WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS
and
ME

by

Marian Seyedi

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the Requirements for the Degree of
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MA Thesis – Marian Seyedi

Dedicated to my brother Edward and to the memory
of my parents.

MA Thesis – Marian Seyedi

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have been published in Two Rivers Meet: Poetry from the Shannon and the Tyne (2008).

My essay, "The Truth of the Heart" is formatted in the MLA style according to the guidelines in Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th Edition. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

Foxy

A lone cub lopes the road at evening time
where orchids hide in limestone pockets
stitched to lunar fields
and summer's seal is everywhere.

I know he'll not be snared nor end
hooked to some old lady's shoulder
or trim with russet fur a stylish coat.

When nights are chill
he'll strike out for Limerick, look me up
with a bark of laughter at my door,
share my fire,
sprawl on green velvet cushions,
rival to any spinney lair.

His topaz eyes wide as meadows,
his ear polite, wrapped
'round my sly foxy chatter;
chatter of shape-shifting
woman to vixen–
vixen to feral moon.

The Return

On the beach at Agadir, the sand sculptor's hand,
like a tender mother, grooms a she-camel and her young

whose fine-grained eyes contemplate the wave's empty
tongue that licks at limbs and tendons, as their bodies

dissolve like children's castles on a sunny day, born
again as brown-green seaweed on the sea's floor.

There on the beach at Agadir, as if eight centuries
were just a second, Jelal-el-din* whispered in my ear:

I died from the mineral and became a plant;
I died from the plant, and reappeared in an animal.

Somewhere in the desert, perhaps Arabia or wide Sahara
amniotic waters break and a dromedary's calf is born.

His breath a throbbing ocean.

*Jelal-el-din Rumi, poet and mystic

Holy Night

Good to be alone in an unfamiliar city
where a crescent moon slivers a navy-blue sky.
Bless this touch of Bethlehem; mirage of
Magi bearing gold and gifts, desert sand
caught in a crease of silken robes. Bless
the magic carpet spun with festive
lights, weaving over Calle Fuencarral
where Messiah soars from an unknown
apartamento.

Bless this narrow room
that allows no space for old accounts,
wide enough
for peace to sneak through graying lace curtains.
Here, I unhook the heavy loneliness
that weighs me down.

Bless this single bed, jaded quilt,
and sixty watts casting long shadows over time,
small TV high as heaven that blinks
on rusting pipes which heat this place,
steady as a metronome
their soft hiss drips on the cold welcome floor.

The Road to the Retreat

Grey-green Russian olives
planted in the early eighties
brittle and spindly now
by one too many droughts.

Jagged black scars of wild forest fires
mar the mountain
where pine-beetles turn trees
to sickly gold.

I left my better self here
and came to fetch her
but the ruts on the road cut deeper
and the cactus needles sharpen.

The Shape of the Wound

Mother, was i
such a handful
You never tendered me
the nipple?
You feared to drop me
in the water, You
gave me to another
who bathed me
in Cod Liver Oil
(i slick then swaddled
in cotton wool)
so fearful like a pink fish
i'd slip,
from your fixed grip
and, Mother,
no cuddle then nor lullaby later;
only again
again
your grim refrain:
shish, shish and shish.
And *shish* –
your litany of smother.

Hungry for Jamaica

Bring me back to Jamaica and to you and me,
to frangipani perfumed weeks
back before heavy-weather squalls
left us ship-wrecked, to an easier time
when we rode the mini to Montego Bay.

Do you remember our pale Northern faces,
waxen sea shells, so out of place
among umber browns and burnt sienna tones
and the tune that swung through the hot bus
as locals, red hens and ducks squawked and swayed
around bends, past Runaway to Falmouth
where we all got out at Spicy Nice for gizzardas,
our tongues sweetened with treacle and coconut,
the driver cool all Irie, because time was endless.
All cool runnin´ man, all cool runnin´ then.

Do you still dream of Jenny's special cakes,
the reggaed nights, our heads light as calabash bowls,
the dawn's scarlet arm on the ocean
while we giggled for a fix of bread,
for anything to much on
for the munchies.

Sacred Places

Bone-chilled we trek through lungfuls of mist
on Ireland's first official day of spring
across soggy fields to a hidden place, a low stone ring,

where white rags bloom on hazel trees, season in
season out, she clasps her old oak church
small as a weathered purse, hallowed water at her feet.

A clutch of rushes fashioned in the four directions,
gifted by a mysterious hand, her amulet
against fires and ailing animals, for centuries.

I circle round her, like a sphere, a planet, whisper
soft familiar sounds on my mother's wooden rosary,
calling down this woman: Shakti-Shekina-Mary-Bridhe.

High across Knock Fierna, seven short miles
as the raven flies, Donn, the god of truth awaits.

No Poem

Consider then when February's raw finger
scrawls along your windowpane:

Walk alone
be your own living poem
or a tourist in your town.

But a stone wall by any other name
remains
a wall of stone.

Frozen daffodils in local parks
Wordsworth, Herrick rhymed each one
and Yeats has found the lake before you.
He scanned those nine-and-fifty
puny swans.

Nothing more to do today;
admit
you've fallen
in and out of love
again.

On Calle Fuencarral

Walking alone and early in Madrid
December days tamed by absent tourists

the year about to turn again towards spring
Easter and our first stay at Calle Fuencarral

where Signora Maria poured camomile tea
in fragile petal-painted cups, at the simple hostale

a small room four flights up, and quiet. Our food
stored in the family fridge overnight, table cloth

a plastic bag spread wide across the bed.
a dish of yoghurt, strawberries, our evening meal

while from out our window her papa's high line
of laundered shirts sailed like fine ocean liners

and always hosts of smiles and *buenos dias* when we left
for museums, galleries, shops, usual tourist things.

The Magdalen Laundry Chimney Speaks

I belch out news of what goes on below
dispatch smoky signals that float
unheeded across your fine trim lawns,
trying to tell you for Heaven's sake.

And as my smuts assault your immaculate wash,
your husbands' shirts balloon along the line–
empty sleeves that hold promises to dry
before the evening Angelus bell,
but you fail to read my message.

Consider this:
at false dawn, before your husbands
reach for you again,
sorrowful girls, bellies heavy with their big mistake
stoop low to coax my fire awake
till my boiler spits out water for the city's endless wash,
while they wait behind these shameful walls
for new life to begin.

Cinerama

We watch The Odeon come down.
A caterpillar's grotesque claw pincers every
weathered brick, grips the last audience
of this last picture show in a dirge of slow memory.
Our bodies swathe in soft debris, breathe
a dusty caul as disconnected wires
lurch naked through what's left behind,
coupling us to starry childhoods spent
at Saturday matinees.

Spotlight falls on two hostesses, short sexy
taffeta skirts partly hidden by pretty pinnies.
A leather strap about their shoulders offers
a suspended box: chocs, crisps, and cigarettes. Up
from the netherworld in tux an' tails, Orpheus
O'Brien rides his Compton organ. Devilishly
electrified in red, green and neon yellow,
coaxing waltzes, polkas, sarabands. Grand
arpeggios rise and slide, Chopin,
down faux deco walls and plummet smoky
afternoons. Quiet now. Wait.

Golden curtains part.
Boys fake deadly humorous swoons to the lion's
celluloid glower. The woman Universal,
lithe and lovely a blue goddess, torch
held high by an eloquent hand announces
the magic hours come 'round.

Messy Verse

I like to write poems in darkened rooms
where curtains give no purchase to light-filled chinks,
pens and pencils lost among frowsy sheets. Fish

for rhythms fast and bright as perch that swim
along a sea blue spread, words that flow
through cake and chocolate fragments. Not caught in time.

When this pen fills up with sap-green ink, could I give birth
to something then: an early primrose on the pillow,
a galaxy of daisies winking in dim light.

For no new couplets come to me at neat oak desks,
nor inspiration gained from knowing
Here Yeats penned his latest verse to Maud.

Give me cigarettes, and ands and buts and crumbs
in a rumpled bed. This muse likes Chaos best.

Ronnie

Russian lap dancer
ex-Israeli army soldier
body sleek as a faun
makes a thousand bucks a night
she says.

Her small taut ass pole-glides
to serpentine rhythms
hands and eyes explore
clients gurgle like babies.

Ronnie Russian lap dancer
a democrat
prays to Allah, eats humus
maps the distance
needs a husband for a green card
or someone to shag
she says.

How 'bout shagging God
I say,
no body needed.

Drought

The mountain lion left his home, padded
on towards town, yellow and black swimming trunks.

Splashy children, happy as September berries
squealed and fled. The library closed,

scared he'd paw a trashy romance, chow down
a nature story. Devour The Lion King.

Supermarkets stayed open: we need to eat.

Villanelle for a Sufi Master

I always doubted I could dance, before
I met a master of the Sufi Way.
He taught me how to breathe and move and soar.

A long long search. I knocked on many doors
then crossed the threshold that before me lay.
I always doubted I could dance before.

My skirts are loose and loose the hair I wear
when on his drum hypnotic pulses play.
He taught me how to breathe and move and soar.

All inner burdens, I attend no more
but welcome each and every perfect day.
I always doubted I could dance before

unending rhythms probed my restless core,
refreshed my heart and held me in their sway
until I learned to breathe and move and soar.

I know I've found what I was looking for,
my body now a instrument of prayer.
I always doubted I could dance before
He taught me how to breathe and move and soar.

Fault Line

The penitent never considered laundry
as geography, until a ladies committee
bestowed a white enamel dryer
to make your life a little easier.

With door shut and dials set
accurate as a ship's compass,
she watches the world fly by-
whole continents turn,
Africa, Asia, America, Australia,
then Europe and a small green towel–
yes there goes Ireland.

A North Pole of shirts melts
into oceans of soft blue summer dresses
as mountains of socks erupt
to spill down an old brown quilt
that spreads like the Kalahari desert,
broken only by the Great Divide
of cotton sashes, until the wring cycle
spins this wash into a perfect planet.

Plenty of time to turn over her own fault line.

Dance

Let there be:
no split between you and the music
no step between you and the dance.

Dance across your New York loft, samba
on down to the sidewalk.
Grab a round yellow cab, wrap
your arms around that. Hip-hop
a traffic stopper or rock
to the sound of a fire truck siren.

When the sun melts the street like butter
make him your partner.
Lay nine long rays upon your tongue.
Know too you will burn
but you'll not lack for love,
for love is here.

Marenge with Macy's moon
navigate through space
on silent chords, on breath's

CRESCENDO

Diminuendo.

Art and All That Jazz

Spiral
spiral

Jazz
at the Guggenheim

Degas dancers
bend and swing

Crowds zing around
like carousel sounds

Oldenberg's electric spectres
eerie jazz
radiate the blues

Witkin's woman suckles asp
wild jazz
snaps all taboos

Green violin fiddles
sweet jazz
Chagal impromptus

jazz in full panoply
Friday night

free

Because this is how poems are made

I climb alone this mountain road,
white as an empty page that turns
by pine and ponderosa.

Should I bring home the mourning dove,
arrange her feathers in a verse,
five brown cows who kick up dust,
flies who circle balls of dung-
do I give room to them?

The Little Flower

Mrs. Murphy always swore
she found red roses
when St. Therese heard her prayers,
fervent petals strewn from a bride's bouquet
or a hapless funeral bud lost
from a florist's wreath.

Mrs. Murphy wore a hat,
a froth of roses on its brim
to tend her garden
bake the bread. Bleach
the daughter's linen.

But did her saint fling roses
all the way from Heaven
when Murphy's daughter
took the bread knife to her dad?

Day Trippers

The boat from Algeciras– a cargo of tourists,
day-packs, Raybans, sun-hats. Cameras mark Gibraltar
where Mediterranean and Atlantic mingle blue
as we exchange dollar-to-dirham conversations,
unsure as bankers facing the third world.

Ceuta. We dock where Abdullah waits
beside the minivan, eyes alert as headlights
beaming greetings in Arabic, French, English.
The motor rattles like a handful of pebbles.

At Tetuan we sit and watch him swap *salaams*
with Customs, time plentiful as sunshine,
our mini climbs through burnt up land, red
and orange hills above.

Hooded burnoose men, where goats cluster
under skeletal trees slowed by an ochre sun,
disregard the horn's mad *halloo*
having seen our kind before.

Time for rides and snaps on an angry camel,
teeth long as nails, one dollar each.

Tangier's Medina

The mini stops beside a horseshoe gate. A wail of quartertones float where criers spread the magic broken news: *Tour bus come*. Time to lay down the town's crippled daughter. A doll frilled and silent across our path, begging cup neat beside her callipered leg. Our Western guilt intact.

We tour this bazaar's honeycombed streets. We are a docile white crocodile, prodded by Abdul's greedy scowl; past sightless beggars, their prayers rising through blue-flied air as we draw near; past merchants still as idols between rows of green peppers, pomegranates and ripened melons. He skirts stalls that are not his cousins, nor his brothers'-in-law, no *baksheesh* worth speaking of– a true and tested route plotted well ahead of time.

Through a darkened alley a fan of five scarlet wallets– a winning hand thrust in my face. No deal. A huckster bangs a muffled drum, small enough for the corner of a suitcase. No. No deal.

Abdul pauses before a latticed restaurant. *The best Moroccan food for you.* We trawl for chicken pieces through a sea of spiced rice, sip sweet mint tea on filigreed stands and stare down the waiter's oily fuss. His smart tap to a saucer, cracked and ready to receive our tips.

Daddy's Girl

She'd have gone to Dublin
to visit an aunt
to have It, there.

It, not a baby boy or girl
but countless midnight jabs from her dad
in the bed where her mother
placed her instead.

Her young mouth shut with a fist of frocks,
baubles, and once a whole sovereign
and the promise of a foreign holiday
for just the two of them.
All this before he delivered her
swollen to the Magdalen.

Caught in the cradle of her ear
his pet names:
Brazen Hussy
Strumpet
Strap.

Black Dog

He blew in without a hint, unwanted
as a summer cold. A German shepherd head
settled on my cream cushioned arm-chair.
His porcelain glint bored in and bawled me out
for I knew not what. I offered

liver, mackerel, tasty chicken morsels, his lips
an achtung snarl, a glare of teeth between.
I offered muffins, maple-cream, chocolate swirls.
His eyes curled up, breath a rank blast, a tongue
fast as a blade lashed at everything.

He barked through tales of Tin Tin Tin
and Lassie. Only the Baskerville hound
from the local library tricked him into quiet.

Friends came. Packed us off to the ocean
salty sting making magic of my body.
I swam, turned, waved one massive dorsal fin
and watched him
at the wave's tormented edge.

Fasting

Fast for fourteen days
the holy one advises
High on Manzano mountain
I cringe but imagine
when sips of water alchemise to wine
and rubies grow in rain-laced grass
and stones inhale
exhale
and my foot falls lighter
lighter
my skin assumes a sheen
my angel-cake dream
where no tattered thought lingers
till day fourteen

Then I soar down the mountain
float past yellow palominos
who startle at the whorl of wings
swoop low along the arroyo
turn bank glide
to any café
order *Omelettes* surrender
my wings

At the lion hunt

on the High Atlas Mountains
no monuments to antiquity
no statues tombs or artifacts
to quicken hearts on budget tours
yet our guide must find an antidote
to entertain such minds
blunted by too many souvenir stops
and full sun
"The Lion's Head!"

One by one we leave the coach
to hunt among a mound of boulders
we shriek when we find ears and eyes
in hollows sculpted out by time
jutting stone his bumpy nose
a woman cries
she sees his mouth a scar
where two rocks rest one upon another

and then the emperor appears
regal in wrinkled skin
flocks of fleeced sheep beside him.

Veil of Degradation

Night upon night the sad child
thin in her thin shift,
beaten for her filthy sin
stands alone till blue
on a long convent corridor,
her own wet sheet upon her head.

Every day on hands and knees
she daubs Cardinal Red
over scratched red tiles
scuffed by nun's serviceable shoes,
till they can smile like dolls
and admire their guileful faces.

No wax can coat this sad child's sin.
She has pooled her bed again
in sodden yellow terror,
till dawn she stands.

Four Haikus and One Senryu

I

Spring signets floating
bodies still curled, necks moving
into existence.

II

Red geraniums
votive in the evening light
glorify shadows.

III

Pale green apples hang
over red adobe walls
messengers of fall.

IV

Welcome blackberry.
September's chambered chalice
coming swirls of taste.

V

Gossip and small talk
Crying out against silence
Lonely sisters rail.

Granada

I move through warm cobbled street
where the slow Duero flows
beside the church of Santa Anna.

Sounds of fragile litanies are lost
when down from caves in cypressed hills,
hippies, dogs, and danging drums
generate such frenzied clatter,
that stifles ancient incantations.

From the labyrinth of Albayzin,
through hidden gardens, ornamental gates,
the muezzin's fervoured chant calls out
from a new and careful minaret,
beckoning his people to prayer
Once more in Andalus.

Above Alhambra's rosy towers
a flare of blissful ghosts appear.
Sultanas raise pale hennaed hands,
ululate *we're here, we're here.*

Two Poets

I catch the half past eight, to visit
Mr. William Butler Yeats.
Resurrected for two good years
amid towers, gyres and winding stairs
at The National Library.
A lonely impulse of delight.

Race across O'Connell Bridge, no fire
burning in my head,
a simple quick intent
temporarily quenched
as Pat the poet
lays out his poems on the city floor.

Although a culchie to the core,
I do not haggle at the cost
of his self-published Cool Press
but hurry up Kildare Street
and pay my respects to W.B.

On the bus returning home,
I take down Pat's book *and slowly read*
of Dublin, past *or passing or to come,*
where all's changed*, changed utterly:*
never to delight William's eyes.

He'll never stroll these streets again
and view this multicultural throng.

Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves

At the Sufi retreat in New Mexico
far from Moscow's turbaned city, the boy
wants to know everything: all postures,
mantras, mystic sounds. His body
bends, arcs and plucks esoteric secrets
from high blue air. His spine
a perestroika of the spirit, creates
dog, cat and serpent poses
in an Eden of his own.

Did the magic of his animals
enchant those on earth-
for along the hard white road
a snake appeared, in no apparent hurry?

A sudden wound. A jet of blood.
A creature with no venom slackens,
and like a tattered rope unravels.

The boy, a gulag of regret, drops his stick.
He never heard of Oscar Wilde nor read
his black lament.

An Old Nun Reflects

. . . and we had nuns in National Schools all aswish
in serge. Ones that ordered us to *listen*
for our vocation, to pay attention 'cos Jesus
could come, could pick us for his stable of spiritual wives.

Loose talk of noble calls and vague renunciation
never of young lives lost to rigid rule.
Why in Christ's name
were so many miserable brides selected?

A few brave souls escaped, returned to farms
or faced some poor family.
Mostly we stayed, made truculent friends
with bells and silence.

We took in wayward girls, trollops, strumpets
who called *us* Mother. Mother.
Our own wombs empty; our breasts flat.

We gave our days. Brought childer to Jesus,
an' us so close, shur didn't we hear His whisper.

Withdrawal

My heart is an empty vault
spent of all its currency
as I watch him stroll to the bank machine
in September's cooling heat.

The keypad, like my body once,
accepts his finger's easy tune,
doles out notes
of different colours
and different numbers.

I watch him walk away
our days of accounts and balances
done
and when he's gone,
like keys that open separate doors,
I enter my own PIN.

Play of Opposites

Say no to flesh and fondants
I heard an angel cry, until

a dancing girl came from Paradise
and on her finger cymbals chimed:

flesh and fondants are simple veils
curtaining the House of Love.

Such veils, she said, are often rent
in states of ecstasy.

The Straight Path

Once more a reluctant seeker
on this sacred mountain, awake
in a small porous dome, I undo
the zip and step into Manzano's dawn–
a slow carnelian across an indigo sky.

Waves of sage brush the straight path.
Pinions and junipers whisper:

Hu, Hu, Hu.

Signs of The Beloved everywhere.

The Way has found me again,
opens me to myself,
to the heart of the heart,
to Remembrance.

Birds

Create an air-show; it's easy -
a few stale crumbs on a rainy day will do;
big enough to wheedle sea-birds up the estuary
for a rollicking epic at the tail-end of February.

I cheer the flash of glide-by white tipped wings
before their bribed return to my balcony,
in search of only one thing that must be laid
on for them, sweet cake– bumps of raisins
moistened by river mist, pounced upon, bickered about
by crows: sober reverend mothers,
black worshippers come to commune at the bird-feeder,
who vow this place their sacred cup, croak holy orders
to finches and other sopranos:
This is not a choir stall–know your place and manners.

From my eerie on the third-floor, I observe
while the radio squawks of wars and global warming
and I cry to be air-borne, stretch my wings
again; peck through last season's glossies–
Canaries, Turkey, Gander.

With a Sufi Master

At the dervish's drumbeat
La illaha illa'llah
my heart's hasp loosens,

tears like quiet rain
bead the soul
and the soul,
a dancer, dances,

Rumi smiles. He knows
the maw of forgetfulness
yawns.

The Diet

Witness this woman; spirit caught in a sugar spell,
a jamoca black magic sugar spell.
While she screams for ice-cream, time
and spring's primrose sun
loosen a cocoon of heavy-knits, exposing
so much flesh
and dread of summer.

Witness her body: untamed hips
constant obstacles to fashion's tyranny,
Sisyphus shackled to bathroom scales
forever chained to a thin task.

Witness her begin her Spartan striving,
counted calories replacing sweetness sucked
from cup cakes, fruit cakes,
and wild blueberry pie.

Witness this heavy toiler: belly doomed to rise,
when her vanquished appetite returns
and pounds roll on again, boulders
to be pushed again by Monday's large
promises, threats, treadmill-time
and eight 8oz glasses of pure monotonous water.

Oh woman. Better a prayer to Marilyn–
To the eternal image of her voluptuous body.

November Blues

Morning leaks like an old roof on the river's
slate-grey mudflats below my closed window.

Light all the red candles at noon today.

Brown skeletons line the empty streets bereft of leaves
that bundle ox-blood skirts against garden rails.

Light all the red candles at noon today.

Pumpkins join the city dump, clawed by mobs
of rats after witchy children's tricks an' treats.

Light all the red candles at noon today.

Persephone slips-on her long black gown
drifting towards Hedes in the dim afternoon.

My Field

Beside the water tower
the field I love so much
waits for me each year

Here bales of hay curl
like contented snails
along the grass

rimmed by sunflowers
a three-cornered hat
where two roads meet

and the moon
is a silver dollar
spent in trees

The Road to Konya

Late afternoon. Bodrum. The bus revved and ready for Anatolia's
central plain: nudges through hoards of buses bound for all parts
Turkey, nudges past tourists who forage for genuine fakes–
Tommy, Gucci, Pucci, and turns by sugar-cubed houses, snips
of beach between where canopies fold like pink magnolias
to flower in tomorrow's bikinied sun.

Twelve hours to Konya. The guidebook describes
a *conservative unfriendly place.*

Segregated by sex and a narrow aisle, where the attendant's smile
offers tea, coffee, cola, all free, and then, Pandini
slices of gold mosaic cake.

I well remember Yeats as we ride through Byzantium.

Isparta. We pick up farm-labourers: lined faces deep as potato grooves,
slouching towards red-cushioned seats, and our attendant's splash
of lemon-scented water lightens their heavy sweat.

By nightfall my neighbour's rosary is done. She points to the white moon
and chants Nuray. Nuray curves her finger towards herself
and I guess White Moon's her name. I offer my own.
We slip to easy-mimed conversation, swap hard-boiled sweets
and handy-wipes. The bus presses on. She fumbles for aspirin.
I mimic a sympathetic headache.

Sarkikaraagac; this sign a strain to read. Men wait for nothing
to happen, beside thrown-up breeze-blocks porous as cinders.
Our headlights their monotonous respite.

Five a.m. We stop by a silent park and I am dropped on the highway
at the edge of a black day.

I have come to the holy city of old Iconium,

a single traveler who takes the only path which ends at a neon glare;
Hosgeldenes. Welcome.

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The Truth of the Heart:

my journey with William Butler Yeats

I have been fascinated by W.B. Yeats (WBY) since I was a young woman and, consequently, am determined to research certain aspects of his poetry that concern youth, age and immortality. In this essay, I will utilise part of his extensive oeuvre to show how William Blake and the Theosophists influenced his poetry. I will also touch on how his poetry has influenced my own work and philosophy of life, which is the truth of my own heart.

I have never strayed too far from W.B. Yeats: Collected Poems (CP). While closely reading the poems, and reading various accounts of WBY has helped me to gain an insight into his poetry, it was only in later years that I truly appreciated the value of what learning by heart could do in terms of gaining, literally, a heart-felt appreciation and love for poetry. Apart from lodging a poem in the heart forever, I believe this form of learning carries within it the power to instil a love for the rhymes, rhythms, imagery and music of poetry. Particularly as he aged, WBY often

referred to his own heart: “and now my heart is sore” (CP 147), and “O heart, O troubled heart” (CP 218).

As a young woman, I moved to Canada where I purchased two long-playing records of the poetry of WBY. One was by Siobhan McKenna and the other by Cyril Cusack, both renowned Irish actors, both reading his work with “passionate intensity.” Each morning, these records played in the background while I got ready for work. Due to constant over-use, the records quickly wore out. By then, however, I had developed an acute sense of his ear-catching rhythms. His enchanting incantations continued to fuel my imagination until my early mornings were energised and delighted by his poetry.

In a general introduction to his work, WBY tells us:

> I have spent all my life in clearing out of poetry every phrase written for the eye. And bringing all back to syntax that is for the ear alone . . . ‘Write for the ear’, I thought, so that you may be instantly understood as when an actor or folk singer stands before an audience. (The Life and Works of W.B. Yeats)

What an inspiring message for any poet!

As a natural progression to my love for his poetry, I became curious to learn more about WBY and, picking up a book on his life, found that he was deeply influenced by William Blake (1757-1827). Therefore, I decided to read Blake’s poetry, which I certainly did not find easy. I learned by heart the following verse from “Auguries of Innocence,”

To see the world in a grain of sand,

And heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,

And eternity in an hour. (Art of Europe)

Shortly afterwards, I had a peak experience; while eating a watermelon, I tossed the pips into a nearby glass and stared unseeingly at the glass. I realised immediately what Blake meant when he wrote those lines; Nature's veil had lifted momentarily and I was favoured "to see the world in a grain of sand", the pips taking the place of the grain of sand. I realised that I had been gifted with an intangible experience of direct knowledge. Furthermore, it confirmed for me WBY's line from "The Song of the Happy Shepherd"; "words alone are certain good" (CP 7). I realized later, through other mystical experiences, that words prove a poor substitute when describing any experience from the invisible world.

Reading WBY and William Blake enabled me to become receptive to mystical ideas, so much so that I embraced the Sufi Path, through which I am privileged to have many experiences similar to Blake's "world in a grain of sand". For this, I owe a debt of gratitude to WBY who led me to Blake. In fact, both poets were major factors in ultimately shaping the course of my life.

WBY was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1865, as the second Industrial Revolution intersected with the first. He was the eldest child of an unorthodox Victorian father, the Pre-Raphaelite painter Jack Yeats. While growing up, WBY was constantly subjected to his father's arguments on the attractions of atheism. In

Autobiographies, he states that it was his "father's lack of belief" in religion that set him thinking about the evidences of religion, and with great anxiety, he constantly weighed the matter, because he didn't think he could live without religion (25-26). We are not surprised, then, when John Unterecker writes that WBY's father's arguments "made formal religion impossible for Yeats and that he [WBY] spent a lifetime investigating informal exotic ones" (A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats 19). To quote WBY himself,

> Arguments with my father, whose convictions . . . had destroyed my confidence and driven me from speculation to the direct experience of the Mystics. I had once known Blake as thoroughly as his unfinished confused Prophetic Books permitted and I had read Sweedenborg and Boehme, and my initiation into the "Hermetic Students" had filled my head with Cabbalistic imagery . . .(A Vision 12)

Yet it was his father who had introduced WBY to the writings of William Blake, a man whom WBY would hold in high esteem for the rest of his life, whose influence would nourish his poetry and whose vision he would feel as he developed his own outlook.

The Young Heart. According to WBY, since he was young his thoughts were fuelled with Blake and as a result he saw the world as a "conflict - Spectre and Emanation—and could distinguish between a contrary and a negation." Quoting Blake, WBY continues: "There is a place at the bottom of the graves where contraries are equally true" (A Vision 72).

I can well imagine how captivated the teenage WBY felt when he first read Blake's poem "Ah! Sunflower". Here, Blake uses the sunflower as a symbol of desire and I can imagine how the poem could thrill the young poet's ears:

Ah! Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun;
Where the traveller's journey is done;
Where the Youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgins shrouded in snow,
Arise from their graves, and aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go! (Portable Poetry)

Blake, poet, visionary, artist, was born in London at the beginning of the first Industrial Revolution, a revolution whose ominous setting he describes as "These dark Satanic Mills." In his poem "Jerusalem" (Poets' Corner). Like his antecedent WBY, Blake began his life as an art student and Kathleen Raine relates how at the early age of ten, he was sent to a good elementary school for young artists (William Blake 12). In Yeats the Initiate, she points out that Blake was possibly one of the most lasting "influences, which formed Yeats's imaginative, intellectual and spiritual life" (82). As WBY would mainly do a century later, Blake discarded the scientific and materialist values of his time and, instead, drew heavily from the ancient world for his values. In Golgonooza, she writes that Blake and Yeats also followed the Platonic tradition, the Neo-Platonists, the Hermetica, and Gnostic teachings, along with the teachings of the Alchemists, and the Perennial Philosophy. (3) Yet, WBY believed

that “none could pass Heavens door / that loved inferior art” (“My Table” 26-27). Raine emphasizes that of all the poets in the English language, both Blake and WBY questioned the assumptions of Western materialism;

> Both challenged the scientific premise that the only object of knowledge is the phenomenal world of nature, assumed to have an existence in independence of mind, which passively receives impressions from a material and lifeless universe. . . both poets held mind itself to the ‘place’ of the apparently external universe. (Yeats the Initiate 295)

Blake was particularly influenced by the teachings of two men: Emanuel Swedenborg, and Jacob Boehme. At first a scientist, Swedenborg, persuaded by a series of visions and dreams, became a Christian mystic. WBY was also strongly influenced by Swedenborg. Raine notes that in a paper entitled “Sweedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Place,” WBY “draws a comparison between the ‘otherworld’ of Celtic folk tradition, where likewise houses and cattle, garments and landscapes are built up in an instant, as with Swedenborg’s spirit worlds.” (Golgonooza 51). As a participant in the secret meetings of the Swedenborgian illumines, Blake, according to Dora Janzer Csikos, would have been introduced to “magnetism, spirit communication, automatic writing and dream analysis, many elements of which are integrated into his poetry” (Csikos 29). Blake’s idea of the Universal Man, echoes of which WBY would find later in the Theosophical Society,

come from the Sweedenborgian, De Mainaduc, who taught “in Man is comprised in miniature, the entire vegetating system in its greatest perfection” (29).

According to Raine,

> Blake has summarized Sweedenborg’s teachings of the many-in-one and the one-in-many of the world of spirits, in the following lines: Then those in great eternity met in the Council of God / As one man, for contracting their Exhalted Senses / They behold Multitude, or Expanding they behold as one, / As one man all the Universal family . . (Yeats the Initiate 28)
>
> also:
>
> Blake’s system [is] in itself a unity of wholeness and Blake tells us “I must create a system or be enslaved by another mans; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create.” (89)

A hundred years later, Yeats would hold a similar view. Renato Barilli echoes this premise: “Blakean poetics recognize[s] the primacy of energy as characterized by unity, wholeness, and holism**”** (Barilli). Raine writes, “Knowledge as Blake clearly saw, is inseparable from knower” (Golgonooza 48). In “Among School Children”, WBY echoes this view when he asks “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (64).

It is relatively easy to discover the chords that unite the ideas of these two poets. Both drew from the Perennial Philosophy whose teachings on the nature of reality do not change through time, culture or doctrine. According to Raine, “Yeats .

. . like Blake was a metaphysician, for whom poetry was the language of spiritual knowledge" (Yeats the Initiate 304). Raine writes in Rediscovering Sacred Science that Blake, in his tractates "There is no natural Religion", states, "He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He who sees ratio only, sees himself only". Furthermore, "The true faculty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences" (274). The latter is a statement Blake could well have found in his esoteric pursuits because, as the Sufi expression goes, "He who tastes knows**".**

The other strong influence on Blake was Jacob Boehme, German mystic and Theosophist. Boehme has described the Perennial Philosophy as: "An open gate of all the secrets of life wherein the causes of all beings become known" (Golgonooza 17). Blake understood that "No psychic energy, or mood of the soul, is merely good or merely evil; the face turned depends upon circumstances" (Golgonooza 27). Important to Blake was the idea that the seeker after Truth must find that source within the self rather than, as orthodox religion would have it, from without. Blake "praises Jacob Boehme above all other spiritual masters whom he had studied, and Boehme affirms that the seeker for God must find the living source within" (4). Yeats, influenced by Blake, believed that "all religions are one". Blake calls that one religion "the religion of Jesus". Raine notes that Blake does not refer to the Church - but to the religion of the Imagination; wisdom itself, the "perennial philosophy" (W.B.Yeats 32). Furthermore, Blake "call[s] the English nation to live the life of the Imagination, and the vision in which 'Everything that lives is holy' " (Golgonooza 6). WBY echoes this line; "Everything we look upon is blessed" (CP 267, 72).

Stanley Gardner concurs with this premise when he states Blake's philosophy: "the identity of each living creature should be accepted as inviolable: 'How do you know but every bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, closed by your senses five?' " (Gardner 85).

One of the fundamentals of Blake's system is the role of contraries or what the Sufis call opposites. Blake believed that contraries energize the universe, a belief that WBY would reiterate in his personal gyre system. In A Vision, perhaps influenced by Blake, WBY elaborates: "All the gains of man come from conflict with the opposite of his true being." If one of these contraries takes priority over its opposite, the result is chaos, or in the words of WBY, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold." (CP 210). The poetry of Blake is also abundant with such archetypal contrary images: Youth and Age, Light and Dark, Heaven and Hell. The following are some of the contraries, which Blake uses: Love and Hate, Good and Evil, Attraction and Repulsion. These contraries

> . . . are necessary to Human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Good is Heaven. Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell." (The Marriage of Heaven and Hell xvi)

George Bornstein in a chapter of The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats entitled "Yeats and Romanticism" writes that Blake saw physical nature as antagonist to imagination, always ready to lead it astray: "Great things . . . depend on the Spiritual & not on the Natural World." Blake, he records, has spoken longingly of

"Leaving the Delusive Goddess Nature." (25). Similarly, Rachael Billingheimer states that all that is beautiful and creative has no existence without all that is ugly and destructive She then quotes the following lines from WBY from "A Dialogue of Self and Soul,"

> Flowers from I know not what embroidery
>
> Heart's purple and all these I set
>
> For emblems of the day against the tower
>
> Emblematical of the night. (Billingheimer 41)

The particular pair of opposites, or antinomies to use Yeatsean parlance, which especially interested WBY, were Art and Nature. Consequently, he saw Nature as an opponent to Imagination. And in writing my poem "The Play of Opposites" I believe I was unconsciously influenced by Blake and Sufi teaching when I wrote:

> Say no to flesh and fondants
> I heard an angel cry, until
>
> a dancing girl came from Paradise
> and on her finger cymbals chimed:
>
> flesh and fondants are simple veils
> curtaining the House of Love.
>
> Such veils, she said, are often rent
> in states of ecstasy.

According to Northrop Frye, Csikos writes,

> . . . Blake began his prophecies with a powerfully integrated theory of
>
> the nature, structure, function and meaning of art, and all the symbolic

> units of his poetry, his moods, his images, his narratives and his characters, form archetypes of that theory. (Csikos 36**)**

She continues:

> Northrop Frye, in his essay "Blake's Treatment of The Archetype" asserts that what finally emerged out of one of the hottest poetic crucibles of modern times, was a poetry which consisted almost entirely of the articulation of archetypes. Frye defines an archetype as "an element in a work of literature, whether a character, an image, a narrative formula, or an idea, which can be assimilated to a larger unifying category." (36)

I believe that WBY shared some of these integrated theories when he responded, through poetry, to William Blake, more than a century later.

Along with William Blake, there are other large influences which play a part in WBY's search for truth and for his wish to become what the Sufi mystics call *El insan el kamel,* the whole or complete man. Two such influences are The Theosophical Society and The Golden Dawn, both of which, to my mind, are inexorably linked.

Madame Blavatsky, a Russian émigré, was one of the founders of the Theosophical Movement, which WBY joined in his twenties. Prior to meeting her, he had read a number of books on the subject of Buddhism, the Tibetan Mysteries, Sufism, and other belief systems and, consequently, was open to receiving many Theosophical teachings. Similar to Blake, Blavatsky has written: "Religions emanate from one source of Being where truth is one." (Rooke), possibly inspiring WBY to

write: “Though leaves are many, the root is one” (CP 105: 1). Given that we already know WBY could not adopt a formal religion, it is easy to understand why he would be attracted to Theosophy. The primary purpose of the movement was to bring about a universal brotherhood based upon the essential divinity of man. Therefore, one of their most important ideas was, and still is, the oneness of life which flows through the whole of creation. Theosophists believe that all humans share a common humanity, a humanity that does not discriminate between religion, race, colour, or gender, a belief similar to the Sufis. Blavatsky introduced WBY to the Cabbala, explaining that those who study Cabbala “are students of ‘secret science’ who interpret the hidden meaning of the Jewish scriptures with the help of the symbolical Kabala.” According to the Cabbalistic book The Zohar, also known as The Book of Splendour:

> The souls must re-enter the Absolute Substance whence they have emerged. But to accomplish this end they must develop all the Perfections, the germ of which is planted in them; and if they have not fulfilled this condition during one life, they must commence another, a third, and so forth, until they have acquired the condition, which fits them, for reunion with God.(Besant 104)

This is a doctrine similar to re-incarnation, a doctrine that would also greatly influence WBY’s work. One of the most important features of the Cabbala is the symbol of the Tree of Life which, according to Gershom Scholem, “pictures the evolutionary path that the soul has to pass through before it can join again with Ain

Soph . . . the hidden Root of all Roots . . .” (Scholem 214). The Cabbalistic Tree of Life was an important inspiration for WBY in the writing of a number of poems. For example, in his poem “The Two Trees,” we find a reference to The Tree:

Beloved, gaze in thine own heart,

The holy tree is growing there;

.....

The flaming circle of our days,

Gyring, spiring to and fro

In those great ignorant leafy ways; (1-2, 14-16)

In his poem “Vacillation”, WBY refers to “A tree there is that from its topmost bough / is half all glittering flame and half all green / abounding foliage moistened with the dew”; (CP 282). In “The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner” we find him sheltering . “. . from the rain / Under a broken tree . . .” (1-2).

Theosophy has been defined as “god-wisdom” and the following are some of its key concepts: nature is infinite in space and time; unity in diversity, or many forms in one essence. All change is the result of cause. Therefore, absolute chance does not exist. For every action there is a reaction, good thoughts and deeds bring good results and evil thoughts and deeds bring the opposite. Therefore, perfect justice triumphs in nature. Theosophy, with its roots in metaphysics, accepts as did WBY, the Hermetic doctrine: ”as above so below.” (Pratt). In 1886, The Dublin Hermetic Society, of which Yeats was a member, became The Dublin Theosophical Society. The following year, WBY met and was impressed by the Brahmin, Mohini

Chatterjee. Chatterjee was a theosophical representative sent from London by Blavatsky. Chatterjee's teachings would later inspire WBY to write the poem "Mohini Chatterjee." R.F. Foster points to the fact that Chatterjee "was a genuinely impressive presence, preaching the Vedantic way of meditation, asceticism and renunciation." (W.B. Yeats: A Life I 47). Commenting on his meeting with Chatterjee, WBY relates: "It was my first meeting with a philosophy that confirmed my vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless" (Autobiographies 91-92). As a result of his encounter with Chatterjee, WBY was inspired to write a number of poems in which he deals with the doctrine of reincarnation. However, Raine is of the view that "Yeats ascribes to Blake his own belief in the doctrine of reincarnation" (Yeats the Initiate 123). Yet, it is quite possible that WBY was more influenced by Chatterjee's Vedantic philosophy when he wrote "The Indian on God." In this poem he continues to explore the theme, which he had begun in his earlier poem, "The Happy Shepherd," namely, that truth lies in one's own heart. From a remote setting, and through the eyes of moorfowl, lotus, roebuck, and peacock, WBY shows us that there is no objective reality because each creature creates an image of The Creator in his own likeness. Referring to "The Indian on God," Joseph Ronsley writes that "a vertical movement of consciousness is evident in each creature's vision of God as a higher manifestation of itself:" (Autobiography 46).

> Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong or weak,
> Is an undying moorfowl, and He lives beyond the sky.
> .....

Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk,

For I am in his image made, and all this tinkling tide

Is but a sliding drop of rain between His petals wide.

.....

He is a gentle roebuck; for how else, I pray could He

Conceive a thing so sad and soft, a gentle thing like me?

.....

Who made the grass and made the worms and made my feathers gay,

He is a monstrous peacock, and He waveth all the night

His languid tail above us, lit with myriad spots of light. (6 -7, 10-12, 15-16, 18-20)

Age and the Eternal Spirit. According to John Unterecker, WBY believed there was everywhere "incontrovertible evidence of an invisible but eminently active spiritual world" (Unterecker 19). This belief would serve to nourish his poetry throughout his lifetime.

In 1890, WBY joined The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn, being the First Order of the Rosicrucians, was a Christian mystical sect, with a school of esoteric knowledge which merged traditional European Cabbalistic Magic and the tarot, and in Yeats the Initiate, Raine emphasizes that the tarot "was central in the Golden Dawn ritual and meditations" (207). The basic strands of its teaching were Egyptian, Judeo-Christian, and Greek, along with elements of Gnosticism and

Rosicrucianism. Like Theosophy, this movement also taught Cabbala, astrology, divination, magic, skrying, and the principles of occult science. WBY's experience there "seems to have been one of those unforgettable openings of a visionary world which poets remember and draw upon for a life-time" (219). Furthermore, the movement furnished him with a wealth of symbols, which he would draw on for the rest of his life. Billingheimer writes:

> Yeats's mystic elements used mainly in his early poems appear to be influenced mainly by the occult teachings of the theosophist, Madame Blavatsky, the notion of "Spiritus Mundi", the Hermetic doctrines of the Golden Dawn Society, Indian teachings such as those of reincarnation and ultimate transcendence, the doctrines of magic, the magical and archetypal voices of ancient Celtic legend. (Billingheimer 2-3)

These images, WBY tells us: "well up before my mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory" (Autobiographies 183). Due to the strong Rosicrucian influence in the Order of the Golden Dawn, its symbol of the "rosa mystica" would provide WBY with the rose symbol, which he used in a variety of guises. "The Rose upon the Rood of Time", "The Rose of Peace," "The Rose of Battle", "The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart", "The Secret Rose" and "The Rose Tree" are titles of some of his poems where he uses the symbol of the rose; that is until, in his later life and work, he was ready to relinquish it for other symbols more pertinent to his life-situation.

The tarot's symbols, frequently used during the meetings of The Golden Dawn, were another source of imagery for the poetry of WBY. Raine is of the view that when WBY wrote "The Circus Animals Desertion", he plucked from the Major Arcana, the cards of Strength/Fortitude, which depicts a woman's hand at the mouth of a lion, and the Chariot card. She suggests that WBY possibly used both of these cards in the following lines: "Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot, / Lion and woman and the Lord knows what." (Yeats the Initiate 232).

During the last phase of WBY's poetic life we find him, at the age of sixty-four, extensively using the symbol of the tarot's Tower card for his great "Tower" poems. Nancy Garen explains: "A Major Arcana card always indicates an important event" (Garen 127). During the writing of the Tower poems, he replaces The Tree of Life for the structure of The Tower whose "winding ancient stair" becomes the "steep ascent of gnosis" (Yeats the Initiate 243). In another poem from the same series we find him pacing "upon the battlements" and wondering what his "troubled heart" will do, because of "decrepit age that has been tied to me as to a dog's tail"

Like a young child testing the depths of the ocean, WBY placed both feet firmly into the stream of imagination, mystery, and wonder, as he sensed an urge beyond himself to wade into the depths of beauty, whether the beauty of nature or that of a woman. The result of the long "paddle" for what may not necessarily have been for WBY a "companionable stream" was that, eleven years before he died, he could emerge with "Monuments of unaging intellect" This, however, is not to say that the poetry of his youth falls short of what he wrote later in life.

We know from the many biographies written about WBY that he did in fact "hunger fiercely after truth" because, along with his Theosophical studies, he also he delved into Plato, the Neo-Platonists and the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Clearly, his belief system was truly eclectic and his search for truth relentless. According to Richard Ellmann, WBY wrote "the mystical life is at the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write" (Ellmann 94).

WBY began "The Wanderings of Oisin" in 1887. Two years later he finished it in Sligo; a county, which held a magical quality for him, a place to which he would often return for poetic inspiration. Foster tells us that before its publication, Yeats advocated that poems should be written on landscapes that are both familiar and well loved, instead of "the strange and rare and glittering scenes" which capture our imagination (W.B. Yeats: A Life I 94). I suspect WBY was referring to "The Indian Upon God," and "The Song of the Happy Shepherd." Unterecker believes that "The Wandering of Oisin" is a solid assertion of what he came to believe was the major theme of all his work; "the horror of old age that brings wisdom only at the price of bodily decrepitude and death" (Unterecker 4). I believe that the "Happy Shepherd" is a good example of one of those people that WBY was referring to when he wrote: "Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking, may be the nearest I can go to truth." (Autobiographies 116). When Raine writes of Blake, she states: "The positivist scientific ideology shrinks man from the unbounded being of Imagination into mortality" (Golgonooza 18). She could easily have been

speaking from the mouth of “The Happy Shepherd.” This lyrical dreamy poem, written when WBY was twenty, is filled with exotic imagery. The shepherd, happy no doubt because he is firmly rooted in the natural world, speaks from a distant arcane place, and advises not to look for knowledge from “the starry men, / Who follow with the optic glass / The whirling ways of stars.” (28-30). While the “starry men” is possibly a reference to astronomy and science, initially I understood that perhaps they were astrologers, bearing in mind that astrology and astronomy were once closely related. Besides, Raine in Yeats the Initiate, points to the fact that WBY “was an accomplished astrologer, familiar with the motions of planets” (123). However, a closer reading of the poem suggests that the “starry men” are more than likely scientists, scientists from the material world who would have likewise affronted William Blake. The Happy Shepherd advises:

> Seek, then, for this is also sooth,
> No word of theirs - the cold star bane
> Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
> And death is all their human truth. (31-34)

Raine, in comparing the affinity of thought between Blake and WBY, poses the question: “Did he, did Blake . . . believe in the Actual existence of circuits and cycles?” (Yeats the Initiate 104).She suggests that the best answer, for those who think in symbolic terms, is found in the following four lines of this poem.

> The wandering earth herself may be
> Only a sudden flaming word,

Its clanging space a moment heard,

Troubling the endless reverie. (18-21)

Billingheimer agrees with Raine. Using “The Wanderings of Oisin” as an example, she writes that Yeats “comes nearest to Blake in his early poems describing internal apocalypse” (Wheels of Eternity 2). WBY’s life clearly shows that he did not completely follow all the advice of The Happy Shepherd, who cautioned not

To hunger fiercely after truth,

Lest all thy toiling breeds

New dreams new dreams; there is no truth

Saving in thine own heart . . . (24-27)

We know from the many biographies written about WBY, that he did in fact “hunger fiercely after truth” because much of his life was devoted to his philosophical studies. Also, Richard Ellmann tells us that WBY has written: “The mystical life is at the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write” (Ellmann 94).

I was introduced to the poetry of WBY while a schoolgirl when I was required to learn by heart “Red Hanrahan’s Song about Ireland”. He wrote the poem in 1904 when he was a relatively young man. My response was immediate. Perhaps it was the constant use of the “b” and “bl” sounds, used seventeen times in a fifteen-line poem that conveyed to me the sense of repugnance and malevolence running through many of the lines.

The old brown thorn-trees break in two high over Cummen Strand.

Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;

Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies

.....

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea (1-3, 6).

It was not until recently, while reading Daniel Albright, that I learned that in this poem "the condition of the human souls is perceived as distorted, anxious, and bloated, accurately reflected in ugly, violent nature-images" (Albright 488). There is also in this poem "A supernatural ideal, latent in man that allows concentration, intensity, refinement and purification." (488). Such purification is no doubt expressed in the magnificent image of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan, who is one personification of Ireland. Cathleen is "purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood" (CP 14), and the Irish race, along with hiding in their hearts the flame out of her eyes, has also, as an act of homage, bent low and kissed her quiet feet. Jeffares writes that the poem was, like many of WBY's poems "partly written out of Yeats's desire to blend Irish pagan and Christian ideas together" (Jeffares 25). I find an echo of William Blake's theory of contraries in the following lines, along with the influence of the Theosophical Society: "Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and dies / But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the eyes / Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan" (2-4).

Despite the fact that WBY wished to be instantly understood, his poetry is generally recognized as being difficult to understand, and some of his poetry is quite obscure. Along with drawing from the Cabbala and Theosophy for his symbols, as already noted, he also drew extensively from nature for both his personal and

universal symbology. The rose, an ever-present symbol of his early poetry; the sea, the sun and moon, along with a vast variety of birds - both painted and golden, forces us to dig incessantly through his lines to uncover meaning.

However, it was through extensively listening to WBY's poetry that I absorbed, as if by osmosis, his gorgeous verse. More importantly, I trusted that somehow my subconscious was "getting it" and, I do believe, it "got" some of it. Especially later on, I understood what a bearing and influence the poetry of Yeats had on a particular aspect of my life, when thirty years ago, I became involved in the mystical path of Sufism. Even to day, I can feel his eternal presence behind my own poetic endeavours. In Yeats the Initiate, Raine writes:

> In antiquity no poet invented his own myths and Yeats, living as Blake had already lived, in a society which has, as a whole, broken with tradition, knew how impossible it is to build up, from a series of intuitive flashes, that wholeness of context which great poetry requires. (97)

However, she states:

> There is, in the treasury of every nation, a body of mythology, legend and folklore, interwoven with history and prehistory, associated with certain places and names of kings and heroes, with events natural and supernatural, preserved by tradition both oral and recorded. (Golgonooza 160)

It is from this treasury that the young WBY plucked Oisin. More importantly, in referring to “The Wanderings of Oisin,” Unterecker points to the fact that “

> the poem is a firm statement of what he came in his old age to feel was the major theme of his entire work: the horror of old age that brings wisdom only at the price of bodily decrepitude and death.” (Underecker 47)

The following excerpts are from Book I of “The Wanderings of Oisin.”

> An old man stirs the fire to a blaze,
> In the house of a child, of a friend, of a brother.
> He has over-lingered his welcome; the days
> Grown desolate, whisper and sigh to each other;
> He hears the storm in the chimney above,
> And bends to the fire and shakes with the cold
> While his heart still dreams of battle and love,
> .....
>
> The hare grows old as she plays in the sun
> And gazes around her with eyes of brightness;
> Before the swift things that she dreamed of were done
> She limps along in an aged whiteness; (402-409, 414-418)

The poem incorporates the legend of Oisin, the Fenian poet-warrior. Oisin, a mortal, falls in love with the fairy-lover, the hypnotically alluring temptress Niamh, who in a

later poem, “News for the Delphic-Oracle”, becomes “man-picker Niamh” (5). Oisin rides away with her to The Land of Youth “Where men have heaped no burial-mounds”. (82). However, in WBY’s poem, Oisin doesn’t reach The Land of Youth but instead tastes three islands of fantastic pleasure. The fairies encourage him to remain with them and experience freedom from sorrow. In typical fairy fashion, three times they repeat that they do not fear “the grey wandering osprey Sorrow,” (303). Oisin is not so enchanted that he abandons his longing for his companions in the land of mortals. He is warned that if he decides to visit them and should his feet touch the ground during the visit, he can never return to fairyland. His feet do touch the ground, and he is rendered earth-bound forever. He becomes instantly an old man and returns to find Saint Patrick and the beginnings of Christianity awaiting him. St. Patrick addresses Oisin as follows:

> You who are bent, and bald, and blind,
> With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,
> Have known three centuries, poets sing,
> Of dalliance with a demon thing. (1-4)

From this poem, we see how brilliantly WBY has knit Irish pagan and Irish Christian ideas together. Surely he speaks here of his personal concern regarding the burden of old age. Although he is not yet “a tattered coat upon a stick” (10), at the time of writing “Sailing to Byzantium”, he has had mortality on his mind from as early as his twenties.

To leave now without commenting on the musicality of the following passage is to leave it too soon. Here, through the employment of rhymes, half rhymes, internal rhymes, and accented and unaccented syllables, is surely an excellent example of what WBY means when he said “write for the ear.”

Oisin: Why do you wind no horn? She said,
And every hero droop his head?
The hornless deer is no more sad
That many a peaceful moment had,
More sleek than any granary mouse,
In his own leafy forest house
Among the waving fields of fern:
The hunting of heroes should be glad. (32-39)

The language throughout the poem can best be described as phantasmagoric. We find Niamh tempting Oisin with: “A hundred hounds”, “a hundred robes of murmuring silk”, “a hundred calves,” “a hundred sheep”, “a hundred spears and a hundred bows,” along with herself for his wife. We meet “horsemen with floating hair;” “a pearl-pale high-born lady” with lips “like a sunset where a citron colour gloomed” in her hair; “a pale-pearl shell that wavered like the summer streams;” “coloured Asian birds at evening in their rainless lands”; “the dove-grey edge of the sea”; a baying hound, a phantom hound with a red ear, deer, a granary mouse, glossy seas, fields of fern, along with barley, honey, wine, salmon, to name but a few, not forgetting the image of the “old wandering moon.” Much of this magic

symbolism and imagery, WBY would draw on over and over again in his work. Ellmann tells us that Yeats, in a running dialogue with W.H. Auden says “The proper metaphor for poetry is magic” (Ellmann 122).

As I read and re-read “The Wanderings of Oisin” and enjoy its almost hallucinatory images and, remembering that WBY’s father was a pre-Raphaelite painter, Sir John Millais’s painting “Ferdinand Lured by Ariel,” comes to my mind. Not unlike Oisin, Ariel is lured by an enticing fairy, but this fairy, unlike Niamh, is accompanied by tiny malevolent sprites.

Getting older. In 1889, Yeats met and fell in love with Maud Gonne, legendary beauty, feminist - before the word was coined, and Irish political activist. Although she rejected his many proposals of marriage, his life-long love for her would inspire some of his greatest love poems. Unknown to Yeats, Maud Gonne had an illegitimate son, Georges, who died. Foster tells us, “During the traumatic mourning for Georges her resistance towards an alliance with WBY – forged in the pure light of hermetic inquiry - was lowered.”(W.B. Yeats: A Life I 117). Apparently, she had participated in countless séances with WBY where she had asked if her dead son could be reincarnated. Foster suggests, “there is some evidence that WBY thought she may have agreed to marry.” If so, the poem, “When You are Old and Grey and Full of Tears” may date from “these transfigured weeks.”(W.B. Yeats: A Life I 117) The following sad sonnet-like poem is a telling testament to Gonne’s declaration according to Jeffares, that “The world will thank me for not marrying you, but do go on writing me these wonderful poems” (Jeffares 17). In “When You

are Old and Grey and Full of Tears," once again, we see WBY as a relatively young man, writing on the theme of old age:

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep; (1-4)

This lyric poem opens with a long "o" sound in "old", a long "a" in "grey" and a double "e" in "sleep," beautifully setting up a pendulum-like slow pace, a perfect introduction to the theme of the poem – the passing of time and old age. The second half of the first line reminiscent of "and peace comes dropping slow" from the earlier poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," allegedly a favourite of Maude Gonne. Eleven "ands" are used throughout the twelve-line poem; helping to contribute to what WBY calls "an alluring monotony" (Geddes 323).

By using ten commas and two semi-colons he slows down the poem and this helps to create the feeling of an older person slowing down, as he or she slips into old age and finally death. The poem continues in iambic pentameter as WBY imagines Gonne reading perhaps a book of poems; poems which perhaps he has written; poems which were inspired by the "soft look" her eyes held once.

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face; (4-8)

In the second stanza, he asks her to think about how many loved her "moments of glad grace" and her beauty "with love false or true." The word "false" here may be alluding to John McBride, a man who fought and died in the 1916 Irish Rising. According to Foster, Gonne had married him and he had sexually abused the daughter she had from an earlier liaison (W.B. Yeats: A Life I 286). "True" probably refers to WBY, whose love for her he knew would remain constant throughout his lifetime. Even when much of her physical beauty would be marred by wrinkles and life's sorrowful events, Yeats would always be the one who loved her "pilgrim soul". This is the soul that brought her through her brief journey in The Hermetic Society and through the Irish nationalistic cause:

> And bending down beside the glowing bars
> Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
> And paced upon the mountains overhead
> And hid his face amid a crowd of stars. (9-12)

In the final stanza of the poem, WBY imagines her murmuring sadly because "Love" has gone. Could "Love" in this instance be the personification of WBY? Then, we are left with the final exquisite image of "Love," grown cold and hiding in a crowd of stars. Surprisingly, WBY had written this poem when he was twenty-six - Gonne was also twenty-six at the time. He clearly possessed the extraordinary ability to imagine her when she would be old and without Love, and we leave the poem pondering upon the nature of this capitalized "Love."

As I pour over the poems of WBY, I am struck by the amount of poetry he has written which refers to ageing— a process which WBY, an aesthete, would, I think, find extremely painful. Throughout his middle years, he continued writing on this theme, a theme he inevitably linked to immortality. In "The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water" (CP 91), he hears the old men say "everything alters, / and one by one we drop away." (2-3). In "The Coming of Wisdom with Time" he hopes he "may wither into truth." In "The Living Beauty" he addresses his own heart with "O heart, we are old; / The living beauty is for younger men:"(8-9). In "The Wild Swans at Coole" he is conscious that the years have "come upon me." He is now fifty-two, a relatively young man by today's standards, as he considers "nine and fifty swans" whose hearts, perhaps like his own heart, "have not grown cold." (CP 147).

In 1917, WBY married Georgina Hyde-Lees, another member of the Golden Dawn. The bride was twenty-five. According to the astrologists of the time, the stars were fortuitously positioned for such a move. While on their honeymoon, writes WBY, she attempted automatic handwriting and in time was told by an unknown writer, "we have come to give you metaphors for poetry" (A Vision 8). She surprised WBY and, given his penchant for all things esoteric, probably delighted him. WBY wrote in Autobiographies: "One thing I did not foresee, not having the courage of my own thought: the growing murderousness of the world" (192). He then quotes the following verse from "The Second Coming":

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity. (1-8)

At the outset, I confess that “The Second Coming” is almost as enigmatic to me now as when I first listened to it almost forty years ago. This passionately lyrical poem, dramatically opening with two “urns,” two “i”s, and two “ings” creating an ominous and eerie sound that clangs in my ear. These lines are immediately followed by the two hard “f” sounds in the second line; that of the falcon and falconer. The third line begins with the phrase “things fall apart,” mundane yet powerful, the line ending with “the centre cannot hold”. Immediately, I am curious, because things are always falling apart while a centre generally remains intact. However, WBY wrote the poem when the world was recovering from the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Irish Uprising — surely a time when “anarchy”, and a “blood-dimmed tide” had been loosed. It is difficult not to reflect on the Second World War with its deployment of the atom bomb. It is difficult also not to reflect, on the current war in Iraq, after reading in stanza two, “somewhere in sands of the desert,” and when later on in the poem “the darkness drops again.” Clearly Yeats merits certain applause for being both alarmingly apocalyptic and prophetic. On reading “The

Second Coming," I am reminded that WBY, like William Blake before him, believed that the play of opposites is a necessity for the life-force of the universe. Again, if one opposite controls the other, then anarchy will be the result. So it is that in these wars, as in all war, good and love are overwhelmed by their opposites, evil and hate, and this could well be an explanation why "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

WBY explains how he sees the soul and the world's energies moving simultaneously through eternal incarnations. To demonstrate his theory, he uses the image of two spinning cones or gyres moving in and out of each other; one cone representing expanding energy and the other contracting energy (A Vision 69). I view these positive and negative energies as the play of opposites.

> Surely some revelation is at hand,
> Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
> The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
> When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
> Troubles my sight: . . . . . (9-13)

Also in A Vision, the following passage precedes the above lines:

> The approaching *antithetical* influx and that particular *antithetical* dispensation for which the intellectual preparation has begun will reach its complete systematization at that moment when, . . . the Great Year

> comes to its intellectual climax when . . . it must reverse our era and resume past eras in itself; what else it must be no man can say. (263)

To continue:

> . . . . . somewhere in sands of the desert
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank as pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
> Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (13-22)

WBY asks: “What if every two thousand and odd years something happens in the world to make one sacred, the other secular; one wise, the other foolish; one fair, the other foul; one divine, the other devilish?” (A Vision 29). With regard to the image of the “rough beast,” he tells us that a member of the Golden Dawn

> gave me a cardboard symbol and I closed my eyes, there rose before me mental images that I could not control: a desert and a black Titan raising himself up by his two hands in the middle of a heap of ancient ruins. (Autobiographies 185-186)

Billingheimer points to the fact that it may well be that WBY took the idea of his rough beast from Blake:

> In Blake the creature of horror is also a manifestation of deep and primitive human conflict giving rise to a chaotic civilization:
>
> Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
>
> In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
>
> Self-closd, all-repelling: what Demon
>
> Hath form'd this abominable void
>
> This soul-shuddr'ing vacuum? – Some said
>
> 'It is Urizen', but unknown, abstracted
>
> Brooding secret, the dark power hid....
>
> (The [First] Book of Urizen, Erd 70).
>
> (113)

She continues: "

> Yeats's 'beast,' which awakes from the mysterious darkness after twenty centuries of stony sleep, bears a likeness to the horrifying emergence of [Blake's] Urizen, who, after awaking from ages of stony sleep, annunciates a civilisation of tyranny:
>
> Ages on ages roll'd over him!
>
> In stony sleep ages roll'd over him!
>
> Like a dark waste stretching chang'able
>
> By earthquakes riv'n, belching sullen fires

> On ages roll'd ages in ghastly
>
> Sick torment; around him in whirlwinds
>
> Of darkness the eternal Prophet howl'd
>
> (The [First] Book of Urizen, Erd 74-75]
>
> (113-114)

She points to the fact that "Yeats' search for the *Spiritus Mundi* as the origin of all images may be seen as suggested by Blake's archetypal forms." Moreover, both Blake and Yeats "saw literature in terms of archetypes, that is they regarded all facets of literature as part of a unified cultural heritage" (4). In the second stanza, WBY sees the need for a "Second Coming" and one cannot be faulted if one assumes he is referring to the return of Jesus Christ. Instead, Yeats anticipates the end of the Christian era. It is worth mentioning here, that those who, like Yeats, are attracted to the Zodiac, understand that we have left the age of Pisces - the fish being the symbol of Christianity - and have entered the New Age, the age of Aquarius, whose symbols' opposites include both chaos and rebellion. This verse continues as WBY envisions startling images that appear out of the Spirit of the World. One of these is an image of a lion's head on a man's body - surely the Sphinx - who is also visible to desert birds who are incensed as they watch his "slow thighs slouching towards Bethlehem to be born." WBY ends the poem with a question mark leaving me to speculate on the birth of this hideous beast. This provocative question mark, to what is perhaps an unanswerable question, leads me to speculate whether this Sphinx, which the Arabs call *Abu Hol* or "The Father of Terror", signifies a

spiritual regression. Or is there simply a new world order being born “in sands of the desert”? Finally, I am reminded of a question asked by WBY: “When a man writes any work of genius, or invents some creative action, is it not because some knowledge or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind?” (Autobiographies 272).

Age and Immortality: “That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.”

In 1928, WBY published a collection of poems entitled “The Tower.” Here he continues his two greatest themes, that of old age and immortality. In a poem from which the collection takes its name, WBY asks,

> Did all old men and women, rich and poor,
> who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,
> whether in public or in secret
> rage as I do now rage against old age? (81-85)

In “All Soul’s Night,” which is another poem from this collection, he again bemoans old age and summons up certain people who have played a role in his life. He remembers a beautiful woman who preferred to teach school among dark skins, presumably Africa, “and there permit foul years to wear hidden from eyesight to the unnoticed end,” (48-50). “A Dialogue of Self and Soul” finds him meditating on death and reincarnation. Then, in his poem “Mohini Chatterjee” he remembers Chatterjee, the Brahmin of his theosophical youth, as he writes on the doctrine of continuous reincarnations; the cycle of life, death and rebirth which seems to be behind so much of his work:

I asked if I should pray,

But the Brahmin said,

'Pray for nothing, say

Every night in bed,

"I have been a king,

I have been a slave,

Nor is there anything,

Fool, rascal, knave,

That I have not been,

And yet upon my breast

A myriad heads have lain".' (1-11)

Billingheimer writes:

> 'Mohini Chatterjee' proposes a perpetual cycle of reincarnations so that what is lost or regretted in one life can be fulfilled in another. In this way the successive rounds of souls communicate with one another. This notion compares well with the concept of [Blake's] Beulah and its fulfilment of love. (47)

WBY published the poem "Sailing to Byzantium," in 1928, as part of his "Tower" collection and I believe it will stand forever as a powerful monument to his own "unageing intellect." Referring to "Byzantium", Balachandra Rajan notes that "The world beyond nature, is associated with age, and youth is linked, not with the 'land of faery', but with the world of growth and change" (Rajan 27).

WBY raises the anchor of his imagination and sets sail his Byzantium, the former name for Istanbul, which represented for him his idea of "Unity of Being." "I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I choose, I would spend it in Byzantium . . . " (A Vision 279).

He continues:

> in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one. . . . .The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. (279-280)

One distinct pair of contraries, which particularly interested WBY, was that of art and nature and, in "Sailing to Byzantium", the influence of Blake's contraries or opposites are apparent once again. WBY uses, with the skill of an older poet who has well honed his craft, the contraries of Nature versus Art. In a chapter entitled "Yeats and Romanticism" Bornstein writes: "Like Blake's, WBY's imaginative speakers seek to move beyond nature into a more permanent world of spirit or intellect or art" (The Cambridge Companion to W.B.Yeats 25);

> That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms. Birds in the trees -
> Those dying generations at their song
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long,

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

Caught in that sensual music all neglect

Monuments of unageing intellect. (1-8)

In “Sailing to Byzantium,” an ageing WBY contemplates life, lyrically, passionately and beautifully in *ottava rima*. In the first stanza of the poem, we find him alluding to great works of mind and spirit as “Monuments of unageing intellect.” Here the body ages but intellect does not. Truth and Art, unlike man, will never perish, as both are impervious to time.

He is mesmerized by the fecundity of nature: the bodily entwined young; birds in trees; salmon en route to spawn; dying generations - presumably an ageing population whom the poet wishes to sail away from; and everything in nature “caught in that sensual music,” without thought or need, WBY assumes, for wisdom, knowledge, or “monuments of unageing intellect.” Personally, I find the latter a rather impertinent assumption, particularly as WBY also spent much of his life in pursuit of the “most fecund ditch of all” (CP 267, 61).

I visited the original manuscript - 13,589 - of “Sailing to Byzantium,” which is currently on view at the WBY exhibit at the National Library of Ireland. There I saw that it was not until he had drafted the poem three times, did WBY find his images of birds, fish and fowl. The manuscript also showed his indecision regarding the pronoun that opens the poem. He originally opened with “there,” replaced it with “here,” before settling on “that.” It is generally assumed WBY was speaking of

Ireland, when he used “that” because he was living in Italy at the time of writing the poem. However, this is not necessarily the case. Throughout the world, the young are always in each other’s arms. Whether he lived in Rathfarnham, Rapallo or Roquebrune, WBY, now an ageing aesthete, would be very conscious of the contraries of youth and age.

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> For every tatter in its mortal dress,
> Nor is there singing school but studying
> Monuments of its own magnificence;
> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium. (9-16)

In the second stanza, we are given the powerful image of ageing man as scare-crow; something that could frighten away birds, a man who now recognizes that he has no place among young bodies; something worthless, except that his soul claps and sings — “and learns at last that it is self-delighting, self-appeasing, self-affrighting”, as explained in an earlier poem, “A Prayer for my Daughter” (CP 211). Cleanth Brooks writes:

> If literature is a valid source of wisdom, no wonder that thoughtful men and women have derived solace, comfort, enjoyment and wisdom from reading what the most articulate members of our culture have

> had to say about life. William Butler Yeats called such writing "Monuments of the [soul's] magnificence" and in his later years found a strengthening power in contemplating them. (Community, Religion, and Literature 325)

In the third stanza, WBY appeals to those sages standing in God's holy fire "as in a gold mosaic of a wall".

> 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 the singing-masters of my soul
> Consume my heart away; sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity. (17-24)

Could these sages be Blake, Boehme, Chatterjee, Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas, Swedenborg, and the many others who influenced him during his lifetime? Does he see them actually standing in purgatory waiting to be cleansed or is he simply imagining saints represented in the gold mosaic of a church? He appeals to these sages to be "the singing masters" of his soul after they have perned him in a gyre; perned, perhaps being Yeatsean parlance for shriven, until his old man's heart is no longer still sick with desire. Could not these sages now gather him into the "artifice of eternity," he asks. "Artifice" is such a curious choice of word. Perhaps Yeats is

implying that eternity is another artifice, another illusion or does he think that he can live forever if his soul is consumed by fire; a fire which would alchemise his soul to art and thereby allow him to live forever as a piece of art? In the final stanza, through using “gold” four times in an eight line stanza, WBY adds to the sense of the richness that is his Byzantium:

> Once out of nature I shall never take
> My bodily form from any natural thing,
> But such a form as Grecian goldsmith make
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
> To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
> Or set upon a gold bough to sing
> To lords and ladies of Byzantium
> Of what is past, or passing, or to come. (25-32)

We know that WBY subscribes to the cyclical doctrine of reincarnation, which states that matter and energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed. Although, in the first stanza, he seemed entranced by the fecundity of nature, he has no wish to reincarnate in the flesh. Instead, he would like to break free from his “dying animal” self to embody an artistic form; an artificial golden bird, hammered out by Grecian goldsmiths; a bird free from decay who would sing from a golden bough, a mechanical bird who could keep “a drowsy emperor awake,” by entertaining him with his song “of what is past and passing or to come.” As WBY’s thoughts were often dialectical, this poem is a good example of his struggle between

the natural and unnatural worlds. According to Marjorie Howes: “For nearly every truth he made or found, he also embraced a counter-truth: a proposition that contradicted the first truth, was equally true, and did not negate it” (The Cambridge Companion to William Butler Yeats 1). With the final phrase of this great poem - “past and passing or to come” - echoing in my ear, as I believe WBY skilfully intended it to do, I hear also, in the tripartite structure, an echo of the “fish, flesh and fowl” and the “begotten, born, and dies” of the first stanza. Perhaps “the fecund ditch” still allures WBY, as surely as it did before he sailed to Byzantium? I have encountered phrases from this poem many times. For example, Philip Roth uses it for the title of his novel, “The Dying Animal”; Cormac McCarthy uses it for the title of his “No Country for Old Men,” surely an indication that the power of this is great poem has seeped into our collective unconscious.

When WBY reached seventy, Foster tells us, he “had a simple vasectomy thus arresting the ageing process and restoring sexual vitality” (W.B Yeats: A Life II 496). Regardless of the questionable results of the operation, Yeats felt rejuvenated. He continued writing his themes of death and immortality but his poems became simpler and we find him he using more direct speech and less metaphor. As an old man’s thoughts will often revisit his youthful days, WBY, nearing the end of his life, turned his thoughts back towards Blake, the man who had such a huge influence on his thought and poetry. In “An Acre of Glass” one of his last poems, we find him not only remembering Blake, but also wishing to remake himself like Blake:

Myself must I remake

Till I am Timon and Lear

Or that William Blake

Will beat upon the wall

Till Truth obeyed his call. (13-18)

That same year he wrote "A Prayer for Old Age." In it we see him praying that though he may "die old," he may seem "a foolish, passionate man" (CP 326). Three years later, in his poem "What Then?" he asks what's next in life, when all "the work is done . . . according to my boyish plan" (CP 347). In this poem, Plato's ghost, who represents the inner voice of WBY, haunts him with what must have been a terrifying question to a spent life. What then?

On January 13, 1939, a mere two weeks before he died, WBY wrote his penultimate poem, "Cuchulain Comforted"; his own life and poetic cycles both now near completion. In *terza rima*, he returns once again to Celtic Mythology and, from where in his youth he had plucked Oisin, he now plucks the great heroic warrior Cuchulain who in an earlier poem,"The Circus Animals' Desertion", once "fought the ungovernable sea" (CP 391).

A Man that had six mortal wounds, a man

Violent and famous, strode among the dead;

Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone.

……

'We thread the needles' eyes, and all we do

All must together do.' That done, the man

Took up the nearest and began to sew.

……

They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,

……

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

(1-3, 16-18, 23, 25)

In “Cuchulain Comforted”, Cuchulain is “a man / violent and famous” who strides “among the dead.” After he dies, he arrives in the after-world, perhaps purgatory, where he is told by a gathering of bird-like Shrouds - the bird being the alchemical symbol for the soul - that in order to live there he must relinquish his individuality, a task not easy for a hero or for that matter a successful ageing poet. He must now “merge with the rest.” Unlike Cuchulain, the rest of those who live in the afterlife are “convicted cowards all”; maybe these cowards were once the soldiers whom Cuhulain had slain in battle or, perhaps they are his own soldiers who ran from the battlefield? A Shroud tells Cuchulain that he must obey the rules, put his individuality aside, and merge with the group. Not easy for a hero or, in WBY’s case, a great poet. Raine writes that WBY, who in this poem identifies with Cuchulain, “was aware of the eternal music,” the “song.’’ The Shrouds order: “Now we must sing and sing as best we can.” According to Raine, “The singing of souls in a choir is one of the most memorable and beautiful images used by Plotinus, who describes the soul as singing in harmony only when we are turned to the divine Choirmaster” (Yeats the Initiate 281). Yeats in A Vision:

> The sweet voices of the bird-souls is traditional in the Celtic mythology of the birds, whose unearthly singing is of a beauty described in the written and unwritten tradition of that world; and in Yeats' poems also the bird-voice is the immortal voice the individual part in the universal harmony. (281)

She is also of the opinion that, in this poem, WBY

> describes a 'path-working' of the kind that as a member of the Magical Order of the Golden Dawn he had learned to perform; an imaginative reverie half-spontaneous and yet at the same time conscious, in which themes will arise from the sleeping mind which is yet to some extent directed by the waking; or perhaps the other way, the sleeping mind tells the story and yet takes the images required from the stock of knowledge possessed by the waking consciousness. That Yeats used this method of penetrating 'the depths of the mind' seems inherently likely; (Yeats the Initiate 259)

She also asks if he has "taken as his point of departure the key of Death, on the 13th path of the Tree [of life] (259). The poem ends with the Shrouds gaining the "throats of birds". Does Cuchulain await resurrection or reincarnation? I am again reminded of WBY's interest in the writings of Thomas Aquinas on eternal life and, of course, the doctrine of reincarnation. In the words of WBY: "Those who inhabit the 'unconscious mind' are the complement or opposite of mind's consciousness, and

are there because of spiritual affinity or bonds created during past lives" (A Vision 237).

Yeats, when he wrote Cuchulain was not far from death. Having spent a lifetime dipping in and out of so many different spiritual ideas it is possible that he would revisit some of these ideas with whatever time he had left in this world. However it may well be that Yeats simply got the idea for The Death of Cuchulain from a spirit who once said to him "We do nothing singly, every act is done by a number at the same time" (A Vision 234).

Foster tells us that WBY, toward the end of his life, wrote in a letter to a long-standing friend, "man can embody truth but he cannot know" (W.B. Yeats: A Life II 650). I am reminded of the "The Happy Shepherd" who at the beginning of WBY's creative life cautioned, "there is no truth / Saving in thine own heart" (26-27). Fortunately for humanity, and the world of poetry, WBY never stopped searching for answers.

"It was the Dream Itself Enchanted Me."

I have had an exciting and enriching journey, travelling with WBY through this dissertation. Having touched on his extensive oeuvre, which covers youth, age, and immortality, along with the influences of Blake and Theosophy, I hope I have also succeeded in showing how his poetry has influenced my own poetry and philosophy on life.

Following the thread of his work, I have highlighted his concern with regard to his own ageing process and immortality.

Beginning with one of his earliest poems, I have attempted to show his life-long search for truth and intimate spiritual experience outside of established religions. I have also shown that even as a young poet, he held within him the potential that matured into the poetic genius that unfolded in his later poetry. Lastly, I have also shown how his poetry indicates that through the vehicle of mysticism he gained access to the spiritual world, and using the language of poetry, extracted from it gems of exquisite beauty, which he polished with the language of metaphor and symbolism and which enriches all who read his work.

Particularly me.

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