

Chapter I

A survey of critical literature about Yeats, examining the scope of this dissertation

For all men, certainly all imaginative men, must be ever casting forth enchantments, glammers, illusions: and all men, especially tranquil men who have no powerful egotistic life, must be continually passing *under their vision...* (Italics mine)

(W.B.Yeats: *Essays and Introductions*: 1961:40)

Yeats's poems have always provoked admiration, debate and, not infrequently, qualified or negative responses. Critics examining the various facets of Yeats's works, have made a significant impact on Yeats studies. In this survey of criticism, I shall indicate major critical preoccupations and comments in order to show the scope of this dissertation. Brooks and Warren (1938) and Brooks (1939), who as New critics were committed to the principle of a text or poem's autonomy, discovered, however, when faced with explicating Yeats's verse, the need to refer to Yeats's prose works and in particular to the account of his system in *A Vision*. Parkinson's two books on the process of composition, in which he argues for the significance of Yeats's involvement in the Abbey Theatre and how this subsequently transformed the nature of his poetry, are complementary. In the first volume (1951), Parkinson considers the revisions to Yeats's early poetry, in the second (1964) the composition of the later verse. The distinguishing feature of both is that he places a discussion of revisions within a larger framework of interpretation. The first book begins with an examination of the poems in *The Rose and Crossways* and of the poems in *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889) that Yeats

revised or excluded from *Poems* (1895). The work excluded, defines Yeats in 1895, and other revisions reveal a poet increasingly immersed in a Celtic world, which was simultaneously drawing closer to his own time and place. Citing the revisions made to "The Madness of King Goll" and "The Indian to his Love", Parkinson underlines how Yeats's verse becomes simpler, less pretentious, how he uses a more natural syntax with fewer inversions, how his words are more suggestive and at the same time more specific. By *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) Yeats's early lyric style culminates. His subject matter is primarily Irish, and more emphasis is given on speech, but Parkinson is quick to remind us that Yeats' rhapsodic style is limited. It is unable to handle more than one aspect of human experience. Hence, he is in need of dramatic conflict and moments of 'passionate intensity'.

Between 1899 and 1911 Yeats wrote a play in each year, and learnt in the process how to become a dramatic poet. The changes between the 1900 and the 1905 version of *The Shadowy Waters* embody a stronger sense of dramatic purpose, which is especially evident in the area of conflict, in the development of character, in the more natural syntax and diction, and in the deployment of a less esoteric symbolism. *On Baile's Strand* (1907) and other plays written during this period reminded Yeats of the necessary existence of the circumstantial world, forcing him to reconsider his entire poetic practice. A new mode of self-dramatization is evident in the *Seven Woods* (1903), but this is a still tentative-between 1903 and 1908 Yeats wrote only four lyrics. There after, his lyrical cry found expression increasingly, and *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) displays a poet responding more vigorously than before to the demands of the immediate world. Personal speech now has the look of dramatized tension, and he seeks a relationship between a daily mood and a

moment of exaltation. This is especially evident in the poems surrounding the Hugh Lane controversy, such as "September 1913", "To a friend", and "Paudeen". From *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917), *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), and onwards into his later verse, Yeats shows how he had learnt to subordinate his rhapsodic and ecstatic impulses to the demands of structure and situation. As to the changes Yeats made to his early verse, Parkinson makes the following observations. He insists, for example, that his study highlights not the discontinuity but the continuity of the early and later Yeats, and that there is an inherent tendency in Yeats towards conflict, which his involvement with drama brought out. The common element in his poetry in evidence both before and after 1901 is 'formal passionate speech', though after 1901 this becomes more eloquent and has more to communicate. The theatre enabled Yeats to recognize the importance of the moment of passion and how the daily world could be transfigured, and this in turn lent to his middle and later verses a dramatic structure. Parkinson also maintains that changes made to his earlier verse, sometimes motivated by a change of outlook, sometimes for technical consideration, illustrate the interdependence of attitude and technique, and how often in origin a change could be technical but in effect substantial.

Parkinson's main argument that Yeats's poetry is largely determined by his dramatic sense is expanded in 1964. He refers briefly to the presentation of the self in Eliot and Pound, the general issue of sincerity in writing, and the relationship between maker and artifact. He then addresses the issue of Yeats's search for a role, a means to transcend the daily self, and embody the truth. The poet, he suggests, has five modes available to him: the individuated person whose life gives weight to his words; the social character, the site of tension

between a social, "Vacillation", the poet as overt dramatist adopting a persona the Crazy Jane sequence; the poet as editor and maker of books. Parkinson suggests that the crucial year in Yeats's transition is 1917. Yeats career enters another phase, beginning with an act of purification in *Autobiographies* and act of elaboration in *A Vision*, and distinguished from the first phase by his ability to view his knowledge and experience as not his own.

Parkinson disputes the allegorical view of Yeats as proposed by Wilson (1958) and sides more with Kermode's (1957) belief, that a Yeats poem is a unique symbol, and cannot be read in terms of some perennial philosophy. Citing the symbol of the swan in Yeats's verse, Parkinson also takes issue with Stauffer (1949), and suggests that Yeats's verse is primarily dramatic and is not composed of symbols. There is no settled pattern of association, and it is merely confusing, for example, to identify the swan in "Leda and the Swan" with the swan in "Among School Children".

Parkinson's comment on Yeats's passionate syntax is also penetrating, informative and persuasive. He reveals how Yeats combined syllabic and stress prosody. While writing more intense lyrics, he tended to employ a fixed number of stresses. Some of Yeats' prosody, such as that to be found in "Crazy Jane and the Journeyman", is highly complicated, but this has to be understood by reference to the poem's metaphysical structure. *Last Poems* contains more anomalous prosodic features, a fact which Parkinson interprets in the context of Yeats's desire for liberation. He notes, for instance, the parallel with the decline in use of symbols after 1932, as if Yeats was aware that icons could no longer be trusted to carry the burden of a poem's argument. Parkinson reflects on two facts: firstly, that Yeats's

influence has been less than one might suppose, considering his stature as the greatest poet of the first half of the 20th century, and, secondly, that he seems out of place in the context of modern poetry.

Bradford (1965) outlines the process of composition to be found in Yeats's poems, plays and prose. General observations on Yeats's practice inevitably give way to an account of the changes from the early to the later Yeats. In this respect Bradford compares and contrasts *The Wind Among the Reeds* with the later verse. In *The Wind Among the Reeds* the principal effort is to write the poem in a single sentence, to make the poetic and grammatical penetration of his later verse. He has not yet mastered a form or a diction suited to a poem such as "Byzantium", nor has he begun to invent the forceful personae of his later verse. What Yeats lacks here is summed up by Bradford in the phrase "personal utterance" and here Bradford follows Parkinson's stress on drama. The idea of personal utterance is traced from *The Wild Swans at Coole*, a volume where Yeats writes about his life as something intended, complete, achieved, through the poems in the 1920s where the prevailing mode is public speech, and the metaphysical reflection expressed in the poems of the 1930s. Bradford's study tends to foreground the problem of transcription.

The discussion of particular poems in Stallworthy's two books (1963 and 1969) is detailed and often perceptive, but his general remarks have lasted less well. Yeats experimented in later years with half-rhymes, the typical poetic movement is from the personal to the general. More than any other English poet, Yeats wrote about individual people. His work is both retrospective and apocalyptic and he has a "razor-sharp self-critical faculty". To this extent it is of value to know, for example, that Edmund Burke and the Russian Revolution

were in Yeats's mind when he was composing "The Second Coming" or that behind "The Black Tower", a poem written a week before his death in January 1939. There stands perhaps the figure of Hitler in the poem. But equally what Stallworthy's study illustrates is how the history of Yeats criticism is not unlike a partial and hesitant discovery. Stallworthy's second book which concentrates on *Last Poems*, is more coherent, though the opening two chapters on 'The Dynastic Theme' and 'The Prophetic Voice', which are designed to orientate the reader to the major concerns of that volume, are too vague to be of real use. The dynastic theme, for example, surfaces in Yeats in the decade or so after 1908. His *Last Poems* having its association with race and eugenics, has turned it into something less gentle. Similarly, when Stallworthy compares *Last Poems* with *The Tower* and *The Wild Swans at Coole* and suggests that Yeats is now anxious to speak out because his time is short, he fails to observe that *The Tower* is his testamentary volume that *Last Poems* has the voice not so much of the prophet as of someone beyond the grave that "Politics" is as fitting a conclusion to his poetic career as "Under Ben Bulbin" and that *Last Poems* is more provisional than its title might suggest.

Clark's study (1983) concentrates on poems written between 1926 and 1931. He prepares the reader by suggesting that the best editors are those who pay attention not just to the words on the page but also to their context. The contexts that Clark invokes are the most far-reaching of any of the critics considered here. The woman in "After Long Silence" is identified by Ellmann and Parkinson as Olivia Shakespeare, but Clark, in reviewing the evidence especially in connection with *A Vision*, and "All Souls' Night", concludes that the reconciliation referred to in the poem is not with his former lover but with Mrs. Mathers, who had been upset by the portrayal of her

husband in *A Vision*. Taking issue with Parkinson, Clark also claims that it is not love which is the supreme theme but bodily decrepitude. In spite of its narrow focus on a handful of poems, this study, which has met with a lively response, extends the principles governing an inquiry into Yeats at work. It is a challenging and slightly unnerving account, for even as it sheds new light on familiar poems it makes us conscious of the extent of the darkness that perhaps surrounds the remaining poems of Yeats not included in Clark's discussion.

Yeats "didn't accumulate poems, he wrote books", declared Kenner (1955:65) in typically arresting fashion, echoing no doubt Yeats's own prophetic remark that "one poem lights up another" (1912: xi). Ironically, as an extended argument, Kenner's essay, which tends merely to repeat its original insight, is not impressive, but in the development of Yeats studies it has played a key role. In constructing a volume of poems, Yeats took care to achieve the right balance. "A prayer for my Daughter" significantly follows, and qualifies the noisy, apocalyptic strains of "The Second Coming". "Sailing to Byzantium" acts as an overture to an exploration of the intractability of history and the decline into old age, and the volume concludes with an epilogue written in 1920 entitled "All Souls' Night". Yeats's volumes often do not reflect their compositional history, but are ordered in such a way as to suggest their unity.

But the influence of Kenner's essays has been profound. Some of the best essays and books on Yeats-as well as more pedestrian ones, such as Young's (1987)-have been those, which affirm the unity of his texts. The essays by Davie on Michael Robartes and the Dancer and by Holloway on it in Donoghue and Mulryne (1965), for example, support Kenner's contention. The meaning of "Easter 1916" is enhanced when

read alongside other poems in a collection, while certain repeated rhetorical modes, such as the exhortation to woman to avoid abstraction, or a common discursive style, reinforce the unity of the volume. In terms of full-length studies, which stress unity, Grossman's reading (1969) of *The Wind Among the Reeds* is in many ways the best. This is an ambitious, intelligent, difficult, but largely sustained account of Yeats's transformation in the 1890s. Eschewing the conventional view of Yeats's escapism, Grossman traces the poet's desire for Wisdom or, we might say, the Muse and his fear that this is unattainable. *The Wind Among the Reeds*, whose basic myth is the encounter between the suitor of the absolute and its symbol, the Wisdom figure, cultivates the unattainable: the suitor undergoes an experience of the *mysterium tremendum*; this brings not happiness but the realization that Wisdom feeds malignantly on his life.

Murphy (1975) and Putzel (1986) have followed Grossman in writing full-length studies of Yeats's early work. Murphy is less convinced that *The Wind Among the Reeds* embodies the search for poetic knowledge or that the apocalypse can be equated with the imagination; for him the volume represents "a collapse into destructive vision". Putzel, on the other hand, builds on Grossman's account and not only stresses the unity of *The Wind Among the Reeds* but also makes out a good case for seeing *The Wind Among the Reeds* and *The Secret Rose* as companion volumes. Thus, both texts articulate tension between the diachronic and synchronic planes; both contain similar themes of time, love, and apocalypse. And *The Wind Among the Reeds* 'presents the "liturgy" of the symbolic system as outlined in *The Secret Rose*.

For fuller surveys of the reception of Yeats's verse we may refer to Hall and Steinmann (1950), Unterecker (1963), Stallworthy (1968), Pritchard (1972), Jeffares (1977), and Cullingford (1984). Although published in 1950, Hall and Steinmann contains seven essays from the 1930s, and five essays from *The Southern Review* of 1942; its bibliography, while excellent for giving a sense of the 'emergence' of Yeats in journals in the 1930s and 1940s, is therefore restricted.

Three areas that have figured prominently in Yeats criticism and that still continue to provoke questions among Yeats admirers: the issue of Yeats and Symbolism, Yeats's lineage, and the relationship between his briefs and his poetry. The intention is to provide a framework for further inquiry, to show connections, to trace outlines, and to shed light on the Yeats's poetry. Observations on Yeats's lineage concentrate for the most part on the Romantic inheritance- his relationship with his Irish background or with a philosophical predecessor such as Nietzsche.

*A retrospective quality is inscribed in Yeats's work. He has the "backward look" characteristic, as Frank O' Connor (1967) might see it, of Anglo-Irish literature as a whole. When *The Wild Swans at Coole* was published by Macmillan in 1919, Middleton Murry proclaimed Yeats's talents to be at an end and that this volume, with its lack of creative vigour, its languor and ineffectuality, its idle dreaming, marked "Mr. Yeats's Swan Song" (Jeffares: 1977:56). Yeats of course was partly responsible for contributing to such a reception, not least in the constant publications of 'retrospective' volumes and collections of his work. 'Hammer your thoughts into unity' has become a touchstone by which he has been assessed, but each volume seems to mark a new beginning as much as a recapitulation of the past. So criticism still takes a long time to absorb the pattern of Yeats's work. For, Yeats is*

the last Romantic who became a leading modern poet, the modern poet who sits uncomfortably in the modernist triumvirate of Yeats-Eliot-Pound, and the Anglo-Irish "hyphenated" poet who has been associated by some critics with Georgian Ireland.

Early key responses to Yeats's verse can be found in Wilson (1931), Leavis (1932) and Blackmur (1936) and we can use these to map out the subsequent critical terrain. Wilson depicts the literary history of our time as a battle between Symbolism and Naturalism, twin movements which emerged in the 19th century against the background of Romanticism and a mechanistic science. *Symbolism* began in France and was characterized by its indefiniteness, its stress on supra-rational sensations and its attempt to communicate unique personal feelings. But the battle was never properly fought out in England, and it was left to Pater to supply Yeats with an English equivalent to French Symbolist theory. Wilson notices Yeats's maturing style and the modern poet's need of a special personality as well as an antagonism between poet and world. He places his drama with the Symbolist plays of Steinberg and Maeterlinck and shows how, in his dealings with the occult, there is always a margin of scientific doubt. Yeats's symbolism in the 1890s, for example, owes as much to Irish folklore and ceremonial magic as to Pater and France. Wilson's influence, however, has been important not least in fuelling an interest in the questions of Yeats's use of symbols.

Leavis stresses the debilitating influence of the Victorian poetic tradition which admits implicitly that the actual world is alien, intractable, and unpoetical, and that no protest of withdrawal. The trajectory of Yeats's career is from dreams to reality, an inner struggle of the 19th-century mind in a heroic form. The change between *The Wind Among the Reeds* and *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* shows

the poet coming alive to the actual waking world--hard, practical, and full of modern speech--while he exhibits a ripeness in disillusion, a difficult and delicate sincerity. This view of Yeats has been very influential, but has become increasingly less so as more sophisticated accounts of Yeats's lineage have been advanced. The relationship between dreaming and reality, for example, needs much more careful handling in the context of a poet who prefaced a volume entitled *Responsibilities* with the words 'in dreams begin responsibility', and who later wrote of the "desolation of reality" that has accompanied the spread of human knowledge and civilization.

Blackmur's essay (1936), examines the way Yeats grasped reality through magic and how this affects his stature as a poet. As a tool for poetry, magic has two major defects: firstly, no available edifice of reason can be established on it; secondly, magic promises what it cannot perform--at least in poetry, for the revelation has still to be awaited. Blackmur asks if the magical material is incorporated because of its organic reference or if its presence is merely rhetorical, and concludes that magic may be a feature of the rational imagination. Even though it does not take cognizance of Yeats's dialectical nature, his essay contains some close observation of the relationship between Yeats's poetry and his ideas.

The association of Yeats with French Symbolism was given its initial impetus when his friend Arthur Symons dedicated to him *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), Yeats being "the chief representative of that movement in our country". This was followed by Bowra (1943), who claims that "Yeats's career is an instructive commentary on Symbolist doctrine", and by Tindall (1945), who added a cautionary note suggesting that Yeats was a symbolist poet long

before he encountered French Symbolism. These early discussions lacked sophistication regarding the concept of influence, and did not address more basic questions: for instance, if Yeats was influenced by something he must have already been open to influence, indeed, perhaps, merely seeking confirmation for ideas which were already in the process of formation. Equally, these critics were too ready to box Yeats into one particular corner, not allowing for the fact that Yeats has many contexts- not least himself. The real difficulty-leaving aside the devaluing of Yeats's autonomy as a thinker or of England's culture vis-à-vis France- stems from uncertainty about Symbolism and how it is interpreted. According to Bowra, Yeats, unlike Mallarme, made use of two kinds of symbols, emotional and intellectual, one connected with sounds and their association, the other with ideas. Bowra also claims that Yeats's mysticism is not "aesthetic rapture" or "creative ecstasy, but a belief in the powers behind the visible world"(32). But how we identify or assess such distinctions or claims depends on much more than a discussion about Symbolism. Grossman (1969), for example, accepts the distinction between emotional and intellectual symbols, but this is interpreted within the context of the Wisdom tradition, the Muse of Ireland, and the struggle for personal liberation. Equally, with regard to mysticism, as the final stanza of "Among School Children" reminds us, there is a rhapsodic quality to Yeats's work which is more than a belief in the powers behind the visible world.

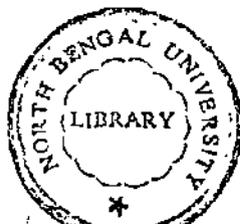
A valuable survey of Yeats and symbols can be found in Seward's little-known study (1960). Seward traces the development of the symbol of the rose in western literature from ancient myths through Dante and the Catholic Middle Ages, through the Renaissance, the Romantic heritage, and into the 20th century, where it rivals, she claims, *The Waste Land* as the symbol of our era. At each point the meaning and

function of the symbol has both changed and expanded, from a different angle. For Adams, this enhances rather than detracts but nothing is entirely lost; the symbol accrues meaning through time. Such a schema and such a view resurfaces in Yeats's multilayered symbol of the secret rose. The Romantic heritage with its new subjectivity and, later, its interest in the occult, added its own stamp, so that the rose became the focus of unorthodox transcendental longings. Later in the 19th century it was assigned a central place in Rosicrucianism. Again, both developments are there in Yeats' symbol, all this is by way of an introduction to Seward's principal concern, which is an examination of the symbol of the rose in the work of Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce whom she unfortunately describes as "British writers". She pictures Yeats as the transitional figure and the first to build a new symbolic art on the ruins of Romantic hyper subjectivity. Unlike earlier critics, Seward is less dogmatic in her approach to Yeats's lineage: she shows, for example, how the volume 'The Rose' is rooted in the English tradition, how *The Wind Among the Reeds* is influenced by French Symbolism, and how after 1903 Yeats left behind the symbol of the rose.

The connection between Yeats and Symbolism has prompted several different kinds of inquiry. Seward's study delineates a 'broader context than is to be found in; she believes that for a proper understanding of Yeats's symbols a much longer history needs to be invoked. Another approach, well represented by Stauffer (1949), has fastened into the changing use of symbols within Yeats's work as a whole. According to Stauffer, Yeats is "incorrigibly a lyric poet whose imagination is set in vivid symbolic visual pattern"(23). In passing, it can be noted that Stauffer anticipates both Kenner's essay (1955) and the more complex argument of Engelberg (1964), while his stress on

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Yeats's lyricism is countered by Parkinson's view that Yeats is primarily a dramatic poet.

The influence of the occult on Yeats's symbols is another important topic. Yeats's essay on magic in *Essays & Introductions* where he states that the "great memory can be evoked by symbols", reminds us of the close association between his poetry and the occult. His interest in the occult precedes any possible influence by French Symbolism and casts an aura round his symbols that can be fully explained only by reference to his involvement in ceremonial magic. Symbols in Yeats's early verse come clothed in the garments of ceremonial magic, with the poet as mage and adept, summoning up the spirits inside or beyond the universe. Even though he became disillusioned with the Golden Dawn after the ugly confrontation between Mathers and the London Temple in 1900 and even though he increasingly sided with Art against the Adept, the presence of magic underlies Yeats's use of symbols, so that when he writes out in a verse the names of the leaders of the Easter Rising he is, as Young (1975) well observes, like the mage effecting what he does in words.

The issue of Yeats and symbolism is set fair to continue. Donoghue (1971) roots the discussion within an argument about power, how magic and poetry are forms of power, how Yeats is concerned with making a masterful style, how moral questions are answered in aesthetic terms, how Nietzsche, therefore, is the crucial figure intervening between Blake and Yeats. Symbolism is the literary form of magic, the difference being that what the mage does consciously the poet does "half consciously and half by instinct". But against the symbol stand history, and in *History and the Secret Discipline*, Donoghue shows how this opposition of symbol and history

produced in Yeats not the single response but an awareness of tension between the two. Thus, while *The Wild Swans at Coole* stresses an accommodation with history, where history is consistent with symbolism, it is symbolism "glancing ruefully at history". History and symbol, truth and system, are like rival allegiances, and fortunately, according to Donoghue, Yeats has a weakness for reality. In his best poems, therefore, we see him mastering but not resolving conflict.

One effect of Wilson's study was to direct attention to the poet's literary and cultural heritage. In a sense, of course, Yeats had given one important clue to his position on the literary map when in 1893, with Edwin Ellis, he edited a book on Blake and when in 1937 in 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited' he referred to himself as one of the 'last Romantics'. Yeats and Romanticism, a topic well suited for revealing how Yeats has been received by his critics, has been approached from several different angles. Rudd (1953) and Adams (1955) undertook two important formative studies assessing the links between Yeats and Blake in the 1950s. The essential difference between Blake and Yeats discerned by Rudd is that while the former is a prophet, the latter is simply an 'enchanter'. In Blake the world is transfigured through the eyes of love; he defies dualism by postulating an incarnate God who overcomes the false god, Urizen. Yeats, on the other hand, is content to cast a spell over the reader. The clarity of Blake's voice belongs to the Romantic age, and if Yeats's rings less clear, this stems in part from his living in a period of late Romanticism, when perceptions of the nature of reality as well as of the relationship between art and reality had dramatically altered. A marked characteristic of this period is its introspective and often frenetic attempts to realign the present with the past. Equally, Yeats's interest in ceremonial magic deserves more than the cavalier treatment to be found in Rudd, who claims that most of it

cannot be taken seriously. In fact, this is precisely what later critics have done—though this is not to say they endorse any of it.

Adams' aim is to compare the two poets in their use of symbolism; he is not primarily concerned with the question of influence, but rather with how the two poets looked at the same world from different perspectives. He outlines Blake's aesthetic in terms of its epistemology, its true vision which he identifies as a vision of apocalypse, or total resolution where the unity of reality is revealed, and its debased vision or moral allegorisation. In Blake the single image draws into it all the minute particulars, where what seemed contraries are shown to be equally true. Throughout this informative discussion of Blake, Adams brings out how Yeats is like a common man caught in a fallen world, and how, in contrast with Blake, his poetry enacts the difficulty of achieving the vision we find in Blake. In Yeats's early poetry the subject-object dichotomy is unsolved; later, he begins to champion Blakean action, but he never transcends the problem of duality, not even in *A Vision* where the single geometrical conception is composed of two symbols, one superimposed on the other, namely the Great Wheel and the interlocking cones. Adams' version of Yeats reveals a poet conscious of limits, aware that he is not a mystic, who shares the same world as Blake but approaches it from Yeats's stature as a poet.

Traces of Adams' argument, as when he writes that Yeats "could not bring himself to share his predecessor's faith in a world transformed by a vision of love and beauty" can be found in Bornstein (1970). Here, though, the comparison is between Yeats and Shelley. This study contrasts the intellectual vision of early Yeats with the antinomial vision of his later period, with 1903 as the dividing year. The early Yeats, in his search for intellectual beauty, follows Shelley in

both theme and imagery, but instead of the star and the cosmopolitan settings Yeats substituted the Rose and Ireland. Until 1900 Yeats denied Shelley's influence, and, moreover, sought to identify the origins of his predecessor's symbols in the ancient world. After 1903 the antinomial vision, with its "movement downwards upon life, not upwards out of life" (469), began to emerge. The material present now rivaled the idea, joy replaced sorrow, and the grey of Ireland overcame the colours of Shelley's Italy. In an interesting chapter where he juxtaposes Shelley's epipsyche and Yeats's Doctrine of the Mask, Bornstein shows how the mature Yeats wrestled with Shelley's idea of love. For Shelley, art should inspire and show the triumph of justice; for the mature Yeats, reality and justice go hand in hand. In a subsequent inquiry looking at modernism in terms of acts of mind, Bornstein (1976) reflects again on the last Romanticism of Yeats, this time in the context of Eliot and Stevens. Making use of the idea of the 'Greater Romantic Lyric', he asks whether Yeats's art deserves to be seen as a continuation of Romantic tradition; his conclusion is that many of the greatest mature poems written between 1918 and 1929 creatively develop out of romantic themes and modes.

Such studies do not tackle more difficult theoretical issues concerned with Yeats's unconscious, whether he merely found confirmation for his own ideas in his predecessors, or, given that Yeats is one of the 'last Romantics', how the relationship between early and late Romanticism is to be described. Bloom (1970), on the other hand, in a challenging study of Yeats's place in the English poetic tradition, confronts such questions. With Freud in mind, Bloom tells us "poetic influence... is a variety of melancholy or an anxiety-principle"(54). Bloom traces a line from Shelley through Browning and Pater to Yeats's typical poem where the poet, as quest-hero undertakes an odyssey of

spirit. The internalized quest-romance is the structure uniting Shelley's *Alastor* with *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* and *The Shadowy Waters*. Browning's antithetical quest, on the other hand, which ended with the permanent suffering of the self alone, was a warning to Yeats. Pater bequeathed to Yeats an impossible aesthetic ideal, a desperate trust in the flux of experience and an acknowledged rift between consciousness and experience. When Blake and Yeats are juxtaposed Yeats is shown to be a Gnostic, a dualist, longing for a future after death, exalting the Shadow, caught in his early career in a solipsistic reverie. Blake, on the other hand, whom Yeats wrongly imagines is a pre-Raphaelite, insists that the emotional and the natural fused in 'the condition of fire', form a single reality. .

In the actual survey of Yeats's work, Bloom seems to lose sight of the issue of influence and concentrates on a series of critical discriminations about the particular merits of individual poems or books. The early poetry of 1885-99 he values higher than the middle poems of 1899-1914; *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918), a "masterpiece in the tradition of marmoreal reveries", and the product of a crucial period in Yeats's imaginative life (1915-17), is promoted above *A Vision*. In contrast with Rudd, Bloom admires a poem like "Vacillation" precisely because it shows Yeats doubting his own mythologies. The most illuminating remarks occur in his promotion of the early poetry and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. How much we need Bloom's Freudian anxiety-of-influence concept is an open question, but setting Yeats against the background of Blake and the Romantic inheritance highlights at once the continuity of a tradition and its decline, and raises doubts, as Bloom rightly observes, about Yeats's modern humanistic vision and its representative status or otherwise.

Other studies, such as Hough (1947), Kermode (1957) and Fletcher (1987), have focused on the late 19th-century context. Hough examines the genesis of Yeats's ideas in English aestheticism. With Ruskin, Rossetti, Morris, Pater, and the aesthetes behind him, Yeats cuts a different figure from when he is cast against a Romantic background. For Hough, Yeats takes his colouring from Victorian culture, from the opposition of art and society; by 1850 the ethical and social bias had spawned its antithesis, and its opposition in art, and by 1870 there was an Aesthetic Movement. Stressing the significance of the visual world, Ruskin pleaded for the integration of visual sensibility with the rest of psychic life, of art with religious experience. Both he and Morris attempted to make the world fit for artists to live in. Rossetti, claims Hough, inaugurated a period of emotional unrest. A conscious aesthete, he sought satisfaction in traditional religious symbolism but was possessed of a love that could never be satisfied, and it was this impasse and the movement inwards to the self that provided Yeats's starting-point. In contrast with Arnold's search for *certainty*, Pater emphasized the *flux of experience*. *Feeling and sincerity* acted as touchstones for an assessment of life, and he sought, therefore, a world outside of turbulence, a home to which he could withdraw. In his discussion, Hough repeats the view that Yeats learnt of French Symbolism through Symonds and stresses that Axel became for a time the poet's sacred book. Unlike the other Rhymers, however, Yeats had the tenacity and spiritual energy to take the aesthetic project further. Hough shows by implication how Yeats questions all his predecessors. Rossetti confused the physical and the spiritual; Morris sought a needed to recover contact with religion, the people and history. Unlike Morris, whose poetry was divorced from its age, Yeats draws more from contemporary Ireland than from Celtic legend and he directly engages with the life of his times. It is not altogether clear, for

example, how his discussion of the occult relates to his overall thesis about the last Romantics, or how much weight is to be attached to Yeats's Irish context, or whether Yeats, especially in the light of his modernist rejection of rhetoric, is a Victorian or a modern thinker and poet.

Yeats is both central and tangential to Kermode's study. Thus, much of the discussion in part one is devoted to Yeats; on the other hand, Yeats seems to be there to illustrate a separate argument about the Romantic basis of modern literature. Kermode links the isolation of the artist- the Romantic theme-with the modern predilection for the image, and he finds in Yeats the exemplary figure. The alienation of the artist from society deepened in the 19th century and found new articulation in the work of Arnold and Pater. Kermode stresses this native English tradition in contrast with French Symbolism, which he reads as a later version of Romanticism. His initial discussion of Yeats concentrates on "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory", an elegy that expresses the predicament of the artist in a world built for action. Yeats, in love with action, is held back from full engagement by his own artistic temperament and by the age in which he lives: hence his admiration for an artist like Gregory who has escaped into action, but who becomes in the process an image of the artist who did not escape. At the same time Yeats also discovered in the *Dancer* the great image that reconciled itself with action and contemplation, and in the *Tree* the contrasting integrity of the image which stood outside time and science and which could not therefore be subjected to any form of dissociation. In this sense Yeats, fully conscious of his heritage, worked through both the nature of the poet's isolation and the problem of the image. Part Two is devoted to exposing the Romantic roots of modernist critical theory. At each point Yeats is held up as the central figure, the

isolated artist who sought to overcome his isolation by Unity of being as expressed in the image.

Though often recommended, the overall value of Kermode's book of Yeats remains uncertain. There is something external in his discussion of Yeats, a remoteness that comes from seeing him too readily as an exemplary figure. Kermode emphasizes the Romantic image selectively, and aspects of the image that do not fit his argument are omitted. Had the idea of the isolation of the artist been really put to work in the case of Yeats, it demands explanation. The natural world in Yeats looks very different from its depiction in Romantic verse: it is never a subject in its own right, rarely challenges, does not share the same life-force as the human world, and its symbolic quality often insists on itself throughout. We might add that the natural world is often relegated to a term in a structured, dialectical argument, and looks not unlike part of the first stage in the adept's ascent to spiritual knowledge. As de Man (1984) rightly notices, Yeats's emblematic landscape differs fundamentally from Wordsworth's transcendental vision. Moreover, between the image and the emblem there is a conflict, an ambiguity, an area of discontinuity, which Yeats sought to bridge but could not. Against Kermode's trumpeting of the "reconciliatory image" in "Among School Children", de Man suggests that the final line is an anguished question: "to choose the dancer means to fall into the transient world of matter for the sake of a few moments of illusive pleasure; to choose the dance means to renounce all natural joys for the sake of divine revelation"(76). Yeats, therefore, affords no reassurance from the anxieties of our post-romantic predicament.

Yeats's beliefs have often been dismissed by critics as silly or out-of-keeping with a scientific age, though in recent years there has been a tendency to cast them in a more positive light. Part of the problem is

that we are still living with the 1930s legacy and are still uncertain how to deal dispassionately with Yeats's occult ideas. Blackmur's essay (1936), for example, still reads well today, but it bears the scars of the 'Hard Fact Thirties' when critics felt obliged to separate Yeats's poetry from his convictions. In this section, with particular reference to Auden (1939), MacNeice (1941), Spender (1935), Muir (1940), Brooks (1939), Tate (1942), Ellmann (1954) and Winters (1960), I retrace the contours of that critical terrain, conscious always that it was not Yeats's personality that posed a problem for critics of the 1930s and 1940s, as Cullingford (1984) maintains, but his 'System' of beliefs.

Critics differ in the value they attach to Yeats's System. Rajan (1965) is not untypical in following Yeats' suggestion that *A Vision* gave the poet 'metaphors for poetry'. Yeats's vision is thus best approached as 'a group of interrelated symbols', and, because it is a myth or a framework, it should be imaginatively rather than literally received. As regards the importance of the System for an interpretation of the poetry, Rajan asserts that "it is to the poetry that we should direct ourselves, and though esoteric interpretation is sometimes helpful and at other times necessary, it has to be controlled by a firm sense of the poem"(37). Malins (1974) goes further, claiming that *A Vision* is "vital to a full understanding of how his poetry was nourished"(78). Some critics have noticed how Yeats's great poetry after 1917 coincides with the development of his System, the composition of which can be traced from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918), through the period of automatic writing from October 1917 to March 1920, to its final shape in *A Vision* (1925-6). Other critics, however, choose to distinguish the poetry from the System or, more generally, from his ideas.

Kermode (1967) observes that Yeats's true commitment was not to the system but to poetry. The System, however, enabled him to see justice and reality together, to understand, that is, the tension between eternity and the dying generations. He laboured to speak in terms of a modern reality without forfeiting the use of paradigms, so that "the whole history of Yeats's style... reflects this regard for the reality that will not be reduced"(34). As a poet, the dream never wholly enchanted Yeats, but as a thinker, unfortunately, it did. His poetry is therefore the product of a skeptical gaze, but in his thinking he gravitates towards authoritarian politics and the dream of apocalypse and crisis. Hassett (1986), in a recent, original inquiry into the place of hatred in the poet's life and thought, suggests that, though often motivated by hatred, Yeats managed to control it when writing verse. At the end of his forthright essay condemning Yeats's fascist tendencies, O'Brien (1965) has the awkward task of returning to the connection between poetry and politics. He negotiates the dilemma not in the more conventional terms of admiring the poetry and hating the politics, but instead by trying to account for the force which surfaces in both the political prose and the poetry. O'Brien develops this by suggesting that Yeats's poetry anticipates Hitler and the Second World War but in "metaphors of such power that they thrust aside all calculated intent". O'Brien's argument serves to illustrate yet again the continuing difficulty critics encounter in incorporating Yeats' beliefs, whether religious or political, into a reading of his poetry.

"You were silly like us: your gift survived it all", wrote Auden in March 1939 in his famous elegy, the gift being 'language' and the ability to write well. Such an opposition is erected into a court-room drama when Auden (1939) presents in turn the case for the prosecution and the defence. In thirties style, the prosecution points to three

accusations the public might have against Yeats: 1] that he does not have a gift for memorable language, 2] that he did not have a profound understanding of the age he lived in, and 3] that he was unsympathetic towards the advanced thought of his time. Formulated thus, they of course miss the mark. 'How many of his lines can you remember?' asks the prosecutor rather foolishly about a poet who is famous for his aphorisms and his quotable lines. The second and third accusations now seem dated, and are turned on their head by the Defence. Yeats's convictions can be better understood in the wider context of the failure of liberal capitalist democracy, and the rise of Irish nationalism. Against the atomization of the individual under capitalism, Yeats sought "a binding force of society"; it was a religious search, and the religious solution may be unworkable, but to Yeats's credit it was based on a "true perception of a social evil". In conclusion, the Defence reminds the court that Yeats was a poet and not a politician, that art is the product of history, not a cause, and that his diction shows a steady evolution towards the true democratic style. Although probably unintended, Auden's essay and elegy, with their no-nonsense rationality, hardnosed realism and superior air, have widened the gap between Yeats's poetry and what he believed, and as a result it has proved difficult either to avoid the obligation to defend him, or to reshape the relationship between his occult ideas and his verse.

MacNeice (1941), in what for Ellmann is "still as good an introduction to [Yeats] as we have", conducts an extended debate with both High Modernism and the 1930s. As he proclaims in his preface, "a poem is both about something but [it] also is". Doubtless with Auden in mind, he seeks to rebut those who maintain that "Yeats was a silly old thing but he was a poet" (78). There is an intimate connection, between the author's life and a wider society; and the value of poetry resides in

its truthfulness to life. MacNeice suggests that, in spite of thriving on theoretical half-truths, preaching an unsound doctrine on poetry, or promulgating distortions about his family, mysticism and Ireland, "Yeats, as a poet, is characterized by integrity". Some of his guiding principles may have been wrong, but there is no guarantee that with the right beliefs he would have written better poetry. Indeed, MacNeice adds, he may not have written at all if he had thought differently. It is to Yeats's credit that he went against the age, and if he is to be an example it is that we should write according to our lights. Through it all, a picture of Yeats emerges that commands respect. MacNeice maintains, Yeats was not a mystic; he was fascinated by the metaphysical dialectic of *Being and Becoming*; he mistakenly thought he could approach popular poetry via an esoteric world; he recognized that a poem--a bridge to the Unknown--had to be constructed in terms of the known; and he learnt to compromise with the language of men, eventually adopting an admirably hard and dry style. As to what he believed, "there was always a skeptic in Yeats"(69). MacNeice stresses Yeats's Irish background and his connections with other Irish writers, how he fused Symbolist with nationalist doctrine, and how nationalism crucially intervened in saving him from theosophy and 1890s aestheticism. And politically, MacNeice argues, citing Auden's speech for the Defence, he should not be dismissed as 'a mere reactionary'. One of the strengths of MacNeice's study is to demonstrate that Yeats was both in and out of touch with his age: he shared much with other modern writers such as Rilke, Eliot, Lawrence, or other Irish writers such as Joyce, or Synge, but he was also his own man, who, for all his campaigning, in the end refused discipleship.

Spender (1935), Muir (1939) and Daiches (1940) add other Thirties voices to the debate, this time in the wider context of modern

literature and poetry. Spender, whose criticism is rooted in the familiar if unsophisticated opposition between romanticism and realism, attempts to detach the poetry from the beliefs. Thus, Yeats's occult activity has little relation to the part that the theory of magic plays in his poetry; his theory of symbolism is "orthodoxly psychological"; his method is most successful when applied to objects which are the least symbolic; his attitude to magical events is like a doctor's, not a witch doctor's, while his poetry is only magical in the sense that he can produce a certain atmosphere. Spender, therefore, admires the poetry not for its magic or its mystery but for its "passion, its humanity, its occasional marvelous lucidity, its technical mastery, its integrity, its strength, its reality and its opportunism"(69). Perhaps his most telling criticism comes in claiming that "Yeats has found, as yet, no subject of moral significance in the social life of his time. Instead of a subject, he offers us magnificent and lively rapportage about his friend"(85). For Muir, the present is a transitional period and such periods encourage apocalyptic visions or the historical sense. Unlike Kermode above, Muir is untroubled by this, content merely to have identified what he takes to be the determining historical context. This leaves him free to fasten into different features of Yeats's work: the relevance of *A Vision* to an understanding of the poetry; how great poems such as "The second coming", "Leda and the Swan", and the Byzantium poems gain from a knowledge of Yeats's occult ideas; moreover, the intensity of even his occasional poems derives from Spender, Muir contrasts the range of Yeats's imagination with his narrow sympathies and alerts us to the way he lacks "moral immediacy". Daiches (1940) comes to conclusions similar to those of MacNeice. Yeats was not a mystical poet; to help him achieve an adequate poetic expression he needed a system, order and ritual; his early poetry indicates a need for pattern, which he found in folk material; Ireland rescued him from his imitative romanticism, so

that by *The Wind Among the Reeds* Irish themes and figures predominate. In a later review, significantly entitled "The Practical Visionary" (1962), Daiches continues such a line of interpretation: Yeats was not an esoteric; Ireland saved him from the Rhymers' Club; "the test of a philosophy was the degree to which illuminating poetry could be based on it, not vice-versa"(22). He concludes that Yeats was a shrewd and practical person, whose life and work formed a unity.

In American criticism, the issue of Yeats's beliefs and his poetry has been coloured both by the Hard Fact Thirties and by the presence of New Criticism. At the end of his chapter on Yeats, Brooks (1939) summarizes what the System gave the poet; concrete and traditional symbols, the ability to see the world as a great drama, a pattern which was flexible enough to allow for the complexity of experience and to take in the whole person, and a doctrine of the Mask which enabled him to break decisively with the optimism, decorum and sentimentality of Victorian poetry. Brooks's concern is not with the issue of the truth or falsity of Yeats's System, but rather with how it constitutes a world-view, the "utterance of the whole soul of man" having for its object imaginative contemplation'.

Close to the center of the New Critical view of Yeats is the issue of how much we need to know in order to appreciate the poetry. Brooks makes use of the System as expounded in *A Vision*, while Tate prefers to rely on "the ordinary critical equipment of the educated critic" (1942). Ellmann (1954), alert both to his own biographical learnings and to the New Criticism, prefers an analytical approach. In his chapter 'Assertion without Doctrine', he makes three observations. Firstly, taking up the last comment in Brooks', he submits-in a way which recalls Spender's remarks that the later poems rest on certain qualities

such as 'breeding' and 'courtesy' rather than on beliefs- that for Yeats a belief is primarily a conviction. Moreover, beliefs have to be welded into a poem, which is not, therefore, merely an expression of belief; the test of an idea is not its significance outside the poem but "its relevance to the speaker's situation". Secondly, ideas in Yeats exist to be wrestled with and overpowered. His poetry is a site of conflict where ideas are altered or qualified according to the context of the poem. Yeats's belief in reincarnation, his view of heaven or the end of the world, his religious imagery all undergo modification in his poetry. He can be skeptical about reincarnation, startlingly variable about heaven, mixed in his attitude towards esoteric doctrine and upholder by turns of both Eastern religion and western thought. Ellmann concludes that the essential standard for the poet is one of 'dwelling in the presence of certain ideas', rather than of positing them as truths demanding adherence. Thirdly, in line with Symbolist theory, Ellmann affirms that the center of a Yeats poem is not its ideological content but its mood. Moods elevate the imagination above reason; they unify the world into one imaginative substance; they can be forcefully expressed.

Hill takes issue with Ellmann's view that Yeats 'remained stubbornly loyal to the conscious mind's intelligible structure'. Following Simone Weil's suggestion that "the simultaneous composition on several planes" is the law of artistic creation, Hill suggests that poetry recognizes the primary objective world "not so much by exercising its discursive faculty as by enacting a paradigm"(99). As an heir to the Romantic tradition, Yeats was involved in distinguishing true from false masks. The true mask could be shaped either as a 'grammar of assent', where there is a reciprocity between imagination and action, or as 'syntax' or 'articulate energy'. Hill argues that 'in Yeats's poetry there is imagination; in Yeats' politics there is action; but

the one does not enrich or deepen the other'. What Hill admires about Yeats's poetry is the energy of his syntax, the 'return upon himself', as in the final lines of "The Second coming". Hill goes on to suggest that "Easter 1916" is a paradigm of the hard-won sanctity of the intellect, which distinguishes it from Newman's grammar of assent, or consciousness. This complex set of discriminations needs close attention and serves to remind us that the issue of Yeats's poetry and beliefs is correspondingly intricate.

Since the formative period of the late 1930s and early 1940s, some Yeats critics have assumed in dealing with the issue of Yeats' ideas and his poetry that they are first in the field or that others have simply got it wrong. Winters (1960) provides a good example; he joins the debate like someone breaking up a party. He accepts the need to take Yeats's ideas seriously, and summarizes them thus: all good stems from emotions; lust and rage are paraded; ignorance is valued; an agrarian society run by a landed gentry is desirable. Yeats admired women for their beauty, had a cyclical view of history, believed in Irish legends, and praised and mythologized his friends.

Despite the abundance of such critical writings, a great deal seems to have been left unexplored. Among such left out, one can speak of Yeats's vision which hardly received any serious attention. Hence, "vision" in Yeats's poetry is so integral that unless it is adequately examined, much of Yeats would remain untouched. The researcher will make an in-depth study of the same. To quote Yeats:

It has often been this vision that has evoked the most startling inspiration, calling into outer life some portion of the divine life, or of the buried reality... (1961:154)