

**TOWARD A MEANINGFUL REALITY: A STUDY OF
THE GOLD / SUN, SILVER / MOON IMAGERY IN THE
LYRICAL POETRY OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS**



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TOWARD A MEANINGFUL REALITY: A STUDY OF
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LYRICAL POETRY OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

An Abstract

Presented to

the Graduate Council of

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

by

Jerry Wayne Thomason

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ABSTRACT

The poetry of William Butler Yeats presents an interesting vacillation of the poet between the imaginary world of his art and the real world of Ireland. In an attempt to discover a reality that would be acceptable Yeats explored the world of fancy and faeries as well as the world of war and politics. He experimented with love, both physical and spiritual. Throughout the lyrical poetry Yeats wrote prior to 1930, this movement between two worlds is symbolized by the use of a corresponding set of images: gold/sun and silver/moon.

At first, the gold/sun imagery dominated his poetry. He belonged to many mystical orders which allowed him to become familiar with the esoteric knowledge of philosophy-science; thus alchemy was a dominant influence upon his imagery. From the alchemical belief in regeneration and renewal Yeats drew much of his hope for the creating of his own artistic world. As his hopes expanded so did his use of the gold/sun images.

Later he turned more to the silver/moon images. He was caught up in the theatre and politics, and as these forces moved him to a closer association with the real world about him, he turned more to the silver/moon images. He then found himself caught between the pull of the two worlds. Accordingly, like Blake and the other Romantics before him, he sought a resolution for his dilemma through poetry.

Within the limits of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery Yeats found an answer to his dilemma. But he later rejected the answer he found. At the point when Yeats rejected his answer, the special sun/moon imagery

changes abruptly in usage and soon becomes minor in the poetry. There is no apparent reason for the rejection or the change. Yeats merely moves back into the countryside of Ireland where things are real and physical.

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A Thesis

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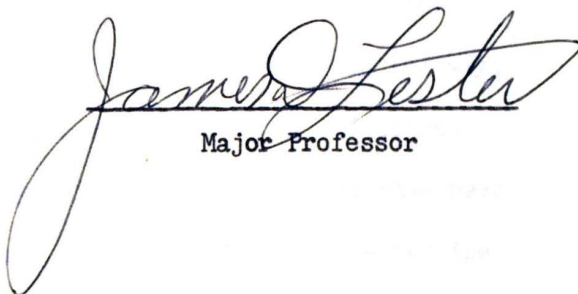
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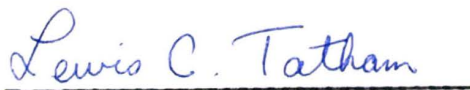
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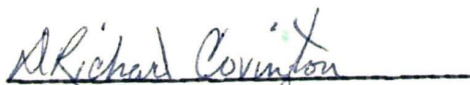
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Jerry Wayne Thomason entitled "Toward a Meaningful Reality: A Study of the Gold/Sun, Silver/Moon Imagery in the Lyrical Poetry of William Butler Yeats." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

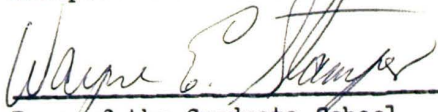

Major Professor

We have read this Thesis and
recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The poetry of William Butler Yeats displays a vacillation between the imaginary world of his art and the real world of Ireland. Several critics have discussed facets of this reality-illusion drama. Harold Bloom, in his recent work Yeats, approaches it from the tradition of the Romantic Quest.¹ Thomas Byrd examines the concept of the poet-seeker and the dream world.² Other scholars have chosen their own particular approaches, so that several techniques of criticism have been utilized in the attempts to follow Yeats' advice: "Hammer your thoughts into unity."

Yet unexamined is Yeats' search for reality through his usage of the corresponding images of gold/sun and silver/moon. This paper will examine the symbolic potential of these images, which reveal not only the pattern of the poet's search but, also, in light of their tradition, his intensity and sincerity in the search.

This study is not meant to be a panacea for the controversy among Yeatsian critics. Actually, it adds another difficulty. While he reaches a resolution within the gold/sun, silver/moon cluster, Yeats' complete acceptance of it appears questionable because the images fade almost completely from his work after 1930. This study does not attempt

¹Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 7-8.

²Thomas Byrd, "The Early Poetry of W.B. Yeats: The Poetic Quest," Diss. University of Florida 1968, p. 5.

to discuss the reason for the fading out of the images, leaving that problem for further work.

A close examination of the deeper meanings attached to gold and silver by alchemists may suggest in part Yeats' incessant usage of the imagery. The following is drawn from John Read, Prelude to Chemistry, 1966:

In its broadest aspect, alchemy appears as a system of philosophy which claimed to penetrate the mystery of life as well as the formation of inanimate substances. A modern writer on this wider alchemy /Mrs. M.A. Atwood of Belfast, Ireland/ voices some of its claims in the following language: 'Hermetism, or its synonym Alchemy, was in its primary intention and office the philosophic and exact science of the regeneration of the human soul from its sense-immersed state into the perfection and nobility of that divine condition in which it was originally created. Secondly and incidentally . . . it carried with it a knowledge of the way in which the life-essence of things belonging to the subhuman kingdoms--the metallic genera in particular--can, correspondingly, be intensified and raised to a nobler form than that in which it exists in its present natural state.'³

Upon such a base Yeats builds his alchemical symbols, exploiting as far as possible the implications of regeneration, perfection, and the raising of the "life-essence" to what Atwood calls "a nobler form." Additionally, the Yeatsean critic must come to terms with esoteric alchemy to see the broader implication of Yeats' alchemical imagery. Read explains: "A distinction is often drawn in alchemical writings between an esoteric alchemy, whose hidden secrets were revealed only to chosen adepts /such as "The Order of the Golden Dawn" to which Yeats belonged/, and an

³ John Read, Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy, its Literature and Relationships (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1966), p. 2.

exoteric pseudo-alchemy, which is depicted as the uninstructed craft of mercenary goldseekers, or 'puffers' /like Jonson's Subtle and Chaucer's Canon/.⁴

Yeats' study of the alchemists would surely be as early as his study of William Blake, for it is Yeats who first comments upon Blake's study of alchemy "from Jacob Boeheme and from old alchemist writers," and that from them Blake learned "that imagination was the first emanation of divinity, 'the body of God,' 'the Divine members,' and . . . drew the deduction, which they did not draw, that the imaginative arts were therefore the greatest of Divine revelations, and that the sympathy with all living things, sinful and righteous alike, which the imaginative arts awaken, is that forgiveness of sins commanded by Christ."⁵ The statement clearly illustrates Yeats' familiarity with alchemy.

The esoteric alchemist had several associations for his gold and silver symbols which relate to Yeats' usage. Gold was associated "with longevity and even with immortality,"⁶ and "assigned to the Sun because of its colour and perfection,"⁷ and occasionally was portrayed as being a rose⁸ or a king.⁹ Silver was associated with the Moon¹⁰ and hence

⁴Read, p. 2.

⁵W.B. Yeats, "William Blake and the Imagination," in Essays and Introductions (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 112.

⁶Read, p. 6.

⁷Ibid., p. 89.

⁸Ibid., p. 99.

⁹Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 20.

imperfection,¹¹ and with a Queen.¹² Another reference concerns the central role the ancient city of Byzantium played in alchemy's history and Yeats' poetry. Both theories of alchemy's diffusion refer to Byzantium: one theory claims alchemy spread from Europe to China by way of Byzantium and Alexandria and the other theory claims it came from China to Europe through Arabia, Byzantium, and Alexandria. Yeats used the ancient gateway city as the central symbol for two very important poems written at a critical period in his life: "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium." In 1924 Yeats visited the site of the ancient city, where he was greatly inspired. The relationship of the city to the desire of the poems can hardly be considered inconsequential in light of Yeats' own statement that "I symbolise the search for the spiritual life by a journey to that city /Byzantium7."¹³

Another influence upon Yeats' imagery is poetic tradition. Harold Bloom has set forth a lineage of the Yeatsean influences: Milton, Blake, Shelley, and the Romantic tradition in general, including Browning.¹⁴ The dominant influence on Yeats' imagery and symbolism was William Blake, who exposed Yeats to the expanding potential of a set of images. That is, Blake established his poetic tradition upon the expanding symbols of the Four Zoas and the image of the refining furnace. Yeats builds his expansion upon the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery.

¹¹Ibid., p. 20.

¹²Ibid., p. 102.

¹³A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 254.

¹⁴Bloom, p. 4.

Another Romantic poet, Shelley, influenced Yeats, especially with his use of Sun and Moon. Yeats is often upset by Shelley's use of these images, especially when the moon is a "cold," "frozen," or an "inconstant" symbol. Yeats comments: "Shelley could not help but see her the moon with unfriendly eyes."¹⁵ The defensiveness here reflects Yeats' strong feeling for the images and their dominance in his thinking.

Certainly there are other poets who should be added to Blake and Shelley as influential on Yeats as an imagist. However, these two serve as sufficient examples of the point being made here, especially in light of Yeats' own comments on his concept of symbolic development from images made in "The Symbolism of Poetry" published in 1900, the same year as the article on Shelley. Yeats gives in the essay what he considers to be the process by which an image or images are built and the way in which they develop their symbolic representations:

All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. The same relation exists between all portions of every work of art, whether it be an epic or a song, and the more perfect it is, and the more various and numerous the elements that have flowed into its perfection, the more powerful will be the emotion, the power, the god it calls among us.¹⁶

¹⁵W.B. Yeats, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," in Essays and Introductions (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 91.

¹⁶W.B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," in Essays and Introductions (New York: Collier Books, 1968), pp. 156-57.

The statement of most relevance here refers to the "flow" of the elements into image and hence into symbol, for Yeats ceaselessly poured new elements into the stream of his imagery as he sought after the most powerful poetic gods to evoke knowledge of the true reality he sought and man's role within that reality.

Finally, in "The Early Poetry of W.B. Yeats: The Poetic Quest" Thomas Byrd observes that "the poetic quest involves art, philosophy, and vision; it is the journey of the poet-seeker, a search for knowledge and true reality through art and artistic vision."¹⁷ Thus in a real sense the quest for imagery becomes an attempt to draw together all the various elements of tradition and contemporary knowledge into a singular symbol of expression. Yeats draws from his esoteric knowledge of alchemy and his deep understanding of the Romantic poetic tradition, as well as from his experiences with life to evolve a set of images that serve him as a poetic tool with which he can explore the possibilities of both the world of his art and the world in which he is forced to live. Thus the imagistic patterns expanded from the gold/sun, silver/moon cluster serve as a valid, valuable key to the interpretation of the Collected Poems.

Each chapter of this study will present the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery of the primary source with strict attention being given to the ordering Yeats gave the Collected Poems. His poetical strength reveals itself through the arrangement and pattern of imagery development within the total work. And Yeats commands continual control over the complex

¹⁷ Byrd, p. 5.

development of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery: when he gives any aspect of the imagery a varied usage, he has a definite purpose for the context of the poem. Close examination unfolds the subtleties and implications of his usage.

Because of the tremendous number of times the various aspects of the cluster appear in Yeats' work--575 times in all--a limitation has been set: only the occurrences of imagery which directly relate to the search for reality and man's role in that reality will be mentioned. Individual volumes are separated in the various chapters so that they may be approached individually.

CHAPTER II
THE TWO WORLDS

I

Crossways

Crossways introduces the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery and establishes the image background against which Yeats' later books of poetry must be viewed.

Gold and sun appear first in "Anashuya and Vijaya." While the poem deals with the two lovers of Vijaya, only Anashuya the daylight lover functions in the poem. Anashuya is a priestess during the "Golden Age," which Yeats associates with Arcadia, the past age of greatness and truth. When Anashuya begs Vijaya to love only her, she requests that he swear by the "Golden Peak":

Swear by the parents of the gods,
Dread oath, who dwell on sacred Himalay,
On the far Golden Peak; enormous shapes,
Who still were old when the great sea was young.¹

The Golden Peak symbolizes the glorious and sacred past which served Yeats as both a source for his poetry and an example for the Ireland he dreamed of creating, the Ireland he sought as reality.

The sun's distance offers hope for a distant dreamland for which Anashuya prays:

. . . may we two stand,
When we are dead, beyond the setting suns,
A little from the other shades apart,
With mingling hair, and play upon one lute.
(p. 10, ll. 7-10)

¹William Butler Yeats, The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 12. Subsequent references to this source will be given in the text.

Not only is the desire for some point beyond the sun, but for a total unity where, "with mingling hair," they may "play upon one lute." This longing for a Utopia is further developed in lines 24-25 when Anashuya tells Vijaya that in the twilight the sun has mystical powers able to slip man off into the realm of dreams:

Vijaya, I have brought my evening rice;
The sun has laid his chin on the grey wood,
Weary, with all his poppies gathered round him.

Vijaya. The hour when Kama, full of sleepy laughter,
Rises, and showers abroad his fragrant arrows,
Piercing the twilight with their murmuring barbs.
(p. 11, ll. 23-28)

With the narcotic properties of the poppies inducing euphoric dreams of the golden past and a paradisaical future, the theme of escape attaches to the gold/sun image. The escape motif of gold/sun parallels the concept of the alchemists who believed in the unity of souls with regeneration beyond this present world.

Yeats in a 1925 interview had commented on the poem:

. . . the little Indian dramatic scene was meant to be the first scene of a play about a man loved by two women, who had the one soul between them, the one woman waking when the other slept, and knowing but daylight as the other only night. It came into my head when I saw a man at Rosses Point carrying two salmon. "One man with two souls," I said, and added, "O no, two people with one soul." I am now once more in A Vision busy with that thought, the antithesis of day and night and of sun and moon.²

Though the concepts of this antithesis change many times in Yeats' poetic maturation, the conflict continually played upon his poetic thought.

²A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 6.

In the "Madness of King Goll" gold/sun imagery carries an escapism associated with the poet-seeker, a king who is, as Bloom succinctly summarizes, "praised for bringing back the age of gold, who in the midst of battle yields to the madness of vision, breaks his spear, and rushes off to become a wandering poet in the woods."³ In the glory of his past Goll had "won many a torque of gold" (p. 17, line 23). But he changes from king to madman, leaving the golden age behind and rushing into his own dream in order to

wander in the woods
When summer gluts the golden bees,
Or in autumnal solidudes
Arise the leopard-coloured trees.
(p. 17, ll. 37-40)

This dream is similar to the "grey wood" of "Anashuya," yet the dream offers no joy for Goll as for Anashuya, to whom the night and its moon did not exist. Goll's moon does exist. He will wander by "a little town/ That slumbered in the harvest moon" (lines 49-50). He will also view the daylight sun as "Orchil shakes out her long dark hair" that hides the sunlight at the end of day. But for Goll both day and night are transitory; he cannot find comfort in either state because "They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old" (refrain). The dilemma of Goll, the wandering poet, represents the dilemma of young Yeats: both are torn between the world in which they live and a world in which they desire to live.

This dilemma appears again in "The Stolen Child" where the heart cries, "Come away, O human child!" (line 9), away to a dream world

³Bloom, p. 109.

where, unlike King Goll, you will find peace. The moon image again represents night, the time when the faeries are at work, and also represents the world where pain does exist:

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
 The dim grey sands with light,
 Far off by furthest Rosses
 We foot it all the night,
 Weaving olden dances,
 Mingling hands and mingling glances
 Till the moon has taken flight;
 To and fro we leap
 And chase the frothy bubbles,
 While the world is full of troubles
 And is anxious in its sleep.
 (pp. 18-19, ll. 14-24)

From this moon-lit world, the faeries steal the human child:

He'll hear no more the lowing
 Of the calves on the warm hillside
 Or the kettle on the hob
 Sing peace into his breast,
 Or see the brown mice bob
 Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
 (p. 19, ll. 45-50)

Yeats is distressed by both the real and dream worlds.

"The Ballad of Moll Magee" and "The Ballad of The Foxhunter" display reality and illusion. Unterecker points out that "the antithesis of youth and age and the anguish of mortality itself serve as common themes to bind together these poems. . . ."⁴ The inability to synthesize the conflict between age and youth or to transcend mortality brings on one form of distress for Moll, symbolized in the moon:

And sometimes from the saltin' shed
 I scarce could drag my feet,
 Under the blessed moonlight,
 Along the pebbly street.
 (p. 23, ll. 9-12)

⁴John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Noonday Press, 1959), p. 74.

The word "blessed" takes on a sarcastic tone, since it implies restfulness while Moll finds none. She does not enjoy even the pleasures of her bed, but is rather driven from it:

A weary woman sleeps so hard!
My man grew red and pale,
And gave me money, and bade me go
To my own place, Kinsale.

And drove me out and shut the door,
And gave his curse to me;
I went away in silence,
No neighbour could I see.

(p. 23, ll. 21-28)

In "The Foxhunter" the disappearing sun symbolizes a similar type of distress. As the foxhunter calls for his horses and dogs, his sight and life slip away:

His eyelids droop, his head falls low,
His old eyes cloud with dreams;
The sun upon all things that glow
Falls in sleepy streams.

(p. 25, ll. 13-16)

The dreams of the old foxhunter elude him as the daylight of life succumbs to the forces of mortality and "The hounds wail for the dead" (line 48).

These last two poems of Crossways summarize the frustration of the young Yeats who could sense the pain and fear around him in the real world under the moon, making him long for some means of escape from this "blessed moonlight" and at the same time making him fear the death that offered escape. Out of his frustration comes a desire for recreating the glorious past, a desire for the ideal Ireland, a desire to find a passage apart from death into some sunlit dreamland of peace and tranquillity. As Byrd observes, a "poetic quest is a concern and a milieu, both poetic and religious, in which the inspired poet works and

searches and hopes, and in which the poet truly becomes the maker, creating something which becomes more than its creator."⁵ The worlds of the conflicting sun and moon are certainly a part of the milieu Yeats is creating.

II

The Rose

The gold/sun, silver/moon imagery of The Rose volume synthesizes somewhat the motifs of escape, dreams, and faerylands found in Crossways. Further, the Celtic legends with which Yeats hoped to establish a national Irish literature first appear in this volume. Unterecker names the new subject matter upon which the themes rest: "Specifically, they deal with his frustrated love for Maud Gonne, the Rosicrucian and Cabalistic doctrine he was learning in the Order of the Golden Dawn. . . ."⁶

"To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time" opens the volume and introduces the "ancient ways" of Ireland in terms of the silver image, associated with the Sad Rose, which has "grown old/ In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea" (lines 6-7). The silver suggests the sorrow and distress of growing old, just as the moon did for Moll Magee who fell under the pressures and pain of the present world.

In "Cuchulain's Fight With the Sea," also from Irish legend, the sun image sets the mood in the opening: "A man came slowly from the setting sun/ To Emer" (lines 1-2). Since Yeats usually relates "the

⁵Byrd, pp. 164-65.

⁶Unterecker, p. 75.

West, the place of sunset, with fading and dreaming things,"⁷ the man is involved with fading dreams. That fading is two-fold: the fading of the victory and glory of Cuchulain and the fading of the son through death. First, Emer tells of the past glory of Cuchulain: "'No man alive, no man among the dead,/ Has won the gold his cars of battle bring'" (lines 10-11). The gold image symbolizes the wealth and honor Cuchulain held. But in spite of his wealth and honor, he fades into the madness that drives him into the sea's "invulnerable tide." The sun image also denotes the fading of the son. Before young Cuchulain is slain by his father, he has a vision that "somewhere under starlight or the sun/ My father stands" (lines 28-29). Under that sun young Cuchulain meets his death:

'I put you from your pain. I can no more.'
While day its burden on to evening bore,
With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain stayed.
(p. 35, ll. 69-71)

Both son and the sun fade with their dreams.

The sun and moon appear together in "The Rose of Battle" to clarify Yeats' desire for escape, for dreams, for the faeryland world. The persona of the poem calls to all those who have experienced the frustration of failure:

Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,
For him who hears love sing and never cease,
Beside her clear-swept hearth, her quiet shade:
But gather all for whom no love hath made
A woven silence, or but came to cast
A song into the air, and singing passed
To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you
Who have sought more than is in rain or dew
Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,
Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,

⁷ Jeffares, p. 66.

Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips,
 And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.
 The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,
 To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell;
 God's bell has claimed them by the little cry
 Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.
 (p. 37, ll. 9-24)

By joining the sun and moon with rain, dew, and earth to round out a symbol of present reality, Yeats shows the degree of his frustration (and the frustration of those to whom his persona calls) over his thwarted love and his isolation in his beloved Ireland. While the traditional alchemical use of the fused sun and moon represents a world of perfection, here the usage represents a reality that all those persons who have "sought more than is in rain or dew/ Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth" are seeking to transcend. The change in usage seems to intensify the feelings of frustration.

Building upon that frustration motif, the moon appears, in "The Sorrow of Love," to depict contrasting scenes of the world. The first scene is a world of order and form under a bright moon, ancient Ireland:

The brawling of a sparrow in the eaves,
 The brilliant moon and all the milky sky,
 And all that famous harmony of leaves,
 Had blotted out man's image and his cry.
 (p. 40, ll. 1-4)

But the second scene is a world of confusion and chaos, present Ireland:

Arose, and on the instant clamorous eaves,
 A climbing moon upon an empty sky,
 And all that lamentation of the leaves,
 Could but compose man's image and his cry.
 (p. 40, ll. 9-12)

Though Unterecker mentions the double use of the moon image here, he fails to denote its significance,⁸ that is, that the image makes the

⁸Unterecker, pp. 80-81.

transition between the two scenes possible. As order disappears in the transition to chaos, the moon loses its luster and takes on the frustration connotation. The glorious past has tumbled into the base present.

Yeats desires that man, by some means, might rise above such sorrow. The means by which man can solve the problem is his poetic quest. The solution will evolve, Yeats believes, from his searching the mythical and magical associations in the idealized traditions of Ireland's glorious past.

He develops more fully in "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland" the dreams implicit in the lost, brilliant moon. The dreamer of the poem passes through four phases: youth, middle age, old age, and death. Yet as he passes through each phase, an illusion prevents him from finding the true joy and satisfaction life should offer. This illusion, seemingly some point beyond the present world, does not bring satisfaction, or joy either, because the persona finds no way of reaching it since it is only a dream, a faeryland. The illusion is represented through the gold and silver imagery. In stanza one, youth idealizes the faeryland and presents it as a world of changelessness and perfection:

But when a man poured fish into a pile,
It seemed they raised their little silver heads,
And sang what gold morning or evening sheds
Upon a woven world-forgotten isle
Where people love beside the ravelled seas;
That Time can never mar a lover's vows
Under that woven changeless roof of boughs.
(p. 43, ll. 5-11)

Then as the persona of "Faeryland" goes into middle age (stanza two) he still hears the call of his illusion:

But while he passed before a plashy place,
 A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth
 Sang that somewhere to north or west or south
 There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race
 Under the golden or the silver skies;
 That if a dancer stayed his hungry foot
 It seemed the sun and moon were in the fruit.
 (pp. 43-44, ll. 17-23)

And again in old age (stanza three) the persona still feels the pull of his dreams:

But one small knot-grass growing by the pool
 Sang where--unnecessary cruel voice--
 Old silence bids its chosen race rejoice
 Whatever ravelled waters rise and fall
 Or stormy silver frets the gold of day,
 And midnight there enfold them like a fleece
 And lover there by lover be at peace.
 (p. 44, ll. 29-35)

Entranced by the imagery of a golden faeryland, the persona comes to the grave uncomforted: "The man has found no comfort in the grave" (line 48).

At this point in his work Yeats apparently realized the double hopelessness of the painful, hurtful world of reality in which he lived (characterized by the Sad, Silver Rose) and the idealized faeryland with its illusive promises of joy and peace which are inaccessible except by death. But as a true poet of Ireland he felt he must continue the search for some resolution to the problem. His statement of this continuing search occurs in the closing poem of The Rose volume, "To Ireland in the Coming Times," which bunches the various associations of his gold/sun, silver/moon imagery into the persona of the faeries dancing under the moon:

My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
 Of things discovered in the deep,
 Where only body's laid asleep.
 For the elemental creatures go
 About my table to and fro,

.....

Man ever journeys on with them
 After the red-rose-bordered hem.
 Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
 A Druid land, a Druid tune!

(p. 50, ll. 20-24, 29-32)

CHAPTER III

THE LURE OF ILLUSION

I

The Wind Among The Reeds

The theme of frustrated love, so much a part of Yeats' life during the period of rejection by Maud Gonne, develops dramatically in The Wind Among The Reeds volume through the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery. In relation to The Rose, The Wind Among The Reeds moves steadily toward the creation of the faeryland where the "faeries, dancing under the moon/ A Druid land, A Druid tune!" can be realized. However, a progression moves the volume from the cry of Niamh's "Away, come away," which echoes the earlier escape theme of the "Stolen Child," to a higher kind of desire for spiritual union. Ellmann sees in the work "a desire to escape from love's misery and from an imperfect world, and a wistful aspiration towards a more ideal state of things."¹ Bloom also points to the aspiration of an ideal world beyond reality when he says "Unrequited love, the immediate theme of The Wind Among The Reeds, itself exemplifies a desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death. The beauty desired by Yeats at the turn of the century depends upon the death of desire, and on an end to time."²

¹Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 23.

²Bloom, p. 123.

"The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart" introduces a "casket of gold" that symbolizes a new creation featuring purity, refinement, and eternalness:

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn
out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a
lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing
the wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in
the deeps of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great
to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green
knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, remade,
like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose
in the deeps of my heart.

(p. 54, ll. 1-8)

Jeffares points out that "your image" stands for Maud Gonne.³ But to relate the image to Maud does not limit the scope of the frustration and imperfection to personal love, for Maud herself often serves as a symbol for Yeats. He makes many comparisons between Maud and Helen of Troy; "No Second Troy" provides one of the many examples. By the comparison, Yeats often implies another comparison--that of Ireland and Troy. His Ireland was sometimes literal and sometimes that ideal and imaginary Ireland for which he labored.⁴ Yeats' ideals, Ireland and Maud, were being wronged by the imperfections lamented in "The Lover Tells. . . ." Correspondingly, the "hunger to build them anew and sit

³Jeffares, p. 55.

⁴William Butler Yeats, "Poetry and Tradition," in Essays and Introductions (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 246.

on a green knoll apart" describes more than a simple hunger to possess Maud, it also describes a hunger to create an immortal mythos and to find in it some hope, through a transitory death, of union with the ancient Ireland he worshipped. The "casket of gold" serves as aesthetic purity.

In contrast to the "golden casket," "The Fish" presents a darkened moon and silver cords that lack perfection, refinement, and eternalness, leaving him void of fulfillment. Written for Maud Gonne, it makes a statement of Yeats' loss of Maud, while on a second level it deals with spiritual pursuit:

Although you hide in the ebb and flow
Of the pale tide when the moon has set,
The people of coming days will know
About the casting out of my net,
And how you have leaped times out of mind
Over the little silver cords,
And think that you were hard and unkind,
And blame you with many bitter words.
(p. 56, ll. 1-8)

The legendary fish are the tribes of the goddess Danu who could take various shapes and then, when approached, vanish.⁵ Likewise, her illusive tribes allure and beguile men, and then, just when the men are about to embrace them, disappear. Yeats expresses in the poem the cruelty of such actions and the disappointment they bring, for night ("when the moon has set") stands for the darkness of physical limitation which causes the difficulties of life to arise. The "little silver cords" represent the inability of the physical to capture the ultimate desires of life, that is, to capture Maud Gonne.

⁵ Jeffares, p. 61.

This theme of unfilled desire builds in "The Unappeasable Host." Using the Danaan Children, another set of faeryland inhabitants, the poem recalls the idea of perfection and dreaminess by using the gold image:

The Danaan children laugh, in cradles of wrought gold,
And clap their hands together, and half close their eyes,
For they will ride the North when the ger-eagle flies,
(p. 56, ll. 1-3)

But their laughing is deceptive, their vision distorted. The cries of the children become desolate winds:

Desolate winds that cry over the wandering sea;
Desolate winds that hover in the flaming West,
Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and beat
The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering ghost;
O heart the winds have shaken, the unappeasable host
Is comelier than candles at Mother Mary's feet.
(p. 56, ll. 7-12)

The glorious dreamland takes on a taint of undesirableness in this poem like a Hawthornian birth mark: it begins to hint that Yeats might harbor a reserve about the mystical orders of the solutions for life they offer. The golden dreamworld of the sun may contain flaws.

Nevertheless, the use of the fused sun and moon image of "Into the Twilight" denotes the kind of united life Yeats and his mystical brothers hoped for:

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:
For there the mystical brotherhood
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood
And river and stream work out their will:

And God stands winding His lonely horn,
And time and the world are ever in flight;
And love is less kind than the grey twilight,
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.
(p. 57, ll. 9-16)

T.R. Henn points out the poem's typicalness of the ideas for "an Order of Celtic Mysteries by which Young Ireland was to be initiated 'into a mystical philosophy which would combine the doctrines of Christianity with the faiths of a more ancient world, unite the perceptions of the spirit with those of natural beauty'."⁶ This mystical order parallels Yeats' personal mysticism about Maud, especially as she comes more and more to represent Ireland's Helen. Yeats summarized the intent of the above lines in his advice to Synge: "'Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression.'"⁷ But fusing sun and moon into harmony appears impossible.

For example, a significant aspect of "The Song of the Wandering Aengus" is that the little fish, which becomes the "glimmering girl," is only silver:

I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.
(p. 57, ll. 7-16)

Alex Zwerdling says that the poem deals with fading of the momentary vision and Aengus' "fruitless search to recapture the lost vision."⁸

⁶Thomas R. Henn, The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), p. 72.

⁷Henn, p. 73.

⁸Alex Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 176-77.

Ellmann also points to the theme of futile quest.⁹ Like a Danu goddess, the dream image has vanished and the limitations of the physical world again bring frustration. Seemingly, Yeats feels that the present world can only create desires which cannot be fulfilled. Hence, Aengus must pursue his dream in the illusionary world where there may be a chance for an embrace:

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.
(pp. 57-58, ll. 17-24)

A definite separation of the worlds becomes evident at this point. The separation of reality and illusion anticipates a choice to be made between these two worlds.

Finally, his frustration would uproot both sun and moon in the poem "He Mourns for the Change That Has Come Upon Him and His Beloved, And Longs for the End of the World":

I would that the Boar without bristles had
come from the West
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out
of the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning
to his rest.
(p. 59, ll. 10-12)

Frustration over the inadequacy of physical love and opportunity for change causes the persona to have a longing for an end to the world where things suffer. The Boar, synonymous with the Black Pig in "The Valley

⁹Ellmann, p. 79.

of The Black Pig," supposedly brings on the final holocaust of the world¹⁰ and advances the Second Coming when a new age, a mystical reality, will bring another change for the lovers of the poem and also Yeats and Maud.

Not relinquishing the golden dreamworld entirely, Yeats returns to that motif in "He Gives His Beloved Certain Rhymes," in which the theme of the glorious past in terms of the gold image reestablishes hope through poetic effort:

Fasten your hair with a golden pin,
And bind up every wandering tress;
I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:
It worked at them, day out, day in,
Building a sorrowful loveliness
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,
And bind up your long hair and sigh;
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;
And candle-like foam on the dim sand,
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,
Live but to light your passing feet.

(p. 61, ll. 1-12)

So Yeats proposes that the past glories complement the rhymes; that is, the glories of the past and the poetry they produce are interwoven into a new entity which exists beyond the scope of the present world. This new entity serves as hope for life and love that have gone askew. Yeats' comment that the poem presented a song sung by a head after its removal from the body would lend support to this view; it's a new rhyme by a new entity.¹¹

¹⁰ Jeffares, p. 71.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 68.

In "The Secret Rose" the persona looks back upon the past glories of Christianity and forward to an apocalypse. First, the leaves of the rose enfold

The ancient beards, the helms of ruby and gold
Of the crowned Magi; and the king whose eyes
Saw the Pierced Hands and Rood of elder rise
In Druid vapour and make the torches dim;
Till vain frenzy awoke and he died. . . .

(p. 67, ll. 8-12)

The golden helmets of the crowned Magi not only looks back at the glory of the beginning of Christianity, but looks forward to "The Second Coming": "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born" (p. 185, lines 21-22). The feeling for spiritual unity eclipses that earlier longing for simple escape to faeryland. However, the dark of the moon hints at the apocalypse:

I, too, await
The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?

(p. 67, ll. 27-32)

"He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead" and "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven," in which gold and silver with the sun and moon spin off on a cosmic gyre, share the apocalyptic desire. "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead" deals with the illusion of perfection beyond death, which transcends the present world. The beloved in the state of blessedness would be forgiving and receptive; things would be right:

Were you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;

And you would murmur tender words,
 Forgiving me, because you were dead:
 Nor would you rise and hasten away,
 Though you have the will of the wild birds,
 But know your hair was bound and wound
 About the stars and moon and sun:
 (p. 70, ll. 1-10)

"He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" echoes these ideas of perfection, peace, and rightness:

Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths,
 Enwrought with golden and silver light,
 The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
 Of night and light and the half-light,
 I would spread the cloths under your feet:
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
 I have spread my dreams under your feet;
 Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.
 (p. 70, ll. 1-8)

The cloths of heaven could make the persona successful in his attempted love. Nevertheless, the frustration of his dichotomy remains, so the volume closes with the longing for the perfect world of the golden sun and the silver moon where Maud Gonne can be reached, held, and loved, where Ireland will realize its potential for union with the glorious past, where the foot-trodden dreams can be reassembled. The human frustrations of the present world may find transformation in the new world of spiritual blessings.

Accordingly, he spins himself into the constellations, the moon and the stars and sun, in the next poem, "He Thinks of His Past Greatness When a Part of the Constellations of Heaven." In that transcendent state, however, he still weeps because he knows "that his head/ May not lie on the breast nor his lips on the hair/ Of the woman he loves . . ."
 (p. 71, lines 8-10).

He has, by the end of this volume of poetry, reached a stalemate. The silver moon brings madness. The golden sun merely offers a dream-world. And an apocalyptic blending of sun and moon removes him from any possible scene of action.

II

In The Seven Woods

John Unterecker summarizes the opinion of most critics concerning the basic theme of In The Seven Woods:

The finished version of this set of poems . . . is designed to give us a picture of the rejected lover who at the end gives up all hope. And yet the feeling of the entire group is not particularly gloomy. Partly, of course, this is because Yeats knew in 1908, when he established the final order of the poems, not only the circumstances of Maud Gonne's marriage but as well the circumstances which led her in 1905 to separate from her husband. Though she had turned to him for no more than friendship, Yeats was comforted that she had let him help arrange the details of that separation. He is consequently careful to keep the tone of the group of poems from sounding in any way tragic.¹²

While Unterecker's statement gives blanket coverage of the composition of the book, there are some significant uses of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery within the work which form a supportive pattern for the critical comments now extant and which show the continuing pattern of Yeats' developing imagery.

"The Withering of the Boughs," the volume's sixth poem, presents a state that corresponds to the suspended state of Yeats' life at the turn of the century: it is a fear of isolation, either in faeryland, reality, or, worse, in the mystical dream-world of those latter poems in

¹²Unterecker, p. 98.

The Wind Among The Reeds. The moon in this poem brings a mood of stasis, and the persona begins to cry when he hears the moon murmuring, for he fears it is suspended:

I cried when the moon was murmuring to the birds:
 'Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
 I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
 For the roads are unending, and there is no place
 to my mind.'

(p. 77, ll. 1-4)

This suspended state appears an illusion, similar to that recorded in "The Stolen Child": "so happy and hopeless, so deaf and blind/ With wisdom, they wander till the years have gone by" (lines 20-21). Only in this poem: "The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill,/ And I fell asleep upon lonely Eichtge of streams" (lines 5-6). Again the "dim moon" drifts "where the Danaan kind/ Wind and Unwind their dances when the light grows cool" (lines 12-13). He argues that he has reached this isolation by his own actions:

No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
 The boughs have withered because I have told them
 my dreams.

(p. 77, refrain)

Under the spell of the moon he gave all his heart and somehow lost.

The hopeless loss is extended in "Adam's Curse." Again under the worn and hollow moon, the persona sits with his loved one; they have grown "quiet at the name of love," watching the day and their love die.¹³ These lovers, like Baile and Aillinn of "The Withering of the Boughs,"¹⁴ see their happiness fade into moon-induced hopelessness:

¹³Ellmann, p. 103.

¹⁴Jeffares, p. 91.

We saw the last embers of daylight die,
 And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
 A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
 Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
 About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
 That you were beautiful, and that I strove
 To love you in the old high way of love;
 That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
 As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

(p. 79, ll. 29-38)

Yeats' mystical illusion appears to grow hollow like the lover's moon. He suggests a growing gulf between his ideal and the reality in which he is caught.

The feeling of disillusionment grows in "Under the Moon" as the persona asserts that he finds "no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde," the mythical woodland of Merlin legend. Throughout the poem's first stanza the persona catalogues references to the legendary worlds of "Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and the sun's/ Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long-lived ones" (lines 6-7). Dreaming opens the portal into these places "laid on a golden bier":

And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun or shore,
 Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,
 I hear the harp-string praise them, or hear their mournful
 talk.

(p. 80, ll. 14-16)

Finally, the theme of reserve and fear becomes clear in the closing four-line stanza where the illusion becomes "famished" in the "horn of the hunter's moon":

Because of something told under the famished horn
 Of the hunter's moon, that hung between the night and the day,
 To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,
 Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

(pp. 80-81, ll. 17-20)

Another poem, "The Ragged Wood," builds upon the past associations of the gold/sun, silver/moon cluster:

O hurry where by water among the trees
The delicate-stepping stag and his lady sigh,
When they have but looked upon their images--
Would none had ever loved but you and I!

Or have you heard that sliding silver-shoed
Pale silver-proud queen-woman of the sky,
When the sun looked out of his golden hood?--
O that none ever loved but you and I!
(p. 81, ll. 1-8)

Yeats finds himself caught between two polarities: the hope for love and peace in the dreamworld of perfection and the hopelessness of the actual world without love and peace.

The result of the dilemma, a feeling of suspension, prods Yeats in his quest for some solution. "The Happy Townland," which closes the In The Seven Woods volume, focuses clearly upon the situation. Here a "golden and silver wood" symbolizes the perfection of the dream, as in "The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland."¹⁵ However, the antithesis between sun and moon remains:

The little fox he murmured,
'O what of the world's bane?'
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane.'
(p. 83, ll. 13-20)

The little fox attempts to lure the one "riding to the townland" from the present world into the world of illusion. Yeats' sun laughs in agreement with the little fox: "O what of the world's bane?" Bane, used here in a Blakean sense, has a connotation of ruin.¹⁶ Because of

the ruin in the present world, the heart seems justified in its desire for escape. But at the same time there is the pull of reality as the moon plucks at the reins in an attempt to thwart the escape. The conflict between the sun and moon represents the conflict in Yeats between the two worlds.

Although the preceding poems work toward a resolution about the form of the unified world of perfection, Yeats has continually broken the imagery into opposing worlds which must lead him to the point of decision as to which of the opposing worlds actually offers to man a meaningful reality, if, in fact, such a meaningful reality exists.

CHAPTER IV
BACK TOWARD REALITY

I

From 'The Green Helmet' and Other Poems

The maturation of Yeats as a poet makes a signal shift in The Green Helmet volume both in style and subject matter, with a more intense emphasis on the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery. Robert Beum comments: a "surer and less nebulous style was a product of Yeats's inevitable awakening from passive aestheticism when he entered upon the writing, producing, and promoting of plays, first for the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899 and then for the Abbey in 1904."¹ A part of the change can be attributed to Yeats' interjection into his poetry of symbolic concepts found in "The Symbolism of Poetry" written in 1900. The book deals, too, with Maud Gonne, but she's an apotheosized Maud Gonne.² Further, it brings again the concern with poetic origins and creative functions, but the poetics function on a higher level.³ The gold/sun, silver/moon images grow more pronounced, giving broader and more subtle references and reflecting stronger emotions. Yeats' own statement relates the change best:

¹Robert Beum, The Poetic Art of William Butler Yeats (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1969), pp. 44-45.

²Unterecker, p. 105.

³Beum, pp. 48-9.

They ^{the} deliberate artists⁷ have sought for no new thing, it may be, but only to understand and to copy the pure inspiration of early times, but because the divine life wars upon our outer life, and must needs change its weapons and its movements as we change ours, inspiration has come to them in beautiful startling shapes. . . . and now writers have begun to dwell upon the element of evocation, of suggestion, upon what we call the symbolism in great writers.⁴

The shifts of style and subject matter parallel a shift in the usage of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery. The images become more subtle and less obtrusive in the poetry and begin to alter in their primary symbolic representation from an illusion-reality conflict to a more complex, life-style conflict.

In "Words" Yeats begins to clarify the new development of his feelings towards the world in which he lives and the world he has long desired. The poem also presents an answer to Maud Gonne's statement, "The world should thank me for not marrying you."⁵ It opens with a lament over the loss of love and, in the second stanza, reveals that the loss has, for a time, brought on a state of weariness:

And I grew weary of the sun
Until my thoughts cleared up again,
Remembering that the best I have done
Was done to make it plain.
(p. 88, ll. 5-8)

The sun image simultaneously symbolizes both life--that is, the time one has to live--and the poetic quest which Yeats pursued vigorously until the early 1900s when he became engulfed in the theater. It could easily represent, too, the toil and labor of the creative process and

⁴Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," pp. 154-55.

⁵Unterecker, p. 105.

the resulting physical strain. The broadened scope of the sun image thus shows a part of the changed Yeats.

In "The Coming of Wisdom With Time" the sun image becomes once again a symbol of the illusive quest like that of the early Yeats "riding to the townland/ That is the world's bane":

Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth.

(p. 92, ll. 1-4)

Though the sun of both "Words" and "The Coming of Wisdom" represents a quest, the former sun looks forward to the new quest of poetic reality, while the latter sun looks back to the old quest of escape.

A new association of the gold image appears in "The Mask." Unterecker says, "What's behind the Mask is of no consequence so long as it engenders the curiosity which must not be satisfied."⁶ Thus the substance and appearance must be the engenderers:

'Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.'

'O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold.'

'I would but find what's there to find,
Love or deceit.'

'It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind.'

'But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire.'
'O no, my dear, let all that be;
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me?'

(p. 93, ll. 1-15)

⁶Unterecker, p. 109.

The gold and emerald become the notches to the "key of all Yeats' plays and poems about ambiguities of personality."⁷ The gold and emerald--both rich and precious elements--symbolize the qualities of life that make life desirable from the Yeatsian viewpoint: "Yeats believed in courage, aristocratic oppositions, and immortality."⁸ The Mask he dons displays at one time or another all these characteristics encrusted in the gold.

The aristocratic face of the mask becomes dominant in "Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation." The house of the poem belonged to Lady Gregory and represents the aristocracy Yeats admired so much as he walked among the beauties of the Gregory estate, Coole Park. The fourth line captures the desirability of the house and the aristocracy: "To breed the lidless eye that loves the sun." The lidless eye belongs to the eagle, the only creature capable of looking directly into the sun. Thus Yeats draws from the Blakean usage of the eagle and the sun, using the imagery as "a symbol for an active objective person,"⁹ who is both artist and aristocrat.

"These Are the Clouds" continues the sun image along with its reference to the eagle's eye. But the usage here develops an antithesis to the preceding poem "Upon a House Shaken" because now the weak, peasant

⁷Unterecker, p. 109.

⁸Donald Stauffer, The Golden Nightingale: Essays on Some Principles of Poetry in the Lyrics of William Butler Yeats (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949), p. 17.

⁹Jeffares, p. 109.

types of the "Clouds" destroy the aristocratic glory:

These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye:
The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie.

(p. 94, ll. 1-6)

Likewise, the sun falls and its eye becomes shut. Yeats foreshadows here the despair he feels toward the Irish masses in Responsibilities, where he repeats the sun and eagle image, and where he looks back at the despair he felt earlier with the commonality of the silver-saddled sea that had destroyed the golden past of Ireland.

"At Galway Races" introduces the moon image to this volume plus another change in the subject matter of the work, the cycles and phases of life. The first cycle reviews the glorious past, the second cycle the present commonality, and the third cycle the hope for the future when things shall return to greatness:

There where the course is,
Delight makes all of the one mind,
The riders upon the galloping horses,
The crowd that closes in behind:
We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.
Sing on: somewhere at some new moon,
We'll learn that sleeping is not death,
Hearing the whole earth change its tune,
Its flesh being wild, and it again
Crying aloud as the racecourse is,
And we find hearteners among men
That ride upon horses.

(p. 95, ll. 1-16)

With the new moon image there appears a hope that things can and will be reversed, that a new day will reveal itself in the glory of some past that is reminiscent of the earlier works.

In the final poem of The Green Helmet volume, "Brown Penny," the verse flows free and jaunty like the spirit of the young lover who could be Aengus except that his quest begins and ends in the present world of the lover's moon:

For he would be thinking of love
Till the stars had run away
And the shadows eaten the moon.
(p. 96, ll. 12-14)

Yeats' life concept continues to move, it seems, closer to the wisdom that age brings. And that wisdom, in turn, appears to lead him down into a reality of love and a world of tangibles that he finds symbolized in the young lover's moon. Certainly he has moved steadily away from the earlier dream world with its illusion of perfection, as the separation of the gold/sun, silver/moon cluster illustrates.

II

Responsibilities

Most accomplished poets take opportunity at some point in their careers to make a statement about their artistic theories. Yeats does so in Responsibilities, though not all critics will accept it as his major ars poetica, especially Harold Bloom.¹⁰ Yet it deserves careful study because Yeats' use of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery within this volume focuses on poetic theory. Furthermore, the unique structure of the volume adds to its credibility as a poetic statement. It opens

¹⁰Bloom, p. 171.

with an introductory ars poetica in italics without a title and closes in the same manner. Both verses make direct comments about Yeats' feelings for his art.

"Pardon, old fathers . . ." catalogues his paternal and maternal heritage, from which Yeats obtained the desire to write. To carry on the heritage became a challenge more noble than the challenge to carry on name:

You most of all, silent and fierce old man,
Because the daily spectacle that stirred
My fancy, and set my boyish lips to say,
'Only the wasteful virtues earn the sun';
Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine,
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.
(p. 99, ll. 15-22)

The sun image represents here the artistic goal and the creative power of the mind that reaches out through the mundane shell of reality, with its pain and sorrow, to embrace life's essence and meaning and that strives to write them down in a book or a verse. Like the Blakean eagle, Yeats felt he must be able to look directly into his sun, soar above the commonplace in life, which meant that in the eyes of utilitarian society his work would be wasted since it would not produce the tangible things like children, or food, or clothing.

In "The Grey Rock" human action relates to Yeats' elevated view of his work. Stanza six, through the sun image, clarifies the relationship of the noble matter of poetry to the noble action necessary to produce it. The stanza develops around the restoration of Ireland after the Scandinavian invasions by Malachy and Brian Boru in 980 A.D. and 1014 A.D. respectively.¹¹ The sun image, equating the duration of the battle to a

¹¹ Jeffares, p. 122.

day, emphasizes Yeats' realization that expediency and immediacy are a part of noble human action, and that there is a short time limit upon man striving to achieve his goal:

'The Danish troop was driven out
Between the dawn and dusk,' she said;
'Although the event was long in doubt,
Although the King of Ireland's dead
And half the kings, before sundown
All was accomplished.

(p. 103, ll. 65-70)

A feeling of despair with old age begins to show here and becomes more pronounced as the volume progresses. Yeats senses an immediate need to accomplish his goal now for his own sun was drawing toward evening.

"To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures" repeats the sun image in association with both the nobility and the Blakean eagle. Dealing primarily with Ireland's social baseness regarding art, the poem works the sun/eagle image into a symbol for the opposite of baseness, true artistic taste:

Look up in the sun's eye and give
What the exultant heart calls good
That some new day may breed the best
Because you gave, not what they would,
But the right twigs for an eagle's nest!

(p. 106, ll. 32-36)

The poet must not allow the social standard to lure him away from the ideal standard. At this point Yeats still stands above the world of tangibles, continuing to fear the destruction it contains, continuing to be afraid it will tarnish his work as it did the old silver cup of "The Grey Rock." So he begins to explore and expose the weaknesses of reality under the lover's moon.

In "The Three Beggars" the moon image develops as the antithesis of the world of nobility associated with the sun. King Guaire offers the beggar who can fall asleep first a thousand pounds:

And when the second twilight brought
 The frenzy of the beggars' moon
 None closed his blood-shot eyes but sought
 To keep his fellows from their sleep;
 All shouted till their anger grew
 And they were whirling in a heap.
 (p. 110, ll. 42-47)

But each beggar, rather than trying to sleep, attempts to keep the others awake, displaying selfishness and perversion. The moon seems to have distorted the beggars' minds.

Besides beggarly attitudes, Yeats senses that those under the influence of the moon are self deceived, as is the harlot of "A Song from 'The Player Queen'." The persona, the harlot's daughter, sings the song which expresses a strong yearning for the ideal, eternal world of the earlier work "The Song of Wandering Aengus":

My mother dandled me and sang,
 'How young it is, how young!'
 And made a golden cradle
 That on a willow swung.

'He went away,' my mother sang,
 'When I was brought to bed,'
 And all the while her needle pulled
 The gold and silver thread.

She pulled the thread and bit the thread
 And made a golden gown,
 And wept because she had dreamt that I
 Was born to wear a crown.

'When she was got,' my mother sang,
 'I heard a sea-new cry,
 And saw a flake of the yellow foam
 That dropped upon my thigh.'

How therefore could she help but braid
 The gold into my hair,
 And dream that I should carry
 The golden top of care?

(p. 118, ll. 1-20)

The daughter's mother wants to believe that something divine occurred during the conception and, as a result, her daughter will someday become a queen. Because of the dream the mother made a "golden cradle" and a dress of "gold and silver" thread. Again the fused images represent a dream of perfection; the "golden gown," the gold braid, and the "golden top of care" fill only the heart of a mother who sees herself as a Leda. She foreshadows the ideal developed in "Leda and the Swan" that some of the divine can be instilled in man. But at most the union with the divine is incomplete and momentary. The dream breaks into reality for the daughter who recognizes the dream-illusion of her mother. Of course, Hazard Adams argues that "Leda and the Swan" "approaches a spiritual union--like that of Blake--but leaves the question unresolved." As a result, Adams stipulates that there "is no resolution, only the gyring away of history to a new falling apart. Vision is momentary, personal, and inarticulate."¹² The daughter, too, has realized the delusion and turned toward those things which are tangible.

"A Memory of Youth" shows the final aspect of the lover's moon to which Yeats objects: the impotency of old age. Jeffares observes that the poem represents the hardening of love into a cold, dead stone.¹³ In stanza one all the attributes of love seem plenteous and capable until "A cloud blown from the cut-throat North/ Suddenly hid Love's Moon

¹²Hazard Adams, Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision (New York: Russell and Russell, 1968), p. 204.

¹³Jeffares, p. 143.

away" (lines 6-7). The moon, like Maud Gonne in The Wind Among The Reeds, becomes distant and unattainable. But at this time Yeats was with Maud again in Normandy¹⁴ and had found a new hope for his love. Stanza three reveals the new-found hope as his moon reappears:

And had been savagely undone
Were it not that Love upon the cry
Of a most ridiculous little bird
Tore from the clouds his marvellous moon.
(p. 121, ll. 18-21)

The message seems to go beyond the single theme of a lover's death. Yeats, by offsetting uses of the moon image, suggests a hope that love can be renewed and illustrates his rejection of the Player Queen's daughter's acceptance of the present world. The change between the two stanzas depicts clearly the continuing vacillation of Yeats between optimism and pessimism, between hope and despair, between illusion and reality.

"The Magi" further illustrates the inability of Yeats at this point to focus clearly on either world, illusion or reality. In the poem the three Magi who come to the birth of his new age bring silver instead of gold, as did the Magi who visited the birth of the Christian era. The change from gold to silver apparently represents Yeats' desire for a totally different new age. He comments on the desired change in

A Vision:

When the old primary becomes the new antithetical, the old realisation of an objective moral law is changed into a subconscious turbulent instinct. The world of rigid custom and law is broken up by 'the uncontrollable mystery upon the bestial floor.'¹⁵

¹⁴Jeffares, p. 143.

¹⁵William Butler Yeats, A Vision (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 105.

Having examined more closely the tangible real world, Yeats feels more unsatisfied by its limitations and its changes which bring impotency. His feelings of frustration and yearning for a change grow stronger.

The gold/sun, silver/moon imagery has moved through the Responsibilities volume to the antithesis of first the world of deterioration and second the world of permanence. Yet Yeats withholds his choice of either world, though he stands most near a world of permanence built upon art.

CHAPTER V
THE QUEST FOR ARTISTIC CREATION

I

The Wild Swans at Coole

The Wild Swans at Coole volume, published in 1919, at a time in Yeats' life when he was much distressed by his thwarted love for Maud Gonne, presents an evaluation of each of the opposing worlds, reality and illusion, as Yeats conceived them at the close of Responsibilities. Feeling the pressure of his loneliness, Yeats as the poet-seeker pursues his quest for the means that will at last allow him to escape the world which subjects him to depression. The depth of his contemplation of the two opposing worlds and his complex decision is illustrated again in the imagery. The force of the gold/sun images in this silver/moon phase of Yeats' work builds upon past usages and expands to new ones.

"Under the Round Tower" returns to a setting common to Yeats' escape theme: a fairyland or place of blessedness:

Upon a grey old battered tombstone
In Glendalough beside the stream,
Where the O'Byrnes and Byrnes are buried,
He stretched his bones and fell in a dream
Of sun and moon that a good hour
Bellowed and pranced in the round tower;

Of golden king and silver lady,
Bellowing up and bellowing round,
Till toes mastered a sweet measure,
Mouth mastered a sweet sound,
Prancing round and prancing up
Until they pranced upon the top.
(p. 135, ll. 7-18)

The gold/sun, silver/moon images represent the state of blessedness in fairyland, and, as Richard Ellmann points out, Yeats "uses the dance to represent both the state of fairyland and the state of blessedness, realms not identical but akin."¹ These states also symbolize unity, since Yeats noted that the dancer cannot be separated from the dance.

Yeats puts his persona, Billy Byrne, in the graveyard at Glendalough, Co. Wicklow. There, near round towers built for protection against Scandinavian invaders, Billy falls asleep, resting his head on the tombstone of his great-grandfather's grave. While asleep, he dreams of the world where all seems joyous and gay and inviting:

That golden king and that wild lady
Sang till stars began to fade,
Hands gripped in hands, toes close together,
Hair spread on the wind they made;
That lady and that golden king
Could like a brace of blackbirds sing.

(p. 135, ll. 19-24)

The dream lures the poor beggar from his present reality, his current frustration. Yet Yeats does not allow him to be completely caught away. That is, the poem does not end with Billy trapped in the illusion of his dream and fantasy as in the persona in "The Stolen Child." Here, the golden king and silver lady, whirling away into their state of perfection with its united sun and moon, singing "like a brace of blackbirds," were to Billy nothing more than a good omen that his luck had changed. He awakes with hope:

'It's certain that my luck is broken,'
That rambling jailbird Billy said;
'Before nightfall I'll pick a pocket
And snug it in a feather bed.
I cannot find the peace of home
On great-grandfather's battered tomb.'

(p. 136, ll. 25-30)

¹Ellmann, p. 79.

The dream world, while not totally acceptable, moves closer to becoming acceptable as an offering of hope.

"Lines Written in Dejection" develops in detail the particular frustrations of Yeats during the time he composed The Wild Swans at Coole. When Yeats wrote the poem, he was beginning to view his life moving rapidly into the stages of physical impotency. This impotency would, of course, add to the bitterness of his already defeated love. Additionally, the years at the theater had taken a toll on his creative powers, as indicated in his Autobiography:

I often wonder if my talent will ever recover from the heterogeneous labour of these last few years. The younger Hallam says that vice does not destroy genius but that the heterogeneous does. I cry out vainly for liberty and have ever less and less inner life.²

This feeling of dejection gave Yeats new zeal in his search for something to fill the void of life:

When have I last looked on
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies
Of the dark leopards of the moon?
All the wild witches, those most noble ladies,
For all their broom-sticks and their tears,
Their angry tears, are gone.
The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished;
I have nothing but the embittered sun;
Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
And now that I have come to fifty years
I must endure the timid sun.
(pp. 143-144, ll. 1-11)

Jeffares points out that the sun and moon in "Lines" represent objectivity and subjectivity respectfully.³ The subjectivity is a

²William Butler Yeats, Autobiography (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), p. 484.

³Jeffares, p. 177.

correlation for Yeats' poetry and the kind of creativity symbolized by the sexual union of his Solomon and Sheba. It has been too long since his last creative act, for creativity had been replaced by the mundane restraints of his utilitarian business interests. These restraints, like Blake's "Mundane Shell," were another of the many forms in the present world from which he longed to escape. The sun, embittered and timid, becomes the symbol of his restrained life.

His longing to escape the "timidness" of the sun is verified in two poems that follow "Lines." "The Dawn" and "On Women" both use the moon image with a singular connotation. The moon serves as the central symbol of the visionary cyclic pattern and has, as its main function, the guidance of man's historical cycle.⁴ This latter function receives strong emphasis in the two poems.

"The Dawn" represents, in one particular sense, both a new dawn and a new life, and, thus, a new opportunity:

I would be ignorant as the dawn
That has looked down
On that old queen measuring a town
With the pin of a brooch,
Or on the withered men that saw
From their pedantic Babylon
The careless planets in their courses,
The stars fade out where the moon comes,
And took their tablets and did sums;
I would be ignorant as the dawn
That merely stood, rocking the glittering coach
Above the cloudy shoulders of the horses;
I would be--for no knowledge is worth a straw--
Ignorant and wanton as the dawn.
(p. 144, ll. 1-14)

⁴Yeats, A Vision, pp. 87-9.

The moon image relates this new life to the birth of the generation that came from Leda and the Swan in Yeats' mythology. There will be another new creation when the moon returns to that phase which brings history around to the point where present systems will be blotted out just as the "Babylonian Mathematical Starlight" systems were blotted out by Leda and the Swan.

"On Women" strengthens the rebirth idea. Hope for another change is bound up in both moon and woman. The moon will bring about the proper phase for the woman to give birth a second time:

What else He give or keep
 God grant me--no, not here,
 For I am not so bold
 To hope a thing so dear
 Now I am growing old,
 But when, if the tale's true,
 The Pestle of the moon
 That pounds up all anew
 Brings me to birth again--
 To find what once I had
 And know what once I have known,
 Until I am driven mad.

(p. 145, ll. 24-35)

After the new birth there will be, perhaps, an opportunity to find the vision of hope Yeats had felt in the Rose volume of creating his new Ireland, a Maud Gonne that would accept his love, a poetic reality where life could be full and rewarding and Yeats could "live like Solomon/ That Sheba led a dance" (lines 42-43).

Birth and death appear to become almost synonymous terms for Yeats as his desire for escape intensifies. At the death of Mabel Beardsley he was moved to write a series of seven poems which continue the separation theme. Beardsley conveyed to Yeats through her death a freedom that comes in the form of a release from the troubles of the

now-world here symbolized by the image of the dog baying at the moon.
The release is the same as the release brought by the new birth in "On
Women":

Because the priest must have like every dog his day
Or keep us all awake with baying at the moon,
We and our dolls being but the world were best away.
(p. 156, ll. 10-12)

Yeats gives a complete picture of the new cycle he envisions for his life, evolving through the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery, in three similar poems as he brings to a close The Wild Swans at Coole: "Ego Dominus Tuus," "The Phases of the Moon," and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes." Ellmann summarizes the use of the imagery here: "Yeats preferred, however, to limit the lunar symbol to the description of the self as it shifts through a multitude of lives, in some of them tending towards the energetic personality, which Yeats calls 'subjectivity,' of a Renaissance hero, and sometimes towards the sheering away of personality and the assertion of undistinguished equality, which he calls 'objectivity,' of Christ or, he thinks, of Marx as well."⁵

In "Ego Dominus Tuus," the moon image functions as a backdrop for Ille's concepts and observations of life which are all in the subjective and which are, as Unterecker points out, revelations of the search for "his own true nature."⁶ Hic establishes Ille's present state under the moon:

On the grey sand beside the shallow stream
Under your old wind-beaten tower, where still
A lamp burns on beside the open book
That Michael Robartes left, you walk in the moon,
And, though you have passed the best of life, still trace,
Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,
Magical shapes.
(p. 157, ll. 1-7)

⁵Ellmann, p. 157.

⁶Unterecker, p. 147.

And at this time Yeats, too, has come to visualize his quest as a quest for the magical shapes which will transport him into the potential reality only the poetic genius can create.

"The Phases of the Moon" underscores this hope for a new creation. Robartes tells of the various phases of the moon in his song and also notes the two stages where there is no life:

Twenty-and-eight the phases of the moon,
The full and the moon's dark and all the crescents,
Twenty-and-eight, and yet but six-and-twenty
The cradles that a man must needs be rocked in:
For there's no human life at the full or the dark.
(p. 161, ll. 24-28)

In the full of the moon no life can exist because phase 15 is the point of complete subjectivity, selfhood, and full creative power:

Robartes. When the moon's full those creatures
of the full

Are met on the waste hills by countrymen
Who shudder and hurry by: body and soul
Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves,
Caught up in contemplation, the mind's eye
Fixed upon images that once were thought;
For separate, perfect, and immovable
Images can break the solitude
Of lovely, satisfied, indifferent eyes.

(p. 162, ll. 68-76)

The important statement in this section concerns the isolation that those of phase 15 feel because they are "estranged" from their countrymen "amid the strangeness of themselves." Yeats does not care, either, if his introspection brings separation at this point: in fact the desire to be separate seems to be his strongest motive. Further, he believes that his images and symbols, with which he will create his new and meaningful reality, will be able to "break the solitude/ Of lovely, satisfied, indifferent eyes."

At the dark of the moon no life can exist because in phase 1 man is suspended in the death-birth cycle where he moves between the real world and the world of the soul:

Aherne.

And what of those
That the last servile crescent has set free?

Robartes. Because all dark, like those that are all light,
They are cast beyond the verge, and in a cloud,
Crying to one another like the bats;
And having no desire they cannot tell
What's good or bad, or what it is to triumph
At the perfection of one's own obedience;
And yet they speak what's blown into the mind;
Deformed beyond deformity, unformed,
Inspid as the dough before it is baked,
They change their bodies at a word.

Aherne.

And then?

Robartes. When all the dough has been so kneaded up
That it can take what form cook Nature fancies
The first thin crescent is wheeled round once more.
(p. 163, ll. 95-109)

The hope here is based upon the concept of reincarnation and a feeling that "cook Nature" will fancy a better form in the next life. The view of death as not undesirable continues at this point, but it becomes noticeably less desirable. At least the death-birth cycle offers release from the present pain brought on by the "crumbling of the moon" after phase 15:

Robartes. And after that the crumbling of the moon.
The soul remembering its loneliness
Shudders in many cradles; all is changed,
It would be the world's servant, and as it serves,
Choosing whatever task's most difficult
Among tasks not impossible, it takes
Upon the body and upon the soul
The coarseness of the drudge.
(p. 163, ll. 80-87)

Yeats appears willing now to accept either form of escape, but prefers an escape into phase 15 with his creative innerself.

"The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" states this hope for creative regeneration forcefully in terms of the moon's phases one and fifteen. The first phase, "When the old moon is vanished from the sky/ And the new still hides her horn" (lines 2-4), illustrates the cosmos in its chaotic form. There all forms are:

Constrained, arraigned, baffled, bent and unbent
By these wire-jointed jaws and limbs of wood,
Themselves obedient,
Knowing not evil and good.

Obedient to some hidden magical breath.
They do not even feel, so abstract are they,
So dead beyond our death,
Triumph that we obey.

(pp. 167-168, ll. 9-16)

Here the hope built upon reincarnation dwindles, and death becomes a gloomy state. But the fifteenth phase illustrates the cosmos in its ordered form, represented by the union of a little girl's dance between the two basic forms of knowledge--the east and west respectfully--the Buddha and the Sphinx.⁷ At this time of order there is no life as commonly experienced, yet there is a recognizable form, for they "were dead yet flesh and bone" (line 48).

The third part of the poem presents life in all its dualities, the life that grows out of the artistic quest. "Being caught between the pull/ Of the dark moon and the full" seems to relate Yeats' feeling of being trapped in the conflicting phases of the moon:

I knew that I had seen, had seen at last
That girl my unremembering nights hold fast
Or else my dreams that fly
If I should rub an eye,

⁷Henn, p. 188.

And yet in flying fling into my meat
 A crazy juice that makes the pulses beat
 As though I had been undone
 By Homer's Paragon

Who never gave the burning town a thought;
 To such a pitch of folly I am brought,
 Being caught between the pull
 Of the dark moon and the full,

That commonness of thought and images
 That have the frenzy of our western seas.
 Thereon I made my moan,
 And after kissed a stone,

And after that arranged it in a song
 Seeing that I, ignorant for so long,
 Had been rewarded thus
 In Cormac's ruined house.

(p. 169, ll. 49-68)

Yeats leaves The Wild Swans at Coole volume longing for that artistic world where the poet-seeker can find meaningful reality. His longing continually intensified, but only at this point does he seem capable of breaking the fear that the artistic world might bring total isolation and separation. He stands on the brink ready for the final step into the artistic world represented by the gold/sun aspect of his imagery.

II

Michael Robartes And The Dancer

The creation of the golden world, which has emerged as the object of Yeats' poetic quest through the preceding volumes, develops slowly because of Yeats' demand that his work exhibit polished perfection. The completed product of Yeats' creative power can be easily grasped in The Tower volume without the reading of Michael Robartes and the Dancer, but the tremendous sensitivity of the process of bringing into

being the work cannot be experienced without reading it. For Yeats uses this volume to convey his emotional involvement and also to sharpen the focus of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery as the emotion and imagery interweave in the final preparations for "Sailing to Byzantium."

"Solomon and the Witch" begins the unfolding of the vision with the moon set in phase 15, one of its two phases where there is neither life or death, but man in suspension. Here the act of creation takes place: literally, Yeats felt this was the period of history when the new, opposite age would be born (as he wrote later in "The Second Coming"): figuratively, Yeats felt himself at this point in his work ready to bring forth his own new, opposite world. The sexual act becomes Yeats' symbol for the creative process in the poem, with the climax corresponding to the death of the present world:

And thus declared that Arab lady:
'Last night, where under the wild moon
On grassy mattress I had laid me,
Within my arms great Solomon,
I suddenly cried out in a strange tongue
Not his, not mine.'

Who understood
Whatever has been said, sighed, sung,
Howled, miau-d, barked, brayed, belled, yelled, cried,
crowed,
Thereon replied: "A cockerel
Crew from a blossoming apple bough
Three hundred years before the Fall,
And would not now but that he thought,
Chance being at one with Choice at last,
All that the brigand apple brought
And this foul world were dead at last.

(pp. 174-175, ll. 1-16)

The cockerel crows because he believes the new, opposite age is dawning, as Yeats believes his new, opposite creation is dawning. T.R. Henn observes that this hope for the new age rests upon "the capacity of lovers to discover, reflect, enlarge each other's shortcomings,"⁸

⁸ Henn, p. 58.

and symbolically, of course, the hope rests upon the capacity of the poet and his muse to accomplish the same on an artistic level.

The strength of Yeats' hope at this point expresses itself twice in the poem, both times in relationship to the moon image. The first expression praises the moon which has brought about the opportunity for the creative act: "Therefore a blessed moon last night/ Gave Sheba to her Solomon" (lines 31-32). The second expression cries out for the effort to continue until the conception has taken place: "And the moon is wilder every minute./ O! Solomon! let us try again" (lines 43-44). And not only does Yeats continue the effort, but he also heightens his anticipation of the freedom and joy the new golden age apparently holds before him, when the conflicts of the present age are past.

In the "Demon and Beast" the resolution of the conflict makes a momentary appearance, bringing a vision of the freedom and joy that is to come:

For certain minutes at the least
That crafty demon and that loud beast
That plague me day and night
Ran out of my sight;
Though I had long perned in the gyre,
Between my hatred and desire,
I saw my freedom won
And all laugh in the sun.
(p. 183, ll. 1-8)

The sun image must be taken in light of the "freedom won," for it, like the rest of the poem, deals with the separation freedom brings. Those who are laughing can be equated with the "countrymen" of "The Phases of the Moon" who "shudder and hurry by" as they see the creature of the full moon. As Yeats moves closer to his golden/sun world, he moves farther away from those who will remain in the silver/moon world.

Never does consciousness of distance between creative man and normal man leave Yeats' poetry.

But for now the vision of the freedom and joy the new world offers absorbs Yeats. Stanza three of "Demon and Beast" describes the blessedness of this new world (though gold/sun imagery is not used here, there is an important artistic belief of Yeats revealed which sheds further development on that imagery):

But soon a tear-drop started up,
For aimless joy had made me stop
Beside the little lake
To watch a white gull take
A bit of bread thrown up into the air;
Now gyring down and perning there
He splashed where an absurd
Portly green-pated bird
Shook off the water from his back;
Being no more demoniac
A stupid happy creature
Could rouse my whole nature.

(pp. 183-84, ll. 21-32)

Yeats explained this feeling of joy:

The arts are the bridal chambers of joy. No tragedy is legitimate unless it leads some great character to his final joy. . . . Some Frenchman has said that farce is the struggle against a ridiculous object, comedy against a movable object, tragedy against an immovable; and because the will, or energy, is greatest in tragedy, tragedy is the more noble; but I add that 'will or energy is eternal delight,' and when its limit is reached it may become a pure, aimless joy, though the man, the shade, still mourns his lost object.⁹

As the bridal chambers of joy, the arts are the object of desire. Only in art can the limits of will and energy be reached. The vision which

⁹ Jeffares, p. 236.

has brought to Yeats this realization leads him on in the quest as poet-seeker for that reality where the joy and freedom can become established, not momentary:

Yet I am certain as can be
That every natural victory
Belongs to beast or demon,
That never yet had freeman
Right mastery of natural things,
And that mere growing old, that brings
Chilled blood, this sweetness brought;
Yet have no dearer thought
Than that I may find out a way
To make it linger half a day.
(p. 184, ll. 33-42)

The way to make it linger, in Yeats' mind, means creating a reality of art, a golden world with a happy sun.

"The Second Coming" offers another reason for Yeats' desire for a world over which he would possess control and, by further developing the contrast between the worlds of the beast and the poet's protected tower, makes dramatic the setting of Yeats' gold/sun, silver/moon imagery as they develop the search for a meaningful and acceptable reality. The poem's most dominant emotion is fear, the fear of what the new age of history would be like:

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come around at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?
(p. 185, ll. 11-22)

The world of the beast, full of frustrations, loneliness, despair, and

often defeat, finds representation in Yeats' mind as a "blank and pitiless" sun. Certainly this sun, over which he has no control, contrasts dramatically with the sun of joy that would light the world of his creation. Here in the present world the conflicting desires of love and hate blind man, the gold and silver lack refinement and union, reflecting the baseness of man's nature.

The world of The Tower, that follows, apparently finds fulfillment for each of the lacking areas of the beast's world. This latter world Yeats represents as the full of the moon, the nobility of the eagle able to gaze directly into the proud sun, and the unified and refined gold and silver bringing to man an existence above and beyond the mundaneness of the beast's world. Yeats prays:

And may these characters remain
When all is ruin once again.
(p. 188, ll. 5-6)

III

The Tower

The introductory poem of The Tower volume makes Yeats' declaration that the long-hoped-for creation had come at last:

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence;
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.
(p. 191, ll. 9-16)

And for the reader who has been following the pattern of Yeats' work through the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery the withdrawal fulfills a long-awaited and anticipated occurrence. The world of Byzantium is the

world created and accessible only through the poetic genius. Donald Stauffer has, in effect, paraphrased Yeats' Byzantium statement by asserting that "Yeats withdrew into the world of A Vision /synonymous with the world of Byzantium/ formally on the afternoon of October 24, 1917. The woman, the theatre, the Ireland he loved had all proved intractable; they had gone on paths where he would not follow. His desires to be understood and to elevate through sympathy had apparently failed. He withdraws into his own lonely world, and he returns in the poems of his four finest volumes."¹⁰ The formality and pointedness of Yeats' withdrawal are statements which Stauffer must prove. The remainder of his observation, however, readily awaits every reader of the Byzantium poem.

The city of Byzantium grew for Yeats out of the ancient city so important to the development of alchemy. In the earliest drafts of the poem Yeats worked with the concept he formed of the ancient city while visiting there in 1924. He had seen during the trip a gold mosaic containing figures, and he used it to build the final image of the "sages standing in God's holy fire."¹¹ With these sages, Yeats could find what he hoped would be his meaningful reality:

O sages standing in God's holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in the gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.
 (p. 191, ll. 17-24)

¹⁰Stauffer, p. 118.

¹¹Stallworthy, p. 97.

In this poem the gold finally assumes full alchemical significance: it is totally refined and purged of its impurities. Thereby, it has the capacity to symbolize regeneration. Through this process of regeneration Yeats seeks freedom from the "dying animal" of his old, impotent body. Further, he wants to be consumed by art, having a soul in communion with the subjective spirits who exist in phase 15 of the moon where there is no physical life:

Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.
 (p. 192, ll. 25-32)

The golden bird symbolizes the freed soul in perfect regeneration, able now to compose verses worthy of the holy city of art. Also the last line gives the artist a universal, omnipotent knowledge that has been the poet-seeker's quest. The line adapts Blake's statement of his bard's omnipotence in the "Introduction" to Songs of Experience:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;
 Whose ears have heard
 The Holy Word
 That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
 And weeping in the evening dew;
 That might control
 The starry pole,
 And fallen, fallen light renew!¹²

¹²William Blake, "Introduction," in The Portable Blake, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York: Viking Press, 1968), p. 99.

In Byzantium, Yeats becomes the essence of poetic genius separated from the real world about him.

If Yeats could have died and left "Sailing to Byzantium" and "The Tower" as his last two poems, critics might have dismissed him as another poet of the escape motif. However, important poetry follows these poems, poetry which reveals that Yeats was not just another escapist poet. For even in the seclusion of his golden-bough tower, Yeats could not lose that constantly nagging feeling that he needed some form of relationship with those of the world from which he had worked so diligently to escape. In the series of poems headed "Meditations in Time of Civil War," poem number VII re-introduces the note of worry over the separation:

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon broken stone,
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,
A glittering sword out of the east. A puff of wind
And those white glimmering fragments of the mist sweep by.
Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb the mind;
Monstrous familiar images swim to the mind's eye.

(p. 203, ll. 1-8)

The golden bough brings freedom and joy, but it also brings the loneliness Yeats had feared earlier. In the loneliness of this separate world Yeats begins to question where man can endure the isolation of withdrawal. The moon even appears different: before it had been changeable and destructive, now it seems unchangeable and unlike itself. In Yeats' meditation he wonders if the things which have put this moon out really were so bad:

Nor self-delighting reverie,
Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity for what's gone,
Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's complacency,
The innumerable clanging wings that have put out the moon.

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
 Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
 In something that all others understand or share.
 (p. 204, ll. 29-35)

Certainly there is some doubt in Yeats' mind about the decision he has made to step out of the world of the moon into the world of the golden bough. But the success of the move looms too new and wonderful to allow the doubt to stand. Yeats will for the moment remain content in the world of reality his art has created for him. And he will remain in it with a feeling of satisfaction:

But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth
 A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,
 It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,
 The half-read wisdom of daemonic images,
 Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy.
 (p. 204, ll. 36-40)

Here the real problem of Yeats' gold/sun, silver/moon imagery arises: after such a determined and painstaking search for a reality of his own making where those things meaningful to him could exist without fear of destruction by the changing forces of the real world, why does Yeats come so quickly to the point where he doubts his ability to remain there? The answer to this question, of course, is not within the scope of this study. But it would be invalid to make the study without admitting the existence of the question.

The use of the image cluster, as Yeats moves into The Winding Stair and Other Poems, brings into focus the growing doubts and fears of isolation, but it does not tell why the doubts and fears come so quickly or forcefully.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE WINDING STAIR AND OTHER POEMS

The glorious freedom of the golden bird singing upon his golden bough in "Sailing to Byzantium" seemed a just reward for the poet-seeker who had journeyed so far and so long to find the object of his quest. But however just the reward, it was not a lasting one. The doubt and fear of the isolation that Byzantium brought to Yeats has already been mentioned, as has the question of why they came so soon. The Winding Stair and Other Poems volume takes up only one aspect of the two-fold problem surrounding his discouragement in terms of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery. For whatever reason, the discouragement came, and with it came a reversal in the longing of Yeats' heart: that is, he now turns back to the world of sensuality, pleasure, and physical life he symbolized so often with his silver and moon.

An important pronoun shift in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" illustrates the feeling of Yeats as he retreats from seclusion, the shift from "I" to "we." Though the poem does not contain the image cluster, the last stanza--where the pronoun shift occurs--sets an appropriate background for the other poems of the volume that contain the images:

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.
(p. 232, ll. 65-72)

"Blood and the Moon" picks up the moon image and begins to bring it into focus as a clear and blest moon, "unlike" the clouded and destructive moon of the earlier works:

The purity of the unclouded moon
Has flung its arrowy shaft upon the floor.
Seven centuries have passed and it is pure,
The blood of innocence has left no stain.
(p. 234, ll. 31-34)

The full force of the moon's feminine and sensual symbolism comes forth in these lines. Yeats uses "unclouded" to reinforce the purity and "flung" to reinforce the sensuality. There can be no doubt that the moon has regained its central importance when the descendents of the "ancestral stair . . . must gather there/ And clamour in drunken frenzy for the moon" (lines 40-42). Even the tower symbol becomes subordinated to the moon:

Is every modern nation like the tower,
Half-dead at the top? No matter what I said,
For wisdom is the property of the dead,
A something incompatible with life; and power,
Like everything that has the stain of blood,
A property of the living; but no stain
Can come upon the visage of the moon
When it has looked in glory from a cloud.
(p. 234, ll. 47-54)

Yeats' new world was as empty as the tower at the top. Already suffering from old age and sexual impotence, Yeats evidently cannot bear the thought of losing the social intercourse that only the real world can offer. With such feelings pressing on his mind, there should be little wonder that the moon with its air of sensuality would appear "in glory from a cloud."

Yeats continues the resurrection of the earlier associations for the moon by including in this volume a poem he wrote in 1923, entitled

"The Crazed Moon." In stanza one of the poem the moon again becomes associated with womanhood:

Crazed through much child-bearing
The moon is staggering in the sky;
Moon-struck by the despairing
Glances of her wandering eye
We grope, and grope in vain,
For children born of her pain.
(p. 237, ll. 1-6)

In the second stanza Yeats praises the manhood that worshipped at the feet of this moon:

Children dazed or dead!
When she in all her virginal pride
First trod on the mountain's head
What stir ran through the countryside
Where every foot obeyed her glance!
What manhood led the dance!
(p. 237, ll. 7-12)

Mingled in these lines are all the feelings of lust and desire that flooded the heart of the young Yeats as he pursued, not in a mystical sense but in physical sense, Maud Gonne, Ireland, and his poetical quest. Now in old age he can but hope to grasp what fleeting pieces he can of the real world joys:

Fly-catchers of the moon,
Our hands are blenched, our fingers seem
But slender needles of bone;
Blenched by that malicious dream
They are spread wide that each
May rend what comes in reach.
(p. 237, ll. 8-14)

The last major use of the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery comes in Yeats' second "Byzantium" poem. In this "Byzantium" the freedom and joy of the earlier, gold-only Byzantium becomes confused and leaves the poet unsure of himself:

A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
 All that man is,
 All mere complexities,
 The fury and the mire of human veins.

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
 Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
 For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
 May unwind the winding path;
 A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
 Breathless mouths may summon;
 I hail the superhuman;
 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.
 (p. 243, ll. 5-16)

An essential difference develops between the earlier "Sailing to Byzantium" and this "Byzantium": the world of nature in the former was rejected, whereas now there remains a fusion at least of the natural and artistic worlds.

Yeats' interwoven pattern of his two worlds at this point finds a parallel in his use of the gold, moon images in stanza three of the poem:

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
 More miracle than bird or handiwork,
 Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
 Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
 Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
 In glory of changeless metal
 Common bird or petal
 And all complexities of mire or blood.
 (p. 243, ll. 17-24)

Amid the indecision and confusion, one point stands out clearly: there no longer exists the desire for a separate world that is void of all physical aspects, for the moon is very much a part of this Byzantium. The poem fills the final gap in the gold/sun, silver/moon imagery by bringing together both worlds in a composite reality where all facets of life exist concurrently. No longer can escape be a solution in the search for a meaningful reality, for it brings only torment:

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
 Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
 The golden smithies of the Emperor!
 Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,
 That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.
 (p. 244, ll. 33-40)

Stallworthy sees the sea here as "the sea of life and passion . . .
 torn by the joyful dolphins [symbols of dead spirits]/--tormented by
 the gong of doom."¹ Yeats did not want to die, nor did he want to live
 alone. Rather, he seems to want a world where he can be both a poet
 and a man, where he can enjoy both the physical and spiritual pleasures,
 where he can write about Crazy Jane and God in the same poem, and where
 his golden sun can fill the day and his silver moon the night.

Yeats described the world he finally comes to accept in
 "Vacillation":

Between extremities
 Man runs his courses;
 A brand, or flaming breath,
 Comes to destroy
 All those antinomies
 Of day and night;
 The body calls it death,
 The heart remorse.
 But if these be right
 What is joy?
 (p. 245, ll. 1-10)

Acceptance of day and night, the antinomies of "Anashuya and Vijaya,"
 is joy. Resolutely, then, Yeats can admonish himself and his reader to:

Get all the gold and silver that you can,
 Satisfy ambition, animate
 The trivial days and ram them with the sun,
 And yet upon these maxims meditate:
 All women dote upon an idle man
 Although their children need a rich estate;

¹Stallworthy, pp. 131-2.

No man has ever lived that had enough
Of children's gratitude or woman's love.
(p. 245, ll. 19-26)

And the gold and silver are not the means of becoming the creator of a
new and private world, but the means by which the present world may be
fully enjoyed!

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