand is surprised by the strength of his memories, and tries to persuade him that he deserves better. In this she resembles Niamh, who cannot understand why Oisin insists on turning "his gaze / On the old sorrows of his human days" (VE 29).

Fand tries to persuade Cuchulain to kiss her, stating that her kiss will grant him freedom from memory, and thus freedom from his conscience, from "Intricacies of blind remorse." She promises him "oblivion." In the final version of the play Cuchulain gives in to Fand, though not without much hesitation, and it is up to Emer, in a scene which greatly strengthens the drama, to save him from the consequences of his decision. In early versions, however, Cuchulain understands the value of his memories, and though he sympathizes with Fand, saying,
How could you know
That man is held to those whom he has loved
By pain they gave, or pain that he has given
Intricacies of pain

he refuses to give them up:

What dread so great as that he should forget
The least chance sight or sound, or scratch or mark
On an old door, or frail bird heard and seen
In the incredible clear light love cast
All round about her some forlorn lost day?  

(CP1 559)

Cuchulain thus refuses to kiss Fand, and she is about to send him off to Manannan (the shadowy personification of fate in the play) for punishment when Emer renounces his love for her and breaks Fand's hold on him, thereby releasing him to return to earth. It is ironic that Emer, who valued only two things on earth, the memory of Cuchulain's love and the hope that this love would one day be reinstated, must give up this hope as Bricriu's condition for restoring Cuchulain to life. He comes back to the arms of his mistress, and Emer is left alone with her memories.

The most effective method of shedding the memories of earth, and thus escaping the mortal condition, is taught by Paul Ruttledge in Where There is Nothing, who leaves his family, his possessions, even his identity, detaching himself from every bond that holds him to this earth, and making his heart and mind "as bare as the wilderness" (CP1 1141), and who urges his followers to do the same. According to Rist,
this is the method which Plotinus taught for achieving union with the One:

The One is pre-eminently simple—to attain likeness to it we too must be pre-eminently simple. Hence Plotinus' cry through all the stages of the 'mystic way' is the more insistent here [in the Enneads]: 'Strip away everything'; 'put away all shape'; 'the man who lets every Form go will see'. If we see the One by being like it, and the One itself is unspeakable and hard to tell of, we ourselves can hardly expect to see it if we are still characterized by the finite Forms.  

The One is the whole, the undivided Self, while the self during time is by definition divided, since it is characterized by memories which Yeats equates in his essay "The Mandukya Upanishads" with a fragmented spirit "forgetting, remembering, sleeping, waking, spread out into past, present, future" (E & I 480). It follows then that these memories must be shed before the spirit can be made whole.

Nevertheless, as Yeats implies in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," this relinquishing of memories [equated with desire] while in the body is a rather difficult step for most men to take.

I think that we who are poets and artists, not being permitted to shoot beyond the tangible, must go from desire to weariness and so to desire again, and live for the moment when vision comes to our weariness like terrible lightning, in the humility of the brutes.... Only when we are saint or sage, and renounce experience itself, can we,

10 Rist, Plotinus, p. 134.
in imagery of the Christian Cabala, leave the sudden lightning and the path of the serpent and become the bowman who aims his arrow at the centre of the sun.  

(Mythologies 340)

While Yeats would argue that it is possible for any man to follow Paul's advice and reach perfection, and thus release from the wheel of time, in any one life, for most mortals the relinquishing of the ties of memory which Paul advocates is a much lengthier process. It takes place during purgatory, in the state immediately following death.

IV. Remembering (Dreaming Back)

After death, wrote Yeats in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" and in "The Soul in Judgment" chapter of A Vision, the spirit leaves the terrestrial condition and enters "the condition of air where images have but a borrowed life, that of memory..." (M 357). The ghost now dreams itself through six different states between lives before it is ready for reincarnation or, if it is sufficiently perfected, for release from the wheel of time:

Neither between death and birth nor between birth and death can the soul find more than momentary happiness; its object is to pass rapidly round its circle and find freedom from that circle.  

(AV (B) 236)

The first three of these states are molded by the memories of its past life; they resemble life in that they also
represent "no orderly descent from level to level, no water-
fall, but a whirlpool, a gyre" (AV (B) 40), and the ghost
must move back and forth between them until it has fully
relived and expiated its memories.

We carry to Anima Mundi our memory and that memory
is for a time our external world; and all
passionate moments recur again and again, for
passion desires its own recurrence more than any
event, and whatever there is of corresponding
complacency or remorse is our beginning of judg-
ment; nor do we remember only the events of life,
for thoughts bred of longing and of fear ... come
again like a rope's end to smite us upon the
face....

(Mythologies 354)

Because thought is existence in this condition, the
memories as well as the fears and doubts of the soul, now a
ghost, form a reality that it believes in completely, even
as it believed completely in its mortal existence while on
earth. Says Dr. Trench in The Words Upon the Window-Pane,

Some spirits are earth-bound—they think they are
still living and go over and over some action of
their past lives, just as we go over and over some
painful thought, except that where they are thought
is reality.

(VP1 944)

The object of the exercise is for the soul to confront and
fully accept the memories of its previous life. In this
state it must work through them all, recollecting them first
with all their passion and fury, and then in tranquillity,
as it were, dwelling on them until their full significance,
their causes and effects, have been understood, and until all
the emotion which they give rise to has been exhausted.
All that keeps Spirit from its freedom may be compared to a knot that has to be untied or to an oscillation or violence that must end in a return to equilibrium.  

(AV (B) 226)

The spirit in the first three states between lives in Yeats's metaphysics is therefore in a purgatorial state, but one that differs somewhat from Christian tradition, as Helen Vendler points out:

the question is never "I did this, and I repent and will do otherwise," but, "Did I do this?"--tracing each action to the source, measuring the lot, forgiving himself (when he can) the lot. To become impassive in the face of one's remembered experience is the Yeatsian goal, not to repent and do otherwise.\footnote{Vendler, "Changing Metaphors," p. 309, n. 2.}

Because for Yeats good as well as evil are merely opposites which must ultimately be reconciled, the ghost in the third state must also be

purified of good and evil. In so far as the man did good without knowing evil, or evil without knowing good, his nature is reversed until that knowledge is obtained.  

(AV (B) 231)

Because purgatory in Yeats's view is purely self-created, it is short if the soul is purposeful, its conscience clear, but it is interminable if the soul is fearful or wracked with guilt about actions and thoughts in its past
life. Thus Yeats often cited the case of a ghost in a Japanese play who burned for ages in a self-created hell as retribution for what it felt was an evil life on earth, and who could not be freed from the burning flames of this hell until it stopped believing that they were real. In the same way characters like the mother in Purgatory cannot be freed to continue their spiritual journey until they stop rejecting, denying, or being entranced by these memories—they must learn to contemplate them with indifference.

Were Cuchulain to have escaped life through death in The Only Jealousy of Emer (and this can be understood to have taken place on another level of the play, though Bricriu later calls him back to life, because he is referred to as one of those dreaming shades who "when they dream no more return no more"), the purging of his memories would quite likely have been lengthier and more traumatic than it proves to be when he finally leaves life in The Death of Cuchulain, for he would have been beset by recurring nightmares such as the memory of having killed his son which ties him to earth in The Only Jealousy of Emer. In The Death of Cuchulain, Cuchulain is now an old man who has played out his life fully and completely and is ready, even eager, for his death. The spirit can leave this life with the least trauma, in C. G. Jung's words,
when life has been lived so exhaustively, and with such devotedness, that no more unfulfilled obligations to life exist, when, therefore, no desires that cannot be sacrificed unhesitatingly stand in the way of inner detachment from the world.12

This is echoed in A Vision, where Yeats writes that "the more fully a life is lived, the less the need for—or the more complete is--the expiation" (AV (B) 236)

The Death of Cuchulain can also be understood on two levels. On the most literal level, of course, Cuchulain is approaching his death. On another level, however, the play dramatizes the expiation of his life which is necessary before he can discard his memories and become pure spirit. Very near death after receiving his first mortal wound, Cuchulain seems in a daze, and says "Where am I? Why am I here?" (VP1 1057). He begins to dream the dreams of a shade, and all the important events and memories of his life, simplified for dramatic purposes, pass before his eyes. First he remembers the events dramatized in The Only Jealousy of Emer (1055); next he sees Aoife, the woman who fought him in At the Hawk's Well and bore the son he killed in On Baile's Strand. Although she is now as old as he is, he at first mistakes her for the young woman he fought and conquered so

long before, and imagines himself still at the scene of the original confrontation:

You fought with a sword,
It seemed that we should kill each other, then
Your body wearied and I took your sword.

(VP1 1057)

She has to remind him that "that time was long ago / And now it is my time. I have come to kill you." Suddenly he remembers the series of events following their first meeting.

And now I know your name,
Aoife, the mother of my son. We met
At the Hawk's Well under the withered trees.
I killed him upon Baile's Strand...
You have a right to kill me.

Other memories float before his eyes, but they fade rapidly away, and just before dying Cuchulain sees the shape he will assume when he is dead; not the body which endured the crises of his mortal existence, but

My soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape,
And is not that a strange shape for the soul
Of a great fighting-man?

(VP1 1060-1)

That he goes to join the company of disembodied spirits freed of their separateness and memories, those spirits which have reached the last stage of the life between death and birth, is made clearer in Yeats's poem, "Cuchulain Comforted," a companion piece to the play written shortly after The Death
of Cuchulain. Here the spirits in unison hand Cuchulain a shroud which, says F. A. C. Wilson, is his "Celestial Body," which once donned will obliterate his "Passionate Body" of mortal life. Wilson quotes a relevant passage from *A Vision*: "If the passionate body does not disappear, the Spirit finds the celestial body only after long and perhaps painful dreams of the past." Cuchulain accepts the shroud, and by the end of the poem has been transformed into a bird and joined the spirits in their collective song: "They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds" (Ve 635).

In *Calvary*, *The Words Upon the Window-Pane*, *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Purgatory*, on the other hand, the various ghosts are trapped near the earth by the memories of crises or crimes in their past lives which they have not been able, 

13 This is a very difficult poem which has led to confusing interpretations, particularly F. A. C. Wilson's, who argues both that it symbolizes Dante's "Valley of the Negligent Rulers" peopled by spirits "Outside true purgatory; granted the ease they sought in life, their punishment is the desire they feel for active purgation" ([Yeats and Tradition](#)) and that it represents a community of "pure souls, who have escaped from the round of birth and death" (248). The most logical explanation, I would propose, is that the poem represents Cuchulain's union with his spiritual Daimons which, because they are his opposites, are "convicted cowards all" since he was a warrior; they are nonetheless purified spirits, though it may be still in the final stages between death and life (AV (B) 234), and lead him quickly through the purging and discarding of his passionate body.

14 Quoted from *A Vision* (B), p. 224, by F. A. C. Wilson, Y and T, 249.
for different reasons, to purge. Because Yeats's explanation of purgatory in *A Vision* constitutes one of his most readily understandable chapters, and because the same beliefs are often explicitly stated in the plays, either by the more self-aware of the ghosts or by interested bystanders, these purgatorial plays are relatively straightforward. Writes Helen Vendler,

> Sorting out the passions of the past, reliving them in thought, occupies the old solitary Jonathan Swift, as we see him through the medium in *The Words Upon the Window-Pane*. Because he has not yet learned impassivity before his fate, his soul remains perpetually tormented by its life.... In the same way, Christ in *Calvary* (1921) "dreams his Passion through," reliving in memory his rejection by Lazarus, Judas and the indifferent Roman soldiers: he, too, has not resigned himself to his fate, that there are those "he cannot save." ... The only way to lay a ghost, in the Yeatsian metaphysic, is to "measure the lot, forgive the lot," and to repudiate is only, in the end, to evade. 15

Both Christ and Swift in these plays do not know that they are dead, so caught up are they by the strength and pain of their memories. Christ is held near the earth by them in the same way that Lazarus is trapped in the world by the life Christ restored to him. Lazarus, like Forgael and so many other Yeatsian protagonists, would have preferred the death Christ took from him, or at least a waste space "where there

is nothing" (VP1 783), and cannot forgive Christ for returning him to this life. Christ in this play is akin to the subjective heron (his opposite) of the opening lyrics who "shivers in a dumbfounded dream" in which he stares at his own reflection in the water, the symbol of generation or matter in which the spirit is reflected or, in this case, imprisoned. He cannot escape reliving his crucifixion and certain events preceding it because, as Vendler notes, he has not accepted his rejection by Lazarus and Judas and the soldiers at the cross. Chant the musicians,

He climbs up hither but as a dreamer climbs. The cross that but exists because he dreams it Shortens His breath and wears away His strength. (VP1 781)

He will not be able to purge these images until he can accept the fact that he could not save all men and consequently, what must be the most painful truth of all for a Saviour, that he is only one of many gods—"If he were the God of dice he'd know it [the dance of dice-throwers], but he is not that God" (VP1 787).

In The Words Upon the Window-Pane it is Jonathan Swift who has not come to terms with his mortal existence, and is still torturing himself over some of the crucial decisions that he made during it. In the play he is a conventional ghost haunting, as one would expect, a house in which at least one of the crises took place. Because the play is
written in prose and dominated by the rational, probing intellects of Dr. Trench and Mr. Corbet it is much more literal and straightforward than the bulk of Yeats's plays. The ghost of Swift re-enacts exactly the same scenes, with exactly the same words, as he has in two previous seances and, we must assume, many more times in the last two centuries:

Dr. Trench: Did the Spirits say the same thing and go through the same drama at both seances?

Mrs. Mallett: Yes—just as if they were characters in some kind of horrible play. (VP1 943)

Swift is reliving crises which occurred at three different times in his life, first with Vanessa, when she pleaded with him to have children, then with an aging Stella, and finally that brought on by his own senility and degeneration. This is the most important crisis, and so the filthy, diseased and senile body of his old age dominates the play, both at the beginning, when the spirit Child Lulu sees him crouched in the corner of the room (VP1 947) and at the end, when the medium awakens to see him "dirty, his face covered with boils. Some disease had made one of his eyes swell up, it stood out from his face like a hen's egg" (VP1 955). But because the ghost takes on the body it inhabited when it underwent the different crises, this senile old man alternates with a younger, more impressive one. Writes Douglas Archibald,
There is great tension between the three images of Swift. The public figure imagined and discussed by Corbet is at the height of his power; the man loved by Stella and Vanessa is past his prime but not yet sunk "into imbecility or madness"; the aged, deformed, and demented apparition is the dying dean of legend and fact.... His Swift is the most powerful, the most fully rendered, of Yeats's images of despair and suffering.  

In *The Dreaming of the Bones* Diarmuid and Dervorgilla appear as young and handsome lovers because, as Dervorgilla explains, their story and the crisis that they are attempting to purge began when they were young. They, unlike Swift, have committed a serious crime, and thus their purgatory is more clearly defined and better understood by the ghosts, who are aware that they are dead and yet unblessed. Their penance has lasted for seven centuries, far longer than the penance for crimes of passion, of love or hate, could ever be. Being shades, they know the fate of other shades, and say that those who "Warred in the heat of blood" have long since forgotten their earthly memories and been united with their former enemies (opposites) of this world:

they and their enemies ...
Mix in a brief dream-battle above their bones;
Or make one drove, or drift in amity;
Or in the hurry of the heavenly round
Forget their earthly names.

(VP1 770)

The young mortal protagonist, astounded by the length of their purgatory, asks, "What crime can stay so in the memory?" (VP1 772).

The answer is twofold. The crime is not forgotten first because the spirits themselves have not forgotten it, or forgiven themselves for their part in it. Tortured by their own consciences, they wander forever together and yet apart, for every time they are about to seek comfort in a kiss, they remember their crime and avert their faces. Yeats writes that, like the ghost in the Japanese play mentioned earlier, "the lovers in my play have lost themselves in a different but still self-created winding of the labyrinth of conscience" (VP1 777). The first step towards release will be accomplished when they realize that the torture is self-created.

There is however an added complication, which adds to the length of their penance. The nature of the crime is such that though it took place seven centuries before, its consequences are still being felt by the living, who themselves refuse to accept the crime and forgive the criminals.
Diarmuid and Dervorgilla betrayed their country, Ireland, for they welcomed the Norman invaders and thus "sold their country into slavery" (CP1 442), and their names and story are known and shuddered at by living Irishmen like the Young Man who listens to their story in the play. Though moved to pity by their plight, he refuses to forgive them and free the pair from their responsibility in the crime, and thus from their memory of it. He remembers the crime with as much bitterness as if it were freshly committed, and says, "O, never, never / Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven" (VP1 773). Because the horror of the crime lives as freshly in the minds of the living as of the dead, the ghosts are doomed to wander until some one among the living decides to forgive their crime and thus set their conscience to rest; writes Helen Vendler, "Diarmuid and Dervorgilla will address themselves to the next passerby, or again to this passerby the next time they encounter him."17

The influence of the living on the memories of the dead is of even greater thematic importance in Purgatory, which focuses not only on the memories of the dead, the ghosts of the ruined house, but also on the memories of the Old Man, the last living survivor of that household. His memories of the household are at first quite blurred and impersonal:

I think about its jokes and stories;  
I try to remember what the butler  
Said to the drunken gamekeeper  
In mid-October, but I cannot.  
If I cannot, none living can.  

(VP1 1041)

As his memories grow more vivid and more personal, the old house is slowly brought to life until even the old man's son, who at first thinks him crazy for insisting that the house is lit up, can see the figures wandering through it. The play centres on the strength and intensity of the Old Man's memory of his parents. He refuses to forgive his father for marrying his mother and dissipating her fortune, or to forgive his mother for betraying her house and heritage by marrying a stable-hand. Neither can he forgive his own son for his potential for carrying the consequences of their crime to the next generation, and possibly to many other generations in the future.

The Old Man is aware that he has a part to play in his mother's torment, and thus can play an important role in freeing her from her memories. He knows that she must, like all spirits in purgatory, purge these memories by reliving them and accepting them and their consequences. They must, he says

Re-live  
Their transgressions, and that not once  
But many times; they know at last  
The consequence of those transgressions  
Whether upon others or upon themselves;
Upon others, others may bring help, 
For when the consequence is at an end 
The dream must end....

(VPl 1042)

He hopes to help her escape her torment by killing his own son, and in this way stopping the consequence from being perpetrated from one generation to another. He does not succeed. Though the boy is dead at the end of the play, the mother continues to await her lover in the haunted house. We are left to wonder if her memories will fade when she accepts and purges them herself, as Vendler posits, saying that "the only way for the Old Man's mother to be freed from the embrace of her lover ... is for her no longer to desire that embrace" or whether her escape must await her son's own acceptance of them. If this is the case, the poor woman's release will be slow in coming; the Old Man will have to forgive and forget through a purgatory of his own, not just her crime but the consequences of her crime, his own murders of first his father and now his only son.

A somewhat similar situation is dramatized in The Player Queen, though in this play the subject of purgatory is treated rather more playfully. In draft 16 of the manuscript versions the ghost of the dead king appears and, 

speaking through a beggar, bemoans his sinful ways during his lifetime and prays that his daughter, by setting a better example than he did, and punishing the sins of his countrymen, will put an end to the sinning of his people which was the direct consequences of his own evil ways, thus allowing his soul to rest. He cries,

Must I wander always in Purgatory for my sins; must I endure pains when I thought my daughter had put all to rights? Obey my daughter, I say, then I shall be forgiven my sins.

(MPQ 220)

While the living can thus "assist the imaginations of the dead" (AV (B) 221) and help them reach their rest, the memories of the living can also, as Purgatory and The Dreaming of the Bones argue, feed and keep alive the memories of the dead. Nevertheless, these memories of the living will not necessarily impede the departed spirit from achieving peace and continuing into other existences, for the memories of the dead which linger after the spirit has accepted and shed its memories, and which must continue to linger while they are remembered by the living, are merely the shell or husk of these discarded memories (M 359). The magical tradition to which Yeats paid allegiance in fact believed that we are surrounded by discarded husks of memory of all departed spirits, husks which float in the astral plane, and it frowned upon spiritism for this reason,
feeling that evil spirits may well enter these empty shells of memory and use them to deceive the mortals attempting to communicate with the dead through a medium.19

The spirit reaches the fourth state after death, a state Yeats called the Marriage or Beatitude, only after it has freed itself of earthly memories: "All memory has vanished, the Spirit no longer knows what its name has been, it is at last free and in relation to Spirits free like itself." Yeats continues, "The Spirits before the Marriage are spoken of as the dead. After that they are spirits, using that word as it is used in common speech" (AV (B) 235). It is at this stage that, as Yeats asserted in the 1925 edition of A Vision, the spirit once again drinks from the cup of forgetfulness in order to prepare itself to enter the next phase of its existence.

Whether it pass to a spiritual or to a human rebirth it [the spirit] must receive in Beatitude—in Cancer—the Cup of Lethe. There all thoughts

19 The magician Maclagan expresses a similar belief in a relevant passage in Yeats's unfinished novel, The Speckled Bird, during a discussion with a medium reported by the Yeats-figure Michael: "These [spirits] were but images drawn out of his memory and made to live by wandering spirits who inhabited them, and he began to explain an intricate theory of the relation between this world and the other. The God and the angels in Swedenborg's writings were but memories too. They were memories or symbols. (The Speckled Bird 69).
or images ... must be passed into the Ghostly Self [the permanent self] and so be forgotten by the Spirit.

(AV (A) 236)

In the next two states the spirit, now a clean slate, readies itself for a different incarnation or, if it has sufficiently perfected itself, returns to the One.

V. Postscript

Two knots in Yeats's theory of memory remain to be undone. First of all it is clear that while we, the living, remember the dead, they continue to exist in their past form. Yeats claimed in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" that ghosts of long-dead men, regardless of the state of their conscience at death, continue to hover near the earth as long as someone on earth remembers them:

the famous dead, and those of whom but a faint memory lingers can still--and it is for no other end that, all unknowing, we value posthumous fame--tread the corridor and take the empty chair.

(M 359-60)

It is this reason that Decima, the player Queen, gives for wishing to die after she is crowned queen in draft 6 of the manuscript versions of that play:

A moment, an hour I am part of the world
And when I am dead shall be mourned a queen.

(MPQ 54)

Posthumous fame is the sole reward that Cathleen Ni Houlihan offers to those who help her fight for Ireland:
They shall be remembered for ever,
They shall be alive for ever,
They shall be speaking for ever,
The people shall hear them for ever.

(YP 229)

Conversely, when the living forget the dead, the latter begin to fade away. Yeats claims that this is what happened to the Irish gods, who lost their past stature when the Irish people ceased to believe in them, and were reduced to the faeries who haunt the countryside. "Quite beyond any doubt," he wrote, "many of them were long ago gods of Ireland" (UP, I, 137) but, since they "can but appear in forms borrowed from our limited consciousness" (UP, I, 247), "They have gradually dwindled in the popular imagination until they have become the Faeries" (VE 796). Yeats tried all his adult life to revive this belief in the ancient gods of Ireland, first through the establishment of Irish Mysteries based on the ancient Druidic mysteries, which AE calls "the noblest of all Earth's memories" (Candle of Vision 65).

Yeats, along with AE and other students of mysticism, worked for about ten years to recreate these mysteries. At one point AE wrote exuberantly to Yeats that "the gods have returned to Ireland" and that he was informed in a vision that "though now few we would soon be many." 20

When their attempts failed, Yeats turned to Irish drama in an effort to obtain the same result, by recreating the ancient Irish myths and giving life to the heroes and gods of Ireland. He hoped that the modern Irish would follow his example and, by remembering their past, their heritage, restore life and breath to these myths. In the mythological plays Yeats attempts to awaken the racial memory which shaped Ireland; in other more bitter plays, such as The Words Upon the Window-Pane and Purgatory, he mourns the demise of the aristocratic class of Ireland which kept the best of Irish traditions, and hence its racial memory, alive.

Yeats also believed that, while the living may influence the forms which the dead can assume, they themselves are influenced by the memories of their ancestors, by the collective memory, that is, of all spirits who once thought. This belief was also held by as eminent a contemporary as Jung, who wrote that,

Although we human beings have our own personal life, we are yet in large measure the representatives, the victims and promoters of a collective spirit whose years are counted in centuries. We can well think all our lives long that we are following our own noses, and may never discover that we are, for the most part, supernumeraries on the stage of the world theater.... Thus at least a part of our being lives in the centuries.21

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Yeats stated his belief in a collective memory, "the memory of Nature herself" (E & I 28) in his essay "Magic," and reiterated it in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," where he spoke of

the conviction that our little memories are but a part of some great Memory that renews the world and men's thoughts age after age, and that our thoughts are not, as we suppose, the deep, but a little foam upon the deep.

It is this memory of nature which is, Yeats continued, "the dwelling-house of symbols, of images that are souls" (E & I 79). This collective memory, the memory of our ancestors, stored, it may be, within nature herself, forms the objective reality of the universe; every action, every thought is retained in the collective memory (though the original thinker may have forgotten it) and only when all spirits forget, or stop perceiving, will this universe dissolve.

Yeats stated this explicitly in a passage in the 1925 edition of A Vision which illuminates further his position as both a realist and an idealist:

Berkeley thought if his study table remained when he closed his eyes it could only be because it was the thought of a more powerful spirit which he named God, but the mathematician Poincaré

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22 Writes AE, "we are led to believe that memory is an attribute of all living creatures and of Earth also, the greatest living creature we know, and that she carries with her, and it is accessible to us, all her long history.... The beauty for which men perished is still shining; Helen is there in her Troy, and Deirdre wears the beauty which blasted the Red Branch. No ancient lore has perished" (Candle of Vision 61).
considers time and space the work of our ancestors. With this system in my bones I must declare that those ancestors still live and that time and space would vanish if they closed their eyes.

(AV (A) 258)

It is only a short step from this statement to "The Seven Propositions," where Yeats describes "reality" as a community of spirits, and says,

When these Spirits reflect themselves in time and space they still determine each other, and each Spirit sees the others as thoughts, images, objects of sense. Time and space are unreal.

The spirits who are perceived by the individual spirit as "thoughts, images, objects of sense" are thus the collective memory which influences the memory, as well as the actions, of the individual spirit. Since the community of spirits determines, to some extent, the individual spirit, it is in a sense his destiny, and we may substitute the word "directive" for what Yeats describes as "instinct" when he writes,

The dead living in their memories are, I am persuaded, the source of all that we call instinct, and it is their love and their desire, all unknowing, that makes us drive beyond our reason, or in defiance of our interest it may be; ... and in their turn, the phantoms are stung to a keener delight from a concord between their luminous pure vehicle and our strong senses.

(M 359)

In the words of AE, whose chapter "The Memory of Earth" echoes Yeats's convictions on the subject,
We soon grow to think our memory but a portion of that eternal memory and that we in our lives are gathering an innumerable experience for a mightier being than ours.

(Candle of Vision 56)

This "mightier being" is, as he later explains, "ourselves beyond this mirage of time and space by which we are enchanted" (148).

The degree to which the individual spirit is determined, be it by the collective memory or by the community of spirits, the 'reality' or 'God' or which it was once, and will be again, a part, will be ascertained in the next chapter, which will examine Yeats's beliefs on free-will and determinism, or choice and chance, and then focus on the choices of Yeats's most intrepid mortal protagonists, the seekers in the drama.
Chapter IV: "He burns the earth as if he were a fire":

Chance, Choice, and the Spiritual Seeker in the Drama

I

In the notes to Calvary, Yeats hints that the issue of chance and choice is the cornerstone of his philosophy. He quotes an old Arab, a follower of Kusta ben Luka on whose teachings Yeats claimed that A Vision was based, who explains that,

Kusta ben Luki [sic] has taught us to divide all things into Chance and Choice; one can think about the world and about man, or anything else until all has vanished but these two things, for they are indeed the first cause of the animate and inanimate world.

(VP1 790)

The relationship of chance to choice is examined by Michael Robartes, Yeats's alter ego, in the opening sequence to A Vision, where he remarks to his friends,

I found myself upon the third antinomy of Immanuel Kant, thesis: freedom; antithesis: necessity; but I restate it. Every action of man declares the soul's ultimate, particular freedom and the soul's disappearance in God; declares that reality is a congeries of beings and a single being....

(AV (B) 42)

That freedom and necessity are equal forces is reiterated in "The Seven Propositions," Yeats's late summary of his
metaphysics, in which the problem of destiny is particularly stressed; Yeats states that "Though the Spirits are determined by each other they cannot completely lose their freedom." Nevertheless, Yeats also implies in Proposition Five that the struggle of the incarnate spirit to retain its freedom in the face of the forces of destiny is the most important struggle in human life.

These forces of destiny are, as Yeats asserts in "The Seven Propositions," the spirits who make up the "stream of souls" which is the universe, and who collectively determine, and are determined by, the individual spirit. Since, as Yeats wrote in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," "All power is from the terrestial condition, for there all opposites meet and there only is the extreme of choice possible, full freedom" (M 356), the struggle between the will of the individual spirit and the forces of destiny is another variation of the conflict between mortals and immortals in the drama, opposites "That have been hatreds for three times the age of / This long 'established ground" (VP1 478). The difference is that the conflict is now on a much larger scale. The forces of destiny take on various forms in the plays, appearing as 'God' or as the forces of generation and destruction which he has at his command, as the cycles of history which supersede the cycles of the individual spirit, as the repressive forces of a particular age which the individual spirit must
either accept or rebel against, and as the spirit's daimon, that being he loves and hates the most.

The theme of chance and choice unfolds on many levels in the plays, particularly as it is often developed through images of fire and burning which are linked both with the larger forces of chance and with the choice of the individual mortal, and which have broad ramifications in the drama. Fire is one of the most powerful symbols of ungovernable force, and the forces of chance (God's choice) and choice (God's chance) are the unquantifiable elements in Yeats's system, capable of wreaking chaos amidst its order. For Yeats water connotes generation, the gushing forth of the foundation of creation; fire on the other hand connotes destruction, for it is equated with the "condition of fire [which] is all music and rest" (M 357) at the end of creation, and with the "fires of the last day" which will destroy creation. With reference to individual spirits, water is the "heart," the mortal passions, but fire is the "soul" (L 286), that which existed before creation and which will continue to exist after it. Following the pattern which we have already uncovered in the plays, images of fire and burning occur far more frequently than those of water and flooding, given the greater concern of Yeats's protagonists with the destruction
of creation.\footnote{A Concordance to the Plays of W. B. Yeats, Vols. I-II (Ithaca & London: Cornell U. Press, 1972) lists 174 entries for fire, another 94 for burning; it lists 10 entries for flood, 89 for water, and another 48 for waves.} The struggle between the forces of free-will and determinism, which will inevitably lead to a reconciliation of these forces and thus to an end of "the world" and "man" (VP1 790) is simply another variation of this longing for destruction.

The forces of chance, from creation (the first manifestation of God's choice) itself onward, wield tremendous power over man in many of the plays. They appear in the form of recurring spiritual and historical cycles which supercede the cycles of the individual spirit in such plays as *The Resurrection* and *The Herne's Egg*, to give only very obvious examples, and are hinted at in many others, including *The Full Moon in March*.\footnote{Cf. F. A. C. Wilson's convincing interpretation of this play as a recreation of the myth of Dionysus, in *Yeats and Tradition*, pp. 58-94. These spiritual and historical cycles are thoroughly explained in the "Dove and Swan" chapter of *A Vision*.} These forces take their most powerful form, however, in the manuscript versions of *The Player Queen* and its companion plays, *The Unicorn from the Stars* and *Where There is Nothing*, where they appear as cycles of violent destruction which can annihilate the world at any time.
These plays hint rather broadly at a coming cataclysm in Yeats's own time, the destruction of the world by fire to succeed the Deluge, the original destruction by water. There is indeed a sense of prophetic urgency attached to the introduction of the forces of chance through images of light, fire and burning in these plays. Since these images are associated everywhere in Yeats's work with the 'otherworld' in its various guises (the Christian God is referred to as the Light of Lights in *The Countess Cathleen*; the Tuatha de Danaan inhabit the Kingdom of Light), this destruction by fire may mean the end of the world as we know it, through a spiritual fire which will destroy it in order to effect a return to the beginning.

This is the fire referred to by the Brother in Yeats's short story "Where There is Nothing," when the child asks him, "Why is the ruby a symbol of the love of God?" Answers the Brother, "Because it is red, like fire, and fire burns everything, and where there is nothing, there is God" (M 185). In the early versions of *The Player Queen*, Yeats hints very strongly that the destruction by fire will signal, as the destruction by water did not, the annihilation of creation. However, even if the world is not physically destroyed, mankind will nevertheless be affected, for the cataclysm will certainly bring about spiritual regeneration: it is linked
in the plays to the prophecy of a second coming, of a new god who will announce a new subjective and, for Yeats, spiritually enlightened age to succeed the decaying objective age brought about by the coming of Christ. In the words of AE,

Out of Ireland will arise a light to transform many ages and people. There is a hurrying of forces and swift things going out and I believe profoundly that a new Avatar is about to appear and in all spheres the forerunners go before him to prepare.³

In addition to these impersonal forces of chance, the plays reveal forces more directly involved with the fate of the individual spirit. A large number of protagonists in the drama feel the influence of destiny at some point in their lives, and usually through a personal intervention which often manifests itself in dreams, or in waking visions and trances (the border between the two worlds which has a psychical, as much as a physical, reality). This destiny, writes Yeats in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," is in fact man's daimon.

I think that all religious men have believed that there is a hand not ours in the events of life, and that, as somebody says in Wilhelm Meister, accident is destiny; and I think it was Heraclitus who said: the Daimon is our destiny. When I think of life as a struggle with the Daimon who would ever set us to the hardest work among those not impossible, I understand why there is a deep

³AE (George Russell), Letters from AE to W. B. Yeats, p. 17.
enmity between a man and his destiny, and why a man loves nothing but his destiny.

(M 336)

The daimon comes to man in a flash of "sudden lightning" (M 361) such as Yeats described in "Vacillation" and again in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae," when, sitting in a restaurant, his mind suddenly became pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from *Anima Mundi*, embodied there and drunk with that sweetness, would, like a country drunkard who has thrown a wisp into his own thatch, burn up time.

(M 365)

This is but a momentary taste of the condition of fire, where all is made clear and lucid, and where man and his daimon are finally united. Guided by this daimon, some men will make the necessary choices for attaining this condition relatively quickly, while others take a much longer time, which is why some men go through the cycles of time so much faster than others, and why, though all journeys began together, at creation, there are now, according to Yeats, spirits in every phase of existence. Nevertheless, the final consequence of man's battling with the more personal forces of destiny, as with its larger forces, is ultimately spiritual regeneration, an alchemical process transforming man's soul and leading to the final blazing consummation of the union with the daimon in the condition of fire.
Yeats states categorically in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" that the greatest conflict, and therefore the greatest choice, occurs in the mortal condition. This is echoed in a number of plays, as in The Wanderings of Oisin where Oisin, having travelled to the island of the immortals who mock "at Time and Fate and Chance" (VE 20) and live

Unchainable as the dim tide,
With hearts that know neither law nor rule,
(VE 22)

feels more than a little constrained by the pressure to be joyful, the only choice in that condition, and longs for the opportunity to battle once more with "good or grievous chance" (VE 24). However, Yeats also argues that true freedom is no more the victory of choice over chance than it is the escape from these forces of chance; true freedom is instead the reconciliation of these two forces, a reconciliation normally associated with Unity of Being at the end of division.

Yeats's concept of freedom in the mortal condition is thus more than a little complex. Man is free on earth, and yet determined by spirits who, it is implied, have chosen this life and this character for him; he is free and yet bound to travel through twenty-eight phases of the Lunar Wheel and countless phases between lives. Moreover, man, it now appears, is most free when most determined by his fate, for the closer he comes to accepting (or choosing) his
rightful destiny, the freer he becomes. Yeats argues in the plays, as will be seen, that those who rebel against the forces of chance and choose complete freedom must, paradoxically, be led by the forces of chance in the end. Only those who are content to struggle with fate, without any hope of winning (as are some antithetical mortals) and those who accept this fact completely, believing that "one day one loses and the next day wins" (VP1 786) (as do some primary mortals) can truly reconcile chance and choice, and therefore most easily escape the conflict.

This escape from conflict is, in Virginia Moore's words, "absolute freedom" as opposed to "relative earthly freedom." While all incarnate spirits have some degree of freedom, for "consciousness is choice" (AV (A) 131), true freedom is the "return to equilibrium" sampled temporarily by the spirit in the discarnate phase of the Lunar Wheel, phase 15, where "Chance and Choice have become interchangeable without losing their identity" (AV (A) 70), and in the later states between death and life, and found permanently in God, or in the unity beyond division.

All that keeps Spirit from its freedom may be compared to a knot that has to be untied or to an oscillation or a violence that must end in a return to equilibrium.

(AV (B) 226)

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Virginia Moore, The Unicorn, p. 292.
The notes to *Calvary* and the poem "All Soul's Night" reinforce this argument. The old Arab states that only in God can the two forces of chance and choice be reconciled: "In God alone, indeed, can they be united, yet each be perfect and without limit or hindrance" (VP1 790). In "All Soul's Night" Yeats implies that this reconciliation of chance and choice in 'God' is the goal of all spirits in their journey through creation. Referring to Florence Farr he writes that, before her death,

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much had she ravelled out
From a discourse in figurative speech6
By some learned Indian
On the soul's journey. How it is whirled about,
Wherever the orbit of the moon can reach,
Until it plunge into the sun;
And there, free and yet fast,
being Both Chance and Choice,
Forget its broken toys
And sink into its own delight at last.
(VE 472-3)
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The ongoing battle with the forces of destiny in the mortal condition thus becomes not a struggle for mastery so much as a struggle for transcendence, for perfection. Since

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5 He goes on to explain that God's chance and, by implication, God's choice are, unlike man's, boundless: "If I should throw from the dice-box there would be but six possible sides on each of the dice, but when God throws He uses dice that have all numbers and all sides" (VP1 790).

6 There can be little doubt that this discourse is *A Vision*, particularly since the poem was printed at the end of the 1925 edition of that work.
this union beyond the confines of time and space is sought as eagerly by the forces of destiny as by the individual spirit, these forces will lead that spirit to make the choices which will lead to spiritual transcendence. Yeats's comment on Shakespeare's plays, that

*I feel in Hamlet, as always in Shakespeare, that I am in the presence of a soul lingering on the storm-beaten threshold of sanctity. Has not that threshold always been terrible, even crime-haunted?*

*(Memoirs 233)*

is certainly at least as applicable to his own plays, since the bitter struggle between the forces of freedom and necessity which is ultimately for spiritual perfection takes place on just such a border, now a "threshold of sanctity," between the incarnate and discarnate worlds.

Images of light and fire are used to present the choices open to the seekers in the drama for dealing with these forces of chance; the most extreme choice, attempted by Martin Hearne of *The Unicorn from the Stars*, is to burn down the

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7Yeats understood nothingness to be complete darkness, hidden by the "bewildering lights" of the nearly perfected spirits such as the Danaans *(DrC 81).* Nevertheless, just as he preferred to depict a golden paradise to a néant in his drama, he also depicted the search for perfection, more often than not, as a search for the light. This was also the practice of the rituals of The Golden Dawn, in which aspirants are reminded that they are "indeed in a Path of Darkness groping for Light" *(I. Regardie, The Golden Dawn, I, 187, quoted in Druid Craft, p. 29).*
world and consume the bonds of mortality in order to set himself free. Martin is set apart from mortals such as Thomas in that play who are content to settle for the comfort of love and family within the confines of mortality, and his choice is ultimately a spiritual one, as are most of the choices which Yeats draws attention to in the drama. Though they are slightly different for the rebel, like Martin, the saint, lover and prophet or poet, they are different manifestations of the same quest. Here Yeats is at his most didactic—the choices of all seekers are finally for spiritual transcendence, for raising themselves and their fellow men above the confines of mortality. Moreover, the seekers are often described with images of light and fire which serve to set them further apart from other men and to link them with the gods outside time, since the more perfected inhabitants of the otherworld are also described with these images.

The highest goal of the seekers in Yeats's drama, and the goal that he, as a practising magician, chose for himself, is to reach a state of perfection in this life that

8 In Yeats's story "The Tables of the Law," Owen Aherne states that he "shall send out of this chapel saints, lovers, rebels and prophets: souls that will surround themselves with peace, as with a nest made of grass" (M 302).
will free them from their incomplete and therefore unhappy state in the journey through the cycles of the universe. Just as important, however, and more feasible, is to achieve a spiritual cleansing, a spiritual regeneration in this life, not only for themselves but for all men and for the age itself. This is the goal that Yeats emphasized and, in his role as dramatist, strives for in the plays. Thus the issue of chance and choice brings out the dogmatic force of the philosophy in the drama, as we shall see. The theme of burning introduces this issue with a prophetic urgency that seeks to present enlightened men with viable options for working with the coming spiritual influx, an influx Yeats strongly believed in, in order to bring about spiritual regeneration for the individual and for the age.

II. Chance

The larger forces of chance clearly influence, even tamper with, the lives of many of the protagonists in Yeats's drama. On the most obvious level they are the God-figures in the plays, from the Christian God in The Countess Cathleen, whose intervention saves Cathleen from the clutches of the devils, and rewards her with a spectacular reception into heaven, accompanied by a great deal of fanfare and as many angels as the Abbey Theatre's limited stage could hold, to
Manannan in The Golden Helmet and other plays, to the Great Herne and all the other personifications of fate. They are also the forces of generation (creation) and destruction (annihilation of the world) that these figures of fate have at their command. Within Yeats's system mortals are determined by less dramatic forces as well, particularly by the seemingly endless cycles around the Lunar Wheel that they must undergo before they can return to the beginning. During these cycles their circumstances and even their character are at least partly dictated by the external forces of the universe, and this they have little choice but to accept: "During its sleep in the womb the Spirit accepts its future life, declares it just" (AV (B) 235). These cycles are, for obvious reasons, difficult to depict dramatically, though they are referred to occasionally, as in the opening lyrics to The Only Jealousy of Emer; their closest counterpart in most plays are the cycles of succeeding ages that must perforce influence the individuals living within them.

Yeats's well-known theory of historical and religious cycles needs but a short introduction. Yeats believed not only that incarnate and discarnate spirits live each other's death, die each other's life, but also that the same thing
applies to successive ages. At the apex of one age, another is born which is its opposite in every sense, and which grows in strength as the first age begins to wane, and peaks as the first age dies. Yeats theorized that these succeeding ages are alternately objective, or primary, and subjective, or antithetical. These historical cycles to some extent determine the character and circumstances of the mortals living within them, and thus represent the forces of chance which impinge on the individual spirit. Nevertheless, they are themselves caught in the battle of free-will and determinism. In the words of Michael Robartes,

After an age of necessity, truth, goodness, mechanism, science, democracy, abstraction, peace [primary], comes an age of freedom, fiction, evil, kindred, art, aristocracy, particularity, war [antithetical]....

(AV (B) 52)

Yeats wrote in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" and again in A Vision that each nation, like each spirit, has a daimon that molds it into its opposite (M 362); clearly the same applies to succeeding ages, since the revelation which precedes the transformation of one age into its opposite, and which is described in the notes to "The Second Coming,"

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9 The correspondence between the cycles of an individual and of an age is similar to that between the individual memory and the collective or racial memory discussed in Chapter III.
comes like daimon to man, in a "lightning flash," oft repeated, until the age has molded itself into its opposite.

At the present moment the life gyre is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion. The revelation which approaches will however take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre. All our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre and prepares not for the continuance of itself but for the revelation as in a lightning flash, though in a flash that will not strike only in one place, and will for a time be constantly repeated, of the civilization that must slowly take its place....

This "scientific, fact-accumulating" primary age whose downfall Yeats predicts is the Christian civilization in which he lived; a large number of the plays echo this same prediction, and look to the antithetical age which must succeed it. Nevertheless, though the primary age must inevitably embrace its daimon and become its opposite, it has, like the spirit, a certain degree of choice as to how quickly to heed the whisperings of its daimon. In The Player Queen the prophet will be born of the union of the unicorn with the queen, but the unicorn will not beget, and so the coming age is continually postponed, to the intense regret of Septimus and, one assumes, of Yeats himself.

The coming antithetical revelation, whether announced by the offspring of the unicorn or of the Great Herne, is
thus just one in a long series of revelations announcing succeeding ages which occur approximately every 2200 years. However, whether for dramatic effect or following the tenets of his secret magical society, Yeats in a number of plays dovetails the coming religious dispensation with one of the two great catastrophes of the earth, the impending destruction of the world by fire (the forces of chance) which follows the great Biblical Deluge, the destruction and restoration of the world by water. Though he had obviously formulated them sometime before, Yeats's ideas on the cyclical destruction and restoration of the world by fire and water are most explicitly stated in the murky depths of his chapter "The Great Year of the Ancients" in A Vision. As they are of particular importance to The Player Queen (where the players begin a performance of a play about the Deluge just as the citizens ready themselves to burn down the castle), and are echoed in Where There is Nothing, The Unicorn from the Stars and other plays, it is useful to turn to A Vision for an overview of these ideas before we trace their unfolding in the plays.

10 Richard Ellmann in Yeats: the Man and the Masks (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Ltd., 1948), p. 97, writes that for Yeats and his esoteric circle "the golden dawn of the individual's transmutation was closely associated with that of the world's rebirth. MacGregor Mathers talked continually from about 1893 on of the 'imminence of immense wars,' which would precede the golden age, and Yeats went so far as to collect prophecies of coming wars from many countries..."
Yeats posits in *A Vision* that the world is destroyed once by water and once by fire in the course of every Great Year.\(^{11}\) The Year begins with the sign of Aries at the full moon in March (the month of saviours and victims) (AV (B) 245) and proceeds through the twelve signs of the zodiac. Citing various authorities, Yeats postulates that the universe is destroyed at the signs of Capricorn (water) and of Cancer (fire):

Empedocles and Heraclitus thought that the universe had first one form and then its opposite in perpetual alternation, meaning, as it seems, that all things were consumed with fire when all the planets so stood in the sign of Cancer that a line could be drawn through all their centres and the centre of the earth, destroyed by water when all stood in Capricorn; a fire that is not what we call fire but "the fire of heaven", "the fire where all the universe returns to its seed", a water that is not what we call water but a "lunar" water that is Nature. Love and Discord, Fire and Water, dominate in turn, Love making all things One, Discord separating all, but Love no more than Discord the changeless eternity.

(AV (B) 247)

Although Yeats does not endorse this theory in so many words, it is sufficiently close to that dramatized in *The Player Queen* to bear some scrutiny. He implies here that the destruction by water is in fact a creation of sorts, for it is by "a 'lunar' water that is Nature" and is equated with

\(^{11}\) Yeats's Great Year, somewhat different from Plato's, encompasses 26,000 years and therefore six antithetical and six primary ages.
Discord and separation (the fall from unity) while the destruction by fire is equated with Love and unity, the joining of the many into the One. A close reading of the various versions of The Player Queen will illuminate this theory further.

The Player Queen is the best example of Yeats's dovetailing of the apocalyptic theme of a coming antithetical dispensation with the theme of the impending destruction of the world by fire, particularly as we now have at our disposal, thanks to Curtis Bradford's diligent scholarship, over thirty manuscript versions of the play, spanning the more than twenty years that Yeats spent trying to rid his play of obsessive philosophic abstractions. Although the published versions of the play seem to announce only the coming spiritual dispensation, in most of these early versions great emphasis is placed on the story of the flood and of the coming destruction by fire, and only by analogy on the coming spiritual changes.

12 The Deluge as Creation is further elaborated on in this chapter: "The destroying flood rose in Capricorn but lasted through the two succeeding signs, only disappearing when the World-Restorer appeared; the creation itself had been but a restoration. To many Christians and Jews, though the doctrine soon ceased to be orthodox, not the Messiah alone but the Spirit that moved upon the waters, and Noah on Mount Ararat, seemed such world-restorers" (AV (B) 249).
Possibly in a last-ditch effort to make his play readily understandable (though this would go against his normal practice) Yeats states explicitly for the first time in the published 1922 version of the play that it announces a new antithetical dispensation, though one that is slow in coming. With lines that can have no other interpretation, Septimus cries,

Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn; but alas, he is chaste, he hesitates, he hesitates. (MPQ, 421, 11, 381-4)

The last extant manuscript versions state this less explicitly, and place more emphasis on the frustration of Septimus at the reluctance of the unicorn: "I will die railing upon the unicorn because he will / Not trample mankind to death under his hooves and beget / Upon some woman a new race" (MPQ 406-7). The Unicorn itself only makes an appearance in Draft 19 and, says Bradford, the "first apocalyptic hint in a play that it was to become decidedly apocalyptic" (MPQ L45) only occurs in Draft 11. It is my contention, however, that the play is decidedly apocalyptic right from the beginning.

The early versions of the play focus on the growing dissatisfaction of the citizens with their Queen, who aspires to be a saint and not a ruler. Knowing Yeats's spiritual bent, it is evident fairly quickly that both the role of the
Queen and her approaching demise have spiritual connotations, especially when an old man is introduced who is possessed by the ghost of the Queen's father and who announces the coming death of one monarch and the elevation to the throne of another by braying with the voice of the donkey who carried Jesus into Jerusalem. The old Man's role is to announce the coming change in the world from the old order to the new. This change is being hurried on by the enraged citizens who, as their discontent mounts, band together to storm the castle and replace the Queen with a more able ruler.

This plot is juxtaposed against a sub-plot in which a group of players, at the Queen's request, are attempting to stage a play within the besieged castle. The play is "The Tragical History of Noah's Deluge" chosen, we are told, because the religious Queen will only tolerate plays based on real and holy stories. That Yeats spent much of his time in the early versions elaborating on the themes of this play-within-a-play indicates that he had other reasons for including it. The Noah play is in fact portentous and timely, though this fact is lost on all the populace (with the exception of the fool) and is even lost on Bradford himself, who does not understand why Yeats insisted on including it. Writes Bradford,
I cannot see that staging the Noah play advanced Yeats's purpose in any way and can only conclude that since Hamlet, the play within the play has had a morbid fascination for playwrights. (MPQ 11)

Elsewhere he concludes that "The Noah play is there to provide a dull part for Decima to dislike" (MPQ 255).

Mad Michael, the fool of drafts 11 and 12, understands the significance of the destruction by water which the play is dramatizing, though his babblings are ignored by the audience:

Before the flood men were spirits, nothing but spirits. But afterwards they had bodies. The flood of space and the flood of time they call it. Those that were drowned did not die. No, no. They were the people that became like the beasts, a multitude of things. They change, they change, they change always. But those in the Ark now, they do not change, oh no. (MPQ 137)

The meaning of this passage, in the light of Yeats's spiritual philosophy, is reasonably clear. Michael is alluding to the mystical traditions which teach that generation occurred through water, and is thus equating the Deluge with creation, with, in Celtic terms, the streams that burst forth at creation from Connlá's Well. The sudden thunderous force of creation, the rushing of everything out of nothing, is quite beautifully represented by the awesome force of the flood. At creation spirits enter the universe of "time and fate and change," as Yeats calls the world in a number of
plays, donning bodies and becoming "wet" or incarnate souls, in contrast to the dry souls of discarnate spirits such as the Hawk-woman in *At The Hawk's Well* of whom the Old Man says, "There falls a curse / On all who have gazed in her unmoistened eyes" ([VP1 407]). Spirits, Michael states, were thus drowned into material form, following Yeats's belief that spirits die into our life as we die into the spiritual life. In the broader context of chance and choice, the Deluge (another symbol for creation) is the first manifestation of God's choice (man's chance). The following versions of the play emphasize the next and perhaps most powerful manifestation of God's choice, the impending destruction of the world by fire.

In draft 16 it is Yellow Martin (Septimus) himself who explains the significance of the play in his "Prologue," but now its significance is more clearly tied to the troubled present, and to the coming destruction of the world by fire. He declaims,

Nobles and gentlemen, now let your troubles cease. The world is safe awhile. It has yet to be consumed by fire--that is the consuming of all forms and images--but once it was near drowned by water. From water generation comes, but that's a mystery.

(*MPQ 221*)

Septimus implies that the destruction by fire will have a different effect. Water gives life ("water is the mother
of change," he says in another version) and thus gives rise to form, while fire will destroy "all forms and images."

But Septimus does not continue, for he is interrupted by the attack on the castle, and the actors scatter in the ensuing confusion. The world is obviously not quite as safe as Septimus fondly believes; "the times are desperate," (MPQ 208) says the Prime Minister in the same version, while in another Peter, one of the actors, cries that the people are about to set the castle on fire: "I heard them say 'burn down the Queen's house, / Throw everything that belongs to her into the flames'" (MPQ 138). That these times are as troubled as were the times before the flood is implied everywhere in the drama. The parallels to Yeats's own time are also abundant. 13 Therefore long before it is made explicit in the play that a new spiritual dispensation is at hand, long before the unicorn is introduced or before Septimus announces "the end of the Christian Era," the parallels between these evil times and the evil times preceding the flood make it clear that the play is apocalyptic, and that it emphasizes the larger forces of chance which mold

13 Perhaps the most obvious parallels are the allusions to the corrupt taste of the theatre-goers who, like the audiences in Yeats's own time, demand realistic drama instead of the romantic but unpopular plays that Septimus wrote in his youth and that Decima longs to act in. These plays sound suspiciously like Yeats's dance plays, the "antiquated romantic stuff" which the Old Man speaks of in the "Prologue" to The Death of Cuchulain (VPI 1051).
the destinies of men.

On the basis of this play, in which the prophecy of the coming cataclysm through fire is very plainly stated, it is possible to unearth traces of the same prophecy in a number of other plays. In *The Unicorn from the Stars*, Father John states explicitly that "the world was destroyed by water, it has yet to be consumed by fire" (VP1 674), though he is willing to wait far longer than is Martin for the destruction to take place. In the play upon which *Unicorn* was based, *Where There is Nothing*, Paul Rutledge states that God's "last judgment" is approaching. Like the revelation of which Yeats speaks in the notes to "The Second Coming," this revelation or apocalypse will strike in different places over a period of time: "God will accomplish his last judgment, first in one man's mind and then in another. He is always planning last judgments. And yet it takes a long time..." (VP1 1158).

Both Martin and Paul predict that it will come in a 'frenzy' of laughter and destruction, while in *The King's Threshold* the dying poet Seanchan announces that a new race is being created in heaven in just such a frenzy, through a marriage which can only take place, interestingly enough, "in the wild middle of summer," that is the month of fire, July (Cancer):
That marriage, because it is the height of life,
Can only be accomplished to the full
In the high days of the year. I lay awake:
There had come a frenzy into the light of the stars,
And they were coming nearer, and I knew
All in a minute they were about to marry
Clods out upon the ploughlands, to beget
A mightier race than any that has been.

... Laughing, it would take the mastery of the world. 14

This same prophecy seems to occur, though heavily veiled, in

The Hour-Glass, one of the few plays that on the surface at
least do not allude to spiritual influxes. The Wise Man

describes his harried state after he has had recurring dreams
of the 'otherworld' in words very similar to those of Sean-

chan:

Reason is growing dim;
A moment more and Frenzy will beat his drum
And laugh aloud and scream
And I must dance in the dream.

Could this scream be "the scream of Juno's peacock" (AV 268),
which announces the coming dispensation? 7

The prophecy of a coming cataclysm through fire is
repeated too insistently throughout Yeats's work to be ignored. Nevertheless, while the physical destruction of

the universe through a consuming fire is the perfect symbol

14 Note the resemblance to the dung-covered swineherd
in The Full Moon in March whose severed heads laughs with
the Queen as she dances before it in a dance symbolizing
their union (VP1 988-9).
for depicting the power of the forces of chance, it may not be necessary to take this symbol literally. The fire, we remember, is "a fire that is not what we call fire but 'the fire of heaven'," and Yeats himself is not entirely certain whether the consequence of this fire will be complete annihilation, or merely a transformation, of the world. Thus he queries in A Vision, "Was the world completely destroyed at the solstice or did it but acquire a new shape?" (AV (B) 247).

In any event, whether or not the world is physically destroyed is finally immaterial since, following Yeats's idealistic philosophy, the world is no more and no less than a thought held jointly by God (the community of spirits) and the individual spirit. In order to effect a transformation, then, what must be destroyed is not so much the physical manifestation of the world as its manifestation in the minds and hearts of men. An obvious analogy is the science of alchemy. While the external manifestation of the alchemical process is the transmutation of lead into gold, this is, for the true alchemist, merely a symbol and a by-product of the transformation of the soul of man into spiritual gold. Explaining the goal of the alchemists, the narrator of "Rosa Alchemica" says that "they sought to fashion gold out of common metals merely as a part of a
universal transmutation of all things into some divine and imperishable substance..." (Mythologies 267). A famous alchemist, Basilius Valentinus, continues the narrator, compares the fire of the Last Day to the fire of the alchemist, and the world to the alchemist's furnace, and would have us know that all must be dissolved before the divine substance, material gold or immaterial ecstasy, awake. (Mythologies 270).

Martin, Paul and Seanchan all receive their knowledge of the impending destruction or transformation of the world through dreams and visions in which they are given a taste of the otherworld. Many protagonists in Yeats's drama experience similar dreams which make them discontented with this world. It is in part because of such dreams that Decima in The Player Queen longs for death:

And yet yonder, it may be, beyond death, are all the things we thirst for: wild adventures among blue mountains, a lovely life we but see in brief dreams, and after we fantastically copy. (MPQ, Draft 16, 236)

It is during one of these dreams that Martin sees "a shining vessel" being dropped and trampled underfoot by unicorns, and hears a command to "Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver" (CP1 345-6). Martin is awakened before the end of the vision and assumes that the Grail-like vessel represents the world that he must set out to destroy. Nevertheless, after he successfully burns down a sizeable portion of the town, Martin learns that he was wrong in assuming
that it would do any good to destroy the material world, since what is material is finally of little importance, being but the mirror of the mind. In a later vision, he learns what Paul Ruttledge has known all along, that what should be set aflame is not the physical world but the immaterial self, the heart and soul.

Chance seems to have merged with choice. Is Martin acting as a free agent in choosing to foment a fiery revolution, or is he merely a pawn of the forces of chance, the means through which the world will be destroyed by fire, either physically or through the minds of men? Certainly chance, in the form of "that other Will" which, Yeats says, "we meet always in the deeps of the mind" (M 337), has tempered with Martin's life, afflicting him with waking trances in which he is given a vivid taste of the otherworld, and directives for joining it—when he awakes, Martin can no longer be satisfied with his humdrum existence in this life. In Where There is Nothing, Paul also claims to be led by the forces of destiny:

I am led by hands that are colder than ice and harder than diamonds. They will lead me where there will be hard thoughts of me in the hearts of all that love me, and there will be a fire in my heart that will make it as bare as the wilderness.

(Pil 1141)

Paul's words echo Yeats's description in "Per Amica Silentia
Lunae" of the daimon, the "hand not ours in the events of
life" who is both the Beloved and the enemy. Man's daimon
is, as we have seen, his Higher Self outside time, the self
from which he was separated at creation. Because the indi­
vidual spirit is but part of the whole, the daimon can be
said to be the other part, and thus the external forces of
chance weighing upon man.

The influence of the daimon is felt by most of the
protagonists in the plays. Cuchulain, in particular, states
in play after play that he is guided by an unseen hand of
fate. In At the Hawk's Well a "lucky wind" and a "charmed
sail" have brought him to Scotland and to the well of
immortality; he is certain that his fate will also lead
him to the water of immortality, for

Why should the luck
Of Sualtim's son desert him now? For never
Have I had long to wait for anything.
(VP1 405)

Cuchulain is too cocky--his daimon is also his enemy, and
will put every temptation in his path to ensure that the
choice for immortality, when he finally makes it, "may be
as final as possible":

The Daimon, by using his mediatorial shades,
brings man again and again to the place of
choice, heightening temptation that the choice
may be as final as possible, imposing his own
lucidity upon events, leading his victim to
whatever among works not impossible is the most
difficult.

(M 361)
The full responsibility for the choice is Cuchulain's alone. In *At the Hawk's Well* he chooses to be seduced by the dancer instead of watching the well, and his life is cursed for his efforts; in *On Baile's Strand* he chooses to go against his instincts, to relinquish his wildness for the comfort of hearth and home, and is rewarded for his choice by having to murder his own son; in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, a broken and middle-aged man, he chooses oblivion in Fand's arms and has to be rescued by Emer through the intervention of her daimon, who has led her to make the most difficult choice possible, to renounce Cuchulain's love in order that he might live again. Paradoxically, it is only in *The Death of Cuchulain*, when Cuchulain truly chooses to give himself up to fate, stating like his son in *On Baile's Strand* that "whether I live or die is in the gods' hands" (VP1 504) that he can finally free himself from the vicissitudes of the human condition.

While they are led to make these choices by their daimon, the actual decision as to whether to follow or ignore their visions is left to the mortals themselves. The proof is that in *The Unicorn from the Stars*, while Martin is not the only one to have these visions—"You are not the first that dream has come to," Father John tells him—he is the only one who decides to act upon them. Both
his father Andrew and Father John have been subjected to them in the past, but both are cowards, and have found means either of ignoring these dreams or of blending them into their normal lives, using them as passive outlets rather than as an inspiration to action. Much the same thing occurs in Where There is Nothing: although Paul initially persuades a number of monks to join him in the difficult path he has chosen as a result of his visions, they all prove to be cowards, and abandon him and the holy lifestyle one by one. And in The King's Threshold Seanchan, who knows that the poet's visions are the purveyors of truth, is abandoned by his pupils when he chooses to die for his beliefs. Though the choice can be dictated to by chance, there does therefore appear to be a fine but real distinction between the two. In the words of the Prime Minister in Draft 16 of The Player Queen,

And those who will not make deliberate choice
Are nothing, or become some passion's voice
Doing its will, believing what it chooses.

(MPQ 208)

III. Choice

In the "Great Wheel" chapter of A Vision Yeats posits that, while chance and choice, now the Body of Fate and the Will, appear in a different balance in every individual, every mortal has some degree of freedom. Most Yeatsian
protagonists choose to exercise this freedom, even in defiance of chance. A common choice is to defy the natural cycles of evolution by escaping from the mortal condition; this is attempted by Forgael, Oisin, Mary in The Land of Heart's Desire and, of course, Cuchulain. With the exception of Mary and, in some versions of the play, of Forgael, these protagonists cannot shake the forces of chance so easily, as Oisin acknowledges quite explicitly at the end of The Wanderings of Oisin. Because he chose to flee with Niamh from the sorrows of the world, Oisin must return to suffer those sorrows more completely.

Oisin: 0 Patrick! For a hundred years
The gentle Niamh was my wife
But now two things devour my life;
The two things that most of all I hate:
Fasting and prayers.

Saint Patrick: Tell on.

Oisin: Yes, yes,
For these were ancient Oisin's fate
Loosed long age from Heaven's gate,
For his last days to lie in wait.

(VE 24)

That Forgael is perfected enough to attain the object of his quest, at least in early versions, is implied by the "Three rows of hounds, the first dark, the second red, and the third white with red ears" which are painted on his sails and which, writes Bushrui, quoting from books on mysticism and from R. Ellmann, "are clearly analogous to the three traditional stages of the Mystic Way: Purgation, Illumination, Union." They symbolize the state to which Forgael has attained by renouncing the material world." (Bushrui, p. 8; quoted from Underhill, Mysticism, p. 145.)
The more man chooses love, the more he must experience what he hates; the more he chooses freedom, the more he must experience its opposite: submission to his fate. This is reinforced by a passage in the 1925 edition of A Vision, where, referring to his plays Deirdre and The Hour-Glass, Yeats writes that,

In the one case natural love is brought to the greatest height, and in the other intellectual search, and both [in the end] reduced to nothing that the soul may love what it hates, accepting at the same moment what must happen and its own being....

(AV (A) 243)

The 1903 version of The Hour-Glass opens to the boasts of the Wise Man that,

Before I came, men's minds were stuffed with folly about a heaven where birds sang the hours, and about angels that came and stood upon men's thresholds. But I have locked the visions into Heaven and turned the key upon them.

(VPl 596)

By the end of the play he has been reduced first to pleading with an angel and with the angel's emissary, the fool, for his salvation, and finally to accepting God's will at whatever cost:

And knowing all I cry
That what so God has willed
On the instant be fulfilled
Though that be my damnation?

(VPl 637)

Yeats later discarded this version, feeling that, while the words were faithful to his philosophy,
An action on the stage ... is so much stronger than a word that when the Wise Man abused himself before the Fool I was always ashamed. (VP1 577)

In the 1914 version fate imposes its will much more subtly upon the Wise Man. While in the first version he meets with an angel almost at the beginning of the play, in the final version the forces of destiny impose themselves first in dreams, tampering with both his dreams and those of one of his pupils in an effort to plant doubts about the validity of his world-view. It is only when this fails that an angel appears and, after warning the Wise Man that he is about to die, threatens him with eternal damnation unless, in the hour of life that he has left, he can find one other person who still believes in the existence of God and the angels.

In these three works, the protagonists must face what they have rejected, in order that the balance may be restored: Deirdre, having felt love, must now feel hatred; Oisin, having escaped sorrow, must now fast and pine; the Wise Man, having denied, must now believe. All three characters undergo a reversal similar to that experienced by souls in Yeats's system in the states between lives which he calls the Shiftings, in which "In so far as the man did good without knowing evil, or evil without knowing good, his nature is reversed until that knowledge is obtained" (AV (B) 231). The
goal for all spirits must be not to attain any one object of desire, but to experience all such objects that their understanding be complete. The closer they come to abandoning any one pursuit and accepting what must be, the closer they come to true freedom.

This theme is carried still further in *Calvary*, where Lazarus, Judas, and even Christ himself are forced to face the opposite of that which they desire. Lazarus, having longed for and then prized his death, is fated to be dragged back to the life he hated by Christ. Judas, who cannot stand the thought that Christ's will is more powerful than his own, chooses to defy Christ's choice to be the God of all men and, by so doing, thinks he has regained his freedom:

I could not bear to think you had but to whistle
And I must do; but after that I thought,
'Whatever man betrays Him will be free';
And life grew bearable again.

(*VP1 785*)

By imposing his own choice upon God Judas claims, in words reminiscent of Forgael's after he has wrested the secrets of life from the God Aengus and subjugated those lesser gods, the Fomor, that he has become at least God's equal:

and now
Is there a secret left I do not know
Knowing that if a man betray a God
He is the stronger of the two?

(*VP1 785*)
Though Judas may have successfully imposed his will on his fate, the play does present the possibility that, like Con-gal in *The Herne's Egg*, who also thinks that he has foiled a god, he may in fact have been merely a pawn of God, duped into thinking that he is following his own will in betraying Christ; thus Christ says that "my betraying was decreed that hour / When the foundations of the world were laid" (*VP1* 785); moreover, "if / 'Twere the commandment of that God himself, / That God were still the stronger." Christ himself longs to be the God of all men, and cannot accept that there are some he cannot save. Though he says "I do my Father's Will" (*VP1* 783), he has not really accepted his fate. Thus he says, rather impotently,

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My Father  
Even now, if I were but to whisper it  
Would break the world in His miraculous fury  
To set me free.  
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(*VP1* 784)

The inadequacy of all three choices is made apparent when they are juxtaposed against that of the dice-throwers at the end of the play. These are the Roman Soldiers who gamble for Christ's cloak; they alone are content, and they alone are truly free, for they desire nothing, but simply accept what must be.

First Roman Soldier: Although but one of us can win the cloak  
That will not make us quarrel; what does it matter?  
One day one loses and the next day wins.
Second Roman Soldier: Whatever happens is the best, we say, so that it's unexpected.

Third Roman Soldier: Had you sent a crier through the world you had not found more comfortable companions for a death-bed than three old gamblers that have asked for nothing.

(VPl 786)

Since only the dice-throwers reconcile chance and choice, they alone escape the conflict altogether. In the notes to the play Yeats labels them objective or primary characters; in A Vision he proclaims that some primary men, those nearing the end or the beginning of the Lunar Wheel, have a greater degree of freedom than is granted other men, because their will is so perfectly reconciled to their fate. In the phases between twenty-three and three, but excluding one, which is the discarnate state,

There is an approach to absolute surrender of the Will, first to God, then ... to Nature, and the surrender is the most complete form of the freedom of the Body of Fate ... When Man identifies himself with his Fate, when he is able to say, "Thy Will is our freedom," or when he is perfectly natural, that is to say perfectly a portion of his surroundings, he is free even though all his actions can be foreseen.

(AV (A) 44, 45)

Significantly, these phases are associated "with elemental fire because here all things are made simple" (AV (A) 24). In this context it is clear that the Wise Man, also an objective character (AV (A) 243), demonstrates this complete
surrender of the will to fate, that greater Will, in *The Hour-Glass*. After resisting for most of the play, the Wise Man at the end gives himself up to the forces of destiny, proclaiming their victory with words that echo Robartes' description of necessity in *A Vision*:

> And now that it's too late I see it all:
> We perish into God and sink away
> Into reality--the rest's a dream.
>
> *(VP1, 1914 v., 635)*

That his reconciliation of chance and choice leads to perfection and, ultimately to the escape from the cycles of time is evident even in the setting of *The Hour-Glass*. While the earliest set of the play was the Wise Man's study, a later design by Gordon Craig altered the set in significant ways, as K. Dorn has pointed out.

In Craig's new design, the Wise Man's study is only part of the set. The desk, now in profile, is in an alcove at the right front corner, in shadow. From the study, a corridor of screens curves round to the left, disappearing back centre stage into light. This arrangement suggests that the Wise Man's place is at one point of a circular pathway, that his domain of learning is at the dark end of a path moving towards light. The set anticipates the circling, gyring, and lunar phases of Yeats's later imagery, the kind of movement Yeats already considered symbolic.16

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16 Karen Dorn, "Dialogue into Movement," *Yeats and the Theatre*, ed. Robert O'Driscoll, p. 125. There are parallels between this set and the new set for *The Land of Heart's Desire*, the play in which the protagonist's choice to escape to the Faery Kingdom is treated as a true escape from the cycles of time. Says Dorn: "The original stage directions
The saint and the fool, because closest to the end of the Lunar Wheel, are the primary characters who have the greatest amount of freedom because, paradoxically, they exercise their will the least of all characters. In A Vision Yeats describes the saint of Phase twenty-seven:

His joy is to be nothing, to do nothing, to think nothing; but to permit the total life, expressed in its humanity, to flow in upon him and to express itself through his acts and thoughts. He is not identical with it, he is not absorbed in it, for if he were he would not know that he is nothing, that he no longer even possesses his own body, that he must renounce even his desire for his own salvation, and that this total life is in love with his nothingness.

(AV (A) 113-4)

This passage describes Paul Ruttledge of Where There is Nothing, particularly towards the end of the play, almost perfectly; by teaching others to shed all that which attaches them to this life and to become nothing, he is the closest of all of Yeats's protagonists to a saint-figure.

According to A Vision, those antithetical characters called for a kitchen room, with everyone except the Faery child on stage the entire time. All argument about the two choices was in the dialogue. But in the new version, Yeats set the play in the kind of scenery he used for Deirdre: a room opening onto trees and beyond, using Craig's lighting, to a "vague, mysterious world." This new stage space gives greater coherence to the dialogue. Take, for instance, the love scene between Mary and Shawn which, like the chess scene in Deirdre, combines the words with the stage set. In the new scenery, the hearth and family are to the right, Mary's bench and book of poetry to the left, and beyond, the mysterious wood with its silver light," pp. 118-9.
who approach the Unity of Being possible at phase seventeen, which is a foretaste of the Unity of Being at the end of time, also achieve a balance of the two forces of chance and choice, and thus a greater freedom than do most men. Writes Yeats,

He who attains Unity of Being is some man, who, while struggling with his fate and his destiny until every energy of his being has been roused, is content that he should so struggle with no final conquest. For him fate and freedom are not to be distinguished; he is no longer bitter, he may even love tragedy like those "who love the gods and withstand them"; such men are able to bring all that happens, as well as all that they desire, into an emotional and intellectual synthesis and so to possess not the Vision of Good only but that of Evil.

(AV (A) 28-9)

For both these primary and antithetical men, this greater freedom, which is less an exercising of their power of choice than a reconciliation with fate, or chance, is a form of blessedness, for they are becoming less fragmented, and thus nearing the point where they can withdraw completely from the conflict of opposites and be united with their daimon.

This point is best illustrated by the play The Cat and the Moon, in which the Blind Beggar (who represents the body, as Yeats explicitly states in the notes) and the Lame Beggar (who represents the soul) travel to the Holy Well of St. Colman to be cured. At the well they meet a saint who offers each of them in turn the choice between a cure to
their physical ailment and blessedness. Says the disembodied saint to the Blind Man:

I am a saint and lonely. Will you become blessed and stay blind and we will be together always? (VP1 798)

The Blind Beggar chooses his eyesight, while the Lame Man chooses to stay lame and achieve blessedness. It is clear that the Lame Beggar has made the better of the two choices; the saint mounts his back in the symbol of their union and the beggar, though supposedly still lame, begins to dance.

All mortals can choose, like the Blind Beggar, to pursue material rather than spiritual goals. Like the historical and religious cycles which may postpone the inevitable and refuse for a time to become their opposite, the spirits may put off making that most difficult of choices for some time. Nevertheless, they will all come face to face with their daimon many times, in many guises, who will present them with the possibility of choosing blessedness, and they must in the end acquiesce. Chance and choice merge most easily in the seekers in the drama, those who, like Martin Hearne and Paul Rutledge, follow the directives of their daimon even though their decision leads to great hardship in this life. Because they are for the most part exceptional men, the seekers are led to make the hardest choice of all—to relinquish their ties with the earth, to destroy the bonds
of mortality and light the fires of heaven in their hearts and minds. Following a number of visions, Paul Ruttledge understands that

We must get rid of everything that is not measureless eternal life. We must put out hope as I put out this candle [puts out a candle] and memory as I put out this candle [as before] and thought, the master of Life, as I put out this candle.

(P1 1039)

Paul's choice is also the choice of the magician and alchemist, "the transmutation of the weary heart into the weariless spirit" (M 269) which the narrator of "Rosa Alchemica" understands rationally but, being a coward, cannot emulate. The choices which Yeats is most interested in and which he highlights in the drama are, like the alchemist's, clearly spiritual choices. Here Yeats is at his most didactic -- the choices of all seekers, whether rebels, saints, lovers or prophets, are finally for spiritual transcendence, for raising themselves, their fellow men and their age above the confines of mortality and thus for bringing about the promised age of spiritual regeneration, whether within or outside this world.
IV. Seekers

The seekers in the drama, those who search out wisdom and truth at whatever personal cost, are markedly different from the ordinary, rational men who are aware only of the physical world by which they are surrounded, and ignore the profounder truth that can be glimpsed in dreams or through the imagination. As Father John says in The Unicorn from the Stars, "it is to those who are awake that nothing happens, and it is they that know nothing" (VP1 650). Like Martin Hearne, who cries "My soul is my own and my mind is my own. I will send them to where I like" (VP1 664), the seekers choose to dream and to follow the instincts and directives of their visions. These seekers can thus be seen as the forerunners of the new antithetical age, the coming "age of imagination, of emotion, of moods, of revelation" (E & I 197).

The precursors of the new antithetical age are, according to A Vision, men who live short but very full lives, like the ancient Greek heroes who burnt themselves out at an early age. Writing after the tragic and early death of Robert

17 The irony, in the light of Yeats's beliefs, is quite evident; life is a dream from which the enlightened strive to awaken; when fully awake they know reality to be nothing.

18 Speaking of the last antithetical revelation, Yeats speculates: "Was it because the older civilization like the
Gregory, Yeats associates him with these men:

Some burn damp faggots, others may consume  
The entire combustible world in one small room  
As though dried straw, and if we turn about  
the bare chimney is gone back out  
Because the work is finished in that flare.  
(VE 327)

The seekers in the drama are also associated with light and fire and, with the notable exception of Cuchulain, often go out in a blaze of light at an early age.

This is true of Martin Hearne, who is associated with gold and fire from the beginning; his trance is induced, it is speculated, by the reflection of the sun's rays on the golden coach that he is building. Mary in The Land of Heart's Desire is called by the Faery Child the "little bird with crest of gold" (VP1 209); her ambition is to escape with the faeries and "dance upon the mountains like a flame" (VP1 192). Cuchulain is also associated with light and fire: in The Green Helmet, for example, Emer refers to "His mind that is fire/ His body that is sun" (CP1 239). Because these images of light and fire are also associated with the more perfected inhabitants of the 'otherworld,' they serve to link the seekers with spiritual enlightenment. Thus, when Martin is surrounded by a golden light at the end of The Unicorn

Jewish thought a long life a proof of Heavenly favour that the Greek race thought those whom the Gods love must die young, hurling upon some age of crowded comedy their tragic sense?" (AV (B) 268-9)
from the Stars, the beggars cry, "There is a sort of brightness about him.... It is not to this world he belongs at all. He is over on the other side" (VP1 708). Even Cuchulain associates himself with the company of immortals who "love to blow a smoking coal / Till it's all flame," (VP1 522), rather than with the ordinary, cowardly men who surround him in such plays as The Green Helmet and On Baile's Strand.

The seekers in the drama, like Paul, Martin and Cuchulain, live their lives, then, as Yeats predicts that all men will in the coming age:

"we will trust our own being and all it desires to invent, and when the external world is no more the standard of reality, we will learn again that the great passions are angels of God, and ... to embody them "uncurbed in their eternal glory," even in their labour for the ending of Man's peace and prosperity." (E & I 197)

They are therefore seen as a threat, and rightly so, by those among their fellow men who prize comfort and material security above all else. Men like Father Hart and Maureen in The Land of Heart's Desire, Thomas in The Unicorn from the Stars and King Conchubar in On Baile's Strand can be said to represent the decaying forces of the primary age which are trying to suppress the emerging antithetical forces embodied in Yeats's golden seekers. Father Hart and Maureen are the least harmful; vaguely sensing the threat
implicit in Mary's dissatisfaction with this world, they try
to lull her into forgetting her desire to escape. Thomas in
The Unicorn from the Stars, on the other hand, sensing the
threat first in his brother Andrew and then in Andrew's son
Martin, sets them both to hard work and bullies Andrew until
he has broken his spirit. At the beginning of the play, he
has almost succeeded in doing the same to Martin, who is
completely engrossed in the coach he is making. King
Conchubar, the representative of law and order in On Baile's
Strand, is impelled by the same fear and sets out to subju-
gate Cuchulain by making him swear, interestingly enough, to
obey the hearth-fire.

The fire of the hearth, so contained that its vital
force has gone from it, is a fitting symbol of the repres-
sive forces of the world that seek to control Cuchulain and
the others in the plays. The hearth-fire is given a promi-
inent place in a number of plays, its primary function being
to ward off the "evil" influences of the 'otherworld' with
which, in this case, the seekers are aligned. Thus in The
Only Jealousy of Emer, Emer lights a roaring fire to protect
Cuchulain from "the enchantments of the dreaming foam" that
"Dread the hearth-fire" (VP1 939).\(^{19}\) The hearth-fire is

\(^{19}\) She doesn't succeed, and in an odd twist on this
theme, the god Bricriu forces Emer to renounce the hope that
often used to try to confine the seekers to this world, and to restrain them from seeking too great a freedom. In the words of Father Hart,

by love alone
God binds us to Himself and to the hearth,
That shuts us from the waste beyond His peace,
From maddening freedom and bewildering light.

(VP1 193)

In Kathleen Ni Houlihan, when Michael decides to join the army and fight for the cause of Ireland, his parents "Try to coax him over to the fire" (VP1 231); as Yeats writes in the notes to that play, the hearth represents the "things of this world" which it is sometimes better to sacrifice, particularly for such an ideal cause (VP1 234).

On Baile's Strand is the best example of what can happen when an individual agrees to be bound by the hearth-fire, by the institutions of the home, and of law and order. In this play Cuchulain is still, at the beginning, a wild, untamed man, "one of those that God has made reckless" (The Golden Helmet, VP1 451). He is portrayed as a man who has long shunned the comfort and security that this world has to offer, and instead "lives like a bird's flight from tree to

they will sit together by the hearth again (VP1 545) before he allows Cuchulain to return to life. Cuchulain is thus allowed to become a wild, untamed man once again, and immediately goes to his mistress.
tree" (VP1 493). As he explains in the early versions of
the play, he much prefers the love of wild women, of "The
women none can kiss and thrive, / For they are but whirling
wind, / Out of memory and mind" (VP1 499)--immortal women, in
other words—to that of gentler mortal women who can be
tamed and, in turn, tame him. In this play he is surrounded
by and contrasted to bosom companions like Daire who, though
he once valued freedom as much as does Cuchulain, now says
"But that was folly / For now that I am old I know it is
best / To live in comfort" (VP1 512); they are confined by
"wives and children."

Conchubar and his followers decide that Cuchulain must
be tamed at all costs:

'How can we be at safety with this man
That nobody can buy or bid or bind?
...
He burns the earth as if he were a fire,
And time can never touch him.'

(VP1 479)

Conchubar, arguing for the security of the state, commands
Cuchulain to swear allegiance to hearth and home over a fire
"That has been lighted from your hearth and mine" (VP1 493).
Cuchulain at first refuses to do so, but finally, and with
great reluctance, he agrees. At this, Conchubar instructs
all the other kings to join him in the oath:

Now thrust the swords into the flame, and pray
That they may serve the threshold and the hearth-
stone
With faithful service.

(VP1 499)
Cuchulain soon learns that he has made a fatal mistake in choosing to obey King Conchubar instead of the dictates of his own heart, for that decision leads directly to the killing of his own son. The new generation, the new life-force, the new law, have been smothered by the forces of the old, decaying order. As the play closes, Cuchulain is seen rushing into the foam, sword upraised, half-crazed with sorrow and convinced that every wave is Conchubar. It is therefore easy to sympathize when Martin Hearne in The Unicorn from the Stars makes the opposite decision, to free himself forcibly from the repressive forces of the old, decaying and life-destuctive institutions of Church and Law, those institutions represented by King Conchubar, with a cleansing fire that will make way for the new order.

In an essay which sheds a good deal of light on The Unicorn from the Stars, Warwick Gould points out that the theme of the physical destruction of the world by man, paralleling that of the destruction of the world by God, is used rather extensively by Yeats not only in this play, but in many earlier works as well. Gould argues that Yeats derived it from the prophetic writing of Joachim de Flora, to which he was introduced by Lionel Johnson, and in which, it seems, this destruction connoted both the destruction of the old order to make way for the new order on this earth,
and the destruction of the earth in God's last judgment.

Central to the concepts of Yeats's fin de siècle Joachitism is that of Straminis Deflagratio, the burning of the straw. It is the notion of the attempt to light the "fires of the Last Day," which later informs Where There is Nothing and The Unicorn from the Stars, that Yeats and Johnson took from genuine Joachimist sources.... Straminis Deflagratio is an oddly overlooked aspect of all Yeats's troy imagery, and is the central notion in "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz":

Arise and bid me strike a match
And strike another till time catch.²⁰

Flora believed that the reign of Christ was soon to be replaced by that of the Holy Spirit, and urged his followers to burn down the old institutions of law and the Christian Church in order to make way for the new spiritual influx. Yeats himself acknowledges the debt of his apocalyptic vision to Joachim de Flora in the "Notes" to The Resurrection:

Our civilization was about to reverse itself...; because we had worshipped a single god it would worship many or receive from Joachim de Flora's Holy Spirit a multitudinous influx....

¹⁹¹³²

Yeats was, at least for a time, quite seduced by the concept of Straminis Deflagratio. Such friends as MacGregor Mathers indeed aspired to a Martinist-inspired revolution.

similar to that undertaken by Martin Hearne; as Yeats writes in his Memoirs, Mathers was "always expecting, as indeed all the visionaries of his time were, a universal war, and had made his wife learn ambulance work that they might join together some roving band" (Memoirs 106), just as Martin joins a group of beggars, Paul Ruttledge a band of tinkers. The Mathers figure in The Speckled Bird, Yeats's early, semi-autobiographical novel, the magician Maclagan, is always advocating the destruction and burning of the present order, and announcing that "Things are going very quickly in the world in our times, and you and I may see the streets and factories burning. Then we who have seen the truth [?] will be listened to. We shall reshape the world" (The Speckled Bird, 22). Later he continues more emphatically,

But there's going to be a great change, there are going to be great disturbances. You and I shall see the streets run with blood, for no great spiritual change comes without political change too. Everything happens suddenly....

(SP 58)

The Yeats figure in the novel, the dreamer Michael, is enchanted:

the fantastic lights and colours of the eastern skies suggested to his imagination armed figures gathering to overturn the present order of the world.... he half persuaded himself that the lights and colours and vapours suggested to him armed figures and not something else because his soul knew what was to come and would show him an omen.

(SP 53)
The dreamer Martin in _The Unicorn_ greatly resembles Michael. Nevertheless, while Michael is like Septimus/Yellow Martin in _The Player Queen_ who bemoans the fact that the new age is so long in coming but does little to hurry it on, Martin decides to take matters into his own hands. When Father John tells him that "We must have patience; the world was destroyed by water, it has yet to be consumed by fire" (VP1 674), Martin disagrees.

Why should we be patient? To live seventy years, and others to come after us and live seventy years, it may be; and so from age to age, and all the while the old splendour dying more and more.

Following what he thinks are the instructions in his vision, Martin decides to burn down the old structures of the world.

When we have brought back the clean earth and destroyed the Law and Church, all life will become like a flame of fire, like a burning eye.... We will rise out against the world and break it and unmake it.... We will consume the world, we will burn it away--Father John said the world has yet to be consumed by fire. Bring me fire. 21 (VP1 686)

Martin is thus abetting the forces of chance, as are the citizens in the early versions of _The Player Queen_ who, increasingly dissatisfied with their ruler, replace the

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21 This desire to destroy the world is not, of course, Martin's alone. As we saw in Chapter II, many Yeatsian protagonists beginning with Forgael state their desire to destroy the world in order to free themselves from the heavy weight of mortality.
primary queen with her opposite, the lowly-born, antithet-
ical Decima. By choosing to aid the coming cataclysm Martin
is in a sense becoming the Marxist idea of the historic
hero, the man who incorporates the forces of change within
himself and through his actions is a catalyst for that change
to take place. This is what Yeats was hoping to transmit to
his audience—the possibility of hurrying on the coming
spiritual liberation from the decaying and life-destroying
order of the Primary age by incorporating this change within
themselves. While Martin chooses violent methods, his goal
is specifically to bring about spiritual regeneration: "We
will destroy all that can perish! It is only the soul that
can suffer no injury. The soul of man is of the imperish-
able substance of the stars" (VP1 691). Whether the destruc-
tion will mean the end of the world, or merely its transform-
ation, does not matter to Martin; "All that is not life," he
says, "will pass away" (VP1 686).

Nevertheless, the end of spiritual regeneration both
within and outside this life is better served by the choices
of the saint and poet than by those of the rebel, as even
Martin comes to admit; "My business is not reformation but
revelation" (VP1 704). Martin finally understands that
physical destruction does not lead very far since, try as he
might, he cannot achieve on earth the liberating ecstasy of
combat that he sees in his vision, and that Cuchulain
ascribes to the Sidhe:

I was mistaken when I set out to destroy Church
and Law. The battle we have to fight is fought
out in our own mind. There is a fiery moment,
perhaps once in a lifetime, and in that moment
we see the only thing that matters. It is in
that moment the great battles are lost and won,
for in that moment we are a part of the host of
heaven.22

(VP1 704-5)

What is possible in this life is to light a fire of
destruction in the minds of men, who according to Yeats are
virtual prisoners of the old, rational order which seeks to
repress the liberating, truth-revealing imagination, "The
wanton imagination of the Poets" which the clerics condemn
in The King's Threshold (VP1 285). This is the social order
which the narrator in "The Tables of the Law" clings to,
fearing that, were he to follow the example of Owen Aherne
and obey the dictates of the angel [as does the Wise Man],

All that I held dear, all that bound me to
spiritual [the Catholic Church] and social order,
would be burnt up, and my soul left naked and
shivering among the winds that blow from beyond
this world and from beyond the stars....
(M 307)

The saint (Paul Ruttledge) and the poet and artist (Seanchan
in The King's Threshold and Septimus and Decima in The Player

22 This is the "fiery moment" that Yeats experienced and
described in "Vacillation" and in the "Anima Hominis" section
of "Per Amica Silentia Lunae."
Queen) are better suited for effecting the necessary transformation in their own minds and hearts and, through teaching and revelation (the way of the saint) and through works of art (the way of the artist), for helping to effect this transformation in others and in the age, thus truly bringing about spiritual regeneration.

The philosophic base of Where There is Nothing is very similar to that of The Unicorn from the Stars, but it is far more obvious, which is why Yeats disliked this play and removed it from his collected works. The play is in fact one of Yeats's most abstract and most didactic, and the dour Paul is far less endearing than is the occasionally comic, occasionally tragic Martin. Paul is a saint-figure almost from the beginning of the play. At first, he is an unwilling witness to the stultifying effect of the modern, well-regulated existence of the gentry and, like Martin, has fantasies of destruction in which he dreams of pulling down his own house and even the world itself. He chooses instead to abandon this life and to join a wandering band of tinkers. Paul soon begins to preach, first to tinkers and later, when he joins a holy order, to the monks themselves. His sermons usually follow a trance in which he receives some revelation, and are so vivid that he soon has a devoted audience among the monks. It stands to reason that Paul, along with his
small band of followers, is soon expelled from the order, since, being part of the old Christian church, it is threatened by new revelations of any kind. The monks seek shelter elsewhere, and the sermons continue.

Believing that,

There is so much fire in the soul, in yours, in mine, in the soul of any old apple-woman in the market that if one could get it out it would consume the world.

(P1 1072)

Paul teaches men to release this fire, by becoming completely still and meditating on a "dangerous thought" until a light forms in their heads. This is the light which the Fool in The Hour-Glass refers to when he tells the Wise Man that he can see angels when he "gets quiet":

then something wakes up inside one, something quiet and happy like the Stars—not like the seven that move [the wandering stars] but like the fixed stars [the condition of fire].

(P1 590)

The monks claim success; one says that "When I was meditating, the inside of my head suddenly became all on fire" (P1 1135), while another describes the experience as "a spout of

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23 The soul can only attain its goal in passivity; Yeats would agree with Plotinus that, in Rist's words, "If we 'pursue' the One, of course we shall always tend to specify it, to see it under some particular aspect. We must learn instead to be passive, to let it come, as it will come if we take away our own restlessness, that very restlessness which prevents us from being like it," Rist, Plotinus, p. 225.
fire going up between my shoulders." The "high thought" is "'He ascended into heaven'" (VP1 1135), and Paul says that "if a man can only keep his mind on the one high thought he gets out of time into eternity, and learns the truth for itself" (VP1 1127).

The high seriousness of all this makes the play almost comic, but in fact Yeats took these beliefs very seriously, and advocated a similar meditation, with a similar goal, in his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry":

there is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture that is the image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images and ... this one image, if he would but brood over it his life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp.

(E & I 95)

Paul is explicitly teaching a way of escaping the cycles of time and rejoining eternity though, it may be, only for one "fiery moment." His own personal goal is, like that of many of Yeats's seekers, to escape the cycles permanently; thus he longs for death, which is, he says, "the last adventure, the first perfect joy, for at death the soul comes into possession of itself, and returns to the joy that made it" (VP1 1160). However, this theme is tied here, as elsewhere in the drama, with the theme of the spiritual regeneration,
even within the bounds of time, of men and of the age, since implicit in the play is a condemnation of both the civic and religious orders of the day.

While the way of the saint leads to perfection perhaps faster than the ways that other seekers choose, the saint can transmit his knowledge, by example and by instruction, only to a few. The poet and artist, on the other hand, can reach a much larger audience, and thus the hope for the regeneration of an entire age lies with them rather than with the saint. The most notable examples of the artist in the plays are the bard Seanchan in *The King's Threshold* and Decima and Septimus in *The Player Queen*.

The arts are linked in much of Yeats's writing to *Straminis Deflagratio*, the fiery consummation of the world. Indeed, Warwick Gould asserts that Yeats also took from Joachim de Flora "the curious paradox--half-borrowed from some fanatical monk, half-invented by himself," as the narrator says of Owen Aherne in "The Tables of the Law," "that the beautiful arts were sent into the world to overthrow nations, and finally life herself, by sowing everywhere unlimited desires, like torches thrown into a burning city" (294). These "unlimited desires," as Michael explains in *The Speckled Bird*, are for the images of heavenly beauty
depicted by artists which make men dissatisfied with the imperfect beauty to be found in the fallen world, and make them long for the 'otherworld.' In the words of the poet Seanchan,

when all falls
In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
The victim's joy among the holy flame
God's laughter at the shattering of the world.

Alluding to his own imminent death, he continues,

And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
On these bare steps.
(VP1 266-7)

The arts can also be instrumental in the regeneration of this world. Yeats argues in The King's Threshold and elsewhere that the world, being but an illusion, is a collective image created by men's minds as a result of looking at images created by the poets from the beginning of the world:

poets hung
Images of the life that was in Eden
About the child-bed of the world, that it,
Looking upon those images, might bear
Triumphant children....
(VP1 264)

This explains Seanchan's words to the cripples in that play, when he asks them,

But why were you born crooked?
What bad poet did your mothers listen to
That you were born so crooked?
(VP1 299)

It follows that if poets can take responsibility for the image of the present world, they can also take responsibility
for transforming the world, by changing its image in the minds of men. That the artist can play an active part in ensuring the spiritual transformation of an age is understood not only by Seanchan but also by the actress Decima in *The Player Queen*, though not by the poet Septimus, who long ago conceded defeat. Decima finds some plays written by a younger, more inspired Septimus which he has discarded because they are so unpopular, so different from the mood of the present day. Decima insists that if he would put on the plays, and allow her to act in them, they would transform the minds of the audience, and gradually the age itself. She urges him in Drafts 11-12 to

Let me become your dreams. I will make them walk about the world in solid bone and flesh. People looking at them will become all fire themselves. They will change, there will be a last judgment in their souls, a burning and dissolving.²⁴ Perhaps the whole age may learn.

(MPQ 132-3)

Explaining why she must take on the role of the beautiful, inspiring, antithetical queens of his early plays instead of the ugly role of Noah's wife, a primary character, Decima says in Draft 15,

I must be beautiful and have shining things to wear. I must grow greater and make all those that look at me grow greater. Bad or good, it does not matter. But I must be a fire, a light.

(MPQ 170)

²⁴Decima's speech is almost identical to one of Paul Ruttledge's; in fact, Decima and Paul are very similar in many ways. They both aspire to become as simple as a flame, and both long for "adventures" beyond the body.
Decima is trying to convince Septimus that rejecting the realistic drama of the old order, and enacting instead his idealistic plays, thus giving life to the images of a world of beauty and imagination, will achieve the same end as would the begetting of an antithetical prophet by the unicorn. Septimus agonizes over the chastity of the unicorn because, as he explains in the 1922 version of the play, "His unborn children are but images; we merely play with images" (MPQ 421). What he does not see is that his own plays are just such unborn images, and they can be brought to life; dramatizing them will resurrect the truth they contain, and will awaken that truth in the minds of those who see them.

The parallels between the idealistic plays of Septimus and Yeats's own are quite obvious. Unlike Septimus, Yeats persevered in writing "antiquated romantic" plays which he knew must be unpopular in such a rational age. He did so consciously, for he knew himself to be an antithetical man in a dying primary age, and thus a precursor of the new antithetical age which must soon take its place. While Yeats was attracted by such alternatives as Straminis Deflagratio, the physical destruction of the old order that would ensure its replacement by the new, he understood that such methods were neither particularly effective nor necessary. The
coming dispensation can be brought on, and the primary age transformed, through an intellectual influx in the minds of men. He argues in the plays both by precept and by example that it is not necessary to wait impatiently for the unicorn to beget; men can become the prophets of the new age, and can bring it on themselves. This message is inherent in a number of plays, and is stated explicitly in A Vision: "antithetical revelation is an intellectual influx neither from beyond mankind nor born of a virgin, but begotten from our spirit and history" (MPQ 262).

V

Choice seems to have merged with chance. In the context of the decaying primary order in which most of the plays are set, there is only one viable choice for the spiritually aware, for the golden seekers in the drama, no matter what role they play. They must work with the forces of chance, to rebel against the life-destructive forces of this old order, and replace them with those of the new, life-giving antithetical order. Most of these seekers in fact embody within themselves, though it may be through their daimon, the coming changes.

Though the majority of Yeats's plays support the belief
that man is free to choose who and what he wants to be, the choice is within a set, and therefore limiting, framework. The only real choice in the long run is spiritual awareness, since the only real goal, again in the long run, is spiritual perfection, the union with the daimon, man's Higher Self, in the condition of fire. Man can choose when to make the decisions to which he is brought by his daimon, decisions that will lead, however slowly, up the spheres, but he cannot, ultimately, choose not to make them. Chance (as the external forces of the universe, or as man's daimon, his other self outside time), and choice (as the individual spirit separated from these forces), are finally, like all opposites, like yin and yang, separate and yet inseparable, for together they form the complete circle; together they dance the cosmic dance:

Considering that . . .
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is heaven's will.

(CP 213-4)
Chapter V: The Completed Symbol

In his Autobiographies, Yeats refers to "personifying spirits" who "bring our souls to crisis," and who are indisputably the daimons of "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" and A Vision. He implies, however, that these spirits act from within man:

I know now that revelation is from ... that age-long memoried self, that ... shapes the child in the womb ...; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind.

(A 337)

The daimon, according to A Vision, is the part of man which exists beyond the confines of time and space, that other self with which man will be united at the end of time (AV (A) 30); together they will form the "Ghostly Self" which exists within the Phaseless Sphere (AV (B) 211). It now appears that the daimon may exist within man himself, in that "buried self" beyond his conscious life.

Yeats was already moving towards this understanding of the daimon in the 1925 edition of A Vision for, though he states that the daimon is a being quite separate from man and is, in fact, interchangeable with several others, he also states that the daimon "carries on her conflict or friendship with man, not only through the events of life, but
in the mind itself, for she is in possession of the entire
dark of the mind" (AV (A) 28).

But there is another mind, or another part of our
mind, in this darkness, that is yet to its own
perceptions in the light, and we in our turn are
dark ... these two minds ... make up man and
Daimon....

(AV (A) 27)

Yeats went much further towards identifying the daimon with
the unconscious when he admitted shortly after the publica-
tion of the last version of A Vision that the communications
of that book may well have been the work of his unconscious
mind working in unison with that of his wife's, rather than
the work of independent spirits, as he had earlier supposed.¹

Yeats makes increasing reference in his later works to
the unconscious of which the conscious life is but a frag-
ment. In his essay "The Mandukya Upanishad," he calls man's
unconscious self that "Self that never sleeps, that is never
divided" (The Upanishads call it the conscious self) and
opposes it to man's conscious self, his "fragmentary, forget-
ting, remembering, waking" self (E & I 480). Elsewhere he
writes that he "always sought to ... immerse [his mind] in
the general mind where that mind is scarce separable from
what we have begun to call 'the subconscious'" (M 342).
Yeats is clearly subscribing to the view, reiterated in the

¹Cf. V. Moore, The Unicorn, p. 370.
Hindu Book of Consciousness and Light, that at birth the two spheres of the psyche, consciousness and the unconscious, become separated. Consciousness is the element marking what is separated off, individualized, in a person, and the unconscious is the element that unites him with the cosmos.²

The Book of Consciousness and Light teaches meditations for uniting the unconscious with the conscious; like the meditations taught by Paul Ruttledge, their ultimate goal is the freedom from division.³

Since "revelation" (the dreams and visions induced by the daimon) comes from the unconscious, that "age-old memoried self," it stands to reason that chance, or the external forces of the universe, can also be understood to be a part of man, that part which he has forgotten at birth and must struggle to remember. Yeats implies this in A Vision when speaking of his plays Deirdre and The Hour-Glass. After stating that in those plays love and intellectual search are "reduced to nothing that the soul may love what it hates," so that, in other words, the soul which has chosen freedom may know its opposite, destiny, he proceeds to equate the


two: the soul must accept "at the same moment what must happen and its own being, for the Ghostly Self [the permanent self] is that which is unique in man and in his fate" (AV (A) 243). Chance and choice are thus, in the final analysis, merely warring forces within one being.

The division of man's psyche into consciousness and the unconscious reflects the division of the One into the many at creation in the same way that "The whole passage from birth to birth," according to Proposition Five, reflects "the whole passage of the universe through time and back into its timeless and spaceless condition." Using the terms of Jungian psychology, which echoes many of the tenets of Yeats's philosophy, the disintegration of the One can be understood on another level as the disintegration of the personality in man, and all the spirits which struggle in the drama simply as warring, separate forces within one personality, and thus ultimately reconcilable.

There is considerable evidence for arguing that the action in many of Yeats's plays has both an objective and a subjective reality, taking place at the same time in Yeats's universe, a world in which matter and spirit meet, and in

Yeats understands by the term unique "that which is one so cannot be analysed into anything else" (AV (A) 221).
the microcosm of that universe, the mind of man. A few examples should suffice, as attention has been drawn to this aspect of Yeats's drama by critics as diverse as Helen Vendler and B. R. Friedman; Vendler argues that each of the groups of plays which she analyzes in "Yeats's Changing Metaphors for the Otherworld" dramatizes an encounter with the other world which takes place in the mind of the central protagonist.\(^5\) Yeats wrote of *The Hour-Glass* that "It is a parable of the conscious and the unconscious mind"; the same can be said about several of the other plays.

Yeats seems to be referring to the struggle within the minds of his protagonists in the following passage from "Plays for an Irish Theatre":

> It was only by watching my own plays that I came to understand that this reverie, this twilight between sleeping and waking, this bout of fencing, alike on stage and in the mind, between man and phantom ... is the condition of tragic pleasure.\(^6\)

This "reverie" is achieved in a number of plays by the use of masks which, says Yeats, by "keeping always an appropriate distance from life, would seem images of the profound emotions that exist only in solitude and silence" (VP1 416). Yeats struggled to portray this "bout of fencing" between

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man and his phantoms even before he began to use masks in
the theatre. The earliest, and perhaps the best, example is
The Shadowy Waters, where Forgael undertakes a journey far
out to sea which is, particularly in the early versions,
quite explicitly a journey into his own psyche. Forgael's
main problem is loneliness; his voyage is purportedly a
flight away from the loneliness of self (DrC 196). Never-
theless, he is surrounded by gods who have been created by
his own mind, "Fashioned / with his thoughts and desires"
(TPBS xiii). These gods, write the editors of A Tower of
Polished Black Stones, are the embodiment of his own emotions;
"They are his perpetual rejection and destruction, in a fury
of action, of all limited mortal experience" (TPBS xiv).
His loneliness is thus compounded by the fact that, separated
from himself (his Higher Self), he is nevertheless surrounded
only by himself: "He is like a man living in a tower made of
polished black stones which each reflect his face" (TPBS 44).
The world and everything in it are merely his creations, his
masks and his costumes:

> For all & souls live
> All souls that build the fire all things that life
> and
> Wrapped up in fur or feather & bright with scales
> that my
> Are but malevolent masks for my own lips press
> and
> for
> And cry through & the woods & waters and winds
> Are robes but the robe I wrap about my head
> And from of ald have shaken with my sighing

(DrC 177; mss. 1896-1899)
Thus the confrontation between spirits and mortal characters, while very real in one sense, in another sense takes place in "the deeps of the mind" of the protagonists, as B. R. Friedman has argued very convincingly in his book *Adventures in the Deeps of the Mind: The Cuchulain Cycle of W. B. Yeats*. At the Hawks' Well, for example, marks Yeats's "ultimate conception of the stage ... as a mirror of the mind."\(^7\) The spirits, such as the Hawk-Woman in this play, and Fand and Bricriu (who actually dons Cuchulain's body) in *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, can readily be perceived both as real communicators from the other world and as personifications of those emotions which are raging within the human characters.\(^8\) This is so in *The Land of Heart's Desire*, whose setting, writes Friedman, is a "psychic metaphor":

> Ranged in the light around the hearth are the embodiments of the restrictions and responsibilities stifling Mary's spirit: Bridget, worn to

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\(^8\) This practice of creating spiritual characters with both an objective and a subjective reality also has a precedent in Japanese Noh drama. Write R. Taylor of the play *Aoi No Ue*, which he claims influenced the writing of *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, "The Oriental model is a very simple ritual of spirit possession and exorcism in which a vengeful ghost is the personification of an emotion so intense that it has become an autonomous agent," in *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese No* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 140.
bitterness by a life of housekeeping; Maurteen, valuing only the material comforts his labour has earned; Father Hart, demanding obedience to a repressive dogma; Shaun, offering a love doomed by mortality. Hidden by darkness beyond lies the fulfillment of Mary's dream wish, the Land of Heart's Desire itself....

Friedman continues,

The Child's passage from the night outside to the light inside projects the emergence of Mary's wish into consciousness. Yeats's scenario captures dramatically the process Blake had defined as imagination: turning mental states into personified images.9

The goal for Yeats's seekers must be a reconciliation of these warring forces within themselves; it is for this reason that Paul Ruttledge urges his followers to still their thoughts until their mind becomes a single flame. The return to the One can thus be understood in alternative terms as a journey inward rather than upward. This is true as much for Plotinus as it is for Yeats. Writes Rist in Plotinus: The Road to Reality,

metaphors of ascent are not the only ones employed by Plotinus when he speaks of the soul's journey. He also frequently talks of returning or 'awakening' to our inner selves.... The soul ascends to the One, or withdraws from the external world to itself, or returns to its source or fatherland.10

9 Friedman, Adventurers, p. 19.
10 Rist, Plotinus, pp. 215, 217.
The last step in the journey of the spirit in Yeats's metaphysics echoes the last step in the journey through consciousness described in the *Book of Consciousness and Light*, when man is finally made whole. The end of this journey, like Yeats's nothing, or Phaseless Sphere, is symbolized in the text by a circle:

Without beginning, without end,
Without past, without future,
A halo of light surrounds the world of the law.
We forget one another, quiet and pure, altogether powerful and empty.
The emptiness is irradiated by the light of the heart and of the heaven.
The water of the sea is smooth and mirrors the moon in its surface.
The clouds disappear in the blue space; the mountains shine clear,
Consciousness reverts to contemplation; the moondisk rests alone.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, pp. 77-8.
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