

***“The Whole Man”*: A Discussion of the Influence of Aspects of  
the Occult and of German Philosophy on Yeats’s Dramatic  
Theory and Performance**



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**Submitted to the University of Limerick, May 2014**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will attempt to set out the core elements of the dramatic theory of William Butler Yeats. He had worked on this for many years, attempting to create a theatre in which unity of Image on stage would lead to a sense of Unity of Being in the audience, which, in turn, would lead to a form of Unity of Culture in society at large. The thesis will examine the core disciplines and areas of epistemology which influenced Yeatsian dramatic theory. Initially, it will look at his pagan or neo-pagan sensibility, as expressed through his belonging to numerous magical societies, and his involvement in different areas of pagan, occult and esoteric knowledge such as Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy and The Golden Dawn. The second chapter will examine his reading of German Philosophers and thinkers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and Friedrich Schiller. It will also address the strong influences of different aspects of the thinking of these philosophers on his dramatic theory. The influence of the psychoanalytic work of Carl Gustav Jung and Sigmund Freud will also be briefly adumbrated. The third chapter will set out the dramatic theory itself, and the different uses of language, ritual, staging and masks that Yeats used to try to create his theatre of art. It will also trace the influences of pagan thought and philosophy on the theory itself. In the final chapter, a representative selection of plays will be analysed in the light of the dramatic theory: *On Baile's Strand*; *The Green Helmet*; *The Shadowy Waters*; *The Hourglass*; *At the Hawk's Well*; *The Player Queen*; *The Cat and the Moon* and *The Herne's Egg*. In this chapter the syncretic and dialectical influence of the performances on the theory, and of the theory on the performances, will be analysed.

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted, in whole or part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other qualification.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to Ellie Malone whose example I try to follow, and to Seamus Doyle who shared his love of the written word with me. Their egalitarian and liberal approach has influenced me in every way both first hand through themselves and latterly through their children, particularly Paddy. The influence of these two extraordinary people I have never taken for granted and will be eternally grateful for.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to acknowledge and thank Dr Eugene O'Brien for the continued support, help and patience he has shown me, for allowing me my space and autonomy, for his open-minded and objective approach to my work and my own idiosyncratic nature.

I want to thank Professor Charles Armstrong for his encouragement, his kindness, his knowledge, his constructive critique and helpful insight which improved this work. Similarly, I also want to thank Dr John McDonagh for his kindness, suggestions, help and idiosyncratic comments which were of great benefit to me.

I want to thank, Paddy Doyle and Tina Doyle for putting up with both me and Yeats and in general giving me space and support. Thanks to Kathleen Dunne for supplying me with coffee during study-breaks when needed and for her continual interest in my work. I want to acknowledge the endless support, hot tea and drinks supplied by Catherine Doyle and Maggie Hutchinson which helped maintain my life-balance and sanity and would similarly thank Deirdre O'Shea for her support and endless supply of coffee. I want to thank Ann-Marie Downey for her trips to Inisteoige, and Paula Murphy and Joanne Sainsbury for being there when needed.

I want to acknowledge and thank Dr James Heaney and all the staff of St Patrick's College, Carlow; without Carlow College, I would not have ended up at this point, James for his open-minded supervising of the original version of this work, for continually challenging and questioning me, for allowing me to write what I wanted to say and allowing me to do so my own way. Additional thanks to Dr Noel Kavanagh who introduced me to the philosophy that became such a major part of this work, though at

times I cursed him for it. I particularly want to acknowledge Carlow College as a whole, as a collection of lecturers and support staff who are perpetually fair, approachable, and objective and more importantly the lecturing staff who encourage an inter-disciplinary ethos which pervades the humanities department, This ethos is evident in my work and this research would not only be poorer but perhaps not exist at all if were not for that ideology.

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## **Introduction**

Anyone who has ever heard of William Butler Yeats can attest to the fact that he had an interest in mythology, fairies and the occult: in fact, the phrase that is often used is ‘a lifelong interest’ in the supernatural, spiritualism and the esoteric. However, few look beyond this statement. The implications of this lifelong interest on the work of Yeats have not been given as much sustained analysis as one might think, and this is especially true of Yeats’s drama, which has always been less academically popular than his poetry, as any inspection of the secondary material on his work will demonstrate. Even when it is studied, there is significant disagreement about its importance in his overall work. The same is true of another of his ongoing interests, namely German philosophy, which, I will argue, is also a seminal influence on his theory of drama and, ultimately, on his dramatic practice.

Consequently, this thesis will examine the influence of occult and philosophical ideas on Yeats’s theory of drama, and will then outline the theory itself before using it as a hermeneutic analytical lens through which to evaluate aspects of some of the plays. It is a study which is very specifically focused on probing the pagan and philosophical influences on his dramatic theory, and the final analyses of the plays will be exploring how the dramatic theory finds expression in these plays, as well as looking at the effect of the influences of philosophical and pagan thinking on the plays themselves. Having set out what this thesis will attempt to achieve it is also important, at this juncture, to specify aspects of Yeats’s work which will not be analysed. Yeats’s poetry is not part of my field

of study, nor are the politics, be these social, nationalistic or cultural, of his life and times. Neither do I concentrate on his biography, except where it informs us about his involvement in pagan and occult societies. Yeats has been correctly seen as a central figure in the modernist movement, but this does not come within my purview either. While I am looking at specific plays in the light of his dramatic theory, I am not offering any form of comprehensive overview of the dramatic canon; rather will I choose plays which enunciate aspects of his dramatic theory. It is the interaction between the dramatic theory and the dramas themselves that is at the heart of this study, as well as the tracing of the influences of pagan and philosophical thinking on Yeats's dramatic theory. This thesis will contend that his neo-pagan perspectives are crucial to any full understanding of his dramatic theory. It should be noted here that neo-paganism as a term is not one generally used by European pagans, but rather is more commonly used by American pagans (Jordan 1996, p. 110). However, I will be using the term in a wholly academic sense, signifying a synthesis of Christian, general occultism, Celtic, Greek and Roman pagan traditions. This usage of the term lends itself to Yeats as he incorporated all of these traditions and ideologies into both his dramatic theory, and the resulting dramas themselves, and it could indeed be argued that as a member of the Golden Dawn, a society that was an amalgam of many differing pagan and Abrahamic faiths, that the term 'neo-pagan' fits Yeats accurately. However, his interest in more ancient and for want of a better word, purer, forms of paganism found in both ancient Ireland and Greece do not lend themselves to the use of neo-pagan above the term pagan and so I will be using both terms to identify Yeats and his work.

While Yeats's interest in paganism and occult ideologies has been adverted to many times in the past, it has not generally been given a prominent place in the study of either his life or work:

No aspect of Yeats's life and work has provoked more controversy, confusion and downright hostility than his life-long concern with mysticism and occult study [...] critics and scholars are sceptical about the depth of Yeats's belief in god, Christianity, or even his own quasi-religious and philosophical system. (Flannery 1976, p.18)

Such scepticism about the influence of his beliefs is one of the issues that will be addressed by this study. It is the contention of this thesis that Yeats had strong pagan sensibilities, as he spent much of his life engaging in magical ritual, something which he stated unambiguously:

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of the truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times and have been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:-

- (1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy;
- (2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself;
- (3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. (Yeats 1961, p.28)

Such a clearly-defined credo is one which had lasting implications for his work in both poetry, prose, drama and his esoteric writings. He had never been comfortable within an orthodox Christian system which advocated an external divine power (Flannery 1976, pp.51-52), and spent his life searching for a religious or spiritual path with which he could feel comfortable, and which fulfilled his own individual needs. Indeed, his search for such a system is paralleled by his search for philosophical systems which could also inform his need for a systemic form of meaning, as well as provide an existential foundation for his thoughts. Versions of both philosophy and magic would provide the intellectual and

imaginative context within which his aesthetic creations would develop and flourish; and it is the contention of this study that both philosophy and magic were important in his search for a mode of expression of the transcendent. He recounts a personal originating pagan experience in *Memoirs*:

I was crossing one afternoon a little stream, and as I leapt I felt an emotion very strange to me – for all my thoughts were Pagan – a sense of utter dependence on the divine will. It was over in an instant, and I said to myself, ‘That is the way Christians feel.’ (Yeats 1972, p.126)

The above statements, from both *Memoirs* and ‘Magic’, suggest a pagan world view, specifically in terms of the allusion to: a female divine power or mind; the sense and acceptance of divine mystery; the notion that humanity can be active and in some respect equal in divinity; the idea that in the enacting of a ritual, practitioners have an active role, and a sense of control over the aims and outcomes of a ritual, rather than merely being submissive supplicants who are dependent upon the will of an authoritarian distant divinity. As he cogently puts it:

The central principal of all the magic of power is that everything we formulate in the imagination, if we formulate it strongly enough, realises itself in the circumstance of life, acting either through our own souls, or through the spirits of nature. (Yeats in Mills Harper, 1974, p.265)

Yeats spoke of himself as having a pagan sensibility, and as being a person who believed in magic, and in the next chapter, I will explain how these two terms are intrinsically linked. In terms of his lived-life, Yeats spent a significant amount of time not only practicing rituals, but also writing and formulating them, and most of these were pagan in influence and origin. In addition, during the split in the society of The Golden Dawn, an organisation to which he belonged for a large portion of his life, Yeats choose not to remain with the Isis Urania temple of the order, but instead joined the splinter branch of

the order, the Stella Matutina, whose stated purpose was the study and practice of ritual magic. By this point, the Isis Urania had abandoned ritual magic and devoted themselves to the study of Christian mysticism (Jordan 1996, pp.157-8).

Many academics view Yeats as an unorthodox Christian, but as a Christian none the less. However, I would argue that having an opinion on Christianity does not necessarily make him a Christian. According to Ronald Hutton:

A good case could be made that he remained a good and self-conscious Christian. He was certainly troubled by the overtly pagan tendencies in the Golden Dawn, and in 1901 wrote a paper arguing that the order was founded firmly upon Christian principles. (Hutton 1995, p.155)

The paper to which Hutton is referring here is entitled: 'Is the order of R. R & A. C. to remain a magical order', written in 1901, which was delivered to Golden Dawn members as part of a discussion concerning the future of the order amid internal tensions and divisions. I would argue that this particular document has been misconstrued, as in this pamphlet, Yeats argues for the return of the Golden Dawn to its founding principles and practices. However, the Golden Dawn was not based upon Christianity, but instead borrowed from Rosicrucianism and the Kabbalah and was largely pagan in its philosophical worldview, drawing primarily from Egyptian paganism (Egyptian paganism is also referred to as Khemetic paganism) and Gnosticism (Butler 2011). At this point in time, the order had reached a crisis, and was on the verge of imploding, and this pamphlet was Yeats's attempt to keep the order together by returning it to its original structure, especially in terms of hierarchy and magical examinations. In any event, the inner turmoil of the order was too great and it did indeed split into two separate temples. Yeats chose to join the magical temple of the Stella Matutina, and his reasons for this are germane to my own argument: '[t]hough Yeats was no doubt disturbed over such a serious break with the past, he surely did not hesitate: he could not approve any group that denied

the validity of magic' (Mills Harper 1974. p.125). This period, involving the foundation and the crisis within the order will be dealt with in more detail in chapter one.

'Is the order of R. R & A. C. to remain a magical order' is the one document that is frequently pointed to as proof that Yeats was a Christian; however, what is often forgotten in this is that the Golden Dawn was heavily influenced by Judaic Kabbalah, the mystical branch of Judaism which is itself the parent faith of Christianity, and by Rosicrucianism, a doctrine amalgamating Gnostic Christian and esoteric beliefs and practices. The conceptual thrusts of this document argues for a return to the Rosicrucianism and Kabbalaistic elements of the original order; however, the most prominent thread within this argument is that Yeats wants to return to the hierarchical structure and the examination process of the first order of the Golden Dawn by 'insisting upon strict obedience to the laws and by-laws' (Yeats 1901, in Mills Harper 1974, p.259). According to Yeats, the Golden Dawn had:

No choice but to remain a Magical Order, whose organisation is a Talisman, or to become wholly a mere society empty of magical significance though sheltering smaller magical groups. (Yeats, 1901, in Mills Harper 1974, p.264)

This document makes no explicit reference to Christianity. There is an expressed wish to restore the oath which all members used to make 'upon the cross on Corpus Christi Day' (Yeats 1901, in Mills Harper 1974, p.260). This oath, and the cross mentioned, is a reference to the Rosicrucian oath taken by all newly-joined members. I would suggest that the significance of Corpus Christi Day is related to the fact that it is the day of celebration around the Eucharist, and therefore symbolic of internalising the divine. God is mentioned within the text, but the context would suggest that the term is being used as a concept or name, and not in an exclusively Christian sense. However Yeats also states 'surely Adeptship must come more easily in an order that reaches "up to the throne of god himself, and has among its members angels and archangels"' (Yeats 1901, in Mills

Harper 1974, p.266). In this context, the idea of God is precisely that: a regulative idea, a term for the transcendent. A paragraph later, he states:

We receive power from those who are above us by permitting the Lightning of the Supreme to descend through our souls and our bodies. The power is forever seeking the world, and it comes to a soul and consumes its mortality because the soul has arisen into the path of the Lightning, among the sacred leaves. (Yeats 1901, in Mills Harper 1974, p.266)

Taking these two quotes together reminds us of the fact that he is not speaking of his own personal faith, nor to a group of one faith. The Golden Dawn was a group who were free to follow any religion they chose, and so it is hardly surprising that a document concerning the order's future, addressed to all members, would use ambiguous language that could be applied to numerous faiths.

This earlier quote from Hutton is often used by academics to label Yeats a Christian, however, Hutton goes on to state that:

What Yeats was describing was not a Christianity ever preached by the established Churches; this notion of an indwelling Jesus had always been, rather, the hallmark of a distinctive strain of radical Christian heresy. On examining the literary works of Yeats it is apparent that Christ is, in fact, rarely mentioned. It is god who features regularly as 'the Eternal Darkness', 'Supreme Enchanter', 'Ineffable name', 'Light of Lights'. (Hutton 1995, pp.155-156)

Clearly, then, if Hutton is locating Yeats as a Christian, it is very much as a heretical one. Ellmann also argues that Yeats's view of Christianity is 'complicated' (Ellmann 1954, p.51) and that 'Yeats had argued that Irish Christianity was at its best when it had retained an infusion of paganism' (Ellmann 1954 p.52). Yet when Yeats expresses a belief in magic, this is not a Christian belief; his core belief is one of pagan origin, it is one of an internal divine presence which is also a universal divinity. Perhaps Yeats's use of Christian terms is nothing more than cultural conditioning. Often, there is a discrepancy

between what Yeats says and what he does; he joined two magical orders for the purpose of practicing ritual magic. He refers to himself as having a pagan sensibility, wrote and practiced what is essentially pagan ritual yet often expresses himself through what is deemed Christian terminology. It is important to note that 'God' is not an exclusively Christian term; there were Gods long before Jesus or even Yahweh. In the Golden Dawn itself, every member was free to follow their own faith, as all that was required was a belief in a supreme divine being.

Perhaps the use of these terms is simply cultural, the Golden Dawn, while an amalgam of many esoteric or spiritual paths, was an order founded and born out of Western European culture, where Christianity was the dominant faith, and so, the use of Christian terms may not reflect faith *per se*, but rather the fact that these were terms that every member knew and could relate to their own personal beliefs. Also, one does not have to be Christian to express an opinion on the faith or its constructs. It is not conceivable that new occult and esoteric ideologies were translated through Christian points of reference so that a new religious experience could be interpreted and understood when placed within the framework of the existing and familiar religious experience of the dominant culture. After all, this is precisely the template used by Christianity when it located important religious celebrations on dates which were significant in pagan calendars, such as locating Christmas on the feast of Saturnalia.

In fact, there is a case to be made that Yeats considered Christianity to be a limitation on humanity, primarily because of the church as an establishment: 'Christendom has based itself upon four short books and for long insisted that all must interpret them the same way' (Yeats 1962, p.432). He had also read Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Foster, 1998), and as a student of mythology and philosophy, Yeats was perfectly capable of seeing the parallels between all faiths and religious traditions. He was aware that before the advent of the Abrahamic faiths there was a plethora of pagan faiths, and

this was particularly true of Ireland where many of the ancient traditions had been maintained:

Behind all Irish history hangs a great tapestry, even Christianity had to accept it and be itself pictured there. Nobody looking at its dim folds can say where Christianity begins and Druidism ends. (Yeats 1961, pp.513-4)

In *The Resurrection*, Yeats puts representatives of Judaism, Christianity and paganism, embodied through the character of the Greek, on the stage, and allows them to discuss their beliefs without favour or mocking. Even in his dramas, it seems that he retained the Golden Dawn's principle of inclusiveness and religious respect.

Frequently in this debate, a letter written to William Horton is cited as proof of Yeats's Christianity. Horton had joined the Order of the Golden Dawn, but ultimately choose not to remain a member, as he felt the order was 'extremely antagonistic' to him 'personally' as a follower of Jesus Christ, and he also argued that his involvement in the order was distracting him from his work (Mills Harper 1980, p.7). Yeats's response to Horton's decision has been cited by both Hutton and Ellmann as an argument for his Christianity, as in April 1896, Yeats wrote to Horton explaining the orders view of Christianity:

Nor is our order anti-Christian; that very pentagram which I suggested your using, is itself, as you would presently have learned, a symbol of Christ. I am convinced however that for you progress lies not in dependence upon a Christ outside yourself but on the Christ in your own breast – in the power of your own devine [*sic*] will & imagination & not in some external will or imagination however devine [*sic*]. We certainly do teach this dependence only on the inner divinity [*sic*] but this is Christianity. The uttermost danger lies for you in an emotional religion which will sap your will and wreck yourself controls. (Yeats 1997b, p.24)

The pentagram is not a usual or orthodox symbol for Christ, and I would suggest that this idea of an internal Christ is not an orthodox Christian view. In further letters to Horton,

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Yeats tells him that after entry to the order, Horton may have visions of Egyptian faces as ‘the Order is greatly under Egyptian influence’ (Yeats 1954, p.261). In a later letter to George Russell, he writes that ‘Christ himself must have been one of the followers of Aengus’ (Yeats 1954 p.324), again pointing to the influence of Frazer and this linking of Christianity to the older paganism smacks of a Gnostic view. Gnosticism suggested that emotional religion is corrupt and that the only true way to divinity is through *gnosis* or knowledge of the self, as it is within the self that divinity resides. This view of the figure of Christ is one which is based upon Gnostic texts in which Jesus Christ was seen as a savior and redeemer in a very specific manner. He is not viewed as a divine entity whose actions would save mankind, but as a being who brought a form of knowledge that ‘could teach mankind how to liberate the seed of spiritual light that was hidden within, and enable humanity to know the true god’ (Smith 2008, p.4):

The Gnostic understanding of the mission of Jesus was quite different to the mainstream Christian or Catholic understanding. It was not the founding of the Church that was the most important aspect of Jesus’ time on earth, nor was his bodily resurrection his most significant act. Jesus brought *gnosis*, and the significance of his time on earth was as a revealer of knowledge. (Smith 2008, p.85)

Yeats writes of this self-knowledge in *Memoirs*:

This culture is really the pursuit of self-knowledge in so far as the self is a calm, deliberating, discriminating thing, for when we have awakened our tastes and our criticism of the world as we taste it, we have come to know ourselves; ourselves, I mean, not as misers or spendthrifts, as magistrates or pleaders, but as men, as souls face to face with what is permanent in the world. [...] I will then compare the culture of the Renaissance, which seems to me founded not on self-knowledge but on knowledge of some other self – Christ or Caesar- not on delicate sincerity but on imitative energy. (Yeats 1972, p.160)

This ‘some other self’ is clearly an external self, and in likening Christ to Caesar, Yeats

appears to be comparing Jesus Christ to a human ruler who declared himself divine as Caesars and Egyptian pharaohs did. From Yeats's perspective, divinity is not found in external idols but internally, in sincere self-knowledge. When man engages with his own latent divine, he encounters the universal divine, and so, to seek divinity in an external source is to seek a cheap imitation and ultimately a false or weak divine presence.

This Gnostic view is prevalent in the ideas of Rosicrucianism which mingled with paganism and other occultism to form the basis of Golden Dawn teachings. I will examine this in further detail in the next chapter, though Gnosticism has no major bearing on my work on Yeats, other than that the societies to which he belonged had Gnostic traits running through their beliefs. In brief, Gnosticism is essentially an unorthodox Christian sect; it is a belief system which views divinity as internal as opposed to being found solely in an external god, it attests that humanity is asleep to the true reality, but can awake to a personal divine reality through the acquisition of Gnosis or knowledge (Smith 2008). Gnostics believed all matter to be corrupt and study what are referred to as the Gnostic gospels, or the Nag Hammadi codices, including the Gospels of Thomas, Philip and Mary, most of which challenge the authority of the established patriarchal Roman Church, and for this reason the Gnostics were deemed heretics (McGrath 2004). In relation to this thesis, the central point is that the Gnostics believed in an internal divine, accessible to all through knowledge. The Gnostics also split the material world from the spiritual world, but felt that all could transcend to intimate knowledge of this spiritual world. Similarly, the Rosicrucians also believed the material to be separate from the spiritual realm, and that man could engage with the spiritual realm through mystical and magical practices. Most importantly, in relation to Yeats, Rosicrucian doctrine claimed that the outer self normally communicated through language, while the inner spiritualised self tended to communicate through symbols. Rosicrucianism appears to be a mixture of Egyptian paganism and Gnosticism, highlighting the symbols of the Rose; the symbol of

Sophia or female knowledge and the cross; the symbol of Christ's death. The founding members of the Golden Dawn claimed to be Rosicrucian and incorporated Rosicrucian practice in the order's rituals all of which will be dealt with in chapter one (Hough 1984; McIntosh 1997).

The Gnostic and Rosicrucian views of Christ and Christianity are unorthodox, and they shed some light on Yeats's view of Christianity. The theological study of Christology teaches us that there is a distinction to be made between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Low Christology takes the human Jesus as the starting point of study, and tries to explore the humanity of the man. Jesus of Nazareth is a human of royal blood, through the Davidic line; he is a ruler without a throne, as Judea is at this point under Roman rule (Rausch 2003). It is Christ, the anointed, the son of God, who is the concern of high Christology; it is his universal significance and his role as divine which is studied here, and the unifying experience of the two studies is the resurrection, as it is in this act, through his death and rebirth that man becomes divine (Higgins 1991 pp.5-13). Yeats's view of Jesus Christ seems to be that of low Christology:

When I close my eyes and pronounce the word 'Christianity' and await its unconscious suggestion, I do not see Christ crucified or the Good Shepard from the catacombs, but a father and mother and their children. (Yeats 1962, p.272)

Here, Yeats expresses a view of Jesus of Nazareth, as a son, as a sibling, and more importantly, as human, perhaps even as a prophet and a bringer of knowledge as he is seen by Gnosticism.

Clearly his view of Jesus was a complex one, and to see this as necessarily making Yeats a Christian would seem to be a leap of faith, especially given Yeats's frequent involvement in societies, organisations and rituals which could correctly be classified under the generic terms 'pagan' or 'occult'. Just because Yeats had knowledge, understanding and opinions on Jesus, either as human or as Christ, or as both, does not

automatically make him a Christian in belief, philosophy or action:

Yeats regards Julius Caesar as a prefigurative example of Christ, noting the contemporary idea that Caesar should be proclaimed 'King', that in July 45 B.C. after the battle of Munda 'his image was carried among the images of the gods in a procession [...] and that he was worshiped as a god after his death. Indeed Caesar's death on the Ides of (15) March links him directly both to the noble pagan, Socrates, and to Christ. (Arkins 1990, p.94)

Arkins makes a telling point here: in his creation of a system of thought, feeling and philosophy, Jesus, like Socrates or Nietzsche, was a significant nodal point of reference. There is an echo here of the cult of the dying god, in which the central tenet is that many faiths have worshiped a god who died and was then resurrected. The corollary of this is that many cultures have had a god of equal significance; these included Jesus Christ, Osiris, Persephone who journeyed to Hades and back again annually, Dionysus, Attis, and Baal (Hutton 1999, pp.114-5; Frazer 1922). In an interesting side note, with the one exception of Persephone, whose death is symbolic, all the other deities are male, while the equivalent idea within the pantheon of goddesses seems to be that those who embody life, death and rebirth do so without the need of an actual death.

While Yeats was involved with a variety of different organizations, all had neo-pagan, and to some degree Gnostic sensibilities at their core:

In Europe, to a great extent, occult doctrines were disseminated through a network of secret societies, like the Rosicrucians and Freemasons. Though claiming affiliation with Christianity, they adhered to complex belief systems quite distant from Christian teaching. Fantastic legendary accounts of their origin are provided to portray themselves as the inheritors of a secret occult tradition, dating back to the beginning of time, and incorporating themes borrowed from astrology, alchemy, Kabbalah and other ancient esoteric traditions. These closely guarded secrets were not regarded as mere legends, but as encapsulating truths that were the privilege of the few, and thus often influenced the thought and actions of its

adherents. (Livingstone 2002, p.2)

The most well-known organisation of which Yeats was a member is the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The members of this society have been variously termed Rosicrucians, Freemasons, quasi Judaic Kabbalists and even Christians, but what they really were was an amalgam of many different faiths: 'synthesizing Jewish, Christian, pagan, and Eastern elements to create a whole complicated cosmology and system of magickal [*sic*] theory' (Penczak 2007, p.52). Though the Golden Dawn was not the only influence on Yeats, it is the one that is cited most often, and I would argue that, in some ways, Yeats needs to be contextualised in terms of the influences of this society and of the other occult groups to which he belonged.

It is impossible to separate this central esoteric element of Yeats's life from his self-expression as an artist. His spiritual path had a direct impact upon his dramatic work, and the two cannot be separated or treated as independent entities. Richard Ellmann attempts to separate the two disciplines, but his main focus is the on prose and poetry, as he states that 'as a poet he largely accepted his father's position that the poet must be free of dogma and formula' (Ellmann 1979, p.233). Ellmann does acknowledge Yeats's beliefs, but he gives them little importance as a means of either formation or interpretation of any of Yeats's poetry, focusing rather on the symbols and themes of his work without exploring their origins and therefore their complete meanings:

Yeats's work [...] has been described as magical or occult poetry, but both terms must be rejected. The case for Occultism is simple and tempting. [...] Predilections (of magical experimentations) of this sort made him not a mystic or an Occultist but one of what he called 'the last romantics'. In so referring to himself, however, he was writing ironically, equating the word with all the defenders of 'traditional sanctity and loveliness'. (Ellmann 1975, pp.2-3)

I would refute this, because while romanticism as a literary or philosophic term can

absolutely be applied to Yeats, particularly in relation to his lyrical poetry, I do not think that as Ellmann calls it a 'predilection' towards magical experiments makes Yeats a romantic prior to an occultist or mystic, particularly as we know Yeats spent a large portion of his life writing and taking part in magical rituals. Ellmann may have a point in relation to the poetry being more in the romantic vein than being connected with occultism, yet I think it is dangerous to simply abandon one facet of Yeats's influences, in any area of his writing. Yeats is an occult writer and a romantic writer, yet he is also a symbolist, a modernist and an impressionist. While I am choosing to focus on one element of Yeats the writer, I am not denying his contribution to any other of these areas and can only disagree with Ellmann's insistence on so doing. Romanticism in both the literary and philosophical senses of the term holds much in common with the occult-based philosophy and theory put forward by Yeats, as both are underpinned by the notion that instinctual or emotional truths are equal to those of empiricism and to the ideas surrounding art as a means of expressing and exploring such truths. Leon Surette rightly states that 'the origin of the modern occult is thus nearly contemporaneous with the birth of Romanticism' (Surette 1993, p.21). It is hardly surprising then that so many find the romantic element tangible within Yeats's mystical or occult-inspired work, and that this aspect receives more attention than the occult influences themselves. The reason for this is that possibly the term 'romantic' is more critically mainstream than the term 'occult' and all its connotations. This is certainly the view held by Surette throughout his book.

As a result of Ellmann's near-hegemonic view of Yeats and his work, little investigation into the nature and epistemological status of these pagan beliefs has been carried out. I would contend that such beliefs, far from being rejected, need to be analysed and critiqued as they form an ethical, moral and spiritual code of conduct which would impact upon any artistic expression of a life:

Literary scholars have long been joined together in an exercise of damage control on the issue of Yeats's Occultism [...] there were a few renegades and mavericks who would not close ranks. In the case of Yeats's Occultism, these voices were successfully pushed to the margins of the scholarly community. This strategy, [...] can no longer be maintained. The spectre of the occult is now being raised on clear cut evidence [...] There have been two general approaches to the topic of relations between the occult and mainstream literature. The 'official' manner is to admit the fact of some infection or relationship but to argue that occult ideas are absorbed into the aesthetic or psychological theory and are thereby rendered 'harmless'. [...] The second approach has been to bring the occult sources and ideas to the interpretation of the literary texts, thereby at least implicitly legitimizing the occult elements. (Surette 1993, p.9)

This thesis will align itself firmly with Surette's ideas on the importance of Yeats's involvement with the occult as part of his creative process. Far from exercising any form of damage-control, I will argue that, combined with some ideas taken from German philosophy, his pagan sensibility was seminal to his dramatic work. This thesis will:

1. examine the significance of Yeats's paganism and his interest in the occult as a way of becoming more familiar with the divine mind, both personal and universal, that which he refers to as the great mind of which 'our memories are part of one great memory, the memory of nature herself' (Yeats 1961, p.28);
2. look at how this fascination with the occult as a mode of Being is connected to his reading of German philosophy and psychoanalysis as to Yeats all are parallel ways of accessing the divine mind either unconsciously or subconsciously;
3. show how both the occult and German philosophy are combined within his theory of drama;
4. analyse certain Yeatsian plays in the light of this dramatic theory.

Each of these four aspects of his work will be developed throughout the thesis to demonstrate that Yeats created, through the inter-connection of pagan and occult systems and German philosophy, an intellectual, emotional and spiritual system which he attempted to articulate through his dramatic theory and practice. In parallel with his lyric poetry, which focused on the individual, by virtue of the fact that the reading of poetry is generally a lone and interior act. Yeats's dramatic theory attempted to influence a broader cohort of people through performance,

Yeats spent much of his life serving a spiritual apprenticeship which began with his introduction to theosophy in 1884 by way of A. P. Sinnett's book *Esoteric Buddhism*, which brought eastern philosophy and spirituality into contact with that of the west, so that a new system was created from a rethinking of the established spiritual and religious systems (Foster 1998, p.45). I would suggest that this fusion of existing systems into a new system is a process which will reverberate through Yeats's later thinking, especially in terms of his theory of drama and his fusion of the occult and German philosophy. This introduction allowed Yeats a freedom with which to develop his own system of spirituality and of art: 'he grew into his occultism continuously; a true Gnostic, in the restricted sense of the term, he was continuously increasing his knowledge' (Hough 1984, p.30):

All varieties of Occultism claim to represent a single tradition reaching back into the remotest antiquity. Yeats, for example devoted much of his life to the study of that tradition. [...] Yeats clearly regarded his occult studies as a central component of his literary education. (Surette 1993, p.7)

Yeats felt unsatisfied and alienated by his Christian upbringing, and he became quite sceptical about organized religion (Mills Harper 1974; Foster 1998). In his quest for a faith which made sense, Yeats sought a system which was spiritual, logical and sensible,

and he found through his study that by fusing Philosophy and occultism, he could escape the restrictive external Christian model and formulate a spiritual framework in which he could believe, and also one which he could performatively enact through his dramatic theory and practice. Within the Yeatsian system, the psyche is split; this duality is echoed in his fusion of philosophy and the occult, with one feeding the rational self, while the other speaks to the emotional spiritual element of the whole Being. Aspects of German philosophy allowed him a structure and logical explanation for his esoteric belief system, particularly the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

Yeats's work reflects his own belief system, which, as has been suggested, was influenced by many differing spiritual paths, including Kabbalah, Egyptian, Greco-Roman paganism, Theosophy, Eastern philosophies and Rosicrucianism. Throughout his writing, he explores the themes of magic, spirituality, the duality of humanity and nature, and much of his work explores magical experience. Within his dramatic works, the form of many of his plays echoes that of magical ritual, and the aim of the drama was to provoke some form of change in the audience, specifically in the perceptions and worldview of the audience in the theatre, just as magical ritual is often practiced to provoke a change in the material world.

Yeats's own system of belief was formulated from all of these differing sources which he felt were closely linked to art, in that such traditions had been kept alive through art (Brown 2001 p.31). All humans express their lives and beliefs in some way, and as Yeats was a writer, it is only logical that he would choose this medium through which to express his own experiences, thoughts and hopes: 'I think the man of letters has powers of make-believe denied to the painter or the architect' (Yeats 1955, p.385). This perspective echoes both Rosicrucianism and Nietzschean philosophy in that language and bodily performance were seen as being expressive of the soul, as opposed to the rationalistic and purely representational art of the painter and sculptor.

### *Introduction*

As a student of both drama and philosophy, Yeats saw drama as a singularly appropriate medium for his self-expression, as drama is immediate, and is the art form which is most reminiscent of the human lived-life. It is also an art form which may have a wider audience 'if Ireland would not read literature it might listen to it, for politics and the Church had created listeners. I wanted a Theatre' (Yeats 1955, p.396). Drama, for Yeats, is more than artistic expression, and more than art for art's sake, 'we should not as a rule have to say things for their own sake in a play but for the sake of emotion' (Yeats 1954, p.657). Emotion is what links all humanity and so if an art form is to speak to a wide audience, then it must present and provoke emotional states of being:

It should not be a matter for surprise that so much of Yeats's energy, both practical and creative, was expended on theatre, for the simple reason that his imagination was essentially dramatic. Just as in his lyrical poetry he found a way of embodying his conviction that conflict was at the root of all life, so in his drama he was to develop techniques that enabled him to shape his vision into an acceptable form. In that process he discovered that the vision itself demanded expression in dramatic mode that was unlike anything being written in English at the time. (Knowland 1983, p.1)

This conflict of which Knowland speaks is the split in the Yeatsian psyche between self and anti-self, between the spiritual and physical human aspects. This internal struggle was best depicted thoroughly the bodily form of a character: 'one of Yeats's core beliefs was that great drama required the expression of the whole personality' (Richman 2000, p.36). Drama is the most immediate and relatable art form, as, while the thematic explorations of a lyrical poem may be obscure to some, drama is a partially visual medium through which the themes of the work are acted out and so become more 'real', more relatable to an audience, and more universal:

Men of letters have sometimes said that the characters of a romance or play must be typical. They mean that the character must be typical of something which exists

in all men because the writer has found it in his own mind. (Yeats 1962, p.144)

Drama is also a communal activity which Yeats hoped would link distant individuals through the emotional response provoked by the unfolding performance, 'the greatest attraction that the theatre actually held for Yeats was its power of transforming isolated individuals into the unity of an audience' (Flannery 1976, p.65):

As a playwright, in particular, he wanted to enter the imagination of the people, having installed there images and codes of self-understanding and for expansion of the consciousness. (Murray 1997, p.14)

The necessity of the performance is paramount to Yeats, for a scene 'gained so in being acted' (Yeats 1954, p.658). Without performing a play, it is but a text upon a page and its consumption becomes an interior and isolated practice, and so fails as an expression of the bodily experience of humanity in time and space. The play depends upon an audience; in performance it is a group activity, and this is especially true of Yeatsian theatre, as the aim of the dramatisation was to provoke the universal emotional response from the audience. In doing so, Yeats places his audience, his actors and himself as the playwright in a reciprocal and dynamic relationship:

Inside and outside the theatre, Yeats spent his creative life striving to bring his mind into unity with those of his many collaborators- with actors, dancers, designers- supremely with Augusta Gregory on folklore and plays and with George Yeats on *A Vision*. (Richman 2000, p.18)

One of his main collaborators is the audience itself, and while this is perhaps true of all theatre, for Yeats the outcome and life of his dramas relies in serious measure upon his audience. Though Yeats bemoans his lack of suitable actors and audience, it could be argued that the theatre as a whole, the building, the audience, the theatre workers and actors formed another society to which he could belong. It could be suggested that Yeats views his dramas as forms of ritual, as incantation and that the theatre building itself could

be seen as a type of temple within which such rituals could be unfolded.

Yeats specifically argued that the ‘theatre began in ritual’ (Yeats 1961, p.170). He is primarily speaking of pagan Greek ritual, where dramatic expression was religious spiritual experience: ‘theatre is one of the many inheritors of that great multifaceted system of preindustrial ritual which embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos’ (Turner in Brandt 1998, p.65). For Yeats, the cosmos and chaos placed upon the dramatic stage is as much internal as it is an external representation, ‘an image of our own secret thoughts. Are we not face to face with the microcosm, mirroring everything in universal Nature’ (Yeats 1962, p.144). His sense of drama as ritual is, I would contend, strongly influenced by his interest, and involvement, in societies and groups where pagan ritual practices were enacted, and I hope to progress this connection in chapter one, but I will first set out the critical context of my discussion.

There has been a multitude of books written on Yeats in the past and no doubt more will follow. I do not have the space here to mention all the important ones that have come before, but in relation to my own work, I will mention those which deal with similar issues, namely his drama, and his interest in the occult and in philosophy. While studies in the past have centered on Yeats’s connections to both the Theosophical Society and the Golden Dawn, it is important to note that such societies held beliefs and practices which were amalgamated from numerous other sources. I would argue that no particular study has brought all these differing paths together into a single cohesive analysis. In addition, the belief systems of these paths are rarely taken seriously, and are generally viewed as part of the fashionable trend of secret societies and spiritualism or mediumship which was prominent during Yeats’s lifetime. Consequently, his interaction with these societies is widely seen as extrinsic to his creative activities as a poet and as a dramatist. I would argue, and hope to show, that this is not the case, and that his involvement with the occult is central to his achievement as a creative writer and dramatist.

## Introduction

The majority of books which do mention his occult interests, do so without much detail, and do not probe deeply into the impact such influences had on Yeats's work. Those which do apply occult teachings or ideas to his creative work, primarily focus on *A Vision*, due to the esoteric nature of the text. So while there has been significant work done on his drama, his occult interests and indeed, the influence of some German philosophy on his work, these three areas have never been conflated into a single critique which attempts to assess the influence of the occult and German idealistic philosophy on his theory of drama. In fact, Yeats's theory of drama is largely ignored or takes a secondary position to the dramas themselves. My other area of enquiry, the application of his dramatic theory to his own dramatic practice, is also sparsely treated in the secondary literature. I will now offer a brief overview of some of the secondary sources which touch on aspects of my own investigations, and I will argue that my own perspective supplements a number of different aspects of these studies.

In his book *Yeats and the Drama of Sacred Space*, Nicholas Meihuizen focuses on one conflict within Yeats's work, that which emerges between the archetypal antagonistic hero and the mythic female figure. While his dramas are mentioned, the primary goal of the study is to explore such conflicts as they arise within Yeats's poetry and prose. Meihuizen claims that 'the Yeatsian development of a mythopoesis of sacred space appears to be provoked by the poet's early sense of existential despair, which is coupled to the tragic vision reflective of an era' (Meihuizen 1998, p.12), but he never considers the origin of Yeats's sacred space as lying within ritual or religion. Meihuizen does consider the influence of Nietzsche on Yeats, but only in relation to the opposing forces of Apollo and Dionysus in Nietzsche's philosophy of art, failing to mention Nietzsche's whole human, the *Übermensch*, in relation to Yeats concept of the whole unified man. The Nietzschean pairing of the Apollonian and the Dionysian will be of special significance to this study, as these two poles stress the different aspects of life: the

rational and the emotional, the upper life of the Apollonian and the lower life of the Dionysian. These terms will be discussed more fully later in the work, as they also embody the connections between Yeats's attraction to the occult and ritual, as well as his abiding interest in the thought of Nietzsche and the connections between Yeats's neo-paganism and the pagan thinking of the ancient Greeks. The idea of pagan ancient Greece as being the ideal is vital to both Yeats, who wished to return drama to the Greek ritualized paradigm and both Nietzsche and Schiller, who considered ancient Greece to be the ideal model of civilization, art and philosophy. Similarly there is a connection between Yeats and Nietzsche in relation to the dramatic form of tragedy, and though this is not my main focus and it is beyond my remit to deal with Yeatsian or Nietzschean concepts of tragedy, I will touch upon this element briefly within this thesis.

Maeve Good attests that Yeats's 'landscape and the world system behind it are conceived as tragic' (Good 1987, p.1), rather than as spiritual, and her work deals with *A Vision* and the dance plays alone, rather than tracing the origin and progression of his system up to and beyond the Noh dramas. She goes on to suggest that the conflict between the hero and his opposite causes the hero to lose 'stature, power and, significantly, accessibility to the audience' (Good 1987, p.32). Whereas Yeats thought that moment of confrontation was the moment which provoked the relatable universal and emotional response from his audience, Good does not view the dramatic theory or the dramatic performance as a whole united system in and of itself. She claims that Yeats's rejection of Christianity creates a problem for academics, as the system with which he replaces it is a 'cyclical system of never-ending conflict' (Good 1987, p.3), and as such, his view is 'hopeless, its pattern always repeated' (Good 1987, p.5). Similarly, David R. Clark focuses on the tragic element of Yeats's imagination in *W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality*, and while he does explore Yeats's search for an anti-self to place upon the stage, he looks no further than the Golden Dawn for the origins of Yeats's ideas of an

interior self. The one and only time paganism is mentioned is in relation to *The Countess Cathleen*, where:

the convergence of Christianity and the old nature faith is used in this play to show the struggle of two universal ways of life – a spiritual and a materialistic – for the control of a particular place: Ireland. (Clark 1993, p.128)

However, the exploration which follows does not research paganism or explore this ‘old nature faith’, but rather talks in terms of Christianity and of the battle between good and evil, and claims the dilemma of the play is the search for ‘a way of uniting these by fusing Irish paganism, traditional Christianity and an aesthetic faith in the occult symbols of artist mystics; and thus to represent a united front to materialism’ (Clark 1993, p.129).

In *The Dramatic Imagination of W. B. Yeats*, Andrew Parkin explores the idea that Yeats’s own imagination was at root dramatic, and he draws upon his poetry, prose and dramas to argue that Yeats’s language and symbolism is always dramatic in form. He goes on to suggest that Yeats struggles to reconcile the real and magical worlds he inhabited, stating that his:

need to express himself in dramatic poetry and plays derived from his struggle to inhabit both real and magical worlds. None of Yeats’s interests seem to have been pursued for its own sake alone; his ultimate purpose was always the creation of his own art, an art full of symbols. (Parkin 1978, p.9)

Parkin only touches on the occult in a vague form, never exploring in any great depth the beliefs and systems which gave rise to Yeats’s perception of the two opposing worlds, and the dialogical struggle between them that followed.

Michael McAteer’s *Yeats and European Drama* focuses on the political nature of Yeats’s dramas, concentrating on the symbolism, impressionism and the representations of national identity within his work, but it does not explore Yeats’s theory of drama, or the original pagan context out of which it evolved. His main focus is to locate Yeats

within the artistic culture of his time, and the book 'aims to convey the range, sophistication and intellectual seriousness of Yeats's body of plays as responses to dramatic changes in the cultural landscape of Ireland and Europe' (McAteer 2010, p.10).

This is not to say that Yeats's spirituality has been totally ignored by academia. In past studies, one or more of the influential pagan or occult paths have been discussed, but rarely in a sustained manner, and often removing Yeats's artistic texts from the context which influenced their creation, namely the originating occult experience. Frequently when the occult is explored, it usually only in relation to the Golden Dawn, and generally such research is concentrated on the poetry and prose, to the exclusion of his dramatic work. There is, I would contend, something of a void within Yeatsian study, a failure to reconcile the occult experience and dramatic expression of the ideas within that experience, and this attitude can be traced back to the work of Richard Ellmann.

In both *The Identity of Yeats*, and *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, Ellmann highlights Yeats's search for self, but divorces his quest from any occult influences present in either the dramatic theory itself, or in the drama created from that experience, his focus is primarily on the poetry. Leon Surette highlights this shortcoming of Ellmann, albeit in relation to Yeats's poetry, though the point remains pertinent to Yeatsian drama also:

The view vigorously held by Richard Ellmann, who argued that Yeats kept his poetry and Occultism separate. [...] I cannot attack this strategy in detail, but the thrust of my study is to displace the old posture which sought to inoculate Yeats, as the most exposed modernist, against the most virulent forms of infection by admitting his Occultism but somehow isolating it from the poetry, despite the fact that everyone knows that the poetry is manifestly occult in topic and imagery. The evidence marshalled in George Mills Harper's collection, *Yeats and the occult*, militates against the 'saving the appearances' arguments of Ellmann. (Surette 1993, p.7)

However, Surette's research is not aimed at examining the influence of paganism on Yeats as a dramatic artist; rather, his focus is on the work of Ezra Pound. Where Yeats is mentioned, it is relation to his role in influencing Pound's ideas which lead to his symbolic modernist work and which influenced his editing of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Nevertheless, Surette does consider Yeats's occult interests as being seminal to his persona and to his creative work:

It has long been recognised, even if largely evaded in commentary, that W. B. Yeats fully participated in occult ideas and even engaged regularly in theurgic activities. Although Yeats's occult interests are now universally acknowledged, the fact that he 'dabbled' in the occult remains an uncomfortable problem for Yeats scholarship. If the literary community was better versed in occult literature, it would recognise that Yeats's Occultism is not nearly as eccentric as it has been thought to be. [...] [O]ccultism as a movement draws into itself texts and ideas that have a very long history in Western literary culture. (Surette 1993, pp.6-7)

In her work, *Pressed against Divinity: W. B. Yeats's Feminine Masks*, Janis Tedesco-Haswell explores Yeats's notion of binary oppositions, particularly those relating to the anti-self. Haswell argues that Yeats's Other self is a female one: 'Yeats's double-voiced verse is a direct result of his gendered diamonology [...] any reading strategy that does not or cannot deal with Yeats's vision of gender is seriously limited' (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.5). While Tedesco-Haswell does explore the idea of a balanced self, containing both male and female elements, she does not delve into the pagan origins of this idea, nor into the wider web of binary oppositions to which it belongs: those of the real and the ideal, and the physical and the spiritual. So, as Tedesco-Haswell's work only deals Yeats's poetry and with one facet of Yeats's binary self, it is limited in terms of any critique of the dramatic theory or dramas themselves.

Sankaran Ravindran has researched the influence of the Indian philosophical tradition on W. B. Yeats, in his work *W. B. Yeats and Indian Tradition*, in which he argues

that Yeats's idea concerning the finite self and the infinite self is drawn from Indian Hindu traditions. He goes on to argue that Yeats succeeded in creating an art in which these two consciousnesses are united. While he does acknowledge Chinese and Japanese influences on Yeats, Ravindran's focus remains on the Indian tradition alone, concentrating on 'Yeats's works that are directly related to Indian ideas of philosophy, religion, and art, works that only imply or suggest the influence and application of Indian ideas are not to be touched upon' (Ravindran 1990, p.10). Again, Ravindran's focus is on Yeats's poetry, and only briefly refers to a handful of dramatic works.

George Mills Harper has written extensively on Yeats's involvement with the Golden Dawn. In his work, *The Mingling of Heaven and Earth: Yeats's Theory of Theatre*, he explores Yeats's search for a unified dramatic character through consideration of the occult influences on Yeats's theory and dramatic work. However, Mills Harper's work is focused mainly on the influence of The Golden Dawn, and on Yeats's own *Essays and Introductions*, and while these are valuable, and the insight is impressive, I would suggest that there are other sources which need to be addressed as well as these if we are to have a full picture of Yeats's occult and pagan influences. So while it is a valuable study, it does not address the full range of issues with which I will deal in this thesis, and I would see this thesis as supplementing his research.

While James Flannery's contention in *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre*, 'is that Yeats's dramatic theories are more important than his actual practices' (Flannery 1976, p.xii), he does discuss the role of ritual, spirituality and the occult within Yeats's systems of theatre, and does deal with the system as a whole:

Yeats's plays, taken as a whole, might be described as a dramatic projection of the theme of spiritual regeneration. Almost every play explicitly or implicitly depicts life as a pilgrimage, with the dramatis personae involved in the ritual process of becoming whole men. (Flannery 1976, p.86)

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The primary occult influence discussed by Flannery is again that of The Golden Dawn, though he does address druidism, and he also highlights the use of ritual masks, music and dance within the practices of The Golden Dawn, elements which would later appear in Yeats's dramatic performances (Flannery 1976, p.239). Flannery's exploration of Yeats's dramatic theory demonstrates an understanding of the system and its origins; however, it is beyond the remit of Flannery's work to deal with the plethora of occult influences on Yeats, and as a result, his exploration of Yeats's dramatic theory is necessarily incomplete, nor does he address German idealist philosophy. In addition, while he does discuss the dramas themselves, they are given a secondary position to the theory rather than being seen as equal partners, though the status of this equality is ever shifting and in a continual state of progression. This is a book which points the way to a more interactive relationship between the theory and the drama, an interaction which I hope to develop in this study.

David Richman's *Passionate Action: Yeats's Mastery of Drama*, like Flannery's, deals with Yeats's foundation of the Abbey, and also with his foundation of himself as a dramatist and the struggles he faced in making this happen. These include his problems with plot, and with learning to work within a group as he navigated his way through relationships with actors and production crews. However, Richman does not deal with Yeats's theatrical theory or with the occult and philosophical origins of the dramas.

Heather Carmen Martin's *Metaphysician as Dramatist: The Struggle of the Spirit in the Drama of W. B. Yeats*, claims that Yeats developed a cohesive metaphysics. In the original thesis version of this work, Martin claims a Neo-Platonic origin for Yeats's theory, and applies *A Vision* to the drama, which is useful, but which differs from my own view of the broader range of influences on the dramatic theory. In terms of the drama itself, her interpretations change throughout the text. Certainly there is a Neo-Platonic element to Yeats, though this specific angle is not my main focus, Yeats did indeed read

Plato, though it appears that he came to Plato long after he had encountered Nietzsche in 1901, sometime between 1917 and 1925 (Martin 1986; Engelberg, 1988; Arkins, 1990). However the dualist view of being as both physical and spiritual of Neo-Platonism is evident within Yeatsian theory as is the idea that instinctive or intuitive knowledge is a valid form of knowledge (Honderich, 2005). Within the Yeatsian system, the idea of instinctive, emotional knowledge of the anti-self, both personal and universal, reflects and parallels the ideas that Plotinus put forward within Neo-Platonism. This notion of emotional knowledge also involves the rejection of the orthodox Christian tradition of obedience and faith as the only modes of salvation. Yeats's ideas surrounding an active engagement with the supernatural do not reflect an orthodox Christian practice, but rather suggest a neo-pagan mode of religious or spiritual practice. To add to this, Neo-Platonism also emphasised the dualism and necessity of both experience and intuitive knowledge and reason, and this unification of these two modes of knowledge is also paralleled within Yeatsian thought and theory. So, while there is a parallel to be found within Yeatsian dramatic theory and Neo-Platonism, this is not my focus, as it appears that Yeats came to Neo-Platonism later than he did to German philosophy, and so I have taken the earlier influence as one of my areas of research. Though not pertinent to my own research here, it could certainly be argued that the main course of Neo-Platonism found within Yeats is actually to be found within *A Vision*, which would be relevant in terms of Yeats's chronology and the ideology and philosophy put forward by Yeats's treatise.

The vast majority of Martin's work claims that Yeats's system is one which begins in the physical and works upward to an external spirit, and that the daimon is an external force. It is only in the closing pages that she appears to change her mind and suggest that the daimon may be internal working toward the universal divine mind. In the published version Martin tells us that Yeats sought to place the whole human on the stage, but neglects to explain how he planned to do this or how he planned to engage his audience,

indeed, there is no mention of the terms ‘self’ or ‘anti-self’ in this work. She makes reference to Yeats as a Christian and claims that it was ‘while writing *The Player Queen* that Yeats developed his theory of opposites’ (Martin 1986, p. xii). Martin makes reference to the Yeatsian belief that transcendence from the physical was attainable through art and sex, and yet makes no reference to Schopenhauer. Throughout the work she uses *A Vision* as dramatic theory and while *A Vision* does add to the dramatic theory, Yeats thoughts on the theory are largely to be found in his essays, letters and diaries rather than in his philosophical ideology. Also Martin’s analyses of the plays are jumbled and largely centre on manuscript and draft versions rather than Yeats’s finished work.

As I have said perhaps Neo-Platonism is best applied to *A Vision* rather than to the dramatic theory as Yeats’s exposure to Plotinus’s Neo-Platonism did not come about until after he had formulated the core ideals of the dramatic theory. Equally, perhaps Yeats’s romanticism, as expressed within his poetry, has more in common with Neo-Platonism. Certainly the central points of Neo-Platonism and Yeatsian dramatic theory overlap, however there are more prominent influences and parallels at play within the dramatic theory, and I have chosen to look at those that came first namely his reading of German philosophy, particularly the philosophies of art put forward by Schiller, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and to focus on the dramatic theory as a whole, including staging and the audience response whose instinctive reaction owes more to the philosophy of Schiller than to Plotinus.

While there has been considerable, and valuable, work done on Yeatsian drama and its intersections with areas of his occult interests, there is a definite lacuna in terms of my own area of study. My work builds on the work of these scholars by looking at a broader range of sources, both occult and philosophical, and crucially, by focusing on his dramatic theory as well as his dramatic practice. The vast majority of Yeatsian research deals mostly with his work as a poet or prose writer. However Yeats’s himself considered

his drama to be the more important of his work, as through it, he was striving to express the whole of human experience. Significantly, it is often forgotten that when Yeats won the Nobel Prize in 1923:

the Nobel Foundation, did indeed suggest that the prize was being awarded as much for Yeats's accomplishments in poetic drama as in lyric poetry, making no specific mention of his poetry volumes yet lavishing praise on *The Land of Heart's Desire* and *The King's Threshold* as well as Yeats's attempts to reform the modern stage. (McAteer 2010, p.1)

Yet, some academics find the notion that Yeats's drama is of equal, if not greater, significance than the poetry and prose as risible: 'The idea that W.B.Y's plays rather than his poetry had created his international reputation is laughable' (Foster 2005, p.250).

One of the strongest imperatives in Yeats's ongoing creative process was to challenge the prevailing conditions of drama as it was being produced. Yeats's dramatic work began when he saw the theatre of his day as lacking that which would make its characters whole and truly human, namely the anti-self, the innate spiritual side of humanity. Yeats believed that all humans held within them something of a divine being and always tried to immerse his mind 'in the general mind where that mind is scarce separable from what we have begun to call "the subconscious"' (Yeats 1959, p.343).

This spiritualised universal aspect of human existence was not present when he looked at the modern stage; rather all that was on the stage was the purely material physical body of a human being:

Realism is created for common people and was always their peculiar delight, and it is the delight to-day of all those whose minds, educated alone by school-masters and newspapers, are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety. (Yeats 1961, p.227)

This is the void which he sought to fill through his own work. This idea of an innate and

equal divinity is not one found in Christianity, where a human, while containing a divine spark in terms of a soul, is seen by default, as a corrupted being who is less than, and submissive to, the divine authority. In paganism, however, and in many occult teachings, humanity can have the potential to be on an equal footing with the divine, through the divinity hidden within their physical selves. For Yeats, there is no greater medium than drama through which to express this duality of human experience, and the conflicts which such duality invokes, as drama is immediate; the characters upon the stage are instantly recognisable and relatable; and it provokes an instant response and depth of feeling which other forms of literature cannot. He wanted to provoke the confrontation between the Selves, to dramatise both the conflict and the resolution, but to do so, he realised that his medium must be a forceful one, one which cannot be ignored or closed and put away as a book might be. Yeats understood fully that humanity, in the main, relies upon its sense of sight and sound; it relies on the spoken word and the accompanying gestures, and on dialogue and interaction to provoke an instantaneous and honest response. The body is a core signifier of meaning and the somatic is almost as important as the linguistic in conveying meaning and emotion, and as such, drama through the actions, sounds and movement of actors, conveys a fuller sense of human being that poetry or prose cannot:

The mature art of drama, of course, goes far beyond either athletics or primitive theatre in the intellectual and emotional demands that it makes on spectators and practitioners. But, as Yeats was deeply aware, drama springs from the response to the human body as the potential source of a form of knowledge that in many ways transcends the ratiocinating knowledge of the mind. A dramatic gesture or movement may at times express more than the most eloquent words. (Flannery 1976, p.4).

Through my research, I will bring all of these occult paths together, finding the common threads within them which Yeats's fused and utilised to influence his theories of spirituality and of theatre. This, in turn, gave rise to a revived religious, lyrical and

transcendental theatre of the bi-polar self, as Yeats's divined the psyche, seeing it as both physical and spiritual; light and dark; male and female.

My focus will be exclusively on Yeats as dramatist, as it is through his drama that he expressed himself most completely as a man, as an artist and as a being who is both physical and spiritual. This thesis therefore, will not address issues of Anglo-Irish politics, nor will it look at his poetry nor will it assess his role as a modernist. All of these have value, and have been the object of much sustained critique, but they will not be addressed by this study. One of my main focus points will be on the originating experience and influence on Yeats, namely his paganism and his occult studies, which cannot be separated from the artistic work, as Yeats the artist is predicated on Yeats the man.

Much has been made of Yeats's dramatic theory of the self, the anti-self and the mask; however, a void is created in the study of Yeats as both a man and an artist when these ideas are separated from their occult origins. As I have already stated, paganism, like all religions, provides a moral code and a particular mentality which can be enacted in every conversation, action and meeting with another being. As this system was influential on Yeats as a man, it seems necessary to trace its influence on Yeats as an artist if a complete picture of the nature of this dramatic art is to be outlined. I believe Yeats's theory of the self, the anti-self and the mask developed out of his occult studies and from the resulting spirituality, and so I will explore the occult origins of Yeats's others, the self and the anti-self. The ideas of a dualistic mode of existence, and the necessity of a dialogical expression within art, is fundamental to Yeats and his work. His occultism or neo-paganism (as we are using the terms in an academic sense), is of paramount importance to any understanding of his work as he fused ideas gleaned from paganism, occult ritual, romanticism, symbolism and to some extent Christianity.

While Yeats's theories were influenced by the occult, it is also very important to note that he had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge of all forms, and did study large

selections of philosophy, particularly the writings of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (Foster 1998; Engelberg, 1988):

The Schopenhauerian doctrine must have influenced Yeats, for he tells us he had read Schopenhauer 'as a young man' – certainly before the 1920's. (Engelberg 1988, p.12)

Philosophy, as a discipline, develops from one philosopher to the next, so that an idea or train of thought can be traced back through differing schools of philosophy and philosophers. Schiller and the German romantics, who believed the best way to express human experience was through art, were of huge significance to Schopenhauer, who in turn became a major influence on the thinking of Nietzsche, who would later critique Schopenhauer as being trapped within a Christian world view. Nietzsche's influence on the existential philosophers, Camus and Sartre, is long-established; they too believed creative writing to be the best way to express the human lived-life.

In light of these connections, I will examine the correlation between Yeats's theory and the philosophy of Friedrich Schiller, focusing on Schiller's ideas on poetry. Schiller believed that modern poetry was disjointed; he believed that in previous ages, artistic expression held within it a harmony of Being, a harmony which was now disrupted. He thought modern poetry was an expression of the search for a reconciliation of Being, something which he believed would come about in the future. He felt that only through a reconciliation found in beauty and art, could man be free: 'for Art is daughter of Freedom and must receive her commission from the needs of spirits, not from the exigency of matter' (Schiller 2004, p.26).

I will also consider the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer in relation to his influence on Yeats. I will focus particularly on Schopenhauer's ideas surrounding the innate spirituality, or divine element, which he sees in humanity, and which is accessible through art. For Schopenhauer:

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Every aesthetic experience is a temporary escape from the dictates of the Will, because aesthetic experience [...] sets us at some significant distance from our normal concerns. [...] It is 'the universal imageless language of the heart'. In aesthetic [...] experience we are elevated beyond the merely empirical, beyond the obstinately willful individual self. (Solomon 1988, p.83)

Schopenhauer and Yeats also shared an interest in Eastern philosophies which impacts upon both of their work, particularly their ideas concerning the self and art. Indeed like Yeats, Schopenhauer considered drama 'the most perfect reflection of human existence' (Schopenhauer 2004, p.56). I will also consider Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of art, specifically the opposing Dionysian and Apollonian forces that are found in art. I will further consider Nietzsche's ideas surrounding tragedy as a mode of expression and specifically in relation to his theory of art, and I will also refer to the idea of the *Übermensch* and the correlations of this idea which are influential on, and present in, Yeatsian dramatic theory. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is a human who has cast off the oppressions of material society and has become a self-actualised being: a human who is balanced and self-defined, however Yeats and Nietzsche differ in how they define a self actualised being and how such balance comes about, which I will deal with later in this work. There is also a correlation here with psychoanalysis, in that a balanced consciousness is one in which neither the Ego or the Id must be allowed rule independently; the Superego is the mediating element, and in light of this I will briefly consider Freud's theory of the self and its component forces, in terms of how it influences aspects of Yeatsian theory.

I will then turn to Jung's concept of the self, specifically the idea of the shadow aspect, the dark internalised self, and its relation to Yeats's anti-self as an aspect of humanity which, in order to engage with the whole dynamic of material and spiritual existence, 'involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is an essential condition of any kind of self-knowledge' (Jung 1998, p.91). I will

proceed to explore the idea that the necessity of a relationship with the shadow aspect or anti-self is also prominent in Yeatsian theory. To Yeats, the anti-self is a base dark aspect of the self which has been restricted and closeted, and the whole point of Yeatsian dramatic theory is to find a way in which to allow this aspect of humanity to step out of the shadows. The first step in this process is the acknowledgment of the existence of the anti-self. There is a parallel here with Yeats's ideas surrounding a latent internal spiritual aspect, in that the spiritualised anti-self, explored through his occultism, allows the spiritual aspect a path into the world ruled over by the overly rational physical self, which seeks to quell any deviation from the accepted norms of the physical life within society, time and space.

I will then consider Yeats's dramatic work in light of, not only his systemic theory, but also the philosophical and occult ideas which inspired him, through an analysis of some of his plays, touching upon his prose where relevant. As I have previously stated, Yeats's theory of self began in his disappointment with modern drama and its limited views and expression of humanity. As a result, the theories of self cannot be separated from the dramatic work that followed, as the dramas are in some way practical experiments exploring the accuracy and legitimacy of this theory of self. Through his dramatic characters, Yeats created human beings who sought to reconcile their opposing physical and spiritual selves. I will go on to argue that Yeats's drama progressed throughout his career, and he did briefly succeed in creating works which enacted his theory by presenting a whole unified character in which the self and the anti-self are balanced:

Yeats's plays, taken as a whole, might be described as a dramatic projection of the theme of spiritual regeneration. Almost every play explicitly or implicitly depicts life as a pilgrimage, with the dramatis personae involved in the ritual process of becoming whole men. (Flannery 1976, p.86)

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My research will be divided into three distinct stages, the primary concern of the first stage will be the influences on, and contributing factors to Yeats's theory. I will also consider the philosophy of the self as found within pagan, esoteric and mystic teachings, and will examine how such philosophies impact upon Yeats's own thought. The second stage will focus on the theory itself in the light of these origins and influences. The concern of the third stage will be an analysis of his dramatic work in light of, not only his theory of drama, but also of the origins of that theory. As Yeats's theory is quite complex, and clearly has roots in a diverse collection of philosophies, experiences and religious paths, it may be useful at this juncture, to give a brief overview of his dramatic theory, outlining its main points and examining the primary reasons for devising such a theory on which to base his work.

Yeats's theory of theatre began as a reaction to the contemporary works of drama being produced in both London and Dublin. During the late Victorian period, theatres spread throughout both cities as drama was one of the most popular forms of entertainment. However, many of the works produced held little artistic merit and lacked originality:

This was a time in which shallow, commercial, entertainment theatre celebrated great triumphs. At the same time, the higher demands of the educated classes were placated with hollow, declamatory theatre, which drove out the last traces of relevance and intellectual stimulation from the classics and stuffed them with boring text. This was after the censor had mercilessly removed every possible offensive snippet [...] Literature and Theatre were separated by a deep chasm. (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p.244)

The emphasis in such performances was not on the art of the dramatist, but rather on the spectacle. With the dominant genres being comedy and farce, many theatres introduced animals to the stage so that theatre now had more in common with the circus than it did with artistic or social drama: 'theatre as a public forum, remained closed to issues such

as women's rights, social Darwinism, genetics, atheism, socialism and so forth' (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p.245).

This escapist entertainment flourished in response to the reality of an oppressive Victorian society. Dramatists, realising the popularity of such performances, produced vast quantities of work, which, while visually spectacular, lacked coherent plots or character development (Brater 1998, p.186). Zola wrote of this form of theatre:

Our theatre badly needs a new man to make a clean sweep of our blighted stage and to revive an art which mere hacks have brought down to the simple needs of the masses. (Zola in Brandt 1998, p.81)

The form of theatre which Zola was championing was naturalism, and while Yeats's own drama was partly a reaction against naturalism, he nevertheless shared Zola's feelings about Victorian theatre. Yeats went further, and railed against realist drama, which he saw as presiding over a 'blighted stage'. In 1903, Yeats wrote:

I think the theatre must be reformed in its plays, its speaking, its acting, and its scenery. That is to say, I think there is nothing good about it at present [...] the modern theatre has died away to what it is because the writers have thought of their audiences instead of their subject. (Yeats 1962, p.107)

The prevalent form of drama during the Victorian period was the well-made play, brought to its zenith by Oscar Wilde. The well-made play followed a formula which meant that the audience knew the plot, the staging and the outcome of the drama before they took their seats, and they had 'become so accustomed to the formula that at last they cannot understand or relish a play that has grown naturally' (Shaw 1911 in Brandt 1998, p.104).

One of the contributing factors to this stagnating English theatre was the role of the censor, as wherever a play broke the formula and engaged with issues which appeared unseemly or unfit for public viewing, even if it reached production, the text 'would be mutilated unrecognisably by the censor' (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p.245):

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We are better off so far as the law is concerned than we would be in England. The theatrical law of Ireland was made by the Irish Parliament, and through the patent system, the usual method of the time, has outlived its use and come to an end everywhere but in Ireland, We must be grateful to that ruling caste of free spirits, that being free themselves have left the theatre in freedom. In England there is a Censor, who forbids you to take a subject from the Bible or from politics, or to the pictures public characters, or certain moral situations which are the foundation of some of the greatest plays in the world. (Yeats 1962, p.131)

At the turn of the century, drama became more realistic in style, with the emergence of playwrights such as Ibsen, Chekhov and Pinero. Flannery points out that the reasons for this change were:

Attacks by the literary critics on the run-of-the-mill theatre critics, dramatists and actors managers prepared the way for a new breed of intellectual and socially committed dramatists. [...] a new and more literate audience was gradually created that not only expected but also demanded a literate and intellectual drama. (Flannery 1976, p.133)

These new dramatists produced works that were social critiques. They were conversational in their dialogue and realistic in their staging. However, the popular theatre remained in the style of the earlier pageant-like performances. Neither of these forms of drama was considered art by Yeats as they held no lyrical quality. He would later write of his experience of this style of theatre:

I resented being invited to admire dialogue so close to modern educated speech that music and style were impossible [...]. As time passed Ibsen became in my eyes the chosen author of very clever young journalists who, condemned to their treadmill of abstraction, hated music and style. (Yeats 1961, p.279)

Realism, in Yeats's view, portrayed nothing of the spiritual or ritual origins of drama. Likewise, the vaudeville performances of Victorian theatre were merely a base form of entertainment, in which actors 'forgot the noble art of oratory, and gave all their thought

to the poor art of acting' (Yeats 1961, p.168). These contemporary theatrical trends provoked Yeats into seeking his own form of drama, a theatre which would place its emphasis on the lyrical quality of dialogue, on the spirituality of humanity and on the creation of a higher form of art. To him, naturalistic and realistic theatre portrayed only one aspect of the human lived life, that of the physical self, the setting of these dramas was always in the material world, whereas his theatre would 'measure all things by the measure not of things visible but of things invisible' (Yeats 1961, p.161). Yeats's theatre would place the spirit-world and the character of the soul upon the stage; for him, art was an expression of both the material body and the spiritual aspect innate within humanity: 'art delights in the exception, for it delights in the soul expressing itself according to its own laws and arranging the world about it in its own pattern' (Yeats 1962, p.168). Allowing the soul to express itself through art is central to Yeatsian theory as this is what he had considered missing from the realist theatre. Here, in his theatre of Art, man's duality would fuse into a whole unified being, rather than portraying the banality of the everyday life outside the theatre, as naturalism had. This transformative power of the theatre echoes Yeats's quest to return to a ritual drama of transubstantiation within his temple-theatre.

In pursuit of this dualistic dramatic form, Yeats formulated a theory of theatre, through which he aimed to develop a thematic drama based on his own ideas. This theory is also one through which he hoped to revitalise the genre of drama itself, just as he wished the result of his work to be the revitalisation of Irish ideas concerning culture, history, identity, spirituality and nation. He sought to move drama away from the prevailing trend of realism. Though at the beginning, he 'admired the modernizing virtues of some aspects of Ibsen' (O'Donoghue 2006, p.102), he soon began to dislike such theatre, particularly its realistic conversational dialogue. Yeats writes that on first encountering Ibsen, he was impressed, but soon came to realise that Ibsen was a clever

man writing for other clever men (Yeats 1961). By this, Yeats means that Ibsen and his realist imitators wrote for the critics and the press, whereas Yeats wanted to write for the multitude. He loathed the critics and the focus on physicality within realist theatre; for his theatre:

The interest is not in the human form but in the rhythm to which it moves, and the triumph of their art to express the rhythm in its intensity. (Yeats 1961, p.231)

This intensity is an internal emotional and spiritual feeling, and it was this ‘emotion of the multitude’, this feeling which links all humans and allows them to engage on an emotional level, that Yeats had seen as missing from the naturalist theatre and so when formulating his own system: ‘Yeats banishes naturalism’ (Good 1987, p.19):

The literature and painting of our time when they come out of a deep life, are labouring to awake again our interests in the moral and spiritual realities which were once the foundation of the arts; and the theatre, if it would cease to be but the amusement of idleness, must cast off that interest in external and accidental things which has marred all modern arts, and the dramatic art more than any. (Yeats 1954, p.310)

Yeats is often seen as being a modernist dramatist, but what he actually did was unlike anything else present on the contemporary stage. Yeatsian theatre was in fact a return to ritual drama, and a reawakening of ancient ideas and knowledge; he was very clear that he wished to return to the theatre, the structures, imagery, symbols and themes of the most ancient stage, particularly the Greek model. It is important to bear in mind in terms of the numerous references to the Greek ideal within Yeatsian thought, that the ancient Greek civilisation was a pagan state and therefore Greek ritualistic drama is pagan ritual drama. Yeats would of course later add an Irish pagan, mythic or folk element to this as he attempted to write Irish plays for an Irish people. He did not necessarily set out to revolutionise theatre, but to restore it for ‘we have forgotten that drama began in chanted

ode' (Yeats 1954, p.309).

Yeats wanted to return drama to its roots, those of the lyrical chanted ode found in ancient Greek choral drama:

Yeats loathed the tendency of the traditional theatre of the West in which action had become more and more important, speech lost its original simplicity and naturalness, and the stage setting had become more elaborate and artificial, destroying the intimacy of art. (Komesu 1984, p.138)

To Yeats, the dialogue of any drama is the crucial aspect, and as such, should be lyrical in style. He wants to 'write for the ear' (Yeats 1961, p.530). His actors were to be lyrical orators who were sensitive to the scripts he had given them, so that their speech held a realistic element, even though it was often of poetical, mythical and epic quality.

In Yeats's opinion, drama is very closely linked with religion: 'the more religious the subject-matter of an art, the more it will be, as it were, stationary, and the more ancient will be the emotion it arouses and the circumstance that it calls up before our eyes' (Yeats 1961, p.285). Such a religiously-charged theatre would provide for Yeats the emotive universal response from his audience which would connect the spectacle and the spectator through the conduit of an innate spirituality which encapsulates both mystery and human hope. He claimed that these elements were missing from contemporary realism, and so would be central to the symbolic drama he would attempt to establish. At its best, Yeats thought theatre to be an intimate, emotive and spiritual experience, and contemporary drama did not provoke such a response in him; it was simply a construct of the intellect and held nothing of the innate spiritual nature of human life. For Yeats, human life is fundamentally one of balance, between the body and the soul, so that if art is to reflect human experience, it should also seek such a balance in the portrayal of both elements.

In his essay 'The Theatre' (1900), he criticises contemporary stage productions as works of commerce rather than of art. He claims that contemporary stage managers 'made

the costumes of the actors more and more magnificent, that the mind might sleep in peace' (Yeats 1961, p.169). For Yeats, such elaborate staging distracted the audience from the dialogue of the actors. Drama had moved away from its ritual roots, he maintained, and had become an obscene commercial spectacle, 'this construction [...] has everything of high literature except the emotion of the multitude' (Yeats 1961, p.215). This idea of the emotion of the multitude took its inspiration from the choral form of Greek tragedy, but also connected drama as an art form to its original roots as productions reserved for holy days, where the performance of drama itself was a ritual of significance and of power within a community. Yeats also wanted to return language to the sacred realm it once inhabited: the 'theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty' (Yeats 1961 p.170). Through his own work, he wanted to create a theatre of Art, one in which props and costumes would be aids to facilitate dialogue, rather than being a distraction from it. He later took this idea further by introducing the mask and so removing the actor's face, as if it too were a mere prop. This was because for Yeats, the actor at his or her best, was a conduit through which a sense of character could be expressed.

Yeats's theatre would allow the spiritual aspect to vocalise itself within epic lyrical dramas enacted upon his symbolic stage, far removed from the naturalist theatre that Yeats grew to hate in which the playwright took 'the contemporary scene and [tried] to present living people in it' (Zola in Brandt 1998, p.86):

In Ibsen's work we find the old traditions and the new conditions struggling in the same play, like a gudgeon half swallowed by a pike. Almost all the sorrow and the weariness which makes his plays so poignant are the sorrow and the weariness of the mean dull life in which nothing happens; but none the less he provides a final catastrophe of the approved fifth-act-blank-verse type. (Shaw in Brandt 1998, p.100)

Contemporary drama, in Yeats's view, was written for, and determined by, the critics. A play's success was based upon its reception, but it was the reception by educated people as opposed to that of the ordinary person. Yeats, then, felt that contemporary dramatists were clever men writing to amuse a minority, and in so doing, they never portrayed a real and universal expression of human life:

Dramatic literature has for a long time been left to the criticism of journalists, and all of these, the old stupid ones and the new clever ones, have tried to impress upon it their absorption in the life of the moment, their delight in obvious originality and in obvious logic, their shrinking from the ancient and insoluble. (Yeats 1961, p.283)

He had little time for the critics who had the power to call a play 'art'. For Yeats, the critic's idea of art is intrinsically connected to the commercial success of a theatre. This consumerist view of theatre is in direct conflict with his own conception of art as an intangible concept that is beyond the human materialistic world: 'he impressed on all those around him the necessity for the truth in art, truth to experience above all' (Murray 2000, p.36). For Yeats, art should embody the abstract concepts of imagination, spirit and truth to which humans cling during life if it is to be a true expression of human experience.

Yeats's continued disappointment in the critics becomes more apparent in his essay 'The Tragic Theatre' (1910), in which he speaks of the critical reception of Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1910). The critics had placed more importance on the 'wheels and pulleys necessary to the effect' (Yeats 1961, p.238) than on the humanist themes of the play. To Yeats, the critics on whom the success of the play depended had been more interested in the technical and structural elements of the work, than in the emotional and intellectual response of the audience. Yeats thought that Synge had captured moments of 'the noblest tragedy' in this play, and was disappointed that the critics had concerned themselves with things which were 'in themselves nothing' (Yeats 1961, p.238). While

structure or visual effect have some importance in Yeats's theory of drama, they are not the main elements of his work; rather, they are secondary to dialogue. It is dialogue and emotive response that should be the driving forces of any drama, and these alone should determine a play's success or failure.

Through his works, Yeats wanted to move drama out of the realm of consumerism and critical acclaim or disapproval, and return it to its ritualistic roots as an art form. He wanted to 'forward the aims of men of letters as distinct from men of the theatre' (Flannery 1976, p.134). Yeats's theatre of Art would be one in which the intimacy and emotion of the early Greek plays would be resurrected. It would be one which would mediate between the real and the ideal elements of the human lived-life, rather than placing emphasis on one or the other, as he felt contemporary drama did. Such emphasis portrayed a false image of humanity, focusing on the bodily experience and so appearing devoid of spirit. There is an echo here of Nietzsche's Apollonian force, where what was produced was nothing more than plastic art which had no merit in the revelation of emotional truth. The realist stage is dictated by the critics and the popular taste, and as such, it is reminiscent of Schiller's sentimental art which betrays nothing of the internal conflicts of humanity, or the conflict between the human emotional state and rational society; it merely presents 'the surface of life' (Yeats 1961, p.166).

In his own plays, he sought to rectify the elements of contemporary theatre, which he believed were harmful to performance art. It is on these aspects that he centers his own dramatic theory. To him, such art is popular due to the current fashions as dictated by critics. A. S. Knowland argues that the importance that Yeats placed on dialogue is one of the main reasons why he rebuffed the popular dramas of his time, stating that: his 'belief in the sovereignty of words led naturally to his rejection of illusionist drama, which for him lacked "beautiful and vivid language"' (Knowland 1983, p.2). Yeats believed in the eternal quality of art, and it is this permanence which he sees as missing from

contemporary theatre. He goes on to state that the purpose of drama is to provoke an emotion, though an emotion which is tied to an experience, one of past history, of current circumstance or of religious meaning. He thought the last of these most pertinent, as he believed the 'artist stands between the saint and the world of impermanent things' (Yeats 1961, p.286).

Drama, for Yeats, should always have a link to experience or to memory. In 'Discoveries', Yeats compares drama to an old wives' tale, in that it always contains something from memory. To him, a dramatist 'felt something in the depth of his mind and he wants to make it as visible and powerful to our senses as possible' (Yeats 1961, p.276). This unconscious feeling was exactly that to which Yeats wanted to give a platform, and this platform would be a sacred space where the rational vocal dramatist could engage with the hidden spiritual depths of his emotional state and self.

All humans are emotional creatures, and emotion is expressed through both facial movement and sound, be it through cries, gasps or coherent words. However, while facial expressions are connected to the physical self, which is a restricted self, vocal exclamations are instantaneous and instinctive. As such, vocal expression of emotion and experience is paramount within the dramatic sphere. Yeats places great importance on dialogue within his dramatic theory and work. It is through language and the human voice that he will provoke a reaction from his audience who will relate to the emotional experience presented, and will then subsume it so that it awakens a personal experience of similar or equal emotional importance within the audience itself. In 'A People's Theatre', he writes that:

I desire a mysterious art, always reminding and half reminding those who understand it of dearly loved things, doing its work by suggestion, not by direct statement, a complexity of rhythm, colour, gesture, not space pervading like the intellect but a memory and a prophecy. (Yeats cited in Bentley 1992, p.335)

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This is crucial to Yeats, as it is the emotive quality of any production that provokes a reaction from the audience, as what ‘moves men in the arts is what moves them in life, and that is, intensity of personal life’ (Yeats 1961, p.265). The instinctive and emotional audience-response causes the drama to be, not only remembered by the audience, but also, to be spoken about long after the curtain call, so that a play’s longevity relies solely upon the audience-reaction. This was a state of affairs Yeats had longed for, detesting the power the critics, journalists, censors and those who would degrade art, and who could determine a production’s success or indeed failure:

Drama, the most immediately powerful form of literature, the most vivid image of life, finds itself opposed, as no other form of literature does, to those enemies of life, the chimeras of the Pulpit and the Press. (Yeats 1962, p.119)

The importance of emotion in drama remains a fixed idea within his theory of drama, from script to staging. To Yeats, drama was the most appropriate means of conveying and provoking emotion due to its immediacy and public production, and as such, it was the most effective medium through which to express human life:

In literature, partly from the lack of spoken word which knits us to the normal man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man – blood, imagination, intellect, running together – but have found a new delight, in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination. (Yeats 1961, p.266)

Yeats’s aim is to create characters that are whole, insofar as they are a merging of both forces: the real and the ideal; spiritual and physical; self and anti-self. In writing of the ordinary human life, which is tinged with the hope of the unseen and unknown entities of spiritual belief or the imagination, he hopes to create accurate and relatable characters; characters he felt were absent from contemporary dramatic literature.

During the development of his dramatic theory, Yeats extols the need for an authentic human character in drama. He maintains that such a character can only be

present when the binary oppositions of the lived human life are represented on stage. A dramatic character must be both physical and spiritual, and it is in the struggle between these two forces that true drama lies. For Yeats 'the dramatic moment is always the contest of character with character' (Yeats 1961, p.239). By this, he means the internal struggle between the base physicality of the human, and the demands of spirituality which are present in personal morality and conscience: in other words, between the rational and the irrational. A whole and unified character to him is one which encapsulates both forces and which, through reconciliation, balances them to form a unified and balanced self. In a letter to Olivia Shakespear, in April 1895, Yeats wrote 'every [...] influence has a shadow, as it were, an unbalanced' (Yeats 1986, p.463). Though writing of an occult experience, namely a guided meditative vision, the occult philosophy expressed is one which he also represented in his dramatic theory. This unbalanced shadow is his anti-self, his spiritual base aspect of humanity and in order to become balanced it must connect with the physical self.

In Yeats's view, the physical sensibility of a human, as expressed through movement and facial expression, is the grounding force of a character, as this is what allows an audience immediate access to the character's state of mind. In contrast, the spiritual sensibility of a human is expressed through language, particularly, in his view, through each person's own lyrical dialogue. To him, it is spirituality that is the noble element of humanity, to which all have access. Through his drama, he hoped to put his audience in contact with their higher spiritual selves, or their antitheses, by means of a connection made through their immediate emotional response to the characters presented on the stage. This would be especially true of those characters who portrayed their anti-selves through the use of the mask, which diminishes the presence of the physical self, and can 'express what no eye has ever seen' (Yeats 1961, p.305). His work would not be that of the stupefying theatre of commerce; rather his 'plays will be for the most part

remote, spiritual and ideal' (Yeats 1961, p.166). Through this ideal spiritual drama, he would connect the stage and the stalls; 'he sought to create a dramatic form in which thoughts and feelings might flow to as well as from the stage, forging a ritual bond between spectators and performers' (Flannery 1976, p.109).

What Yeats is searching for is a balanced theatre which allows the audience to be physical beings while at the same time forging a spiritual connection with the proceedings on stage. This idea of balance is perhaps a result of his interest in paganism, and of his acceptance of the overriding pagan tenet of balance in both the self, and in the natural world. In addition to this influence, the quasi Judeo-pagan society of The Golden Dawn also heavily influenced Yeats. As I have already mentioned, Yeats had read Schopenhauer when he was younger, and he came to Nietzsche in 1901, no doubt recognising the parallels between the philosophies of separated Selves in search for unification and those of the neo-pagan ideals of societies such as the Golden Dawn. In 1926, Moïna Mathers, the wife of one of The Golden Dawn founders, S. L. MacGregor Mathers, wrote of the aims of the society in her preface to her husband's best-known work *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, in which she stated:

The whole aim and object of the teaching is to bring a man to the knowledge of his higher self, to purify himself, to strengthen himself, to develop all powers and qualities of the being, that he may ultimately regain union with the divine Man latent in himself. (Mathers 1991, p.ix)

While this statement by Mathers is for the most part true, her motives in writing it are questionable due a sexual-abuse controversy in which both MacGregor Mathers and The Golden Dawn had been embroiled from 1900 to 1901, when Mathers unwittingly became involved with a couple who used a bogus occult order to defraud members of London society, and in one case which also used occult initiations as a prelude to rape (Gilbert 1995, p.305). Nonetheless, the aims of the rituals and teachings of the order did rely on

an idea of unity of the physical and the spiritual.

In Yeats's view, such a union could only take place when balance had been achieved, and such a balance would have a rippling effect outward into society as a whole.

This effect is what he is trying to provoke through his work:

To attain a unity at all levels of life – spiritual, aesthetic, cultural, philosophical, etc. – was Yeats's lifelong aim [...] of achieving a unity of multiplicity, a resolution of all conflict. At the spiritual level he endeavored to attain a Unity of Being, [...] at the aesthetic level he tried to achieve a Unity of Image, [...] and at the cultural level he tried to achieve a Unity of Culture, a Byzantium where all things have oneness. (Komesu 1984, pp.55-56)

Though I will explore in more detail later, Unity of Image is a stage representation of the whole unified self, as Unity of Being, which is an actual balanced human state in which self and anti-self engage and are in harmony. Unity of Culture occurs when Unity of Being spreads throughout a civilization or culture. There has been mention in the past that Yeats took the term:

doctrine of Unity of Being, which he says he found in Dante (though no one else has been able to find it there), who, according to Yeats, used that term “when he compared beauty in the *Convito* to a perfectly proportioned human body”(Auto., p.190). (Olney 1980, p.75)

Yeats goes on to say that he had learned the term Unity of Being from his father. Certainly Yeats was well aware of parallel concepts from his reading of philosophy. Yeats also states that ‘nothing so much matters as Unity of Being, but if I seek it as Goethe sought [...] in whom objectivity and subjectivity are intermixed’ (Yeats 1955, p.354). Regardless of where the term Unity of Being originates, the concept of the merging of the objective or physical and the subjective or spiritual was not a new concept by the time Yeats sought to make it his quest, and can easily be identified in the romantics, Goethe, Neo-Platonism, neo-paganism and Ancient Greek philosophy. Which may be why so much has been

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written surrounding both romanticism and Neo-Platonism and Yeats, particularly in relation to *A Vision*. Similarly the prevalence of Romanticism in Yeatsian study is legitimate, as Yeats's theory of anti-self has much in common with Coleridge's theory of the imagination. Harold Bloom views Yeats as a romantic, as does Ellmann, and perhaps in poetic terms they are correct. However in terms of the drama, I think there is more at play here than romanticism alone, as the performance element, the significance Yeats gives to the spoken language of the instinctive self and the role of the audience all add an extra dimension to the romantic artistic paradigm. However, such aspects of Yeats in beyond my remit and my focus will be on the idea of Unity of Being as a concept, theory and outcome of Yeats dramatic work.

Yeats's view of drama is one in which characters must be presented in a real and identifiable world. However, perhaps it is the character's emotions, situations and responses in conjunction with the audience's engaged reactions, which make the theatrical world real. In 'The Tragic Theatre', he writes that 'character can only express itself perfectly in the real world', and for him the true hallmarks of the real world are comedy and tragedy' (Yeats 1961, p.243). It is in these two dramatic genres that a true human character can be found, as these are the governing and opposing passions of human life.

Therefore, to be true art, drama must consist of such oppositions if it is to be an accurate expression of human life. Ideally, then, drama should house human characters, realistic settings, a lyrical dialogue, dance, music and passion, all of which work in harmony, and this balance of the different elements should be evident on viewing the play as a whole. He wants his audience to look beyond one specific element of a production, such as an actor or a setting, and to strive to see the 'oneness' of which he speaks. Yeats writes of the realistic settings of drama, stating that:

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If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions. (Yeats 1961, p.243)

It is his view that such patterns and rhythm provide the spiritual and artistic elements of a dramatic performance. Yeats's dramatic world is, then, a nuanced world which creates a parallax within itself. According to Slavoj Žižek, a standard definition of a parallax is 'the apparent displacement of an object, [...] caused by a change in observation position that provides a new line of sight' (Žižek 2006, p.17). In view of this, a dialogical production contains two opposing elements, each portraying what is absent in the other when viewed as a whole, or when viewed from either side of the dialogue. In light of this, is Yeats also creating a parallax in the theatre building itself by demanding that the audience engage with his characters? If a stage character is devoid of the spiritual aspect, the audience's own spirituality could help to provide it through the recognition of what is absent. Similarly, by removing the physical traits of the character by employing the mask, Yeats forces his audience, who cannot escape their own physical being, to supplement that which is missing from the stage so that they may engage with the drama. The dramatic theory itself contains the parallax relationship, in that from occultism Yeats drew on an overtly spiritual element which, when held against the rational mirror of German philosophy, managed to create a whole system. Philosophy gave him a rational argument and logic to express what he had always felt, and drama gave him a mode of not only expressing both aspects, but also of unifying them.

While Yeats places much emphasis on the emotional and spiritual response of the audience, as physical beings, they must also relate to the bodily characters on stage, as otherwise the production and the reactions it provokes are unbalanced. This idea of a balanced self is a central tenet of paganism, and will be explored further in the next chapter. A balanced personality is one which is both physical and spiritual, and more

importantly a being who embraces and relates to both facets of the human condition. This embrace of the dual aspect is what Yeats wants to draw from his audience; he wants the spectators' response to be an instinctive one, whereby the audience member relates, not only to the personality on stage, but also to their own innate duality. The conflict of the self as it meets the anti-self or of the self as devoid of the anti-self was dramatised, not only to explore the conflict, but also to navigate a path towards reconciliation. Yeats believed all humans understood something of the divine or the soul, their other self or anti-self, and so, by portraying a clash or an absence of the two dominant forces in human existence, he would provoke a response from the audience and make them complicit in the reconciliation of the selves, through reconciling their own selves, subconsciously in reaction to the play, and the psychoanalytic dimensions of this will be briefly explored later in the thesis.

Throughout his theory of drama, Yeats speaks of a need for unity within theatre, not just a unity of dramatic performance, but also a unity of the characters portrayed within a play. Ellmann argues, in both *The Identity of Yeats* and *The Man and the Masks*, that it was a unity of self for which Yeats was searching, using his drama and poetry as a means of exploring the opposing elements within his own being:

His work can be read as a concentrated effort to bring such contrasting elements as man and divinity, man, woman, man, external nature, man, and his ideal into a single circle. [...] But his organization of the world is never placid. It is enlivened by a keen sense of tension. (Ellmann 1954, p.7)

According to Ellmann, the theory of the mask develops out of this process of self-searching, and the tension he writes of arises out of Yeats's failure to unify his own being. This may be why the dramatic presentation of unified characters obsessed him to the point of revising and rewriting much of his drama while neglecting some of his other work:

I have sleepless nights, thinking of the time that I must take from poetry, [...] and

yet perhaps I must do all these things that I may set myself into a life of action and express not the traditional poet but the forgotten thing the normal active man. (Yeats 1955, pp. 491-2)

The theory of the mask is again one of parallax, of the self and the anti-self, with one portraying the failings of the other. The mask, to Yeats, is a means of disguising the self so that the physicality of the actor may be removed, leaving only the normally hidden spiritual self or anti-self as portrayed by the mask, which often appears as inhuman and grotesque. It is this absence of physicality which allows for the presence of the spiritual side of the character to reveal itself. He makes this very clear in his essay 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan' (1916):

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player [...] the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body. (Yeats 1961, p.226)

Through proximity to the anti-self, or the spiritual self of the character, the audience will have to use their own latent spirituality to relate to the character, bringing the audience closer to the stage, not in a sense of any physical proximity, but in that of a wholly spiritual one. Yeats had seen a parallel of this process on stage through the work of Synge:

The Player had become, if but for a moment, the creature of the noble mind which had gathered its art in waste islands, and we too were carried beyond time and persons to where passion [...] becomes wisdom; and it was as though we too had touched and felt and seen a disembodied thing. (Yeats 1961, p.139)

This idea of bringing an audience close to a performance fuses with his idea of a need for dual perspectives within drama.

Yeats was very interested in the oppositions of distance and intimacy. For him, an

ideal theatre would balance the two, engaging the audience in the performance, while also establishing a physical distance between the stage and the stalls, though his intention is that there would be no spiritual distance between the audience and the actors. Thus, it is in this space of spiritual co-habitation that the universal and emotional reaction occurs:

He sought to create a dramatic form in which thoughts and feelings might flow to as well as from the stage, forging a ritual bond between spectators and performers, but without breaking down the aesthetic distance between them. (Flannery 1976, p.109)

Yeats intends for his art to remain distanced from the realities of the world, as 'all imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance, once chosen, must be firmly held against a pushing world' (Yeats 1961, p.224). The distance of which he seems to be speaking here is a physical distance, so that the audience does not place an importance on the physical embodiment of the character as portrayed by the actor on stage or on physicality itself. Instead, Yeats forces the audience into a disturbing confrontation, and in turn acceptance, of the purely spiritual element of both the character presented and their own selves. For Yeats, it is an engagement with the spirit or anti-self of the stage-character that brings a physical audience into an intimate relationship with the portrayed character, while also making each production a personal experience in that the aim is to force the audience to engage with their own personal anti-self and in doing so recognise the universal anti-self. This engaging of spirit was influenced by Yeats's experience of Japanese Noh drama in which masks and costumes were used to enhance the character, placing emphasis on human rhythm, and not on the human form. This physical presentation, and the spiritual origins and significance of the Noh as a ritual Shinto performance, spurred Yeats to include the physical and ritual aspects of the form into his own developing spiritualised dramatic style.

Flannery suggests that Yeats's use of masks, dance and an almost ritualistic form

of performance to create a balance of the opposite forces of the natural and the spiritual, has its origins in his neo-pagan beliefs, particularly his associations with the Golden Dawn of which Yeats was a member until 1902 (Jordan 1996, p.190). In *W. B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre*, Flannery writes:

The rituals of the Golden Dawn employed colourful masks, richly adorned costumes, and formal dance-like movements, ambulation, and gestures focusing on or about the central symbols of the order. (Flannery 1976, p.239)

It is apparent, then, that Yeats's employment of similar elements in his dramas suggests a ritualistic intent in his plays, a ritual which, mirroring those of paganism, will bring about the balance Yeats desired. According to Ellmann, Yeats's focus on the spiritual seems to corrupt his search for balance in that he appears to give the spiritual element of his work dominance over the physical and natural aspects of human life. Ellmann suggests that, rather than filling the gaps which he saw in naturalist theatre, Yeats merely succeeded in turning dramatic work into the other extreme of spiritualism, and that his characters, as they were now portrayed, appeared almost illusory in nature. While in some cases this would appear to be true, particularly in the case of his early Cuchulain, I would argue that rather than failing outright, Yeats presents characters who are themselves unbalanced, who are overwhelmed by their spiritual anti-selves, and who are in fact seeking a unity between their interior and exterior selves. Thus, when Yeats sees the audience as overwhelmed by their physical selves, in trying to project the spiritual anti-self onto the stage, he sometimes goes too far and produces a character with whom the audience may be unable to identify. While many of Yeats's characters struggle throughout the plays to find their own balanced identity, by the end of each drama there is a conclusion of sorts and an attempt to attain a balanced form. This is not to say that he succeeded in finding a balance or a Unity of Being in each play, but rather that each work and each revision demonstrates a progression toward this end. Each work acts as a step

forward in the direction of a whole and reconciled drama. This reconciliation of self and anti-self plagued Yeats when it came to concluding a play. As Ellmann asks, 'once the characters had turned into their antithetical selves did they ever lapse back? Or was eventually some reconciliation effected between the old selves and the new?' (Ellmann 1979, p.189).

Over the entire span of his artistic career, Yeats portrayed the conflict between the physical and spiritual elements of drama with increasing clarity. Though many plays came close to achieving the balance Yeats sought, most remained unbalanced by their end, which is perhaps why he continually revised and rewrote his work. Yeats's theory began as a reaction against his contemporaries, but it developed into a complex and innovative dramatic system which he used to produce dramas of a challenging nature. While some of Yeats's plays fail to create characters which are whole, in that they have not reconciled their physical and spiritual elements, Yeats continued in his quest to create such characters, so that for him, the creation of an ideal drama is a lifelong search, as is the unification of the human self and indeed his own being. The aim of Yeats's dramatic work is to create a human character who is both physical and spiritual; a character who is a balanced being. However, he found the resolution of the opposing forces a difficult one, requiring each drama to be reworked in the search for his ultimate goal, namely a whole and united character.

Though some of the works he produced failed to fulfil his theory, others clearly did succeed, such as *The Cat and the Moon* (1924). He also succeeded in revitalising drama as a genre as many who followed him were clearly influenced by aspects of his dramatic theory. Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come* (1965) makes use of the self and the anti-self as opposites through the separation of the character Gar into his public and private selves. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* (1952) also portrays this idea of Yeats's, as the characters of Estragon and Vladimir are void of an anti-self, but the

presence of this opposite spiritual self is implied through the absent character of Godot; like many of Yeats's characters, Didi and Gogo fail to achieve a unification of self as they wait for the spiritual to find them, rather than actively engaging with, taking responsibility for, and reconciling, their own dualities of being. While *The Field*, by John B. Keane, also heavily echoes the central themes of *On Baile's Strand*. In this thesis, I will be studying aspects of Yeats's dramatic theory, and I will trace the influences of the occult and of aspects of German philosophy on that theory before using the theory itself through which to analyse aspects of Yeats's own dramatic practice.

In chapter one, I will examine the occult influences on his theory, including an explanation of paganism and other aspects of spiritual theory which were important to Yeats, because in order to explore Yeats's theory of theatre and the dramatic work he produced from this theoretical position, we must begin with the originating experience. I will then look at philosophical influences on Yeats's work in chapter two, as these developed and furthered his quest for a Unity of Being. I will consider aspects of the philosophies of Schiller, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, before turning briefly to the theories of self as put forward by both Freud and Jung. In the third chapter, I will examine Yeats's theories of drama and of the self and will then explore the relationship between these two theories, their entwined nature and the equal status of each element of his system. I will also consider how each occult encounter and philosophical reading furthered both theories by allowing them to progress.

The fourth chapter will turn toward Yeats's dramatic work, applying the theory to selected dramatic productions: *On Baile's Strand*; *The Green Helmet*; *The Shadowy Waters*; *The Hourglass*; *At the Hawk's Well*; *The Player Queen*; *The Cat and the Moon* and *The Herne's Egg*. I will argue in this chapter that each work betrays a progression of his theory in action, culminating, albeit briefly, in instances of a successful drama of the whole self. My concluding chapter will reiterate my aims and will, using material from

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the previous chapters, argue that Yeats's theory was brought to fruition through his artistic work by successfully creating a whole and balanced character. I will further argue that to divorce the dramatic system he created from its roots in the esoteric and the occult is to give a fragmented account of his work and of himself as both man and artist.

## **Chapter One**

### **‘Seeing with Internal Eyes’: Yeats and the Occult**

In order to fully understand Yeats’s theories, it is necessary to locate their origins in his occult studies and in his associations with many organisations, as it is here that he found the ideas of balancing the physical and spiritual selves, of the mask and of a return to a ritualised drama. As I have said in the introduction, this aspect of Yeats has not been given due credit in academic circles, and has been ‘underestimated, denigrated or deliberately undervalued’ (Mills Harper 1976, p.2). Throughout this chapter, I will explore the spiritual paths, organisations and societies relevant to Yeats, including neo-paganism, Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy and the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn.

Yeats’s ideas and sensibilities appear pagan in origin, and certainly his own assertions regarding the importance of magic and balance coupled with his life-long active participation in neo-pagan or occult associations and rituals augment this viewpoint; as a result of this, it is important to understand the nature of paganism. Almost every association with which Yeats was involved drew on paganism or perhaps neo-paganism is the correct term here, in some way to inform its own beliefs, rituals and structures. Therefore it is important to understand its central tenets so that they can be recognised in the teachings of the orders that followed, even when they have been corrupted or merged with a separate system. It is also necessary to be able to recognise the spiritual elements which Yeats employed when formulating his theory of drama and

also, the ritual and practical elements he placed upon the stage through his dramatic performances.

Yeats was neither strictly a Freemason nor a Rosicrucian, nevertheless, both societies and their teachings were instrumental in forming the structure, rituals and teachings of the first incarnation of The Golden Dawn, of which Yeats was a prominent member from 1891 until his resignation in 1904 (Foster 1998; Jordan 1996). To fully understand any of the organisations, we must understand their origins, which informed their philosophies, rituals and teachings. It is beyond the remit of this chapter to deal with every organisation in depth; rather my focus will be on the elements of each which are relevant to Yeats, as it is from these elements that he took ideas and principles that he then added to his theory of drama so that it became a multi-layered, progressive working hypothesis.

## **Paganism**

What is paganism? As with all faiths there is no one single answer to this question. However, over the course of this chapter and the following chapters, I will look at the more relevant examples of what paganism meant to Yeats. He was involved with, and influenced by, many different pagan paths, societies and ideas. All were linked, and for the most part appear to emerge out of one another, in that one society would evolve into something new or else give rise to a splinter organisation. It should be stated now that the paganism I am speaking of is largely European pagan practice and belief. The term neo-paganism, which I have used in relation to Yeats, in a purely academic sense of the word, is not a term common to European paganism and is often used in a derogatory manner as most would assert than paganism is ancient and though practices may adapt with each

age, the faith itself should not be defined as 'new'. The term is frequently used by American pagans in a positive manner to denote modern paganism: 'in the United States neo-paganism [*sic*] encompasses a broadly New Age philosophy' (Jordan 1996, p. 110) Some have identified the modern era of paganism with Mathers and the Golden Dawn, while some point to the emergence of Wicca in the 1950's (Hutton, 1999). Either way, the common thread in the definition of modern paganism, and therefore the term neo-paganism as used by pagans themselves signifies the emergence of pagan paths which were an amalgam of a plethora of occult or pagan traditions and practices, exemplified by the Golden Dawn's incorporation of Greek, Egyptian paganism, Christianity and Kabbala. Within in this research, I will use the term neo-pagan in the academic sense which echoes the use within paganism, in that I mean an amalgamation of many differing pagan, occult or religious traditions, and it is hardly surprising that such a term would be applied to the work of a member of the Golden Dawn. However, it is interesting to highlight the fact that the European pagan community do not use the term to identify themselves, even those who follow a Wiccan path.

It is now necessary to explore paganism in general terms, as it is on its general spiritual ideas and practices on which offshoots are based. Paganism has been defined as:

The belief in a religion other than Judaism, Christianity or Islam. [...] Modern paganism is represented by a diversity of groups and individuals linked by a common belief in certain traditions, including the old nature and fertility cults of the Celts and Norsemen, magical and alchemical traditions, mystery traditions and others. It is generally characterised by a lack of hierarchy or bureaucracy, although some organisations are becoming increasingly hierarchical in their construction. (Jordan 1998, p.116)

This definition may not be looked on kindly by practitioners of Shinto, Hinduism, or most other Eastern faiths, yet it does seem to cover all Polytheistic faiths or faiths based on a

belief in elemental spirits.

Paganism is an umbrella term for a collective of spiritual paths; however all share certain commonalities, and it is these common threads that are important, as they unite the pagan community, whose focus is always on commonality rather than on difference. The differences between paths largely refer to methods of practice, as the hermeneutic of principles in practice and the orientation of each particular group, what might be called the core principles, remain the same for the vast majority (Jennings 2002, p.8). There are some small splinter groups, who claim paganism as their own, yet these groups, such as the neo-Nazi offshoot of Germanic paganism, are denounced by the pagan community at large, as paganism is an inclusive rather than an exclusive faith.

Pagans believe in Gods and Goddesses, 'but most importantly, recognises that they can exist within the individual, not [only] in the sky out of reach' (Horne 2000, p.4). In this belief, they see that the natural and supernatural worlds are not separate and distinct from one another, but rather, are intertwined and interdependent. A harmony of balance between the two is sought through pagan practices, which are governed by the ideas concerning of the sovereignty of the natural world, the freedom of the individual, and the idea of balance in all areas of life and intent in action (Horne 2000, pp.7-9). To a pagan, every action will return triple fold, so that positive action brings about positive consequences and vice versa. There is no structured sense of morality or sin, so that to a pagan, personal freedom is paramount, and it is because of this that pagans are accused of hedonism and promiscuity, when in actuality pagans place a great importance on the sacredness of sex and sexuality:

Witches do not see the emotional and physical union of heterosexual couples as superior to that of lesbian or gay couples. Love and pleasure are sacred to all Witches and Witches are free to explore these in any way they choose.

Reproduction of the species is not the only expression of love or pleasure, or the only form of fertility. (Horne 2000, p.239)

All sexual partnerships are accepted within paganism; intimate relationships between consenting adults remain private, and are not the business of the pagan community at large. There are some who claim that the soul is androgynous and gender is simply pot luck in each physical incarnation from one life to the next. Thuri Calafia claims that 'we are born as a particular gender to learn a particular lesson. [...] [O]ur sexuality as well as our gender is a soul path' (Calafia 2008, p.12).

All pagans believe in the necessity of balance; they believe in a balanced spiritual, emotional and physical self, and in a balanced natural world. There must be a balance between light and dark; life and death; private and public selves; male and female; the physical and spiritual: no one element must be allowed to overwhelm and subsume another. To pagans, human life must be balanced for it to be happy, full and successful (Jennings 2002, p.9). To this end, they spend a great deal of time on this concept of balance, undertaking cleansing rituals and lifestyle changes in order to maintain a balance when they recognise a lack of equilibrium in themselves or their world (Horne 2000, p.7).

There is a great belief in a meditative inner self and in self-actualisation; it is vital to all pagans to be open, honest and at all times true to themselves. No pagan would ever support any cause or behaviour in which they do not fully believe, nor would any pagan ever denounce the personal life-choices of any person, 'everyone is entitled to their own informed choice of spiritual path, so long as they harm no one else' (West 2003, p.4). Harm to another is difficult to define but is usually classified as 'needless or senseless harm'. To cause another person harm can block entry to the pagan community and to covens, as 'entrance will likely hinge upon [one's] grasp of, and ability to exhibit, strong personal ethics' (Calafia 2008, p.24).

The Pagan Federation has published three universal principles, on which most can agree:

Love for the kinship with nature. Reverence for the life force and its ever-renewing cycles of life and death;

A positive morality, in which the individual is responsible for the discovery and development of their true nature in harmony with the outer world and community.

This is often expressed as 'Do what you will, as long as it harms none';

A recognition of the divine, which transcends gender, acknowledging both the female and male aspects of Deity. (Pagan Federation 2000 cited in Jennings 2002, p.9)

Magic and witchcraft are often mentioned in relation to paganism; witchcraft is the practical element of paganism, and it is to paganism what prayer, pilgrimage and fasting are to the Abrahamic faiths. Within paganism, witchcraft is held as too important to be undertaken lightly, and so is only practiced when all else fails, if at all. While many pagans never practice witchcraft, it is impossible to be a witch without also being pagan; this is akin to mastering a theory before putting it into practice (Jennings 2002, p.12).

While most pagans will describe themselves as pantheistic, the majority subscribe to a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses, some dedicating themselves to one particular Deity, or to one divine pairing. This divine pairing of a male and female union, such as Osiris and Isis; Hades and Persephone; and The Dagda and Danu, promotes balance, as to worship one deity without their gender counterpart can be seen as unbalanced and therefore detrimental to the self, and to the physical and spiritual worlds. There are also those who believe in one universal divine presence, common to all faiths, though worshipped under different names. Such pagans view all cat goddesses, all love goddesses and all lunar goddesses, as one goddess who simply has a different name within each country or tribe on the earth. Within the Celtic tradition the goddess of both death and

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### *'Seeing with Internal Eyes': Yeats and the Occult*

rebirth is Morrigan, while in Egyptian craft she is named Selket, and is called Kali in the Indian path. Similarly Aphrodite (Greek), Venus (Roman) and Ishtar (Babylonian) are all Goddesses of love (Blair 2002). This idea also applies to Gods, with the Greek god of the sea being Poseidon, who is called Neptune within Roman paganism and Manann Mac Lir within the Celtic tradition (Jordan 2002). Many quote Dion Fortune, whose real name was Violet Firth and who was a member of the Golden Dawn in the 1920's. Fortune left the Golden Dawn to form her own society, and in her magical fiction *The Sea Priestess* she wrote: 'all the gods are one god, and all the goddesses are one goddess, and there is one initiator' (Fortune cited in Penzack 2007, p.55). Yeats was well aware of the idea of the parallels between god-heads of differing cultures through Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and he uses the stereotypical dying god of two separate cultures in his plays *Calvary* and *On Baile's Strand*, where both Christ and Cuchulain are sons of a god; both are leaders of men, both die alone at a young age after a physical trial and both leave a strong legacy behind.

Acceptance of divine mystery is prevalent in all pagan paths, so while study and questioning are actively encouraged, it is accepted that humanity will never know everything about the divine. It is important to point out that pagans do not consider any deity as either good or evil; they believe the divine presence to be both. They do not subscribe to an idea of the Devil, which is an entity of Judaic origin and belief. Neither do they believe in demons. Some believe in fairies, but recognise these as elemental natural spirits which can be both positive and negative forces within the natural world. Interestingly when Yeats joined the Golden Dawn he took the name 'Demon Est Deus Inversus', meaning a demon is the inverse of god 'though the word "demon" may mean daimon or personal deity as readily as demon or devil' (Mills Harper in Yeats 2008, p.240, n64; Alldritt 1997, p.104 ). Perhaps it meant both, but in any case, Yeats's use of this

phrase as both a moniker and motto highlights a pagan understanding of the interconnectedness and relationship between the concepts of good and evil.

For pagans, the natural world is a spiritualised place and so deserves respect, it is a place where time must be spent in order to engage with Divinity, which is why many practice outside, as the earth is considered a grounding force for any magical practice, which will 'make it real – not just wishful thinking' (Hardie 1999, p.21). In this time of growing urbanisation, outdoor ritual is not available to all; many create a sacred space indoors, as and when they need it, while others also erect altars in their homes or gardens for magical purposes. 'The whole purpose of an altar is to act not only as a place of worship but a place to focus, channel, attract, and project magickal [*sic*] energies' (Horne 2000, p.116).

Pagans celebrate feast days or Sabbaths, most of which are related to the seasonal changes of the earth, though the number of Sabbaths varies, depending on the type of path or pantheon with which a pagan is associated. However the major Sabbaths remain the same for all. Most modern pagan paths have adopted the Celtic names for these Sabbaths. The year begins with Samhain, which signifies the beginning and end of the pagan year, and in the northern hemisphere this takes place on October 31<sup>st</sup>. On Samhain, the dead are remembered and celebrated; it is also a time for cleansing rituals in order to prepare for the New Year. Samhain, like most pagan rituals, has been diluted and has now become Halloween, a corruption of its other name All Hallows Eve, the hallowed or sacred eve. There are also many lesser Sabbaths, the main ones being celebrated on the winter and summer solstices of Yule and Litha and on the spring and autumn Equinoxes of Eostre and Mabon (McCoy 1998, pp.184-185). Yeats himself titled some of his personal prose *Samhain*, hence referencing the old name for Halloween and perhaps notably in conjunction with his system, the night when the barrier between the physical and spiritual

realms is at its weakest.

Witchcraft is often practiced on these Sabbaths, and also at different phases of the moon, depending on the aim of a spell. The moon is of huge significance, particularly to female witches, with the sun being seen as a masculine force. Often, magic is practiced at specific times to coincide with the phase of the moon appropriate to the aim of the spell or ritual, the waxing moon is associated with new beginnings and constructive magic, the waning moon corresponds to rituals of closure and destructive magic, while the full moon is a time of high power and is applicable to all magic, particularly that pertaining to female matters (Conway 1998).

Just as pagan Gods are neither good nor evil, likewise there is no such thing as black or white witchcraft; there is just witchcraft. It is the intent of the practitioner which makes the act constructive or destructive; however, most witchcraft is practiced for healing or purification. Nevertheless, destructive magic is seen as a necessary element of pagan life, as humans are both positive and negative beings, and it is believed that 'a witch who cannot hex, cannot heal' (Budapest 1989 cited in Horne 2000, p.7). As I have stated, there are some who never practice witchcraft, believing magic to be unnecessary, while others separate magic into two distinct categories:

High Magic is said to be that of trying to bring about the spiritual enlightenment or personal development of the practitioner, and a closer relationship and understanding of the divine Cosmos. Low Magic is more concerned with the mundane and everyday world, and includes spells healing, gaining wealth, position or a partner. (Jennings 2002, p.118)

Witchcraft is all about balance and energy; it is about channelling the energies of the natural world and then directing them toward a specific outcome. Some induce an almost trance-like state in order to do this, there are others who use alcohol or drugs to do so, but

this is discouraged by most; instead mediation is the more popular method. Many also use music or chants to achieve a heightened state, particularly music with a strong drum beat or base line. Many tools are employed, by both hedge and coven witches: candles, crystals, cloaks, cauldrons, goblets or chalices, amulets, mirrors, incense, wands and athames, which are double edged ceremonial knives or daggers are all employed in ritual magic (Calafia 2008, pp.323-330). Many of these tools were employed by Golden Dawn members during their own rituals (Regardie 1990). Yeats's guardian in *At the Hawk's Well* could be easily seen as a witch, as someone who stands on a boundary and knows secrets beyond that of the understanding of the material mortal world; 'she becomes the agent through which the superhuman manifests itself to the human world' (Knowland 1983, p. 117), I will discuss this further in the later analysis of the play.

Most pagan rituals take a basic structure which can be adapted for specific purposes. Generally, rituals begin with a sacred space being opened, cleansed and protected; many lay a circle of salt to do so, though only indoors, as outdoors, this practice would be harmful to the earth over time. Once the circle has been opened, the magical work may be done at the end of which, the circle is closed, cleansed and blessed. Many also leave offerings, usually in the form of cakes and wine or ale. In later chapters, I will explore the similarities of this process to that of a dramatic performance.

Symbols are also significant within paganism, where they are used as talismans for protection; as visual aids on which to focus during meditation; and as signifiers of a particular path or deity. The most commonly known and used is the pentacle, a five pointed star, which symbolises harmony and the merging of the male and female aspects. Upright, with one point at the top, it is a symbol of life; inverted, it is a symbol of death. This does not mean actual death, but rather a symbolic death. This could represent the end of a way of life, a relationship, or even a job. The triple spiral is also prevalent as a

sign of the triple elements of life, death and rebirth, and it is often associated with women as a symbol of the three phases of female life: maiden, mother and crone; it can also be used as a symbol of the phases of the moon (McCoy 1999, p.169).

Paganism is a varied and widespread faith, yet it is not a public faith, it is one which is practiced privately, alone or in a group. There is no call for declarations of faith, as most believe faith to be an internal force which has no need for outside validation. Ultimately they believe that all humans have the right to walk whatever spiritual path they wish, and as a result, they respect all spiritual and religious paths as valid and as a personal choice.

During the late nineteenth century, and the early twentieth century, paganism, albeit a watered-down version, was thrust into the public sphere by the fashionable trend toward secret societies which took on some of its practices and beliefs, while incorporating elements of other systems of belief and using them to inform their own occult philosophies and rituals:

Occultism became the language of radical counter-culture in late nineteenth century France, just as paganism did in Britain during the same period. [...] Unsurprisingly, it [Occultism] soon spread from France to most parts of the European cultural world, including Britain. (Hutton 1999, p.72)

The central points highlighted above: the ideas concerning ritual structure, harmony and balance; the ideas on gender and the sun and moon; the use of music, chant, dance and symbol, are all reoccurring aspects of Yeatsian theory and theatre, which will be explored in the later chapters. Throughout his personal prose and letters, Yeats makes numerous mentions of his meditations upon a colour or symbol, as well as notions of calling upon spirits (particularly in his letters to George Russell). Throughout his life, he had embraced pagan practice to 'summon the invisible powers and gaze into the astral light; for we had

learned to see with the internal eyes' (Yeats 2004, p.182).

Paganism informed every group with which Yeats was involved, the main one being the Golden Dawn, which also borrowed from systems other than paganism. While Theosophy borrowed elements of Hinduism and Egyptian paganism, The Golden Dawn took from Kabbalah and Rosicrucianism, and also saw its origins in both Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism. As the Order of the Golden Dawn played a major role in Yeats's life and thinking, it is important to understand the traditions from which they borrowed and built upon. Yeats's philosophy is a multi-layered one, as he himself, built upon the Golden Dawn's teachings incorporating paganism, Celtic mythology, touches of Gnosticism and German philosophy. It is now appropriate to examine the societies which influenced the Order of the Golden Dawn, beginning with the oldest Freemasonry.

## **Freemasonry**

The origins of Freemasonry are unclear. Some contend that the society's origins can be traced back to the Biblical King Solomon and his chief architect Hiram Abif, while others locate the foundations of Freemasonry in 16<sup>th</sup> century Scotland. Whatever the true origins, Freemasonry became a movement which influenced every organisation which came after it. Such societies were ones 'into which members were initiated upon an oath to observe confidentiality of proceedings, and which contained a strong ceremonial element. The source, and thereafter the main tradition, of these was Freemasonry' (Hutton 1998, p.52).

In terms of my research, the only elements of Freemasonry which are of interest are the central tenants and structures which would later influence the Golden Dawn, and by extension, the magical practices, religious beliefs and ritualised drama of Yeats. As I have already noted, there are two versions of the history of Freemasonry. One claims that

the society is over two thousand years old, originating from the grand architect of the biblical Solomon, Hiram Abif. Most, however believe this to be little more than myth, though a prominent one which influenced the rituals surrounding initiation into the third degree of masonry. According to Jeremy Harwood: the 'legend became part of Freemasonry between 1723 and 1738. [...] It is a ritualistic drama, actually acted out in the lodge during the progress to the Third Degree initiation, in which the candidate plays the part of Hiram Abif' (Harwood 2006, p.18). It is generally accepted that the masons evolved out of guilds of stone masons operating throughout Europe during the medieval period. These stone masons travelled throughout Europe looking for work, and in order to be recognised by other members of both their craft and their guilds, they formed a coded language of signs and symbols, which were later incorporated into the society that became known as the Freemasons.

It is accepted that the first official and formal Freemason Grand Lodge was founded in an ale house in London in 1717. From this point on, the society quickly spread throughout Europe, and this Freemasonry was far removed from that of the medieval guilds:

The eighteenth century witnessed a metamorphosis of Freemasonry from an operative craft into a symbolic speculative society whose ceremonies had fossilised a builder's tradition. [...] The admission of non-operatives into once operative lodges meant that the practical knowledge of the builder's art had stagnated into the trappings of the ceremonial. Apprentice became initiate: the master builder was now closer to a master of ceremonies. Within the Masonic arcane, the symbol served to celebrate abandoned skills. (Mulvey Roberts, 1995, p.107)

Freemasonry was now a quasi-philosophical, secular brotherhood based upon a tradition of secrecy, arcane knowledge and fraternity, as it was traditionally only open to men. The

society's aims were to promote morality; it sought 'to advance the practice of brotherly love and charitable action among all persons – not simply among Masons' (MacNulty 2006, p.9). Freemasonry does not promote any one faith, but 'requires its members to believe in the existence of a "Supreme Being"' (MacNulty 2006, p.9). The nature of the Deity, or of the corresponding Scripture, is dependent upon the individual's own personal beliefs, and is not the concern of any other member of the society. Ronald Hutton claims that the society became more pagan as it continued to progress into a spiritual system of belief and ritual:

Something very apparent about both Freemasonry and the affiliated orders is that the religious language which they used, and the tradition which it implied, was not a Christian one. It implied no necessary hostility toward Christianity, but in its determination to produce a spiritual ambience in which all denominations could be at ease, and representing an accumulated wisdom of millennia, passed on through unbroken descent, resulted in a syncretic patriarchal monotheism in which all ancient sky-gods and father-gods were regarded as aspects of the Supreme Being, and Christ was quietly pushed out of the picture. (Hutton 1999, p.61)

This is true of all subsequent societies: all claimed Christian or Judaic origins, principles and practices, yet their practices and beliefs appear primarily pagan in origin and structure. It is at this time that the idea of Christian magic came forward, as the term 'Christian' put an acceptable gloss on illegal pagan activities. The British Witchcraft Act was only repealed in 1951, 'mainly because it was thought that Witches no longer existed' (Jennings 2002, p.12). Invitation to be a Freemason was never extended to would-be initiates; rather candidates must approach masonry as free individuals, who choose to undertake the spiritual endeavours of the society.

The rites and rituals of Masonry mainly pertain to progression of the degrees, and

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### *'Seeing with Internal Eyes': Yeats and the Occult*

rites include prayers, a memorised dialogue between initiate and initiator, and oaths of loyalty and confidentiality to the brotherhood and their craft. The most interesting rite is that of the third degree, during which a ritual dramatisation of the murder of Hiram Abif occurs. In this ritual, the initiate takes on the role of Abif, while his fellow masons act as the murderers (Harwood 2006, p.29). This ritual enacts the symbolic death and rebirth of the brother into a life of a higher consciousness of the divine element latent in man and his world. Freemasonry holds at its centre many signs and symbols pertaining to the stone mason's craft, including the gavel, the rule, the square, the keystone, the costumes of their rituals, and the freemason's apron. Freemasonry also uses Egyptian and Biblical iconography, such as the pyramid and the twin pillars of the temple of Solomon, named Boaz and Iachim, which symbolise wisdom, understanding, strength and stability. The pentacle star is also employed, and within Masonry, is said to be a symbol of wisdom and a representation of the five wounds of Christ. Perhaps the most well-known Masonic symbol is the of the all-seeing eye, as it has been immortalised on the American dollar, and this all-seeing eye is a representation of the omnipresence of the Great Architect, the divine presence (Harwood, 2006). Even though the Golden Dawn structured itself in a similar way to Freemasonry, the most important element here is that of a ritual drama. The Golden Dawn used drama as ritual as will be shown, and this is its primary area of influence on the dramatic theory and practice of Yeats. This sense of drama as a spiritual or religious experience or rite is prominent throughout Yeats's work, and will be discussed in following chapters.

Another association which is central to any view of Yeats's aesthetic and intellectual development is that of Rosicrucianism. The founding members of the Golden Dawn, were for the most part Rosicrucians, namely Dr. W. Wynn Westcott, Dr. W.R. Woodman and S. L. MacGregor Mathers: 'three prominent members of the Societas

Rosicruciana in Anglia, the Rosicrucian Society' (Gilbert 1995). When the rituals and initiations of the Golden Dawn were written, largely by MacGregor Mathers, they were infused with Rosicrucian symbolism, structure and ideas:

The ingredients that went in to Mathers's recipe included Qabalah, alchemy, tarot, astrology, and many other traditions, including the Rosicrucian legend. Golden Dawn members were led through a series of grades corresponding to the Gold-und Rosenkreuz system. [...] But it was the Rosicrucian legend that lay at the very center [*sic*] of the Golden Dawn system. (McIntosh 1997, pp.100-103).

## **Rosicrucianism**

Like Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism claims ancient roots that it cannot prove, at the centre of which is the figure of Hermes Trismegistos, meaning 'thrice greatest Hermes' (Hurton 2002, p.4). It is claimed that this figure was a living prophet who came to return the divine wisdom of Thoth-Hermes to man. Hermes Trismegistos was the link between the divine and man; the unifier of the physical and the spiritual. The cult of Thoth-Hermes is reputed to have been in existence in Egypt long before Alexander conquered the land in 331BC. Thoth-Hermes is an amalgamation of Hermes, the Greek messenger of the Gods, and the Egyptian Thoth, who ruled over the dead, magic, medicine and the moon (McIntosh 1997, pp.3-5). It is from this figure of Hermes Trismegistos that hermetic studies claim their authority:

The authority of Hermes Trismegistos was employed to dignify two main classes of writing. Firstly, a coterie of practical and theoretical lore relating to talismanic magic, astrology, astrological medicine and, notably alchemy, and secondly, philosophical writings in dialogue form. These latter tracts were concerned with the nature of god, man and the cosmos. (Hurton 2002, p.4)

## Chapter One

### 'Seeing with Internal Eyes': Yeats and the Occult

The writings referred to here are called the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The teachings of Hermeticism claim that, in order to be saved from the pure materialism of the physical life, spiritual vision is required. The physical world holds within it, and expresses, something of the spiritual plain which can be viewed through an enlightened eye. It is claimed that the *corpus* was written by a number of Greek authors whose aim was the promoting of Egypt as a place of spiritual insight and philosophical wisdom, and this knowledge seemed to be gleaned from Egyptian paganism.

Modern Rosicrucianism emerged out of Germany in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; the history of this movement is bound to the perhaps-mythical or allegorical figure of Christian Rosenkreutz. In 1614, in Germany, a document appeared which may have been circulating since 1610, claiming to be the lost teachings of one Christian Rosenkreutz. The *Fama Fraternitatis, dess Löblichen Ordens Des Rosenkreutzes* (*The Declaration of the Worthy Order of the Rosy Cross*), claimed that Rosenkreutz had lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and had acquired wisdom on his travels to the East. It was suggested that on his death, his followers had hidden his body, and that it had recently been rediscovered by the order, which according to their traditions, was an omen of the dawn of a new age. Over the following two years, two more documents emerged, the *Confessio Fraternitatis* which simply reiterated the teachings of the *Fama*, though more forcefully, and the *Die Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosenkreutz* (*The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*), which was first published in Strasbourg in 1616, and claimed to be written by Rosenkreutz himself (McIntosh 1997, p.xix). This incarnation of the Rosicrucians appears to have been dedicated to the study of nature in order to gain spiritual insight (MacNulty 2006, p.71). There were two distinct branches of teaching within the order, one concerning itself with the mystical, and the other being focused on the magical. The order also split the self into two distinct aspects, claiming the outer self usually expressed

itself through language, while the inner self communicated through symbols (McIntosh 1997, p. xxi; Hurton 2002, p.16).

Some claim that this order never existed and was merely an Enlightenment philosophical ideal created by a Protestant theologian called Johann Valentin Andreae, who is almost certainly the author of *The Chemical Wedding*, and co-author of the *Fama*, while the author of the *Confessio* is unknown, though some speculate that it was also written by Andreae (Hurton 2002). There are many accounts of educated men contacting the order in the hope of joining, and while none appear to have ever met a fellow member, many claimed to have found contact-details for fellow members in the leaves of books or in advertisements in national papers (McIntosh 1997, p.xxi). The order can then be seen as an imagined entity, one in which educated men could pursue scientific, philosophical and occult ideas. However the order's supposed beliefs and rituals were adopted by both Freemasonry and the Golden Dawn as if they had been a reality, and so in this way Rosicrucianism became a reality.

Whether Freemasonry was an influence on Rosicrucianism, or whether Rosicrucianism was an influence on Freemasonry, is unknown, and both sides of this argument are hotly debated. Either way, both societies are entwined, and both influenced the Golden Dawn greatly, so much so that an initiate who achieved the grade of Adeptus Minor, as Yeats did, was called a Rosicrucian (Brown 2001, pp.69-70). The idea of the split self, of an interior self which is expressed through symbols, is one which, though rooted in the Rosicrucian legend, is of paramount importance to Yeats as he progresses, as the idea of the characters and audience as split into two aspects is central to his dramatic theory and practice.

Another relevant society, and one in which Yeats immersed himself for a period, was the Theosophical Society, to which he was introduced through the writing of A. P.

Sinnet (Foster 1998, pp.45-47). Yeats joined the Theosophical Society in Dublin (Foster 1998, pp.45-47) which became his introduction to esoteric occultism, and it is from this starting point that Yeats began his spiritual journey, taking him through the Golden Dawn to a spiritual and artistic philosophy of his own devising, and one which he attempted to express through his dramatic work. Theosophy in and of itself contains little, but in terms of Yeatsian study, it is vital as it launched a process of both personal and professional exploration; I would maintain that Theosophy is the prologue to all Yeatsian occult study.

## **Theosophy**

Theosophy came to prominence through the figure of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in 1875, when she founded the Theosophical Society in New York. The headquarters were later moved to India, where they remain to this day. Yeats and George Russell joined the Dublin Theosophical Society in 1885. On moving to London in 1887, Yeats quickly joined the London branch of the order, and he very rapidly progressed to the newly established esoteric section, where he joined other advanced students whose time was spent studying tables of esoteric symbolism (Komesu 1984, p.82). Theosophy merged Eastern occult traditions, particularly Hinduism and Egyptian pagan symbolism to form a theory of spiritualism which promoted a universal brotherhood, a study of comparative religion and an ongoing investigation in search of the spiritual powers latent within the human race (Jordan 1996, p.162). This was very similar to Freemasonry in that every member was free to follow which ever religion they wished, and to worship any god they saw fit. Theosophy is thus not religious in motivation, but rather concerns itself with the esoteric doctrine which 'is thus really the missing link between materialism and spirituality' (Sinnott 1994, p.66).

However, Blavatsky herself promoted India as a source of spiritual enlightenment, just as the Hermetic traditions promoted Egypt in this way. In doing so, she 'described the old pagan Deities as useful personifications of natural forces, and both honoured and dismissed Christ by calling him merely one adept of the ancient and "true" religion' (Hutton 1999, p.19). The Theosophical Society lay out its aims as follows:

To form the nucleus of a universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, colour, race, sex, caste, or creed;

To promote the study of Âryan [referring to people or scriptures of Indo-European descent] and other Scriptures, of the world's religions and sciences, and to vindicate the importance of the old Asiatic literature, such as that of the Brâhmanical, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian philosophies;

To investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible, and the physic and spiritual powers latent in man especially. (Blavatsky 1948, p.8)

Blavatsky's investigations were strictly based on psychic and mystical principles; she forbade the practice of ritual magic, particularly of the form used during the medieval period (Hutton 1999, p.74):

Neither the Societas Rosicruciana nor The Theosophical Society actually practiced ritual magic; the most the later would do was establish an Esoteric Section in 1888; for the study of it. (De Blécourt et al 1999, 11)

In fact, the only reason Blavatsky set up the esoteric section of the society was to stop members leaving to join the more operative Golden Dawn.

Theosophy teaches that there are seven plains of existence which are all connected. The human self is spilt between the physical and the spiritual; it is the 'imperishable Ego' or spiritual self which is reborn through incarnation, with the physical self being in essence little more than a vehicle for the true spiritual Being (Blavatsky 1948, p.49). It is the spiritual being which strives for immortality, an immortality which

can only be granted through the achievement of a unity with the divine. Within Theosophy, the divine consciousness is not considered as an actual Being, as this would place a limitation on the divine:

We reject the idea of a personal, or an extra-cosmic and anthropomorphic god, who is but the gigantic shadow of a man, and not even of man at his best. If god is called infinite – i.e., limitless – and especially if absolute, how can he have a form and be a creator of anything? Form implies limitation, and a beginning as well as an end; and, in order to create, a Being must be able to think and plan. How can the Absolute be supposed to think- i.e., have any relation whatever to that which is limited, finite and conditioned. (Blavatsky 1948, p.23)

Theosophy maintains that the spiritual evolution of the human race is being watched over by a group of wise elder spiritual masters, or Mahâtmâs, who teach humanity about the spiritual truths of Theosophy, and it is from these gurus that Blavatsky claimed to have gained her knowledge and understanding of theosophy. She also claimed that the Mahâtmâs were sending her messages to guide her teachings, her published works and their theosophical cause; however, an investigator of the Psychological Research Society subsequently proved that Blavatsky had in fact written the messages herself (Hough 1984, p.37). This investigation also accused her of plagiarising her writings, a charge which she refuted, claiming that 'the mental vibrations of the Mahâtmâs, who dictated to her, and those of the plagiarized authors had unfortunately crossed' (Materer 1995, p.17).

Theosophy maintains that man has something of the divine latent within himself, and that this divine element can be reached through meditation, and is the universal aspect which binds all of humanity together. Communication with the Spiritual consciousness of others is possible through séances, again in order to gain knowledge of universal divine truths. It is the goal of the spiritual higher self to attain unity with the divine spiritual universal consciousness. This idea seems to have been taken directly from the Eastern

faiths that Blavatsky endorsed. Hinduism extols the notion of Brahman which states that each individual holds within them an element of the divine Brahman, and in order to be absorbed fully into the immortal divine consciousness of Brahman, one must endeavour to reach a heightened state of Being.

Hinduism is a collective of many different Indic faiths, however the most common form worships three principle deities; Shikta, the creative female force of the universe; Shiva, the destroyer; and Vishnu the maintainer, who balances the creative and destructive forces of the universe. Theosophy also uses Egyptian symbolism and the idea of one great spiritual power: 'the Egyptians revered the "one-only-one" as Nout; and it is from this word that Anaxagoras got his denomination nous' (Blavatsky 1948, p.33). The deity to whom Blavatsky is referring here is also known as Nut, the goddess of the sky.

Theosophy is in essence little more than a philosophical idea which drew on a variety of differing sources, Blavatsky's teachings were 'reckless in their mixture of Hindu and Buddhist material with a comprehensive selection of Western occultist lore – Hermetic, Neoplotonic, Cabalistic and Rosicrucian' (Hough 1984, p.35). However, Theosophy offers little in the way of a practical occult study, and it was because of this that Yeats left the society. During his time in the Theosophical society, Yeats had been following his own occult investigations through magic and experimentation; he also encouraged his fellow members to do the same, and this became 'a cause of scandal in the society, and in 1890 he was asked to resign' (Hough 1984, p.41). Indeed, he was told by a secretary that he was 'not in agreement with their methods or their philosophy' (Yeats 1955, p.182). According to Yeats's own letters, the reason was down to an article he had written criticising the order:

They wanted me to promise to criticise them never again in same fashion. I refused because I looked upon request as undue claim to control right of individual to

think as best pleased him. I may join them again later. We are of course friends and allies-except in this matter & except that I told them that they were turning a good philosophy into a bad religion. (Yeats 1986, p.234)

However, he had already joined another society in 1890, which would satisfy some of his occult desires, namely the Golden Dawn. However, the ideas of an innate spirituality or divinity within humanity and of the division between the physical and spiritual selves promoted by Theosophy are ones that appear again and again throughout Yeats's work.

## **The Golden Dawn**

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn began when S. L. MacGregor Mathers, Dr. W. Wyn Westcott and Dr. W. R. Woodman, three self-professed Masonic Rosicrucians, claimed to have found contact details for their German counterpart, Ann Sprengel while deciphering a 'mysterious manuscript', which they allegedly received from a fellow mason (Gilbert 1995, pp.303-4). On contacting Sprengel, they were given permission to found the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in London. However it is doubtful that she ever existed.

In 1888, they opened their first temple in London under the name of Isis Urania. Yeats joined the order in March 1890, as an initiate of the degree of Neophyte; at this point, he was still a member of the Theosophical society until asked to resign in the November of the same year (Greer and Kuntz 2007, p.20). In 1891, Westcott announced the death of their superior in Germany, Anna Sprengel. By 1898, Mathers was the only one of the founding fathers of the organisation remaining, and as such, had full authority over the order's structure, members and general running. Following Helena Blavatsky's death in 1891, Mathers announced that the Spiritual Masters who had been guiding her had now contacted him, so that he could continue their work (Hutton 1999, p.76).

The Golden Dawn drew on all prominent occult ideologies and practices to form their own structure and rituals, including Masonry, Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah, paganism, Judaism and Gnosticism. Many claim that they were a Christian or Judaic organisation and as such could be termed a neo-pagan society, however 'there was no credo or statement of belief as such; all was implicit in the ritual' (Hough 1984, p.42). The rituals were not of any ancient form or structure; rather they were largely created and constructed by Mathers, who drew on his own knowledge of a variety of occult rituals to form his own teachings, over which he had authority and a supposed all-encompassing understanding. Yeats, in his later dealings with Mathers, became aware of his authoritarian streak, stating that Mathers envisioned a change in the world order in which 'he imagined a Napoleonic role for himself, a Europe transformed according to his fancy, Egypt restored, a Highland Principality, and even offered subordinate posts to unlikely people' (Yeats 1955, p.337).

The aims of the rituals of the Golden Dawn were to encourage the initiates to subsume divine forces, not by cajoling deities and spiritual forces, but by achieving spiritual self-actualisation (Hutton 1999, p.83). At least that was the theory, yet in practice, many of the rituals did invoke spirits for the purposes of granting the magicians their desired result, as at the end of each ritual, the spirits were released (Regardie 1990). During rituals, temples were decorated with altars, pillars and swathes of cloth, and tools were employed to further magical effect, including consecrated talismans goblets, daggers, sceptres or wands, ankhs, crosses, and candles. During the ritual for spiritual development, adepts placed ingredients of wine, bread, salt and a rose in a cauldron as a sacrifice to the invoked (Regardie 1990, p.439).

The Golden Dawn took magical practice and made it the pursuit of an intellectual elite, and in doing so, they made the pagan natural craft and belief a lower base form,

rather than a foundation to be built upon and respected as an originating experience. The Golden Dawn, as already noted, built their system of magic upon Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, neither of which are pagan in origin, though both borrowed heavily from pagan traditions and practices. Both societies were elitist in that, not only were they patriarchal, but also their members were drawn from the educated upper-classes of society. Through this process of selection, they separated their constructed form of ritual magic from the older universal form of ritual magic found in paganism. The Golden Dawn and its predecessors structured magical learning into a strata of degrees and promotions; magic was now severed from the older instinctive form and instead became a learned discipline. The Golden Dawn is the point in modern history in which high magic and low magic become two distinct forms and philosophies of magical theory and practice, labelling practitioners as either magician or witch. This distinction has found its way into modern pagan practice, as highlighted by the earlier Jennings comment outlining the difference between high and low magic. They are also the society which thrust Abrahamic symbolism into their system of high magic, forcing the polytheistic pagan traditions to fuse with the monotheistic Abrahamic faiths:

Many witches disdain the Judeo-Christian symbolism of high magick, or the intellectual, masculine approach to the mysteries. In their opinion, high magick is full of pomp and ceremony, with few practical results, and most witches favour practical results. (Penczack 2007, p.67)

In simple terms, the Golden Dawn placed an importance upon the minutiae of the ceremony, thereby overwhelming the ritual itself, and the intended outcome of that ritual, so that the ceremony became a rigid performance rather than a spiritual practice. It is clear that Yeats hankered to belong to the elitist high magic group, and studied high magic in order to achieve this sense of belonging, exemplified perhaps by his writing of 'Is the

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order of R.R & A.C. to remain a magical order', and his campaign not only to keep the order together, but to return it to its strict formulaic structure of ranks and examinations. However, his continual use of ancient myth and magic in his dramas seems to betray his desire to return to the roots of magic, just as he wished to return drama to its ritual Greek roots.

The Golden Dawn was structured as a hierarchy of ten grades, however no-one but Mathers and his wife Moïna seem to have passed on to the three highest degrees. Mathers took the names of the degrees from Jewish mysticism. An initiate entered at the grade of Neophyte, and proceeded along the ten grades, yet it appears few adepts achieved higher than the fifth grade of Adeptus Minor, which related to Tiphareth in the sefirot, signifying the attribute of harmony.

According to Israel Regardie, the main aim of every member of the Golden Dawn was to merge with the divine element latent in humanity, and the influence of this attempted fusion on Yeats's dramatic theory will become very clear as this study develops. During rituals, the adepts would invoke a god or spirit and beseech them to 'conquer the evil that is in me, by the binding and controlling of my mortal parts and passions' (Regardie 1990, p.436). This evil is the physical, and therefore corruptible, element of humanity, and by asking the gods to control it, the human adepts are seeking to promote and enlarge their own innate spiritual aspect. However, does begging the gods to control human physicality absolve the human of the responsibility for their physical actions? The Golden Dawn had no code of morality as such, yet their view of human physicality as a lesser surely had some impact on their moral lives.

Regardie himself was a member who was ostracised for publishing the order's secrets and rituals. He claimed that the grades higher than those of Adeptus Minor were beyond the understanding of ordinary people un-schooled in the esoteric and occult. This

idea is no doubt one which Mathers encouraged, as it cemented his own position of authority as so very few members achieved the higher grades. Every member was encouraged to seek unity with god, though the Dawn never ascribed to any one god or religion, so ultimately that choice was a wholly subjective one on the part of the individual member:

They were also expected to cultivate their psychic abilities, by meditation, visualization, and experimentation with clairvoyance, Tantric techniques, geomancy, numerology, astrology, and the projection of the spirit from the body. (Regardie 1973, cited in Hutton 1999, p.77)

Rituals were structured and formalised, with each member wearing the robes and symbols pertaining to their particular grade, and the ritual circles were heavily adorned with Egyptian symbolism including the Ankh (McIntosh 1997, p.101). Rituals also included Biblical symbolism, particularly images of the Seraphim who appeared to Ezekiel with the four heads of man, a bull, an eagle and a lion (Ezekiel 2:10). One of their most common and well-known rituals is that of the lesser pentagram, which, in reality, is an expansion of the pagan pentacle salute, which consists of crossing oneself with the pentacle star, much as a Christian would bless themselves with the sign of the cross. Whether the commonplace of the pentacle salute in paganism today is a result of the Golden Dawn's influence on the modern craft, or whether the practice pre-dates the order, though the symbol itself certainly does, is unknown.

The ritual of Adeptus Minor was based upon the Rosicrucian legend of Christian Rosenkreutz, during which the adept would lie on an altar as if he were the dead Rosenkreutz lying in his tomb, awaiting discovery. This death was a symbolic one which signified the initiate's progression from the outer order to the inner order of the Golden Dawn (McIntosh 1997, pp.100-101). During this ritual, adepts took the following oath:

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I further promise and swear that with the divine Permission I will, from this day forward, apply myself to the Great Work – Which is, to purify and exalt my Spiritual Nature so that with Divine Aid I may at length attain to be more than human, and thus gradually raise and unite myself to my Higher Divine Genius. (Regardie 1990, p.10)

For the Adeptus Minor ritual, two pillars were placed at either side of the room, one black, one white. These were borrowed from the pillars of Freemasonry, and symbolised the place the Adeptus Minor grade took in the grand order, in that this grade was one of harmony, as an Adeptus Minor stood between the light and the dark; the outer and inner temples of occult knowledge; and the purely physical and spiritual worlds. The Adeptus Minor grade separated the inner and outer temples of the Golden Dawn, as it was within this grade that the adept moved from the practice of low magic to the study and practice of the higher philosophical magic (Regardie, 1999).

The members who initiated a candidate, tied the candidate to a cross called the cross of suffering symbolising the sufferings of Christ, and supposedly also those of Christian Rosenkreutz, yet during this ritual, the chief adept who is conducting the ceremony announces that:

I am Amoun, the concealed one, the opener of the day. I am Osiris Onnophris, the justified one. I am the lord of life triumphant over Death. There is no part of me which is not of the Gods. (Regardie 1990, p.239)

Both Amoun and Osiris belong to Egyptian paganism, with Amoun being the creator god, the god of the Sun and sky, as well as being the supreme King of the Egyptian world. Osiris is the god of the underworld, of death and rebirth, as he returned to life after his own death (Jordan 2002), and here again, is an echo of the idea of the universal dying god as mentioned in the introduction. As I have already stated, many claimed the order to be either Christian or Judaic, in other words Monotheistic, yet the line 'there is no part of me

which is not of the Gods', contradicts that view somewhat, as does the blatant blending of every religious path known to Mathers into Golden Dawn theory, practice, lore and law.

This ritual best exemplifies the tendency of Mathers and the Golden Dawn to merge religious and spiritual paths, yet to do so in a way that is contradictory. Egyptian paganism, Rosicrucianism and the Monotheism of the Abrahamic faiths, are significantly different in terms of ritual and some core beliefs, yet Mathers used them to construct a secret society over which he spread a cloak of vague esoteric occultism, which enthralled his members.

The Golden Dawn society unravelled as Mathers began accepting more and more initiates, one of whom was Aleister Crowley. However, those few who had achieved one of the higher grades, including Florence Farr, refused to promote him to the grade of Adeptus Minor. Mathers's continuing associations with Crowley, and his bestowing of the Adeptus Minor grade upon him, caused tension within the order. Mathers at this point was living in Paris, and the distance made it impossible for him to retain the control he had once had on his members. He went so far as to demand written statements of voluntary submission from his members, though oddly Yeats was exempt from this demand, perhaps because he would not have signed such a statement (Mills Harper 1974, pp.14-18). In January 1900, Yeats and Mathers argued, and the Dawn finally split into two factions. The London order passed regulations which refused to recognise the uninitiated, namely Crowley, and began to redraw the constitution of the order, and to reject theosophy and freemasonry as elements of the order, while retaining the Rosicrucian connections.

In 1900, an American couple, Theodore and Edith Horos, made contact with Mathers, and somehow Edith Horos managed to convince Mathers that she was in contact

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with the spirit of Anna Sprengel, and proceeded to deceive him into supplying them with details of some of his orders rituals. Mathers had met the couple the year previously in London. They had founded several bogus occult orders in a variety of countries, and had duped some innocent people out of valuables and money. In early 1901, they arrived in London and tried to use Mathers' name to gain access to the London branch; however, several members of the order were aware of what had happened in Paris, and it was Yeats who wrote to Mathers to warn him that they had returned (Mills Harper 1974, p.109).

In 1901, the Horos's, whose real names were Frank and Edith Jackson, were arrested, charged and found guilty in December of that year of fraud, and the rape of sixteen year old Daisy Adams. It is assumed that the rape was part of a supposed initiation ceremony (Gilbert 1995, p.306). Frank Jackson received a 15 year jail term, and his wife a 7 year sentence (Jordan 1996, p.86). Yeats himself, in a letter to Lady Gregory claimed to have 'heard nothing of the case until [...] the morning of the trial' (Kelly 1994, p.139).

As a result of the internal rivalries, difficulties and external damnation, the London branch of the Golden Dawn split into two separate temples, the Isis Urania and the Stella Matutina. The members of Isis Urania devoted themselves to Christian mysticism and rejected ritual magic and astral activities or divination. The Stella Matutina temple was named the Amoun temple and these members devoted themselves to the study and practice of magic, particularly astral communication with Christian Rosenkreutz and his original Arabic teachers (Jordan 1996, pp.157-8). Yeats was the head of the Stella Matutina until 1904, but remained an active member until the Stella Matutina temple dissolved in 1920 (Jordan 1996, p.190). While this was the end of Yeats's formal dealing with the Golden Dawn and its offshoots, he remained a student of the occult for the rest of his life, and brought his studies to bear through his dramatic works. Mills Harper has maintained that Yeats for all his involvement with the order, retained a certain scepticism:

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I think that he had always looked upon Mathers as a unifying figurehead rather than a divine agent. He suggests also that he is sceptical (as usual) about the claims for the 'extreme antiquity' of the Order, possibly the authenticity of the Cypher Manuscripts themselves. (Mills Harper, 1974, p.73)

As the Crowley crisis brewed, Yeats became disillusioned with Mathers. Yeats had respected him and followed his example, but had always seen him as something of a fantasist, particularly in relation to Mathers's affectation of a Celtic self-mythology and highland dress (Yeats, 1955). None the less, throughout his time in the order, Yeats studied and practiced ceremonial magic of the high variety, and yet he also studied and recorded the peasant practices of low paganism that remained prevalent in the folk traditions of the older Irish people whom he sought out, and this is another example of Yeats trying to balance two states of being, namely practiced logical study and ancient spiritualised practices.

During his time in the first incarnation of the Golden Dawn, Yeats had sought, and received permission from Mathers to form a Celtic-based order (Foster 1998). In 1897, Yeats began working on the formation of the Celtic Mystical Order, and, though it ultimately came to nothing, it remained on his mind, and he thought to return to it after the Golden Dawn split in 1901. The plan never came to fruition, but perhaps found expression in his emerging dramatic theory rather than in any formulaic ritual. Once again, the ideas promoted within the Golden Dawn: the engaging of the latent divinity within humanity, the use of ritual drama and symbols, all find expression in Yeats's vision of humanity and art. The Golden Dawn had taught him what high magical ritual looked like, especially the elaborate costumes, staging and the masks used, and all of these facets would later reappear in his dramatic theory as he formulated how his ritual drama would look to the audience. While the Celtic Mystical Order never actually came to pass, it could be argued that the Celtic ritual re-emerged in his theatre, where the roots of most of his

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stories were Celtic or Irish, and in making the stage a ritual sacred space for the performance of such material, it could be claimed that through Yeats's vision of drama, the Celtic Mystical Order became a performative reality:

Not only did the Order provide Yeats with the magical and symbolic material to fuel his creative work, but it also provided some invaluable contacts who would go on to become key players in Yeats's other interests, most notably the actress Florence Farr and the theatre benefactor, Annie Horniman. However, it was the world of magic which furnished him with the language, symbols and techniques to evoke the images found in his work. The Golden Dawn provided him with the possibility that the world of myth and magic found in his imagination may indeed, exist elsewhere. (Butler, 2011, p.173)

These organisations and faiths can be seen as the building blocks on which Yeats structured his own dramatic dualist dynamic. This should be no surprise as he had studied at the feet of two masters in Mathers and Blavatsky, both of whom had created spiritual structures over which they dominated. Yeats however, never dominated his construct; he did not use his theories to govern others rather he used them to provoke his subjective audience to engage with the spiritual divine latent within themselves on their own terms, and in the next chapter, another of his sustaining areas of influence will be discussed, namely his abiding interest in philosophy, especially that of German philosophy, and the concept of the conscious and unconscious as outlined in psychoanalytic theory.

## **Chapter Two**

### **‘Transcending and Creating Forms’: Yeats and European Philosophy**

In the previous chapter, I explored the pertinent pagan, neo-pagan and occult influences on Yeatsian theory; this chapter will continue to view influences, while also discovering some parallels, between Yeats’s ideas and some relevant theories of self. This chapter will explore Yeats’s theory in relation to the philosophies of Friedrich Schiller, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, and also in relation to the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Like Yeats, Schopenhauer was hugely influenced by Eastern paganism and applied many of its central tenants to his philosophy. Both Nietzsche and Schiller held Greek civilization, and the Greek pagan ethos, as a template for their own philosophies, and it is well know that Jung studied and practiced occultism, using many of the symbols and archetypes found within the occult in his own work. While it is unclear if Yeats actually read Schiller, as I have already stated, he did read Schopenhauer and in any case, the influence of both philosophers on the thinking of Nietzsche cannot be ignored. I would maintain that to understand the correlations between Nietzsche and Yeats, Nietzsche’s influential predecessors must be given their due credit. Yeats was well aware of the psychoanalytic theories of both Freud and Jung (Foster 2005). Jung had a copy of Yeats’s *A Vision* in his library, though it has been

reported that Jung wrote in private correspondence that in relation to Yeats 'I am not acquainted with his work at all. I have never read a line of his' (cited by Olney 1980, p.3).

It has been stated that 'there are no references to Freud in Yeats' (Bloom 1970, p.239), although according to Bloom, he is reported to have spoken of Freud and Jung to Henry W. Nevinson, who noted in his diary, dated 1916, that Yeats 'talked of Freud and Jung and the Subconscious self, applying the doctrine to art' (Nevinson 1944, p.55, cited by Whitaker 1989, p.302, n.32). This thesis will argue that there is a correlation between the Freudian structure of the psyche and the Yeatsian system, and I will further suggest that Jungian themes and systems are also evident in the writing and thinking of Yeats.

It is far beyond the scope or scheme of this chapter to investigate every aspect of any of the philosophies or theories mentioned above; rather I will be focusing solely on those areas which are most prominent within Yeats's own dramatic thought and work. I will consider Schiller's and Schopenhauer's ideas surrounding art, and explore these ideas as they appear within Yeats. There has already been much written on Nietzsche's theory of eternal reoccurrence in relation to Yeats's theory of the gyres as set out in *A Vision*, but this is not of central significance to my research, which focuses on the drama, so I will look at other aspects of their intellectual connection.

In 1902, Yeats received a copy of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* from the New York lawyer and artistic patron John Quinn (Bohlmann 1982, p.1). The volume Quinn sent included the three works: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *The Case of Wagner* and *A Genealogy of Morals*. Yeats's ideas concerning duality and balance were already mostly formed by this time; however, he found in Nietzsche an echo of his own theories, and saw him as someone who had come to 'the same conclusions on several cardinal matters' (Yeats 1994a, p.313). Yeats, it seems, had previously been aware of Nietzsche through the essays of Havelock Ellis, which had been published by 1896, and

which emphasised the 'parallels with Blake, his [Nietzsche's] attacks on perceived morality, and his discussion of the Greeks' pursuit of unity in culture as a hallmark of culture' (Foster 1998, p.159). Foster claims that Yeats was aware of Nietzschean ideas through his exposure to the Ellis essays, and perhaps also to James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*; however, many of Nietzsche's ideas find their genesis in earlier philosophers particularly Schopenhauer whom Yeats had read in his youth (Foster 1998, p.213; Yeats 1961, p.347).

In Nietzsche, Yeats found a parallel in relation to their respective philosophies of Art, though the two philosophies do diverge at certain points. Yeats wrote in 1903 that 'Nietzsche remains to me as stirring as ever, though I do not go all the journey with him' (Yeats 1994a, p.335). Much has been written on the relationship between Nietzschean and Yeatsian ideas, yet very little work has been done on Yeats's connection to Schopenhauer, who is rarely discussed and certainly never given significant credit in relation to Yeatsian theories. There has also been quite a lot written in relation to comparing Yeats's whole man with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, albeit in relation to Yeatsian poetry; however what Yeats understood by the *Übermensch* is unclear, indeed Nietzsche's own 'use of the word *Übermensch* is "elastic" to the end' (Bohlmann 1982, p.113):

The *Übermensch* is clearly something more than human, but Nietzsche's description is so thin that one must conclude that the very concept is more an expression of disgust with human beings as they are than an actual ideal of what they might be. (Solomon 1988, p.124)

As there is so much confusion and argument around Nietzsche's own meaning, and Yeats's comprehension of it, I will not add to that confusion, when I am unconvinced that the ideal of 'the sublime one' (Nietzsche 1997, p.114) has anything more to add to Yeats's

concept of the dramatic whole man, particularly given that Yeats had formed this ideal of the whole balanced human before he read Nietzsche.

However, I will add this observation: the *Übermensch* appears to be a point at which Yeats and Nietzsche diverge dramatically. Nietzsche wants man to 'o'erleap his own shadow' (Nietzsche 1997, p.114). The *Übermensch*, as I understand the concept, is a man, who accepts that he has no predestined divine essence and in understanding this, overcomes the restrictions placed upon him by society and moral norms, and so takes the leap and becomes a self-actualised being who designs his own fate inasmuch as anyone can do so. The *Übermensch*, then, is a human who has reached his full potential. Yeats, in contrast, does not want man to cast off his inner shadow; instead he wants his ideal man to be a human who engages with the shadow, and in so doing, becomes the self-actualised whole man who accepts all facets of his being: his physical presence, his personal spiritual aspect and his part in the collective universal divine, all aspects that have a clear relationship to the neo-pagan ideals of the various societies examined in the last chapter. Therefore, I will concern myself with Nietzsche's philosophy of Art and his dualist idea of humanity.

## **Schiller**

Friedrich Schiller emerged out of the German Romantic movement, also known as *Sturm und Drang* (the storm and the stress). This rebel movement wanted to break from enlightenment empirical philosophy and establish artistic expression as a valid philosophical language. Politically, much of the *Sturm und Drang* movement is tied to German nationalism and unification. The German Romantics were post-Kantian idealists who wanted the German language to be recognised as a philosophical language, and to

be held in the same esteem within intellectual circles as were English and French (Solomon 1988). They also argued that art as a philosophical mode of expression was as valid as empirical or rational language. For these post-Kantians, emotional truth and instinctive human feeling were as much truth as that which was tangible and cognitively held to be true; structures of feeling were now a mode of knowledge possessed by all, regardless of societal position, economic or educational standards. This line of thinking is very reminiscent of romanticism as academics use the term, and certainly we can understand why the term is so often applied to Yeats particularly in relation to his poetry. The romantic element within Yeats is not my particular area of focus but it is perfectly clear that his ideas surrounding immediate emotional audience response could be seen as paralleling the central aspects of romanticism.

Friedrich Schiller's main concern was to encourage moral education through the aesthetic as opposed to the religious, as Kant had argued, and so, he proposed a moral system whereby an internal aesthetic informs the right and moral action in humans: 'a synthesis of morality and aesthetic judgement' (Solomon 1988, p.46). This element of his work has little direct bearing upon my research; however Schiller's thoughts on aesthetic beauty, and his ideas concerning the division between the emotional and physical aspects of humanity does impact upon Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, which means that elements of Schiller are found in the philosophies which followed him, elements which are mirrored within different aspects of Yeatsian dramatic theory.

Schiller believed humans to be immersed in the world, and yet also able to step back and view the world in which they live from a different perspective, and so to him, human beings are subject to two forms of knowledge: the universal emotional form and the removed cognitive form. He was 'especially concerned with the "fragmentation" of an entire generation of Germans, who found the separation of the "heart and the head"

intolerably alienating' (Solomon 1988, p.45). He believed that humanity possesses an innate spiritual quality: '[w]e exist because we exist; we feel, think and will because there is something other besides ourselves' (Schiller 2004, p.61). This was a belief with which Yeats was in agreement: 'god puts divinity into man as a man puts humanity into his dog' (Yeats, 1962, p.296), and like Yeats, Schiller too argued for the unification of this divine element, or soul, and the physical self:

Every individual man, it may be said, carries in disposition and determination a pure ideal man within himself, with whose unalterable unity it is the great task of his existence, throughout all his vicissitudes, to harmonize. [...] Man in time can be made to coincide with man in idea. (Schiller 2004, p.31)

Schiller refers to the unchanging ego that which Yeats would go on to call the spiritual anti-self, as the person, and the mutating physical aspect, the 'man in time', as the condition. While René Descartes had separated the mind from the body with his aphorism, '*Cogito ergo sum*', Schiller wanted to re-establish a relationship between the two aspects of humanity, as he strove for a balanced ideal, or what he refers to as 'the beautiful soul', and this balanced idealised self is Yeats's 'whole man'.

Yeats, too, criticised Descartes' creation of the schism in the human psyche 'Descartes, Locke, and Newton took away the world and gave us its excrement instead' (Yeats 1962, p.325). In Schiller's construct, man has two impulses, the sensuous and the reasoned, the sensuous being that which ties man to his physical presence and 'seeks to make him pure object' (Snell 'Introduction', in Schiller 2004, p.13). The impulse of reason however comes to him 'from the Absolute, and is capable of leading him back to the Absolute' (Snell 'Introduction' in Schiller 2004, p.13). Schiller, like Yeats, believed that the human is both physical and divine:

So Man is a creature of two worlds, urged in two opposite directions at once- to

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the empirical, the contingent, the subjective on the one hand, and to the free, the necessary (...), the objectively valid on the other. He has to satisfy the demand of both capacities and somehow bring them into harmony with one another; and this he does through the aesthetic, which unites matter and form, sensuousness and reason. Not until he has achieved that harmony is he free; he is a slave as long as he obeys only one of the impulses. (Snell 'introduction' in Schiller 2004, p.13)

Yeats too recognises a conflict in the two opposing elements of the human being, 'the divine life wars upon our outer life' (Yeats 1961, p.155). Yeats's concern is to allow both aspects their autonomy and yet still try to bring them to a balanced Unity of Being, while also provoking a unity with the 'great memory' or universal divine:

Every action in man declares the soul's ultimate freedom, and the soul's disappearance in god; declares that reality is a congeries of beings and a single being. (Yeats cited by Kiberd 1996, p.320)

Yeats sees art as the perfect vehicle through which to forge this relationship. However, the aesthetic mode of expression must itself be balanced; it must reflect both the self and the anti-self in equal measure, so that artistic exploration of the human lived life is also a balanced endeavour:

An art may become impersonal because it has too much circumstance or too little, because the world is too much or too little with it, because it is too near the ground or too far up among the branches. (Yeats 1961, p.272)

In Yeatsian terms, neither drama nor character can be overwhelmed by either aspect; to allow either to dominate is to present an inaccurate depiction of the ideal state of humanity.

Art, then, must represent both the physical and the spiritual elements of nature: should the analytical self be to the forefront, art becomes too empirical and restricted by reason portraying nothing of the emotive soul; should the anti-self reign, then the lack of

the reasoned self makes the art fantastical and betrays nothing of the lived societal life of humanity:

All art is sensuous, but when a man puts only his contemplative nature and his more vague desires into his art, the sensuous images through which it speaks become broken, fleeting, uncertain, or are chosen for their distance from general experience and all becomes unsubstantial and fantastic. (Yeats 1961, p.193)

While the conflict between the two elements is explored, art must maintain a balance as it is a representation of the Ideal. Therefore, Yeats's ideal artistic characters are whole, in that they, perhaps unlike their audience, are balanced selves incorporating the physical and the spiritual natures of humanity, where the conflict has been resolved and the self and the Other are in harmony.

Schiller sees the divided self as a modern entity; he believed that human nature had once been in harmony, and that it was 'culture itself that inflicted this wound upon humanity' (Schiller 2004, p.39). Schiller's magnum opus, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, was published in 1795, and it is this work which expounds his philosophy of art and its moral implications. Like Nietzsche and Yeats, Schiller held Ancient Greek culture and art to be the zenith of human expression, and it was to the Greek state that he wished to return. Yeats too wished art, particularly drama, could return to the earlier Greek forms in that he wanted modern drama to once again be injected with divinity and ritual (Yeats 1961). He also saw the separation of self and soul as a modern state of affairs:

Our life in cities, which deafens or kills the passive meditative life, and our education that enlarges the separated, self-moving mind, have made our souls less sensitive. Our souls that were once naked to the winds of heaven are now thickly clad. (Yeats 1961, p.41)

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Just as Yeats wanted drama to provoke a collective audience reaction, so too for Schiller, Art also relates a universal emotional truth, as in his scheme, artistic ideals and ideas come from the spiritual divine element, or as Schiller calls it the Absolute: 'Art is the daughter of freedom, and must receive her commission from the needs of spirits, not from the exigency of matter' (Schiller 2004, p.26). By freedom, Schiller means that Art must be a wholly personal and subjective endeavour, it cannot be dictated to by society's tastes, or by 'the spirit of the age which threatens to remove it further from the Art of the Ideal' (Schiller 2004, p.26). Ideal Art, for Schiller, is derived from the divine aspect as opposed to that of the physical; however artistic expression is by its very nature a physical act, and so the spiritual is expressed through the physical, thus enabling art to reconcile both aspects of humanity and express the nature of the human and the lived life better than any other discipline through idea and action.

Schiller states that there are two forms of Art, that which is naïve, and that which is sentimental; naïve art is true art, it is representative of a human whose dualistic nature is in harmony. Sentimental art occurs when the human is overwhelmed by their rational aspect, and so art becomes removed from emotional universal truths, because the aesthetic response and judgement is dictated by societal conditioning, or by the artist himself; however, because aesthetic experience must be free and subjective, it must be judged on its own terms:

The nature of man who sees or hears the work must remain completely free and inviolate, it must go forth from the magic circle of the artist pure and perfect as from the Creator's hands. (Schiller 2004, p.106)

For Schiller, modern art, and poetry in particular is in turmoil, as the conflict between freedom and nature, the real and ideal, puts pressure on the art form, and in its struggle for a resolution, it has become sentimental, and overwhelmed by its author. Naïve art

holds no such conflict as it is a representation of humanity reconciled to itself and to the world of nature. Naïve art is the representation of the whole individual, while sentimental art portrays a being that has been lost in modernity and the trials of societal survival:

And so gradually individual concrete life is extinguished, in order that the abstract life of the whole may prolong its sorry existence, and the State remains eternally alien to its citizens because nowhere does feeling discover it. Compelled to disburden itself of the diversity of its citizens by means of classification, and to receive humanity only at second hand, by representation. (Schiller 2004, p.41)

The harmony of naïve art is not just the integration of body and soul, but also a unification of the human being and nature:

In naïve art, the artist is overshadowed completely by his work, dissolved in it; sentimental art, by contrast, requires that the artist's personality should stand out in the work and cast a certain light upon it. (Gaidenko 2005, p.12)

Naïve art absorbs the self and places man in a position of harmony with the Absolute and nature, while sentimental art places an importance on the elements of man which are conditioned and derived from societal norms. Schiller believes that there will be a return to the harmonised self, in what he refers to as the Elysian age, when humanity will again become cognisant of universal emotive truth and place the individual before the collective (Honderich 2005, p.845). Yeats, too, sees this division in artistic form, particularly in relation to modern art:

Everywhere some limiting environment or idiosyncrasy is suggested; everywhere it is the fact that is studied, and not that energy which seems measureless and hates all that is not itself. It is a powerful but prosaic art, celebrating the fall into division not the resurrection into unity. (Yeats 1962, pp.188-9)

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This art that studies fact rather than energy is the subject of the theatre of commerce; an art consumed with presenting representational views of human life that, though accurate, lacked something and appeared stagnant and static. Yeats's theatre of Art would rectify this lack, by placing the dual aspects of humanity on the stage and returning to the 'emotion of the multitude' (Yeats 1961, p.215). Yeats's theatre of Art would present naïve art as celebrating the 'all-uniting nature' as opposed to the 'all-dividing intellect' (Schiller 2004, p.39).

Similarly for Schiller, aesthetic contemplation does not necessarily involve a cognitive understanding, because our reactions to an aesthetic object are instinctive and emotional: 'it is not possible to separate an emotion or spiritual state from the image that calls it up and gives it expression' (Yeats 1961, p.286). In artistic creation, we do not apply rational, causal or societal concepts to the object, but rather treat it as if it were an utterly free object, so that artistic expression is removed from analytical contemplation, and societal or moral justifications, and is judged in terms of the immediate reaction it provokes:

Art, like science, is free from everything that is positive or established by human conventions, and both of them rejoice in an absolute immunity from human lawlessness. (Schiller 2004, p.51)

Yeats seeks the same freedom of art and reaction, in that the goal of his dramatic theory is to allow the instinctive and immediate audience-reaction to be that by which the art is judged, as opposed to the analytical response of critics or of forms of theatrical commercialism. The rationally-conditioned self is, then, restricted by the emotional and instinctive anti-self. Cognitive reason for Yeats is anathema to an aesthetic which is predicated on freedom:

If I had acted upon impulse and against reason I should have created a finer world of rights and wrongs, a more personal and passionate life than impersonal reason could give. Reason is the stopping of the pendulum, a kind of death. (Yeats 1962, p.254)

In Yeats's audience-centric system, the self is not allowed time to think about the character or the action taking place on stage, so that the human response to artistic expression needs to be an instinctive reaction if it is to be a truthful one: '[t]he very preoccupation of the intellect with the soul destroys that experience, for everywhere impressions are checked by opinion' (Yeats 1955, p.467). To allow the self to judge art is to reduce artistic expression to a realm of restricted perceptions; hence, art without the anti-self is a sentimental and static art which only represents one aspect of the polarised human; it is an art devoid of emotion and instinct.

## **Schopenhauer**

Arthur Schopenhauer took up the terms which Kant had used in his separation of the physical world from the spiritual world, namely the phenomenal and the noumenal. Phenomena refers to the world of appearances, while noumena is the thing in itself, *das Ding an sich*, the spiritual universal undifferentiated mass, that which, for Kant is unknowable as humanity can have no direct experience of it: '[j]ust as we know of the earth only the surface, not the great, solid masses of the interior, so we know empirically of things and the world nothing at all except their appearances' (Schopenhauer 1970, p.55). Schopenhauer also substituted these Kantian terms with the terms 'will' and 'representation', as for him, the noumenal aspect is the will, and the physical world is simply representation, so that all appearances of the physical world, even human bodies, are manifestations and perceptions of the will '[t]hese beings [humans] stand before the

cognitive faculty as objective and external phenomena, that is, as objects of experience' (Schopenhauer 2005, p.27).

However, Schopenhauer did not make an absolutely distinct separation between the two aspects, rather he believed the phenomena and the noumena are the same thing, the only difference being human perception, as both aspects are perceived and understood differently, with one being connected to causal experience, while the other can never be known in that way. For Schopenhauer, there is one reality discerned in two different ways:

The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, first, quite directly, and then in perception by the understanding. The action of the will is nothing but the act of will objectified, i.e. translated into perception. (Schopenhauer 1966, p.100)

Yeats speaks of a similar understanding of human perception of the spiritual:

We, who are believers, cannot see reality anywhere but in the soul itself, and seeing it there we cannot do other than rejoice in every energy, whether of gesture, or of action, or of speech, coming out of personality, the soul's image. (Yeats 1962, p.170)

In aesthetic experience, Yeats too understands that there are two modes of perception of 'the soul's image', which also harks back to Schiller's notions of man as person, and also as a condition. In Yeats's view, personality is the individual emotional self, while character is the will defined by the phenomenal:

I look upon character and personality as different things or perhaps different forms of the same thing. Juliet has personality, her nurse has character. I look upon personality as the individual form of our passions [...] Character belongs I think to Comedy, but all that's rather a long story and is connected with a whole mass

of definitions. (Yeats 1954, p.548)

The soul's image is then in Yeats's view a reality; it is the soul as perceived through a physical act, and it is Schopenhauer's will manifesting itself through the limited form of the physical self. Yeats, like Nietzsche, believed in reincarnation (Snukal 2010, p.40). Yeats's view on incarnation also echoes that of Schopenhauer on the physical perceptions of the spiritual:

If men are born many times, as I think, that must originate in the antinomy between human and divine freedom. Man incarnating, translating 'the divine ideas' into his language of the eye, to assert his own freedom, dying into the freedom of god and then coming to birth again. (Yeats 1962, p.306)

All ancient nations believed in the re-birth of the soul and had probably empirical evidence like that Lafcadio Hearn found among the Japanese. In our time Schopenhauer believed it, and McTaggart thinks Hegel did, though lack of interest in the individual soul kept him silent. (Yeats 1962, p.396)

This cyclical view of life shows the influence of both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on Yeats; once born into the physical world, man must subsume the spiritual aspect in order to make it relatable. Man must perceive the noumenal as phenomenal, as he is a temporal being, and can have no other way of relating to the divine aspect until his death, when he returns to the divine undifferentiated mass. To Yeats, it is not just individuals who are subject to this cycle, but also whole civilisations, who, being defined by time and space, at the end, return to a shared divine existence:

At the end of an epoch or civilisation I imagine a maturity, not of this or that science or art or condition, but, in so far as may be possible considering time and place, of the civilisation itself an instant before its dissolution or transformation, when it may, wherever it is most sensitive, submit not to this or that external tyrant but to a Being or an Olympus all can share. (Yeats 1962, pp.316-7)

In Schopenhauer's system, '[w]ill is the ungrounded ground of all things and if will is abolished then the world, too, is abolished' (Collinson and Plant 2006, p.153). The will then, is the spiritual aspect, or Schiller's 'man in idea', and as such it cannot be understood in human terms, so that all knowledge is based upon human perceptions and limitations. For Schopenhauer, the central limitation is humanity's existence within time and space, because temporal physicality binds man to the phenomenal realm:

For man, like all objects of experience, is a phenomenon in time and space, and since the law of causality holds for all such a priori and consequently without exception, he too must be subject to it. (Schopenhauer 2005, p.46)

Yeats expresses a similar view of human perceptions in the temporal reality:

The ultimate reality is not thought, for thought cannot create but 'can only perceive,' the created world is a stream of images in the human mind, the stream and cavern of his symbolism; this stream is Time. (Yeats 1961, p.419)

In Yeats's view, perception is tantamount to the creative process, but it is a process which is subject to time, as while man may free himself through art from the bounds of society and morality, man can never be free of time: he is always, necessarily, subject to it. While Schopenhauer advocated that man can encounter that which is outside of time and space, the noumenal, Yeats conversely considers time as one more element of the human experience to be balanced, but significantly, as an experience which is a human creation or perception. It is humans who perceive the passing of time through bodily ageing and seasonal changes, and it is humans who named the experience and gave it the power it has in the imagination. As a perceived universal experience shared by all humans, Yeats would want time to be incorporated into Unity of Being, and to be brought into perspective and balance with the other elements of the human condition. In Schopenhauer's system, freedom is possible if the temporal chains could be cast off, and

forgotten about, because then, man could transcend his physical limitations and glimpse the noumenal realm. The phenomenal world objectifies the will and only in overcoming this can man reach the noumenal and share in this universal experience of 'ecstasy, rapture, illumination, union with god' (Schopenhauer cited by Collinson and Plant 2006, p.158).

All humans carry within them a universal spiritual reality or 'cognitionless primal state' (Schopenhauer 1970, p.72), but live in, and are restricted by, the phenomenal material reality. In the timeless reality of the noumena, there is no individuation of consciousness, because it is the phenomenal world which erects the barriers between humans and between the phenomenal and the noumenal. Schopenhauer claims that we may glimpse the noumena when we transcend the bounds of time and space, and when these boundaries are broken and man is released from his temporal perspective through aesthetic contemplation; such transcendence, he feels, can be found in experiencing art, music and sex. These are all occasions when humanity is so enveloped in sensation that it forgets its physical presence and transcends to a spiritual existence, and is thus, however briefly, reabsorbed into the universal mass of noumenal reality. Yeats, too, understands that there is a link between sex and transcendental mystical experience, where the phenomenal experience coincides with the noumenal experience, so that sexual union and spiritual revelation are one and the same, albeit perceived differently:

One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision – that the mystic way and sexual love use the same means- opposed yet parallel existences. (Yeats 1954, p.715)

Schopenhauer is one the first philosophers to address sex as a human drive as opposed to an emotion:

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It is symptomatic that most philosophers have largely ignored sex, both as phenomenon and as desire, and when they have discussed it (like Plato in the *Symposium*) they have often imposed the most absurd idealizations, and insisted on seeing it not as sex but as love, as the attraction of two individuals, and the promise, if not the guarantee of happiness. But the truth is, Schopenhauer tells us, that sex is not at all personal or a matter of individual choice, but is inherently a source of suffering, however strong our initial attractions. (Solomon 1988, p.81)

Schopenhauer believes that the sexual drive, though necessary for pro-creation, is also an instance of the will acting through the physical entity. Similarly, Yeats saw the anti-self or spiritual self as a sexualised self, a sexuality which was not subject to moral or procreative constraints. Much of this perception of the anti-self is probably connected to Yeats's own early oppressed sexuality; sex for him was:

A continual struggle against an experience that almost invariably left me with exhausted nerves. Normal sexual intercourse does not affect me more than other men, but that, though never frequent, was plain ruin. It filled me with a loathing of myself. (Yeats 1972, p.72)

In terms of Yeatsian theory, the sexualised anti-self feels no shame, and acts purely on wilful instinct. It is the Dionysian frenzy personified, as opposed to Apollonian rationality, and as such, this self has an element of escapism to it; it is the self which the phenomenal self would wish to be, but cannot because society places the group above the individual and restricts individual drives through moral rules and codes of conduct.

In Yeats's own lived reality, the sexual freedom of the theorised selves is lacking, and has more in common with the obverse of Schopenhauer's thinking, namely that sexuality is a form of suffering: 'it puts my own mood between spiritual excitement, and sexual torture and the knowledge that they are somehow inseparable' (Yeats 1954, p.731). Schopenhauer, on the other hand, sees the sexual drive, not as the escapist self of Yeatsian

theory, but rather as a demanding force which torments the phenomenal being. As the demands of the will can only be satisfied momentarily, 'sexuality becomes for man a source of brief pleasure and protracted suffering' (Schopenhauer 1970, p.45). Thus, release from the demands of the will occurs at orgasm, when the phenomenal is completely abandoned, so it is here that humanity encounters the noumenal, the undiluted will, perceived not through phenomenal understanding, but on its own terms, as an instinctive emotional experience, as the 'cognitionless primal force'.

As I have already mentioned, Janis Tedesco-Haswell has written on Yeatsian ideas concerning sex, gender and the anti-self. Yeats's views on gender, particularly in gendering the anti-self, appear to be fluid, for him gender is more than biological and is in flux, particularly in relation to the anti-self. For Tedesco-Haswell, the anti-self or daimon is always the gendered opposite of the self: 'Yeats believed that female daimons inhabit men, male daimons inhabit women' (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.7). Throughout her work, she argues that humanity finds in sexual intercourse a temporary and externalised Unity of Being as opposed to the internal Unity of Being which Yeats sought, where individual self and anti-self can unite and engage with the universal spiritual whole:

Yeats believed the union of masculine and feminine ('the rounded whole') to be the way to completion and freedom. He even uses sexual intercourse as a symbol of the highest good-what he called 'Unity of Being'. (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.7)

In terms of *A Vision*, the idea that Unity of Being can be expressed or found through sex is an appealing and interesting one, but in relation to the dramatic theory, it is a tenuous argument, as here, ideal and personal Unity of Being is always an internal and wholly subjective experience, one which requires the two personal aspects of the one psyche to reconcile themselves into an equal partnership. As mentioned in the introduction, Yeats's aesthetic Unity of Image can provide access to the more spiritual Unity of Being which

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is an internal balancing of public physical and private spiritual selves. This raises the question as to how sex can promote Unity of Being, as it is not an engaging of two facets of the one Being, but rather the engaging of two Beings, or perhaps only one half of two Beings, if a purely physical interaction. Perhaps the distinction is that the Unity of Being achieved through sex is always corrupted as it is external and dependent upon physicality, while the Unity of Being postulated within the dramatic theory is always the idealised form and as such always internal and personal.

Yeats's ideas on gender vary throughout his lifetime, and across his work, and are often adapted for each genre, as that which is expressed through drama is very different to that which is expressed through poetry, prose or philosophical treatise due to the necessity of both a public performance and an audience reaction. I will consider his views on gender and the gendering of the anti-self in more detail in the following chapter. However, ultimately, perhaps Yeats, as a man, wrote from a male perspective, about not only the world and himself, but also about women. Without experience of female life, all that can be expressed is an outsider's perception and interpretation. His search for his own personal daimon is a search for his female aspect as much as it is for his spiritual aspect, and so Yeats's conception of Unity of Being is imbued with a decidedly male perspective. While his system incorporates women and gives female power and sensibilities a prominent place, it is not a scheme which can be used by women without adaptation, as Unity of Being as a theory has no knowledge of the female lived-experience, and so can only guess at or idealise the unified female.

While Yeats accepts that every human carries within them both male and female forces (Tedesco-Haswell 1997), he views the spiritual aspect to be more in tune with the female personality:

Women come more easily to that wisdom which ancient peoples, and all wild

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peoples even now, think the only wisdom. The self, which is the foundation of our knowledge, is broken in pieces by foolishness, and is forgotten in the sudden emotions of women, and therefore fools may get, and women do get of a certainty glimpses of much that sanctity finds at the end of its painful journey. (Yeats 1959, p.115)

Yeats's view of women as emotional beings is not a derogatory opinion, rather he sees women as being 'nearer to the daimonic' (Yeats cited by Mills Harper 2006, p.305), and as such, more connected to their instinctive emotional aspect. Women are, therefore, less inclined to be defined by their physicality, and are naturally predisposed to engaging in a relationship with their noumenal will. Yeats associates women with the lunar impulse and men with the solar, another idea which can be traced to paganism, and he views sexual action as an oscillation between the two poles of gender:

The slight separation of the sun and the moon permits the polarity which we call sex while it allows of the creation of emotional unity, represented by the oval and the light it contains. (Yeats 1954, p.324)

In contrast to my opinion, Tedesco-Haswell argues that for Yeats, women are profoundly visual and seek to lure lovers with her physical appearance, while men value 'the power of speech or song' (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.98); however, this view contradicts Yeats's opinions of the sexes. Yeats understands that all humans lean toward one or other gendered aspects of being, regardless of the physical body for:

Either sex is inhabited by the opposite sex up to a point, for, biologically speaking, it is simply the greater number of masculine genes that tips the scales in favour of masculinity ... [every man] carries Eve, his wife, hidden in his body. (Yeats cited in Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.7).

He also considers the movement between the gendered forces to be in a state of flux:

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When man is in his most antithetical phases the daimon is most primary; man pursues, loves or hates, or both loves and hates – a form of passion, an antithetical image is imposed upon the Daimonic thought – but in man's primary phases the daimon is at her most antithetical. Man is now pursued with hatred, or with love. (Yeats 2008, p.26)

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, views women as completely incapable of aesthetic understanding:

Women could be called the unaesthetic sex. Neither for music, nor poetry, nor the plastic arts do they possess any real feeling or receptivity: if they affect to do so it is merely mimicry in service of their effort to please. This comes from the fact that they are incapable of taking a purely objective interest in anything whatever. (Schopenhauer 1970, pp.85-6)

Women, for Schopenhauer, are a means to an end, whose attractiveness is based solely on the demands of the sexual drive, '[o]nly a male intellect clouded by the sexual drive could call the stunted, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped and short-legged sex the fair sex' (Schopenhauer 1970, pp.85-6). It seems, then, that in his thinking, women are devoid of the sexual drive, which begs the question are they also devoid of the will; are they purely phenomenal entities? This is perhaps more of Kant's influence, as he regarded the objectification of a sexual partner as necessary (Honderich 2005, p.867). Yeats in contrast, takes a much more egalitarian view of gender issues, which is not surprising given his pagan sensibilities, and the role and status of women within pagan faiths. However, Yeats is also a man of his time, and a man surrounded by exceptional female characters, including Maud Gonne, Annie Horniman, Florence Farr, Augusta Gregory, Constance Gore-Booth and his own sisters Lilly and Lolly. During Yeats's lifetime, creative career women were gaining liberties and rights that had hitherto been denied to them. The rise of the suffrage movement, and of organisations such as the Irish Women's

Irish education league, and the Ladies Land league, gave women a place within the political and public sphere. By 1909, the National University of Ireland had followed Trinity College's example of 1904 by enrolling women as students and equals to their male counterparts (Kiberd 1996). While my research is tightly focused on Yeats's occultism and theatrical system and so will not and cannot deal with the cultural or societal position of women. Alison Butler highlights the role of women within occult societies such as The Golden Dawn, suggesting that this is one more element of the cultural of change in relation to women taking place at this time and suggests that:

This equal status for women within the order indicates that the people involved in the Golden Dawn were supportive of some of the ideas expressed by those at the forefront of the women's movement in late Victorian Britain. (Butler 2011, p. 159).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar highlight Yeats as someone who saw women, particularly female writers as the heralds of the modern age, to them 'the Irish visionary believed that women had some originating connection with modernity in general and with modern literature in particular' (Gilbert and Gubar 1989, p.3). As I have already stated, it is beyond the scheme or scope of my research to deal with Yeats's views on women as a whole, I will be merely highlighting the most interesting and pertinent points in relation to my reading of Yeatsian dramatic theory and practice. Nonetheless, the cultural context of Yeats time and the prevailing changing attitudes toward women are important to bear in mind.

Yeats's view of sex and gender appears as one of reciprocal oscillation, and this perspective while echoing his changing society, can also be traced to his studies of Eastern religion, philosophy and Tantric practices, all of which may be used instead to engage with the divine presence:

An Indian devotee may be recognised that he approaches the self through a transfiguration of sexual desire; he repeats thousands of times a day words of adoration, calls before his eyes a thousand times the divine image. He is not always solitary, there is another method, that of Tantric philosophy, where a man and a woman, when in sexual union, transfigure each other's images into the masculine and feminine characters of god, but man must not finish, vitality must not pass beyond his body, beyond his being. There are married people who, though they do not forbid the passage of seed, practice not necessarily at the moment of union, a meditation, wherein the man seeks the divine self as present in his wife, the wife seeks the divine self as present in the man. (Yeats 1961, p.484).

Within Schopenhauer's scheme, the release from the phenomenal world which occurs through sex and art is temporary; to him, all human life is suffering, torn between the desires of the will and phenomenal experience:

Every aesthetic experience is a temporary escape from the dictates of the Will, because the aesthetic experience [...], gives us a disinterested appreciation of the art object and sets us at some significant distance from our normal concerns. (Solomon 1988, p.83)

A sustained escape comes only from denying the desires of the will, leading an ascetic existence and devoting one's life to philosophy; it also comes in death, where the will is freed from its phenomenal bonds and returns to the undifferentiated mass:

The state to which death restores us, on the other hand, is our original state, i.e. is the being's intrinsic state, the moving principle appears in the production and maintenance of life which is now coming to an end: it is the state of the thing in itself, in antithesis of the world of appearance. (Schopenhauer 1970, p.71)

Art, for Schopenhauer, allows the human to be unburdened of the restrictions of physical life, and to dissolve into the noumenal whole, which is free and self-defined:

It is the presentation in visual form of an eternal object, or of what is as near as possible to it, in such a way that we have an apprehension of the corresponding Idea. That, Schopenhauer assumes, must emerge from a tranquil and peaceful mind, so that the viewer, even if he is not free from emotion himself, will take something from the artist, and even see force in the contrast between that peace and his own possibly turbulent state. (Hamlyn 1999, p.112)

Schopenhauer sees music as the most powerful and pure of all the art forms, at it has no representational or pictorial aspect:

It is 'the universal imageless language of the heart'. In aesthetic, and especially musical, experience we are elevated beyond the merely empirical, beyond the obstinately willful individual self, and by engaging with the Will as such we free ourselves of its power. (Solomon 1988, p.83)

Yeats also understood the power of the imageless and non-lingual experience, he incorporated music, beat and rhythm into his visual dramas, though did not give the form dominance over his lyrical dialogue: 'music was an unconscious creation, the words a conscious' (Yeats 1961, p.20), and the influence of Schopenhauer can be detected here.

Yeats's employed music to enhance the dramatic experience, not to overwhelm it, frequently using chanting speech as a means of expression; this device harks back to his magical studies and the use of language in ritual. Yeats's drama, after all, was to be a ritual, a ritual of unity: 'a dramatic form in which thoughts and feelings might flow to as well as from the stage, forging a ritual bond between spectators and performers' (Flannery 1976, p.109). Additionally, the bond would be between the individual self and anti-self, while also producing a bond between the anti-self on stage, and the quelled anti-self of the phenomenal beings in the audience, so that the dramatic experience became transformative experience, allowing the noumenal vision to be accessed, however briefly.

Yeats believed art to be the provocation of the spiritual self, as it is through artistic representation that we recognise the spiritual, which in turn triggers the anti-self into transcending the physical self. However, as an occult practitioner, as was explored in the previous chapter, Yeats believed in magic and viewed it in the same vein as art as a means of 'breaking down barriers between the phenomenal or conscious world and the spiritual or super-conscious world' (Mills Harper 1974, p.55). For Yeats, the central principle of magic is that everything we formulate in the imagination finds reality in life. This is also the central principle of art, as through art, the internal emotional reality of man finds expression and therefore a pathway to the physical world (Yeats 1901 in Mills Harper, 1974, p.265), and the 'mind becomes a platform for a drama about power' (Murray 1997, p.25), the power being that which provokes the universal response of the audience and hence the transcendental experience found in both occult practice and in Yeats's ideal theatre.

## **Magic and Ritual**

Magic is not the concern of this chapter, but it is important to bear it in mind as a medium for allowing the anti-self to connect with the physical realm. Yeats sees art as a domain for the spiritual dimension, a place where practicality and rationality are suspended for a time, and where, by pushing one aspect downward, the polar opposite comes to the surface, sometimes with a violent turn of speed. The spiritual absolute, which is an unfettered entity, allows the human to simply be, there is no thought of time or space, or societal pressures, and so art is a medium through which man may experience true freedom from physical bonds:

Art delights in the exception, for it delights in the soul expressing itself according

to its own laws and arranging the world about it in its own pattern. (Yeats 1962 p.168)

Man, however is still in his physical body, and so is not free at all, so it becomes a matter of perception, as the mind forgets the physical aspect and conceives that it is a bodiless entity, an undifferentiated mass, and so the phenomenal human is reconciled to the noumenal self.

As noted in the introduction, Yeats was seeking to remake the dramatic arts, to abolish the theatre of commerce and found a theatre of Art which returned drama to its ritualistic roots, and which presented characters which were whole in their representations of humanity as both spiritual and physical beings. Interestingly in this context, Schopenhauer, though not specifically speaking of dramatists, wrote that there were two kinds of writers:

Those who write for the subject's sake, and those who write for writing's sake. While the one have had thoughts or experiences which seem worth communicating, the others want money; and so they write for money. Their thinking is part of the business of writing. (Schopenhauer 2004, p.1)

This commercialism is precisely that against which Yeats rebelled, and this rebellion involved giving the aesthetic vision of the writer a status that had been missing in contemporary theatre which was pandering to the journalists and critics who delighted in:

obvious originality and in obvious logic, their shrinking from the ancient and insoluble ... Drama is a means of expression, not a special subject-matter, and the dramatist is free to choose where he has a mind to. (Yeats 1961, pp.283-4)

Drama then, for Yeats, is about presenting the whole human as their lives are lived, 'we wanted plays about life, not about opinions [...] A work of art is any piece of life, seen through the eyes or experienced in the soul, completely expounded' (Yeats 2000, p.255)

Schopenhauer saw drama as the 'most perfect reflection of human existence' (Schopenhauer 2004, 56), yet he did not particularly view drama as a means of engaging with the undifferentiated universal; as already mentioned, he prized non-representational art as the ideal, due to its lack of a phenomenal aspect. Yeats however, was not trying to escape human life, but rather was trying to enrich it through an understanding and a relationship with the noumenal, and he saw drama as a way of unifying the physical and spiritual. Yeats's theatre is often referred to as symbolist as opposed to a materialist art:

The materialist believes there is no difference the natural and the spiritual order; his knowledge comes from observing the external world through his senses. The symbolist does believe there is a difference, an absolute difference, between nature and the spirit; for him, the world is the external expression of what lies hidden in the mind. At the centre of the universe is the 'universal mood', the truth of god, of which everything in art and nature is an expression or embodiment. (Styan 1983, p.61)

For Yeats, the material world, when depicted in art, becomes a conduit for the will rather than a physically separate condition: art 'often uses the outer world as a symbolism to express subjective moods. The greater the subjectivity, the less the imitation' (Yeats 1954, p.607). Thus Yeatsian drama would not be the realist drama which he criticised; it would not be a carbon copy of 'the surface of life' (Yeats 1961, p.166); it would instead express the undefined internal life. Yeats's drama would echo magical ritual whereby:

The persons upon the stage, let us say, greaten till they are humanity itself. We feel our minds expand convulsively or spread out slowly like some moon-brightened image-crowded sea. (Yeats 1961, p.245)

Yeats's ideal drama would cause the inner self to grow large in the mind until it found expression and life in the physical sphere, and significantly this aim is also a characteristic of magical practice, whereby what is true in the imagination finds a shape and form in

physical reality. Thus Yeats's dramatic structure parallels ritual structure, as does his use of chant, music, dance, symbols, masks and costume, many of which echo Greek or Egyptian costume. For Yeats, drama itself is a ritual, and if he is to return drama to its origins, to a form which placed a whole spiritualised human on the stage, then he must return theatre to its esoteric origins: 'the theatre began in ritual' (Yeats 1961, p.170). For Yeats art and the mystical are intrinsically linked:

I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half unconsciously by their successors, the poet, musician or artist. (Yeats 1961, p.49)

Of course Yeats used his symbols very deliberately to represent the anti-self, and to force the confrontation of the selves, so that his universal anti-self, the 'great memory', may be revealed to his audience:

And just as the musician or the poet enchants and charms and binds with a spell his own mind when he would enchant the mind of others, so did the enchanter create or reveal for himself as well as others the supernatural artist or genius, that seeming transitory mind made out of many minds. (Yeats 1961, p.43)

Through such a synthesis of drama and the occult, he would 'cast a glamour or enchantment' to bring about Unity of Being (Yeats 1961, p.42).

## **Nietzsche**

Friedrich Nietzsche inherited the pessimism of Schopenhauer, which later turned to Nihilism as he became disillusioned with what he saw as Schopenhauer's bondage to Christian ideology. Nietzsche began his philosophic career with the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in which he expresses a theory of both humanity and art which

finds its mirror in Yeatsian thought, though Yeats, as already stated, did not formally encounter Nietzsche until 1902. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche tells us there are two distinct forms of art, which emerge depending upon their initiating primary force. These primary forces he classifies as Dionysian and Apollonian, named for the Greek Gods. Nietzsche finds ancient Greece to be the zenith of human civilisation, which is not surprising as he had trained as a Classical Philologist, and was heavily influenced by Schiller (Solomon 1988; Nesbitt Opper, 1987). Nietzsche divides humanity and the world into two aspects: the physical and the spiritual aspect:

Underneath this reality in which we live and have our being, is concealed another and quite different reality, which, like the first, is an appearance; and Schopenhauer actually indicates as the criterion of philosophical ability the occasional ability to view men and things as mere phantoms or dream-pictures. Thus the esthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of dreams as the philosopher to the reality of existence. (Nietzsche 1995, p.2)

For Nietzsche, the reality of dreams is the domain of Apollo; in this reality, detail is obscure, people are as phantoms, they have form in appearance but little in internal substance; this parallels the world as representation in Schopenhauer's scheme. It is illusory, sober and fixed.

In contrast, the Dionysian world is the world of reality, emotional and drunken. It is a reality in which elements of the very essence of humanity, the dark primitive instincts, may dwell and be expressed on their own terms. Nietzsche too, saw art as divided into two categories, with one ruled by Apollo, which was analogous to Schiller's sentimental art. To Nietzsche, Apollonian art is what he refers to as plastic art, that is any art which is static, particularly sculpture. Nietzsche speaks of the Apollonian force in two distinct senses: Artistic and metaphysical. Art, in the Apollonian sense, is simply that which I have mentioned above: plastic, static representational art. In the metaphysical sense, the

term Apollonian means much more: the Apollonian aspect is the *principium individuationis* (Nietzsche 1995, p.11), a term for individuation which he borrowed from Schopenhauer. It is the world consciousness which is rational; it is the faculty by which we divide the world into individual consciousnesses; it is the aspect which places barriers between humans, yet it is also that which places a boundary between humanity and nature: 'the aesthetically Apollonian is the metaphysically Apollonian perceived as beautiful' (Young 1993, p.33). The Apollonian, then, is Schopenhauer's will perceived as phenomenal representation; It is aesthetically-conditioned, image-laden and specifically individual, in that it speaks of its artist and of the represented world but of little else; it is 'an appearance of appearance' (Nietzsche 1995, p.11). This is what Schiller referred to as sentimental art, an art which depicts the socially-conditioned personality of the artist, and nothing of the divine Absolute as expressed in his notion of naïve art.

Nietzsche's Dionysian art destroys the borders that Apollonian art creates; in its frenzy and rapture, it breaks the fences and allows man to see himself as more than an individual, and as part of a greater spiritualised whole, and by so doing, it allows man to return to a harmony and relationship with nature and the universal. Dionysian art echoes occult ritual practice, as it too destroys the barriers between the physical state and the spiritual state. The Dionysian force is a purely spiritual state which is however outside of the temporal, for 'the soul cannot have much knowledge till it has shaken off the habit of time and of place' (Yeats 1959, p.358); or in Nietzschean terms, until the grip of the Apollonian force has been lessened.

The Dionysian, then, is analogous to Schopenhauer's undifferentiated mass, and to Schiller's Absolute, yet the Dionysian aspect understands itself as one part of a greater whole, an aspect which is exterior to the social representational world ruled by Apollo:

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man

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reaffirmed. But Nature which has become estranged, hostile or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. [...] Now the slave is free; now all the stubborn, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice or 'shameless fashion' have erected between man and man, are broken down. Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbour, but as one with him; he feels as if the veil of Mâyâ has been torn aside and were now merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious Primordial Unity. (Nietzsche 1995, p.4)

The Dionysian is Other, it is that which is outside the rules and regulations imposed by the rational; it is an instinctive undomesticated force, which for Nietzsche, is characterised by a drunken ecstatic state, not unlike Schopenhauer's transcendental state when the phenomenal is forgotten through aesthetic or sexual experience.

This frenzied Dionysian self expresses itself through forms which mirror its freedom and unregulated condition, most prominently through music. It should be noted that Nietzsche's promoting of music as the essential form through which to express the Dionysian may have been due to his admiration for Richard Wagner (Young 1993, p.25). Yeats views the Dionysian and Apollonian perspectives as conflicting forces, and in a letter to John Quinn, dated 15 May 1903, he writes:

I have always felt that the soul has two movements primarily, one to transcend forms, and the other to create forms. Nietzsche, to whom you were the first to introduce me, calls these the Dionysic and Apollonic respectively. (Yeats 1994a, p.372)

Yeats's reading of the Dionysian paradigm is in line with that of Nietzsche, and his perspective on the Apollonian appears to be connected to the metaphysical sense of that term in Nietzsche's philosophy. Both Nietzsche and Yeats understand that the individual is part of a larger Dionysian whole, and must recognise that if the individual is to flourish, then the singular human consciousness must be aware of, and connect with, the universal

Dionysian spirit. There are also obvious echoes of Schopenhauer in Yeats's statement, where he sees the will as transcending the world perceived as representation.

Just as the Apollonian aspect has two senses of interpretation, similarly the Dionysian force is also a dualistic entity, as it can be both sensual and cruel; it is in the Dionysian we find the fine line between ecstasy and anguish; sex and torture; life and death; comedy and tragedy. The Dionysian frenzy can easily transform from ecstasy to rage, and as such, its representations can inspire great pleasure or disgust as it ranges from divine beauty to harsh graphic evil (Nietzsche 1995, p.6). Dionysian art is primarily musical; it is that which contains movement, beat, rhythm, passion and a lack of self-awareness. Dionysian art is instinctive and emotional as opposed to that of the measured restricted and formulaic art of the Apollonian paradigm:

In song and dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak; he is about to take a dancing flight into the air. His gestures bespeak enchantment. Just as animals now talk, just as the earth yields milk and honey, so from him emanate supernatural sounds. He feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like to the gods whom he saw walking about in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art; in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity. (Nietzsche 1995, p.4)

Nietzsche's Dionysian force echoes many of the characteristics of the Yeatsian anti-self. This other self is rebelling against the restrictions of its alter ego; it is a spiritualised, sexualised self which is straining to be free, and to express itself on its own terms without external impediments. However, Nietzsche also puts forward an idea concerning the unification of his two forces, and for both Nietzsche and Yeats, drama is the perfect mode through which to reconcile the two forces, as the dramatic mode itself is Apollonian in

structure and formalism, and it is a form through which the Dionysian, in its lyricism and musicality, may be enunciated. Nietzsche focuses his attention of tragic drama as the perfect form of art through which to express the relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian.

Within Nietzsche's theory of art, he speaks of tragedy as a mode of artistic expression which demonstrates the conflict between his dialectical forces, and it is through tragedy that the Dionysian and Apollonian find an accord, or at the very least find a space which both can occupy. He, like Yeats, marks Greek choral drama as important within traditional Greek tragic drama, which is akin to Yeats's ideas of surrounding the 'emotion of the multitude' (Yeats 1961, p.215). For Yeats, it was through the chorus of Greek drama that the Dionysian expressed itself. Nietzsche considered tragedy as an Apollonian form through which the Dionysian could express itself and so in some sense a unity of the dualistic natures are bonded:

We must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian chorus, disburdening itself again and again in an Apollonian image-world. The choric parts, therefore, with which tragedy is interlaced, are in a sense the maternal womb of the entire so-called dialogue, that is, of the whole stage-world, of the drama proper. In several successive outbursts this primal basis of tragedy releases this vision of the drama, which is a dream-phenomenon throughout, and, as such, epic in character: on the other hand, however, as the objectification of a Dionysian state it represents not the Apollonian redemption in appearance, but conversely, the dissolution of the individual and his unification with the primordial existence. The then drama becomes the Apollonian embodiment of Dionysian perceptions and influences, and therefore separates itself by a tremendous gap from the epic. (Nietzsche 1995, p. 27)

This view is one which Yeats to some degree shared, as he felt that through the physical place of the theatre, and the structured form of drama, the anti-self could impose itself

upon the sphere of the self. While Nietzsche very clearly promotes tragedy above all other genres of drama:

The solution he favors is the Dionysian solution, the solution offered up by Greek tragedy. This, he says, belongs to a higher state of Greek culture and offers a "more profound" world view than that offered by Apollonian art. What then is the Dionysian solution? Nietzsche says that while Apollonian art tries to convince us of the joy of existence by a glorification of phenomenal reality, Dionysian art "teaches us that we are to seek joy not in phenomena but behind them". It brings us, that is to say, a certain "metaphysical comfort" for the "terrors of individual existence". (Young 1993, p. 45)

Nietzsche conceives of Greek tragedy as an emancipatory experience in that on encountering it we transcend the fear and pain it suggests, and are instead confronted by the ecstatic joy of living.

Certainly we can plainly see how this transcendental theatre finds a parallel within Yeats. However, while others have called Yeats's imagination and work tragic in its outlook, I am not convinced the term wholly applies to him. Some of his dramas do indeed contain a tragic element, and yet there is also comedy, meta-drama, impressionism, symbolism, mysticism and modernism contained within the Yeatsian dramatic canon. So that while there well may be a congruence of the tragic mode within the thought of both Nietzsche and Yeats, it is not the only emblematic genre present within Yeats's theatrical work.

The Yeatsian anti-self expresses itself best through an art form which is fluid, and reflective of the interior. This allows it to transform and to transcend to the realm of the exterior, in that through the artistic conduit the noumenal may enter the phenomenal world and here there are evident parallels with Schopenhauer's will. Yeats makes much of the need for a musical element in speech and performance, and yet he seems to

contradict himself when his ideas are taken in conjunction with Nietzschean thought. In his essay 'The Theatre', Yeats states that 'verse spoken without musical emphasis seems but an artificial and cumbersome way of saying what might be said naturally and simply in prose' (Yeats 1961, pp.168-9); however six years later, in 'Discoveries', he writes: 'music is the most impersonal of things, and words the most personal' (Yeats 1961, p.269). The view Yeats appears to be taking here is that of the metaphysical Apollonian paradigm, in that words are personal as they spring from the individuation of the self, which is created by the Apollonian force, while the Dionysian, music is that of a universal shared experience, and so is impersonal. This perspective is not necessarily in conflict with his earlier opinion, as what he is basically saying is that words said without emotion or passion do not ring true. I would suggest that this is due to the fact that the human voice is different in every instance: inflection, timbre and tempo vary from person to person, so that while speech and the opinions voiced may be a personal attribute from the Apollonian individuation, the delivery and musicality of a voice, and therefore emotional truth, is a Dionysian trait, and the desire for some form of unity between them is an ongoing trope in Yeats's theory of drama.

It is vocal delivery that Yeats admires most in his performers, as he wants his actors to be orators first, prizing vocal ability over physical performance, and criticising actors who abandon the tiring performance the Dionysian demands:

The emotion that comes with the music of words is exhausting, like all intellectual emotions and few people like exhausting emotions; and therefore actors began to speak as if they were reading something from the newspapers. They forgot the noble art of oratory, and gave all their thought to the poor art of acting. (Yeats 1961, p.168)

For Yeats then, the frenzy of the Dionysian aspect is often an exhausting encounter, and he says that he can find it difficult to maintain his enthusiasm for the demanding god: 'I think I have to some extent got weary of that wild God Dionysus, and I am hoping that the Far-Darter will come in his place' (Yeats 1954, p.403). Just as his audience were exhausted by the overwhelming Dionysian anti-self, so too was Yeats at certain points, as he was left wishing to return to the rational physical viewpoint. However just as he returned to the plays to rewrite and refine his ideas and ideals, so too, he never abandoned his search for an engagement with the Other.

While Yeats lauds the musicality of voice, he is not dismissing the cognitive content of the words which are spoken; what he is seeking is a balancing of the personal Apollonian and the impersonal Dionysian, as he is searching for the whole human character. He believes each human tends toward once aspect or the other:

You will side with one or the other according to the nature of your energy, and I in my present mood am all for the man who, with an average audience before him, uses all his means of persuasion – stories, laughter, tears, and but with so much music as he can discover on the wings of words. (Yeats 1961, p.268)

The words and the music of voice must fuse for Yeats's characters to be in balance, and to appear as fully-formed humans who could exist away from the stage:

In literature, partly from the lack of that spoken word which knits us to a normal man, we have lost in personality, in our delight in the whole man – blood, imagination, intellect, running together – but we have found a new delight, in essences, in states of mind, in pure imagination, in all that comes to us most easily in elaborate music. (Yeats 1961, p.266)

Yeats's self finds parallels in the idea of the Apollonian aspect; both establish an individuation of self and so sever humanity from the collective spiritual mind, or 'great

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memory' (Yeats 1961, p.52). The self and the Apollonian form restrict perceptions of, and interactions with, the natural world and the human community at large. The self is characterised by its intellect, by its rationality, by its concern with order and by its regulating the human lived life; it contests everything the anti-self represents and extols.

The anti-self, when examined, is questioned in the terms of the self, in analytical terms, and is once more restricted and perceived only within a certain framework, rather than within a structure of its own devising: it is the noumenal perceived as the phenomenal, and for Yeats, the self's perception produces an inaccurate representation of the anti-self: 'the very preoccupation of the intellect with the soul destroys the experience, for everywhere impressions are checked by opinions' (Yeats 1955, p.467). Thus, in Yeats's dramatic theory, the anti-self must go unanalysed, it must be allowed to be as it is, on its own terms, it must be free to be instinctive and emotional. The anti-self does not critique or analyse itself, it simply exists and its existence is one of instinctive action, it is Schopenhauer's cognitionless self, and Nietzsche's Dionysian frenzy personified.

However, Yeats did not make the distinction between the art forms that Nietzsche did, because for Yeats it is perfectly conceivable that the anti-self may be present in a static medium of artistic expression. For Yeats, the most suitable art for the anti-self is an immediate one, such as drama, music and dance; it is an art in which the artistic moment, the moment in which the anti-self becomes present, is immediately evident, and it is this birthing of the anti-self which provokes the audience reaction. The objective is that the audience-reaction be immediate and instinctive; a reaction which has not been controlled or analysed. This is the judgement of Schiller's naïve art, that which is free of the restrictions and corruptions of human modern society; it should be an art created by an artist who must 'look upwards to his own dignity and to Law, not downwards to fortune and to everyday needs' (Schiller 2004, p.52).

To Yeats, the ultimate art form in which the anti-self may reign is drama, as it is immediate and permanently in flux: it changes with each performance, it is as fluid as the human lived experience 'life is never the same twice and so cannot be generalized' (Yeats 1954, p.534). Drama also allows the anti-self a voice, namely the rhythmic patterns of human speech. Voice is the most prominent medium and method of human expression and communication, and so for Yeats to enable the anti-self to engage with humanity through this primary form of expression is of paramount importance to his theory of drama. Dramatic experience is also a collective experience, as opposed to the solitary nature of reading prose or poetry, or the generally solitary appreciation of purely representational art. Drama collects a diverse audience who share in the aesthetic experience. While Yeats's mode of expression for the anti-self was Dionysian in essence in that it was instinctive and rhythmic, it was also however, contained within an art form which is somewhat Apollonian in that traditional drama has a formulaic trifurcated structure of exposition, conflict and conclusion. Drama, then, bridges the gap, and allows the self and anti-self to explore and express themselves in their own terms, on an equal footing which creates a balance in the forces of each aspect, so that neither one dominates the artistic work. In this way, drama becomes the optimal mode through which the spiritualised anti-self may enter the sphere of the physical, as the anti-self which materialises dramatically is corporeal. Drama gives the anti-self a phenomenal existence, a body. Nietzsche considered tragic drama to be the ultimate depiction of the Dionysian on stage, largely due to the inclusion of the chorus within Greek drama, and certainly this is a view with which Yeats agreed, and which he expressed in his early plays. However Yeats plays are not mere tragic alone, many are melancholic, comedic, symbolic and modernist. I am not particularly interested here in categorising Yeats as one specific type of playwright, nor am I interested in labelling Yeats's dramatic genres. However,

Yeatsian drama could fairly be called symbolist, modern, impressionist, tragedy, comedy, proto-drama, revivalist and romantic. While Yeats may share ideas surrounding tragedy with Nietzsche, I will not focus specifically on this one genre, as I have shown that many labels can be applied to both Yeats and his work, he is never one thing or one label alone. He, like his works, encompasses a multitudes of disciplines and characterisations.

While Schopenhauer wanted to ascend to the spiritual whole, casting off the individual and the suffering of human life, Yeats wanted the spiritual to descend into material reality, and to unite humanity through a shared experience of the noumenal self, so that the dualistic nature of humanity could be balanced. Through this balance, humanity could be free of the dictates of either force, be they called Apollonian or Dionysian; noumenal will or phenomenal reality; or Schiller's reasoned and sensuous impulses.

### **Freud, Jung and Psychoanalysis**

There is also a parallel to be drawn between Yeats and the psychoanalytical theories of Freud and Jung. It is important to bear in mind that both Freud and Jung developed their theories through clinical observations and as such, their case-studies are very much based on subjective interpretations. Their discussion of the unconscious as an area of subjectivity which was very difficult to access has colorations with Yeats ideas of Unity of Being, and it is this aspect alone which will be the subject of my brief analysis of their work.

Sigmund Freud famously coined the term 'psychoanalysis', and through his many published works, he argued for a structural theory of the mind. Freud tended to see every crisis of the mind as a repression of a sexual drive or desire, and connected most neuroses

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to events in the past, and while this is not important in terms of my research, it is of huge significance in Freud's relationship to Carl Jung. Freud's importance to Yeats lies in his basic formulation of the structure of the mind. In 1920, Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which he argued that humanity was constituted by two drives, the libido, or the drive toward life, and the drive toward death, and he saw these two drives as battling each other for dominance. He also set out his tripartite system of the mind: the id, ego and superego (Freud 2005). The id in this system is that which is totally unconscious and consists of the drives; the ego is a partially conscious self which enables defence mechanisms and reasoning faculties; and the superego is the enforcer of societal constraints and taboos, and harbours conscious and unconscious guilt, while also being only partially conscious itself due to its close connection to the id (Freud 1960).

Three Years later, in 1923, he published *The Ego and the Id*, which clarified and refined his ideas further. Freud uses the term the 'unconscious' as both a description and as a term to signify the systematic function of the mind. The id is that which is wholly unconscious to us, that which is hidden, but it is also the baser self, the animal instinctual aspect of humanity whose goal is the gratification of 'the pleasure principle'. The id is repressed and hidden from consciousness, but can be brought forward through analysis, while the preconscious consists of that 'which is latent but capable of becoming conscious' (Freud 1960, p.5).

However it is the ego which is the central concern of this work, which he sees as 'battling the three forces: the id, the super-ego and the outside world' (Gay 1989, p.xxv). The ego is the conscious segment of the mind, and as such it is 'a quality of the physical' (Freud 1960, p.3). The ego is ruled by reason and the reality of the external world, as opposed to the purely interior and passionate id; however the ego is not very far removed from the unconscious aspect 'the ego is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion

merges into it' (Freud 1960, p.17). The ego is the faculty which perceives the empirical world and wants to impose some of the external world's restrictions upon the id, so that it 'endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle' (Freud 1960, p.19). In this respect, it has something in common with Schopenhauer's will, which as stated, perceives the world as image and strives through the sexual drive primarily to free itself from representational physical existence. Freud also echoes Nietzschean ideas, as the frenzied Dionysian struggles to cast off the static solid form of the Apollonian aspect.

There are echoes here of the Yeatsian self and anti-self. While the anti-self is connected to a separate world, a spiritual realm, it cannot be perceived by the self alone. The anti-self is a hyper-sexualised self, which wants to satisfy its own desires and needs, irrespective of the codes of conduct of the physical society in which it lives. Yeats's anti-self is the emotional and artistic core of humanity, and as with the earlier contrast with German philosophy, art, which contains instinctive feeling, derives from the anti-self, for as Yeats puts it 'the more unconscious the creation, the more powerful' (Yeats 1972, p.248). The ego or self is defined by the physical world, and its perceived place within the societal structure; it is concerned with maintaining the physical life, through socially accepted rules: 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' (Freud 1960, p.20); it is unconcerned by the instincts and emotions of the id:

The ego is especially under the influence of perception, and that, speaking broadly, perceptions may be said to have the same significance for the ego as instincts have for the id. At the same time the ego is subject to the influence of the instincts, too, like the id, of which it is, we know, only a specially modified part. (Freud 1960, p.37)

It is clear, then, that the relationship between the id and ego is a complicated co-dependent one. What Freud appears to be suggesting here is that the id and the ego are of the same

material, but perceived differently; he also appears to be suggesting that the ego is a facet of the id. So, could it then be inferred that the unconscious id, or Schopenhauer's will, is the essence of the human which precedes the physical conscious self? Is it simply that the id is an individualistic self which is prior to the socially conscious mind? In Yeatsian terms, the influence is clear in that the anti-self is a self-centred aspect, while the self is aware of the community of other egos in which it must exist to physically survive.

This again echoes the philosophies discussed earlier in this chapter. Nietzsche's Apollonian aspect and Schopenhauer's 'world as appearance' are what divide humanity into individual consciousness, and as such, restrict the Dionysian or the will, so that the individual human may continue to exist socially. However, this social construct is damaging to all three philosophers, as in limiting the spiritual aspect, to paraphrase Schiller, it inflicts a wound upon the human psyche as a whole, placing 'man in time' above 'man in idea' (Schiller 2004). The central aim of every philosophy and psychological theory I have mentioned is analogous to aspects of Yeatsian theory in that they all strive to offer some form of unity of expression to the human subject, and to find a way of allowing the different facets of humanity, from the physical to the spiritual to the unconscious, to be fully expressed. Yeats's first introduction to this concept came through his occult study of the Golden Dawn, which aimed to 'regain union with the divine Man latent in himself' (Mathers 1991, p.ix).

Freud's bi-polar system of id and ego is complicated further when he divides the ego so that it now contains the super-ego, which is overwhelmed by reason and morality as derived from its external world. The ego, understanding that both the super-ego's and the id's drives are impractical and extreme, tries to find a balance of the two; however when the ego is itself overwhelmed, it utilises coping mechanisms, such as denial and repression, in short removing threatening ideas from the consciousness, and relegating

them to the unconscious, though they remain a threat to the well-being and stability of the mind. Freud appears to define the ego in relation to the differences and relationship to both the subconscious and preconscious; the preconscious gains its knowledge from world-presentations, while the subconscious garners information from 'some material which remains unknown' (Freud 1960, p.12), or from what Yeats terms the 'age-long memoried self' (Yeats 1955, p.272). It appears as if the purely subconscious id is relegated to something beyond human experience, similar to the Yeatsian spiritualised anti-self: 'anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions' (Freud 1960, p.13). In Yeatsian terms, the interior anti-self, if it wishes to be understood by the self and take part in the physical realm, must express itself in terms of reference defined by the physical self, and in so doing, is automatically restricted and subsumed by the ruling presence of that self, 'we must assume that second self' (Yeats 1955, p.469). In the Yeatsian system, the anti-self, the counterpart of the id, is not supposed to be fully controlled, it is supposed to be engaged with as an equal entity, while also given autonomy as a self-defined entity. Though Freud does argue that the id must be dominated by the ego, he also says that occasionally, the id must be allowed guide the ego into 'transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own' (Freud 1960, p.19).

Within Freud's scheme, the ego holds the id and super-ego at bay, trying to balance and control the more extreme tendencies of both. This relationship is analogous of a see-saw in that the ego is the centre point, desperately trying to maintain its precarious position. Yeats does not give us an ego, he does not give us a method by which to regulate the bi-polar selves, but he does insist that these different aspects of the self must be brought to a balanced relationship, with drama being a privileged mode of expression. It would seem then that the self, or the consciousness as the rational and more altruistic

feature, is the force that recognises when a shift has occurred and compensates accordingly, by either tightening its grip on the demands of the anti-self, or else by relinquishing a certain amount of control to the unconscious, so that balance is restored for the betterment of the whole being.

Carl Jung was seen by Freud as his successor; however, Jung was never in full agreement with Freudian psychoanalysis, and he refused to believe that all crises of the mind were related to either the childhood formative years or to the sexual drives alone. Jung has more in common with Yeats than Freud, yet 'there is no lateral or temporal line that connects Yeats with Jung, but there are parallel lines which one could demonstrate and retrace' (Olney 1980, p.9). Jung splits the psyche into two sections, namely self and Other; the conscious and unconscious, and as such, Jung's system is slightly less convoluted than Freud's, even though Jung also proposes a divided unconscious consisting of both personal and collective forces:

We must distinguish three psychic levels: (1) consciousness (2) the personal unconscious, and (3) the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious consists firstly of all those contents that became unconscious either because they lost their intensity and were forgotten or because consciousness was withdrawn from them (repression), and secondly of contents, some of them sense-impressions, which never had sufficient intensity to reach consciousness but have somehow entered the psyche. The collective unconscious, however, as the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation, is not individual but common to all men, and perhaps even to all animals, and is the true basis of the individual psyche. (Jung 1983, p.67)

Jung put forward the idea of a collective unconscious, a larger spiritual whole through which all humanity is connected, and this undoubtedly is influenced by his interest in Eastern religions and philosophy, and by his reading of Schopenhauer. Yeats too, considered human spirituality to be linked to an eternal collective:

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I thought of myself as something unmoving and silent living in the middle of my own mind and body [...]. Then one day I understood quite suddenly that I was seeking something unchanging and unmixed and always outside myself. (Yeats 1961, p.271)

I think that two conceptions, that of reality as a congeries of beings, that of reality as a single being, alternate in our emotion and in history, and must always remain that something human reason, because subject always to one or the other, cannot reconcile. I am always, in all I do, driven to a moment which is the realisation of myself as unique and free, or to a moment which is the surrender to god of all that I am. (Yeats 1962, p.305)

Yeats then understands himself as both an individual soul and as a part of the greater collective whole. There is a parallel echo of Coleridge within this idea:

The IMAGINATION then, I consider as either primary or secondary, the primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. (Coleridge 1907, p.202)

Yeats also understands the need to try to reconcile the two aspects of his own being, an idea about which he was aware through his study of neo-paganism, idealist Romanticism, Kabbalah, Hinduism and Buddhism, all of which encourage humanity to seek a balance in both their internal and external lives. His use of the term 'god' in this quotation does not mean a Christian understanding of one divine omnipresent being. Indeed, as was outlined in the previous chapter, Yeats's understanding of divinity was much more in line with neo-pagan ideas of a collective divine mass or spirit.

Neither the individual soul, nor the portion of it which shared in the divine, could be fathomed through reason alone, as neither aspect is subject to cognition; rather, emotional feeling and instinct defined the interior aspects, and this idea in the theories of

both Yeats and Jung, harks back to Schiller's philosophy of aesthetic experience. Like Jung, Yeats thought that the soul presents itself to the conscious mind through vision and instinctive imagery. Jung understood from his work with schizophrenic patients that certain common themes appeared in the delusions of people from varying social backgrounds, and his extensive experience of mythology and comparative religion allowed him to see the similarities. 'Jung described the collective unconscious as consisting of mythological motifs or primordial images to which he gave the name "archetypes"' (Storr in Jung 1983, p.16):

Jung distinguishes between 'the personal unconscious,' which he says speaks the language of experience, and 'the supra-personal or collective unconscious,' which he claims speaks only in the language of myth – a language that individual psyche understands not because of any previous experience in this life but because of its participation in the psychic collectivity. (Olney 1980, p.207)

The myth-making ability of all humanity, regardless of culture, is derived from a shared collective consciousness or divine will, with the images which arose from this faculty of the mind being termed archetypes by Jung, while Yeats encountered them through his visions, image meditations and symbolism. The archetypes have strong connections with Yeatsian symbolism, as they correlate with those images and ideas which come from the collective universal will or spirit, and which find expression in the material world:

Every symbol is an invocation which produces its equivalent expression in all worlds. The incarnation which involved modern science and modern efficiency and also modern lyric feeling which gives body to the most spiritual emotions. It produced a solidification of all things that grew from the individual will. (Yeats 1972, p.166)

Every image of the collective unconscious will find a way to express itself in the material physical sphere. Both Yeats and Jung want the unconscious self, which incorporates the

universal collective, to find a mode of existence in harmony with its conscious counterpart. Jung argued for a self-regulatory system, and saw the emergence of neurosis as an indicator of unbalance within the psyche. He argued that dreams and visions were communications with the unconscious, often signifying that which was needed or ignored in the conscious state, so that visions were also a warning system reflecting a disturbance in the harmony of the personality. One of the main archetypes which Jung sees as having an impact upon the personality or ego is the shadow; for him the shadow is an aspect which is the negative dark side of the personality whose 'nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious' (Jung 1983, p.91). The shadow is the part of the unconscious which is closest to the conscious and so the easiest to access, yet Jung states that to become conscious of the shadow takes 'considerable moral effort' (Jung 1983, p.91):

To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, [...] Closer examination of the dark characteristics – that is, the inferiorities constituting of the shadow – reveals that they have an emotional nature, a kind of autonomy, and accordingly an obsessive or, better, possessive quality. Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him. (Jung 1983, p.91)

Jung's shadow aspect is remarkably similar to Yeats's anti-self, it is the darker part of the psyche which, as an archetype, is common to all humans and all cultures. It is the part of the mind which must be recognised and accepted for a human to truly know their own nature. Jung contends that the shadow can be incorporated into the conscious being, so that the two find a balance. Yeats, as I have already outlined, considers women to be more connected to their anti-self or shadow aspects than men, though some have argued that this means that the anti-self is then a contra-gendered self. Yeats, to my mind, wavers

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between the anti-self being male or female, and perhaps this is connected to the idea of the personal soul and the universal soul; perhaps the personal soul is bound to physical gender while the universal soul is opposite, or not gendered at all. This possibility will be looked at further in the following chapter. Jung contends that the shadow aspect is always the same gender as the physical being (Jung 1983, p.93).

Jung's idea of a personality is a person who has formed a relationship with their unconscious states:

I use the term 'individuation' to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is, a separated indivisible unity, or 'whole'. (Jung 1982, p.212)

For Jung, individuation only occurs when a person 'can consciously ascent to the power of the inner voice' (Jung 1983, p.19). Through making humanity self-aware, individuation provokes the balanced ideal:

Individuation brings to birth a consciousness of human community precisely because it makes us aware of the unconscious, which unites and is common to all mankind. (Jung 1983, p.22)

This common unconscious, both personal and collective, is the Yeatsian anti-self and Yeats, for his part, regards personality as derived from the interior self, and makes a distinction between personality and character which has already been pointed to in the previous chapter in the quote about Shakespeare's Juliet and her nurse. Yeats links personality to the anti-self, while the self is represented by character, and he too considers art as an expression of the artist's personality, rather than their character, which has been informed by the temporal existence:

Personality is not character. Character is made up of habits retained, all kinds of things. But everyone has not the same personality, which means a certain kind of

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charm and emotional quality. If we want to speak of an artist who is really good we say he has personality. Personality is finer than character. It differs from character in this, that it [i.e. character] is always to some extent under the control of our will. (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.38)

It is clear that what Yeats means by will here is not the Schopenhauerian will, but rather the self, the conscious man in time, so that the physical being is always controlled by the dictates of the self and its learned, culturally-informed, morality.

The personality, on the other hand, is the anti-self which holds within it the innate universal spiritual self, reminiscent of Jung's idea of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious:

By personality Yeats means something similar to what he had meant by symbolism during the 1890s. His concept of symbolism had been built on a belief in the uniqueness and sacredness of all living forms; a symbol he saw as the physical manifestation of a thought or emotion. (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.5)

For Yeats, personality is that which comes from the interior existence of the human being, it is 'the individual form of our passions' (Yeats 1954, p.548). For Jung, personality is a unified psyche, and it is formed when man engages with his inner voice, in other words, with his universal unconscious or anti-self. The unified psyche, in Yeatsian terms, is the whole man or Unity of Being. Yeats uses Unity of Image to provoke Unity of Being, with the aesthetic leading to the spiritual: hence by displaying both the anti-self and self in artistic expression, he wants to encourage the audience to encounter their own opposites. Jungian theory also advocated an acknowledgement of psychic divisions so that a unity could be achieved when the conscious and unconscious faculties engaged with each other and recognised each other as Other. This is very important to Yeats as the anti-self must be an Other, it cannot be defined in physical terms and subsumed by the physical self. This is one of the main reasons for his adopting of the mask, as by removing the physical

body of an actor, the anti-self, while given a physical presence, is allowed to present itself as a self-defined entity. Yeats's mask holds the human communal world at bay and allows the inner individual to be evident and self-actualised.

The idea of the mask is also present in Jungian thought, though the construct is opposite to the Yeatsian form. Jung's mask is the socially acceptable face we adopt to maintain societal systems:

The construction of artificial personality becomes an unavoidable necessity. The demands of propriety and good manners are an added inducement to assume a becoming mask. What goes on behind the mask is then called the 'private life'. This painfully familiar division of consciousness into two figures, often preposterously different, is an incisive psychological operation that is bound to have repercussions on the unconscious. (Jung 1983, p.94)

Jung, then, like Yeats considers the division between the interior and exterior human existence to be a danger, because the exterior communal life has rights that the interior is denied, which means that the mental and emotional aspect is restricted and refused its expressions and autonomy: 'so that people really do exist who believe they are what they pretend to be' (Jung 1983, p.95). This division is one of the central themes of Yeatsian dramatic theory, as he adopts the mask so that the hegemony of the socially-adopted artificial personality can be lessened, and in order that the anti-self may take an equal position on its own terms. Indeed, he considers the medium of drama as that which allows society's rules to be left at the stage door so that the drama expresses 'the soul rejoicing in itself' (Yeats 1962, p.169).

The Jungian mask is a mask of pretence, it is the face we show to the exterior, judgemental world so that we may be accepted, and this again returns to the idea of maintaining social constructs. Jung's mask is a static stoic Apollonian construct, in direct opposition to Yeats's mask, yet 'the excellence of the mask is compensated by the

“private life” going on behind it’ (Jung 1983, p.95). What lies hidden beneath Jung’s mask is the Yeatsian mask which stands in contrast to the world as representation. It is the true face of the anti-self or the Dionysian frenzy. The Yeatsian mask is adopted so that the anti-self may speak on its own terms, and not be restricted by manners nor by socially accepted topics or opinions. The Yeatsian mask, as I have mentioned in the introductory chapter, and will further explore in the next chapter, removes the physicality of those who adopt it and allows personality to express itself without the restrictions the Jungian character mask imposes.

As I have already suggested, Yeats considered drama to be the perfect form of human expression as it contained ‘the living impulse of life’ (Yeats 1962, p.129). This soul or spirit of the human experience was the central theme of his conception of drama. He wanted to find a means of letting the soul be present upon the stage, and though he struggled to express what defined the anti-self when it was enunciated through a physical body on stage, he had a clear idea of the inner self in theory. The theoretical anti-self has much in common with the psychological theories of both Freud and Jung, and with the philosophical conceptions of humanity and art present in the works of Schiller, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Jung, like the philosophers before him, considered artists of all mediums to be engaged with their unconscious selves in a way in which most people were not, so that artistic expression was the unconscious or hidden self being made tangible. It is not the aim of this chapter to deal with every possible link between Yeats and these thinkers, as many books have already been written on Yeats’s relationship to both Nietzsche and Jung in particular. Rather, I am highlighting some of the main intellectual crossing-points between them, and at the patterns of influence that exist between these thinkers and Yeats, in order that his dramatic theory may be put in context. It is also important to note that while Yeats’s theory is one of dramatic form and content, it is also

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a theory of art as a whole, of human beings as individuals and of humanity as a collective. Yeats's theory is not simply a matter of literature; it is an interdisciplinary construct and must be understood as such. The aim of this, and of the previous chapter, has been to tease out the ideas found in occultism, pagan ritual and philosophical and psychoanalytic theories with respect to notions of self and Other; to notions of the personal and the universal; to notions of the mind and the body and to notions of the transcendent and the immanent, which influenced Yeats as he slowly developed his dramatic theory.

The following chapter will explore Yeats the dramatic theorist in further detail, while developing the arguments of the previous chapters, which lay the foundations on which to build a coherent and comprehensive exposition of the dramatic theory in and of itself. As I have already observed, Yeatsian theory is complicated, though often appearing more complicated than it needs to be. The following chapter will detangle the theory and explore the themes, aims and structure of Yeats's dramatic theory bringing together all the contributing elements considered in the previous chapters.

## **Chapter Three**

### **‘Continually Varied Music’: Yeats’s Dramatic Theory**

Yeats’s dramatic ideas and ideals continually progressed and expanded as he explored and experimented with his theories. His ideas flowed from his thoughts regarding human life and experience, as he understood Art to be an expression of both the human lived life and the spiritual life: ‘for literature is the child of experience always’ (Yeats 1961, p.317):

Literature differs from explanatory and scientific writing in being wrought about a mood, or a community of moods, as the body is wrought about an invisible soul; and if it uses argument, theory, erudition, observation, and seems to grow hot in assertion or denial, it does so merely to make us partakers at the banquet of the moods. (Yeats 1961, p.195)

By ‘mood’ here, Yeats is referring to those fragments of the universal divine which communicate with the personal divine innate within humanity, and through which the universal communicates with the individual, for ‘these moods are the labourers and messengers of the Ruler of All’ (Yeats 1961, p.195). The use of the term ‘Ruler of All’ again reminds us of the links and parallels between the Platonic ‘One ‘ and Coleridge’s great ‘I AM’. Nevertheless for Yeats, as we have seen, the ‘Ruler of All’ is the universal divine as a concept and entity, regardless of the differing names given to it by artists, philosophers or organised religion.

If we accept the importance of the occult to Yeats, and his lifelong study and experience of esoteric subjects and experiments are well documented by himself, his contemporaries and his commentators, then we must then accept that such disciplines are of value in studying and understanding his creative work. Yeats himself states as early as 1892:

As to Magic. It is surely absurd to hold me 'weak' or otherwise because I chose to persist in a study which I decided deliberately four or five years ago to make, next to my poetry, the most important pursuit of my life. Whether it be, or not be, bad for my health can only be decided by one who knows what magic is and not at all by any amateur [...] If I had not made magic my constant study I would not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would The Countess Kathleen have ever come to exist. The mystical life is at the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write. (Yeats 1954, p.201)

Yeats is clearly of the opinion that only someone who understands the occult can understand his practice of the discipline and categorically states that his occultism is at the core of his creative work, as an originating experience and creative force within his artistic life. The central scheme of all his creative work is the idea that human beings are both physical and spiritual, and that there is a greater divine presence in the world that the human spirit is connected to and also equal to, for Yeats the supernatural is a reality:

The spirit cannot help but be. Nor should we think of spirit as divided from spirit, as men are from each other, for they share each other's thoughts and life. (Yeats 1994c, p.52)

Thus, the Yeatsian ideal of a balanced physical and spiritual human is an inherently state of being derived from many sources including neo-paganism and Neo-Platonism, as is the idea that the material world has a parallel in the supernatural (Hutton 1999; Calafia 2008). Yeats's quest for a method of harmonising the opposing forces of the human life,

what he terms 'a unity delicately balanced between opposites' (Engelberg 1988, xxii), is crucial, and his whole collective work demonstrates:

The unceasing determination of Yeats to unify and express his vision of a transcendental reality beyond the material world as he experienced this in nature worship, peasant art, and supernatural lore, mythology and arcane knowledge. (Flannery 1976, p.296)

Through this chapter, I will explore the dramatic theory itself, and I will consider the characteristics of the self and the anti-self and the relationship between the two. I will discuss the mask as both a symbol and a device in Yeatsian drama.

One of the major problems and sources of confusion in Yeatsian study is the proliferation of terms he devised, and the ways in which he uses them. Often, many terms are used to denote the same concept or a slight difference in concepts, and sometimes different terms are used to represent the same idea when viewed from a different angle. Frequently Yeats's ideas developed somewhat interchangeable terms such as 'daimon', 'anti-self', 'character', 'personality' and 'will'. These are scattered throughout his work, often used in different ways, which may be a contributing factor as to why Yeatsian dramatic theory is not as widely studied as his other work, and even why it has been 'submerged in neglect' (Knowland 1983, p.xv).

Throughout this chapter, I will be referring to Yeats's letters, essays and autobiographical writing; however, I will consider the precursor to *A Vision*, the essay 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae' particularly in relation to his concepts of Anima Mundi and Anima Hominis. I will also be looking to his autobiographical fiction to explore his dramatic theory, particularly 'Rosa Alchemica', 'The Tables of the Law'. These essays in particular are a means through which Yeats explores his theories surrounding the occult, the self, anti-self and the mask, and I would suggest that they should not be ignored

as valuable sources simply because they are technically fictional in form. These essays have been called the forerunners of the philosophy he articulated in *A Vision*, and so are of value to any attempt at a full understanding of Yeatsian theory. I would see this as being particularly the case in relation to 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae'. In fact some argue that *A Vision* as a thesis is a failure as it is too engrossed in mathematical and intellectual abstraction. It can also be seen as too far removed from its origins in the occult and transcendental meditation, and it could be argued that 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', due to its poetical form, is a better expression of his theory and system of self (Komesu 1984):

Per Amica is a far better introduction into the visionary crux of Yeats's work than the later and far more famous *Vision*, a work ossified under the weight of its own systematic occultism. (Levine 1983, p.6)

While Yeatsian drama has been analysed in a number of books and articles, the theory itself has seldom been subject to sustained investigation. Many academics apply elements of the dramatic theory to the poetry, and frequently focus on the poetical texts rather than on the dramatic works themselves. As I have explained, Yeats's poetry is not my concern, but I would strongly contend that Yeatsian dramatic theory cannot be appropriately applied to the medium of poetry, though some of the same ideas and ideals are expressed in the poetry. The reason for this is that drama is performed, and the aim of Yeatsian dramatic theory is that it provokes a collective response from its audience through this performance, something which is an impossibility in poetry:

In poetry the antithesis to personality is not so much will as an ever growing burden of noble attitudes and literary words. The noble attitudes are imposed upon the poet in papers like the *Spectator*. (Yeats 1954, p.548)

It is hardly surprising that a writer so consumed with ideas of self, soul, philosophy and spirituality would deal with them in each medium through which he wrote, be it poetry,

drama or quasi-philosophical treatise, but the outcome of each medium is different, as is its performativity. Because poetry relies on an internal subjectivity to convey and create meaning, it is a medium which inhabits the individual imagination and is an entirely insular experience. Drama is aural, oral, visual, illusionary and real, and also at once both objective and subjective, while at the same time being a shared collective experience. Of course it too engages internal subjective response, but goes beyond this by its very nature as an external artistic structure:

Effective drama, moreover, must be imbued with a feeling for the flesh-and-blood realities of life in order that it may evoke responses from a heterogeneous audience on a primary human level. (Flannery 1976, p.281)

However, this does raise the greater question about to what extent can any academic study analyse drama, as it is a performance, and depends upon the performance to be complete. Drama is variable, changing with each performance, with each theatre, with each troop of actors, and with each different audience. At best, an academic study may only deal in theory and analysis, and centre itself on the text, stage directions and the author's ideas relating to costume or props or past performances. This is further complicated by the fact that Yeats reworked his plays many times, always seeking the perfect expression of his theory, so that some of his plays were either rarely or never staged at all, so that:

The reader who wishes to understand fully what any single work means must pass through a kind of initiation in those of his ideas that never went beyond the manuscript stage. (Ellmann 1979, p.4)

There is an important distinction to be made between Yeats's theory of self and the dramatic theory. While everything he wrote is centred on his theory of a self, the dramatic theory pivots around ideas of conflict and on the relationship between the two aspects; it focuses on staging and on many aspects of performance and audience reaction.

The dramatic theory, then, is the theory of self in action:

Far from being an essentially lyrical poet who happened to be interested in holistic philosophies, Yeats strove constantly to overcome the limitations of the lyric in the creation of more expansive and inclusive structures. This is part of his greatness and it is intimately connected with the conflict in the man and his work between a passionate attachment to nature and an insistent quest for transcendent reality. (Mills Harper 1976, p.225)

Most importantly, drama for Yeats, gave the anti-self a temporal reality as through drama, as opposed to any other literary form, the noumenal could become phenomenal, because only in dramatic form could artistic expression have an actual body.

In his lecture *The Theatre*, Yeats stated that all dramatists have as their goal 'the exposition of human life in human forms, for the sake of human life' (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.19). Any artistic expression of humanity must expose both the innate physical and spiritual aspects that Yeats believed all humans to possess:

We have within us an 'airy body' or 'spirit body' which was our only body before our birth as it will be our again when we are dead and its 'plastic power' has shaped our terrestrial body as some day it may shape apparition and ghost. (Yeats 1994c, p.67)

As his knowledge, and his own perceptions of occultism, philosophy and spirituality evolved, so too did his theories and the resulting dramas. In the previous chapters, we have seen the relevance and importance of Yeats's interest in and evolvment with neo-paganism and occultism:

While occultism was for most a passing fad, Yeats's interest did not wane; he was involved with the occult for most of his life. Most scholars mistakenly wish to dismiss this lifelong preoccupation as a youthful fancy. Like W. H. Auden, many of them find it 'embarrassing' that Yeats was not only a persistent student of the

occult but a practicing magician as well. But there is no dismissing the fact that for more than thirty years of his mature life Yeats was a member of the Order of the Golden Dawn, or its successors, the Morgenröthe and the Stella Matutina. He has testified repeatedly to the importance of his occult studies, announcing to John O'Leary that, next to poetry, these studies were 'the most important study' of his life. (Fennelly in Mills Harper 1975, p.285).

Yeats's interest in spiritualism and the occult has already been outlined in Chapter one. The relationship between Yeats's occultism and lyricism is evident in his dramatic theory, where esoteric philosophy is applied to a system of artistic expression: 'the major aspects of Yeats's theory of the theatre – ritual, symbol, pattern, rhythm – were all important elements of occult theory and practice' (Howes 1998, p.89). Yeatsian dramatic theory began as a reaction against the contemporary forms of drama prevalent on the London and Dublin stages, but quickly became something more. As explored in the previous chapters, Yeats thought realist theatre was lacking in its portrayal of humanity, as for Yeats, humanity contained a divine essence, a spirit or soul, which had been removed from the characters of naturalist drama:

Modern drama, on the hand, which accepts the tightness of the classic plot, while expressing life directly, has been driven to make indirect its expression of the mind, which it leaves to be inferred from some commonplace sentence or gesture as we infer it in ordinary life. (Yeats 1961, p.334)

The temporal self was the concern of realist drama, where the surface of the human life was explored. Yeats considered this art form to be little more than imitation:

The realistic dramatist, Yeats contended, is concerned with the exposition of characters and circumstances in the external world, with copying the surfaces of life, and presenting on the stage the merely clever and mimetic. (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.11)

He also considered actors to be complicit in this lessening of the whole human being to one aspect, namely physicality. As a result, Yeats wished to return to dramas which placed whole human characters on the stage, through the portrayal of a character which was both physical and spiritual. He did not want any member of the audience to see the actor upon the stage, but rather he wanted them to see and relate to the character that was being created through the performance, and to do so he needed to find actors who could become conduits for his own particular concept of the dramatic character. In Yeats's system, an actor must become 'a medium, a clear transparent vessel through which the emotion that is embodied in word can pass' (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.13). For Yeats, actors had become too concerned with the physicality of the character, as they only expressed the outward façade of the dramatic character, and in doing so, had lessened the power of emotion as expressed through voice. They began to 'speak as if reading the newspapers. They forgot the noble art of oratory, and gave all their thought to the poor art of acting' (Yeats 1961 p.168). Yeats gives sovereignty to language, and lyricism, musicality and rhythm of speech are of paramount importance to his drama, for it is through these traits that the anti-self, that which is emotional instinctive and spiritual, is expressed. Thus, his actors must understand this central concept:

An actor must so understand how to discriminate cadence from cadence, and so cherish the musical lineaments of verse or prose, that he delights in the ear with a continually varied music. This one has to say over and over again, but one does not mean speaking in a monotonous chant. (Yeats 1962, p.173)

Yeats's musically-toned theatre would express the Dionysian Other, and expose the anti-self in a way in which contemporary theatre was incapable, as the popular stage was a cluttered space, filled with distractions, elaborate scenery and costumes, so that the audience were unchallenged and unchanged by the dramatic experience (Yeats 1961).

Realist theatre, particularly that of Ibsen, was, according to Yeats 'too close to the mundane life to embody that heightening of everyday reality which art should achieve' (Wright 1987, p.57), and so he set about formulating his own theatre, a theatre which would embody his perception of humanity as a divided self, both physical and spiritual: 'I need a theatre [...] I believe myself to be a dramatist; I desire to show events and not merely tell of them' (Yeats cited by Clark 1993, p.xiii).

Yeats's theory of the self fed directly into his theory of a dramatic self, and the encompassing philosophy he developed would later be expressed in both *Mythologies* and *A Vision*. As a result, Yeatsian drama is permeated by his esoteric sensibilities for the idea of the human spirit being equal to a universal divine is a prominent neo-pagan and Romantic one (Jennings 2002). Yeats believed that there was an innate spiritual aspect common to all humans, and he saw this spirit or soul as a fragment of the greater divine whole and yet no lesser than the universal: 'all energy that comes from the whole man is as irregular as lightening, for the communicable and forecastable and discoverable is a part only' (Yeats 1961, p.279). Yeats believed all humans had the ability to connect with the universal via their own particular spiritual aspect, though to do so, the restrictions of the physical life had to be lessened, Yeats wrote in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae':

The soul cannot have much knowledge till it has shaken off the habit of time and of place, but till that hour it must fix its attention upon what is near, thinking of objects one after another as we run the eye or the finger over them. Its intellectual power cannot but increase and alter as its perceptions grow simultaneous. Yet even now we seem at moments to escape from time in what we call prevision, and from place when we see distant things in a dream and in concurrent dreams. (Yeats 1959, p.358)

Through his dramatic theory, Yeats was trying to find a method of balancing these bipolar forces, the soul and the body in time. Yeats longed for 'a half subjective, half

objective life: that balance that brings Unity of Being' (Moore 1973, p.205). The idea of balance is arguably the most important aspect of Yeats's theories, according to Herbert Trench (Trench acted as chairman when Yeats delivered his lecture entitled 'The Theatre' in 1910 or 1911, to which this statement is a response):

When all is said and done, the ideal which Mr. Yeats is trying to express, the primary and universal passions of men and the concern of man with his destiny – these big and universal questions must remain the only vital ones for the art to express. These plays on the surfaces do not count in the long run. (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.25)

What Yeatsian dramatic theory is trying to underwrite, and what Yeatsian dramatic performance is trying to achieve, is balance within imagery or symbolism, a unity within the stage character, individual humans and finally within society as a collective entity, and these are all central tenets of the occult and philosophical thinking within which Yeats had long been immersed.

As we have already seen in the previous chapters, this idea of the balancing of light and dark, male and female, good and bad are derived from his esoteric studies, as this was not an ideal of orthodox Christian lore. Yeats joined the Dublin Theosophical Society in 1885, before later moving to the London branch, and then on to the Order of the Golden Dawn (Foster 1998). From the very beginning of his occult scholarship, Yeats was deeply interested in the notion of 'physic and spiritual powers latent in man', and this is one of the main statements of belief in theosophy, and an idea common to all the organisations with which Yeats was involved (Blavatsky 1948, p.15). As I have stated in the previous chapter, Yeats was asked to leave the Theosophical Society as he had criticised them and their methods, and was unsatisfied by the lack of ritual practice (Yeats 1986, p.234; Yeats 1955). However, it has also been suggested that Blavatsky's banning

of mediumship among her followers, and her insistence on chastity, may also have contributed to Yeats's dissatisfaction with the society (Howes 1998). The Golden Dawn went further than Blavatsky in their declaration of aims, as they wanted to explore the divinity latent in all men, and to subsume that divine power not to be subject to it:

They encouraged the practitioners to empower themselves with incantation, within a ceremonial setting, so that they came to feel themselves combining with the divine forces concerned and becoming part of them. (Hutton 1999, p.83)

Out of these societies and paths of study emerged Yeats's understanding of the duality of human beings and so too the artistic representation of such a dialectic existence.

For Yeats, drama is the ultimate mode for such expression, as it is an art form which reflects the physical existence of humanity; indeed, it is the only art form which gives artistic characters a corporeal form. Drama is the closest art form to actual human life in that it portrays human emotions in human form. It is an immediate system of art, the response it provokes is instantaneous, the stalls do not analyse or censor their reactions, and this is important for Yeats, who feels that literature must have an 'external test' (Yeats 1962, p.152). Drama has more in common with the real, lived experience than has any other art form, as it has an exterior reality, and as such, Yeats considered it to be the medium through which he would bring about his triple-fold unification. Theatre, as a concept or as an art form, is in some way a fractured form, in that it consists of both interior and exterior aspects, and fused both Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy together in one art form; thus, it is both objective and subjective in relation to its spectators:

What attracts me to drama is that it is, in the most obvious way, what all arts are upon a last analysis. A farce and a tragedy are alike in this, that they are a moment of intense life. (Yeats 1962, p.153)

Yeats considered the idealised, balanced, dramatic character to be a Unity of Image, which would produce a universal emotional response from the audience, triggering Unity of Being. This balanced audience would then, through interaction with society at large, assist and enable his Unity of Culture. This central aspect of his theory is perhaps the most difficult branch of his scheme to actually envision or to explain adequately:

For Yeats, the theatre as occult ritual could inspire audiences to practical work in the public sphere precisely because it accessed the intersubjective unconscious, instinct and the emotions. More cerebral occult studies, on the other hand, remained interior and private experiences and would not mobilize people for the collective endeavor because they only engaged the conscious intellect. (Howes 1998, p.89)

Only through drama did art become a phenomenal reality in the societal sense which Yeats sought, and so cease to be an abstraction:

The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should tell them either of their own life, or of that life in poetry where every man can see his own image, because there alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions. (Yeats 1962, p.96)

The Yeatsian human self is a split entity: both the physical self and the spiritual anti-self exists separately but are interconnected and must unite: 'Man can only love Unity of Being and that is why such conflicts are conflicts of the whole soul' (Yeats 1962, p.302). The dramatic form itself lends itself to this process, as through exposition, conflict and resolution, it mirrors the ideal life-cycle of the dramatic character. A drama begins with the introduction of characters of either self or anti-self, the relationship between these two aspects is one of conflict, so their engagement must be resolved, and they must be brought to a unity by the curtain fall, though this does not always happen in Yeatsian drama.

Balance is the key as neither self nor anti-self must be allowed to overwhelm each

other, as the former will make human expression banal and mundane, trapped in the repressive societal status quo, while should the anti-self reign impulse, appetite and anarchy would rule:

Yeats came to see that a man who loses himself completely is no more able to create than the man who remains completely detached. The solution Yeats found toward the end of his life was a precarious balance between self-control and an acceptance of inner forces that are at once a danger and a source of power. (Webster 2000, p.88)

I would broadly agree, but would maintain that this was not just a later-life epiphany. Yeats had sought balance in drama from the onset, but as time went on, he had solidified the key objectives of his theory and through experimentation in practical application (that is in each staging of a play), he learned to progress his theory of self and adapt it for the stage. From the very beginning of his career as a dramatist, he reworked and rewrote his plays always pursuing Unity of Image, wherein self and anti-self could realise some form of fusion.

## **The Self**

The self is the intellectual physical being, defined by, and fully integrated with, the material world, while the instinctive spiritual aspect, that which Yeats calls the anti-self, is part of the human world and also the universal spiritual world, 'our thoughts and emotions are often but spray flung up from hidden tides that follow a moon no eye can see' (Yeats 1961, p.189). The self is often used to suggest or express aspects of the anti-self: 'the function of the real, then, is to suggest the unreal' (Mills Harper 1975, p.24). An important aspect to Yeats's dramatic theory is the way in which the anti-self is presented

in relation to the self; it is the relationship between the two which is the crux of Yeatsian theory:

In view of Yeats's concern with antinomies and his relentless search for Unity of Being, an aesthetic of balanced opposites should come as no surprise. Yet it is interesting how often critics of Yeats have readily conceded his pluralism, his dichotomized mind, only to proceed to examine one mask – to use the fashionable word – at the expense of the others. (Engelberg 1988, pp.xxi-xxiii)

Frequently the aspect which is focused upon is the anti-self, as the self is rarely explored, and Yeats himself could also be accused of this, as he too writes little of the self in relation to the amount of time he gave to the anti-self.

The self is the human being in body, time and world. Due to the physicality of humanity, the self lives in the material world, it is 'our daily trivial mind' (Yeats 1955 p.272), and is subject to the laws of time and space, and is it also subject to humanity's social construction. It must live within society, and obey the social, moral and legal codes of conduct:

The average man is average because he has not attained to freedom. Habit, fear of public opinion, fear of punishment here or hereafter, a myriad of things that are 'something other than human life', something less than flame, work their will upon his soul and trundle his body here and there. (Yeats 1962, p.168)

The good of the society or the tribe takes precedent over the good of the individual, so that society may be maintained, and so Yeats's self is a restricted identity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the self can be likened to Freud's conscious ego, bound to, and acutely aware of the super ego, namely the restrictions of, reality. It is also related to Nietzsche's Apollonian force, which is representational and static in time and space. As seen in the previous chapter, Yeats's reading of Nietzsche's Apollonian force was in the

metaphysical sense of the term. Thus, for him, the Apollonian self is that which separates individual from individual, and also individuals from the world as a whole. In this context, Nietzsche meant the separation of humanity from nature and the Dionysian universal divine (Nietzsche 1995). Each individual Yeatsian self, then, is also restricted by its particular life, as it is a social identity, an identity determined by the collective.

The self is rational and readily conforms to the societal super ego, because the mind, concerned with physical survival, knows it must do so. Moreover, the self recognises that for society and survival to be maintained, all within the group must conform, so that the self is not only a restricted entity, but is also that which restricts all other individual selves. The self is a base entity for which survival is the primary concern and therefore, the self seeks food, warmth, shelter, and propagation. The self seeks survival as opposed to any form of aesthetic or imaginative lived life, and thus would seem to be a poor subject for Art, which is supposed to be the human expression of the lived life:

All literature created out of a conscious political aim in the long run creates weakness by creating a habit of unthinking obedience and a habit of distrust of spontaneous impulse. It makes a nation of slaves in the name of liberty. (Yeats 1972, p.247)

However the Yeatsian dramatic self is the self analysed, it is the anti- self which is a source of that spontaneous impulse of which he speaks, primarily in relation to its opposite. This can be seen as a parallax in that each aspect betrays what is absent in its counterpart. The self, like Freud's ego, has a role to play in interacting with its opposite; while Freud allowed his self a level of control over its Other, in that the ego places limitations on the demands of the id, Yeats argues for a reciprocal and co-dependent relationship between his dualistic aspects, but he does not give us a defined method by

which this occurs. The Yeatsian dramatic self is a physical entity, confined by all the afore-mentioned criteria, but it is also the grounding force of many Yeatsian characters in the physical body of the actor, though some are devoid of a face courtesy of the doctrine of the mask. Simply put, the physical body of the actor acts as an anchor and a host for his anti-self-dominated characters. Yeats understands that humanity is consumed by 'our preoccupation of a single problem, our survival of the body' (Yeats 1994c, p.64), and as such, the grip of the physical self on the human psyche is too powerful to simply be abandoned on entering the theatre.

Yeats recognises that humanity takes its cues from the facial features and the bodily movement of each person, so that if a dramatic character is to be relatable and sensible to an audience, then the initial connection must be on a physical basis. The audience must recognise the stage character as being of human form 'for it is always ourselves that we see upon the stage' (Yeats 1961, p.241), and once that is established, then the anti-self can enter the scene. The self cannot be allowed to overwhelm the stage for to do so would reduce the Yeatsian idealised theatre to realist drama, and furthermore, it would make art empirical and thus lacking in emotion. To Yeats's mind, an art of this form would not be 'remote, spiritual and ideal' (Yeats 1961, p.166), which is why the self in his theory is always seen in tandem with the anti-self.

### **The Anti-Self**

Unlike the self, of which we as humans have empirical evidence and experience, the anti-self or Other is open for debate as it is in some ways an abstract concept. The phenomenal world is one based upon observation and experience, while the anti-self is far from everyday experience and is imbricated in philosophy and religion. The prominence of the

anti-self in Yeatsian theory is a definite legacy of his well-documented occultism and his seemingly Gnostic view of Christianity (Surette 1993). However, the anti-self's evident Otherness is also in need of study, as it is the anti-self and its relationship with the self, and indeed the contrast between the two, which must be understood particularly in relation to Yeatsian drama, as it is in the theatre that Yeats gave this relationship corporeal expression and experience. To give the anti-self a body is to give it a physical door to the material world, so that the noumenal can be perceived through the phenomenal. This is another reason why Yeatsian theory cannot be applied to the poetry or prose, as neither has the phenomenal form of drama. I have briefly mentioned the Romantics and Coleridge's theory of the Imagination in relation to Yeatsian theory, and though parallels definitely exist, it is interesting to note that the expressive modes are generically different: while the Romantics chose to in the main write poetry, Yeats held firm to the idea that drama was the ultimate mode for suggesting or expressing his dialogical theory.

The self's shadow in the Yeatsian system is the anti-self or daimon, it is the self's polar opposite. Yeats believed in an innate human soul, which was not the individual unique soul of Christianity, but rather both an individual spirit, and also a fragment of a collective universal divine essence. Yeats's concept of the anti-self is analogous to the Dionysian force, a force which is part of the greater spiritual universal, while also existing in, and engaging with, humanity. It is an emotive and philosophical force which destroys the boundaries and restrictions which the physical self erects, not only between individual material selves, but also between the self and anti-self, body and soul. Within Yeats's system, all things have an opposite, all light creates a shadow, and all who are strong are weak to somebody else: 'every <symbol has sep> influence has a shadow, as it were, an unbalanced' (Yeats 1986, p.463).

Yeats's anti-self has one foot in the physical sphere and one outside: 'there are

two realities, the terrestrial and the condition of fire' (Yeats 1959, p.356). As a result, the anti-self has restrictions placed upon it by the socially-conscious self. However, as the anti-self is also partially outside the material world, it is also free to a degree, and it lives in the unconscious and so is unburdened by every limitation society applies to its members. The anti-self is an instinctual animal-self, hyper-sexualised and hyper-spiritualised. Unlike the collectively defined self, the anti-self is a self-construct, which defines its own morals and codes of conduct. Due to the lack of physical form, it is devoid of gender or any societal considerations. For Yeats the anti-self is expressed through spirituality, sexuality and art. In terms of spirituality, the anti-self is a wholly ethereal entity. Yeats contends that the spiritual element in humanity is equal to the supernatural divine: 'one may fix attention upon the form of some god, for a god is but the self' (Yeats 1961, p.461). In Yeats's view, the divine presence, either internally or externally, was the true subject matter of all artists, no matter what faith they professed or what name they gave the divine, for the divine subject is the human subject:

If our craftsmen were to choose their subjects under what we may call, if we understand faith to mean that belief in a spiritual life which is not confined to one Church the persuasion of their faith and their country, they would soon discover that although their choice seemed arbitrary at first, it had obeyed what was deepest in them (Yeats 1961, p.208).

### **Sexualised Anti-Self**

The sexualised anti-self is akin to Freud's pleasure principle, in that it has little interest in procreation; whereas the sexual drive of the self is as restricted by society as any other aspect. In line with Schopenhauer's ideas discussed in the previous chapter, Yeats too saw sex as a means of expression for the anti-self, and he makes the point 'that the mystic

way and sexual love use the same means – opposed yet parallel existences' (Yeats 1954, p.715). The spiritual anti-self embodies a sexuality and a sexual freedom that the societal self cannot possess, and sex was another expression of Unity of Being. Yeats viewed sexual intercourse as an externalised Unity of Being, perhaps even a substitute for the internal Unity of Being between the physical and spiritual aspects; it has been recorded that Yeats said:

Sexual intercourse is an attempt to resolve the eternal antinomy, doomed to failure because it can only take place on one side of the gulf. The gulf is that which separates the one from the many, or if you like, god from man. (Yeats cited by Arkins 1990, p.148; Meihuizen 1998, p.153)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Yeats's own sexualised 'self-loathing' (Yeats 1972, p.72), and his struggle with his 'senses' made him 'dread the subject of sex' (Yeats 1972, p.33), added to the prevailing societal norms of his age, perhaps sanitised the sexual element within the dramatic theory and resulting plays: though it is there, it is not overt in the majority of the dramas, the one obvious exception is *The Herne's Egg* which he wrote in later life. It has been argued that it is not until later in his life, and upon marriage, that Yeats began to speak openly of sexuality, and went to great pains to rework his theory in order to incorporate this basic human drive, though this reworking is mainly limited to *A Vision* (Tedesco-Haswell 1997). Few academics write of Yeats's ideas concerning sex or sexuality, though many do write of his biographical sexual life; his pre and post-marital affairs are well documented, as are his struggles with impotency (Alldritt 1997; Foster 2005). Though his artistic sexual life is often passed over, some like Meihuizen, Webster and Tedesco-Haswell, do address the sexual element to Yeats's work. Through her study *Pressed against Divinity: W. B. Yeats's Feminine Mask*, Tedesco-Haswell examines *A Vision* and discusses Yeats's conceptions on gender and sexual relationships between the

genders, in terms of both self and daimon. While *A Vision* is not the focus of my own research, the ideas relating to sexuality expressed within it, and Tedesco-Haswell's work on these, have something to contribute to an understanding of the dramatic theory, and to the Yeatsian theory of self as a whole. I have already looked at this work in previous chapters, but will highlight some pertinent points here.

Tedesco-Haswell claims that Yeats reworked *A Vision* as he was 'clearly unhappy with the focus of the text, not because it lacks those meaty philosophical abstractions he later prizes in the second edition but because it falls short of elucidating his sexual dynamic' (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.36). What is Yeats's sexual dynamic? Yeats views sex as a potent powerful drive, and also a subject of importance: 'I am still of the opinion that only two topics can be of the least interest to a serious and studious mind –Sex and the dead' (Yeats 1954, p.730). Yeats believed in an afterlife, and seemed to view the dead as those who transcend to the universal divine and can, through evoked vision, communicate and have an impact upon the living, so that the dead appear to have been integrated into the universal Other (Yeats 1959). The dead, as Yeats describes them, and their position in his scheme, are comparable to what he earlier referred to as the moods (Yeats 1961).

In terms of the sexualised anti-self, this self, as we have seen, is Dionysian in its mode and as such, is frenzied and drunken so that the sexual state of the anti-self is not one of inhibition. Returning to Schopenhauer, in his philosophy it is through sex that we forgo the material world and glimpse the universal divine. In Yeats's understanding, the sexual and the mystical were closely bound, and he thought there was a direct conduit linking the two states of being, and yet perhaps as a result of his own early sexual repression, he found it difficult to articulate or explore this idea or understanding of his:

I was tortured by sexual desire and had been for many years. I have often said to

myself that someday I would put it all down in a book that some young man of talent might not think as I did that my shame was mine alone. (Yeats 1972, p.71)

In 'Autobiography', which is dated 1916-17, coinciding with his marriage in 1917 to Georgie Hyde Lees, he recounts a vision he had, though he does not date the experience:

One night I heard a voice, while I lay on my back, say I would be shown a secret, the secret of life and of death, but I must not speak of it. The room seemed to brighten and as I looked towards the foot of the bed I saw that it had changed into precious stones and yet these stones had a familiar look – they reminded me of the raised glass fruit on the bottle of lime-juice in my childhood. I never associated this growing brightness with sex, until all became suddenly dark and I found I had emitted seed. (Yeats 1972, p.127)

The link between mystical experience and sex is evident here in his descriptions of a climactic sexualised spiritual experience, there is no bodily contact with another person; the sexual encounter as he describes it is also not masturbatory but rather the originating experience is noumenal culminating in orgasm which goes unnoticed until the spiritual encounter has ended. Present here too is the underlying trend of the secrecy of esoteric knowledge that ran through Yeats's occult life, and similarly Yeats's subconscious association of the divine with precious stones, with aesthetic beauty and with monetary worth, a trope which would reappear in 'Rosa Alchemica', where the gods glimmer 'like rubies and sapphires' (Yeats 1959, p.287).

It is later in his life when he was impotent, that he became consumed with the idea of linking artistic ability to sexual potency, and returns as Tedesco-Haswell argues, to *A Vision* where he attempts to express the idea of a link between spirituality and sexuality. According to Tedesco-Haswell, who focused on *A Vision* and the automatic scripts (which are the papers which document the newly-married Yeats' experiments in automatic writing), Yeats spent much time questioning the spirit guides of his wife on the

role and composition of sexuality:

The Dialogues of 1919, when sexuality assumed centre stage reveal that a man's daimon uses all the faculties (Senses) of the body, but particularly the sixth sense, which is sexual (243). Through the sixth sense, the daimon accesses the Anima Mundi and the personal Anima Mundi (244). [...] The connection of daimon to sexuality is absolute: 'Have we no consciousness of daimon apart from sex?' 'None' the guide replies (259). (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.53)

The last line of this parallels the insistence of Schopenhauer that through sex, humanity can glimpse the spiritual, though as we have already seen, both Yeats and Schopenhauer argue that art could also be a conduit to the divine. By 'Anima Mundi', Yeats means the gendered anti-self, the unconscious memory and also personal memory, which is probably what is distinguished here by the use of the term 'personal Anima Mundi'. The term itself is one borrowed from Jung, who considered it to be 'the soul-image' or in simplistic terms, the internalised, oppositely-gendered self of a man, as Jung referred to such a female internalised gendered-opposite as Animus (Jung 1983; Tedesco-Haswell, 1997, p.16). In some ways, the term Anima Mundi can be substituted for anti-self: 'the Anima usually contains all those human qualities that the conscious attitude lacks' (Jung 1983, p.101) The Anima Mundi is then equated with the unconscious, but is this not also what the daimon is? This ambiguity and confusion is perhaps why Yeatsian theory is under-explored, as it is complicated and often contrived. However, Yeats also uses the term 'Anima Hominis', which is the creative self, the mask: '*Anima Hominis* and *Anima Mundi*, the first dealing with the mask and the second with the relation of the mask to the spiritual world, realm of *daimons* and the dead' (Bloom 1970, p.178).

Hence, if the Anima Hominis is the mask but not the daimon, then the daimon is equally not anti-self. This exemplifies my point about the multitude of terms which Yeats employs, and also about the interchangeable way in which he uses them, and how this

can be a source of confusion. Margaret Mills Harper rightly states, not just in relation to Yeats, but in respect to the notion of the daimon in western culture in general, that 'it is never clear whether daimon is a minor god or an emanation from someone's own interior state' (Mills Harper 2006, p.300). One of the problems in relation to Yeats is that he appears to use the term 'daimon' to mean slightly different things in differing contexts; thus the term 'daimon' within *A Vision* seems a much larger concept, but in relation to the drama, daimon appears to simply be anti-self, man's own shadow:

daimon comes not as like to like but seeking its own opposite, for man and daimon feed the hunger in one another's hearts. Because the ghost is simple, the man heterogeneous and confused, they are but knit together when the man has found a mask whose lineaments permit the expression of all the man most lacks. (Yeats 1959, p.335)

Yeats is fully aware of his elastic use of daimon as a term, and in the retrospective foot notes to this quote, he states that:

I could not distinguish at the time between the permanent daimon and the impermanent, who may be 'an illustrious dead man', though I knew the distinction was there. I shall deal with the matter in *A Vision*. (Yeats 1959, p.335n)

Evidently Yeats's own understanding of his terms is also progressive.

The Yeatsian sense of sexual identity is closely bound to his conception of the anti-self as Other. The sexual identity or impulse is also instinctive, immediate and for Yeats emotional; it is beyond the rational or intellectual and therefore must be the domain of the anti-self. However like the Other, it resides in a body and needs a body to express itself adequately in the real world, so sex, like art, is the means through which the noumenal becomes phenomenal, while also allowing for the transcendence of an individual entity both conscious and subconsciously. As I had already touched upon,

Tedesco-Haswell argues that Yeats's anti-self is always the gendered opposite of the self, this mainly stems from Yeats's referring to his own anti-self as female, as in his poetical persona 'Crazy Jane': 'Yeats clearly envisioned the daimon as "she" because his own was female' (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.38). She further views Yeats's conception of gender as a fixed ideal: 'the gendered opposition is internal as well as external', and builds her argument on the *Vision Papers*, Yeats and George's experiments with automatic writing (Tedesco-Haswell 1997, p.29). However I would suggest that Yeats may have associated his own anti-self with a female essence, simply because it was the opposite of his own bodily form. Furthermore he does not labour the point that all anti-Selves are gendered opposites, and I am more in agreement with Barbara Sues, who argues that the Yeatsian anti-self is androgynous, although she does stress that she is referring to a psychological and culturally-conditioned notion of identity:

My delineation of Yeats's philosophical and theatrical approach to androgyny does not concern androgyny in its physical or sexualized aspects (e.g., not as represented by hermaphroditism, transsexuality, or drag culture) but with psychological androgyny as it relates to the social construction of identity. (Sues 2003. p.93)

## **Gender**

Yeats's view of his own gender is interesting, because he is more than aware of his own feminine nature, and writes to George Russell of his 'womanish introspection' (Yeats 1954, p.434). Yeats was not the stereotypical 'man', with stereotypical male traits particularly in relation to Victorian English society; he was an aesthetic of weak constitution, and most of his letters contain some reference to his bad health or poor eyesight. In this context, he is aware that his weakened physical presence would liken

him to a woman in the contemporary Victorian stereotype which saw women as generically delicate and emotional. However as I have mentioned, change was in the air, because just as Yeats conceived of the beginning of a new age in relation to religion and the art, a change in attitudes toward women and their position within society was also taking place, as the women's movement gained momentum and influence. Similarly Yeats's involvement in occult societies which favoured equal status among the sexes added to his own opinions and views of gender.

Yeats himself, never considered woman as weak, in fact he places emotion and intuition, traditionally female traits, as the most powerful characteristics of the anti-self, and their representation is a central aim of his dramatic theory, in that the point of a Yeatsian performance is to induce the audience to an emotional and instinctive response. Yeats believes that such a response is the universal trait that binds humanity together, as the physical self is arbitrary and conditioned by society. For Yeats, woman are nearer to the anti-self, because they appear to have a closer relationship with the spiritual realm (Yeats 1959, p.115). In terms of his occult experiments and mediations, according to Howes, he tended to see visions while in the company of woman (Howes 1998, p.88). He writes of having a vision of a woman who was 'both man and woman; and once a young boy and a young girl' (Yeats 19772, p.127). Yeats frequently creates female characters who are ethereal, and possessed of secretive and powerful wisdom, although, since many of his plays are based upon ancient Irish myths this may not be all his own doing, as the myths of pagan Ireland promote female strength and equality in a way that contemporary Victorian literature did not:

It was left for the Irish playwrights of our own day to bring back the supernatural to the theatre and to render it acceptable to modern taste. Recapturing the strangeness and beauty of Celtic superstition they seek to create an atmosphere

charged with the mystery of the unseen and the indefinable rather than display the cruder manifestations of the supernatural. (Budd 2005, p.91)

I have no interest here, in exploring Yeats's ideas concerning Anglo-Irish conceptions of gender or his cultural nationalism or identity, all of which have received sustained academic attention. However, many have drawn parallels between the patriarchal English and the matriarchal Irish tendencies, and the trend within the English mentality to view Ireland as feminised and therefore inferior to the masculine England (Seuss 2003; Pickett 1999). Declan Kiberd, in particular, draws a parallel between Yeatsian dualism and the Anglo-Irish relationship, equating the English characteristics to the primary self and Irish characteristics to the anti-self:

Anglo-Gyre – Primary: democratic, scientific, factual, objective, Christian, realistic, god over one soul.

Celtic Gyre – antithetical: hierarchical, aesthetic, visionary, subjective, pagan, idealistic, multiple self. (Kiberd 1996, p.318)

As I have said, the English/Irish dichotomy is not of central interest to my own research, but is an interesting and important point to bear in mind in relation to Yeats's system as a whole.

Yeats's female characters are often stereotypically masculine in their actions; however Yeats, as we have seen, believed in a basic duality of humanity, which meant that gender is as fluid as any other state. While we are born to a certain body, all other concepts or restrictions of gender are null and void, as according to Yeats's theory, all humans possess female and masculine traits. In his system, women may be aggressive and violent, while men can be overwhelmed by emotion or become hysterical, which is exemplified by Cuchulain at the close of *On Baile's Strand*, or the portrayal of Conchubar's patriarchal rule. The Yeatsian conception of the anti-self, as we have seen,

harbours many traditionally female characteristics, but these are characteristics which he recognised within himself and within his own psyche. The anti-self is equally a spiritual entity or soul and therefore is devoid of a gender which is a biological state and human intellectual construct.

Both the sexual self and the spiritual self are identities without a bodily form through which to express themselves; rather they are instinctive emotional forces often articulated through the aid of language, sound, music, movement, and symbols. Though Yeats gives lyrical language sovereignty within his scheme, he also incorporates sound, music and rhythmic bodily-movement into his ritualised drama, particularly in his 'plays for dancers'. In 'Rosa Alchemica', Yeats portrays a rhythmic sexualised ritual, where his character of the self is seen to engage with a dark woman who wears black lilies in her hair, from which no petal was 'shaken from their places, and I understood with great horror that I danced with one who was more or less than human, and who was drinking up my soul' (Yeats 1959, p.290). This woman is either a goddess or a demon or both: she is the Other, the universal and personal anti-self in corporeal form. In this scene, her otherness, the fact that neither time nor gravity, to which humans are subject, touches her, betrays that she is not subject to temporal reality. In this encounter, she drains him of his potency, both spiritually and sexually, but crucially the narrator of the story, rather than engaging with her, is repulsed by her, and by the sexualised ritualistic experience. The narrator-character had gone to great pains to keep himself wrapped in his safe orthodoxy while dreaming of esoteric experience, the reality of which makes him retreat from the mysterious dark lady to that which he knows, his talismanic rosary. While this character retreats from the Other, some Yeatsian characters chase the anti-self in pursuit of a relationship, such as Cuchulain in *At the Hawk's Well*. While others, such as Congal in *The Herne's Egg*, and the Wise Man of *The Hourglass*, seek to destroy and dominate the

anti-self in order to retain the familiar material world and their authority within it.

## **Conception of Art**

Yeats's use of chant and music in these dramas is a return to Greek choral theatre, and while the subject matter of his work is Irish, it is also heavily influenced by Japanese Shinto ritualised dramas. Though these dramas are an amalgamation of three different ritualised origins, Yeats fuses them into a cohesive work. Indeed, it could be suggested that this is yet another Yeatsian unity of theatre, fusing the Greek ritual drama, from which all theatre as a structured art form springs, and which represents the universal aspect of the anti-self, with the Shinto influence, which represents the highly spiritualised unfamiliar masked Other, and the Irish influence, which may be seen to represent the reality of the physical, temporal self.

The anti-self is expressed through art, as in artistic expression, the author is free of the societal restrictions; his imagination is free in a way that his body in time, space and civilisation is not. Art stems from emotion and passion; it does not derive its subject matter from empiricism:

Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is from the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body. Its morality is personal, knows little of any general law. (Yeats 1961, pp.292-3)

Art then originates in the Soul, the anti-self, and it is personal passion given a sensuous element so that it may enter the phenomenal world, unlike the perceptions of the self in relation to the anti-self. Yeats allows the noumenal to be perceived as phenomenal by giving it a sacred space which suspends the temporal reality through the medium of

drama. He allows the artistic anti-self to be a self-defined entity, removing the perceptions of the self from the relating and understanding of the anti-self. For Yeats, the artistic urge to create is the anti-self which is striving to be perceived. Art comes from the soul as art is emotive expression:

I am certain there is something in myself compelling me to attempt a creation of an art as separate from everything heterogeneous and casual, from all character and circumstance. (Yeats 1955, p.321)

Perhaps more accurately, it could be said that art is a result of the conflict between the passions of the anti-self and the conditioning of the societal self, and ultimately from the lessening of self-imposed or community-imposed restrictions:

We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.[...] The other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may choose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality. (Yeats 1959, p.331)

The audience sees, hears and understands the shadow aspect which provokes an instinctive and instant response. This response acts more quickly than the thinking self which must analyse and justify its reaction to art. The self's reaction to art is always one of opinion because the self, by its very nature, is a physical and social being, it reasons and rationalises its reactions individually, and yet as it is also part of a collective community, it has been socially-conditioned to some extent in its judgements and the formations of its opinions. This means that reactions which may seem instinctive are often habitual in origin, or born out of insecurity (Yeats 1961, p.189). The self has a duty to agree upon societal norms. The prevailing societal conditions of Yeats's time were those of Victorian/Edwardian England, and of a conservative Christianised community, influenced by enlightenment ideas and by the emergence of anthropology and

psychology. Of course, as we have already seen in chapter one, there was a movement within certain circles of this society toward the arcane and esoteric, and there was a flourishing of secret societies, and spiritualism, séances and table tapping grew in popularity among the upper classes. We have also touched upon the changing status and attitudes concerning gender roles, specifically in relation to women.

## Duality

Yeats like his anti-self, also had a foot in another world, as in Ireland, though Christian on the surface, ancient memories of paganism and spirituality survived in folk stories and beliefs, many of which Yeats collected with Lady Gregory, and recounted in *The Celtic Twilight*, as early as 1893. This fractured aspect of the Irish psyche surely inspired the theory of the fractured self which Yeats espoused and attempted to reconcile. Foster highlights another element to Yeats's own inclination toward the unifying ideals of the occult. Yeats, as a member of the Protestant ascendancy, was in a minority in terms of religion in Ireland, he was also an outsider in cultural terms, and he felt this sense of marginality quite keenly. Though he considered himself to be Irish, he knew his Irishness was slightly different to that of the majority:

The Irish Protestant sense of displacement, their loss of social and psychological integration towards the end of the nineteenth century, was particularly acute in the Yeatses case. (Foster 1998, p.50)

This division of Yeats's own cultural identity may have lead him to explore the theme in the first place, and Foster certainly argues that Yeats's attraction to, and study of, the occult stemmed from such a feeling of alienation. His occult and philosophic studies would have shown him that the occult and the primary ideology of paganism, which

referred to a split in the human psyche between a physical and spiritual aspect, would indeed have paralleled his own personal experience in Ireland. This idea is not my primary concern, and has been explored by many others, but it is an idea which bears consideration. Though Yeats often criticised the Irish for failing to understand his dramas or what was trying to achieve with the Irish theatre, and though he based elements of his theatre on Noh, Greek and some Indian ideals, his theatre was, nevertheless, to be an Irish Theatre:

I understand my own race and in all my work, lyric or dramatic, I have thought of it. If the theatre fails I may or may not write plays – but I shall write for my own people – whether in love or hate of them matters littler – probably I shall not know which it is. (Yeats 1954, p.501)

In *A Vision*, Yeats redefined his ideas concerning self and anti-self, introducing even more terms and dividing the entities into two further aspects. Yeats postulates that a human contains four faculties: the will, the mask, the body of fate and the creative mind. The will and the mask he sees as being antithetical and lunar, while the creative mind and the body of fate are primary and solar. In simpler terms, the will and mask belong to the anti-self, and are defined as follows:

By Will is understood feeling that has not become desire because there is no object to desire; a bias by which the soul is classified and its phase fixed but which as yet is without result in action. (Yeats 2008, p.15)

'By mask is understood that image of what we wish to become, or of that by which we give our reverence' (Yeats 2008, p.15). Evidently, the remaining two belong to the self. The body of fate is as it appears 'the changing human body, the stream of Phenomena as this affects a particular individual' (Yeats 2008, p.15). The creative mind is intellect that is 'all the mind that is consciously constructive' (Yeats 2008, p.15). In light of this, we

can postulate the anti-self to be the mask, something which is to be revered in that it is the divine element of humanity, while also being the emotional instinct. The self, on the other hand, is the temporal individual man who is separate from his fellow humans and employs the faculty of reason. There is again an echo here of the individuation of humanity as expressed in the construct of Nietzsche's Apollonian force. Though the terms self and anti-self are efficient enough for an understanding of the dramatic theory, Yeats goes on to complicate his system further by introducing the terms 'personality' and 'character', and it is the latter term that is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether he means what he defines as character in general, or whether he is referring to the dramatic character on the stage. In the following section, I shall use the term 'dramatic character' to mean just this: a 'dramatis personae'.

### **Character/Personality**

In the sphere of the theatre, Yeats himself introduces the terms 'character' and 'personality'. Character he equates with the physical self, while personality emerges out of the individual passions of the anti-self. I have already touched on this distinction in the previous chapter. The ideal dramatic form for Yeats is the unity of character and personality:

Yeats conjures – as he does with increasing force throughout his theoretical, critical and autobiographical writings – an ideal for the expression of passion on the stage. That ideal emerges as a noble being, communicating in all its lineaments the individual form of its passion. (Richman 2000, p.31)

The most prominent and comprehensive academic study on this idea and Yeats's use of these terms is found in the second chapter of *Yeats and the Theatre*, written by Robert

O'Driscoll: 'Yeats on Personality: Three Unpublished Lectures'. This chapter not only gives O'Driscoll's analysis, but also reproduces the three lectures dating about 1909-1920, that Yeats presented in London drawing rooms as a fund raising exercise for the Abbey Theatre.

Yeats equates the self with character, as character is developed through living as the self in time, so it develops with age and it has a personal history unique to itself: character 'can only express itself perfectly in a real world, being that world's creature' (Yeats 1961 p.243). Conversely personality is:

the expression, without regard to circumstance or accruing advantage, of the energy that is unique to an individual expressing himself in active life or passionate feeling. Caught up with it is the sense of individuality, identity, and an instinct which intuitively draws a person to something, before the intellectual faculties can justify that process. (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.7)

This is the instinctive anti-self which ignores convention and acts before the self has a chance to mediate or restrict its actions, and it is this very act of instant emotive response that Yeats wants, and indeed needs, from his audience. In his dramatic theory, their reaction to a character, situation or the drama as a whole must be one of passionate feeling, it cannot be a rationalised censored reaction. The self must not be allowed time to form an opinion or sanitise the unconscious response, so in this way, the emotive response from the anti-self is the honest response which is the teleological aim of Yeatsian drama. O'Driscoll proposes that what Yeats sought was a:

Literature that celebrates the energies of the body as well as the energies of the mind, which captures the intensity of personal life that moves a man who is free from fear and dependence on external circumstance (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.5).

Yeats sought to call personality onto the stage so that the dramatic form probed beneath

the surface of life, and mined the fears and the restrictions that are part of lived experience in order to expose the core motivations of each stage character, while also exploring that which connected all humans to the universal divine element. By calling the personal anti-self to the stage, Yeats wanted to present the virtues of both the physical public body, and the private emotive mind. In short, he desired to present the whole man, or the potential man, the being which all could be through his system. Yeats also used the terms 'tragedy' and 'comedy' to signify the characteristics and dramatic forms of each aspect.

For Yeats, tragedy was from the anti-self, it was an emotive response that broke 'the dykes that separate man from man, and it upon these dykes that comedy keeps house' (Yeats 1961, p.241). The tragic response is the expression of the anti-self, while the human life as it is lived in the absurdity of the perceived world is portrayed in comedy. In the previous chapter, I mentioned a letter Yeats wrote to his father on his analysis of Juliet and her nurse from *Romeo and Juliet*, where he spelled out the difference between terms: 'Juliet has personality, her nurse has character' (Yeats 1954, p.548). The nurse is very much an earthy character, who is concerned with placing restrictions on Juliet while also being an element of comic relief in the play, while tragic Juliet is overwhelmed by her passionate anti-self and as it is allowed free reign without the guiding hand of the regulatory self, all in ends in anarchy and destruction. This parallels Nietzsche's conception of tragedy as Dionysian, as it reflects the element that breaks the boundaries of man and nature. The Dionysian is the force, which while it may embody ecstatic and frenzied pleasure as we have seen, can also destroy all that it touches. However Nietzsche also suggests that such wholesale destruction leads to a unity:

When we anticipate, in Dionysian ecstasy, the indestructability and eternity of this joy. In spite of fear and pity, we are happy living beings, not as individuals, but as the one living being, with whose creative joy we are united. (Nietzsche 1995,

p.60)

For Nietzsche then, tragedy as a genre is at its core a positive and affirming form of art as it ends in joy and calm. Interestingly, Bohlmann claims that Yeatsian tragedy 'pivots around passion leading to a calm' (Bohlmann 1982, p.49) and goes on to suggest particularly in relation to the dance plays that 'tragedy is revealed as a state of mind which the mask is able to embody on the stage' (Bohlmann 1982, p.50). This reiterates my own opinion of the mask as an Apollonian static representation through which the Dionysian may enter the scene. It also reflects Nietzsche's own ideas on tragedy as the art form through which the Dionysian speaks through the Apollonian 'image-world' (Nietzsche 1995, p.27). To some extent then Nietzsche concept of tragedy can be seen as paralleling Yeats's ideas concerning Unity of Image, however I don't think Unity of Image relies so heavily upon one genre of drama over another.

For Yeats the dramatic character is an example of Unity of Image, it is a visually sensible creation, and by presenting an audience with such a whole, Yeats sought to provoke a Unity of Being in each audience member. He hoped that the stage-character would cause an instant emotive universal response, and in so doing, would allow the anti-self of the audience to burst forth and engage with the self, no matter how fleeting that engagement. The aim was that a relationship of balance would emerge within the audience member who, on leaving the theatre, would provoke the same response in society in general: this, in microcosm, is Yeats's notion of Unity of Culture. The Unity of Image took place in the artistic sacred sphere, while Unity of was a wholly individual experience occurring in the stalls, and the ensuing Unity of Culture happened on the streets, in the very society that had restricted the Other:

We must cry out that imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that Great Mind, and that Great Memory? Can

there be anything so important as to cry out that what we shall call romance, poetry, intellectual beauty, is the only signal that the supreme Enchanter, or someone in His councils, is speaking of what has been, and shall be again, in the consummation of time? (Yeats 1961 p.52)

This quote exemplifies why many chose to locate Yeats within the Romantic tradition, particularly Ellmann and Bloom, However I would suggest that while there are elements and parallels with Romanticism to be found in the writing and thought of Yeats, he was more far too complex a thinker and writer to be explained by an label or combination of labels.

Yeats considered his theories of Unity to be a replacement for the waning orthodox religions, and this highly spiritualised system would be, if not a new spiritual system of faith, then one which would reawaken the old pagan faiths:

The arts are, I believe about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essences of things, not with things. (Yeats 1961, p.193)

This renewed way of being would be a return to the universal divine aspect, to the Dionysian unified essence, rather than what he saw as the contemporary focus on the material objects and trappings of a faith bound by the temporal existence and institutions of orthodoxy:

The Makers of religion have established their ceremonies, their form of art, upon fear of death, upon the hope of the father in his child, upon the love of man and woman. They have even gathered into their ceremonies the ceremonies of more ancient faiths, for fear a grain of dust turned into crystal in some past fire, a passion that had mingled with the religious idea might perish if the ancient ceremony perished. They even renamed well and images and given new meaning to ceremonies of spring and midsummer and harvest. In very early days the arts were so possessed by this method that they were almost inseparable from religion,

going side by side with it into all life. (Yeats 1961, pp.203-4)

This passage by Yeats refers to the adoption of pagan festivals and deities by Christian holy days and saints, the most well-known example being St. Bridget who had been the pagan Goddess 'Bridget', and he is also reminding his reader of the ritual origins of theatre, recalling the dramatic convention of the *Deus ex Machina*, the entry of the divine onto the human artistic stage. Yeats further explored his ideas surrounding the Christian church and paganism in *Mythologies*.

## **Rosa Alchemica**

In 'Rosa Alchemica', published in 1897, Yeats introduces his character or perhaps his own anti-self, Michael Robartes, who later appeared in 'Michael Robartes and the Dancer' (1921). The first question most academics address in relation to 'Rosa Alchemica' is whether or not Yeats is the narrator of the story. I think this a very valid point, and though I have said that the dramatic theory cannot be fully applied to Yeatsian poetry, and perhaps it cannot be fully applied to the prose either, yet we can glean an understanding of Yeats's theory of self through some of his fictional prose, particularly those in *Mythologies*. William Gorski argues that:

Though some critics maintain that the narrator is a stand-in for Yeats, I would clarify this by stating that Yeats used his creative work to give form to the dissenting, cautioning voices that his declamatory stances in his essays would not allow. (Gorski 1996, p.69)

I would also argue that, in some way, the narrator of the story is Yeats, in that this is the fictional Yeatsian self, though not an autobiographical self as such. This narrator could be considered as one fragment of the Yeatsian persona, although I do also think it would

be possible to consider this character to be a personification of the Societal self at large, in that he is a reflection of many men of Yeats's social group: men who studied history, myth and the occult; men who were aesthetic in inclination but who were ultimately restricted by the legal and social community within which they lived. If this narrator, who is never named within the story, is the fictional self, then Robartes must be anti-self. It is very interesting that Yeats frequently does not name some of his characters, and this is particularly seen in the dramas, where he gives them their descriptions, 'fool', 'blind man', 'old man', 'the Greek' and 'musician' instead. This anonymity may be there to remove the phenomenal dimension from the character, similar to his adopting of the mask for the same purpose, because names categorise and are sometimes symbolic of ownership or control. This absence of defining features such as faces and names may also be indicative of Yeats's interest in notions of perception and in the inherent ambiguity such a concept implies.

Humans name things which they do not understand so that they may impose their world view on them. A good example of this is the idea of the changeling: 'everyone has heard of changelings, how a baby will be taken away and a miserable goblin left in its stead' (Yeats 2004, p.118). Is it not conceivable that this notion of a fairy child being left in the place of a human one was a primitive and yet wholly understandable way of explaining deformity, mental illness, epilepsy, autism or numerous other conditions, that science came to explain? One of the most notorious cases in Ireland was the Bridget Cleary case, where by a woman was burnt by her husband and father as they believed her to be a changeling, or so they claimed. Yeats himself was aware of the case (Burke 2001, p.163). Of course, it is also perfectly conceivable that the changeling is nothing more than someone who retains pagan tendencies, as in herbalists or someone who does not conform to the societal norm, in Yeatsian terms, the anti-self could be called a changeling. Naming

something foreign takes the fear away and gives an element of power to those who impose the name. Yeats's unnamed characters usually belong to the anti-self, in they are not mythological characters, but they are recognisably human though deprived of the human convention of a name. I will explore this further in the next chapter, when I will analyse the plays in light of his dramatic theory.

Yeats's explores his theory of self through many of his essays, and much of his autobiographical work; often, these texts are dense, and cluttered with quotations, and they are challenging to read and understand. However, he also explored the theory through fictional prose and in this way, made it perhaps more relatable. 'Rosa Alchemica' begins with the narrator surrounded by aesthetically beautiful objects, many of which gesture towards the esoteric and ancient pagan. Then he is pulled from his reverie by the appearance of Michael Robartes, whom he has not seen in ten years. Robartes presses him to become an initiate of the order of the Alchemical Rose. The narrator is a character who surrounds himself with the symbols and trappings of ancient esoteric occultism and paganism, with 'antique bronze gods and goddesses' (Yeats 1959, p.268). He is a writer who writes on alchemy, though he is not an alchemist himself, and so remains apart from the reality of the occult world of Robartes: 'Through art and meditation he believes he can experience the range of human passion without bitterness' (O'Driscoll 1975b, p.37). He is the self, restrained by his society, and yet seemingly not by Christianity, and in the freedom of his own back rooms can fantasise surrounded by imagery of a world to which he is too afraid to commit himself. He is not a Christian, he is a man who has:

Gathered about me all the gods because I believed in none, and experienced every pleasure because I gave myself to none, but held myself apart, individual, indissoluble, a mirror of polished steel. (Yeats 1959, p.268)

Is it odd that a man concerned with alchemy would liken himself to a base metal, though one that has been cleaned and buffed to reflect, and perhaps imitate, his surroundings? Perhaps this is an image of possible transformation into gold, through his alchemical studies? He is the self which is trying to provoke Unity of Image by surrounding himself with his gods, nymphs and the peacock feathers of Hera; however, he has failed to realise that in order to achieve Unity of Image, he must take an active role, rather than simply passively admiring his treasures:

The narrator has withdrawn into a cocoon to protect his tenuous sense of self and, in alchemical terms, he has refused to submit himself to the fires of the crucible. Although he obviously desires the transformation that alchemy represents, he is trying to sidestep the process of transformation, especially so, as Yeats here conceives it, since submission to the fires entails yielding to an unknown power, an 'Other'. (Gorski 1996, p.80)

On meeting Robartes again, he is reminded of the 'magnetic power' which this being, who is something between 'a debauchee, a saint, and a peasant', had over him. Robartes's freedom of Being is intoxicating to the narrator, who tells us that Robartes had asked him to become an initiate ten years previously, a request the narrator had left unfulfilled. Robartes declares that the narrator is dreamer, a fantasist:

You have shut away the world and gathered the gods about you, and if you do not throw yourself at their feet, you will always be full of lassitude, and of wavering purpose, for a man must forget he is miserable in the bustle and noise of the multitude in this world and in time; or seek out a mystical union with the multitude who govern this world and time. (Yeats 1959, p.273)

This is Yeats's theory of the self out of the mouth of Robartes: the self is bound to the material world in time and space, but may find a freedom in an engagement with the anti-self, and a mystical union with the universal divine. The narrator agrees that he may need

a spiritual reunion, but asks why he should turn to 'Eleusis and not to Calvary?' Robartes replies that no one speaks to just one god, and 'the more a man lives in imagination and in a refined understanding, the more gods does he meet with and talk with' (Yeats 1959, p.274), reflecting the neo-pagan attitude of the character.

Robartes's view appears to be one which reflects Gnosticism, Frazer's cyclical system, and also neo-paganism in that he is promoting a polytheistic faith, and he goes on to rage against the 'god of Humility' who 'has cast so great a spell over men that they have tried to unpeople their hearts that He might reign alone' (Yeats 1959, p.275). The Christian god of 'sorrow' and 'humility' has demanded that men worship him alone and remove the other old gods from their hearts. Robartes, however, contends that this is impossible for some to do; the old gods live on and can be united with man again. The continuing argument sways the narrator who agrees to go with Robartes to become an initiate in his order. On their arrival at the ramshackle temple of Robartes's order, there occurs a conflict as they face a Christian who calls them 'idolaters' and 'witches', and bids them to go to hell so that the fish may return to the bay, and here again Yeats's knowledge of the Irish folk faith, and of Christianity tainted with the old pagan ideals, is abundantly clear, for if they were wholly Christians, then they would not believe that a human could curse the seas. These people and their disturbance of the narrator's transcendent experience parallels the narrator's earlier declaration:

I feel a great tolerance for those people with incoherent personalities, who gather in chapels and meeting-places of obscure sects, because I also have felt fixed habits and principles dissolving before a power, which was *hysterica passio* or sheer madness, if you will, but was so powerful in its melancholy exultation that I tremble lest it wake again and drive me from my new found peace. (Yeats 1959, p.278)

The spirituality and ritual of the alchemical order that Yeats portrays in this story parallels his theories of self and drama. The narrator learns that their spirituality centres around a belief in 'spiritual alchemy', whereby they 'put off the mortal and put on the immortal', and also a belief in the 'independent reality of our thoughts'. This transformation is the understanding of the world as a perceived and imposed idea, and a belief that, through the shaking off of the self and an adoption of the anti-self, a spiritual unity may be acquired, not through the grace of god but by actual human action, through ritual. He is also told that divinity appears through symbols and imagery which can be created by magicians and artists. The order makes a distinction between divinity and demonic, and yet suggests that both good and evil originate in the one place. There are echoes of neo-paganism here, in terms of duality, as all gods, as we have seen, are both light and dark as nature is (Horne 2000).

The narrator must prepare both his mind and body for the ritual through dressing in crimson robes and by learning the rhythmic dance of the ritual: 'rhythm was the wheel of Eternity on which alone the transient and accidental could be broken, and the spirit set free' (Yeats 1959, p.286).

The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols. (Yeats 1961, p.159)

So for Yeats himself, who wrote the above statement in 1900, and the narrator of 'Rosa Alchemica', rhythm is a means of freeing the anti-self from the dictates of the self and in doing so, it evokes the symbols and imagery of spiritual freedom. This also echoes the previous chapter's section on Schopenhauer, who believed that music above all caused

man to loose himself, to forget his temporal existence, and to engage with the undifferentiated universal divine mass. So rhythm must be incorporated into the dramatic theory if the anti-self is to be invoked; so, just as a witch would invoke a god into the sacred circle, so Yeats would conjure the internal gods into the sacred sphere of the playhouse.

On his way to the ritual space, when placing his hand on the door handle, the narrator enters a trance-like state in which he is transformed, and 'seemed to be a mask'. The mask is a symbol of the anti-self, as it is the means of obscuring the self, and implies a state of readiness in the narrator, who by adopting the mask, has left his body in time outside the temple walls, and is now willing to engage with the gods, including his own internal divinity. He is now an initiate of the order and a conduit of the anti-self, both personal and universal.

The sacred space itself is circular, symbolising the equality of all present; they are surrounded by a mosaic of gods and angels, symbolising the battle of the ancient polytheism and Christianity:

the gods glimmered like rubies and sapphire, and the angels of the one greyness, because, as Michael Robartes whispered, they had renounced their divinity, and turned from the unfolding of their separate hearts, out of love for a god of humility and sorrow. (Yeats 1959, pp.287-8)

The ritual itself has an overtly sexual tone, the participants dance and invoke Eros and as he walks among them, veiled, the overwhelmed narrator is swept into the dance: 'dancing with an immortal august woman, who had black lilies in her hair' (Yeats 1959, p.289). This dark woman symbolises death, perhaps not actual death, but more likely orgasmic release, *le petit mort*, release of bodily consciousness. She who is 'drinking up my soul', drains the narrator, causing him to lose consciousness, which suggests that she may be a

vampiric sexualised Other who was 'more or less than human' (Yeats 1959, p.290). The narrator recoils on realising the power and control this woman has over him:

When he fully attains the (orgasmic) sense of dissolution he longed for, he is terribly frightened by it. He retreats to the external control of Catholicism, and when he feel threatened by 'the indefinite world,' he drives off his fears by pressing the rosary to his neck. (Webster 2000, p.87)

There is an obvious parallel here to Schopenhauer, as through sexual experience, the narrator has encountered a divine ecstasy, though there is also an element of Schopenhauer's negative view of women, in that she is a means to an end, and yet the dark lady of the story is the one with the power, as she dominates the narrator and drains him of vitality. As another Yeatsian woman who possesses stereotypical masculine qualities, she retains power, and uses the narrator for her own reasons. There is also an element here of the Hindi goddess Kali the Black, who dominated and used men for sex before killing them, as she is often associated with vampirism and is frequently depicted as having 'fang-like teeth' often dripping with blood (Jordan 2002, p.126).

The narrator awakes to find his fellow participants asleep in 'disordered robes, their upturned faces looking to my imagination like hollow masks', again hinting at a sexualised ritual, or a ritual of union, between human self and immortal anti-self, and between man and woman. There is a parallel here with Tedesco-Haswell, and her idea of sexual union as being an external and surrogate Unity of Being, which involves substituting another human for the internal anti-self. The anti-self, the universal divine, had walked among the celebrants as Eros and as the dark woman of the dance, and now that the Dionysian frenzy has burnt out, the physical bodies lay drained and exhausted, transformed now into static Apollonian figures. As the narrator sits taking in this scene, he becomes aware of a clamour, and sees that the Christianised mob had come to tear

down the temple of spiritual alchemy. The narrator flees the societal indignation and violence directed toward himself and his fellow participants, and from then on, he dresses himself in a symbol of Christianity, a rosary, and pressing it too his skin repeats his affirmation:

He whose name is Legion is at our doors deceiving our intellects with subtlety and flattering our hearts with beauty, and we have no trust but in Thee. (Yeats 1969, p.292)

It may be important to note here that the rosary is traditionally a symbol and talisman of Catholicism, which may strengthen the argument that the narrator is not representative of Yeats himself, as Yeats states clearly 'I have not found my tradition in the Catholic Church, which was not the Church of my childhood', but rather he has found his own spiritual tradition in 'more universal and more ancient' (Yeats 1959, pp.368-9). Perhaps the narrator is an everyman, particularly representative of the Irish Catholic, or perhaps a stereotype for the transitory *Zeitgeist* of his time, where man has become disillusioned with the established accepted conventions:

I cannot get out of my head that this age of criticism is about to pass, and an age of imagination, of emotion, of moods, of revelation, about to come in its place; for certainly belief in a supersensual world is at hand again. (Yeats 1961, p.61)

As shown by the earlier quote, Yeats considered artists to be the priesthood of this new system, and so drama would be the ritual of the super-sensuous view, this return to pagan sensibilities:

We who write, we who bear witness, must often hear our hearts cry out against us, complaining of their hidden things, and I know not but he who speaks of wisdom may sometimes, in the change that is coming upon the world, have to fear the anger of the people of the Faery, whose country is at the heart of the world.

(Yeats 1961 pp.51-2)

The narrator himself is the personification of transition, because he has passed from being the wholly material man without a god at the beginning, to an occult initiate, and finally to a man who has gone to Calvary, who worships the god of humility and sorrow, who now denounces the polytheistic divinity of Robartes, speaking of his:

Spiritual alchemy, which contains the possibility of breaking the shackles of his self-imprisonment. We may speculate that Yeats's choice to have the narrator flee from the influence of Robartes attests to Yeats's own grave misgivings about the 'world of essences.' Perhaps, like the narrator, he fully believed in higher worlds but feared that his own personal power was not adequate to withstand those influences. (Gorski 1996, p.81)

According to Yeats himself:

I have come to believe so many strange things because of experience, that I see little reason to doubt the truth of many things that are beyond my experience; and it may be that there are beings who watch over that ancient secret. (Yeats 1961, p.51)

What is Robartes's spiritual alchemy but yet another term for Yeats's Unity of Being: it is the transmutation from one state of being to another; it is the merging of the physical and the spiritual; of both a personal divinity and an external universal divinity. While Robartes's ritual took place in the magic sacred circle, Yeats placed his on the stage, a place where reality is transitory, distorted and can be anything the dramatist can imagine and represent.

Dramatic reality is its author's perception; Yeatsian drama is the enacting of his own personal perception and ideals of humanity as a being of both material and spiritual aspects. Yeats originally wanted his drama to return to the source, to Greece, where drama was a ritual enacted in honour of the gods and in which the gods themselves would take

a role (Yeats 1961, p.215; McCoy 1999, p.113). Yeats's theory of self is a similar returning to an ancient ideal, a return to a pagan understanding of both a dualistic individual self, and of a divinity which is present in all living things, and this reminds us of the primacy which Yeats, Schiller and Nietzsche all gave to the Ancient pagan Greek paradigm. This pagan, or perhaps neo-pagan, sensibility suggests that the fragment of divinity present in humanity was equal to the universal divine. Robartes is clearly the anti-self embodied, but Yeats saw, and indeed anyone who reads the story can see he is overwhelmed by that one aspect, so he is also, in some way, a representation Cuchulain's mystical, aggressive madness. This is the frenzied state of being that caused the Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand* to fight the waves and to see Conchubar's face on every crest and it is an example of where the Dionysian frenzy turns from ecstasy to cruelty. While Robartes is not explicitly cruel in this story, he is as bombast and aggressive a character as the Cuchulain in *On Baile's Strand*.

### **The Tables of Law**

In the companion story 'The Tables of the Law', Owen Aherne takes centre stage 'as the spiritual guide whom the narrator admires but ultimately rejects' (Gorski 1996, p.106).

Aherne, like Robartes, is a persona overwhelmed, but by the self:

He is not the mask but the face. He realizes himself. He cannot obtain vision in the ordinary sense. He is himself the centre. Perhaps he dreams he is speaking. He is not spoken to. He puts himself in place of Christ. He is not the revolt of the multitude. (Yeats 1972, p.138)

Aherne like the narrator of the 'Rosa Alchemica' is surrounded by art, but Aherne's art is very much that of the conventional church:

'The Tables of the Law' employs the same two-tiered dialectic as in 'Rosa Alchemica' – i.e., historical change and individual transformation – but used Christianity, rather than Hermeticism, to arrive at that end. The principle theme, however, rests on the definition of alchemy as formulated in 'Rosa Alchemica': 'the gradual distillation of the contents of the soul.' (Gorski 1996, pp.106-7)

Aherne lives according to morals 'half borrowed from some fanatical monk, half invented by himself', believing that 'the beautiful arts were sent into the world to overthrow nations, and finally life herself, by sowing everywhere unlimited desires, like torches thrown into a burning city' (Yeats 1959, p.294). When the story begins, Aherne promotes a Gnostic individualism as he has turned his back on holy orders, because, influenced by a medieval Christian prophet or mystic, he has been inspired to go away and become a self-made prophet himself. He feels that he should write his own secret law:

just as poets and romance-writers have written the principles of their art in prefaces; and will gather pupils about me that they may discover their law in the study of my law, and the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit be more widely and firmly established. (Yeats 1959, p.301)

Aherne, like Robartes before him, does not meet the narrator again for a decade, but when Aherne returns, he has become Robartes's opposite, and he warns the narrator of the dangers of his scheme. Rather than finding divine unity, he has become forsaken, as through his knowledge, he has come to believe that to be unified with god that one must first be separated from him (Webster 2000). This separation, according to Aherne, occurred through sin, 'and I understood I could not sin because I had discovered the law of my being' (Yeats 1959, p.305). The contrast between Robartes's spiritual state and Aherne's is striking: Robartes adheres to the Yeatsian ideal, in that he understands that his innate divinity is part of a universal whole, and as such, he can never be cut off from his personal and exterior divinity. Aherne, due to his adherence to the Christian paradigm

of the human soul being less than the divinity of god, cannot attain unity through individualism, so he must conform; he 'must bow and obey!' (Yeats 1959, p.305). His attempt at self-actualisation only served to sever him from divinity, he is a pariah, he has 'lost [his] soul' due to his disobedience of the rules and restrictions of the Christian Church. He has seen that the Christian view is not the ultimate reality:

I have seen the whole, and how can I come again to believe that a part is the whole? I have lost my soul as I have looked out of the eyes of angels. (Yeats 1959, p.306)

This echoes Robartes's own stance, when he derided the Christian god for demanding that all other gods be cast out so that he alone could rule over humanity. Webster argues that the narrator's fantasy in 'Rosa Alchemica', explored through his ecstatic spiritual experience, is to fuse with the divine mother figure:

The narrator of 'Rosa Alchemica' moved from the aesthete's retreat into an abyss of unconscious impulses. Aherne's progress is similar, but whereas the fantasy behind the narrator's visions in 'Rosa Alchemica' seems to be one of fusion with the mother, the central fantasy in 'The Tables of the Law' – from a later stage of development – is one of rebellion against the father. (Webster 2000, p.92)

This is an interesting and important point, Aherne's quest for self-regulation can be read as a rebelling against the restrictive patriarchal society, while Robartes extols a pagan ideal of dissolving into a divinity embodied by a woman. As we have seen, and will see again in further detail in the following chapter, Yeats frequently promotes the prowess and wisdom of matriarchy, while rebelling against a patriarchy which quells individualism by demanding loyalty and a passive adherence to rules. Instantly we think of Conchubar's demands on Cuchulain, while the immortality he has sought his whole life has been given to him in the form of his son by Aoife, and in the form of his prowess

as a warrior, which he acquired under the tutelage of Scathach. These female characters are characters of wisdom who teach Cuchulain something of himself, whereas the figure of patriarchy embodied by Conchubar places demands upon Cuchulain, and his own personal morality, without replenishing the hero's psyche. Similarly Robartes has abandoned the domineering and demanding patriarchal god of orthodoxy in favour of seeking transcendent knowledge through sexualised ritual in which he engages with women who are 'more or less than human' (Yeats 1959, p.290). Aherne's rebellion is more complex, he too has turned away from the demanding father figure presented in Christianity, as god demands that Aherne be less than he believes humanity to be and promised unity through degradation rather than wisdom. Aherne in despair flees, because he has seen the universal divine which shattered his belief that the Christian god was the only way to spiritual unity. In his self-doubt and sorrow at being cast away from divinity, because he has not accepted the quality of his own soul, he is unable to engage with the universal divine.

These two stories, which are full of dramatic conversation and character interchange, highlight the two aspects of the Yeatsian system; they are exaggerated and overwhelming of their respective Other. The ambiguity and dichotomy suggested by these characters reflect the conflict, and perhaps the problems, encountered in attempting to express Unity of Image, but in their lack of subtlety, we can get a firmer grip on what Yeats was trying to suggest and achieve. Robartes is the bombastic anti-self, giving little regard to convention, delighting in rhythm, ritual and sex. He is self-actualised, he is not the passive watcher as is the narrator, nor is he the passive supplicant that Aherne has become. Michael Robartes has accepted his inner Other as Other, and this has made him a pariah and somewhat of a victim to others. He has failed to find a balance, to find a place within society, while also retaining his own personal belief system. Owen Aherne

is the converse portrayal, as he is entirely consumed by the conventions of the socially-accepted religious church, he cannot envision his inner or spiritual aspect, and so his physical persona is dominant. He searches for spirituality in the wisdom of another human, rather than within himself or within the universal aspect. Aherne wants the mystical experience, but like the narrator of 'Rosa Alchemica', he looks for it in the wrong place, and in so doing, makes his life far worse than it was at the beginning. These two stories, particularly when read as a pair, express Yeats theory of self, hinting at its origins in the occult, in Greek drama and in neo-pagan rites, originating elements which he further incorporated into his drama. Within the dramatic process, the self and the anti-self are the focal point, scenery is lessened, and the whole dramatic experience is made impressionistic. The self, as Yeats saw it, had been the mainstay of realist drama, but now, he sought to place the anti-self on the stage, and in making setting and scenery recede, he brought the anti-self forward, in an attempt to make it the dominant presence on the stage.

### **Theatrical Unity**

For Yeats, the anti-self was synonymous with personality; it was emotive, instinctual and spiritual. Yeats understood that humanity and the arts were bound to physicality, and so he sought to remove as much of the Apollonian practice from the theatre as he could. The Yeatsian stage would not be the cluttered, ornately dressed space of the contemporary theatre; he wanted to remove all distraction from the scene so that the human character would be the focal point, and so that the audience's relationship and reaction to the dramatic persona would be authentic, and in this way Yeats attempted to 'wrestle from a resolutely plural self a satisfactorily comprehensive "Unity of Being"' (Wright 1987,

p.37). The effect of this Unity of Being would linger in his audience, so that they would carry it out of the theatre as they went, and thus he invested these unifications with a real power, seeing them as a form of transubstantiation. Just as the narrator of 'Rosa Alchemica' was altered by his engagement with the Other, so too in Yeats's dramatic theory would the audience. He felt that, having experienced a Yeatsian drama, members of the audience would walk out into the streets as embodied aspects of the Unity of Being and provoke a cyclical response from others, and so Unity of Culture would be incrementally enacted. This was the dream, one which faded as Yeats grew older and remapped his ideas surrounding Unity of Culture:

The dream of my earlier manhood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture, is false; though it may be that we can achieve it for some small circle of men and women, and there leave it till the moon bring round its century. (Yeats 1955, p.295)

This re-imagined Unity of Culture would instead remove Yeatsian drama from the very explicitly public theatre; ideal Yeatsian productions would now be performed for a small select, and perhaps even elitist grouping, people who he felt would understand his vision. He would also stage these productions in private houses, and in drawing-room theatres, and while aware of charges of elitism, he was not afraid of its being an unpopular theatre 'like a secret society where admission is by favour and never too many' (Yeats 1962, p.254). This form of drama would exemplify his 'aristocratic' theatre (Yeats 1961), and he felt that this format would create the dialectical relationship of intimacy and distance which he sought for his idealised drama (Komesu 1984). This idealised relationship of distance and intimacy is problematic, as it is 'ambiguous at best and often downright antagonistic' (Putzel in Orr 1991, p.107).

Yeats had particular ideas around the concepts of distance and intimacy in the theatre, with these being yet another pair of antinomies: 'distance means to keep all superficial, realistic representations from the stage' (Komesu 1984, p.103). The stage situation must be kept apart from material reality, because art itself must come from the Other and so must not be tainted by too close a contact with the corrupted physical realm:

All imaginative art remains at a distance and this distance, once chosen, must be firmly held against a pushing world. Verse, ritual, music, and dance in association with action require that gestures, costume, facial expression, stage arrangement must help in keeping the door. Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs as it were in a plush or a plain frame, but the arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols enable us to pass for a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation. (Yeats 1961, pp.224-5)

The imaginative theatre of Art, as Yeats envisioned it, would use those tools of the anti-self – musicality, lyricism of language and ritualised form – to loosen the control of the restrictions of the self, and the trappings of the physical materialistic world, over artistic expression, so that the anti-self could be judged on its own terms and exist in a position of freedom. Intimacy is the element that represents the anti-self, and it is dependent upon the maintaining of the distance from materialism. While distance rejects realism, intimacy rids the stage of distraction, so that the dramatic character may engage the full focus of the audience. Intimacy is a progression of his earlier idea of removing elaborate costumes and props from the stage:

I would have costumes that would not disturb my imagination by startling anachronisms or irrelevant splendour, and such scenery as would be forgotten the moment a good actor had said 'the dew is falling' or 'I can hear the wind among the leaves'. (Yeats 1954, p.309)

Clearly, he wanted some scenery and stage settings, but his aim was to strike a balance between the two, so that some realistic scenery co-exists on stage with the fantastical:

If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left empty we summon, rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edges of trance. (Yeats 1961, p.243)

In order to achieve his ideals of distance, Yeats wanted plush backgrounds and scenery to be replaced with simple settings: 'I have been the advocate of the poetry as against the actor, but I am the advocate of the actor as against the scenery' (Yeats 1962, p.177).

His background would be one colour or one tint so as not to distract attention from the play itself. Also, to provoke the imagination of the audience members, Yeats's theatre can never be a realistically representational theatre, because the audience is required to work, and to engage all of their faculties. Thus, he will not deliver to them a paint by numbers play that portrays every detail of a scene or story, nor will he blatantly tell an audience how to react. Indeed, the exact feeling produced by a play is insignificant to him; the point is that the audience reacts with spontaneity: 'it is not possible to separate an emotion or a spiritual state from the image that it calls up' (Yeats 1961, p.286). In so doing, in placing the self and Other on a cleared stage within the public sphere, Yeats would portray a Unity of Image. In bold terms, he would put the whole man onstage, a dramatic character who is both physical and spiritual in essence and representation. The Unity of Image would thus provoke Unity of Being, in that Yeats's audience would register the anti-self on a subconscious and instinctual level through the lens of their own internal self. However this delicate balance of distance and intimacy, this quest 'for the ideal psychic distance was never ended' (Mills Harper 1975, p.25) as was every Yeatsian search for unity.

Tied to this idea of distance is his insistence that every writer, and every artist, must remain distanced from their audience, in that a writer must only write of what pleases and interests him 'and do so without shame or fear' (Yeats 1954, p.548). He must never concern himself with the appetites and whims of the crowd. He must never seek the audience's approval or 'try to make his work popular. Once he has chosen a subject he must give it expression as will please himself' (Yeats 1961, p.206). Art is to be a pure expression of man's interior life, and therefore if it is to be eternal, must take as its ideal audience its own creator:

For few men do their best work when their getting work at all is dependent on their pleasing anybody but themselves. The good sculptor, poet, painter or musician pleases other men in the long run because he has first pleased himself, the only person whose taste he really understands. Work done to please others is conventional or flashy and, as time passes, becomes a weariness or a disgust. (Yeats 1954, p.333)

The symbols and images called on to the stage must, then, be the artist's own vision. Yeats's overarching vision was one in which unification of opposites would be achieved through art (Komesu 1984). After years of occult study and adeptship, Yeats had found a way to take his neo-pagan principles and his artistic need to create, and fused them into a dramatic theory, which like an occult ritual practice, aimed to provoke a change within the confines of a space in which reality was suspended. The Yeatsian dramatic sphere mirrors the pagan ritual space, and the early words Mathers spoke to Yeats stayed with him for many years, 'life should be a ritual' (Yeats 1972, p.35). As I discussed in the introduction, Yeats wanted his drama to be a return or renewal of the ritualised dramas of Greece, and in constructing his own theatre, he was well-aware of the parallels with the magical practices in which he had taken part. 'While Ritual, the most powerful form of drama, differs from the ordinary form, because everyone who hears it is also a player'

(Yeats 1962, p.129). The ritual outcome of his drama involves the integration of the audience into drama, and this is the Unity of Being in action, the provocation of the universal response. The Yeatsian theatre would mirror the magical circle of *The Golden Dawn*, in that the stage itself becomes a sacred space.

## **Theatre as Ritual**

There is a parallel to be drawn between the core dramatic structure of exposition, conflict and resolution, and that of the structure of a pagan ritual, or of the ceremonial magic of *The Golden Dawn*. The sacred space is opened or exposed so that the universal divine or god may enter the space; the spell is cast, the incantation uttered, and finally the deity is released, the space is closed and the veil between physical and spiritual is redrawn. Similarly in the Yeatsian schematic, the boundaries between what is physical and spiritual, self and anti-self, real and ideal are broken within the sacred insular space of the theatrical stage. Here, the anti-self, both personal and universal divine, may enter the phenomenal space where time and perception are halted and transformed based upon the dramatist's own personal expression (Yeats 1961, p.207). Within the dramatic sphere, the anti-self is free to be itself in bodily image and emotive expression, though this will bring the spiritual self into conflict with the temporal self, a conflict which Yeats tried, and often failed, to reconcile by the individual play's end. On the dramatic stage, Yeats sought to bring the self and anti-self to an understanding of their opposites, and thus to bring about a balancing of the two diverging forces. The fact that magical practices contained lyrical chant or affirmation, and often dance and beat in the form of a spell, also likens the occult utterance to the dramatic language of Yeats's symbolic and lyrical stage. Both settings suspend reality and present a separate idealised version of reality, an imagined or

desired state of being, and both settings in the Yeatsian scheme transform physical perception to spiritual perception.

## **The Mask**

The mask has been used in ritual for just these reasons, to disguise the physical so that the spiritual may have dominion and to signify a separation from the material sphere:

Masks are fundamentally double in function, signification, and experience, serving simultaneously as tools for disguise and as markers of identity. Covering the face renders the individual performer anonymous and neutralizes his or her humanity. At the same time, the performer is defined anew by the mask and is transformed into a deity, demon, or some universal superhuman type, or conversely, into an exaggerated representation of a subhuman impulse. Beneath the mask, the performer is constrained by the fixed facial expression and at the same time liberated to explore the heightened expressivity of the rest of the body and the voice. (Sheppard 2001, p.25)

Yeats used the mask for the same reasons, as with the mask, he could disrupt the self and give the anti-self a portal into the dramatic sphere. Through bodily movement and voice, the anti-self can express itself in an emotive and instinctive manner without relying upon visual or facial cues through which to connect to the audience:

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player [...] the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice. A mask never seems but a dirty face, and no matter how close you go is yet a work of art; nor shall we lose by stilling the movement of the features, for deep feeling is expressed by a movement of the whole body. (Yeats 1961, p.226)

Yeats's mask, like the anti-self, has had other terms applied to it. Before Yeats adopted the physical mask, he had used a figurative mask that which he often refers to as image or symbol. His image or symbol is the Other pushed into the physical world, a symbol which can trigger an emotive response linked to memory or idea. Through his exposure to paganism, neo-paganism, the occult and through his own reading, he knew of and practiced guided meditation or divination and of the use of symbols in occult practices. Perhaps at this point, it is worth explaining what this term means. Simply put, guided meditation is the practice of focusing on a particular symbol while meditating, and of allowing any image or idea to come to mind which can be interpreted later. Such images were always seen as spiritual in origin, both in terms of a personal and universal spirit. It is basically an exercise in free association. Yeats, as I have stated previously, considered emotion and instinct to be fundamentally spiritual, either from the internal perhaps subconscious divine or the universal divine: 'it is not possible to separate an emotion or a spiritual state from that that image that calls it up and gives it expression' (Yeats 1961, p.286):

The symbolist does not reason from outer to inner, from effect to cause, but from prior to posterior, from cause to effect; he proceeds from intuition to concrete manifestation. The activity of the mind, he argues, must parallel the activity of the senses: indeed to him observation, sensation, and the external world are merely a means by which the inner world of the mind is revealed, 'the symbols or correspondence whereby the intellectual nature realizes or grows conscious of itself in detail.' To the symbolist external nature is the shadow, not the substance, the distorted mirror of reality, not the reality itself. (O'Driscoll 1975b, p.11)

Yeats practiced such meditations many times, even using the method to provoke an outcome, in other words, he focused on an image with a particular outcome in mind, in the case his uncle's recovery from blood poisoning, he says 'I use the symbol of water

and the divine names connected in the Kabbalistic system with the moon' (Yeats 1972, p.75).

Yeats also frequently referred to the outcome of some of his experiences as visions, of course he also engaged in other occult practices using crystals to again provoke a symbolic vision (Yeats 1972, p.70). He also invoked 'lunar power' to induce the image (Yeats 1972, p.100). Yeats's image or symbol is the anti-self as expressed in the subconscious through imagination or memory. The image, however, is often overwhelmed by the physical aspect's dominance, and so in giving the image a physical manifestation, that is the actual mask, he lessens the power of the corporeal. The theory of the mask takes the ideals of image and symbol out of the private, purely-imaginative realm, and makes them solid. The anti-self is no longer an interior and somewhat subjective entity, but can now be placed in an actor's body and positioned on the public stage within the dramatic story and structure.

Yeats himself credited his introduction to Noh ritual theatre with his adoption of the mask, and many academics point to this as the sole influence of his theory and use of the mask; however, his inclination toward the mask was in fact greatly influenced by Greek drama, by Wilde and by the use of masks in pagan rites and the ceremonies of the Golden Dawn (Flannery 1976):

Writers such as Wilde, Nietzsche and Yeats himself invariably focused on the importance of artifice or fiction as the means of achieving a higher truth – higher, that is, than the truth of straightforward, unmasked self-revelation. Wilde wrote 'Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth'. (Adams 1984, p.12)

However this is not to belittle the importance of Noh in Yeatsian study, the discovery of which was a revelation to Yeats. In Noh, he found his own ideas executed on a ritual stage.

Noh drama is the ritual drama of the Shinto religion. Ezra Pound introduced Yeats to Noh in late 1913, late in the scheme of his own thinking on his dramatic theory. However in Noh, Yeats found another parallel with his own ideas and theories surrounding drama:

For centuries, the stage practice of the Nō [*sic*] drama had embodied many of the concepts which Yeats had tried to define in his theatrical writings and which, with varying degrees of success, he had attempted to have realised in productions of his own plays. (Miller 1977, p.190)

As Nietzsche had provided echoes of Yeats's own philosophy, so Noh presented him with an appropriate artistic concept of theatre. Noh incorporates chant, music and dance, and its language is formal and symbolic. Interestingly, there is a further parallel in Japanese theatrical traditions, where Noh is considered the noble, pure and lyrical drama in opposition to the popular drama of the Kabuki theatre. So at a number of levels, Noh is the comparable theatre for Yeats's aristocratic theatre of the drawing rooms. There is an obvious parallel here between Noh as a spiritualised theatre comparable to Yeats's theatre of Art, and Kabuki as the popular theatre of the masses paralleling the realist theatre was of Yeats's own time. In finding Noh, Yeats had located a template for his own endeavour. Yeats of course was trying to revive ritual lyrical drama in the face of what he called the theatre of commerce. Another influence on Yeats, was the practice within Noh of using an unchanging backdrop in all plays, as this segued with the removal of distracting scenery, something which had plagued Yeats for years as he struggled to balance the

action and the atmosphere of the stage through his theory of dramatic distance and intimacy.

By adopting the mask, Yeats put pressure on his actors to be the orators he had long wished them to be. By removing unnecessary physical movement and material distractions from the stage, the physicality of the actor could be, if not totally attenuated, then certainly lessened so that vocal ability, the rhythm and lyricism of speech, could have its full impact. To repeat myself, the whole point of causing the physicality to recede was to bring the spiritualised aspects of character to the fore:

The mask, by cloaking the physical personality, allows the inner persona, the performed role, to inform the actor's presentation to his audience. But more than this, it is the supreme achievement of the masked player to convince the audience that the mask he wears has become part of his flesh. (Miller 1977, pp.209-10)

The mask may also be seen as that which unifies the dialogical self, because while the mask is a physical self, it is a wholly sculptural one; it is the Apollonian static representation of humanity, through which the Dionysian speaks. Yeatsian masks are devoid of gender or expression, particularly the Hildo Krop masks, which are sculptural, as they portray strength and little else, because their features are exaggerated to the point of almost being non-human. They are also androgynous, and interestingly, many of the mouths are portrayed as closed, with the notable exception of those which represent ghosts. At this juncture, it is also worth noting the protruding foreheads of many of the masks as the ancient pagans believed that the soul resided in the head, right around the point that is called the third eye, which is the point on the forehead just above and between the eyes. Similarly, Edmund Dulac's masks are also static as they are very strongly modelled on the Noh mask (Miller 1977). They are a blank stare and a blank slate onto which the anti-self could superimpose itself. The use of the mask instantly positions

Yeatsian theatre as separate to the commercial theatre of realism: 'style, personality-deliberately adopted and therefore a mask – is the only way to escape from the hot – faced bargainers and the money-changers' (Yeats 1955, p.461). In this quotation, Yeats references the biblical money lenders in the temple, who defiled the consecrated sacred ground where the divine enters the physical world. In a parallel manner, Yeats's theatre was also to be a type of temple, a temple of art through which he could escape the power of the critics and the need for a theatre to make money in order to be deemed a success. Art, for Yeats, 'will measure all things by the measure, not of things visible, but of things invisible' (Yeats 1962, p.161). However the reality of supporting a theatre meant he needed to find a way to 'perform plays for little money' (Yeats 1962, p.125). Yet he also claimed that the more money that was spent on a production, the more the artistic merit of the work suffered, for ready money took away the need for creative experimentation (Yeats 1962, p.125).

While the mask allows Yeats a face for the anti-self, it is not an identifiably human face: the mask is a façade, it is Other which will provoke the response he wants from his spectators:

It was the mask that engaged your mind,  
And after to set your heart to beat,  
Not what's behind. (Yeats 'The Mask' 1994b, p.76)

The Yeatsian mask is the opposite of the Jungian mask, whose conception centred on the material life. The mask, for Jung, was the face we showed other humans while also hiding the interior life. Conversely, Yeats's mask was a means and expression of that interior life:

With his theory of the mask he made an aesthetic of his introspective musings about the physic origins of creativity in the transcendence of weakness and

passivity. (Webster 2000, p.3)

The mask is also immortal, as once the mask 'assumes the face of the player' (Yeats 1961), it will never matter what actor takes the role, or on what stage or in what year the play is performed:

The advantage of a mask over a face is that it is always repeating unerringly the poetic fancy, repeating on Monday in 1912 exactly what it said on Saturday in 1909 and what will it say on Wednesday in 1999. (Craig cited by Knowland 1983, p.110)

His mask is an active persona, the anti-self, as I have said, is not inhibited or restricted by society, and as such, it transcends the self to engage with the universal divine. It is an interior life that reaches an exterior existence far beyond the limitations of the phenomenal world. The mask is personality itself, full of individual and collective passions; it is now an active self in an-actualised aspect. By negating the physical face as a relatable medium for the audience to judge and understand the stage character, Yeats is forcing a confrontation. While the play itself portrays the crisis at the point of self meeting the anti-self, the audience is also forced into just such a parallel crisis. Humanity bases much of its reactions on facial expression, so by removing this, the audience cannot rely on habit, and so must find another medium through which to access the stage character. The anti-self communicates through lyrical and emotive language and instinct as signified by somatic gestures, so that it is with this reality that the audience must engage. In his drama, then, that Yeats forces the audience to subconsciously use their own internalised Other, their own anti-self, to relate to the stage characters:

Emotion must be related to emotion by a system of ordered images, as in *The Divine Comedy*. It must grow to be symbolic, that is, for the soul can only achieve a distinct separated life where many related objects at once distinguish and arouse

energies in their fullness. (Yeats 1961, p.293)

Yeats's anti-self is a deliberate and calculated presentation, which compels the private Other of the audience into the public sphere. This does not mean, however, that every audience member would experience this, or that the selves are completely balanced. This idea was also an element in his decision to move his theatre to small private drawing rooms, as if the audience was of a small select group, he felt he would be better positioned to achieve his tri-unification (Yeats 1962).

This is one of the major problems of Yeats's theory in practice, as while he could present the anti-self onstage and sometimes off stage, he struggled to balance the two, so that frequently one aspect would overwhelm the other. In trying to write the anti-self, he often became too immersed in the Other, and lessened the self to a point where it was subsumed by the anti-self. However Yeats was aware of this, and reworked each play, many times, and even then, he could not bring about a balanced conclusion. Speaking of himself through Aherne, he remarks:

Mr. Yeats's completed manuscript now lies before me. The system itself has grown clearer for his concrete expression of it, but I notice that if I made too little of the antithetical phases he has done no better by the primary. (Yeats 2008, pp.lxiii-lxiv)

Yeats was clearly aware of his failures in trying to produce Unity of Image, he knew that he had become overwhelmed by his quest for the anti-self to the detriment of the self. He did try to balance the scales through 'The Tables of the Law', where he allowed the self, embodied in Aherne, as equal a part as he had given to Robartes. However, in the text as it emerged, Aherne dominates, negating his Other. Perhaps an attempt to seek such a unity in prose was folly anyway, as there is the need for a dialectical and performative element which is not available in prose, despite the dialogue between characters. However, these

two stories, taken as a partnership, give us a further insight into Yeatsian theory. Yeats understood that his theory was just the beginning of this new theatre of Art. He considered it a work in progress, in which over time, and through trial and error, the self and anti-self could be brought to harmony:

It will take a generation, and perhaps generations, to restore the theatre of Art; for one must get one's scenery, from the theatre of commerce, until new actors and new painters have come to help one; and until many failures and imperfect successes have made a new tradition, and perfected in details the ideal that is beginning to float before our eyes. (Yeats 1961, p.170)

This of course has not happened, and his dramatic theory was largely abandoned by the theatre and by academia. This is possibly because it is complicated and contrived in places, and because Yeats's style of writing is dense with ideas that he does not always fully express, and which are often signified through changing terminology. There is also a level of ambiguity within Yeats's work, deliberately so in some cases, which may derive from the fact that it is a highly conceptual, and to some degree a subjective interpretative system. In addition to this, it is very hard to explain Yeatsian theory unless the occult is given its rightful place as both an originating experience and as a fundamental element. In a Christian worldview, the occult, like the anti-self, is represented within a Christian framework and within a Christian understanding of what the occult is, or rather what it is perceived to be through the socially-accepted theistic lens. However, an understanding of Yeats's neo-pagan sensibilities and principles is crucial, as otherwise, the dramas are reduced to largely poor representations of myths which would almost be labelled science-fiction because they seem to contain little that relates to contemporary, lived human experience. Remove the mystical from Yeats, and while there is lyricism aplenty, there is little substance.

### *Chapter Three*

#### *'Continually Varied Music': Yeats's Dramatic Theory*

The next chapter will apply this mystically-rooted theory to some of the dramas themselves. While this chapter sets out an analysis of a selection of Yeats's dramatic works in light of his dramatic theory, it will also add to the understanding of that theory, for ideas and ideals of theatre are supposed to be performed, and through the experimentations in theory, we come may come to a better understanding of the complex Yeatsian theory of self and his system of theatre.

## Chapter Four

### **‘The Theatre Grows More Elaborate’: Readings of Selected Plays**

The Yeatsian dramatic system is a unique and idealised form of theatre, it is a system which Yeats hoped would have far-reaching consequences culminating in Unity of Culture:

As a playwright, in particular, he wanted to enter the imagination of the people, having installed there the images and codes for self-understanding and for expansion of the consciousness. (Murray 1997, p.14)

However, after his death the theory, and to some extent the drama itself, was largely dismissed by acting companies and academia alike, until the 1970's and the work of James Flannery and Richard Ellmann. As mentioned in the introduction, it was beyond the scope of Flannery's work to explore the theory in detail; however, he does lay out the main points in a clear manner. Richard Ellmann took the theory to task in his work *The Identity of Yeats*, suggesting that it was an unsuccessful experiment; however, I would maintain that Ellmann divorced the dramatic theory from its occult origins and concluded that the theory was in execution a failure:

Yeats knew he was a poet and not a magician, and displayed his talismans for their artistic, not their occult, utility. Yet, in his delight in his symbols, he often preens them too much. (Ellmann 1954, p.84)

It is clear by now that I do not share this view. I view the dramatic cannon as a work in progress, because as Yeats experimented and explored his ideas through his staging, he built upon his original conceptions of the self and anti-self and his use of the mask, both as a concept and as a dramatic device, gradually developed and became more complex over time. Over the course of his canon, both the theory and the dramas evolve whereby a process of evolution can be traced as Yeats's theatre of Art moved beyond its reactionary origins as the antithesis to the theatre of commerce.

Throughout this chapter, I will analyse a selection of Yeats's plays. However, due to the restrictions of space, the analyses of the plays will simply focus upon the main expressions of the theory within each play. I would maintain that there is a wealth of theoretical evidence within most of the selected plays which deserves more study than can be allowed here. The plays are the practical embodiments of the Yeatsian dramatic system, as each play not only draws upon the theory but also informs the theory. Yeats learned with each play and production as he progressed, altering the text, the stage and lighting constructions and ultimately polishing his ideas as he moved from play to play.

I do not need to reiterate my view that the dramatic theory finds its origins in Yeats's occultism, but my argument is informed by the conviction that Yeats considered himself to be an occultist, and also by the lasting impact such study had upon his creativity:

As to Magic. It is surely absurd to hold me 'weak' or otherwise because I chose to persist in a study which I decided deliberately four or five years ago to make, next to my poetry, the most important pursuit of my life. Whether it be, or not be, bad for my health can only be decided by one who knows what magic is and not at all by any amateur [...] If I had not made magic my constant study I would not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would The Countess Kathleen have ever come to exist. The mystical life is at the centre of all that I do and all

that I think and all that I write. (Yeats 1954, p.210)

Many of Yeats's early dramas contained all the ingredients of Unity of Image, and though he reworked and rewrote many of the plays, often he could not bring them to the balanced conclusion which he desired. This ambiguity within Yeats's drama does not lessen the importance, nor indeed the impact, of his theatrical system as a whole. I have said from the outset that his theatre, both in theory and practice, should be viewed as a work in progress. Perhaps such ambiguity is to be expected due to the conceptual of the theory and the subjective nature of the idealised outcome.

In this chapter I will set out the selected plays in this chapter chronologically, so that we can see the progression from play to play, though the progression of his ideas is far from linear, and it should also be noted that Yeats frequently worked on many plays at once. One of Yeats's first attempts at portraying Unity of Being occurs in *On Baile's Strand* (1904). I agree with James Flannery when he says: '*On Baile's Strand* is possibly the finest of all of Yeats's plays. Certainly it is the most perfect early realisation of his dialectical drama' (Flannery 1976, p.307).

### **On Baile's Strand**

This play tells the story of Conchubar Mac Nessa, who reaching the end of his life, is attempting to solidify his material power and wealth. In this context, the main asset he wants to own, for want of a better word, is Cuchulain. The play portrays the argument between the two as Cuchulain wants to retain his freedom. Paralleling this theme is the choric dialogue between the Fool and the Blind Man, who act as narrators to the main conflict, in that they provide the back-story. Eventually Cuchulain submits to Conchubar's will and agrees to be his subject. His first task is to go to the shore and kill

a young man who has just appeared there, and may be a threat to Conchubar's kingdom. On killing the young man, Cuchulain is informed that he has slaughtered his own child, and in his grief and madness he turns to attack the sea, which 'masters him' (Yeats 1997a, p.72).

*On Baile's Strand* centers on the conflict between Cuchulain and Conchubar. Conchubar represents the physical world and the necessary social norms which stabilise it, while Cuchulain is pure individualised spiritualised anti-self (Knowland 1983). This play clearly defines self and anti-self through these characters, and through their ensuing conflict, however as an expression of the aims of the theory, it fails as there is no Unity of Being by the play's end. It could be argued that there is a form of the Unity of Image presented here, through the juxtaposition of the sub-characters of the Fool and the Blind Man who can be seen as corresponding figures to the noble characters of Cuchulain and Conchubar:

Yeats's Fool is the lowly parallel and shadow-image of his reckless hero; the Blind Man, who, the Fool complains is 'always thinking', is the shadow-image of King Conchubar. (Hoffman 1967, p.98)

Certainly this contrast between the noble characters and the peasant characters is deliberate, though Yeats himself claims to have forgotten the exacting meaning of each:

I have made the Fool and the Blind Man, Cuchulain and Conchubar whose shadows they are, all image, and now I can no longer remember what they meant except that they meant in some sense those combatants who turn the wheel of life. (Yeats 1962, p.393)

Possibly what he means here is that the force which turns the wheel of life is the duality of humanity in its physical and spiritual aspects, and his four main characters are representations of not only each aspect, but also of the internal conflict of humanity. It

could be argued that these characters represent the subconscious and the consciousness of the human being.

As the Blind Man and Conchubar are concerned with their physical survival, they could be seen as being indicative of the ego through their concern for the reality of the external world, because as Freud remarked: 'the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego' (Freud 1960 p.20); The Blind Man's primary concern is his stomach while Conchubar's thoughts centre on his material kingdom. While the sexualised Cuchulain and Fool could be seen as being informed by the id, it is also apparent that Cuchulain is more overtly sexual than the Fool. Crucially, the relationships presented portray the Yeatsian belief in the need for connectedness and balance, as The Fool and the Blind Man are wholly dependent upon each other. The Fool relies upon the Blind Man, who guides him through life and whose leadership provides the Fool with the food and shelter he requires, while also providing him with knowledge of the world of the court he inhabits. The Blind Man equally depends upon the Fool to be his eyes. The Fool is in some small way a representation of anti-self, but unlike his mirror Cuchulain, who is clearly a man with adult pursuits of hunting, war and sex, the Fool is child-like in his demeanour, and talks of playing on the beach with the witches. Though he is disengaged from his personal anti-self, and equates spiritual needs with physical and sexual desire:

There are some that follow me. Boann herself out of river and Fand out of the deep sea. Witches they are, and they come by in the wind, and they cry, 'give us a kiss, Fool, give us a kiss', that's what they cry. (Yeats 1997a, p.50)

The Fool's sexual aspect has less potency than Cuchulain's, as he speaks of waiting for the 'witches' to find him, and how he 'would not have them beat at the door and say, "Where is the Fool?"' (Yeats 1997a, p.50). Cuchulain, on the other hand, fully engages with his sexual nature, he 'will make love, wherever and whenever I've a mind to' (Yeats

1997a, p.54). As such, Cuchulain could be seen as a true representation of the Dionysian Other, forceful in his proclamations, not only in relation to sex but also in relation to his independence and his identity.

The Fool's sexual desire centers on a kiss, and so he will never experience the noumenal as Schopenhauer theorised it, because he is lacking a strength that would make him wholly Dionysian and yet he is certainly not a 'man in time' (Schiller 2004). He is continually wandering away physically and mentally, he sings to himself while the Blind Man is trying to speak to him of the world around him, in some small way this action could be seen as a Dionysian trance. Perhaps this oscillation of the Fool's state is indicative of Schopenhauer's view of the human condition as being one of suffering, as it is torn between physical demands and experience and the desires of the sexual and spiritual drives. The Fool cannot understand the spiritual aspect on its own terms, continually degrading it to terms he understands through his experiences of the physical world, though he is 'always wandering about', away from the warm hearth (Yeats 1997a, p.68). He is aware of the physical world and is concerned with his hunger, he often forgets and rambles away either physically or mentally as he spontaneously begins to hum and sing to himself in the self-soothing manner of a child. Yeats deemed this an appropriate mode of speech for his theatre so that a character would hold the attention of the audience, 'the sing-song in which a child says a verse is a right beginning' (Yeats 1962, p.108). The Fool is indeed child-like, and his manner is entralling, particularly in his attempts to sort out for himself the situation of the play by using his feet, a cap and a bag to make sensible the action in which he himself is a player. While enacting the conflict between Conchubar and Cuchulain, the Blind Man demands that the Fool, playing Cuchulain, swears his oath of allegiance; the Fool simply curls up and whines as opposed to the Cuchulain who rages against Conchubar's demands (Yeats 1997a, p.51; p.54-59). Later, while the Fool and the

Blind Man argue over their roles within their relationship, each trying to plead their case to Cuchulain, the Fool, quickly loses interest in his own defense and begins singing and 'putting feathers into his hair' (Yeats 1997a, p.69). Mentally he has again drifted away from not only the external world but his own physical interest.

The Blind Man can be seen as a mirror of Conchubar, as his concern is with finding food and warmth. The Blind Man guards his knowledge with care, only imparting what he must, while the Fool is easily confused and blurts out his knowledge of Cuchulain's son in a child-like manner. The Blind Man has been cursed with his blindness for 'putting a curse upon the wind' (Yeats, 1997a. p.52). As Conchubar tries to make the wild Cuchulain submit, he too has made himself 'blind' in forcing Cuchulain to surrender to his will and to kill his own son, because by so doing, Conchubar has crippled himself and the stable kingdom he wished to leave for his children. By the play's end, with the loss of Cuchulain, Conchubar's kingdom is left unprotected. Conchubar had always used Cuchulain for his most dangerous tasks, just as the Blind Man sends the Fool 'down the cliff for gull's eggs' (Yeats 1997a, p.68). However, while the Fool and the Blind Man are dependent upon each other and inextricably linked by the absence of physical faculties, Cuchulain and Conchubar are independent opposites who portray the clash of self and anti-self more clearly than the Fool and the Blind Man. As it is an early play, the theory is not fully realised, nor are the characters fully symbolically developed as representations of self and anti-self; however the four entwined characters remind us of Yeats's four faculties put forward in *A Vision*. The Fool could be said to be the antithetical aspect of the Will, representing that which is:

feeling that has not become desire because there is no object to desire; a bias by which the soul is classified and its phase fixed but which as yet is without result in action. (Yeats 2008, p.15)

Cuchulain is clearly the other antithetical state, that of the mask, an aspect which is 'predestined, Destiny being that which comes to us from within' (Yeats 2008, p.16). The Cuchulain of this play is a fated character, as the chorus predicts his death, and his betrayal of his internalised locus of identity leads him to a spiritual death. On the primary side of the Yeatsian faculties stand Conchubar and the Blind Man. Conchubar could be seen as a representation of the Creative Mind, the overwhelming intellect which when left unbalanced by its shadow 'calculates coldly' (Yeats 2008, p.16). Finally the Blind Man equates to the Body of Fate, the physical state which is the human condition in time, caught in 'the stream of Phenomena' as it affects a particular individual (Yeats 2008, p.15). As I have stated it is beyond my remit to deal with *A Vision* here, but these parallels are interesting to bear in mind as the four central characters do bear a striking resemblance to these concepts.

In *On Baile's Strand*, Yeats's theory is far from fully formed. The key elements are present, but only in the self and the anti-self of Cuchulain, who is the only character who is fully aware of the oppositions within himself:

Of oil and water, candles and dark night,  
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun-  
And the cold, sliding, slippery-footed moon-  
A brief forgiveness between opposites. (Yeats 1997a, p.58)

Cuchulain speaks of the physical world in overtly spiritual and elemental terms, as he views and accepts the supernatural as present in the natural world:

Between the wood and water, or on some mountain  
Where the Shape-Changers of the morning come. (Yeats 1997a, p.63)

Cuchulain has been loyal to his land and his society; he has protected both his entire life and so has fulfilled his obligations as a member of the tribe, yet he does not want his duty

to his society to be defined by, or imposed by the external force of Conchubar as king or by the state, as it is:

I whose mere name has kept this country safe,  
I that in early days have driven out  
Meave of Cruachan and the northern pirates,  
The hundred kings of Sorcha, and the kings  
Out of the Garden in the East of the World.  
Must I, that held you on the throne when all  
Had pulled you from it, swear obedience  
As if I were some cattle-raising king?  
Are my shins speckled with the heat of the fire?  
Or have my hands no skill but to make figures  
Upon the ashes with a stick? Am I  
So slack and idle that I need a whip  
Before I serve you? (Yeats 1997a, p.55)

Cuchulain as anti-self is a self-defined identity, a right he would cling to, and his moral and ethical duty is formulated internally and universally; he is both personal anti-self and universal anti-self and as such, refuses to be defined by another external self:

Cuchulain's point is that a man should act according to the law within him and not by compulsion imposed from without. And Conchubar recognizes this. His reply, 'No, no whip, Cuchulain,' is an effort to make his old comrade-in-arms see that the issue is not personal. But to Cuchulain it must be because he finds it impossible to separate his heroic role from his individual self. (Rees Moore 1971, pp.111-112)

In this respect, he does mimic the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, in that he wants to be free of the imposed rules and definitions of society as embodied in Conchubar as monarch. Cuchulain will be self-defined and self-actualised, but of course he fails in this as he returns to a state of 'bad faith' as Jean Paul Sartre puts it, when he betrays his

individualistic moral code and agrees to swear Conchubar's oath of obedience. In his disloyalty to his own identity, and to the moral code he has lived by, he has also abandoned the central tenants of paganism which pervades the Irish myths upon which Yeats based his dramas. In taking the oath, Cuchulain has failed to 'o'erleap his own shadow' as the shadow, in Nietzschean terms, would be Conchubar (Nietzsche 1997, p.114). He equally has failed to engage with his Other as, in denying his anti-self, he has demoted it as an aspect in favour of Conchubar's societal inclined will.

Ultimately Cuchulain cannot separate his dual aspects because he understands that both personae make him who he is, and to remove one would be to lose an integral part of his identity. In this he relates back to the pagan idea of a human spirit or soul as being both universal and personal. There may also be a connection here to the Jungian concept of the consciousness as both personal and collective, and additionally, under a Jungian lens, Cuchulain becomes a full personality as he has a relationship with his unconscious state what Yeats might term 'the individual form of our passions' (Yeats 1954, p.548). If the Cuchulain of this play is anything, he is a passionate individual in every sense, and thus he momentarily fails this full sense of himself, and the concepts which inform Yeatsian theory, when he concedes to Conchubar's will.

Conchubar is concerned with his material status and identity as King and father, hence his wish to 'leave a strong and settled kingdom' to his children (Yeats 1997a, p. 54). Conchubar remembers when he was as wild, as spiritualised and as sexualised as Cuchulain, but his duty to the state, and his role within it has forced him to cast off the anti-self as his dominant force, and instead to accept his imposed fate as a societal self and as part of a familial line. To Conchubar, being part of a blood chain is of paramount importance; to him a family's name, land and possessions should be passed down through the generations, rather than 'pass into a stranger's keeping' as Cuchulain's will (Yeats

1997a, p.56). There may be a parallel here with Schiller's ideas concerning the toxic effect of modern society on the meditative life which has made humans less sensitive to the universal divine, which he calls the Absolute (Schiller 2004). Cuchulain may be viewed as a the paradigm of Schiller's complete human, as a being which can be part of society, while also being able to step outside of the societal constraints and reconcile himself to the Absolute: 'Man in time can be made to coincide with man in idea' (Schiller 2004, p.31). It is interesting that Conchubar, such a prominent male figure is so concerned with home and hearth, while his female counterpart, the queen Aoife, is portrayed as aggressive, passionate, wild, war-like, and turbulent. Cuchulain marks her as his equal and as an ideal woman and mother for she is a challenge, he mocks Conchubar for preferring his women meek, domestic, placating and ultimately dominated, and one can influence of both neo-paganism and the cultural changes of the time at work here, in terms of seeing women as powerful figures in their own right.

Cuchulain has spent his life concerned with the pursuit of his individualistic, personal pleasures. He is in this, Dionysian in his mood, he is lustful, aggressive and in his penchant for the hunt, he perhaps embodies the darker cruel aspect of the Dionysian force:

I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love,  
Wherever and whenever I've a mind to. (Yeats 1997a, p.54)

Cuchulain agrees to be bound to Conchubar through a ceremony presided over by three women who, in conjunction with Aoife, are paradigms of Yeats's thoughts on women, in that they are both powerful and domestic figures while also being supernatural conduits. They cast a spell to keep wilder, more lustful women at bay, in other words, women who are pure anti-self, women like the fabled Aoife of Cuchulain's past, she who has cursed Cuchulain by sending his own son Conall to kill him:

The ritualistic scene of three women (like the three fates), chanting their spell against 'the women none can kiss and thrive while one of them tosses fragrant herbs into the bowl of fire carried by the other two, forcibly reminds us how intertwined the heroic realm of Cuchulain and Conchubar is with the most primitive kind of witchcraft and magic. (Rees Moore 1971, p.114)

These three women are perhaps representational of the three perpetually-repeated stages of female life: dormant, fertile and barren; or possibly of the triple goddess of the Celtic pantheon. These women stand on a boundary between natural and supernatural, they guard the 'threshold and the hearth', they use occult forces to bind Cuchulain to his phenomenal duty. In Yeatsian terms, these women could be seen as representing Unity of Image, as they portray the self through their domesticity and place within the court, while at the same time depicting the anti-self through their overt spiritualism and mastery of magic. Later, they will divine Cuchulain's death in the ashes of the fire, yet their prediction is ambiguous 'Cuchulain has gone out to die' (Yeats 1997a, p.67). Cuchulain does not physically die by the 'unnoted sword', rather he suffers a mental and in some part spiritual death, he will not have immortality in a physical sense through the blood line of his son. While Conchubar has demanded obedience from Cuchulain, it is these women who validate and make the promise of allegiance a reality. This can be seen as harking back to the pagan idea of women as being more naturally adept at holding spiritual power and also physical power in sense of the resonance of the natural cycle within the female body, and the female ability to carry and nurture human life when it is at its most vulnerable. Similarly these women, through their actions, strengthen Conchubar's authority by binding the strength of Cuchulain as warrior and defender of the tribe to the unprotected kingdom.

Cuchulain has abandoned his own self-regulated law, as he has allowed himself to be subject to Conchubar's will and the resulting madness causes him to lash out and

blame all but himself, and though he attempts to kill Conchubar, he enters a trance-like state when faced with the sea. Cuchulain has now rejected the oath he took, but also cannot return to his previous state of the anti-self, for now he must take responsibility for the choice and resulting action. Unable to reconcile his own identity with the version of self which he became under his oath, he attacks the waves, Yeats's perpetual symbol of the noumenal. Interestingly the battle with the spiritual signifier is unseen; the Fool relates the battle to the audience:

There, he is down! He is up again. He is going out in the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him! (Yeats 1997a, p.71)

The fact that the climactic scene is unseen by the audience is interesting given Yeats's interest in perception and Schopenhauer. The audience is expected to interpret the action offstage based upon the interpretations of the perception of the Fool. The audience in the end is put in a similar position to the Blind Man who receives all his information through the Fool and his personal perception.

In the final battle, personal anti-self battles universal anti-self, and so Cuchulain's internal conflict is played out among the waves, this is the one battle which the epic hero cannot win and he is indeed defeated:

When the sea overwhelms Cuchulain at the play's close, there is a definite sense of the Dionysian flood engulfing the heroic individual, as the waves vaster than the ego sweep him beyond the petty world of Blind Man and Fool. (Bohlmann 1982, p.56)

The Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand* is clearly identified with the Dionysian frenzied anti-self. However, the character does not achieve this Unity of Image as we are presented

with both the self and anti-self of Cuchulain separately, and at the point of crisis, when Cuchulain battles his own Other, and the universal Other in the waves, the action takes place off stage and is related to the audience through the prism of the Fool. This means that the audience is deprived of Unity of Being enacted on the stage. However, as I have mentioned, it could be argued that Unity of Image is displayed in the figures of the women. They are both phenomenal and noumenal entities, and so through these unified figures, the audience can glimpse and engage with the external anti-self onstage and the internal anti-self in the stalls. This again echoes Schopenhauer's idea that through sexual or in this case artistic expression when the temporal condition is forgotten, the universal can be perceived. Such perception relies on Yeats's ability as a dramatist to capture the attention and emotions of his audience. As the dramatic form is subjective, it is more than probable that someone in the audience will have an emotional response to the play, and in so doing, come to a knowledge of that which is universal in all humanity, that which Yeats termed anti-self.

### **The Green Helmet**

By 1910, Yeats had again used Cuchulain as an archetype to try to reconcile his dialogical selves in *The Green Helmet* (1910). This is a play which has received little academic analysis, and such that it has received has generally focused on the techniques used in staging the play, or on its relation to issues of Irish history and Nationalism. This may be as this play is a juxtaposition of aspects of the Middle English poem, 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', and Irish myth, in that while the premise and structure may be English in origin, the characters within the tale are decidedly Irish.

It is often considered the weakest play of the Cuchulain cycle, and possibly this is

true, as the Cuchulain portrayed here is far removed from the mythological and Yeatsian archetypal Cuchulain. In terms of the dramatic theory, it is not the most overt of Yeats's plays, yet it still contains some strong elements of his dramatic ideal. The play centres on Cuchulain, who, on returning home to Ireland, finds his friends Laegaire and Conall together in a house. They are terrified as they have played a game with the supernatural Red Man, who came from under the sea. The game is simple, 'a head for a head' (Yeats 1997a, p.76). Whoever cuts off the Red Man's head will give his own head in return, a challenge Conall undertook, but in fear refused to allow his head be taken, and so the Red Man departed promising to return in a year for payment of the debt, which he did only to be refused again:

And he called for his debt and his right,  
And said the land was disgraced because of us two from that night  
If we did not pay him his debt. (Yeats 1997a, p.77)

The play opens another year later on the night that the Red Man is to return. Laegaire and Conall fear that the Red Man has cursed them and the land, but more than that they fear that the Red Man will let it be known that they behaved as cowards. The Red Man returns, and on discussion with Cuchulain, agrees he may have 'jest[ed] too grimly when ale is in the cup' (Yeats 1997a, p.79). He removes his green helmet, which is an intertextual reference to the source poem of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', but in the world of the play it is also a talisman, in that it is a symbol of the supernatural, it is an item of strength and it is a repository of power. As a member of the Golden Dawn, Yeats had studied talismans, wherein they were defined as follows: 'A Talisman is a magical figure charged with the force which it is intended to represent' (Regardie 1990, p.479). The helmet then represents the supernatural power of the Red Man.

The Red Man leaves the helmet as reward for the bravest of the three, which

triggers a series of arguments relating to who should claim this symbol of courage. In an attempt to bring peace, Cuchulain throws the helmet into the sea. The Red Man returns with his black, cat-eared consorts, seeking payment. There may be an echo here of the notion of a supernatural familiar, which was usually embodied by a black cat, and it is probable that Yeats is also referencing Lady Gregory's *Irish Mythology*, in which she relates a tale of the Fianna happening upon an army of cat-headed figures (Gregory 1994 pp.183-5).

Cuchulain offers his head to settle the debt; the Red Man then reveals he is protector of Ireland, and was seeking the land's champion which he has now found in Cuchulain who has all the qualities he had sought:

And I choose the laughing lip  
That shall not turn from laughing, whatever rise or fall;  
The heart that grows no bitterer though betrayed by all;  
The hand that loves to scatter; the life like a gambler's throw. (Yeats 1997a, p.86)

From the outset, Cuchulain is marked as a man apart, he portrays a self-confident and individualistic air, characteristic of the anti-self. He shows no fear of the Red Man, and he accepts the nature of the supernatural (Knowland 1983, p.59). Conall and Laegaire not only fear the Red Man to the point of inaction, but they are also men concerned with outward appearance and status in society. They are also concerned for the behaviour of others, and they insist on adherence to proper social protocol, specifically in terms of the behaviour of Cuchulain's wife Emer:

That though she may be his wife, she has no right to go  
Before your wife and my wife, as she would have done last night,  
Had they not caught at her dress, and pulled her as was right. (Yeats 1997a, p.74)

In this, *The Green Helmet* repeats the theme of *On Baile's Strand*, Conall and Laegaire

remind us of Conchubar in their concern for societal behaviours, while Emer reflects her husband's earlier outing, in that now it is she who embodies the persona of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. However, unlike the Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand*, who momentarily bowed to societal pressures, she has shaken off the shadow and remains throughout a wilful individual with little or no regard for what her peers have deemed proper behaviour. While the force of Conchubar's will and disapproval of Cuchulain brought Cuchulain to heel, Emer will not be bound to any concept of behaviour than is not of her own formulation, and in her character and embrace of her anti-self, the influence of neo-pagan notions of gender and power is clear.

Throughout *The Green Helmet*, Cuchulain not only acts as mediator between the supernatural world and the material world, but also as peace-keeper among his own society, though he has been apart from that society for some time. When the men argue over who is entitled to claim the helmet, Cuchulain suggests that it be filled with ale from which all three will drink. In this liquid agape, he would have the supernatural artefact unite them rather than divide them:

In this play Cuchulain is not only involved in his society, he assumes a social responsibility. He perceives that the challenge thrown down by the Red Man is in itself extraordinary and requires an extraordinary response. [...] Conall and Laegaire treat the helmet as an excuse for personal petty rivalry. Cuchulain on the contrary would turn it into a loving cup. (Knowland 1983, p.58)

Conall and Laegaire argue among themselves, both boasting of previous deeds yet both have denied the Red Man his due, so that when Cuchulain flings the helmet back into the sea 'he is accused by the others of depriving them their lawful right' (Rees Moore 1971, p.156). The helmet of course is no man's right as it must be earned. When the wives squabble over who should enter the house first, Cuchulain orders the wall torn down so

that they may all enter simultaneously. Cuchulain here reminds us of the Dionysian force which will tear down the Apollonian barriers which separate human from human. The Cuchulain of this play is not wholly anti-self. He has knowledge of the supernatural and is accepting of it, but he would try to find a way to bring reconciliation with the occult world of the cat-headed men and the Red Man and his own terrestrial society, thereby suggesting some form of unity. He seeks balance and the peace it will bring; he attempts to settle the arguments of the mortals through rational compromise. He attempts to solve the clash between the Laegaire and Conall and the Red Man through self-sacrifice. The supernatural world has demanded a price to be paid to free the material world of the curse, admittedly a curse that Conall and Laegaire brought upon the land themselves by refusing to accept the consequences of their actions. Heather Martin suggests that the predicament of the humans within the play is caused by the supernatural:

As the Red Man, he has tampered unmercifully with the minds and lives of Cuchulain's people in order to test Ireland, and specifically to test, and then reward, the courage of its bravest man, Cuchulain. (Martin 1986, p.39)

The Red Man may have offered up the helmet, but the behaviour of the society beyond that is their own doing, they freely chose to behave as they do, they are not under a spell like Dectora in *The Shadowy Waters*, and this is proven by the fact that Cuchulain chooses to behave as he does. Even on meeting the Red Man, he holds firm to his own individual code of conduct, which shows itself to be more moral than that held by his society, which would rip itself apart out of a desire to possess a symbol of heroism, the green helmet.

Much has been made of Yeats's colour scheme for this play; all mortal characters are dressed in differing shades of green, while the Red Man is dressed head to toe in red topped off by the green helmet itself, and his cat-headed companions are clad in blacks and purples. The house itself is orange-red, the furniture so deep a purple as to be black,

while the sea is green. Both Rees Moore and Richman see this use of colour as being representative of the Anglo/Irish relationship: 'The strife between orange-red and green can hardly have been lost on the 1910 Dublin audience' (Richman 2000, p.158). This is an obvious and accurate reading of the play on one level, but is it not interesting that the Red Man and his companions come from the green space of the sea, while the mortal men in green dwell in a red-orange environment, and is it not conceivable that this is Yeats trying to show the intertwined nature of the mortal world and the supernatural world as he saw it. This would certainly enunciate aspects of his dramatic theory in that both sides portraying elements of the other, rather than clearly defining either as one thing suggesting:

The nearness of occult powers: all natural barriers are to be down, and there is free passage between the living and the dead. (Wilson 1969, p.103)

This nearness of a supernatural world is of course a prevalent idea taken from neo-paganism, Greek and German philosophies and Gnosticism; it is certainly not an orthodox Christian or Abrahamic idea where the supernatural is very much separated from the physical. This interconnectedness of the supernatural and natural is another example of the influence on Yeats of neo-paganism, the occult, Greek philosophy and romanticism. This neo-pagan sense of the dialectical relationship of the human world and supernatural became of fundamental importance to Yeats and his dramatic theory, and it became a core element of his dramatic theory and practice.

In the character of the Red Man, Yeats allows the supernatural to be in some part human, embodied by the deity who likes ale, and who, on drinking too much becomes quarrelsome, finding humour in places where a sober person would not. He is Dionysian, full of drunken frenzy bordering on cruelty. The character of Cuchulain is always part human, part god, relating back to his origin myth as the son of Lugh, and perhaps this is

why Yeats gives him the role of pacifier in this play, but in doing so he attenuates the traditional deified identity of Cuchulain, and thus limits his own image of the anti-self. Perhaps, in this, Cuchulain is a Freudian figure, in that he is the supernatural id and yet in this play, acting as the mediator and the reasonable character who tries to find a practical and fair solution to this supernatural problem, he also portrays the ego. The Red Man is also clearly id, portraying a lustful appetite which embodies facets of the pleasure principle. Again the Cuchulain of this piece reminds us of Schiller's reconciled ideal of 'man in time' and 'man in idea' as a being who can be of the temporal world while also being outside it (Schiller 2004), again suggesting how philosophy and the occult fused in aspects of this character.

Yeats uses gender relations within this play to point to his idea of Unity of Being, through the marriage of Cuchulain and Emer, who 'praises none but her man' (Yeats 1997a, p.75). She highlights the balance in their relationship; they are in their contrasting natures complementary to each other:

For I am the moon to that sun,  
I am the steel to that fire. (Yeats 1997a, p.83)

Yet their bond is also a physical and terrestrial one, which is why Cuchulain would leave her in order to pay the debt which the Red Man is owed:

Cuchulain meets the challenge with a gesture that derives its sanction ultimately from a superhuman world. He resists the tug of his wife's domestic passion in lines that link him to the source of the heroic, the sea. (Knowland 1983, p.59)

Cuchulain, through his actions, brings about reconciliation and in doing so, proves himself the champion of his tribe, in contrast to Conall and Laegaire who have boasted of past deeds and who define heroism by the acquisition of the helmet, a mere object and

symbol, albeit a talismanic one. It is Cuchulain alone who behaves as a hero and sacrifices himself, without fear of what awaits him. Cuchulain's suitability to claim the helmet is not defined by traditional heroic stereotypes, as the Red Man identifies the characteristics he has been searching for: someone who finds humour in both comedy and tragedy; someone who does not become hardened by humanity's cruelty and betrayal; and someone who accepts that life is changeable and full of opportunity and risk: 'the champion turns out not to be the mightiest but the most comely-hearted' (Ure 1963, pp.69-70).

Cuchulain in some respects could then be equated to the *Übermensch*. He has cast off the restrictions of human fear and society, but he goes beyond the Nietzschean concept to the Yeatsian concept of a balanced self, influenced by his occult studies, whereby he embraces the supernatural presence. Evidently the anti-self in this play is the Red Man, he is the supernatural side of the coin, while Conall and Laegaire in their preoccupation with societal imposed manners and status are self-personified. What then of Cuchulain? This is perhaps the only play in the Cuchulain cycle where Cuchulain is not overwhelmingly representative of the anti-self. The Cuchulain of this play does not portray the Other, yet he is aware of its existence and accepting of its reality; he is a bridge between the two poles so extremely portrayed: 'the Yeatsian hero rises above the natural (i.e. social) world to confront a supernatural reality' (Rees Moore 1971, p.162), in a manner the other members of the social world were unable or unwilling to do.

Cuchulain is also the outsider, he has only just returned from Scotland, so he remains outside the arguments and has no part in the supernatural wager; yet he takes on a responsibility for the society, both the mortals and the immortals. At no point does Cuchulain attempt to dominate either the natural or the supernatural spheres; instead, he tries to engage on equal terms with both parties, so that all retain their identities. In this,

Cuchulain expresses a pagan sensibility, as I have already suggested, in that he is refusing to cast judgement on another human, and he does not attempt to subsume the Other, but instead allows each individual to be an individual in their own right. Though not the strongest of portrayals, there is none the less a quality of Unity of Image to his character, a character in which human as individual, the human as part of a social collective and the human as part of the supernatural universal, is embodied. Though this is one of the main aims of the theory, Cuchulain's anti-self is never truly present on the stage, and this play is also far removed from the intimate theatre Yeats wanted to create; 'Yeats had never before and would never again put so many people on the stage' (Richman 2000, p.158). It would be easy to think that the sheer number of societal selves onstage would overwhelm the piece, but the Red Man is so bombastic a character that Yeats has managed to find a balance of the opposing forces of physical and spiritual in his portrayal. Yet Cuchulain is a shadow of Unity of Image, in that he is too peaceable; there is little internal conflict within him in order to truly represent the dialogical clash of anti-self and self. This characterisation of Cuchulain in *The Green Helmet* was perhaps in some part an attempt to rectify the problems of the Cuchulain of *On Baile's Strand*. Nevertheless, the point can be made that this portrayal takes him too far in the opposite direction. However, if we take the Red Man and Cuchulain as mirrors of each other, then we can see an example of Unity of Image, in that neither dominates the other. Indeed, both characters show a respect for the identity of the other and this echoes neo-pagan and occult ideals, while also segueing with the Yeatsian dramatic ideal of a self and anti-self which are allowed to be self-defined and actualised, while engaging in an equal relationship with neither subsuming the other.

## The Shadowy Waters

As I have stated, Yeats rewrote his plays many times trying to fully express his theory, however none more so than *The Shadowy Waters* (1911). Yeats began thinking of the central themes of the play during the 1880's, and he continued to rework and rewrite the play for 25 years until he was satisfied with it in 1911, which of course means that while he was writing many of the other plays, he was still revising *The Shadowy Waters*:

Perhaps the chief significance of the many revisions of *The Shadowy Waters* is that they demonstrate the unceasing determination of Yeats to unify and express his vision of a transcendental reality beyond the material world as he experienced this in his nature worship, peasant art and supernatural lore, mythology and arcane knowledge. (Flannery 1976, p.296)

*The Shadowy Waters* is a play which is difficult to research, as it provokes a dualistic academic approach, in that in one sense, it appears to be considered a lesser play and is not even mentioned by some Yeatsian studies, such as Maeve Good, whose book centres on the philosophy of *A Vision* and its concepts of good and evil as they impact upon Yeats's dramas. Tedesco-Haswell, who concerns herself with Yeatsian concepts of gender and female roles, also does not reference *The Shadowy Waters*.

However, on the other side of the coin is a plethora of studies which do not analyse the final staged version of the play at all, but rather focus on the revisions and re-workings of the play from the original manuscripts, whereby it is not the play itself which is the primary object of study but Yeats's process of writing. Many of these studies do not reference the dramatic theory or even the final acting version of 1911. These works all owe credit to, and were spurred into being by, the publication of *Druid Craft: The Shadowy Waters*, which for the first time in 1972, gave academia access to the working manuscripts and to an analysis of the play in progress. Therefore, we are left with another

lacuna in Yeatsian dramatic study, as *The Shadowy Waters* as a finished production is seldom examined, though there are a handful who have analysed the final version of the play on its own merits without being distracted by the manuscripts, such as John Rees Moore, David Richman, A. S. Knowland, Nancy Ann Watanabe and Andrew Parkin.

A. S Knowland highlights the fact that the manuscripts offer such a tantalising view of Yeats's working progress that they are far more attractive to a researcher than the finished work:

It is difficult to resist the temptation to discuss this version of *The Shadowy Waters* except in terms of its genesis, its development in manuscript and in published versions, and the variations in them. (Knowland 1983, p.35)

In terms of my analysis, *The Shadowy Waters* may in fact be the most important play within the Yeatsian canon, as with the working manuscripts are available for study, this play may be a microcosm of the macrocosm of the development of the dramatic theory itself. If the theory, the working manuscripts and the final version of the play were to be studied together, we would have a greater insight into the Yeatsian dramatic system and its processes. Parkin goes even further in his analysis, arguing that it is a revolutionary work within the history of the theatre itself:

*The Shadowy Waters*, besides being part of the symbolist and magical revolution, was part of the theatrical revolution bent on circumventing the contemporary commercial theatre of Victorian and Edwardian London for the Irish theatre of art, beauty and folklore after the fashion of the little avant-garde theatres in Europe and England. (Parkin 1978, p.76)

*The Shadowy Waters* takes place aboard a pirate ship captained by Forgael, who possesses the harp of Aengus, the Irish god of love, which can enchant anyone into a dreamlike and submissive state. The ship has been at sea a while, yet they have not raided another ship

or town in some time. Forgael is consumed with his own self-interests, and his men, dissatisfied with their leader, plot to murder him. However the second mate, Aibric retains his loyalty and is above all a friend to Forgael. Forgael's sole reason for being is his quest, as he is in search of love with an immortal woman whom the souls of the dead, embodied by the accompanying man-headed birds, have promised him. The quest is primarily a quest for Unity of Being, as through a relationship with an ever-living woman, he will attain a spiritual and sexual union, which will be an engagement with the universal anti-self or in Nietzschean terms, with the Dionysian force. His personal anti-self will return to the universal Anima Mundi and so discover the truth of his own being by casting off the representations of truth that the material and societal world have forced upon him.

The ship encounters a royal ship which the men attack, returning with a mortal woman, and at first Forgael is angered that she has a shadow and therefore cannot be his promised lover, proclaiming 'You are not the world's core' (Yeats 1997a, p.8). However, Forgael gradually comes to believe that Dectora is indeed his promised lover:

Both you and I are taken in the net.  
It was their hands that plucked the winds awake  
And blew you hither; and their mouths have promised  
I shall have love in their immortal fashion.  
They gave me that old harp of the nine spells  
That is more mighty than the sun and moon,  
Or than the shivering casting-net of the stars,  
That none might take you from me. (Yeats 1997a, p.10)

As a character, Forgael is the anti-self, he is deemed a mage, a questing visionary who communicates with and is guided by the dead, or perhaps by the gods, those embodied by the man-headed birds which fly over his head. He is a dreamer, an idealist, and a fantasist who has abandoned his responsibilities, and to a large extent his own life within the

material world, in favour of a life informed by, and ruled over by, the spiritual world: he has had 'his wits drawn out from him through shadows and fantasies' (Yeats 1997a, p.3). He is a character of inaction, as when the play opens, Forgael is asleep while his men plot mutiny and his murder. He has reneged upon his duty as their leader in that they have had little by way of material gain or physical pleasure since he has undertaken his quest: 'We did not meet with a ship to make a prey of these eight weeks, or any shore or island to plunder or to harry' (Yeats 1997a, p.3)

Dectora's ship is raided twice in the course of the play, and each time Forgael does not lead his men, instead choosing to remain aboard his own vessel. This physical inaction also highlights the fact that he is not representative of the self, his lack of a physical presence in action identifies him as something other, as anti-self. This is a characteristic of Yeats's earlier plays, where in an attempt to play down self and elevate anti-self, the characters become acute representations of one polar opposite or the other. It can be said that often his exaggerated anti-self defined characters 'hardly exist physically' (Richman 2000, p.43).

Forgael's ship is unnamed and above it fly the man-headed birds, it is a world of its own which is cut off from the human world; it is an environment where the spiritual life is evident and present through the figures of the man-headed birds. The fact that Yeats places the play aboard a ship, but does not name the ship, symbolises its separation from the material physical world:

*The Shadowy Waters* is the purest example in Yeats's drama of the hermetic sealing off of heroic love from all earthly contaminations. It is no accident that the action should take place entirely on the water. Even in realistic works strange things happen at sea. The enforced isolation of the boat magnifies any tension that exists between a captain and his men. (Rees Moore 1971, p.77)

Forgael's ship is a contained universe of its own and under his command; it is outside normal societal conventions, and indeed, it could even be argued that it is outside of the normal rules of time and space, as it is watched over and guided by supernatural entities, a situation which intertextually references Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

The setting of *The Shadowy Waters* is a place where the spiritual is active indeed Yeats himself referred to the ship as 'a sort of allegorical thing' (Yeats 1955, p.514). The ship itself is Other, and the atmosphere of isolation also enhances the conflict between Forgael and Dectora. It could equally be argued that the ship is symbolic of Forgael himself, as he too is cut off and adrift from both society and his companions on board. In addition, his relationship with the man-headed birds is not as secure as he might wish, as he fears they will pass him by, taking with them his chance for spiritual and sexual fulfilment. The correlation between sexual and spiritual experience here harks back to Schopenhauer's ideas, and certainly Yeats's own belief that the spiritual and sexual were intrinsically connected. Forgael appears to be more of the Schopenhauerian ilk than that of the Yeatsian in his treatment of Dectora. As we will see, Forgael seems to view Dectora, not as his equal, but as a means to an end; she is a conduit for his own sexual and spiritual gratification. His presentation as a Dionysian character gravitates toward the darker aspect of the force, he is the ecstatic universal frenzy turned aggressive and cruel.

This play is a seminal point in Yeats's dramatic theory and practice. Yeats conceived of his theatre of Art in reaction to, and as a rejection of, the contemporary commercial theatre. He wanted to place the indefinable and intangible elements of the human lived life on the stage, primarily the spirit or soul and the sexualised self. In doing so, he wanted his audience to relate to those elements so that they would experience an instinctive, universal emotional response. Simply put, the stage anti-self or Unity of

Image would force recognition and engagement with the anti-self of the audience, both personal and collective and so provoke Unity of Being:

He really wanted an impossible thing: an audience on whom not a single allusive nuance would be lost and yet would have this knowledge in their bones so that in a flash of intuition all occult wisdom could be, as it were, concentrated in a single beam of light. (Rees Moore 1971, p.79)

This ideal caused many of the early plays to be overwhelmed by the spiritual element, and *The Shadowy Waters* is such a play. Forgael as a character is pure anti-self, he is the embodiment of all the characteristics Yeats ascribed to the Other, as he is overtly spiritualised, sexualised, emotional and instinctive, and it is interesting to note that these are generally traits traditionally associated with women in literature. Forgael is described as having a connection to the supernatural through his relationships with the harp of Aengus, and with the man-headed birds who give him power of a magical nature, and yet, he is not in control of that power, as he always seems uneasy with his situation. He fears that they will leave him:

I never wake from sleep  
But I am afraid they may have passed;  
For they are my only pilots. (Yeats 1997a, p.5)

There may be an element here of Yeats's view that women more comfortable with mystical elements (Yeats 1959, p.115). As the play begins, the sailors express the view that Forgael is mad, driven crazy by 'shadows and fantasies' (Yeats 1997a, p.3). Aibric also tells Forgael that the man-headed birds 'have all but driven you crazy' (Yeats 1997a, p.5), and later Dectora asks:

Has wandering in these desolate seas  
And listening to the cry of wind and wave

Driven you mad? (Yeats 1997a. p.9)

Forgael is a lost man, though apparently in possession of supernatural knowledge, he does not fully understand or rule over it, rather the supernatural rules over and possesses him:

I can see nothing plain; all's mystery.  
Yet sometimes there's a torch inside my head  
That makes all clear, but when the light is gone  
I have but images, analogies, [...]  
But when the torch is lit  
All that is impossible is certain,  
I plunge in the abyss. (Yeats 1997a, pp.6-7)

While every other character considers Forgael a mad man, he himself seems to equate madness with living without his supernatural relationship or quest;

No, I am not mad –  
If it be not that hearing messages  
From lasting watchers that outlive the moon  
At the most quiet midnight is to be stricken. (Yeats 1997a, pp.9-10)

The insanity of Forgael is a representation of an unbalanced identity, he has abandoned his self in favour of allowing his anti-self to rule over his being and his life. In some respects, it could be argued that Forgael is the polar opposite of how Yeats saw the contemporary theatrical audience, for as we have seen earlier, Yeats believed the audience and society in general to be overwhelmed by self and the restrictions this facet placed upon society as a whole, so Forgael could be viewed as a dramatisation of the other extreme, which can then engage with the audience.

For Yeats, the audience represented a collective of selves and in his theatre such selves would encounter an anti-self; the audience response would be universal, immediate and emotional. In other words, the dominant mood of the responder in the stall would

move from self to anti-self, in the hope that the audience would balance their own duality and so become, however briefly, some type of Unity of Being. This would be brought about by the staged Unity of Image. Ultimately Yeats wanted his drama to 'hold the attention and linger in the memory' (Yeats 1962, p.108), so that the unifying effect would spread outward from the theatre and so gradually bring about Unity of Culture. Though the main aim of his drama was to present a unified stage character, in placing such an overwhelmingly antithetical character upon the stage, Yeats highlighted the opposite nature of the audience, as he saw it. So that the audience is now incorporated into the theatrical experience, and in some way become players themselves. Yeatsian theatre relies upon the audience to complete the action, to bring about a balance:

He is never an individualist like Blake, developing by himself and to a considerable extent for himself; he has always an audience in mind, writes to be understood, and wants approbation. (Ellmann 1979, p.296)

The understanding that he sought was not a rational one but an unconscious, instinctive and perhaps Dionysian one, in that the reaction must be extreme and emotional and as such unifying, devoid of the classifications that societal place or consideration demand.

Dectora is the self in this play. On her arrival, she is a mortal woman, a queen, and she makes reference to her status as royalty and to her material wealth many times. Though Richman describes her at this point in the play as a 'desperate queen' (Richman 2000, p.42), I think it is clear from all she says that she portrays a strength lacking in her opposite Forgael. Her first act on meeting Forgael is to demand compensation for the pirate raid, for the loss of her ships, for her treasure 'of nine conquered nations', for her husband and also for the treatment she herself has received:

I am a queen,  
And ask for satisfaction upon these

Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me. (Yeats 1997a, p.8)

Forgael refuses all her requests, informing her that they are a destined pairing, but concedes that until she comes to believe this for herself, he will not touch her:

Until your lips

Have called me their beloved, I'll not kiss them. (Yeats 1997a, p.10)

Rather than be bound to him, Dectora runs to throw herself overboard, suicide is her choice over servitude to Forgael's fantasy. Though he still believes that fate will not allow her to leave, his men offer to return her to her ship and kill Forgael on the condition she takes them with her back to land. Forgael uses his harp to enchant his sailors so that they cannot help her, and Dectora picks up Aibric's sword and threatens Forgael 'I will end your magic on the instant' (Yeats 1997a, p.13). Once again Forgael breaks his promise, as he now uses the harp to enchant Dectora, making her believe that she and he are mythical lovers who have been entwined for a thousand years. To Parkin, using the harp to enchant Dectora, was 'instinctively right' from a dramatic perspective, as otherwise:

If he [Yeats] is not careful, his hero is going to look not only cruel like Conchubar in *Deirdre* but spiritually weak beside a woman of such mettle. (Parkin 1978, p.82)

However, surely Forgael's domination and deception of Dectora marks him as cruel, and the need for this use of magic makes Forgael seem weak in comparison, as it is only when he himself is threatened, that he does act. Until this point in the play, he is a passive character while she is an active figure.

This reversal of gender stereotypes is not an accident on Yeats's part, as we have seen in the earlier chapters that he believed all humans to be composed of both masculine and feminine dimensions. The fact that he re-worked this play so many times should

indicate that everything in the final version is deliberately placed. Yeats's use of the harp to enchant Dectora is the main point of transformation within the play, as prior to this point, Dectora was an authority figure within the physical world, a queen of wealth and power, making reference to her royal status both by blood and marriage, four times in the short passage between her boarding the ship and becoming subject to Forgael's spell. She appears to have no external spiritual existence herself, as she calls on the 'gods, that my people swear by!' (Yeats 1997a, p.12), as opposed to gods that she herself might worship.

After Forgael has cast his spell, her voice softens and becomes ethereal, and 'she takes off her crown and lays it on the deck' (Yeats 1997a, p.13). She begins to grieve and wring her hands for her dead lover, but Forgael convinces her that he is her immortal lover. From this point on, Dectora is no longer self-defined; instead she is now under Forgael's power. In other words, she too has been overwhelmed by the anti-self. Dectora began as a wholly physical presence, she was commanding, self-assured and proud. Now that she has cast off the symbol of that identity, her crown, she is an overwrought, emotional, grieving woman, and not the queen demanding a blood-price for her dead lover. Dectora is now defined by an anti-self, but it is not her own, because if anything she has become just a projection of Forgael's Other. Thus, she is just as restricted as a societally-defined self, because her love for Forgael is 'a love created by his own imagination' (Knowland 1983, p.41). As we have seen, the anti-self requires freedom, freedom that Forgael in his dominance has denied her, so she is now outside the temporal reality and exists only in the present moment:

What do I care,  
Now that my body has begun to dream,  
And you have grown to be a burning coal  
In the imagination and intellect?  
If something that's the most fabulous were true-

If you had taken me by magic spells,  
And killed a lover or husband at my feet-  
I would not let you speak, for I would know  
That it was yesterday and not to-day  
I loved him; I would cover my ears. (Yeats 1997a, p.15)

All of this is what happened, but while previously she had cared about the past, even mentioning her father and grandfather, she is now under the thrall of the mystical Other which is outside of her conception of linear time. Not only is she subsumed by the Other but she also metaphorically offers Forgael the symbol of her lost power:

I looked upon the moon,  
Longing to knead and pull it into shape  
That I might lay it upon your head as a crown. (Yeats 1997a, p.16)

Not only would she give him a crown, but a lunar crown, surely a symbol of the mystical feminine and as such representative of her universal anti-self. Forgael would then in some way possess her physical social status and also her physical gendered identity. Again we return to Yeats's idea that 'women come more easily than men' to mystical wisdom (Yeats 1959, p.115). In this Yeats may be pointing us toward the complete domination of Dectora by Forgael, because he has already subsumed her phenomenal power by casting the spell, but now in this state of thralldom, she is willing to part with her feminine self, her entire identity as woman. Forgael will have then taken her self and anti-self. In this, Dectora is far removed from Yeats's other female characters, she is neither the fierce alternative self of Aoife nor the domesticated supernatural women in *On Baile's Strand*. She is possibly now the type of woman Conchubar Mac Nessa would have, one who will praise their mate unreservedly, the type of woman Cuchulain mocks and condemns as weak and unfit as a partner for a true man. Forgael is not a man as Cuchulain would have defined him; he has forced his own individualist will upon another, just as Conchubar had

done in *On Baile's Strand*.

Forgael had been portrayed as a magician engaged with nature and yet, he asks Dectora 'Am I to fear the waves, or is the moon my enemy?' (Yeats 1997a, p.16). While Forgael had possessed esoteric knowledge, he had little mastery over it and feared it; he feared it would leave him or turn against him. Forgael is more that happy to make his esoteric dimension an external aspect of identity, and he is at all times vocal on his relationship with the man-headed birds. Under Yeats's system her identity as a woman would allow Dectora a more harmonious relationship with the supernatural, and so through Forgael's subsuming her feminine force, he is strengthened and his fear of the supernatural is nullified.

Dectora's transformation disturbs Forgael, not because of what she has become, but because he now realises that if her love has its origins in deceit, then it will never be real. The man-headed birds cry overhead, signalling to him that he has misused his magic. There is a trace element here of Forgael returning to self, he is no longer the magician who will possess an immortal love; he now has nothing 'but desolate waters and a battered ship' (Yeats 1997a, p.15). He now cries for the material wealth which he does not have, while previously, as anti-self, he had no interest in such things, leaving his men wandering the sea for two months without any earthly reward:

I weep – I weep because bare night's above,  
And not a roof of ivory and gold. (Yeats 1997a, p.16)

However, Forgael very quickly returns to his former state, claiming the man-headed birds are calling to them to follow. The physical realm asserts itself with the return of Aibric and the sailors, who have looted Dectora's ships of spice, jewels and oriental statues. The spell has left them and, interestingly, Aibric refers to Dectora as Queen, while Forgael now calls her 'this woman' (Yeats 1997a, p.17). Prior to this, Forgael had called her

Queen and spoke of her being his fated lover; however now that he has possessed her, she is nothing more than a woman. Aibric again acts as counsel, but this time to Dectora:

Speak to him, lady, and bid him turn the ship.  
He knows that he is taking you to death;  
He cannot contradict me. (Yeats 1997a, p.17)

Dectora chooses to remain on Forgael's voyage, though Forgael briefly urges her to leave, while Aibric and the men take her ship and return home. In Dectora's concluding speech, she finally calls Forgael her beloved, and does indeed crown him with her hair. Again Yeats is highlighting her submission to Forgael. Earlier, she had defined herself as being of status and royal lineage in her own right, separate from her regal husband, when she asked:

Who is there can compel  
The daughter and granddaughter of a king  
To be his bedfellow? (Yeats 1997a, p.10)

Clearly the answer to this question is Forgael, though he compelled her through deception and a magical power. By the play's end, the anti-self reigns and in doing so shows why Yeats sought balance. While a state ruled by a dominant self would be detrimentally static and censored, one ruled by anti-self is shown to be just as restrictive, if not more callous. In this the depiction of the anti-self, we are shown the dark side of the Dionysian aspect, which is sinister, overbearing and ultimately destructive. Both characters go to a death which is both physical and spiritual under the thrall of this aspect. Up to now, Yeats had been railing against the spiritual death of those consumed by self, whereas here he shows the necessity of balance by demonstrating the dangers of allowing one aspect to dominate entirely.

It has been suggested that Dectora is no longer under his spell, and has come to

accept Forgael as her lover of her own accord; that it is 'Dectora's decision to reject the ordinary world' (Parkin 1978, p.74), yet her rejection of her former life is not her own decision, because under the spell of Aengus she has abandoned her own life and power so that by the curtain's close, it is Forgael who wears her crowning glory. Once the spell has been cast, she never again calls herself queen, nor portrays the early strength and authority which she possessed. It is clear she is still enthralled; her will has been dominated by Forgael's. She is sailing to her death on his terms, whereas earlier when she was willing to die to escape him, her passage from the material world would have been on her own terms. A. S. Knowland argues that in agreeing to accompany Forgael, Dectora completes his quest:

He is the epic hero who achieves his quest. The quest is for the revelation of truth that can only be achieved by union with Dectora. Before that can be achieved, Dectora herself must establish herself as a participant in the quest. (Knowland 1983, p.39)

He is right in that the quest is about truth but a spiritual and sexual truth, the truth of the anti-self; however, Dectora never makes the free choice to go with Forgael, as once the spell has been cast, Forgael takes away her ability to choose. In doing so Forgael's quest is doomed, and he will never achieve Unity of Being.

*The Shadowy Waters* is a problematic play in terms of the dramatic theory which it was supposed to embody. There is no Unity of Image here, as the closest we get to a balanced self is possibly that of Aibric, but as he is so little used within the play, there is too much unknown about him to make a critical judgement. Though it is beyond me to deal with in detail here, it is interesting to note that here, as with the women of *On Baile's Strand*, a peripheral character could portray more of the idealised Unity of Image, when traditional dramatic convention would hold that the main characters must be the most

prominent, and most interesting. Yeats felt that possibly the absence of a hero could be more interesting than the stereotype and perhaps this is also related to his ongoing interest in the notion of perception.

It could be argued that Forgael and Dectora are a parallax, and that when taken together, they could possibly represent the Unity of Image, and perhaps even the external Unity of Being that Yeats identified as being present within sexual experience. Yeats does hint at a Unity of Image in the very last words of the play, where through their union, they have glimpsed the divine and shared in it themselves:

Beloved, having dragged the net about us,  
And knitted mesh to mesh, we grow immortal. (Yeats 1997a, p.18)

However, the relationship presented is not one of equal balance, because through his magic Forgael has subsumed the identity of Dectora, and thus the anti-self has over-ruled self.

The notion of the anti-self consumes *The Shadowy Waters*, Forgael as a character is overwhelmed and once the spell has been spun, Dectora too is conquered by the spiritual aspect. In terms of his dramatic theory, there is not enough conflict between the self and anti-self within this play, as it is very much weighted in favour of the anti-self. Forgael began as anti-self, and apart from returning to self, briefly through his guilt, he remains Other. Dectora begins the play as self, and while some will argue that she transforms into anti-self, this anti-self is not truly present, as when she is enchanted and seems to present this sense of Otherness, she is really just a projection of Forgael's desire, as he has subsumed her will and dominated her sense of self. Everything she says and does from that point on is not done of her own volition; she has no free will and as the anti-self is so closely connected to and dependent upon, individual freedom, what is presented to us is never her anti-self, but a shade of what Forgael wants her to be. She

begins as self dominated by him and ends as victim devoid of any identity. Perhaps as it is the first play it can be forgiven for its flaws and yet while the Unity of Image is not realised, we are shown the primary elements of the theory in isolation, as we are faced with pure self in *Dectora*, we experience pure anti-self in *Forgael*, and we inhabit the Yeatsian setting in the remoteness of the isolated unnamed location, there is nothing in the background that 'will distract the attention from speech and movement' (Yeats 1962, p.110).

Though Yeats would later achieve Unity of Image on his stage, this was not the only play that failed in terms of its theoretical aspirations, but because this is the one which Yeats reworked more than any other, perhaps he understood the potential this play had to become 'remote, spiritual and ideal' (Yeats 1961, p.166), but could not find a way to balance his dialogical forces. However, the seeds of Yeats's theatre of opposition are present within the play as he himself wrote: 'it has a simple passionate story for the common sightseer, though it keep[s] back something for the instructed eyes' (Yeats 1954, p.462). Theoretical failure though it may be, *The Shadowy Waters* deserves further study, particularly in its representations and themes of gender and gendered stereotypes. The dialogue of self and anti-self is a continuing conversation within Yeatsian theatre, while working on both *On Baile's Strand* and *The Shadowy Waters*, Yeats was also working on *The Hourglass*, which he worked on from 1903 until he arrived at the acting version of 1914.

### **The Hourglass**

*The Hourglass* embodies a moral and philosophical discussion, it is in a small way a meta-discussion of the Yeatsian theory of theatre itself, which may go some way to explaining

why it is rarely mentioned or analysed. The play centres on another nameless character, a Wise Man, who believes, and has taught every human that he has encountered, that there is no other world or existence but that of the material world. His belief-system is challenged by the appearance of an angel who tells him that he will die within an hour, when the hourglass on his desk has emptied, and on his death he will go to hell for his teachings:

You have denied there is a purgatory,  
Therefore that gate is closed; you have denied  
There is a heaven, and so that gated is closed. (Yeats 1997a, 35)

His only hope of salvation is to 'find one soul, before the sands have fallen, that still believes' (Yeats 1997a, p.36), and so to save himself, he must find one person whom his teaching has not destroyed and who believes in God. The Wise Man finds that he has corrupted and dominated everyone he has taught, with the exception of Teigue, a fool, and though Teigue believes in the spiritual aspect, he refuses to declare his beliefs. The Wise Man realises he is doomed, but in his death, he accepts the fate before him.

The Wise Man is the embodiment of the Yeatsian self as he is overtly rational and concerned purely with the tangible:

The Wise Man is the inheritor and erstwhile embodiment of that dry and sceptical rationalism Yeats thought of as bringing ruination on modern man. (Rees Moore 1971, p.83)

An argument erupts in the class room when one of the pupils reads a passage that contradicts the Wise Man's philosophy: 'There are two countries living, one visible and one invisible' (Yeats 1997a, p.30), the Wise Man declares that such beliefs are the words of a beggar, and yet he interprets them through a Schopenhauerian lens:

There is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be seen or known till the faculties, whereby we master the kingdom of this world, wither away like green things in a winter. (Yeats 1997a, p.31)

This Schopenhauerian perspective continues as the Wise Man says that when he sleeps and dreams, he glimpses something of the spiritual aspect, suggesting that when the conventions of time, and the grounding force of the physical, are cast off or forgotten, then humanity may receive flashes of divine inspiration or will. However as a rational sceptic he ignores such thoughts as unreal folly:

Twice I have dreamed it in a morning dream,  
Now nothing serves my pupils but to come  
With a like thought. Reason is growing dim;  
A moment more and Frenzy will beat his drum  
And laugh aloud and scream;  
And I must dance in the dream. (Yeats 1997a, pp.31-32)

This passage and the proceeding one, parallel Nietzsche, as he has noted that when the Apollonian reason is lessened, the Dionysian Frenzy embodied in music, dance and rhythm will pour into the world. The Dionysian aspect offers transcendence of the purely material, but the Wise Man has spent so much of his life repeating his mantra of rationalism that he cannot accept there may be a truth within his dreams, as 'everybody is a fool when he is asleep and dreaming' (Yeats 1997a, p.32). The Wise Man is termed as 'wise' and yet to Yeats's own mind and belief system, he is not a full human as he denies his inherent spiritual aspect:

Indeed, Yeats seems to have conceived his protagonist as a crude parody of the materialists he himself had been fighting throughout the nineties. (Richman 2000, p.124)

Teigue, the fool, is an obvious counterfoil to the Wise Man, he is anti-self and yet he is

also an 'underdeveloped mystic' (Wilson 1969, p.143). As a character, Teigue is vague, he is overtly spiritual but exists on the edges of the play, and perhaps this is deliberate, as earlier attempts to portray the anti-self ended in the entire production being overwhelmed by that one aspect.

Teigue recounts the effects of the Wise Man's teachings, and also his domination of all he has met. He has caused priests, friars and people at an ancient sacred well to turn away from their spiritual existence and instead to spend their time playing cards and sleeping (Yeats 1997a, p.32). The force of the Wise Man's self has subsumed the individual spiritual will of all he has encountered, including his own children, who repeat his lessons as they have learned them by rote. His wife has also been bullied into submission; he 'dominates everybody by the mocking power of his intellect' (Rees Moore 1971, p.84). Bridget 'believes in whatever her husband tells her' (Yeats 1997a, p.42), she is now a purely domestic figure, covered in flour and concerned with her place in the kitchen. She is currently too tired for any sense of a spiritual life, and while she had initially been sorry about its loss, now her domestic physical life leaves her 'sleepy in the evenings' (Yeats 1997a, p.42), her lived life offers her no reward or rest, her only respite is in sleep, where as we have seen the spiritual dwells, though we are not told if she dreams.

On encountering the Angel, the Wise Man is convinced of the existence of the supernatural, and it is interesting that he needed to see evidence before he believed. The Angel is the only masked character within the play, as it is a purely supernatural un-gendered identity, but as its appearance is fleeting, it can have no real part in the ensuing action or discussion. In fear, the Wise Man attempts to undo all he has done, but his will has been too strong. Though he begs for more time, his fate is sealed. Through his destructive domination of others, heaven has lost souls and so he must pay that debt with

his own soul, even though he has never believed in a soul.

The only person who may save him is Teigue, the one character he has failed to dominate. He claims that everyone he has taught 'were fools before I came' (Yeats 1997a, p.34), while Teigue alone began as a fool and has remained a fool. Teigue it seems symbolises the individualistic will, who, despite the pressing of the world around him, has remained loyal to his own self defined spiritualism and identity. Teigue has it within his power to save the Wise Man from damnation; all he need do is proclaim his faith. Teigue refuses to do so as the Wise Man 'might steal away my thoughts' (Yeats 1997a, p.45), just as the Wise Man has spent his life stealing the thoughts of others. His wholesale corruption of every spiritual identity which he has encountered is his own undoing, and though Teigue is deemed a fool, he is not so stupid as to allow the self to dominate him. On the Angel's advice, Teigue agrees to impart what it is he knows, however by this time the Wise Man has accepted his fate, and also the consequences of the actions of his mortal life, and orders the fool to:

Be Silent. May God's will prevail on the instant,  
Although, His will be my eternal pain.  
I have no question:  
It is enough, I know what fixed the station  
Of star and cloud.  
And knowing all, I cry  
That whatso God has willed  
On the instant be fulfilled.  
Though that be my damnation. (Yeats 1997a, p.46)

By the play's end, Teigue remains the vague version of the anti-self, and though the Wise Man may look like an example of Unity of Image, he is not an accurate depiction of this state because he had to be frightened into seeking spirituality. There is no willing active

engagement on his part; he has spent his life serving his physical and rational faculties and his search for the spiritual aspect is so that he may escape hell. His behaviour is as it has always been, namely selfish and in his own interest. He remains a character who dominates everyone around him. In trying to find a person who will save him, he is in effect searching for a way to dominate the supernatural will by subverting the fate he deserves. In his death he has accepted his fate, and has now become the dominated will, so there is no equal engagement of forces in this play and it ends with a reversal of his original state.

This play may have failed to achieve Unity of Image, however here the self is allowed a major role, whereas earlier it was the anti-self which overwhelmed the stage; and though there is a diminutive anti-self present here, the identity of the self in this play adds to our overall knowledge of the self as a concept throughout the cannon. Earlier, we saw the self defined by material status in the case of Dectora, or by the all-consuming concern with bodily survival in the Blind Man of *On Baile's Strand*, but here we are given another layer of interaction. The self of the Wise Man is defined by his intellect, his rational identity which dominates his life and censors the individual freedoms of all he encounters. Just as the royal heads of state had dominated from a sense of terrestrial power, so the Wise Man restricts the will of his wife and his pupils. In this, Yeats expands his notion of the self as purely physical in a bodily sense, This depiction is reminiscent of Conchubar of *On Baile's Strand* who equates to the Creative Mind as one aspect of the self, that which is pure intellect, calculating and 'consciously constructive' (Yeats 2008, p.15).

Though Yeats published a finished acting version in 1914, he continued to rework the play:

That Yeats chose to revise the play several times over the years between 1911 and

1922 suggests that his notions about the relations between drama and philosophy, for all his theoretical pronouncements remained fluid and troubled. (Richman 2000, p.125)

Yeats's continual rewriting of his plays highlights the idea that he himself saw his theatre as a work in progress, he also considered his ongoing depictions of Cuchulain as a work in progress and returned to him throughout his career as an ideal character through which to express a staged Unity of Being.

### **At the Hawk's Well**

By 1916, Yeats had revisited the character of Cuchulain as an ideal vehicle of expressing his theoretical and theatrical ideals, and interestingly, by this time he had been exposed to, and heavily influenced by, Noh theatre. *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) is the first play Yeats produced within this new ritualistic structure (Ellmann, 1979; Miller, 1977). *At the Hawk's Well* is set in a desolate sacred space, where the well of immortality is guarded by a hawk-woman, aided by three musicians who sing rather than speak. There is an echo here of *On Baile's Strand*, where the three women sing in their binding of the supernatural Cuchulain to the physical world of Conchubar. It also reminds us of the Fool, and of Yeats's assertion that a sing-song vocal was a good start. On encountering the ritualistic and idealised theatrical structure in Noh, Yeats had now had found a form in which his dramas could be enhanced. As music and dance are the conduits for the Dionysian aspect or the anti-self in Yeatsian terms he now had a physical method of placing an expression of the anti-self on the stage to layer on top of his own belief in the sovereignty of the musicality of emotive and instinctual language which could:

create an ideal country where everything was possible, even speaking in verse, or

speaking to music, or the expression of the whole of a life in a dance (Yeats 1996, pp.100-101)

In this form, drama now becomes more capable of Unity of Image, as drama is representational of life and therefore Apollonian, so by introducing the Dionysian tool of tangible music and dance to add to emotional, lyrical and instinctive language, all the elements of Unity of Image are in place on the stage. It is the lack of these stereotypically Noh elements that Yeats had criticised in naturalist drama, and had tried to produce himself in his early experiments; in Noh he found a readymade formula to amalgamate with his own ideals.

The character of the Old Man has been waiting fifty years for the well to produce water so that he may gain physical immortality, but each time the water flows, he falls asleep. Enter a Young Man who has heard of the well and has come to find it himself. The Old Man discourages him, and claims ownership of both the well and the hawk-woman, ordering the Young Man to: 'Go from this accursed place! This place belongs to me, that girl there, and those others. Deceivers of men' (Yeats 1997a, p.117). In response, the Young Man claims that he will dominate the hawk-woman and will share the water with the Old Man. When the hawk-woman becomes possessed of the divine spirit, and the water flows, the Old Man falls asleep, and the Young Man becomes distracted by the guardian herself, and follows her away from the well. Both men miss their opportunity to drink, and the Old Man says that the guardian has 'roused the fierce women of the hills' (Yeats 1997a, p.121), the women of the Sidhe, against the Young Man. The play ends with the Old Man begging not to be left alone at the well, though the Young Man does not hear him as rushes off to meet the women of the Sidhe.

This play uses Yeats's theory of the mask to full effect, as we are told in the stage directions that the two fully-recognisable human characters are wearing masks, while the

musicians and the guardian of the well have their faces painted in order to resemble masks. The painted faces are there to give a physical element to these spiritual characters, as they will move with every facial expression and act of speech, though of course the features will not change. It could also be seen that these painted masks represent Unity of Being within these characters, as they are clearly human but live a life outside of conventional society which is engaged with the spiritual. The masks of the two human men, however, are immobile and leave the audience nothing but their dialogue with which to engage. Neither character is named, rather they are given descriptions based upon the length of time they have lived, in other words, based upon their human condition and their place within a temporal existence. What they will say and how they act will define their being.

The Old Man enters from the audience indicating his connection to the real physical world which is shared by those watching, and it is almost like a member of the audience coming on stage. Though he has left society behind fifty years previously in coming to the desolate sacred place, he is still dominated by the fixed ideas of the material world: he is dominated by his existence within time and space. The Old Man is present at the well in the vain pursuit of immortality and his method of obtaining such a reward is one of passivity and inaction. He has done nothing but wait over the fifty years, and he makes little attempt to engage with the spiritualised beings at the well. He abuses the musicians who mediate between the spiritual hawk-woman and the physical men, declaring them to be 'as stupid as fish' (Yeats 1997a p.116). One could see this play as a foreshadowing of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the underlying ideas of existential philosophy and absurdist drama.

The Old Man continually blames the musicians for his inability to drink from the well:

And yet the dancers have deceived me, Thrice  
I have wakened from a sudden sleep  
To find the stones were wet. (Yeats 1997a, p.118)

He condemns the spiritual element of the sacred well for not engaging with him when he himself has remained stationary throughout, unwilling to be active in a relationship with the spiritual hawk-woman. The Old Man has lived in this sacred space for fifty years, and yet his consciousness is so consumed with physicality that he cannot accept that which is evident and present before him:

You have deluded me my whole life through,  
Accursed dancers, you have stolen my life.  
That there should be such evil in a shadow! (Yeats 1997a, p.121)

He is afraid of the woman and the mystery that surrounds her, and he has no desire to either understand or accept her, as his only desire is the physical benefits of her existence, namely bodily immortality. On facing the hawk-woman, he covers his head, hiding behind a physical boundary. To Knowland, this action 'must be seen as his response to the challenge she represents' (Knowland 1983, p.117). The challenge of all humans is to engage with the spiritual in order to be whole, and Yeats's challenge to his audience is to not to cover their own heads, but rather to engage with the spirituality inherent in themselves and provoked through their emotional response to his dramatic work. The Young Man accepts this challenge as he looks into the guardian's eyes, and in doing so, is forced into a relationship with the spiritual anti-self. Conversely the Old Man fears to look at what he does not understand, and his final words of the play betray his identity:

O, do not go! The mountain is accursed;  
Stay with me, I have nothing more to lose,  
I do not now deceive you. (Yeats 1997a, pp.121-122)

## Chapter Four

### *'The Theatre Grows More Elaborate': Readings of Selected Plays*

He has lived the majority of his life awaiting the benefits of spirituality, but without any active engagement on his part, and thus he has received nothing in return. He has withered and will shortly die without the comfort of an afterlife, as he has renounced his faith when making physical reward the sole purpose of his life. The Old Man has lived his life as the self, and by never giving credence to his inner antithesis, and by defining his entire being in material terms, he has led a life which achieved nothing but inevitable death. Though he is a masked character, he has not attained Unity of Being, though the opportunity was always there.

As I have said, Yeats used the mask as a means of demoting physical presence, so that the anti-self could emerge through the conduit of the actor, but in this instance, Yeats deliberately left the Old Man as a self, completely devoid of an anti-self. The Young Man, in contrast, begins as self, and while, by the play's end he has not achieved Unity of Being, he has nevertheless begun his quest for it. He has seen the spiritual aspect of life and would freely engage with it. The Young Man is set as an opposition to the Old Man, though both emerge from the audience by entering from the theatre aisle, and both are in search of immortality. It could be argued that these characters are symbolic of Yeats's ideal audience, in that they enter the theatrical space from the phenomenal world and are challenged by their experience within the sacred space of the stage. The challenge is to engage with the noumenal as expressed onstage through the hawk-woman, and we are shown the consequences of refusing to do so through the Old Man, who by the play's conclusion is paralyzed by his fear of the unknown and is left with 'nothing more to lose' (Yeats 1997a, p121). In contrast, the Young Man who does engage with her is changed through his interaction with the hawk-woman. While the Old Man has lived in this place for five decades, the Young Man is a newcomer and he:

Passes through this barren place like a refreshing wind, bringing not rain but

assurance that the desiccated heroic tradition can be rejuvenated. He is the hero the Guardian of the Well has been waiting for, and if he is a victim who has fallen into the trap of the gods he is also the agent who restores the broken contact between the natural and the supernatural. (Rees Moore 1971, p.208)

Initially, the Young Man claims that he has assaulted the hawk and wishes to find a means to hood it. Unlike the Old Man who wants to take what he can from her, the Young Man wants to ensnare and tame the guardian, the symbol of spirituality and sexuality who is both bird and woman, both supernatural and natural. The woman at the well represents both aspects, because when she represents the self, she is still and peaceful and her eyes:

are not of this world,

Nor moist, nor faltering: they are no girl's eyes. (Yeats 1997a, p.120)

She is clearly not a little girl, she is a woman, an authority figure, self-possessed and assured. She does not cry or falter as the Old Man says, and yet her eyes also betray her as something other than merely human. In her dance, in her Dionysian frenzy, we see that she is also anti-self and is comfortable inhabiting both spheres. Here again is the neo-pagan influenced suggestion that women are the conduit of the mystical, possessing a connection to, and an ease with, the supernatural that a man does not. Pete Ure sees the guardian in an opposite light, as he insists that she 'destroys Cuchulain's Unity of Being, or confounds his search for it' (Ure 1963, p.71). However, it is clear from what Yeats tells us within the text that she is a physical human woman and yet when she speaks: 'It was her mouth. And yet not she, that cried. It was that shadow cried behind her mouth' (Yeats 1997a, p.119). These lines embody the essence of the entire theory of the mask, it is the shadow aspect, the anti-self, that is behind the mask of societal propriety, and in its Dionysian frenzy, it is the spiritual aspect that presents itself.

In her embodiment of both aspects of Yeats's ideal, the guardian is Unity of

Image, so she is representational and as such is Apollonian; however, as a spiritualised character, and as a conduit for the immortal, she is also Dionysian and in this becomes Unity of Image, for she is never overwhelmed by either aspect, but is permanently at peace and balanced. Her placement on the stage highlights the contrast between her and the pure self-identity of the Old Man and the Young Man who has the courage to look her in the eye, and in doing so, is willing to accept and engage with the anti-self, both personal and universal. In the three characters, the journey towards Unity of Being is depicted: the Old Man is pure self, his only concern is the condition of his bodily state; while the Young Man is initially of the same mindset but on encountering the hawk-woman, he is faced with another reality of being. The Young Man is like Yeats's ideal audience member, provoked into seeking the anti-self out for himself and actively trying to establish a relationship with her. While we do not see him achieve Unity of Image, we do witness him take his first steps towards the Yeatsian ideal. He does not see the purely physical immortality that the Old Man does; he will be as she is, a unification of both realities, both self and anti-self. Thus, on confronting the hawk-woman, the Young Man states that:

I am not afraid of you, bird, woman or witch.  
Do what you will, I shall not leave this place  
Till I have grown immortal like yourself. (Yeats 1997a, p.120)

It is at this point that the well fills. Though the Old Man sleeps, the young man is entranced, and abandoning the well and the promise of immortality, he follows the guardian off stage:

For the Old Man she is sexless and unattractive, a reflection of all the negative qualities that inhere in him. For Cuchulain she is a woman too, but one who arouses his sexual appetite, which is also an aggressive impulse. She is also the

means of access to immortality. (Knowland 1983, p.117)

The Young Man follows her as he sees something he desires in her, both physically and spiritually, but the important point is that he follows her, he walks away from the water that would give him physical immortality in search of another form of immortality. In his willingness to engage with the spiritual, and in his active participation in his search for his anti-self, he has gone beyond his material self, and so begins the individual process of reconciliation of his two opposing selves: 'immortality must be earned by mortality' (Rees Moore 1971, p.203). Unlike the Old Man, he must be active in the acquisition of his immortality, he must learn of and take part in the conflict of self and anti-self.

It is after he has engaged with the mystical that the Young Man names himself as Cuchulain. He now has an identity, other than that of a being of time, and he now has personality. As we saw in chapter three, Yeats equates personality with the anti-self:

It is the sense of individuality, identity, and an instinct which intuitively draws a person to something, before the intellectual faculties can justify that process (O'Driscoll 1975a, p.7).

This sums up the character of Cuchulain, as he has a strong sense of identity and is drawn, not only to the guardian, but also to the women of the Sidhe. Though the hawk-woman has fled from him, and set an obstacle in his path in the form of the 'the fierce women of the hills' (Yeats 1997a, p.121), who the Old Man tells him will take his life, nevertheless, he still chooses to face the spiritual and sexualised aspect. On meeting the Old Man, Cuchulain is aware of his identity and declares that his name 'is not unknown' (Yeats 1997a, p.116), yet by the play's end, his declaration of identity is even stronger in tone, it is more assured as he has seen his shadow aspect and would now incorporate it into his understanding of his whole identity. The Old Man tells him that now he has roused the supernatural:

And never till you are lying in the earth  
Can you know rest. (Yeats 1997a, p.121)

Cuchulain will spend his life chasing Unity of Being, and he will be perpetually in opposition to the social human world. The play ends with the musicians who tell us that 'wisdom must live a bitter life' (Yeats 1997a, p.122), implying that Cuchulain's physical life spent on this quest will be unpleasant though rewarded with knowledge, while they refer to the Old Man as an idiot: 'who but an idiot would praise dry stones in a well' (Yeats 1997a, p.122). The Old Man has spent his life in the worship of a physical place which is reputed to be sacred, rather than seeking the sacred that is present in the natural world. As a man defined by his physical role, he is incapable of understanding the noumenal force without subjugating it to his physical experience. Thus, he demands the musicians speak to him in simple sentences that he can understand. The musicians and the Old Man speaks different languages, for want of a better term, because they can only sing and the knowledge they impart is confused, because the Old Man cannot decipher their meaning and wishes them to be 'pleasant and companionable' (Yeats 1997a, p.116). He wants them to be other than they are, he wishes them to be more social, more human, and he cannot accept them as they are, which is as other than himself. He can only understand what he can see through the lens of phenomenal reality.

*At the Hawk's Well*, unlike earlier plays, does not portray a character who is overwhelmed by anti-self, only a character through the Old Man, where self is overtly present. This can be seen as a dramatic device which is used to show what is absent from the Old Man when he is compared to the other characters. Unity of Image is not only present in complete form through the guardian, but also as a burgeoning identity through Cuchulain who, like Yeats himself, has become aware of the anti-self and has set himself on a life-long quest to meet, incorporate and understand it.

## **The Player Queen**

Yeats's own personal ideals surrounding art, the artistic process and the passing of the rationalistic age later found expression in *The Player Queen* (1922). Through the character of Septimus, Yeats vocalises many of his philosophical and symbolic ideals. *The Player Queen* takes place in an unnamed unhappy kingdom, where the people are rebelling against their queen, whom they have never seen. There is a beggar among them who is a prophet, and he has prophesied that the Queen must die in order to restore the stability of the kingdom. The play opens at dawn, as a drunken actor wanders the street searching for his wife Decima as she is to play the role of the queen at a state performance. As she has vanished, there will be no play, and Septimus will be goaled. His wife and leading lady is hiding under the throne, refusing to play any 'woman older than thirty' (Yeats 1964, p.89). The young Queen enters, and we see that she is deeply unhappy in her role, because she is dominated by her Prime Minister, who wants to quell the rebellion outside the castle walls. The young Queen, however, wants an ascetic and spiritual life; in fact, she is 'ready for martyrdom' (Yeats 1964, p.90). Meanwhile, Decima argues with her maid Nona over the love of Septimus, who eventually leaves Decima for the maid, and, feeling betrayed Decima decides to kill herself. The Queen tells Decima that to do so 'would be a great sin', and the two women switch places (Yeats 1964, p.105). The play ends with Decima taking the place of the Queen while the latter flees to a convent to live the life for which she longs. Stability is restored to the kingdom, the prophetic beggar is sentenced to death for his lies and Septimus is goaled after all, for proclaiming that Decima, the Queen is his 'bad, flighty wife' (Yeats 1964, p.108).

This play is a play of both opposition and reversal; Decima and the Queen are the

primary and obvious characters of this trope. Before we meet either character, we are told that they are both 'bad' (Yeats 1964). Decima is deemed bad by leaving her husband drunken and soaked in the gutter, though he ended up drunk and in the gutter by his own actions. Throughout the play, Septimus is shown to be the embodiment of Dionysian Frenzy, permanently drunk, he is anti-self while also being a mouthpiece for Yeats himself. Many of his speeches echo Yeats's own prose, in particular 'The Adoration of the Magi'. Septimus is an apocalyptic character, in that he announces 'the end of the Christian Era', and proclaims that there will be a new age whose figurehead will be the unicorn as he is both animal and symbol, and therein lies the crux of Septimus' philosophy:

Man is nothing until he is united to an image. Now the Unicorn is both an image and a beast; that is why he alone can be called the new Adam. (Yeats 1964, p.101)

This is reminiscent of the theme of 'The Adoration of the Magi', wherein a new age is heralded by the birth of a unicorn to a human woman in a Parisian brothel (Yeats 1959). This statement also encapsulates the central principle of Yeatsian dramatic and philosophic theory, namely that humanity must be unified to a symbol, to the anti-self, if it is to become a self-actualised identity. Throughout the play, Septimus' inability to care for himself physically, as he is so intoxicated that he needs help to walk, and his continual declaration of his personal philosophy, identifies him as the anti-self:

He is unfit for the world because only the transcendent is pure enough for him. His drunkenness is a sign of his estrangement from the earthly concerns. (Rees Moore 1971, p.167)

His occupation as an actor and dramatist also hints to his role as a character who straddles two worlds: the worlds of the real and of the unreal. He is the drunken Dionysian, both

literally and figuratively, he is physically drunk and he also understands that this is the state he must maintain if he is to retain his artistic talent and vitality. In his drunkenness, he becomes aware of the spiritual truth, his knowledge of Unity of Being came to him 'at the second mouthful of the bottle' (Yeats 1964, p.101). Much of Septimus' dialogue consists of declarations of his identity as anti-self and of prophecies about the world that is to come. He proclaims the Unicorn to be 'both image and beast' (Yeats 1964, p 101), which means that the symbol of his apocalyptic ideal is both phenomenal and noumenal; Apollonian and Dionysian. Septimus, through his drunkenness, identifies himself with a predominantly Dionysian force, and he feels that he is more noble and trustworthy when he is drunk: 'I am only unfaithful when I am sober' (Yeats 1964, p.103).

Just as he is a player prophet, so Decima is the player queen of the title. Their marriage does not portray Unity of Being, as they are in crisis rather than in balance with each other. I would suggest that she is self, although Peter Ure claims that this 'aspect of Decima is impenetrably obscure' (Ure 1963. p.140). When we meet her, she refuses to wear her costume, and she refuses to put on the mask. Decima's refusal of the mask, and her hiding from Septimus and the other actors, signal her as an outsider among them. While the thespians play within the sacred space of the unreal, she hides from this space, seeking a reality which is materialistic. She is the wilful self, who lunges several times for the 'bottle of wine and [a] boiled lobster' (Yeats 1964, pp 91-93) that Nona denies her, until she dresses for the performance. She longs to be a real physical queen as opposed to channelling the essence of an unreal queen. She is a bodily and earthy character, literally, having been 'born in a ditch' (Yeats 1964, p.92). In her argument with Nona over the love of Septimus, she recounts that he loves her 'eye, hair, complexion, shape, disposition, mind – everything' (Yeats 1964, p.95), so clearly for her, physical attributes are her glory.

In her confrontation with the Queen we see Decima as a woman rather than as a portrayal of exaggerated self, because as she bargains with Septimus to retain his fidelity, she reveals her emotions to the Queen, who mirrors Decima's own unhappiness. Both have been in crisis, bound to a life which was not in keeping with their dominant mood. Decima and the Queen agree to take each other's place and in their reversal of roles, Decima may finally have her desired life of physical authority and material wealth, while the Queen may live the life she wants, away from the social and political world of the court. Her unsuitability for this position is symbolised by the fact that the state gown of her mother was ill fitting on her frame. Interestingly Decima now adopts a mask, the mask she was to wear in the play, so the image of the unreal anti-self has now been transformed into the real face of the self. The significance of this mask is unclear:

Neither we nor Yeats know at the play's close whether Decima has grown into her mask or not, and our inability to know prevents the play from attaining coherence. (Bloom 1970, p.334)

However, Yeats often says he has forgotten, or is unsure of, the meanings within his plays (Yeats 1954), and perhaps this is deliberate as the whole locus of his theatre is that it provokes a subjective response from the audience, rather than one that is directed by the author. This underscores his theoretical idea that the meaning of drama occurred between the performance and the audience's reaction to that performance. However, it could be argued that the mask Decima adopts at the end of *The Player Queen* is reminiscent of the Jungian mask of societal norms, it is the 'adopted attitude' this is more than apt as Decima is the adopted Queen (Jung 1998, p.98).

The Queen is in some way a representation of a passive anti-self, similar to Teigue in *The Hourglass*. In contrast to the true anti-self character of Septimus, she is vague and weak. Her spirituality is one of convention and order, perhaps representative of organised

religion, while that of Septimus represents the Dionysian ecstasy of unfettered emotional and passionate spirituality. Bloom is correct, and not just in relation to Decima, as there is no Unity of Image within this play, and all the central characters remain as they were in essence at the beginning of the play. There is no purely spiritual aspect, and though Septimus comes close, his drunken state is an induced state which would imply that he needs something other than individual personal will to engage with his anti-self. By 1924, Yeats had removed the exaggerated opposites from the stage so that the portrayal of the self and anti-self became quieter and more simplified none more so than as explored in *The Cat and the Moon*.

### **The Cat and the Moon**

As in many of Yeats's earlier plays, *The Cat and the Moon* (1924), makes use of three musician characters who are once more supernatural conduits expressed through the fact that the living face has again been made up to resemble a mask. In many ways this play is a precursor of *Waiting For Godot*, in that it tells the tale of two beggars who are on a journey in search of Saint Colman so that he may bless them and restore their physical faculties though worry that 'Saint Colman would not have us two different from what we are' (Yeats 1997a, p.140). Rather than meeting the musicians at the sacred place as in *At the Hawk's Well*, the beggars are accompanied by them on their journey from the start. They encounter the great Saint who asks 'will you be cured or will you be blessed?' (Yeats 1997a, p.140). The Blind Beggar chooses sight while the Lame Beggar chooses to keep his affliction and be blessed. On regaining his sight, the Blind Beggar, seeing that his friend has stolen from him, beats him. The Lame Beggar claims his friend to now be 'a soul lost' (Yeats, 1997a, p.143), and he tells the Saint that he must flee the Blind Beggar.

The Saint then asks the Lame Beggar to bend so that he may carry the Saint on his back. Once the Saint, who weighs 'no more than a grasshopper' (Yeats 1997a, p.143) is on the cripple's back, he tells the Lame Beggar that he must bless the road by dancing on it, so the Lame Man tries to dance only to find he has also been cured by the Saint and is proclaimed by the Saint to be 'a miracle' (Yeats 1997a, p.144).

The play opens with lines sung by the Musicians, and the song they sing is a repetition of an earlier poem by Yeats also called 'The Cat and The Moon' taken from his collection *The Wild Swans At Coole* (1919):

The Cat went here the Cat went there  
And the moon spun round like a top,  
And the nearest kin of the moon,  
The creeping cat, looked up.  
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon,  
For, wander and wail as he would,  
The pure cold light in the sky  
Troubled his animal blood. (Yeats 1997a, p.137)

Minnaloushe can be seen as representative of all animals who look at the supernatural in fear or lack of understanding, and yet they are 'nearest kin', in that according to Yeats's system, all animals possess an innate spiritual or divine element and as such they share in the supernatural, being a particular part of it. However there is also a separation from the supernatural, as animals are also phenomenal and temporal beings who are subject to bodily demands in order to survive, to the point that phenomenal reality often dominates supernatural reality, though the spiritual instinct is intact and troubled on encountering supernatural experiences, in a manner embodied by the cat of the poem.

Yeats once more denies his main characters a name; they are beggars and have been together for forty years 'knocking about the roads' (Yeats 1997a, pp.142-143); and

perhaps as they have never had a place within society they have no need of such a convention. The Blind Beggar's concern is that if he is cured by the Saint, he will lose the money that people give him out of charity, as he realises that many would give 'nothing but a curse to a whole man' (Yeats 1997a, p.138). However, his friend is acutely aware of the necessity of being a whole man, and of the benefits which such a transformation will bring to his life. When the audience are first introduced to the characters, the Blind Beggar carries the Lame Beggar upon his back, echoing the Musician's lines, because just as the wholly physical cat looks up at the supernatural moon, 'thus, Lame Beggar on Blind Beggar's back suggests the interdependence of body and soul' (Knowland 1983, p.146). Though they may be dependent on each other, just as the Blind Man and the Fool were, yet they are also separate identities, and Yeats does separate them, as the Lame Beggar gets off the back of his friend. It is in their separation that we see their very different personalities.

The Blind Beggar is concerned with his physical life alone, while the Lame Beggar can see that a spiritual existence is of greater value than a restored physical life. In this the Blind Beggar echoes the earlier Blind Man of *On Baile's Strand*, he too is the an element of the self Yeats referred to as Body of Fate, a temporally-trapped being who is aware only of his bodily needs and survival; his aim is to see again so no other human can 'steal my things and tell me lies' (Yeats 1997a, p.141). The Lame Beggar, however, has encountered the anti-self and has chosen to engage with it, in a manner recalling the Young Man of *At the Hawk's Well*. There is a suggestion here of the eternal nature of the Other, as in choosing to be blessed, the Lame Man will have his name in the book of the Saint and so be immortalized as 'kin to the blessed saints and of the martyrs' (Yeats 1997a, p.141). He represents the mask of the anti-self, as he has become that 'which we wish to become, or that to which we give our reverence' (Yeats 2008, p.15).

On meeting the Saint, who speaks through the First Musician, they are asked, 'Will you be cured or will you be blessed?' (Yeats 1997a, p.140), and they must choose between a purely physical reward, or one which would leave them as they are physically, but which would grant them spiritual insight and the implied rewards of such spiritual awakening. The Blind Beggar chooses the immediate reward of sight:

Even though the Blind Beggar receives his eyesight, he remains spiritually blind, because he chooses to renounce his faith. The Blind Beggar exchanges the physical life of his body for the spiritual hope for his immortal soul. (Watanabe 1995, p.275)

This rejection of a spiritual, and thus moral, conscience is seen in his subsequent behavior through his physical attack on the Lame Beggar, who, in choosing to be blessed by the Saint is now in possession of a sense of spiritual vision, as displayed through the fact that he can see the Saint while the newly sighted Blind Beggar is unable to see him.

Saint Colman represents the anti-self as he is a purely spiritual entity without a body of his own, using a musician to encounter the physical world. On blessing the Lame Beggar, he takes on physical form by climbing onto his shoulders. The Lame Beggar comments on how light the Saint is, indicating that spirituality for Yeats is not a burden, and can only serve to enhance life. This betterment of the Lame Beggar's life is seen through the portrayal of him as both blessed and physically cured by the play's end, as he begins to dance with the Saint upon his shoulders. The play ends with another excerpt from the poem 'The Cat and The Moon':

Minnalouslyhe creeps through the grass  
From moonlit place to place.  
The sacred moon overhead  
Has taken a new phase.  
Does Minnalouslyhe know that his pupils

Will pass from change to change,  
And that from round to crescent,  
From crescent to round they range?  
Minnaloushe creeps through the grass  
Alone, important and wise,  
And lifts to the changing moon  
His changing eyes. (Yeats 1997a, p.144)

This final statement of the play suggests the interconnected nature of the supernatural and natural; they mirror and echo each other, they are, according to the earlier snippet of the poem 'closest kin', and the question is does the animal recognise the supernatural in himself? To Yeats, to embrace the internal and external supernatural is paramount to achieving a whole self. The Lame Beggar of the play has attained his Unity of Being, he has not been consumed by his physical wants or needs; instead, he has sought to be blessed, and in engaging with the Saint, has been blessed both physically and spiritually:

Thus self and anti-self were reconciled and Yeats had a miracle much more esoteric than any he had written about in his early plays. Regardless of the presence of the Saint, the reconciliation of opposites was for Yeats a secular miracle, the key to his verse, his private system, and his life. (Ellmann 1979, p.221)

### **The Herne's Egg**

The final play in this chapter also offers up a version of Unity of Image. Written in 1936, *The Herne's Egg* offers us a character close to the mystical guardian of *At the Hawk's Well*. The central theme of *The Herne's Egg* is that of conflict:

Seeing his plays in performance gave Yeats the inspiration for a new play, *The*

*Herne's Egg* based on *The Player Queen*. He selected aspects of the play, omitting much of the political and sexual intrigues, and emphasizing instead the moment of confrontation. (Dorn 1984, p.93)

It is another play which is difficult to research as it is also rarely mentioned or studied by academics perhaps this is because it was not staged during Yeats's lifetime. The play was offered to the Abbey on completion, though Yeats knew it would cause 'uproar' (Yeats 1954, p.868). The board of the Abbey rejected in on grounds of obscenity and it remained unperformed until 1950 (Miller 1997, p.302; Richman 2000, p.174).

*The Herne's Egg* opens with a battle between the kings of Connacht and Tara, after which they agree they are evenly matched and so come to peace. On his return from the battle, the King of Connacht, Congal, encounters Attracta, an ascetic priestess of a god, who is symbolised or manifest as a herne, and she protects the herne's nesting site and also their eggs. As a herne's egg is a delicacy, Congal wishes to have some for the feast to celebrate his peace with Tara, and though he is told he must not, he steals 'every new laid egg' (Yeats 1997a, p.234). Corney, Attracta's servant proclaims the curse of the Herne god, stating that any who steals his eggs shall die at a fool's hand. At the banquet, Congal receives a hen's egg, and insulted, he resumes his war with Aedh, King of Tara and in the ensuing battle, Aedh is killed. Attracta enters carrying a herne's egg. One of Congal's men, Mathais, accuses her of having switched the eggs, the act which lead to Aedh's death and the loss of the peace between the kingdoms. Congal readily accepts this account, and adds that the god is partially to blame as 'all she does he makes her do' (Yeats 1997a, p.242), and so he plans to exact his revenge on both Attracta and the god by telling the others that they:

Must handle, penetrate and possess her,  
And do her a great good by that action,

Melting out the virgin snow,  
And that snow image, the Great Herne;  
For nothing less than seven man  
Can melt that snow. (Yeats 1997a, p.243)

The morning after the rape, he claims to have triumphed over the god, as *Attracta* is now a fully-human woman, and no longer the vestal virgin figure. *Attracta*, however, claims that the rape never happened, instead she insists that she consummated her celestial marriage to the god. The god manifests himself through a roll of thunder and all the men, apart from *Congal* repent, and so *Congal* must face his fate and fight a fool, who with a roasting spit does inflict a wound upon *Congal*. Rather than let the god defeat him, *Congal* attempts suicide insisting that in this way he will triumph over the god's curse and will, however though he 'falls symbolically on the spit. It does not touch him' and so dies of the wound inflicted by the Fool (Yeats 1997a, p.252). On his death, *Attracta* asks *Corney* to have sex with her so that on the moment of his death, *Congal* may be reincarnated in human form, however she is too late as two donkeys offstage have conceived before she could and so *Congal* will be born into his next life as an ass.

The character of *Attracta* is presented to the audience in a manner that echoes the presentation of the guardian of the well; she too is a human who, on being possessed by a bird-god, becomes something more than human, something part-supernatural. *Attracta* is also a guardian, and whereas the hawk-woman was alone in her desolate reality, *Attracta* is placed in a social environment and has companions and subjects in *Corney* and the girls who seek her council. She is an authority figure with a power of her own. She may be summoned, but will only come 'if she has a mind to come' (Yeats 1997a, p.231), and it is she who instigates the curse on *Congal*, even though it is *Corney* who speaks the actual words:

Those eggs are stolen from the god.  
It is but right that you hear said  
A curse so ancient that no man  
Can say who made it. (Yeats 1997a, p.234)

When *Attracta* is possessed by the god, she portrays Yeats's ecstatic vision and the Dionysian force, as she sings and dances in her trance-like state, yet the god is not wholly external to her. When the eggs are stolen, Corney encourages her to 'bring the god out of your gut' (Yeats 1997a, p.233), symbolising Yeats's belief in an internal divine presence, and also perhaps pointing to the mystical nature of women as bearers of the womb in which the cycles of nature are repeated month on month.

In this union of eternal presence and a finite being, *Attracta* is representative of Unity of Image. She portrays both self and anti-self, though not as unified or balanced, as her psyche is overwhelmed by anti-self on possession. In her Dionysian trance:

Her human life is gone  
And that is why she seems  
A doll upon a wire. (Yeats 1997a, p.236)

Her physical being is in the thrall to the supernatural force in these moments, however for the majority of the play, she is fully human, yet aware and engaged with the supernatural on both internal and universal levels, and so she is the embodiment of Unity of Image:

She convinces us of the reality of her mystical life by her human dignity and warmth, and the way in which these contrast, when she is in her trance, with the harsh and terrified abandon of her welcome to the god. (Ure 1963, p.154)

Conversely, *Congal* is pure self, and like so many Yeatsian symbols of self, he is a figurehead of state and consumed with his position within that state, hence his indignation

when he is refused the eggs, as he feels that he has a right to possess them. Moreover, he portrays a sexual appetite that is more earthly than the Schopenhauerian paradigm, as he is the whole self, both cold, calculating Creative mind and the Body of Fate, concerned with his physical appetites and with the expansion of his kingdom. His justification for the rape is to normalise Attracta and so 'do her a great good' (Yeats 1997a, p.242). He will have her returned to a state of pure physical selfhood, a domesticated woman no longer in the service of the god, but in the service of men, so that:

She may be free from all obsession,  
Live as every woman should. (Yeats 1997a, p.243)

In raping her, he will 'cure' her of her supernatural possession (Yeats 1997a, p.233); he conceives of the supernatural force as a purely external entity. After the rape, he expects her to be domesticated and sensible, indicating a return to the rational and tangible self:

A sensible woman; you gather up what's left,  
Your thoughts upon the cupboard and the larder.  
No more a herne's bride – a crazed loony  
Waiting to be trodden by a bird-  
But all woman, all sensible woman. (Yeats 1997a, p.245)

Attracta had been the guardian of the eggs prior to the rape, and Congal thinks her concern for them is through concern for the food supply. However, she is gathering them 'as such eggs are holy' (Yeats 1997a, p.243). She is keeper of the supernatural eggs, but also her own eggs within her womb, which she protects through her insistence that her virginity is to be sacrificed only to a supernatural purpose. Webster equates the Herne's egg with male force, and the hen's egg which Congal is served with female weakness, hence his perception of insult (Webster 2000, p.149). However neither egg is gendered and as eggs are the biological property of the female aspect, it could be argued that the true distinction

between them is that the hen's egg is of the physical world, while the herne's egg is indicated as being important to the god, which would suggest that the hen's egg was more suited to the persona of Congal. The fact that Congal ordered all the herne's eggs 'boiled soft' (Yeats 1997a, p.245) as one would for a child, could be seen as highlighting his selfish appetites and also his need to make the scared more palatable on his own terms, therefore he is self, seeking to dominate anti-self.

Congal is an arrogant character, he is an earthly King and sees the god as being in opposition to him. As the god is a purely spiritual entity and beyond his reach, Congal will dominate, 'handle, penetrate and possess' the body which the god inhabits on occasion, namely *Attracta* (Yeats 1997a, p.243). Similarly, after he murders Aedh, he claims:

But I have taken kingdom and throne  
And that has made all level again. (Yeats 1997a, p.241)

In other words, earthly balance is restored now that he, Congal, is master of all. He will dominate both Connacht and Tara. As the play opened, we saw that Congal and Aedh were evenly matched, and when the fight breaks out at the banquet, Aedh seeks to abate the argument by insisting that a servant had made a mistake; however we learn it was not an innocent mistake:

AEDH: A servant put the wrong egg there.  
CONGAL: But at whose orders?  
AEDH: At your own.  
A murderous drunken plot, a plot  
To put a weapon that I do not know  
Into my hands. (Yeats 1997a, p.240)

Aedh further accuses Congal of having planned the attack, and of 'having practised' for

the fight in which Aedh would die, as we had seen at the beginning of the play that they had been evenly matched, we must believe Aedh's account. (Yeats 1997a, p.240). Congal is the extreme of the Yeatsian self, in that he is above and beyond the law of state which might subdue him if he were an ordinary citizen but as King, he believes himself to be the embodiment of the law. Congal must always have his way, he cannot be questioned or challenged, and he dispatches his earthly enemy by trickery and will do the same with Attracta through the rape. After the rape, Congal is insistent that he has won, and he proclaims that he has indeed dominated and subsumed Attracta's supernatural will, though she claims he did not. She says she consummated her celestial marriage to the Great Herne. Attracta's sexuality is not expressed in bodily terms, she is the Yeatsian ideal:

One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision – that the mystic way and sexual love use the same means – opposed yet parallel existences. (Yeats 1954, p.715)

In Attracta, these parallel lines converge, as her sexual experience is real but not of the body; rather it is the mystical sexual union of Schopenhauer's philosophy. She has put herself outside of society, time and space in order to achieve the orgasmic state which results in Unity of Being. Congal's folly here is in assuming that Attracta did not possess an internal supernatural aspect which shares in the universal divine will. He views the Great Herne as he views himself, as an external force which will dominate Attracta, in this Attracta is as women are to Schopenhauer, a means to an end, also in assuming the god is as himself he is also denying the Great Herne autonomy and subsuming that divine identity.

The sexual act heralds Attracta's transformation into Unity of Being. Prior to this, the god is only spoken of, the curse is proclaimed by Corney, but now that she has been

united with the universal divine she has a supernatural power rather than being subject to it. She calls on the god to proclaim that she has 'is pure', thereby reinforcing her assertion that she has not been subjugated by the physical strength of Congal and his men. Thunder is heard to roll, thus portraying her new state of balance with nature and the supernatural manifestation of this new state. The men in fear all repent and affirm that Attracta is indeed still bonded to the god. Yet, Yeats grants Congal a reprieve of sorts, as when he insists that he did indeed rape Attracta, she answers:

You were under the curse, in all  
You did, in all you seemed to do. (Yeats 1997a, p.247)

One might see this admission as indicating that Congal and his men were surrogates for the god himself; 'that the Herne had used the rape to effect the consummation of his marriage' (Webster 2000, p.150). However, at no point in the play does Congal seem to be an anti-self, he never encounters divinity internally or externally, and as such, he cannot be a divine surrogate. The key phrase here is 'all you seemed to do' (Yeats 1997a, p.247). Yeats is playing with notions of perception. There is a whisper here of Schopenhauer, as Congal's purely phenomenal existence has led him to perceive what occurred as phenomenal reality:

The ultimate reality is not thought, for thought cannot create but 'can only perceive,' the created world is a stream of images in the human mind. (Yeats 1961, p.419)

Perception is not always truth, and his men have already sworn that the rape did not occur, so who is to be believed? Perhaps the truth lies in the perception of the audience or the reader. I have just given my interpretation of the sexual conflict within this play which is a limited reading, as I already mentioned that any academic analysis will always be

limited due to the lack of the performative element. In this play, as in the climactic scene of *On Baile's Strand*, the action takes place off stage, and here, Yeats asks his audience to use their subjective interpretation to interpret the two different perceptions of what has occurred. This raises the possibility that what happened off-stage can be both rape and consensual sex depending on the perception of the audience. Perhaps this ambiguity of the play, wherein Yeats offers up this question and fails to answer it, but leaving the issue open to the perceptions and interpretations of the audience, may have been a factor in the rejection of the play by the Abbey.

The final product of art is the subjective meaning projected onto the performance of the play by the audience, regardless of what Yeats's meant or what played out on the stage. With this in mind, I will refer to John Rees Moore who sees Congal as the hero of the piece, and views the play contrary to the analysis I have just given:

Congal is actually god's rival for the sexual favors of Attracta. In trying to save her humanity (make a normal woman of her), Congal sacrifices his life, even his next life to come. Attracta fails to raise him to the company of the gods, though she has clearly chosen him. Woman is both the hero's blessing and his curse. Attracta is responsible for ending the ideal friendship of Aedh and Congal. She brings out the worst in men, reducing them to bestiality. (Rees Moore 1971, p.297)

The play ends with the curse being fulfilled, Congal is indeed killed by a fool, but the fool is himself, as it is he who set the action in motion with the theft of the eggs. Congal thinks that by committing suicide he can finally defeat the god, and that in his ritual death, he will finally be dominant, however his attempt fails and he dies of the earlier wound inflicted by the Fool. Of course his idea that he will ultimately prevail is proven to be false when, despite Attracta's attempts to save him, he is reborn a donkey. Congal's death is not the death of a king or an 'old campaigner' (Yeats 1997a, p.233); instead, he dies by domestic implement, a roasting spit which mocks his dominant attitude, and here we are

reminded of his beating to death of Aedh with the leg of a table and his desire for Attracta to be concerned with domestic matters. His death mimics his earlier domination of those whom he saw as set in opposition to his phenomenal will and physical status. Attracta's attempt to save him, or rather to save his soul, mirrors his own justification for the rape through which he would save her from her spiritual madness and return her to her human state. She will, through supernatural reincarnation, return him to a human form.

Throughout these selected dramas, we have seen the ebb and flow of a theory in progress; for every failure within the cannon, there are plenty of successes. *The Cat and the Moon*, *The Hawk's Well* and *The Herne's Egg* all work well as expressions of the dramatic theory as it stood on Yeats's death. This is not to say that a theoretical failure is a dramatic failure, because both *On Baile's Strand* and *The Shadowy Waters* are beautifully written, lyrical and wholly engaging dramas full of tragic conflict. As I have said, Yeats's system, due to its conceptual nature and the problems in making such a concept tangible, may always contain a level of ambiguity, which does not lessen the overall effect or importance. The theory, like the plays it informed, was also a work in progress and so it will never be perfect. The Yeatsian system will always contain flaws, but as it is a human expression of a human lived life; it is predisposed to contain the imperfections of humanity as all art forms do. Nonetheless it remains a unique dramatic form which deserves more detailed critical engagement than it has so far received.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis, we have seen that Yeatsian theatre, and the dramatic theory that underwrote the dramas has been strongly influenced by occultism, philosophy, psychoanalytic theory, and by his reaction to, and rejection of, the existing modes of contemporary theatre. Yeats wanted to reform drama and to return it to a spiritualised format akin to Greek theatre, while also creating a theatre which was new and challenging and ‘make the theatre a place for intellectual excitement – a place where the mind goes to be liberated’ (Yeats 1962, p.107). To Yeats, much of contemporary theatre portrayed only the physical life of humanity, and such expression of the lived experience was anathema to his own belief that all of humanity has within it a personal spiritual aspect, while also sharing in a universal spiritual aspect. We have seen that this belief has its origins in neo-paganism, and on some level in a Gnostic view of Christianity, while also finding a parallel in some German philosophies and in some concepts derived from psychoanalysis. Yeats transmuted these fundamental beliefs into a theory of self and a theory of drama.

It has been my contention that Yeats’s dramatic theory informs the resulting dramas, and that it must be understood in order to fully comprehend the thematic and structural concepts of his plays. The dramas are expressions of, and experiments deriving from, the theory. To Yeats, drama was the perfect mode of artistic expression as it was the closest format to the human lived experience and to his mind if humanity is a dialogical being then art and particularly drama must reflect this dualism.

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Yeatsian dramatic theory, then, is full of conceptual terms which he introduced as a means of reforming the theatre as it stood and creating a theatre of Art. The self and anti-self are the central concepts which have been explored throughout this thesis, both on their own terms, and in relation to the parallel concepts of Apollonian and Dionysian; self and shadow; phenomenal and noumenal; physical and spiritual and id and ego; while the anti-self itself has also been considered in relation to its associated concepts of mask and daimon. The anti-self and self relationship was to produce and even greater conceptual result, namely Unity of Image, Unity of Being and Unity of Culture.

We have seen that often Yeats failed to express the theory adequately in his dramas, yet the central elements were always present, sometimes in an exaggerated manner, because as Yeats tried to create a dramatic anti-self, he often allowed the anti-self to overwhelm the corresponding self, and hence the play as a whole, as seen in *The Shadowy Waters*. That said, the theory and the drama are intertwined, as the theory informs the drama, and with each performance, revision and subsequent re-writing of parts of the work, the drama informs the theory it was written to express. As such, Yeatsian theatre as a whole, theory and practice, can be viewed as a progressive and dialectical model. It is a work in progress, because Yeats developed each idea further as he grew older, so that each play was reworked numerous times after its performance, with each revision refining the theory.

Initially, Yeats thought that his theatre of Art would not be brought to fruition during his life time: 'it will take a generation, and perhaps generations to restore the theatre of art' (Yeats 1961, p.170). By 1919, the reality of the Abbey theatre as a building and as a business had taken their toll on his thinking. In an open letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats writes:

We thought we could bring the old folk-life to Dublin, patriotic feeling to aid us, and with the folk-life all the life of the heart, understanding heart, according to

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Dante's definition, as the most interior being; but the modern world is more powerful than any propaganda or even than any special circumstance, and our success has been that we have made a Theatre of the head. (Yeats 1962, pp.252-253)

This is not to say that Yeats considered his theatre an outright failure, but rather that it had not become the organic whole that he had planned it to be. In the same letter, he uses the phases of the moon as analogous to his theatre:

The objective nature and the subjective are mixed in different proportion as are the shadowed and the bright parts in the lunar phases. (Yeats 1962, p.253)

He goes on to classify his, and Lady Gregory's, plays as capable of holding the attention of an audience as, 'both have used so constantly a measure of lunar light, have so elaborated style and emotion, an individual way of seeing' (Yeats 1962, p.253). Yeats seems to be viewing the failure of the theatre of Art, not as a failure on the part of the expression of the realisation of the anti-self, but rather, as a failure on the part of the audience to engage with his characters, and to fully understand their role in completing the performance. This is what Putzel refers to as Yeats's dilemma as:

he hoped his productions would appeal to spectators' anticipations and emotions and so recreate them as a single entity – an audience – yet he requires the individual's personal creative involvement [...] This desire for complicity that Yeats in his own way shares with his Nō predecessor moves beyond a mere suspension of disbelief; now the spectator is co-creator and coconspirator in the construction of the stage fiction. (Putzel in Orr 1991, pp.113-114)

While Yeats might have been able, if free of the monetary concerns of the Abbey, to control the dramas and the actors to some extent, he could never control the audience or their reactions, and as Flannery has noted: 'the audience was, in the final analysis, what Yeats blamed most for his failure to win acceptance as a dramatist' (Flannery 1976, p.350).

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The audience was an unforeseen problem. Yeats's early idealism gives way to the reality of the failure of the stalls to engage with the stage. Yet in spite of this, Yeats holds true to his own paradigm of creative freedom: the audience may fail him, but they are to free to so, and he realises that he can never reign over his system. He never ascribes a set meaning to his work or his themes, and hence the fluidity and subjectivity of art is always maintained. The individualistic nature of the Yeatsian structure is still preserved, even when the audience fails to engage with their role in the completion of the expression of Unity of Culture. I am sure there is more work to be done in relation to this aspect of the biography of Yeats's theatre, probably in relation to the historical context of the Abbey. Such research is beyond the scope of this thesis, but Suess does point out that:

It is not Yeats but his contemporary audience whom we see demand over and over again that art should not progress but remain within the narrow limits of the dramatic and social conventions of the time. Critics frequently singled out Yeats as being too progressive. As one representative reviewer from the *Birmingham Daily Mail* puts it, 'Mr Yeats is perfectly right in his idealist ideals of dramatic presentation, but they are half a century in advance of the means at his command'. (Suess 2003 p.147)

Perhaps this comment underlines the crux of the matter. Yeats was a man out of step with the prevailing social and moral norms of this time and place, and through his theatre, he gave men like Synge and O'Casey a stage. He defended *The Playboy of the Western World* and *The Plough and The Stars*, promoting the artist's right to create and speak freely (Foster 1998; 2005). Through his drama, he attempted to place on the stage a true portrayal of humanity with all its light and shade, and he refused to shy away from the darker characteristics of humanity: Forgael and Congal are unsympathetic characters, and they are selfish, brutish, and despicable men.

While Yeatsian theatre is nearly always referred to as idealist in orientation, and I have so referred to it myself, his depictions of these men seem to grate with this

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classification, but the important point here is that Yeats's ideal portrayal of humanity is not one which glamorises humanity; rather, he sets out to show humanity in all its facets, even those darker cruel aspects which some artists would prefer to gloss over. The idealist element of Yeats, then, is not the human form but the theatre itself, because for him, the idealist theatre is a theatre of truth. It is a theatre which shows humanity as it is, and as it is perceived to be, and in this Yeats is a pioneer within Irish theatre, as he very consciously plays with ideas of self and self-perception. While Yeats the man was a social being, taking part in Irish debate and history, within the transformative space of the theatre, he was free to deride the man he was outside its walls. Within the theatre, he was free to explore his own anti-self, but being a conceptual playwright he also wanted to explore the anti-self of all, and sought to educate the masses through his discoveries. To my mind, he is every bit as iconoclastic a writer and thinker as Synge or O'Casey:

He writes of his county's important events and important men, he serves in its senate. Though he never ceases to regard himself as a rebel whom society has imprisoned, he builds his own jails, escapes from them, then builds others; or, to put it another way, Yeats hides in the centre of the city and emblazons his name upon his hiding-place and equips it with a public-address system. (Ellmann 1979, p.296)

Does this failure to completely fulfil all the goals of the dramatic theory make either the theory or the drama of Yeats unimportant? I would argue that while Yeatsian drama in performance and practice may be incomplete depending on the audience, the drama as an expression of the theory and the plays themselves is of huge significance.

Yeats's theatre of Art set out to portray the intangible and interior elements of human beings and their nature and it does just this, as many of his characters are far removed from conservative representations of humanity. He manages to put the anti-self on the stage, and at times, he is able to portray a character which is both self and anti-self,

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as seen in the hawk-woman, and in the *Lame Beggar*, and in doing so brings about Unity of Image. I would maintain that Yeatsian theatre, as an expression of Unity of Image, depends upon his occultism and his exposure to different philosophical concepts to influence its central tenets. As the theory informs the drama, so too does his fundamental neo-pagan sensibility inform the theory. I stated at the beginning of this research that I believed Yeatsian drama and dramatic theory to have its origins in neo-paganism and occultism and found parallels within German Philosophy. The fundamentals of the theory, the notion of the anti-self as a spiritualised element both universal and personal, and the idea of humanity being a dualistic identity, consisting of light and dark, male and female, good and evil elements are indicative of a neo-pagan and perhaps romantic sensibility. Paganism views both the divine and the human as being made up of all these dualistic aspects: light and dark; good and bad; noumenal and phenomenal and physical and spiritual. The idea of balancing these dialogical forces is also pagan as we have seen, and as such, Yeatsian theatre becomes an expression of a neo-pagan ideal, so that any study of Yeatsian theatre must credit these occult origins of the dramatic system as a whole.

While he may have succeeded in part in expressing this ideal on the stage through some characters, his notion of Unity of Being is more difficult to express, as it relies upon an individual audience member to understand and engage with the stage character. Unity of Culture, however, seems an impossibility as Yeats did not have the all-engaging audience that he had wished for early in his career, and he came to understand this later in his life and wrote:

The dream of my earlier man hood, that a modern nation can return to Unity of Culture, is false, though it may be we can achieve it for some small circle of men and women, and there leave it till the moon bring rounds its century. (Yeats 1955, p.295)

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So it seems, despite his declaration in 1919 that ‘I am not a successful dramatist and so my example cannot carry weight except for the sake of the theory it illustrates’ (Yeats 1954, p.658). What is clear from this quote is that despite the staging problems and the inability of the audience to complete his vision, Yeats still believed the theory which informed his dramas to be the more important element of his system. He never relinquished the idea that such a balancing of opposites, and its transformative societal and cultural effects, could become a reality:

He never gave up hope of bringing together myth and fact into a new religion, or, as he called it, a new ‘sacred drama’ of Unity of Being’. (Ellmann 1979, p.294)

Whether or not Yeatsian theatre, either in theory or practice, fails or succeeds in its goal is largely irrelevant, as the efforts were ongoing and produced an art which had a profound effect on audiences all over the world. While this effect may never have been what he saw as Unity of Being, nevertheless, it did have an effect. Yeats’s theatrical system is an all-encompassing one, one which deals with notions of humanity; of physicality; of spirituality; of sexuality; of community and of artistic expression as modes of esoteric knowledge. The resulting dramas are multi-layered nuanced portrayals of the theory and while sometimes they do miss their mark, nevertheless there have been some resonant successes.

As I have demonstrated, Yeats’s theatre is better understood in light of the dramatic theory, as an understanding of the theoretical system that informed the dramas gives us an enhanced awareness of the nature of Yeats’s theatre that has been so far absent. In addition, to understand the theory also allows us to see the failings of the dramas as modes of expression. In order to appreciate where Yeats achieved his ends, it is necessary to see where he missed his goals; thus, in order to understand the glory of the Cuchulain of *On Baile’s Strand*, we must understand that the character is lacking in light

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of the theory, because he is overwhelmingly anti-self. However, this may be overlooked if we do not recognise that which is absent, namely the self; so in other words there is yet again a parallax here, as by seeing what is absent in Cuchulain, we come to a better understanding of the aspect of the character which is present, namely the anti-self. I would argue that without an awareness that Cuchulain is overwhelmed by one aspect of his Being, there is a danger that he could become an obnoxious unsympathetic character who could be mistaken for self; so that our perceptions of Yeatsian drama depends upon our recognition or lack thereof, of the theory behind it. This is the reason for the writing of this thesis: to develop the mutual influences of his dramatic theory on his drama and of his drama on the theory.

Yeats's central aim in formulating his dramatic sphere was to place the whole human on the stage, something which he felt had been hitherto lacking. Yeats believed that humanity was more than a physical entity; he believed there was a personal and universal spirit inherent within the human being, and he sought to depict this whole entity in his stage work. He believed drama to be the optimal mode of expression for his theory as it is the closest art form to the human lived life, as it is a collective and immediate experience and as it is a mutable art form, changing with each performance reflecting the ever changing status of the human experience in reality.

Through my research I have considered the influences and origins of Yeats's theory, laid out the theory itself, culminating in an analysis of some Yeatsian dramas in light of the theory and its origins. I believe it to be a mistake to divorce Yeatsian theory from the dramas themselves as much as I believe that to ignore the occult aspects of the theory also deprives us of a full understanding of Yeats's drama. To me Yeats's dramatic system is his magnum opus, it pulls together all his other work, within the dramas we find his philosophy, his poetry, his beliefs and thoughts regarding humanity as both physical and spiritual as both individual and as one part of a whole, the aim of which was not only

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to express humanity and the human lived life but also to challenge humanity. As such Yeatsian drama in origin, theory and practice is deserving of more study that it has received and of study which is objective and which allows Yeats his freedoms rather than projecting on to the work who we think Yeats should be or what we think his work should express.

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