Chapter IV

Evolution of vision from *Crossways to Michael Robartes and the Dancer*

Artists and poets, who are taught by the nature of their craft to sympathise with all living things, and who, the more pure and fragrant is their lamp, pass the further from all limitations, to come at last to forget good and evil in an absorbing vision of the happy and the unhappy.

(W.B.Yeats: *Essays and Introductions*: 1961:129)

W.B. Yeats was a lifelong quester for the holy grail of poetic perfection. In his wanderings, he started from the never-never land of dream and romance, of awe and wonder and waded through the distopia of disillusionment where beauty "grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies" and where "men sit and hear each other groan" (Fifteen Poets 1999:360). Hence, the thesis aims at tracing the evolution of poetic vision of W.B. Yeats. It is a necessity to show how the poet undergoes "the paths untrodden" in order to attain a fuller vision as an artist. The evolution of his vision as a poet seems to reflect both the spirit and letter of Shakespeare's "Seven ages of Men".

Both the fancy of the infancy and the exuberance of the early youth find expression in the early poems. Yeats's early poetry is mainly introspective and escapist and he lays bare, though symbols and myths, to the inexpressible longings of his soul. His early period explores two trends of his vision- his romantic longing and his nationalistic urge to revive Celtic past and build a New Ireland of heroic standards. Yeats "had an intricate searching mind that reached deeply

into legends and superstitions of Ireland, and was capable of penetrating below the surface of human ambiguity" (Edel: 1955:21).

The poet's passion for Irish legends and myths of yore can be found in his atheism. As Yeats lacked any faith and stability of a true religion, he created a vision of his own. In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats writes: "I had made a new religion, an infallible church, of poetic tradition, of fardel of stories"(1992:10). Yeats turned his country of his into a dreamland, a Celtic utopian world of fancy. This earlier phase of his poetry is commonly known as "The Celtic twilight". In the Introduction to "The Celtic twilight" Yeats wrote:

> I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of beautiful pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my own people who would to look where I bid them (1970:6).

Yeats's early poems are a mapping out of an imaginary country for which the consistent inspiration is Ireland: its folklore, mythology, natural and supernatural landscapes. Both in its imaginary and real aspects, the poet continues to explore Ireland during the whole of his career in increasingly experimental ways. The two major sources of poetic inspiration are the occult and the Irish folklore. The poet was very much ambitious to adopt Irish myths, themes and settings in order to create a "new religion", which is "an infallible church of poetic tradition"(Yeats 1992:10). The Irish folklore around which Yeats designs his early poetry was particularly rich in legends and stories, banshees, enchantments, the sidhe and visionary Druid-poets. The content of folklore is essentially metaphysical in the sense of the interrelation of the "two worlds"—"the natural" and "the supernatural".

The occult, in the forms in which Yeats encountered it, offered complex metaphysical doctrines, reincarnation, magic and spiritual alchemy, often from ransacking the world-wide variety of religion, mythologies and symbolisms. Both folklore and occult used exile, the quest and the voyage as symbols of the spirit's journey from life to death. But as Michael J. Sidnell puts it, "In his own early poetry, Yeats not only searched Irish and mystical traditions for symbols but strained to elevate all the images of his poetry to symbolic status" (1996:07). Yeats also prescribes an image that "has transcended particular time and place becomes a living soul" (1970:80).

Yeats's hope to create a new Irish poetry-national but with occult perspectives, Celtic but written in English, manifested his need to sink himself imaginatively in Ireland. It may be noted in this connection that he spent much of his early life in London. The poet's longing to go back to Ireland of yore emphasized the contrast between the ugliness of modern English urban life and the simplicities of traditional Irish peasant life. Hence, the idea of Ireland as a pastoral retreat forms the very hub of Yeats's early poems.

Yeats's early literary career shows to a great extent the influence of Blake, Spenser and Shelley. He began as a famous poet of pastoral verse dramas based on English literary models and as an anthologist of Irish folklore. The poems of the earlier phase of his life are escapes into an imaginary world from an uncongenial, unpoetical real world. They are critiques of a kind of poetry of fancy. Group of Yeats's early poems includes under the title *Crossways* (1889), which bespeaks of the poet's longing for a flight away from the world of reality in favour of pastoral settings.

"The Song of the Happy Shepherd" is a call to a vanishing world of dream as against the modern world of "sick hurry" and "divided aims". Like the romantics, Yeats finds happiness and certitude a far cry in the world of reality. The poem provides a relatively plain-spoken commentary on the limits of pastoral in the late nineteenth century: "The woods of Arcady are dead"(Yeats: 1955:07). The contrast is drawn between the world of Arcadian pastoral ("dreaming") and the new "grey truth" of scientific or materialist philosophy. The "antique joy" is contrasted with the artificial "painted toy", and the emphasis is on the face of the golden world. The expression-"words alone are certain good" (1955:07) - speaks of the survival of language over the onslaught of time. The invitation into a world of illusion overshadows reality. The poet of "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" has made a decision to get away from the world of action and deeds, science and technology into that of fancy and fauns, the daffodils and lilies. The only truth that is worth seeking is the truth in "thine own heart" (1955:08). Round his shattered statue, "the lone and level sands stretch far away" (1955:07). As action ends in smoke, Yeats asks rhetorically "Where are now the warring kings" (1955:07)? In the cracked tune that 'Chronos' sings, there is little chance of happiness or certitude. Hence, the poet comes to the conclusion that the best alternative is to look within his heart.

On the contrary, "The Sad Shepherd" captures the same vision of pastoral world with sad overtone. In this, the elements of earth and sea are suggestive of impermanence and intangibility. The sea "cried her old cry still" (09) represents the flux of time. The sad shepherd is wandering about in a hostile world seeking to share his sorrow with some other creatures. But unfortunately, all his attempts are futile, as he has found no comforter. Then he picks up a seashell to breathe

sadness of his heart through 'a hollow, pearly heart' in order to get rid of ancient burden". But instead he hears the echo of his own misery:

> But the sad dweller by the sea-ways lone
> Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
> (Yeats: 1955:09)

Thus, "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" and "The Sad Shepherd" are poems of provoking antithesis and Yeats was haunted all his life by the conflicting claims of the 'poetic word' and 'the dusty deeds' (1955:07). In the graceful lyric, "The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes', the dark sorrow of the sad shepherd is dressed in a cloak, fair and bright and lovely and shod in the shoes of white wool in order that, its soundless footfall be light in all men's ears. Poetry can at least soften the edge of human misery.

The anxiety to get away from the world of reality permeates in "The Stolen Child". Fed up with the troubles of the world; the poet seeks a refuge for the survival of his own soul. Yeats believes at the core of his heart that poetry should maintain remoteness away from the world of humdrum reality. "The Stolen Child" strikes the keynote of this escapism, common in Romantic poetry, a longing to step into a world beyond the reach of the cares and heartaches, which infest the human world.

In fact, Yeats is always pining for "what is not" in the world which is "full of weeping than you can understand" (Yeats: 1955:20). Thus, Yeats is ignoring the world of reality and engages in exploring the world of fancy, imagination, myths and legends. The poem consists of four stanzas, each ending with and driving home the lesson:

Come away, O human child
To the waters and the wild
With the fairy hand in hand
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand

(Yeats: 1955:20)

The child the poet represents is not only an individual but an archetype of everyman. While the fairies invite one child to come away, the poet is suggesting to all the readers the one way to happiness. The human child is given the vision of the world of fancy. No wonder that the child, "solemn eyed", baffled by a weeping world, leaves it for the faeries' island. This island is seen as retreat from the disorder of the world to a never-never land of love and idleness, which we also find in "An Isle in the Water". In fact, "The stolen child" "reveals the dreamy-eyed sensitive romantic that Yeats chose to mask for purposes of both poetry and perhaps, for sheer survival" (Unterecker: 1969:73)

Still a poet of fancy and imagination, Yeats of "The Rose" (1893) is matured a bit by seeking wisdom in the heart of nature. "The Lake isle of Innisfree" is not only a poem of longing, it is a longing for wisdom and knowledge. Yeats's poems of escape contain much poetry of earth also, and his Innisfree cabin is at once a realm of imagination and an actual island in Sligo. The tone of the poem is the same romantic poet's longing to create a myth for the survival of his soul. The poem is again a vision of an 'elsewhere' of rural, isolated reflective peace- an idealized Irish pastoral setting:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

(Yeats: 1955:44)

Yeats commented that the poem was written in London, and that it represented his "ambition of living in imitation of Thoreau on... a little island in Lough Gill". Like Thoreau's *Walden*, which set on a lake, Yeats's Innisfree becomes a transcendental mirror of nature. For, Innisfree as an island is symbolically isolated, cut-off from the mainland of cities, roads, time and change with which the poem concludes. It represents a harmonious setting at a distance from ordinary life. The Innisfree beckons Yeats with its promise of 'soma peace' away from London's 'pavements grey' (Yeats: 1955:44). The poet's world is here seen not in full sunlight but in starlight and twilight and unearthly cold light of dawn, and under visionary powers.

"The Valley of the Black Pig" from *The Wind Among The Reeds* (1899) is obviously a different kind of poem, with a mythological emphasis suggested by the mysterious title. But the romantic frame of mind still persists. What the poem itself evokes is surely a sense of mysterious dreams and sudden awakening from them into a world of battle of an archaic kind with spears and horsemen. The poet associates himself with those who 'labour by the cromlech on the shore' (Yeats: 1955:73), who are evidently seeking some kind of higher reality than that of 'world's empires'. These are prepared to worship an unnamed spiritual power that is described in the mysterious final line of the poem as "Master of still stars and of the flaming door". The reader also feels on the edge of another world, perhaps to be approached through the 'flaming door' (1955:73), which may suggest a kind of purgatorial experience. The poem marks it off from other poems as we have moved away from the landscape of Ireland to mythology, although a mythology with Irish associations.

In the earlier phase of his poetic career, Yeats's poetic nature made him dream and ruminate whereas the historical period in Ireland in which he belonged demanded concrete action. Torn between these two extremes, Yeats craved for a sense of balance and equilibrium. But far as he would, he failed to reconcile Yeats, the inveterate dreamer with Yeats, the intended man of action. Moreover, his chance meeting with and loss of heart to the Irish beauty Maud Gonne further complicated the matter. It is evident then that Yeats's attitude toward his beloved had a great deal to do with the state of mind that generated his early poetry. Maud Gonne was a public figure, and to win her he had to spend far more time on public activities than he would have otherwise done. As a result, the dream life became harder for Yeats to sustain.

Though Yeats was right in believing that his genuine poetry lay in 'personal utterance', he recognized as well that personal frustrations and feelings of hopelessness alone could not organize a body of lyric poetry and drama into the organic structure he hoped to build. For, personal feelings, as he had discovered in his earliest experiments in verse, are beset always with the danger of sentimentality, which leads poetry away from the reality. As Yeats himself said:

> One of the means of loftiness, has been the choice of strange and far-away places for the scenery of art, but this choice has grown bitter to me (1970:296).

Further, Yeats's frustration in love, and his bitter experiences in politics and in the Abbey theatre shattered his illusions and produced the harsh, sardonic tone of the Middle poems. The poet hurtled down to the hard realities- the grime and the dust, the sham and swank. In "A

Coat', Yeats expressed the change from a dreamy glorification of Ireland's past to a cynical awareness of its present:

I made my song a coat
Covered with embroideries
Out of old mythologies.
From heel to throat;
But the fools caught it,
Wore it in the world's eyes.
As though they'd wrought it.
Song, let them take it,
For, there's more enterprise
In walking naked.

(Yeats: 1955:142)

In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats speaks about his need to encompass a wide vision of life:

> All my life I have been haunted with the idea that the poet should know all classes of men as one of themselves, that he should combine the greatest possible personal realization with the greatest possible knowledge of the speech and circumstances of the world (1966:470).

Maud Gonne's marriage to McBride may be said to complicate Yeats's middle years. These were years, not only of emotional strain, but also of the poet's many literary and political wrangles at home. The poet had been thrust out of his chosen fairyland; the waters and the wild, the lake isle of Innisfree and its bee-loud glade had no place for him. In the frustration of early love, apparently he has paid the price of escaping to fairyland, and the memory of it is bitter: he still champions, he still puts above everything the nobility and splendour of the

imagination; he must face life's hard condition. And the consciousness of inexorable limits has brought his art to a sharper focus- the unbinding of "youth's dreamy load" has made him a better poet. No longer content with the ice-eyed queens of fairyland, Yeats applies to poetry all the vigour of his intellect and the energy of his passion.

The transition had already shown itself in "The Folly of Being Comforted" in which the poet is denied any comfort for his love. From then on, the development runs faster than any expectation. Language gains the force of gesture. "No Second Troy" from *The Green Helmet and the Other Poems* (1910) is a dramatic poem, though we hear only one voice, that of the poet discussing the woman who has caused him to suffer. The poem does not blame the woman, but rather the times in which she is living. The note of challenge is struck in the first question- "Why should I blame her"? If she has caused revolutionary violence- which we link with the Irish nationalist struggle against English –and caused the poet suffering, this is simply because she is a heroic figure whose archaic qualities find inadequate expression in the modern world. The image of the "tightened bow" surely suggests tension and danger, and leads forward to the suggestion in the final line that the woman is the successor of Helen, whose beauty had led to the destruction of Troy. Thus, Yeats is leading the reader on to the plane of heroic legend and myth to which his imagination was powerfully attracted, and which we encountered in "The Valley of Black Pig". A marked feature of the poem is, of course, the series of urgent questions, which helps to create the dramatic feeling and bring the heroic past into a vivid relationship with contrastingly unheroic present.

In "September1913" from *Responsibilities* (1919), the poet is contrasting the impulsive and courageous nationalist leader of the past

with modern Irishmen who are concerned only "to pay and save": to save their souls by "shivering prayers". The refrain—"Romantic Ireland's dead and gone" (Yeats: 1955:121), contrasts the reckless heroism of O'Leary (died in 1907) and his patriotic peers with the petty modern Irishmen who "fumble in a greasy till/And add the halfpence to the pence" (Yeats: 1955:120). The sacrifices of the past heroes seem pointless if they have led only to the materialistic, selfish state of the Ireland of 1913, in which notions of self-sacrifice are so remote that the heroic gestures would now be regarded as mad romanticism. The "delirium of the brave", according to Eliot, constitutes the corner stone of the dignity and progress of humanity:

> My friend, blood shaking my heart
> The awful Dearing of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this and this only we have existed
>
> (Jain: 1996:58).

Men whose motto is to "give", not to "receive", perform such deeds of reckless courage but the petty agitators of today (Ireland after 1913) cannot even imagine that men can be capable of such a noble strain of public spirit. By the end of the poem, though, the surviving feelings are of reluctant acceptance, but there is no point in trying to retain the notions of the heroic in modern Ireland. The poem, indeed, expresses complete disillusionment, but does so with striking vigour.

Yeats' *The Wild Swans at Coole* works as a collection. The collection creates in the reader an imagined figure of the poet who, through the collection, searches for a poetic vision. The ordering of the poems in the collection creates a narrative in which the imagined poet discards poetic identities in order to arrive at a singular poetic practice.

Yeats' 1919 collection *The Wild Swans at Coole* marks a turning point in the trajectory of his poetic career. He was already well known and, according to C.K. Stead, "widely regarded as the most important living poet writing in English" (1986:13) by the time he began his artistic relationship with Ezra Pound in the early 1910s. However, it is Yeats's later work, beginning with the 1921 collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, from which his greatest poems have emerged. In 1915, a year after the publication of the collection *Responsibilities*, Yeats was offered a knighthood by the British government, which he declined for political reasons. As Ireland's national poet, Yeats's acceptance of knighthood from his country's colonizers, the English, would have been demoralizing not only to his nationalistic poetic project, but also to Ireland, for which he sought to create an autonomous literary style. Two years after the publication of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Between the honours of his declined knighthood and the Nobel Prize, Yeats radically changed his relationship to his poetry. While he once stated that "We will have to make a literature for [Ireland]... The poets will save the people," by 1915, he was beginning to see his position as Ireland's national poet in a different light. (Qtd. in Marcus: 1970:5) In *The Wild Swans at Coole*, Yeats finds himself at a crossroads and ill at ease with the Irish nationalism and Irish mysticism so prominent in his earlier work. Biographically, he had turned fifty years of age in 1915, during which he was writing many of the poems in the collection. Yeats' personal life was itself at a crossroads: he had proposed and been turned down by both Maud Gonne, with whom he had been obsessed for the previous twenty-five years, and her daughter Iseult during the conception of many of the poems. Furthermore, he had married George Hyde-Lees in 1917. Thus, the period between 1915, in which the first poems of the

collection were published, and1919 mark a turning point in both Yeats's life and work.

Yeats's position with respect to the English canon presents a key conflict in the collection. In 1892, he had written that "no man who deserts his own literature for another's can hope for the highest rank."(Qtd. in Marcus: 1970:14) It is not that he did not think there was anything for an Irish poet to gain from reading the literature of the colonizing English; one should not "imitate" another country's literature, he stated in 1893 but, rather, "study them constantly and learn from them the secret of their greatness." (Qtd. in Marcus: 1970:18) The project of his early poetry and plays, then, was to create a "native" Irish style using the English language. In studying Irish dialects of English, Yeats sought to invent a literary style that was wholly Irish; he intended for Ireland to have both its own voice and symbolic lexicon, working towards the latter by appropriating symbols from Irish mythology in his poetry. By 1915, however, his own poetic voice had become more personal and less the "native" Irish voice. He and John M. Synge had sought to invent in creating a literature for Ireland.

In *The Wild Swans at Coole*, this change in Yeats's poetry comes from a reprioritization, a change in his self-identity as a visionary. In order to examine the collection, however, we want to look at the poem "Easter, 1916," because it illuminates several central concerns in *The Wild Swans at Coole*. In the poem, Yeats states that his "part" as a poet is "To murmur name upon name" (Yeats: 1955:204), elegizing the Irish nationalists who were sentenced to death after the Easter rebellion of 1916. We can see in the poem a questioning of the place of nationalism in poetry. "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the

quarrel with ourselves, poetry," Yeats hesitates in his theoretical treatise *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. The poem presents Yeats's inner dialogue about the merits of the rebellion. "Too long a sacrifice/ Can make a stone of the heart," he states of the rebels (1955:204). Of the first of the historical Yeats's handful of proposals to Maud Gonne in 1891, when she told him that their "parts" were to work towards the Irish cause and not domesticity, Hugh Kenner states "[Yeats] imagined her selling her soul to the devil to free the Irish from bondage"(1983:30). This struggle between the personal and the political is one of the many issues Yeats tackles in *The Wild Swans at Coole* as he searches for a poetic identity. At the poem's end, Yeats acknowledges that the rebels' deaths were perhaps not "needless... after all" as "Now and in time to be, / Wherever green is worn, / Are changed" (205). However, the ambiguity is important, as the "changing" of the rebels only concerns Yeats's nationalistic project because the Irish national identity has also been changed. The rebels had become martyrs and, in doing so, as Edward Malins states in *Yeats and the Easter Rising*, "[provided] an emotional stimulus for the birth of a nation no less than that of Paul Revere and the Minutemen of Lexington."(Qtd. in Jeffares: 1968: 228-229).

The poem's internal dialogue enacts Yeats's poetic shift; the poet's "part" is that of a mythologizer—he has gone from portraying mythological Irish heroes such as Oisín to creating contemporary ones—but it is certainly not that of a rhetorician. Furthermore, though the rebels he mythologizes become heroes, they do not necessarily stir up revolutionary fervour in Yeats. "We know their dream," he states in the poem, or at least "enough/ To know they dreamed and are dead" (1955: 204). He implies, then, that to sympathize with the rebels is not the same as being aroused by their martyrdom. He knows what they

mean to Ireland and its people, but their deaths do not incite in him what the death of Robert Gregory does in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," namely the poetic impulse that drives Yeats's poetry. As an Irish poet, however, it is his duty, his "part," to mythologize the rebels, regardless of whether they incite in him the revolutionary zeal which they do in others. The poem, then, is not a failed attempt at a political poem but, rather, an examination of the political responses in Yeats's work, specifically of his role as Ireland's national poet. For Yeats, identity is dependent on symbols. In "The Symbolism of Poetry," Yeats writes that the function of poetic symbols is to "evoke an emotion which cannot be evoked by any other arrangement of colours and sounds and forms."(1977: 156) For the symbol to be effective, that is, evocative, the poet must himself be moved to create it as such. That MacDonagh, MacBride, Connolly, and Pearse fail to stir in him revolutionary zeal is akin to his failure to create, in the collection's title poem, symbolic swans that move him. Furthermore, "Easter, 1916" illustrates nicely the way Yeats strips away poetic identities, as he fulfils his function as national poet, but is at odds with the role.

He feels obligated to elegize the Easter rebels because they are Irish heroes, but is not altogether convinced that he can perform the role with passion. The rebels, then, become mere names, their entire lives have been essentialized into their act of sacrifice. Yeats memorializes them as historical figures rather than as the living presences. "Easter 1916," then, provides a nice preface to *The Wild Swans at Coole*'s title poem. Yeats' failure in "Easter 1916" to share the dream of the rebels becomes a failure to derive poetic feeling from the swans in the title poem. The refrain

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born (1955: 205)
becomes "The Wild Swans at Coole"'s
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread
And now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful
(1955: 147).

In examining Yeats' relationship to his themes, we see him feeling with many poetic roles and, as we have already seen in "Easter 1916" and will see in the title poem, he dramatizes a poetic failure in the poems in order to investigate what kind of poetic vision he wants to achieve. The figure of Yeats we uncover from the poems is constantly changing as he finds himself lacking passion for his themes and symbols. "Ego Dominus Tuus," "The Phases of the Moon," and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" are good cases in point. It is in "Ego Dominus Tuus," however, that Yeats finds a centered poetic identity, that is of a visionary poet. Here again we look at the poems' ordering and how the final poem, "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," represents the culmination of the poems that precede it. Having arrived at a poetic identity, Yeats, in composing "Ego Dominus Tuus"and "The Phases of the Moon," sets up necessary failures to frame the success of the final poem. Hence, we examine the collection as a whole, identifying the reconciliation of memory and imagination as the "unity of being" for which his poetry is a search.

In "Lines Written in Dejection," Yeats laments the impermanence of symbols that were once alive to him. The witches,

centaurs, and moon, all symbols from Yeats's earlier work and, furthermore, figures from his conception of Irish mysticism have disappeared from his poetic vision. In their stead, he is left with the "timid sun." Richard Ellman states of the poem, "His symbols had lost their power in part because of over-use, but also because he had abandoned projects of which they had once been a part... there would be no Irish mystical order and no magical rites... The future of Ireland... did not stir him as much as in the past, and the Irish gods were accordingly of less interest"(1978:195). The poem, then, is less about the powerlessness of symbols than his loss of interest in the themes for which they stand. In the poem, Yeats does not gain a new passion Indeed, in both "Lines Written in Dejection" and "Easter, 1916," he enacts their inability to inspire him. The poems' true inspiration, then, is Yeats' s loss of a position of a true poetic role.

As "Lines Written in Dejection" literalizes Yeats' lack of passion through his inability to see centaurs, witches, and the moon, in "The Wild Swans at Coole," Yeats finds that the swans' meaning has disappeared for him. The poem opens the collection depicting a return to a scene that was previously filled with meaning and emphasizes an inability to be moved by its subject, the swans that inhabit Coole, as poetic symbols. In the case of the poem "The Wild Swans at Coole," the swans, a symbol that he had used earlier in his poetry and that exists in Irish mythology, change from the swans he had known nineteen years earlier when he first encountered them at Coole Park. The poem, with the poet's return to Coole Park and his inability to take from the scene what he once did, recalls Wordsworth's return to the banks of the Wye in "Lines Written a Few Miles over Tintern Abbey." In the poem, Wordsworth returns to the Wye only to find that he cannot derive from

it the same passion he had derived in youth. However, he discovers in its stead "abundant recompense," as he has

> ...learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity.
>
> (Ed. Hayden, John O: 1994:68)

However, Yeats does not achieve the Romantic recompense that Wordsworth does. Rather, the similarity of the beginning of "The Wild Swans at Coole" and "Tintern Abbey" creates the expectation of recompense and, the poem failing to meet the expectation, draws attention to Yeats's movement away from his Romantic predecessors.

One reason for the poem's movement away from the Romantic expectation it introduces is political. Embracing the literature of his English colonizers represented defeat in that it ceded to them cultural dominance over Ireland. We know that Yeats had read Shelley before 1900— which he had stated in his essay of that year "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry", "I have re-read his *Prometheus Unbound* for the first time for many years"(Yeats: 1977:77). However, his poetry had, before the poems of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, resisted the English Romantic influence, using instead characters and themes from Irish mythology. This is not to say that his poetry had, before "The Wild Swans at Coole," not been Romantic; rather, that he had previously written into his English vague Romanticism an Irish landscape. "The Wild Swans at Coole" is not a Romantic poem. It enacts the process by which Yeats struggles between two voices: that of the Irish voice with which he had felt the responsibility to peak in his poetry and that of the English

tradition. One source for the symbol of the swans is Shelley's "Alastor," in which Shelley's character of the visionary poet watches a swan fly away and imagines it going home to meet its mate while lamenting his inability to find consummation in the external world (Complete Works of Shelley: 1901: 31-43) The struggle between the inner and the outer world—not to mention that of the competing English and Irish influences on Yeats's poetic vision—is a recurring theme in Yeats'collection. It is fitting that *The Wild Swans at Coole* takes its name from a poem in which Yeats attempts to tame swans for his poetry. He attempts to depict them in his poem as wild, but they are, instead, domestic. He finds hem "beautiful," but also "mysterious" (Yeats: 1955:147). The speaker is forced to struggle with his subjects and eventually depict them as merely elusive.

The poem resists both the Shelleyan Romantic symbolic vocabulary and Wordsworthian premise Yeats imports. As the poem introduces itself as Romantic, it is difficult to avoid reading the swans as cousins of Shelley's domestic swans. Domesticity is obviously an issue in the poem; however Yeats' attitude towards domesticity is difficult to determine. We know that the historical Yeats feels alienated from it. Maud Gonne had told Yeats when he first proposed her that neither he nor she wasthe type to marry, as the "parts" which they were destined to play were with the Irish cause. When she married Easter rebel John MacBride in 1903, Yeats was devastated. "What would he do now that his most cherished dream was gone?" asks biographer Richard Ellman rhetorically (Ellman 1978:195). "I am exhausted, I can do no more," Yeats told Lady Gregory when she offered him money to get married in order to release himself from his obsession with Gonne (Qtd. in Ellman 1978:162) Roughly twenty years later, if we can read his poem as an accurate indicator of his feelings towards domesticity,

he still lacks energy—due in no small part, as he presents himself in the poems, to feelings of dejection and futility. He again became infatuated with Gonne after MacBride's execution and asked her to marry him once more, but, as Ellman suggests, he had anticipated and was, perhaps, relieved that she again declined his proposal. (1978:222) Rather than, as Gonne had suggested, choosing between domesticity and nationalism, Yeats chose a third route: the tower. For Yeats, the tower—an actual tower in a castle on the edge of Lady Gregory's Coole estate that he made his home shortly after marrying George Hyde-Lees in 1917—is a symbol of solitude and distance from the external world, precluding both love and nationalism. As we see beginning with the second poem of the collection, Yeats uses the tower in his poetry as a fortress of imagination and solitude, his actual marriage notwithstanding. His marriage to Hyde-Lees represented to him not only domesticity but also a visionary poetics; shortly after their wedding, she attempted automatic writing. Though Yeats came to embrace his marriage, in marrying her, he was in part looking for a means with which to end the absence of passion and indecisiveness that marks *The Wild Swans at Coole* and, on a personal level, rid himself of his longstanding obsession with Maud Gonne. "[He] felt that she would help him move forward," states Ellman (1978:222). Yeats is unsure what form he wants the swans to take in "The Wild Swans at Coole," yet they no longer elude him as they once did; he can now finish counting them before they fly away. However, though he presents them, like Shelley's swans, as lovers, his count yields 59, an odd number. The swans resist their narrator, as the poem, in its inability to represent the swans as objects of desire, resists the English Romantic tradition. Similarly, Yeats' return to Coole Park does not yield the same result as does Wordsworth's return to the banks of the Wye. Yeats does not, as Wordsworth does in "Tintern Abbey," find in place of the feelings once

evoked a deeper feeling but, instead, finds the swans "mysterious" and the true meaning of the swans still eludes him. Rather than seeing the swans through the clearer eyes that come with age, Yeats imagines the swans elsewhere, delighting someone else's eyes. By the end of the poem, the swans have become so elusive that they are hypothetical. They are no longer Shelleyan figures of desire or Irish mythological swans; they are merely symbols of their own elusiveness. In the third stanza, the narrator begins to cease deriving passion from the swans and, instead, aims at merely incorporating them into the poem. The poem becomes a marveling at his inability to be moved by the swans:

> I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
> And now my heart is sore.
> All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
> The first time on this shore,
> The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
> Trod with a lighter tread.
>
> (Yeats: 1955:147)

In the second stanza, the swans had been figures of desire that flew away before he could finish counting them; he could incorporate them into his poetry as elusive symbols whose brilliance he sought to, but which could not reflect his own spirit. Yeats's "heart is sore" because "All's changed." However, his declaration that "All's changed" both marks the shift from the present to memory and the extinction of his desire to make symbols of the swans.

> But now they drift on the still water,
> Mysterious, beautiful.
>
> (1955:147).

No longer does he find the swans brilliant but, instead, can only find their beauty "mysterious." His desire for what the swans had once been to him becomes wonder at their not being so. As Yeats is unable to use the swans as figures for poetic desire, the poem loses its connection to a present reality. He cannot achieve the straightforward symbolism of the swans reflecting his desire, as they do not act as he would like them to. In the last stanza, then, he removes the swans from his landscape, transporting them into a vision of an imagined future:

> Among what rushes will they build,
> By what lake's edge or pool
> Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
> To find they have flown away?
>
> (1955:147)

The Wordsworthian recompense from which the poet imagines creating poetry is replaced with an inability to write about real or ideal swans. They can only exist as elusive mysteries in the poetry. The swans neither sing swan songs nor die; instead, they appear to become domestic, pairing up, their hearts having not grown old. As they no longer reflect how Yeats feels, they pair up with one another and fly away to "build" at "other rushes" and reflect someone else's feelings. The swans that scattered when he counted them but never flew away had been a constant preoccupation with Yeats. But he can no longer, as he had done for nineteen years, watch them and admire them as figures of desire. He had achieved a domesticity with the swans—he had returned to the scene every autumn. He portrays the swans as migrating to settle domestically elsewhere, delighting their new beholders and finding symbolic rest. Literally, they still inhabit Coole, but now mystify Yeats, who finds them at once "beautiful" and "mysterious." As symbols, then, they do not do what swans should,

that is, sing and die. Rather, it is Yeats who sings here a swan song. The poem is not only a valediction to the swans as the figures of desire but does provide symbolic import. Part of the poet he had been, is dead. In scattering before he could finish counting them, the swans enraptured him. However, the swans do not become symbols for Yeats's newfound inability to derive delight; in the third stanza, all changes. Instead, as he does not understand their symbolic function in the poem, they come to stand for his indifference to what is lost. Edward Said and Seamus Deane argue that Yeats's mysticism comes out of his passion for a culturally self-determined Ireland—"Yeats's wilful mysticism and incoherence embody a revolutionary potential, and the poet insists "that Ireland should retain its culture by keeping awake its consciousness of metaphysical questions,'" Said states, quoting Deane (1993:227-228). Yeats's mythologizing is similar to his use of Irish dialects: giving Ireland a language of its own rather than using the language of its colonizers, the English. However, we find Yeats the Irish nationalist in *The Wild Swans at Coole.*

"In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," he calls Robert Gregory "our Sidney." If Gregory is Sidney, then Yeats, the elegist, is Edmund Spenser, who wrote "Astrophel," an elegy for Sidney. This aligning of himself with the English tradition becomes more conspicuous when viewed in light of his diminishing passion for Ireland in the poem. The argument can be made that comparing himself with Spenser, who was England's national poet, Yeats is exerting his Irish nationalism. In 1596, he wrote *View of the Present State of Ireland,* in which, Said states, he "boldly [proposed] that since the Irish were barbarian Scythians, most of them should be exterminated" (1993: 222). Yeats, when comparing himself with Spenser, is making a bold statement about his relationship to both Ireland and England. Furthermore,

Gregory—the subject of the elegy—died fighting for England in the First World War, hardly a nationalistic act for an Irishman.

"In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" begins as an elegy to Yeats' dead friends, each a historical Irish figure. However, as in "The Wild Swans at Coole," he lacks feeling for his subjects until he reaches Gregory, around whom he, as the poem's title suggests, refocuses the poem. John Synge, he states, though dying, "chose the living world for text" (149). The "living world" chosen by Synge is presented in contradistinction to the dead world of Lionel Johnson, whom Yeats elegizes in the previous stanza. In the poem, Yeats states that Johnson "loved his learning better than mankind" and, indeed, his learning is removed from the living world as it is "Greek and Latin learning" (148, 149). Johnson's remoteness in devoting himself exclusively to the Classics, then, is comparable to Yeats's symbolic retreat to his tower, in which the poem takes place. For Yeats, Johnson was already dead in life. Synge, on the other hand, is concerned with Ireland, for him "the living world." However, Yeats is unable to derive poetic inspiration from Synge, as he is unable to do from Johnson and Alfred Pollexfen, the third dead friend Yeats attempts to make present in the poem. He thus proceeds to devote the remainder of the poem to Gregory: "I am accustomed to their lack of breath, / But not that of my dear friend's dear son" (150). While Yeats's attitude towards Johnson's death points to Johnson's biography, his inability to feel the same passion for the deaths of Synge and Pollexfen as he does for Gregory's death, points to his own failure, as Synge and Pollexfen, unlike Johnson, were not dead in life. As with the elusiveness of the symbols in "Lines Written in Dejection" and the swans in "The Wild Swans at Coole," Yeats is no longer moved by what once moved him. The poem shows his loss of interest in Irish heroism, Synge and Pollexfen being Irish heroes, and

the emergence of his self-image as something other than Ireland's national poet. No longer does Yeats seek to create a "native" Irish style or symbolic lexicon. As we also see in "Easter, 1916," he is even at a distance from the heroic deaths he mythologizes. Yeats tellingly chooses "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" to follow "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory". In the latter, he states that Gregory's death "took all my heart for speech," extinguishing his passion for elegizing Synge, Johnson, and Pollexfen (152). In the former, he creates the Airman, an idealization of Gregory in his act of dying. Whereas Johnson, Synge, and Pollexfen "burn damp faggots," Gregory

> ...may consume
> The entire combustible world in one small room
> As though dried straw, and if we turn about
> The bare chimney is gone black out
> Because the work had finished in that flare.
> (1955: 159).

The "measureless consummation" to which Johnson's learning draws him ever nearer but which he nonetheless never attains is achieved by Gregory not through Johnson's death-in-life but, as we see in the following poem, through an active embrace of death. The Airman, unlike Johnson, seeks death rather than merely rejecting life. In "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," Yeats writes of Synge:

> But that, long travelling, he had come
> Towards nightfall upon certain set apart
> In a most desolate stony place,
> Towards nightfall upon a race
> Passionate and simple like his heart.
> (1955: 149)

In the end, Synge's passion leads to the same fate as that of Johnson, a solitary death. Where Synge was simple of heart, and from this simplicity came his passion, Yeats is dispassionate precisely because he sees the desolation that Synge, though he chose "the living world," encountered. In contradistinction to Synge and Pollexfen in the elegy and the rebels in "Easter, 1916," then, Yeats creates in "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" a character of Gregory who is decidedly unheroic. Speaking through the Airman's voice, Yeats states,

> Those that I fight I do not hate,
> Those that I guard I do not love;
> My country is Kiltartan Cross,
> My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
> No likely end could bring them loss
> Or leave them happier than before.
>
> (1955: 152)

These lines ally Yeats with the anti-English camp; however, while Yeats, speaking through the voice of his idealized Gregory, has reservations about defending his colonizers, the poem also shows his reservations about the cause of Irish self-determination. The Airman chooses to fight for the English, despite the fact that they are his colonizers. The Airman distances himself from the Irish cause: he fights for the enemy, yet he does not care if they win. Lacking passion in remembering Synge, Yeats, like Johnson, turns away from the world. If worldly action can only lead to a solitary death, then Yeats, through the voice of the Airman, has no use for the world. Yeats's reference to the Airman's consummation in or with death is not an example of making present his visionary death through absence. Rather, it is an enactment of Yeats's inability to produce anything in his poetry—"We have no gift to set a statesman right," he writes in "On Being Asked for a War Poem"—

except for absence (3). The Airman exists as an extinguishing of Yeats's nationalistic impulse. Seamus Deane states that the Easter rebels created "a new and specifically Irish version of modern, existential heroism" and that "Easter Week made the Great War look like a mindless, despiritualized carnage"(1987:46). The Airman's death is a reaction similar to that of the Easter rebels, only his death affects himself alone. The Airman's embrace of the futility of the Irish cause mirrors Yeats' own: the pursuit of "a lonely impulse of desire" as opposed to reinventing the Irish national identity. In "The Phases of the Moon," Yeats, through the voice of Michael Robartes, states of himself, "he seeks in book or manuscript/ What he shall never find" (184). Like the Airman, who retreats into himself and literally escapesto a "tumult in the clouds," the second character of the poet in "The Phases of the Moon" hides from the world in his tower. Yeats ends "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death":

> The years to come seemed waste of breath,
> A waste of breath the years behind
> In balance with this life, this death.
>
> (1955: 152).

However, unlike the Airman's life-in-death, what Yeats seeks is a visionary transcendence that does not come at the expense of his life. Gregory's "lonely impulse of delight" at once marks his self-removal from the world and his entrance into the absolute present, which extinguish his breath, and intimate his visionary experience in death.

Yeats, the poet, however, does not achieve Gregory's transcendence with his ventriloquism; instead, his poem points to the final step he claims Gregory had taken but that he, in his tower, will not and, in his poetry, cannot take. Like Johnson, then, his

"measureless consummation" is deferred. This poetry is a poetry of absence, which is devoid of passion. And passion, as evidenced by the life and death of Synge, inevitably ends in a solitude too like Johnson's. *The Wild Swans at Coole*, a collection based on loss, is concerned with this loss of passion for his older concerns and purpose. Instead of finding loss numinous or finding recompense in loss, as Wordsworth does in *Ode to Intimations on Immortality*, the poetry in *The Wild Swans at Coole* is a reflection on loss. In the Gregory and Airman poems, Yeats is unable to represent the passion he claims to feel in poetry. He states in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," that his passion in thinking of Gregory's death "took all my heart for speech." Yeats, then, does have passion, as he is moved in imagining Gregory's death, but cannot make it present in his poetry. His portrayal of Gregory's death in the Gregory elegy is not, as was his goal at the beginning of the poem, to perform a séance to conjure his dead countrymen, making them present in the poem. Similarly, for the Airman, all is "waste of breath" except for his moment of visionary experience. Unable to represent the passion he does feel—namely, for Gregory and the Airman's visionary deaths—early in the collection, Yeats can only point to the visionary ascent of Gregory and the Airman, unable or unwilling to make their fates his own.

The Wild Swans at Coole enacts his search for a centered poetic identity from which he can achieve the symbolic vision. As the consecutive poems "To a Young Beauty," "To a Young Girl," and "The Scholars" follow the trajectory of the collection as a whole. In "To A Young Beauty," Yeats claims that he "may dine at journey's end/ With Landor and with Donne," aligning himself with the English tradition (1955: 157). As a Protestant, thus Anglo-Irish as opposed to Irish Catholic, he is estranged from the Irish dialects with which he and

John Synge had once sought to create a "native" Irish style. The Irish dialects to which he gives voice in his poetry, then, are not his own; his use of them is akin to that of a colonizer—the Anglo-Irish making up Ireland's ruling class. Norman Jeffares states that, "Yeats disapproved of the Bohemian company Iseult Gonne [the poem's young beauty] was keeping in Dublin" (1968: 167). Choosing to align himself with the English canon rather than with his countrymen, Yeats seems to doubt the possibility of creating an independent Irish literature. In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, also, he states that Landor "lived loving and hating, ridiculous and unconquered, into extreme old age, all lost but the favour of his Muses"(Yeats: 1959:342). As with most things Yeats writes, his assessment of Landor is ambivalent. Like Yeats, Landor is faced with a choice between the external and internal and his choice of the internal allows him to produce poetry. However, Yeats cautions that for a poet to seek that which Landor achieved, there comes a risk of ending up like Wordsworth, who, he states in the same paragraph, "[withered] into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and [climbed] to some waste room and [found], forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust." (Yeats: 1959:342)

In "Men Improve with the Years," he describes Maud Gonne's beauty as "a pictured beauty" as if "found in a book,"(152-150) comparing his feelings for her to his lack of passion for Johnson, Synge, and Pollexfen in the Gregory elegy, whose faces he stated "[seemed] to look/ Out of some old picture-book" (149). Furthermore, the introduction of the younger Gonne continues the theme of aging introduced in the title poem. Yeats' "praise [for] the winters gone" presents a progression from his anxiety with aging in "Men Improve with the Years" and the lines

O heart we are old;
The living beauty is for younger men:
We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears
(1955: 156)

in "The Living Beauty." In "The Living Beauty," he finds in age an escape from his passion for Maud Gonne. However, as we have seen, the canonicity that comes with his distancing of himself from the younger men who chase beauty is but another identity that he eventually sheds in "The Scholars." J. Middleton Murry writes of "Men Improve with the Years": "He is not worn out with dreams, but with the vain effort to master them and submit them to his own creative energy," a sentiment that can be applied to the entire collection. (1961: 11) "To a Young Beauty," "To a Young Girl," and "The Scholars," ordered as they are in the collection as opposed to chronological order, mirror Yeats's struggle in "Men Improve with the Years":

...men improve with the years;
And yet, and yet,
Is this my dream, or the truth?
(1955: 153)

The opposing forces that allow him to write at once allow him to write through them, attempting to arrive at a vision without such preoccupations. He does arrive at such a vision but ultimately cannot maintain the distilled poetic vocation at which he arrives.

The shedding of poetic identities that we see in the beginning of *The Wild Swans at Coole* takes a decided turn in "Ego Dominus Tuus." In "Ego Dominus Tuus" Yeats seems to have decided what kind of poet he wants to be—though by the end of the final poem, "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," he is no longer so sure. He revisits the symbolic swans he could not tame in the title poem and seeks a poetry

in which his symbols do not elude him. It is only through such a resolution that his poetry can come to a rest. It is in particular the narrative structure of the last poems that reveals the last poetic identity on which Yeats settles. In "Ego Dominus Tuus," Yeats presents a dramatic dialogue between Hic and Ille, the objective and subjective voices. The narrative framing of using a dramatic persona takes us into the ultimate end in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes." In "Ego Dominus Tuus," Yeats shows his method in attempting to achieve the visionary transcendence—Harold Bloom states that the poem "is a touch... too much the expositional text Yeats had been working to achieve" and "expounds itself, as though the poet had become his own academy, his future critics" (1970: 197) In "The Phases of the Moon," the second character of the poet watches over Robartes and his companion Owen Aherne as Robartes explains the system that the book inherited by Ille would presumably contain. Many of the ideas contained in "The Phases of the Moon," "Ego Dominus Tuus," and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" come from the historical Yeats's ideas that eventually became his grandiose theoretical work *A Vision*. *A Vision* creates a system, which equates personality profiles with the twenty-eight phases of the moon. In this system, humanity is drawn between the opposing forces of subjectivity, symbolized by the first phase of the moon, and objectivity, symbolized by the twenty-eighth. In *A Vision*, the fifteenth phase is the ideal: "the consummation of a slow process" and "the phase of complete beauty."(Yeats: 1977:135) It is this phase, where the poles of subjectivity and objectivity are balanced, in which one can find unity of being. Having written through the method and the system, "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," contains the visionary transcendence, a symbolic recovery of the swans lost in the collection's first poem, for which Yeats spends an entire collection searching.

The self-consciousness of Yeats's poetic enterprise in "The Wild Swans at Coole" and his ventriloquism in "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" provide an antecedent to the narrative frames of the poems at the end of *The Wild Swans at Coole*. First, Yeats writes himself—or, as I have stated, a thinly disguised version thereof—into "Ego Dominus Tuus." Ille, having inherited the books of Michael Robartes, seeks a Shelleyan vision, yet cannot achieve it, despite having the instructions by which to do so. "We are but critics, or but half create," Ille states (180). Yeats's tower figuratively presents a distancing of the poet from his characters. We first encounter the tower in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory." In it, the poet composes the poem from the tower he had just purchased—he begins the poem, "Now that we're almost settled in our house"—emphasizing his solitude in composing the poem. As he imagines Gregory's death at the end of the poem, his séance to call up his dead countrymen becomes, like "The Wild Swans at Coole," a failed memory. In the second stanza, he states, imagining a dinner party with the dead:

> ...not a friend that I would bring [to the tower]
> This night can set us quarrelling,
> For all that come into my mind are dead.
>
> (1955: 148)

In comparing a dinner party with calling to "mind" his dead friends, Yeats introduces the tower as a symbol for the mind. Later in the collection, the tower comes to stand for Yeats's position outside of the world, the tower standing for poetic imagination—"Under the Round Tower," for example, is about the dreams of a beggar. "Ego Dominus Tuus" is a literalization of Yeats's poetic project, Ille's tracing of characters from his book in the sand standing for Yeats's creation of

emblems, as opposed to *images*, that have their own power. The vision Yeats seeks is a unity of mind and body; as the tower stands for the mind, Ille must descend from it back into the world in order to put theory into practice. When, in "The Phases of the Moon," Yeats portrays Aherne and Robartes in opposition to the poet in the tower, he further draws out the polarity of the mind and the body. "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "The Phases of the Moon" both draw heavily from what was to become *A Vision*. Indeed, in *A Vision*, the historical Yeats regrets being "fool enough to write half a dozen poems that are unintelligible without it." (1977:19) However, instead of explicating Yeats's complex systems as *A Vision* does, "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "The Phases of the Moon" portray his relationship to the system. Both state that what is found in books cannot by itself lead its reader—or composer—to the visionary experience for which Yeats by this point so longs:

> I seek an image not a book
> (1955:182)
> And now he seeks in book or manuscript
> What he shall never find
> (1955:184)

As Bloom points out, the irony of "Ego Dominus Tuus" is that the historical Yeats goes on to write *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and *A Vision*, precisely the kind of books Ille and Robartes possess. Hovering over the poem is Yeats the poet, enacting his internal debate on his poetic project. Yeats cannot commit his poems to the real (*images*) or the *imaginary (emblems). De Man states that*

> [Yeats] presents emblems disguised as natural images. On the other hand, when the poems are more openly emblematic in imagery, this is often counterbalanced by

a thematic insistence on the value of incarnated beauty. (1984:203-204)

Yeats seeks the visionary transcendence of the completed *image*, but he cannot achieve it through mere representation. The symbols for which he strives must find a balance between the self-sufficiency of the *image* and the visionary power of the *emblem*. Yeats's symbol of the dancer presents his poetic ideal of resolving his conflict between memory and imagination. In "The Phases of the Moon, he finds a unity of body and mind, a resolution of the two poles. One achieves, Yeats explains, such a unity at the fifteenth phase, which is, for him, humanity at its most transcendent:

> All thought becomes an image and the soul
> Becomes a body: that body and that soul
> Too perfect at the full to lie in a cradle
> (1955: 185).

In his system, the two poles that govern human existence, the objective and the subjective, cannot exist in human form in their absolute form, symbolized by the first and last phases of the moon. Thus, to transcend the living world, one must achieve a perfect balance of the two. The dancer, as we will see in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," becomes an intersection of *image* and *emblem*: imaginary and real, moving and still, natural and transcendent. It is precisely the emblematic meanings of the Buddha and Sphinx between which she dances that creates dancer *image*. For Yeats, such a vision can only be achieved through poetry. In "The Wild Swans at Coole", Yeats presents a visual scene that does not reveal any more than a two-dimensional representation in order to introduce the conflict between the real—Yeats does not seem to differentiate between reality and reality

mediated through memory and the imaginary. Yeats plays out this conflict in "Ego Dominus Tuus" and the poems that follow; however, even the resolution we find in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" is not a satisfying resolution.

In "Ego Dominus Tuus," as in so many of the poems in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, Yeats points to the visionary moment he seeks but does not achieve it in the poem. Unlike "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," in which Yeats ventriloquizes the Airman and intimates his imminent transcendence—a transcendence not achieved within the poem—in "Ego Dominus Tuus," Ille cannot do even that. The characters do not conjure the vision he seeks; for Yeats, creating *emblems* is not enough. "Ego Dominus Tuus" merely tells the reader that such a vision is attainable and the ways in which one cannot achieve it:

> *Hic.* Yet surely there are men who have made their art
> Out of no tragic war, lovers of life,
> Impulsive men that look for happiness
> And sing when they have found it.
> *Ille.* No, not sing,
>
> For those that love the world serve it in action,
> Grow rich, popular and full of influence,
> And should they paint or write, still it is action
> ...art
> Is but a vision of reality.
> (1955:181-182)

The irony, of course, is that Ille is a figure for the poet, who is attempting in writing the poem to "sing" and not "act." Despite Ille and Yeats' efforts, the poem does not transcend reality—to find the "vision" he seeks—but is, instead, didactic; Ille instructs Hic as Yeats explicates

his theories that are to become *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and *A Vision* to the reader. Like "Ego Dominus Tuus," "The Phases of the Moon" also fails to produce the vision Yeats seeks; however, Michael Robartes, whose book Ille inherits, possesses the insight Ille does not. Here, Robartes is capable of "envisioning," but does not do so, withholding his visionary practice from the second character of the poet in the tower. Again, the poem is didactic, and the narrative frame comes out of a conflict. While Robartes mocks the poet—again a figure for Yeats himself—the poet is at the same time, within the fiction of the poem, composing this mockery, speaking through Robartes. Robartes understands the system and relates it to Aherne. However, understanding the system does not translate into being able to achieve the visionary transcendence that Robartes and Yeats seek. Robartes alone is capable of "envisioning." The poet relates the system through Robartes, but is unable to produce the vision as he watches Robartes's performance. He can imagine that—but not what—Robartes sees; "he seeks in book or manuscript/ What he shall never find" (1955:189). For him, the poem presents a failed attempt to produce a vision. Robartes and Aherne's mockery of him, then, is a self-flagellation—"He'd crack his wits/ Day after day, yet never find the meaning," states Aherne (1955:188). For Yeats, the mockery is an enactment of the elusiveness of his poetic project and an acknowledgement that his ventriloquism of the Airman earlier in the collection did not satisfy him, as it stopped short of its transcendent climax.

In creating the second character of the poet, Yeats draws attention to himself in the poem. He had devised a system through which he intended to achieve visionary transcendence, a transcendence that would have raised Robartes out from beneath the tower and Yeats himself from the tower into an imaginary realm. However, as Bloom

states, the failure of the poem is that it is merely a system, and Yeats can "never... find anything but endless cycle."(Yeats: 1970:206) To use Yeats's terminology, "The Phases of the Moon" does not peak at the fifteenth phase; rather, it builds to the end when the light in the tower goes out. The individual poem, as Bloom states, is a failure—Yeats makes this clear when Robartes, to the dissatisfaction of Aherne, finishes his song with "The first crescent is wheeled round once more" (1955:187). However, in the scope of the collection, the poem builds to Yeats' escape from the tower. That the light in the tower goes out is Yeats' metaphorical transcendence of the tower. Yeats, then, has taken the reader through the system and is ready to conceive his vision in poetry. Both Yeats and the character leave the tower, having composed the system through Robartes, to engage with the vision Robartes achieves in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes." The tension between Yeats and the second character of the poet in the tower comes from two conflicting tensions: on one hand, it is the tension between the real—the poet—and the imaginary—Robartes and the second character of the poet.

In "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," we see the realization of Yeats's work towards transcendence. He creates an image of the Sphinx and Buddha watching the dancer between them. It is clear, even within the narrative fiction of the poem, that the scene is imaginary, as we are told that we are hearing Michael Robartes relating his vision. While we cannot create a mental picture of the intersection of the Sphinx and Buddha's respective gazes at "all things known, all things unknown" and "all things loved, all things unloved," the intensity of the two beings coming together at a perfect balance gives imagistic life to the dancer (1955: 193). As opposed to "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," in which the Airman narrates his internal dialogue

leading to his decision to die a visionary death, Yeats presents Robartes's vision as a presence. The first line of the second movement recalls Yeats' 1914 poem "The Cold Heaven" and his 1923 poem "Leda and the Swan." In "The Cold Heaven," the abruptness of the first line, "Suddenly I saw the cold and rock-delighting heaven," makes the poem's narrative palpable to the reader. In "Leda and the Swan," we see a similar device, except that it is the action in the poem, "a sudden blow," that comes to life. In the poem, we do not watch the violence of the swan's swoop from afar, but experience it. It is as if it takes place through the reader, the reader neither experiencing the action through Leda nor the swan but in the action itself. It is this type of narration that creates an inhabitable space for the reader. In "The Wild Swans at Coole," the disruption of

> I saw...
> All [of the swans] *suddenly* [my italics] mount
> And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
> Upon their clamorous wings
>
> (1955:147)

brings us into Yeats' memory, but only for a moment, as he frames his one vital image with "I have looked upon these brilliant creatures,/ And now my heart is sore," again distancing the reader (147). The suddenness of Robartes's vision, then, brings Yeats's initial memory of the swans back into mind of the reader, establishing himself as like the man on the lake's edge where the swans have resettled. "The Double Vision" differs from the failure dramatized in "The Wild Swans at Coole" in that, in the former, Yeats displays a mastery of his symbols. If we carry over the conceit of "The Phases of the Moon," Robartes achieves transcendence while Yeats, the poet, but overhears and translates it into verse. What kind of symbolic resolution, then, does "The Double

Vision of Michael Robartes" present? Robartes achieves the fifteenth phase of the moon: Yeats symbolizes his transcendence through his ability to watch the dancer—the figure of absolute beauty—achieving the delight Yeats attempted but failed to portray in the title poem. Yeats, however, is removed from the dancer, as it is not the voice of the poet that relates the vision but that of Robartes. Robartes states that, seeing the dancer, he has seen the girl in his "dreams that fly" (194). Still, Yeats finds himself wholly rooted in the imaginary and having mastered his symbols. In "The Double Vision," the reader imagines Yeats achieving the dual victory of making of the swans into both an *image*, portraying his delight in remembering them, and an *emblem*, as, understanding the symbolic practice of "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "The Phases of the Moon" in "The Double Vision," he implies a symbolic mastery that extends to an understanding of that which the swans did not yield in the opening poem. In portraying Robartes's vision, is Yeats merely simulating a vision or does "The Double Vision" truly mark the victory he seeks through the collection? If Yeats concerns himself solely with what Ellman calls "Esoteric Yeatsism," what of Ireland? Oisín spends hundreds of years away from his kingdom at a Calypso's Island with the fairy Niamh. Returning, he finds everyone he had known dead and a ruined castle the only remnants of his kingdom. It is at this point that the mask of Robartes disappears, exposing Yeats behind it.

> It is clear in ["The Wild Swans at Coole"] that the poet has not obeyed the holy law of visionary ascent, that he has lost the fiercer life of passion derived from vision. Indeed, this is a poem of remembered vision only, a poet generated by a dejected sense of physical and imaginative change. (*Yeats Annual*: 1993: 113)

As we travel from the wild swans at the beginning of the collection to the emblematic Sphinx and Buddha at its end, the theme of memory draws ever closer to the theme of imagination. They begin as opposites, the collection's first two poems are seen passing from memory into imagination. But the collection concludes with the two coming together in Michael Robartes's vision. He cannot derive passion from the swans—they cannot become figures for him—because he is without a centered identity of which to make them figures. That the swans have changed with him, sedentary as he is now contemplative, disallows the comparison implied by the poem's first three stanzas and, instead, leads him to venture into the imaginary. In doing so, he creates a metaphysical distance between himself and the swans, a distance that he must constantly attempt to make up, but that can never be completely bridged. The collection of which "The Wild Swans at Coole" is the first poem, then, becomes Yeats's process of recovering the swans; he wants to become the man at the imagined lake's side where the swans have resettled. Such a project presents a symbolic retrieval of the swans that have eluded him. The swans begin as symbols for his younger self—that he is no longer moved by them initiates a comparison between his current and younger selves. However, the swans resist his symbolism. Realizing that he cannot recreate a memory of his earlier visits to Coole Park, Yeats creates an imaginary world in which the swans do fulfil their symbolic function: to delight their beholder, be he the poem's narrator, or the man on the other lake's edge. However, this imaginary world does not yield different swans; rather, as is the case throughout the collection, it is the beholder who must be able to find delight in his symbols. The images—the swans and Michael Robartes's dancer—become themselves symbols for Yeats's visionary impulse. That the swans delight the imaginary man's eyes, then—like the fact that the vision of the dancer can only be

seen by Michael Robartes—exposes the failure of the poet. Yeats' failure is not merely that he cannot recreate a memory convincingly so much as he is not satisfied by such an enterprise. He seeks in memory the visionary nature of imagination. Yeats's quest *for a poetic self-identity*, a process in which he discards persona after persona, ends with a visionary poetics. In "Ego Dominus Tuus," Yeats takes up the role of the visionary poet, his poetic goal becoming a reconciliation of memory and imagination in creating in poetry a vision. He discards his poetic personae to distill his project. It was Robert Gregory's various talents that led to his demise. Yeats elegizes Gregory not because he was a soldier, scholar, *and* a horseman but, rather, because his being an artist—for Yeats, Gregory's primary occupation—was strong enough to consume him in his quest—again, as an artist—to achieve unity of being.

As we have seen in the title poem, alone, neither memory nor imagination can represent the kind of vision, achieved through unity of being Yeats seeks. In "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," the recollections of Johnson, Synge, and Pollexfen fail to incite the ability to bring life through an act of imagination. It creates a presence in his fortress of artistic solitude. Through such a bringing of life, then, he transcends the stolid intellectualism of the tower, as Johnson never could. At the same time, Yeats's shedding of poetic personae includes stripping himself of his ties to specific people and causes, most notably Maud Gonne and the cause of Irish independence. Yeats's project is not to exchange his life for unity of being—were it even possible. His goal is to bring such unity into being through narrative layers in poetry. As in the collection's title poem, his recollection of Gregory in the elegy loses its rootedness in memory and becomes an envisioning of Gregory's momentary vision as he dies. This envisioning of Gregory's death brings

life to the tower through the poem's passage into imagination, creating a presence the only way a solitary poet can. Gregory's transubstantiation in the Gregory elegy, his consuming of—

> The entire combustible world in one small room
> As though dried straw, and if we turn about
> The bare chimney is gone black out —
>
> (1955:151)

achieving unity of being from living to ceasing, comes to determine the trajectory of his poetry. The poem ends, "A thought/ Of that late death took all my heart for speech" (152). Thus, Gregory's visionary act—as well as that of the Airman—at once give Yeats the empathetic release he desires, given what he aims to achieve: poetry, or, rather, creating a vision therein. Yeats cannot, as Gregory and the Airman do, achieve an all-consuming vision. Simply put, it is not his project to achieve a vision as his characters do but, rather, to create one in poetry. Frank Kermode states of "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death":

> The impulse is from within; it is an impulse to resolve the tension between the growing absorption of the dream and the desire for society and the pleasures of action. For a moment an equilibrium is achieved; the tensions resolved, there is life, life of extraordinary fullness; but at the cost, the world being what it is, of immediate extinction. This unifying and destructive delight, the singular achievement of life itself, is [also] a leading motive in ["In Memory of Major Robert Gregory"]. (1957:37)

The Airman is an idealization of Gregory, but that the Airman is unnamed in the poem prevents us from simply assuming that the

Airman is the same character as the preceding poem's Gregory. According to the Gregory elegy, Gregory dies because, as an artist, what he can and, indeed, must achieve can only come, as Kermode argues, at the expense of life. However, the poem does not speak of his inclination towards self-destruction but, rather, suggests that, as an artist of such talent, his actions are so intense that they are necessarily, though unintentionally, self-destructive. The comparison the elegy makes between Gregory and Johnson, then, is of the intensity of their respective acts, as Johnson's scholarship is also action. Both act in pursuit of "measureless consummation," that is, Yeats's vision: a transcendence of the world. However, Gregory's action, because of his immense artistic talent, is more intense than that of Johnson. The imagined figure of Yeats, then, is not like Gregory in this respect. Rather, he seeks to create a vision. In both the Gregory elegy and "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," he merely points to those of others. In the Gregory elegy, he states that of which Gregory is capable—the intensity of his talent that "may" consume the world—and, the poem being an elegy, implies what Gregory has done with intensity with which he lived his life of passionate to sustain in the living world. In the case of the Airman, Yeats literally stops just short of the vision, the Airman's narration taking the reader through his reasoning, but not through his actual visionary death. The Gregory elegy fails to achieve Yeats's goal because it, like "The Wild Swans at Coole," passes from memory into imagination but does not find rootedness in the imaginary world it creates. Just as the question

> Among what rushes will they build,
> By what lake's edge or pool
> Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
> To find they have flown away?
>
> (1955:147)

opens up an imaginary world in which the swans delight their beholder, the rhetorical question, "What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?" opens up a world that immediately closes on the poet. "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death" fails to create a vision because the poem takes place entirely within the Airman's mind. The poem cannot progress beyond its last line, as there is no imaginary space for the reader to inhabit. The poem is a self-contained internal monologue, leading up to but withholding from the reader the reward of the Airman's reasoning. We can compare the poem to the collection as a whole, which is Yeats' internal discussion leading up to his renunciation of politics and pursuit of visionary experience. However, Yeats is able to achieve through Robartes what he cannot through the Airman because the Airman's transcendence is an existential gesture towards the politics that afflict him whereas Robartes is focused on the visionary experience itself. That the Airman's reasoning comes into question—indeed, it acts as the center of the poem—refers back to Yeats, who has not extinguished politics from his poetics. Without the necessary concentration, the poet, within the fiction of the collection that Yeats presents, cannot portray the vision. George Bornstein states that,

> The student [whom I call "the second character of the poet"] in the tower of 'Ego Dominus Tuus' and 'The Phases of the Moon' represents Yeats' antiself in being solitary, constant, and devoted to one activity. He is one of those images of passionate intensity and (because wholly devoted to one object) simplicity through which Yeats's many-faceted self sought Unity of Being. (1970:138)

In this system, then, memory is concrete; it is historically fixed and must be given presence. Like Robartes's "dreams that fly," Yeats's imagination of the swans in the title poem and of Gregory being old in the elegy are dreams. The worlds the poems create are uninhabitable because they are not concrete. While memory is generally malleable, for Yeats, it is a fixed account of an actual event. To bring such rootedness into imagination, then, is to make the created imaginary world inhabitable for the reader. Only when a vision is conceived with sufficient intensity, then, it is possible to create a concrete memory of it. Still, Yeats is not the mere documenter of visionary experience. He creates the character, Robartes, through whom he narrates the vision. "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" walks the reader through Robartes's experience of his vision, mediated through memory. Yeats seeks transcendence; however, unlike Gregory and the Airman, Yeats must create an imaginary world in which to present his vision. Rather than escaping into pure experience like Gregory and the Airman, who do not need to and, indeed, cannot reconcile memory and imagination, the poet must frame his vision in terms of time and space. Thus, the character of Robartes, through whom Yeats does create a successful poetic vision, plays the part of the poet within the poem. Like the Airman, Robartes narrates the process of his vision; however, Robartes does not stop short. Thus, Yeats must invest the character of Robartes with the poetic problems that befall him and the solutions with which to solve them. Yeats, then, occupies the same space in the poem as the reader in the second section of "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," taking in Robartes's account of his vision and experiencing it through him. The narrative framework, however, falls apart in the third section, where the concerns of the poet reemerge as the mask of Robartes disappears, exposing Yeats writing through him. Through his narrative layers, then, Yeats creates the transcendent vision he seeks.

Yeats's concerns—the external world he had ignored in favor of an internal imagination—which he sheds from his poetry in pursuit of visionary transcendence, return. The collection achieves an interesting symmetry here: Yeats, having achieved his momentary vision, finds himself again an old man, the same preoccupation with which he begins the collection in its title poem. Using the Irish myth of Oisín, then, our figure of Yeats is thrust back into his role as Ireland's national poet. Though he has had to remove it from his poetics to achieve his ultimate goal in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," his national inheritance remains. It is important to remember that, while the historical Yeats is composing "The Phases of the Moon" and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," he also has a cache of political poems. Among them are "Easter 1916" and "Sixteen Dead Men," which eventually make up much of his 1921 collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*. In November of 1919, the same year as "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" was completed, Yeats composed "Under Saturn" (published in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*), a remembrance of Irish heroes. The poem ends with these lines (one of the heroes, an ancestral Yeats who the poet states "died/ Before my time", speaks the two lines in quotations):

> ...You have come again,
> And surely after twenty years it was time to come.'
> I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain
> Never to leave that valley his fathers called their home.
>
> (1955:202)

These lines reflect Yeats's Ossianic homecoming from his imaginary world back to Ireland and the real world, returning to the national theme that both before the collection and after it occupied much of his

work. Furthermore, the theme of national and cultural inheritance is at play in "Easter, 1916," in which the lines

> Too long a sacrifice
> Can make a stone of the heart
> (1955:204)

are in part a reference to Maud Gonne's oft-quoted claim that she and Yeats should not marry as their lives were better spent participating in the Irish cause than in domesticity. For the historical Yeats, then, national and political poems can find rootedness in the personal, where visionary poems must deny all ancillary themes. His conflation of duty with the personal exposes his conception of national duty as rooted in a personal sense of inheritance. However, while Hic in "Ego Dominus Tuus" inherits the book of Michael Robartes, there is no such thing as visionary inheritance. While knowledge, in the form of Robartes' book, is passed on, visionary prowess is not. Thus, to propose a continued poetic career, Yeats cannot claim to rest in the realm of vision.

Even if we do not look outside of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, we can see the end of "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" as a passage back into the varied poetic identities with which Yeats begins the collection. Robartes's claim that he "had been undone/ By Homer's Paragon" is, Jeffares states, a reference to Maud Gonne (55-56). (Jeffares: 1968: 216) The fact that she "never gave the burning town a thought" at once refers to her marriage to the Easter rebel John MacBride and reflects Yeats's own temporary suppression of the Irish nationalist impulse—be it political or literary—that obviously occupied him earlier in the collection. That Robartes is "undone" by Homer's Paragon presents a double meaning for Yeats: he is at once reminded of the Irish cause that he suppressed while Gonne embraced it and of his

own feelings for Gonne, around which many of the collection's earlier poems centered. The two themes converge to "undo" his envisioning of the dancer through Robartes. As these themes and poetic identities return, the poem cannot sustain the memory of the vision. Robartes's memory, then, loses the presence that made it inhabitable and, for Yeats, successful, and becomes, like the swans in the title poem, detached from the mind of the poet. Robartes finds himself, his vision "undone," "caught between the pull/ Of the dark moon and the full" (1955: 194). His vision of the dancers having a transcendence of temporality in it, time is "overthrown." This transcendence comes from a balancing of the opposing forces of the dark and full of the moon, which Yeats allegorizes in the figures the Sphinx and Buddha. In *A Vision*, Yeats creates a system of interlocking and opposing gyres one standing for objectivity, the other subjectivity. The cycle begins with a phase of pure objectivity, in which human life cannot exist. As the objective gyre grows smaller, the subjective gyre grows larger; Robartes's vision takes place in the fifteenth phase, in which subjectivity and objectivity are balanced. Like the Airman, Robartes achieves his vision when the forces that act upon him are in balance. However, where the Airman's transcendence consumes him, Robartes' is momentary, though it seems not to take place within time. After the vision, then, after the fifteenth phase has passed, the two forces are again at an imbalance, and pull him away from the unity of being he had achieved. At this point, Robartes is no longer like the man on the lake's edge, his eyes delighted by the swans. In fact, he no longer even exists. The poetic mask of Robartes disappears as the themes from earlier in the collection reemerge and it is Yeats who is rewarded—as because the speaker at the end of the poem speaks from "Cormac's ruined house." The tower, introduced in "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," is the collection's final image. We are no longer seeing the

imaginary world through Robartes's eyes but, rather, we see Yeats looking at himself—remember that he is, throughout the collection, in the tower. The end of the collection marks a self-reexamination and finds Yeats back where he began, struggling with poetic self-identity. He is very much the poet in the tower; however, he is no longer, as he was in the Gregory elegy, unable to be moved by Irish heroes and attempting to commune with the dead. Instead, he is occupied with love and national duty. Cormac's castle fulfils a double-fold symbolic role: it at once resonates with the loneliness of Yeats's own solitary tower and reminds him of Ireland, which he has ignored—"ignorant for so long"—while in pursuit of visionary transcendence (194). In looking at the castle with which he has been "rewarded," he sees the isolation that he had criticized in Johnson. The reemergent concerns informed Yeats's impulse to examine his tower for what it is; that he presents it as a ruin implies the close of his poetic project of visionary transcendence. This is not to say that the historical Yeats is no longer interested in visionary poetics—after all, he publishes the collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* two years after *The Wild Swans at Coole* while *A Vision*, which he began writing in earnest in 1916, does not see completion until 1925. It is, rather, that the figure of Yeats we imagine to be composing the collection has lost the unity of focus that allows Robartes's vision to come into being.

The poetic identity at the end of the collection is the same as that of the beginning: one that does not know what it is but is burdened with much inheritance. As I have stated, the historical Yeats enters the collection with the burden of being Ireland's national poet weighing heavily on his poetics. As well, his thirty-year obsession with Maud Gonne came to a head and was, by many accounts, finally exorcised when he married George Hyde-Lees. As Michael Robartes's vision

dissipates in the collection's final poem, our imagined figure of Yeats discovers Gonne behind the dancer, his figure of absolute beauty. In "Yeats and the Idea of Revolution," Seamus Deane calls the Easter rebels specifically Irish modern, existential heroes:

> The men of 1916 had offered their deaths to history. In doing so, they had broken the cycle of eternal recurrence... Cuchulain's (and, by extension, Ireland's) cycle of recurrence became finally complete in the sacrifice of [the Easter rebel] Pearse. (1987:46)

However, neither Yeats nor Robartes can do as the Easter rebels—or, for that matter, the Airman. The Airman's transcendence of politics points to its importance. His death is an existential triumph over England, the only way to stop the repeating cycle of Irish history that dates back to well before Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland.* Yeats's "The Second Coming" shows the cyclical nature of history, undoing the symbolic victory of 1916. However, for the rebels, the cycle has come to a close. They are dead and immortalized; their memory—no matter that it is problematized in "Easter, 1916," as the problematization points more to Yeats than to them—is fixed. They exist in mythology, not with the concerns of the living world. Thus, they have transcended the cycle of history. Yeats, however, has not. "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," then, presents Yeats's hope for the living: a momentary rupture in the cycle or, in Aherne's words, "The strange reward of all that discipline."(1955:185) The title poem is an attempt to disrupt the cycle; no longer looking at Ireland's mythological past to create a renaissance of its future, Yeats's swans become disembodied. Yeats cannot break the cycle, only enjoy the "reward" once a revolution and that is why the swans escape, so that he can recover them. In doing so, he momentarily forgets that the cycle exists

and ventures to its center. He at once sheds his worldly preoccupations and creates the play of emblems that makes him like the man at the other lake's edge:

> What is it but nightfall?
> No, no, not night but death.
> (1955:204)

For the Easter rebels, it is death but, for Yeats, merely nightfall. It will pass again into day, just as the rough beast in "The Second Coming" will be (re-) born. The beauty in "Easter, 1916" is terrible because it is ephemeral; Yeats cannot shake himself of the awareness that his victories are temporary. It is for the same reason that his beautiful swans are "mysterious." Graham Martin states,

> When the swans lift from the lake they establish their independence of this personal meaning [as reminders of Yeats' youth]... The action of the poem embodies his discovery that far from commanding the swans he is commanded by them and must resign himself to the situation they represent (for him): physical-emotional life as an order of transcendence. (1966:62)

Thus, Yeats begins the poem intending the physicality of the swans to correspond with his emotional state. The swans' beauty, then, like the terrible beauty of the Easter rebellion, cannot last. Like the falcons in "The Second Coming," the swans evade their falconer's control and scatter in "great broken wings"; the center cannot hold. In the scope of the historical Yeats's career, the 1927 poem "Sailing to Byzantium" presents a transcendence of his concerns in *The Wild Swans at Coole.* He escapes the recurring cycle of history by sailing to "the artifice of eternity," in which he becomes an artificial bird, achieving timelessness

in an afterworld ruled by "monuments of unageing intellect" (1955: 217-218). Yeats, then, comes to the conclusion that art—disembodied art, no less—and not "sensual music" will save him from the eternal succession of lives and deaths. However, our imagined figure of Yeats in *The Wild Swans at Coole* has not yet come to this conclusion. For him, unity of being, ephemeral as it is, is the only possible transcendence—save, of course, death. Transcendence necessarily comes with the consciousness of its undoing. Even in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," the strange reward of the collection, his consciousness of time being overturned points to his understanding that it, too, will pass. *The Wild Swans at Coole*, then, is framed by two instances of suddenness. In the title poem, Yeats momentarily creates the memory of the swans as they "suddenly mount," a living presence in memory he will never again achieve in the collection. In "The Double Vision," as he "suddenly" sees the Sphinx and Buddha, he finally replaces the living presence in memory he can no longer achieve with visionary experience, imaginary presence in memory. Yet, as we see in the poem's third movement, he must return to his tower: Cormac's ruined house. Like Oisín, he must also touch the ground; he can escape neither the real world nor aging. Robartes's song is the opposite of that of the artificial birds in "Sailing to Byzantium." To the drowsy emperor of Byzantium, detached from the movement of time and the cycle of history, singing of "what is past, or passing, or to come" affirms his transcendence of history (218). To our imagined figure of Yeats, Robartes's song of his momentary transcendence comes with an understanding of an imminent descent. Robartes's double vision yields two rewards. In the poem's second movement, he attains what Aherne in "The Phases of the Moon" calls "the strange reward of all this discipline," his visionary experience of the dancer's dance. At the end of the poem, he is "rewarded thus, / in Cormac's ruined house," his vision

ended and his worldly concerns reemerging. His second reward, then, is constant motion. We are, in reading *The Wild Swans at Coole*, constantly "passing." In the memory and the vision that frame the collection—the two instances in the collection in which Yeats creates a presence. It is impossible, then, to decide on a final vision for Yeats, as his identity is at all points changing, though in a cyclical fashion.

W.B. Yeats rightly asserts in his *Autobiographies*, a poet "had to take the first plunge into the world beyond himself, the first plunge away from himself that is always pure technique, the delight in doing, not because one would or should, but merely because one would or should, but merely because one can do." The entire sequence of this realization matured into that fine poem, "The Fisherman",

> All day I'd looked in the face
> What I had hoped 'twould be
> To write for my own race
> And the reality.
> (1955:166).

For this, the poet had to imagine a man, his sun-freckled face, his grey Connemara cloth. Perhaps the idea is no longer merely a product of sentiment. Perhaps the fisherman is "A man who does not exit, / A man who is but a dream"(Yeats: 1955:167). Yet the dream of the poet still remained to do a poem for such a man

> Before I am old
> I shall have written him one
> Poem may be as cold
> And passionate as the dawn.
> (1955:167).

Michael Robertes And The Dancer (1921) is the volume in which Yeats's mature style—"violent and terrible"—is fully evinced. Irish political activity had its impact on him and he had joined the search for "certain noble qualities of beauty, certain forms of sensuous loveliness, separated from all the purposes of life". "Easter 1916" is one of the finest poems on a public theme, which reveals this quality. It is indeed a beautiful movement of the poem, from the temporal—the comic Dublin after the 1916 rising against British occupation—to the timeless:

I met them at close of day
Coming with vivid faces
From counter or desk among grey
Eighteenth century houses.
(1955: 202)
Then comes the warning:
All changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born
(1955: 203).

So, the poet here thinks back, as he had known them earlier, in a world of 'polite meaningless words': suddenly everything is changed, 'changed utterly'. The transformation, whatever its human cost, has occurred, and Irishmen will forever remember those who took part in this decisive act.

For Yeats realized, as he wrote to Augusta Gregory after the rebellion, "that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature and criticism from politics"(1954:13). The years of war unleashed by 1916

wrought in Yeats's mind an even more complex response. As W.I. Thomson observes,

> The longer Yeats thought of men of 1916, the more their deaths took on the tragic joy that Yeats esteemed as the highest wisdom man could embody in action (1967:163-164).

Yeats "has completed his emancipation from the twilight, has securely achieved the self-conquest that is style and has fought his way into the twentieth century" (Rajan: 1965:79).