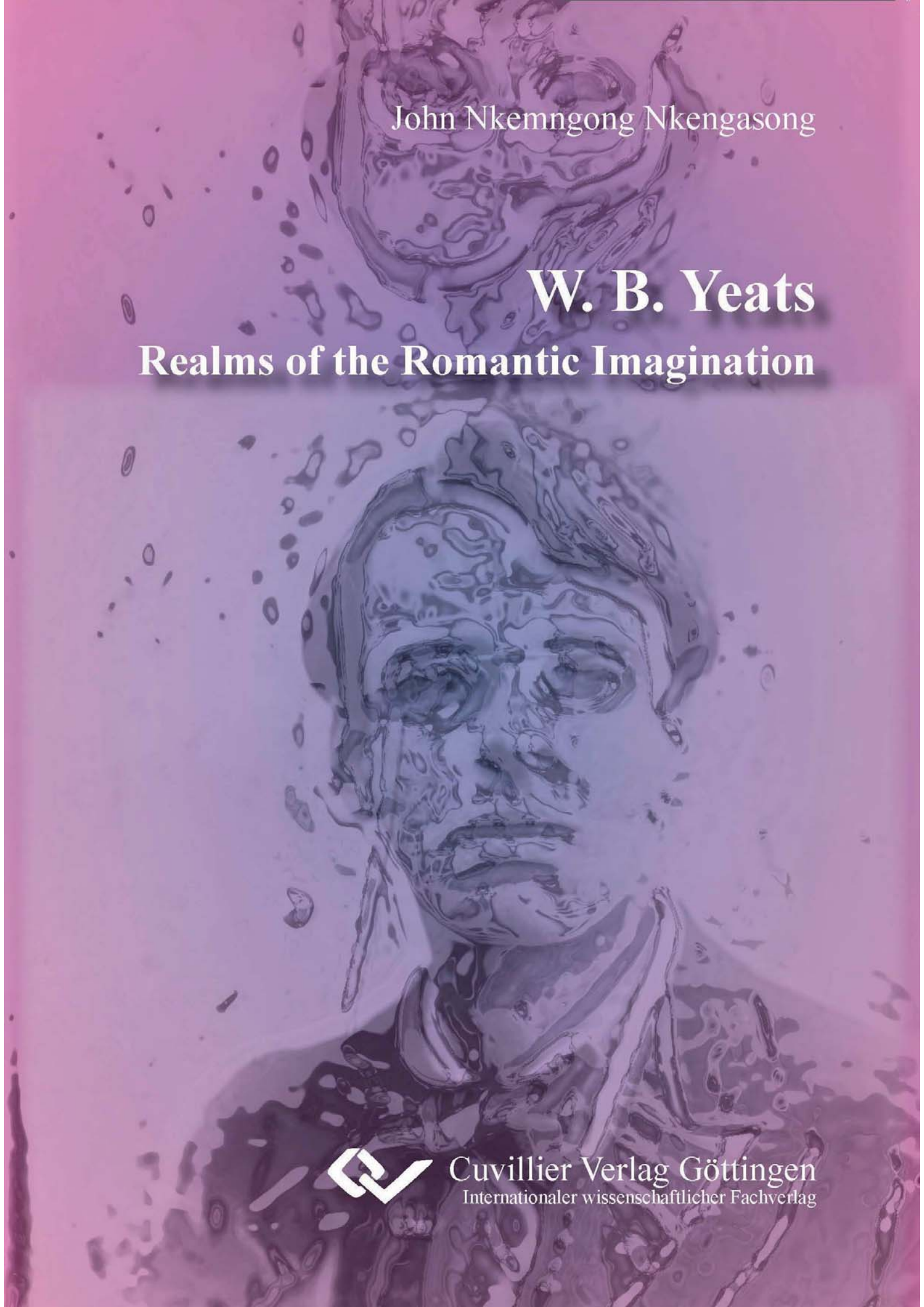
John Nkemngong Nkengasong

W. B. Yeats

Realms of the Romantic Imagination



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For
all my students,
past and present

Contents

Acknowledgements

When I was awarded the *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst* (DAAD) grant for a research visit to the University of Regensburg, Germany in 2007, the original objective was to study the poetry of William Butler Yeats and Thomas Stearns Eliot from the internal and intertextual structures and the conceptual frameworks based on the Romantic Imagination. The project intended to carry out a comparative study of both poets against the backdrop of the antagonistic and schismatic criticism that often characterizes the study of their poetry. It aimed at bridging the gaps created by the conflict between proponents of Yeats and those of Eliot in the struggle to ascertain the depth of their modernism as well as the degree to which both poets were committed to the Romantic tradition.

In the process of the research, I came to the realization that the Romanticism of Yeats has never really been given the consideration it deserved. Much critical attention has focused on the poet's modernist poetics, thus highlighting the concept of modernism which gained so much critical grounds and influence in the early twentieth century, to the detriment of Romanticism, which preceded it. This was an opportunity for me to carry out a

more in-depth study on Yeats on whose poetry I have covered more ground than Eliot's. Besides, the study of the Romantic imagination in Eliot's poetry is itself a major project which could be carried out later with greater focus and attention.

It is, therefore, my wish to acknowledge that this book is the outcome of the German Academic Exchange, (the *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch)* research grant, though it has taken a longer time than was expected to get it published. I am particularly indebted to Prof. Dr. Rainer Emig who was my host and mentor at the University of Regensburg, Germany, and who remains my most vital professional link; to PD Dr. Susanne Schmid, also a lecturer in the Department of English and American Studies whose sound knowledge of Romantic poetry and penetrating discussions on the poetry of Blake, Yeats and Eliot inspired some of the arguments raised in this book. I am grateful to Mr Wolfgang Funk, Ms Julia McIntosh-Schneider, all of the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Regensburg for their cooperation; and the personnel of the University of Regensburg library and the *Bibliotheks Verbund Bayern* which hosts a lot of critical sources on Romantic poetry in general and the poetry of Yeats in particular. I am equally grateful to Prof. Rachel R. Reynolds of Drexel University, USA, for painstakingly reading through the manuscript, making valuable suggestions and writing a foreword; my colleague, Prof. Christine Djockoua Manyaka Toko of the University of Yaounde I for her suggestions and encouragement; and my doctoral students: Oscar Labang Chenyi, Peter Awoh Foinjong, and Mary-Louisa Lum, for their cooperation.

Foreword

Even as figures like Ezra Pound or Somerset Maugham fade in influence at the beginning of the third millennium, Yeats remains one of those poets at the centre of understanding of literature. Scholarship on his work continues to appear and his readership apparently holds steady. Whether in the core English-using countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland, or the USA, or whether one is in Anglophone Cameroon, South Africa or south Asia, for example, all learned readers know some of Yeats's poetry. Certainly he came to us through secondary or tertiary education, and these formal contexts keep his works alive. But also for those of us who are consummately engaged with literatures in English, Yeatsian visions appear to us through the rich ideas, figurations and experiments in representation that appear in those he influenced. To me, Yeats has also remained richly inspirational over the years, as his major images and figurations ("Among School Children" or Byzantium's "artifice of eternity") echo and resonate through the course of my life. We learn to live, or perhaps to understand living, through these fragments, and Yeats emblematizes them as part of our collective culture as readers of literature in English.

This volume shows us how Yeats's unorthodox approaches to poetic meaning, especially within modernist poetry, are part of the how the poet "astonishes" his contemporary readers. By astonishment, I am referring to the *Aesthetics of the Canon* in

which Frank Kermode explains how each generation of readers must always discover anew the wonder of transcendent meaning in poetry. What John Nkemngong Nkengasong does here is demonstrate how Yeats ultimately adhered to forms of creativity more aligned with Romanticism, undergirded with the sense of transcendence that is part of poetry itself and not necessarily part of the wider forms of belief which modernism engages and perhaps battles.

Reading Nkengasong's *W.B. Yeats: Realms of the Romantic Imagination*, I find yet again a renewed appreciation of the poet. This interpretive study teaches new ways to think about the nature of transformation, personally and metaphysically (are we not all also aging and looking for meaning in a changing world like Yeats did?), and in the construction of poetry. The book also positions questions of poetic production in historical and psychological perspectives, examining the shifts in Yeats's poetry through the vicissitudes of the poet's own life, especially his love life, his movement into statesmanship and old age. Through close textual analysis, the book teaches about the evolving relationship between an encroaching sense of the untenable and the horrific in the daily reality of life of the early 20th Century, characterized by the last bloody revolutions of an age in which Romanticism was founded, and the horrors of modernity as experienced through World War I. Nkengasong ably demonstrates how Yeats's poetic modes are a way that Yeats handles disappointment, horror and fragmentation through a changing and ever more complex poetic universe of myth, nature, and eternity, where wholeness and harmony might be idealized.

Perhaps most significantly, Nkengasong provides a series of interpretations that makes analysis and appreciation of major works of Romantic poetry part of reading Yeats, stepping away from the bleary-eyed experience of interpreting Yeats as pure modernist. Moreover, Nkengasong touches on some things here that are uniquely Irish, especially through the analysis of Yeats's nature poetry, joining the major tropes of the most important animators of Irish myth to the experiments and purposes of the

poet's Romantic forebears. In particular, the reader will enjoy the cogent chapter on how politics and Yeats's experience of unrequited love in the midst of revolution come together to create a cathartic set of figurations in Yeats poetry. Additionally, there is a fascinating chapter titled "The Dome of the Visionary" on Yeats's own difficult book of philosophy and aesthetics, *A Vision*. In this chapter, Nkengasong provides a method of closely reading the poet's later works that is a heuristic for greater understanding and appreciation. It concludes with a masterful reading of "Sailing to Byzantium" that brings alive the excitation of reading Yeats in the year 2011.

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Introduction

Defining or developing a theory for Romanticism has been a constantly contentious issue in the history of literary criticism. In English Literature, debates have touched on the problems of periodization and the discrimination of Romantic poets with the aim of establishing common paradigms suited to the discussion of Romantic literature even with the more popular English Romantic poets like William Blake, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, P.B. Shelley, Lord Byron and John Keats.

Contemporary debates about Romanticism's character began with Réne Wellek's attack on Arthur O. Lovejoy's argument that there is a multiplicity of Romanticisms with distinct thought-complexes. Wellek went on to formulate a theory of Romanticism which highlighted the "imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style" (161).[1] From 1948, Wellek's proposition became the hallmark for the discussion of Romantic poetry until Jerome McGann later dismissed it on grounds that Wellek paid more attention to the perspective of culture and society rather than to the poetic imagination, and further that his theory of Romanticism is inadequately categorized and the synthesis "too abstract and conceptual" (739). Although Morse Peckham attempts to reconcile the conflicting theoretical positions by synthesising the ideas of Lovejoy and Wellek through the

introduction of the concepts of organicism, dynamism, and diversification (11), McGann further claims that Byron does not fit easily into Wellek's criteria for Romanticism and that he (Byron) cannot simply be removed from the historical phenomena. McGann however, traces important distinctions between different Romantic ideas of the imagination as expressed by Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and Coleridge (738-739).

The issue is even more complicated when one attempts to apply Romantic phenomena to a poet like William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) who is better known as a modernist poet. The tendency most often is to limit Yeats's Romanticism to his early poetry and consider every other poem beginning from "A Coat" to be modern because he indulges in a highly esoteric, symbolic, experimental and philosophical poetic style which suits the taste of the modernist critic. Some prominent scholars on the Romantic imagination and the poetry of vision like G. Wilson Knight and Maurice Bowra go further to treat Yeats somehow iniquitously by categorically subjecting the definition of Romanticism to a historical context. These critics consider Yeats as some kind of a decadent Romantic poet despite the rich and insightful qualities of the Romantic imagination evident in his poetry. G. Wilson Knight, for example, has done elaborate studies on the poetry of vision in *The Starlit Dome,* dwelling exclusively on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. He hardly says anything about Yeats from whom he borrows the expression that forms the title of his book, an expression that is located in the core of not just the poet's second "Byzantium" poem but also in his overall experience as a Romantic poet: "A starlit or moonlit dome disdains/All that man is,/All mere complexities" (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 280).

Furthermore, in a comprehensive analysis of the Romantic imagination, Maurice Bowra in *The Romantic Imagination*

concludes that, "Within this period and afterwards there were no other poets whose conception of the imagination was quite this and who though they may have much in common with the great five are not in agreement on the essential point…." The period mentioned above is definitely the Romantic period (1798-1832) and the "essential point" which Bowra states in a preceding discussion is that,

> …the five major poets – Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, in spite of their differences agreed on the major point that the creative imagination is closely connected with a peculiar insight into the unseen order behind visible things…. (271)

Knight and Bowra seem to overlook the fact that although Yeats wrote mainly in the twentieth century, his poetry is invested with similarly rich and spiritually-profound values which urged and fashioned the imagination of the poets of the Romantic tradition. If "the peculiar insight into the unseen order behind visible things" becomes the paradigm for judging the Romantic poetry, then Yeats, more than any Romantic poet, fits appropriately within it. The persona in Yeats's poems demonstrates a wonderful ability to use the imagination to penetrate the "unseen order behind visible things" in search of ideal reality within the natural environment, in myth and visionary experiences.

George Bornstein is perhaps the critic who has most clearly brought out Yeats's full potential as a Romantic poet by effectively showing the strong link between Romanticism and modernism in his poetry. In his book, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot and Stevens*, Bornstein underscores the "critical recognition" (Bornstein iv) of Romanticism's importance to modernism by examining pro-romantic Yeats and Stevens as well as anti-Romantic Eliot. He counters the subtle

objection to Romanticism's link with modernism by two principal critics, J. Hillis Miller in *Poets of Reality* and Monroe K. Spears in *Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth Century Poetry,* by arguing that modernism is a "development of and from Romanticism" stating further that "at its birth, modernism is often a transformation of Romanticism" (19). The extent to which one can separate Yeats's early Romantic poetry from his later modernist verse is therefore only in terms of the poet's revolutionary poetic techniques. But as Bornstein further states, "pro-Romantic Yeats and Stevens as well as anti-Romantic Eliot all used the Romantic schema to formulate their own poetic strategies and stances" (23).

Even with studies like Bornstein's, which tend to melt down the wax separating Romanticism from modernism and other literary movements, John Paul Riquelme is of the opinion that there is still "no critical census about Romanticism's character" (6). However, whatever directions the debates have taken, either considering Romanticism as a general characteristic of mind and art in all periods and cultures, or as an attribute of a specific historical period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it could be argued that in the core of Romantic poetry, is the imagination. This is possibly what Bornstein refers to as "mental action", stressing that "Chief among mental powers, whether as Lord (to Blake) or *primum inter pares* (to Wordsworth) is imagination" (8).

Based on Bowra's theoretical stance which emphasizes the prominence of the imagination in Romantic poetry, this book attempts to trace the submerged Romanticism in the poetry of W.B. Yeats and explore the complexities and ambiguities of his imagination and his changing consciousnesses within the traumatic experience of the early twentieth century Europe.

It is generally understood that all poetry is the product of the imagination. However, theories on the Romantic imagination distinguish between the ordinary and the creative imagination which we can qualify further as the poetic and the philosophic imagination. The ordinary or poetic imagination refers to the use of figurative language to create poetry and the creative or philosophic imagination is the subject matter of the poems. The philosophic imagination employs the poetic image as a device for philosophical speculations about life and this is evident in the imagination's quest for esoteric values in a world beyond real experience, what Bowra, as already stated, describes as "a peculiar insight into the unseen order behind visible things". The interplay between the poetic and philosophic imagination therefore, culminates in what may be referred to as the Romantic imagination.

The pioneering emphasis on the importance of the imagination in Romantic poetry is Coleridge's. The Romantic imagination, as he explains, identifies the creative power with the imagination and considers it "the highest faculty of man" that "synthesizes raw materials into concrete images." He writes in *Biographia Literaria*:

> The IMAGINATION, then, I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition of the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. (167)

By distinguishing between the "primary" and "secondary" imagination Coleridge carried his philosophic speculations upon

imagination into the realm of transcendentalism. Since the imagination is the "prime agent of all human perception" and is involved in the eternal activity of creation, Coleridge therefore, likens it to God or some transcendental reality. Like other poets, Coleridge considers the imagination not only as an instrument for poetry but as its subject-matter, and he illustrates this by animating through poetry an otherwise lifeless and cold world of scientific and Christian ethics.

Many critics on the Romantic imagination often lay stress on the imagination as the principal device for art. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, the imagination remains the most important gift to poets because it enables them to re-enact the transcendental or even the godly. The imagination in their opinion enables man to come into contact with ultimate reality and to attain an understanding of the oneness of things. In other words, it is the very source of spiritual energy, which makes Romanticism, to use Marc Redfield's expression, to "remain a fundamentally ambiguous event in which we seem fated to participate as political and ethical beings" (100).

William Blake shares the same view with Coleridge and Wordsworth, but his perception of this faculty is apocalyptic. In other words, his idea of the imagination is more of an elaboration of Christian doctrines of Heaven and Hell. He does not attempt the creation of new supernatural values as Wordsworth or Coleridge does. Blake considers that the imagination is divine, the very source of spiritual energy:

> This world of the Imagination is the World of Eternity; it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of the Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite & Temporal. (407)

Yeats evidently subscribes to this view of Blake and that of the other major Romantics who claim that the imagination is the only means by which one can attain transcendental reality. It is a faculty which takes one into a world which is infinite and eternal, the realm in which the beauty absent in the real world is possible. He, however, differs from the other Romantic poets in terms of approach. The six Romantic poets approach the imagination from a doctrinal point of view, preaching more often about the existence of such a faculty, and the fact that it links man with the ultimate reality. But they do not state clearly enough what forces or conditions compel or inspire a poet to acquire it. This seems to suggest that the imagination is an instrument, or an activity with which one can voluntarily engage to attain the realm of a higher consciousness where all is divine and eternal and attainable through the awareness of its existence.

For Yeats, however, the imagination is a state in which one involuntarily finds oneself. Unhappy with the flaws of social conventions and the artificiality of moral doctrines and philosophy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the persona in Yeats's poems searches for an ideal and a more permanent reality from one realm of the imagination to the other. Therefore, the imagination to Yeats becomes a means of emancipating oneself from any form of life that is traumatising and frustrating. It is possible then, to view his experimentation in poetic forms and techniques especially in his later poetry as the hallmark of modernism necessitated by the imagination's quest for the reality that lies beyond ordinary human understanding. This would in fact not make him a repudiator of Romanticism, but sometimes unconsciously, a belated follower of Romantic traditions.

Yeats's poetry illustrates that his indulgence in the imagination by which he creates and fashions new worlds where ideal reality is possible was imposed on him by increasing complexity, tensions, and frustrations during his lifetime. The world in which he lived was getting increasingly uglier. The drama of political struggle which plunged man into the catastrophic First World War, the horrors and conflicts which were fiercely alive in the Ireland of his day and his despair concerning his unfulfilled love for Maud Gonne, the woman to whom he gave his soul and "loved in misery", were among the factors that spurred the poet to explore the recesses of his imagination in search of greater values than the actual world could provide. Besides, developments in the field of philosophy were disturbing. Writers also concentrated more and more on psychological rather than surface realism. These tendencies therefore, called for an orientation toward something that could inspire poets to create meaning out of the emptiness of the supposed modern civilization, since Christianity which was the religion of the civilised West, in the opinion of Harry Blamires, was increasingly seen as unable to fulfil this role (5).

Yeats's Romanticism as well as his modernist experimentation therefore, can be read as unconscious or semiconscious attempts to penetrate the psyche as well as the metaphysical with the imagination in order to provide answers to the essential question which has always been at the centre of humanity's dilemma: Towards what direction can humanity seek salvation in the face of impending despair, trauma, helplessness and decline? Yeats, like most poets in the first half of the twentieth century, wrestled with the imagination to provide answers to this question. This explains why much of his poetry reflects a world different from the ordinary one. The poet

explains this tendency within himself in a letter to a friend, Katharine Tynan [2]:

> I have noticed something about my poetry…that it is all a flight into the faeryland from the real world; and a summons to that flight. The chorus of "The Stolen Child" sums it up – that it is not poetry of insight and knowledge but of longing and complaint. (Yeats: *Letters to Katharine Tynan,* 47)

In his early as well as his later poetry, the poet reveals an absurd human experience characterized by "the times bitter floods", with "love's bitter mystery" and with anarchy "loosed upon the world". Faced with the adversity of corporal experience, the persona in Yeats's poems struggles to liberate himself by dreaming of more ideal worlds where "peace comes dropping slow", where "lies eternity" and where the "mystical brotherhood…work out their will". But could Yeats escape the realities of the modern world entirely through his imagination? What motivated him to write poetry which is all "a flight into the faeryland?" There is substantial evidence in Yeats's poems to suggest that as a result of the traumatic experiences of the early twentieth century, the poet was in search of a spiritual order through which he could attain ideal reality. Equipped with the poetic imagination, the poet gets into contact with the "unseen order behind visible things", that transcendental reality in the "moonlit or starlit dome" of Byzantium, what Blake has called "Jerusalem" (187) and Keats "Elysium".

Yeats's imagination essentially occupies four realms which are coherently linked to one another. The four realms – reality, Nature, myth and vision – form the basic structure of this book. The first chapter examines the poet's perception and imagistic projection of reality. This is the first realm of Yeats's imagination which is characterized by the tensions and frustrations of

personal as well as general life in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. A discussion on the mystical concept of nature follows, with the aim of assessing the extent to which the poet's imagination explores the moral, psychological and spiritual nature of being; the imagination's perception of things outside reality; and the complicated relationships between feelings, human consciousness, and ideas with the landscape and the external universe. The next focus is on the imagination's quest in myths which are exploited as romantic symbols for the expression of spiritual essence behind visible experience. In the next chapter, on the dome of the visionary, the analysis shows how the imagination probes into higher values for ideal existence including the universality of being, eternity, spiritual consciousness, and the sublime nature of art. As a way of conclusion, the chapter titled "Modernist Romanticism" assesses Yeats's contribution to the Romantic Imagination as well as modernist poetry.

NOTES

1. Réne Wellek's attack on Lovejoy is based on the latter's article: "On the Discrimination of Romanticism" first published in PMLA XXIX in 1924 and in "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas", published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas II* published in 1941. "On the Discrimination of Romanticism" was later published in 1975 in *English Romantic Poets,* a collection of critical essays on the major Romantic poets edited by M.H. Abrams.
2. Katharine Tynan (1861-1931) was a poet and novelist born in Dublin. She was life-long friends with William Butler Yeats.

1

A Poetic Image of Reality

Yeats's revelation of the world of reality in poetry very much reflects the gruesome experiences he had during his life time. These experiences initiated him not only into using the imagination as a weapon of art but also as a means of reaching worlds where life was more tolerable and appealing. His father's repressive attitude, the strain of frustrated love, the political crises in Ireland, and his concern about old age are some of the major factors that spurred him into writing poetry.

From childhood, the excessive repressive influence exerted on the poet by his father, John Butler Yeats, especially within the first ten years of the poet's life, was a manifestation of a family practice that had long existed. He wanted his son to follow the family tradition of studying in Trinity College, Dublin, but Yeats did not meet with the requirements for admission. Besides, Yeats was too taken away in reverie and could not learn his lessons successfully. Discovering that his son never possessed the qualities he expected, John Butler Yeats decided to shape him by terrorising him. As Richard Ellmann states, "Yeats confessed that he remembered little of his childhood but its pains" (25). In addition to his father's repressive tendencies was the poet's concern about unfulfilled love relationships. He was fascinated

by women and his love was very idealistic, modelled on celebrated women in classical mythology. However he never achieved the ideal relationship his imagination forged for him in actual life. The effects of unfulfilled love relationships on the poet can best be appreciated from Norman Jeffares's view in *W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet* that Yeats's poetry changed most pronouncedly upon his falling in love with Maud Gonne and that the wistful strain in his poetry is explicit with an understanding of a knowledge of the strange history of the poet's love (66).

Concomitant with Yeats's unhappy relations with Maud Gonne was the precipitating civil strife in Ireland in that era. The Irish problem was two-fold: first was the raging conflict between the Protestant-aristocratic minority and the Catholic-peasant majority, and secondly, the quest for Home Rule from Britain. These concerns were at the centre of multiple rebellions, assassinations and other deadly forms violence, especially in the first half of the twentieth century.

In addition, an important influence on Yeats's imagination was infirmity and age. The period of his life from 1922 to 1939 when he died was a delicate one. He was unhappy with the fact that knowledge and experience had come to him at the time he was already too old to translate them into action; at the time he could skilfully weld reality and the imagination into the kind of ideal reality he desired.

Several factors constitute Yeats's imagination as can be concluded from his rich biographical experience. The most important is his ability to transform the terrifying world of political conflicts, old age, and social, institutional and sexual repression into poetry. Writing poetry for Yeats becomes a means of distraction from the unstable world of reality. The experiences of his lifetime provided ample material for the subject matter of

his poems. His frustrated love for Maud Gonne, the political upheavals in Ireland, and infirmity and age are variously projected in the whole range of his poetry. One finds the poet on different occasions decrying the hardships of the physical world, and at the same time, creating more pleasant worlds outside ordinary human experience. The poems, embellished by imagery and other techniques of versification, show the poet's imaginative perception of real life as he found it.

When one looks over the gallery of Yeats's poetry in relation to the imagistic projection of the world of reality, one has a feeling that the world in which he lived was tedious and austere in many ways. Whenever the poet deviates from the recesses of his imagination to face reality, the tone of his poems invariably changes to an expression of despair. His poetry delineates an uncompromising and confused reality, particularly dictated by the strain of frustrated love, the casualties resulting from political conflicts, the worries about old age and the regret for the failure of science and religion to provide lasting solutions to the problems of a desperate humanity.

Frustrated Love

Yeats's distressing love experiences cannot be ignored in any detailed study of the development of the poet's imagination. His first love venture with a cousin, Laura Johnston did not last long because Laura was already engaged. In 1889, he met Maud Gonne whose beauty and obsessive idealism fascinated him throughout life. However, because of their contrasting ideologies and ways of life, Yeats's unrelenting efforts to marry her were consistently aborted. The significance of the lavish imagery with which Yeats describes Maud Gonne during their first meeting is

later expanded in various forms in the depiction of the mistress in his poems:

> I was twenty-three when the troubling of my life began [….] Presently she drove up to our house in Bedford Park with an introduction from John O'Leary to my father. I had never thought to see in any living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the blossom of apples and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, a statue so great that it seemed of a divine race. (Yeats: *Memoirs,* 1946)

The poetic description of Maud Gonne's beauty above exploits varying images to project in the reader's imagination what ideal beauty meant for Yeats. Yeats compares Maud Gonne's beauty to "famous pictures", to poetry", to "legendary past", to the "blossom of apples" and to a "divine race". Expressions like "famous pictures" and "poetry" are representative of the handiwork of art which creates in the reader's mind images of perfect beauty. The metaphors also tie up with the concept of artistic beauty which in Yeats's philosophic imagination is a divine activity and the final product itself is the divine being. The fascinating description of Maud Gonne in his prose work is echoed in Yeats's perception of beauty and love in poetry.

Frustrated love permeates most of Yeats's poems. The undertone of emotional suffering that underlies his biography is expressed at almost every level of his poems. Many of the poems celebrate a woman's beauty as shown by the "rose" poems. These poems, indeed, illuminate the erotic and all-pervasive nature of the poet's love. What elaborately invests the poems with a peculiar force and beauty is Yeats's embitterment resulting from the unrequited love for a woman he regularly refers to in the

poems as "beloved". The "beloved" is represented as an ardent Irish revolutionary, a rebel, and rhetorician, with "so great beauty", which belonged to "famous pictures". She is portrayed in the poems as "Sheba", a "phoenix", "Helen of Troy", and "Leda", images which are an embodiment of Classical and Renaissance beauty. She is the woman with additional heroic energies which symbolize the tremendous nationalistic spirit in the Ireland of her days. Yet, she is the beloved who shuns her fanatical admirer in favour of revolutionary activities with "scarce a pitying look". She is the woman Yeats rages to possess and subdue to his ideal solitude, and when he fails, he is seen in other poems pining and dreaming of ideal worlds forged by his fertile and boundless imagination.

The poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds*, *The Seven Woods* and *The Green Helmet* reveal varying outlooks of emotional starvation, beginning with the baffling disappointment of a lover whose heart-felt advances are rejected. This disappointment generates, at other levels, several poems of frustration, hopelessness, languor, nostalgia and resignation. Yeats's greatest love poems are those in which he accepts defeat, while at the same time nursing the bitterest memories of unrequited love which keep haunting him. The greatness and uniqueness of some of those poems lie in the bitter note and tone with which they are expressed, their depiction of a raw and evocative nature of a troubled passion, and in the excitement and tinge of disillusionment of old age that they express.

It is from the manner with which Yeats expresses feelings that the reader of his poems understands the intensity of the poet's frustration in the real world; that the reader can measure the level of the poet's abhorrence of the pangs of reality. By so doing, the reason why the world of the imagination which the poems variably project and which becomes for the poet a

convenient abode for escape can be clearly understood. Yeats's resentment against unrequited love is explicit in genuine regret and indignation. His growing passions sometimes lead him to a desolate awareness that the loss of his cherished love is a reality. This makes him address the beloved at times more directly, revealing his frustrated ideals in a touching melancholic tone as in "When You Are Old":

> But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
> And loved the sorrows of your changing face;
> And bending down beside the glowing bars,
> Murmur, a little sadly how love fled
> And paced upon the mountains overhead
> And hid his face upon a crowd of stars.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 46)

The gentleness and personal melancholy expressed in these lines make the poem intensely moving and reveal the dedicated nature of the poet's love. They further reveal that the speaker in the poem is confronted with a serious psychological conflict because he loves a woman whose restlessness expressed by the metaphor "pilgrim soul" makes it difficult for him to reach her. The metaphor also effectively defines the holy nature of her restlessness, which has a divine mission of bringing Ireland out of her troubles. The poet is further fascinated, as he says, by the "sorrows of your changing face" a symbol which communicates the idea of endurance and the struggle for her motherland. But the paradox in this situation is that the poet loves the woman for her endurance in her divine mission of bringing happiness to Ireland, yet would not want her to stay away from him.

The bitter note communicated is rooted in the poet's emotional attachment to a woman who ignores her most sincere

admirer to pace "upon the mountains" and "amid a crowd of stars". The mention of the mountains and stars where the beloved paces is, in fact a hyperbolic and metaphorical presentation of the extreme revolutionary activities of the woman as well as a portrayal of the disparity between the persona and the beloved. The persona is aware of this disparity in their moods. His mood is of ideal quietude and intellectual calmness, and the beloved's is of restless heroic achievement; the two are incompatible and love can hardly be fulfilled in such a situation. The poet wishes that the beloved were dead, and thus subdued by death she would return his love. This wish is expressed in the following lines in "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead" in which the poet's frustration can be perceived:

> Were you but lying cold and dead,
> And lights were paling out of the West
> You would come hither and bend your head,
> And I would lay my head on your breast
> And you would murmur tender words
> Forgiving me, because you were dead:
> Nor would you rise and hasten away
> Though you have the will of the wild birds
> But know your hair was bound and wound
> About stars and moon and sun:
> O would, beloved, that you lay
> Under the dock-leaves in the ground
> While lights were paling out one by one.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 80-81)

"Death" in the poem may be considered the realm in which a man or a woman recognises and repents of the extremes of his or her indulgence in some uncompromising experiences when he or she lived. It is shown as a state that subdues and brings human

beings to the same level in spite of their precedent disparity. Yeats also imagines death as a realm in which love unrequited in life as a result of the incompatibilities of the parties involved can be requited. The poet's gently-flowing emotions and wishful-thinking in the first six lines of the poem are overtly shown when he calls on death to subdue the beloved, thus making it possible for the lover and the beloved to participate in the activity of love. For, if the beloved were dead she would bend her head and murmur tender words to the poet while the poet himself would lay his head on her breast. "Death", therefore, is poetically exploited by Yeats as a symbol of reconciliation between opposing attitudes and as a force which is capable of suppressing one's engagement with radical politics that supersedes the question of individual love.

However, the gently-flowing emotions easily give way to angry denunciation of the beloved in the next four lines of the poem. The beloved is presented in those lines as one who cannot easily be calmed down by death. She seems to be endowed with natural strength because the metaphors in the last six lines of the poem like "wild birds", the attachment of her hair to the "stars, moon and sun", and the "dock-leaves" reveal her as having a strong relationship with the cosmic order. Being beyond subjugation she would not succumb to death as a force that brings all of life's activities to an end. However, "Death" in the context of the poem is political and not physical, since the speaker wishes that the end of politics would bring her much closer to him. And she would not "rise and hasten away", even though her ways are compared to those of the "wild birds" and her activities strongly attached to the "stars and moon and sun".

The varying tone of the sonnet-structured poem, "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead", shows a contrast in the mood, especially in the poet's yearning for a quiet life with his beloved,

and his realisation that the beloved's political zeal makes their relationship impossible. It also reveals the contrast in the personalities of both the lover and the beloved. In the first six lines, a touching melancholy is prevalent but the tone is not harsh. The poet's wishful quietude is suggested by words like "murmur" which are seen to have the same effect of evoking the sympathy of the reader as in "When You Are Old", with words like "lying", "dead", and "forgiving". After the sixth line of the poem the tone changes to a harsh and severe reproach of the beloved, demonstrating the poet's anger and despair inflicted on him by the harsh realities of the physical world which the imagination must of necessity reconstruct.

The poet's bitterness at times is expressed with great emotional fervour and devastating hallucinations. The apparent rise in anger and self-reproach becomes more prominent especially when the poet sees the impossibility of subjugating the beloved to his preferred quietude. This is effectively depicted in the poet's desolate cry for his beloved in "Maid Quiet":

> Where has Maid Quiet gone to,
> Nodding her russet hood?
> The winds that awaken the stars
> Are blowing through my blood
> O how could I be so calm
> When she rose to depart?
> Now words that call up lightening
> Are hurtling through my heart.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 78)

This relatively short poem is imbued with bitter passion not unconnected with the speaker's unreciprocated relationships. In the lines above, one detects shimmering anger that creates a

staccato effect in the poem. The poet's emotional state is compared to the disorder of the elements of nature: "winds that awaken stars", and "words that call up lightening". The reference to the winds that blow in his blood is an effective use of metaphor to demonstrate the extreme torture the poet goes through. The violence of such winds compel out of the poet words which command lightening and, therefore, give hint to the tumult that is prevalent in the persona's mind in the face of reality. The psychological tumult brought about by words that invoke lightening is found "hurtling" in the speaker's mind. The "hurtling" image, at its surface level, denotes a violent activity. But poetically, it reflects how he is violently shaken by love advances which are rather rejected.

From the poet's expression, one further notices the precipitated derangement of a rational personality whose images are drawn from abstractions like the elements of the universe. The feelings are communicated freely and frantically, thus the magniloquence of the poet provides a clue to his state of mind. His inability to subdue his beloved rather makes him furious: "O how could I be so calm/When she rose to depart". The fury is moreover, greatly felt in the poignant irony which describes his beloved as "Maid Quiet", although contrarily, the beloved is perceived as a wild and restless person.

The tumult caused by elemental forces depicts comparatively the extremes of the poet's anger. The elements of nature which the poet calls "elemental powers" in another poem, "The Poet Pleads with Elemental Powers", are forces of subjugation similar to those in "Maid Quiet". They are as well divine forces capable of intervening in the poet's favour to reconcile the beloved to the ideal quietude he desires:

Great powers of falling wave and wind and windy fire
With your harmonious choir
Encircle her I love and sing her into peace
That my old care may cease.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 80)

Although the natural powers are capable of causing disorder they are also bestowed with a sense of unity of being, as seen in the expression, "harmonious choir". This means that the turbulent elements of nature are capable of uniting towards a purpose. The poet's invitation to the elemental powers to unite in order to subject his beloved, suggests how the wild activities of the beloved deprive the poet of his quiet solitude.

The poet's "old care" in the lines above refers to his frustrating love concern. It is the devoted care for a beloved who despises her infatuated admirer with wild and unrestrained nobility. The poet's embitterment is perpetrated by the elements surrounding him in the natural environment. The manifestation of these natural activities reminds him of the "old care". In "He Reproves the Curlew" the speaker pleads with the curlew to cry no more in the air because its cry revivifies in him those beautiful qualities he adores. The particular qualities the poem highlights of the beloved's beauty are the "passion-dimmed eyes" and "long curly hair" that are shaken out of the poet's breast. The perception given of the beloved's beauty is quite keen, especially, in the use of the metaphor "passion-dimmed eyes". The metaphor echoes the degree of the poet's fascination as well as his emotional involvement with the beloved's passionate looks.

It is evident from the foregoing analysis that Yeats's main disgust with the physical world as delineated in poetry is to a major extent created by unreciprocated love. Much of the imagery which best reveals the poet's emotional state of mind is

that which deals with unreciprocated love. He also explains the effect of lost love on his personality by constant emotional expressions, laying emphasis on his desperate situation in the physical world. In those poems which deal with frustration, the poet constantly suggests that there is no reason to live in such a world. It is no good world for a man whose basic desires are frustrated. The poet's desolate cry of frustration is evident in the following lines from "He Mourns for the Change That Has Come upon Him and His Beloved and Longs for the End of the World":

> Do you hear me calling, white deer without horns?
> I have been changed to a hound with one red ear,
> I have been on the path of stones and a wood of thorns
> For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and
> Fear under my feet that they follow you night and day.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 68)

The richness of the metaphors in the extract effectively depicts the intensity of the speaker's frustration which presumably is the handiwork of the beloved he describes as "white deer without horns" because of her extraordinary and uncompromising nature. He sees himself firstly, as a deformed ugly creature "a hound with one red ear". This deformity, one understands, is the result of the strain inflicted by desperation for lost love. Secondly, the metaphors reveal the uncomfortable and hazardous nature of the world into which the strain of frustrated love has thrown him. Such a world is described as "the path of stones" to reveal the coarseness of life, and as a "wood of thorns" to project the psychological strain which coarse existence inflicts on its victims. To the speaker, the roughness of the stones and the sharp nature of the thorns depict the excruciating misadventures of his life. Concomitant with the metaphors, "stones" and "thorns", is

the use of antithesis, as well, to illustrate his prolonged suffering. He is faced with "hatred and hope", "desire and fear", "night and day" which all express his contrasting and permanent emotional states. He understands that his love ideals have failed to concretise, as "hatred", "fear" and "night" illustrate. But the strain in his mind is sustained because, although defeat is accepted, the poet still "hopes" and "desires" for the fulfilment of his dream.

From a haggard personal experience, Yeats desperately evaluates the nature and components of unreciprocated love. The seriousness prevalent in some poems accompanies the painful undertone in the voice of a disconsolate personality who looks at unreciprocated love from all its gruesome shades. This is exposed in a very short poem "A Pity of Love"

> A pity beyond all telling
> Is hid in the heart of love
> The folk who are buying and selling,
> The clouds on their journey above,
> The cold wet winds ever flowing
> And the shadowy hazel grove
> Where mouse-grey waters are blowing
> Threaten the head that I love.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 45)

The strain carried in this poem is emphasised by the stress on "pity" which occupies a clear thematic position in the first line of the poem. This stress is further illuminated by the words qualifying "pity" – "beyond all telling". "Pity" in the poem is self-pity, a self-realisation of dejection and corresponding wretchedness which emanates from unfulfilled love. The poet's appeal to cosmic elements – the folk, clouds, winds, the hazel

grove and the "mouse grey waters" – to make his wish concrete, instead acts as a threat to his ambitions. The elements assist instead in separating the beloved from the lover because, as has been observed above, the beloved is more attached to the natural environment than to the human world.

With the idea of defeat effectively established in the poems analysed above, the speaker frustratingly acknowledges the lesson he has learnt from infatuation. This is embodied in another poem, "O Do Not Love Too Long" in which the poet's total exhaustion is manifested in the images used: "I loved long and long/And grew to be out of fashion/Like an old song" (Yeats: *Collected Poems* 93). The comparison between his frustrated ideals and an old song is evidently exposed by a lucid simile. The significance of an "old song" in Yeats's poetic context is that it loses its vitality and thus becomes boring and repugnant; in other words, defining the degree of the speaker's frustrated love ideals. The image is used to define the extent of the poet's frustration. The vitality with which he sets out to engage love experience completely wears him out, leaving him outmoded.

In lines like those quoted above Yeats rationally analyses the defects of unrequited love on the speaker's personality. The speaker does not easily extricate himself from emotional suffering. The torture in fact persists as it is evident in "Against Unworthy Praise":

> O heart be at peace because
> Nor knave nor dolt can break
> What's not for their applause
> Being for a woman's sake.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 103)

The speaker's effort to calm himself acquaints the reader with his sustained languor. The steps taken towards self-comfort are equally defeated because the beloved's nobility and unsurpassable beauty still kindle his desires and revivify his interest. The greatness of the loss can be discerned in the speaker's anger in an acknowledgement of three women who played vital roles in his life:

> And what of her that took
> All till my youth was gone
> With scarce a pitying look?
> How can I praise that one?
> When day begins to break
> I count my good and bad
> Being wakeful for her sake.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* "Friends", 139)

The rhetorical questions throw more light on the poet's frustrated ideals. They reveal the extent to which the poet's "youth", an embodiment of his love energies, has been extremely exhausted as a result of infatuation. The beloved does not reciprocate the poet's love, and she does not show any sympathy – even a "pitying look" – at the man whom love has rendered desperate and desolate. The speaker's frustration is exemplified by his being "wakeful". That is, his sleeplessness illustrates the sustained psychological strain also evident in the following lines of yet another poem, "He Thinks of His Past Greatness When a Part of the Constellations of Heaven":

> I became a man, a hater of the wind,
> Knowing one, out of all things, alone, that this head
> May not lie on the breast nor his lips on the hair

> Of the woman that he loves, until he dies.
> O beast of the wilderness, bird of the air,
> Must I endure your amorous cries?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 81-82)

Thus, love is accepted as defeatist because it cannot be fulfilled. The last two lines of the extract still illustrate the perpetuity of the poet's anger and emotional strain. This situation is grossly provoked by the "amorous cries" of birds which remind him about lost love.

When Yeats finally accepts frustrated love as a reality he rationally acknowledges the benefits of such love that fails. Firstly, he recognises the beloved's involvement in the revolutionary politics of her country and her contribution to the moulding of Ireland into a peaceful and an independent political entity. Secondly, he realises that in trying to dissuade the beloved from her revolutionary activities, he becomes involved in politics himself with the realisation that as a visionary he has an important role to play in rescuing the "blind bitter land" of Ireland from British domination. In accepting defeat, he attains poetic maturity explicit in "Words". In "Words" the poet's attitude towards love and life changes considerably. He regards defeatist love as a disruptive force, yet accepts it because it inspires nobler ideals. There is also a notable change from the way ideas in the poem are brought out, especially, in the poet's display of generosity when he refers to an uncompromising lover as "darling". In sum, the maturity attained in "Words", as shown in the style of the poem, reflects the poet's maturity in poetic expression as well as in his philosophic imagination.

In accepting defeat, Yeats discovers also that, as a natural phenomenon, "even the best of love must die". In the poem "A Memory of Youth", the poet reveals love moments which caused

a dramatic change in his life "as at play". The benefit he gets from hopeless love is the wisdom which he has acquired. When both lovers sit silent as a "stone" they are certainly wearied of each other, and convinced of the mortality of love. The solemn quietness in the last stanza of the poem suggests a point of no return, a point at which those burning passions of youth can no longer be expressed. Thus, love cannot be reciprocated because every atom of it has been "savagely undone" by the poet's prolonged emotional suffering.

In old age, the poet's bitter passions and feeling of nostalgia still persist. He admires beauty to the same degree as he had done in his youth. The "sixty-year-old smiling public man" in "Among School Children", is evidently the poet's self-projection. He discovers among a group of school children a "Ledaean body", one of the school girls whose beauty and attractive qualities are remarkable, comparable to that of Leda, a heroine in Classical mythology whose ravishing beauty overwhelms Zeus and he consequently seduces her. Like the Greek god, the poet's love passions are rekindled. He rages against age in the rest of the poem because, as a "sixty-year-old smiling public man", he is handicapped by age from savouring the beauty of youth.

In "Two Years Later" the poet also shows strong emotions of love but he is hindered by his ageing personality from savouring youthful love. The girl in the poem is young but he is old, and this situation makes it difficult for their love to be reciprocated. The poet confesses that he can no longer pay the tributes which love demands because, as he writes, "But I am old and you are young/And I speak a barbarous tongue" (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 137); "barbarous" because the strain of lost love in his youth and his rage over age have destroyed his passion for love. The disparity between a passionate old man and youthful beauty is also evident in "The Living Beauty" where the worry about old

age is expressed: "O heart we are old;/The living beauty is for younger men/We cannot pay its tributes of wild tears" (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 156). The "tributes of wild tears" again expresses the intensity of passion which youthful love demands. The tone communicated is that of frustration because being old, he can no longer participate in intense passionate activity articulated in the "wild tears" metaphor.

Few poets in the history of English Literature have so earnestly portrayed their innermost feelings and the excruciating consequences of unrequited love as Yeats has done. To Yeats, unrequited love becomes a very repudiating element in human existence which makes life less tolerable. The emotional fervour in some of his love poems and the lucid imagery drawn mostly from the turbulent aspects of nature to explain his troubled mind all combine to invest his poetry with a certain admirable force and literary beauty. John Keats evokes similar experiences. Some of Keats's best poems are lamentations over unrequited love and the quest for an ideal, permanent counterpart and a flawless happiness beyond earthly possibilities. This to some extent is the subject matter of poems like "Endymion", "La Bell Dame Sans Merci", "The Eve of St Agnes" and "Lamia". But Keats lacks the emotional force which characterizes much of Yeats's love poetry.

In much of Yeats's love poetry, as it has been observed, there is an intermittent expression of powerful emotions especially of loss and regret. The cost of lost love is raving obsession, depression and disillusionment. At times, the reader detects severe implicit suffering, expressed in calm melancholic tones. At other times the harshness of the poet's tone reveals the tumult prevalent in the mind of a frustrated lover. The poems that have been examined so far suggest that had the beloved succumbed to the poet's passionate yearnings, there would certainly have been no visionary poems which portray the poet's quest for ideal

existence in the higher realms of the imagination. Yeats would simply have resigned into quietude to savour his beloved's beauty, and would have possibly ended up writing poetry in praise of love or to celebrate beauty like John Donne does in his secular poetry. There would have been little to provoke him into strain and therefore widen his imagination in his search for greater values beyond the world of real experience.

In poetry therefore, Yeats's feelings about love are recorded in imagistic terms as characterized by uncompromising relationships which lead to psychological strain. His poetic presentation of unfulfilled love, the beloved's role in fashioning the imagination of the poet is of primal importance. The poet's failure to attain the glories of fulfilled love in the real world drives him to create more ideal and wholesome experiences outside reality through the imagination. Yeats therefore, perceives reality as ruthless and uncompromising. What is certain, however, is that the degree of psychological torture that he records in poetry is highlighted with varying images and tones of lamentation, especially, when the poet concentrates on the theme of unrequited love. The lament about lost love also is instrumental to sharpening his imagination with which he indulges in ideal relationships through the dream convention. Finally, the pangs of unfulfilled love run across Yeats's poetry and make him see the real world as plagued with psychological anguish. Therefore, in much of his poetry he shows the need to explore the realms of the imagination in search of a more pleasing reality.

Political Conflicts

Many poets who initiated the Romantic tradition perceive reality as completely ruthless and savage, due to the prevalence

of political strife, oppression and death. Wordsworth, Blake and Coleridge were to some extent influenced by the French Revolution. Blake and Shelley particularly wrote poetry to inspire men to refrain from creating a cycle of human relationship characterized by constraint, fear and violence such as that of the French Revolution in the later part of the eighteenth century. Consequently, Shelley's "Revolt of Islam" which literarily re-enacts the sorrows of the revolution was to produce through the magic of poetry an effect on the human imagination.[3] Yeats in his own era lived through the harrowing experience of war and terror generated by the troubles raised by conflicting forces in Ireland and the First World War. His political poems do not, however, give much hint to the casualties that resulted; neither do they express profound social sympathy. But Yeats brings out the memories of the serious conflicts which were fiercely alive in Ireland in his days as one can judge from some of his poems which are either wholly or partially political in tone.

There has been some controversy in the attempt to state whether Yeats's involvement in the politics of Ireland was a genuine reaction to the problems that the country faced or a way to convince Maud Gonne that he too sympathised with the political crises in Ireland. Conor Cruise O'Brien, for example, thinks that critics and biographers like Richard Ellmann exaggerate the importance of the Maud Gonne influence on Yeats's political involvement. O'Brien is of the opinion that the political situation in Ireland was just another opening for Yeats's self-expression since he could through it, as he thought, weave a fragmented world into a harmonious one. Thomas R. Edwards on his part criticizes Ellmann for overstating Yeats's political involvement when he (Ellmann) observes that "His [Yeats's] political poems…are always complicated by his being above

politics….” Edwards’s reaction to the statement is worthy of mention:

> The commentator is Richard Ellmann, who must know more about Yeats than anyone, but it seems just enough “off” to allow a qualification. To be “above politics” is not quite the same as to have elements of both nationalism and anti-nationalism in one’s thought. This is not above politics but squarely in it. (186)

The attacks on Ellmann, possibly the most committed of Yeats’s biographers, are to an extent a measure of the poet’s political involvement. The poet was evidently conscious of the political events in Ireland. In his poetry he is passive, sensitive and anti-factional, stating simply, “We have no gift to set a statesman right”, when, as Marjorie Perloff comments in “Easter, 1916: Yeats’s First World War Poem” he was requested to send a war poem (227-228)[1]. “We”, in the above statement, refers to poets or artists as a whole, whose essential role, as Yeats meant in his reply, was to contemplate through the resources of the imagination ways of recreating a better world, to preach to men the need for peace and harmony as opposed to political agitation and the perpetration of factionalism. It does not imply that the artist is powerless before men of power but that art, as Obi Maduakor claims, should not concern itself with politics and ideology. Rather the ideal subject matter for the arts was the heroic past, heroic passions and moods (64).

Yeats was certainly discontented with the horror and the casualties which uprisings and civil wars brought to humanity. He writes of the world of the early twentieth century engaged in disastrous political conflicts:

> Doubtless because, fragments broke into fragments, we saw one another in the light of bitter comedy, and in the arts where now one technical element reigned and now another generation hated generation and accomplished beauty was snatched away when it had most engaged our affections. One thing I did not foresee, not having courage of my own thought was the growing murderousness of the world. (Yeats: *Autobiographies,* 192)

Yeats's worry that violence and hatred could destroy humanity led him to deeper philosophical contemplations which he re-enacted in poetry. He portrayed the horrors of a turbulent world, contemplating the outcome of humanity if it finally destroys itself. His confirmation about the "growing murderousness of the world" was inspired by a number of events. The first was the Dublin Lock-out in 1913 which resulted in acts of terrorism. Yeats came out explicitly and vehemently against the employers' allies – police, media and clergy – questioning why they constantly created suffering for the masses. The second major incident was the Easter 1916 uprising which destroyed so many lives. In 1916 Irish extremists staged an unsuccessful Easter rebellion in Dublin which British forces savagely suppressed. In 1919, the Irish members of Parliament boycotted Westminster by setting up an illegal Irish Parliament in Dublin. These rebels were treated harshly. The Black and Tan terror was now at its worst throughout Ireland. The Irish Republican army reinforced the struggle and the result was a savage war, torture, murder and great cruelty towards the citizens. Yeats was personally appalled by the deaths of many patriots. Some of these names which regularly appear in his political poems include Robert Gregory (Lady Gregory's son) and John MacBride (Maud Gonne's husband whose death revived the old passions of love for Maud Gonne).

Evidently, the events of political strife and civil war in Ireland intensified Yeats's strain in the real world. Many of his poems give the impression that the real world was not a fitting place for him because he had endured its pains for so long. With bloodshed and lawlessness everywhere, Yeats's conclusion in the political poems as Maurice Bowra states in *Poetry and Politics 1900-1960* was that "the Irish civil war was mere confirmatory evidence that the world was taking a sharp turn for the worse" (58). The world in which he lived was completely devoid of harmony. The Easter 1916 uprising particularly affected him because of Maud Gonne's involvement, especially when MacBride, Maud Gonne's husband, was killed in the uprising leaving Maud Gonne despondent. Yeats also participated in Irish politics in order to inculcate a nationalistic spirit in Ireland through literary movements which did much in awakening Irish consciousness. He often contemplated the absurdity that humanity had abandoned myth and art and lived through casualties, destruction and deaths. The events however, spurred him into writing more serious poetry that dwelt more profoundly on the human condition. His search for a more reliable myth by which humanity could be saved intensified his desire to explore a higher realm of his imagination in quest of a more ideal reality.

It has already been noted that Yeats got involved in politics out of the necessity to help Ireland out of her troubles, as many of his compatriots did. As a poet he had the ultimate aim of exposing the cruelty of the oppressed, or expressing his sentiments over ruthless political experiences. But the fact that he wrote poetry to show the damage politics had caused to his love for Maud Gonne cannot be underestimated. Some of his political poems, especially those which achieve poetic dignity, are those that reveal the extent to which politics contributed to the eruption of his love. His personal emotions provoked by political struggle

in such poems are more profoundly felt than in his wholly political poems. In such poems, the beloved is set against the background of the Irish political struggle towards which the poet expresses his personal discontent. This discontent is the subject matter of one of Yeats's most profound poems, "No Second Troy". In the poem he represents the beloved's political diligence in instigating the oppressed against the oppressors in the following words:

> Why should I blame her that she filled my days
> With misery, or that she would of late
> Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
> Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
> Had they but courage equal to desire?
> What would have made her peaceful with a mind
> That nobleness made simple as a fire,
> With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
> That is not natural in an age like this,
> Being high and solitary and most stern?
> Why, what could she have done, being what she is?
> Was there another Troy for her to burn?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 101)

The poet's point of contention in this sonnet-structured poem is not so much against the beloved's political indulgence. Rather, he thinks that political activities have taken possession of the beloved, thus depriving him of the glories he had anticipated if they were engaged in love.

The opening line of the poem shows defeat and the poet's acceptance of this defeat, although the tone of misery is still eminent. But the poet however, admires her political ingenuity in setting the oppressed against the oppressors. Also, the poet does not settle on the political theme for long and his passions quickly

submerge into a series of images which effectively illustrate the relationship between the poet and the beloved. The vivid use of imagery in "No Second Troy" effectively demonstrates the persona's dilemma. "Troy" is the main image in the poem and has a variety of implications. It is an allusion to Homer's *Iliad*, specifically the role of Helen in the siege of Troy during the Trojan War.[2] Yeats, therefore, sees his beloved as capable of generating conflicts of epic dimension in Ireland by hurling the "little streets upon the great". Troy could be seen to represent modern Ireland which the Yeatsian Helen could destroy with her excessive political energies, since she could teach ignorant men "most violent ways". It is most appropriate to see Troy as symbolizing Yeats himself. Since the beloved does not reciprocate his love, the burning of Troy is analogous to the destruction of the poet from the point of view of the psychological turbulence in the poet's mind. Yeats's Helen is, therefore, imaged as one who concentrates all the energy which destroyed Troy on the mind of a single individual and that is the poet's. The rhetorical question that ends the poem: "Was there another Troy for her to burn?" may not very much relate to Ireland as a twentieth-century Troy, but to Yeats's frustrated ideals. Such a conclusion is derived from the poet's celebration of the beloved's beauty which he projects through the use of the metaphor "tightened bow", to express the captivating solidness and perfection that subjects the persona to the casualties of passion reminiscent of the siege of Troy, thus revealing the degree of the speaker's emotional suffering.

In his wholly political poems, Yeats brings out the terrible casualties wrought by civil strife in Ireland, expressing a bitterness and frankness which can only be likened to those in Shelley's political poems. He does not present the horrors of the era with so ethical a mind as Shelley does. He mainly indicates a

situation of violence and its ensuing consequences, whereas Shelley believes in the power of passive revolution as a solution to tyranny. However, Yeats's two main political poems, "Easter 1916" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" certainly have a bearing on Shelley's "The Mask of Anarchy".[3]

In "Easter 1916", Yeats refers to prominent Irish nationalists who were murdered in the Easter massacre of 1916. He writes of "A drunken, vainglorious lout/Had done most bitter wrong/To some who are near my heart" (Yeats: *Collected Poems* 203). He lays much emphasis on the one man, "the vainglorious lout", who contributed in making his existence a miserable experience. The "bitter wrong" exposes the coarseness of the realities of the world faced by the poet. The tragic atmosphere of "Easter 1916" is intensified by the naming of the victims who were killed during the uprising. One of the victims is described in the poem as one who was "beautiful when young" but has ruined that beauty in death because of her involvement in the political agitation. Another victim mentioned in the poem is a poet and school teacher, and the other who had shown sensitivity and intellectual daring. Yeats lists these victims as follows:

> I write out in verse –
> MacDonagh and MacBride
> and Conolly and Pearse
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn
> Are changed, changed utterly;
> A terrible beauty is born.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 203)

The speaker in the poem observes with regret the destruction of peace, the ultimate value that makes life a satisfying experience.

His apparent honesty, as Dennis Haskell observes, evokes the emotional force of the uprising while still being able to preserve its historical complexity (174). Thus, "Easter 1916" is a reflection on human catastrophe, the distortion of harmony in life by a warring humanity. This is what the poet paradoxically calls "terrible beauty" because such beauty is seen in the gruesome consequences of war and not the advantages the war brings to men. It is a terrible contrary to the poet's ideal beauty. To him, no form of beauty can be the outcome of war or violence, thus the contradiction in the paradox that violence and war can bring peace to Ireland is, in the poet's opinion, a "terrible beauty". The nationalists that Yeats mentions have left a comic world which gives birth to this "terrible beauty". The emphasis here is on terror which ironically possesses its own beauty, is characterized by death and suffering. Yeats shows that humanity's folly and destruction coexist. This is emphasised in the poem's refrain: "Changed, changed utterly/A terrible beauty is born".

Other Irish heroes and heroines who are victims of political violence, and whose names recur in the poems include Eva Goore-Booth, Major Gregory, Constance Markiewicz, Lord Edward and Wolf Tone. Yeats expresses genuine regret for that natural love for humanity which led to their death, that love which results from their attempt to resist the oppression of the people of Ireland by the colonial forces. He wrote several patriotic poems including "Sixteen Dead Men", stimulated by his nationalistic spirit of an Irish man who witnessed a lot of loss of lives including that of his old friend, Dora Sigerson Shorter (Chapman 143). In "Sixteen Dead Men" for example, Pearse is seen to be "deaf and dumb" and only MacDonagh's "bony thumb" can signify that he was once alive. The bitterness over the loss of these lives and the absolute disregard for a harmonious existence spur the poet to emphatically denounce man in another

poem, "Death". Yeats writes in the poem that "Man has created death", because of his role in initiating deadly political upheavals. Violence and terror are also discerned as destructive forces on the natural environment which is itself endowed with beauty. In "The Rose Tree", Yeats shows the effects of political violence on natural beauty. The conversation between Conolly and Pearse in the poem is based on such destruction – "the breath of politic words/Has withered our Rose Tree". The "Rose tree" stands out in the context of Yeats's poem as a symbol of Ireland's beauty, which has been destroyed as a result of political struggle. Conolly questions how the Rose Tree can be brought to blossom again and Pearse replies, "There is nothing but our own red blood/Can make the right Rose Tree" (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 206). He seems to emphasise the fact that violence as a solution to oppression is necessary to solve Ireland's problems. The lines also suggest the need for patriotic Irishmen to sacrifice their lives to make Ireland a beautiful place as was the motivation in the Easter 1916 uprising in Dublin.

The paradox contained in Pearse's reply illustrates that it is only through self-sacrifice, and mostly by way of violence and death, symbolised by "our own red blood" that Ireland, represented by the "Rose Tree", can be made beautiful again. This is tantamount to the old-age notion that to make peace there must be war, and to wage war there must be peace. The paradox in Pearse's reply indicates Yeats's position in political struggle even clearer. In Yeats's poetic context, it is peace and ideal solitude not violence and war that should make Ireland a beautiful environment. Yeats illustrates this in most of his dream poems where he escapes the banalities of the real world to explore the regions of the imagination. Pearse's reply, therefore, is opposed to Yeats's non-violence approach. The shedding of blood in order to make Ireland an admirable paradise is not to

him an acceptable method of bringing peace to Ireland. He is in favour of Shelley's ethics of non-violence and passive revolution. Both poets appeal to humanity through poetry, to find better glories in the imagination. To Yeats, the solution recommended by Pearse to Conolly is another way of perpetrating lasting violence in the country. As was the case with Homer's Troy, such violence could lead to the complete destruction of the Ireland that politicians like Pearse and Conolly are struggling to build.

From the tragedy that awed Ireland in the 1916 uprising, Yeats in many political poems written within that period meditates on the calamitous nature of war and the confusion that has taken control of the world. Political strife is seen to have reached a point where man finds pleasure not in what he hopes to achieve after fighting wars but in the act of war itself. The twentieth-century man is still perceived in the image of a savage uncivilised hero of Homeric epics, who demonstrates total disregard for what human life means. This situation is bitterly invoked in "Meditation in Times of Civil War". In this poem, the persona is amazed at the manner with which soldiers respond to war:

> An affable irregular
> A heavily-built Falstaffian man
> Comes cracking jokes of civil war
> As though to die by gunshot were
> The finest play under the sun.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 229)

The poet is threatened and terrified by the image of the "Falstaffian man" who is lured into war to be killed for the sake of war. In Shakespeare's *King Henry the Fourth Part One,* the "Falstaffian man" alluded to considers war as a jest and makes

fun out of it because he thinks there is absolutely no honour in it.[4] He is persuaded into war, like Wilfred Owen's victim in "Dulce et Decorum Est", because politicians make them understand that it is honourable to fight and die for one's own country.

The difficulty coming out with good reasons why people engage in wars is further expressed in the passionate remorse of the Irish airman who confronts death during war:

> I know that I shall meet my fate
> Somewhere among the clouds above;
> Those that I fight I do not hate,
> Those that I guard I do not love;
> My country is Kiltartan Cross
> My countrymen Kiltartan poor,
> No likely end would bring them loss
> Or leave them happier than before
> Nor law nor duty bade me fight
> Nor public men nor cheering clouds
> A lonely impulse of delight
> Drove me to this tumult in the clouds.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", 152)

What makes this poem lucid is its pathetic tone revealing the lack of a convincing reason for violence and war. But the poem is particularly solid by the fact that it is built on paradoxical frames; that is, it reveals some of the most contradictory situations which human life faces. The first contradiction is noticed when the airman says he does not fight in the wars because he hates his adversaries, or guard others because he loves them.[5] The paradox in this statement effectively reveals that humanity indulges in acts of cruelty and destruction of lives without a definite purpose. The second contradiction has to do with the aftermath of war. To

the airman the end of the war would not bring any loss to those involved in it; neither would it make them happier than they were before the war. What is, therefore, the rationale in brutal engagements in war and violence? This is the question Yeats keeps asking. The airman consequently represents the folly of humanity whose undertakings in the world, especially in war, do not have a definite purpose but might lead to the destruction of humanity itself. The smooth rhythm and regular rhyme of the poem illustrate that war is a kind of baseless art.

Whatever was Yeats's stand concerning the political crisis of Ireland at the time, it could be concluded that in poetry, he expresses the role of political strife in depriving him of his cherished dream – the subjection of the beloved to the poet's passionate demands. Secondly, the range of casualties, especially those culminating in the deaths of compatriots, who paradoxically become the symbol of Ireland's beauty, leave in Yeats's poems a sad experience of the world at the time. Finally, what makes Yeats's political poems significant is their ultimate rejection of violence. In other words, he gives the impression, like Shelley does, that beauty cannot be achieved through violence; it can be achieved through the imagination and he set out to explore the various realms of the imagination for a much more harmonious existence as most of his poems demonstrate.

Infirmity and Age

In addition to Yeats's frustrated love hopes and the political crises in Ireland, a new element begins to creep into the poetry of Yeats's later years beginning specifically with "The Tower". This is the lament over old age, the fact that he attains maturity and intelligence at an age that he could no longer satisfy his youthful ambitions. A.G. Stock has commented that "Yeats was growing

old in peace. He was free from want, famous, happy in marriage…" (212). It is evident that at old age Yeats was famous and free from want. But Stock's opinion that the poet "was growing old in peace" and was "happy in marriage" is questionable. A re-assessment of Yeats's ageing days and the analysis of some of the poems he wrote to express concern about old age may be relevant for the understanding of his mature imagination at old age.

When Yeats returned to Ireland in 1922 after having spent many years abroad, particularly in England, he realised that he had become very famous. Queen's University in Belfast gave him an honorary degree in July that year. In December the same year, Trinity College, Dublin gave him another one. Towards the end of the year, President Cosgrave of the newly formed Irish State appointed him Senator as a reward for his services to Ireland. In 1924 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature which made him a writer of global importance. In spite of these successes, his life from 1922 to 1927 was still full of bitterness. In addition to physical ailments caused by age, he constantly regretted the lack of youthful energy with which he could effectively translate experience acquired at old age into reality. His health deteriorated very rapidly with blindness in one eye and deafness approaching. Twice in 1922 he came close to death. In October 1927 in Dublin he developed lung congestion which almost took away his life, and in December 1928 he contracted Malta fever and was critically ill for almost four months. This was closely followed by high blood pressure which made the process of living difficult. In 1934, he received a glandular operation which gave him more vitality and energy to vent his frustration about the real world and to show greater desire to live in worlds created by his own imagination. He was seriously ill again from 1936 until his death in 1939.

Yeats's last years were years of deepening frustration, moreover, because the pangs of unrequited love for Maud Gonne still haunted him. One would have thought that his marriage to George Hyde-Lees in 1917 would have been satisfying for one who had laboured so much in youth in search of reciprocated love. But the poet was hardly contented. Instead he wrote poems of complaints regretting the youthful vitality he had lost with age. It became difficult for him to propose his new doctrine of unity of being to the Irish nation. After his return to Ireland in 1922, he was restless and excused himself for his practical inability to partake effectively in the building of his country. He wrote to Mrs Shakespear in June, 1922:

> I am tired and in rage at being old, I am all I ever was and much more but an enemy has twisted me so I can plan and think as I never could, but no longer achieve all I plan and think.
>
> (Qtd by Richard Ellmann in *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, 245).

The enemy, of course, is old age which paradoxically provides him wisdom but denies him the ability to act for his country. When he was young, he organized meetings for the purpose of creating Irish consciousness in his countrymen, based on the ideas and philosophies he had propounded in life. But at old age when he had acquired knowledge and experience he found himself incapable of rebuilding society by inspiring men because he lacked the strength and agility of youth to mobilise people.

From this murky background of Yeats at old age, Stock's claim does not seem tenable. We shall prove this further by examining some of the poems in which he depicts in imagistic terms his concern about age. Some of the most revealing later

poems display intense bitterness, regret and nostalgia. This view will be illustrated by references to two extracts from "The Tower". The poet's feelings in old age are recorded in the opening lines of the poem:

> What shall I do with this absurdity –
> O heart, O troubled heart – this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 218)

The "absurdity" mentioned above is the poet's worry about being old and the pathetic exclamation, "O heart, O troubled heart—," reveals in the first place, his anger against age which evokes the sympathy of the reader; secondly, it is a glaring contradiction of Stock's idea that Yeats was growing old in peace. The burden of age on the poet is compared to a burden tied to a dog's tail which makes it difficult for the dog to express happiness. Likewise, age is a burden that stops the speaker from showing delight. The simile is effective in demonstrating Yeats's emotional suffering at the time he needed peace to enjoy the glories of marriage and literary achievements. In the same poem Yeats questions:

> Did all men and women, rich and poor,
> Who trod upon these rocks, or passed this door,
> Whether in public or in secret rage
> As I do now against old age?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 221)

The question, a rhetorical device usually employed by Yeats to bring out the contradictions in the world of reality, emphasises

"rage", that is, his anger against old age. The speaker in these lines gives the impression that his anger exceeds that of any other human being who ever raged against old age. Old age is therefore compared to "rocks" because of its hardness and inflexibility.

Stock's claim that Yeats was growing old as a "famous" man is a fact. But to think that the poet was free from want and that he was happy in his marriage requires further investigation. Two poems: "Two Years Later", and "The Living Beauty", dwell on a similar subject matter and one can conclude after analysing them that Yeats's adoration of beauty is keener in old age than in youth. The poet remorsefully presents old age as an impediment to his venture for young beauty. He confesses that he cannot pay the tribute of passionate tears such as is expected from a young lover. One thing that is clear is that at old age, the poet's desire for love is exceeding and he likens this excess to a plague:

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention upon my old age
> They were not such a plague when I was young.
> What else have I to spur me into a song?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, "The Spur", 359)

The "song" in the rhetorical question, "What else have I to spur me into a song?" refers to poetry, which is Yeats's finest achievement in terms of art, the relic of his outrageous "lust" for a beloved one. It is poetry itself, the product of the imagination representing art as a whole. At the same time "song" represents his continual search for a more ideal life beyond reality.

Even though Yeats attained old age, was married and settled, he still yearned for youthful vigour in order to satisfy his lustful ambition, and to continue to write poetry. In spite of his successes in public life the poet still despaired over unrequited

love. His poetry, especially his later poetry in which the pangs of defeat are very obvious, shows that there was something in the poet that had not been fulfilled. Therefore, Stock's claim that Yeats was free from want or that he was happy in marriage is not tenable because the pangs of unfulfilled love and old age haunt him all through as his later poetry clearly illustrates. In old age, Yeats's imagination had extended so far. He could at that time see himself sailing into the paradise of his imagination after death. He could see himself in old age still welding his bitter experience in life into concrete poetry and into myth. He could also see himself at the apex of self-assertion and self-expression and although old age deprived him of activity his imagination was at its best, exploring and creating unknown worlds which he equipped with the values absent in the world of reality.

The Collapse of Science and Christianity

One observes from Yeats's presentation of the real world that the values of modern life were antipathetic to him. The hotchpotch of the real world, characterized by unreciprocated relationships, old age, political strife, civil wars and mob tyrannies resulting in death, confirms his conviction that scientific rationalism and Christian beliefs which uphold the need for a harmonious life instead perpetuate monstrosity, outrage and horror. According to Yeats, man is entirely responsible for the absurdities of the real world because his attempts to rationalise life through scientific investigation and Christian morality have failed. Yeats holds that scientific rationalism which Plato and Plotinus[6] represent in his poetry does not give a comprehensive explanation of the universe. He writes in the "The Tower":

> I mock Plotinus' thought
> And cry in Plato's teeth

Death and life were not
Till man made the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 223)

Yeats's rejection of philosophy and science is revealed in his mockery of Plotinus and Plato. The poet holds that both philosophers and their ideas have contributed much in instituting suffering and death in the human world, especially with the creation of deadly weapons like "lock", "stock" and "barrel" which are themselves metaphors suggesting torture and murder. Because man is essentially evil, his greatest achievement in philosophy and science has been to invent the instruments of death out of his "bitter soul". Like Blake, Yeats deplores rational philosophies because they aggravate man's helplessness and take him further away from the ultimate reality. Even after two millennia of Christian civilization, humanity has achieved little in the direction of harmonious living. "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" contains Yeats's most convincing conception of horror and terror in the twentieth century[7]:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 223)

Yeats's poetic imagination is very keen here in depicting the horrifying nature of the twentieth century. The imagery in the extract above projects varying forms of terror. The days are compared to the "dragon", and in the image of the fabulous creature, the fiery and terrifying experience of the century is revealed. The "nightmare" is effective also in depicting memories of the horrible experience of the century. It "rides upon sleep", showing the complete dominance of horror over a peaceful existence, principally with the invention of instruments of destruction which the drunken soldier uses to execute terror on an unprotected humanity. The "drunken soldiery", who is the executioner of terror, can be viewed as a specimen of delirium and blood-thirstiness that characterizes the century. Since the soldier has lost his wits he has no qualms for the blood he has spilled, and no empathy for the "mother" struggling in her own blood to regain life. To Yeats, philosophy is responsible for the creation of the instruments of terror. He further implies that attempts to control life through philosophy, science and experience create dangerous tendencies like trepidation and homicide, therefore, projecting in the "weasels" metaphor humanity's condition of endless brutal entanglement with itself.

Yeats does not believe either that ideal life is a goal which can be achieved by moral discipline. Although he respects Christianity, Christian mysticism becomes to him an unconvincing way of saving humanity since its main achievement is to paint horrid images of hell which only trouble the imagination of men.

The poet's contention against Christianity is expressed in one of his longest poems, "The Wanderings of Oisin". The poet tells the story of Oisin whose feet touched the earth after three hundred years of wandering in a faery eternity with his faery-bride. He becomes a shrivelled old man who dies with the sound

of church bells ringing in ears. St Patrick baptises him and tries to save him by teaching him about the Christian's heaven and the sinner's hell. But Oisin is not a good convert. He lives successfully with his faery-bride, Niamh, for three hundred years but when he comes back to reality, Christianity cannot save him. He spends his last days lamenting Finn and Fianna for whose sake he has come back to mortality. He loses them in conjunction with the glory he has enjoyed in the faery eternity with his bride. Nothing more is left to him than the unsubstantial Christian heaven. To St Patrick, who is an embodiment of Christianity, Niamh is the spirit of hell. Consequently, Oisin should not lament his parting with Niamh but should rather repent and seek reconciliation with the Christian heaven. The harmony which reigns between Oisin and Niamh in the world beyond makes Christian heaven seem a vague and joyless eternity. He recounts his adventures and experiences in the faeryland with Niamh to St Patrick and declares that he would rather endure the flames of hell in the company of Niamh than face the boredom of heaven among the saints.

Religious symbolism in Yeats's poems can be identified more with other myths than with Christianity. He found Christianity incapable of solving the problems of real life and thus dismissed it:

> I – though heart might find relief
> Did I become a Christian man and
> choose for my belief
> What seems most welcome in the tomb –
> a predestined part
> Homer is my example and his unchristened heart
> The lion and the honey comb, what has scripture said?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, "Vacillation", 285-286)

One notices in the lines above, a complete rejection of Christian values which are concerned mainly with frightful stories like the one about the lion and the honeycomb that has no significance in Yeats's idea of transcendental reality. He therefore, chooses unchristened Homer as his example, and Homer, as a myth-maker can be perceived as the symbol of attainable unity between man and a veritable spiritual essence.

Like "Vacillation", "The Second Coming" vividly gives Yeats's final vision of the real world, a world in which Christianity's control is no longer possible, especially, with the survival of hatred, violence and death. The reader is informed that the falcon no longer obeys the falconer. Consequently, things fall apart. Anarchy, a replication of Shelley's "King Anarchy", has taken control of the world and Christian values, represented in the poem by the falcon and falconer, have failed to control anarchy. The horrifying world of the twentieth century therefore, promises no other solution but a violent era "gyring" to its conclusion. Faced with this situation, Yeats calls on mankind to indulge in the recesses of the imagination to control reality which he demonstrates effectively by first of all recording life's deficiency in the real world in the image of poetry so that humanity can amend itself, followed by his venture at the creation of a myth in *A Vision* quite outstanding from existing ones.

Yeats could not find peace in a world where everything is terrifying and awful. The experiences of unfulfilled love, the violence in civil strife, senile decay, the failure of science and moral doctrine all create a painful world which he distressingly depicts in poetry. Thus, there is a need for an urgent solution; there is need for the creation of more meaningful forms of religion which can expiate mankind from the evils of reality. He

is certain that such a move is possible because man is dominantly responsible for the fate that befalls him. It cannot be the will of Homer's or Virgil's god. It is the will of man himself. And in view of these absurdities that characterize the real world, the poet resorts to his imagination in search of peace and ideal reality. He rarely shows any social sympathies; neither does he expose man under any kind of economic pressure. His poetry is exclusively of the individual and the individual is the poet himself who depicts his own gruesome experiences, mainly of emotional strain emanating from the uncompromising attitudes of his beloved. Whenever he talks about the terrible consequences of political strife in Ireland, he does not require his readers to sympathise with the oppressed. He requires them to see in the Irish problem, an example of horror which controls the world. The ferocity of his tone and power of rhetoric, which Hazard Adams unconvincingly attributes to the influence of Blake, creates in Yeats's poetry a force of originality of expression.

Yeats therefore, experienced in his lifetime an ugly and terrifying world characterized by social, institutional and sexual repression; the experience urged him to develop a voracious appetite for the abstract for which his imagination became a useful weapon. All his effort, his temperaments and obsessions in life, however, culminated in poetry. In other words, in writing poetry, Yeats does not only record his obsessions and temperaments but he also reveals the various absurd domains from which his imagination rescues him in favour of better worlds beyond. Yeats writes of the world of reality: "The world in which I lived was a bundle of fragments, and the responsibility of the artist is to establish a fiction of integrity that would serve the world" (Qtd in Kermode, "Introduction", 1681). Yeats presents this fragmented world in his poetry by revoking all the horrors which surrounded it. To the poet therefore, the

responsibility of the artist is to use the resources of the imagination to weld the world into an inextricable whole.

NOTES

1. This was Yeats's reply to a request to write a poem during the World War I. Marjorie Perloff further comments that the request came from Henry James who was assisting Edith Wharton to put together a collection of poems to raise money for the Belgian refugees in Paris (228).
2. Homer, in the *Iliad*, narrates the events of war fought by the Achaeans against the Trojans for the recovery of Helen, the wife of the Achaean chieftain, Menelaus. Yeats poetically revivifies the incidents of that terrible war to elucidate the image of the "beloved" of his poems by comparing her to Helen of Troy.
3. According to Shelley, life as it existed in the first decades of the 19th century, one century before Yeats wrote, was tyrannical, obscene and hypocritical. This was perpetrated mainly by tyrants who were involved with ruthless oppression of the masses who in turn resorted to violence as a solution to tyranny. "The Mask of Anarchy" draws its material from the August 1819 Peterloo Massacre when unprovoked government troops stormed a crowd of people peacefully gathered to hear Orator Hunt speak on government reforms. In the first movement of the poem, there is a triumphant march of King Anarchy and his followers, drunk with "the wine of desolation" to London. Three of Anarchy's henchmen are described in detail: Murder (Castlereagh), Fraud (Eldon), and Hypocrisy (Sidmouth). The facts of the situation are that the multitude

has been made slaves to a tyrannical few through force and cunning. They forge the arms that are used to oppress them. But to Shelley, rather than retaliate they have to find victory through education, unity and passive resistance, rather than through violence:

> "And if the tyrants dare
> Let them ride among you there,
> Slash and stab and maim and hew –
> What they like, let them do.
> "With folded guns and steady eyes
> And little fear, and less surprise
> Look upon them as they slay
> Till their rage has died away.
>
> ("A Mask of Anarchy", 344.)

4. In Shakespeare's *King Henry the Fourth Part One*, Falstaff considers war to be a jest, implying there is no meaningful purpose in fighting wars. Indeed, he finds no honour in it after the death of Sir Walter Blunt. Yeats probably makes allusion to the "Falstaffian man" to demonstrate the lack of purpose in the perpetration of violence in the world.
5. There is an undertone of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound" in what the Irish airman says. Mercury, the dandified messenger, carrying news of revenge from Jupiter against Prometheus, is rather sympathetic with Prometheus. But he has to execute the command of Jupiter. Mercury does not like being a messenger of doom and evil but he has to execute Jupiter's command for the sake of his own security.
6. Plotinus was the Greek Neo-Platonic philosopher who lived between AD 205-70.

7. Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen was a year of heavy fighting in the Irish War of Independence. Yeats drew inspiration from the war to illustrate the terror that had taken control of the 20th century.

2

The Mystical Concept of Nature

The imagination, as conceived and cultivated by Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Bake and Shelley, is that sublime faculty which enables the poets to re-examine the realities of human experience and to explore the natural environment and the cosmos. It cherishes the view that there are higher realms of experience which ordinary human reasoning cannot comprehend. A distinctive feature of the Romantic imagination is the awe-inspiring or rapturous supernatural experience, the vitality and intensity which is very explicit in Nature poetry. It is this Romantic perception that creates a sense of mystery within the background of Nature and the poets themselves are endowed with mystical faculties to penetrate this realm of the imagination.

Mysticism may be defined as a state of sublime imaginative and spiritual experience in which one has direct perception of an all–embracing infinite and eternal reality which in this context we can describe as Nature mysticism. In R.L. Brett's view, the "world of nature is not a dead world made of immutable material atoms" organized according to mechanical laws as it is the case in the world of reality (81). In Romantic poetry, it is a world of symbols, images and shadows imbued with life of the mystical, spiritual or transcendental kind which creates awe and wonder

and lies beyond appearances perceived mainly by the creative imagination. In his early poetry, Coleridge saw the natural world as consisting of "purposive and intelligent natural forces" which he considered to be monads (Piper 47), like the mysterious force of the mountain in Shelley's "Mont Blanc".

This chapter attempts an assessment of the extent to which Yeats's imagination explores the moral, psychological and spiritual nature of being; the imagination's perception of things outside reality; and the complicated relationships between feelings, human consciousness, and the mystical link between the landscape and the external universe.

Yeats did not only possess the exalted and inclusive imagination of a great Romantic poet but was also supremely endowed with the illumed spiritual vision of a mystic in the sense of Wordsworthian mysticism revealed on the hills, in the valleys, in the lakes and the whole expanse of the natural landscape. David Ben-Merre explains that "Yeats's flight into the faeryland begins in his early childhood with Celtic folklore" (72). From an early age the poet's fascination with Irish folklore imparted to him by his mother enriched his creative imagination. As Anne Markey observes, Irish folklore provided him with subject matter and symbols which he employed in his literary enterprise (37).

In the first attempt to escape from the absurd world of real experience, Yeats's imagination turns to the mystical and fascinating world of Nature. This realm of the poet's imagination is projected poetically as a world of symbols, images and shadows of transcendental reality which lie beyond appearances.[1] By means of imagery, the poet's imagination creates new life experiences with varying and gratifying values. Unlike in his perception of the world of reality where he uses sordid imagery to project the shortcomings of real life, his poetic expression about the world of Nature reflects his conception of ideal life and

his desire to seek refuge in it from the unrest in the world of reality. Yeats wrote:

> The thicket gave me my first thought of what a long poem should be; I thought of it as a region into which one should wander from the cares of life. The characters were to be no more real than the shadows that people the Howth thicket. Their mission was to lessen its solitude without destroying its peace…. (Qtd in Ellmann, *Yeats: Man and the Mask*, 30)

The "thicket" mentioned in the quotation above can be seen to represent the whole range of the natural landscape delineated in Yeats's poetry. It can also be considered an inspirational force because, as Yeats says, through his love for Nature he came to write long poems. The "thicket" can as well be viewed as a symbolic representation of the natural environment, that realm of the imagination which is more inviting, more loving, harmonious and glorifying with the prevalence of spiritual characters and activities. It represents the region to which the poet yearns to escape from the "cares of life"; "cares of life" referring to the worries, the tumult, the trauma, and the agonizing experience of real life.

In his Nature poems, therefore, Yeats deals with the mystifying, yet inspiring characteristics of Nature. Of particular interest is the fact that apart from possessing mystifying qualities, Nature also provides predominant values like unity of being, reciprocal love and eternity. We begin the analysis of the mystical concept of Nature in Yeats's poetry by examining "dew-drops" as Romantic metaphor for inspiration and as a spiritual force, then the other mystical presences in Nature and the enchanting values of the world of Nature which the poet projects by imaginatively exploring the realm of the natural environment.

Dew-drops: A Romantic Metaphor

An important feature of Romanticism is the source of inspiration most often identified with archetypal images like "sleep" in the case of John Keats, or the "breeze" or "wind" as is the case with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. This source of inspiration is the main catalyst of the creative imagination. The constant reference to "dew-drops" in Yeats's poetry is a significant agent of the creative imagination attached to sleep and dream, as any other source of inspiration found in Romantic poetry. The attachment of creative imagination to certain features of Nature may be less explicit in Yeats's poems because of the limited scope of his pantheism, which in Wordsworth is quite vast. But the idea of dew-drops comes up frequently as an agent of the creative imagination through which perfect beauty is attainable and by which means he perceives the mystical forces that abound in the heart of the universe.

In his Nature poetry therefore, Yeats through the constant use of the "dew-dropping" metaphor imbibes a kind of Romantic phenomenon which associates certain objects or activities in Nature with the power of inspiration or a catalyst of the imagination. Dew-drops in his Nature poems engender sleep, akin to Keats whose prime agent of inspiration and the imagination is sleep. As Garett Stewart writes, "In 'Sleep and Poetry', Keats explores – and strategically blurs – the border of art and the unconscious, underpoliced by the dream logic of words themselves" (138). Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley on the other hand, consider the breeze, breath, or wind to be responsible for activating their creative spirit. Commenting on the poetry of the major Romantic poets, M.H. Abrams in "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor" notes that in their major poems, "the wind is not only a property of the landscape

but also a vehicle for the radical changes in the poet's mind" (37). To Yeats the dew-drop is an agent of inspiration, a spiritual inhabitant in Nature and above all, it inspires the dream which is a metaphor not only for the imagination but for the poetry of vision.

In the context of archetypal critical theory, one would consider dew-drops as an "archetypal metaphor" because it yields little of the universal signification which the breeze or breath, wind or respiration obtains in Romantic poetry. However, a closer view of Northrop Frye's definition of the archetype reveals that an archetype may not be just a repetition of the same kind of image like the wind or breeze but that other ideas, characters, narrative formula or images (as dew-drops in this context) "can be assimilated to a larger unifying category" ("Blake's Treatment of the Archetype", 58). Seen from this perspective, archetypes become recurrent patterns in Literature that cut across social, cultural, racial, generation and geographical boundaries. Therefore, dew-drops that initiate the dream become in Yeats's poetry a corresponding Romantic metaphor for inspiration and the imagination as the archetypal breeze or wind in the poetry of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron. In the opinion of Clyde Kluckhohn, archetypal criticism should concern itself with relating the specific experiences of people to general or universal aspects of human experience, especially that which "result from recurrent reactions of the human psyche to situations and stimuli of the same general order" (46). However, beyond the metaphorical reference to the creative inspiration, dew-drops could be seen as the symbol of the mystical quest in Yeats's landscape.

Yeats penetrates that realm of the imagination which resides in the natural landscape by virtue of the "dew-dropping sleep". The "dew" is a prominent feature of his landscape, portrayed as

possessing mystifying qualities because it is the prime agent of inspiration, as well as a weapon of the imagination, much akin to that of John Keats.[2] The poet subjects himself to the inspirational force of the dew whenever his creative power fails or is disturbed by images from the world of reality from which he wishes to escape, as it is the case in "He Tells of Perfect Beauty":

> O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes,
> The poets labouring all their days
> To build a perfect beauty in rhyme
> Are overthrown by a woman's gaze
> And by the unlabouring brood of the skies:
> And therefore my heart will bow, when dew
> Is dropping sleep until God burn time,
> Before the unlabouring stars and you.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 74-75)

The "perfect beauty" referred to in the lines above is poetic beauty represented by "rhyme", while the "woman's gaze" represents all forms of sensual indulgence which distract the persona in the poem from the art of versification. Because sensual indulgence seems to overrule the creative spirit, the poet appeals to this natural element to protect him. The poet's supplication to the "dew-dropping sleep" is evident in the phrase "my heart will bow". The phrase also suggests that the "dew-dropping sleep" is a superior spirit capable of ordering human activities against the background of Nature.

The implication here, therefore, is that, the natural environment into which the poet escapes from the troubles of the real world wields a serious influence on the poet himself. It is only against this background that his creative spirits are enforced. Once in a natural environment, the dropping of the dew

engenders sleep and dream. The "cloud-pale eyelids" and the "dream-dimmed eyes" in the lines above suggest sleep and dream respectively, which in the context of Keatsian Romanticism is the source from which poetry springs.

The characteristic inducement of sleep and dream by the dropping of dew is overtly presented in "The Valley of the Black Pig":

> The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
> Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
> And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
> Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
> We who still labour by the Cromlech on the shore,
> The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,
> Being weary of the world's empires bow down to you,
> Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 73)

The opening line of the poem brings out the activity of the dew inducing sleep – "dews drop slowly and dreams gather". "Dream" in this context is a symptom of the imagination as well as a metaphor for creative inspiration. Similar to "He Tells of Perfect Beauty", the poet's dew-drop-engendered dream in this poem is interrupted by the traumatizing features of reality. This time, it is not simply a "woman's gaze" but the hurtling of spears, the clashing of fallen horsemen and the shattering of perishing armies. These images of destruction reiterate the ruthlessness of the real world, characterized by unreciprocated love and violent political conflicts. The poet's desire to enter the realm of Nature through the imagination is also seen in his supplication, "bow" to the "dew-dropping sleep". Bowing to the dropping dew again demonstrates Yeats's veneration of the dew as an agent of

inspiration and as a mystifying spiritual force which can provide a means of escape from the tortures of reality, illustrated in the poem by the speaker who is "weary of the world's empires". But of particular interest is the fact that as "Master" the dew controls the other elements of Nature like the stars and every other object which produces light. The "flaming door", for example, stands out distinctively to connote the passage of light, vision or the imagination through which one can perceive life beyond ordinary human understanding, a world into which the poet seeks to escape.

A comparative analysis of the two poems, "He Tells of Perfect Beauty" and "The Valley of the Black Pig", may be useful in the understanding of Yeats's dew-dream convention. Both poems have a similar structure consisting of eight lines each, and a similar rhyming pattern which define the poet's artistic consciousness. The first lines of both poems suggest the nature of the dream, followed in the proceeding lines by the elements of disturbance which are all sources of Yeats's desolation in the real world including infatuation for his mistress and political violence. Most particularly, in the third section of the poem the poet seeks this absolute power which initiates the dream. He bows to this power as evidence of the importance he attaches to dew-dropping as an image of poetic inspiration.

On the other hand, the dream-inducing characteristics of the "dew-drops" symbolise the link between tumultuous reality and the glorifying world of Nature. The reason is because the poet seeks its assistance to reinstate his dream each time he is disrupted by the vices of reality. In other words, dew-drops which are themselves part of the natural environment provide a means of escape into that dream dominion. Its activities also provide as well a perfect setting for the imagination within the

realm of Nature, through which force it is possible to evaluate and perceive the mystery that surrounds the environment.

In the context of Yeats's Nature poetry "Dew-drops" are also capable of providing the three main virtues absent in the world of reality – silence, rest and love. The poem, "A Faery Song" illustrates this. It is a song sung by the people of faeryland over Diamuid and Grania in their bridal sleep under a cromlech. Diamuid and Grania have come "new from the world":

> Give to the children, new from the world,
> Silence and love
> And the long dew-dropping hours of the night,
> And the stars above:
>
> Give to these children, new from the world,
> Rest far from men.
> Is anything better, anything better?
> Tell us it then:
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 43-44)

What is emphatic in the two stanzas of the poem is the appeal to the old generation of Faeries to provide peace, love and rest to Grania and Diamuid. It is assumed that they have left the physical world into a faery world located in the limitless bounds of Nature. They need peace, love and rest because the physical world is full of unrest and desolation. The "dew-dropping hours of night" are among the three forces from which the poet solicits assistance to provide these values to the children from the world, the poet inclusive. The other two include the faeries and "the stars above". But the "dew-dropping hours of night" are invested with a familiar force which does not only engender sleep and dream, but provides peace, love and rest as well, values opposed

to the ruthlessness of the old world which is represented in the second stanza of the poem by the expression "far from men". The rhetorical question, "Is anything better?" shows peace and rest as the most solicited values in human experience attainable in the world of Nature as opposed to violence that characterizes the real world.

However, "dew-drops" do not become an all-desirable force in Yeats's Nature poetry. At times the poet rejects them when he thinks or wishes for other values found in Nature. This is the situation in "The White Birds", a poem in which the speaker expresses the wish for his beloved and himself to become like the swans which are rocked in the foams of the sea. Because of his fascination for the swans he rejects the falling "dew", the "lily", "rose" and the blue stars which in other poems play major roles in realising cosmic unity:

> A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily and rose;
> Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the meteor that goes,
> Or the flame of the blue stars that lingers, hung low in the fall of the dew:
> For I would we were changed to white birds on the wandering foam: I and you!
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 47)

"Dew" is rejected here because it engenders dream and creates weariness. The weariness also comes from too much admiration of the "lily" and the "rose" which are noted for their immense beauty. It comes as well from the desire to admire something different. The lily and the rose are referred to as "dreamers" because they are "dew-dabbled". Here, the "dew-drops" are seen

to create the same effect on Nature as on the poet who finds himself in a similar situation or environment. However, although the poet rejects "dew-drops" in order to admire the other riches of Nature represented by the "white birds", the association of dream with "dew-drops" is once more evident.

The constant reference to "dew-drops" in Yeats's poetry therefore, is significant as an agent of poetic inspiration attached to sleep and dream, as any other source of inspiration found in Romantic poetry. It is a symbol of the imagination through which perfect beauty is attainable. As already stated, the link between poetic inspiration and certain features of Nature is not very evident in Yeats's poems because of the limited scope of his pantheism. However, the idea of dew-drop comes up occasionally as an agent through which the poet perceives the characteristic beauty of the landscape and the glories surrounding Nature. But the fact that it is an agent of poetic inspiration or a spiritual force with which Yeats endows his landscape and through which we are linked to other spiritual presences within the background of Nature cannot be ignored.

Mystical Presences

Some of Yeats's greatest romantic poems bring out the beauty of the natural environment which the poet perceives through the principal agents of sleep and dream induced by dropping dew. The landscape is seen most often to be composed of a few enduring elements like woods, thickets, pools, lakes, rivers, hills and valleys. It is a familiar landscape but the imagination sometimes creates its own inhabitants endowed with the ideals the poet upholds. In addition to the dew-dropping, Yeats's world of Nature is thickly populated by other mystical presences which assume multifarious vegetational or

topographical forms. A good number of these inhabitants are the poet's self-projections. They include supernatural beings, faeries, hermits and cottage dwellers, and druids and heroes of Irish legends which populate the romantic environment. The presentation of the supernatural in Yeats's poetry is perhaps less sophisticated than Coleridge's more complicated mystical-quest pattern in the poems of mystery and demonism like "The Rime of the Ancient Marina", "Christabel" and "Khubla Khan". However, the fundamental aim of creating mystical presences in Yeats's poems as in those of Coleridge is to seek reconciliation between the poet's self-consciousness and the higher order of being. The simple and mystifying characteristics of the landscape projected in the poet's imagination are fascinatingly illustrated in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree":

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made
> Nine bean rows will I have there a hive for the honey bee
> And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
>
> And I shall have some peace there, for peace
> Comes dropping slow,
> Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
> cricket sings;
> There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow
> And evening full of linnet's wings.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 44)

"Innisfree" in the poem is an embodiment of the poet's imagination and of the glorifying values that abound in Nature. It symbolizes any romantic environment which is devoid of rational or scientific interference. It is an unsophisticated environment,

attractive and composed of simple things like a small cabin made of clay for the honey-bees, singing of crickets, a shimmering midnight, and a glowing morning; all these combine to create a harmonious atmosphere with peace "dropping slow".

The values described in the poem suggest Yeats's conscious rejection of the complexities of the rational world. The attractive components of Innisfree, its unsophisticated and simple nature are conceived as an appropriate abode for one who is oppressed in the fragmented world of rational thinking. The urgency with which Yeats wishes to inhabit this world of Nature represented by Innisfree is evident in the opening lines of "The Stolen Child": "Weaving olden dances/Mingling hands and mingling glances/Till the moon has taken flight" (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 20). The activities in which the faeries invite the child to participate while in Nature – walking, fishing, dancing and smiling – suggest the strong alliance between Nature, the faeries and any being who has not yet been corrupted by the scientific world. To Yeats, as to Blake, only the child is qualified to live among faeries because he is innocent and uncorrupted. The child's ready acceptance of the faeries shows that he identifies himself with them because he is not yet corrupted by the forces of the real world.

Just as the faery and the child explore the landscape in "The Stolen Child", glorifying in their pleasures, Aengus, a wandering poet, in "The Song of Wandering Aengus" has prospects of happiness arising from his exploration of the landscape, characterized by the "long dappled grass", and from the reciprocity of love and unity of being between himself and the faery girl:

> I will find out where she has gone,
> And kiss her lips and take her hands;
> And walk among the long dappled grass,

And pluck until the times and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 67)

The fascinating beauty of the mysterious girl is compared to the "silver apples of the moon" and the "golden apples of the sun" which the persona yearns to possess. This is achieved through the kissing of lips and the holding of hands. The "hazel wand" which Aengus cuts and peels, and to which he hangs a thread and a berry to bait the silver trout further suggests the mystical and magical qualities of Nature.

In "The Wanderings of Oisin", the longest of Yeats's Nature poems, the idea of unity with the cosmos is slightly different from what we find in other poems. In this poem, not only the faeries and other spiritual beings partake in the unifying act, but the passive elements of nature also play active, visible roles, since they are themselves endowed with spiritual powers. As in other poems there is the presence of a faery and this is Niamh, Oisin's bride. When both lovers visit the island of forgetfulness, they are seen against a background of a strong unified alliance with Nature. Oisin narrates their experiences in that natural environment:

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid my body as low;
And pearl-pale Niamh lay by me, her brow on the midst of my breast;
And the horse was gone in the distance, and years after years 'gan flow;
Square leaves of ivy moved over us binding us down to our rest.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 436)

The "pearl" metaphor suggests the spiritual wealth of Niamh whose relationship with Oisin is revealed in the manner in which she places her brow on Niamh. The square ivy leaves are an inalienable embodiment of this unity, undertaking as well, the spiritual task of binding the lovers together and linking them to the rest of the cosmic whole.

Like the ivy leaves, the physical elements of Nature; the moon, sun, hollow, wood, river and stream are endowed with a life of their own, acting mysteriously as unifying forces within the landscape. In "Into the Twilight" they are referred to as "the mystical brotherhood" with unlimited liberty and freedom of action. The poem is an invitation to humanity, represented by the metonymy "hearts", to ignore the cares of the real world and wander into that realm of the imagination where,

> Your mother Eire is always young,
> Dew ever shining and twilight grey;
> Though hope fall from you and love decay
> Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue
>
> Come hearts where hill is heaped upon hill:
> For there the mystical brotherhood
> Of sun and moon and hollow and wood
> And river and stream work out their will;
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 65-66)

If Eire is always young, and dew ever shines, while human love and hope fall and decay, it then implies that Nature is timeless. Yeats thus, invites "hearts" (humans) to enter the timelessness of Nature.

The libertine characteristics of Nature are emphasized in the lines above. Life is not controlled. There is perpetual twilight and above all the expanse of Nature is not limited to a particular environment. The "mystical brotherhood" forms a complete whole and provides the harmony that exists in Nature. In "The Poet Pleads with Elemental Powers", these features are given greater spiritual powers: "Great Powers of falling wave and wind and windy fire"; a combination of the power of the wave, the wind and fire, capable of subduing a stubborn beloved: "Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,/That my old care may cease…." (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 80). The "elemental powers" in "The Poet Pleads with Elemental Powers" like the "mystical brotherhood" in "Into the Twilight", are spiritual forces that bring together elements of cosmic unity. They constitute a congregation, a "harmonious choir" with the single unifying purpose of encircling or incorporating a strayed beloved into the unity of all elements of the cosmos. This reflects Yeats's fervent belief that Nature is endowed with spiritual forces whose major role is to create beauty. His imagination does not perceive Nature as mainly controlled by the faeries only. The wind and fire, the sun and moon in the poem cited above are what Stock describes as "flaming Angelic presences" because they are not just elements of the universe. They also have the important role of controlling and ordering human activities through their spiritual influences. The hills and valleys are themselves spirits or the "flaming Angelic presences".[3]

In much of Yeats's Nature poetry, some significance is placed on the spiritual values of the wind. The wind does not have the same values like other physical features mentioned above although it plays similar roles of bringing the elements of Nature together and re-animating life[4]. However, as an archetypal image of creative inspiration, the wind in Yeats's poems is not

very much exploited as other Romantic poets have done before him. Yeats portrays the wind as capable of ordering the activities of Nature as well as those of men. For example, it is the principal force to which the poet appeals in order to suppress the wild qualities of the beloved in "The Poet Pleads with Elemental Powers". It is also viewed as a god – the "sidhe" – the Gaelic word for wind[5]. In "The Hosting of the Sidhe", the winds passing re-animates life within the confines of Nature – the leaves whirl, the hair is unbound, breasts heave, arms wave, and new hope is created in life.

From a contrary view, the wind in Yeats is also a destructive force as in *The Old Testament* and in Shelley's poetry. The wrath of the Gaelic wind gods is reflected in "The Unappeasable Host". In the poem, the wind indulges in an activity of total disorder:

> Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea;
> Desolate winds that hover in the flaming West;
> Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven and beat
> The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering ghost;
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 65)

The winds are desolate because they are ignored, being as they are spiritual forces. Their desolation provokes their wrath, explicit in their cry over the wandering sea, and in the way they beat the doors of Heaven and Hell. It could be judged from the lines cited above that the winds are themselves evil. In "He Reproves the Curlew", it plays an exceptional role of transmitting messages or sounds from other elements of Nature. The cry of the curlew is evil because it reminds the poet of lost love, and the wind is interpreted as an unwelcome messenger since it transmits the evil cry of the curlew. The poet's disgust for this activity of the wind is recorded in a declarative statement in the poem:

"There is enough evil in the crying of the wind". However, the wind in Yeats's Nature poems is vital in reconciling incompatible relationships. It is the power the poet appeals to when he is in need of reciprocated love. The wind is also an important spiritual force in Nature because it re-animates life, thus placing the poet in a more harmonious world of the imagination, which is opposed to the dead cold world of reality.

The "rose", like the wind, is another mystical element in Yeats's world of Nature. It is a feature of the vegetation which most often has been exploited by poets as a conventional symbol of beauty. Yeats views the rose in his Nature poetry in the same light, but at a more profound level it can be considered one of the principal spirits that people the natural landscape and which is endowed with the functions of reconciling and directing those who are willing to savour the bounty of Nature. A good number of Yeats's "Rose" poems express this view. One of the most revealing of these poems is "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time" which presents the rose as a beautiful and charming flower as well as a spirit in action, directing a yearning poet towards the natural environment in which there is eternal beauty. The persona in the poem pleads to the rose spirit for help, more especially because it is an instrument of salvation represented by the rood (the cross on which Jesus was crucified). Yeats, therefore, uses the rose as a symbol of salvation by which man's gruesome fate in the world of real nature can be avoided. In other "Rose" poems, the rose is a spirit which reconciles man with his life by seducing him to attach himself to Nature and savour the splendour that abounds in it. In "The Rose of the Battle", the rose spirit reconciles warring factions, enabling humanity to desist from war as a means of resolving conflict by engaging peaceful solutions to differences among people.

Apart from the floral and topographical features which perform vital spiritual roles and mysterious activities within the realm of Nature, there is a class of inhabitants who reside within the natural landscape. These are particularly characters drawn from old Irish legends, like hermits, an old priest, the Fiddler of Dooney, druids and heroes like Fergus, the King of the Red Branch of Kings, and to a certain extent medieval Queens like Maeve. They are seen against the background of Nature performing mysterious roles, principally that of controlling the activities in Nature and providing the glories the poet anticipates in that realm. The druid, a significant mystical presence in the poems, first assumes the shape of the raven which is fascinating and extraordinary because its wings, "ancient wings", possess no feathers. Later the druid changes to a weasel in order to move from one stone to the other, and lastly it takes a human shape, showing, therefore, that the druid can partake in the activities of Nature whatever they might be and wherever they can be found by transformation.

Fergus's amazement comes possibly from the fact that he finds Nature more bountiful than he expected. He discovers that the freedom to explore Nature is mainly a question of having an instinctual feeling once in it. The rapport existing between the individual and other elements of Nature is facilitated as long as there is a feeling for it. From Fergus's interrogation of the druid, one notices that his intention is to remain a king, not a worldly king, but a king in Nature in which he can freely participate in the bountiful values that this realm provides. When the druid requests from Fergus what he would want, Fergus replies:

> A king and proud! And that is my despair.
> I feast amid my people on the hill,
> And pace the woods, and drive my chariot-wheels

In the white border of the murmuring sea;
And still I feel the crown on my head.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, "Fergus and the Druid", 36)

The word "feast" in the second line above metaphorically shows the satisfaction which Fergus can derive from Nature, especially when he paces the woods and drives his chariot in the sea freely. The druid in this conversational poem stands as a mystical presence that can grant Fergus his desire. He is the one who initiates Fergus who comes from the real world into the realm of Nature. He does this like some magician who has captured, and controlled the secrets of Nature. Like other mystical inhabitants of Nature – "the mystical brotherhood", the "elemental powers", the wind and rose – the druid acts as a liaison between the civilised world and the world of Nature. He is ready to initiate any person into the dreaming wisdom, anyone who rejects the world of civilisations as Fergus does.

The "little bag of dreams" he provides Fergus with is a symbolic element which links Fergus to the ultimate in Nature. It is that little bag of dreams which opens Fergus's vision to the bounty of Nature provides. This is one of Yeats's dream symbols which suggests that the ideal is seen and felt more in Nature through the resources of the imagination and not by magic or other baser arts. This possibly gives credibility to the fact that this lower realm of his imagination is more fascinating and enchanting as Fergus's zeal to possess the dreaming wisdom illustrates. For, as soon as Fergus takes the little bag of dreams and loosens it, he is endowed with the power of perceiving his nature and his changing personality.

In the poem "Who Goes With Fergus", the newly-initiated persona is discovered in profound harmony with Nature. In fact, the whole poem is attractive and awful because Fergus now seeks

to lure the young to his dream dominion whose "woven shades" and "level shore" suggest the attraction in Nature. He is seen to perform a major role in governing Nature:

> For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
> And rules the shadow of the wood,
> And the white breast of the dim sea
> And all dishevelled wandering stars.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 49)

The "brazen cars" and "wandering stars" refer to celestial bodies like the sun, moon and stars which, together with the "woods" and the "sea", represent the expanse of the natural environment controlled by Fergus.

A number of conclusions can of course, be drawn from Yeats's presentation of the natural landscape, its characteristics and inhabitants. The first is that Nature is inspiring and inviting. It inspires the imagination by way of the dream; the "dew-drops" and the druid being the principal spiritual agents through which the expanse of Nature can be fully explored and its rich spiritual values appreciated. In the second place, the other mystical presences, mainly the faeries, the wind-gods, the "mystical brotherhood", "the elemental powers", the "rose" and the heroes drawn from Celtic legends play significant spiritual roles, such as demonstrating the mystery that is hidden in the heart of the universe, initiating and inviting characters from the world of reality into the fascinating domain of Nature. They are involved in ordering and shaping activities in the natural landscape and providing values which the poet finds gratifying in that realm of his imagination which is placed against the background of Nature.

The Bounty of Nature

Apart from providing the ordinary beauty of the countryside, Nature offers Yeats's imagination a number of vital values which are antithetical to those of the sensory world. It is at every moment a romantic environment in which happiness, peace, liberty, harmony, and spiritual beauty wrought by spiritual forces prevail. It is not the horrifying, awful yet attractive world of Wordsworth or Coleridge. Yeats emphasizes the peaceful element of the world of Nature in the sense that his poetry hardly mentions instances of winter, sorrow or fear. Instead, there is always singing and dancing, such as the faeries do with the human child in "The Stolen Child".

For Yeats, the natural and the spiritual elements are always seen in union with one another. The harmony prevalent in the realm of Nature is an emanation from reciprocal relationships, unity of being and eternity. Most of the poems which deal with love, especially those seen against the background of Nature, show ideally what reciprocated love should be. "Down by the Salley Gardens", for example, emphasizes the amorousness and emotional warmth of the girl who meets her lover in the Salley Gardens. Her "snow-white" qualities metaphorically represent perfect beauty and purity in love. Her emotional acquiescence is seen when she bids her lover to take love easy:

> In a field by the river my love and I did stand
> And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white hand.
> She bade me take life easy, as the grass grows on the weirs;
> But I was young and foolish and now am full of tears.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 23)

The lovers are engaged in a relationship which is more complementary, involving sincere emotional exchanges. The beloved shows more concern for the lover, contrary to what Yeats makes one perceive in the real world. She educates the lover on how love should develop. In short, love and life should grow naturally in the same way as grass grows on the weirs. And it is when love and life develop in that natural way that it has prospects of being reciprocated. The persona gives the impression that love and life are not values that individuals should despair to develop or reciprocate. Although the boy regrets that his foolishness makes him unable to consent to the girl at first, he after all, returns the same emotional feelings which she shows towards him.

Similarly, the "glimmering girl" in "The Song of Wandering Aengus", who transforms from a silver trout and fades into the air, leaves Aengus in regrets. The girl's mystical disappearance does not imply a complete rejection of Aengus but a signal or a test of Aengus's emotional strength. But the speaker's certainty and determination to find her,

> And kiss her lips and take her hands;
> And walk among the long dappled grass,
> And pluck till the time and times are done
> The silver apples of the moon
> The golden apples of the sun,
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 20)

further define the quality of love that is reciprocal, harmonious and eternal. Likewise, the persona in "He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers" dreams that he is standing in a valley and watching "happy lovers" pass two by two. This fascinates him and he cries out in his dream, in admiration of the attainment of reciprocal

love. The lovers who parade the valley do not show any signs of discontent with one another. They move hand in hand showing the emotional bond that ties them together. This form of reciprocated love is made more fascinating because it is placed against the background of Nature which provides a perfect environment for love-making, especially, because of its ideal quietude and mysterious qualities. Love is hardly portrayed as an artificial experience and Nature itself plays an important role in binding the lovers together as can be judged from the activity of the square ivy leaves in "The Wanderings of Oisin".

Against the background of Nature, harmony in life is seen to contrast with the fragmented and anarchical perception of contemporary experience. Life becomes an embodiment of a whole, in terms of man's inextricable union with fellow man. The idea of unity of being is very evident in the world of Nature because every element in it has a strong attachment to the other. Wordsworth describes the trifling mixture of man with the starry universe and the divine as one total unified being. The poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" clearly illustrates his concept of cosmic harmony. It is a poem of joy in Nature in which the daffodils, waves, stars, all participate in one happy event. Wordsworth at first is detached from this universal harmony but by virtue of the imagination, "that inward eye", he joins it, in a similar way like the persona's attachment to natural harmony in Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree". The protagonist in Yeats's poem expresses a yearning for the romantic ideals of Nature such as the "lake water lapping", the sound which is closely attached to his "deep hearts' core". The urgency with which the speaker wants to leave for Innisfree is in response to the cosmic law of unity that binds any being that is willing to partake in the universal harmony.

"The Stolen Child" provides a better understanding of the concept of unity of being than "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", especially when the faeries succeed in convincing the child to go with them into the world of Nature. The faeries parade hand in hand with the human child on the landscape in harmony with other elements of the universe like the moon, and the "frothy bubbles" of the stream. The mystical behaviour of the faeries does not present any threat to the child or other inhabitants of Nature, showing that even the human child is endowed with mystical qualities which make him identify himself with the faeries with whom they commune easily to make life a happy and admirable experience.

Another significant idea with which Yeats's imagination invests the landscape is eternity. Since reciprocal love and unity of being are possible in Nature, there is the implication that life in that environment is infinite. No forces are in conflict with one another. Consequently, the possibility of death is quite slim. There is no hatred, despair or strain that depreciates life. Instead, there is continual happiness as the characters explore the natural landscape which offers them a variety of pleasures that can be enjoyed freely and limitlessly.

Wordsworth and Coleridge depict death in Nature, but Yeats does not see it as a valuable account of such a universe. The hero of "The Wanderings of Oisin" dies because he extricates himself from the faery landscape to visit his old friends, forgetting that what actually seems to him to be three years in the faery eternity are actually three centuries. He returns to the real world to find that all his friends have died. Oisin's experiences in the faery world where he moves from one island to another, is also a good illustration of Yeats's concept of eternity in Nature, an eternity of peace and happiness, unmarred by time. Death comes when man detaches himself from that cosmic spiritual harmony.

Faeries, humans, souls and other spiritual personae manifest virtues of eternal life evident in many other Nature poems, especially when the personae participate in reciprocal love and other harmonious activities in life. “Into the Twilight” reveals a similar experience to Oisin’s in “The Wanderings of Oisin”, where three years are actually three centuries spent in a faery eternity. In “Into the Twilight” the persona holds that “time and the world are ever in flight” since life that is lived harmoniously and without despair is unaware of time that passes. “Song of Wandering Aengus” is the celebration of love which is supposed to continue “till the time and times are done” signifying that life comes to an end only when time comes to an end. In “He Tells of a Valley Full of Lovers” the persona who watches happy lovers in a dream pass two by two and hand in hand encourages the women to put their lovers’ heads on their knees and drown their eyes with their hair, “Till all the valleys of the world have been withered away”. Love in the poem is placed against the backdrop of eternity because it is difficult to estimate when the valleys of the world would disappear.

It is necessary at this point to evaluate what Yeats’s imagination achieves in the realm of Nature and the way his imagination depicts it. One would want to know whether Nature’s thickets, woods, rocks, hills, rivers and lakes, the moon, stars and sun – the “flaming angelic presences” – supernatural beings and other mystical presences provide the poet with the satisfaction he yearns for, whether peace, reciprocal love, unity of being and eternity are actually celebrated in accordance with the ideals he desires. Yeats exploited Irish legends to reinterpret life and redefine greatness. Investing Nature with some of the legendary characters became to him a starting point for thought. The heroes he uses to enrich the natural landscape, and who accept Nature as an appropriate environment for peaceful abode

are what they are because the poet desires to create a new life with varying and gratifying qualities. It has already been discussed that Yeats's imagination projects communion among the elements of Nature, proving by comparison that human society is ruthless since it is limited to rules and interpersonal contacts with no connections with the other elements of the universe. Wordsworth's universe, for example, is immense, too vast for the poet, and he shows, like Yeats, an unquenchable desire to explore its realm and live in harmony with its values. Like Wordsworth, Yeats's spokesman, Fergus, shows this characteristic zeal for exploring the realm of Nature. It is also for this reason that Fergus, another of Yeats's self-projections, decides to abandon the limited world of reason to explore the limitless bounds of Nature by accepting the bag of dreams from the druid.

Yeats aims at the sublimation of instinctual feeling in Nature. He is not simply out to display the enormous riches and wonder that exist in Nature as the Georgian poets do. In the heart of the natural landscape which his imagination explores is the desire to weave the universe into a unified whole. The intention of the poet is actually to find the unseen order behind visible things, those values which are remote from the world of reason, and which in his deepest convictions provide man with a variety and stock of the rudimentary human needs. His approach to the universe might differ from Wordsworth's because Wordsworth is sermon-like, preaching to prick the imaginations of men to turn from the life of rational experience into the domain of Nature, as a solution to the repressive nature of life. His Nature mysticism harps more on a theory of poetry and an analysis of consciousness than portraying the gratifying qualities of the natural environment.

Yeats on the other hand, seeks mainly to recreate and inhabit Nature through the imagination, using the landscape as an appropriate realm to project those qualities which give existence a meaningful experience. He is hardly a personage of his landscapes although his presence is felt in the characters he creates. He adheres to and worships Nature as Wordsworth does, but expressing at the same time its glorification. His depiction of Nature is not as exhaustive and sophisticated. However, the few poems that dwell on Nature show a clear picture of an ideal environment for existence, being the first realm where the imagination settles in the poet's endeavour to avoid reality. Yeats finds cause to rejoice because his imagination becomes keener at this realm and enables him to discover other higher and profounder realms in which he finds more gratification than the world of Nature could provide.

Yeats's imagination paints the landscape with the qualities he admires. His world of Nature is a harmless and harmonious environment, yet it cannot be considered a satisfactory account of the world he desires. This is because most of his poems that treat Nature as a theme were written in his early twenties, suggesting that the poems represent his earliest attempt to search for ideal life. His imagination then was not mature enough to see the implications of the natural world, evidenced by the style of his early poetry; it is not so mechanical. It is simply decorative, especially with the abundant use of metaphors and similes and allusions to Irish lore whose heroes are used to beautify the landscape and project a full account of the ideals he creates. Had Yeats succeeded in solving the problems he faced in life before 1900, he would have ended up as a decadent Nature poet, or would simply have added more colour and mysticism to Nature and preached pantheism as his doctrine of art. The poet conceives and creates the universe of the landscape as an abode for escape

from the tortuous experience of real life, as an environment he could admire and inhabit through his imagination. But he later finds such a world too vague and vulnerable, to the point that the cares of reality could still shatter his dream. By the time he wrote "The Wind Among the Reeds", the strain of unrequited love had gone on for too long. Some poems in that collection are stormy and many are full of desolation. The "Rose" no longer remains an all-inclusive symbol of spiritual beauty and the agent of reconciliation between fragmented values and warring factions. It now becomes like Blake's "sick rose", a mortifying element because it reminds the poet of lost love, and it seems to Yeats the world of Nature was not in perfect accordance with the values he sought through the imagination. Concomitantly, the wind no longer becomes a symbol of spiritual rebirth but a messenger of evil, for, in "He Reproves the Curlew", it transmits the evil message in the cry of the curlew and reminds him of lost love, thereby placing him in desolation. Furthermore, the dew-drops which induce peace and the dream are constantly disturbed by images from the real world. Similarly, in "The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart", he perceives Nature as "uncomely and broken", "worn out and old" and which destroys therefore, the rose which blossoms in his heart.

Consequently, the persona in the poem is determined to rebuild another universe because of the imperfections he finds in the natural environment:

> The wrong of unshapely things is wrong too great to be told;
> I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
> With the earth and sky and the water, remade, like a casket of
> gold….
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 62)

The imagination in the poem is the principal agent of activity as well as the power which seeks and reconciles life with a higher consciousness. This consciousness is no longer possible in the realm of Nature because the poet has come to a realisation that, the natural environment is "unshapely" and does not effectively represent the ideals of beauty he envisages. The imagination then turns off to explore a higher and more concrete realm, where the world could be rebuilt like a "casket of gold". The emphasis here is on the intrinsic values of life, including peace, reciprocated love, unity of being and eternity which the poem, the casket (a treasure chest) made of gold symbolises. The "gold" symbol represents a world which is no longer vulnerable like the faeryland of Oisin and Niamh which is ruined because Oisin thinks of revisiting his Fenian friends in the real world.

There is a further suggestion in Yeats's later poetry of the intention to create a world which is completely independent of the ordinary one. He does not need to focus his imagination any longer on existing environments like Innisfree which is an island in Lough Gill, Sligo, Ireland. This is because such an environment was still subject to human interference and rational pollution. He uses the names of existing places in his later poetry as symbols rather than real environments with their characteristic landscape with which he describes Innisfree in his early poetry. There is also an indication in his later poetry that he does not want to have anything to do with the inhabitants of the natural environment, and he rejects any rational physical being who has had any contact with the real world. If any such people are made mentioned of, they are used later on not as elements of life but as poetic images which express varying ideas.

Had Yeats considered the values in Nature satisfactory, he would have found it irrelevant to explore the other realms of the imagination. He would have concentrated on Nature poetry as

Wordsworth and Coleridge do, and fashioned the world of Nature imaginatively to suit his taste. Vivian De Sola Pinto holds that in the second phase of Yeats's career,

> …represented by "The Wind Among the Reeds", he is making a voyage within, withdrawing as much as possible from the contemporary world and enriching his inner life by concentrating on purely visionary themes. (106)

The "journey within" mentioned in Pinto's assessment is the journey into the higher realms of the imagination, a journey which is expedient because the contemporary world and the realm of Nature do not present a satisfactory account of his ideal universe. The journey from the contemporary world and Yeats's concentration on visionary themes are what creates a main difference between Yeats and the major Romantics. Yeats's imagination is propelled by the forces of evil which control contemporary life, and even Nature which is itself one of the visible aspects of reality, whereas the major Romantics merely preached vision as the doctrine of art. Their imagination does not follow a progressive trend from one realm to the other as is the case with Yeats. Therefore, it would be erroneous to think that Yeats's Nature poetry is an attempt to demonstrate his love for Nature such as has been said of his early childhood love for the landscape. He does not aim either to sing praises to Nature's beauty like Wordsworth does in "The Tables Turned" and "Expostulation and Reply". Wordsworth even goes further to reproach Hazlitt for indulging exceedingly in his books rather than exploring the bounty that is disseminated in Nature. Unlike Wordsworth, Yeats does not principally aim to inspire men to discover through instinctual feeling the grandeur of Nature. If this were the case, he would have settled on themes drawn from Nature and exploited his countryside experiences to provide a

good stock of images which he could employ at various degrees to delineate the world in Nature.

However, Yeats's faeryland, as Edmund Wilson puts it, "has become the symbol of the imagination itself", that is, a symbol of the world of Nature and its gratifying values. It is a world of its own, infinitely delightful and infinite seductive (18). It is the realm of Yeats's imagination which makes one addicted, with which one becomes fascinated and drunken. Finally, it is a world which is somehow incompatible with and fatal to the life of the real world which is full of weeping, and from which Yeats wishes to withdraw. The realm of Nature, however, is the realm of the imagination which is not solid enough to provide a more secure abode for the poet, from the pangs of reality. Consequently, Yeats goes beyond Nature; that is, at the level of myth, in search of more perfect glories in life.

NOTES

1. R.L. Brett's argument on Coleridge's theory of the imagination is that the world of reality is perceived through appearances, but Nature is seen mainly through images.
2. It is akin to Keats because the dew-drops engender sleep and Keats's prime agent of inspiration is sleep. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, on the other hand, consider the breeze, breath or wind to be responsible for activating their creative spirit. To Yeats, the dew-drops are both an agent of inspiration and spiritual inhabitant of Nature.
3. Wordsworth uses the "flaming angelic presences" to create the mystery that is buried in the heart of the universe. But, unlike Wordsworth's, Yeats's "flaming angelic presences" or the hills do not create fear and awe.

4. In myth and religion, the wind and sometimes breath often play an essential role in the creation of the universe. Even in the Old and New Testaments the wind and breath are given extra powers of renewing life after death (Ezekiel 37:9 and John 3:7-8). But God's breath in the *Bible* could be a destroying storm as in Kings 19:11 and Ezekiel 13:13, symbolising the expression of God's wrath as well as the gift of life or grace.
5. The "sidhe", often translated as "fairies", are actually ancient Irish gods.

3

Myth as a Poetic Symbol

Since Yeats's imagination becomes very vulnerable in the realm of Nature, especially because of its constant contact with the evils of reality, the poet's search for a satisfying mythology becomes increasingly expedient particularly in his later poetry. Yeats gives the impression that it is mythology which gives life significance, the only way by which the soul can attain a much higher and more permanent reality. He believes that man needs a belief that is wholly attached to his existence and which could control the evils of the world of reality and the vulnerability of the natural environment. He, therefore, casts aside the decorative verse of his early poetry and the lower realms of his imagination – reality and Nature – to create a more concrete realm of the imagination perceived entirely in myths.

The world of myths is thus revealed as a symbol of the world of the spirit, the supreme and god-like in which ideal reality is attainable. For many centuries, the Christian church provided a mythical concept of life in doctrine, revelation, experience and inspiration which Blake, and later Eliot, saw as symbolic patterns for belief in the modern world. But for Yeats, the Christian symbolic patterns had long collapsed and there was need for a

new form of belief that could effectively cater for the needs of the modern man.

Daniel T. O'Hara in "Modernism's Global Identity: On the Dogmatic Imagination in Yeats, Freud and Beyond" explains the link between symbol and myth more elaborately. For him Yeats, like Sigmund Freud, envisions human identity as being dependent on the essence of a comprehensive and coherent system of symbols which they call "myth" and that these symbols or myths constitute a cultural machinery to produce and enforce identity (1-2). For both Yeats and Freud, humanity after the First World War was deprived of the master symbol which could bring together the broken pieces of modern experience into a significant whole in order to create a cultural identity. The absence of the master symbol placed humanity in a dangerous position of symbolic destitution by either losing its essence or becoming inessential. Through his quest for the supernatural Yeats therefore sought to fill this gap by reinventing myth. What is apparent here is that myth becomes a poetic symbol through which Yeats creates his ideal universe. As Rainer Emig argues, when the symbol in Yeats's poetry is not attached to the human sphere as in religion and magic, it is connected to the realm of myth (39).

What is therefore, the place of myths in the Romantic imagination? Poets require a vision of the world which is determined by the urgency to understand the forces that lie in the heart of the universe and which determine the human condition. Myths provide promises of ethereal beauty and of course, bring the poet closer to the Creator. Frank Kermode explains in *Romantic Image* that the work of art itself is a symbol which is alive because of its participation in the higher order of existence (44). Consequently, a Romantic poet's relationship with myth is not merely reflected in the semantic core of his work as one finds

in the work of most traditional poets. For Romantic poets like Blake and Yeats, the quest for the ideal in myths condition the vocabulary, the structure of their arguments and the patterning of their religious outlook, seen in terms of ritual, prayer, sacrifice, and worship. Poetry is made of words, but it also expresses an attitude or a vision. A mytho-poetic experience reveals the world as sharper, fuller, more intense, real and significant. In other words, poetry makes experiences out of events, and such experiences are stocked up in the human consciousness which can be regarded as mythic.

At an exalted realm of the imagination, Yeats like Blake relies essentially on what Bernard Bergonzi in his essay, "Late Victorian to Modernist: 1880-1930", considers to be "primitive myths" which in his opinion could help humanity to "grasp and order the chaos of the twentieth century experience" (347). Yeats and Blake and later Eliot, sought mythical alternatives in their poetry because the world in which they lived, as Terry Eagleton confirms, was that of political and ideological turmoil, which was never only a matter of wars, economic slumps, and revolutions but also of a "crisis of human relationships and of the human personality, as well as the social convulsion" (131). These poets were among the few who made use of history myth, of rebirth and of fulfilment through poetic vision. Myth criticism became prominent at the time they wrote. It focused on areas such as the psychology of Jung, social anthropology, the study of religions, and on metaphor. One of such fervent scholars of myth criticism is Northrop Frye who attempted through archetypal criticism to redefine what criticism is and what it is expected to do. To him, the objective of myth criticism is not to evaluate or to show how one work is more successful than the other, but to demonstrate how all works are structured by similar relationships with each

other no matter the differences in kind, proportion, combination, and the manner with which they are employed. Mythology also provides structuralist critics with a kind of language for communicating ideas both in terms of content and the structure of its systems which may today be defined within the space of modernism.

Yeats demonstrates through the image of poetry that the twentieth century was saddled with multifarious problems that rendered human existence futile. While philosophers like Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, in the face of the gruesomeness of human experience, cajoled the world with existentialist philosophies which preached the non-existence of God and the need for humanity to depend on its own resourcefulness for salvation, Yeats saw a continual need for belief, for salvation through mythical contemplation. He demonstrates by his visionary experiences in poetry that there is need for some spiritual essence, which as he holds, is at the centre of meaningful human existence hitherto ignored by the modern man.

Myths therefore survive in Yeats's "collective unconscious" as authentic sources of spiritual essence in a world of desolate reality and they are central to the understanding of his philosophic and poetic imagination. He re-enacts or creates myths as alternative means of rescuing humanity from the crises of the despair that characterized the era. He uses the Celtic, Classical and Biblical myths in his poetry as poetic symbols to delineate a more desirable reality. From these sources, and from his wide readings of magic and Theosophy he draws images and symbols with which he creates a personal myth clearly expatiated in *A Vision*. The myths in Yeats's poetry are used to express different situations and modes of life that are more perfect and useful in the reconstruction of human fate. Yeats does not say

which mythical cult is preferable. To him, humanity should be conscious of the divine presence and come to terms with it. Myths in Yeats's poetry, therefore, become a symbol by which the imagination reaches a more permanent and ideal life absent in the world of reality and the natural environment.

In reading Yeats's poetry, therefore, one has a clear idea of the poet's vision of ideal life which the imagination projects at a transcendental level. He uses the gods and figures from the various myths to project that life of the spirit and the god-like. The mythical figures are often seen in harmony with one another, participating in love that is ideal, reciprocated and eternalised, showing concern for the union of all transcendental beings, and professing life that continues into eternity.

Celtic Mythology

Yeats's quest for the glorified values absent in the real world, begin with his visionary contact with primitive myths, specifically Celtic myths; some of their characters as we have seen in the previous chapter are linked with the mystifying presences in the natural environment. Primitive myths may be considered primordial myths or myths that have not attained universal significance but they equally represent spiritual concepts which in their own way hint on the mystery that lies in the heart of the universe. It is the mystery which the modern man has lost touch with, yet the mythical figures are seen to play important roles in shaping human activities in Yeats's poems.

Yeats's adherence to Celtic mystical and spiritual concepts helps to explain some of the ideals for which he yearned in life including reciprocity in relationships, unity of being, eternal existence and others. Images, figures and situations of Celtic

myths appear more frequently in his poetry, presumably because of his Irish background. He had a good knowledge of Irish folklore including its myths. Virginia Moore states that, "At a still formative age Yeats had become as familiar with the valorous Irish gods as with Sligo neighbours. They invade his poetry" (45). Moore's comparison of Yeats's knowledge of Irish mythology with knowledge of the countryside neighbours shows that Yeats was fully acquainted with Celtic mythology before he started writing poetry. However, it is clear that most of the Celtic myths alluded to in his poetry do not explain themselves fully. They are used mainly as images and symbols to express various ideas, particularly to give lucidity to the life lived at a transcendental level.

A leading figure in Celtic mythology who appears more regularly in Yeats's poetry is Aengus. According to Irish mythology, he is the ancient master of love, and god of youth, poetry and beauty. He appears in "The Song of Wandering Aengus" in the guise of a mortal. In the hazel wood, he catches a silver trout from the stream and the trout transforms into a glimmering girl then fades into the air. The story Yeats tells in the poem is in line with that of the god's love for Celtic myth. The transformation of the god into a trout and later, a glimmering faery girl, is evidence of divine omnipresence. The transformational experience is reminiscent of that of the swan in "Leda and the Swan" which makes one understand that gods have a tendency to transform into various shapes to savour the beauty of enchanting women. Yeats's imagination presents this image as a quintessence of reciprocated love, unhindered by the complication of differing personalities and ideas. Through the imagination, therefore, Yeats could relive the experience of a god like Aengus and the faery girl.

Another main character drawn from Celtic myths and who is frequently used in Yeats's poetry as a symbol of supernatural presence is Fergus. In Celtic mythology, he is the king of the proud Red Branch of Kings who preferred less worldly virtues. Fergus gave up his power to Conchubar, son of Nessa.[1] Fergus is thus presented superficially as a mythical figure in search of a fascinating and ideal situation. He is seen from one perspective as a half-king and from another a double king floating between two realms, one realm controlled by the forces of Nature and the other is the mythical realm in which, as the poet's self-projection, he becomes an embodiment of vision. He is not interested in relinquishing what he longs for, that is, the kingship of the Red Branch. At the same time he wants to possess the ideal realm of desire and the imagination. This is succinctly the subject matter of the conversational poem, "Fergus and the Druid".

The druid, a magical being capable of transformation into several shapes and who functions as a priest in ancient Celtic societies, questions the reasons for Fergus's despair and what he would desire. Fergus's desire is to remain King of the Proud Red Branch of Kings but at the same time he wishes to abdicate the throne and spend his life peacefully hunting in the woods. He also wants to learn the "dreaming wisdom" of the druid, with which he will easily explore the boundless realm of nature. To him being king is carrying "a burden without end", or becoming a "foolish labourer", both expressions suggesting that kingship is tiresome and uninteresting. Fergus's dilemma is only resolved when the druid gives him a "bag of dreams" to make him forget that he was king of the proud Red Branch of Kings and learn instead "the dreaming wisdom" which takes him to the realm of the mythical.

Fergus's initiation into the dream world is complete because he can at the end of the poem understand the powers underlying the "small slate-coloured thing", which changes his life entirely:

> I see my life go drifting like a river
> From change to change; I have been many things—
> A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
> Upon a sword, a fir-tree on the hill,
> An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
> A king sitting upon a chair of gold –
> And all these things were wonderful and great;
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 37)

The process of transformation into several forms: "a green drop", a gleam of light", "a fir-tree", "an old slave" and, finally, "a king" is divine, giving the impression that as a mythical figure Fergus can manifest himself in any form.

Fergus prefigures many characters in Yeats's poetry such as the old man sailing to Byzantium and the other spiritual beings who visit the "bestial floor" in "The Magi". He becomes both a mythical figure and a visionary symbol. He appears again in "Who Goes with Fergus" as the poet's wry spokesman and seeks to lure the young generation to his dream dominion with woven shades and level shores representing Yeats's idea that mythology is capable of triumphing over life's disorder. Through Fergus the poet reaches that dominion of the imagination where the pangs of unfulfilled love could be forgotten in the company of his spiritual being:

> Young man lift up your russet brow,
> And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
> And brood on hope and fear no more.

And no more turn aside and brood
Upon love's bitter mystery
For Fergus rules the brazen cars

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 49)

The rather gentle, soft and consolatory advice given in the extract above presents Fergus as an agent of salvation for a frustrated lover. The persona in the poem is faced with a situation of despair, of hopelessness and fear especially resulting from "love's bitter mystery". But since Fergus is presented as one who can provide more concrete hopes, the persona is asked to "lift up" his brow and meet salvation from the mythical figure. The Fergus one finds in the poem "Fergus and the Druid" is no longer the same personality in "Who Goes with Fergus". While in "Fergus and the Druid" he simply possesses magical qualities which permit him to transform himself into differing shapes, in "Who Goes with Fergus" he "rules the brazen cars", suggesting that he has gone beyond the level of simply transforming himself into shapes. He has now become an all-powerful force which controls the activities of the universe. It must be stated here that Fergus, though seen mostly against the background of Nature – one of Yeats's techniques of enriching that lower realm of his imagination – is also a representative of the world of myths. He embodies values which mostly symbolise the vision towards the salvation of humanity.

Oisin and Niamh are also significant personae in Celtic myths. Oisin was the son of Finn. Because he was a great poet as well as a warrior, Niamh, the daughter of Aengus chose him for a lover. The mythical characters are clearly brought out in what could be described as Yeats's longest and most complete narrative poem, "The Wanderings of Oisin". They echo the

heroes in Virgil's *The Aeneid* and Keats's "Lamia" who all participate in the celebration of love at a transcendental level. As the story is told by Yeats, Oisin and Niamh rode away over the sea to a faery eternity where, because all aspects of their lives are fulfilled, time passes fast and they mistakenly believe they had been there for a relatively short time. They find in their transcendental faery world splendour and fascinating experiences that provide not despair but the joy of living. However, Oisin yearns to see his friends again in the mortal world. He comes back to the world to realise that he has been away for three centuries and many changes have taken place in Ireland. His mortal friends had become forgotten heroes, a new race of men had emerged and Christianity had been introduced and was firmly rooted in Ireland. He goes around on his faery horse insulated from mortality but unable to find his place among the people. As soon as his feet touch the earth, the earth claims him and he dies a scruffy old man with church bells ringing in his ears.

There are a number of ideas implied in the story of Oisin. First, it shows that man can never completely escape reality. This is illustrated by Oisin's desire to come back to mortality to meet his friends in spite of the glories offered in the faery world. Secondly, Yeats uses the story of the myth to demonstrate his rejection of Christian values because Christianity does not save Oisin and does not provide him with the glories which he enjoys in the faery eternity with Niamh. St. Patrick is presented as a fake Christian who has no other insight into the world of the spirit, except by preaching moral doctrines to highlight the glories of heaven and the horrors of hell. Above all, Yeats's imagination projects in this myth the relationship between Oisin and Niamh as a perfect example of love experienced at a transcendental level. What is most fascinating in Oisin's narration of his

adventures to St. Patrick is that both lovers spend three hundred years together wandering from one island to another enjoying the beauty of the faeryland.

In the first part of the poem, Oisin is hunting with his fellow Fenians when Niamh, the daughter of the King of the Young, entices him to go with her to her kingdom. It is fascinating to note the facile manner with which both of them fall in love at first meeting. Oisin expresses his feelings as soon as Niamh makes her request to his father:

> "You only will I wed" I cried,
> And I will make a thousand songs
> And set your name all names above,
> And captives bound with leather throngs
> Shall kneel and praise you one by one
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 411)

The effect which the recurrent hyperboles in these lines create is that they place Niamh in her actual status of a deity. The stress on the "thousand songs" to be sung in Niamh's praise and reverence, the placing of her names above all other names, and the deployment of captives to supplicate to her are exaggerations which combine with Oisin's eagerness to create a panegyric effect in the poem and display the mythical values of Niamh.

Filled with the pleasure of Oisin's eager consent, Niamh returns the same feelings, promising several honours for Oisin. Such a reply from Niamh is exemplary of reciprocity in love, seen at a higher plane where gods and faeries, and sometimes mortals who have been incorporated into the mythical realm, are participants. This is explicit in Niamh's passionate invitation of Oisin to her kingdom:

"O Oisin, mount by me and ride
To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,
Where men have heaped no burial-mounds,
And the days pass like a wayward tune,
Where the broken faith has never been known,
And the blushes of first love never have flown,
And there I will give you a hundred hounds;
No mightier creatures bay at the moon,
And a hundred robes of murmuring silk,
And a hundred calf and a hundred sheep
Whose long wool whiter than sea froth flows,
And a hundred spears and a hundred bows,
And oil and wine and honey and milk,
And always never-anxious sleep;
While a hundred youths mighty of limb,
But knowing no tumult nor hate nor strife,
And a hundred ladies merry as birds,
Who when they dance to fitful measure
Have a speed like speed of salmon herds
Shall follow your horn and obey your whim,
And you should know the Donian leisure;
And Niamh be with you for a wife…."

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 411-412)

The extract though long, contains a summation of Yeats's wishful thinking and the ideals he yearns to achieve through the imagination. In the first place, Niamh's reply indicates a return of the same passionate feelings that Oisin has promised her. In the presentation of the glories anticipated in the faeryland Yeats reveals Niamh's kingdom as a joyful harmonious paradise. The hundred hounds, hundred robes, hundred calves, sheep and others are material elements that govern contemporary love. But the exaggerated inventory of the material aspect of love in the extract

only shows that there is abundance of values in Niamh's celestial kingdom. Therefore, Oisin could not remain in the physical world despairing for these values. This proves that reciprocal experience in love is shown in the emotional exchanges by the individuals concerned.

Perhaps, Niamh easily grants her consent because Oisin is a poet and possesses that imaginative faculty with which he can savour the excesses of Niamh's faery kingdom, among which is eternity. There is a suggestion that love at that level is permanent and enduring because, as Niamh says, frustrated love has never been known in her faeryland. The love that she calls the "blushes of first love" is love that is pure and unaffected. It is love experienced at a transcendental level, not hampered in any way by death. That is why Niamh invites Oisin to her kingdom where men "have heaped no burial mounds", giving the impression that death is not part of the life in her faery eternity.

Niamh also places love against the background of harmony and it is characterized by reciprocity and endurance. The merry women and the healthy young men of her kingdom are those to provide the festive mood – dancing and singing to "fitful measure". The festive atmosphere shows that Niamh's paradise also promises peace and harmony. The inhabitants of that realm know "no tumult nor strife", which in the mortal world is responsible for misunderstanding, disorder and despair. It is further implied in Niamh's reply that faery love leaves no room for unnecessary contemplation or rationalism. It takes those involved unawares, especially when reciprocity is attained. That is why Oisin and Niamh spend three hundred years together, little noticing that "days passed like a wayward tune". The first one hundred years are spent fishing and hunting in the country peopled by the young. In the next one hundred years both lovers

move to another island where "rose a world of towers/And blackness in the dark". Here, Oisin fights with the demon and sets to freedom a girl who has been enchained by the demon for a hundred years. In the third century they go to the Island of Forgetfulness where, lulled by a bell-branch, Oisin dreams for one hundred years. The relationship between Oisin and Niamh would have continued to eternity had Oisin not gone back to mortality against the wish of his faery bride. She weeps when Oisin indicates his intention to visit his friends because she understands the dangers Oisin will face in the mortal world.

This interesting story, no doubt, gives Yeats's full idea of what love that is fulfilled should be. In the poem, Oisin and Niamh are not only considered as symbols by which the imagination can reach that transcendental reality where love is real, but they are also presented as characters themselves in action, seen against a background of eternity. Of all other forms of myth, the one which centres around Oisin touches on a familiar story as it was told in ancient Ireland. The only difference is that Yeats stresses so much the nature of reciprocated love, bliss, and harmony, values which are very lucidly brought out in Yeats's poetry because of the effective use of poetic imagery. That, certainly is where the original version of the myth differs from that of Yeats since the poet has his own peculiar ideals to project.

As Oisin's experience with Niamh illustrates, Yeats uses heroes of Celtic tradition to express reciprocal love and to lay emphasis on the role of the gods in controlling human activities. Aillin, as a mythical figure, for example, is a princess and daughter of King Lugaidh. She is in love with Baile, heir to Ulster's throne, but Aengus, the master of love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, causes them to tell each other the story of each other's death. Consequently, their

hearts are broken and they die. In Yeats's version of the myth told in "Baile and Aillin", Aengus is a god of reconciliation between the grieving lovers. Although Aengus's efforts are to reconcile the lovers, a few points are worth mentioning. First, the story represents Yeats's idea of life after life; that is, the soul continues its existence after the death of the organic life. That explains why both Aillin and Baile tell the story of each other's death, giving the impression that their souls are in action, and that they are no longer their organic selves. Therefore, in Yeats's visionary conception, it is the soul that continues for eternity. Secondly, the story of Aillin and Baile shows the importance Yeats attaches to a supreme being whose role is to reconcile ailing factions and not to castigate or victimise as Shelley's gods and sometimes Blake's, often do. Aengus, consequently, is that indispensable symbol in mythologies whose role is to make the souls of men come to terms with each other at the level of a higher consciousness. Lastly, it should be understood that the mention of death in Aengus's kingdom is not spiritual death but physical death, and this is one of the rare instances in Yeats's poetry where death is given prominent concern. However, Aengus stands out as well as a liaison between death and life-after-life.

The gods of ancient Ireland are further presented in Yeats's poetry as "winds", performing vital roles in life in that realm of the poet's imagination. In the previous chapter we looked at winds as simple spiritual forces that inhabit the natural landscape familiar to the life of real experience. At the level of myth, the wind adopts a much higher status and role. In "The Hosting of the Sidhe" for example, the wind-gods journey in the whirlwind in a kind of dance which in the Middle ages was considered to be the dance of the daughters of Herodias, Herodias taking the place

of some old goddess. Therefore, the Sidhe, as the wind-gods are called, are more than faeries in Yeats's context. In "The Hosting of the Sidhe" they are supernatural beings of a more exalted character. Yeats sometimes thinks of them as including all the mythical heroes like Niamh and at other times he makes them quite sinister. To be touched by them is to be set aside from other mortals as the story of Oisin reveals. As in "The Wanderings of Oisin" these gods show a wonderful ability to lure away mortals into that transcendental, spiritual world. This is evident in "The Hosting of the Sidhe" where Niamh again lures away Coalite, Oisin's companion, just as she does to Oisin in "The Wanderings of Oisin":

> And Niamh came calling away, come away:
> Empty your heart of its mortal dream
> The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
> Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
> Our hearts are heaving, our eyes are agleam
> Our hands are waving, our lips are apart;
> And if any gaze on our rushing band
> We come between him and the deed of his hand,
> We come between him and the hope of his heart
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 61)

The extract brings out the enchanting powers of the wind on mortals. When the "winds awaken", the mortals show surprise because their cheeks grow pale, their lips are apart, their eyes gleam and their hearts beat. Niamh who is an incarnation of the "wind gods" further shows the role the winds play – they come between mortals and their deeds and hopes, revealing, therefore, that they do not only lure away mortals to the spiritual world, but mediate between their hopes with the intention of reconciling

them. In doing this, they divorce the mortals from their "mortal dream" and place them at a more fascinating, and exiting transcendental realm.

Yeats, therefore, invests the higher realm of the imagination based on myth by employing a plethora of figures and situations drawn from Celtic myths. The gods are shown performing varying roles, as has been noted, the main one being that of reconciling mortals and luring them into a spiritual eternity where more enduring values like harmony, peace, reciprocal love and unity of being absent in the world of reality are attainable. This shows Yeats's conviction that gods have that important role of relieving humanity from the pangs of real life experience. As the Celtic gods illustrate, they participate visibly in convincing the mortals of the reality of the transcendental world where the soul is the principal inhabitant. And they do this not by preaching moral doctrines or the glories existing in their world, but by inspiring the mortals through their own spiritual powers which the "Sidhe" or the wind gods possess.

It can also be said of the Celtic gods that they are instruments of vision. They confirm, as shown in Yeats's poetry, that vision or the imagination is a commendable weapon with which humanity can reach out to that realm of the soul and reconcile humanity with myth. In sum, the Celtic gods, as Yeats describes them, are the gods of salvation from the ruthless experience of the real world.

Classical Mythology

While in Celtic myths the gods are seen participating actively in the process of uniting the mortals with the spiritual, and providing them with the harmony non-existent in the mortal

world, Yeats's imagination occasionally turns to classical mythology, mostly to bring out the values which ideal love provides at the mythical level. The central figure in those poems which allude to classical mythology is "Helen". The "Helen" in the poems is no longer the Helen of Troy but a symbol of transcendental beauty, the kind that is capable of generating lasting conflicts between those who seek it. Thus, the "Helen" symbol is much more effective in the projection of beauty than the conventional "rose" symbol. Helen possesses the kind of beauty that Blake calls "highest beauty" because it is divine.

The beloved of Yeats's poems is at times portrayed in the "Helen" image. However, it must be noted that the beauty of the beloved which is compared to that of Helen of Troy is that which is capable of generating lasting psychological and political conflicts. "No Second Troy" has Homeric mythical implications with "Helen" being the principal focus. Her name is not mentioned in the poem but we draw from the circumstances presented in the poem that there is a subtle comparison between Helen of Troy and the beloved. Besides projecting the beloved's beauty with a very appealing simile – "with beauty like a tightened bow", and one which is not natural in contemporary life, the poet implicitly alludes to Helen's beauty which was the main object of war between the Greeks and the Trojans. However, beyond her beauty and unlike Helen of Troy, the beloved possesses additional energies, revolutionary in kind and which urge her to engage in violent political activities. According to the speaker in the poem, a combination of these two values – beauty and the revolutionary spirit are capable of causing serious destruction on those who seek such beauty. Yeats does not want to see himself as Troy that should be destroyed by such transcendental beauty which Helen possesses, and which culminated in the sacking of Troy.

Unlike in "No Second Troy" where the speaker unconditionally accepts that his love for the beloved cannot be reciprocated and frankly evaluates her contribution to the political struggle in Ireland, "A Woman Homer Sung" presents a darker shade of despair over love that is not reciprocated. The "Helen" image in the latter poem is put side by side with that of the beloved and the speaker's regret about his inability to possess that beauty, a woman who "…trod so sweetly proud/As 't were a cloud,/A woman Homer sung" (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 100). The woman Homer sung in poetry is definitely "Helen", the principal subject of contention in the ten-year war in the *Iliad*. Thus Helen's story is of epic dimension but instead of being the subject of political contention that led to the destruction of Troy, she is presented in Yeats's poem as a political activist as well as one endowed with fascinating beauty. Her manner of walking is described as grandiose and comparable to the majestic sailing clouds.

There is some departure from poems that celebrate beauty and the destruction which such beauty is capable of creating amongst men as in "No Second Troy" and "A Woman Homer Sung", to poems which display reciprocity in love relationships like in the poem, "When Helen Lived" where the poet's imagination is once more found wandering on "Those topless towers/Where Helen walked with her boy". The "topless towers" represent that indefinable, unsubstantial realm of the poet's imagination where images and symbols are the principal objects. They also suggest a world of transcendence where ideal beauty and reciprocal love are attainable. The fact that Helen moves on the towers with "her boy", who presumably in Homer's myth is Paris, hints at the smooth fulfilment of love relationships at the level of myth.

The ideal of reciprocal love is more vividly illustrated in "Leda and the Swan" in which the body of Leda, the "staggering girl", merges with that of the swan with "great wings" which according to Janet Neigh, "turns the fragmentation into a violent union" (150). By alluding to the Greek story of Leda and the Swan, Yeats was from one perspective expressing the brutality of the colonial on the colonized and the ability of the oppressed to withstand oppression, but more convincingly to show how understanding can be a key factor in building harmonious human relationships. The beloved is seen in the image of Leda whose love of the swan, like that of Helen and Paris is not based on equal strength or similar physical appearances but on understanding:

> A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
> Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
> By the dark webs, her nape caught in the bills,
> He holds her helpless breast upon his breast…
>
> A shudder in the loins engenders there
> The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
> And Agamemnon dead.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 241)

Leda does not possess the brute's knowledge and strength to be able to resist the swan's great lust. The girl in the poem is said to be "staggering" and her breast "helpless", but this does not imply complete rejection of the swan. It is all part of the activity which the poet describes in a frenzied rhythm, not a rejection of the amorous advances of the swan.

The "broken wall" and the "burning roof and tower" are poetic expressions of the outcome of Leda's contact with the

swan. In Greek mythology, Leda is ravished by Zeus in the form of a swan. From that act are born two sets of twins: Helen and Pollux, and Clytemnestra and Castor. Yeats's imagination recalls the Trojan War that ensued from the struggle to possess Helen and the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra (with her lover Aegisthus) upon his return from that war. The poet questions whether the impregnation of Leda by the Swan was accompanied by divine illumination of her understanding. In the context of Yeats's other poems, the miraculous conception of Leda revealed in this myth is based on the idea that genuine love rests principally on understanding and reciprocity.

The "Ledaean" image again occupies the poet's imagination in "Among School Children", where the persona of the poem, the "sixty-year-old-smiling-public man",[2] visits a school room and the beauty of some of the girls strikes him. His imagination stretches back to the Greek myth and he "dreams of a Ledaean body". He now sees the children not as Leda but as the "daughters of the swan" who inherit the beauty of their mother. The poet is so greatly charmed by this beauty that his imagination takes him away from the object of his visit. He is immersed in philosophical contemplation of beauty represented by Plato, "Soldier Aristotle" and "golden-thighed Pythagoras".

Yeats, therefore, makes the beauty of the school children divine. It is the poet's conviction that the beauty which the school children possess survives generations. It never dies. This is why Leda gives birth to the two sets of twins to continue that generation of ravishing beauty. However, it is only the imagination that can make the beauty of the school children last eternally, given that organic beauty elsewhere in Yeats's poetry is short-lived. Therefore, quintessential beauty such as that which the girls possess is enduring because the poet's imagination

connects it to bygone memories or celestial samples of beauty which Leda and Helen incarnate. The connection between myth and the soul is achieved in "Among School Children" with beauty which is overwhelming and eternally enchanting.

So far, the analysis above presents some of the major areas of Classical myths, specifically Greek myths from which the imagination recreates life. Amongst the images drawn from Greek myths, Yeats seems to have been particularly influenced by those in Homer's poetry. He believes and admires Homer's non-Christian beliefs and incorporates them in his works at will. Homer, to Yeats, becomes something more than a poet. He is a summation of the values created in his epic and those that exist in other classical epic poems. He becomes a god himself, a myth and no longer a myth-maker. He is seen in this realm of the poet's imagination to have the attributes of Fergus and Aengus in Celtic myths who become the path through which the imagination can reach and savour the values of that world which really exists transcendentally – that transcendental reality that promises the joy of reciprocal relationships and enduring beauty such as Homer's heroines, Helen and Leda possess.

Homer also becomes, for Yeats, a most desirable alternative of beliefs, Christian beliefs especially. In the last poem of "Vacillation", Yeats shows his preference for Homer as an epitome of the kind of beliefs he subscribes to:

> I – though heart
> might find relief
> Did I become a Christian man and chose for my belief
> What seems most welcome in the tomb—play a
> predestined part.
> Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
> The lion and the honey comb, what has scripture said?

> So get you gone, Von Hügel, though with blessings on
> your head.
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 285-286)

Yeats acknowledges that Christianity does provide relief although it fails to provide convincing practical means with which humanity could connect with the harmonious realm. He therefore, dismisses Von Hügel because he embodies the values of Christianity. The poet is of the opinion that the story about Samson's fight with the lion and the adventure with the honey comb[3] does not have any real substantial value for anyone who has chosen Homer. They are only stories told to trouble the poet's imagination, to show the horrors of hell and the glories of heaven. Yeats prefers Homer who is an example of one who connects the transcendental or spiritual world with reality through the magic of poetry. To Yeats therefore, Homer becomes a symbol of myth, for in other poems his image actively participates with other celestial figures in the celebration of happiness in that realm of myth.

There are other references Yeats makes to classical myths but they are not as overt and significant as those mentioned already. The significance of the myths also varies but they particularly enrich the reader's understanding of Yeats's basic concerns, especially his attempt, through existing myths, to create an eternally-glorifying world at a transcendental level. In this domain celestial beauty and reciprocal love are celebrated in spite of the varying forms and shapes of the participants. Those involved share a certain degree of understanding. In all this, the imagination plays the major role of bringing the poet to this level of transcendental reality.

Biblical Mythology

Yeats does not make as much use of biblical myths as he does Celtic and classical myths. But there are constant allusions to various situations in the *Bible* and Christianity in general which express the poet's various attitudes toward life lived in the realm of myth. Although he rejects Christian beliefs as incapable of leading man towards salvation there are a few references to ideal love recorded in biblical myth. In "Adam's Curse", for example, beauty is not idealised as in "No Second Troy" and other poems. "Adam's Curse" describes a conversation between the persona and a close friend, herself a lovely woman, while the beloved sits silently by. The protagonist speaks in a gentle tone about how the world regards his very difficult labours of writing poetry and the friend replies that women too "must labour to be beautiful". The word "labour" here suggests womanliness which yearns to be appreciated beyond her ordinary appearance.

The fall of Adam and the ensuing labours which have to be undertaken to achieve divine beauty such as Homer's Helen possesses do not actually represent the values which Yeats yearns for in myths. The biblical image merely reveals the harrowing experiences of real life, seen in the beloved whose stillness at the end of the poem indicates out-worn values. They might have been great lovers but the travails of the world resulting from Adam's curse have ruined that possibility. Thus, biblical myths reveal a lot of suffering and misunderstanding. Yeats certainly understood the rationale for creating beauty which not long after was condemned, but he found that Christian faith didn't sustain his poetic vision of love.

A major singular incident which captures Yeats's ideal values in biblical myth has to do with the relationship between

Solomon and Sheba whose love the imagination perceives to be at a higher plane. It is a love relation which is purely romantic, mature and fulfilled. King Solomon is a biblical personality reputed in mythical terms as a man of great wisdom. In Yeats's vision he is capable of loving his wife and excellently too. Sheba, on the other hand, is his beautiful wife who shows herself as a woman of great understanding. This is reflected in the way she returns her husband's compliments in a romantic conversation:

> To Solomon sang Sheba,
> Planted on his knees…
>
> Said Solomon to Sheba,
> And kissed her Arab eyes,
> "There is not a man or woman
> Born under the skies
> Dare match in learning with us two,
> And all day long we have found
> There's not a thing but love can make
> The world a narrow pound.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, "Solomon to Sheba", 155)

Sheba's song explains the happiness which prevails when love is reciprocated. The fact that she is "planted on his knees" metaphorically illustrates the deep-rooted relation that exists between the lovers. Solomon returns her compliments by kissing her "Arab eyes", Arab because the eyes possess a kind of charm reputed of Arab magicians. This romantic and ideal love between Solomon and Sheba is reminiscent of Oisin and Niamh, and Leda and the Swan whose reciprocal relationship and understanding reduce the burdens of life to what Solomon calls "a narrow

pound". Solomon's response and view of love is a solution to Yeats's worldly problem which the poet achieves at that realm of the imagination.

After the analyses of the three sources of Yeats's myths, it is evident that from renouncing the falsity of some cults and beliefs, the poet's imagination proliferates on richer values like reciprocal love and unity of being. It can also be deduced that eternal life with accompanying values like peace and happiness can be accomplished on a much higher plane of myth and in the spiritual values that surround the natural environment, than in real life. The myths also stress the role of the gods in shaping human activities, controlling and guiding man towards the achievement of those values which appeal to the poet.

Yeats's poetry consists of myths drawn from his wide readings of classical literature, his propensity for Celtic myths many of which he acquired in his childhood in the county Sligo, and from his varied interests in magic and theosophy. The poet uses them to express different situations and modes of life which he considers ideal. In so doing, he reaches the conviction that they are important in the reconstruction of human fate. He does not say which mythical cult is preferable. To him, humanity should be conscious of divine presence and come to terms with it. Myths, therefore, become the means by which the imagination could come to terms with a more desirable and permanent reality in which man can extricate himself from the falsehoods and banalities of contemporary life.

One keeps asking questions: does Yeats through the imagination find satisfaction in the Celtic, classical and biblical myths? Are they a veritable path towards which man can save himself from the pangs of reality? The analysis of the three sources of myths in Yeats poems explains his conviction of life lived beyond the ordinary human experience. They are merely

representative of the values that he anticipates, values which are projected in the ideal world described in the myths. There is also an indication that the myths may not after all be the most satisfactory means by which the imagination can attain those goals, since existing myths might have become so stereotyped as to lose their value. This is shown by the poet's continual search for an order which is far removed from stereotyped creations. Except perhaps "The Wanderings of Oisin", it is apparent that some of the myths the poet makes references to are too brief to present a convincing account of ideal life at a transcendental level. But this poem falls short of eternity because that eternity is disrupted by Oisin's desire to visit the mortal world. Furthermore, there are echoes, although not frequent, of horror, awe and suffering decipherable in the poems which reveal that transcendental world of myths. Oisin, for example, fights with a demon to save a girl who has been enchained for one hundred years in the world of the spirit. The Celtic wind-gods, that is the Sidhe, play an important role of reconciling humanity with the unseen but they are also capable of terrible destruction, especially when their wrath is provoked. On their part, the Christian gods require humanity to labour a great deal in order to achieve celestial beauty. Lastly, these stories show that the soul is not regarded as the central part of mythology.

NOTES

1. In notes to *W.B. Yeats: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, Edward Larrissy explains that in Irish lore, Fergus MacRoich was king of Ulster who was persuaded by his wife Ness to abdicate in favour of his stepson and her son Conchubar (489).

2. The "Sixty-year-old smiling public man" is probably Yeats's self-projection. Edward Larrissy suggests that the poem was inspired by Yeats's visit to St Otteran's School, Waterford, in February 1926 (506). Yeats was appointed Senator in 1922 and had visited a Domestic Science Centre at St Otteran's School where he was struck by the beauty of some children and the experience rejuvenated his "lost love" feelings.
3. Yeats draws the image from the story of Samson in *The Old Testament* who fought and killed a lion, and scattered a honey comb without defects. It is Yeats's characteristic device to show Christian beliefs as creating wonder and awe rather than reconciling conflicting ideals.

4

The Dome of the Visionary

Looking over the gallery of Yeats's poetry up to the time he wrote *A Vision,* it becomes evident that he was in search of a credible belief. Much of his later poetry underscores the idea that man's relation with the ultimate reality had been lost and the result was his inability to understand and express the most profound thoughts about his existence. The first part of the 20th century was seriously affected. The factors that are particularly responsible for this state of affairs began in the 19th century with the Industrial Revolution which produced a new kind of being whose existence and well-being was understood to be evidently and practically determined by economic factors and no longer by spiritual belief. At the turn of the 19th century a plethora of philosophical ideas sprung up with the urge to explain the new phenomena in man and his environment. Philosophies like those of Jeremy Bentham, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and Jean-Paul Sartre, amongst others, excluded the importance of God in shaping human existence. These philosophies which were the hallmark of modern civilization consequently shattered man's relations with the unseen. Existing myths including the Celtic Myths, Classical and Biblical myths failed to rescue humanity from the situation of unbelief, a situation which saw the human

condition worsening in the first half of the twentieth century. This possibly led Yeats towards the realisation as in "The Second Coming" that the world was without order.

The chaotic atmosphere of the early twentieth century is lucidly brought out in the first stanza of "The Second Coming": "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 211). The reason for anarchy as it has been stated before is the absence of a spiritual link between the Christians (falcon) and Christ (falconer). Because of this realisation, the poet's opinion stands solidly in favour of visionary contemplation, a means of reaching out to a more significant and reliable spiritual order. In his poetry, he creates through personal myth-making, a vision of his own paradise symbolised by the dome in the "Byzantium" poems. The visionary experiences which the dome symbolises probe into higher values of ideal existence, including the universality of being, eternity, spiritual consciousness, and the sublimation of art. To him, it is not the moral code that brings one towards paradise as Christianity preaches. Mythology becomes to him something more than a belief. It is a symbol of ideal life which connects the reader's imagination with the glories that are hidden in the heart of the universe. Graham Hough confirms the poet's view that mythology is symbolism because it "is the only possible expression of some otherwise expressible spiritual essence…is what Blake calls "Vision or Imagination", and it represents what really exists eternally and unchangeable…." (228-229). The "inexplicable expressible spiritual essence" paradoxically reveals a mythological perspective. It is inexplicable because its spiritual existence cannot be explained or traced. But it expresses itself through vision or the imagination.

Commenting on Coleridge's theory of the imagination I.A. Richards states that: "Without his mythologies man is only a

cruel animal without a soul – for the soul is the central part of his governing mythology – he is a coterie of possibilities without order and without aim" (172). Coleridge, as Richards reiterates, sees myths as the elevation of the spirit above social conventions and the world of ordinary or sensual experience to a world of the spirit or idea which is supreme and godlike. This life of the spirit is what constitutes life without which, Coleridge claims, organic life is a mere condition of somnambulism (172). The main point raised in the views of Richards and Coleridge is that human life has meaning only when it is attached to mythology because life at the mythical level is "life in the idea". And the "idea" in Yeats's visionary poems has nothing to do with worshipping mythical heroes.

Yeats draws his characters from varying myths to effectively illustrate his notion of ideal life. To him, like to Coleridge, organic life is hopeless without contemplation on transcendental reality. This led him throughout his life to search for a creed that he felt could replace other forms of mythology and provide man with a more lucrative source of meaningful existence. He achieved his aim by writing *A Vision*, which is a complete account of his personal myth. But the image of the heaven of his myth is most lucidly depicted in his poetry in what he calls "a starlit or moonlit dome". The dome becomes the symbol of vision as well as Yeats's poetic paradise akin to that of the major Romantic visionary poets. On this plane of the imagination, all forms of beauty – the glories of ideal life and artistic beauty – are perfected and eternalised. Through personal myth creation, Yeats provides a vision for the world in terms of doctrine of art, revelation, experience and inspiration which the Christian church and other forms of mythology had not provided for centuries.

Yeatsian Mythology

Most poems, especially in Yeats's later poetry, show a desire to create a personal myth, a completely new belief quite unconnected with Irish, classical or Christian myths. Presumably, the poet's intention in indulging in this kind of venture is to completely dismiss reality and all that exists in it, including its myths. Consequently, from the realms of Nature and mythology the poet's imagination takes him to a completely new universe attainable only through the power of vision with the symbol as the principal agent.

The foundation of Yeats's search for a satisfying spiritual system which led him into philosophical speculations in poetry is explained in *A Vision*. A few days after his marriage to George Hyde-Lees in 1917, he attempted automatic writing through the invocation of spirits which led to the writing of *A Vision*. With the writing of *A Vision* Yeats became fully esoteric. His imagination had taken a more complicated turn to create a new mythology, by combining various elements of frustrated love for Maud Gonne, theosophy, arcane studies and magic to command spirits and weld himself and his surroundings into a myth.

Yeats's psychic communication in *A Vision* can be appreciated from three perspectives: an elaborate theory of the variation of human personality, a theory of history and the transformation of the soul in the real world, as well as in the world after life. Yeats classifies men in twenty-eight psychological types constituting a cyclical movement between complete objectivity represented by the sun and complete subjectivity by the moon. The objective and subjective selves are

antithetical and the psychological types are arranged in a circle to correspond to the phases of the moon.

By 1924, Yeats had not clearly found a means to completely express his personality and philosophy apart from writing. Even then he needed to interpret his writings to those who were prepared to study his system. He still hoped to introduce *A Vision* directly into the political scene. He concluded that thought was nothing without action, and added that if readers could master his system they would understand that a new vision for mankind had been established for the future.

One may wonder why Yeats was so suddenly preoccupied with the future, specifically with the doctrine of immortality of the soul. As an old man troubled with ailment he saw eternity not far from him. He therefore, wanted a system of belief which was consoling to his mind and discovered that the soul was capable of incarnation. The forms of philosophy he sought to concretely express in *A Vision* were those he thought should have universal impact on men.

But Yeats was further worried because his principles were not easily applicable to the contemporary Irish scene and he faced difficulties in making his philosophies understood in real practical situations. He finished writing *A Vision* in 1925 and published it privately in 1926. Although he denounced Plato and Plotinus on grounds that their philosophies were partly responsible for the chaos in the modern world, he began to read their works more deeply and found in them a feeling of wisdom and pure contemplation which seemed what he had always desired. Also, he read more philosophy because he feared ruining his own system by insisting on its practical application to the Irish situation. From the experience he had writing *A Vision*, he drew some strength to write some of his most complete abstruse poems, expressing his idea about old age, and seeking to define

the nature of life after the death of the vegetated body, a means to prepare an old man for eternity. Some of these poems include "Sailing to Byzantium", "Byzantium", "The Tower" and "Amongst School Children" in which the old man is the principal protagonist and whose main interest is to connect human experience with eternity through vision or the imagination. Most of the poems Yeats wrote at this time and after express a kind of immortality he yearned to create for his soul. However, his endeavour to introduce his philosophies in real life was a little premature and he did not meet with any commendable success because his worry about old age became more intense and deprived him of activity through which he could express himself.

Daniel T. O'Hara in "The Spirit Medium: Yeats, Quantum Visions and Recent Lacanian Studies", is of the opinion that the starting point of Yeats's mythical system is in "The Cold Heaven" where the poet hints at his "poetics of visionary metamorphosis" (92). To O'Hara, "The Cold Heaven" is not simply an expression of personal history whereby he reveals past relationships with the love of his life, Maud Gonne, but a prelude to his supernatural investigations expressed especially in the last three lines of the poem. O'Hara supports his view by tracing the terror which Yeats experiences in the poem to biographical and esoteric sources, particularly in relation to Maud Gonne's unhappiness in her marriage and the desire to divorce her husband (John MacBride) who physically abused her and worse still, sexually molested her half-sister and daughter.

Yeats's visionary metamorphosis which O'Hara traces to "The Cold Heaven" is however, much more developed in "News for the Delphic Oracle[1]" which may be considered a poem of transition from crude reality through the spirituality in Nature and existing myths to a reality depicted in visions. It is in this poem that one notices the growing tendency in the poet to create a

personal myth which he achieves by writing *A Vision*. Many values in "News for the Delphic Oracle" are not seen against the background of Nature or stock myths, although characters from other myths are used. But the characters are used more as symbols. The world of the poem is a very unfamiliar one. It is Yeats's attempt at reconstructing an earthly paradise inhabited by figures representing every variety of mythical romance and sensual passions. Divine love makes up the whole environment. It is a transcendental and joyous world composed of odd old persons, codgers, Oisin and Niamh, Pythagoras, Plotinus, Dolphins, Nymphs and Satyrs, whose souls are seen in perfect harmony with one another. They are drawn from varied sources including myth and philosophy. The poet reinvents the personae and invests them with roles which as they perform, culminate in a single experience of harmony and unity of being. Niamh stands forth in the poem as a symbol of reconciliation between the world of scientific rationalism represented by Pythagoras and Plotinus, of existing myths represented by Oisin, the spiritual values existing in Nature represented by Nymphs and Dolphins with the transcendental world of the spirit in which the soul is the principal inhabitant. The spirits are carried on Dolphins backs to,

> …some cliff – sheltered bay
> Where wades a choir of love
> Proffering its laurel crowns
> They pitch their burdens off…
>
> Intolerable music falls
> Foul goat-herd, brutal arm appear,
> Belly, shoulder, bum,
> Flash fishlike, nymphs and satyrs
> Copulate in the foam.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 377)

The coming together of these souls from varying environments to partake in the activity of harmony gives a lucid picture of reconciliation and achievement of unity of being in Yeats's reconstructed universe. There is a possibility of a more enduring eternity because only the souls inhabit this spiritual environment and not the creatures themselves. The souls are seen in a "Choir of love", suggesting the dominance of harmony over life's disorders. The nymphs and satyrs copulate to demonstrate that all souls are one and are capable of sharing the same harmonious experience. It is this kind of harmony that the poet yearns for that Pythagoras[2] and Plotinus have set asunder in the real world through philosophical and scientific rationalism.

The vividness of "News for the Delphic Oracle" is brought out through the immediacy with which the poet brings the souls together and also from the harmony that prevails as the souls of the different creatures interact together. They are seen in a "choir of love" with "intolerable music" falling and the copulation in the foam. The caesura is effectively used in revealing the excitement which characterizes the environment. The numerous uses of commas in the second stanza of the extract create a heightened effect in the atmosphere evoking desire and a ceremony of excitement.

The groundwork of Yeats's myth introduced in "News for the Delphic Oracle" is elaborately explained in *A Vision*. The system is conveniently divided into three parts: a picture of history, an account of human psychology and an account of the life of the soul after death. Several poems incorporate the poet's mythical philosophy. "The Phases of the Moon" for example, is a good summary of the ideals of *A Vision*. In the poem, the moon is used as a symbol of the imagination in its purity, of the complete subjective intellect. The subjectivity of the first fifteen phases

stands for the creative imagination, while the second cycle stands for objectivity – science. The moon is revealed to play an important role in governing human life while the various nights of the lunar month are representative of the various phases of the incarnation of the soul. Of importance is the fact that at a moment of perfect beauty the soul first achieves a unity of being, for the soul is already what it wills to be and every outcome matches with its ideals. In the fifteenth phase, the soul poised at the opposite pole of the cycle begins to see itself in a more objective reality. There is no bodily beauty here because the soul is not controlled by its own will but from without. Therefore, this incarnation which corresponds to the moon's darkness is beyond the world. But between these two phases (the fifteenth phase and phase one) men's lives aim at achieving one goal or the other, conditioned by historical circumstances or what has taken place in the past lives. What further determines their activities are the soul's four faculties – the "Will", "Mask", "Creative mind" and "Body of Fate".

Very much akin to the Freudian Ego is the "Will" which attempts to find out its own value as well as what is good for itself and strives towards the incarnate self which is the "Mask". The "Creative Mind" is a kind of recollection of ideas or general principles learnt in past lives and the power of thought that is inborn, with the purpose of understanding the circumstances that affect it from the outer world, closely linked to the "Body of Fate". Many people see the "Body of Fate" as inherent to the individual but it might not be the case because it comes to him by choice, or rather, by the very nature of his soul, from the meanings and happenings of his past life. These two processes are always at work: the "Will" trying to assimilate itself to the "Mask"; the "Creative Mind" trying to understand the "Body of Fate". Yeats sees them as two gyres whirling in opposite

directions, "each living the other's death, dying the other's life", whirling into one another's centres, merging and then separating.

The "sun" is the symbol of activity, and that is what takes place in the second cycle of Yeats's history. The meaning is clear when the reader gets to the penultimate section of the poem, "Blood and Moon":

> The purity of the unclouded moon
> Has flung its arrowy shaft upon the floor
> Seven centuries have passed and it is pure,
> The blood of innocence has left no stain.
> There, on the blood-saturated ground, have stood
> Soldier, assassin, executioner,
> Whether for daily pittance or in blind fear
> Or out of abstract hatred, and shed blood
> But could not cast a single jet thereon.
> Odour of Blood on the ancestral stair!
> And we that have shed none must gather there
> And clamour in the drunken frenzy of the moon.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 269)

This extract explains that after seven centuries, or at a certain phase of the moon, the purity of the moon disappears and the sun takes its place. The activities which the sun represents are seen in the poem as mostly bloody, enforced by the expressions: "soldier", "assassin" and "executioner". Those that gather on the "ancestral stair" of the tower are poets with creative imagination which is linked with the moon. They gather there in order to evade the ruthless activities which the sun represents, and to seek the protection of the moon which in Yeats's system governs human life.

Yeats's contemplation of the cyclical movement of history is visible in "The Second Coming", "Two Songs From a Play", and

"Leda and the Swan". "The Second Coming" sets its own era or age in the perspective of eternity. The world is ending in the first eight lines of the poem; a world which is characterized by violence and terror is given hope of continuity in another eternity. The revelation of doomsday and the second coming follows naturally from the description of horror of the present era. The vision out of "Spiritus Mundi" from which the poet sees the present era moving to its conclusion and the new era beginning in the following lines evokes the historical idea of an apocalypse:

> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to a nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 211)

The time limit between one era and the other is two thousand years ("twenty centuries"). This is explained in Yeats's theory of history contained in *A Vision*. These are the two thousand years of violence that are drawing to a close. It is not evident what the new shape of things will look like at the beginning of the next two thousand years. Rosenthal explains that it must be terror-filled, by the very fact that it will entail a very revolutionary change (217).[3] He illustrates his view by making reference to World War I, the civil wars, and the rise of mob tyrannies which have been themselves terrifying.

Rosenthal's claim is justified in the sense that Yeats's mention of a "rough beast" to be born in Bethlehem, suggests the birth of a new era which will be a violent one. However, the "rough beast" brings out the poet's hatred for Christian values which St. Patrick embodies in "The Wanderings of Oisin".

Furthermore, Yeats might state the idea of a catastrophic end, but it does not necessarily imply a terrifying second coming. In the first place, a good understanding of the "gyre" phenomenon explained in *A Vision*, as well as the two major cycles of the incarnation of the soul demonstrates that the gyres are in themselves opposites – one gyre takes a contrary shape in an extremely opposite direction. This, therefore, suggests that the second coming will not be marked by violence because it is expected to embody the characteristics of Yeats's visionary and ideal world.

The second argument in favour of the non-violent nature of the new era is that, throughout, Yeats's other poems hardly show an indication of violence or horror in a mythical or an outer world. The poet does not give a hint in "The Second Coming" of how the next existence would look like. In the poem Yeats merely signals a violent end. Nevertheless, it is understood in the context of other visionary poems in which the poet's imagination is not in any way infested with the ideas of trepidation and horror that it conceives of a new era or life beyond the physical one. What is important in "The Second Coming" is the idea that the era is growing worse with turbulence, and the imagination searches from "Spiritus Mundi" the birth of a new era of hope and glory. There is also emphasis on the idea of eternity which the poet continues to explain in the philosophy of the incarnation of the souls. The poems in "Two Songs from a Play", as in "The Second Coming" represent Yeats's account of the first coming, the annunciation to Mary of the birth of Christ, the dynamic force which was to motivate the two thousand year cycle of Christian civilization. The first stanza of the second song further illustrates the close dependence of Yeats's poetry on his system:

In pity for a man's darkening thought
He walked that room and issued thence
In Galilean turbulence;
The Babylonian starlight brought
A fabulous formless darkness in,
Odour of blood when Christ was slain
Made all Platonic tolerance vain
And vain all Doric discipline.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 240)

The "Babylonian starlight" might have brought a new force in Babylon which Yeats associates with the early study of stars. It is also associated with a mathematical, history-less measurement of events, which suggests that Christian civilization is dominant but rudimentary. In contrast, the two thousand years of Greco-Roman civilisation are dominantly antithetical.

Yeats's myth also recounts a very complex description of human psychology, presented on the great wheel in which the four faculties – Will, Mask, Creative Mind and Body of Fate are always antithetical values, in which every individual finds his place in the great wheel with his own characteristics. The supernatural part of Yeats's system, as A.C. Partridge claims, is concerned with the life of the soul after death and the miraculous certainty of reincarnation. One may say that Yeats's belief is clearly shown in the fact that the soul after death goes through certain cycles in which it relives its earthly life, is freed from pleasure and pain, from good and evil, and finally reaches the state of beatitude. After going through the cycle of human rebirths, the soul then receives a cup of the waters of Lethe and, after forgetting about its former life, is reborn in a human body. Yeats's myth, thus, provides for a possibility of the reincarnation of the soul.

An understanding of the mystery behind Yeats's esoteric myth makes the interpretation of his later poems easier. Both his poetic and philosophical visions become more explicit, although not without the complicated algebraic formula drawn from the concept of faculties and principles which systematically represent the order of his knowledge and experience. Yeats uses scientific material to present his system in *A Vision* but his quarrel with science is largely that a system of science allows no place for the supernatural – vision, trances, and credible happenings. Consequently, he exhibits a system which gives room for such happenings in his visionary poems. Instead of separating science from poetry Yeats prefers in his visionary poems to rewrite both elements and fuse them into a religion. In "News for the Delphic Oracle", for example, Pythagoras and all those who represent philosophy and science are in harmony with characters who represent art and the imagination. The poet in the poem reconciles these two conflicting schools of thought and brings them closer to the fact that the world of the imagination is more concrete than that of philosophy and science. This also proves to the reader's logical understanding that there is a transcendent portion of his being that is eternal, harmonious, without boundaries and easily reached through vision.

In creating a personal myth, therefore Yeats illustrates that the soul and no longer visible beings with organic lives, can occupy that realm of his imagination. Even when names of organic characters are mentioned, as is the case in the "Byzantium poems", they impersonate only shadows and spirits. However, one cannot completely reject the values and significance of the Celtic, classical and biblical myths which Yeats makes allusion to in his poetry. Apart from drawing the readers' attention to the myths themselves as meaningful paths towards transcendental reality, these myths provide Yeats with a

rich repertoire of images and symbols which express the main values yearned for by the poet's imagination, including reciprocal love, unity of being and eternity. His personal myth which is elaborately explained in *A Vision* is echoed in his poetry as an embodiment of the same ideals, this time with greater originality of thought and expression, proving right the claim that modern literature is indeed taking the place of religion.

Yeats's last poems paint a picture of his ideal paradise in which the dome is a principal visionary symbol. To understand its artistic and philosophic significance, it is necessary to trace the origin of the "dome" symbolism before engaging in the analysis of some of the poems to illustrate its visionary implications.

The Gold-Wrought Dome

Long before Yeats wrote poetry, the dome had become a prominent symbol in Romantic poetry. It was used to represent varying ideas which are also effectively conveyed in Yeats's poetry. Some of the ideas represented by the dome symbol are enumerated in the introduction by W.F. Jackson Knight to G. Wilson Knight's book, *The Starlit Dome,* which examines the visionary poetry of the major Romantic poets – Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley:

> A dome is sometimes what we now understand by a dome, but the word is cognate with other words, conveying other meanings, for example, "cathedral", or merely "house". Now the poets regularly introduce an edifice of some sort when they are thinking about aspiration generated in human life. Human life flows onwards but it is not content with horizontal flow. We aspire to a reality more high and more permanent, that is to eternity. (xii)

The main idea evident in Knight's explanation of the significance of the dome is that the philosophic imagination uses it as a symbol to create a reality that is quite excluded from ordinary experience. This reality, "more high and more permanent", refers to a transcendental world which is attainable through the power of vision, the highest realm of the Romantic imagination where eternity is a major characteristic. It is a reality in which the soul of the human being and other strange and outlandish beings are the major participants.

According to Knight, a dome may be found anywhere, in a stream, in the passing wind, a valley, a hill, a cave or some other strange environment, depending on the values which the poet's imagination sets out to create in that dome. The values may include beauty of some sort; spiritual beauty, pleasure and harmony, wonder and awe, and eternity. All these values are most often used to invest an edifice or the environment with some spiritual importance which is most often believed to be a reconstruction of the real world. It should however, be noted that Knight's interpretation of the "dome" symbol in the poetry of the major Romantic poets highlights the hierarchical dominance of vision over imagination by going into minor details and establishing a general visionary phenomenon that characterizes the poets. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley could see through the imagination a different kind of life controlled by unnatural beings in the woods, the rivers, the lakes, the hills and caves of some imaginary towers or buildings surrounded by rivers and possessing elements of transcendence discernible through the philosophic imagination.

Like those of the major Romantic poets, Yeats's domes are found in woods, lakes, sea shores, towers and halls as well. But unlike the domes in the works of the major Romantic poets which

are most often a horrifying heaven (even though possessing poetic beauty because they are endowed with awe and wonder), Yeats's domes in the realm of the visionary are free from any form of suffering or despair. We shall start by examining Yeats's other domes before we approach those in the "Byzantium" poems which are a complete projection of his poetry of vision and from which Knight borrows the expression with which he assesses the visionary aesthetics of Romantic poetry.

The poem which closely parallels the Romantic imagination is the narrative poem, "The Wanderings of Oisin" which is very much like Keats's "Endymion". The two poems portray the poet's quest for ideal feminine counterparts. The heroes are placed against strange and wild backgrounds. In "The Wanderings of Oisin", Oisin and Niamh explore strange faery environments, – seashores, woods and towers. In the island where Oisin fights with the demon to save the girl we are told,

> …dark towers
> Rose in the darkness, and the white surf gleamed
> About them; and the horse of the faery screamed
> And shivered, knowing the Isle of Many Fears
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 423)

The strangeness of the environment also lies in the fact that the "dark hall" of the tower is "rooted in foam and cloud". The hall is also described as:

> A dome made out of endless craven jags,
> Where shadowy face flowed in to shadowy face,
> Looked down on me; and in the self-same place
> I waited hour by hour, and the high dome,
> Windowless, pillarless, multidinous home

Of faces, waited; and the leisured gaze
Was loaded with memory of days
Buried and mighty.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 427-428)

The characteristics of the dome expressed in "The Wanderings of Oisin" are not different from Coleridge's "pleasure dome" in "Kubla Khan". The extra-ordinary nature of the hall, "windowless", "pillarless", shadowy" and "dark", is as strange as Coleridge's dome where walls and towers are built round rivers meandering within caves. Yeats's description includes a "dusky demon dry as the withered sedge" which is present in the hall. His confrontation with the demon is horrifying, just like the tumultuous and horrifying sacred river and ancestral voices in "Kubla Khan".

The element of horror is characteristic of the Romantic imagination. Coleridge's pleasure dome in "Kubla Khan", for example, is a blend of pleasure, horror and awe from which paradoxically, beauty is derived. From when Kubla Khan hears ancestral voices prophesying doom, he finds,

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From fountains and the caves,
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice.

(*Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, 182-183)

We find in Coleridge's poems, domes constructed in waves, fountains and caves, and the mixture of pleasure and horror

which are characteristic of Coleridge's visionary poems. In "Christabel" sleep and silence are disturbed by a blend of terrifying sounds like that made by the owl, and the agitated mastiff, in combination with metaphors of religious grace. But Coleridge sees, as Shelley does in "Ode to the West Wind", natural tumult, horror, wonder and awe as positive energy (or energies) which animate(s) a dead and cold world of science and philosophy.

In Yeats's poetry however, the element of horror is almost insignificant, especially where the imagination's intention is to depict the glorifying ideals of the outer world. There is also the idea of harmony expressed in "The Wanderings of Oisin" although eternal harmony is destroyed after three hundred years of wandering because of Oisin's desire to visit earth again. The faery eternity is however, upheld by Niamh even when she regrets the loss of Oisin. She sails away again into the faery land with memories of the emotional bliss she had shared with Oisin before his desire to visit the earth. Similarly, in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", we see in Innisfree an ideal romantic environment freed from human intervention. The Isle, like Coleridge's "fertile grounds" in "Kubla Khan", can as well be considered a dome because it represents Yeats's desire to create a paradise that suits his ideals of a transcendental world. The hazel wood in "The Song of Wandering Aengus" possesses mystical qualities like the hills in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, which scare the boy rowing in the lake in the evening.

At the highest realm of Yeats's imagination the dome symbolises paradise, a region in which the soul finally resides after incarnating the twenty-eight phases of the moon. This region, as Yeats explains in *A Vision*, is "Byzantium" where harmony in life attains perfection:

> I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St Sophia and closed the academy of Plato. I think I could find in some little wine shop some philosophical worker in mosaic who could answer all my questions, the supernatural descending nearer to him than Plotinus even, for the pride of his delicate skill would make what was an instrument of power to princes and clerics a murderous madness in the mob, show as a lovely flexible presence like that of a perfect human body.
>
> I think that in early Byzantium, may be never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one…the work of many seemed the work of one, that made building, picture, pattern, metal work of rail and lamp seem but a single image….(279-280).

Of all the civilisations which Yeats mentions in his complicated system in *A Vision*, the Byzantine civilisation is the most appealing to him. The focus of Yeats's imagination in the extract above is on harmony. Evidently, what is most revealing of this harmony is the "mosaic" which is the dome symbolising the unity of all aspects of life in its differently coloured bits of stone. The "philosophical worker" is certainly the mosaic artist whose keen imagination attracts anarchy and "murderous madness" in life. Yeats gives the impression that the power of the "philosophical worker's" imagination can provide solutions to the puzzles of life and bring individuals who possess similar imagination closer to the transcendental world where harmony is prevalent. Byzantium is thus exhibited as a place in which every activity and all persons are seen as one; conscious individuality strives towards a unity of being like the mosaic worker and the supernatural. The relationship between the people and the supernatural in Byzantium is very close. Supernatural beings are not presented as tyrants, for example, Shelley's Jupiter. Instead

Yeats's supernatural forces descend near the philosophical worker in the wine shop to demonstrate the spirit of oneness and equality. Furthermore artistic, religious and historical values are inextricably interconnected.

Yeats writes plainly in the closing paragraphs of *A Vision* that "A book of modern philosophy may prove to our logical capacity that there is a transcendental portion of our beings that is timeless and spaceless…, and our imagination remains subjected to nature as before" (Qtd in Brooks, 70). The "book of modern philosophy" is *A Vision* in which Yeats outlines his philosophical conceptions of life and death and the resurrection of the soul to the kingship of heaven. To Yeats, heaven is Byzantium, a place where life is "timeless" and "spaceless". The philosophic ideas connected to Yeats's heaven, elaborately discussed in *A Vision*, are equally effectively defined in poetry in which the dome is the principal image of ethereal beauty.

The two Byzantium poems, "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" embody Yeats's vision of ideal paradise. In both poems, the poetic imagination describes the qualities of harmony and unity of all fragmented and conflicting values which are perfected and eternalised. Art too is a principal quality of that world and a weapon which the imagination uses to attain the glories of Byzantium. The first of the Byzantium poems, "Sailing to Byzantium" is an expression of a desire by an "old man" to travel to the holy city of Byzantium. The desire is precipitated by the fact that real life is characterized by banal and sensual pleasures, "with the young in one another's arms", even if the speaker is too old to participate in these glories. The complete rejection of the old world of reality is reinforced by the demonstrative pronoun "that"; the pronoun effectively shows the distance which the poet has covered and the level which he has reached in his search for a new life. Apart from the mundane

realities of the physical world, one reason for the poet's rejection of it is that it is a transient world of "dying generations" in which everything that is brought to life dies, as opposed to Byzantium described in the extract as "Monuments of unaging intellect". It presupposes that Byzantium's artistic essence is eternal, "unaging" and devoid of sensual and rustic pleasures of the real world which the young men, the birds, the salmons, the mackerel, are an embodiment of. However, the old man's rejection of the "country" which is a symbolic representation of Ireland as well as the world of the early twentieth century, is a rejection of reality and all that is mundane and mortal:

> That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
> —Those dying generations— at their song,
> The salmon falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
> Monuments of unageing intellect.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 217)

The old man anticipates harmony in Byzantium which is a more ethereal realm than Ireland or the entire sensual universe. Although in the physical world life seems to be fostered by "sensual music" which culminates in a dance, to the old man who is the poet's spokesman, such sensual music is not what ideal life should look like. Instead, the "country" referred to in the lines above is entirely a symbol of degeneration of human values and their spiritual essence.

Singing and dancing as symbols have several implications in Yeats's visionary poems. They become a unifying force which

brings together the souls of every creature to partake in the celebration of ethereal joy. Singing and dancing are thus the principal agents of harmony and reconciliation of the souls. In the second Byzantium poem, "Byzantium", music and dance symbolisms are effective in presenting the harmony existent in the dome; the "blood-begotten" spirits come with all "complexity of fury", "dying in to a dance". The dance of the spirits further demonstrates that the soul of man moves through the twenty-eight phases of the moon. Thus, in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", one finds that "all men are dancers and their tread/Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong". The image of the dance in the poem is symbolic of the final phase of the incarnation of the soul which prepares itself through the dance to reach Byzantium. However, unlike in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", the image of music and dance in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" is different in meaning in the sense that the girl who has reached the esteemed level of perfection dances to death. But by following the rhythm of the cosmic dance she perfects herself so that only the expression of the soul reaches the phases of the full moon, of perfect beauty. Thus, music and dance become a manifestation of perfect beauty, showing the harmony prevalent in Yeats's heaven projected through the image of poetry.

Apart from projecting music and dance as unifying agents in Byzantium, and as symbols of the end of the incarnation of the soul, Yeats seems to lay a lot of emphasis on music as the major activity. In the first stanza of "Sailing to Byzantium" the young men in each other's arms, the "birds in the trees", the salmon, the mackerel, fowl and other cosmic elements produce music which completely absorbs them and makes them forget the glories of the physical world. But the singing that is prevalent in the sensual world is a premonition of eternal glories anticipated in

Byzantium where there exist "monuments of unaging intellect". This element of music reverberates in all the stanzas of the poems, reinforced by their vigorous rhythm and regular rhyme scheme.

In the second stanza, the persona considers an aged man as a worthless thing except that his soul can sing, "And louder sing" to the extent of obliterating his obsession about old age, making it possible for him to effortlessly attain the paradise of Byzantium. In the third stanza, the old man appeals to the sages who already occupy a prominent place in the paradise of Byzantium to sing to his soul and quicken it to this eternity. Here, the sages refer particularly to poets and artists who are prominent characters in Byzantium. According to Matthew Gibson, the sage was an image of a philosopher who, in Coleridge's poetry, became the interpreter of both philosophy and Romanticism. As a figure in Romantic writing, the sage became the spokesperson for a new and exciting form of mysticism (5). In the last stanza of the poem, the old man wishes his soul, when it finally reaches Byzantium, to be set on the golden bough to sing to the lords and the ladies of Byzantium. Considering that the old man is Yeats's spokesperson, he becomes a poet himself like the sages he earlier appealed to. This illustrates the point that the song itself is poetry and only poets can perform the art of singing. In other words, singing which is symbolic of poetry is also symbolic of the conception of the permanence of harmony at the topmost region of Yeats's imagination.

This explains possibly why the rhythm of "Sailing to Byzantium" has a melodious effect on the reader. Because of the poet's frequent use of the caesura, especially, in the first and the third stanzas, rhythm is broken, but fast, revealing the excitement and the desire to quit the world to attain the harmony he anticipates in Byzantium. Also the melodious effect of the poem

is reinforced by constant repetition of sounds. Assonance and consonance, for example, are evident in, "The salmon falls, the mackerel-crowded seas", and in quite a good number of other lines. Assonance and alliteration too are used for serious sound effect; "fish flesh, fowl", the "salmon-falls", in combination with other sound patterns reinforce the idea of music and the harmonious experience that beckon the old man into the world of Byzantium.

The enthusiasm which the old man shows in the second Byzantium poem also reveals his own excitement and desire to sail to the heaven of his imagination. The old man in his apostrophe to the sages, says:

> O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
> And be singing-masters of my soul.
> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fasten to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems* "Sailing to Byzantium", 217-218)

The excitement is reflected in the speaker's appeal to the sages to convey his soul to the dome of eternity. It is difficult to determine whether or not the sages are primarily images in the mosaic. There is however, evidence that the painted figures and the transfigured saints are strictly similar, since the essential characteristic of Yeats's holy city of Byzantium is artistic perfection. For, an image in the world of art is as holy as a sage.

God in the poem stands less in the position of the Christian God than the supreme artist, an arch-artist or artificer of eternity.

The holy fire is hardly existent in Christian belief, except the tongues of fires on the Pentecost Sunday. But Yeats's holy fire is reminiscent of the fires and the forges of the Grecian goldsmiths in the dome, hammering and "gold enamelling". God can also be seen as the poet and the human imagination in which Yeats's system of creation is the maker of all things. From this perspective, anyone becomes a god who can use the imagination effectively to create a paradise of enduring values. The old man's appeal to the sages is prompted by the fact that all bodily forms are rejected. Here, the marble and bronze represent this changeless world, beyond time and beyond the intellect because they are themselves changeless in time and space. The old man's soul has a place in this heaven because it identifies itself with artistic creativity. He praises the withered tree and the dry well, hoping only to escape into the world of complete being, the world of the self-begotten.

Therefore, "Byzantium" can be taken to be a brilliantly contrived pattern of what Yeats considered to be a work of art. The reconciling force is the imagination, the creator of the symbol by which men "dream to create Translunar paradise" which the old man calls the "artifice of eternity". This world of the imagination, infinite and eternal, in which art is the principal doctrine, is lucidly delineated in the second "Byzantium" poem where the world is that of the image, both the spiritual and the poetic images, for in it,

> A starlit or moonlit dome disdains
> All that man is,
> All more complexities
> The fury and the mire of human veins.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* "Byzantium", 280)

As a world of the spiritual image, the dome disdains all human values. Life here is life of the image or the spirit or the soul far above the fury and mire of human embodiment. Moreover, the persona of the poem does not see any concrete substance. He sees but images:

> Before me floats an image, man or shade,
> Shade more than man, more image than a shade
> For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
> May unwind the winding path;
> A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
> Breathless mouths may summon;
> I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems,* 280)

In Greek mythology, Hades is the underworld, or the place where the spirits of the dead go. Yeats uses this image of Hades to qualify the spiritual characteristic of Byzantium which welcomes the soul or the image of past lives. There is a further suggestion that these images are hardly invested with any form; that is, they are not endowed with biological life because there exist in that world "mouths that have no moisture", and mouths that do not breathe. Yeats antithetically describes the life of the image as "death-in-life and life-in-death" because the images do not experience whether they are living or not. That is, they are unconscious of the notions of life and death. The images or spirit which inhabits Byzantium are so because they are perceived through the imagination.

The poetic image of "Byzantium" is effective in delineating this paradise made of images or spirits. It presents Byzantium or the dome as possessing enduring elements wrought by the artists. The creative symbol is strongly suggested here. The dome is not

a commonplace paradise such as Garden of Eden where nature abounds, but it embodies great artistic qualities. The gold mosaic wall of the dome suggests aesthetic beauty. This explains why the old man in "Sailing to Byzantium" thinks that, "Once out of nature I shall never take/My bodily form from any natural thing". He prefers such forms as "Grecian goldsmiths make" of gold, and pictures himself as the golden bird on a golden bough singing; the golden bird is imaged as a product of "golden handiwork", and it is planted on the "starlit golden bough".

The "gold" symbol emphasises the artificialized values of Byzantium not mainly to project ethereal beauty and perfection but also to suggest creative art as a requisite for existence in that environment. Such a transcendental world which Yeats creates cannot be the product of the mysterious incantations of a magician. It is the product of serious artistry, an attempt to achieve eternal beauty of which Yeats himself is a living manifestation. The poet becomes what he creates, a symbol of art which the golden bird represents. The golden bird also symbolises the poem itself, the created artefact into which the old man fades, becoming, as it were, what he creates in his imagination.

The dome itself represents the world of the artist where everything is gold-wrought, the golden bird, the golden bough, and the golden smithies of the Emperor. This reflects Yeats's belief in the power of the creative symbol which he represents. There are several suggestions in his poetry that the creative symbol is that which links man with his dome, with that transcendental world which Byzantium represents, and which promises more permanent harmony and eternity of being and art. The dome finally becomes Yeats's artistic edifice, symbolising all that is beautiful and attractive and all that is eternal. The beauty may not be seen strictly in terms of physical beauty. The

implication here is that it is more of divine or transcendental beauty than ordinary or daily beauty.

The artistic qualities of Yeats's dome are seen also in the fact that the atmosphere of the dome does not reflect the landscapes of ordinary experience. The dome is either starlit or moonlit, and the "bough", the singular vegetational evidence in the poem does not give an impression of an ordinary tree perceived in real life. It is a golden tree on which sits the golden bird. Even the flames which light the Emperor's pavement are extraordinary. They are not lit by faggots or steel and the winds do not disturb them. Thus, the dome is completely devoid of the characteristics and features found in the world of real nature, proving that it symbolizes a world of art where images forged by the imagination, not by any physical act, are more realistic and permanent.

Consequently, Yeats's vision finally hardens up into concrete symbols which project art as a divine experience, and the imagination as a god, a means through which the individual can reach the glories of the dome. Yeats singles himself out as an exemplary artist whose imagination enables him to create an entirely new world symbolised by art. He uses biblical and Irish myths, but where he attempts a more profound vision into the unknown he discards all that exists and all that had existed and creates his own pattern of belief. The image he creates of his dome is not that created by a god or the unseen forces beyond ordinary existence as the case might be with other poets of the imagination. It is the work of an artist of whom the poet stands solidly as representative. Almost everything in the dome is gold-wrought, and the characters, some of whom might have relationships with the real world, like the old man, are images rather than ordinary living creatures. They are mostly used as symbols and the poet delineates images whose existence is only

shown in the poems and nowhere else. For example, the "monuments of unaging intellect", "God's holy fire", the "golden bough", "mouths that have no moisture and no breaths" have little bearing with existing knowledge. They only exist in Yeats's poems and give hint of the poet's extraordinary imagination which deviates from values related to reality.

NOTES

1. The Delphic oracle was the most famous oracle in Ancient Greece, celebrated in Delphi and presided by Apollo.
2. Pythagoras was a Greek philosopher and mathematician.
3. M.L. Rosenthal in the explanatory notes in *Selected Poems and Two Plays of William Butler Yeats*. He thinks that the title "The Second Coming" is a new manifestation of God to man suggested by the prevalence of terror at the end of the era. P. 217.

5

Modernist Romanticism

The main contention against placing Yeats within the ranks of the major Romantic poets comes from the fact that much of his most profound poetry was written at the age of maturity. This was in the second phase of his poetry, at a time when he had moved away from the ordinary fascination about the faeryland or the natural landscape to using the same elements of the faeryland and the natural landscape as significant symbols to express major philosophical concerns about ideal life. Because of the abstruseness of his style in his later poetry, particularly his veneration of the symbol which became to him an instrument of vision, modernist critics tend to see more of modernist than romanticist tendencies in his poetry since, like Eliot, Pound and Stevens, he employs unconventional artistic strategies to forge a new kind of poetry which reflected the ideals of modernism which Eliot in particular propagated.

However, whatever paradigms that may be used to judge Yeats either as a Romantic or modernist poet would have to consider that the driving force behind his poetry is his imagination's quest into the realm of Nature, myth and vision for an order beyond existing forms, an activity that makes him in the first place a Romantic poet. In other words, he revolutionized

Romanticism by applying modernist poetic techniques. By adopting the modernist tempo he enriched Romantic poetry and widened the horizons of the imagination's quest for truth. To a limited extent, he became conscious of his changing moods, subject matter and style which enabled him to state unequivocally in "Coole and Ballylee, 1931", eight years before his death: "We were the last romantics—chose for theme/Traditional sanctity and loveliness"[1] (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 240). Within himself, he was aware that in his early as his later poetry he was a Romantic poet, providing indicators of his shifting style and his penetrating imagination in poems like "A Coat", "Words" and "The Tower". His Romantic stance thus declared in "Coole and Ballylee, 1931" is not necessitated by any form of theoretical argument or technical support for Romantic poetry as in Wordsworth's in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* or Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*. Neither is he a modernist poet by the exigency and the practical criteria for modernism laid down by Eliot in *Tradition and Individual Talent.* Yeats becomes a Modernist poet as an outcome of his Romanticism and can therefore be best described as a modernist Romantic poet.

This chapter therefore, assesses what Yeats's imagination achieves for him as a Romantic as well as a Modernist poet and explains the link between his Romantic and modernist scope. Yeats became a modernist poet, even unconsciously, when his imagination explored a higher order of existence; this higher order replaced those forms of belief and being that had failed to provide mankind with the harmony it desired. In an attempt to discard the values of the 19th and the early 20th century which he considered antiquated and loaded with meaningless stereotype and clichés, he spent the later part of his life trying to forge a new belief which he thought could provide answers to the disturbing human condition. This is explained by the urgency with which he

needed to create a creed at old age, a suitable and sustainable credo that would liberate the modern man from the multiplicity of contradictions in which he was entangled. While he was still desperate about not being able to put his wisdom and experience into practical use, his poetic ingenuity was at his best symbolised by "The Tower".

The Romantic Tower

If Yeats became a modernist poet, it was in an attempt to correct the weaknesses of Romanticism or strengthen it by not dwelling so much on the landscape but by indulging in a maze of imagistic reckonings of sensibilities. That is why in his later poetry his images become more concrete symbols. In other words, he concretized Romanticism with the more powerful symbols of his later poems including "The Tower", "The Circus Animals' Desertion", "Sailing to Byzantium", and "An Acre of Grass".

"The Tower", is a magnificent poem which demonstrates Yeats at the crest of his poetic artistry, but it is also one of the most revealing poems in which the poet depicts his worry about his inability to act in old age with the experience and the visionary insight he has acquired. It is a poem in which the poet is involved with some form of self-evaluation having attained age and maturity. More significantly, the poem places Yeats in the core of romantic poetry in terms of themes, form and poetic style:

> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible—

(Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 218)

From a more exalting perspective the tower symbolizes the highest realm of the Romantic imagination and the persona who paces at the battlements is a demonstration of a poet who has attained perfection in Romantic poetry. In other words, Yeats's later mature poems rendered abstruse and esoteric as "The Tower" do not merely make him a modernist but a romantic poet who is mature in thought and expression and above all, imbued with a very lively imagination. Although in his later poetry, Yeats was (un)consciously developing into a modernist poet with the use of more precise and concrete diction, he always turned back to his original Romantic tradition which allowed the imagination a liberal expression prohibited by the modernist theories of Eliot. In Bornstein's words, he became "a great modern poet of Romantic mental action and scorned those who seemed to grant imagination a lesser role" (*Transformations of Romanticism,* 80).

Whatever philosophical ramifications may be attached to "The Tower" as a symbol, it is important to note that Yeats's old age is particularly announced in the poem. The tower symbolises Yeats at maturity, decidedly, the breaking point between youth and old age, reality and imagination; also, a meeting point between ignorance and experience and Romanticism and modernism. Just as the old man and the golden bird in the "Byzantium" poems whose soul is invested with the creative imagination, Yeats transcends the dome of eternity from where he beckons man to that realm of the imagination where,

> …being dead, we rise,
> Dream and so create
> Translunar Paradise.
> I have prepared my peace
> With learned Italian things
> And the proud stones of Greece,

Poet's imaginings
And memories of love,
Memories of the words of women,
All those things whereof
Man makes a superhuman
Mirror resembling dream.

(Yeats: *Collected Poems,* "The Tower", 223-224)

Yeats proves here that the topmost realm of his imagination is made of mosaic of fragments, including "learned Italian things", the "proud stones of Greece", "memories of love". Like the Grecian goldsmith, he reconciles fragments and brings them together to create ethereal beauty, a "Translunar Paradise" in which, of all other values, he achieves a peaceful mind. The desire to create a personal myth ends up with the creation of an all-enchanting dome which undergoes a series of contemplations and initiations. But what is most characteristic of Yeats's dome is the absence of the intrusion of other beliefs and conceptions such as Blake, Wordsworth and, later, Eliot imbibed to express their varying conceptions about transcendental reality[2].

Robert S. Ryf notes that although Yeats's bitterness over the issues that plagued his life was still apparent by the time he wrote "The Tower" in 1925, his imagination had become richer and more active (615). However, the poet does not welcome age like one who has prepared for it. Old age seems to take him unawares and comes at a time when the passions of youth remained unfulfilled. This explains why Yeats's fury at old age in his later poetry is at times too poignant. From the fiery nature of his emotions it can be concluded that his arrival at old age without satisfying his main ambition in life constitutes yet another vital factor in the poet's psychological strain in the real world which he seeks to evade by the magic of the imagination. At the level of

the poetic imagination, the poet struggles to escape from his worry about old age by seeking refuge in artistic creativity. At one point he does not quite find it easy to write poetry because his themes have been exhausted. As he explains in "The Circus Animals' Desertion", old age prevents him from easily finding a theme and he consequently resorts to reiterating former ones. By so doing, he deserts his "circus animals" which in the context of the poem represent artistic fancy. Nevertheless, the "circus" metaphor more vividly illustrates what Wordsworth describes as the "spontaneous overflow" of feelings (*Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, 1392) because circus performances are themselves acts of spontaneity which draw from their audiences feelings of wonder and awe. The poet, therefore, compares the circus experience to his early life which was filled with vigour and the spontaneity of artistic creativity.

Although as an old man Yeats finds difficulty in the creation of new themes as is the case when his "circus animals were on show", he is decidedly bent on continuing with artistic creativity as a means of extricating himself from worrying about infirmity of age. It has been stated that the main reason for Yeats's bitterness about age results from his inability to satisfy his sensual ambitions. He lacks the vigour of youth, which explains why the "old themes" enumerated in the poem centre around love, with romantic figures like Oisin and the Countess Cathleen as symbols of fulfilled love.

From a similar standpoint, as in "The Circus Animals' Desertion", the old man in "An Acre of Grass" yearns for an "old man's frenzy" to accelerate his interest in artistic creativity. The "acre of green grass" is evocative of the "green" where the children play joyfully in Blake's "Nurse's Song". The "green" therefore, is a metonymy for the immense universe where the communion between innocence and Nature is manifest through

instinctual feeling and the imagination. The thematic position Yeats takes in the poem clearly shows the poet's lagging imagination affected by age. He is placed in the position of Blake's Nurse who in *The Songs of Experience*, is embittered because her waning age cannot permit her to participate in the joyful activity of the children who play on the green.

A comparative analysis of "The Circus Animals' Desertion" and "An Acre of Grass" exhibits both the circus and the green grass as metaphors of youthful vitality which raise a conflict in the poet's mind. He is old and tired but he does not want to abandon creativity. Therefore, in "An Acre of Grass", because "strength of body goes" he appeals to his muse for "an old man's frenzy" as a source of inspiration at old age:

> My temptation is quiet.
> Here at life's end
> Neither loose imagination,
> Nor the mill of the mind
> Consuming its rags and bone,
> Can make the truth known.
>
> Grant me an old man's frenzy,
> Myself must I remake
> Till Timon and Lear
> Or that William Blake
> Who beat upon the wall
> Till truth obeyed his call;
>
> A mind Michael Angelo knew
> That can pierce the clouds,
> Or inspired by frenzy
> Shake the dead in their shrouds;
> An old man's eagle mind.
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 346-347)

The central idea is the old man's determination to get more forcefully into artistic creativity and to search for philosophical truth. In the first stanza he is aware of his aged personality. He is at "life's end", but he is incapable of letting free the imagination or what he calls the "mills of the mind" to engage itself with creativity, from which perspective philosophical truth about life can best be illustrated.

The peculiarity of the last two stanzas is implicit in the poet's desire to acquire the wild, creative excitement which invests the individual with the philosophic imagination. It is the wild excitement at old age which William Shakespeare invests in the characters of Timon and Lear. The allusions to the two Shakespearean plays, *Timon of Athens* and *King Lear* respectively project situations in which the old men, Timon and Lear, become delirious because they discover the philosophical truth too late when age completely overshadows them. Lear in particular goes mad, having been slighted by Goneril and Regan, two of his daughters on whom he relies to relish the comfort of his last days. As a mad old man in the storm, Lear's imagination becomes very keen as he tries to decipher the nature of truth.

Yeats invokes the frenzy of Timon and Lear in order to make his imagination active in old age; to permit him to write poetry and gain greater insight into the philosophical truth. In the same way as Timon and Lear, Blake and Michael Angelo are embodiments of artistic and philosophical truths. They are also shown as possessing artistic frenzy which transcends the physical experience. For Blake, his furious beating of the wall makes "Truth obey his call", while for Michael Angelo, his frenzy wakes the dead in their graves. By seeking to indulge more frenziedly in artistic activity at old age, Yeats sought to prove that there is a transcendental reality which can be reached by the

imagination, poetically and/or philosophically. He realises in "Words", when defeatist love becomes a reality, that "words obey my call", very much like Romantic Blake who at the tower of his imagination "…beat upon the wall/Till truth obeyed his call." "Words" and "truth" represent poetic and philosophic imagination respectively. The "frenzy" or the excitement about lost love magnifies his imagination, like with Timon and Lear, and Blake and Michael Angelo. Finally, in "Sailing to Byzantium" the frenzy of the old man leads him to the top of the Romantic tower, an artistic realm in which the old man's soul can find recess. He dismisses reality because it is "no country for old men". The atmosphere in reality is dominated by the temporal sensual pleasures with youths in one another's arms. Provoked by the youthful activities and his inability to participate with them, the poet seeks the more permanent world of Byzantium where all the souls partake in a single event of harmony. Byzantium, as has been observed, symbolizes Yeats's idea of ideal reality where the old man anticipates transcendental glories absent in the world of reality. It could be said that by invoking the wisdom and experiences of Shakespeare's characters, Timon and Lear, and of artists such as Blake and Michael Angelo, Yeats was in a way greatly fighting against senile decay. His pursuit of wisdom went on with great intensity and he achieved this by writing *A Vision* in which he tried to interpret the past and to predict the future through the phenomenon of the movement of the gyres.

One may wonder why Yeats was so suddenly preoccupied with the future, specifically with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. As an old man, and one troubled by illness, he saw eternity not far from him and thus wanted a system of belief which was consoling. He expressed this belief in *A Vision* but it was not easily applicable to the contemporary Irish scene. He read more philosophy which provided him more symbols and

imagery to write more poems which expressed his worry about old age and which sought to define the nature of life after the death of the vegetated body, a means to prepare an old man towards eternity represented by the "tower". Some of the poems include "Sailing to Byzantium", "Byzantium", "The Tower", and "Amongst School children" in which the old man is the protagonist and whose main activity is to connect human experience with eternity through vision or the imagination.

Even though his endeavour to introduce his philosophies in real life were a little premature and he did not meet with commendable success because his worry about old age became more and more intense, depriving him of activity with which he could express himself, most of the poems he wrote at this time and after show the kind of immortality he yearned for his soul. They also demonstrate the fact that the poet reached the level of Romantic imagination that few poets in the history of English Literature have.

Beyond Modernism

After writing poetry which spans through a full life lived within the fragments of two centuries — the 19th and the 20th centuries — representing two major literary epochs, the Romantic and the modern, Yeats cannot simply be labelled a modernist poet. He is beyond modernism because unlike many poets of that generation including Ezra Pound, Eliot and Stevens, he is influenced more by the Romantic tradition and he combines both the romanticist and modernist elements to give poetry a new insight which creates the status for him as the greatest poet of the century. Without necessarily pigeonholing the poet exclusively within the modernist tradition one can comfortably state that his

achievements, both as a Romantic and modernist poet are quite significant.

The concept of modern poetry and its connection to Romanticism is itself controversial, especially in terms of its birth. Octavio Paz is of the opinion that the birth of modernism can be traced in English and German Romanticism which developed to the avant-garde movements in the twentieth century (vi-vii). Also of interest is the claim by Robert Bernard Hass, that modernism is a "varied and complex movement, fraught with the remnants of the nineteenth century's intellectual tensions" (57); the tensions, as we have already observed, sprang from the doctrines of Utilitarianism, Freudianism, Marxism, Darwinism, Existentialism and others, and became the main philosophical influences on modern poetics.

Rainer Emig on his part suggests a subtle connection between the late 19th century avant-garde movements and the age of Enlightenment, an idea which possibly led Bornstein to think that the canonization of modern poetry particularly by Eliot was achieved by thwarting literary history. Eliot, Bornstein further comments, was the first in the attempt in criticism and literary history to exclude Romanticism in modern poetry. Rather, he considered Donne to be the model for the new poetry as well as standards for judging other writers. The criteria which Eliot considered to be the hallmark for modernist poetry included "wit, irony, logical and sensory precision, neutrality" while Romantic poetry was on the other hand to him an "egoistical deviation, infected by crude emotion, a weak grasp of reality, pretentious claims, and uncertain technical skill" (Bornstein 16). Eliot's criteria attracted the admiration of Cleanth Brooks, an American New Critic, and the British critics, Allen Tate and F.R. Lewis who were overwhelmed by the criteria with which Eliot set out to evaluate modern poetry and to construct a literary tradition they

called modernism. At this point, the discrimination against Romanticism was clearly set; thus "to defend modernism was to attack Romanticism" (Bornstein 17).

According to Bornstein, the elements of Romanticism most useful in understanding modernism include theories like the creative imagination, forms like the greater Romantic lyric, the particular manipulations of imagery, and rhetorical strategy. The poetry of Yeats, like that of Eliot and Stevens, became the prime example of modernism, the foundation that was laid down by Eliot's prose. And if modern poetry is an act of the mind, it therefore echoes what Wordsworth had stated before in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* that poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (1392), thus qualifying the act of mind in response to the various situations, ideas, experiences and feelings in the universe. In other words, within modernism is an underlying Romanticism. Bornstein proves this by revisiting the Romanticism of Yeats within the context of modernism, showing Yeats as unequivocally associating himself with the major Romantic poets: "We were the last Romantics". Bornstein argues that Yeats's concept of Romanticism is explicit in his presentation of Romantic heroes as incarnations of passionate mood or as principles of mind. The interpretation of specific Romantic poets which displays psychological doctrines and mental actions makes the poet's quest for images the paradigmatic imaginative act (27).

Bornstein observes further that the modernist's neglect of the alternate principles of self-portrayal and mental action which Yeats derived from the Romantics caused a lot of critical problems (33). Yeats was most greatly influenced by the Romantics like Shelley and Blake from whom he derived his characteristic mode, especially in his use of the imagination as

the redeemer and imagination's ability to transform material nature and make truth more evident, a way which reason failed to do. What is important is that contemporary critics like Christopher A. Strathman[4] and particularly George Bornstein have come to acknowledge the centrality of Romanticism in modern poetry. And if "modernism" is what Rainer Emig considers to be characteristic of abstractions, obscurity, multiplicity of perspectives, unexplained allusions, disintegration of coherent narratives, amongst others (1) we can equally say that the heightened point of Yeats's Romanticism is his expression of modernist tendencies.

This explains why studies on Yeatsian Romanticism have been based mainly on the poet's relation with the radical Romantic poets – Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and Keats. Bloom and Bornstein, for example, have meticulously traced the sources of Yeats's Romanticism to Shelley, Blake and Wordsworth, while Gibson shows that Coleridge's influence on Yeats was great particularly by analysing the relationship between Yeats and Coleridge especially in Yeats's prose works. To him, Coleridge was of "almost unique importance to Yeats", since in the last part of his career Yeats was in constant attempt to reconcile his passion for poetry with that of philosophy which he acquired from Coleridge (Gibson 2). Yeats saw Coleridge as a source of his philosophical and mystical ideas. While the full potential of Yeats's Romanticism can be explained by showing the influence of the major Romantics on his works, the fact should be stressed that beneath the major influences of the radical Romantics on Yeats were socio-political concerns which he used Romanticism to articulate. His poetic revolution in terms of style and technique was not dictated by theoretical dogma or the wrangling between the romanticist hold on him and the modernist disavowal of his romantic inheritance.

It was not until the late 1950s and the early 1960s with the reappraisal of modernist poetry that its connection with Romanticism was recognized. For Raphael Ingelbien, modernism is a more seriously contested concept in English literary history especially in the fact that recent studies stress the importance of national contexts and the relationship between the texts and the history of the nation. Ingelbien thinks that Yeats's modernism, if he must be put in that category, is influenced by a national Irish culture which is explicitly illustrated in his poetry (183). It is Yeats's cultural nationalism that proves Ireland as an independent political and social entity, uninfluenced by Anglo-Saxon traditions in which modernism had become an important concept in the early twentieth century. Thus Yeats's modernism is complicated further by the fact that, unlike other modernist poets, he unconsciously becomes one without adhering to the technical elements imposed by orthodox critics like Eliot. He is a poet who seeks ways of realising the ideals he yearns for, inspired dominantly by an un-English culture. Therefore, his folkloristic approach to poetry revealed his concern for artistic and spiritual relevance to Ireland in a changing world. He thus combines the lore and legends of the Irish countryside and his own individual visionary experiences to give modern poetry an extra dimension which in Anne Markey's view, caused his being categorized as one of the greatest modernist poets that ever lived (37). Markey argues that Irish folklore is not simply used to expose the *fin-de-siècle* gloom but to reveal the spiritual metamorphosis in Yeats which ushers in not just a new spiritual order but also an innovative literary tradition. Thus, for Markey, Irish folklore provided imaginative inspiration for a "modern, rational, materialistic world crying out for rejuvenation by an ancient spirituality" (37). Yeats explores Irish folklore in his early poetry to present Ireland as a country imbued with "magical

sense of life" nurtured by an ancient spirituality. In his later poetry he attempts to show a link between what he believed in Irish folklore and esoteric religion and this facilitated his exploration of the alternative realities. As Markey puts it, Yeats found in Irish folklore a pre-Christian, universal worldview that might still be exploited to "stem the flow of the "filthy modern tide" of forces hostile to the mind, spirit, and imagination" (36).

Considering the views above about Yeats's Romantic and folkloristic background and its relation to modern poetry, T.S. Eliot and Richard Ellmann must not be quick to place Yeats's modernism on a dissecting table of critical analysis in order to determine the value of its spirituality because it is Yeats's quest for this spirituality that leads him into esoteric subject matter and symbolic representations. Both Eliot and Ellmann provide exemplary critical opinions which are sceptical about Yeats's search through the imagination for an ideal order in myth which culminate in the creation of a personal myth so much expressed in his poetry. They represent the confusion of the modernist reproach to the poet's Romantic phenomena. Eliot, on his part, is of the opinion that Yeats was in search of a tradition a little too consciously. The result, Eliot says of Yeats's world of the imagination, is a "somewhat artificially induced poeticality" (45). Eliot is here suggesting in a light mood that Yeats's imagination is not, substantial; that he does not create images in his myth that can enthral the reader. To substantiate his position he quotes I.A. Richards in *After Strange Gods*:

> "After a drawn battle with drama, Mr. Yeats made a violent repudiation, not merely of current civilization but of life itself, in favour of the supernatural world. But the world of the "eternal moods" of supernatural essences and immortal beings is not like Irish peasant stories and the Irish landscape part of his natural familiar experience. Now he turns to a world of

> symbolic phantasmagoria about which he is desperately uncertain". (45-46)

Stephen Spender writes that Richards attacks Yeats and D.H. Lawrence for believing in absurdities, and congratulates Eliot for writing *The Wasteland*, a poem which was cut off from all beliefs, and which supports orthodox Christianity (132). Richards's position is exemplary of the confusion of the modern era. Eliot's personal reaction against Yeats's myth-making as we have observed, is also testimony of that confusion. The most explicit dilemma is that between adopting Romantic values in poetry or maintaining the Augustan orthodox values. The latter became increasingly prominent because the age itself was characterized by scientific and abstract thinking. Many of the poets wrote poetry from a technical point of view as Alexander Pope and the Augustans did. The confusion has cut modern poets off from their past when poets expressed personal beliefs, conceptions and nature which were intimately linked with their lives and the universe. It has caused the neglect of the primary place of the imagination that creates beauty in life and poetry, and blurred the fact that the imagination itself is religious no matter what form it takes.

What Eliot, like Richards, expects of Yeats is that Yeats ought to have created a myth with a familiar background with Irish folklore and landscape. But Yeats's disapproval of reality, as has been observed, drives him to create a world completely different from that reality, or from anything familiar with reality. Therefore, he casts aside reality and the myths existing in it, especially in his later poetry and suggests a new form of belief. Yeats might be uncertain about the "phantasmagoria" he creates in the Byzantium poems, but the poems themselves and their rich imagery are a testimony of the doctrine which preaches art as a

means of attaining real ethereal beauty, and of restricting what he considers the burdens of the real world.

From Richards's observation quoted by Eliot above, Eliot concludes somewhat categorically that:

> It is I think only carrying Mr. Richards's complaint a little further to add that Mr. Yeats's "supernatural world" was the wrong supernatural world. It was not a world of spiritual significance, not a world of real good and Evil, of holiness or sin but a highly sophisticated lower mythology summoned, like a physician, to supply the fading pulse of poetry with some transient stimulant so that the dying patient may utter his last words. (46)

Eliot is here suggesting that Yeats's myth is simply absurd and fantastical. But the point is easily understood. Eliot's poetry does not attempt virgin mythical creations but relies on Christian virtues and orthodox beliefs which Yeats considers fake and unsubstantial, antiquated and stereotypical. Yeats might have been uncertain about the world and myth he creates but it is all geared towards expressing and demonstrating the urgent need for creating a more meaningful myth for a world that was falling apart. Eliot, on the other hand, thinks that Yeats's invention could threaten the validity and credibility of the writers of the twentieth century. He writes further in *After Strange Gods*: "In an age of unsettled beliefs and enfeebled tradition, the man of letters, the poet and novelist are in a situation dangerous for themselves and for their readers" (62). These remarks contradict H.E. Stowel's observation, that the later poetry of Yeats appeals strongly because it has grandeur and dignity of thought and expression which is of high value in a rootless and unstable age (159).

Eliot has an orthodox approach to beliefs. He feels that they must be criticised and brought up-to-date under the supervision

of what he calls "orthodoxy". His doctrine of art leaned towards modernism, a doctrine which he championed and which in itself was a repudiation of the values of the Romantic imagination. Eliot, therefore, accepts in the twentieth century what the Romantics had discarded in the eighteenth century. These are dangerous tendencies which Yeats sought to ignore, advocating change through his example. He writes poetry which ends in the creation of a myth because he feels that the world is the way it is because the imagination is not allowed to wander in the various realms to seek gratification of the mind. He sees orthodoxy as an imprisonment of the mind and soul. Once in conflict, Yeats argues, the unrealities of orthodoxy are exposed.

This draws attention to the crucial concept of liberty in Romantic poetry. Since Romantic poetry was a kind of reaction against neo-classical orthodoxy which Eliot attempted to resurrect in the 20th century, it can be said that the imagination in Yeats's poetry is a perfect illustration of liberty in Romantic poetry. The idea in Romantic poetry is not to restrict human experience to settled beliefs and convictions which stifle existence and make life a burdensome experience. Yeats, like the major Romantics, sought to liberate the mind and the imagination as a way of making life more tolerable and more gratifying, the reason why the poetic imagination turns to the external universe which, as has been observed, has a pattern of its own but which offers limitless horizons for the liberal imagination.

James Lovic Allen, in his article "Belief Versus Faith in the Credo of Yeats", thinks also that Yeats's beliefs which develop from the major ideas acquired from his involvement in occult systems have provoked so much controversy and doubt as to the authenticity of the poet's beliefs (692). In this essay the target is Richard Ellmann whom he considers one of Yeats's most respected critics. Allen uses Yeats's utterances and writings to

argue that if Yeats committed himself to any belief system in his later years it was because such commitment originated from the mythical theology enshrined in his complicated system explained in *A Vision*. According to Allen, Ellmann insists that "Yeats did not believe in the immortality of the human spirit in a timeless realm of changeless being, in the existence of a transcendental God, or in cycles of rebirth or reincarnation" (697). This implies that Yeats as a poet was simply out to produce ideas to stimulate the fading pulse of poetry as Eliot also thought, rather than provide a system of belief that could replace other forms of belief he found unsubstantial.

A cursory survey of Yeats's poetry proves that from his earliest poem to the last, the poet was in search of an order or a system which he could believe in. The irony about his religiosity is that although he grew up in a society with an intense religious character, he spent his lifetime looking for a religious belief, for unknown gods. His father's repressive attitude towards him, the strain of frustrated love, the political crises in Ireland, and infirmity and old age only impelled him to aspire towards what James A. Notopoulos describes as the "heavenly Kingdom of God" and an "earthly paradise typified by Byzantium" (317). His reliance on the resources of the imagination which leads him into the faeryland, into myth and vision, was dictated by the urge to find some mythical order or a belief to rely on.

Yeats's involvement in arcane studies, Theosophy, cabbalistic magic, among others, was intended not just to understand the world but to look for means of reaching that transcendental reality. As a result of his search he came to believe fervently in those aspects of the supernatural he considered relevant. That is why in the most symbolic of his later poems like "The Tower", "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" in which the imagination operates at the

transcendental realm of being, we find an interplay of the immortality of the human spirit, the reincarnation of the spirit through a sequence of existences, different kinds of communication between man and the spiritual or divine through mystic vision, all of which, in Allen's opinion, made Yeats a "devoutly religious man and a confirmed theist" (693). Like Eliot, Ellmann is against Yeats's anti-orthodox stance. It should be stated that Yeats rejected Christian orthodoxy all his life and we have already illustrated how some of his poems show abhorrence for Christianity for not being able to provide mankind with a credible system of belief.

Therefore, Yeats's mythopoetic experience which ends in the creation of a dome shows that he is different from other poets. One would dare to say that the experience places him in a position quite unique in Romantic literature and serves as a means of escape from the confusion of modern poetry. His mytho-poetic imagination seems to answer the question often asked by the public: What can poets do to save civilisation from destruction? The answer is contained in the "Byzantium" poems and much of Yeats's later poetry, particularly in his conception of the dome in which he turned the experiences of his life into concrete symbols.

If the Romantic imagination turned away from the world of reality[3] to seek in the transcendental realm other sources of being as against those of will and reason, Yeats's breaks through not just the outer world but the modernist tradition of the early twentieth century which Eliot sought to establish but ended up being a significant Romantic poet himself. In writing poetry, he is aware of the "innerself" and the "outerworld" alike, unlike the child in Wordsworth and Blake who is innocent about the circumstances in which he finds himself. That is why Yeats's poetry is hardly seen from the point of view of nostalgia, that is,

through the eyes of a mature poet who records his childhood experiences to project the circumstances of the past in order to illuminate the situation in the present. Possibly, Eliot's point of contention rests on the fact that Yeats's mytho-poetic experiences are not influenced by existing dogma and mythology. In trying to evade the pangs of real life, Yeats gradually welds his experiences into a myth. This explains why his imagination develops with his changing moods and experiences of the real world right up to old age. In old age, he creates a paradise, prepares his soul for it and equips it with the values he yearned for throughout his life.

Even in the twentieth century, an era which Yeats is more generally identified with, he may be considered an outsider because of his distinctive Irishness and a unique mytho-poetic faculty that searches for its values through the image of poetry. To use David Daiches's words, "he was the giant of the first half of the twentieth century" because of his independent imagination and no other poet in English during his time had his stature (39). In a large degree, he remains detached from what may be called the politics of literature. In other words, he is not obsessively involved with creating literary canons and influencing his generation to abide by those canons; he is not involved with arguments about the nature and function of literature as most of his contemporaries are. This is because his best poetry is influenced neither by the canons of Augustan or Romantic traditions nor by the dictates of modern experimentation. His poetry is a direct reaction to the problems he faced in his life and his Byzantine dome is actually a model which he believes the twentieth-century man has to adopt in order to find relief for the century's drama of despair. In addition, his poetry suggests the doctrine of art, by which his dome is possible, as a means of avoiding disillusionment. There may be misunderstanding in the

era as to what form of poetry is to be written to serve the spiritual needs of man but Yeats's personal myth-making provides a model for a whole generation of poets, be they Romantic or modernist.

Resisting Conclusions

One does not need to be an artificer to be able to penetrate Yeats's dome, to understand his conception of ideal life and to appreciate the uniqueness of his imagination and what he achieves by the magic of poetry. By carefully tracing the development of the poet's mind as it is revealed in his poetry, one understands why his myth as a whole contains values quite remote from existing myths. His poetry, as we have observed, has generated much controversy in an attempt to clearly define which literary tradition he belongs to. Therefore, making definite conclusions about Yeats's poetry would seem to suggest that the criticism of poetry in general could be subjected to a singular critical agenda. We will resist such conclusions and instead attempt a closer assessment of Yeats's philosophic and poetic imagination as evident in his poetry.

The imagination and religious faith are not the same things. Religious faith requires the subjugation of oneself to dogma whereas the imagination, be it poetic or philosophic, rejects any situation that is conditioned by dogma. Religion in Eliot's poetry may involve insistence on dogma and traditional attitudes but the imagination remains the primary activity in poetry as Yeats's experience proves. Yeats thus throws away dogma in poetry and establishes a personal and independent order. Of symbolism in poetry he writes in *Essays and Introductions*: "Good poetry must have the perfection which escapes analysis, the subtleties that have a new meaning every day" (165). He makes use of the

elements of Western and Oriental beliefs and varieties of mysticism which fade into symbols expressing purely personal conceptions rather than the stereotyped ideas of the era. Like the major Romantic poets, Yeats's imagination set out to explore the external universe in order to come to terms with the unknown spiritual reality which he believed was necessary for ordering human experience in a chaotic universe. The imagination thus takes the poet from the absurd reality to the realms of Nature, myth and vision where ideally, he finds gratifying values absent in the real world.

In this way, Yeats stands out as the only un-intellectualised modernist Romantic poet because he allows his imagination and his mind to flow freely. He does not think of the mechanical aspect of poetry, as his contemporaries do, rejecting Augustan concepts, yet being too technical in their verse; avoiding the Romantic involvement in Nature, yet wanting to be particularly concerned with the tragedy of ordinary humanity in the face of the realities of the world; wanting to be in Nature, yet living in an increasingly technical world. His contemporaries possess a kind of artistic self-consciousness which is not very much explicit in his poetry. And it is the kind of self-consciousness that blurs the imagination of the modern writer from seeking those realms of beauty we find in Yeats's dome.

One cannot completely refute the fact that Yeats joins the rest of the modern poets in his later poetry by indulging in critical consciousness in the art of writing which draws him away from the purely Romantic phenomena of his early poetry. This is the subject matter of "A Coat" in which he decides to give up the "embroideries" in the style of his early poetry and indulge in symbolism in which he finds "enterprise in walking naked". This indulgence to Yeats is an experience as well as a preparation for esoteric thinking than for intellectual exercise such as has

become the flaw of modern poets. His poetic style is innovative and yet devoid of the technical proneness of the modern poets.

Yeats cannot also simply be understood as reacting against classicism and advocating the pattern of Romantic poetry; as writing Romantic poetry, yet subscribing to the technicalities of modern poetry. Both the Romantics and the twentieth century poets are more interested in formulating theories of art. He does not show desire for dogmatic patterns. His style is largely influenced by the maturity of his imagination and thought, and by the interminable pangs of his life. He is constantly conscious of changes in his style as we have seen in "A Coat", where he moves from fanciful poetry to symbolism. In "Words", he realises,

> That every year I have cried 'At length
> My darling understands it all
> Because I have come into my strength
> And words obey my call';
>
> (Yeats: *Collected Poems*, 100-101)

He realises as none of the Romantics or twentieth-century poets does that "words" obey his command to the extent that his poetry bears evidence of what he considers to be the hallmark of style for both Romantic and modernist poetry. "Words" also become a prominent symbol of literary art; the poem symbolises a rich reservoir for arts from which the poet draws significant images and symbols to demonstrate his persistent longing for permanence in a world of change and trouble.

This brings us back to the central role of the imagination in modern as well as in Romantic poetry. In a disorderly world which also experiences the decay of values, the imagination's only option is to create new cohesive values which make life

more tolerable; the imagination cannot depict accepted doctrines such as Eliot adopts and Yeats rejects; it cannot refer to symbolic meanings already recognised by the reader but construct new symbols which provide more stimulating interpretations. Everything has to be reinvented in each work as Yeats has done. Yeats's dome, therefore, symbolises the virtues which Yeats anticipates through his imaginative quest and which are poetically revealed in the Byzantium poems. Frank Kermode writes:

> The work of art itself is symbol, "aesthetic Monad", utterly original and not in the old sense "initiated"; "concrete"; yet fluid and suggestive, a means to truth, a truth unrelated to, and more exalted than that of positive science […] dead, yet alive because of its participation in the higher order of existence. (44)

One therefore, sees in Yeats's poetry a symbol of art, innovative versification which does not lend itself easily to imitation and which searches for the truth, not dogma, making connection with the higher order of existence possible.

The Romantics began a tradition which allowed the imagination to discover this truth and build myths around it. If Yeats improves on this tradition and reaches the level of vision few Romantic poets do, it is because his poetry is influenced, more than that of any of the Romantics, by the very spiritual barrenness of the world surrounding him, a world penetrated by the antiquated dogmas of Eliot and his school of thought. Thus, Yeats, from the point of view of his poetic imagination, is a major Romantic poet differing from the Wordsworthian School only in terms of era, and the circumstances in real life which sharpened his visionary insight.

Yeats, therefore, attains transcendental reality through poetry. His poetry imprints on the mind the idea that there exists in real terms, a world beyond ordinary human understanding and the imagination is the only faculty that can seek and inhabit it. After the dome there is no other indication in Yeats's poems that there is another paradise elsewhere. He believes that in life, the soul seeks fanatical experience. After death it assimilates, masters and finally discards memories of its experience until it is purified and ready for the marriage of souls in the dome where there is perpetual glamour of transcendental light supplied by the moon and stars, the Emperor's flames and God's holy fire.

From the point of view of poetic ingenuity, especially in Yeats's later poems, the poet's experience and adventure into the creation of very personal symbols and images, and his maturity at versification proves that he attains the peak of his poetic and philosophic imagination which the "tower" symbolises. His symbols abstain from acquiring collective implication, like Blake's "Jerusalem", or Eliot's "Michelangelo". His attempt to avoid universality of symbols makes him turn to symbols of geometric relevance such as "cones" and "gyres" and others which are used to express his philosophy of "death-in-life and life-in-death". The final product of Yeats's attempt at myth-making is poetry of such great artistic worth that few poets since his death have written.

It can be said that the greatest achievement of Yeats's imagination is the fact that it creates a great volume of fine verse which preaches the symbol as the principal doctrine of art. But this would suggest that he contrives such great poetry for commonplace aesthetic doctrines, or to assert ideas which are merely arbitrary. His imagination proves a little more than this. He indulges in the imagination somehow unconsciously as a means of escape from the falsehoods and banalities of the real

world. In doing this, he employs both the poetic and the philosophic imagination to beckon mankind away from the absurdities of physical experience into the higher realms of his imagination where ideal reality is possible. Man, he thinks, is in constant agony because he seeks to solve the problems of life through reason and moral doctrines. Through the imagination, values like unity of being, eternity and reciprocal relationships which are among the greatest virtues he yearns for could be achieved.

Indulgence in the imagination is to Yeats a way of providing variety in human experience, a way of emancipating oneself from the social conventions and discovering the native as well as the primitive instincts in man. Humanity gets entangled in the webs of confusion, terror, and conflict because the twenty-first century mind focuses more on orthodox ideas and political power. The imagination of the twenty-first century man has been imprisoned by these conformist values of science and religious morals. It is not allowed to wander in the various realms to find comfort and recess as Yeats demonstrates by his experience in poetry.

Distinguishing between poetic and scientific imagination, Edwin Muir says that the poetic imagination does not prove or demonstrate but it can only divine and persuade. Like Frank Kermode, Muir looks at poetic imagination in terms of poetry and agrees with Kermode on the point that the imagination is a shared human experience when he writes: “Imagination tells us that we can become human by reputation, that our lives are a reversal of lives that have been lived over and over” (225). Thus, man sees life in the image of past lives. However, Muir’s concept of the imagination is much more akin to philosophic imagination than the poetic. He is of the opinion that we live in a world created by applied science, religious ideals and other forms of mythology which are a suggestion of the same principles and

morals. Therefore, a poet like Yeats who wrote dominantly in the twentieth century and who identifies the creative power with the imagination, as the Romantics do, turns his imagination away from routine existence to seek life that is more glorifying and permanent. By exploring the resources of the poetic imagination, one becomes not just comprehensive of the use of the image as the main weapon of art, but comes to grips with the philosophic imagination, that is the poet's speculations about life beyond that of ordinary experience such as Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, Byron and Keats experience in Romantic poetry.

One can conveniently place Yeats in the ranks of the major Romantics – Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron. In doing this we are indeed refuting the opinions of G. Wilson Knight and Maurice Bowra who are a little too conservative and orthodox in their interpretation of the Romantic imagination. The intention in the present study has been to prove in another sense that Yeats fits appropriately in the criteria with which Knight and Bowra define the Romantic imagination. In fact, Yeats's domes are more clearly defined than those of any of the Romantics, his visions, although a little complicated by his use of abstruse symbolism, are more explicit and his landscapes and myths suggest a more glorifying experience. Where Yeats differs from the Romantics is in the manner of inspiration, and the era in which he wrote. But his poetry remains largely "Romantic", his poetic experience takes the reader back into Shelley's caves and domes, into Coleridge's sacred rivers and to Wordsworth's hills and dales where the mysterious and the divine are perceived with the help of appropriate images and symbols.

Whether, as James Najarian explains that Romanticism, seen from Réne Wellek's assertion, was a cohesive phenomenon or Lovejoy's claim that it was a fragmented one, or from Jerome

McGann's point of view that the Romantic period is a substitute for late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers, it is evident from Yeats's experience that Romanticism is more of an aesthetic or philosophical category than a historical phenomenon. For Najarian, it is not the definition of Romanticism from the perspective of periodization that matters. Instead, what is important is the author's awareness of what Romanticism is and how he fits his works within the ambit of critical investigations (150). Judged from Najarian's view and placing the major Romantics within the paradigm of critical investigations applied in the discussion in this book so far, it could be stated that Yeats is more outstanding as a Romantic than a modern poet. Therefore, the controversy as to which category Yeats belongs can only be resolved by the understanding that in his quest for ideal existence, to change or renew the symbolic order Yeats's imagination reached a realm in which without being conscious of the modernist strands introduced by Eliot, he became a modernist Romantic poet. It is true he was conscious of his change in style evident in the rendition of "A Coat" still in a quest for a symbolic order, but it does not represent the elaborate consciousness of the avant-garde writers at the time who indulged in conscious experimentation in style and subject matter, tired of the traditional mode of writing.

Yeats considered himself a Romantic poet without consciously creating or stating the rules as Wordsworth or Coleridge would in *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* and *Biographia Literaria* respectively. He knew that in the core of Romantic poetry was the imagination which became a live force of not just poetry but philosophy elaborated in *A Vision*. He fits in the Romantic Criteria even more than the celebrated poets of the specified historical era. Besides fitting in the criteria of Romanticism which described a specific period, he becomes the

icon for the Romantic phenomena which Jacques Berzun clearly mapped out for Romantic poetry at all times:

> A return to the middle ages, a love for the exotic, the revolt from reason, a vindication of the individual, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific method, a revival of pantheism, a revival of idealism, a revival of Catholicism, a rejection of artistic convention, a return to emotionalism, a return to nature…. (Qtd by Peckham, 6)

Apart from the "revival of Catholicism" which Yeats openly denounced, his Romanticism makes him the most outstanding poet in the twentieth century. His mytho-poetic inventiveness, his uniqueness and variety and stock of images and symbols makes him detached from the uncertainty of the century. The gentle-moving, decorative nature of his earlier poems easily fade into the more concrete verse of his later poems with a mysterious power over words, including his rhetorical power, his profuse use of imagery and the fierceness of tone which often frees his poetry from desperate longing and the mechanical nature of the poetry in the era.

It is also possible to claim that Yeats's imagination develops from lower to higher realms, dictated by the intensity of pain and despair in the real world. This development arises from his attempt to uncover truth, to come to terms with a more permanent reality which is finally attained in the Byzantium poems. All aspects of real life are contaminated. Reality is characterized by its ruthlessness and lack of compromise. The poet's imagination turns away from it into Nature, symbolised by "Innisfree". But the poet soon finds in myth greater ideals in life and sets out to create a personal myth. The dome, the highest realm where the imagination finally resides, is a symbol of all that is perfect and

permanent; it is a symbol of his poetic paradise incorporating all that is harmonious, eternal and glorifying.

Rainer Emig has written that "only the imagination is capable of uniting dislocated events into symbolic unity of fictions" (56). Therefore, through the symbol the imagination in Yeats's poetry acts as a liaison between art and harmony, the real world and the transcendental. The means by which Yeats achieves transcendental reality is not through spiritual or divine assistance and moral perfection, but through art, specifically through poetry. The dome itself is an important symbol of happiness and harmony. It has nothing to do with death, pain or despair. It is neither awful nor horrifying as is the case in some of Wordsworth's or Coleridge's visionary poems. In Yeats's poetry, there is no reference to divine omnipotence which subjects man to its will or decides his spiritual fate. Yeats sees divine omnipotence as a tyrannical force that wills the destinies of its subordinates. His imagination avoids such personalities or forces because they are responsible for human suffering. He could not recreate tyranny in an after-world or outer-world. Tyranny, which puts the contemporary world asunder, is incompatible with the ideals of Yeats's imagination. However, Yeats here and there refers to a god or an emperor, but they are themselves passive in the exciting atmosphere of Byzantium. They are seen more as arch-artists who create eternal beauty than supernatural tyrants such as Shelley's Jupiter, and Blake's Urizen. In Yeats's poetry, there is no hell where all defied souls face excruciating eternity.

Following the main arguments so far raised in this book, one cannot claim that Yeats could successfully avoid reality and depend entirely on the imagination. We gather from the interpretation of his poetry that the imagination coalesces with reality and it is required for the control and improvement of reality. There is need for this divine faculty in a world which is

falling apart. The interplay of the imagination and reality could transmute the world into a happy, harmonious and eternal paradise of Yeats's dreams. Yeats employed the Romantic imagination as an essential tool to provide solutions to humanity's despair. He experienced personal crises as well as crises of faith (political and religious). He also lived through the historical experience of the First World War and witnessed the subsequent political developments leading to the Second World War. In the face of circumstances he saw either in the natural environment or human consciousness, myth, and vision the means by which humanity could rid itself of the stupor of existence. His quest for an ideal reality culminates in a poetry that could be considered highly symbolic, complex and allusive. He draws on a great variety of primitive, occidental, and oriental myths and symbols and visionary experiences with dynamism similar to Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. Finally, Yeats demonstrates that art, specifically poetry, is an instrument of the imagination through which philosophical beauty can be attained, appreciated, perfected, and eternalised.

NOTES

1. Graham Hough suggests in *The Last Romantics*, p. xiv that the "we" in "We were the last Romantics" possibly refers to Ruskin, William Morris, Rossetti, Pater, and Yeats himself.
2. Blake's poetry, like Eliot's, abounds mostly in his recollection of biblical beliefs. Wordsworth and Coleridge do not involve themselves so much with apocalyptic material. They rather explore traditional myths and legends and renovate them to come out with varying ideas.

3. The reason for turning away is that at a later age most of the Romantic poets could not achieve in the society of will and reason what Nature accorded their childhood. Much of their poetry is inspired by this fact. Therefore, they wrote poetry expressing nostalgic feelings. These feelings in Wordsworth are discernible in "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" and in Coleridge in "Dejection: An Ode".
4. Christopher A. Strathman in *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative: Schlegel, Byron, Joyce, Blanchot* traces the links between theories of German Romantic poetry with modernist literature and modern literary theory.

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