W.B. YEATS, T.S. ELIOT AND THE
ASSOCIATIONIST AESTHETIC

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE LOSS AND RECOVERY OF MEMORY

I

'No more remembering what had been.'

The epistemological structure of the symbol towards which Yeats's early poetry had been developing was one entirely dependent on the efficacy of memory. This is true equally of the associationist-aesthetic and the occult potentialities of the symbol, since the occult symbol exists only through its retention by secret societies and cults which rediscover or retain the memory of what the dominant social world wishes to forget. Since memory is the essential precondition of this type of symbol it is a part of the poet's work, as it is a part of the occult group's work, to continue the preservation of certain kinds of memory upon which their own symbols rely for their effectiveness. Thus the Irish mythology which Yeats used in the 1890s had been made available to him by scholarly reconstructions; but the poet, by using these symbols in his work, not only builds on the foundations of scholarly effort, he extends the dispersion and the range of the symbols and so aids the preservation in the communal memory of those associations upon which his own creations depend.

The interdependence of poet and community is revealed in an essay Yeats wrote in 1900, in which he describes the psychological dependence of the artist on a personal and social unconscious:

I think I remember Mr Martin telling me that he knew nothing, or next to nothing, about the belief in such women as Peg Inerny among the Irish peasants. Unless the imagination has a means of knowledge peculiar to itself, he must have heard this belief as a child and remembered it in that unconscious and instinctive memory on which imagination builds.1

1 Frayne II, p. 204; 'Maeve' and certain Irish Beliefs' (Beltaine, February, 1900).
The personal 'unconscious and instinctive memory' forms a part of the communal memory which exists in the peasant community.

The symbolic power of any particular image derives from its length of purification in the communal memory, but the power it exerts on the mind in the present is a function of the number of links it has with other elements in the communal mind. The grasping of the significance of the symbol is the unravelling of the quantity of its associations, a passage into more and more distant reaches of the past. Yeats takes delight in connecting the idea of 'Maive' in high art with the ramblings of an old mad woman whom he met while collecting folk tales. In describing the connections at the level of significant literary achievement Yeats makes the physical structure of the 'faeries' an index of the amount of belief with which they are invested - thus the smallness of English fairies - but the belief itself is proportionate with the strength of the communal memory:

Maive (Medb is the Irish spelling) is continually described as the queen of all western faeries, and it was probably some memory of her lingering in western England, or brought home by adventurers from Ireland, that gave Shakespeare his Queen Mab. But neither Maive, nor any of our Irish faeries is like the fairies of Shakespeare; for our faeries are never very little, and are sometimes taller and more beautiful than mortals. The greatest among them were gods and goddesses of ancient Ireland, and men have not yet forgotten their glory.

Such memory is not only an aesthetic advantage. Despite Yeats's oft voiced antagonism to literature as a 'criticism of life' it is also ethical. The old mad woman informs Yeats that,

"There is no such race living now, none so finely proportioned," or the like, and then said, "The present queen is a nice pleasant-looking woman, but she is not like her. What makes me think so little of the ladies is that I see none as they be," meaning the spirits. "When I think of her and the ladies now, they are like

1 Frayne II, p. 206.
little children running about without knowing how to put their clothes on right. Is it the ladies? Why, I would not call them women at all!" This old woman, who can neither read nor write, has come face to face with heroic beauty, that 'highest beauty', which Blake says, 'changes least from youth to age', a beauty that has been fading out of the arts, since that decadence, we call progress, set voluptuous beauty in its place.1

The decadence of progress leads to the acceptance of a queen who is to real beauty as the English fairies are to the Irish. The fading of memory in the modern world is the loss not only of aesthetic intensity, but of the standards by which life should be judged and lived.

The moral purposes of memory is revealed in another of Yeats's essays from that same year, in which he holds that the memories of the Gaelic race are the foundation of a new social system antagonistic to the dominant one represented, presumably, by English culture.

Though I doubt not that all but one's convictions go deeper than reason, I think that our Irish movements have always interested me in part, because I see in them the quarrel of two traditions of life, one old and noble, one new and ignoble. One undying because it satisfies our conscience though it seems dying, and one about to die because it is hateful to our conscience, though it seems triumphant throughout the world. In Ireland wherever the Gaelic tongue is spoken, and to some extent where it is not, the people live according to a tradition of life that existed before the world surrendered to the competition of merchants and to the vulgarity that has been founded upon it; and we who would keep the Gaelic tongue and Gaelic memories and Gaelic habits of our mind would keep them, as I think, that we may some day spread a tradition of life that would build up neither great wealth nor great poverty, that makes the arts a natural expression of life that permits even common men to understand good art and high thinking and to have the fine manners these things can give. Almost everyone in Ireland on the other hand, who comes from what are called the educated and wealthy classes, that is to say, every man who has read a little Homer for the grammar, and many vulgar books for his pleasure, or who thinks a stable of more importance than all libraries, seeks, and often with fervour, to establish a tradition of life perfected and in part discovered by the English speaking peoples, which

1 Ibid., p. 207.
has made great wealth and great poverty and which would make the arts impossible were it not for the self-sacrifice of a few who spend their lives in the bitterness of protest, and has already made the understanding of the arts and of high thinking impossible outside of a small cultivated class.

The correlation between the form of life and the form of art is made explicit by Yeats in this fine piece of rhetoric: what distinguishes the social possibilities of the two forms of life is that the Gaelic language preserves the 'Gaelic memories and Gaelic habits of thinking'. The art which such memory makes possible in turn provides men with a different ideal of their social existence to reach towards. If they have already committed themselves to the form of society that endorses 'progress' they have committed themselves to mindlessness: even their education fits them with no memories, since Homer never enters fully into their consciousness. The lack of such memory further enforces their mode of existence by making art impossible: without memory there is no way that they will be able to entertain any experience that might act as a criticism of their standards. The only way out of the closed circle is by violence, the Irish movement 'has need of the violence of the mob that it may sometimes tear that subtle net.'

As Yeats himself says in this address, 'one's convictions go deeper than reason', but the form in which his argument is put is one which is homologous with the associationist thinking of his essays on literature. As I have already argued, Yeats moved from a Gaelic based to an aristocratically based conception of how memory might be retained without loss to his associationist conceptions, but he did so only with difficulty. The stridency of the above passage might almost be equal to the effort with

1 Frayne II, p. 246.
which he could continue to maintain his position. Just as the recognition of the purely associationist basis of the image led him steadily towards a conception of the poem which creates or constitutes the image in its own structure, rather than adopting one from without, so his conceptions of the relationship between the form of life and the form of art led him to a position in which his own works could constitute a more noble way of life, rather than reflecting one which already existed. In March, 1909 he wrote in his Journal: 1

Meanwhile the need of a model of the nation, of some moral diagram, is as great as in the early nineteenth century when national feeling was losing itself in a religious feud over tithes and emancipation. Neither the grammars of the Gaelic League nor the industrialism of the Leader, nor the attacks on the Irish party in Sinn Féin give any sensible image for the affections. Yet from Lady Gregory almost always, from parts of Synge, from Katherine Tynan and Lionel Johnson, from O'Grady, from my work, could be taken material that would enable a school of journalists with very simple moral ideas to build up an historical and literary nationalism as powerful as the old and nobler.

It is Gaelic which is now castigated as being merely a matter of grammar; the significant historical memories are not used by the works of the modern movement in Irish literature, they are constituted by it.

History had refused Yeats's projections into it; Ireland had not conceived a new nationalism based on the revival of the traditional material its legends and folklore offered. The refusal of history to conform made the passage of time ever more daunting, depriving Yeats of the opportunity to remake his own existence in a different form. What had happened on the public level was a reflection of what had also occurred on the personal level: Maud too had refused to correspond to the symbolic nature ascribed to her. If the symbol did not offer a direct transcendence of the ontological realm of time - and each of these failures suggested that it

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1 Memoirs, pp. 184-185.
could not - then the poetic imagination had to come to terms with the realm of time as a place of process. If only process would allow the achievement of transcendence, then process must be encountered directly; the more so since the elements of the historical process - the legends and folk tales - which Yeats had counted on to give associative intensity to his poetic creations were part of what the process of time was destroying. Through the first sixteen years of the new century, I would argue, the central problem that Yeats faced was the attempt to recover from history a place for memory, such that the symbol could continue to operate within the world. Having lost the community upon which his early poetry depended, both the Gaelic community and, to a certain extent, the occult community, Yeats had to remake a community inside the workings of history: no ready made one stood aside from history for his benefit.

The change between early and later views of the poet's relationship with time and its transcendence are interestingly recorded in some of Yeats's revisions to 'The Rose' volume. The revisions to these poems are among the most substantial he ever made, testifying to his strength of feeling on the issues they involved. The most substantially rewritten of all is 'The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner'. The 1895 version of the poem was as follows:

1 Central to both, of course, was the loss of Maud; she rejected his proposal in Paris in 1899, and married early in 1903. In the same period the Golden Dawn was undergoing major upheavals (see Harper, Yeats's Golden Dawn, chapters five and six); although Yeats remained involved in the occult order until the 1920s, his relations with it were much less close and several of his most intimate associates were driven out of the order or resigned between 1900-1902.

2 CP, p. 52; V, p. 131. The revisions in this poem have been extensively studied by Parkinson, W.B. Yeats: Self-Critic, see pp. 164-176.
I had a chair at every hearth,
When no one turned to see,
With 'Look at that old fellow there,
'And who may he be?'
And therefore do I wander now,
And the fret lies on me.

The roadside trees keep murmuring
Ah, wherefore murmur ye,
As in the old days long gone by,
Green oak and poplar tree?
The well-known faces are all gone
And the fret lies on me.

The sense of loss which this poem expresses is a sense of a lost environment. The fact that he is now noticed, not welcomed, and that the people he knew are no longer around him isolates him from his surroundings. Time is, however, conceived here in terms which are almost spatial: the trees assert a spatial continuity with which the loss of his acquaintances cannot be integrated. The isolation in time is conveyed to us entirely in terms of a reaction to place. In the later version of the poem (if indeed we can refer to it as the same poem) the spatial elements have been reversed: instead of 'wandering' because he is old and isolated the pensioner is now static:

Although I shelter from the rain
Under a broken tree,
My chair was nearest to the fire
In every company
That talked of love or politics,
Ere time transfigured me.

The situation of the pensioner here suggests the static conception of time of some of the earliest of Yeats's poems in the parallelism established between the psychological state of the character and his surroundings. The pathetic fallacy need not be invoked, however, because the correlation is not created from the outside by the poet, it is created by the old man himself. He chooses his spot as a symbolic identification of himself with the world around him, and the identification becomes complete in the final stanza:
There's not a woman turns her face
Upon a broken tree.

In constructing himself into a symbol the pensioner transfigures himself, and it is that energy of self-transfiguration that allows him to defy the corporeal effects of time:

I spit into the face of time
That has transfigured me.

The energy, however, is only available because of the saving possibilities of memory,

And yet the beauties that I loved
Are in my memory ...

Through memory the continuity of time is maintained; the individual is released from his own corporeal existence - it is Time that has a face, the final 'me' has lost all semblance of a limited physical existence - into symbolic status. And yet it is too much to suggest, as Bernard Levine does, that 'the world around him and time itself serve, he claims, for his own transfiguration'.

1 The final 'transfigure' still refers to what time has done to him: the paradox which the poem explores is that the transfiguration of self is only possible on the basis of memory, but memory necessarily involves the loss of living possibilities. The final lines cut both ways: to have lived in time provides the material for transcendence, though it is only time which deprives one of life and makes one need transcendence. The final lines point as much towards a desire for the return of the living restlessness of youth as they do to a 'tough-minded attitude to the lure of the past'.

2 The 'yet' of the final stanza points not only to the mind's ability to overcome the past by retaining it, it is also a cry of despair

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1 Bernard Levine, The Dissolving Image, p. 43.
2 Ibid., p. 42.
at the lack of peace time brings to old age.\textsuperscript{1} Like the symbol, the transfiguration is achieved by the incorporation of the past into the present, but such an effort is only necessary because the past and its values are lost.

The importance of memory to Yeats's later conception of imagination and the poetic act is revealed in other revisions dating from the same period. In 'The Two Trees' the opposition between The Tree of Life and The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is transformed by the substitution of only a few key words. The truth contained in one's heart is available, in the 1895 version of the poem, to direct introspection:

\begin{center}
There, through bewildered branches, go
Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
Tossing and tossing to and fro
The flaming circle of our life.
When looking on their shaken hair,
And dreaming how they dance and dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care ...
\end{center}

By 1929 direct apprehension has become subordinated to the increasingly valuable act of memory:

\begin{center}
There the Loves a circle go,
The flaming circle of our days,
Gyring, spiring to and fro
In those great ignorant leafy ways;
Remembering all that shaken hair
And how the winged sandals dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care ...
\end{center}

The lover in the later version still has some hopes of an indirect creation of a caring attitude towards himself, but the 'care' can no longer be produced

\begin{itemize}
\item[I] I am always tempted to read the final lines as referring to the rewriting of the poem itself: a necessary act, but one which in no way compensates for the loss of the youth which produced the frailties of the earlier poem.
\item[3] \textit{CP}, p. 54.
\end{itemize}
by direct introspection, it has to be mediated by the processes of memory. It is, therefore, that much further beyond his control. A similar pattern of revision can be seen in 'The dedication to a Book of Irish Stories from the Irish Novelists'. The poem offers us two versions of the aesthetic potentialities of the idea of Ireland, one represented by 'a green branch hung with many a bell / When her own people ruled this tragic Eire', the other by a bell-branch torn 'from the barren boughs of Eire' as it is in the present. The 1895 version is directed towards the 'Exiles wandering over many seas' and the relevance of the bell-branches is described in the final stanza:

A honeyed ringing: under the new skies
They bring you memories of old faces,
Cabins gone now, old well-sides, old dear places;
And men who loved the cause that never dies.

The loss is thus, though temporal, presented, as in 'The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner', as essentially spatial: it is their distance from their native land that makes these scenes aesthetically valuable, distance in space rather than time. In the later version, however, Yeats introduces himself as one of the exiles, even though he has not, in fact, left his country:

That country where a man can be so crossed;
Can be so battered, badgered and destroyed
That he's a loveless man ...

The exile is thus psychological and temporal - the 'green boughs' have been torn and tossed 'Until the sap of summer had grown weary' - rather than spatial. The saving remnant, however, is provided by memory, because the communal memory out of which future art is built preserves nothing so unaesthetic as present 'bitterness'. Art brings 'gay bells or sad',

1  CP, p. 51; V, p. 129.
'memories / Of half-forgotten innocent old places', and the bitter is consigned to the past. The communal landscape, a landscape in time, defies the spoliation which history would wreak upon it, and preserves a past that the modern world wishes to forget.

What is 'half-forgotten', however, can only with difficulty provide an associational context for poetry. To have lost the memory of the past is to have lost the possibility of significance in the present, moral and aesthetic. Shut out from his own past in his changed relations with Maud and shut out from the memory of old Ireland by social change, Yeats produced only a few poems between 1900 and 1908\(^1\) and even then his inspiration did not return in full flow till about 1912. Partly, of course, this was because of his increasing and demanding involvement in the Abbey Theatre and in the writing of drama. The turn to drama, however, is perhaps partly founded upon the difficulty of writing an associationist kind of poetry in the context of the changes I have described. In the drama the symbol need not be expressed verbally but can appear visually; the poetry does not need to subserve itself to the implications of the associationist possibilities of its own images, it can be used as an adjunct to the development of the image in action. Instead of a poem constantly forced towards narrative and away from its own essential symbolic junction, narrative and speech can run together towards a symbol which is compounded of both but transcends each. The associational context available to the poet was not sufficiently strong to allow him to develop a formal use of it; only word, gesture, image working together could sufficiently evoke the

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\(^1\) See Ellman, Identity of Yeats, p. 288, for the chronology of poems in these years. Yeats's production between 1900 and 1908 seems to have amounted to no more than twelve poems, if the dating offered by Ellmann and Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poetry of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1968) is correct.
observer's own associations to generate the intensity of great art and, perhaps, by occurring within a situation which is already communal, the community of the audience, recreate the associational and the traditional symbols which would make poetry possible:

These Japanese poets, too, feel for tomb and wood the emotion, the sense of awe that our Gaelic-speaking countrypeople will sometimes show when you speak to them of Castle Hackett or of some holy well; and that is why perhaps it pleases them to begin so many plays with a traveller asking his way with many questions, a convention agreeable to me, for when I first began to write poetical plays for an Irish theatre I had to put away an ambition of helping to bring again to certain places their old sanctity and romance.  

The recreation of locuses of associational energy in the landscape and legend of Ireland is part of the purpose of Yeats's drama; creating a community - by 1916, when that passage was written, an aristocratic community - of shared associations. The poem is not sufficient in itself to constitute a symbol out of its own action; it must always pass beyond itself and yet, if there is nothing but destruction of the past around it, there is nothing for it to pass into. Yeats describes the problem in a passage in his Journal that deals with the parallel failure of drama:

The Abbey Theatre will fail to do its work because there is no accepted authority to explain why the more difficult pleasure is the nobler pleasure. The fascination of the national movement for me in my youth was, I think, that it seemed to be an image of a social ideal which could give fine life and fine art authority. One cannot love a nation struggling to realize itself without an idea of the nation as a whole being present in one's mind. One could always appeal to it in the mind of others. National spirit is, for the present, dying, because the influence of the Nation newspaper, which had this synthetic thought, has passed away. The result is that plays like Kincora (which should have certain poems and traditions to help it, and at its first production caused so much excitement), rouse slight interest, while Casey's plays grow more and more popular. Casey alone requires nothing but his own thought.  

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1 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan', E&I, p. 233.
What Yeats is here describing, the lack of any buttressing knowledge from other arts or from tradition to provide the associations that make a work understandable, and which points towards his move away from 'popular' drama, is the same situation that his poetry had faced several years earlier. The drama might have provided such a context, but by 1909 even that had gone under to the rising tide of city civilisation. Yeats himself could only make sense of the 'modern' drama by providing an associational context for it:

In watching a play about modern educated people, with its meagre language and its action crushed into the narrow limits of possibility, I have found myself constantly saying: 'Maybe it has its power to move, slight though that is, from being able to suggest fundamental contrasts and passions which romantic and poetical literature have shown to be beautiful.' A man facing his enemies alone in a quarrel over the purity of water in a Norwegian Spa and using no language but that of the newspapers can call up into our minds, let us say, the passion of Coriolanus.¹

The associational context which Yeats deliberately imposes in order to see some sort of possibility of power in the realistic drama is, however, what is essential to any experience of his own: lacking that there can be no drama or poem.

The poems of this period, the period covered by 'In the Seven Woods' and 'The Green Helmet' in Collected Poems, are dominated by a sense of personal loss which is parallel with the public loss. Both are marked by the detaching of memory from present existence, so that there can be no real connection between past and present, though they also point forward to the discovery of a new tradition where the integration of past and present can still take place. In the ordered domain of Lady Gregory's house the transcendence which can only be achieved by the combination of time past with present potentiality is still possible:

¹ 'Discoveries', E&I, pp. 275-6.
I am contented, for I know that Quiet
Wanders laughing and eating her wild heart
Among pigeons and bees, while that Great Archer,
Who but awaits his hour to shoot, still hangs
A cloudy quiver over Paric-na-lee.\footnote{1}

The figures through which the transcendence of the tensions in the present
are projected, personified 'Quiet' and the 'Great Archer', are too vague
to carry much conviction. They reveal the circumscribing of the poet's
frame of reference to stateable realities: the personification is incapable
of drawing forth the suggestions which the more purely Irish mythology had
contained; they are the forced constructions of an imagination that has
lost its grip on the past, though what they portend is the return of a
time when the poet will not be so outcast. They point forward to possibilities
which will make them irrelevant, because such personal constructions will no
longer be necessary. They reveal the present necessity in the loss that
they are built out of:

\begin{quote}
I have forgot awhile
Tara uprooted, and new commonness
Upon the throne and crying about the streets
And hanging its paper flowers from post to post
\end{quote}

Yeats's description of the situation is ironic; what he 'forgets' is a world
that is happily forgetting its own past and destroying the potentialities of
his art by so doing. Only by forgetting the present can the poet feel at
home in the world. The process of the poem is a reversal of the technique
of 'The Old Pensioner': it is by a spatial change, a discovery of a
particular location, that the poet can overcome temporal loss, though that
overcoming be only a matter of vague hope for the future. The poem's
hopefulness is demonstrated formally by the way in which it builds towards
an apocalyptic image, but it is one that can create a few reverberations in

\footnote{1 'In the Seven Woods', \textit{CP}, p. 85; \textit{V}, p. 198.}
the reader, being attached to no common mythology and, despite the structure of the volume, having few connections with the rest of Yeats's symbolism. The associationist technique which the structure of the poem suggests is, in effect, denied by its content: like much of Yeats's poetry it gains its power from its argument about the failure of poetry in his time. It dramatises the situation in which art is limited by being denied access to the form of memory which, according to Yeats's own principles, are the major element of poetic experience.

The schizophrenic situation in which poetry is forced to deny its own essence in order to exist at all appears in several poems, often linked with the fact that the associative process has, in Yeats's own case, been deflected from his art to his love for Maud. Thus in 'Old Memory' the poet has to have his own thought refer to himself as 'he', so distanced is he from his own poetic processes:

O thought, fly to her when the end of day
Awakens an old memory, and say,
'Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,
It might call up a new age, calling to mind
The queens that were imagined long ago
Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough
Through the long years of youth ...

1 Significantly perhaps Yeats's note to the volume suggests the extent to which the failure of his time has affected even that oasis of peace: 'I made some of these poems walking about among the Seven Woods, before the big wind of nineteen hundred and three blew down so many trees, & troubled the wild creatures, & changed the look of things.' (V, p. 814).

2 Ellmann (Identity of Yeats, p. 103) suggests that the final image reveals Yeats's 'mindfulness of his predominantly secular audience': that awareness came to Yeats, it seems to me, as a painful necessity and often, as here, impaired the poetry - as Yeats's theory suggests that it should. Secular associations are no sure guide except, as in some eighteenth century aestheticians, where they can be claimed to be based on empirical evidence, and Yeats's apocalyptic figures in this poem have little associative potential.

3 CP, p. 86; C, p. 201.
It is the constitutive imagination of the poet which has made her the focus of an associational intensity which is a large part of her beauty, but what he has made her now separates her from him and himself from his own art. What he has made of her returns to taunt him because it refuses itself to him. The memory which revives in him is not one which can, like the memories with which he has surrounded her, become effective in the present. The poet, through what he has made of his beloved, might call up a new age, but there is no fulfilment in it for him, because there is a complete separation between his personal memories and the literary associations of which his art is constructed. 'The Folly of Being Comforted'\(^1\) reveals the same pattern: time brings no alteration to the beloved's beauty because it renews itself endlessly in terms of the increase in potential association which time has made possible:

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\text{Time can but make her beauty over again:} \\
\text{Because of that great nobleness of hers} \\
\text{The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,} \\
\text{Burns but more clearly.}
\]

The interdependence of poet and lover has been fractured: she has retained the associations he helped create, but he has lost the beauty that was a stimulus to aesthetic activity. The failure of Maud's public life left both sides of the arch ruined: the poet is cut off from his own past and from the effectiveness he might have had, indirectly through her, in the public world.

In these poems eternal and temporal exist in a conflict which is no longer one of ontological duality. The temporal is integral with the eternal, they coexist and yet they refuse each other. The nobility of the beloved is, at least in part, a temporal creation, but once achieved it

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\(^1\) CP, p. 86; V, p. 199.
denies the temporality which would give the poet-lover any hope for a future in which his desires might be fulfilled. There is no longer any salvation in an image which unites two disparate realms of existence: particles of the eternal are only given to us in time through the possibilities of time, but once completed they refuse to participate comfortably in it. Transcendence involves an effort in time which does not annihilate time itself, but destroys the vehicle through which it is achieved. This is the central lesson of 'Adam's Curse',¹ the three participants in the conversation are isolated in a world dominated by the noisy set

Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world.

Their isolation is forced on them because they seek what most men regard as of no value - perfection, whether of the work or of the self. The two come together in the poet's discussion of love:

There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough.

The lovers not only find perfection in each other, they find it through discovering in previous art models for their own situation. They live out the associationist concept of beauty in their own relations, their sense of the present constantly travelling back into the past to find intensity by surrounding themselves with images from the communal memory. Like the players of the Noh whom Yeats described in his essay 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan', they are living versions of the associative process, their present role being established only in relation to their predecessors,

¹ CP, p. 88; V, p. 204.
whose memory they keep alive:

The players themselves, unlike the despised players of the popular theatre, have passed on proudly from father to son an elaborate art, and even now a player will publish his family tree to prove his skill. One player wrote in 1906 in a business circular ... that after thirty generations of nobles a woman of his house dreamed that a mask was carried to her from Heaven, and soon after she bore a son who became a player and the father of players. His family, he declared, still possessed a letter from a fifteenth-century Mikado conferring upon them a theatre-curtain, white below and purple above.1

The thirty generations of nobility that it takes to make a mask 'carried from Heaven' is the same as the effort involved in achieving love's perfection in 'Adam's Curse'. That effort in time, however, is antipathetic to the happiness of those who make it: they are the vehicles of something which transcends them and in labouring to make that transcendence possible they destroy the vitality of their own existence. The transcendence of art which they all seek, where even love is an art, is imaged for us in the moon; as Bernard Levine says, it 'is a composite image (hinging on the associations of the word "shell") summing up the lover's now weary anticipation of time's end.2 The associations, however, pass beyond merely semantic possibilities; the moon's significance here is constituted by what has preceded it. The moon is the single unit that gathers together the various strands of the previous conversations and unites them. Our associations from it are, in some ways, unlimited, since the image is not only of transcendence but itself transcends the situation in which it is perceived, but in other ways the poem itself creates the associations that the image is to generate.

1 E&I, pp. 229-30.
The poem as a whole is not an associationist poem: its dramatic mode makes a formal exploitation of an associationist context impossible, but what it does reveal is a new awareness on Yeats's part of how to construct an image that will generate associations in a world which has failed the poet. The poem moves towards an image which will transcend the limits of what is directly communicable, but it will do so by gathering together the significances of previous situations and statements. The forward movement of the act of reading the poem will discover an image which travels back through the poem for its significances. The image does within the poem what the lovers whom the poem describes did in order to intensify their sense of themselves, it feeds from the past from which it emerges:

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

The importance of this passage in the poem is that it itself gathers together the waves of 'time's waters' as they have passed through the poem; the quiet anticipates the silence in which the mind passes on into its own inner reflection on the image. What happens in the ending of the poem is the speaker's own response, but it is one that neither the poem nor the image commits us to:

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

1 The often commented upon similarity of this passage to Yeats's earlier style can perhaps be taken thus as a self-conscious summing up; it also points to the fact that the supposedly 'modern' style of the speaker's first statement (see, for instance, Stock, Yeats: Poetry and Thought, p. 95) is forced upon the poet by the condition of the world rather than by commitment to its kind of style.
What the speaker has done is take one axis of the previous section's meaning and treat it as total. He takes 'worn' in the sense of 'worn out, exhausted', but we can, equally, read it as of jewelry: the sky 'wears' the moon as time's achievement of beauty through effort, the shell is purified by the passage of time. The paradox is intensified, of course, by the fact that the moon is not subject to the time of 'days and years', but creates them as the measure of its own existence. The poem and its culminating image therefore passes beyond even the speaker's own awareness of it; his awareness, that is, as a suffering human being and not as a creator of that which transcends time. Denis Donoghue has argued an opposite case:¹

Such poems do not merely come to an end. In 'Adam's Curse' what is enacted is the acceptance of defeat, the failure of a man's love, in the first instance, and then the failure of the entire terminology which that love sustained - in this case, the force of everything in life which Yeats praised as subjective and antithetical. For the moment, these powers have failed, defeated by the primary world, objectivity, the tyranny of fact.

What, I think, Donoghue does not take into account is the conflict between the associational impact of the image and the dramatic form of the poem: the poem announces defeat, but in its central image it enacts transcendence. The man is defeated by time, but through the action of time, and the image's ability to recall into the present the past, time is integrated into its own transcendence. The structure of the poem denies the antimony of either/or with which its principal speaker is left.

The double effort of Yeats's imagination in these years between 1900 and 1908, the effort of developing his critical understanding of his own inheritance from the past in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' and in 'Discoveries', and the effort of the drama, may have led to a significant

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reduction in the amount of poetry he was able to write, but in 'Adam's Curse' they provide him with two poles of a conflict which can be embodied in poetic form. The dramatic possibilities of dialogue allows him to construct a poem which does not depend entirely on associational energy for its success, but the developing sense of the distinction between religious symbolism and associational use of imagery allows him to play off against the limitations of the dramatic, with its necessary emphasis on the individual point of view, the objectivity of the image that produces a subjective energy in each reader. That energy, however, must be developed within the poem itself, because the associational context no longer exists beyond it with sufficient strength or unity to support the image. Yeats was not, however, satisfied by that situation: his adoption of a modern style was not a dereliction of the principles upon which his art was founded. Rather his modern style was an attack on his times, an attempt to create through poetry the consciousness which would serve as a fit audience for his own poetic purposes.

It may seem a rather paradoxical situation that what cannot be fulfilled in the poems - the associationist technique - is central to the meaning of the poems, but it is exactly this paradox that seems to me essential to the development of Yeats's art in this transitional period of his career. The essays of this period are the ones in which the associationist principles become most fully realised, though realised in a world which denies them appropriate implementation. In 'The Tragic Theatre', for instance, an essay from 1910, Yeats presents us with the distinction between tragedy and comedy which was to be crucial to his later thinking, including as it does the idea of the mask:

We may not find either mood in its purity, but in mainly tragic
art one distinguishes devices to exclude or lessen character, to diminish the power of that daily mood, to cheat or blind its too clear perception. If the real world is not altogether rejected, it is but touched here and there, and into the places we have left we summon rhythm, balance, pattern, images that remind us of vast passions, the vagueness of past times, all the chimeras that haunt the edge of trance; and if we are painters, we shall express personal emotion through ideal form, a symbolism handled by the generations, a mask from whose eyes the disembodied looks, a style that remembers many masters that it may escape contemporary suggestion.1

The crucial words in such a passage are, I would suggest, 'remind' and 'remembers'. The essence of the style Yeats is trying to define is one which refuses merely contemporary significance by suggesting previous experiences to which it relates itself. Thus the drama should not enact vast passions, but remind us of them and of past times, seeking the powers that exist within each of our minds but which are shut out by the everyday world. Each image should be purified by being traditional and should be intense by recalling in each of its observers the whole range of the tradition. There is, however, no possibility of such experience in a population which has lost its memory of the past and its fear of all intensity except that of the common day:

We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.2

It is Yeats's anger against this fallen world that dominates the poems of 'The Green Helmet' and, to some extent, of 'Responsibilities', an anger born of the fact that the modern world is a denial of the preconditions of his art. The poem no longer offers to the poet an immediate mode of transcending the

1 E&I, p. 243.
2 'At Galway Races', CP, p. 108; V, p. 266.
temporal world; because the associative process is itself integral with
temporal experience, being a series of impression in a temporal sequence,
the poet cannot deny temporality. The poem if it is to achieve trans¬
cendence needs the temporal world, but the temporal world is a historical
world and the process of history in the early twentieth century is a denial
of all that the poet stands for.

The denial of the preconditions of art had occurred, according to Yeats,
throughout the rest of Europe, but Ireland had been spared; it had been
spared though, if at all, only temporarily, and perhaps had only been spared
in his imagination. The move, in 'The Green Helmet', to an extension of
the mythological basis of Yeats’s art, in the development of idea of Maud
Gonne as Helen, is one which reveals the failure of the Irish context of
associations. The poetry has to deal with that failure, which is symbiotic
with the failure of Maud Conne herself, as Yeats saw it, to be what she
ought to have been and might have been in some other situation. The
failure is a failure of history and thus the poet awaits, not a moment of
transcendence into a higher realm, but 'some new moon' when he can hear
'the whole earth change its tune'.¹ The loss of the Irish context remains,
however, truly a loss. These poems, apparently more accessible to the
'ordinary' reader, are in fact much less available in terms of Yeats’s
conceptions. Their subject matter is the historical accidents of a
particular time and place and the contingent memories of the poet's own
mind, as in 'King and No King',² and it is a subject matter which can reach
towards no underlying unity of the human, or even the specifically Irish,

¹ Ibid.
² CP, p. 102; V, p. 258.
consciousness. The increased power that the poems reveal is the power of handling syntax and rhythm and that power has been applauded by generations of critics following the lead of Pound, but it is a power which developed out of a sense of loss of poetic purpose, a diminution in the idea of poetry itself, ultimately a failure of the activity of memory. The comparison of Maud with Helen was, we can see with hindsight, the first step towards a much more inclusive mythology, but at the time it was an acceptance of the most circumscribed area of association that he could assume of his readers. That we have been accustomed to such a circumscribed idea of poetry over the past thirty years does not entitle us to disparage a much more ambitious - and therefore, of course, possibly more absurd - concept of poetic possibility. One is tempted to think that Yeats's shift of perspective has gained him so much credit because it made him easier to accept among a cosmopolitan group of critics unwilling to entertain the postulates of his nationalism, or to accept than an Irish mythology need not necessarily be parochial.

It is by realising, I think, the context of failure rather than success that we can understand the power of Yeats's poems about Maud Gonne in 'The

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1 See Pound's essay 'The Later Yeats', Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1960), pp. 378-382. The essence of Pound's view is that Yeats's poems are 'becoming gaunter, seeking greater hardness of line.'

2 The associative basis of Imagist art is very close to Yeats in this: its directness, hardness, clarity are often based, particularly in the work of H.D., on an implicit Hellenism.

3 Ted Hughes, for instance, defines the separation between himself and other recent poets in the following terms: 'One of the things those poets had in common I think was the post-war mood of having had enough ... enough rhetoric enough overweening push of any kind, enough of the dark gods, enough of the id, enough of the Angelic powers.' 'Ted Hughes and Crow', London Magazine, N.S.10 (Dec., 1970), p
Green Helmet'. Whitaker has argued, in relation to 'No Second Troy', that 'as in many later poems, the speaker incarnates in his own defeat the nobility he sees in the defeated person upon whom he meditates' and that therefore 'his transcendence of time and hers become one'. These poems, of course, do transcend time in being successful and lasting works of art, but I find in them no sense of a transcendence achieved. What they enact, it seems to me, is the failure of the poet to achieve a transcendence based in the real nature of his own culture; the comparison of Maud with Helen is not a transcendence, but the sign of the failure of the Irish context to provide its own Helen.

Yeats explores the tension between failure and success in terms of two different conceptions of art. In 'A Woman Homer Sung' the first stanza invokes a conception of art as reflective, offering to the future what, at last, the artist has managed to construct as an adequate image of the beloved in the past:

Whereon I wrote and wrought,
And now being grey,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
That coming time can say,
"He shadowed in a glass
What thing her body was."

The conception seems close to what Yeats suggested of Synge, that the 'imaginative writer shows us the world, as the painter does in his picture, reversed in a looking glass, that we may see it, not as it seems to eyes habit has made dull, but as we were Adam and this the first morning'.


2 OP, p. 100; V, p. 254.

the third stanza the poem makes an abrupt transition:

For she had fiery blood
When I was young ...

The logic of 'for' would seem to demand that this stanza follows on from the first, explaining the jealousy that Yeats had described there of his own younger self, but in fact the stanza represents a parallelism with the second stanza. Yeats's art offers the future an image of Maud's bodily form as it was in the past; Maud's bodily existence is understood in terms of a backward reference to past art. What happens in the final stanza is a return to the time of his youth but a return made in the context of what his later years have made of the experience through his art. By having been transformed into art (the art Yeats offers to the future) Maud's existence in the past is able to be understood in terms of art, the art of Homer. The poem thus mimics the creation of an associative chain passing from the future readers of his works through the history of their lives towards the art of the past. As all meaning, in the associative scheme, depends upon the past, so Yeats understands Maud in terms of past art, but in order to do so he has to project his own art into the future so that its present meanings will be established by being already past. By being seen in the context of these other areas of temporality the poem can modulate from a description of the past into the timeless present of art itself:

For she had fiery blood
When I was young,
And trod so sweetly proud
As 'twere upon a cloud,
A woman Homer sung,
That life and letters seem
But an heroic dream.

The fourth line, 'A woman Homer sung', is suspended out of the syntactic movement of the verse as the climax of a gradual movement away from the real:
'fiery blood' already establishes a certain metaphoric distance (and perhaps suggests her blood purified in the fire of Yeats's art), but treading on a cloud makes a complete shift out of our ordinary world. The suspended phrase then asserts itself as a reality, assuming a verb of existential presence - 'was', for instance - rather than its real dependence on the 'seem' which is to come. We are tempted into seeing as real what the poem itself is revealing as illusion.

The existential suspension of the image of Maud as Helen is constituted by a poetic process which itself is only a matter of 'seeming'. The dialectical relationship between poet and beloved is established only to be undercut by the final lines. The woman can only be 'A woman Homersung' because of the poet's recreation of his own past through his art; he could perform that recreation because he understood her nature in terms of past art; what is established is a relationship of interdependence in which each of them is removed from reality into the simulated existence of the 'heroic dream'. What, in the end, Yeats is saying, though he says it in a tone which suggests great achievement, is that as far as the present is concerned they are deluding themselves. They have constructed for themselves roles whose significance is not for them to usurp: only the future can justify the kind of connections that he is imposing through his art upon their past existence, and that they have adopted in their relations with one another.

It is in the context of this constitutive act of the poet's that we must read the opening line of 'No Second Troy'. The 'why' of 'Why should I blame her' is not only one that implies that the beloved does perhaps

1 CP, p. 101; V, p. 256.
deserve blame - 'Though the beloved may seem vindicated, we do not forget that "counter-truth", that passion being kept down by the sword's point'¹ but that the poet has himself created her to be what she is: 'he kneaded in the dough / Through the long years of youth.'² The emphasis falls on 'I': 'why should I blame her.' The world that has failed her has done so through him, because had Ireland been what he had hoped it to be the need to image the experience in terms of Troy would be irrelevant. The intensity Yeats discovered in Maud deserved an appropriate setting, an appropriate literary as well as social setting, and it is that that Yeats is not able to provide. It is, I think, absurd to see Yeats offering Homer to us as a 'sort of classical parallel to himself'³: Homer was able to sing his Helen and in so doing also sang Maud. What Homer succeeded in doing Ireland and Yeats have failed to do. After all, the final line - 'Was there another Troy for her to burn' - hardly suggests that Helen was the kind of woman who might not have filled Yeats's days with misery, who might have been 'peaceful' in any age. That final line attributed the activity of Troy's destruction to Helen: she was not merely the accidental cause of it, but the wilful cause of it. The problem that the poem poses is not Maud's role in a historical situation that is unsuited to her: the problem is Yeats's ability to accept the role that she plays and which he, though he has partly created it, has failed to live up to. Bloom suggests that the difficulty with this poem is that its questions are too easily answered,⁴ but what

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1 Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 149.
2 'Old Memory', CP, p. 86; V, p. 201.
4 Bloom, Yeats, p. 170.
if the answer to the final question is yes? Yes there was another Troy and she has burned it. What if the historical opportunity for a poetic creation equal to Homer's has been lost by Yeats because of his involvement with Maud, because he has failed to see and seize its moment? Perhaps the 'could' of the second last line is an opening of possibilities rather than a closing of them. To read the 'why' and 'what could' of the penultimate line as identical with the 'why' and 'what could' of the first and sixth lines, to read the title as an inevitable answer to the last question is wilfully reducing the power of the poem. The need to ask the question in terms of the Greek and not in terms of the Irish imagination is a sign of the latter's failure, faced by someone who is in herself no failure - or no different failure from Helen. What she has done has perhaps been less than noble, but what then of Helen? Action is not what is relevant to her, but creation is what is relevant to the poet: Yeats creates his poem out of his despair at the disruption of the dialectical relationship between poet and heroine within a culture. To replace the real Maud with a Greek paradigm is not to constitute an image of the Irish race, but to reveal the failure of the race to bring forth such an image.

Only when the present reality has disappeared will the poet be able to make pure the image; transcendence is only possible through the relationship between the poet and his environment where that environment offers him something of an intensity equal to the intensity of his art. But the poet can never deal with the reality directly; it must already have been purified in the communal imagination before he can take it up into his art. The blame in 'No Second Troy' is partly his for being so involved, for what 'A Woman Homer Sung' reveals to us is that the artist's shadowing of perfection can only be achieved when involvement has ceased. Only the blind
man can be poet because only he, like Raftery in 'The Tower', is not seduced by the beauty he celebrates. 'Peace' applies a similar thought to Maud herself:

Ah, that Time could touch a form
That could show what Homer's age
Bred to be a hero's wage.
Were not all her life but storm,
Would not painters paint a form
Of such noble lines,' I said,
'Such a delicate high head,
All that sternness amid charm,
All that sweetness amid strength?'
Ah, but peace that comes at length, 1
Came when Time had touched her form.

Again Yeats uses the idea of reflective art to reveal the extent to which the essence cannot be captured. As only the 'body' could be shadowed in the glass in 'A Woman Homer Sung', so here the painter's art cannot capture the 'storm' of Maud's life. There can be no direct translation of reality into art: the translation which Homer achieved was partly due to the circumstances of the times, allowing the development of a different kind of character, but the lines also contain a pun which refers us back to the earlier poem. 'Homer's age / Bred to be a hero's wage' directs us not, perhaps, to social conditions but to Homer's longevity: Homer could only - like Yeats in this respect - create his hero's wage when he was sufficiently distanced from actual involvement in life by age. That this is partly true of Maud is a revelation of the frailty of actual life - its essence cannot be grasped or revealed at the time, it can only be revealed by one who is able to use time to purify what time has provided.

It is only by the acquisition of a perspective in which the contingences of the actual are dissolved away that the essence can be revealed; Homer

1 CP, p. 103; V, p. 258.
was able to do this for Helen, Yeats has to adopt that purification because he is unable to provide one for Maud himself. To compare her to Helen is, of course, to elevate her - too much, some might say - but it is also to reveal the failure of Yeats's society and Yeats's imagination to come to terms with what she represents. The tension is revealed, I would argue, in 'Reconciliation',¹ which picks up the idea of 'blame' from 'No Second Troy' attributing resentment against the beloved for taking away the poet's power by her treatment of him:

and I could find
Nothing to make a song about but kings,
Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things
That were like memories of you - but now
We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;
And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,
Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.

What Yeats had made his song about were those Irish memories which would have brought to the image of Maud her own pure essence; the passage reverses the associative process, by making the associations 'memories' of her, instead of her inspiring, by her nature, the appropriate mythic memories. The reversal reveals the failure of distance between the poet and his subject: he wants to live the life he creates, thereby achieving a transcendence which the poetry cannot help him to as he passes not merely in the imagination, but literally into the past: 'for the world lives as long ago'. The final lines,

But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,
My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

turn away from action towards passivity, a recognition that the dramatic gesture casting off the trappings of drama leads nowhere. Without the past there is no awareness by which the present can be lived and, having

¹ CP, p. 102; V, p. 257.
cast away his own mythic past as she cast away their past by her marriage, present life can have no vitality, no intensity.

It is the interpenetration of past and present that allows the transcendence by the imagination as it allows the achievement of the nobility upon which imagination dotes for a model and, by its models, helps create. The personal contradiction which 'Reconciliation' documents is the loss of both the literary and the individual past. The verses inspired by youthful love were lost with the loss of the beloved; the mythic art which replaced them is lost by her recovery; that recovery cannot return to the speaker his own past. The only possibility is to hide himself in the present. This personal dilemma is parallel to the social situation of Ireland: the bourgeoisie who have come to prominence during the previous decade are people committed only to the present and willing to accept the denial of the only living past which remains, the traditions of the aristocracy. In the aristocratic environment alone the associative connections which make great art and intensity of action possible are retained, and it is this context which Yeats sees as threatened by the developing political situation in Ireland. The political content of 'Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation'¹ has often been analysed and it has often been quoted to show Yeats's discovery of the significance to him of the Anglo-Irish tradition, but like the rest of the poems in this sequence it is directed towards the outside world as an indictment of its failure to maintain the preconditions of an associationist art. In the sixth of the poem's twelve lines, at its axis point, Yeats gives us an image of the associationist process linked to the genetic inheritance of the aristocrat:

¹ CP, p. 106; V, p. 264.
Where wings have memory of wings

The mind bred in such conditions stretching back 'Time out of mind' - a marvellous Yeatsian use of a colloquial phrase, suggesting not only the vagueness of the distant past, but the subjectivity of traditions retained by memory - is one which is able to relate all thoughts to others, and so is able to strive towards 'gradual Time's last gift, a written speech / Wrought of high laughter, loveliness and ease'. The process of time in one direction, the direction of history, and the process of the mind in the other direction, that of memory, combine to make possible the highest of social achievements. The poem, almost programmatically, reveals the dialectical relationship between time and memory in the creation of an associationist art. Yeats is not creating such an art, nor is he suggesting that the speech towards which history is leading will be associationist in any formal sense: what he is asserting is that the psychological conditions within which all great achievements occur is one that is determined by the associations which memory makes possible for the individual.

In tackling the failure of his society to provide such a context, Yeats's art has to take upon itself the limitations of that failure:

There's something ails our colt
That must, as if it had not holy blood
Nor on Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,
Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt
As though it dragged road metal.1

It is an art which succeeds, but succeeds within limitations which are a denial of the essence of art - at least as Yeats had defined it in the past and would define it later. It was an art forced to be effective in history - or to announce its own failure in history - and not an art transcending

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history. Of course, the art does transcend its occasion, since by its perfection it outlasts the moment of its occasion. As Thomas Whitaker says of 'Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation': 'The root motive of such poetic elaboration is neither hatred of an opponent nor desire for social change, but love of a transcendent ideal, an "impossibly noble life", but the impossible nobility is not the nobility held by what actually exists, by any individual, it is the product of the individual in relation with an endless past. The individual, like the image, does not draw its intensity or perfection totally from its own being, but from the associations which the mind is able to bring forth in the face of it. The 'vision' of a transcendent ideal is a vision, but that does not mean it is unrelated to the actual: it is only possible because of an actuality whose own relation with the past is the same as the process of vision itself, where 'wings have memory of wings', the given setting off the train of associations that travel back into the mind's own past. The vision of such nobility is only possible because it is a nobility which maintains the preconditions of the process of intensification by which vision is possible: 'suggestion is richest to the richest and so art grows unpopular in a democracy like this.'

The poem describes a situation in which intensity is still possible, but its polemic is directed towards an audience whose minds are incapable of that intensity and the poem, therefore, must create its own power out of statement, out of syntax, and not out of association.

1 Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 151.

2 Cf. Memoirs, p. 225; in the entry in his Journal from which the poem started Yeats wrote of the house that 'it gave to a far people beneficent rule, and still under its roof living intellect is sweetened by old memories of its descent from far off'.

3 Memoirs, p. 209.
It is this point that seems to me essential in the understanding of Yeats's development during these years which marked his transition towards what we now consider to be a modern poet. In an often quoted passage from 'A General Introduction for my Work', Yeats described the transition in the following terms:

It was a long time before I had made a language to my liking; I began to make it when I discovered some twenty years ago that I must seek, not as Wordsworth thought, words in common use, but a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza.

The suggestion is of a language that is spare and economical, achieving its power by the complexity of thought held in tension by the formality of verse structure: 'Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language.' But to stress this aspect of Yeats's achievement is to miss what the change carries with it: later in the same essay Yeats describes what he considers to be the purpose of the young poets of the thirties:

They are determined to express the factory, the metropolis, that they may be modern. Young men teaching school in some picturesque cathedral town, or settled for life in Capri or Sicily, defend their type of metaphor by saying that it comes naturally to a man who travels to his work by Tube. I am indebted to a man of this school who went through my work at my request, crossing out all conventional metaphors, but they seem to me to have rejected also these dream associations which were the whole art of Mallarmé.

Despite the attempt to create a poetic language from words in common use Yeats did not forego the associations which were the essence of Mallarmé's

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2 E&I, p. 521.

3 E&I, p. 522

4 E&I, p. 525.
poetic. In the context of a failing public - even if it had always been no more than an ideal creation of his own - he may have wrestled with his own opposite, a style that is closer to statement than suggestion, a style learned in part from Ben Jonson, but it was learned, finally, as an addition to the associationist possibilities of poetry, not as a substitute for them. The passionate syntax of ordinary speech is the passionate syntax of someone fully involved in their own associational patterns, one which, to the man in the tube, may seem to have no connection with the real world because of its "irrational" nature. Thus immediately before his reference to the Wordsworthian example - and Yeats was much closer to Wordsworth than he would perhaps have liked to believe¹ - in 'A general Introduction', Yeats provides the following analogy for what it is he means by a passionate speech:

I tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech. I wanted to write in whatever language comes most naturally when we solilquise, as I do all day long, upon the events of our own lives or of any life where we can see ourselves for the moment. I sometimes compare myself with the mad old slum women I hear denouncing and remembering; 'How dare you', I heard one say of some imaginary suitor, 'and you without health or a home'. If I spoke my thoughts aloud they might be as angry and as wild.²

It is the function of form, of conventionality to provide the tension, the counter-balance to the personal, but it does so by winnowing the accidental from the essential in the mind's own memories. It does so by purifying associations till their contents are neither accidental nor personal, but have the form of universal experience. Yeats's aristocratic ideal is not different from his early ideal of the Gaelic world, it is a recognition of the historical processes within which his ideal has to be achieved and the

¹ Wordsworth's description of his intentions in the Preface to Lyric Ballads comes very close to Yeats's purpose: 'to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement.'

² E&I, p. 521.
limitations that history imposes. Both are attempts to maintain the continuity between past and present which allows the accretion of a body of significant memory, memory which is essential to both aesthetic and moral existence.

The dilemma of such a position, however, is that, contrary to much avant-garde propaganda, the artist is not free to make his art from totally new beginnings. The past cannot be denied, because it is implicit in every word, every image. The poet depends upon the retention of the past and a much longer past held in a much greater memory than he can himself acquire. At the same time, his work will only fulfil itself when he has made sufficient of that memory his own, and related enough of his own memories to it, to be able to sort the accidental from the essential. The living memory of which art is experienced and created is possible only because of the death of each moment in the past which consigns its contents to our remembrance. The mad old woman of the Dublin slums sums up the contradiction: she lives again as though it were real an event from the past whose fruition is now denied her. The past is always failure: it is an ontological failure in that time defeats every human achievement, but that ontological failure finds its appropriate image in those individuals who are defeated in time, as well as by time. Success leads to continuation into the present; real significance can only be fully understood, however, when the event or person has become purely the property of memory. It is only at the point of its dissolution that the great house can be realised by Yeats as the image of all greatness in civilised society; it is only when the memory that it maintains becomes itself a memory that it becomes truly significant. The need, in the associationist scheme, to have everything a part of the past before its true meaning can be realised turns Yeats's sense of failure inside out: failure in life is not the failure of memory, but one of the
preconditions of memory. The artist commits everything to the past and to failure so that it can exist in the present, in eternity, in art. Thus it is that tragedy becomes central to Yeats's thinking: the work of art celebrates what life fails to overcome, time itself. As the moment, or the hero, dies so is set off a train of reflection that consigns them to the past, but wraps the past and them together as a gift to the future. By becoming a part of the past each moment, each person becomes available for inclusion within the body of significant memory which is always alive in the present. The surrealist images of 'His Dream', the opening poem to 'The Green Helmet', no doubt reflect the difficulties of Yeats's relationship with Maud Gonne and perhaps a latent fear of sex, but it would be possible to read it also in terms of the situation I have just been describing. The speaker's boat -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I swayed upon the gaudy stern</th>
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<tr>
<td>The butt-end of a steering oar,</td>
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<tr>
<td>And saw wherever I could turn</td>
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<tr>
<td>A crowd upon a shore.</td>
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- could be seen as his art, which carries its cargo of a human life as a 'figure in a shroud'. The art which preserves is always the art which demands destruction; the artist is Charon, carrying the beautiful or heroic to eternity in his 'gaudy ship', but it is an eternity that demands their death because the world, the crowd upon the shore, though it will follow the beautiful or heroic, will in the end shrink from their life. The beautiful exists as a corporate image created by the poet; the society he creates it for will admire, will be driven to ecstasy by it, but will

2. The beautiful figure that has, like Maud Gonne, 'such dignity of limb', is presented in terms of a reversal of the Elizabethan pun on 'death'. Strangely, this poem finds no place in Brenda S. Webster's Yeats: A Psychoanalytic Study (London: Macmillan, 1974).
only feel it fulfilled by its destruction. As poet, the speaker therefore demands the failure and suffering of those to whom he is closest that they may be perfected in his art. Equally, of course, they demand suffering of him that he may create. The discovery that failure itself is the basis upon which the whole process of art is built, with its moral implications, releases for Yeats the possibility of a recovery of the potentialities of memory. The loss of memory which I have been documenting was based on the recognition of the failure of the various social groups in whom Yeats had placed his faith: the realisation that failure itself was a part of the pattern releases him from his dilemma, and gives back to memory its fruitful poetic possibilities.

II  'And left but memories'

It is, of course, part of the critical inheritance that 'Responsibilities' marks the emergence of Yeats into the modern world and that it is, therefore, a particularly important step in his career. The stylistic developments which it reveals perhaps impress us more than they ought to because they are at the root of much that we take to be central to poetry in our own time. But the advances that Yeats made were also losses: it seems to me that the view of the world expressed by the poems in 'Responsibilities' is essentially less complex and in many ways less interesting than those of many of the earlier poems. They only hesitantly reach towards the discovery of a new ontological status for the poem to replace the one that was lost when Yeats ceased to view the poem as the connecting link between two incompatible realms of existence. The complexity of form which Yeats discovered and developed by realising a new style, and particularly the coincidence between period and stanza, is complexity of texture in the poem, but it is not more
complex in the establishment of external relations. We can see this in the ballad poems, 'Running to Paradise'\(^1\) and 'Beggar to Beggar Cried'.\(^2\) They are much more subtle achievements than the early ballads and they are imbued with more thought, in the sense that they point towards general statements of human truths:

Poor men have grown to be rich men,
And rich men grown to be poor again,
And I am running to Paradise;
That tossed a bare heel when at school,
Now it has filled an old sock full:
And there the king is but as the beggar

The variation between general statement and specific, 'low' images reveals Yeats's control and scope, but ballads like this one occur within a group of 'beggar' poems in 'Responsibilities' and their form is justified by their subject matter. There is no attempt here to link this specific poem to a class of people in the world to whom it is a natural expression. The form is used in a 'literary' way, it turns inward upon Yeats's own conception of the relationship between nobleman and beggar rather than outward towards the world. There is no longer the assumption in the poem of a community to which the poem is particularly relevant by virtue of its form.\(^3\) Beggar and king are abstracts in a pattern of thought which mediates between poem and world in a way which was unnecessary in the earlier ballads, no matter how much less sophisticated they were in technique and construction. The sense of isolation which they suggest in the poet has been aptly

\(^1\) CP, p. 129; V, p. 300.
\(^2\) CP, p. 128; V, p. 299.
\(^3\) None of the beggar poems suggest the same beginnings as 'Down by the Salley Gardens': 'An extension of three lines sung to me by an old woman at Ballisodare.' (V, p. 797).
summed up by T.R. Henn, who sees the beggar as an image of Yeats's own poetic stance, suggesting 'the stripping off the lendings of Celtic mythology, and of his own dramatically perceived and even masochistic abandonment of the hope of popularity or fame or love'. Henn makes the isolation into a heroic virtue, the ability to 'walk naked', but it is one that is imposed on Yeats by the failure of - or his own loss of contact with - the folk memory. In 'A General Introduction' Yeats contrasted his view with that of other modern poets.

Some modern poets contend that jazz and music-hall songs are the folk art of our time, that we should mould our art upon them; we Irish, modern men also, reject every folk art that does not go back to Olympus. Give me time and a little youth and I will prove that even, 'Johnny, I hardly knew ye' goes back.2

The assertion of 1937, however, is an assertion made in the context of a rediscovered strength in the folk idiom that Yeats had exploited in, for instance, the 'Crazy Jane' poems; in 1914 Yeats would have held the same views, but would have felt them denied by his times even more strongly.

The memory upon which all art depends in such a view leads to a dualism which is much more radical in its own way than that of the early poems, the split being now entirely between past and present. The poem may be a means of mediating this division in the same way that it mediated between antagonistic ontological domains in the earlier poetry, but it cannot do so where there is no memory for it to feed upon, where there is no recollection of a common past with which it can form a connection. The transcendent of the earlier poems might have been unknowable, but in many ways that was preferable to a situation in which what has been known is forgotten. The unknowable can

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2 E&I, p. 516.
be discovered, the forgotten has to be recovered: can the dead rise from their graves? My rhetorical question is not mere overstatement: the two things, recovery of past through memory and the assertion of an eternal spiritual existence of the individual, are identical. Yeats recovered the power of memory by recovering the power of the occult, of magic, of the calling up of spirits. The poems of 'Responsibilities' and 'The Wild Swans at Coole' form a dialectic between personal and public loss and personal and public recovery, a recovery that was acted out in Yeats's marriage and his wife's automatic writing, and that was theoretically established by Per Amica Silentia Lunae. What was recovered was the power of memory, a memory that went beyond the community memory directly into the Great Memory, and by the recovery of memory he recovered the associationist principles of his poetry.

The loss of the occult, which many might see as an advantage in Yeats's middle poetry, is, in fact, essential to the poet's sense of failure and isolation. The awareness of impending old age, which motivates poems such as 'The Living Beauty'\(^1\) or 'Song',\(^2\), is given its terrible significance because of the loss of certainty about spiritual reality. The predicament is put in 'The Mountain Tomb'.\(^3\)

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Pour wine and dance if manhood still have pride,
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;
The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,
Our father Rosicross is in his tomb.
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The conditional clauses reveal the extent of Yeats's doubt about the retention of the values by which the Rosicrucian truths can be revitalised. By the

\[\begin{align*}
1 & \quad \text{CP, p. 156; V, p. 333.} \\
2 & \quad \text{CP, p. 156; V, p. 334.} \\
3 & \quad \text{CP, p. 136; V, p. 311.}
\end{align*}\]
final stanza the hope seems to have faded, the pride and the rose have disappeared:

In vain, in vain; the cataract still cries;  
The everlasting taper lights the gloom;  
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes,  
Our father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

Like so many of the middle poems this one asserts the failure of poetic truth: the poem does not seek to use the occult symbols as poetic symbols; it cannot because the occult symbols are no longer part of the living heritage.

And yet Yeats has not quite lost all hope: the opening stanza which presents us with hopeful possibilities of revitalising the tradition uses 'is' in its final line. The ambiguity of 'is' points us in two directions: he is in his tomb and therefore dead, and his knowledge with him, or he exists in his tomb, still, in some sense, living. The loss of hope in the final stanza is balanced by 'sleeps', suggesting an awakening to come, though without losing the sense that it has as a common euphemism in English. The poem retains a hope that it cannot itself fulfil or even point towards in its own technique. Similarly, the following poem in Collected Poems, 'To a child dancing in the wind'¹ although it opens with a confident assertion,

Dance there upon the shore:  
What need have you to care  
For wind or water's roar?

ends in doubt, the wisdom of age qualifying the vitality of youth:

What need have you to dread  
The monstrous crying of wind?

'Monstrous' takes all the comfort from the line, intensified by the lack of the definite article. The feeling of the poem, despite its initial direction, is all towards the sense of what time will deprive the child of, or her

¹ CP, p. 136; V, p. 312.
delight as only a greater potentiality for loss. The literary equivalent is 'The Realists':

Hope that you may understand!
What can books of men that wive
In a dragon-guarded land,
Paintings of the dolphin-drawn
Sea-nymphs in their pearly wagons
Do, but awake a hope to live
That had gone
With the dragons?

My colon after the title does, I think, destroy some of the poem's effectiveness. I read the title as an integral part of the poem, rather than taking the first line as a disconnected short tempered outburst. The realists are not those who would do away with books of dragons and their like, but those who would interpret them in terms of the understanding, in terms of the 'real' as they define it. What Yeats asserts is that the meaning of mythic creatures cannot be given in this way: their real meaning is their form, their assertion of a mode of understanding different from that practised in the modern world. To read them in the modern world does not entail translating them into realistic terms, it is to realise how much the world has lost by losing them as significant imaginative visions. Reality has, in associationist terms, to find its significance in them, not they in it.

The sense of failure which permeates this phase of Yeats's art is partly owing to the distance which the associationist mode sets between art and life. Since association occurs at its most intense in the process of reverie it is necessarily cut off from the world of action. While Yeats could still believe in magic as the pinnacle of an associational mode the divorce between

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1 CP, p. 135; V, p. 309. Unterecker offers the clearest version of an opposite reading: 'The exclamatory "Hope that you may understand!" Yeats addresses to them (the realists) in the beginning of his little poem clearly implies that he has no expectation that such men will know what he is talking about.' (Reader's Guide, p. 124).
meditation and action was not complete, but as Yeats grows older not only
does he lose the occult context of his early creations, he becomes aware
of the disjunction between art and life as a function of the increase in
associational power that age brings, while effectively diminishing the power
to implement any of the knowledge that one gains through it. This is not
merely a matter of biography: length of life, like length of historical
remembrance, brings an increase in associational intensity, but decreases
the living vitality from which art derives and to which it ought to return.

An interesting poem in this connection is 'A Memory of Youth',\(^1\)
because it ends with a powerful image which in effect operates as a denial
of associational power. The two lovers fail, in the course of the poem,
to find any real connection with one another,

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{And had been savagely undone} \\
    \text{Were it not that Love upon the cry} \\
    \text{Of a most ridiculous little bird} \\
    \text{Tore from the clouds his marvellous moon.}
\end{align*}
\]

Ellmann suggests of this ending that 'the man the woman who have failed to
find unity are suddenly united by an image' and that the image 'is no mere
picture to complete the scene, but a violent reconciler which tears the
clouds apart'.\(^2\) But the moon here is not a poetically constructed image,
though occurring in a poem, it is a real moon which intervenes in a scene
which the speaker has been creating as a poetic construction, and that real
moon destroys the art with which the lovers have surrounded themselves and
permits them to re-enter life. The poem opens with the translation of the
lovers into an aesthetic dimension: 'The moments passed as at a play';
'Believing every word I said, / I praised her body and her mind', and it is

\(^1\) \text{CP, p. 137; V, p. 313.}

\(^2\) \text{Ellmann, Man and the Masks, p. 206.}
precisely the aesthetic distance thus established which keeps them from one another. It is only when something is given from without, something poetic, in a debased sense, but natural too because produced at the order of 'a most ridiculous little bird', that the lovers can escape from a desolating sense of eventual failure - 'Even the best of love must die' - into acceptance of the present. The final image allows unity by being part of a natural world, and insisting on their participation in that natural world, and by having escaped from the aesthetic unity which the speaker had set out to construct.

The predicament is given its most haunting form in 'Men Improve with the Years',¹ in which the repeated, framing image -

A weather-worn, marble triton
Among the streams

turns the poet himself into a work of art, static amidst the movement of life. The reason for the stasis, however, lies in the fact that he approaches life with the double distance of age and reverie, that, confronted by youthful beauty, he treats it as a piece of art and not as a living temptation:

And all day long I look
Upon this lady's beauty
As though I had found in a book
A pictured beauty,
Pleased to have filled the eyes
Or the discerning ears,
Delighted to be but wise ...

The reverie induced by treating the living as art seems to be acquisition of increased wisdom - 'Delighted to be but wise' - but very quickly reveals itself as an intensification of the aesthetic awareness through the separation from life enforced by age:

O would that we had met
When I had my burning youth!

¹ CP, p. 152; V, p. 329.
There is no longer, for Yeats, any unity between aesthetic experience and lived experience. Once they enhanced each other, now they are in conflict. The loss of memory, the sense of failure, leads to a dissolution not only of individual associative connections, but to the larger, more encompassing connections between different areas of life. Thus the lovers in 'A Memory of Youth' are united in the end, but by an arbitrary chance, and perhaps also, if we read the title to suggest that the lovers' situation is itself a memory of youth and not that the poet is remembering a youthful experience, it happens under the impulse of re-established memory. But in 'Men Improve with Years' there can be no linking of aesthetic and lived experience, they are entirely contradictory. In 'Lines Written in Dejection'\(^1\) it is the occult which has become separated from present life, leaving the poet to 'endure the timid sun'. This is an interesting poem because it rehearses an associative process (and encourages associations in the reader), on to dismiss it as mere memory; that is, an experience he can remember having had, but not one whose actual outline returns as an immediate memory in the present:

When have I last looked on  
The round green eyes and the long wavering bodies  
Of the dark leopards of the moon?  
All the wild witches, those most noble ladies,  
For all their broom-sticks and their tears,  
Their angry tears, are gone.

What is most real in the poem, those obscure images which encourage the reader to form his own associational connections, are unreal in the poet's mind: there is not only a divorce between the poet and life, there is a divorce between the man and his art. The associative connections upon which his art depends are remembered by the man, but are unusable by the poet:

\(^1\) CP, p. 163; V, p. 343.
The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished;  
I have nothing but the embittered sun ...

The poem invokes, with its archetypal images, that movement back to the ancestral images that all art calls upon, while at the same time describing the failure of the process by which such a movement can be achieved.

It is not enough that one merely remembers the past, or that the poet remembers some of the past, the past has to return to the present as a set of living connections. To invoke images in the way that 'Lines Written in Dejection' does is to invoke only the simulcra of memory, not the real thing, because these particular images do not bring with them a host of other suggestions from the totality of past experience. No doubt some

Old, learned, respectable bald heads
Edit and annotate the lines

but that does not bring the images back as living realities, as full and complete associative experiences. Instead of transcending its own place in the poem the image, and particularly the climactic terminal image, is reduced to being either the thing that it is, and no more, or a merely personal memory. 'Fallen Majesty', for instance, examines precisely this aspect of the poet's relationship with the past in its image of the poet as a gypsy traveller who has fallen from better things:

this hand alone,
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping-place
Babbling of fallen majesty, records what's gone.

The poet cannot recall the past into the present as a living, or relived, experience: it is gone, full stop. The poem builds towards a climactic image but is an image which cannot achieve that total transformation of past

1 CP, p. 158; 'The Scholars'.

2 CP, p. 138; V, p. 314.
into present, the sudden intrusion of past into present that is typical of Yeats's great climactic images:

These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud.

The implications of 'burning cloud' are too vague to create a really powerful image, but in any case what the poem presents is precisely the fact that the crowd cannot become aware of that 'burning cloud', the poem will not bring it back into the communal memory. The 'babbling' courtier records what's gone as though uncertain of the veracity of his own remembered impression, exactly because it is only remembered, it does not return as an immediate awareness in the speaker's, or the listener's or reader's, mind. It is memory that returns the outline of an experience, it is not the re-experiencing of something through memory, or the presentation of something to which multitudes of secreted memories can gather. As 'Broken Dreams' suggests,

Your beauty can but leave among us
Vague memories, nothing but memories.

The vagueness which afflicts Yeats's poetry in this period is not the linguistic vagueness for which his early poetry has been so often criticised, it is a vagueness about the purpose of poetry itself. It has become a 'babbling' about the past with no real purpose in the present, no active place in life. The memory which inhabits these poems is not of the kind that posed problems for associationists such as Hume, the kind that is so vivid as to be as

1 CP, p. 172; V, p. 335.

2 Hume distinguishes three levels of experience; impressions, which are immediate, and ideas, which are either remembered or imagined. We distinguish them Hume claims, according to their vivacity: impressions are more lively to our perception than ideas, and ideas of memory are more lively than those of imagination. 'And as an idea of the memory, by losing its force and vivacity, may degenerate to such degree, as to be taken for an idea of the imagination; so on the other hand an idea of the imagination may acquire such force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory'. [David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 86. See Norman Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London: Macmillan, 1941), chapter XI, for a discussion of the difficulties of Hume's account.]
as real to the senses, or to the imagination, as an immediate experience itself. These poems are full of recollection, not of the intense present awareness of a past impression. Such recollection ought to operate only as an element in the associative process, a contributing intensification of the central image which returns powerfully into the present because it has been purified in the communal memory and still lives there; in these poems it is the only possible form of memory. The distinction between these two kinds of memory helps us locate the changing pattern of Yeats's use of mythological paradigms. Whereas the Helen poems, I argued, reveal the failure of the Irish imagination to come to terms with its own experience, 'A Thought from Propertius' stands midway towards a higher level integration of mythologies. The title indicates the extent to which doubt remains: Yeats does not claim the poem's substance as his own.

She might, so noble from head
To great shapely knees
The long flowing line,
Have walked to the altar
Through the holy images
At Pallas Athene's side,
Or been fit spoil for a centaur
Drunk with the unmixed wine.

The separation of 'might' from 'have' enforces the ambiguity of the subjunctive in English: to see this woman would be to believe, and not necessarily falsely, that she did perform her part in some ancient rite; to see this woman is to realise that, had the conditions been appropriate, she would have had the potential for such a rite, or, if we take the emphasis to fall on 'have' we can read it as implying that she would have done this had she been born at some time in the past rather than in the present. Fulfilled actuality in the past, unfulfilled potential in the present, failed possibility of the past:

1 CP, p. 172: V, p. 335.
the three are suspended in the timeless intensity of the image. The image is so intense that we do not know if what we are experiencing is a product of the imagination, that is, a creation of our own, or whether it is a memory of some impersonal kind to which are given sudden access. Is it a personal fantasy or something that has some basis in reality? There is no way we can know by considering the image itself: its intensity, its vividness proves nothing either way. We need some validation from without, some external guarantee of the nature of our experience, but we have only the experience itself.

It is around the need for such a guarantee that the poems of 'Responsibilities' and 'The Wild Swans at Coole' revolve, seeking continuity between different levels of experience in order that they can mutually validate each other's existence. It has not, I think, been noticed how closely related the introductory poems of each volume are to one another despite very different subject matter. The opening poem of 'Responsibilities' is 'The Grey Rock' an allegory justifying Yeats's poetic development and revealing the continuity of past and present in his work: 'I have kept my faith, though faith was tried'. 'The Wild Swans' points in the other direction, towards the future, but with a sense that the future is not for the speaker, though it will continue his purposes:

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

'The Grey Rock' uses Yeats's previous style in order to reveal the possibilities of the future for the poet; 'The Wild Swans' uses Yeats's new style to

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1 CP, p. 155; V, p. 270.
2 CP, p. 147; V, p. 322.
discuss a sense of all possibilities being past. Each is an attempt to assess the relevance of memory to the understanding of the present.

'The Grey Rock' rehearses an argument that we have seen consistently throughout Yeats's poetry, from the 'Happy Shepherd' onwards, that the world has forgotten the most important aspects of its past:

You kept the Muses' sterner laws,  
And unrepenting faced your ends,  
And therefore earned the right - and yet  
Dowson and Johnson most I praise-  
To troop with those the world's forgot,  
And copy their proud steady gaze.

The 'proud steady gaze' is that of the gods who figure in the poem's narrative, the ancient Irish gods whom the world has chosen to forget. And yet, it is not entirely folly to have forgotten them; to come too close to them is a destructive possibility:

We should be dazed and terror-struck,  
If we but saw in dreams that room,  
Those wine-drenched eyes, and curse our luck  
That emptied all our days to come.

King Goll's madness is recalled by these lines, but the opposite pole of time's relation with the transcendent is invoked by the story which the poem tells, of a goddess in love with a mortal. The man gives up the gift of a pin, which makes him invulnerable, in order that he can be equal with his companions, suffering wounds that he might avoid, and is himself killed in battle. To be true to one's companions one has to give up the possibility of immortality. Aoife, however, the goddess in love with a mortal, has her suffering quenched by being drenched in the wine of the gods, 'sacred stuff', the source of inspiration:

And she with Goban's wine adrip,  
No more remembering what had been,  
Stared at the gods with laughing lip.

The poem reveals a double destruction of memory. The world no longer remembers
the gods, or those who are like them in life, the poets; the goddess no longer remembers the mortal to whom she had promised 'two hundred years', and is no longer haunted by the question which haunts all of Yeats's early poetry:

Why must the lasting love what passes,
Why are the gods by men betrayed?

The gods have forgotten the world, the world has forgotten the gods, but the poet asserts his loyalty to the union of the two, even though he is 'in no good repute' because of it. That assertion is assertion only, it is unfulfilled in the allegory itself which reveals only the discontinuity between the past and the present, between time and transcendence. The poetic act in the form of the wine has become an escape from the remembrance of pain, but that destruction is itself a terrible challenge to a poetry which not only seeks to be remembered, but which works on an essential basis of memory. The poetry seeks to overcome the suffering it creates, but if it does so by forgetting, it destroys the very basis by which it exists.

If Jeffares is right,¹ the background to 'The Wild Swans at Coole' is similar to the structure of 'The Grey Rock', in that it is a poem of sorrow that Yeats's passion for Maud Gonne was dead. The meaning of the poem, as Graham Martin rightly insists,² is centred on the meaning of the 'symbolic swans', but we must not be deceived into thinking that the meaning of the poem is to be established by discovering some particular meaning in the swans, that the swans are equivalent to some other thing. It is exactly that equivalence which is in doubt. The swans are symbolic birds, but their

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¹ A. Norman Jeffares, Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats, p. 154.
² Graham Martin, 'The Wild Swans at Coole', in Donoghue and Mulryne, An Honoured Guest, p. 61. See also Bloom, Yeats, p. 192 for a reading based on the influence of Shelley's 'Alastor'.
meaning to the speaker is something that has changed in time, reflecting the different moods in which they have been apprehended by him, but giving those moods the appearance of continuity. The continuity, however, is now uncertain and, being uncertain, the stability of their significance must be likewise uncertain. We need not search for some specific equivalence for the birds: on the one hand, we have to accept the necessary subjectivity of our associations with the given image because the image transcends any individual interpretation; on the other, we have to see that transcendence of the subjective is what the poem dramatically reveals to us. The birds link the various elements, uniting water and air, as well as past and present, but it is a link which has not been created by the speaker. It is given in the external world as it has related to the speaker's own life and when the given is taken away the unity which it establishes will be lost. The past cannot be recalled into the present to make the integration of the various antipathetic areas of existence possible, only the swans which, in themselves, already form a continuity can suggest the possibility of such an integration, but it is one which is no longer valid for the speaker. The swans have accidentally been symbolic of the speaker's life, but the loss he has suffered divorces him from the possibility of discovering any universal symbol at all. The swans gesture towards a symbolic integration of conflicting areas of existence but the meaning of the symbol is precisely what the speaker lacks. He is trapped within the accidents of a personal past and by the radical division between his present condition and his potentialities in the past. Previously, the swans had pointed towards a higher integration:

I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.

The rings, of course, suggest the cycles by which reality is ordered, but in
the present the swans are seen in a more circumscribed role:

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air.

Personal, not universal, significance is all they can be attached to, 'climbing' the air suggesting something much less patterned than the previous 'wheeling'. In the context of declining significance, of a reducing circumference of meaning, their disappearance is the logical outcome. The poem thus enacts the decline from symbolic import, or the reduction of symbolic significance through time - the reversal of what ought to be happening, just as 'The Grey Rock' narrates the loss of symbolic significance by the divorce between two realms of existence, each of which forgets the other. To try to discover a symbolic meaning for the swans and to read that into the poem in each of its stanzas is to lose the poem's dramatic confrontation with the speaker's own loss of the past and the power of memory to overcome time. The speaker can remember at the instigation of the swans what his experiences were when he previously encountered them, he cannot re-experience his original impression. For him, therefore, they have not escaped from time, they have not become a transcendent image, and his only hope is that they will find suitable eyes elsewhere; that the transcendence they seemed to offer him but which has failed exists elsewhere, even if not for him.

Both these poems balance loss against recovery; the recovery is slight, a pointer only towards a possibility of renewal, but the forms they use, in one the mythic narrative, in the other the meditative soliloquy upon a landscape, are held in tension with their content. The mythic narrative points towards the eternal transcendence of its characters though its story denies any connection between them and the world of time in which poems are created; the soliloquy is about failure and loss, about a world reduced to
the personal, but its focus is the potentiality of transcendence offered, even if since unfulfilled, by the birds. The assertion in each of them is of a continuity which defies the break up of life within which the poet is trapped; in the first it is the break-up of the social world, with its consequent loss of connection with the past, in the second it is the break up of the personal world, again depriving the speaker of any sense of unity between past and present. In this context Yeats wrote a group of poems, or perhaps more accurately, placed a group of poems in Collected Poems, which are an assertion of the need for the outstanding individual to stand alone, to accept his or her separation from the community. In this group I would include 'Paudeen', 'An Appointment', 'A Coat', and 'An Irish Airman'. In each the essential awareness is that urged upon Lady Gregory in 'To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing':

Bred to a harder thing
Than Triumph, turn away
And like a laughing string
Whereon mad fingers play
Amid a place of stone,
Be secret and exult,
Because of all things known
That is most difficult.

Isolation has become in these poems its own justification, and it is raised to an aesthetic ideal in 'The Fisherman'. The final lines of this poem

1 CP, p. 122; V, p. 291.
2 CP, p. 141; V, p. 317.
3 CP, p. 142; V, p. 320.
4 CP, p. 152; V, p. 328.
5 CP, p. 122; V, p. 290.
6 CP, p. 166; V, p. 347.
have often been offered as a summation of what Yeats was trying to achieve in his later poetry:

'Before I am old
I shall have written him one
Poem maybe as cold
And passionate as the dawn.'

That isolation was, however, I would argue, a blind alley for Yeats. It does not help to integrate the fisherman himself into Yeats's career as 'another mask or compensation', because the fisherman is the audience, not the speaker. What is important in the poem is that the fisherman emerges before us out of nothing, he is imagined - 'Suddenly I began / ... / Imagining a man' - and remembered continuously, 'Although I can see him still'. The isolation of the artist is revealed in Yeats's imaginative creation of his own perfect audience, but the poem's use of 'see' in its first line offers an imagined reality which is so intense as to remain a perpetual experience and not merely a remembered experience: memory returns it fully and not merely schematically. What is being remembered, it seems to me, is something of very little real significance: the suggestion that Yeats is really thinking of Synge makes more sense, because then he is envisaging an audience which is not merely isolated from the destructive currents of the time, but is also stocked with the appropriate associative possibilities. What is important is that the poem reveals in the poet-speaker a rediscovered capacity for maintaining an image as a constant impression, or rather for re-experiencing the past in the present. But it is an image, if we take it at face value, which denies the associative basis of art. The fisherman is part of no community, his existence is no validation of a communal mind upon which the poet can draw for the connections which makes his poems live in others'

1 Henn, The Lonely Tower, p. 75.
2 Henn, The Lonely Tower, p. 70.
consciousness: 'one / Poem maybe' is indeed all that he is worth.

The paradox of 'The Fisherman' is revealed by a companion poem (itself closely related to the associative processes of 'Lines Written in Dejection'), 'The Dawn'. It is not enough, I think, to see this as merely an assertion of a new solar phase in Yeats's career, the dawn banishing 'all the moon's imagery' to 'be replaced by a new "masculine" realism', because the poem's structure is in ironic tension with its assertion. Like 'Lines Written in Dejection' it demands a response from the reader which is 'lunar' rather than 'solar', because although it may desire to be 'ignorant as the dawn' it does, in fact, use extremely abstruse references to make its point.

The dawn may have 'looked down'

On that old queen measuring a town
With the pin of a brooch,
Or on the withered men that saw
From their pedantic Babylon
The careless planets in their courses,

but we can hardly make sense of their relevance unless we - and Yeats - are very far from being 'ignorant as the dawn'. The desire is countermanded by the actuality: total independence is no more compatible with the creation of poetry than was total absorption into mysticism in the 1890s. Each is the destruction of the relationship with the past and with the community upon which all poetry is founded; because the community has denied the role of the poet does not mean that the poet can revoke his participation in the community and remain a poet.

Most of these poems belong to the period between 1912 and 1914,

1 CP, p. 164; V, p. 344.
2 Unterecker, Reader's Guide, p. 139.
3 The datings given by Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 287ff. are: 'An Appointment', 1907; 'The Coat', 1912; 'To a friend whose work has come to nothing', 1913; 'The Dawn', 1914; 'The Fisherman', 1914; 'An Irish Airman', 1918.
which saw a sudden outburst in Yeats's poetic activity. The sense of independence and isolation might owe something to Yeats's winter residence during this time in Sussex, where Pound acted as his secretary, and they immediately precede Yeats's embarking on the writing of his memoirs in 1914, an act which was to reveal to him hitherto unrealised continuities between past and present and was to reintegrate the past as a living memory in the present. These years were also the years of most bitter attacks and counter-attacks surrounding the pictures that Hugh Lane wished to present to the city of Dublin, and it is perhaps not surprising that Yeats felt so much alienated from the community he imagined himself to be serving. In that controversy Yeats revealed the extent of his continuing commitment to a concept of the poet as the retainer of national tradition and, more than that, as the creator of perspectives in which the present can be judged against the virtues of the past. In each case, however, the failure of the present reveals the pointlessness of trying to retain the memory of better things. Thus 'To a Wealthy Man' argues the case for a living art in Dublin by reference to the court of Urbino, but reveals the essence of that Renaissance achievement as itself an active recovery of memory:

Indifferent how the rancour ran,  
He gave the hours they had set free  
To Michelozzo's latest plan  
For the San Marco Library,  
Whence turbulent Italy should draw  
Delight in Art whose end is peace,  
In logic and in natural law  
By sucking at the dugs of Greece.

Without such active creation of a tradition there can be no creation at all, but this is not just 'tradition' as a way of retaining certain standards or virtues from the past, it is tradition made necessary by the fact that in the

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1 CP, p. 119; V, p. 287.
contemplation of any work of art the mind has to be able to bring to it a host of previous experiences in order that it can have any effect at all. The perceiving mind must travel, in its reverie upon the given work, back to the earliest images of the human consciousness, just as this poem, in arguing a contemporary problem, travels back to Renaissance Italy and then to Greece for its images. Although what Yeats is presenting us with in this poem is an argument, the form of the argument is the same as the form of the aesthetic experience which the argument is designed to protect and sustain. The poem recalls the past into the present to show how much has been forgotten, to reveal the undermining of its own existence as an aesthetic object by the conditions of the time. 'To a Shade'¹ performs a similar act of memory, recalling Parnell to the present to judge its fall from the values of the past, though dismissing him in the end because the present is no place for such a ghost from the past. The poet enacts in the poem the memory which he cannot depend upon the reader having and then denies the appropriateness of that act under present conditions: the poem retains, therefore, by virtue of its form, what it dramatically refuses in terms of its content. With each reading an act of memory is repeated which the poem itself asserts to have no continuing significance. The poem announces itself as a particular act in history but transcends, by its own formal perfection and its own power of remembering, the history it submits to. Both these poems play upon the same tension between time and eternity: instead of a static symbol whose significances spread out into the past as it exists in the reader's own mind, we are given a statement which itself performs that movement, denying that it can, any longer, be performed by the reader. The act of memory

¹ CP, p. 123; V, p. 292.
which the poet can still perform is seen as an isolated one, as isolated
as the ghost it recalls to the present, and when it has been achieved it
has to acknowledge its own irrelevance. What Yeats says of Parnell's
ghost is equally true of the memory by which it has been brought from its
grave:

The time for you to taste of that salt breath
And listen at the corners has not come:
You had enough of sorrow before death -
Away! away! You are safer in the tomb.

But the form of the poem, the fact that this historical statement will be
read beyond the historical circumstances in which it is created, means that
the memory which is dismissed will be revived with every reading. The
memory which the poet gives up as having no place in the present is constantly
revived by the formal structure within which that statement occurs. The
tradition is preserved despite the fact that the speaker despairs of it.
Isolation in these poems becomes a locus of fecund tension between the actual
situation of the speaker and his awareness of his role as a poet, and there¬
fore as a preserver. What the man gives up in despair, the poet who turns
the man's complaint into art preserves.

In each of these poems, therefore, what appears to be a step back,
an admission of the failure of memory, is in fact a step forward, the
retention of memory, even if only in isolation. The memory which is
presented as memory only, becomes a living memory, an imaginative reality
in the matrix of the poem. Each of these poems, therefore, reveals one of
the essential patterns of Yeats's imagination, which is the dialectic of
form and content. What had been a theoretical, formal requirement of the
poem becomes a part of the poem's tactical presentation of its content;
the assertions of the poem as content are denied by their formal status.
Having given up, because of circumstances, an associational form to his poetry, Yeats presents the associational basis of his art in its content; the universality which the associational form implied, the fact that everyone shared at some depth in their minds the same images, having been lost, Yeats asserts the failure of ultimate value in society, but asserts it using images whose value his poem preserves. This dialectic, retrospectively, we can see to have operated throughout Yeats's art, in the suspended verbs of 'The Indian to his Love', in the narrative structure of the apparently 'symbolist' and therefore static Rose poems, in the mythic eternity which turns out to have temporal elements in the poems of 'The Wind Among the Reeds'. The dialectic is centred on the difference between the poem as a communication, as words passing meaningfully between writer and reader, and the poem as an act in which both participate through the patterns of association which they cannot help but bring to the poem. Because Yeats never commits himself to the dream imagery of Mallarmé, and yet accepts its centrality to the working of poetry, one aspect of the poem is always in tension with another, the poem is always balanced against a process which it cannot fully control but upon which it is entirely dependent, the process of the reader's mind. And indeed, the process of the poet's own mind is equally unstable, called in doubt by the conditions under which it operates. Without some external validation, for instance, there can be no certainty that the poet has memories which are universal or significant.

The memory which returns in 'To a Wealthy Man' and 'To a Shade' is social, and is embodied by the form of the poem as a living memory. The dialectic, however, turns that formal retention of the past into content in several other poems of 'Responsibilities'. I am not arguing, necessarily, for a biographical account of Yeats's development here: what I am arguing
is that Yeats's technique is dialectical. He not only wrote poems to form units in Collected Poems, poem balanced against poem as 'The Dawn' and 'The Fisherman' are balanced, he also seems to have written with a sense of how the formal aspect of one poem could be placed in tension with the content of another, as well, very often, as in tension with its own elements. By doing this he perhaps discovered, perhaps invented experiences which were subsequently embodied in the fictional biography that is his work. The preservation against destruction which 'To a Wealthy Man' and 'To a Shade' achieve for the memories they contain, is balanced in 'Responsibilities' by poems where memory returns as personally destructive. The achievement of an integration of past and present which is desired formally because all poetry depends on it is, when fulfilled, realised in terms of a personal desolation. Thus 'Friends'¹ is a deliberately formal act of homage, - 'Now must I these three praise' - which denies any kind of associationist basis to its formal structure, yet what it enacts is the essence of associationist poetry, the recall of the past as an actuality in the present. The poem does not use associational techniques, but by an act of memory the formality of the poem is in the end overthrown by personal emotion:

When day begins to break  
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,
What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root
So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.

Yvor Winters took exception to the final lines of 'Friends', arguing that 'Yeats ought to have been too old for such immature pseudo-poetics',² but

¹ CP, p. 139; Y, p. 315.
the point of those lines is that the experience is no longer the experience of a middle aged man, but the conflation of past and present through memory. The poet remembers the past, 'what she had', and that memory reveals itself in continuity with the present, 'What eagle look still shows'. As always in Yeats the word 'still' holds a crucial balance: does her face still have an eagle look, or is it that her eagle look still reveals something behind it, some spiritual quality which has been continuously hers despite time's effect? The line enacts the conflation of previously contradictory elements of experience and allows the speaker the revelation of a continuity in his own existence, reveals to him the 'root' of his own being. The revelation of that root, however, though a revelation of 'sweetness', has an effect on the poet which is hardly sweet. The reintegration of past and present is, personally, traumatic, though it is the necessary foundation of art.

'Friends' immediately precedes in 'Responsibilities' the most powerful poem of this period of Yeats's career, 'The Cold Heaven' and its power is partly a summation of the recovery of memory, both to the technique and to the content of the poem, though memory which remains destructive to the speaker. This poem has been discussed in some detail by several major critics, all of whom comment upon its powerful opening lines:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice.

Ellmann sees this heaven in terms of a comparison with Yeats's earlier versions of perfection:

The heaven which he now sees in vision is not that which he had imagined in the 'nineties, a pretty heaven of "embroidered

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1 CP, p. 140; V, p. 316.
“cloths” but a cruel and remorseless one of burning ice; for a staggering instant he beholds himself shorn of all his accomplishments and defences, with no memory left except that all-important one of love crossed long ago, for which he feels inexplicably compelled to take all the blame.¹

Bloom argues for a longer perspective on its significance:

The sky is a Romantic image of division and fall, of a covering that must be rolled away in the fullness of revelation ... Yeats stands beneath that Urizenic sky, a failed Promethean quester confronting the purgatorial mark of his own "fear and self-contempt and barren hope." Suddenly, unable to protect himself, he saw the cold heaven, delight to antithetical birds, but torment to the poet who could not sustain his self-annihilating quest for the impossible beloved.²

Robert Snukal, on the other hand, urges us to see the image as the particularisation of a more general problem:

The heaven of the poem functions in the same manner as all ideals. For if ideals, the belief in heavenly perfection, spur us on to great deeds, they must also, of necessity, constantly serve as a reminder of how far we have fallen short of perfection. So the heaven in the poem functions first of all as an inspiration or goal for the speaker, banishing all the casual thoughts of ordinary living (lines three and four), and introducing in him a kind of idealism that is proper to young men, but which can only make him unhappy in his current situation (lines five and six).³

There is much in these, and particularly in the last of them, that seems to me misguided,⁴ but the characteristic they all have in common is that they want to see the image in terms of a unitary meaning, 'the cold and rook-delighting heaven' means, or is equivalent to, one abstraction, one state of mind, one human experience. I do not want to maintain that the image

¹ Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 207.
² Bloom, Yeats, p. 174.
³ Robert Snukal, High Talk: the philosophical poetry of W.B. Yeats, p. 63
⁴ See my discussion of Snukal's concept of 'iconic significance'.
has no articulable meaning, it is evidently not meaningless, but its meaning may not be of a unitary kind. Its significance may lie exactly in its contradictions and not in some single term which lies behind the particular elements of the image. It is the clash of contradictory forces which we experience in reading the line, the associations of 'heaven' conflicting with those of 'cold' and providing no natural home for 'rooks'. Bloom translates Yeats's 'heaven' into 'sky', thereby removing part of the associative tension which the line creates; Snukal translates it even further, into equalling all human ideals. Neither of these, however, is the purpose of the line; the line is a perfect example of Remy de Gourmont's 'dissociation d'idées', which is outlined in La Culture des Idées:

Il y a deux manières de penser: ou accepter telles qu'elles sont en usage les idées et les associations d'idées, ou s'agir ou d'imaginer des rapports nouveaux entre les vieilles idées, les vieilles images, ou de séparer les vieilles idées, les vieilles images, unies par la tradition, de les considérer une à une, quitte à les remanier et à ordonner une infinité de couples nouveaux qu'une nouvelle opération d'association encore, jusqu'à la formation toujours équivoque et fragile de nouveaux liens.

It is such a 'dissociation' which Yeats gives us at the opening of 'The Cold Heaven' and its power comes exactly from the mind's grappling with the contradictory directions which are suggested to it. Habitual patterns of thought are dislocated into awarenesses which are significant exactly in not being able to be reduced to some unilateral meaning. It is unilateral meaning which is being denied by the poem and which critics insist on reading back into it. For all the pious exhortations that we should read Yeats's poems as dramatic statements, there is an insistent tendency to

1 Remy de Gourmont, La Culture des Idées (Paris: Mercure de France, 1900).
reduce the complex movement of the poems to the different level of complexity of prose statement. Of course, everyone knows that poetry is not prose, but there is still the tendency, one of our habitual patterns of thought, to think that there must be something to correspond to any statement. But what corresponds to Yeats's statement? It is not just that we don't know if this is an actual or a fictive experience, if we imagine the kind of experience it is the only scene which we can imagine is of a man out for a winter stroll who glances up and sees a cold winter sky in which rooks are flying. The object is totally inadequate to the statement: Yeats is not giving us a picture of heaven in opposition to his earlier pictures of heaven, because this 'heaven' is just the sky, but to see it as only the sky is to ignore Yeats's choice of the word 'heaven'. It is the conflict between the two poles of meaning which is the meaning of the line, not their reduction to some unitary statement or object. The form has been described by Roland Barthes in terms which reveal the centrality of associationist thinking to some aspects of modern linguistics:

... there is a whole area of contemporary linguistics which deals with the definition of words less by their meaning than by their syntactic associations, according to which they take up their position; very broadly speaking, associations between words occur according to a certain scale of probability: dog is fairly straightforwardly associated with barking, but pretty improbably with 'meowing'; even though syntactically there is nothing to forbid the association of a verb...and any subject. This kind of complementary syntax of signs is sometimes given the name of catalysis. Catalysis is closely linked with the special character of literary language. Within certain limits, which of course have to be worked out in detail, the more abnormal the catalysis, the more patent the literary character. Naturally, if one confines attention to the literal units, literature is in no sense incompatible with a normal catalysis. In 'the sky is blue

like an orange', there are no deviant associations between words; but if one moves to a higher level of unit, a level corresponding with connotation, the catalytic difficulty reappears fairly clearly, because it is statistically rare to associate being blue with being orange. Literary messages can thus be defined as deviant associations between signs.

We may not want to accept Barthes's limiting concept of the literary message, but what he emphasises is the extent to which literature creates its effects by introducing contradiction and opposition into its linguistic matrix, and that we find the opposition 'significant' precisely because it does not have a unitary meaning. Yeats, of course, is talking about something, but the something is an experience which is defined by the contradictory patterns of associations within the verbal matrix and not vice versa.

The associative conflict which the first line creates, in 'The Cold Heaven', is related to, or is the stimulus for, a process of association in the speaker:

> every casual thought of that and this
> Vanished, and left but memories ...

The poem does not detail the specific memories which are linked together in this experience, but reveals the process of memory as horrific. Memory returns as destructive imposition on the present, though for that very reason its living quality cannot be denied. The poem is apparently constructed on a past - present - future basis, the 'present' being the narrative present of the time of the experience described, though it is described in a past tense: 'Suddenly I saw'. This narrative past tense which we accept as the present experience as we read in poem or novel is so common that it is easy to forget the extent to which it is a convention, and it is a convention which Yeats undermines in this poem. The verbal structure of the poem is one designed to conflate various temporal sequences and reveal past and present as totally integrated one into the other. The
initial 'I saw' sets a temporal location for the experience around which the other experiences will be grouped:

And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light.

The original seeing of the sky leads back into the past, to 'memories ...
of love crossed long ago'. But that long ago is revealed only after the parenthetical clause 'that should be out of season / With the hot blood of youth'. We can read this to mean that what one does in youth should be done only for the present and so should not be an important memory later on; such a reading retains the apparent time scheme intact, but the parenthetical statement follows immediately upon 'memories', as though such memories in the present are inappropriate because of the hot blood of youth. In other words, the poet is not an ageing man looking back to his youth, but a youth looking back. The latter possibility is, of course, denied by the 'long ago' and the contradictory direction of this parenthetical statement suspends the temporal situation, doing so because the return of memory is so vivid as to entail the return of the whole situation: the speaker does not know at which point in time he is, because the memories are so vivid as to be present now as experiences, as a return of the hot blood of youth. The conflation of past and present into a single experience throws into confusion our sense of the temporal location of the verbs which follow: did he, as a young man, take all the blame, or does he now, in this moment of insight? The only answer can be both: the grammatical conflation allows us no other possibility. Of course, we can read it to be either, and probably cannot in fact read it as both except as two distinct operations.
of consciousness, but it is exactly that introduction of contradiction into our habitual patterns of awareness which gives the poem its power. The structure of language imposes an order on experience which another language structure, this particular poem, tries to break down. What we have is an experience which, in 'riddled', is the re-experience of a previous experience: the emotional shock of loss relived as though it were the return of past experience into the present, or the return of the speaker to a past time in his own experience, or, as the last lines suggest, the prophecy of an eternal recurrence of one's most painful experiences:

Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

The question asked in terror follows from the re-experience: if life can conflate past and present in this way, perhaps death can too, an afterlife lived not in the resolution of our conflicts, but in their repetition.

Ellmann is, I think, wrong to feel that 'as the books say' 'introduces a caveat at the crucial moment' because Yeats comes close to 'committing himself to a belief he does not fully hold.' The truth of the statement is not in question in that sense. The conflation of past and present comes full circle in 'as the books say' because we realise that it is because of what he has read of the afterlife that the speaker has seen the sky 'that seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice'. The cold heaven under which the speaker stands at the beginning is itself a memory relived as real, a memory derived from books about the afterlife. The relation between present and past only occurs under the accidental — but significant — pressure of a forgotten possibility of the relation between any lived

Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, p. 144.
experience and the afterlife. In remembering what the books say the speaker is only drawing out the source which made possible his experience, an experience we now see to be the undergoing in life of what the books had held to be true of the afterlife. The irony of temporal conflation cuts several ways: Yeats's speaker experiences in one moment both the future and the past; he is both in life and already, since that original experience, merely living out an afterlife. To have realised the source of the experience makes it tolerable, perhaps, but the doubt it leaves is not that the books might be wrong, but that they might be right.

The pattern of this poem, in effect, mimics the effect of unitary readings of the poem. The location of the source of the experience in what 'the books say' allows a diminuendo after the appalling climax of 'Riddled with light', allows a return to a normal, rational mode of discourse, but what the final lines imply is precisely a terrified apprehension that knowing the source of the experience will not protect one from the logic dissolving contradictions which one has momentarily apprehended. The end of the poem foretells the possible return of its beginning, a return which the poem's end cannot make any the less easy if it does occur. And the experience of reading the poem is the same: as we grapple with the associative conflict of the opening, so we resolve it in terms of the explanation of the final lines, but the use of word 'skies' instead of 'heaven' to describe the universe of the afterlife sends us scurrying back to that initial conflicting set of associations. The power of the poem lies precisely in its refusal to allow its associative conflicts to be resolved, although its discursive movement might suggest a possible resolution. The speaker's confusion, faced with the sudden apprehension of a world which no longer conforms to the patterns he had presumed of it, is transferred
by the process of associational disjunction to the reader, and any attempt to reduce that disjunctive process to a unitary meaning is a closure of what Yeats's final question mark is designed to leave open.

Despite a note linking it to 'The Dolls', the process of associational disjunction to the reader, and any attempt to reduce that disjunctive process to a unitary meaning is a closure of what Yeats's final question mark is designed to leave open.

Despite a note linking it to 'The Dolls', The Magi seems to be a companion poem to 'The Cold Heaven', turning the personal significances of the latter into historical significances. The structure of the two poems is similar, as Yeats's note perhaps reveals:

After I had made the poem ['The Dolls'], I looked up one day into the blue of the sky, and suddenly imagined, as if lost in the blue of the sky, stiff figures in procession. I remembered that they were the habitual image suggested by blue sky, and looking for a second fable called them 'The Magi'.

The conflation of direct, imaginative 'seeing' and memory is the same as in 'The Cold Heaven', but instead of working from the specific to the general 'The Magi' works from the general - 'Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye' - towards the specific image which sets the contradictory trains of association, and also the contradictory chains of history, the two becoming identical at this point in Yeats's career, in motion:

hoping to find once more,
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

Where, in 'The Cold Heaven', the speaker finds the return of previous experience destructive, these wait for the return of a previous experience in hope of an ultimate fulfilment. Their permanence is a sign of undecaying memory, certain that it is not only not lost by being past, and that it is not only able to return in the form of a living experience in the present,

1 CP, p. 141; V, p. 319.
2 CP, p. 141; V, p. 318.
3 V, p. 820.
but that it will actually be re-enacted in history, and the return of past experience in the mind will be only a simulacrum of a return in the greater mind that is the history of the world.

What each of these poems point to is the rediscovery by Yeats, perhaps in personal terms, though the personal progress as recorded in essays and in the chronology of the poetry was halting, but certainly in poetic terms, of the power of memory and with it the recreation of the purpose of poetry through association. The date of the latter poem is September 1913\(^1\) and falls therefore in the middle of a period of Yeats's life when he was busy in investigations into supernatural occurrences. There was the miracle at Mirabeau, the automatic writing of a young woman of apparently remarkable mediumship and, then, finally, the appearance to Yeats of his own familiar daimon, Leo Africanus.\(^2\) The return of the supernatural to Yeats has, of course, created many problems for critics: such mystical baggage is felt to be inappropriate to a modern poet even if it was necessary to the poet of the 'nineties. But the supernatural, whether Yeats believed in it or not, whether we believe in it or not, released for Yeats a store of memory and a connection between present and past which the modern world had denied to him. If spirits live on after death then the dead retain in living form the past that they have experienced, and if they can communicate with us then we too can share in that past: the past is not lost, its images are the images we find at the limits of our own memories, and spiritualism and the unconscious have the same relation to present existence - they allow us to tap a fund of experience which is extrapersonal, but related specifically to the person that we, consciously or accidentally, are. Through the supernatural forces which he discovers and charts in these years, Yeats gives himself a different way of connecting with the past. He no longer

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depends upon a community of the living, but upon a community of the dead: the symbol no longer operates as the passage between this-worldly and other-worldly, but as a passage between the living dead and the dead living. This world and other world are worlds in time, one containing the living and one containing the dead, and the symbol allows each to complete the other, though they remain separated in their ontologically divided realms of existence. The separation, however, is not total since there is continuity of the spirit that passes between them; the life lived in this world flows on into that other world where it works out, expiates, completes the work of this world before returning to it. We may take this as fact for Yeats, as certain belief on his part in the eternity of the soul, or we may take it as metaphor or as necessary construction for his poetry: whichever we decide, its emphasis is to the recovery of connection between past and present, a rediscovery of the powers of memory such that memory ceases to be accidental and personal but becomes again a part of a totality of human experience. The spiritualistic consequences of this rediscovery are worked out in A Vision, and particularly in Book III, 'The Soul in Judgment':

But knowledge of the past is not sufficient. The second stage contains in addition to the Dreaming Back and the Return what is called the Phantasmagoria, which exists to exhaust, not nature, not pain and pleasure, but emotion, and is the work of Teaching Spirits. The spiritual and moral life is completed, without the addition of any new element that the objects of hope may be completed, for only that which is completed can be known and dismissed ... It is indeed a necessary act of the human soul that has cut off the incarnate and discarnate from one another, plunging the discarnate into our "unconsciousness". The Phantasmagoria completes not only life but imagination.¹

What is divided in life is completed in the afterlife, but is, as it were, already present in life as a guiding force, one which poetry can reach in

¹ Yeats, A Vision, p. 230.
the 'unconscious' to create a common fund of experience. What the mystical patterns of *A Vision* provide is a justification for the fact that nothing experienced by human beings is lost: neither death nor history destroys what has been built up, except as part of a process of its recovery. If we have no awareness of such memory, still it shapes our purposes in this life unconsciously:

In the Purification (corresponding to the sign Leo) a new *Husk* and *Passionate Body* take the place of the old; made from the old, yet, as it were, pure. All memory has vanished, the *Spirit* no longer knows what its name has been, it is at last free and in relation to *Spirits* free like itself. Though the new *Husk* and *Mask* have been born, they do not appear, they are subordinate to the *Celestial Body*. The *Spirit* must substitute for the *Celestial Body*, seen as a whole, its own particular aim. Having substituted this aim it becomes self-shaping, self-moving, plastic to itself, as that self has been shaped by past lives.¹

Rebirth of the new thus necessarily embodies the purposes of the old: though all memory has vanished, the self that is created is one 'shaped by past lives'. Beyond the boundaries of our own activities there are thus multitudinous activities which guide the shape of our lives: the associationist description of the psyche has become a description of the ontology of the universe. The individual psychic 'deaths' which structure the pattern of our thinking, occasionally revealing to us some lost image we had not realised had ever been a part of our memory, macrocosmically becomes the series of deaths through which our spirit has passed in order to reach our present state.

In this new community the problem of relating personal to universal disappears: the personal only exists as a process of winnowing experience into a universal pattern which will allow an absorption into the totality.

The personal associations of the individual mind are therefore justified, but are given their particular significance where they shape themselves to the opposition of their daimon, some spirit with a special affinity to the soul because it completes the pattern of that soul's limited personal existence. The community of the dead is not merely, however, an impersonal community of spirits: it is also the community of one's own dead, the dead who live in one's blood -

Merchant and scholar who have left me blood
That has not passed through any huckster's loin

and who give Yeats back a sense of specific community, of relationship with Ireland. These dead mediate, as it were, between the personal life and the universal life of the spirits: they are a community of memory; part of an Ireland that is acknowledged as dead, but which is no longer, because dead, divorced from the present. The recovery of a trans-individual memory that transcends the particular failures and sufferings of the individual is celebrated in 'Under Saturn', from 'Michael Robartes and the Dancer', which is the first collection written with a complete sense of recovered memory behind its poems. The personal basis of the poem, an assurance to Mrs Yeats that her husband's state of mind is not based on the loss of his first and most important love, leads outwards to an assertion of the significance of what Yeats has learned through his wife's automatic writing - 'the wisdom that you brought, / The comfort that you made' - and its relation to the life he has lived:

Although my wits have gone
On a fantastic ride, my horse's flanks are spurred

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1 CP, p. 113.
By childish memories of an old cross Pollexfen,
And of a Middleton, whose name you never heard,
And of a red-haired Yeats whose looks, although he died
Before my time, seem like a vivid memory.
You heard that labouring man who had served my people. He said
Upon the open road, near to the Sligo quay -
No, no, not said, but cried it out - 'You have come again,
And surely after twenty years it was time to come,'
I am thinking of a child's vow sworn in vain
Never to leave that valley his fathers called their home.

The rediscovery of a local community through an extension of memory, the
memory of, for instance, a man of his own family whom he had never seen,
and the memory of the old man who shouts to him on the road, may reveal
wasted years spent in isolation from the community, but it does point to
a new sense of its persistence, a recovery of its significance, which is,
in part, provided by the experience of the 'fantastic ride'. Even that,
however, has its impulse in memory: the child's memory has led him outwards
from the 'valley his fathers called their home' and brings him back to it.
A circle is complete,¹ though its completion is partly a denial of what
the child had hoped for.

III  'Flames begotten of flames.'

Loss and recovery are thus realised as balanced in a new way: loss
is the necessary condition of a life lived in time and under the imposition
of forces which one does not control, but the loss is not final. At each
stage of life and at each level of existence what is lost is stored for the
future: the accidents of this life are repeated and purified in the after
life, exactly as the elements of art are repeated and purified by later art -

¹ Cf. A Vision, p. 236: 'Neither the Phantasmagoria, nor the Purification,
nor any other state between death and birth should be considered as a
reward or paradise. Neither between death and birth nor between birth
and death can the soul find more than momentary happiness; its object
is to pass rapidly round its circle and find freedom from that circle.'
We can deliberately refashion our characters, but not our painting or our poetry. If our characters also were not unconsciously refashioned so completely by the unfolding of the logical energies of art, that even simple things have in the end a new aspect in our eyes, the arts would not be among those things that return for ever. The ballads that Bishop Percy gathered returned in the Ancient Mariner, and the delight in the world of old Greek sculptors sprang into more delicate loveliness in that archaistic head of the young athlete down the long corridor to your left hand as you go into the British Museum.

The feelings about the return of art in new forms which Yeats could establish as an empirical fact in 1906 could only be given an ultimate validation when it could be seen, ten years later, as part of a process in which the individual imagination itself is made and remade through its appearances and disappearances in time. The pattern which Yeats had been able to see in art is repeated in life and life and art thus cease to be divorced one from the other. The ontological division between this world and transcendent, between art and life becomes a dialectical movement between them, not a total opposition between them. The symbol is no longer a way gesturing towards the other, or allowing the mind a passage into the other: the symbol, in A Vision, is the totality which integrates the dialectically related elements of experience. The symbol is no longer an individual object seen in a particular set of relationships, as the Rose was, but a pattern which integrates the elements of experience - the pattern of the gyres, the pattern of A Vision itself. The symbol is not something linking two mutually exclusive realms of existence, but revealing the harmony between them; it embraces all the dialectical oppositions and reveals their essential unity. The dancer is the symbol of this integrated condition of symbolism: she does not point beyond herself but points to herself:

1 'Discoveries', E&I, pp. 289-90.
O little did they care who danced between,
And little she by whom her dance was seen
So she had outdanced thought.
Body perfection brought,

For what but eye and ear silence the mind
With the minute particulars of mankind?
Mind moved yet seemed to stop
As 'twere a spinning top. ¹

The contradictions of the world are resolved by finding a focus in a single image, but it is not enough to see the dancer in isolation. The dancer exists as a product of the imagination which still poses questions to the intellect:

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?²

The associations which flow from the central image are still conflicting, but their conflict is resolved, not by the dancer's image itself, but by the fact that they form an overall pattern in the mind, and the mind then finds the dancer as the appropriate image of its own condition because it no longer discovers associations as fragments or dislocations of experience:

I knew that I had seen, had seen at last
That girl my unremembering nights hold fast
Or else my dreams that fly
If I should rub an eye ³

The total pattern of the universe having been understood, the dancer image is given as the single focus in the otherworld - 'For now being dead it seemed /
That she of dancing dreamed' - of the multitudinous patterns of this world. The dancer in her self-containment is an image of the mind which apprehends her, because that mind can now contain within a perceived pattern the whole

¹ 'The Double Vision of Michael Robartes', CP, p. 192; V, p. 382.
² 'Among School Children', CP, p. 242; V, p. 443.
³ CP, p. 194; V, p. 384.
contradictory process of the world. The associations the dancer image generates find themselves resolved at a higher level in the total pattern of the universal system, in the complete containment in the universal memory of the whole past. The dancer is the central point upon which a whole universe of time turns, but she can only be seen because that universe has been understood in its totality. The symbol of the system, 'the great wheel', is the macrocosm mirrored in the microcosm of the image of the dancer.

What has happened, and what troubles the critical mind so much as it worries at the meanings of these poems, is that in justifying his associationist principles, giving them ontological grounding in the very nature of the spirit's journey through life and death, Yeats has deprived them of associational significance. The mind must chart Yeats's own associations, not discover its own, in the face of the given image. In a note to the poems related to the development of the system Yeats wrote: 'To some extent I wrote these poems as a text for exposition'. In so far as they are texts for exposition, they refuse themselves to the associative processes of our own consciousnesses; in so far as we respond to them as images triggering our own associative connections, we defy Yeats's purpose in writing them. If we take the former line, we see the continuity in Yeats's thinking: the dancer is a dynamic image, unlike the Rose of the earlier period, but just as the Rose symbolised a state which, if experienced, would deny the poetry by which it was communicated, so too the dancer symbolises an experience which defies the 'pull / Of the dark moon and the full' within which poetry can exist. The poem does not give us the experience, as Mallarmé would have us believe, but records its occurrence. The image cannot be experienced in the poem, it can only be experienced at the end of a meditation by which

1 V, p. 821.
its significances are defined and which force it upon us as a direct vision. The poem tells us the experience is there and gives us an image of it - perhaps significantly - for Michael Robartes, but we have to make the image our own if it is to be more than a gesture. That making is what the system short-circuits: instead of only telling us that there is a significance to be found, the system attempts to explicate what that significance is; or rather, the poem can only exist as an experience drawing upon the discoveries which have been ordered in the system. Where the Rose was left vague, Yeats, in the attempt to defeat vagueness, not only gives us something which is, in itself, specific, but the specific relations which it is to enter into. The construction of the religio-philosophy of _A Vision_ gave Yeats what he felt history had deprived him of, but that construction of a system violated the associative processes which its existence proved.

The poems which emanate from the system have two quite separate and even contradictory functions: on the one hand the poem finds its appropriate associations in the elements of Yeats's own meditations, systematised in _A Vision_, on the other the poem generates its significances out of whatever associations the reader's mind contains. The critical explication into which so much effort has been put is an attempt to stock our own minds, quickly, with the materials that Yeats's mind contained so that we can 'properly' experience the poem. In fact, such efforts are supported by Yeats's own practice of providing notes to his poems and by the publication of _A Vision_, but they work essentially against the associative principles by which the poems are supposed to work. If we do have, at some level, a fund of common images then the poem will work without the explanation of exactly what they might have meant to Yeats; if we have no common mind then we will each create the poem for ourselves in isolation. The isolation of the poet who needs to create a system will be the mirror image of the reader
who has to create a poem. Our efforts at explication, in other words, are a denial of the validity of the kind of poetry Yeats is writing – except that Yeats never commits himself fully to the associative mode. Having gone to the heart of the crisis that the associationist aesthetic forces upon the poet, Yeats turns back, dramatising his own position within the crisis in a poetry which works by different means:

A man in his own secret meditation
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made
In art or politics.¹

The poems maintain a dialectic between a 'traditional' view of poetry as communication, a language that is a window between reader and the objects of the world, and language as association, opaque, turning back on itself and upon the reader's mind. The apparent, surface logic of grammar which Yeats never dislocates and fragments – as Eliot and Pound did – should not blind us to the extent to which Yeats's poetry has the appearance of fragmentation in our reading of it, especially in some of the great poems of 'The Tower' collection. We can construct a continuity out of the images of some of the poems but it is a constructed experience, which, I would argue, is in many ways a falsification of the experience. The problem is perhaps analogous to that of cubist painting: the cubist painting offers us an object seen in multiple perspectives rather than in a single perspective and is, therefore, a much more total version of the object than any single perspective can provide. And yet the experience we have of that intellectually total object is of discontinuity, fragmentation rather than totality. Yeats's systematising gives us an apparently total way of seeing his poems, but the experience of the poems is of discontinuity rather than unity. That the fragmentation proceeds from an argument of unity does not make it united,

¹ 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', CP, p. 232; V, p. 428.
except in so far as we ourselves, in reading, transform the images into a unity: 'it is something in our own eyes that makes us see them as all transcendence'.

The problems of the associative tensions in Yeats's poetry in the period around the writing of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and *A Vision* leads us in two different directions, related but opposed as indeed, given Yeats's dialectical turn of mind, they should be. It is in the oppositions and reconciliations of these two modes of poetry that the associationist principle in Yeats's work comes to its climax. The first path that I want to chart is that revealed by the group of great meditative poems in 'The Tower' volume, 'The Tower' itself, 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' and 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'. These poems share the same kind of structure, a kind that has been challenged by L.C. Knights:

And if the poems dealing explicitly with contemporary chaos are, in the long run, disappointing, it is for a similar reason. In *Meditations in Time of Civil War* and *Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* there are memorable lines and striking images ... but if the success of the poems seems partial and fragmentary it is because 'the half read wisdom of daemonic images' (which, we are told, 'suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy') is made to take the place of a deeper understanding.  

Even a more sympathetic critic, A.G. Stock, has suggested of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' that, 'taken as a continuous meditation the six parts lose all coherence'. Both these criticisms are a result, I think, of a failure to realise the nature of the poems with which the critic is dealing. It is a kind they may reject, but only by encountering it fully. The 'deeper understanding' which Knights demands cannot be given in the poem in the way

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1 Yeats's note to 'The Tower', *V*, p. 826.
he wants: the poem is precisely the embodiment of a depth beyond the understanding, because it is not a 'continuous meditation'. In each of these poems the structure is a formalised imitation of the associative process in the speaker's mind. It is not a direct imitation of that process, Yeats never gives up poetic for natural form, but it does consciously create a pattern with associative elements. The lacunae between the different sections of the poem are not the failures of poetic structure or of the understanding, they are the vacuum from which thought emerges and into which it disappears. The visual space within which the poem occurs, the white page from which it emerges, becomes the representation of the spatial consciousness in which images are released and concealed. Like the cubist painting we can see the disjunctive effect of this as an attempted totalisation, but it is a totalisation which occurs within perspectives created by a situated human being and which, therefore, can never be successful: we see it equally as discontinuity. The challenge of the imitative fallacy is one that this kind of poetry has often had to meet, but the poem is not just a representation of the creative mind at work, however formalised, it is also an accommodation to the nature of the reading mind. The reading mind is known to make meaning by travelling the paths of its own associations, the poem directs itself at this mind not only in the construction of individual images and metaphors, but in the construction of the whole poem. The tension between the different sections is the tension which the reader's mind has to accept, has to fill out from his own experience. Just as much as 'The Waste Land' these poems are a product of the new, post-War, relativistic universe, each section operating within terms which are inappropriate to the others, accepting no overall concept of their purpose.
'The Tower', for instance, opens with one of Yeats's rhetorical flourishes that succeeds in proportion to our awareness of its partial truth:

What shall I do with this absurdity -
O heart, O troubled heart - this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail?

Its asserted intention, however, -

It seems as though I must bid the Muse go pack,
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
Until imagination, ear and eye,
Can be content with argument and deal
In abstract things;

- is contradicted by the second section of the poem, which refuses to deal 'in abstract things', but, in reverie, recalls a series of figures from the past whose abstract connections are far from clear. The pattern of this section of the poem is microcosmically the pattern of the whole poem. The sudden switch to a particular location,

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
Tree, like sooty finger, starts from the earth ...

reverses the rhetorical and abstract direction of the first section, gives us a place in which to entertain the imagination's own 'sort of battered kettle at the heel'. Whitaker has suggested the relevance to 'The Tower' of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' because it 'contains the same initially perplexing fusion of complaint, elegy, and defiant assertion', but the second section of the poem comes from a more distant source, the meditation of Gray in the churchyard. It is from this precursor that we trace the process that will

1 CP, p. 218; V, p. 409.
2 Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 198.
send imagination forth
Under the day's declining beam, and call
Images and memories
From ruin or from ancient trees, ...

Of course, what Yeats finds is very different, not only in its moral tenor, but in the specificity of its population. But the reflections are held together by the same process, a calling up of the dead in the presence of the landscape of their life. What Yeats is discovering here are his own potent images; the images by which his own imagination has been formed. As he stands on the top of his own tower, he looks out at the 'foundations of a house', which are the foundations from which his own eminence has been achieved. The process of recall, as suggested by the implications of that word itself, is partly willed, but what it wills into present contemplation are memories which are only possible because of the community memory to which the speaker is heir:

Some few remembered still when I was young ...

Their entry into that memory, however, has only been made possible by a kind of creative endeavour, a purification either of their own intensity, as in Mrs French and her serving-man, or a purification by art, as in the blind poet's transformation of the peasant girl. Each of them exhibits the dialectical relationship of memory and imagination. In that first stanza of the second section 'Images and memories' which are passively in, as it were, the ruins and trees are actively sought out by imagination. What imagination finds, however, can only passively be there because of some previous creative activity, imagination is the 'serving man' that runs to do the bidding of a mind that has not yet spoken, bringing back as an actuality its own hidden thought.

All these assembled memories are the pattern of the place and of the mind that looks upon it, its own contribution being Hanrahan. The choice
of Yeats's own gift to the Great Memory is a significant one: the blind poet offers it a girl he has never seen, but whose beauty as created by his rhymes can drive 'wits astray',

And I myself created Hanrahan ...

That Yeats has not a woman to offer to the Great Memory is, of course, significant in the light of the question he will pose of his own creation in the final stanza of the section:

Does the imagination dwell the most
Upon a woman won or woman lost?

His own imagination had, of course, been most inspired by 'woman lost' -

That she had done so who can say
What would have shaken from the sieve?
I might have thrown poor words away
And been content to live.

- but that loss has already been defined poetically, the imagination given its form for that experience:

Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;
Yet, now I have considered it, I find
That nothing strange; the tragedy began
With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.

Raftery, the blind poet, repeats what Homer has done and Yeats accepts that continuity; not being blind and denied the sight of a woman he creates his alternative existence in Hanrahan, old and lecherous as Yeats was young and faithful. As they meet they have each had time to reckon the value of their own experience, Hanrahan reliving life backwards beyond the grave, Yeats reviewing his own life in the light of approaching old age. Yeats retains Hanrahan when he dismisses the other ghosts because of the particular memories which he brings:

1 'Words', CP, p. 100; V, p. 255.
Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan,
For I need all his mighty memories.

Hanrahan's 'memories', however, are a part of Yeats's imagination: the word conceals the essential relationship which makes Yeats's question to his own creation a redundant one. The specific relationship between Yeats and Hanrahan is the same as the general relationship between Yeats and the landscape: what is there is passively there until activated by his own outgoing imagination. Imagination can, therefore, only discover what is already the pattern of its own existence. Although Hanrahan was created by Yeats as a mask to his own self, that mask retains the lineaments of its source and will only be activated in response to the particular form of the imagination which calls it forth. Yet it is exactly the independence of his own creation from himself that Yeats needs if he is to know the answer to the most important question of his life. Hanrahan's return is ironic, because Yeats had made of him a scapegoat for his own situation,

And I myself created Hanrahan
And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn.

Hanrahan's passivity then, trapped in the web of Yeats's imagination, mocks his creator now, for Hanrahan says nothing. The dead have nothing to say because they have been called up only in proportion to their fitness to the imagination that calls them. Yeats put the relationship in the following image in 'Memory', again about the relationship between the mind and its primal experiences:

One had a lovely face,
And two or three had charm,
But charm and face were in vain
Because the mountain grass
Cannot but keep the form
Where the mountain hare has lain.¹

¹ CP, p. 168; V, p. 350.
The mind is formed by its experiences in such a way that no other later experience will fit once its shape has been established. Hanrahan can say nothing because anything he says is itself an emanation of Yeats's own psyche. It is in this context that we can see the brilliant construction of Yeats's double edged analysis of the past:

If on the lost, admit you turned aside,
From a great labyrinth out of pride,
Cowardice, some silly over-subtle thought
Or anything called conscience once;
And that if memory recur, the sun's
Under eclipse and the day blotted out.

Critics have tried to separate out from this passage a single purpose: either Hanrahan has failed, by turning aside from 'a great labyrinth' - or Yeats is referring to Maud Gonne. The division, however, is unnecessary: Hanrahan's mighty memories are Yeats's imaginings and Yeats's imaginings are based on his own memories. The structure of two minds is the same, though they face in opposite directions. Hanrahan may have turned aside, but from what? It depends upon our interpretation of 'labyrinth' in the previous stanza and 'great labyrinth' in the final stanza. Hanrahan turned aside from the labyrinth of loss, from the exploration of his own being as expressed by the workings of his own imagination on what has been lost; Yeats turned aside from the 'great labyrinth' of another's being in not winning, perhaps in not wanting to win, Maud. For each of them memory is destructive: for Yeats because it brings back what he never attained, for Hanrahan because it brings back what he did attain, and which, therefore, destroyed the poetic purpose Yeats's loss allowed. Hanrahan and Yeats divide between them the world of imagination and memory, the world of action and passivity, of attainment and loss, but so divide it because one has created the other to

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1 See, for instance, Unterecker, Reader's Guide, p. 175; Bloom, Yeats, p. 351; Dudley Young, Out of Ireland, p. 142.
perform this doubling of his own personality, a doubling by which neither can be satisfied.

The first section of 'The Tower' reveals to us a situation in the present from which there is no escape, old age, but one which is made absurd by the retention of youthful imagination; the second reveals the shape of the past, from which, equally, there is no escape. Those ghosts which seem to have achieved an independent existence in fact are the mirror of one's own consciousness, suffering the divisions and torments of that consciousness. Section three explores the future, for which there is apparently still an element of choice:

I choose upstanding men
That climb the streams until
The fountain leap.

Choice, however, is merely the past imposing on the future:

I leave both faith and pride
To young upstanding men
Climbing the mountain-side,
That under bursting dawn
They may drop a fly;
Being of that metal made
Till it was broken by
This sedentary trade.

Independence, likewise, turns out in the logic of the images, to be isolation: the pride that he leaves, the pride 'of people that were / Bound neither to Cause nor to state' subsides into the pride of the dying swan; the mockery of Plotinus' and Plato's thought is based on the fact that 'Death and life were not / Till man made up the whole' and therefore his willed assertion of afterlife - 'being dead, we rise / Dream and so create / Translunar Paradise' - is itself merely the imposition of selfhood upon the universe. In this final section the poem divides against itself constantly, unable after the recall of the ghosts to find anything that is not an image of self,
'a superhuman / Mirror resembling dream'. Because the whole nature of imagination is based on memory it can never escape the pattern of its own experience. The final section of 'The Tower' has been criticised as a falling off from the achievement of the earlier parts, but it has to be read dramatically, as a voice seeking a resting place in 'will', an act towards the future undetermined by the past, and failing. It can only find rest from its own hectic rhythms in an image whose significance eludes us in the multiplicity of its associative connections, a multiplicity created by a deliberate grammatical disjunction and the location of a particular image in an isolated space within the poem:

As at the loophole there
The daws chatter and scream,
And drop twigs layer upon layer.
When they have mounted up,
The mother bird will rest
On their hollow top,
And so warm her wild nest.

The 'loophole' is exactly that: the speaker escapes from his 'Mirror resembling dream' through a loophole in the argument, but one which cannot be understood in terms of the argument: its self-enclosed nature gives it the completion that the 'mirror resembling dream' can never have, because it offers generation, renewal of the active life. Such renewal is not available to the poet, though he wills it upon his fishermen. The poem finds its rest in the end partly through will turning back upon its own source:

Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school.

1 See, for instance, Bloom, Yeats, pp. 351-2: 'Here the poem is in decline, and its celebration of "upstanding men" for their pre-dawn fishing expeditions is rather inappropriate if not silly.' Dudley Young comes to a similar conclusion: 'The poem's final section is marred by ill-tempered rant, and signally fails to resolve or even acknowledge the profound and moving testimony which precedes it.' (Out of Ireland, p. 142).
The force of 'make' reveals the stress under which such achievement can be reached, and in the conclusion that force is revealed as self-conscious evasion, all the evils of age being made to

Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades,
Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.

'Seem' takes all the force in my reading of this: the poem dies away beautifully but aware that its acceptance is based on a force of will - 'make', 'compelling' - that cannot be allowed to slacken as the verse slackens.

Whitaker believes that in the third section,

Having dramatically vindicated the imagination in the face of all that is temporal, having seen also that anxious possession of created and known is a bar to further creation and exploration, he may now rest in a more serene faith in the independence of the imagination and in a "pride" that is not the ego's apprehensive desire to possess and dominate but the whole being's sense of creative giving.

But the third section is an emptying of the poet of everything he has, contradictions as well: it is a self-made death, an escape from life by giving away - not 'creative giving' - his whole self, so that his soul will no longer be bounded by its past and can, therefore, deliberately acquire a new past from some 'learned school' that will allow it to accept with equanimity the losses it may suffer from. They will cause no suffering because they will no longer be loss, all that attached them to the self having been evacuated as the self detaches itself from its past. That self-made death, however, is a 'death in life', creativity given over to its own destruction because what it works upon, memory, attaches it to its own past and therefore to suffering.

Of course, what I have given here is something that comes close to a

1 Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 198.
discursive reading of the poem, which is in itself a willed making of the poem according to patterns that it refuses. The poem is not a logically developing argument, it is no philosophe following the course of reason, but a caged beast in a world of mirrors. It is a series of gestures in different perspectives whose integration is a denial of their essence. There is a surface logic to the poem - present, past, future - as there is a surface of grammatical coherence to its sentences, but at each stage the elements of the poem emerge from an abyss which is unknowable. We can construct a structure to link together the particular images: but why those images? The relationship between Mrs French and the fishermen will always escape from our ultimate observation, because the relationship exists as the emanation of a process of memory and association the traces of which have necessarily disappeared. This does not mean that they are not meaningful, but their meanings are of multiple kinds, and like the particle of which, according to Heisenberg, we can know either its speed or its location but not both, one aspect at least of its connections escapes our view whenever we look at it. If we construct a logic of the poem that holds it together, we fail to come to terms with its disjunctions, with its own failure to achieve an ultimate pattern from past experience; if we concentrate on the associative potentialities of its interconnections, we lose the logical structure by which its poetic disjunctions are held in place. The poem explores a relativity with which our criticism has not come to terms, being committed to a logic which poetry has abandoned.

I want to look now at one more poem of this kind, a kind which, I want to suggest, is the summation of Yeats's development as an associationist poet. It is a poetry which uses traditional modes, but in a disjunctive way, those modes being themselves a part of its structure of memory. What Yeats says of the 'moods' in an essay of 1895 is true of his poetry in 1920: 'and if
it [poetry] uses argument, theory, erudition, observation, and seems to grow hot in assertion or denial, it does so only to make us partakers at the banquet of the moods'. Yeats uses style and technique as a part of 'the banquet' and not as elements in a formal argument. The poem I want to look at is 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', a poem which, like so many others in the modern canon, not least 'The Waste Land', we have got used to rather than come to understand. The fact of this is, I think, evident from the amount of annotation it requires: we need to know something of Irish history, of Greek sculpture - and, if Whitaker is right, of Pater's attitude to Greek sculpture and Thucydides;¹ we need not be put off by not knowing about Loie Fuller, but we have to have a fair grasp of elements of Platonism, and we need to know about the daughters of Herodias - Symons, Pater, Mallarmé, Heine, Jacob Grimm and Charles Leland are relevant here, again according to Whitaker² - and, finally, we have to be familiar with fourteenth century Irish witchcraft. For a poem of only 130 lines it is a fairly daunting list. What is it we do, though, when we track down such a set of connections? Are we really providing information which clarifies the poem, or are we merely substituting one set of ignorances for another: unless we know all these things, does it help us to know enough about them to think we know them in the poem? What this kind of analysis amounts to, I would suggest, is not an analysis of the poem, but an analysis of what is not open to our inspection, Yeats's own associative processes. There is a description in one of Freud's lectures which comes close to the kind of thing we do in tracking down the sources of a poem like this. Freud

¹ Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 223.
² Ibid.
divides the dream into manifest and latent, the one is what is given directly in the process of dreaming, the other what we want to get at in analysis.

Freud's procedure is as follows:

... we ask the dreamer, too, to free himself from the impression of the manifest dream, to divert his attention from the dream as a whole on to the separate portions of its content and to report to us in succession everything that occurs to him in relation to each of these portions - what associations present themselves to him if he focuses on each of them separately ...

... If one listens to these copious associations, one soon notices that they have more in common with the content of the dream than their starting-points alone. They throw surprising light on all the different parts of the dream, fill in gaps between them, and make their strange juxtapositions intelligible. In the end one is bound to become clear about the relation between them and the dream's content. The dream is seen to be an abbreviated selection from the associations, a selection made, it is true, according to rules that we have not yet understood.1

In the kind of criticism which is so often applied to poems like 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' the critical effort is often dominated by the need to uncover from somewhere a set of connections which we can presume to be Yeats's and which will integrate the manifest text of the poem. The poem, in other words, is seen as an 'abbreviated selection from the associations' though one made 'according to rules we have not yet understood'. The trouble is that so few critics seem to be aware that this is what they are doing; the structure of their criticism is itself a structure of associations which takes as the limits of its field the supposed limits of the reading and acquaintance of the writer. Scholarship is no safeguard, because we do not know and cannot know the associations which impelled this selection. Freud understood the nature of the difficulty:

At that point we intervene on our own; we fill in the hints, draw undeniable conclusions, and give explicit utterance to

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what the patient has only touched on in his associations. This sounds as though we allowed our ingenuity and caprice to play with the material put at our disposal by the dreamer and as though we misused it in order to interpret into his utterances what cannot be interpreted from them. Nor is it easy to show the legitimacy of our procedure in an abstract description of it.¹

Freud was perhaps overoptimistic in hoping that he could overcome the difficulty: he had to recognise that what the analyst analysed was not only his patient but himself. H. Stuart Hughes gives a graphic account of the process in Freud's speculations:

Leonardo is a good book with which to begin an analysis of Freud's only half-recognized assumptions. It clearly shows his self-identification in his middle years with the figure of Leonardo - as in his old age he was to see himself in the image of Moses. In his sympathetic understanding of the Florentine painter's bisexuality he reflected the androgynous tendencies he had discerned in himself - and that through his patients he was to find in mankind in general.²

It is this self-discovery that is at the heart of the associationist technique, since each individual has only his own associations to understand the pattern of the world by. Indeed, the pattern of the world is his own associations. Since this is the case, there can be no knowing the real nature of another's world, our associations will only be appropriate to a limited extent. The effort to annotate has its values, but it gives us answers in only one dimension; it gives us a cluster of possibilities that we may wish to maintain, but need not. We have no proof that Yeats's own version of his associations in A Vision is not corrupt, itself the product of some neurotic imbalance which deforms what it informs.

What then can we say of the poem? Of course, there is a lot in the poem that is not tied to an associative technique: the opening section, despite

¹ Freud, New Introductory Lectures, p. 41.
its allusions, forms a coherent argument about the relationship between what we take to be eternal, the achievements of civilisation, and history. History is always in the end destruction, a destruction we will with apocalyptic glee:

Man is in love and loves what vanishes,
What more is there to say? That country round
None dared admit, if such a thought were his,
Incendiary or bigot could be found
To burn that stump on the Acropolis,
Or break in bits the famous ivories
Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.

The historical situation of 1919 is, though, only the externalisation of the process of forgetting that we have seen so often in Yeats. Here it is not the passive forgetting of apathy or mediocrity, but the deliberate destruction of what is most valuable because it challenges us, or worse, because we have grown so accustomed to it: 'We too had pretty toys when young.' The concentrated disordering of the universe in the first section has to be seen in tension with the formal order of Yeats's description of it and then in contrast with section II of the poem, which gives us a perfect example of the associative process at work, making universal order out of its own nature:  

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
It seemed that a dragon of air
Had fallen among the dancers, had whirled them round
Or had hurried them off on its own furious path;
So the Platonic Year
Whirls out new right and wrong,
Whirls in the old instead;
All men are dancers and their tread
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.

Cf. Dudley Young, Out of Ireland, ch. 3, 'The Spider's Eye', for a description of this process from an essentially Hegelian point of view. 'The modern figure emerging from our story is a solitary and embattled individual, surrounded by a world he does not trust; and his cognitive ambitions already look decidedly aggressive. Whether he be philosopher, scientist or lover, he will himself admit that he wants to make something of the world, not merely observe its passing ... this figure may usefully be seen as a spider.' (p. 81).
This is one of Yeats's most explicitly personal references which, without outside guidance, we can hardly be expected to feel comfortable with. It is, however, false to the purpose of the poem for us to have Loie Fuller's dancers explained to us. The image deliberately invokes something personal and something, moreover, which, though art, is transitory and therefore unlike Phidias's sculptures, in order to reveal the movement of the mind from personal to impersonal. The associative process that leads us from the dancers and their ribbon, to a dragon, to the Platonic year reveals the way in which the general and universal can be derived from the personal and limited. The structure of the section moves outward from a specific instance to a general truth about the universe and back to its implications for mankind. But it is important to recognise that the specific observation has been already structured by the Platonic theory to which it is related. The Platonic theory comes first and allows the present experience to lead back into it to find its meaning. The process is thus not one of discovery, but an enclosed and self-justifying circle. It comes as the first movement away from the question of the final stanza of section I, 'But is there any comfort to be found?', but its comfort is illusory: the speaker is not outside the dance of history as he is outside of the dance on the stage.

A different image is therefore invoked in section III, one that can comfort because it offers a consolatory view of the soul's relationship with the world. The image is not left to have its own significance, the speaker moralises it for us:

Some moralist or mythological poet
Compares the solitary soul to a swan;
I am satisfied with that,
Satisfied if a troubled mirror show it,
Before that brief gleam of its life be gone,
The wings half spread for flight,
The breast thrust out in pride
Whether to play, or to ride
Those winds that clamour of approaching night.
The image again is self-enclosing: the swan is offered from some source as a mirror of the soul, the soul then finds in its own life and the life around it - 'a troubled mirror' - an image of its condition, which is swan-like. The description of the swan prepared for flight is illusory, the transformation of the inherited image into a consolatory gesture which is unattached to any real act in the world. The observer is still outside of the world, though he sees himself, through the image of the swan, as acting in it, even if it is in solitude. That image is 'the labyrinth' that man is trapped within in his 'own secret meditation': the image is a selective choice from the past which will satisfy the present. The same is true of the following stanza: 'some Platonist' is brought out of intellectual cold-storage to justify the solitude which the mirroring image has created. The self-enclosed soul is told that its self-enclosure is triumph by a thought that it has itself drawn from its memory, one that allows it to avoid the implications of

A man in his own secret meditation  
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has made  
In art or politics.

But such self-enclosure is just another way of not including oneself inside the world that one is engaged with: one's solitude is put on one side of the universe, everything else on the other. The 'desolation of reality' is yet to come, when that last bastion goes, and the comforting image takes flight and leaves the isolated consciousness within the world that it has deserted:

O but we dreamed to mend  
Whatever mischief seemed  
To afflict mankind, but now  
That winds of winter blow  
Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed.

This terrible reality is not merely the outcome of the fact that, as Whitaker says, 'the attempt at transcendence [is] a failure'; it is that transcendence

1 Whitaker, Swan and Shadow, p. 228.
is seen as self-deception, as the imposition upon the other world of the necessities of this. What the poem does is to apply to Yeats's own imagery what he had, so many years before, applied to the peasants of Ireland: 'We who have less terrible a need dream less splendidly'. The dream as a self-induced compensation is here stripped away and in the final line 'when we dreamed' does not only refer us back to 'we dreamed to mend / Whatever mischief seemed / To afflict mankind' but to all dreaming, to the whole process.

The poem comes full circle: the casual observation that,

The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

applies generically to all mankind; in section IV it becomes specific:

We, who seven years ago
Talked of honour and of truth,
Shriek with pleasure if we show
The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

No images from consolatory philosophy, but from predatory nature. All that is left is mockery, and a final turning in of the poem upon itself as included in the world, inescapably:

Mock mockers after that
That would not lift a hand maybe
To help good, wise or great
To bar that foul storm out, for we
Traffic in mockery.

The formal stance of the poem towards the world in the opening section, suggesting a firm grip on its own nature even as it contemplates a world given over to violence and destruction has here disappeared. There is nowhere left to escape to.

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1 Frayne I, p. 189.
What the poem has been doing, I would suggest, is constructing an argument which breaks down the normal associative patterns that we would expect from Yeats or to gather from his system; the dragon of the Platonic year may adequately represent some truth about the nature of the universe, as may the swan, but they are truths which are projections of the psyche in search of consolation; they are self-interested creations with which the speaker fails to satisfy himself. They are not the real pattern of the psyche seen in the external world, but the desired; the mirror is troubled not because it is mirror but because it is not being allowed to mirror properly. The subjectivity of the universal pattern is accepted by Yeats, but one cannot stand outside subjectivity and that is what these images try to do, to get outside of the real self which needs to be apprehended as a part of the movement of the world going on around it.

It is this self-recognition which the final section of the poem magnificently enacts. Dudley Young poses the problem that has troubled critics about many of Yeats's poems: 'What is remarkable and troubling about Yeats's conclusion is that it leaves us feeling exhilarated, not frightened or depressed ... is this poetry about hysteria or is the writing itself hysterical?' It seems to me that the answer lies in the function of the final image as the achievement, at last, of an unwilled revelation whose significance is not directed by the hand of the poet.

1 Bloom notes that the poem 'shows Yeats forsaking his emerging system', *Yeats*, p. 358.
2 'Swift seemed to shape his narrative upon some clairvoyant vision of his own life, for he saw civilisation pass from comparative happiness and youthful vigour to an old age of violence and self-contempt, whereas Vico saw it begin in penury like himself and end as he himself would end in a long inactive per se.' *Ex.*, p. 354.
3 Young, *Out of Ireland*, p. 65.
In other words, we have here no self-delusion, as we have in the previous images, because we have no attempt to moralise the given before or after its appearance. We are left with this image or set of images; their significance is unknown except in so far as we experience them within our own patterns of association. That the daughters of Herodias have this or that intellectual history is irrelevant, as are the particular relations of Lady Kyteler and Robert Artisson: the poem here achieves its associationist technique fully, presenting an image which is justified, despite its specificity, by not being warped by the intention of the poet who communicates it. We are left with a 'tumult of images' in which we must find our own image of our real relations with our time. In that image we will find our own soul judged: 'All art is the disengaging of a soul from place and history, its suspension in a beautiful or terrible light to await the Last Judgment, though it must be, seeing that all its days were a Last Day, judged already.' It is that judgment which Yeats faces in his image, which we seek by following the connections of the image in our own consciousnesses. The pattern of history which this revelation invokes will be determined, somewhere, by the patterns in some mind, perhaps a mind moved by this very image. That the image is terrible, frightening, hysterical is irrelevant: we have found our appropriate image in eternity. We cannot see the total pattern, we cannot stand outside, we can only find ourselves matched to this particular moment and be satisfied that we know our

The unwished revelation is wished because it ensures that there is a pattern, that we are not alone in the labyrinth. The calm, consolatory resolution of section two, the desolate failure of section three, are resolved in revelation, but revelation whose significance is formal, not conceptual. Each of us, in our own 'secret meditation', must test its truth, must discover its significance.

The poem can therefore be seen as a structure which moves through commonly explicable images, which are consolatory exactly because they are explicatory, towards an image which will transcend any of our previous categories of association and demand a confrontation, deep within ourselves, as to its - and our - true nature. The associationist movement of its individual sections and their relations culminates in a climactic image whose meaning is the associations it generates in us, the intrusion of

1 Whitaker reveals the search for associations that will make the vision appropriate in his discussion of this poem, Swan and Shadow, p. 231: 'It is proper for the revelation to include "something which is as unforeseen, as completely organised, even as unique" as this fourteenth century minor devil and his slave of passion. But our initial shock of surprise gives way to a shock of recognition ... Artisson was ready to take his place in the poem. Yeats himself had earlier suggested that he might be one of the Sidhe; and Dame Alice Kyteler was virtually a human daughter of Herodias, for she was one of those witches who, according to popular belief, were called together at night by "a spirit named Herodias". We are referred for the preparation for this 'shock of recognition' to Lady Gregory's Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland and to various books, read by Yeats, which deal with fourteenth century demonology. But the recognition which has to come is not from our preparation in Yeats's sources, but from the effect of the image in our own patterns of association. If it has none, we or the poem have failed: we cannot substitute knowledge for something which ought to be a part of our being. The preparation for the recognition is in the poem and in us: the image sums up what we have read, gathering all its associations together. Or perhaps we see in it a perverse, inverted version of the relationship between Yeats, art's son, and his patron: the observers of a new apocalypse calling from the past the initiators of an old.
the image into our consciousness as the historical events around which the poem is based intrude their violence into our individual lives. We can never define these associations in the poem because the superb full stop of the poem's ending -

To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought
Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks.

- is its announcement that there is no finality. The formal completion is in conflict with the essential dynamic of the image, which passes on into our associations to be resolved.

The power of this image is precisely opposite to the power of the dancer image. The dancer is self-reflective, and image of an all embracing unity within which the whole universe, life and death too, is included, whereas the image of Artisson and Lady Kyteler emerges from an unformed 'tumult of images' and passes on into 'the labyrinth of the wind'. We have not chosen them, they have chosen us. The dancer reveals the essential unity of the poem with the universe within which it exists, the harmonising of contradictory forces and contradictory associations; in 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' the image in the poem is of the contradictory forces which the poem sets loose in the reader's mind and of the contradictory forces in the history with which it is implicated. The dancer represents the unity of the poet's visionary mind in its apprehension of the universe; Artisson and Lady Kyteler are the poet and his patron seen in an opposite but parallel historical situation. They are the disorder out of which order was built - the order described at the beginning of the poem; Yeats and Lady Gregory are the order from which disorder arises. The flux of history, like the flux of association generated in the mind from those images thrown up by the communal mind - and Yeats refers his image to beliefs of the
'country people'\textsuperscript{1} - is endless. Instead of the self-reflecting intellectual systems which men have built up and whose illusions they accept - a man's 'secret meditation' - there is the setting loose of new forces that necessarily seem like desecrations of our existing order because, like association itself, its 'purpose in the labyrinth of the wind' is not the creation of an eternal 'master-work of intellect or hand' but a 'tumult of images'. We accept that tumult of images, however, only because the vision of Artisson and Kyteler reveals to us, despite their disorder, despite the fact that the former is 'without thought' and the latter a breaker of social order in her passion, that nothing is lost. The image that the communal memory returns to us is of destruction, but the fact that it returns to us is a sign of preservation. Destruction is made acceptable because the ontology of souls in the Great Memory inevitably defeats the desolation created by history.

The exhilaration that we feel in the experience of this image is an exhilaration that comes from the sense of security that it offers in its very acceptance of the violence of history. The form denies the content, since the form preserves what the content asserts will be destroyed. The image points towards the preserving power of time as well as to its destructive potential. Paradoxically, of course, the preserving form only operates by introducing this eternal work of art, Yeats's poem as a formal construction, into the decay of time that is the context of our associations with it, while its destructive content points towards the formal pattern of historical recurrence which makes any particular destruction bearable.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} V, p. 433.

\textsuperscript{2} I say 'points towards' because although the poems seems sufficiently emphatic Yeats is, as usual, circumspect in his own note on the poem, balancing affirmation and doubt on the knife edge of his rhetorical question: 'Are not those who travel in the whirling dust also in the Platonic Year?' (V, p. 433).
Thus even in the depths of a historical despair, in the context of a world in which eternity of art seems to be denied - "Many ingenious lovely things are gone" - Yeats's recovered sense of the powers of memory allows a transcendence of time through the workings of time. The recovered memory which I have been examining is put to its severest test in time and is not found wanting, and it seems appropriate, therefore, to examine with it, though Yeats did not pair the poems, his paean to the preserving power of memory and the transcending power of the imagination in 'Byzantium'.

Such enormous critical labour has been expended on this poem that it seems presumptuous to trample further over the ground again. My reading owes heavily, as can hardly be avoided, to the work of previous critics\(^1\) and I have nothing new to offer on the central symbol, 'Byzantium' itself. I accept Bloom's concise rendering of its complexity:

Yeats thought that Shelley 'believed inspiration a kind of death', and Byzantium is for Yeats a state of inspiration, a kind of death, and an actual historical city, all at once.\(^2\)

My only caveat is one supported by T.R. Henn when he wrote that he 'sometimes thought that the two Byzantine poems have been buried under a great mass of exegetical rubble, and that we may lose sight of what they are.'\(^3\) It will be evident from what has gone before that I regard the use of A Vision as a source for the elucidation of the images in 'Byzantium' as an unfortunate


\(^{2}\) Bloom, Yeats, p. 390.

\(^{3}\) Henn, The Lonely Tower, p. 236.
short-circuiting of the poem's effect, though one that Yeats has given us justification for. D.J. Gordon and Ian Fletcher note that 'we are to see these poems as encyclopaedic in the sense that they represent a compendium of Yeats' system of images', 1 but that encyclopaedic quality, if it is to mean anything, means that the range of reference within the poems is inexhaustible. This being the case, isn't there a kind of absurdity in chasing all the shadows which inhabit it through the pages of critical journals? In one sense, we feel committed to this exactly because we are not prepared to let the poems stand on their own account, perhaps because we think they would in fact fail. Yeats's theories of universal memories to which his images would attach in the reader's consciousness are not a sufficient bulwark against our own fear of allowing them - or us - to fail. Yet I would insist that this poem, like the great meditative poems, is disjunctive: that the attempt to make it a complete unity as it stands on the page is a falsification of its style. The depth of the abyss from which the images emerge cannot be met except in the depths of ourselves, because it is the abyss of a man's whole life, of everything that went into the making of an imagination and a memory exploited as though that was common property. I would like us to reverse Yeats's own suggestion about reading Swift when reading Yeats himself:

In judging any moment of past time we should leave out what has happened since; we should not call the Swift of the Drapier Letters nearer truth because of their influence upon history that the Swift who attacked in Gulliver the inventors and logicians; we should see certain men and women as at the edge of a cliff, time broken away from their feet. 2

2 Ex, pp. 359-60.
It is as such that we should see Yeats's poems, but with the past broken away from his feet and only our past between us and the poem. To track down passages that 'it seems most likely Yeats would have read' is to substitute the illusion of knowledge for experience. The demandingly disjunctive structure of a poem like 'Byzantium' - and even F.A.C. Wilson cannot account for all of its elements in terms of traditional, occult symbols - is demanding not because we have to find out what Yeats knew, but because we have to discover what it is we know. As a structure which allowed Yeats to codify his own thoughts, A Vision was no doubt useful, and may even have an intrinsic interest for us, but the limitation of the significance of the poem to the schema of the system is a denial of the form which it achieves so marvellously - and in any case has signally failed to completely unify the poem.

In saying all this I am not advocating a return to a subjectively amateur criticism and a refusal to be scientific. As Yeats well knew, and subsequent scientific theory has validated the views he drew from Berkely, the objectivity of science is a fallacy: what I am trying to

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2 See W.B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Gollanz, 1958), p. 236. Wilson, though much criticised, is more sympathetic than many of Yeats's critics in his use of background material, because he sees it as a living tradition which we have to make a part of our own consciousness and not merely as something to be ransacked for explanations to poems.
3 See 'On the Boiler', Ex, pp. 435-6; 'The ancient foundations had scarcely dispersed when Swift's young acquaintance Berkeley destroyed the new for all that would listen, created modern philosophy and established forever the subjectivity of space.'
elucidate are the areas in which intersubjective agreement is relevant to our experience of the poems and where it is not. Poems such as 'Byzantium' involve a deliberate appeal to elements of consciousness assumed to be universal: if they are universal explication can be of only a subsidiary relevance to interpretation, if they are not universal the poems are either based on false assumptions, which must seriously question their value, or they work by means other than those which the author had assumed. What I hope I have shown is that Yeats's conception of the symbolic working of poems was so tied with the associationist psychology that we do not need an assumption of universality. Indeed, Yeats himself was never certain about it, as is shown by a letter to Maurice Wollman that is quoted by Wilson: 'I don't want to interpret "The Death of the Hare". If an author interprets a poem of his own, it limits its suggestibility.' It limits, in other words, the extent of its potential associations and, consequently, its aesthetic power. It is that associative opening out in the mind of one or in the minds of many readers which Yeats's kind of symbolic poem powerfully achieves; that he was not satisfied with committing himself entirely to the subjectivity he had learned from Blake and Berkeley is evident from his own notes, explaining his poems. What that gives us signal evidence for, however, is not the need for further exploration along the same lines, but the tension between two poles of poetic value in Yeats himself. On the one hand there is the desire to communicate truths, defined as propositions about the universe, and on the other the desire to impart truths, defined as individual experiences. The tension is summed up in one of the last passages in 'On the Boiler':

1 Wilson, Yeats and Tradition, p. 48.
Of late I have tried to understand in its practical details the falsehood that is in all knowledge, science more false than philosophy, but that too false. Yet, unless we cling to knowledge, until we have examined its main joints, it comes at us with staring eyes. Should we drive it away at last, we must enter the Buddhist monastery in Auden's play and for the reason there given. And now comes my brother's extreme book, The Charmed Life. He does not care that few will read it, still fewer recognise its genius; it is his book, his Faust, his pursuit of all that through its unpredictable, unarrangeable reality least resembles knowledge. His style fits his purpose, for every sentence has its own taste, tint, and smell.  

A contradictory knowledge which is not knowledge, being individual, personal is what Yeats urges on us and what his poems demand of us, even as they and we are seduced towards more comfortable general truths.

The tempting thing about 'Byzantium', however, is that despite its surface obscurity it seems so closely related to the system that it is explicable point for point. Yet such explication has not made it a complete poem, as Bloom succinctly points out:

The function of this stanza (stanza three) has not yet been defined satisfactorily by any Yeats critic, in my judgment, and one can wonder how the poem would suffer if the stanza were to be omitted ... If this is one of the problems of understanding and valuing Byzantium another is presented by the sequence of the poem's two remaining stanzas. Winters rightly observed that "the fourth stanza deals with the purification of the entering spirits, and the fifth with their struggle to enter: as far as the mere logic of the discussion goes, these stanzas ought to be in reverse order.  

The problems arise, I would suggest, because the poem, as well as being a disjunctive associationist poem, also attempts to be an explanation of associationist procedures. It tries to offer us, in the one amalgalm, both kinds of knowledge, knowledge as personal experience deriving from

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1 Ex, pp. 449-50.
the 'taste, tint, and smell' of each individual image, line and word, and knowledge as a description of some propositional truth. The propositional truth, however, reflects back upon the first kind of knowledge, because this is one of Yeats's self-reflective poems. The propositional truth is the truth about how we come to have individual, personal knowledge. To see this we have to remember how Yeats's ontology of souls, divided between life and death as parallel existences, is based on the psychology of associations. The soul after death relives the memories of its past in the pattern of their associations, just as the mind out of time in the contemplation of a work of art is reliving the pattern of associations inspired by the work. The point is made in 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and Desolate Places' in the description of the other world:

This earth-resembling life is the creation of the image-making power of the mind, plucked naked from the body, and mainly of the images in the memory. All our work has gone with us, the books we have written can be opened and read or put away for later use, even though their print and paper have been sold to the buttermen; and reading his description one notices, a discovery one had thought peculiar to the last generation, that the 'most minute particulars which enter the memory remain there and are never obliterated', and there as here we do not always know all that is in our memory, but at need angelic spirits who act upon us there as here, widening and deepening consciousness at will, can draw forth all the past, and make us live again all our transgressions and see our victims 'as if they were present, together with the place, words, and motives'; and that suddenly, as when a scene bursts upon the 'sight' and yet continues 'for hours together', and like the transgressions, all the pleasures and pains of sensible life awaken again and again, all our passionate events rush about us and not as seeming imagination, for imagination is now the world.²

I do not think I have hoisted myself with my own petard by using background quotations from Yeats's prose to substantiate my argument: what I am considering is not the meaning of individual images, but a structure of relationships between images, a structure which defines itself in terms of the subjectivity of individual meanings.

Ex, p. 35.
The angelic spirits who thus make us relive our existence after death until it is purified are the same angelic spirits whom Yeats had invoked twenty years before in his description of the Moods, 'the angels of more modern days ascending and descending upon their shining ladder'; the relationship between inspiration and death thus becomes clear, for each is a reliving of the patterned existence of our memory through the associations generated in us by forces that come from an alternative or opposing realm of being.

It is in this relationship that the double function of Byzantium in Yeats's poem is established. It is the place of the most complete imagination, which is the most total association and memory, and of the purification of life after death, which is endless association and memory. The mirroring ontology of Yeats's system, making of the other world a realm which functions exactly in terms of the psychological processes of this world, is invoked in order to link the processes of artistic creation and of the purification of the soul after death in a single, fused location. The 'unpurged images' are both the unpurged images of the eye that looks on the 'real' world and cannot see the other world of the spirits, and the images of memory while still unrefined by the patterning power of associational recall.

The two images which dominate stanzas two and three, the ghostly 'image, man or shade', and the work of art, 'Miracle, bird or golden handiwork', face each other as separate but parallel transcendences of our ordinary world. The contrast between them is the contrast between the dancer and the climactic image of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen': one points to itself as a denial of all the processes of change, the flux of life, scorning 'aloud / In glory
of changeless metal', while the other invokes all the change of life and transfers it on to a plane in which an essential and repeatable pattern is observable: 'For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth / May unwind the winding path'. The shade relives backwards the experiences of life, giving to their apparently casual order the significance of an eternal pattern; the bird which, as Sturge Moore pointed out of its original appearance in 'Sailing to Byzantium', is still a part of the natural world yet by its changelessness asserts a transcendence of the flux of existence. Both are thus deeply implicated in the life from which they have escaped; they may seem to be absolute denials of 'The fury and the mire of human veins', but only from the point of view of those subject to that 'fury and mire'. The poem uses that point of view to describe the nature of these transcendent appearances, but it uses it only to reveal its falsity.

In order to understand the logic of the poem's statement in stanza three one has, I think, to see that Yeats is using the terminology of spirits in order to describe both the appearance of some part of the after life in this life at the hour and place appropriate to their interconnection, and that that description is also of the effect of the work of art on a beholder. The process described is the process by which art becomes equivalent to the soul's experience after death, a recalling of all the past to a judgment of what one is and will be.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flames,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

The final line describes not a supernatural flame, but the flames of art: we watch on stage or read in a book agonies which touch no one, though we agonise
over them. The complexities of life are winnowed into the pattern of art, the dance, in the condition of supernatural or creative vision, reverie, the trance. The supernatural spirits, like the memories of the associative process, are 'blood-begotten', and yet they retain no part of that implication in the material world, they have become self-generating, 'flames begotten of flame', the most perfect description of association that one could wish for.¹ 

What Yeats is describing, however, is not the on-going associative connections that we have in life, but the moment when the pattern of our associations ceases to be a chain and becomes a circle, the moment when our single line of associations is integrated into some higher unity in which an all encompassing pattern can be perceived, the dance which is the still and still turning point at the centre of a multitudinous but ordered pattern of memories. Seen as having the structure of a culminating moment of the associative process as its propositional content in this way, the connection between - and the order of - stanzas four and five become clear. It is not a contradiction in the logic of the argument, as Winters claims,² nor is it a turning back, almost nostalgically, as Ellmann claims, to the world of generation:

Yeats casts one of the many backward glances in his poetry, directing it here towards the life of action that the spirit or image is transcending. At the very moment that he heralds the purgative process, he reminds us that the purgation can occur only outside action, for there it has no power. The same reflection causes him, at the end of the poem, to express not his admiration for the completed work, as might be expected,

¹ Donald Pearce in an article entitled 'Flames begotten of flame' (Sewanee Review, LXXIV, 1966, pp. 649-668, actually uses the image to suggest the connections between Horace, Keats and Yeats; each, he argues, writing poems out of his predecessors work. The associationist schema would justify such a connection more fully, especially if we see 'Byzantium' describing the process it uses.

² Winters, Forms of Discovery, p. 217.
but his wonder at the spawning images, covered with the mire of experience, in which the work began.¹

Ellmann is wrong precisely because he mistakes Yeats's view of art: the completed work is not the golden bird, it is the golden bird which, despite its changelessness needs to be completed in the mind of an observer. Art is not the work itself, but the work experienced in someone's mind in the context of his associations. The poem does not turn back to the images 'in which the work began', but continues on into the images which it generates in the experience of it.

Several critics have commented that the turning point of the final stanza is the word 'break', with its ambiguity between 'rend' and 'release':²

The smithies break the flood
The golden smithies of the Emperor!
Marbles of the dancing floor
Break bitter furies of complexity,
Those images that yet
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin torn, that gong tormented sea.

The verb, however, is not only semantically ambiguous, it is syntactically so far removed from the completion of the sentence that the concluding lines stand almost as syntactic absolutes. As such they suggest permanence, timelessness even, a tone we have been prepared for by the suspended verbal form of 'Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood, / Spirit after spirit.'

The use of such locutions was one I pointed out as particularly prevalent in Yeats's early poetry, qualifying the descriptions of paradisal realms by revealing the incompletion of the journey towards them. Yeats utilises it again with a similar effect, but an opposite purpose. He does not invoke it in order to induce a poetically constructed stasis in something

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¹ Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, p. 222.
² See particularly Whitaker's analysis of 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', Swan and Shadow, p. 225.
which is recognised as, in reality, a place of change - as in 'An Indian to his Love' - but to reveal the process of change as, in its totality, a form of stasis. The world of time as a whole domain is as eternal, indeed may be more primal, than the spirits or works of art which apparently transcend it. The sea is the image of this primal world: it is eternal though each of its waves breaks against the shore, and the spirit or work of art only seems eternal from our point of view within the world of change. In effect, however, they are totally dependent for their transcendence on experiences in time, on the mind which, in the face of the work of art's stasis, comprehends it by its own processes of association, by the ability to 'yet / Fresh images beget'. The transcending symbol is not beyond time, but exists only in complicity with time; it needs the time it scorns. The transcendent spirits are thus, though out of time, effectively reliving time, while the work of art, with its formal stasis, can generate an experience which seems to be out of time, but can do so only by invoking the temporal process of the image creating associations of a mind in time. Afterlife, art and the temporal world of this life are thus brought together in a total synthesis by the poem, revealing not only their mutual interdependence but, in the final stanza, how the transcendent re-enters the world of time through the images, supernatural or art, which are unloosed in the perceiving mind. Whereas Yeats's early paradisal places were places separate from the real world, but flawed by their implication with it, Byzantium is the fulcrum for an integration of the discordant elements of the universe in a new and necessary implication the totality of which, and not any of its individual elements - even works of art, represents perfection.

'Byzantium' is thus a poem with a double structure. Its effects are
achieved through Yeats's associationist technique, driving towards our own memories to comprehend its imagery and its shifts of perspective, while at the same time it enacts a propositional framework, a poetry of direct statement, which justifies the associationist view of art by linking it with the soul's journey through life and afterlife. It brings these two forms of poetry, forms between which Yeats had oscillated almost from the outset of his career, into a unity exactly as it unites the antipathetic ontological realms which had dominated his work. The repetition in the other life of the divisions of this life, which I examined in the early poetry, remains but those divisions are transformed by the revelation of the continuity of memory between the two realms. There is thus the unity of association among spirits that Yeats had hoped for of his own audience, a closing both of the ontological divisions of the universe and the divide between the poet's associations and those of the communal mind, a common purpose established between poetry and the processes of history. In A Vision Yeats wrote:

I remember some spirit once said to me: "We do nothing singly, every act is done by a number at the same instant." Their perfection is a shared purpose or idea.

Through his mystical insights Yeats could share that purpose and idea, but he could not control or enforce that sharing upon a multitude of minds where no 'act is done by a number at the same instant', where no associations are held in common - upon the modern world, except by desperate and delusory political means.
CHAPTER SIX
YEATS AND THE POWER OF NAMES

Almost to a greater extent than any other poet since Milton - and possibly for reasons of a similar cultural clash between the intellectual language of his ideas and the actual language in which he wrote - Yeats's work reveals a predilection for the use of names with resonant possibilities. The locations and the cultures from which he drew names may have changed during the course of his career, but his ear remained ever ready to exploit the phonetic clash - and the increase in rhymes - of names drawn from other languages. Two examples will do to show the continuity and the change in Yeats's use of this resource:

The host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-Bare;
Caolite tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling Away, come away ...

Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed
By Oisin on the grass;
There sighed amid his choir of love
Tall Pythagoras.
Plotinus came and looked about ...

And of course Yeats's penchant for names also expressed itself in his use in the poems of his own friends, Lady Gregory, Robert Gregory, John Synge; of historical characters Irish and European, Pearse and Parnell, Duke Ercole and Guidobaldo; and of his own fictional selves, Michael Robartes and Owen Aherne. Titling of poems by reference to places is a typical tactic, 'The Fiddler of Dooney', 'The White Swans at Coole', 'Byzantium', 'Under Ben Bulben'; and the use of names in the titles of poems, though it remains in Collected Poems

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1 'The Hosting of the Sidhe', CP, p. 61; V, p. 140.
2 'News for the Delphic Oracle', CP, p. 376; V, p. 611.
in, for example, the Crazy Jane series or 'Ribh denounces Patrick', was much more common in early volumes such as The Wind Among the Reeds: resonant names in poems such as 'Aedh tells of the Rose in his Heart', 'Hanrahan Reproves the Curlew' and 'Mongan Thinks of his Past Greatness' were later revised to the neutral 'he'. Yeats was never slow to put his own poetic predilections to work in his art and it is the use of names and the naming process that I want to look at in this chapter.

Proper names have an odd status in language, they do not work on the same principle as other words because they do not in themselves mean anything. There is a certain set of defining qualities by which we can properly apply the word 'table' to the object upon which my typewriter sits, but there is no set of defining qualities by which we can tell that someone is called John or Bill. The names apply to more than one thing, to various people, but apart from their being people there is nothing to tell us what their names are from what they are in themselves. People have names, so a person must have a name, but that name need not be any particular name because of any qualities she or he has, and may be a name, even, which the person shares with a dog or a horse or even a mountain ("meet my friend Ben Bulben"). The problem of names thus divides into two parts: firstly, there are no qualities by which we can justify the giving of a particular name. John Stuart Mill, for a different purpose, offers the example of Dartmouth as a town at the River Dart and which thus might seem to have specific properties

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1 The importance of names to people's sense of their own existence has received horrific validation in our own time in the concept of an 'un-person': someone whose name has disappeared from all records so that their existence can no longer be asserted. Compare the final scene of Arthur Miller's The Crucible in which Proctor refuses to sign the false confession: 'Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another life! ... How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul, leave me my name'. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 124.
to justify its name. The problem here is that the answer is regressive, since it turns on the original attribution of the name 'Dart' to the river and, as Mill points out, the name will continue the same even when the qualities disappear, for example, if the Dart dries up and the town ends up ten miles inland. Secondly, names have no 'meaning' because they can be applied to any object: the name 'Dartmouth' suggests a town or place to me but I need have no specific images or definitions to go along with it; Bill or John might likewise have suggestions for me, of shortness in one case and fatness in the other say, which would be overturned at the next instance of meeting a Bill or a John since the names do not require these properties as part of their attribution.

Graham Martin has offered an analysis of proper names such that they will be consistent with other common nouns:

... how are proper names and common nouns different once we know their use? Once we have learnt to use 'Alexander' of one particular individual, is it not in virtue of certain attributes that we recognise him and use his name correctly? Of course it is ...

On the score of properties, therefore, names and nouns cannot be distinguished. There is a difference, certainly, but it is the difference between individuals and classes, not the difference between attributes and the supposed lack of them. Proper names apply to different instances of the same individual, common nouns apply to different instances of different individuals of the same kind. 1

The central point, however, is that we need to know the qualities or properties of the person whose name we are dealing with before that name can be meaningful to us. Names without definable properties known to the user or hearer of the name are meaningless. Russell explains this point in An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth:

When I say that an unspecified member of a class occurred, my statement is significant provided I know what class is meant; but in the case of a true proper name, the name is meaningless

unless it names something, and if it names something that something must occur. 1 This may seem reminiscent of the ontological argument, but it is really only part of the definition of 'name'. A proper name names something of which there are not a plurality of instances, and names it by a convention ad hoc, not by a description composed of words with previously assigned meanings. Unless therefore, the name names something, it is an empty noise, not a word. And when we say 'Tom preceded Harry', where 'Tom' and 'Harry' are names of particular noises, we do not presuppose 'Tom occurred' and 'Harry occurred', which are both strictly meaningless. 2

Names without referents are strictly meaningless, but their meaning is dependent, more than in cases of other nouns, on the particular experiences of the individual using the name. If I say 'Napoleon' there is nothing in the world to correspond to it; or at least there is nothing to correspond to it if I mean the Napoleon. The name is not, however, made thereby meaningless, since there are certain attributes and properties which I can predicate of this name: relation with Josephine, short, Corsican, Emperor of the French, defeated at Waterloo. The name names not a thing in the world but a series of more or less true propositions about the historical figure. The meaning of the name is the sum of these propositions: for a historian the sum of the propositions will be many more and more exact than they are for me, but that does not affect the meaning of the word for me. I have not made a mistake in meaning if some of my propositions are wrong, because there is nothing but another series of propositions for my meaning to be judged against. If all my propositions are wrong, however, it does not mean that my word 'Napoleon' is meaningless, only that it is a different

1 Russell uses 'occurs' for 'exists' because he is working in terms of space-time and not in terms of space and time.

2 Bertrand Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 30. It is, of course, fallacious for Russell to suggest that 'Tom' and 'Harry' name noises when they name no one: they are merely noises intended as names which in fact fail to name, but which, in philosophical argument, carry the same value as x or y in algebra.
Napoleon that is meant from the one meant by historical writers. If I take it that my Napoleon is the Napoleon of history I am making a mistake in attribution - like thinking something is water when it is an effect of light - not in meaning. After all, the numerous fictive Napoleons are not meaningless, though untrue.

The theories of meaning which derive from logical positivism and its successors have all had difficulty with the concept of 'meaning', and therefore with unreal and fictive meanings, because they define meaningfulness as verifiability or some variation thereon. In other words, a statement or word is only meaningful if its truth is verifiable - if it exists; otherwise it is merely emotive, like a growl, grunt, whine, scream. But in the associationist schema this need not be the case: a word whose referent is not known can be meaningful through the associations it generates rather than the referent it identifies. Thus 'Tom' and 'Harry' suggest down to earth fellows unlikely to be persuaded into becoming mere noises in the mouths of philosophers. That suggestion is the function of a train of associations which we have with the name, a train of association derived from previous experiences such as the phrase, 'Tom, Dick or Harry', compounded with a knowledge of the lower class characters in British novels or movies over the last thirty years. The associations, in other words, are essentially personal, though in the case of 'Tom' and 'Harry' there is a large area of social concurrence. That social concurrence, however, has its limits and the significance of the name descends from socially agreed associations towards vague suggestion towards a blank. Even the blank, however, a name with which we have no associations, which means nothing to us, is meaningful to the extent that we recognise it as a name: we don't take it to be a growl or scream or whine but a meaningfully intended signification. Thus when
we read at the beginning of Jane Austen's novel, 'Emma Woodhouse ...' we do not take it as an expression of emotion, but wait for the series of propositions which will constitute the character, the meaning of the name, for us: 'Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition ...' The name, as it were, creates a semantic space which we expect to be filled and which, perhaps, we fill immediately with associations generated by the elements of the name. This is especially so with fictional creations where we expect the name itself to have some kind of connection with the character to be filled out. Sometimes this operates by direct semantic application, as for instance in Thwackum, the schoolmaster in Tom Jones or McChoakumchild who has the same role in Hard Times; with characters who demand more serious attention the connection can be less evident - does Woodhouse suggest something natural, simple, but self-contained? Whatever it suggests the meaning of it will, eventually, be the sum of all the propositions about Emma in Jane Austen's novel.

In a novel the establishment of the relevant propositions is, of course, easy, since the author has such wide limits of space to work in; in a poem it is evidently much less easy. There are certain names which one can depend on having common resonance: Helen of Troy, for instance. But the common range of reference in Western culture is primarily Graeco-Roman, and the problem for all the Romantic nationalist writers of the nineteenth century was to make their own set of common reference points, to create a set of names around which the associations of their own nation could focus. There was, however, a much more obvious difficulty for Yeats, whose Romantic nationalism had to be expressed in a language which he shared with those from whom he wanted to distinguish himself. The natural tendencies of the language in which he wrote was to create associations which were primarily
English, yet he was incapable of committing himself to Irish Gaelic because it was not his natural language. Even the landscape of Ireland was not so different from an English landscape - as is, for instance, the landscape of Indian or African writers in English - that his mere description of it would separate him from English writers. His resort was to the utilisation of Irish names: he animated his landscape not through description of its particularities, but by peopling it with figures out of Irish lore whose names, by having no associations in English, would insist upon the alien quality of the poetry to an English audience. The names that Yeats uses in his early poetry function for an English speaking audience as semantic and associational blanks: they are known as names, but the 'meaning' of the name is purely its Irishness, the fact that its intention is to draw associations with a non-English background. When he was young Yeats seemed to have seen this primarily as an added attraction to English readers, as this letter to Katharine Tynan reveals:

I think you will be right to make your ballad Irish, you will be so much more original - one should have a speciality.
You have yours in Ireland and your religion.¹

On the other hand, one should not make too much of casual statements in letters which their writers did not intend for publication; less than a year later Yeats was writing to Katharine Tynan again to suggest a subject which would allow her to link her religious with her national interests, and implying that there was a particular obligation on a writer to write out of his or her local culture for its own sake, rather than as something 'original' in the cosmopolitan setting:

Did you read that delightful saint story in Irish Monthly called the "Rapt Culdee" - if not do, and write a poem

about it. He lived in your own neighbourhood at Tallaght. A great many poems should be written on him ... Do not forget him.¹

I am delighted to hear about the "Culdees". How do you treat it? Will you bring in local scenery? I hope you will do that. It would be a fine thing to write a poem that always would be connected with Tallaght in people's minds. All poetry should have a local habitation when possible.²

The connection between poetry and landscape is a traditional one in associationist aesthetic theories because each intensifies the other by the interlocking relationship which they establish. The landscape is more meaningful by being peopled by the memories of the art written about it, the art is more meaningful by being set in a landscape with which one is intimately connected. 'Meaningful', of course, in this connection implies the quantitative associative possibilities which each of them contain for the perceiver - 'meaningful' in a sense which would be denied, or reduced to emotive elements, by Russell and the logical positivists.

It is the meaningful connection between landscape and art which Yeats comes increasingly to insist upon in his art. There is very little landscape description in Yeats's poetry, his landscapes are always reduced to a bare minimum of emblematic elements, and this is perhaps because he assumes the landscape as the context of the poem's associations, as part of the poem's necessary completion in the reader's own consciousness. The landscape need not be there in the poem because it is already in the mind of the community to whom the poem is addressed. The blanks which denote only Irishness for an English audience are filled out with specific associations for an Irish one. Yeats's introduction to Lady Gregory's Gods and Fighting Men supports exactly that relationship:

¹ Ibid., p. 86; February–March, 1889.
² Ibid., p. 92; March, 1889.
When I asked the little boy who had shown me the pathway up the Hill of Allen if he knew stories of Finn and Oisin, he said he did not, but that he had often heard his grandfather telling them to his mother in Irish. He did not know Irish, but he was learning it at school, and all the little boys he knew were learning it. In a little while he will know enough stories of Finn and Oisin to tell them to his children some day ... But now they can read Lady Gregory's book to their children, and it will make Slieve-na-man, Allen, and Ben Bulben, the great mountain that showed itself before me every day through all my childhood and was yet unpeopled, and half the country-sides of south and west, as populous with memories as her Cuchulain of Muirthemne will have made Dundealgan and Emain Macha and Muirthemne ...

The countryside had been 'unpeopled' for Yeats when young because he had not known the legends associated with it; the countryside had been there and yet blank for him, as it was not quite to the child of an Irish speaking family who had ceased to know the language. He recovers it through an English translation which makes the landscape 'populous with memories' and therefore an appropriate source of poetic possibilities. For the English audience the reverse is the case: they have in Yeats's poems and Lady Gregory's stories the names but not the landscape to which those names are meaningful. Both are necessary, as the continuation of this section in Yeats's essay reveals:

... and after a while somebody may even take them to some famous place and say, "This land where your fathers lived proudly and finely should be dear and dear and again dear"; and perhaps when many names have grown musical to their ears, a more imaginative love will have taught them a better service.

The associative connection between past and present, between landscape and human life, is fulfilled, with all its implications for human values, when 'many names have grown musical to their ears'; when the names have become full of associations that relate them to the landscape and to people's lives they will establish a nationalism even in a place where the language has died.

1 'Gods and Fighting Men', Ex, pp. 28-29.
2 Ex, p. 29.
Thus the names in Yeats's early poetry are meaningful rather by their Irish aura than by the specific properties attributable to the particular characters. Like the Rose symbolism their meaning is entirely undistinguished: the name is a semantic space in which the reader can generate some association, but these are tied to no specific characteristics of the thing named. As in the case of the Rose the unlimited nature of the possible associations is, in fact, a loss of associative power since there is insufficient in the given to activate the mind. Thus in the following passage from 'The Wanderings of Oisin' - which Yeats hardly changed in the course of all the poem's revisions - it is the lack of content of the names rather than the ninetyish adjectives which, I would argue, give the poem its lethargic verbal texture:

Caolte, and Conan, and Finn were there,  
When we followed a deer with our baying hounds,  
With Bran, Sceolan, and Lomair,  
And passing the Firbolgs' burial-mounds,  
Came to the cairn-heaped grassy hill,  
Where passionate Maeve is stony-still;  
And found on the dove-grey edge of the sea  
A pearl-pale, high-born lady, who rode  
On a horse with bridle of findrinny;  

The names have only the vaguest resonance unless they have been filled out by previous knowledge of the Irish legends from which they are drawn, knowledge which Yeats could not expect of his audience - as is evident from the notes which he published first in Poems of 1895 and kept along with the collection throughout its revisions and reprintings until 1924. Most of these are rather cursory and Yeats evidently did not want to pre-empt his freedom to do what he would with his material. The note, for instance, on the Firbolg is longer than most but actually repeats the information contained in the poem itself:

An early race who warred vainly upon the Fomorians, or Fomoroh, before the coming of the Tuath de Danaan. Certain Firbolg kings, killed at Southern Moytura, are supposed to be buried at Ballisodare. It is by their graves that Usheen and his companions rode.1

Yeats's poem is, in fact, constructing the myth with which it operates, since the myth is practically unknown to the readers for whom the poem is intended, but treating it as though its characters were already well known. The justification for this probably lay in Yeats's interest in Blake, but it did mean that 'The Wanderings of Oisin' could not help but be vague, since the associative potential was not there for it to work on. Was this why Yeats put it in a group of narrative poems at the end of Collected Poems - so that the names of the characters would gather strength from the cumulative associations of all the other poems in which they appear? The privacy of the symbolism in 'The Wanderings of Oisin'2 was matched by the openness of the names: the 'romance is for my readers'3, Yeats wrote to Katharine Tynan, and the romance lay at least in part in concealing, or rather in the necessary concealment, of any sense of detail about the characters apart from their names. It is a tactic which was at one with the decontextualisation of meaning that is typical of much modern art, and which we find often, for instance, in Eliot:

1 Yeats, p. 795.

2 See, W.B. Yeats: Letters to Katharine Tynan, p. 68: 'In the second part of 'Oisin' under disguise of symbolism I have said several things to which I only have the key'.

3 Ibid. 'The romance is for my readers. They must not even know there is a symbol anywhere. They will not find out.' One wonders what Yeats's idea of symbolism could be if he really meant this; it could only have been that which was esoteric and private, for the symbolic possibilities of the poem could hardly have been taken as mere romance.
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting the candles; Fraulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door. 1

Eliot gives us a single context for each name, a suspended action which represents the only meaning of the name; Yeats gives us the names in a virtually unknown mythic background which fails to define for us what it is the characters are doing in this poem and what the reasons behind them.

A further shared characteristic is the ventriloquism of giving us a poem attached to a name, the name being defined only by the attitudes we find in the poem. Eliot did this memorably in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', standing at once within and ironically without his own character, but it is a technique Yeats used throughout 'The Wind Among the Reeds' in its original form. But again Yeats's names are unspecific and his definitions of them in his notes less than helpful except, as he himself admits, to 'students of the magical tradition'. 2 The names are attached as suggestions of 'principles of the mind' rather than actual characters and even Yeats evidently found the mental principles insufficiently differentiable to justify their continued use into Collected Poems. What the names do reveal, however, is Yeats's attempt to see his own fictional creations and his Irish mythic characters on the same level, co-existing in the same spiritual universe and each of them drawing the substance of their meaning from the knowledge of something other than the poems themselves. The poems do not define the characters, the character of the poems is defined by the associations of the name to which each is attached, associations drawn either from Yeats's own occult stories or from the legends themselves.

2 V, p. 803.
as they appear in Yeats's works. The title which leads us into the poem thus leads us as insistently away from it, fulfilling the dialectic with which Yeats's associationist principles constantly inform his poetry. The removal of these names - though they are virtually 'meaningless' - is in this respect at least a loss.

Yeats's early poetry uses names which are dependent on special knowledge of Irish mythology or occult lore, and depends therefore on special areas of memory in the community. As I have already emphasised there is a crucial loss of confidence in the powers of this social memory during the first decade of the century. Yeats had evidently hoped that where he used names which had very little content his very use of them would reintegrate them with the communal memory and thereby make them a living part of Irish culture once again. By his use of them Yeats was giving new meaning to the old names, meanings which would accumulate into a full set of associations available to the whole audience, the whole nation. The failure of those hopes led, I argued above, to the use of the comparison with Helen in Yeats's poems about Maud Gonne. The switch to using a Greek name rather than an Irish one is a sign of the failure of the Irish mythology to fully realise its associative potentialities, whether that failure follows upon or is the cause of Yeats's changing social allegiances, from the peasants of the West to their Anglo-Irish rulers, is hard to say: the two go hand in hand. That ruling caste, however, had its own mythology, a historical mythology of its own great achievements, and one of those achievements, despite his antipathy in the 'nineties to all things more Anglo than Irish, Yeats had had to admire, the men of Grattan's parliament.

1 For a complete discussion of Yeats's shifting allegiance between Gaelic and Anglo-Ireland see Donald T. Torchiana, W.B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), particularly p. 23 ff.
President, in 1898 of the 'Wolf Tone Memorial Association' and had written to the newspaper United Ireland defending himself against a charge of trying to take over the celebrations for a particular revolutionary party. The terms in which this letter are couched are significant: 'We were sent by "The Centenary Committee of Great Britain" alone, and had no purpose but to secure a representative celebration, believing that the memory of the men of '98 is a National and not a party memory'. For Yeats the significance of the celebrations was the keeping alive of a memory which united the whole nation, which was part of a common inheritance. It was the incubus, from the historical point of view, of a memory which was being gradually created by poets and scholars in relation to Gaelic culture. Only when all the forces of that memory could be united could the nation itself be united, either politically or in literary terms. Literary achievement, in fact, was founded on the precondition of such unity, a precondition which Yeats felt to be very close to fulfilment in his own time. Thus he suggested of the Young Ireland movement that its value was what it had left of itself as a memory to the nation rather than what it achieved in literature, an achievement undermined by the lack of appropriate memory in their period:

It is probable, however, that even if public needs had left the "Young Irelander" free to make a national literature, the season to make it had not come, for a national literature can only be painted, as it were, against a background of patient and minute scholarship, and patient and minute scholarship in Irish things had only just begun in their day. They did the one excellent thing, the one seasonable thing, that cried out to be done - they taught fervour, and labour, and religious toleration, and left their memory for an inspiration to the young men of Ireland.2

1 Frayne II, p. 38.
2 Frayne II, p. 35; review of Sir Charles Gavin Duffy's Young Ireland in The Bookman, January, 1897.
By the time that Yeats shifted his political ground sufficiently for the Anglo-Irish tradition to be his tradition, it too was a dying memory, dying at the hands of the inheritors of the Young Ireland movement:

Ireland since the Young Irelanders has given itself up to apologetics. Every impression of life or impulse of imagination has been examined to see if it helped or hurt the glory of Ireland or the political claim of Ireland. There was no longer an impartial imagination, delighting in whatever is naturally exciting. Synge was the rushing up of a buried fire, an explosion of all that had been denied or refused, a furious impartiality ...\

The lack of memory which had characterised the original Young Irelanders had become a vicious habit of mind in their intellectual descendants, as deliberate a shutting out of world of the real Ireland as the Anglo-Irish was a deliberate acceptance of it: '... then there is the patriotism of those who have grown up in the Church of Ireland, and that has its own special meaning - but in it there is always a choice'.

The elements of choice were, however, being constantly eroded by the failure of the communal mind: for the poet the names were becoming useless because they generated no associations of significance any longer. Yeats gave the whole situation memorable shape in 'September 1913':

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

1 'The Death of Synge', Autobiographies, p. 520.
2 'A Poet's Memoirs', Freeman's Journal, 26 Jan., 1924; quoted in Torchiana, W.B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland, p. 66.
3 CP, p. 120; V, p. 289.
These are names which ought, for the audience to whom the poem is addressed, to be full of meaning, to be replete with associations, but instead they have become the blank semantic spaces that mythic Irish names would be to an English speaking audience. Romantic Ireland is dead and gone because the last man to retain its memory to the full is dead; O'Leary was the memory of Ireland and now he too has become one of the forgotten in a world where men can only

... add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer ...

In the degraded modern world of catholic Dublin the men who ought to be symbols of the living imagination as much as - and more easily than - any of the mythic heroes have become literally meaningless. The names that were in themselves once sufficient to have 'stilled your childish play' are now lost. The name which was once a symbol is now no more than a noise: 'They have gone about the world like wind.'

Discussion of this poem has centred on the problem of the tension between the bitterness of Yeats's attack on the present and his application of the word 'delirium' to the heroic figures of the past. That term suggests a kind of madness about such bravery, but Yeats needed it because the men were not in fact Romantic nationalists. He had to insist on something in them that transcended an actuality which might well have united them to 'our old Paudeen in his shop'. That situation transcending delirium need not be truth, for the truth of the communal memory is an imaginative truth, a winnowing of the obscure nature of the real into the pure light of form. In 'First Principles' Yeats suggests that,

1 Ellmann, Identity of Yeats notes that 'Yeats said that he thought in writing the lines of an old peasant who loved to roll such names over his tongue.' (p. 143). The peasant, of course, is a part of a tradition of communal memory as the man behind the till is not.

2 'Paudeen', CP, p. 122.
If one remembers the men who have dominated Ireland for the last hundred and fifty years, one understands that it is strength of personality, the individualising quality in a man, that stirs Irish imagination most deeply in the end. There is scarcely a man who has led the Irish people, at any time, who may not give some day to a great writer precisely that symbol he may require for the expression of himself.1 Such a symbol, however, as he has already pointed out in the same essay, is nothing like the historical figure:

Yet Richard II as Shakespeare made him, could never have been born before the Renaissance.2

That making by the writer which transforms the historical person into a figure allowing us to 'know something in our own minds' can only take place if there is something in our own minds that needs knowing. Yeats's cry against his age is that he lives among men who need nothing, not knowing that there is nothing they need to know.

It is on this that the central irony of 'September 1913' turns: the irony of the poem is not the irony of 'delirium', an irony intended to place the heroes firmly back where they really belong, it is that Yeats's dismissal of the heroes at the end of the poem -

But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave.

- denies what it appears to assert. The very act of naming them preserves in the consciousness of Yeats's own time what he says in the poem can only belong to a previous time. The historical act of admitting defeat on the speaker's part - Yeats as the ordinary man - is denied by the formal status accorded to the names in the structure of the poem. The formal construct of the poem transcends the historical moment which it encapsulates and so

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1 Ex, pp. 147-148.
2 Ex, p. 145.
at its every reading the possibilities of these names are reactivated, are given a new associative content through the setting in which Yeats places them. The poet preserves and recreates his society's symbols and so the poem, by virtue of its form, succeeds in retaining what its apparent content, the voice of the historical man speaking at a particular point in time, gives up for lost. The meaningless blanks of the names become attached to new sets of associations through Yeats's apparent inability to find any associative potential in them.

Thus instead of a simple ballad style, or a rhetorical political poem, we have a complex and sophisticated poetic structure that depends upon playing off its awareness of its own form against its social context, a context which dominates the presentation of its content. The temporal process, the dramatic movement of the speaker's mind, which the poem reveals, is negated by the existence of the poem as a non-temporal totality which will never 'let them be'. The poem may not be able to establish these men again as symbols in the living memory, but it can retain enough and give enough associative power to keep them as potential symbols for the day of the rebirth of Irish society.

That rebirth, of course, might be seen to have been the Easter rising of 1916. The rising coincided with the revival of Yeats's own poetic confidence and perhaps contributed to it by revealing that the memory out of which heroic action can be born had not been destroyed utterly among the catholic middle class against whom Yeats had been so bitter. Yeats's own ambivalence of attitude has often been charted, but that ambivalence discovered its appropriate form through an inversion of the naming process

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1 See particularly, Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'Passion and Cunning: the Politics of W.B. Yeats', in In Excited Reverie.
which Yeats had discovered in 'September 1913'. Where, in the earlier poem, the form retains what the speaker seeks to cast aside, 'Easter 1916' enacts internally, after much hesitation on the part of its speaker, what its form demands. The chant of names with which the poem ends is the first step in the creation of names so full of associations as to be symbols for the national consciousness, rather than a final effort to preserve the decay of such symbols, and enacts Yeats's recognition that the complex historical reality of the rebellion must be purified in the imagination to a symbol that matches the imagination's own reach and scale.

Like 'September 1913' 'Easter 1916'\(^1\) utilises the contrast between the historically placed speaker, unable to fully comprehend what happens around him, and the prophetic role of the poet, a role created by the eternal forms which he creates. The transformation brought about by the rebellion is as much a transformation of the speaker as of the dead: he is forced to match their act with his imagination and, though the poem is tentative, it ends with the act of creation itself, humbly aware of its own insufficiency:

I write it out in verse

The ordinary man is compelled to ask the questions which are irrelevant in the light of the imagination,

Was it needless death after all?
For England may keep faith
For all that is done and said.

The ordinary man is time-bound, questions of before and after dominate him, but the imagination operates on the level of permanence to which such questions are irrelevant, and when the ordinary man is a poet he must escape from the domination of time into the light of eternity, even when dealing

\(^1\) CP, p. 202; Y, p. 391.
with the events of his own time. The process of the poem is the mutual purification which poet and hero undergo at each other's behest.¹

It is this mutual interaction which lies at the crux of the complexity of the 'stone' image in the third part of the poem:

Hearts with one purpose alone
Through summer and winter seem
Enchanged to a stone
To trouble the living stream.

What is true of the rebels is equally true of the poem that Yeats creates: it too enchants life into fixity and denies the flux. It has often been pointed out that Yeats's description in this passage is closely related to his comments on the state of Ireland in 'J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time', in which he characterises Ireland as a

land that has given itself to agitation overmuch; abstract thoughts are raised up between men's minds and Nature, who never does the same thing twice or makes one man's mind like another, till minds, whose patriotism is perhaps strong enough to carry them to the scaffold, cry down natural impulse with the morbid persistence of minds unsettled by some fixed idea.²

But art is the one thing in life which refuses nature's law: no two works of art can be the same, but the same work of art returns again and again to set off new streams of consciousness in men. The work of art is there to 'trouble the living stream', and though it celebrates the horseman, its own existence is of a different kind:

Minute by minute they live:
The stone's in the midst of all.

¹ Dudley Young is, I think, right to make the comparison between the sacrifice of the rebel to his cause and the sacrifice the artist makes to his art: 'The movement from history to mind, from them to him, is accomplished by suggesting that their sacrifice is analogous to the one he makes daily in order to serve his Muse.' (Out of Ireland, p. 43).

² E&I, p. 313.
Thus the stasis the rebels have created of themselves is matched by the stasis to which the poem returns them at its conclusion. That stasis was, however, itself a poetic vision: Yeats moves from 'the casual comedy' of section two of the poem to the deeper truths of section three, but those deeper truths are all metaphoric and predicated upon 'seem': 'seem / Enchanted to a stone'. The placing of 'seem' (a favourite one with Yeats) emphasises the provisional nature of what he is describing. The description in fact, may be imposing the fixity which poetic metaphor creates upon the true nature of the dead. To move out of the casual comedy into the light of poetic perception is necessarily to move from change and flux into essences: the stone is a creation of the poetic consciousness which is intended to aid understanding but which implants in what it attempts to reveal its own static nature.

Thus no symbol will be sufficient to the act; the symbols are all constructions which impose another kind of fixity on the fixity the rebels have achieved. Despite the doubts of the ordinary man, maintained - perhaps even increasing in strength - till the very end, the poet has only one course open to him, to 'murmur name upon name / As a mother names her child':

I write it out in verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

The terror of the beauty is multiple, of course, but at least a part of it is not only its fixity, but its power to generate new significances, new associations. What the chant does is to purify the names, to burn out the dross of what the lives they signified actually contained and leave them with only one meaning; the names become radically reduced semantic spaces
into which multiple other meanings may flow, and from which other significances will emerge - poetic stones to trouble living streams.

'Easter 1916' is thus the creation of significant names, a creation founded upon a simplification of reality that will leave the names with no referents but many associations, as opposed to 'September 1913' which attempts to prevent names losing their associations. The naming process is, I think, so important to Yeats at this time because he has lost the source of his art in the social memory, and has not yet gained a basis for it in the ontology of spirits. The poet lives in a world of time which is unredeemed by connection with the past or within a relationship with the eternal. He can no longer be given his associational focuses, he has to earn them in the labour of creation and that labour is dramatised by the course of the poem. 'Easter 1916' reveals the poet working towards the creation of an associative context because none is provided for him in advance, but the deepest entry into this contextless world is, I think, made in 'Prayer for my Daughter', where Yeats's language and imagery become self-generating contexts of meaning gradually divorcing themselves from the entire world.

The opening stanzas of the poem present us with a superb evocation of a world denuded of meaning. Meaning demands a two term relationship, the recognition of something which is separate from oneself and to which one relates through a sign, a word, a name. The relationship of Yeats the speaker

1 Of course, biographically this is untrue and untrue too the chronology of the poetry: the return of visionary insight must have begun around 1911, if Ellmann is correct (Man and the Masks, p. 196 ff.), and this changed consciousness is certainly evident in 'The Cold Heaven', written in 1913, but Yeats's dramatisation of the condition, perhaps his awareness of it, only comes when it is about to be superseded.

2 CP, p. 211; V, p. 403.
of the poem to his own daughter is, however, of a different kind, a genetic kind, a relationship of their physical existences. The child, however, remains unnamed: apart from being his daughter she has as yet no meaning: no qualities or properties except her connection with her parents separate her into an identifiable individual who can support the attribution of a name. As the names of the dead at the end of 'Easter 1916' were blanks into which meaning had to be poured, so the child is a blank in the physical world into which meaning has to be poured. The meanings which might fill the blankness of the child's existence are challenged though by the howling destruction of meaning that is the storm:

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream.

The world without challenges the human order by surrounding the distinctions the human mind makes through language - tower, bridge, elms and stream - with an inarticulate, obliterating 'scream'.

In the face of this obliteration Yeats tries to construct a character for the child, to draw out of its meaningless existence some meanings to hold against the meaninglessness of the wind. And this because the meaninglessness of the wind is not meaningless for Yeats: it is an image of the human world when language loses control, loses its sense of appropriate relationships and becomes 'an old bellows full of angry wind.' That the child's inability to assert meaning should later be balanced by becoming meaningful only through assertion, an imposition upon the world parallel to that of the wind, is Yeats's fear, having seen it happen before in Maud. Paradoxically, he wishes for an achievement which will itself be a denial of meanings for a higher order of meaningfulness, not opinions but order and beauty. Like the poet of the conclusion of 'Easter 1916', but unlike
him in being free from the pressures of the social world, her thoughts should,

like the linnet be
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.

In this context meaning comes at a higher level than merely the meanings of words: the words should exist only for their sound, for the relationships which they establish between people in the world, the closeness they create. Their meaning is given by their situation within the pattern of existence provided by 'a house / Where all's accustomed, ceremonious.' Conversation as a social act dissolving possible conflict in a higher integration is exactly parallel to the force of the verses at the end of 'Easter 1916', an act which transcends social division in the pattern of sound created by the rebels' names. One is inside the world of time, one is outside, but their functions are identical; one accepts the world's conflicts playfully into the surety of its own sense of order, one takes the world's divisions and conflicts into a higher resolution; one is the female role and one the male.

In 'Prayer for my Daughter', however, Yeats goes beyond the conception of meaning offered in 'Easter 1916' to create a transcending language which reintegrates what had been separate in Yeats's own poetry. Association as a poetic technique works best from definite things: abstractions rarely generate powerful trains of associations, or, when they do, they are so stereotyped as to be poetically barren. Images in the end are the most effective source of associations, but the poetry towards which Yeats had been working, in the light of the failure of the social memory, had been a poetry of argument, strength of line and strength of thought rather than description of objects which would generate associations. It is a poetry developed from drama where the images on stage require less associative
power from the language for the total associative experience to be achieved. The language can vary more, can bring in more of the possibilities of ordinary language, of argument, assertion, thought, commonplace in order to create a complex matrix which will yet not deny the associative basis of the totality. In fact, by increasing the levels on which the art operates it increases the possibilities of tension between its different levels: the conflict of images offering different associative possibilities and therefore a more profound generation of associations is extended into a conflict between associative and other levels of thought. For much of the time Yeats works in this poem at a very abstract level, concrete images being mere hints within a meditative attempt to draw out the implications of abstract terms like 'beauty' and 'courtesy':

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

The abstract level rises, however, out of the very concrete situation of the man on the tower's top in the storm and it will rise further, back into the concrete, but a concrete imaginatively apprehended and not realistically perceived. At the opposite pole of meaning from the speech which has 'no business but dispensing round / Their magnanimitities of sound' and yet intimately related to it, is a speech which makes its meanings into the real stuff of the world. Normally we assume in metaphor that one part of it is 'real', is the real object we are dealing with, and the other an imaginative invention to describe it in some way: Yeats presents us with a metaphor in which the first object turns into, is revealed to us as the reality of the second. Words, which are meaningful by not being part of
the causal process of the world, but by indicating the world's processes, here become causal agents. Like the wind they are capable of changing things, but changing them creatively, as opposed to the destruction induced by Maud Gonne's attempt to make language imitate the power of the wind. Yeats's metaphor in stanza six is one of his most daring exactly because it defies the linguistic world from which it is created:

May she become a flourishing hidden tree ...

O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual, place.

Between these lines is the description of the hoped for language of meaningless beauty: in other words, in the one stanza Yeats gives us a theoretical description of one kind of language, one that ignores meaning and develops the beauty of sound and of situation, and shows us in operation another kind of language, the poet's language, in which meanings establishable only in language, and which we would ordinarily consider a violation of reality, becomes itself the reality. The act of magic is achieved by the word 'become': 'may she become' suggests a transformation different in kind from those hoped for in the previous stanzas - 'May she be granted beauty', and 'In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned'. These statements suppose qualities added to being, qualities filling the blank being of the child; the image of the tree involves a transformation of that being into its essence. The essence is of growth, of an unfolding of inborn possibilities, and therefore of process and temporality, and yet the image itself is static: 'flourishing' suggests an atemporal dimension, a continuous present, and the stasis is insisted upon by 'rooted'. The force of 'become' implying an actual transformation into a 'flourishing hidden tree', moves us from the world of change and development into the world of pure and eternal
essences. The actual has been magically transformed by language, by language's power of constructing meaning independently of the nature of the world, into something eternal, something total. The hesitant accumulation of qualities which could at any moment be interrupted by changes in the historical world in which we live is put aside for a direct apprehension of the essential unchanging totality, a totality hoped for but seen suddenly complete because the temporal order is given to us to be apprehended in a single unit, a spatial order. Only language allows the ontological leap from one to the other, though we have been prepared subtly for the transformation by the temporal order appearing already in the spatial order of the poem's opening description of the wind.

The destruction of ontological boundaries is compounded by Yeats's use of the Horn of Plenty image. It is introduced in a stanza given over to classical allusion: it both appears appropriate in its cultural context and in its metaphorical use:

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man,
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In the deliberate concreteness and debasing of classical allusion in this stanza the Horn of Plenty appears almost as a reassertion of the norm, an acceptable moral guide-line because of its familiarity. The later lines come, therefore, as a deliberate intrusion, a further breaking down of our

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1 This symbol is another of Yeats's self-referential symbols: the inclusion of time within an eternal and static perfection, which the tree suggests allegorically, is also the process by which it develops its associations symbolically.
normal categories, intensifying its refusal of our ontological categories as a metaphor gives birth to a woman:

Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn ...

The insistently inverted first foot of the second line, the sudden transformation that the second line wreaks on 'born' as the inclusive becomes exclusive, dislocate patterns of expectation that go much deeper than merely linguistic: they are the dislocation of our sense of the difference between linguistic conventions and realistic categories. Language has done away with our ordinary world and replaced it with its own: what should be a function only of meanings has become the only reality.

The wind which can destroy real things in the world - 'roof-levelling' - is opposed by a language which can transform them: a world in which objects are threatened by the processes of time is replaced by a world in which living things incorporate the processes of time; the child whose growth is looked forwardly to uncertainly is transformed into an image whose growth can be looked back at certainly ('flourishing' 'rooted' 'tree'); a world in which qualities are accidental acquirements becomes a world in which they are necessary developments; the temporal meaninglessness of the object is replaced by the eternal referent intended by the word. The blank existence of the child, which cannot even support a name and so can have no associations, is replaced by the words which are a name - laurel tree - and through the name the poem creates an object; it is a 'hidden' object perceivable only by our ability to imagine through meaning, but an object nevertheless which can generate multiple associations. The abstract words with which the poet tries to describe what he hopes for are the common currency that can be violated by anyone who uses them falsely
- from 'an old bellows' - but the image-object cannot be violated because there is nothing in the world that is it: it is pure meaning, yet through that meaning constructs a phenomenal object which generates its meanings by associations. The meaning of the word is an object because the word is a name; the name calls the object into existence in the mind and the mind discovers the meaning of the object in its associations.

With this image we are at the core of the poem; the poem has taken us to a transcendent symbol and we are beyond the temporal, historical world into the ahistorical world of meanings and associations. In many poems it is at this point that Yeats stops, but there is no common ground of associations to which he can refer in using this image. Its initial range of associations is delimited by what he has said about 'beauty' and 'courtesy': we feel the image include these within itself even as it transcends them. It also creates part of its emotional context from its opposition to the opening stanzas, its sense of settled peace. Yet having given us the image Yeats continues in the same abstract tone as before:

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late ...

The description could almost be of the dead associative powers which the image itself has just appealed to, and yet the continuing stanzas demand more and more that we read each word and line with our minds travelling back through the poem to find the appropriate meanings for them:

If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

This is the easiest backward reference and introduces us to the new level on which the language of the poem is now operating: instead of accepting
the common meanings and common objects of the world as the currency of its communication, it is defining its meanings in the memory of its own structure. In the meaningless wind of the historical destruction the poem is generating meaning to the extent that it can create its own micro-memory within the circumference of the poem itself. Stanzas eight and nine build toward a conclusion which will bring together the whole past process of the poem's imagery so that its understanding requires the mind to bring to bear all that has gone before; the associations of these lines are associations based in the previous history of the poem:

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence ...

She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

An associative intensity has been generated which is achieved entirely within the limits of the poem itself, a poem substituting the developing memory of its own images for a communal memory in the world.

It is, however, the associationism of a world fallen from grace, a world in which memory reaches no deep roots in the past, no deep roots in our communal being. It seems to me that there are two different movements in this poem, two intertwined developments: on the one hand is this process of association, being generated within the poem itself. It starts from the meaningless of the wind, develops through the only past it can refer to, the conventional past of the Greek myths whose names it cannot, apart from Helen, remember, and fulfils itself in the bellows.1

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1 Unterecker (Reader's Guide, p. 167) thinks the rich Horn of Plenty is 'associated' with courtesy, aristocracy and ceremony. My reading does not accord with this: the Horn of Plenty is what is given by life and therefore gained without effort. That is why its beneficiaries are so self-destructive, they have had to labour for nothing and it is out of labour that ceremony and courtesy and aristocracy are created.
It is powerful poetry, but it is poetry which asks us to compare its functioning with that of the other strand of the poem, one which is not linear but cyclic. At the centre of the circle is the tree, around it are ranged the various abstract terms upon which Yeats meditates, trying to discover their meaning and suitability for his hopes for his daughter. The circle is completed by the final stanza:

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

Once again Yeats creates an ontological disjunction: the innocence and beauty of the baby actually born in our biological world has to be compared with the metaphoric birth from the mouth of Plenty's horn, and that with the concluding birth: 'born' here is, I would suggest, a pun on 'bourne' because innocence and beauty in this sense, in the sense which the poem has given to these terms by its redefinition or qualification of them, are not born at a particular moment, but arise out of, coexist with custom and ceremony. To be born out of the mouth of Plenty's horn is to be born accidentally endowed, it is a sudden appearance in the world of value, not the slow creation of values by holding the destructive potentialities of the world at bay. Those who are born with all given to them invoke the forces of violence so that their values may end with them: those who seek to maintain values seek to create innocence and beauty and leave it to their children. Ceremony and custom are the vehicles of this achievement and the final image of the poem, of the daughter brought to a house by her bridegroom, performs on the ordinary level of the poem's language the same process that the image of the laurel tree does on the level of essences:
It looks back at the completed process. It thus reveals that the daughter was born into innocence and beauty; by fulfilling the achievement of them and continuing the recreation and procreation of them, she has proved that the custom and ceremony of her father's house has allowed innocence and beauty to be born.

The final two lines resolve the poem's two kinds of definitions: the abstractions whose intellectual content we have gradually been coming to know are suddenly revealed not to be complex linguistic relations but simple names: 'Ceremony's a name for the rich horn / And custom for the spreading laurel tree'. What the poem has done, therefore, is to relate a whole group of abstractions, which can only be related by a complex discursive argument in our ordinary language, directly to one another through the common focus of the laurel tree and the rich horn. The decapitalising of 'horn' reveals that it has ceased to be an intrusion of the gods into the world and has become a part of the mundane world itself. The rich horn thus denies the associations of the 'Horn of Plenty' and thus stops the only exit out of the poem into associations from the literary past. Where the associative focus does fall is on the laurel tree: its associations do transcend the limits of the poem but are also enclosed by the poem, since its 'meaning' is defined by the intellectual content of the terms to which it has been attached: 'innocence', 'beauty', 'ceremony', 'custom', and to the whole idea of birth and growth and fulfilment. The images and words in the poem are thus made to form a self-contained, self-justifying circle: at its heart are words which are just beautiful sounds, at its periphery meanings which reveal themselves as names for objects which are in turn called into existence only by their names. The poem is therefore a linguistic imitation of its own theoretical assertion:
Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will ...

The poem's willed dissolution of meaning in an image, and assertion of that image as the meaning of its terms, frees meaning from the constraints of the external in exactly the way that Yeats believes the self to be free of the external. Yeats has created a poem which corresponds to the linguistic principles of 'symbolisme', which fulfils Mallarmé's desire for a language that will become the world, but has done it without breaking down the sign and referent basis of ordinary language. What he has done is to dramatically embody the transference of signs and referents in such a way as to make all his terms mutually defining, and justified only by an image which is a sign called out of the void. The meaning of that image ought to be its associations, its personal connections in our minds, but Yeats has ceased at this point in his career to trust those connections, and has not yet invented a system to attempt to stabilise them, and so by-passes them, generating his own self-enclosing circle of associations within the poem itself. Meaning by association and meaning by definition thus cease to be mutually exclusive, but are combined in order to exclude the use of the terms in the ways in which the world demands. The associations of the tree and the horn are the meanings of the abstract terms and the meanings of the abstract terms are the associations of the images. What one names and calls forth the others are names for.

This self-generating associational context is a remarkable feat, the magical creation of an art out of conditions which apparently deny its possibility, but it is one that Yeats could hardly draw upon for further developments. Many of his later poems use the technique of repetition
which builds up layers of meaning in or around certain words, but at no later point could the use of it be so total: the ordinary meanings of the mundane world of words must be retained and, if possible, transformed, but a purely poetic transformation would lead to an intense privacy: 'Prayer for my Daughter' balances two modes of language against one another, retaining the appearance of one while in fact transforming itself into the other. The continuance of poetry depends on changing the actual conditions in which it is created so that it need no longer labour to spin itself out of its own bowels. Since Yeats had ceased to hope for significant political change - that chimerical hope would return in the 'thirties - the necessary change revealed itself as the rediscovery of a dualistic ontology, a world of souls parallel to world our souls actually experience. In terms of this new world names would take on a different significance, because they would not be terms which called to mind certain qualities, but terms which actually called from the dead the ghosts who had carried those names. Those dead would then bring with them elements which went beyond anything we had knowledge of, associations which belong to their existence rather than to our memory of it. The transition from one form of association, in which a name brings back our memories of its bearer, and the form based on an ontologically divided universe in which ghosts come with their names and their memories, is recorded in the draft of Yeats's Autobiographies:

Her chief power was an occasional pre-vision. I got with her my first proof of the old magical claim that names have a power apart from our associations with them, at any rate apart from our obvious associations. I was trying to call up 'the last incarnation of George Pollexfen' and all there expected some event in the eighteenth century at latest. She saw an obvious Anglo-Indian, and my uncle remembered that there was one other George Pollexfen in the world, a retired Anglo-Indian. Lucy Middleton had never to her knowledge heard of this man, and [he] belonged to a branch of the family from whom the Sligo Pollexfens had separated a century ago.1

1 Memoirs, p. 76
Yeats's recalling of these early experiments in 1915 may well have been one of the stimuli to his rediscovery of a realm of metaphysical and thereby poetic significance. However it was, by the time of writing A Vision, it had become a fixed and settled part of Yeats's convictions, but its relation with associationism and with buried memory is perhaps revealed best in this section of the introduction to 'The Words upon the Window-pane':

But at most seances suggestions come from sub-conscious or unspoken thought. I found the preacher who wanted Moody's help at a seance where the mind of an old doting general turned all into delirium. We sat in the dark and voices came about us in the air, crowned head after crowned head spoke ... Then came a voice, 'King George is here'. I asked which of the Georges, and the sitter who hated Cromwell said, 'King George, our George; we should all stand up', but the general thought it would be enough if we sang 'God save the King'. We sang, and then there was silence, and in the silence from somewhere close to the ceiling the clear song of a bird. Because mediumship is dramatisation, even honest mediums cheat at times, either deliberately or because some part of the body has freed itself from the control of the waking will, and almost always truth and lies are mixed together. But what shall we say of their knowledge of events, their assumption of forms and names beyond the medium's knowledge or ours?¹

The patterns of unconscious suggestion and association in this world are crossed with those of the other world, and find each other where their mutual need is greatest.² Poetry's associations are a vehicle for communication in community of the living and the dead.

The steps towards the achievement of this community can be charted in the stances of several of Yeats's poems. In its public aspect it is most clearly stated in 'In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen'³ in which those

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¹ Ex, pp. 365-66.
² It is perhaps significant that Yeats's own familiar daimon appeared first as a bare name - Leo Africanus, a name for which Yeats eventually found a personality through a medium: 'Speaking through her, Leo Africanus said that he was Yeats's opposite, that "by association with one another" they "should each become more complete".' (Ellmann, Man and the Masks, p. 199.)
³ CP, p. 175; V, p. 360.
commemorated take on special significance by being bearers of a particular name. The individual characters seem hardly to matter in the poem as death reunites them with their past; and the final cry against mortality -

At all these death-beds women heard
A visionary white sea-bird
Lamenting that a man should die;
And with that cry I have raised my cry.

although it reveals a supernatural significance to the Pollexfens, seems also to pale before the power of the poem's opening, with its overtones of a deliberate choice of the moment of death:

Five-and-twenty years have gone
Since old William Pollexfen
Laid his strong bones down in death
By his wife Elizabeth
In the grey tomb he made.

The conscious choice of death implied in the transitiveness of 'laid' and in the preparation of the tomb, is echoed towards the poem's close in the death of Alfred, to whose memory the poem is dedicated, because it is a death in a chosen environment, among his forefathers:

And yesterday the youngest son,
A humourous, unambitious man,
Was buried near the astrologer,
Yesterday in the tenth year
Since he who had been contented long,
A nobody in a great throng,
Decided he would journey home,
Now his fiftieth year had come,
And 'Mr Alfred' be again
Upon the lips of common men
Who carried in their memory
His childhood and his family.

The readoption of his previous name in the community to which his family belonged is a sign of the vitality of a community memory which is underpinned by the supernatural: by their names their lives are continued, by their names they live on in the common memory and in the poet's cry. It is almost, however, as though the Pollexfen name supports that common memory;
as though without 'Mr Alfred' there would be nothing for the common men to carry in their memory, and as though without the occult speculations of astrologer George and the sea connections of the long lost John that supernatural sea-bird would not cry. They, by effort of character and of mind, have held together the community which will give their names meaning in future.

By having asserted a community, even in death, the Pollexfens have demanded the poet's acknowledgement, but the community of the dead takes a different shape in 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory'. This poem has been much written on and I do not want to tackle the vexed judgments that it has produced, but a central issue on which the role of names seems to impend is that of Yeats's attitude to Gregory: whether, as Kermode suggests, he sees in him the artist escaping from the antinomies in which he is held in life, or whether, as Dudley Young insists, Yeats is ambivalent in his attitude to Gregory exactly because he refuses to fit into the patterns that Yeats has created out of his own past, because he challenges Yeats's myth of the artist. I connect it with 'In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen' because I think the latter gives us parameters to apply to the more important elegy. The community of the Pollexfens is a community in time, spanning the generations, maintained by a deliberate commitment to a community of place. Thus the concern over the loss of

1 CP, p. 148; V, p. 323.

2 Kermode has argued for its being the first of Yeats's great poems (Romantic Image, ch II); Wynters that it is 'a very bad poem' (see W.B. Yeats: A Critical Anthology, ed. W.H. Pritchard, p. 277); Bloom that it is an 'ambitious poem' but that Gregory himself is too weak for the weight put on him (Yeats, p. 193).

3 Romantic Image, particularly p. 38.

4 Out of Ireland, pp. 52-53.
a member of the family who died overseas: 'But where is laid the sailor
John / That so many lands had known'. In the Robert Gregory elegy these
two communities have become separated, separated between the poet who
has been like a son to Lady Gregory and the son who might have fulfilled
himself as a great artist.

Yeats's community is a community of the dead spanning his life:
'All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved / Or boyish intellect
approved'. They are defined for Yeats through their names:

I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in th'ancient tower ...

The names, however, are terms for events which have no longer any existence
in the spatial world. Their content is, therefore, based not on any
definite and identifiable attributes, but upon their role in the life of
the mind that remembers them: 'They were my close companions many a year,/ A portion of my mind and life'. They can be invited to be at home in the
tower because they have contributed to Yeats's significant choice of new
home: the tower is an expression of a life whose meanings have been in
part defined by them. Not only are each of them defined in terms of a
time when they were close to the developing Yeats, they each express a
different attitude to time: Johnson's learning, for instance,

seemed
A long blast upon the horn that brought
A little nearer to his thought
A measureless consummation that he dreamed.

His grasp of the past was an attempt to advance the future as a total
escape from time. Synge is described as 'long travelling' in order to
find his appropriate place, but the emphasis falls not on spatial dis-
tinctions but upon the temporal one, 'towards nightfall'. George
Pollexfen comes last, I would suggest, for two reasons: one because he
provided the context which would be continuous in Yeats's thought, more continuous than what he gained from the other two:

The half-read wisdom of daemonic images, 
Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy

- and secondly, because he provides the most inclusive attitude to time, one which acknowledges neither ultimate endings nor personal choice of ends:

That could have shown how pure-bred horses 
And solid men, for all their passion, live 
But as the outrageous stars incline ... 

Thus the pattern of personal relations, meanings ordered by Yeats's memory, is matched by an impersonal pattern of relations which imposes on all life. Between these two patterns the dissonance of life is resolved: 'But not a friend that I would bring / This night can set us quarrelling'.

In the poem named after him Robert Gregory, however, goes unnamed; in effect he is named only by a temporal transference that makes him into 'Our Sidney and our perfect man'. The failure to name Gregory reveals the difference between the meaning of his name and the meaning of the others' names. Within the tower as temporal object - 'th'ancient tower' - all the meanings are Yeats's; they have been built up in the course of time from a purification of their associations. Dudley Young suggests that the difference with Gregory is that his 'being has not yet been digested and refined in the purgatorial fires of poetry', but the case has to be put more strongly: it is that his being cannot be so refined because he is given over to a spatial concept of the universe rather than a temporal one, a spatial concept which is a denial of the aristocracy into

1 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', CP, p. 232.
2 Young, Out of Ireland, p. 53.
which he was born. He is the inheritor of the Horn of Plenty rather than
the rich horn which is Yeats's inheritance. But he challenges Yeats's
inheritance because the landscape into which Yeats invites his past, a
landscape chosen by him and made symbolic by him, actually belongs to
Gregory.

For all things the delighted eye now sees
Were loved by him.

Gregory has appropriated that landscape because he has ridden over it, he
has painted it, he has even assisted in Yeats's planning of the tower.
The ghosts whom Yeats calls to his tower are at home there as long as it
is Yeats's temporal creation, but even Yeats is not at home in it - he is
himself an uninvited ghost - after Gregory's death, because it ought to
have been consumed along with him: 'others may consume / The entire
combustible world'.

Gregory can find no place in the world of time, the world of Yeats's
mind, because he was a man committed to space. Kermode sees Gregory as
an 'artist-contemplative and as nothing else'; but this, I think, is to
ignore the differentiation between Gregory and three men whom Yeats calls
to mind. They are the artist contemplatives, and the horseman among them
only becomes that by giving up horsemanship ('Having grown sluggish and
contemplative'). Pollexfen's change is the result of commitment to time;
Gregory undergoes no such change. He therefore leaves no mark upon the

1 Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 38.

2 Yeats, of course, is walking a very difficult line: he is writing an
elegy on the death of the son of his oldest friend and so cannot be
critical. But the constraints of the formal elegy must not lead us
to suppose that Yeats is not prepared to differentiate his excellences
into those of a kind of character which, though admirable, is in-
sufficient. Support for this reading can perhaps be drawn from 'An
Irish Airman' with its refusal of time: 'The years to come seemed waste
of breath, / A waste of breath the years behind'. (CP, p. 152).
landscape that he owns, as Yeats does with his tower: 'and where was it /
He rode a race without a bit?' The memory is dying already, and because
he himself had no sense of time, and therefore no memory, he could not
possibly be an artist. There is no evidence in the poem for treating
Gregory as an artist: the temporal dimension in which art acquires its
significance is only possible to those not committed to space, to the
aristocrats of the 'rich horn', Yeats and Lady Gregory:

We dreamed that a great painter had been born ...
The dreaming has to take all its significance, not only of future hopes but
of illusion, because great artists are not born, they are born out of
effort. The repeated line, 'Soldier, scholar, horseman', makes no
reference to art, and what it does do is entirely different from the 'appropriate
commentary on the previously remembered characters: instead of a name which
generates some essential pattern of associations in the mind, we are given
a dispersed pattern of association which refuse to focus on a name, but
focus on a set of functions. The line 'Soldier, scholar, horseman, he',
insists on lack of unity rather than unity, his being held separate from
each thing it did, none a manifestation of essence. Thus there can be
no purification in the refining fire of poetry because nothing essential
remains to be remembered. Stanza XI is not dividing one sort of artist
from another, or one solution for the artist from another, but the artist
and his material from a man who refuses the world of both:

Some burn damp faggots, others may consume
The entire combustible world in one small room
As though dried straw ...

The spatial insistence of line two distances it from the temporal concerns
of the artist, and if Gregory was an artist he was an artist of his own
life, which leaves nothing behind, nothing of the artist,1 nothing of his art. Kermode's assertion that the horsemanship is hardly relevant except as a hint that 'he was able to achieve, in the life of action, that Unity of Being which is the ideal of the personal life, and which the present age denies'2 ignores the doubting implications of 'Soldier, scholar, horseman, he, / As 'twere all life's epitome'. Yeats does not say that Gregory is, as it were, all life's epitome; if the line contains that possibility it has to be balanced against its implications that he does these things as though they were all life's epitome - which they are not. The climactic 'What made us dream that he could comb grey hair?' reveals the temporal dimension in which they live, but which Gregory refuses. It is in terms of this distinction that, I think, the final lines can be taken to be more than just Yeats's usual creation of a poem out of saying he cannot make a poem: 'but a thought / Of that late death took all my heart for speech.' The important term is heart: Gregory may have Yeats's heart, but he cannot be made a part of his mind:

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind ...

The heart feels, but the mind recalls; life dies, art remembers.

To see 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' in this way is to make it continuous with the other poems on the same theme: Yeats sees in Gregory's death an unnecessary act, necessary perhaps for himself, but one which is a denial of all that order and custom create. The democratic nature of

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1 Yeats's newspaper elegy which Kermode quotes cannot be used to substantiate what is not in the poem, see Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 32. In fact, the newspaper obituary reads as follows: "He had so many sides: painter, classical scholar; scholar in painting and in modern literature, boxer, horseman, airman." What is left out in the summing up of the poems is significant - "painter".

2 Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 41.
'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' has often been noted as though Yeats had somehow set aside his beliefs in writing it, but the airman's death is a deliberate turning aside from his personal and his national duty to his countrymen: 'No likely end could bring them loss / Or leave them happier than before'. Yeats's aristocratic beliefs may have involved him in disdain for the lower orders, but it also was a code of noblesse oblige. The point is made more forcibly in the poem Yeats did not publish, 'Reprisals':

Although your last exciting year  
Outweighed all other years, you said,  
Though battle joy may be so dear  
A memory, even to the dead,  
It chases other thought away,  
Yet rise from your Italian tomb,  
Flit to Kiltartan cross and stay  
Till certain second thoughts have come  
Upon the cause you served, that we  
Imagined such a fine affair.

The dear memory of an adventurous death 'chases other thought away' for the dead and so it does for Yeats at the end of the elegy, but even as he performs the necessary act of grief he places his own ability to transcend that moment by providing us with the perspective of memory which Gregory, alive or dead, refused.

That perspective of memory is made possible by names, which retain the experience we have of someone as an associative potentiality. The names are, as it were, tokens of a whole congeries of associated elements of a personality, associated elements which may change but which will always be activated, whatever their nature or truth, by the name itself. That activation, however, need not depend on our own memories because those

1 \textsuperscript{1} V, p. 791.
2 \textsuperscript{2} E, p. 527.
are attached to the ontologically separate other world through our daemons. The final attachment of the naming process to that other world of memory as well as to this world of memory is announced in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae': 'and the famous dead and those of whom but a faint memory lingers, can still - and it is for no other end that, all unknowing, we value posthumous fame - tread the corridor and take the empty chair. A glove and a name call their bearer; the shadows come to our elbow amid their old undisturbed habitations'. The actual calling up of the dead by their names is the explicit theme of 'All Souls' Night', which Yeats used as the epilogue to A Vision. The particular dead he calls upon, W.T. Horton, Florence Emery and MacGregor Mathers, are all occultists, people who have spent - and ruined, perhaps - their lives in the search for the wisdom to which Yeats has now, at least halfway, attained, having written his system incorporating all he knows of the other world. Having given us brilliant definitions of those names, Yeats turns aside, however, to announce: 'But names are nothing'. The perspective of personal memory is no longer essential to the maintenance of a relation between past and future: at this midnight, this moment suspended out of time when the dead walk, what Yeats has realised is the inter-relation of the living and the dead, the fact that one completes the other. It hinges on the meaning of 'whole' which changes in the course of the poem:

For it is a ghost's right,
His element is so fine
Being sharpened by his death,
To drink from the wine-breath
While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.

The fume of muscatel
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy
No living man can drink from the whole wine.

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1 E, p. 527.
The first passage separates the wine-breath from the whole wine which we experience; the second is much more complex because the line end forces us to read it with a double intention. Firstly, the ghost gets ecstasy from the fumes that we do not get from the whole wine (because it is experiencing something that belongs to its opposite, an equivalent to the experience of vision for the living man); secondly, however, we have to read the lines with the line end after 'ecstasy' partly separating out the last line, so that it implies that the whole wine includes the wine breath which no living man can drink. As the whole wine is both the body of the wine and its 'breath' so the whole man is both his living self and his ghost. The completion of this connection is achieved by an insufficiently remarked shift between the beginning and the end of the poem:

    I need some mind that, if the cannon sound
    From every quarter of the world, can stay
    Wound in mind's pondering
    As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound;

    Such thought, that in it bound
    I need no other thing,
    Wound in mind's wandering
    As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound.

The switch of 'pondering' to 'wandering' is intensely significant. Because the ghosts are caught up in a constant process of association, reliving their pasts, their escape must be into thought, into the purity of pattern, and in a connection with life (the wine breath); the living, however, are caught up by the will, by action and need to escape into the associative process, 'mind's wandering'. That Yeats's use of the occult was primarily

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Yeats must have changed his mind about how to present this ambiguity several times; V. lists three readings: 'ecstacy', 'ecstasy!', and 'ecstasy.' The latter two would increase the strength of my second reading and decrease the strength of the first.
a stimulus to this latter process and to what it made possible is suggested by a passage in the dedication to the 1925 version of *A Vision* in which, looking back on the 'phantasy' of his early studies, he feels now that it 'did not explain the world to our intellects which were after all very modern, but it recalled certain forgotten methods of meditation and chiefly how so to suspend the will that mind became automatic, a possible vehicle for spiritual beings.'¹ The final stanza reveals the extent to which Yeats, even in this life, has reached towards that visionary state which joins the two worlds: he holds tight thought till 'meditation' masters the totality of it, association is wound around him like mummy cloth, preserving his temporal self in its spiritual form, which is given by its bodily existence at least in part. However his mind wanders now, it wanders within a pattern and is no longer trapped within accident. What the breath of wine in a single moment is to the ghost, the grasp of the totality of the spiritual is to the living man.

The interconnection of these two realms of being re-establishes fully the ontological duality of Yeats's early poetry, but at a much higher level of integration and complexity. The ontological realms are no longer viewed as mutually exclusive, but as mutually dependent; what was implicit in so many of the early poems, that the achievement of transcendence led only to a reduplication of the categories of the lower realm, is retained and justified, since the other-world is now an unwinding of the experiences

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¹ *A Vision* (1925) p. xi. George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*, p. 150 draws attention to this passage and points out in a note that in 'revision he changed 'folklore' first to 'reverie' then to 'phantasy'. (p. 198). The connection between the three is their basis in association. The original sentence was: 'I look back to it as a time when we were full of a folklore that has been handed down for generations'. See also 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae', E, p. 508, for the connection between 'evocation', 'reverie' and 'trance'.
of this world, this world a working out of the implications of the other. The symbol which had been thought to mediate between these two worlds in the early poetry has disappeared; the symbol is now that which wraps up the past - as the bobbin winds on thread - and so transcends, without leaving, the world of historical change in which we live. What corresponds in the later thought to the earlier symbol is what Yeats still calls a symbol, but which is in actuality a complex pattern of inter-connected elements: 'The Great Wheel' is the principle symbol of A Vision and instead of being one thing which is, as it were, an escape door into the other world, it is the complex pattern which includes the whole universe and is the essence, the core structure of all happenings in the universe. Thus the Great Wheel is macrocosmically what the gyres are to all parts of it, it includes all that they explain. What has happened in Yeats's theory of symbols is that the different aspects of the Rose have been separated out: its specific symbolic qualities relating to the actualities of life have been multiplied into towers and birds and swords and horsemen, while its establishment of the connection between this world and other world has been aggrandised and mechanised into wheel and gyre. These provide us with the structure of all the patterns of the universe upon which any number of individual elements can be woven: the later thought provides us with multiplicity within a fixed pattern where the earlier had seen multiplicity around a single focus.

The ontological duality, however, remains and the connection between them is still a name. The link of this world and other world is that which, in this world, is least tied to our physical existence: the words which we use to mean something, the meaning of that thing being eternal in the name, even though the thing itself passes away. The Rose embodied
that sense for Yeats because the individual members of the class might all fade in turn and yet that essence, that meaning, be ever available to our minds. The parallel conception within the later thought, the name which permits a passage from this world into other world is 'Byzantium'. The place that it describes is gone, though enough of it remains - 'unageing monuments' - to suggest what it might have been. The name wraps up all the time of its actual existence into the multiple associations of many minds; the name is also what calls it out of the other world, out of that other world of unwinding memories which is the other half of our own. What has to be recognised about this alternative world is that it is not out of time, though it is out of our time. Time is reckoned by change and in Yeats's other world there is constant change in the unwinding of memories. These ghosts are not out of time but out of history, which is change external to the needs of the individual psyche. In the world beyond the grave the souls purify all that accident into an acceptance of self,

And there, free yet fast,
Being both Chance and Choice,
Forgets its broken toys
And sink into its own delight at last. ¹

What that whole other world experience can do as a form of life, however, the work of art can do in this life as a form of death: 'imagination divides us from mortality by the immortality of beauty.' ² It is not the symbol in the work of art which connects us with the other world, it is the work of art itself, which is the place in which associations from both worlds meet and mingle: the poem is no set of words upon a page,

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¹ 'All Souls Night', CP, p. 258.
² 'William Blake and the Imagination', E&I, p. 112.
It is a form of the human imagination 'Wound in mind's wandering / As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound'.

It is this place in which both worlds meet that is at once asserted and demonstrated by 'Sailing to Byzantium'. The world of nature and the world of civilization, the world of action and the world of memory, the world of worldly life and the world of after life, the world of youth and the world of age, the world of timeless time and the world of age-old timelessness are held in mutual interdependence by that single name, Byzantium, that, at the end of the second stanza, forms the exact mid-point of the poem. In assimilating that word, in reaching it we encompass the dialectic and pass from one pole to the other. And yet we do not really pass from one to the other: we look outwards or look inwards because the antinomies, 'those whirling gyres', are there in each stanza: the 'monuments of unageing intellect' among the 'dying generations' of stanza one; the 'singing schools' beside the scarecrow of stanza two; the 'dying animal' with the 'sages in God's holy fire' in stanza three, and the lords and ladies with the golden bird in four. Each section of existence is shadowed by its opposite without which it would not be 'whole', in the final sense of that word in 'All Souls' Night'. The city itself is Yeats's own historical opposite, being all that modern Ireland has failed to be, providing the aristocratic and artistic elite which Yeats's own art had to do without.

'Sailing to Byzantium' is now such a much criticised and evaluated poem that one is unlikely to detract or to add to its stature by any marginal shifts in interpretation - and given the treatment it has had only

1 CP, p. 217; V, p. 407

2 Almost no major critic of Yeats has failed to deal with the poem: my own principal debts are to F.A.C Wilson, W.B. Yeats and the Tradition; William Empson's criticism of Wilson, 'Mr Wilson on the Byzantine Poems', Review of English Literature, 1,3, July 1960; Frank Kermode, Romantic Image; Giorgio Melchiori, The Whole Mystery of Art; John Stallworthy, Between the Lines.
marginal shifts would seem to be possible. On the one hand I take this as substantiation of the 'openness' of the poem, an openness that depends partly on the significance we accord to the central words and images - birds, generations, scarecrow, monuments, nature, lords and ladies and so on - but more importantly on the significance we attach to Byzantium itself. And here, of course, the associationist principle can be most powerfully invoked: no citing of evidence from A Vision or from any late nineteenth century source would be sufficient to establish the significance of the name. The name contains whatever the reader happens to feel about it: as long as that coheres in some emotive or ideational way with the rest of the poem - and perhaps even if it doesn't - that set of associations will be appropriate. On the other hand, I feel that Yeats is not writing a real associative poem in 'Sailing to Byzantium': it is too clearly held by the system and by various forces within it into some kind of fixed discursive meaning - the problem is, what meaning? The particular difficulty that besets the poem is that we are faced by such massive underpinnings of serious reflection that we seem forced to take the poem seriously, and yet the easiest way to make sense of the poem is to see it ironically.

The problem stems from Sturge Moore's famous criticism of the poem which suggested that it was contradictory because,

such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as a man's body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come to Lords and Ladies.¹

The possibility of that contradiction has been met time and again by the assertion of the ironic intent of the final stanza. However, the oddness

¹ W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore; A Correspondence, p. 162.
of Yeats's transformation of himself into a golden mechanical bird is hardly solved by saying that Yeats is aware of the oddness: we need some reason for it, some justification. William Empson, who puts this case most engagingly offers us the following possibilities:

Consider, few poets have cared to write down 'When I die I shall go to Heaven'. They would feel it bad luck as well as bad taste, and Yeats was not a man to feel otherwise. Then, as to symbolism, the more you think of birds as able to take messages up to heaven, intensely spontaneous in their lyrics, and so forth, the more a clockwork bird with a built in tweet-tweet is bound to seem pathetically ludicrous ... No doubt he felt sure that the Byzantines, if they could make this machine as he says he has read somewhere, would make it an impressive piece of sculpture; so there is a genuine boast about himself, but it is wry enough to be sweet.

In this perspective the poem becomes a complex anti-Innisfree: more coherent and complex than the earlier poem, perhaps, but hardly more interesting. I think, though, that Empson is right to attack the wholehearted seriousness of the Vision-scanning critics: the poem is a witty poem. It opens the 'Tower' section of Collected Poems with the settled equipoise which will be asserted in a different way at the volume's end by 'All Souls' Night'. Its poise, though, is not irony, but wit: after all, the thought of crack-voiced, tone deaf old Willie Yeats learning to sing in stanza two is just as funny as his reappearance as a golden bird in stanza four. A hand-clapping soul is just as childish - pace Blake scholars - as Empson feels clockwork singing birds to be.

The point of the clockwork golden bird is not self-irony, I suggest, because self-irony would imply that the poem is climactic and, as Bloom points out, it is in fact peculiarly static: concern with parts of the

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verb 'to be' echoes through the poem with an insistence which undermines all sense of activity. The speaker is between the two countries he describes, still just 'sailing to' despite the strength of the closing description. In this suspended state he is able to perceive the limitations and advantages of both states. This is not a matter of having it both ways, it is a matter of seeing the dialectic of the poem. When the speaker says 'And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium', we know that he has not arrived: there remains the tension of 'come' which might imply 'have' or might mean 'am coming towards'. Similarly the poem offers us a tension in its terminology: either he has sailed the seas to visit the modern city or he has sailed in imagination into the past to the holy city as it was in its great artistic period. The sea is the metaphoric sea of experience which gives him the knowledge to imagine a holy city of the imagination, or it is the real sea which brings him to the relics of a real city which he can imagine as it might have been. The tension is essential because it is only by the continued existence of the monuments through time that the existence of the city in imagination, out of time, can be reconstructed. The paths of our lives lead us to that which is our antithesis: we need the experience in time in order to have the experience out of time.

The same tension is true of the 'sages standing in God's holy fire': we do not know whether Yeats addresses them now that he has reached his imaginative (or is it imaginary?) Byzantium, or whether he is addressing something that has survived it. We are out of time because our perception is something permanent, but the point from which we view it is still some point in time. The invocation to the sages poses the hope that we are out of time, that we are entered into the world of art so that what is static
from our point in time will now be active because we too are out of time, but it never reveals to us that the hope is fulfilled. The sages no more do step from the fire than the old man is a scarecrow: it is a cry looking forward, or outward, from a situation in time, as stanza one is a cry looking backward or inward; Yeats no more becomes a singing bird of beaten gold than he becomes a scarecrow. In the world of art, which we may have entered as we passed through the word 'Byzantium,' such transformations are metaphorically possible, but we have never, in fact, been out of the world of art and metaphoric transformations. In stanzas one and two life is turned into art both because it is a description of life in poetry, establishing its realisations through metaphor, and because all are caught in 'that sensual music,' living process as an artistic form. In stanzas three and four art turns into life. The metaphoric direction has changed, but the process is the same: in stanza two an old man becomes a scarecrow and in stanza three the sages in a mosaic become singing masters. 'As in the gold mosaic of a wall' points us to the changed condition of metaphor in these stanzas: the actual condition in the world (the work of art) becomes metaphoric, what the work of art depicts (the sages in a purifying religious fire) becomes real. We look at the content and ignore the frame and we cannot tell where we are who are doing the looking. We have lost all sense of time, we are in eternity, but only so long as we are outside looking at the contents of a work of art. If we actually entered the work of art the dualities which we experienced in life would reassert themselves, as they always do in Yeats's ontological other worlds.

It is in this sense that stanza four cannot be taken to be a desired and fulfilled hope. Yeats, however, is not mocking his own desires, but
seeing the extent to which either state involves dualities, contradictions of some kind, and only the poem which contains them, the act of making art and not of being art, can hold the two together. If we take the Byzantium of stanza four as some shade in the other world which we can actually reach, then it is a shade which is out of history, but not one that is out of time. Its perfection is static in relation to we who are in history, but it is a perfection which incorporates change and movement, being the unwinding of what actually existed. Its perfection out of history, however, is achieved by its having been, within history, a static civilization, one that denied all change. In so doing, however, it denies the relevance of the art it makes possible. Note that it is Grecian goldsmiths who are the artists, the incomers, possibly even slaves, who retain the memory of previous art, previous civilisation as the drowsy emperor does not. It is their sense of time which makes the art possible, their sense of history in a world no longer involved with history. Art depends on history and time, and thus the song of the golden bird through which the soul of the artist sings to these aristocrats who have moved beyond history is meaningless: meaningless because the bird's song has no meanings, is pure sound. Its art is thus, like the woman's words in 'Prayer for my Daughter', its perfect participation in the pattern of life within which it happens; its meaning is a function of that pattern and not of what the soul of the artist chooses to sing about, what he must sing about, 'what is past, or passing, or to come'. What he intends by his song is, however, irrelevant in this historyless world, as irrelevant as it was ignored in the world of the first two stanzas where too there is time and change, 'Those dying generations' - but no history. 'Whatever is begotten, born, and dies' belongs to a natural world where everything
is always the same despite the change, because change is constant renewal.

History is the area in which there is preservation and change and history is the dimension which belongs outside the frame of this poem altogether: what we are given is the opposition of two worlds, the world of natural procreativity and the world of art. Both ignore history: the first ignores what history produces, the 'monuments of unageing intellect' which, however unageing, could only be produced by people with a sense of history, those 'Grecian goldsmiths'; and the second ignores what those monuments are a witness to and, by calling down forces into the world, generate; 'what is past, or passing or to come'. The Byzantium of stanza four may be a perfect city of art, but it is not art that can be experienced as art since such experience depends upon a sense of history, of the past, which Byzantium, trying to be like the inner nature of art, denies. The inner nature of art is static; it is that stasis which allows it to be effective within our consciousness, but our consciousness must be a consciousness in history, which is, in fact, where the poet's consciousness is, in this poem. Yeats's soul is outside the static structure of the poem, it is in a world of time, because it is only in the world of time that the significance of Byzantium can be apprehended - it could not be apprehended at the time. Thus the name 'Byzantium' means, in effect, two different things in the poem: at the end of stanza two,

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium

the name is temporal, the aggregation of all the associations which the city has collected through time. It is the city as apprehended from the modern world, no city at all but a name full of associations. Only an old man can find the relevance of it because his own memory is sufficiently stocked to find the relevance of its 'monuments of unageing intellect' in
his own experience. The accretions of experience - the 'seas' of life - are necessary to the understanding of that which attempts to transcend experience in time. The 'Byzantium' of stanza four, with its use of the same rhyme,

Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

is a spatial existence in which a sense of time is held only by the lower orders of Grecian goldsmiths. It is no longer a holy city, it is a city incapable of associations because its name has now been defined in terms of certain - spatial - existences. It has ceased to have the same - temporal - associative power. The artist, whether out of nature or in nature, is in conflict with a world which denies history because that is the only thing that allows the accretion of the memories upon which his art depends. He is committed to neither of these realms: neither to the world of biological change, nor artistic stasis, but to the doubtful, hesitant, difficult world of human history in which meaning develops and is enlarged through the associations that life creates for us. The irony of the poem, if it has any, is that the associative potentialities of the name 'Byzantium' are downgraded if we attempt to take it as a reality to be entered. The lesson of the final stanza is the same lesson as Yeats had announced in 'The Rose', not to come too close to the symbol of perfection:

Ah, leave me still
A little space for the rose-breath to fill.

What he had feared then would indeed be true if he accepted a bodily form from a golden artefact, he would 'learn to chant a tongue men do not know' because it would be a language which had neither meaning nor associations for its hearers: beautiful but pointless. Art only has
point in the world that is suggested by 'Sailing to Byzantium' but is not described by it: the world of the name 'Byzantium', the world of human history, but one which has an ontological justification in the complementary world of souls living in their memories. To attempt to suspend the dialectic between these worlds, to find fixity and stasis, is to make art meaningless, since its meaningfulness depends exactly on its being static and fixed within a world of change. Its structure generates meanings out of the change which surrounds it: the world may not listen, but

Solitary men in moments of contemplation receive, as I think, the creative impulse from the lowest of the Nine Hierarchies, and so make and unmake mankind, and even the world itself, for does not 'the eye altering alter all'?1

The elements of 'Sailing to Byzantium' are not a failed quest poem, as Bloom would have it,2 but a revelation of the failure of quest, for

Neither between death and birth nor between birth and death can the soul find more than momentary happiness; its object is to pass rapidly round its circle and find freedom from that circle.3

Freedom is not contained within the poem 'Sailing to Byzantium', it would be an outcome of it, of the speaker's having encompassed the antithetical possibilities of his own existence. It is that encompassing which the poem achieves by its passage through the multiple significances and associations of the name Byzantium. Byzantium is as much an apocalyptic name, though a specific and historical one (though not so specific that

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1 'The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, pp. 158-159. 'Leda and the Swan' provides us with an image of such interaction between other-world and this-world: was the imagining of the act sufficient to engender the 'broken wall, the burning roof and tower'?

2 Bloom, Yeats, p. 348.

3 A Vision, p. 236.
Yeats would be tethered by the mere details of history), in Yeats's later work as the Rose was, though generic and ahistorical, in the early.

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1 See *A Vision*, p. 279: 'I have not the knowledge (it may be that no man has the knowledge) to trace the rise of the Byzantine State through Phases 9, 10 and 11. My diagram tells me that a hundred and sixty years brought that State to its 15th Phase ...'
CHAPTER SEVEN
T.S. ELIOT'S DIALECTICAL ART

I  The Early Poems

Yeats's poetry, I have argued, reveals a continuous dialectic between associational and non-associational modes of writing, but in the case of Eliot's work the dialectic operates at a different level. Eliot, too, uses non-associational techniques in the construction of poems, but at the level of individual images and at the level of whole poems his writing displays a construction which is deeply influenced by associational demands. These range from poems such as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' or 'Gerontion', with their formalised presentation of an individual's highly personalised associational processes and memories, to the disjunctive images and non-continuous narrative modes of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' or 'A Cooking Egg'. What occurs throughout Eliot's poetry, however, under the impulse of the tension between associational and non-associational modes, is a constant engagement between the mode of the poetry itself and the world it depicts, an engagement that sometimes takes the form of a complete identity between the character presented and the nature of the language by which he is embodied - as in Prufrock - or a total divorce between language and subjects - as in the Sweeney poems. Whereas Yeats, staring out into the universe, finds repeated in its ontological structure the psychological structures of his own aesthetic theory, Eliot's poetry at every stage discovers in its own creations the mirror images of its technique. Yeats's poems seem like constructions of an eccentric and esoteric philosophy and turn out to be investigations of the poet's subjectivity; Eliot's poetry seems to deal with the banal realities of the modern world but, in effect, presents images of the poetic process itself in operation. Perhaps I can draw the
distinction as the difference between an art that starts from a centre and moves outwards, centrifugally, and an art that starts from the circumference and moves inward, centripetally, but in each case centre and circumference mirror each other:

From man's blood-sodden heart are sprung
Those branches of the night and day
Where the gaudy moon is hung.¹

or, alternatively,

as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen.²

The dialectic of Yeats's poetry is between the content of its statements and its form as association; in Eliot the dialectic is between its content as something presented, as a real object in the world, and its awareness that that object is formed by its poetic techniques and cannot escape from them. The subjectivity which is a problem for Yeats's art is the subjectivity of the reader to whom the poem is addressed; the subjectivity which is a problem for Eliot's art is the subjectivity from which the art emanates.

Prufrock is the earliest, and most powerful, instantiation of such subjectivity in Eliot's early work. He is a character incapable of any action that he can conceive to be significant precisely because he is subject to - and the subject of - a self-consciousness which consumes the world and all its possible acts before he can commit himself to them. It is not by insignificance that Prufrock is trapped, but by his awareness that no action he can undertake would ever be truly significant. The ironic pose of the poem is possible not only because of the author's superior awareness, shared with the reader, but because Prufrock is himself

¹ 'Vacillation', Yeats, CP, p. 285.
made so intensely conscious of his situation. Prufrock is aware both of the trap in which he is caught and of the fact that any escape route is itself only part of the trap: he can achieve no significant action because he cannot imagine a possible transformation of his environment which would justify any individual act. His imagination fails to engage with the world around him - or rather overleaps it, and leaves him stranded where he began.

The terms of this process are caught perfectly in the repeated two lines

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michaelangelo

which assert, by their repetition and their insistent present tense, a state of affairs which is unalterable. It would be easy to take from these lines one of Eliot's often invoked contrasts between the splendour of the past and the banality of the present; the triviality, the directionless 'come and go', the insubstantiality of talk contrasted with the powerful permanence of 'Michaelangelo'. The rhyme pitches a single syllable of no great semantic relevance against a name burdened alike with syllables and connotations, but the movement is not one that works in a single direction. The women have appropriated Michaelangelo into their own forms of life: he does not transcend or overwhelm that life and they exist in a kind of equality with him. We can see in this a debasement of the artist, but it represents also an elevation of the socialites of Boston, for they have achieved, in however qualified a sense, a way of life that has a permanence apparently equivalent to that of art.

1 Kenner, Invisible Poet (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 5 writes: 'The phenomenon of sound obscuring deficiencies of sense from writer and reader is often to be observed in English poetry; the Romantics may be said to have elevated it into a method. Mr Eliot's originality consisted in allowing the deficiency to be concealed only from the speaker.' Eliot's critical dictum seems to me to be obscuring the poem from the reader here; Prufrock is much more deeply implicated in Eliot's own technique than Kenner would wish.
To suggest that these lines can only operate on a satirical level, underlining the disjunction between the prattling women and the subject of their conversation, is to miss the extent to which the same pattern can be found throughout the poem. The achievement of those whom Prufrock cannot escape - led to meet them as he is by the 'insidious intent' of the very streets through which he passes - lies in the ability they have acquired to transform anything that might, by its transcendence of ordinary human categories, pose a threat to the security of social life. Those aspects of experience which are antipathetic to human existence are reduced to somnolence by the social processes of polite society. Thus the fog that threateningly surrounds it is suddenly transformed from violent action - 'made a sudden leap' - to domesticity:

And seeing that it was a soft October night
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

The destructive leap becomes a protective envelope: the cat whose violence is wreaked upon the outer world is tamed within the social world and so returns later in the poem as the image of the transformation of the annihilating effects of time into acceptable social forms -

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Soothed by long fingers,
Asleep ... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.

The time of which Prufrock is so afraid - 'And indeed there will be time' - becomes in the context of the drawing room and afternoon tea a mere appendage to the social formalities.

Prufrock's personal failure is not to be identified with the failure of his society: it is, in part, his failure to identify himself with his society. Lines, for instance, such as

I have measured out my life with coffee spoons
do not point directly towards the triviality of the social world. Rather, they are the intersection of two different conceptions of absolutes between which Prufrock is trapped: the social forms represented by the coffee spoons are necessary to the transformation of an alien world which the social world achieves, but it is a transformation that Prufrock cannot bring himself to live within and whose terms he cannot see except as falsifications of the real. It is the flickering intensity of Prufrock's internal life -

In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse
- which makes his integration into the stately permanence of the world in which he moves impossible. The social world is for him - and for those who are more centrally a part of it - essential to the very structure of the universe, so that even the domestics are metamorphosed into minor deities:

And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat ... 

The intersection of the timeless with time in this world occurs in the very structure of the social formalities: in subjectivity all time is relative, discrete - 'in a minute there is time' - whereas whatever is external to subjectivity takes on the aspect of the eternal. The social world has entirely dominated the universe, a domination achieved through a domestication which Prufrock, and perhaps Eliot too, seems to see as a primarily feminine achievement that leaves no place for the male. Prufrock's fear of the women he encounters is symptomatic not only of his social inadequacy but of the emasculation they enforce by their ability to tame any force whose power might emanate from beyond the boundaries of their social world.

It is because he is trapped within this environment that Prufrock's every attempt at significant action appears to him as a challenge to the entire nature of the universe. That social world is the universe as far as those with whom he mixes are concerned and the contravention of its laws
is a kind of death. Thus Prufrock's visions of himself achieving some kind of significant act revolve constantly around images of death - his head 'brought in upon a platter', 'Lazarus, come from the dead', Hamlet, Polonius. But each of these is an image already hallowed by the processes of art: the horror of the event is transformed by its being raised to the universal level of the art work in which it exists. John the Baptist's head becomes an object of contemplation in an eternal artistic pattern just as the violence of Hamlet's death is neutralised by its existence within the repeatable form of the play. From his living death Prufrock's mind flies off into deaths whose significance lies in the fact that the reality of death has been removed from them: they too have been 'domesticated', by a different medium from that of the social world but one which is not truly antipathetic to it. Each of Prufrock's envisaged roles represents a gesture rather than a series of actions; a pose at the point where life makes itself significant in the face of death, but does so only in a context in which death is made irrelevant.

His final recognition of the inappropriateness of the roles he envisages,

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be...

does not lead him to step outside the framework of the play and therefore of death made acceptable by art, but leads only to a slide down the scale of achievement within the work of art, from Hamlet through Polonius to the Fool. Similarly, throughout the course of the poem he does not progress towards deeper understanding of the dualities within which he is trapped, but wanders along different boundaries between the social universe and what he feels to exist beyond it. The streets, the fog, the visions are all elements which border on the social universe, which offer alternatives to it but which remain unrealisable alternatives for Prufrock. The most striking instance of this is the image of the lonely men in shirt sleeves,
for here we have men who are not conditioned into the feminine universe, who accept with equanimity their ambiguous position of being half in a house, half in the street. It is a self-possession which evidently arises in part from social class but which can only drive Prufrock to his most violently defensive escape from his own situation:

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

The final scene on the beach is the consummation of these various boundaries since here Prufrock finds himself physically on the boundary of his world. That the beach has been taken over by the social world is evident:

I shall wear white flannels, and walk upon the beach
and the other world, though apparent, remains unattainable:

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

But in the final three lines the unattainable other world undergoes a sudden transformation by which it becomes the world in which we have, actually, been living; thus completing the interconnection of imaginative with social existence:

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

The 'we' is as disturbing as the sudden switch to finding ourselves located in the world which had seemed unattainable. The 'we' has an obvious relation to the 'you and I' of the opening, but as so often in Eliot's verse the words are stripped of context and cannot be given a precise reference.¹

¹ George Williamson in his Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967) has, among others, propounded the theory of a split personality, one half of which is addressing the other and which here achieves a brief reintegration. There seems little in the poem that can support or refute such a contention except the oddity of a conversation between a conscious and a suppressed self, whose existence in the end is necessitated by the need for it to be forgotten.
It is the consistent decontextualising of the language of the poem, however, which makes the introduction of the mermaids as the poem's conclusion so appropriate. The significant terms of the final section - mermaids, sea-girls, chambers of the sea - are all words which have no referent in what we usually describe as reality. In the case of these particular terms the words themselves are the real existents, they exist in virtue of their meaning and not in virtue of their reference to some existent in the world. As such, these words form the climax of one of the major processes of a poem which moves almost entirely through hypothesis, suggestion and possibility and only once achieves a direct statement which seems attributable to an actually existing situation:

And the afternoon, the evening sleeps so peacefully
- and that, of course, is qualified by the image in which it is couched.

The reference of all the other verbal arrangements in the poem, like the referents of the final section, are a function of the recollections, projections and imaginings in Prufrock's consciousness. Bertrand Russell, in An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, discusses in the following terms the relation between word and object:

When I say 'the sun is shining', I do not mean that this is one of a number of sentences among which there is no contradiction; I mean something which is not verbal, and for the sake of which such words as 'sun' and 'shining' were invented. The purpose of words, though philosophers seem to forget this simple fact, is to deal with matters other than words. If I go into a restaurant and order my dinner, I do not want my words to fit into a system with other words, but to bring about the presence of food.1

But Prufrock is not a man trying to deal with the external world; his language functions as a constant evasion of that world and finds its consummation in the language of mermaids. Indeed Prufrock himself is sub-

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1 Bertrand Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, pp. 140-1.
stantially the creation of his name - the prim correctness of it is the focus of all that the poem contains, but what the poem contains are words whose referents are in Prufrock's consciousness, words which do not point out into the world but turn back upon their source. The words create a world and a consciousness which both exist only in the words themselves. The words are not fully self-referential, turning back upon their own meanings, but neither are they referential, since they turn back upon the significance of their use by Prufrock. The words hover constantly around the possibility of a real verbal act such as is described by Russell, but in fact never reach it - the question cannot be asked because it is the verbal equivalent of an action that cannot be undertaken and each would demand an acknowledgement of external reality in a form that Prufrock cannot accept. We know Prufrock through the uses he makes of words but the use he puts all his words to is one which evades the primary use described by Russell.

It is this transformation of language, the fact that the words are cut off from the objects to which they refer and reflect back upon the consciousness which projects itself through them, that constitutes the essential originality of Eliot's poem. For Eliot consciousness plays the same part in relation to language that the transcendent does for the symbolists: the harsh materiality of the world disappears into a contemplative inner space and language finds an ideality which is based not on an Absolute that transcends reality but on a relative isolation from it. Consciousness is, in itself, the only transcension in Eliot's poem, and language cannot therefore operate as an escape route towards transcendence since it emanates from it. Language is the signpost of consciousness but can only return consciousness to itself in an intensification of its isolation.

When Eliot has Prufrock say,
No! I am not Prince Hamlet nor was meant to be
he is not only implicitly referring to Hamlet's famous soliloquy, but also
underlining the relationship between meaning and being in the poem. It
is only through meaning that being can be achieved. As Eliot was to put
it in his thesis:

The object qua object would not exist without the bundle of
experiences, but the bundle would not be a bundle unless it
were held together by the moment of objectivity which is
realised in the name.1

The bundle of perceptions which are the poem are located in a single con-
sciousness by virtue of being attached to a name which gives them objectivity.
Prufrock's differentiation of himself from Hamlet is created on the basis
of the attribution of a name which gathers together certain experiences into
a particular centre. But the kind of arbitrariness which this implies
affects equally the language in which Prufrock apprehends his world: that
world exists for him only through the naming processes by which he becomes
awake of it. Language thus comes to constitute his world, in the sense
that it is the words which define the consciousness that is Prufrock. The
objects can only be apprehended by the reader as elements within that con-
sciousness, since, indeed, they constitute that consciousness. The
language of the poem has ceased to be an intermediary between a subjectivity
and an objectivity whose existence is accepted as more basic than that of
language: it is only in and through language that these come to exist at
all. The ontological priority of what we consider to belong to the real
world, including mental phenomena, is displaced in favour of a reality -
including consciousness - which is a function of the existence of language
itself.

1 K&E, p. 133.
Now, evidently there is a class of objects - which much troubled Russell in the shape of the king of France's head - for which we can find no existent; objects which we can loosely denominate 'fictive'. Fictive objects have a kind of existence since we can talk to each other about them, contemplate our idea of them and so on, but their existence is not separable from the word or image by which they are designated. Mr Pickwick is nothing other than the meanings of the words in which he is described; we cannot verify the accuracy of Dickens's descriptions because they could only be matched against some inner idea or picture that Dickens himself had of Pickwick, and if he returned to provide us with that inner idea it could only be a further set of words.

Prufrock, of course, is also a fictive existent of this kind, but whereas Pickwick is described in a language which masquerades as a presentation of a reality beyond language, Prufrock's language is constructed on hypothetical situations which undermine our sense of any other reality than that of language itself. Dickens's prose locates Pickwick in a world of supposedly real objects; Prufrock emerges from a world of hypothetical objects into his supposed reality. What gives reality to the events of Pickwick's world is, essentially, its time scheme, which imitates the ordinary processes of mechanical time, but in Eliot's poem events emerge from a temporal hinterland which subverts ordinary time scales. Everything is seen as a projection from an unstated point in time and space: 'Let us go then', 'There will be time', 'For I have known', 'Shall I say' and so on. The effect of these disjunctive temporal modes is that we never see Prufrock

1 Russell's discussion of this problem is contained in his essay 'On Denoting', originally published in Mind (1905) and later collected in Logic and Knowledge, ed. by R.C. Marsh (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 39 ff.
except in an act of consciousness, of memory or imagination, and so it appears as though consciousness is annihilated in the moment of action. Any act in the present cannot fully enter into consciousness: past and future, real and fictive share the same status and cannot, therefore, operate as spurs to action.

Prufrock's problem is, as it were, that he does not experience the world as real, he experiences it as a linguistic construction, as a projection of the self:

Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that
trail along the floor -
And this, and so much more? -
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on
a screen ...

The objects of this passage exist, like the parts of the poem, in a kind of spatial as well as temporal vacuum: they have no relationship with each other except through the medium of Prufrock's consciousness and the reiterated, but by reiteration entirely vague, 'after'. The image of the magic lantern describes Prufrock's world: consciousness sees in the world only what it feeds on in its own situation. Meaning, therefore, becomes impossible,

'That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.'

because there are no common objects through which it can operate. All objects are, as it were, personal fictive creations. Thus Prufrock attempts by these lists of minor objects to retain a relation between word and object which is denied him whenever he attempts to approach 'some overwhelming question'. Eliot later wrote:

'Saint Paul's' might retain its full fixity of meaning for me...
if everyone else meant by the same term, let us say 'Notre-Dame'. There would, of course, be contradiction in my world which I should have to rectify in one way or another; but the social consilience goes toward the construction of our world and not toward the definition of idea."

This fearful personal isolation in relation to language is the direct equivalent of Eliot's presentation of Prufrock's isolation from his social world. Prufrock is a man who is unable to achieve the social consilience which would make language itself secure.

To say this is not, however, to say that 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is a study in psychological disorder; rather Prufrock is preternaturally aware of the real nature of his relations with the rest of the world and is, by that awareness, made unfitted for the ordinary intercourse of life.

Any assertion about the world, or any ultimate statement about any object in the world, will inevitably be an interpretation. It is a valuation and an assignment of meaning. The things of which we are collectively certain, we may say our common formulae, are certainly not true ... All significant truths are private truths; they become facts, or at best, part of the public character; or at worst, catchwords.2

That which passes for truth in the conventional world can never, in fact, be true and it seems to me entirely false in relation to this to say, as D.E.S. Maxwell does, that

all these are poems of a society concerned exclusively with trivial refinement, second-hand experience and complete spiritual inaction

and then to assimilate Prufrock to that society:

Life, if it is lived as the lady and Prufrock live it will be destroyed by them as surely as the lilac stalks which are also in their hands.3

1 K&E, p. 44.
2 Ibid., p. 165.
The pathos - though perhaps it comes nearer to a modern version of tragedy - of Prufrock's situation lies exactly in the extent of his awareness of possibilities other than those offered by society; his realisation that it is in the face of death that one must judge one's life achievements, but that there will be no significant death for him because he lives his death at every moment -

Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter
I am no prophet - and here's no great matter

Such a death, however, is one that can be accepted with the same security from the reality of death that the social world offers. Failure of that sort hardly amounts to heroic refusal but it is a failure which emphasises the destruction of human potentialities by an alien order of existence.

It is Prufrock's superiority to those around him that makes him feel so inferior in their company, and his failure to be able to act according to that superiority that makes him pathetic in his own eyes. The pathos, however, lies in a self-aware sense of waste rather than in the mere spectacle of failure; and it is a pathos that ought to come near to heroism in our eyes.

In this Prufrock exhibits the same characteristics as the language through which he is embodied and it is that identity between character and style which makes the poem such a complete production and such a total exemplification of a new attitude to poetry. The fear of action, the enforced passivity which are central to Prufrock's character are true equally of a verbal matrix which turns back upon itself, which finds its real meanings in the gaps between syntactic units rather than in the units themselves. Eliot's language never commits the crime of escaping to a dreamworld, a crime for which Eliot castigated the Romantics; it always
retains its connection with the banal, the actual, but even as it does so it is aware of itself as a flight from reality into the medium of language. The irony of the poem's pose is the irony of knowing that what it deplores - the break between consciousness and reality - it enforces by being a linguistic construction, the projection of fictive existents.

The whole movement of the poem is towards an increasing identification of Prufrock with the fictive and imaginary, with the work of art and the mythic mermaids. It is this movement which is central to our - and to Prufrock's - awareness of his failure to encounter reality. Jonathon Rabon has suggested that "Prufrock, like Pound's Mauberley, is an ironic model of the failed twentieth-century poet, of the writer who is the inheritor of many styles but for whom none is fully adequate." But Prufrock, it seems to me, is less an ironic model of the poet than an ironic model of the act of poetic communication itself. Prufrock provides us with a personality whose relationship to reality is parallel to that of poetry and of language itself. Prufrock's passivity is the mirror image of the passivity of poetry in the face of the real, of poetry's passivity in the face of the reader when it is the kind of poetry that demands the reader's creation of his own connection between its elements and between its individual images. The poem's ultimate irony is that it depends on a reader to make connections which it declines to allow anyone to make: Prufrock depends upon a world whose existence he wishes not to be able to recognise; we depend on the poem to tell us about a Prufrock who can only be constructed by our intervention

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

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The final line applies as much to the reading of the poem itself as to the character whose consciousness is presented through them. It is the reader too who has undertaken the journey into a fictive universe becoming aware of itself as fictive, it is the reader whom Prufrock embraces with

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea.

The poem is a language act which will be destroyed by the intervention of real human voices using language as a means of connecting with reality because we have given up that reality for the process of art, except that we probably do not have the humility to accept ourselves as 'the Fool'.

The epigraph invites us to enter the hell of art, of being trapped within art - 'no one has ever returned alive from this gulf' - because it is our principal reality but an insufficient one. Art offers a road to action which its existence as art negates: the irony of the poem turns back upon the reader, refusing to allow him to accept his own superiority.

The poem never loses its awareness that the aesthetic it mocks in statement it enhances in form.

In this interconnectedness of form and content 'Prufrock' is the finest poem of Eliot's first volume, but it evinces a profound suspicion of aesthetic experience in general and therefore of its own nature in particular, a suspicion that art is necessarily a mode of making acceptable the terrors of existence while giving one the impression of encountering them. Eliot has presented us with a poem in which language's failure to encounter reality has become self-conscious in a character who, through his imaginative use of language, asserts the failure of society to take account of the whole of life, but can only envisage the life beyond society in terms of art forms which domesticate the anti-social as much as society itself does. Eliot, in other words, is using language as though it were an
absolute realm of its own but locating the use of absolute language in a particular, relative social situation. Where the absolute language of the symbolists had been used to point towards some transcendent existence, Eliot's absolute language, by being located within a character, can point only inwards to the consciousness which is behind all of the words. Instead of a poetic method intended to reveal the noumena, Eliot provides us with a poetic method which necessarily closes off all approach to anything outside of the individual consciousness. The incapacity of the poetic techniques to reveal anything beyond themselves is the precise analogue of Prufrock's incapacity to ask his question. As Prufrock retreats into his own consciousness so the language of the poem retreats into a consciousness which we can never know, the consciousness from which the language emerges, and retreats into our own consciousness as we attempt to make, through personal association, the connections which it denies us. Poet, character and reader are each trapped in the privacy of the patterns of their own consciousnesses.

Eliot's characters are therefore caught within a double determinism: that of the communal banality of the social world and the solipsistic, individual accretions of the personal. It is a confrontation that is dramatised in 'Mr Apollinax',¹ for here the speaker and his subject face each other across the intervening desiccation of their tea-table companions, perfectly integrated into the social world they inhabit. Against that desiccation is placed the vitality of Apollinax's conversation, but it is a vitality we can only become aware of - as readers of the poem - through the significance of the images in which it is presented to us by the speaker.

¹ CP, p. 33.
Like Prufrock, Apollinax is seen as one initiated, in a way that his hosts are not, into the mysteries of life and death, since his laughter unites that of the 'irresponsible foetus' with that of the guardian of the place of death, the sea. This unification of opposites is also, of course, evident in the assimilation to Apollinax of the characteristics of both Fragilion and Priapus. But that comparison enters almost casually, a stray thought in the mind of the speaker:

I thought of Fragilion, that shy figure among the birch-trees,  
And of Priapus in the shrubbery  
Gaping at the lady in the swing.

These accidental thoughts lead, however, into images whose reality is balanced completely against the 'reality' of the academic tea party:

In the palace of Mrs Phlaccus, at Professor Channing Cheetah's  
He laughed like an irresponsible foetus.  
His laughter was submarine and profound  
Like the old man of the sea's

All the time the poem is moving verbally towards the assertion of the superiority of the imagined over the context of its imagining. At this point the two are poised in equilibrium but with the final three lines of the first section what we had taken to be the imagined becomes so dominant as to be taken for the real:

Hidden under coral islands  
Where worried bodies of drowned men drift down  
in the green silence,  
Dropping from fingers of surf.

The weight given to this description, its fulsome alliteration, the length of the penultimate line with its slowing down through the single syllables of 'drowned men drift down in the green silence', establishes the superior reality of the imagined scene over the context of its envisaging.

The intellectual vitality of Apollinax stimulates an imaginative
vision which is the equivalent of his philosophical one; the two are very different but both transcend the environment in which they take place.

In fact, the speaker's vision has become so intense that the second section opens with his searching for the real existents of his imagined objects:

I looked for the head of Mr Apollinax rolling
under a chair
Or grinning over a screen
With seaweed in its hair.

The equivalence of speaker and subject is thus completed, for the philosopher's talk is also of imagined objects, centaurs — another of Russell's favourite illustrations for the problem of denotation — which the speaker comes to hear as real,

I heard the beat of centaur's hoofs over the hard turf.

The philosopher and the poet remain, however, trapped in their isolation, unable to communicate one with another because of the context in which they meet, but the philosopher has acted for the poet as the locus of an imaginative experience that the context cannot deny. Nothing remains of the philosopher but the imaginative vision which he has inspired; the reciprocity between creator and subject of creation is complete, whereas of the other guests what remains are merely the mechanical and partial residual elements retained by memory: 'I remember a slice of lemon, and a bitten macaroon'.

There is no escape, however, from the spiritual banality represented by 'dowager Mrs Phlaccus, and Professor and Mrs Cheetah' except by a personal withdrawal, a retention of awareness within the individual. The poem holds out the possibility of a victory for the forces of imaginative vitality over those of social sterility, but it is a pyrrhic victory which can only be maintained during the actual connection between the speaker and Apollinax and can only be retained in the form of the poem. It cannot be maintained permanently, as the poem demonstrates in its necessary return in its final
lines to the world of the desiccated. Again the imaginative transformation of reality has been represented by Eliot in terms of fictive referents, emphasising the extent to which the poetic act itself is unable to engage in a struggle with the reality it deplores. The speaker of 'Mr Apollinax' remains silent, his consanguinity with his subject unstated, their mutual transformations of reality unaccepted by the world in which they live.

The paradox that the transformation evoked in 'Mr Apollinax' cannot avoid is that imagination cannot operate without the help of the memory processes which are relegated in that poem to the area of the socially sterile. The imaginative release which the poem celebrates is possible only on the basis of memory, even though it does so in the very act of renouncing the implications of memory. 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', however, explores an escape from normality which reorders - or perhaps disorders - experience in apparently significant ways through the dissolution of the ordinary patterns of psychic existence:

Whispering lunar incantations
Dissolve the floors of memory
And all its clear relations,
Its divisions and precisions ...
...
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

The final image is one of the most powerful of Eliot's early disjunctive images and part of its power lies in its enactment of its statement. The relation between midnight and memory and between the madman and his geranium is one which even after long acquaintance retains its full quota of anarchic oddity. As John Dixon Hunt insists, 'readers of the poem must hold the two images uneasily in their minds and refuse any critical tactics to impose

upon them a false logic of reconciliation', but in the service of that belief I would like to offer at least a partial reconciliation of the image. Memory in this poem has become the prey of an anarchic force: the mind released from its normal clear relations, its habitual patterns of association, seeks to shake life into the dead past, but the life will not return to the dead geraniums of memory itself, but will be released in the space between them. Vitality will not return through the disordering of memory, but through the new relations which will be established between its dead elements; relations which, because they will always remain unrepeatable, will always remain to a certain extent ungraspable, as indeed the image from which I have adduced this does. That which is dead cannot be made to live again except by bringing it into a new relation with the present, such a new relation as the image itself actually performs as we read it, though it denies it in its content.

Each of this poem's sections presents the mechanical imposition of the external world upon the speaker -

The street-lamp said, 'Regard that woman
Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door.

The street lamp and the time enforce an immediate sensation from which the speaker cannot escape, but because mind and body have been set free of their normal behavioural patterns, the immediate sensation gives rise to an

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1 John Dixon Hunt, "Broken Images": T.S. Eliot and Modern Painting', in 'The Waste Land' in Different Voices, ed. A.D. Moody (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), pp. 170-1. Hunt's essay offers, through the analogy with painting, a useful corrective to the intellectual analysis of Eliot's images, and the recovery of their essential irreducibility. D.E.S. Maxwell, for instance, suggests that the opening image in 'Prufrock' is not altogether successful, for synthesis fails to result from the yoking together of the disparate ideas' (The Poetry of T.S. Eliot, p. 49). Eliot's images are not metaphysical conceits and it is their accuracy of disjunction rather than similarity by which they are to be judged.
extraordinary association. The prostitute's eye is seen, strikingly, as a 'crooked pin', but at that,

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things

The solace offered to Wordsworth by the daffodils 'remembered in tranquility' has been replaced by nightmare: there is no solace in these images, no extractable meanings, only a sense of possible but ungraspable significance locked in the lines of force set up by their oppositions. Memory here releases images which suggest a possible transformation of life's meanings, a new sense of underlying realities, but exactly because these new meanings can only be produced when the mind is dispossessed of its normal functionings there is no way that those meanings can be made active in the ordinary world. The essential insight into the form of things remains predicated on an 'as if':

A twisted branch upon the beach
Eaten smooth, and polished
As if the world gave up
The secret of its skeleton,
Stiff and white.

The content of this memory image reveals the nature of, and the failure of, the process by which it arises: the recalled object, even if only by virtue of the fact that it has been remembered so vividly, gains some deep personal significance that makes it a formative element in the subject's experience of the world. It is therefore part of the essential form of the world - for him; part of the essential subconscious order through which he experiences the world, but its significance in that role always escapes the subject. It leads merely into further associations, of equal weight, but of less universalisable content:

A broken spring in a factory yard,
Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
Hard and curled and ready to snap.
The image describes its own power as an agent of spiritual renovation.

'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' thus performs its own version of the duality of imagination and world that is common to most of Eliot's early poems, a duality which is repeated in the character himself in the conflict between social role and inner consciousness. The inner world is profound and profoundly personal, but it cannot be made to relate either to the external world or to the character's behaviour in the social realm - except as an impediment. One's real self and one's real knowledge of the world lies in these private, submerged experiences that emerge under certain disordered conditions and yet to trust to them drives the speaker into further isolation from the social world (like Prufrock on the beach) and therefore into an even more limiting contact with it. In these characters the problem of the poetry itself is being rehearsed, since its images can only communicate at an unverbalisable level to the reader, seeking some personal connection in the depths of his experience to unite the disjunctive images, but in so doing driving further from engagement in the external world, further into a personal and isolated world of inner experience.

Thus in the fourth section of the poem the movement into inner experience has become so total as to suggest the complete mindlessness and automatism of others. Their inner experience is locked entirely out of reach of the speaker:

So the hand of the child, automatic,
Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.
I could see nothing behind that child's eye.

Observed from outside there can be no sense of personality, of thinking process, and all life is reduced to the behavioural mechanism of primitive forms of animal development:
I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

The old crab figures forth not only the mechanical aspect of all physical life, but emphasises the mechanical aspect of mental activity too. The street lamp holds out a stick (the cat in the gutter) and memory performs its gripping act, tossing up some image from the past over which the consciousness has no control.

Quietude belongs only to the moon which has 'lost her memory': no geraniums which once had life, but only 'a paper rose' that can undergo neither decay nor regeneration. The moon's is a state of consciousness in which any number of sensations can co-exist in the present because they are all merely repetitions of past experience: there is, for her, no accumulation of experience or depth of memory, merely the meaningless and random order in which individual experiences occur. To the speaker, however,

The reminiscence comes
Of sunless dry geraniums
And dust in crevices,
Smells of chestnuts in the streets,
And female smells in shuttered rooms,
And cigarettes in corridors
And cocktail smells in bars.

The dead geraniums lead into an accumulation of the meaningless and random memories provided by the modern world. Their isolation from each other is not productive of the kind of energy and tension which had characterised the earlier images; their isolation is part of the nature of their relationship to each other in the world. They are the memories imposed by modern social life which will not connect with the deeper layers of remembered experience and so bring them into some kind of fruitful relation with the present. The deepest layers of experience can only be released under
conditions which allow the mind to escape from the impositions of the social world, but exactly because of that those underlying patterns of experience cannot be made active in that world. The disjunction between the two arises out of the failure of the modern world; the world of 'cigarettes in corridors / And cocktail smells in bars' cannot provide sufficient potentiality for the significant associations by which the mind might discover real patterns of meaning.

This meaningless accumulation of the paraphernalia of modern life points towards the poem's final irony: the memory which had created fleetingly a seemingly significant escape from the banality of the actual leads the speaker back into the ordinary life he had left:

Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.

Memory may have the key, but it is one that locks the speaker into his banal world and out from his real self or vice versa. There is no possible interchange between these two realms of experience. The imaginative 'decreations' of reality which the night has permitted are illusions of freedom within the fatalism of memory's accretions that are the speaker's life. There is no renewal of life because the imagination here operates as a submerged anarchism, inflicting occasional acts of destruction on the normal patterns of experience, but leaving them finally untransformed. The madman will never shake the geranium back to life, and the human being, when not a mindless machine, is a walking graveyard of his past. Since it is from this graveyard that the life of poetry comes, the disjunction within the individual is also the disjunction between the world of the poem and the world in which it finds itself.

Trapped between the mechanism of body and the determinism of mind,
the typical speaker of Eliot's poems suffers his enforced passivity in the face of his world. This static conflict is the psychological equivalent of the stasis which is forced upon the character in his relations with the social world that he inhabits. Seeking a mode of effective action, each of Eliot's characters attempts to create for himself a role which will fit him into the world from which he is alienated by consciousness - or self-consciousness. Thus Prufrock's constant playing with alternative roles, whereas for the speaker in 'Portrait of a Lady' the possibilities are less elevated:

And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression ... dance, dance
Like the dancing bear,
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.

Both the search for an appropriate role and the search for a means of integrating the inner, personal elements of consciousness with the external world are, however, bound to fail - each collapses back upon itself, with the subject driven into further isolation. The mind is trapped in passivity in its necessary acceptance of its own contents and the patterns they form (and perhaps this is where Bradley's congeniality to Eliot took shape), but the only vitality that could be given to this material would involve the acceptance of an activity before which one remains passive, the profound because totally uncontrollable activity of madness. The vitality of the new associative patterns, the energy discharged in the space between previously unrelated elements in consciousness, is thus illusory, since its basis remains the dead contingences of individual experience. And for the poem it is a vitality which can be achieved only at the expense of derogating its energy to the uncontrollable creations of the reader's contingent experience.
Of course, neither character nor poet ever gives himself to that underworld of experience totally. The anarchic and disjunctive happen momentarily in particular images within the poem, and the overall pattern of the poems are such as to leave constant gaps, logical vacuums which disrupt the sense of order, but both of these are held in tension by the prevailing measured tone: the 'déreglement de tous les sens' advocated by Rimbaud and implied by 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' is matched by the strong sense of order in the individual lines and paragraphs of Eliot's poems. The order is the product of Eliot's grave handling of language, as though it had to be held constantly at arm's length. Through repetition Eliot suspends the movement of a poem, transforming the casual into part of an essential order:

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.

The repetitions in a passage such as this not only serve a function in relation to the psychology to which they refer, their creation of micro-structures of order, of insistent patterns internal to particular areas of the poem, is the counterbalance to the apparent discontinuity of the total pattern. Similarly Eliot plays the anglo-saxon against the latinate in lines such as,

Time to turn back and descend the stair
in which 'descend' represents a measure of verbal control that balances the lack of control of which it speaks.

The balance between order and disorder that is thus at work in the verbal matrix of Eliot's poetry formulates the ambivalent attitude to the social order that exists not only in Eliot's characters but in these poems where he seems to speak more directly in his own voice. In poems such as
'Aunt Helen'\textsuperscript{1} and 'Cousin May'\textsuperscript{2} Eliot's attitude to the mores that he describes seems to me to be extremely ambivalent. Kenner deals with them in a chapter entitled 'satires', and like most satires they turn out to be very far from radical attacks on their society and its order. The inability to act that affects Eliot's characters so deeply is reflected in the ambivalence of the judgments that these little satirical pieces make.

In 'Aunt Helen', death provides neither regeneration nor revolution, only the continuation of a slow decay. The old lady leaves no family to renew her way of life, and those who remain, the servants and the pets, continue in their old roles, merely enjoying a freedom within them that had not previously existed. In the face of this Eliot seems almost to suspend judgment. Lines four and five are typical in the way that they collapse heaven and earth in a mutual deflation:

\begin{quote}
Now when she died there was silence in heaven
And silence at her end of the street.
\end{quote}

Do we take the silence in heaven to be respectful - or condemnatory - or even fearful? And is the silence at the end of the street she evidently thought of in terms of possession, the silence of loss - or does it reflect merely the talkative qualities of the lately deceased? The poem restrains itself, hovering between the alternative suggestions of its own syntax and committing itself, if at all, only indirectly. Each possibility is accurate within a certain perspective; almost all of the perspectives remain open. The mockery of the irrelevance of the old lady's life never extends fully to the world she inhabits. In the final lines the actions of the footman are presented as a decay of order - he now sits upon the table at which he had waited, holding the second (not the first) housemaid on his knees. In the end the poem turns back, almost regretfully, to the lost virtue of the housemaid,

\begin{footnotes}
1 CP, p. 31. \\
2 CP, p. 32.
\end{footnotes}
Who had always been so careful while her mistress lived. The regret, however, is poised upon ambiguity: 'careful' in not doing what she has now been seduced into doing, or 'careful' only in the openness with which she would indulge such attentions? The ambiguity throws us back to the previous use of the word in the poem and the fact that Aunt Helen was

Cared for by servants to the number four.

The economic situation of being employed as servants and the situation of human concern, of caring, are telescoped together - did the moral order ever correspond to the social order, or was that merely an illusion fostered by economic carefulness on the part of those concerned? Has the death of the old led to a release of vitality or only to the last stages of decay? The poem balances on its tone, its prim knowingness suggesting implication in the existing order of society and thereby a refusal to accept the breaking of ranks by servants, while at the same time it looks with a jaundiced eye on the representatives of superior value in the previous order. The mockery emanates, however, from presuppositions which the poem does not state and which are by no means necessarily antipathetic to the actual values of the society whose individuals it deals with.

The following poem in the Collected Poems would, in fact, suggest that the mockery is the defensive reaction of personal indecision. 'Cousin Nancy' shows us a revolution in social values, an influx of vitality into the deadening conformity of the past. The sense of life and power exemplified in the opening lines -

Miss Nancy Ellicott
Strode across the hills and broke them,
Rode across the hills and broke them -
The barren New England hills -

is emphasised by the implications of sterility overcome in 'barren New England
hills' though the achievement of 'breaking' the hills is undercut by the already achieved domestication implied by the next two lines:

Riding to hounds  
Over the cow-pasture.

The middle section, however, reveals what this energy and vitality are directed towards:

Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked  
And danced all the modern dances;  
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,  
But they knew that it was modern.

The verse achieves, by throwing the stress on to the last syllable, 'smoked', and stopping the line there, a kind of verbal raising of the eyebrows, a questioning of what is involved that is underlined by the repetition of 'dance' as though the application of the term to what is under discussion is not quite appropriate. The verse, like the aunts, is not quite sure how it feels about it and remains poised on the dubious value of 'modernity'.

The tension which the poem thus so far embodies is far from being resolved by the conclusion: rather the conclusion stands as witness to the ambiguities within which the various values are trapped.

Upon the glazen shelves kept watch  
Matthew and Waldo, guardians of the faith,  
The army of unalterable law.

By the use of the Christian names in conjunction with a reversal of normal word order, Arnold and Emerson are reduced to puny familiarity, irrelevant display pieces no longer actively involved in the culture of the community. And yet the whole movement of the poem leads towards the suspended final line: 'The army of unalterable law'. The law, of course, has been altered, in a certain sense, since it is no longer obeyed, but through the structure of the poem the law seems to be invoked by the poet to the estimation of the acts from which the poem started. The poem acknowledges the irrelevance
of its sages, but refuses to forego their wisdom - and seems paralysed between the two positions.

Both poems are concerned to reveal the sterility of the existing order and, at the same time, the lack of value in the possible revolts against it. There is, as it were, an abyss which separates past forms of life whose values, though outmoded, seem at least to retain a sense of the gravity of life, and the new forms of life, which turn out to be hedonistic, concerned only with their own existence in the present. Just as the individual psyche cannot be made to establish links with the social role, so at the level of the community as a whole the present cannot be made to connect with the past, and all continuity of value - and therefore the primary value of continuity - is destroyed. The poetry in both cases emerges from the abyss, but it is inflicted with the paralysis of its situation and is, therefore, unable to create any real bridge between the two areas of existence it recognises as having been separated.

Neither of these socially oriented poems makes any significant use of the associative techniques that I have been analysing in Eliot's other early works, and this turning outwards was typical of much that he was to write in the period around the First World War. The disjunctions of the earlier poems, which were the product of the associative patterns of speakers, are created in later poems by the suppression of narrative connection by the poet. The discontinuities produced by the aberrations of the psyche thus become the discontinuities of the external world, but the creation of such a poem, for instance, as 'A Cooking Egg' involves a much greater degree of wilful obscurantism on the part of the poet than any of the earlier productions. In a poem like this we are left with only the outward
mechanism of a symbolist poem. It performs within itself some of the disjunctions of the world in which it exists, but its logical lacunae are mildly puzzling rather than structurally creative: there is no sense in which the poem is the medium of some spiritual transcendence or regeneration. Through its satiric pose the poem offers to deal with the failings of society, but the engagement with society, like the use of symbolist techniques, is only of the surface. In reality, the poem will only deal with the messy business of the social world from a safe distance, holding it like a lump of coal in a pair of tongs.

Sweeney, that other creation of the novelistic imagination of the younger Eliot, is the pre-eminent focus in this kind of poetry. If Prufrock is, as I have argued, a personality whose strengths and inadequacies mirror those of the poetry in which he exists, then Sweeney provides a dialectical opposition to the poetry in which he occurs. Satiric distance is not created through a contrasting awareness of the morally good, the humanly valuable, but in the very construction of the poems themselves. Their self-conscious virtuosity in verbal construction - with pre-eminence going to 'Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service' - is in itself the value by which the vulgar placidity of Sweeney is to be judged. The ambiguity we have seen in the relation of central figure to social context is switched in these poems into a tension between the central figure and the poetic context. Sweeney is the archetypal representative of the mass society in which the poem has to exist merely because of the accident of history, but Eliot

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1 Donald Davie's essay, 'Pound and Eliot: a distinction', in Martin, ed. Eliot in Perspective, pp. 62-82, has an interesting discussion both of this poem and the critical controversy it aroused in the pages of Essays in Criticism, July 1953 and January 1954. Davie argues for seeing Eliot as a symbolist poet and for a 'symbolist' reading of this poem.

2 CP, p. 57.
provides us with no social context for Sweeney such as he provides for Prufrock. Poetry itself is the environment in which Sweeney exists; our approach to him is dominated by the verbal matrix with which Eliot surrounds him. Sweeney is trapped in the poem like a fly in amber: an alien specimen made harmless by the context in which he is held.

Prufrock and Sweeney between them divide up Eliot's poetic universe: if my arguments are accepted, we can see in Prufrock the symbolically suffering and sensitive centre of a poetic achievement at odds with its social situation and by that confrontation reduced to inactivity; while in Sweeney we see the callous centre of a society with which poetry must grapple if it is not to be a mere flight into a dreamworld, but one which is entirely inimical to the values of the poetic act. For Eliot there can be, apparently, no heroic human action in the debased society in which we have to live - his characters are either too inhibited by consciousness or too low in aims for them to reach any significant plane of action. The only heroism is the heroism of poetry itself: the very existence of the poem constitutes its real meaning, which is the heroism of art in perfecting its technical procedures in the face of the refractory material with which it is forced to deal. What has happened in these poems is that artistry has taken on the significance of a symbolic act, the poem has been transformed into a mode of doing - a gesture perhaps, in Yeats's language - rather than a mode of communication. A poem of this kind is a process which connects with no other realm of truth, which channels no statement: it points only to its own existence as a symbol of the perfection which its content and existential environment would deny. As a mirror for its society it is only the clarity of its polish and the wealth of its frame that it can assert as values. Where in the ossified cultural context of Boston the poetry and Prufrock met as similar sufferers, the poetry in the quatrain poems maintains a lonely vigil between its content and its society, which find
in each other mutual solidarity.

And yet Sweeney and the poetry are not so far apart as Eliot himself might have liked to think, for in a sense Sweeney does reveal to us some of the qualities of the poetry he inhabits:

Sweeney addressed full length to shave
Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base,
Knows the female temperament
And wipes the suds around his face.

Sweeney's lack of concern for the sufferings of those with whom he is involved, his concentration on his own face in the mirror, is a fitting image - if one which is located at the opposite end of the social spectrum - for the poetry and its lack of human sympathy. The imaginative construction through which the first two stanzas of 'Sweeney Erect' approach their subject -

Paint me a cavernous waste shore
Cast in the unstilled Cyclades,
Paint me the bold anfractuous rocks
Faced by the snarled and yelping seas.

Display me Aeolus above
Reviewing the insurgent gales
Which tangle Aridne's hair
And swell with haste the perjured sails.

- is a self-congratulatory prelude to its dehumanising vision of the human beings it presents:

Morning stirs the feet and hands
(Nausicaa and Polypheme)
Gesture of orang-outang
Rises from the sheets in steam.

The human appendages are made inert by the opening line, submitting to forces outside of themselves, while the classical allusion further insists upon the self-control of the poetry - and poet - before the sudden collapse into the destructive reduction of the third line. The sense that other people are automatons because of the very distance from conscious subjectivity to action in one's own experience, a feeling which is pervasive in the meditative poems, has become in this poem not an ontological problem
affecting all human life, but a social characterisation. It is the social status of the characters - not the nature of the universe - which allows such metaphoric attributions. The epigraph reveals a character able to envisage herself in a symbolic setting appropriate to her emotional experience:

And the trees about me,  
Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks  
Groan with continual surges; and behind me  
Make all a desolation.

but no character within the poem is sufficiently aware of his or her own experience, or of the human traditions from which they emerge, to be able to match that achievement. By their lack of 'culture' they have regressed to a previous stage in evolution and have, though all unaware, made 'all a desolation' behind them. Only the poet, standing outside the action, can provide the kind of tradition and poetic context that is provided by Aspatia, the speaker of the epigraph, for the benefit of her maids. The poet's sense of animus towards his creations arises from his sense of constantly declining historical perspectives:

'(The lengthened shadow of a man  
Is history, said Emerson  
Who had not seen the silhouette  
Of Sweeney straddled in the sun.)

And the responsibility for the failure of history lies fairly and squarely on the emergence into positions of power and responsibility of 'mass man', of the Sweeney's of this world. It is an attitude that Eliot perhaps summed up in his 'London Letter' for the Dial in which he discussed the Georgian anthologies:

The dulness of the Georgian anthology is original, unique; we shall find its cause in something much more profound than

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1 The Dial, 70, April 1921, pp. 448-453.
the influences of a few predecessors. The subtle spirit inspiring the ouija-board of Mr J.C. Squire's patent prestidigitators is not the shattered Keats but the solid and eternal Podsnap himself. This party represents, in fact, the insurgent middle class, Mr Munro's General Reading Public. At the very moment when the middle class appears to be on the point of perdition - beleaguered by a Coalition Government, the Three Trades Unions, the Income Tax, - at this very moment it enjoys the Triumph in intellectual matters, of being able to respect no other standards than its own. And indeed, while its citadel appears to topple, it is busy strengthening its foundations. Year by year, royal birth-day by royal birth-day, it gains more seats in the House of Lords; and on the other hand, if it rejects with contumely the independent man, the true man, all the individuals who do not conform to a world of mass-production, the Middle Class finds itself on one side more and more approaching identity with what used to be called the Lower Class. Both middle class and lower class are finding safety in Regular Hours, Regular Wages, Regular Pensions and Regular Ideas. In other words there will soon be only one class, and the second Flood is here.

It is worth quoting this passage in full, for it shows the extent to which Eliot sees the lower classes as being identified with the middle classes and both with the destruction of the culture his poetry aspires to. Poetry is overwhelmingly opposed by the processes of history which favour the Sweeney's of this world.

The poem's reduction of its human figures to anthropoidal automatons is at one with Eliot's turning away from his associative technique. Association as a poetic mode demands the poet's acceptance on the one hand of a depth of experience on the reader's part sufficient to the creation of his own aesthetic experience in the face of the stimuli the poet offers; and, on the other hand, if it is to operate as an element of content, associationist techniques demand a consciousness at the centre of the poem which is imbued with significant memories. What Eliot's comments in The Dial reveal are how minimally Eliot, in the period after the First World War, regarded such presuppositions as being fulfilled by his own time.

The elements in each of the quatrain poems revolve in a poetic space
in complete isolation from each other. In 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', for instance, we are provided with the stage props of a location, but in effect each of the characters within the poem inhabits a separate area of space - and a separate verse space - within that location, and contact between them is absolutely impossible. When contact is attempted, the verse rises to an enjambement only to note the failure of what it mirrors in terms of its own metrics:

The person in the Spanish cape
Tries to sit on Sweeney's knees
Slips and pulls the table cloth
Overturns a coffee-cup,
Reorganised upon the floor
She yawns and draws a stocking up;

The 'person in the Spanish cape' fails to make any contact with Sweeney not only for the reasons which one might assume and interpose within the poem but, essentially, because they inhabit entirely different spatial domains. They are cut off, one from another, by the very nature of the universe which they inhabit.

Such a separation of spatial areas can hardly help but bring to mind the spatial experiments of the cubist painters of whom Eliot was a contemporary. It is from exactly this kind of comparison that Joseph Frank develops his seminal essay 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature' in which, writing of 'The Waste Land', he says:

The one difficulty of these poems, which no amount of textual emphasis can wholly overcome, is the internal conflict between the time logic of language and the space-logic implicit in the nature of poetry.\(^2\)

While cubism, therefore, is multiplying perspectives within its normal

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1 CP, p. 59.

category of perception, Eliot's poems are multiplying perspectives which are antipathetic to their literary mode. What Frank does not take into account, however, is the extent to which what he describes in 'The Waste Land' as spatial is, in effect, part of a subjective temporal process founded on the creation of associations. Where his distinction does apply is precisely in a poem like 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', because there the characters are located in a discrete space which defies the submerged possibility of what Frank sees as being essential to all literary art, 'some form of narrative sequence'.

The narrative connection of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' is entirely illusory, or rather, multiplies its possibilities endlessly. The real establishment of its temporal dimension is not in its hints of narrative form, but in its final stanza, which provides for the reader a temporal scale to set against the fragmented space of the poem. It is not the spatial disconnections which provide the higher, transcendent synthesis that cubism offers to the eye; it is the temporal connection asserted as a counterpoint to the disjunctions of Sweeney's own world that performs that function for the reader:

The host with someone indistinct
Converses at the door apart;
The nightingales are singing near
The Convent of the Sacred Heart,

And sang within the bloody wood
When Agamemnon cried aloud
And let their liquid sittings fall
To stain the stiff dishonoured shroud.

Suddenly into the spatial differentiations enters a temporal one and with it a whole amalgam of associations created by the reference to ancient myth, the pun on 'nightingales' and so on.

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1 Ibid., p. 16.
Like many of Yeats's early poems, this one has found the secret of ending on an image which will have a charged but incomplete associative content: it is left suspended in the reader's mind to echo on through the associations into the silence which is the completion of the temporal act of reading. And also like Yeats, the final image draws much of its power not from any specific memories but by the act of memory which the name induces. Eliot himself did not construct the image in a full awareness of its complete logical application,¹ so that the contrast between Sweeney and Agamemnon can be seen much more in terms of their ability to generate connections between past and present rather than in any specific set of connections one may construct between them. The specific connections are what the poet 'had in mind' and what the reader may have in mind when he completes the poem, but neither of these need be identical. The form of the connection, with its return to temporality and therefore to the true nature of the poetic act against which a character like Sweeney militates, is the essential meaning about which we can conduct a critical discussion; the content of the connection can never be brought fully out of the area of the subjective. It is the associative connection which Sweeney has destroyed in his own existence and which the poem mirrors in its acceptance of spatially discrete description that is broken down by the final image, reasserting the value of the poetic as a finder of deeper significances than its characters can know. In 'Sweeney Erect,'² the poetic imagination provides merely the introductory, ironic stagings of its action; the poem is left in the end with no more than the banality of the pragmatic:

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¹ As is pointed out by B.C. Southam, A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1968), p. 65 'Agamemnon was murdered in a bath-house in mid-January, neither the time nor the place for nightingales to be singing. When these anomalies were pointed out to him Eliot explained that the wood he had in mind was the grove of the Furies at Colonus.'

² CP, p. 44.
But Doris, towelled from the bath,
Enters padding on broad feet,
Bringing sal volatile
And a glass of brandy neat.

But in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' the imagination raises the poem in the end to an active transformation of its content, setting it within a new series of relations and reflecting not only on the possible similarity of all human experience, however degraded it may have become, but seeking in the reader's mind for the regenerative power that the world, as presented in the poem, lacks. In some ways its position in Collected Poems at the end of 'Poems 1920' and immediately before 'The Waste Land' is a fitting one, since it points forward, as much as 'Gerontion', which Eliot had intended as a prologue to his long poem, to the techniques and achievements of Eliot's masterpiece.

The imaginative climax of 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales' is not, however, one which transforms the perspective in which its characters are beheld; the final stanza may liberate poet and reader to a certain extent, but the characters remain trapped in a world deprived of human connections and human meanings - and therefore of human beings:

The silent vertebrate in brown
Contracts and concentrates, withdraws;
Rachel née Rabinovitch
Tears at the grapes with murderous paws;

Each part of the human being exists in a separate spatial universe; like the universe that Einstein had imagined there has ceased in these poems to be unified space and time - everything creates its own field of gravity which can only be measured in relation to itself. The poem instantiates each of these fields, but is only marginally able to transcend them. What transcendence there is, however, remains that of a suffering passivity: the poem cannot encounter or communicate with the world it instantiates in such
a way as to make any modification of it possible.

The major example, perhaps, of that passivity, and one whose offensiveness is probably a function of its impotence, is 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleckstein with a Cigar', in which contexts and relations which transcend the awareness of the characters themselves are constantly being created by the poet through the multiplicity of his references to previous works - a multiplicity of which we are forewarned by the cacophonous chaos of the epigraph. The poem, through its references - too numerous and too little enlightening individually to require our detailed attention - performs an awareness of cultural connections of which neither of its protagonists are capable. Burbank is, literally, seduced from his attempt to understand the past by the decadent modern inheritors of Venetian greatness in the form of Princess Volupine, while Bleistein is incapable of making any sense of the past, despite the fact that he is in no danger of similar corruption - he carries his corruption with him in his genes. Burbank is headed for the kind of declension into which Venice has already gone, but can find no reason for either:

Who clipped the lion's wings
And flea'd his rump and pared his claws?
Thought Burbank, meditating on
Time's ruins, and the seven laws.

The poem, however, is well aware of the underlying forces of corruption, an awareness founded on its ability to create the kinds of temporal perspectives of which its characters are innocent or incapable:

The smoky candle end of time
Declines. On the Rialto once.
The rats are underneath the piles.
The Jew is underneath the lot.
Money in furs.

Unknown to himself, Burbank is undermined by his 'compatriot' and the
destruction of cultural values by the mercantile, industrial nature of his race. The density of the poem's allusive texture, the associative demands it makes upon the reader, are an index of its desperate attempt to create significance out of material which refuses to match its technical possibilities. The transforming cultural awareness remains external to its contents, a gesture of despair in the face of the facticity of the actual.

'Poems 1920' contains many of the poems which have fed the revulsion against Eliot's social attitudes: they figure largely, for instance, in John Harrison's discussion of Eliot in The Reactionaries.¹ There is no denying the destructiveness of the vision they offer, the dehumanisation they impose on their characters, their lack of community with the world they describe. There is no 'notion of some infinitely gentle / Infinitely suffering thing' which would make the world acceptable even in its debasement. In this the poems are a witness to the failure of the symbolist view of language: they utilise techniques with which they are no longer in accord. Since for Eliot language can never offer more than a subjective escape from the banalities of the actual, the only permanent transcendence that can be offered is the poem's own ability to transcend its materials, to offer, for those able to accept them, connections with the past of which the characters in the poem are incapable. Since the poem is the transcendence of the given and not a means to that transcendence, then culture as a whole is the only structure through which a more lasting transcendence is possible, a culture which is invoked by every line of the poem. The position which this represents is, however, as self-stultifying as the most rigorous

aestheticism - it refuses to leave the world behind, but is incapable of
taking the world with it.

Two of Eliot's poems before 'The Waste Land', spanning the whole period
of his early writings, do, however, point in their different ways towards an
escape from the limitations which the other poems reveal: 'Preludes' and
'Gerontion'. Both are marked by an objectivity which is very different from
the points of view within which the others are enclosed. In 'Gerontion'
subjectivity so far removed in time and space from its own acts is able to
provide the illusion of objectivity, while in 'Preludes' there is no
consciousness to which any of the contents of the poem can be firmly attached.
At the same time, 'Preludes' offers us the most insistently banal aspects of
modern life of any of Eliot's earlier poems, and nothing like it will
appear again until 'The Waste Land'. Reality on the level of perception
here is given unmediated; the language is as bare of significance as the
scene it presents. The spatial isolation which appeared towards the end
of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' and which is so strongly marked in the
quatrain poems is emphatically registered by the opening of the poem:

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o'clock.
The burnt out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots.

There are no connections established between the items mentioned except
their co-presence within the perspective that is the poem. One might
argue for their temporal contiguity, but time, though retaining chronological
development, has become as discrete as space. The hour stated is an
isolated event among other isolated events; its precision is lost in the
vague 'And now' and further compromised a few lines later by, 'And then
the lighting of the lamps'. The isolation which has invaded the scene, dissolving all the relations which unite objects and events in the world, finds its image in the lonely cab-horse, disregarded, cut off from either its natural environment or its social function.

The whole movement of the poem, however, is towards the closure of the gaps in this deprived world. The falling apart of the day at evening, with its confusion of the natural and the human - 'withered leaves' and 'newspapers' - is turned back when,

The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer

There is unity between perception and existence in these two lines, since the morning is none other than the 'stale smells of beer'. Similarly, the feet of the pedestrians have become annexed by the street as a part of its existence so that no matter whose feet they are they form part of the continuity of its existence. The street is no longer merely the location of disparate events: the events have become an integral part of the unifying consciousness of the street and the morning. It is, however, a unification which does not touch the core of the human deprivation of the landscape; it is a unification of the falsehoods by which people order their existence in conformity with the 'appearances' of the world - time, of course, being one of the 'appearances' in Bradley's metaphysic:

With the other masquerades
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

The unification offered by the street fails to integrate or elevate the people who inhabit its environment, united only by their deprivation. Thus in section III the vision of the 'you' whom the poet addresses, coming as an epilogue to a kind of spiritual self revulsion -
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted ...

- performs a subjective unification of all the discrete elements in the poem, but whether for good or evil the poem leaves unsaid. This subjective vision, however, cannot break down the personal isolation within which the individual is trapped:

Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.

We have thus reached a position where individual vision and unifications imposed by the external world have each failed to include the other within their transformation of the street.

The final section implies a dialectical synthesis:

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block,
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

The accumulation of details again implies the disparity of elements which are included within modern life and their lack of intrinsic connection, but they are now unified syntactically within a single sentence, united by a series of 'ands', and incorporated finally into 'the conscience of a blackened street'. It is, however, a false synthesis, one whose unity emerges out of the limited awareness of 'eyes / Assured of certain certainties', the repetition underlying the dubious extent of the area of certainty. It is at this point in the poem that its use of pronouns undergoes a profound change, from the distant 'one' and impersonal 'you' to the suddenly intrusive 'I', cutting across the synthesis towards a personal vision of transcendence:
I am moved by fancies that are curled Around these images, and cling: The notion of some infinitely gentle Infinitely suffering thing.

The 'I' cut off from the foregoing inclusive sentence, asserts itself against that synthesis both by its lack of relation to what has gone before and because it insists on the previous events as images upon which it meditates: they have ceased to have an independent existence. Beyond the inclusive 'I' is sought some transcendence which might, with an infinity of compassion, give life again to the etiolated spiritual existence of the 'blackened street'. Such a transcendence is, however, denied by those who inhabit the street and remains isolated within the verbal framework of the poem, and the poem's only means of matching that insouciance is to insist on the otherwise meaningless nature of the universe. The final image is a brilliant presentation in poetic terms of the scientific picture of the universe as a place in which energy is only in motion towards a final conflagration: in the vacant spaces the running down of life in the bodies of the old is identical with the preparation of a fire:

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh; The worlds revolve like ancient women Gathering fuel in vacant lots.

Such is the outcome of a world where the only transcendence of discrete existents is one achieved by the integration of human beings into the external world which they inhabit. Balanced against that realisation, however, is our awareness that it was in the context of the reduction of the reality of the external world to the status of 'images' which led to the conception of a personal transcendent, but one that remains founded on the word 'notion' - it, too, is translated into an element of consciousness and may, in fact, be no more. Like Kant's ontological argument for the existence of God it may only reveal something about the nature of consciousness itself.
In the end the disjunction between consciousness and the world it inhabits is reaffirmed, but the poem has held out the possibility of a true unification of the world, one that occurs outside of the limitations of the ego. The translation of the world itself into a realm of consciousness fails in realisation, but remains as potentiality of Eliot's poetic universe. It remains possible that subjective meanings are not alienated from objective meanings and that the two can be made to correspond - as indeed they come to do in the closing sections of 'Little Gidding'. The potentiality is one perceived in a context in which the poem makes only minimal use of the associationist technique. The lacunae between each of the sections of 'Preludes' demands of the reader a shift of focus, but does not seek to raise the buried elements of memory to the completion of the work. Being free of the associationist technique, the poem is also free of the past: the 'I' which points the way to a transcendence of the world it perceives has no character or location, no inhibitions imposed by the experiences it has undergone. The associationist poem is always held together by the past; its real existence is in the past and the consciousnesses within which Eliot locates the content of the poem has always to correspond with that essential perspective. The sparse poetry of 'Preludes' is a poetry attempting to do without the past.

'Gerontion' stands at the opposite pole of Eliot's poetic achievement, yet it too ends on a note of scientific apocalypse:

De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs Cammel, whirled
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear
In fractured atoms.

and begins in the banal, run-down world of the modern metropolis:

My house is a decayed house,
And the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner,
Spawned in some estaminet of Antwerp,
Blistered in Brussels, patched and peeled in London.

But its structural mode is that of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock',
its fragmentary development being the order of an associational meditation by the character upon his own life. Where Prufrock had been distanced from the world by the gulf of consciousness, however, Gerontion is distanced from it by time: he seeks not some course into action, but the pattern of his past actions.

'Gerontion' is the most purely associational poem that Eliot wrote: its central character exists almost entirely as the process of associational recall, seeking the meaning of the past in the unfolding of his personal recollections. For Gerontion, however, as much as for Prufrock, the world and one's consciousness of it can never be made to match. The process of association is an endless deception since the patterns it produces are infinite; no essence of past experience can be achieved because it is eternally 'Swaddled in darkness'. The past is a continual betrayal of what we have become by the revelation of what, in the light of later experience, we see ourselves to have been - or perhaps what we were not, that much at least is certain:

I was neither at the hot gates
Nor fought in the warm rain
Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
Bitten by flies, fought.

The fairly specific associations of 'the hot gates' pass into a declining associational context for the later images, but at the same time they become more detailed and direct in presentation and lead towards that suspended final 'fought', an assertion of activity made in despite of the sentence within which it is embedded. Gerontion's private past is given a transferred energy from the efforts he has failed to make in the public world. What these negatives surround, what lies at the heart of the past, remains unstated, perhaps unknowable. Similarly, the certainty about other people is in inverse proportion to the apparent certainty with which they are
remembered. They are each defined by an action -

Fräulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.

- but the inner meaning of the action can never be known. The suggestions of Fräulein von Kulp's name are clear, but does it in any sense reveal the person, any more than the action does? Every judgment, like every association, is trapped within subjectivity.

Harvey Gross has suggested that,

Gerontion's knowledge is his obsessive, debilitating belief in the downfall of Europe. A mongrellized society and a polluted culture leave Gerontion little hope for regeneration; moral failure and religion known only in historical reconstruction point to little hope for spiritual rebirth. ¹

but it is not so much a sense of continual decline which is debilitating, but the sense that there is no possibility of discovering the true pattern which underlies the past, and which would allow one to know whether or not history is in decline and whether or not one has played one's part in it.

It is not the meaning of the present which he demands, or demands directly at any rate, but the meaning of the past. His dilemma, however, is that he is fully aware that the present, like the past, will be understood differently depending on which perspective one views it from. History is not an inevitable process, or cannot be known as an inevitable process, because it is an 'ideal construction'. Thus when he says,

Think at last
We have not reached conclusion, when I
Stiffen in a rented house.

the poem insists upon the continued reorientation that the perspective of the future will give to the events of the past. Neither an intellectual conclusion, nor the conclusion of life will seal the true nature of his existence:

his past actions, like the whole of history, will continue to generate its own multiplicity of meanings within the points of view of the future. Bradley's idealism returns as a historical rather than a metaphysical trap: it is no longer that the individual is caught within his own solipsistic consciousness, but that the meaning of his actions in life can never be understood by him, because they are meanings which depend on relations which are - like the meanings of works of art - continually to be redefined by the future. The 'cunning passages' of history are not only the possible actions we can undertake in the future into which we will be guided 'by vanities', they are also the possibilities we perceive from the present in the past:

Think

Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices
Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues
Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.

This passage not only describes the way that actions in the present can have causal consequences very different from the moral tenor of the original actions, it describes the way that, in the backward perspective of history, actions can appear as very different from their original motivations. The totality of meanings which we, trapped in the midst of events, can never know transforms our own actions so that we cannot recognise them, nor trust ourselves to them in the present.

Gerontion, in his meditations upon his own past, necessarily fails to come to grips with it. There is no way that he can know it with any accuracy, for every remembrance is also an interpretation and thus he meets the past tangentially in a series of generalities:

I that was near your heart was removed therefrom
To lose beauty in terror, terror in inquisition.
I have lost my passion: why should I keep it
Since what is kept must be adulterated?

The words fail to describe any particular relationship and end by justifying
their lack of contact with the past on the basis of a personalised entropy -
everything becomes equal and equally undifferentiated in time:

I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:
How should I use them for your closer contact?

The gradual disintegration of the person, however, is, in its equalising
of all responses, equivalent to the multiplication of perspectives that
takes place in the wider world, where the mind will 'multiple variety /
In a wilderness of mirrors'. The nullity at one end of the scale is
precisely balanced by the variety at the other and both are a defeat of
individual significances.

The case is no different with language itself. It asks,

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

Gerontion may be supposed to know what he is talking about, but there is no
way that we can be let into that secret; we can only know how he is talking
about it. He is so far removed from being a character with specific
attributes that his language is made free, but free, like himself, only
to be more conscious of the determinations of the past. The word 'knowledge'
in that line has no referent to which we can attach it. There is no act,
no situation in the poem which will enlighten us as to the nature of this
knowledge; the word is left charged with all the multiple meanings which
the language has given it. The association which links this specific set
of sounds and marks to a set of ideas is let loose to generate all its
possibilities, in the same way that so many of the lines disappear into the
words of someone else. The language cannot be made to create a pattern
which will suffice to understand its applications; like history it
multiplies its meanings in all directions and no ultimate set of meanings
will ever make it coherent. Like the transcendence of 'Preludes' this
one turns out to be false: Gerontion's prophetic voice can offer us no knowledge, even of the past. It can only rehearse its own inability to make a pattern of experience; the only pattern that counts is the pattern of physical decay with which all are afflicted, and yet which— in terms of the poem's epigraph as much of Eliot idealist philosophy— is to be counted as of no importance, mere appearance.

In 'Gerontion' the associative principle is used more strikingly than in almost any other poem one can think of: every word is charged with multiple ambiguity, but there is, it seems to me, no way in which these ambiguities can be harmonised. In 'Gerontion' the associative technique reveals its own mistrust of itself, even as it demonstrates its poetic vitality. The multiple meanings, the allusions, spread out into the hinterland of language and literature to lose themselves in verbal entropy where all the meanings are possible and all are equal:

These with a thousand small deliberations
Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled ...

It is the sense of the associative technique that has here cooled, losing itself in an endless variety from which no common meanings, and therefore no communication, can be achieved.

In 'Prufrock' language is suspended between consciousness and the external world, unable fully to connect with either, but in 'Gerontion' language is suspended between the past of consciousness and the past of language, and meaning resides in an intersection between the two which we can never be certain of having achieved. It is no longer that the epitomy of language's poetic use is a word whose referent is imaginary, but that every word is a flight into the multiplicity of its own past, unable to relate to the present. The decay of the present is identical with the obscurity of the
past; there is no facile comparison to be made in favour of the latter, because there is nothing one can gain from it to transform the present. The only hope, the coming of 'Christ the tiger', is an intrusion from outside that will give meaning, but only by a destruction of the self that one had sought in history: 'Us he devours'.

Gerontion is thus identical with the language in which he is presented: all that is left to him are the multiplicities - and duplicities - of his past, a past whose pattern has no personal or transcendental significance and whose elements, including the elements of language, were the creation of forces which the individual cannot control or fully commit himself to:

Gull against the wind, in the windy straits
Of Belle Isle, or running on the Horn.

The immediate situation in the world is all that one can be certain of and thus Gerontion remains,

an old man in a dry month,
   Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.

Language cannot be made active as a mode of transcending the present; it encapsulates a past only to separate it finally from the present in which it is used and its possibilities offer no fertility, but only a 'wilderness' into which, like the associative processes of which it is a part, it disappears in an endless retreat from reality. The poem completed in the mind of the reader in his own consciousness cannot be made anything other than the flight into the past that the character reveals as valueless; the poem remains for the reader as its elements are for Gerontion,

Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.

The identity between character and style which Eliot had achieved in Prufrock has come full circle, and 'Gerontion' is not so much a prelude to 'The Waste Land' - though its technique certainly helps us understand the later poem -
as a postscript to the whole development of a dialectical relation between content and form in Eliot's early poetry.

II The Waste Land

The failure of association, the hopelessness of memory which 'Gerontion' reveals, is a summation of tendencies that run through all of Eliot's early poetry. It represents the collapse of all the values that had offered security against the isolation of consciousness within the present. Eliot had explored the problem in different ways, from the creative disordering of the individual's memory in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' to the omniscient narrator's memory in the quatrain poems, memory asserted as the only bulwark against the rising tide of forgetfulness in the world with which the poetry has to deal. In 'The Waste Land', I want to argue, Eliot confronts the situation of memory in the modern world directly and, in tackling that problem, faces the essential dilemma of his own associationist aesthetic: how can one write a poem that works on the basis of the reader's individual memories and yet achieve a communication between poet and reader, an experience which is not self-enclosing and self-deceiving? How can poetry of this kind become a revelation of truth, a breaking open of our individual contingences, and not an intensification of the determinism of our personal pasts?

That 'The Waste Land' is an associational poem needs, perhaps, at this stage in my argument, little demonstration. Several critics have already attempted to come to terms with this kind of poetry without assuming that it is merely a submerged narrative in which all would become clear if

1 CP, p. 61.
we could only work out the appropriate order of the events. C.K. Stead, for instance, argued that in 'The Waste Land' 'we face a kind of poetry that has seldom appeared in our literature - a pure, non-discursive image - and we must speak of it accordingly.'\(^1\) The concept of an 'Image' in relation to the whole of 'The Waste Land' seems a little difficult to maintain, but Stead's sense of how the poem defies our normal reading expectations is important. When he comes to analysing the process which it involves, however, he can give no real explanation of how the poem is to - or how Eliot thought that the poem could - achieve its non-discursive purposes. Stead argues that the Image is the representation of a particular state of mind which we apprehend as soon as we confront the Image. Yet he feels able to distinguish between successful and non-successful versions of this process. For instance, of 'Gerontion' he writes:

Some such feeling as I have outlined here seems to lie behind 'Gerontion' but Eliot, I think, fails to project it into a coherent poem. Only a pattern imposed by the critic willing to do some of the poet's structural work for him will give the poem an appearance of completeness.\(^2\)

In comparison, he argues of a passage in 'The Waste Land' that,

This passage projects, creates an image of, a particular state of mind. This image or projection is composed out of the indissoluble union of, on the one hand, a particular poetic music, and on the other an edited recreation of the experience - auditory and visual - of a specific time and place.\(^3\)

The problem with Stead's approach to these two poems is that there can be no certainty that the critic, in discovering a lack of unity in the first, is not merely failing to unify it properly, and that his discovery of


\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. 158.

\(^{3}\) Ibid., p. 165.
unity in the second is not an inappropriate imposition by a critic unaware that he is, in fact, doing 'some of the poet's structural work for him.' And, of course, there is no way that we can know that the critic has fully experienced the emotion that lay behind the Image - because we only have the Image and our interpretations of it to tell what does or did lie behind it. Eliot's art demands that we treat our experience of it as the under-going, at every reading, of a new work of art, not the participation in some primal emotion lingering behind the work of art.

A more recent critical effort along similar lines, but one which has the advantage of a grounding in Bradley's philosophy, is Anne C. Bolgan's What the Thunder Really Said, which argues that the poem cannot be made to fit any particular emotional or intellectual pattern because its essential structure consists of a clash of incompatible elements which generate a synthetic emotion that transcends both:

The significant point ... is that the "idea" and the emotion attendant upon it are not - as in other methodologies of form - merely expounded or reflected upon or given a merely ornamental shading but instead are generated. And further that they are generated by the reader or not at all.¹

The dialectical structure of the poem works by making the reader recreate an experience through the discovery of a third term which will integrate the opposing poles of reference within the poem. Ms. Bolgan attempts to avoid the impasse of Stead's reading by arguing for the full validity of the objective correlative:

If the reader, in this very important sense, is confronted by Eliot with a "do-it-yourself" poem, it does not follow from this that he can "do it" any way he likes, for the process is both self-generative and self-corrective as it goes along. What the new methodology emphasizes is that the use of "objective

¹ Anne C. Bolgan, What the Thunder Really Said, p. 87.
"correlative(s)" will provide, as nothing else can, a precisely controlled subjective response and one that is unique in being both subjective and impersonal at the same time. It is so in the sense that, although it is personally generated and felt, what is generated and felt is both guided and restrained by the systematic and impersonal relations whose objective lineaments the reader has retraced.1

As will be evident from my previous discussion of the 'objective correlative' I disagree with the possibility of an objective transference of emotion from writer to reader in this way. Significantly though, Ms. Bolgan's major discussion of how this might work is not in terms of some individual image or chain of events such as Eliot describes in his essay on 'Hamlet', but Eliot's line

When lovely woman stoops to folly

and the clash of its context in 'The Waste Land' with its context in Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield. The clash of contexts here produced is, of course, a literary version of the disjunction Eliot creates at the opening of 'Prufrock'. There is a collision between two disparate elements and the effect of the line is created out of the space between them - except, of course, that one of the elements - the original context - is not given in the poem, but assumed by it. The operation of memory is therefore doubled in this kind of disjunctive image, since the mind has not only to bring forth the associations of two given objects, but to apply to a single object - the poetic line - the associations it has in the context of this particular poem and the associations it had in an original context which has to be brought completely out of memory. Ms. Bolgan's 'dialectical dance of the particles' contained by the poem ignores completely the role of memory on the part of the reader as an element in the dialectic; she

1 Bolgan, What the Thunder Really Said, p. 87.
insists that the reader is "co-creator"\(^1\) of the poem, but in her chief example she is more concerned with the co-creation of the literary past in the poem than in the reader's actually achieving this. Ms. Bolgan's dialectic, like Stead's, demands an ordered synthesis which neither can demonstrate actually at work in the details of the poem.

The reason for their failure is not because they have misunderstood the kind of thing that the poem is, but that having recognised it they continue to attempt to describe it as though there was some common ground from which readers of the poem could work in order to come to some agreement about it. At this level there is no common ground. Eliot's poem is, quite literally, undiscussable at this basic level because what it does in generating its emotional-intellectual complex is something that it does to each individual reader on the basis of that reader's knowledge and experience. To track down every individual reference and quotation takes us no further because we cannot know what each meant to Eliot when composing 'The Waste Land' so that we can have that as an element of our own consciousness. The writers that both Stead and Bolgan condemn for attempting to analyse 'The Waste Land' in terms of some intellectual superstructure are in many ways more correct, since they are discussing the poem at the level of general structure where, perhaps, some common ground is possible, though of course the general structure can never be fully explicated in the vacuum of a lack of certainty about so many of the individual elements at the level of micro-structure.

The associationist basis of the poem makes it impossible to describe with any accuracy what it is that is occurring in the reading of the poem;

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\(^1\) In terms of the associationist aesthetic the idea of the reader's creative role is a falsification: the reader is passive before the work, subject to whatever connections his memory happens to provide.
each reader is being investigated by the poem and is creating the 'poem' out of the contents of his own memory. What we can discuss is the form of the operation the poem is enacting, in what particular ways it is seeking to have itself created into some new unity in the mind of the reader. In 'Gerontion', for instance, the dubiety with which so many of the words are surrounded because of their multiplicity of meanings is not a means towards our understanding the mind of the speaker, it is a mirror of his lack of certainty about his own actions in the past. The uncertainty of the language is the uncertainty of the past since the past can only be recreated through his language. The language which reaches into the speaker's past with such lack of surety about the meanings it will create or discover reaches similarly into the reader's consciousness, evoking not some specific emotion but a host of associations, imagistic, intellectual and emotional. It is the form of the poem's enactment of this process which is its real meaning and the content it provides is one that parallels precisely the difficulty of establishing real meanings through its form.

A poem such as 'Gerontion' is a poem written in a technique which entirely undermines the possibility of real communication between poet and reader, but even more it is a poem which mistrusts its own technique's ability to connect the present with the past, a connection which was its original motivation. The mind of Gerontion, seeking the meaning of his past and failing to discover any certain pattern, precisely mirrors the act of reading the poem, as the reading mind seeks for the associations which will complete the poem without ever achieving any finality in that search. It is the finality of a common and communal basis in memory which 'The Waste Land' seeks and upon which its techniques are founded. In 'Gerontion' the associative process can only be felt to 'multiply variety / In a
wilderness of mirrors', in 'The Waste Land' we enter the wilderness in the search for common meanings and the re-establishment of a level of communion, if not of communication, between poet and reader, a communion which will release us from the isolation of subjectivity and integrate our present with the past.

'The Waste Land', however, must not be seen as a retreat from the methods of 'Gerontion', a retreat which would lead us back to a search for some 'coherent intellectual thread upon which the items of the poem are strung,'¹ or, alternatively, for some 'protagonist' in whose consciousness all the elements can be placed:² 'The Waste Land' is a poem whose coherence exists only in the mind of the reader, but which searches into that mind to discover some basis of shared memory which will reunite poet with reader and both with a reintegrated social world. The displacement from the social world, the major theme of Eliot's non-associationist poetry, and the problems of the associationist technique, come together in 'The Waste Land' to produce a poem which seeks to resolve both problems simultaneously. The resolution is effected, I believe, by the uncovering in the individual consciousness of a mythic memory which underlies and unites the discrete individual memories which separate us one from another. The importance of the allusive technique is not in the 'meaning' of the individual allusions, which are endlessly associative, but in their activation of memory itself. It is in their form, as an appeal to memory, a demand for

² This is the approach developed by Cleanth Brooks in his seminal essay in Modern Poetry and the Tradition (London: Poetry London, 1948); it has continued to dominate critical thinking to this day, see, for instance, Anne C. Bolgan, What the Thunder Really Said, ch. 4, which presents us with a 'poet-protagonist'.
the workings of memory, that their significance lies. One does not need to recognise all or even most of the individual allusions of the poem in order to come to terms with it, one needs to recognise only that there is a process of allusion and to allow one's own memory to provide whatever associations it can. These personal and individual memories arising out of the literary tradition, and therefore having some common focus, are only the first stage, however, in the mind's descent towards the primal, mythic memories which are the common currency of the subconscious. Eliot's mythic method is not the same as Joyce's; it is not a continuous parallel between the present and the past, and the Grail myth and Fisher King myth do not harmonise the elements of the poem. What these elements do is to insist that there is a level of consciousness, a level of associative connection, at which all the different individual and cultural divergences of mankind find a common focus: in the image of the waste land itself the Christian grail legend, the more primitive Fisher King myth, and the literary image from the Oedipus story are found to discover an essential unity, a unity which transcends, by being more primal, the separation which history and culture impose on them. The process of the poem, I would argue, is the uncovering of this unity, or the possibility of this unity, not in the consciousness of some protagonist,¹ but in the reader's consciousness as he reads. The poem is not a communication, but an act; it acts to reunite the reader's own personal associative connections with the primal memories of his own unconscious and so reunite him with his own inner being and with the whole of the human past. 'The Waste Land' operates to uncover in

practice what Yeats had asserted in theory - a Great Memory which prevents us from being lost in the labyrinth of our own minds.

The sterility of the modern waste land that Eliot describes is a sterility whose well-charted effects are spiritual and sexual, but are created essentially by the destruction of memory, the reduction of memory to the trivial limits of personal reminiscence. The poem's famous opening suggests, by its own recall of the literary past and by the universal metaphor of life returning in spring, a reconnection, however fearfully, of past with present:

April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing Memory and desire, stirring Dull roots with spring rain. Winter kept us warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow ... (11. 1-6)

It is the return of life as memory which the spring portends, a defeat of wintry forgetfulness, but as the passage develops memory turns out to be no more than nostalgic personal recollection:

And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's, My cousin's, he took me out on a sled, And I was frightened. He said, Marie, Marie, hold on tight. And down we went. In the mountains, there you feel free. I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter. (11. 13-18)

There is nothing in such memories to unite past with present and the speaker even evades the forgetfulness of winter, that would demand later some rediscovery of memory, by 'going south in the winter'. The ironic presentation places the speaker's reading, which activates no significant memory, against the poem's own significant capacity to remember the literary past. Those trapped in the waste land know only the surfaces of existence, not its depths, 'know only / A heap of broken images' which remain discrete precisely because there is no sense of the underlying forces - the forces of association
if we take that line as an image of the whole poem - which might unite them.

The introduction, in the second section of 'The Burial of the Dead', of the direct description of the desert landscape which images the spiritual condition of the modern world leads to two significant and significantly different acts of remembrance:

(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust
Frisch weht der Wind
Der Heimat zu
Mein Irisch Kind
Wo weilest du?
'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
- Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence,
Oed' und leer das Meer. (11. 26-42)

What we are given in this passage are two different moments which deny ordinary temporality: the first is the 'handful of dust' which denies all the accumulations of time ('morning' and 'evening') a reduction of life to that which has neither past nor future; and the second is the moment beyond time, beyond the human scale of life and death, at the source itself, 'the heart of light'. These two moments, however, can only be offered to us in the scale of temporality which they deny: the first is in the future - 'I will show you' - as our individual deaths are in the future, the second is in the past and can only be recalled by the speaker, it cannot be relived.
The moment in which nothing is known or remembered, before which there was nothing, can now only be remembered. The memory is intense and yet it offers no knowledge, because it offers no relations between past and present but is, rather, a denial of all relations in a total inter-relatedness.
The speaker has the same condition, almost, as Tiresias, suspended between life and death, but it is in his case momentary and not permanent. In another sense, however, he is like the Thames-daughter who 'can connect / Nothing with nothing': she is lost amid all the particulars, he has lost all particulars. The transcendence which the moment out of time offers, but cannot maintain because it is remembered only, is, however, placed within one of the poem's most crucial collage effects, the reminiscence of Wagner's opera. The memory of the moment which denies time (and therefore memory) is framed by a deliberate act of memory on the part of the poem, but one whose content is, equally, a function of continuous memory, since Wagner's opera is constructed on one of the primordial European legends. The associative potentialities of this passage are, it seems to me, infinite: there is no way that we can track down some precisely - or even vaguely - delimited range of appropriate associations. The passage works not in terms of its specific powers of recall, though those are there, but in terms of its general function as recall. Of course, we may construct connections - suggestions of tragically lost love and so on - but the specific connections will always outrun our ability to make them totally coherent within the poem. It is the fact of associative potential itself which is significant. The individual memory of a time-defying experience is balanced by the poem's memory of an experience insinuating the whole of time in the various associations which it is capable of generating: the individual transcends time by unifying all connections, the poem defies time by generating an infinity of connections.

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See Bernard Harris, 'This music crept by me': Shakespeare and Wagner' in A.D. Moody, 'The Waste Land' in Different Voices, pp. 105-116, and particularly p. 111 for a discussion of the possible extent of the association that Tristan und Isolde allusion might invoke.
in time.

There is thus, it seems to me, several entirely different levels of memory operating in the poem, levels which cannot be attributed to any single consciousness, but which, rather, reveal the distinction between the memory of any individual speaker in the poem and the memory of the poem itself. The poem's potentiality for memory is all inclusive, but the memory even of the supposed 'protagonist' is suspect. In 'A Game of Chess' he is asked,

'Do
'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing?
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.  (11. 121-125)

The significance of this passage is perhaps clarified by the drafts, for Eliot has removed, at some very late stage of the poem's composition, the following:

I remember
The hyacinth garden. Those are pearls that were his eyes, yes!  

The 'protagonist' is thus, in the final version, refused the right to connect his significant personal memory with Madame Sosostris's drowned Phoenician sailor (1. 48) and the memory embodied in 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' is demoted from significant literary allusion to a mere recalling of its previous use within the poem. The art displayed in 'The Tempest', an art capable of transforming reality, is reduced to conformity with the present:

O 0 0 0 0 that Shakespeherian Rag.  (1. 104)

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1 This version is given in both drafts in 'The Waste Land': a facsimile ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber, 1971), an apparent criticism by Pound, and is dropped in the final version despite Vivien Eliot's having written beside it, 'wonderful'. 
Instead of the dialectical interchange between past and present which 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' envisages, we have here the submersion of past art within the present, unable to offer any real new differentiation of feeling because it has lost its temporal perspective. The transformation of the temporal perspective of art into a purely spatial perspective is what is imaged in the 'withered stumps of time' with which the characters are surrounded in the first part of 'A Game of Chess':

Above the antique mantel was displayed  
As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene  
The change of Philomel ...

(11. 97-100)

We experience the poetry as a temporal connection, but what it describes is art given over to purely spatial relations, ones that the characters are surrounded by but with which they have no real connection. Thus even the personal memory of 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' is incapable of communication in this environment: the lost connection with its own literary sources becomes the lost connection between the two characters.

The externalisation of memory which the lady's decor implies represents a false achievement of impersonality, one that does not reach beyond personality but merely evades it. It is parallel to the false resolution through rebirth suggested by the end of 'The Burial of the Dead':

There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: 'Stetson! 'You who were with me in the ships at Mylae! 'That corpse you planted last year in your garden, 'Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?  (11. 69-72)

The connection through memory can only be extreme where all are trapped within mechanical time - 'Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours / With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine' - but the response to such a human connection in this environment generates a surreal image which is, as it were, an organic equivalent to the kind of life accepted by the office workers. They are entombed from nine till five in a life lived not for
its own sake but for the sake of some elsewhere or some other time: but being so entombed they can never come fully alive again except through the dissolution of the only organic connection they have - that with their own bodies. Rebirth could only occur as a result of the dissolution of their physical existence. The image of the revival of life from the 'dried tubers', with which 'The Burial of the Dead' begins, and which is offered as a metaphor for spiritual rebirth, is seen at the end of the section to be fulfillable only as an actuality, by the return of human beings to their non-spiritual, organic beings. The corpse planted which 'has begun to sprout' is the very reverse of a spiritual rebirth, and yet its condition is not unlike the highest spiritual experience, being 'neither living nor dead'. Around the central image of the 'heart of light' Eliot has suggested processes of false memory and false rebirth; the false past of personal reminiscence is integral with the false future of Madame Sosotris; and the false rebirth of spring (our spiritual regeneration can be tied neither to cyclic nor to mechanical time) is integral with the false resurrection of the sprouting corpse. 'The Burial of the Dead' is a rehearsal, not of the 'difficulty in rousing oneself from the death in life in which the people of the waste land live',¹ but of the false rebirths with which we satisfy ourselves. Even the hyacinth garden experience is a false rebirth, since now it is only a reminiscence and has failed to integrate itself with the rest of life. The opening has to be read, I think, not as a statement of truth:

April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land...

¹ Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, p. 139.
but as self-indulgent pathetic fallacy,\footnote{The falsity of this passage - although, of course, it remains a truth at a deeper level - is suggested to me not only by the context of the rest of the section, but by the rhythms falling away from the stressed first syllable of each line, which I cannot help hearing as an escape from the 'truth' being asserted, and also by a sense of the inappropriate-ness of 'lilacs', which are not tubers and seem inconsistent with the rest of the imagery. This might, of course, have been merely a misconception on Eliot's part.}{1} as an awareness of a need for change which is created by external stimuli and passes with them: 'Summer surprised us ...' And it is the falsity of our rebirths, the falsity of our knowing acceptance of literary allusion and memory as sufficient for rebirth, our acceptance of literature as a surrogate for rebirth, with which we are challenged in the final line:

'You! hypocrite lecteur! - mon semblable, - mon frère!'

It is here, I think, that we see the honesty of 'The Waste Land' as compared with the quatrain poems. Memory in 'The Waste Land' is not used as a sign of the superiority of the poem's memory over the reader's or over the characters whom the poem depicts:\footnote{Cf. Ian Hamilton's discussion of 'The Waste Land' in Martin, Eliot in Perspective, pp. 102-111. Hamilton argues that the legend supplies a dishonest framework to its evaluations, 'a bogus specificity to the criteria by which modern humans have been found guilty.' (III)} the poem here certainly places its memory over against its characters' lack of memory as a mode of evaluating them, but at the same time the quote from Baudelaire turns back upon the poem. It too suffers from the deprivation it abhors, and suffers so because its allusive technique offers a memory which is no real escape from the personal. It recognises its dependence for its completion upon the 'hypocrite lecteur', who is no more nor less 'hypocrite' than the poem itself, though their hypocrisies may be of different kinds.

The poem's raids upon the past are as 'personal' and arbitrary as Madame Sosorit's raids upon the future: 'Stetson! You who were with me on...
Chaucer's Pilgrimage! The corpse planted is the corpse of the literary past too: what Eliot describes later as the 'dark embryo' has here a different connotation, for the literary past is being brought back into a false life, a false connection with the present as a reaction to the mechanical life lived in the present. The poem can only fulfil its own desire for a continuity of memory if there exists truly some suprapersonal memory with which it can engage: unless it can discover such a memory it will remain what it describes - a waste land - since its own memories will never have any justification in the minds it offers itself to. The conscious remembrance which the poem's literary allusions provide are in themselves insufficient - though necessary - because conscious memory must be founded on the structure of the unconscious. There must be some justification for certain things being retained in the memory, and that justification is not in consciousness itself, but in the unconscious - whether the unconscious is purely psychological or is the unconscious that underlies the process of historical differentiation. The opening section of the poem is, in effect, I suggest, a challenge to its own technique to be more than the mere burying of the corpse of the past, but a discovery of valid connections between past and present.

The social division embodied in 'A Game of Chess' are more than merely social: it is the division discussed in chapter three in which social classes come to operate as the unconscious of 'higher' social classes. Throughout 'The Waste Land' the characters who belong to the lower orders act out sexual relations and primitive rites associated with the return of fertility, but with no consciousness that they do so. They have retained a form of life without a form of memory. Lil's fertility, in part two of 'The Waste Land', is placed against the sterility of the
waste land in general, but represents a spiritual sterility. Her fertility, however, is a function of the fact that among the lower orders fertility rites are still unconsciously complied with:

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said, What you get married for if you don't want children?

(11. 163-164)

Thus in part three of the poem Mrs Porter and her daughter perform a traditional rite,

They wash their feet in soda water

(1. 201)

while 'conscious' culture can only refer indirectly to its possibilities of renewal:

Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

(1. 202)

The activity of the lower orders is unenlightened by memory, the memory by which the higher classes are surrounded is unable to invigorate their actions - 'What shall we ever do?' (I. 134). The relationship between consciousness and passivity which is evident in 'Prufrock', and between memory and passivity evident in 'Gerontion', are here combined. The poem's drive is towards some means of re-integrating conscious culture and memory with unconscious action; it is towards providing a consciousness capable of being at once conscious and active.

The divorce between conscious memory and active engagement in the world is one which is integral to the whole conception of an associationist poetry, since associations can only occur fully in a situation of suspended action - Yeats's 'reverie'. The conflict performed by the characters in 'The Waste Land' thus mirrors the situation of the reader who, as he reads the poem, can only be committed to the passive process of associative recall
and who cannot, therefore, be committed to action. Section three of the poem, 'The Fire Sermon', reflects this situation in its two initial situations, for what it gives us are actions - 'Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song' and 'While I was fishing in the dull canal' - which are bodily passive. The speakers are engaged in an act which yet involves no real action. And at the same time they are characters with a memory, but one which is only momentarily relevant to their situation by its accord with their environment. The first speaker is able to recall the poetic tradition which was integral with a certain kind of landscape because momentarily that landscape, even though in itself 'wintry', is removed from what is typical of the contemporary world:

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,  
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends  
Or other testimony of summer nights.  

(11. 177-179)

The 'nymphs are departed', but the deprivation of desire - and therefore of possible action - that that portends allows a brief experience of the identity of past and present. For the second speaker, on the other hand, it is not the transcendence of time, but an awareness of time, which offers a sense of continuity. Death itself allows a continuity between past and present that allows the retention in the modern world of a traditional function:

While I was fishing in the dull canal  
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse  
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck  
And the king my father's death before him.  

(11. 189-192)

Environment may not be integrally related with experience, but there remains despite everything a temporal continuity. Each of these speaker's, however, is challenged by what the other is able to accept as an integration of self
with the world: the first is challenged by death, despite the continuity of environment:

But at my back from time to time I hear
The rattle of bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.
(11. 185-186)

and the second is challenged by environment, despite the temporal continuity:

But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs Porter in the spring.
(11. 196-198)

The insistent cultural memory of the first speaker, revealed in the multiple repetitions from Spenser, is defied by the sense of death as a destruction of that memory, since it is purely personal, and the insistent functional continuity of the second is defied by a world that has forgotten its function.

These two speakers, I suggest, represent two levels of memory within the poem, the level of conscious cultural memory which is only accidentally relevant to its time, and the level of archetypal memory, still enacted but nonetheless forgotten by its time. Through the reference to Marvell these two levels of memory are given a relation within the poem, but it is a relation established in despite of the failure of any actual connection which they are able to form in the world described by the poem. These levels of memory are only connected within the transcendent memory of the poem itself, an essentially cultural memory, which cannot, however, transform the world it perceives. The condition all these levels of memory in relation to the modern world is contained in the figure of Tiresias, since he is both a literary and a mythic figure, is a part of the past and is present in the contemporary environment. Tiresias embodies the transcendent memory of which he is a function; one of the poem’s own acts of remembrance who is significant precisely because of his memory:
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.
(11. 245-246)

What Tiresias, as transcendent memory, is aware of, however, is a world
entirely denuded of memory:

She turns and looks a moment in the glass
Hardly aware of her departed lover
(11. 249-250)

The mirror - as in 'A Game of Chess' - represents a world with no temporal
perspective, a world in which people are reduced to the sum of their
physical surroundings:

On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays.
(11. 226-227)

Tiresias may contain the memory of all experience, but by the very fact of
being such pure memory he is unable to participate in the active life of
the world he perceives. When all memory is sucked up into Tiresias's
consciousness there remain in the world merely automatic puppets, significant
only by their enforced location in deformations of past poetry. Tiresias,
in effect, is the kind of memory that had been present in the quatrain poems,
a continuity in Eliot's art which Pound's editing removed from the final
version.\(^1\) The memory which Tiresias offers may be an essential element
in the regeneration of the world, but it is in itself insufficient. The
continuities it preserves remain external to the lives of those who are
not eternal, as he is, and remain external too to the reader, forming a
connection between the allusive material and the contents of the poem which
by-passes the reader's own personal engagement. Tiresias is a surrogate
for the kind of memory which we ourselves ought to be able to bring to

\(^1\) See the Facsimile, p. 43 ff.
the poem, and his memory is only necessary because of the failure of the
memory, the reader's memory, for which it seems to offer a cure.

In 'The Fire Sermon', therefore, I suggest, what Eliot gives us is
a series of insufficient resolutions of the problem of memory for which the
first part offered false solutions. In each section of 'The Fire Sermon'
connections between past and present are achieved only to be revealed as
deeply flawed, just as the characters achieve connections which are humanly
flawed. The young man cumbuncular and the typist are not only to be con-
trasted with Tiresias - like Sweeney in the quatrain poems, they also reveal
something about the perspective within which they are viewed. Tiresias
can no more connect with the world than the couple can spiritually connect
with each other; and Elizabeth and Leicester no more offer a valid per-
spective within which to apprehend the human situation than they do.
Past and present intersect in this section as the human beings do - in only
one dimension. Thus the casual encounter, with sexual overtones,¹ with
'Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant', is balanced by the casual encounter
with the spiritual possibilities of the church of Magnus Martyr. The
personal, and contingent, nature of both connections is a denial of their
full human value, either as a personal relation or as a spiritual revelation.
The moment of transcendence in Magnus Martyr is achieved in isolation from
any complete community - the fishmen whom the speaker sees but does not
meet - just as the encounter with Eugenides bespeaks a failure of community
values,² similar to the failure of Highbury, Richmond and Kew for the
Thames-daughters.

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¹ John Peter, 'A New Interpretation of The Waste Land (1952)', Essays in
Criticism, XIX (1969), pp. 140 - 175, suggests a pederastic reading for
this passage. Doing away with the conception of a single (male) pro-
tagontist makes other interpretations possible, though, of course, it
doesn't exclude such a possibility.

² A name which possibly suggests eugenic confusion.
What we have in 'The Fire Sermon' is a second Fall, one whose terms are the reverse of the first, since this time man is betrayed by the world and woman is betrayed by man. Thus it is the female figure who is left to announce, as a challenge to the partial connections which the opening of this part of the poem suggested, 'I can connect / Nothing with nothing' (ll. 301-302). Only the poem's memory itself can transcend the world it describes, and yet that transcendence is itself dependent on a reader whose memory responds to its allusive connections, a reader who, according to the poem's description of the world, cannot, in fact, exist. Any reader will have appropriate memories for only one aspect of the total memory needed for the reintegration of the psyche and the modern world, especially if that memory, or its discoveries, must also be made active in the world. The dilemma of this fallen world is thus likewise the reverse of the original fall: it is how to re integrate knowledge with action, to bring together the constant movement in the 'unreal city' - 'go south in the winter', 'a crowd flowed over London Bridge', 'a closed car at four' - which has no purpose or end, and static but significant memory that is represented by Tiresias. The divorce between meaning and action which the poem describes in its characters is repeated, however, in its own stance towards the world in the divorce between meaning and intention: it acts upon the reader's consciousness through his associations but can never know the meanings which that act produces. The terrible situation that the poem faces, and which makes it a much more humane work than some of the earlier productions, is that in its technique it suffers the same fate as that of the characters it describes. This is not a matter of 'imitative form', but of an awareness that it is not itself immune, in its dealings with the world beyond the poem, of the problems described in
the poem. The dialectic of form and content is once again complete: what it describes at the level of content it suffers at the level of form - but so suffers only if there is no consciousness which can redeem its form by bringing it appropriate associative responses, a consciousness which would then also be able to redeem the world it describes.

The poem's tactic for achieving this all-embracing associative response is, I suggest, represented by its movement from the level of learned cultural allusion to primal mythic allusion. In the final section of the poem there is sudden decrease in the number of specific poetic allusions, and an increase in the general use of mythic situations. Of course, we have already had elements of the fisher king and the waste land myths in previous sections, but they have always been deeply embedded in learned cultural recollections, 'Son of man' and 'Musing upon the king my brother's wreck' for instance. In the final section we have entered directly into the mythic landscape, to a direct apprehension of the archetypes, and our entry into this new form of awareness is made possible by the apparently problematic death of Phlebas in part four. Phlebas's death is the undoing of personal memory:

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

'Forgot' is the crucial word: death for Phlebas is a process of forgetting, an undoing of the trivial memory by which, in 'The Burial of the Dead', we have lived, and for him there is no nostalgic return to the past, but a literal undoing of his temporal existence.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

The whirlpool is Eliot's equivalent of the refining fire in Yeats's 'Byzantium',

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a process of undoing life backwards, a reliving of it in memory until all is purified. The individual and accidental memory of 'the drowned Phoenician sailor' is unravelled that he may become his mythic archetype, preserved unconsciously in the memory of Madame Sosotris's Tarot cards.

The sense of this mythic world is created by the deliberate exclusion (except in the 'Who is the third who walks always beside you?' passage which is distanced by its Biblical allusion) of all reference to an experiencing mind, an 'I'. We are beyond the 'I' in this part of the poem, beyond the ordinary mind and its personal awareness. The drafts, for instance, make clear that some of Eliot's excisions in this part of the poem have been made precisely to decontextualise the experiences from any particular consciousness. One of the most powerful disjunctive images, for instance, is contained in the following passage:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

This piece is powerfully associative, but its associations are no longer cultural allusions, but the revelation of the inversion of all the dead world we had witnessed in the opening sections of the poem. The woman, of course, suggests the woman in 'A Game of Chess', whose hair 'Glowed into words', but the 'whisper music' recalls Phlebas, his bones 'picked in whispers', while the 'towers / tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours' takes us back to Saint Mary Woolnoth and its 'dead sound on the final stroke of nine' and the 'peal of bells / White towers' of the Elizabeth and Leicester passage. Again, it seems to me, there is no way that we can establish some intellectual coherence to this pattern of associations,
rather the passage exists to manifest the associative process at work, an associative process now taking in the whole of the past of the poem, but able to take it in because we have entered the timeless world of myth; we are beyond the 'whirlpool' and reaching towards a totally inclusive memory. In the original draft, however, this powerful decontextualising, implying a recall which is an essential part of the poem's own technique and not of some consciousness in the poem, is much less clear:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
The Shriil bats quivered through the violet air
Seeming Whining, and beating wings,
distorted
A man, one-witched by some mental blight
contorted
Yet of abnormal powers
Such a one crept
I saw him creep head downward down a wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells -1

By the final draft of the poem Eliot has cut out both the 'I' who watches this nightmare scene and one of its participants. He leaves only the woman who recalls a previous passage in the poem, and leaves her as a direct presentation, unmediated by any observing consciousness.

Similarly, Eliot has left out of the poem the prologue to this vision which would place it securely in the fevered consciousness of a 'protagonist'. The drafts contain the following lines:

So through the evening, through the violet air
Seme led
One A-/Seme tortured meditation dragged me on
(wherfrom (had
Concatenated words (from which the sense (seemed gone
(wherof (was

(.....)

Oh, through the violet sky, through the evening air
wherof
A chain of reasoning ef-which the thread was lost gone
(I
Gathered strange images through which (we walked (alone2

1 'The Waste Land' Facsimile, p. 113.
2 Ibid.
These lines would have made of the images the chain ('the thread') of a disordered associative process in a character; instead the associative connections are left free in the poem as it stands, generating their power not in relation to our sense of some psyche to which they are significant, but in relation to our own psyche. Instead of a tortured meditation, we have an image given, complete in itself, justified by its location within the reality of the mythic landscape which inverts the values of our ordinary world, and making of disordered dream profound truth which demands a response from the reader at the level of associative reverie and denies the attempt to locate the passage within a consciousness which Eliot had deliberately excluded from the poem.

It is here, it seems to me, that existing interpretations of 'The Waste Land' are crucially wrong: just as critics, when faced with a poem like 'A Cooking Egg', have resorted to supplying the missing narrative connections, so with 'The Waste Land' they have constantly invoked some central consciousness, some 'protagonist', whom the poem deliberately denies us. In other words, traditional criticism of 'The Waste Land' has attempted to see it as an extended version of the form of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' or 'Gerontion'. But, I would suggest, 'The Waste Land' is not of this kind at all. It is essentially an open structure, one whose coherence lies not in the images on the page, but in the associative processes of the reader. There are connections which we can trace and which I have

1 As Gertrude Patterson has suggested, see 'The Waste Land in the Making', Critical Quarterly, 14 (1972), pp. 269-283, much of the interest in the publication of the Facsimile was aroused by the hope that the poem would, after all, turn out to have had a logical narrative, or at least symbolic, structure.

2 M.L.Rosenthal has offered an interpretation of the poem based on the openness of its intention; see 'The Waste Land as an open structure', Mosaic, 6:1 (1972), pp. 181-189. His analysis, however, takes no account of the associative justification for such openness.
been attempting to trace in this chapter, but they are connections which exist primarily at the level of the function of images rather than their meanings. We can trace a process through the poem, but that process will always be deeply implicated with our own associative responses, and, consequently, intensely personal. This is nowhere more so than in the final section, which is often described as a 'journey' in order to give some logical narrative structure to the images. But there is nothing in the poem itself to suggest such a journey: there is the reference to the journey to Emmaus, certainly, but there is no way that that journey can be integrated into a package tour of 'the decay of Eastern Europe'.

What we are given in part five of the poem is a series of situations, of landscapes, each imbued with mythic significance. We have passed through the various levels of experience to reach the most basic mythic memories of the human mind, memories which make of all history mere appearance:

Falling towers
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

Here in the mythic landscape nothing changes: it is not a movement from the waste land to the fertile land, it contains both. There is no achievement in the Chapel Perilous, there is only and always the approach: there is no time, only the eternal present of 'We who were living are now dying', of 'Here is no water but only rock', of 'Who is the third who always walks beside you?' These are the eternal images of the human soul and their meaning is not given directly in them, meaning is constructed out of them in our response to them. It is the associative connections between whatever images we are given at the depth of our subconscious which make them

1 CP, p. 84, note to 'What the Thunder Said'.

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meaningful to us; their essential meaning is always unknowable. We reach them only to turn back towards the subjectivity from which we wished to escape, assured - but not of common meanings, only of common experiences from which we derive personal meanings. The journey which is undertaken through these images is not by some 'protagonist' in the poem, but by our own minds, towards the primal depths of its own experience, the archetypes by which our consciousness is governed.¹

What the theory of the journey undertaken by the 'protagonist' has never been able to fully account for is the return, at the end of the poem, to the dislocated process of literary recall. But that return, precisely parallel to the final stanza of Yeats's 'Byzantium', is demanded by the associative process itself. The images which we reach by the undoing of personal memory necessarily leads us back into personal memory: there is and can be no resting place. The final literary allusions thrust the reader back into the dialectical interchange between the poem's images and his own memories, forcing him through the literary memory towards the discovery of his own primal memories. The process can never end, any more than the process of exploring the potential associations of the whole of Eliot's poem can end. It is this turning back from the mythic towards the personal which is mirrored in the 'Ganga was sunken' passage. The common experience, the thunder's voice, generates different meanings: 'DA' becomes 'datta', 'dayadhvam', damyata', and the gloss on each reveals how we are trapped into subjectivity -

¹ The reference implicit in my use of this term to Jung's theory is not accidental: it seems to me that, just as much as Yeats, Eliot's poem reflects, even if he had not read Jung, the nature of the unconscious which we have come to regard as Jung's particular discovery; see Elizabeth Drew, T.S. Eliot: The Design of his Poetry (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950) for an interpretation from a Jungian point of view.
I have heard the key
Turn in the door and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
- even as the common primal term, 'DA' itself, reveals the continuity of experience. The sense of personal isolation, the failure to connect, which each of the personal memories evinces is at once confirmed by the thunder - everyone will take a different meaning from its voice\(^1\) - and denied by it. We can connect, but only if we are able to bear in mind, to make conscious, the whole process of history that links the inhuman voice of the thunder with its multiple meanings for mankind and the differentiation of those meanings through time. Only in the dialectic between sources and endings can wholeness be achieved, and only by the power to recapitulate and maintain all the layers of meaning, layers of memory, that separate us from that primal voice, can the reintegration of the individual with the community be achieved. The process of memory is always decaying, must always be preserved, and it is to the process of cultural memory that the end of the poem returns us, since without that the primal memory and the personal memory cannot be made to connect. It is the poet, whose technique reveals 'all the stratifications of history that cover savagery',\(^2\) who keeps open the channels of communication by which the individual human being can be saved. The poem's ending thus balances precariously between the sense of a recognition of personal failure -

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1 The legend to which Eliot directs us in his note is of three groups who ask for wisdom from the god, and who each interpret the answer - DA - in different ways. Thus must we approach the images of the final section of the poem.

2 'War Paint and Feathers', Athenaeum, 4668 (Oct 17, 1919), p. 1036.
what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract ...

(11. 401-404)

- which is, at least, now acknowledged, and the continuing challenge to maintain the continuity by which such personal evaluations can be made:

These fragments I have shored against my ruins
The bringing to consciousness of one's deepest personal failings is correlative with the discovery of one's most profound subconscious awareness: the two are linked in a dialectical movement uniting the most profound levels of mythic memory, which underlie all the cultural accumulations of memory, and the most profound personal memories, which one usually wishes to evade.

Yeats's mythic archetypes from the Great Memory performed a continuous evaluation of human action and a spur to achievement; at the depths of 'The Waste Land', mythic memory does not allow so much, but it does allow the uncovering of those most powerful moments - and most powerful failures - of our past,

Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms

(11. 406-409)

These memories belong to our personality more profoundly than any apparently personal memory we might bequeath to the future: it is these with which we must come to terms if there is to be any rebirth, and it is only by the journey to the depths of the unconscious that we have been able to escape from the trivially personal memories of our everyday psyche. Having reached that point, however, there is still the return through all the 'stratifications of history' to be made, still the re-experience of all the associations in their new order as generated by this new central awareness: 'Shall I at
least set my lands in order?' (1. 425). Reaching the depths of the past, whether mythic or personal, has the same effect on the totality of one's memories that the introduction of the 'new work of art' among the 'existing monuments' has: there can be no end to the reintegration of experience into new wholes, no end to the associations each new experience will generate. The only end will be arbitrary; one has achieved enough for the time being: 'Shantih shantih shantih' - but there is no full stop.

Eliot's poem, partly as a result of Pound's intervention, but much more under the impetus of his own developing associationist aesthetic, culminates in 'The Waste Land' in an openness which is complete and yet still maintains a purposiveness in its stance towards the reader. Its pattern of development represents an attempt to use the associative process in the reader's experience to lead him towards an apprehension of those memories which 'may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer'.

The fact that such images exist, however, the fact that we have become aware of the existence of our depths of feeling, if not of their nature (just as we can never be aware of the meaning of the images in the poem) cannot leave unchanged the mind to which they have become conscious. The poem cannot go beyond such images, to those depths of the unconscious where our common existence lies, but it can point towards them before turning back to the levels of memory with which it can deal. In reaching those images, however, and in directing the reader towards the achievement of those images in his own experience through the processes of association which it invokes, the poem has gestured to that inner transcendence of subjectivity by which its own open structure is justified. The transcendence of discrete personal memory which the poem images in Tiresias, but which it

1 UPUC, p. 148.
cannot make active in its own structure, becomes active by the associations which it generates in us, and our own actions will be evaluated and placed by our reaching towards those ultimate depths of which our ordinary existence is, most of the time, an evasion. In reading such a work we do not explore its connections - it acts as an exploration of ours, an exploration whose results the poet cannot control.
Yeats's essay on Edmund Spenser, written in 1902, is one of the crucial turning points of his intellectual biography. It is pervaded by Yeats's sense of a historical fall from grace, a 'dissociation of sensibility', which was the outcome of the overthrow of 'the Anglo-French nation, the old feudal nation that had been established when the Norman and the Angevin made French the language of court and market.' Yeats saw in this the destruction of Latin gaiety, of the passion and beauty for their own sakes which is the basis of all great art. This racial conflict is repeated in the Irish context: Spenser is at least in part a representative of this old Merry England in England, but in Ireland he is the representative of the new England, of an official order which denies poetry and artistry:

When Spenser wrote of Ireland he wrote as an official, and out of thoughts and emotions that had been organised by the State. He was the first of many Englishmen to see nothing but what he desired to see. Could he have gone there as a poet merely, he might have found among its poets more wonderful imaginations than even those islands of Paedria and Acrasia. He would have found among wandering story-tellers, not indeed his own power of rich, sustained description, for that belongs to lettered ease, but certainly all the kingdom of Faery, still unfaded, of which is own poetry was often but a troubled image.

One can see in this final sentence Yeats's sense of personal success, of his awareness that, despite his in some ways similar position to Spenser's as a member of the protestant ascendancy, he has made contact with that buried imagination of the Gael. The division of Spenser into an England/
Ireland schizophrenia is resolved into a higher unity in Yeats's essay, which sees the events of the sixteenth century as parallel to the events of his own recent history and to some extent completed by it:

He entered Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1569, and translated allegorical poems out of Petrarch and Du Bellay. Today a young man translates out of Verlaine and Verhaeren; but at that day Ronsard and Du Bellay were the living poets, who promised revolutionary and unheard-of things to a poetry moving towards elaboration and intellect, as ours - the serpent's tooth in his own tail again - moves towards simplicity and instinct.¹

In the unified perspective of history the divisions of the time are resolved as developments into their opposite.

Such unity, however, seems thin in comparison with the divisions by which both times are beset, because it seems impossible to avoid seeing Yeats discovering in the historical pattern of Elizabethan England, despite the suggestions of the fall, the same that he now faces in Ireland. Thus the racial conflict in which the old ruling class is assimilated presupposes or enforces an economic conflict that manifests itself in literary form:

Allegory itself had risen into general importance with the rise of the merchant class in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; and it was natural when that class was about for the first time to shape an age in its image, that the last epic poet of the old order should mix its art with his own long-descended, irresponsible, happy art.²

The economic conflict reveals itself in turn as a religious divide:

Born at the moment of change, Spenser had indeed many Puritan thoughts. It has been recorded that he cut his hair short and half regretted his hymns to Love and Beauty. But he has himself told us that the many-headed beast overthrown and bound by Calidore, Knight of Courtesy, was Puritanism itself. Puritanism, its zeal and narrowness, and the angry suspicion that it had in common with all movements of the ill-educated, seemed not other to him than a slanderer of all fine things.³

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¹ E&I, p. 356.
² E&I, p. 367.
³ E&I, p. 367.
Thus Yeats brings the whole cultural situation of the time to bear upon his reading of Spenser. There is very little detail in this reading, but it provides broad general outlines of homogeneity between Spenser's position in his society and the nature of his art. It is evident too that Yeats sees himself as being at the end of the process that Spenser began: that in England Puritanism is victorious, and that in Ireland, faced by the puritanism of the modern catholic, Yeats feels he has to preserve the values of an aristocracy likewise threatened by a narrow, sectarian religion. The point is implicit in the Spenser essay, which praises the 'old Catholic feudal nation', but identifies that catholicism with the Irish peasant; it becomes explicit in a 'Journal' entry of 1909:

I have been reading Taylor's Owen Roe O'Neill, an able historical book, very interesting to me because I think I find in Owen Roe that directness and simplicity of mind which is today Protestant and Ascendancy, and in his now opponents, now allies, of the Kilkenny Council that slackness and vagueness which is today Catholic. He was in Irish affairs a last representative of Celtic Catholic aristocracy, and simple because of the habit of personal energy and of an aim accepted by associates not too far below him. But even more interesting to me than Owen Roe is Taylor.... I realise for the first time the reason of my own hostility to a man I always admired. He had the pedantry of Irish Catholic education, inspired by an almost mad energy which made his mind like some noisy and powerful machine. This pedantry comes from intellectual timidity, from the dread of leaving the mind alone among impressions where all seems heretical, and from the habit of political and religious apologetics. This pedantry destroys religion as it destroys poetry, for it destroys all direct knowledge.

The shifting of the categories to retain a unity of forces at work in human history allows Yeats to see the human situation as constant while giving the

1 E&I, p. 364: 'If one of those poets (who attended Spenser's funeral) ... came to England he would find nothing there but the triumph of the Puritan and the merchant - those enemies he had feared and hated.'

2 E&I, p. 367.

3 Memoirs, p. 195.
maximum latitude to his speculations about the divisions and contradictions of any particular historical period. But the nature and form of human thought is very clearly seen as integrated into a social fabric which, as it gradually unfolds in history, makes possible or denies certain universal values of the human mind.

'Edmund Spenser' is Yeats's clearest attempt at a social understanding of art: it is an attempt which culminates in the historical patterns of A Vision, explaining the relationship of art to particular cycles of history, and reaches its nadir in 'On the Boiler' with its discussions of eugenics as a means of creating appropriate social conditions for art. Yeats's associationist presuppositions about the epistemology of art drove him to an understanding - or, at least, an attempt to achieve such an understanding - of how the psyche is conditioned by its social situation, and of how the art of a time reveals that psyche and that conditioning. As I have argued, the same drive can be seen in Eliot's critical writings: each practises, in the course of his career, with increasing sophistication and with sometimes fearful purposes, a sociology of literature. It is a sociology not entirely directed towards the uncovering of economic motives in literary works, but it does not fail to underpin its argument with economics when need be. Eliot provides us with a discussion of modern protestantism in After Strange Gods which is not very dissimilar from Yeats's discussion of Spenser, though Eliot would include Yeats in his category:

I trust that I shall not be taken as speaking in a spirit of bigotry when I assert that the chief clue to the understanding of most contemporary Anglo-Saxon literature is to be found in the decay of Protestantism ... I mean that amongst writers the rejection of Christianity - Protestant Christianity - is the

1 Ex, p. 407. See particularly sections iv and v, p. 424 ff.
rule rather than the exception; and that individual writers can be understood and classified according to the type of Protestantism which surrounded their infancy, and the precise state of decay it has reached.¹

'Writers can be understood ... according to the type of Protestantism which surrounded their infancy' is exactly parallel as an attempt to discover the sources of a writer's art as Yeats's attempt to see in Spenser the conflict of two racial and cultural traditions. It is not enough, each of them maintains, to understand the work itself, one must understand the forces that shape the work. Both use it as a negative criterion: we understand failure by the social and economic causes of that failure, the values of the successful work of art are always the same, but it is a negative criterion whose positive dimension is not applied to art, but directly to the political arena in order to bring about the suitable social preconditions of art.

In a thesis which has devoted some of its attention to the role of audience and society in the thinking of both these poets it would be a dereliction of what is there to be learned from them to ignore this dimension in attempting to understand their own work. We can if we choose regard the social dimension as necessary only when we want to understand why a work has failed to achieve certain standards, but perhaps the more interesting question lies in how the poet has come to succeed, what the preconditions of success, have been. Eliot, of course, was insistent that we must always separate art from other aspects of life,²

² See, for instance, 'The Frontiers of Criticism', OPAP, p. 166: 'We can therefore ask about any writing which is offered to us as literary criticism, is it aimed towards understanding and enjoyment? If it is not, it may still be a legitimate and useful activity, but it is to be judged as a contribution to psychology, or sociology, or logic, or pedagogy, or some other pursuit.'
but at the same time he retained always a sense of the interconnection of poetry with other areas of life: 'But poetry, like every other single element in that mysterious social personality which we call our 'culture' must be dependent upon a great many circumstances which are beyond its control.'

These 'circumstances which are beyond its control' are, I want to argue, an essential part of the meaning of the work of art, and not just the apparent cause or support for it: 'meaning' at a general level, but nonetheless a significant one. If we take any human statement it has meaning on several different levels: there is the meaning of the words themselves; there is the meaning of the words in the context, so that 'Let them eat cakes' has a very different meaning (let us call it 'significance' if we want to keep 'meaning' for what is in the dictionary) when spoken by a dietician, a careless mother, an indulgent aunt or Marie Antoinette; and there is the meaning of the words in a context which is hidden because it is unconscious, as, for instance, in the Freudian slip, or when Oedipus announces his intention to do his best to find the killer of the king whose place he now holds: 'I mean to fight for him now, as I would fight / For my own father, and leave no way untried / To bring to light the killer of Laius.' The unconscious realm may be psychological, supernatural or historical, but it gives to words a different meaning ('significance') from the one apparent in the meanings of the words, even if only the meaning generated by historical hindsight, as in re-runs of newsreels of Neville Chamberlain announcing 'peace with honour'.

1 OPAP, p. 23.

2 I put 'significance' in brackets because I think there are few actual language situations in which this is not a part of the meaning of the statement.
Even more important, however, is the need for us to establish a valid totality for any reading of a literary work based on the idea of influence. We very often use influence in reading works to explain their nature: we attach them to this previous set of possibilities and orientate the meanings we draw from the works themselves in directions guided by the overall development of the 'influence' within which we are locating them. Thus I have attempted to place Yeats and Eliot in the context of associationist thinking about art and to see the development of their own art as a function of the problems created by the associationist aesthetic. Others have offered other perspectives within which to understand the nature and development of their work; as well as the standard biographical approaches we have had the Kantian Yeats, the Bradleian Eliot, the occult Irishman and the Anglo-Catholic American. None of these approaches is or can be exclusive: we are not being offered truths but models for the understanding and models are valuable as long as they explain something. There is, however, no obviously quantifiable method for establishing the extent to which such influence does explain: on the one hand, we might figure its explanatory value in terms of the ground it can cover, the number of different works and authors that are enlightened for us, or, perhaps, we must reckon the depth of perception into the individual work which it allows. The difficulty, of course, lies in the fact that hardly any is ultimately falsifiable and their appeal to us may be based on novelty, or usefulness or some other subjective condition. One cannot do away with this kind of dilemma, but it is a dilemma that, at least in part, arises from the delimitation we make of the material to be explained. If the influence has also to explain something other than the work itself, its explanatory potential has to be far greater than if we concentrate purely on the work.
or even purely on what we choose to delimit as literature. Lucien Goldmann poses the problem in the following terms:

... ce qu'on appelle couramment "les influences" n'a aucune valeur explicative et constitue tout au plus une donnée et une problème que le chercheur doit expliquer. Il y a à chaque instant un nombre considérable d'influences susceptibles de s'exercer sur un écrivain; ce qu'il faut expliquer c'est pourquoi ce n'est qu'un petit nombre d'entre elles ou même un seule qui s'est réellement exercée ...¹

Goldmann's refusal of validity to the idea of influence is a refusal of its explanatory value per se, because it does not have enough resistance from the material it explains to make its explanation of that material truly valuable. The material moulds itself to the lineaments of the theory so that what we have is a secondary work of art that requires explanation.

Goldmann's answer lies in the conception of coherence not only within literary terms, but in the context of the collective consciousness of a social group at a particular point in history, that collective consciousness being the function of its economic situation. The Marxist basis of this sort of analysis does not imply a passive reflection of economic circumstance, but the development of culture as one mode by which people meet their economic situation and attempt to transform it. Thus the influence which provides the best model for understanding the work is the one which most explains the relationship between the work and the economic circumstances both of the social group to which the author belongs and the social groups who take over the work in reading it. We move thus towards a more complex set of terms which have to be brought into coherence and thus limit the multiple developments of non-exclusive influences. There can, of course, be no end point: each area which we try to incorporate ultimately eludes

us, but the explanatory task becomes a worthwhile achievement as explanation of the work’s meaning in history rather than as elucidation of the work’s possible meanings as generated by the particular influence. The situation is akin to that described by Eliot in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* on the relationship between art and religion:

> Aesthetic sensibility must be extended into spiritual perception, and spiritual perception must be extended into aesthetic sensibility and disciplined taste before we are qualified to pass judgment upon decadence or diabolism or nihilism in art. To judge a work of art by artistic or by religious standards, to judge a religion by religious or artistic standards should come in the end to the same thing: though it is an end at which no individual can arrive.

The end, of course, is what is embodied in tradition and the appropriate standards find their fulfilment in the creation of and in the accommodation to the tradition. As Eliot presents this in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* the demand for coherence is apparently autonomous to the cultural tradition, but it is a demand based ultimately on recognised social and economic bases. Therefore the coherence demanded of the work of art and of our perception of it, is, as it were, functionally similar to the coherence demanded by Goldmann between the work of art and its social environment. One is diachronic and one synchronic, but each demands the conformity, in our perception of it, of the work of art with a totality within which it assumes its real meaning:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.

The equivalent statement from Goldmann posits a different totality, but the

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1. *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, p. 30.
2. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *SE*, p. 15.
The difficulties presented by the relationship between an author's life and his work, far from suggesting that we should go back to simply studying the text, encourage us to keep moving forward in the original direction, going not only from the text to the individual, but from the individual to the social group of which he forms a part. For since the individual facts which we encounter are inexhaustible in their variety and multiplicity, any scientific study of them must enable us to separate the accidental from the essential elements in the immediate reality which presents itself to our experience. Leaving on one side the problem presented by the physical sciences, where the situation is different, it is my contention that, in the study of man, we can separate the essential from the accidental only by integrating the individual elements into the overall pattern, by fitting the parts into the whole. This is why, although we can never reach a totality which is no longer an element or part of a greater whole, the methodological problem... is principally this: that of dividing the immediately available facts into relative wholes which are sufficiently autonomous to provide a framework for scientific investigation.

Goldmann's view of part and whole, of meaningfulness and its relation to totality is very similar to Eliot's, as indeed one would expect it to be since Goldmann's thought is profoundly mixed with Hegelianism through the influence of the early Lukács and of Alexandre Kojève's Introduction à la lecture de Hegel, and Bradley's philosophy is essentially Hegelian.

I make this connection in order to assert the importance of Eliot's thinking in the context of European developments in critical thought: Eliot and Yeats were both much less insular in their thinking than many of the critical writers who have adopted, adapted or written about their work.

1 Lucien Goldmann, The Hidden God, pp. 11-12; Cf. Eliot, Notes towards the Definition of Culture, p. 21: 'It is part of my thesis that the culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of a group or class, and that the culture of the group or class is dependent upon the culture of the whole society to which that group or class belongs.'

Equally, however, I make it in order to justify the analysis I want now to give of the significance of the associationist aesthetic within the setting of particular social groups. It is an analysis which, I hope, reveals the extended explanatory value of the associationist method as an integral part of a collective consciousness because it cohered with a total situation in which particular groups or classes found themselves. 'Cohered', of course, in the sense that Eliot uses the term, and thus implying both that it forms the consciousness and is formed by it. Thus I do not want to assert that the associationist basis of Yeats's and Eliot's art was a function of their class position or caused by their class position. What I do want to assert is that the two major figures in English poetry in the period of the early twentieth century both shared certain aesthetic presuppositions, both were outsiders to the central English tradition, and both came from social groups which had lost power in their homeland, but had transferred that power on to an intellectual plane. These elements do not have a relation of cause and effect in the production of the poetry, rather it is the combination of circumstances which makes a certain kind of poetry possible. The associationist tradition does not explain the generation of great art, what it does is reveal why only artists from a particular kind of social group could successfully develop its implications, because those implications were integral to their own historical situation. The associationist tradition was there and it allowed the expression of something: the tradition makes the expression possible, but there can only be the expression because there is situation which needs to be expressed. That need, however, does not only belong to the social groups from which the poets are drawn but, in a deflected way, to the groups to whom they speak. Sartre makes this point in his discussion of Flaubert:
Psychoanalysis, working within a dialectical totalization, refers on the one side to objective structures, to material conditions, and on the other to the action upon our adult life of the childhood we never wholly surpass. Henceforth it becomes impossible to connect Madame Bovary directly to the political-social structure and to the evolution of the petite bourgeoisie; the book will have to be referred back to contemporary reality insofar as it was lived by Flaubert through his childhood. There results from this a certain discrepancy, to be sure; there is a sort of hysteresis on the part of the work in relation to the very period in which it appears; this is because it must unite within itself a number of contemporary significations and certain others which express a state recent but already surpassed by society ...

There will come a moment when Flaubert will appear to be in advance of his period (at the time of Madame Bovary) because he is actually behind it, because his book, in disguised form, expresses to a generation disgusted with romanticism the post-romantic desairs of a student of 1830. The objective meaning of the book - which Marxists, as good disciples of Taine, take simply as conditioned by the moment represented in the author - is the result of a compromise between what this new generation of readers claims in terms of its own history and what the author can offer to it from his own; that is, it realizes the paradoxical union of two past moments of this intellectual petite bourgeoisie (1830 and 1845).¹

This paradoxical union of different moments of history in the text is a modern awareness: it is one which is highly developed in Yeats and Eliot because the associationist aesthetic makes it an essential precondition of the experience of art, and it is one which therefore demands our attention in understanding their art.

Edmund Wilson has suggested of Eliot that his 'spiritual and intellectual

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method, pp. 63-64. David Craig has argued the same case, giving the following summary of his discussion: '1) If upheavals or qualitative leaps occur nearly simultaneously in literature and in social life, it is more likely than not that they are causally connected. (2) But the one cannot be a "reflection" of the other, for how could artists transform their modes and styles so quickly as to be able to catch the essence of a new way of life a few bare months or years after it had dawned? (3) The probability, therefore, is that they are connected by a common root, which clearly must be looked for in the generation immediately before the change itself ... What we have to recognise is that evidently kindred developments on the planes of history and literature are more likely than not to be cognate.' Mosaic, Vol. V, No. 2 (Winnipeg, 1972). Also in Craig's collection Marxists on Literature (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 139.
roots are still more firmly fixed in the New England than is ... ordinarily understood', but the overall direction of Wilson's treatment does not allow him to develop this remark. More recently S. Musgrove has gone further by tracing Eliot's indebtedness to the native American tradition in poetry in T.S. Eliot and Walt Whitman, and it is, I think, in the context of Eliot's American experience that we must look for the social dimension within which his poetic practice develops its significance. Eliot would seem to have concurred with this view: of Turgenev living in Paris he wrote in 1917 what might well have been a description of his own position in London, since 'he recognised, in practice at least, that a writer's art must be racial - which means in plain words that it must be based on the sensations of the first twenty-one years.' Eliot does not seem to have shifted his position very much in the course of his stay in Europe since in the 1959 Paris Review interview he stated that his poetry 'in its sources and in its emotional springs ... is almost wholly American.' The significance of Yeats's Irishness needs hardly to be argued to the same extent, but what perhaps does need to be stressed is the importance of his Englishness. Not only is this a function of his Anglo-Irish background, but of a complete commitment to English literature: Yeats may

1 Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (London: Fontana, 1967), p. 90. Wilson, in fact, attempts to link Eliot's background with the reception of his work in England by arguing that 'the colonisation by the Puritans of New England was merely an incident in that rise of the middle-class which has brought a commercial industrial civilisation to the European cities as well as to the American ones ... the desolation, the aesthetic and spiritual drought, of Anglo-Saxon middle class society oppresses London as well as Boston.'


have drawn his ideas, his myths, his intellectual inheritance from Gaelic Ireland or eighteenth century Anglo-Irish society, but his poetic inheritance from Spenser, Blake and Shelley puts him equally firmly in an English tradition. The tension is revealed in all its complexity as Yeats looked back over his life in his 'General Introduction for my Work':

I was but eighteen or nineteen and had already, under the influence of The Faerie Queene and The Sad Shepherd, written a pastoral play, and under that of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound two plays, one staged somewhere in the Caucasus, the other in a crater of the moon; and I knew myself to be vague and incoherent. (O'Leary) gave me the poems of Thomas Davis, said they were not good poetry but had changed his life when a young man, spoke of other poets associated with Davis and The Nation newspaper, probably lent me their books. I saw even more clearly than O'Leary that they were not good poetry. I read nothing but romantic literature; hated that dry eighteenth-century rhetoric; but they had one quality I admired and admire: they were not separated individual men; they spoke or tried to speak out of a people to a people; behind them stretched the generations. I knew, though but now and then as young men know things, that I must turn from that modern literature Jonathon Swift compared to the web a spider draws out of its bowels ...  

The English romantic is finally challenged by the representative of Anglo-Ireland which the young man rejected, and yet the fact that what he admired in Ireland was the sense of a people, that behind the poets 'stretched the generations', demands that we recognise the continued romanticism of Yeats's position. It is a romanticism which he tries to root in Ireland, but which is grafted from English stock as much as the Anglo-Irish with whom he came to identify so closely.

The tension between these three cultures - Gaelic, Anglo-Irish and English - is experienced not only on the literary level, but directly in Yeats's own life. Of his school days in London, he wrote:

I was divided from all those boys, not merely by the anecdotes that are everywhere perhaps a chief expression of the distrust of races, but because our mental images were different. I read

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1 E&I, p. 510.
their boys' books and they excited me, but if I read of some English victory, I did not believe that I read of my own people. They thought of Cressy and Agincourt and the Union Jack and were all very patriotic, and I, without those memories of Limerick and the Yellow Ford that would have strengthened an Irish Catholic, thought of mountain and lake, of my grandfather and of ships. Anti-Irish feeling was running high, for the Land League had been founded and landlords had been shot, and I, who had no politics, was yet full of pride, for it is romantic to live in a dangerous country. 1

The feeling of alienation from the England whose literature he loved 2 drove him to the vain efforts to unite the two Irelands into one, to give the two communities the same memories, the same associations:

I had noticed that Irish Catholics among whom had been born so many political martyrs had not the good taste, the household courtesy and decency of the Protestant Ireland I had known, yet Protestant Ireland seemed to think of nothing but getting on in the world. I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, a European pose. 3

The idea of Unity of Being is a product of this fragmented situation, an attempt to create an integrated culture within which an integrated individual can fulfil himself. The need for unity is a specific outcome of a fragmented social situation in which the individual can find no place for himself, to which he cannot accommodate his own psychological development: 'that multiplicity of interest and opinion, of arts and sciences, which had driven

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1 Autobiographies, p. 35.

2 'I who had never wanted to see the houses where Keats and Shelley lived would ask everybody what sort of place Inchedony was, because Callanan had named after it a bad poem in the manner of Childe Harold.' (Autobiographies, p. 101). The importance of the associations of names and places has already been discussed (ch. 6); compare Yeats's interest with that of American poetry readers in the poem "Gertrude of Wyoming" by Thomas Campbell, which created a similar interest in a particular place because of its literary associations, a place previously marked by no associations at all and therefore not available to the cultured mind as a place of significance; see Andrew Hook, Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750-1830 (Glasgow: Blackie, 1975), p. 144.

3 Autobiographies, pp. 101-102.
me to conceive A Unity of Culture defined and evoked by a Unity of Image'.

Such a fragmentation of the self dispersed among the different possibilities of the social world in which it has to find its way represents a potentially paralysing inner conflict, a complete loss of direction - 'From the moment when these speculations grew vivid, I had created for myself an intellectual solitude; most arguments that could influence action had lost something of their meaning.' Yeats could escape from the dilemma only by positing and believing in some transcendent unity within which one could integrate the conflicting diversities of the actual, though the dilemma was never far from his shoulder: if unity were not possible every man should strive for it through his mask, enforcing action upon the contemplative, will-less poet.

Eliot's background is, in this respect, oddly similar. He too suffered from a multiple division of his sense of self, resulting from a fractured social world. In the famous letter to Herbert Read he charts a part of the problem:

Some day I want to write an essay about the point of view of an American who wasn't an American, because he was born in the South and went to school in New England as a small boy with a nigger drawl, but who wasn't a southerner in the South because his people were northerners in a border state and looked down on all southerners and Virginians, and who so was never anything anywhere and who therefore felt himself to be more a Frenchman than an American and more an Englishman than a Frenchman and yet felt that the USA up to a hundred years ago was a family extension.

The division between North and South is, as much as Yeats's division between Protestant and Catholic, a division by cultural achievement, but whereas

1 Autobiographies, p. 269.
2 Autobiographies, p. 263.
Yeats was a Protestant looking for a total Ireland in the Catholic imagination of the past, Eliot was a southerner who believed the north to represent the true American tradition, and one to which he properly belonged despite the place of his birth. The north to which he attached himself was itself, however, unsure of its real identity:

The Boston mind appeared to have lost its force. It was yielding, inch by inch, to the Catholic Irish; and the time was approaching when a Catholic Irish mayor of Boston was to say that the New England of the Puritans was as dead as Caesar.

The New England to which Eliot as a boy went to spend his summers, and in which he was educated, was a culture once held to be the core of American life, just as Eliot had felt the 'USA up to a hundred years ago' to be 'a family extension'. New England had, however, by the 1890s ceased to provide the nation with the leading lights of its intellectual life. It had begun to fill the vacuum of its own identity with foreign importations - 'What came from Pusey's Oxford or somebody else's Persia seemed necessarily better than anybody's Boston' - or an identification with the culture in Europe from which it had sprung and to which it returned in order to distinguish itself from the New England of the immigrants and the United Sates of the mid-west.

Divided thus in their loyalties and in their sense of themselves as part of a community Eliot and Yeats both sought for some secure social location for their existence as individuals and poets. The failure of the active will which afflicted Yeats was, equally, something which troubled Eliot. Immediately before his visit to Switzerland during which

2 Tate, T.S.Eliot: The Man and his Work, p. 15.
he wrote most of 'The Waste Land', Eliot wrote to Richard Aldington to say that his 'nerves' was not a serious affair; they were due, he added, 'not to overwork but to an aboulie and emotional derangement which has been a lifelong affliction.' The directness of political purpose which would later reveal itself in both men seems almost a sign of the intensity of their need for a unity external to themselves to hold their own fragmentation at bay. For both, however, their later social and political opinions were a return to the cultural context and dominant values of the social group from which they sprang, a reassertion of the importance of the elites to which, by birth, they belonged and from which circumstances had divorced them. In each case the elite was a social group which had come to emphasise its cultural importance in proportion to its loss of political and economic power.

In fact, the social groups to which Yeats and Eliot belonged were each suffering from an eclipse of their power as a result of the increasing industrialisation of other parts of their country. In Ireland from the middle of the nineteenth century the Protestant Ascendancy was under challenge from several different directions. The first, and perhaps most significant in the long term, was the rise of the industrial centre based in Belfast, which shifted the balance of economic power in Ireland from Dublin to the North and, in the process, created a new kind of Protestant Ascendancy, one that had little to do with the values of that based in Dublin. The growth of Belfast was remarkable, from a population of 100,000 in 1850 it had reached 400,000 in 1914, whereas in the same period Dublin grew from 250,000 inhabitants to 300,000. By 1914 Ireland, from a statistical

point of view, looked in fact like a fairly advanced industrial economy, since a third of the gross national product was created by industry. That industry, however, had a very narrow base and £19 million of the £20.9 millions of non-food exports left from the northern city. Economic power was shifting rapidly: it remained in protestant hands, but it was a protestantism of a different stamp from the old Ascendancy and its demands upon the United Kingdom were very different. The Dublin Ascendancy had always used London and the Empire as a way of providing places for its members within the traditional hierarchies of British society, in the military and diplomatic service for instance, but the North's interest in the British connection was more urgent, for it needed Britain as an outlet for its exports.

During the same period, however, the economic base of the protestant ruling class in the South was being undermined. Initially this was a result of the rapid decline in population that followed the famine of 1845 - 49, but the aggravation of traditional hostilities thereafter and the unfortunate effects of government interventions, such as the 'unencumbered estates act' of 1849, led to a gradual erosion of landlord power. In the immediate aftermath of the famine a change from arable agriculture to cattle grazing allowed the landlords to keep up their own financial position, but the increasing pressure from political movements, firstly during the Fenian


2 '[Protestants in the South] were apt to forget that there existed in Ireland another kind of colonist besides the Ascendancy and that these colonists had built and meant to hold on to a very non-Ozymandian monument in the shape of Ireland's only modern city.' Conor Cruise O'Brien, The Shaping of Modern Ireland (London: Routledge, 1960), p. 20.

disturbances and later from the Land League, spelled the beginning of the end of their dominance. The franchise act of 1884, which established complete male suffrage, ensured the end of their political domination, because their opposition to a takeover of power by the majority in Ireland could no longer be seen as a defence of the religion of the realm and a matter of loyalty to the monarch:

Protestants of all classes still clung, even if sometimes half-consciously, to the old notion of protestant ascendancy; and the establishment of an Irish parliament would not only bring what remained of that ascendancy to an end, but would establish a new Roman Catholic ascendancy in its place. The presence of a few protestants in the Home Rule party could not alter the fact that the party worked in close collaboration with the Roman Catholic clergy, and a pronouncement by the hierarchy in favour of home rule, in February 1886, seemed an ominous indication of things to come. The protestant Irishman was fond of asserting his loyalty to the crown; but he did not really regard home rule as an issue between Great Britain and Ireland; for him, it was a revival of the seventeenth century struggle between Roman Catholics and protestants for ascendancy in Ireland ... 1

In this same period, when the Home Rule movement was forcing the protestant group into a re-enactment of past conflicts, agriculture was stricken by the depression that affected all of Britain with the opening up of the Canadian prairies. It was as though every pillar of the protestant way of life was simultaneously under attack.

In this situation Dublin was something of an anomaly for, although its growth could in no way match Belfast's, it went on being a successful city, and its population increase during the nineteenth century was considerable, given its dearth of industrial development. 2 The city was, in fact, maintained by its commercial activity, banking 3 and maritime trading, but

3 Joseph Lee, The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848 - 1918 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), points out that 'banking dividends frequently exceeding 10% confirm that the commercial sector of the Irish economy subsisted quite comfortably.' (p. 20)
its lack of any dynamic industrial sector led to an emphasis on professional rather than entrepreneurial achievement.\(^1\) Joseph Lee notes that the progress of Irish catholics up the social scale can be measured by their movement out of business and into the professions, which had a higher social status.\(^2\)

Business opportunity was in any case severely limited by an overall decline in industry owing to the decline of the population during the second half of the nineteenth century and the invasion of the home market by cheaper British goods. Alexander Humphreys suggests that,

> coupled with the increased migration to the towns, this made for the frustration of potential middle class elements in the urban population, restricted the number of skilled artisans, and begot a mass of general unskilled labourers, and unemployed struggling to maintain themselves on a subsistence level.\(^3\)

The rise of the middle class, when it came, was the rise, after the Wyndham act in 1903 establishing single ownership of land and ending the thirty years of experiment in joint ownership between tenant and landlord, of a rural middle class. As Mansergh points out,

> ...the chief legacy of the land question was not a peasantry reconciled to 'good' government, but a peasantry who, conscious of their new economic status as owners of land, had been brought once and for all into the national struggle. It was a decisive development in the political as well as social history of Ireland. The solution of the Land Question heralded the emergence of of a rural middle class, whose control over the Nationalist movement has been challenged frequently, but never successfully, a class whose social and political philosophy is embodied in the constitution of 1938.\(^4\)

The peasantry in whose name Yeats had opposed the Ascendancy in the 1890s in

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1 This was enforced by the predominantly Church of Ireland character of higher education. Trinity College abolished religious tests in 1873, but retained much longer its role as a producer of professional men for the higher echelons of Irish society, echelons necessarily favouring the elite. See T.W. Moody, 'The Irish University Question in the Nineteenth Century', History, xliii (1958), pp. 90 - 109.


3 Humphreys, The New Dubliners, p. 46.

fact was only a function of the existence of that Ascendancy; as the Ascendancy's economic and political control over the country weakened so the character of the peasantry changed. Yeats's image of the peasant was not something opposed to the essential nature of protestant Dublin, but integral with its social system.

The gradual destruction of the traditional bases of the protestant Ascendancy in Ireland left the social group as a whole with all the memories of greatness and none of its supports. During exactly the same period the New England patriciate had undergone a similar loss of position. Despite his birth and early life in St. Louis, T.S.Eliot's family was closely connected with the elite group of New England culture. The Eliots took pride in connections with two presidential families, those of John and John Quincey Adams and Rutherford B. Hayes, and therefore with the patrician class of the Eastern seaboard which provided most of the presidents of the Republic since its foundation. That class, based in Boston, dominated American political and intellectual life, and even after the civil war it could appropriately claim to be the 'American Athens'. As Van Wyck Brooks put it,

Two centuries lay behind the New England writers, and, if they largely ruled the national mind, if they were voces populi, there were reasons for it. They had grown in the great tradition of the Revolution, they were closely connected with the soil, they were students of the classics.  

By the 1890s, however, that centrality had gone. Barrett Wendell wrote in 1893 of those he felt to be the true Yankee folk: 'We are vanishing into provincial obscurity. American has swept from our grasp. The future is beyond us.'

The reason for the loss of power by the old Boston patriciate lay in

the rapid industrialisation of the United States economy in the period after
the civil war. The New England states depended for their economic power
on mercantile trading and commercial expertise as well as on its natural
resources in land. In 1870 the United States was primarily an agricultural
economy, 52% of the population working on the land; by 1910 this figure had
dropped below 35% and, from a position of 75% of the population living in small
towns and villages in the late nineteenth century, by 1910 the majority of
Americans lived and worked in the major cities. The concomitant of this
transformation - or perhaps it was its stimulus - was an enormous influx of
immigrants between 1880 and the beginning of the century. These were from
predominantly non-anglo-saxon, non-protestant countries, and the extent of the
religious and racial shift in the population can be judged from the fact that
in 1857 Massachusetts had a population in which only one in five were
foreign born or even the children of foreign born, whereas by 1908 only
32% of the population could be classed as belonging to the original
protestant settler stock. The actual industrial transformation of the economy
was occurring outside the domain of the New England patriciate, but it was
New England that took the brunt of the effects of immigration. Trapped between
a new plutocratic class on the one hand and a mass of impoverished immigrants
on the other, the patriciate retreated behind the defences of social superiority.

It was a class of brahmins without power which was left in New England,

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1 Details are from Harold N. Ross, 'Economic Growth and Change in the U.S.
under Laissez-Faire', in Frederic Cople Jaher (ed.), The Age of

2 Brooks, New England: Indian Summer, p. 7n, quotes these figures from
Bliss Perry, Park Street Papers.
and which, in Edith Wharton's words, had to 'fall back on sport and culture'. The process by which the mercantile elite of pre-civil war Boston was transformed into a self-regarding social elite before the end of the nineteenth century has been charted by Frederic Cople Jaher in his essay 'Proper Bostonians in the Era of Industrial Capitalism'. As always in such group situations, it was those who had experienced a parallel personal reversal who were able to give voice to the general feelings of the community. They felt the loss of power, and therefore the loss of significant direction to their own lives, as a dereliction of them by history, a dispossession of their rightful heritage which was identical with the failure of the historical process to support the true values of civilisation:

> Throughout the aristocratic perspective of Brahmin criticism inherent value was discerned in tradition, family, community, authority, order, excellence, leadership, beauty and heredity. Conversely materialism, mechanization, mobility, equality, individuality, democracy and innovation were condemned.  

The terms could be a roll-call from the vocabulary of Eliot's essays half a century later. Literary figures of New England, such as James Russell Lowell, Charles Eliot Norton and the Adamses, found themselves overtaken by a world with which they had no sympathy and, in the face of its victory over the future, they retreated into their own New England past, or into the European past which they believed their class to have maintained in the New World. They could continue, however, to call on a sufficient sense of their own prestige to be able to take their own doom as a serious indictment

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1 In Jaher, The Age of Industrialism in America.


3 For a discussion of Norton's career and the New England climate in the late nineteenth century, see Frederic Cople Jaher, Doubters and Dissenters: Cataclysmic Thought in America, 1885 - 1918 (New Jersey: Free Press, 1964)
of the modern world. Jaher sums up by suggesting that

The failure to retain ante-bellum economic leadership was due in part to disadvantages in natural resources and geographical location. Aristocratic traits, values and functions assumed in developing from a business elite into an upper class, also contributed to the eclipse of brahmin entrepreneurship. Older industries dominated by proper Bostonians declined in importance, while emerging opportunities usually were not exploited to the full because of conservatism or lack of capital ... The Boston aristocracy did not disappear as a formidable commercial entity, nor was it without accomplishments in modern capitalism. Proper Bostonians, however, suffered irreperable loss of commercial and class position in competition with capitalists from other regions and origins.

Economic decline, as in Ireland, could not be made to tally with the class's sense of its own significance, a discrepancy between envisaged history and real history which was transferred into the cultural sphere as the role of the doomed and sufferingly aware hero of a conflict against overwhelming historical odds.

In these pressed situations, faced with a blank and hostile future, each group asserted a sense of identity which depended on the separation of itself from the present and the discovery of a past in which its values were actually at the heart of their historical position. In Ireland this involved the assertion of the values of the Ascendancy as it had existed some hundred and fifty years previously and, also, the values of the Empire of which, as protestants, they formed a ruling part. The Imperialist spirit was strong exactly because it asserted the superiority of the rulers over the ruled on a world wide scale. Such a spirit, however, survived only appropriately where there could also be


2 Conor Cruise O'Brien, States of Ireland (London: Hutchinson, 1972), offers the following comparison: 'The position of the seventeenth century Ulster Protestant was like that of his contemporaries in New England, and his Dutch Calvinist contemporaries in South Africa. His descendants have grown more like Afrikaners in spirit than like New Englanders. The reason for this is that in Ulster, as in South Africa, the natives are still there too.' (p. 36). The situation of Southern Ireland is possibly more like that of New Englanders in their relation with the immigrant population.
some identification with the modern nature of England itself. The imperialist spirit was one which presented itself in ideal terms that had nothing to do with the messy reality of economic exploitation; as Lord Hugh Cecil defined it in 1912 it was 'a feeling for the greatness of the country and for that unity which makes its greatness.'\(^1\) But the reality of late nineteenth century England was not done away with by such ideals: it was an advanced industrial economy, the kind which was taking over the future from displaced aristocratic elites like those in Ireland or New England. The real condition of England was as unacceptable to these elites as its ideal version was comforting.

This was, perhaps, particularly true for the artist: it has often been noted that Imperialism and aestheticism are not antagonistic creeds, but rather two different modes of spiritualising the increasingly materialistic life of industrial man.\(^2\) In Yeats's case, his inheritance from his father was an aestheticism which, as much as any Irish feeling, would turn him against the Imperialist escape from the condition of the modern world:

Two pictures come into my memory. I have climbed to the top of a tree by the edge of the playing field, and am looking at my schoolfellows and am as proud of myself as a March cock when it crows to its first sunrise. I am saying to myself, 'If when I grow up I am as clever among grown-up men as I am among these boys, I shall be a famous man.' I remind myself of how they think all the same things and cover the school walls at election times with the opinions their fathers find in the newspapers. I remind myself that I am an artist's son and must take some work as the whole end of life and not think as the others do of becoming well off and living pleasantly.\(^3\)

'Abhorred London', as Yeats called it, drove him back to Ireland, but to an


\(^3\) Autobiographies, p. 42.

\(^4\) Ibid. p. 191.
Ireland which preceded the religious division of the society as it was in his own time, an Ireland which refused the modern world. Yeats was separated from his natural class affiliation by its Imperialism, which he opposed with his aestheticism, and from identification with English culture by his first hand experience of modern London and its materialism. The retreat into the past was all that was left open to him.

Paradoxically, the ancient Ireland to which he returned was itself the creation of the protestant mind. Ascendancy men like Sir Samuel Ferguson had revivified the old Irish material and Yeats, in writing of Ferguson, had to resort to stressing the importance of the tale rather than the teller in order to bring him into the camp of a new national and nationalist literature.¹ It is important to note, however, that the emotion which sustained Yeats's nationalism was not far different from that which sustained the Imperialist feelings of his English contemporaries:

I do not appeal to the professional classes ... - nor do I appeal to the shoddy society of 'West Britonism', - but to those young men clustered here and there throughout our land, whom the emotion of Patriotism has lifted into that world of selfless passion in which heroic deeds are possible and heroic poetry credible.² Yeats could, without losing his Irishness, hold together what would appear in England and to Englishmen to be conflicting emotions: he could assert the military virtues associated with Imperialism by locating them in an Irish past without giving up the aestheticism of his Rhymers' Club

¹ See Frayne I, pp. 87 - 104, for Yeats's defence of Ferguson in the face of obituaries (Ferguspn died in 1886) which stressed his loyalty to the crown.

² Frayne I, p. 104.
companions. At the same time he could find in the peasantry who were descended from that noble time a set of beliefs which justified his revulsion from materialism, a set of beliefs which did not need to appear as integral with their catholic religion, but rather as the reminiscence of more ancient beliefs. The fragmentation of the modern world was healed by a return to the sources of group existence in a primitive world; the world which 'was now but a bundle of fragments' could be made whole again by a purification of consciousness in the return to ancient art, which retained the emotions out of which could be made a new and better social structure in the present: 'and I had begun to hope, or to half hope, that we might be the first in Europe to seek unity as deliberately as it had been sought by theologian, sculptor, architect from the eleventh to the thirteenth century.'

The significant dates in the rediscovery of this Gaelic past which could offer Yeats the model of a new future for Ireland are clustered around

1 Cf. Conor Cruise O'Brien, States of Ireland, p. 52: 'Southern Protestants are, and even then were, a very small and scattered minority, almost all middle class, or landed. Their relations with Catholics, though not always easy, are far more frequent and varied than is generally possible in Ulster siege conditions. A Samuel Ferguson, in Ulster, could interest himself in ancient Ireland, but not too much in the degenerate descendents of a great Irish past.'

2 Autobiographies, p. 189.

3 In 1886 Yeats divided the world's imagination along the following lines: 'The seven great cycles of legends - the Indian; the Homeric; the Charlemagnic; the Spanish, circling round the Cid; the Arthurian; the Scandinavian; and the Irish - all differing one from the other, as the peoples differed who created them. Every one of these cycles is the voice of some race celebrating itself ... Back to the old legends go, year after year, the poets of the earth, seeking the truth about nature and man, that they may not be lost in a world of mere shadow and dream.' (Frayne 1, p. 81)

4 Autobiographies, p. 195.
the period of the 1880s and early 1890s. Ferguson's last work was published in 1880 and the late 'eighties saw the appearance of Douglas Hyde's studies of Irish folklore. In December 1892 Hyde's speech on the de-anglicising of Ireland effectively gave birth to the Gaelic League, whose purpose was to renew interest in Gaelic in order that it should become the living language of modern Ireland.\(^1\) The same period was crucial also to the consciousness of the old stock Protestants in New England. The sudden influx of poor Germans, Jews, Poles and Irish had led to a search for roots in a different community from the divided one in which they were actually living. In order to assert a stable cultural and racial identity for this beleaguered class there blossomed a multitude of societies which would continue links between the original settlers of the country and define the mainstream of American culture:

These old stock patriots, desperately seeking hereditary and historical roots in a rapidly changing world, flocked to the standards of such newly formed societies as the Sons of the Revolution (1883), the Colonial Dames (1890), the Daughters of the American Revolution (1890), ... the Society of Mayflower Descendants (1894), the Aryan Order of St. George or the Holy Roman Empire in the Colonies of America (1892) ... This whole movement was, of course, intimately bound up with anti-immigrant and anti-semitic sentiments. Thus the leader of the D.A.R. saw a real danger in 'our being absorbed by the different nationalities among us.'\(^2\)

I do not think it is stretching historical connections too far to see in this

\(^1\) Hyde said, in his speech to the National Literary Society in 1892: '...I believe it is our Gaelic past which, though the Irish race does not recognize it just at present, is really at the bottom of the Irish heart, and prevents us becoming citizens of the Empire.' (Quoted Mansergh, The Irish Question, p. 268) Yeats wrote to United Ireland about Hyde's speech, asking, 'Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit for being English in language?' (Frayne I, p. 255.)

the prototype of,

But this or such was Bleistein's way:
A saggy bending of the knees
And elbows, with the palms turned out,
Chicago Semite Viennese.

A lustreless protrusive eye
Stares from the protozoic slime
At a perspective of Canaletto.
The smoky candle end of time

Declines. On the Rialto once.
The rats are underneath the piles.
The Jew is underneath the lot.
Money in furs. 1

The racial mix of modern industrial America stares mindlessly at the artistic products of his European heritage, whose culture has been undermined along with its purity. Eliot's poem, I think, dramatises a conflict which is not born out of the American confrontation with Europe, but out of the conflict within American society and the apparent assault upon higher culture by lower in that society.

The genealogical interest that went along with the founding of these societies of the pure in blood did not pass by the family of the Eliots of St. Louis, who had their family tree drawn up in 1887, a year before Thomas Stearns was born. What that family tree revealed was later to be put to poetic use in 'Four Quartets'; it has also been put to historical-critical use by John Soldo in ascertaining the influence on Eliot of his New England background. 2 Soldo traces the way in which the unitarianism in which the Eliot family was deeply imbued underwent a gradual transformation in the nineteenth century:

The aristocracy of the spirit was shifted to the social plane; the upper classes were the best of all possible classes. Hand in hand


with this theological liberalism went a social conservatism that reinforced itself by the retention of a strict Puritan morality. ¹

Soldo, however, allows himself to be deceived by Eliot's religious conversion - and that individualising quality that must pertain to the artist - into thinking that Eliot made a purely personal break with the family traditions: 'His American predecessors were too deeply woven into the fabric of Unitarianism to provide useful material for Eliot, the revolutionary artist.'² This treats the diachronic break that Eliot makes with the family tradition in isolation from the synchronic historical situation in which that break was made.

The young T.S.Eliot, after his local schooling in St. Louis, was sent to Milton Academy, 'one of the select preparatory schools of New England ... which to Unitarians was what Groton and St. Paul were to Episcopalians.'³ T.S. Matthews points out that Milton was willing to accept the young Eliot for a year's finishing before his going to Harvard and that this seems 'to indicate the pressure of Eliot influence, and its efficacy.'⁴ The boarding school was a passport to the best society in Harvard and was itself an interesting expression of the changing consciousness of the American elite. Most of the New England boarding schools were either founded in or underwent a sudden expansion during the period of mass immigration, their purpose being to strengthen the fibre of the ruling elite in the face of an uncertain future.⁵

² Ibid. p. 372.
⁵ See Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment, p. 127 ff.
When Eliot arrived at Harvard a distant relation, C.W. Eliot, was
president, and the Harvard of his time was one of the intellectual
distinctions of its country. C. W. Eliot saw his university as a place
for the training of the future leaders of the nation. The university was
firmly rooted in Unitarianism, but the elder Eliot's vision of the future,
as outlined in 1909 when his young relation was finishing his undergraduate
studies, consisted of a religion of the future embodying the following
principles:

i) it would believe in one God indwelling in the entire creation;
ii) it would seek to prevent illness and disease;
iii) it would lead to universal goodwill;
iv) it would cultivate love and hope;
v) it would harmonise the teachings of Jesus Christ with democracy,
   individualism, social idealism, zeal for education, research into
   preventive medicine, advances in business ethics, and would
   welcome change and innovation.

The tenor of these remarks is entirely antipathetic to what the younger
Eliot would later assert as his own beliefs, but after listing these
propositions Secourt adds:

Early and subtle associations had also nurtured in Tom Eliot an instinct
for European culture. Suppose that in the sensitiveness of the heart
and intensity of intellectual ability there is a need for inner
communion with the spirit of the universe. Young men with such
appetites would reject what is preferred by self-satisfied elders.
Arriving at Unitarian Harvard from Unitarian Milton to study classics
and philosophy, Tom felt rather irritated and resentful at what
President Eliot took from the past to depict the "religion of the
future".

Rejecting the religion of the American future, the young Tom Eliot
also swept out of consideration one of the most distinguished figures
Massachusetts had produced...

We do not, however, need the indulgence of supposals about the psychological

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1 Secourt, T.S. Eliot: A Memoir, p. 27.
2 Ibid. p. 28.
propensities of sensitive and intellectual young men to understand Eliot's rejection of this future religion, for that vision was already an eccentric one in the society of its time. The pressures of the immigrant classes had radically altered the intellectual ethos of New England since C.W. Eliot's youth, and he was to write to Charles Francis Adams in 1914: 'you have seen reason to abandon the principles and doctrines of your youth, while I have not.' In this Adams was closer to the mainstream of New England experience, and closer, too, to the views we have come to associate with T.S. Eliot.

C.W. Eliot's views on the workings of the social system provide an interesting comparison with T.S. Eliot's and a measure of the changing complexion of New England life between late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For both men, for instance, the importance of the family in the social mechanism was of crucial significance: C.W. Eliot insisted that if society as a whole is to gain by mobility and openness of structure, those who rise must stay up in successive generations, that the higher levels of society may be constantly enlarged, and that a proportion of pure, gentle, refined and magnanimous persons may steadily be increased, new risen talent should reinforce the upper ranks ... The assured permanence of superior families is quite as important as the free starting of such families.  

C.W. Eliot believed that the American way of life could produce new families of good breeding and thus extend the elite over a broader section of the racial mix of the society, though the elite itself should endeavour to preserve itself as a continuous body. Compare those views with Eliot's in Notes towards the Definition of Culture:

Yet group culture, as observable in the past, has never been co-extensive with class, whether an aristocracy or an upper middle class.

1 Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment, p. 145.
2 Ibid. p. 146.
A very large number of these classes have always been conspicuously deficient in 'culture'. I think that in the past the repository of this culture has been the elite, the major part of which was drawn from the dominant class of the time, constituting the primary consumers of the work of thought and art produced by the minority members, who will have originated from various classes, including that class itself... But the individuals from the dominant class who compose the nucleus of the cultural elite must not thereby be cut off from the class to which they belong, for without their membership of that class they would not have their part to play. It is their function, in relation to the producers, to transmit the culture which they have inherited; just as it is their function, in relation to the rest of their class, to keep it from ossification. It is the function of the class as a whole to preserve and communicate standards of manners - which are a vital element in group culture. It is the function of the superior members and superior families to preserve the group culture, as it is the function of the producers to alter it.¹

From their apparently opposed positions the two Eliots come to occupy the same ground: the pattern of change and preservation which is compatible with the maintenance and development of civilised values, initiation by rising individuals, preservation by established families in the dominant social group, form similar structures in their theories of society. The difference between them primarily in the perspective in which this process is seen:

C.W. Eliot presents it as an optimistic projection of an indefinite extension of the higher parts of society which will be able to assimilate any number of eminent individuals of whatever background as well as new risen families; T.S. Eliot, sees the dominant group's ability to maintain its values as being dependent on its being small enough to remain cohesive and so able to prevent its gradual assimilation into another class and another culture. The elder Eliot retained the optimism of his youth; the younger lived after the deluge:

The real revolution in that country was not what is called the Revolution in the history books, but is a consequence of the Civil War; after which was swollen that stream of mixed immigration, bringing² (or rather multiplying) the danger of development into a caste system.

It is the 'mixed immigration' which destroys the continuity between upper

¹ Notes towards the Definition of Culture, p. 42.
² Ibid. p. 45.
class and the rest of society and so forces that dominant class into the rigidity of a caste.

Eliot's rejection of the liberal vision of an American social system was not the first stirring of the revolutionary artist. Even at Harvard, which C.W. Eliot had attempted to maintain as a place where talent could make its mark without discrimination of background, the caste system had begun to impose itself. As Samuel Eliot Morrison wrote in his history of Harvard:

Since 1890 it has been almost necessary for a Harvard student with social ambition to enter from the 'right' sort of school and be popular there, to room on the 'Gold Coast' and be accepted by Boston society in his freshman year in order to be on the right side of the social chasm ... Conversely, a lad of Mayflower or Porcellian ancestry who entered from a high school was as much out of it' as a ghetto Jew. ¹

The change in the tenor of the social structure, becoming more exclusive as the university grew larger and accepted more catholics, Jews, and immigrant nationalities, was accompanied by a change in the tenor of religious affiliations. Previously staunchly Unitarian, and still presided over by a Unitarian, Harvard by the 1890s was a place where the sons of established families were 'being seduced by the richness of Anglican ritual.'²

In this context, T.S. Eliot's early flirtation with Buddhism, followed by a conversion to Anglicanism, might be seen as a typical, if belated, conversion rather than an extraordinary one, reflecting the need to seek new cultural credentials as a support to declining status in economic and political terms. Indeed, Van Wyck Brooks sees Eliot's whole development as typical of the

2 Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment, p. 144.
New England patriciate in this period:

The Bostonians were great collectors. They collected religions, along with their objects of art... They also collected political ideas; and in their revolt against democracy and realism, their desire to expunge all remnant of the Puritan past, they conceived a monarchist movement, a royalist movement... This singular Bostonian royalism, with other admixtures of soberer hue, reappeared in T.S. Eliot. 1

...Eliot's mind was itself composed of all the tastes of this latter-day Boston, a scholarly "museum of idols" like Sargent's fresco. There one sees the Boston royalism, the Boston Anglo-Catholicism, the taste for Donne, Laforgue and Rémy de Gourmont, the interest in Dante, Sanskrit, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Elizabethan dramatists and poets, the classicism of Babbit and Santayana. Eliot's mind was the mirror of Boston Alexandrianism. 2

What is significant in Brooks's analysis of what Eliot owed to New England society is that none of it belongs to New England: it is essentially a discovered, a remade past. The society of the patriciate had been so severed from its own real roots and traditions that it had to re-invent a set of new connections with the past, a surrogate tradition to replace the real history of their own defeated traditions. The aspect of a discovered past is true, equally, of Yeats. Yeats's inheritance from his father was of an aestheticism which owed nothing to Ireland. The Irish connection does not seem to have bulked large in J.B. Yeats's conception of his role as an artist and it was from O'Leary that Yeats learned of the poets of the Young Ireland movement and, more than probably, from Lady Gregory that he drew his conception of the values of the Anglo-Irish past which, as a young man, he had disowned. In the creation of such substitute pasts Yeats and Eliot were integral to the movement of spirit in their classes.

2 Ibid. p. 516.
The particularly psychologically obstructive aspect of the relationship of these classes to their own pasts, however, was that the new shape of their destiny was in itself partly the logical outcome of their own actions. The New England patriciate was suffering from the extension to other and better fitted areas of the United States of an industrialisation process which they had themselves attempted to initiate for their own economic benefit, just as they were suffering from an influx of immigrants which they had originally encouraged in order to build up the country's population. It was in effect their own past traditions which had led to their dispossession in the present; thus their need to disown their own past and discover a more suitable one. For the Anglo-Irish the situation was similar; the British parliament to which they were attached by religion and past history now threatened to hand them over into the control of those whom it had previously given them to control. George Dangerfield's portrait of Sir Edward Carson on the eve of the crisis of 1912 sums up the nature of the impasse:

Sir Edward was of granite all compact; Celtic granite. He could not play; above all things he could not play with his principles. And yet it was one of the contradictions of his nature that he could turn his principles against themselves, and attempt to overthrow the constitution in the name of the Constitution, and attempt to discredit the Crown in the Crown's honour.  

Trapped in such a situation a class has only two choices: the militant antagonism of Sir Edward or the retreat into the past that Yeats initially offered, unless, of course, it joins some other class or some other society and does away with its own existence - as Eliot chose to do, effecting the choice of a different past by actually aligning himself with that alternative past.

The great danger, of course, of analyses such as this is that one flattens out the specific historical situation in the attempt to make two separate groups fit the same pattern; as Michael Holroyd puts it, in 'seeking common trends within any set of people one is obliged to misrepresent ... the actual individual truth in order to preserve an even facade.'

I am not, however, seeking to make the two groups identical (though the problem facing the New England patriciate was, at least in part, a consequence of the actions of the Anglo-Irish, and the immigrant Irish in America were to be the main supporters of action against the Anglo-Irish hierarchy as well as the effective instruments of the social decay New England tradition), but rather to suggest a parallel relation between such cultural groups and the development elsewhere of industrial society. It is not in their specific character that the groups are the same - though similarities do exist at this level - but in their structural relations with other cultures. At this level the connection can be taken even further to include that other fecund source of the modern in poetry, the Southern Agrarians. Eliot acknowledged his connections with them in *After Strange Gods*:

> You have here, I imagine, at least some recollection of a 'tradition', such as the influx of foreign populations has almost effaced in some parts of the North, and such as has never established itself in the West.

- but it is a connection based not on Eliot's partly Southern background, but in a common sense of loss. As Solomon Fishman points out,

> For the Southern critics the pre-civil war South embodies, however imperfectly, the characteristics of a traditional society. Before 1850, by which time the last vestiges of the theocratic state had

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2 *After Strange Gods*, p. 15.
been obliterated, New England seemed to preserve some of the same attributes. 1

In the South too there is a culture which survives but survives without any real sense of direction or power: out of that Southern consciousness have come many of our most 'modern' writers. The nature of modernist poetry seems to be integral to precisely this kind of lost elite and, I suggest, is integral in this way because of the changed relations of the poet to his audience in the modern period.

The changing of the artist's position in relation to his audience during the decline of patronage and the rise of the reading public has been well documented at least since the time of Schucking's History of Literary Taste, 2 but even that change did not divorce the writer from a distinct audience effectively integrated into the social structure. Even the critical novelists of the Victorian era, Dickens say, or George Eliot, remained secure within a set of values which they felt to have a social location, even if those values were deformed in particular situations. But the identification between the author and a particular social class breaks down in the late nineteenth century. The issuing of cheap editions of novels and the breaking of the power of the circulating libraries, the rise of the popular press, the Education Act have all been brought in as reasons for this change, but much more important that any is a general change in all industrial societies brought about by specialisation at all levels, from the development of mass production with the breaking up of all operations into discrete units, to the separation of the sciences into


more and more specialised fields of investigation and application. In the intellectual sphere the result was a fracturing of the old general reading public into specialised branches catered for by special publication - the rise, in literary terms, of the small magazine. The result is outlined by Renato Poggioli:

A cultural sociology for our own time can only be constructed from the now certain hypothesis that a plurality of diverse and contradictory intellectual strata exists. Such a plurality impedes any crystallisation or fossilising. What happens is exactly the opposite of the hierarchical and sharp stratifications of medieval society, of primitive and archaic civilizations. Our cultural and social situation is now in a continual state of flux, an uninterrupted process of agitations and metamorphoses ... What happens is a continual up and down from one to another elite, from elite to nonelite. Thus the artist and intellectual are led to form their own group, taking up positions of distance or detachment from the traditional culture of the society to which they belong, at least originally.

The fault in Poggioli's analysis is that he sees this as peculiarly the position of the intellectual and artist, but in the technocratic world of advanced industrialisation it is the position of everyman. Its image is the modern city and its impact on us as 'a continual state of flux, an uninterrupted process of agitations and metamorphoses.' As Walter Benjamin suggested, 'the shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to what the worker "experiences" at his machine.'

The difference lies in the fact that for the worker the sudden shock of action is repetitious as the shock of the streets is varied; the specialisations of intellectual functions offers an opportunity for extending

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knowledge and experience - even if only within narrow limits - whereas the worker's specialisation is a denial of all change and growth. What these specialisations make possible, however, is a breadth of choice and of knowledge previously unknown. The worker consumes goods produced by other workers: their narrowed, specialised existence as workers is his broadened existence as a consumer and vice versa.\(^1\) The specialisation of intellectual life makes conversation across the boundaries of disciplines ever more difficult and yet makes an abundance of knowledge available to all.

Each individual not only exists, therefore, in a social world which is made up of a multiplicity of groups which have no apparent interconnection - family, commuters, workers, consumers and so on, - each individual changes in himself depending on which of these groups he is with or belongs to at a particular time. Thus, the scientist is a specialist, say, in some branch of chemistry but only an educated layman in physics and a member of the public in relation to electrical engineering. The suppression of an overall, integrating perspective is parallel to the worker's loss of perspective when the advanced capitalism of the limited company replaces the individual capitalism of the family firm. When the person who runs the business is only a career executive, a paid worker and not an owner, the personal relations which characterise even the antagonism of workers and owners (and which is faithfully recorded in the interviews arranged by the authors of the 1840s between worker and employer - for example, Stephen Blackpool and Bounderby in Dickens's *Hard Times* and John Barton

\(^1\) T.C. Barker writes '... greater shopping facilities accompanied and strengthened the remarkable rise in working-class purchasing power which was the outstanding feature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century.' *The Twentieth Century Mind*, ed. C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, Vol. 1, p. 54.
and Carson in Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton*) disappears into a dubious anonymity. The transition between these two forms of social experience happened relatively quickly; when Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was being written before the First World War, it explored an individual capitalism which was already being superceded in the most modern industries and was about to receive literary expression in the distinction between Gerald Crich and his father in Lawrence's *Women in Love*.¹ The associationist technique of Yeats's and Eliot's poetry does not reflect these social movements, it is analogical with them; it is the mode through which a similar loss of connection on the part of the artist can be expressed.

The difference between the specialisation of the scientist and the specialisation of the worker, one intensifying a personal pursuit of knowledge, the other antagonistic to all discovery, is repeated in the cultural sphere. The artist is freed by mass society because he has no longer, like nineteenth century writers, to carry a large audience with him. He carries only spiritual baggage. It is a sudden destruction of relations creating complete isolation: that freedom finds its inverted image in the worker's isolation in the mechanised production line. Poggioli outlines the difference in terms of the difference between nineteenth century and modern periodicals:

> We can express the difference by defining the Romantic nineteenth century periodical as essentially an organ of opinion, exercising an avant garde function only insofar as it leads and precedes a vast corps of readers in the labyrinth of ideas and issues; but the avant-garde periodical functions as an independent and isolated military unit, completely

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¹ Tressell's novel was left unfinished when he died in 1911; Lawrence started work on *Women in Love* in 1915, though its publication came only in 1921.
and sharply detached from the public ... 1

Where no relations can be established antagonism creates one. The isolation of the artist is a situation which can only be fully expressed, if the foregoing argument is valid, by someone who belongs to a class which has experienced as a class that isolation and so can assert a coherent response to it.

It is exactly this which, I want to maintain, allowed Yeats and Eliot to develop more fully than anyone else the insights of a 'modern' consciousness. In their class situations the radical destruction of relationships across society, which was brought about by advancing technological development, had already been experienced as a temporal disjunction, a total loss of relationship with the past and the future. The loss of tradition in their class situation became the model for a loss of connection in the social framework, and could be adopted by the society which was the consumer of their works as a model for its condition, even though the model was derived from a very different situation. In the 1890s Yeats's celtic twilight atmosphere could be taken as an escape from the modern world into a situation in which relations could still be maintained on a positive basis; the failure of Yeats's celtic nationalism as a spiritual force was what made him a modern poet, since it deprived him of any possibility of re-establishing a world of personal connections which would also be truly social connections. The social connections of his own friends could never, after the early years of the century, appear to be the real social relations of the whole society:

... the dream of my early manhood, that a modern nation can

1 Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant Garde, p. 23.
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 round its century.

For Eliot European culture was a chosen set of temporal connections which would overcome the destruction of tradition in his own class, but its very lack of basis in any particular society, its constructed nature, enforced the awareness of radical discontinuity between past and present, between the ideal tradition and the actual life of a modern city - even in Europe.

The discovered nature of each of these men's traditions meant that it was a tradition based not on immediate acquaintance or living contact, but on learning, on acquired knowledge. It was here that the associationist aesthetic could adequately fulfil their ambiguous relation with the tradition which they had adopted. On the one hand it permitted the assertion of tradition as integral to the meaning of every word, every image because those meanings could only develop through traditional associations. The importance of cultural continuity was integral with the very method they used. At the same time, however, the associations were able to be learned: they did not turn entirely on inherited tradition, but could be acquired by effort, intellectual effort. What the associationist technique asserted, therefore, was precisely the importance of the intellectual, the artist as a member of that particular social group which, as Karl Mannheim points out, has in common only its education:

Although they are too differentiated to be regarded as a single class, there is, however, one unifying sociological bond between all groups of intellectuals, namely education, which binds them together in a striking way. Participation in a common educational heritage progressively tends to

1 Autobiographies, p. 295.
suppress differences of birth status, profession and wealth, and to unite the individual educated people on the basis of the education they have received.\(^1\)

The acquisition of sufficient 'culture' to understand the allusions and associative possibilities of Yeats's and Eliot's poetry does not entail a certain kind of background, but a certain kind of education, a certain area of knowledge. Thus, though the suppression of connecting links 'mirrors' the condition of intellectual, artist and worker in modern society, the possibility of attaining a unified perspective through the acquisition of the correct knowledge and appropriate taste belongs to the group of artists and intellectuals, those who share a particular kind of knowledge through education. Of course, the knowledge required of the reader by Yeats is different in kind from that required by Eliot, belonging as it does to an underground tradition of learning, but it is no less dependent on education for all that.

In the isolation of the artist from the rest of the social world, an isolation taken to be particular but in fact a general condition, the associative hinterland of the poem asserts a secret unity among the members of a group which has no overt group direction or role in the world. The relevance of the occult group to this is evident: the occultists are in miniature what the whole group of artists and intellectuals are in the daylight world of society. Each member of the group finds himself reflected in the poem because he finds there a knowledge to which he is, by specialisation, privy. The fragmented multiplicity of the modern world has its secret unity in our consciousness of it, in the fact that it is our consciousness upon which it multiplicity imposes, and thus the poems tell the

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story of modern consciousness even to those who are not privy to the secrets
which they embody. By what Sartre describes as a hysteresis the situation
of the artist as isolated in our time comes to be a mirror for the people
from whom he is isolated, from whom he turns away.

The great works in this mode converge upon the period between 1915
and 1930 and the sense of disjunction between past and present had, of
course, been forced upon a generation by the war. For the artists the
disjunction was already there and their works would take on the colouring
of that historical rupture. The rupture, however, had not in fact affected
writers in the core of English culture. The sense which many writers have
expressed that Imagism and modernism were, in fact, alien flowers in
English culture is accurate: English culture was incapable of presenting
itself with that kind of image of total disjunction because it had no
experience of such disjunction. It experienced it in the War and its
effects, but not in the very basis of its cultural sense of itself, because
its cultural traditions remained constant. That constancy was immortalised
in the confrontation recorded by Michael Holroyd:

When an angry pullover-knitting lady asked an elegant young
man-about-Bloomsbury whether he wasn’t ashamed to be seen

1 I would count here, as well as Yeats and Eliot and the obviously related
works of Pound and Joyce, David Jones's In Parenthesis and Hugh
MacDiarmid's A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.

2 See particularly Graham Hough, Image and Experience (London: Duckworth,
1960).

3 The isolation of F.R. Leavis in the mainstream of English academic life
is indicative of the continuing effects of this tradition. Leavis,
of course, belongs to a different tradition whose vision, as George
Steiner has described it, is 'of a non-conformist, morally literate
England, of an England in the style of Bunyan, Cobbett or D.H.
Lawrence.' Encounter, xviii, May 1962, p. 44. Steiner also notes
Leavis's similarity to Allen Tate and the Southern Agrarians and his
indebtedness to the criticism of Eliot.
out of uniform while other young men were fighting for civilization, the reply was confident and characteristic: 'Madam, I am the civilization they are fighting for.'

The fact is that there never was a group of free-floating intellectuals in England such as developed in most European countries in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Too much of the country's intellectual development was centred not only in the traditions of Oxford and Cambridge but, as N.G. Annan has revealed, in a tightly-knit group, which he calls the 'intellectual aristocracy', who had found a secure place for themselves within the social structure: 'They all regarded themselves as gentlemen'. This group, even when its members were participating in left wing politics, was the embodiment of a sense of continuity and order within the social world:

The influence of these families may partly explain the paradox which has puzzled European and American observers of English life: the paradox of an intelligentsia which appears to conform rather than rebel against the rest of society. The proclivity to criticize, of course, exists; Matthew Arnold flicked Victorian confidence with his irony and in recent years notable members of these families were among the leaders of the ethical revolution which took place in the decades immediately before and after the first world war. But the pro-consular tradition and the English habit of working through established institutions and modifying them to meet social needs only when such needs are proven are traits strongly exhibited by the intelligentsia of this country. Here is an aristocracy, secure, established and, like the rest of English society, accustomed to responsible and judicious utterance and sceptical of iconoclastic speculation.

That aristocracy had been formed gradually within a society whose sense of order had been maintained throughout the revolutionary process of industrialization, a society which had, in effect, retained an aristocratic tradition despite the rapid changes that it had experienced. This tradition can be

1 Holroyd, Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group, pp. 52-53.
3 Annan, ibid., p. 285.
felt in a continuity of status, in a sense of social emplacement which remains despite the 'rise of the middle class'. As Walter L. Arnstein notes, 'not only was the British government of 1900 predominantly aristocratic, ... it was predominantly landed aristocratic.'\(^1\) With the end of the war a visible change had occurred:

The new balance of political power within the upper class was symbolized by the passing over of Lord Curzon in favour of the 'countryfied businessman' Stanley Baldwin for Prime Minister ... It was naturally a matter of deep regret to aristocrats like Lord Henry Bentick who believed that the Conservative Party was being 'thoroughly commercialized and vulgarized'; and Plutocracy 'ennobled, decorated, knighted and enriched'.\(^2\)

But the important point is that it is a change of power 'within the upper class', and not a by-passing of that class. Eliot says in Notes Towards the Definition of Culture that 'the real revolution in that country [USA] was ... a consequence of the Civil War; after which arose a plutocratic elite.'\(^3\) That plutocratic elite by-passed the traditional Bostonian elite, because that elite was not institutionalised as it was in Britain. Thus the situation in Britain had a surface similarity to that of the American and Irish patrician traditions, but it was a similarity modified by a continuity of which there was no hope in either of those societies. The intellectual shape of the break is parallel in the situation of the twentieth century inheritors of that Intellectual Aristocracy which Annan has charted, the group known as Bloomsbury:

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3 Notes towards the Definition of Culture, p. 45.
For although these friends who met on Thursday evenings before the war shared no fixed and common values germinating from an original gospel, they may be said to have been permeated with similar intuitions. The keystone to these intuitions was a desire for partial independence from the parochial and pretentious fog of Victorianism. They were alike in their determined opposition to the religious and moral standards of Victorian orthodoxy; and in their work they represented more truly than anything else the culmination of the aesthetic movement. Essentially they were reformers rather than revolutionaries. Virginia Woolf's concept of a proper financial and domestic standard, no less than Strachey's Preface to *Eminent Victorians*, was a declaration of this spirit of partial independence, a wish to cut herself off from the immediate past by escaping from the family sitting-room to another, unopened wing of the same house - not to a new house or town or country.¹

The difference between that and a Yeats or an Eliot who has to choose an entire tradition is the difference between cultivated English contemporary art and full-blooded modernism.

The survival of the aristocracy, which was an inhibiting feature of the intellectual - and economic² - landscape of England for artists and intellectuals from the cultural core of English society, was exactly what made the English tradition available to T.S. Eliot, just as the personal connection with Lady Gregory opened up the Anglo-Irish tradition for Yeats. People living fully within these traditions could not use them as outsiders, or partial outsiders could, who could accept from them only the intellectual content that suited their purpose, who did not have to come to terms with a lived content. The need for such a tradition was partly a function of the loss of situation for the artist - note, for instance, the way that Yeats feels that his father's art has lost something by breaking with his pre-

¹ Holroyd, Lytton Strachey and the Bloomsbury Group, p. 53.
Raphaelite youth but it was also integral with the associationist aesthetic within which Yeats's and Eliot's thought came to maturation; the secret unity of the educated was an insubstantial thing, existing only in the present in libraries. That unity had to be given a firm basis in the soil of the past rather than the reading of the present if it was not to be an accidental accretion, if its associative power was to be permanent. The associationist principle demanded such a completion in an aristocratic tradition because it demanded a body of knowledge which transcended the learning of any individual, which was embodied in a way of life. Thus the circle completes itself, or the two parallel streams rejoin: the member of the social group whose status has been destroyed by historical change and who is able, therefore, to express the alienation of the artist and of things spiritual in the modern world, utilises the associationist technique which at once mirrors the loss of relation in that world and asserts a secret unity among the displaced, but is then forced by his own technique into the rediscovery of an aristocracy which will return to his associations a public unity. The class he discovers has itself to be one threatened by the modern world and this, partly, because the associationist principle demands that all meaning should lie in the past and its force, therefore, is towards an overthrowing of the present and a re-achievement of the past so that meaning can be apprehended directly again. The hope is, of course, a spurious one: meaning, in associationist terms, will always be past, but the relationship between present and past meanings exactly fits the relationship outlined by Poggioli of the relationship between the avant-garde and bourgeois society:

1 See Autobiographies, p. 81: 'I was always hoping that my father would return to the style of his youth, and make pictures out of certain designs now lost, that one could still find in his portfolios.'

2 Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, p. 140, notes that 'there are two courses of action which unattached intellectuals have actually taken as ways out of this middle-of-the-road position: first what amount to a largely voluntary affiliation with one or the other of the various antagonistic classes ...'
... avant-garde art can exist only in the type of society that is liberal-democratic from the political point of view, bourgeois-capitalistic from the socio-economic point of view ... [it] cannot help paying involuntary homage to democratic and liberal-bourgeois societies in the very act of proclaiming itself anti-democratic and anti-bourgeois: nor does it realise that it expresses the evolutionary progressive principle of that social order in the very act of abandoning itself to the chimera of involution or revolution ... This historical and psychic type of the avant-garde artist belongs specifically to our social system: even admitting that our society condemns him to death, another society would have prevented his being born.¹

The associationist principle embodies exactly this paradox: at every turn the artist, whether by the objective correlative or by the creation of a modern myth, attempts to undermine the subjectivity of the reader and the consequent loss of control which it imposes on him, and which is essential to the meaning of his artistic enterprise. To limit meaning by definition would deny the very sources of his art, but it is a denial which Yeats and Eliot constantly toy with in their dissatisfaction of the position which this imposes on them vis-a-vis their audience. The democratic principle which releases the work of art into the multitudinous possibilities of the reader's mind is counteracted by the attempt to dictate meanings and, finally, by the attempt to dictate the shape of those minds. The formal shape of the work of art must be met by a formal shape in the reader's mind, one that will not be subject to accidents beyond the forces which the writer controls because he himself submits to them.

Denis Donoghue has outlined the crucial area of the problem which afflicts these artists and tackles what so many have swept under the carpet, either with disdain for Yeats's and Eliot's politics or contempt for their creative achievement:

The single article of faith which goes undisputed in the Babel of modern criticism is the primacy of the creative imagination. It bloweth where it listeth, indisputable and imperious, it gives no quarter. In extreme versions, it concedes no rights to nature, history, other people, the world of natural forms is grist to its mill. It is strange that we have accepted such an authoritarian notion in aesthetics while professing to be scandalized by its equivalent in politics ... The freedom conceded to the poet's imagination is fundamental in European Romanticism, represented accurately enough by Coleridge. The modern understanding of imagination assumes that order is imposed upon experience by those exceptional men, the few, capable of doing so: that it is natural for such men to do so, as an act issues from a prior capacity. It would be possible, I suppose, to devise an aesthetic which would consort with a democratic politics, but no such aesthetic has flourished in modern literature.¹

As far as he goes Donoghue is right, but what he misses is the extent to which the obverse side of the theory of the creative imagination is a democratic theory, because it insists that ordinary men, non-artists, experience art through a process of association which is a function of their own essential experiences. Even as the artist is elevated to superhuman status the rights of the ordinary man are asserted - except that they are not asserted by the artist, who denies that that ordinary man has read the work, has experienced it. Only other artists can do that. The democratic impulse by which the poem becomes each man's own individual poem through his associations from it, is countermanded by the elitist impulse that such experience is not an experience of the poem. The passive mind of the reader² is not, in fact, passive enough to suit

¹ Denis Donoghue, Yeats, p. 121.
² The passive view of the reader is still profoundly present in modern criticism, in Cleanth Brooks, in I.A. Richards (particularly the stimulus, causation theory of mental events - see ch. 11 of the Principles of Literary Criticism) and is asserted by Elder Olson who argues that the reader must be passive, but passive precisely in keeping his associations at bay, because the poem then 'becomes a mere stimulus to independent poetic activities on the part of the reader.' Wilbur S. Scott (ed.) Five Approaches to Literary Criticism (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 216. The passivity of a former age is insufficiently passive in this.
the artist, and its passivity in a particular pattern must be maintained by the work of Coleridge's enlightened clerisy, or by a modern education system, or by a church, or by men in blue or brown or black shirts.

The active-passive division which the Romantic theory and its successors has erected into a standard part of our critical outlook is, from the artist's point of view, a reaction against the passive, contemplative view of the mind we have inherited from the eighteenth century and which, in positivistic philosophy, still haunts the modern world. The artists' revolt, however, in favour of their own processes of imagination as active and creative has left the rest of the world in limbo. Coleridge asks, 'What is poetry?' and replies that it 'is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to one is involved in the solution of the other.' Such a view makes poetry as experienced by the reader an irrelevance. It is only the creative act which counts, not the receptive act. This active-passive view of the mind, however, is based on a contemplative view of humanity, that the essence of our knowledge is in contemplation rather than action, which suits the philosopher in his study but not the man who, to use Hume's famous instance, plays backgammon with his friends. Yet it is to Hume that we owe much of the power of the contemplative view of the mind and its workings: 'the mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.' As long as we accept some such idea of the mind we can

1 Biographia Literaria, p. 173.

2 David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, p. 269: 'I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them any farther.'

3 Hume, Treatise, p. 253.
never overcome the dissociation of sensibility which inflicts us when we
divorce thought from action, creation from reception. The way out of the
problem was pointed by Sartre in his study of the imagination; in which he
tackles the crucial area of Coleridge's operation of the mind that 'dissolves,
diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate':

How can the existence of images be reconciled with the re-
quirements of synthesis? They failed to realize that an
atomistic conception of images was already contained in the
very manner of formulating the problem. There is no
avoiding the straightforward answer that so long as images
are inert psychic contents, there is no conceivable way to
reconcile them with the requirements of synthesis. An
image can only enter into consciousness if it is itself a
synthesis, not an element. There are not, and never could
be, images in consciousness. Rather, an image is a certain
type of consciousness. An image is an act, not some thing.
An image is a consciousness of something.

If an image is a consciousness directed towards, if it is an act performed
and not a sensation received or an association generated, its meaning ceases
to be dependent upon the past. Its characteristic direction is intentional
and towards the world, not reflexive and away from the world. The artist's
image thus does not disappear from him into an endless succession of
associated images disappearing into the depths of the past, but encounters
a mind whose activity is directed into the future. In such an encounter
the poet neither is promised total control nor is threatened with total
loss of control: a human face can be given to the mask of the muse, but
whether the productions of such an art would satisfy us, would satisfy
what it is we seek in art is another matter. Such a poetry, however, would
not be a poetry of the social classes which produced the great works of the

1 Biographia Literaria, p. 167.
2 Jean-Paul Sartre, Imagination: A Psychological Critique (trans. Forrest
Williams, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972); originally
early twentieth century: the meaning of Yeats's work, of Eliot's work lies precisely in its commitment to an idea of the imagination, of culture, of meaning itself which is entirely past directed. We are offered, as a 'modern' view of the world, a view which is homologous with that of social classes which have been completely by-passed by the modern world.
In or about 1929, to misdate Virginia Woolf, human nature changed. The Wall Street Crash offers a convenient historical divide, marking perhaps the last nail driven in the coffin of a world that had staggered on after the World War, hardly sure any longer of where it was going. But in the way that art has of being parallel in its significant moments to the great historical crises of an age, the years between 1928 and 1930 contain a cluster of significant endings and beginnings in British art. 1928, for example, was the year of Lawrence's last major work, _Lady Chatterley's Lover_, of MacDiarmid's _A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle_, of Auden's first privately produced collection of poems. In the European dimension it was the year of Freud's _Civilization and its Discontents_ and it was the year that Wittgenstein returned to Britain, having decided that his early philosophy had not, in fact, brought philosophy to an end.

If 1922 had marked the high point of modernist writing - _The Waste Land, Ulysses, Garnett's Lady into Fox, Lawrence's Fantasia of the Unconscious_ - then 1928 marked its climax and sudden termination. This is perhaps particularly true of Yeats and Eliot. In 1928 Yeats published _The Tower_, containing, mostly, work from the period around 1922, but in the following years came the first edition of _The Winding Stair_, nearly all of which had been written during 1928, and in that year and the next he also produced most of the poems for 'Words for Music Perhaps' and 'A Woman Young and Old'.¹ He had rarely had a more productive period for the writing of poetry. In 1928, too, Eliot's introduction to _For Lancelot Andrewes_ made public his

¹ Datings according to Ellmann, _The Identity of Yeats_, pp. 291 - 293.
belief that he was 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion.'¹ Few of the readers of the revolutionary poem of 1922 would have expected such a pronouncement, and yet 'Ash Wednesday' was to follow in 1930 to give evidence of the poetic fruits of this new consciousness. With these works of 1929 and 1930 both poets enter on a new phase of their development. As Malcolm Bradbury suggests, the 'crucial compound' of modernist art 'persists after the war, and certainly up to 1930. After that it seems that the elements of Modernism seem to be reallocated ...'² One of the reallocated elements is the associationist basis of Yeats' and Eliot's poetic.

With 'The Waste Land' and the Byzantium poems we reach the apogee of associationist writing, but they are achievements which seem to 'consume / The entire combustible world in one small room.'³ Having taken their exploration of the associationist mode to fulfilment, having discovered some universal which underlies all our personal memories, they turn back to the world to find its actual condition even more of a denial of their art, for their art now has an ontological or a psychological grounding in the nature of things themselves. To confront that violation of the most profound truths one has to use techniques which do not assume those truths to be operative of the minds of the reader: to defend associationist art one has to deny it. Poetry ceases to be an attempt to act upon the psyche at levels beyond consciousness, and accepts its more limited but more necessary role as a conscious confrontation with the values and beliefs of its time.

¹ For Lancelot Andrewes, p. 7.
³ Yeats, 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory', CP, p. 151.
From Yeats the 'thirties brought poems of astonishing power, but few of them utilise associationist principles, even though those principles still govern the theoretical bases of his attack upon the failures of history, on the failure of Ireland to match the potentialities of its own and Yeats's imagination of it. The poetry ceases to seek the climactic image which will be left to echo on through the personal meditation of the reader, but offers instead the bitter wisdom of the past now fully known, and fully judged:

Through Jonathan Swift's dark grove he passed, and there Plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood.  

or the quiet acceptance of the inevitability of life's defeats, certain

That day brings round the night, that before dawn His glory and his monuments are gone.  

In this fallen world no image culled from the Great Memory will find a hearing among the crowd, or if some individual seeks to accept the challenge of such an image his work will be pulled down around him. The poet now is mere entertainer, 'Malachi Stilt-Jack' of 'High Talk', who cannot even walk in the procession as his predecessors had done because 'Some rogue of the world' stole his stilts 'to patch up a fence or a fire.' There is, for him, no hope of revelation, because all that he achieves, as all the poet achieves, can be explained away:

All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all. 'High Talk' reveals the terrible dilemma of Yeats's later poetry, because, despite everything, it does strive towards the kind of culminating image

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1 'Parnell's Funeral', CP, p. 320; V, p. 543.  
2 'Meru', CP, p. 334; V, p. 623.  
3 'High Talk', CP, p. 386; V, p. 623.
reminiscent of his earlier poetry:

Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the dawn.

It is an image which can only be achieved, however, through the total isolation of the poet from the community for whom he writes, from his isolated confrontation with the universe:

A barnacle goose
Far up in the stretches of the night; night splits and dawn breaks loose;
I, through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk on;

The power of the climactic image of the final line is founded upon this identification with the freedom of the barnacle geese, with his metaphoric transformation of them: entered upon his own metaphoric universe significance returns, but to what purpose? In such isolation he has no direction and the reiterated 'stalk on' does not, despite its assertion of the will determined to reach a goal, offer any consolation for the loneliness of his vision. There is no way that his poetically constructed experience can become common property, founded upon a communal associative connection.

In this condition the reader's associations have become irrelevant to Yeats's art; the reader is one of those

unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds

fit but to be ordered how to respond:

Think where man's glory most begins and ends,
And say my glory was I had such friends.

Yeats's art becomes again a poetry committed to argument and statement. As before the rediscovery of memory's shaping power through the influence

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1 'Under Ben Bulben', CP, p. 400; V, p. 639.
of the spirit world, the poet is limited to writing - however brilliantly - the kind of poetry which his time demands. There is no place now for

Character isolated by a deed
To engross the present and dominate memory.1

The 'masterful images' depend upon the powers of the mind, upon memory; all that is left to the poet is the 'rag-and-bone shop of the heart'.

In Eliot's work one can discern a similar pattern: after 'The Waste Land' the fragmentary surface of 'The Hollow Men'2 conceals an almost allegorical structure in which images, such as 'death's dream kingdom' take on a one to one relation with terms in a conceptual scheme. 'Ash Wednesday'3, too, moves from associationally disjunctive imagery towards their resolution in a Christian symbology in which the associative potential of the images is given a delimiting context. These poems, as it were, hover between an open structure and a closing of the scope of their images, and even in a poem like 'Marina'4 which seems to keep the basic form of an associational structure and which presents a struggle to recover memory -

I made this, I have forgotten
And remember
- the struggle is the opposite of that presented in 'The Waste Land', for it is the struggle to retain a connection with the world of our ordinary experience, so complete has been the entry into a new and all embracing consciousness 'under'sleep, where all the waters meet'.

In 'The Four Quartets' Eliot does return to associationist techniques - just as he returns to a formalised version of the structure of 'The Waste

1 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', CP, p. 392; V, p. 630.
2 Eliot, CP, p. 87.
3 CP, p. 93.
4 CP, p. 115.
Land' - but it is with no sense of commitment to the potentialities of associationist art itself. The poem does not enact a recovery of memory, as 'The Waste Land' does, but the understanding of an already achieved memory. The move beyond personal memory is no longer into a hinterland of unspeakable but potentially shared meanings, but towards a knowable and shared communion:

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead: the communication
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.  

There are here no contingences of personal memory, or none that are not or will not be resolved in the fullness of time. The personal is insistently drawn into the pattern of Christian transcendence to discover that its real meanings are not to be discovered, because they have been already and forever known. Only the relation between personal experience and what lies beyond it must be meditated upon. 'Tongued with fire' is not intended, in the above line, to release in us free associative possibilities, for it connects across the poem with a formal pattern of developing meanings and, ultimately, intersects with Christian definitions:

When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.  

Associatively productive disjunctions of images are revealed only to be gathered up in a pattern which transcends any individual's consciousness, a pattern of oppositions resolved by miracle, rather than charged with the

1  'Little Gidding', CP, p. 215.
2  'Little Gidding', CP, p. 223.
tension of conflicting associations:

The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terro  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge of sin and error  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-^-1  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

The associative wilderness of 'Gerontion' in which memory, incapable of discovering any final pattern, wanders forever lost, is redeemed in 'Four Quartets' by the miraculous moment in which the apparent shapelessness of individual life is crossed by the purpose of an eternal will. As Yeats's dancer represents the centre established by resolving the temporal movement of association into a cyclic pattern, so for Eliot the Christian hierarchy establishes the limits of mind's submission to the determinism of its own personal life. The lesson of the dancer, the lesson taught by the 'familiar compound ghost', is pattern -

From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit    
Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire  2  
Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

- but Yeats's pattern is one woven in a dialectical interchange between centre - dancer - and circumference, back into the whirling associations. Even though there is pattern in the process of history or of the psyche, the moment of recognition of the pattern can only generate a further train of events or of associations. In Eliot's Christian context, on the other hand, though it may leave unchanged the continual shifts of meaning to which the past is subject, it asserts a transcendence which is not only into pattern, but beyond pattern. It asserts the existence of pattern

1 'Little Gidding', CP, p. 221.  
2 'Little Gidding', CP, p. 219.
through the momentary revelation of that which transcends all pattern and composes all pattern. It offers a calm assurance which Yeats's dancer can never provide:

the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. 1

Yeats's dancer points to herself as a moment of perfection, but she cannot save us from the processes of association of which she is a part and a product, she cannot save us from the determinism of history; Eliot's moment out of time cannot release us from time and history, leaves us still with the struggle to discover the appropriate pattern in our own existence, but it can save us.

Out of the certainty, that is never fully certain, of that faith comes a poetry of exhortation and education, a poetry of statement and not of association:

The world turns and the world changes,
But one thing does not change.
In all of my years this thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil. 2

But even had such personal belief not intervened it is difficult to imagine that the openness of art towards which Yeats and Eliot had striven could be maintained: it created out of itself an opposite force determined to close its possibilities, a force which took aesthetic, religious and sometimes political form. Unable to control sufficiently the nature of the reading experience through the shape of the poem itself, the poet is driven to more and more extreme lengths to enclose his art within

1 'Little Gidding', CP, p. 222.
2 'Choruses from The Rock', CP, p. 163.
a social pattern that was as enclosed and formal as his art demanded
for the completion of its own forms.

It is one of discordant elements in our perception of British
modernism that Joyce, the pre-eminent innovator of modernist techniques,
should have remained untouched by the totalitarian politics which affected
his contemporaries. This is the stranger since Joyce, too, is someone
who works within the associationist tradition or, at least, in the
assumption of an associationist psychology. The significant difference,
however, between association in a poetic and in a novelistic context is
that the novelist uses the process of association as material to be
transcribed into his novel, to be created for his novel, and to be given
complete within it. The associational patterns which the novelist uses are
always entirely controlled by him, and though Bloom's associations in
Dublin have all the contingency of the mind in the midst of a constant
flow of sensations and memories, it is a contingency constructed and ordered
by the writer. The reader is asked, as Hallam asked nineteenth century
poetry readers, to put himself in the place of the perceiving mind and
understand the connections that it is making. The reader's own associative
potentialities are not demanded as an integral part of the experience of
the work. Joyce's mythic method, unlike Eliot's, does not demand an
associative response from the reader, rather it reveals the total control
which the artist exerts over the apparent randomness of the world he depicts.
The construction of the continuous parallel between the epic and the flux
of modern urban experience offers an underlying pattern to the multitudinous
contingency of that experience, but it is an order enclosed within the finite
limits of the work of art, not one stimulating the infinite associative
potentialities of the experiencers of that art. The reader's personal
associative potentialities are not put in question, therefore, as they are for the poets, because the novelist creates a total world of association, whereas the poet demands the reader's associations as the totalisation of the world of his work. The total world of the novelist is, because inclusive, ultimately one of sympathy for its characters; the totalisation demanded by the poet is ultimately enforceable only by totalitarian means.

The paradoxical disappearance of the associationist technique in poetry as a result of the attempt to defend in poetry itself is coincident, however, with forces which were in any case undermining its validity. The associationist foundation in psychology was, by the 1930s, being taken over into behaviourism as part of its timulus-response analysis of all human processes, and behavioural psychology could offer no inspiration to art, since it regarded association as a useful denial of anything one could describe as an inner life to the human being rather than as the culmination of that inner life. And in art itself the exploitation of disjunctive associative potential passed to the surrealists, whose conception of the unconscious was hardly less mechanical than the behaviourists' conception of consciousness. The associational psychology which had, for several hundred years, been at the very centre of man's drive to comprehend the inner workings of his own mind, and which had directed art consistently towards an exploration of that inner universe, was suddenly transformed into an instrument of denial of any fundamental significance to inner life. The literary impact of that denial is a return to traditional modes of language use. The reversion to language as a communicative procedure rather than an associative one, a language directed to speaking stateable truths rather than generating personal associations, is apparent in both Yeats and Eliot in the 1930s, though both maintain a profound awareness of the themes and problems with which their associationist technique had confronted them, but the
reversion to non-associational modes of language becomes complete in the political poetry of the 'thirties and, finally, in the work of the 'Movement' poets in the 'fifties. For both these groups, no matter how much lip service they pay to Yeats and Eliot, no matter how much the former may have influenced their verse structure and the latter their view of the modern world, their most significant liaison is with the much abused Georgians and with a poetic tradition founded in common values and a common landscape, rather than in the desperate attempt to reach communion through the uncovering of common images in the depth of history or the depth of the psyche.

The relation between these two modes of poetry and their potential audiences is a paradoxical one: the modernist mode is theoretically more available to a wide readership, since its function is to offer a stimulus to association of which every mind is capable, but it is effectively more limited since it makes no compromise with readers unwilling, unable or just unused to reading within the terms of its methods; the traditional poetry, on the other hand, is theoretically more limited, since it depends on the acceptance of a common area of social experience which it can discuss as the content of its poetry, it depends ultimately on a common set of values in its audience, which necessarily limits it to a particular social group, but it is effectively more available to a general readership already used to its techniques. The fact that all of our great modernist writers are ones who do not belong to the cultural core of English traditions emphasises the extent to which their poetry is not just a matter of creating a 'correct distance' between the poet and the reading public in England: it was a matter of

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1 Cf. C.K. Stead's argument in The New Poetic, ch. 2: 'In this matter of the relation between poet and audience, a more violent thrust than [the Georgians'] was required if a correct distance was to be achieved.' (p. 66)
poets with no real relations with the audience seeking an audience beyond the boundaries of the existing audience, or beyond the boundaries of the consciousness of that audience. Those provincial poets had no inherent connections with the English tradition of which they felt themselves a part, and so had no inherent connection with the audience which had also derived from that tradition: their answer was to reconstruct the tradition as a denial of the values of that audience. No poet from the English cultural heartland made that break with the past, precisely because that past was a much more pervasive factor in their own awareness of the world.¹

The effect of the cultural isolation of the modernist poets was to emphasise the alienation and the isolation of the artist, and that alienation was one which found its appropriate vehicle in a poetry which allowed the artist no insight into the reader's reaction to his work, in poetry based on the associationist aesthetic. The intense subjectivity which this engenders, the intense awareness of being locked into the determinism of one's own past and one's own associations, allowed both Yeats and Eliot more fully to apprehend the 'human condition' in our time than the alternative mode of the native tradition in England. The poetry of the Georgians and their cultural descendants is a poetry which, no matter how much it may deplore contemporary industrial society, is integral with the

¹ Consider, for instance, these two stanzas from Philip Larkin's 'The Importance of Elsewhere':

Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,
Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,
Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:
Once that was recognised, we were in touch.

Living in England has no such excuse:
These are my customs and establishments
It would be much more serious to refuse.
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

[The Witsun Weddings (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 34.]
social values of a time and place, a time and a place both deeply attached
to the benefits of industrial society. For Yeats and Eliot there is no place, except a place to be constructed in the imagination, which will support the values which they wish to assert, and out of that enforced sense of creating the culture by which their poetry was to be understood and valued came the intense avowal of the isolation of the individual within the modern world, and the intense and deceitful subjectivity by which modern man is surrounded in his relations with the universe. From the need to create a total culture out of subjectivity they are able to figure forth the subjectivity of all values, the relativity of cultures, the loss of control amidst an overwhelming history, that has been our lot in the twentieth century. The central English tradition has never faced the complete destruction of values which has afflicted so much of Europe over the past sixty or seventy years, and its poetry has never had to do without the support of an audience and a culture at its back and, valuable as its products have been, it has never provided poets whose technique has matched the depersonalisation of values in the modern world. And this because its values have never been depersonalised.

Out of the pressures of their cultural situation Yeats and Eliot created a poetry which is integral with the nature of the modern experience, but could do so because the associationist aesthetic provided them with a theory and a technique which justified the nature of their disconnection from the experience and values of their audience. With none of the bulwarks of continuity of culture with which English traditions have surrounded their artists, Yeats and Eliot were able to give us an image, despite their own patrician leanings and despite their own backgrounds, of what it is to live in a world where all values have to be forever remade, constantly asserted
against an inhuman universe, whether it is the social universe of market forces or the mindless universe of electrons and quasars. We are caught up, defenceless and yet struggling, striving to bring something valuable out of a system which may be meaningless except that one thing follows upon another, a process in which knowledge itself may be desolating:

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop? ¹

Perhaps the fourteen year old version of my self who read the poetry of Yeats and Eliot in the broken down industrial landscape of West Lothian was not falsely reading them after all.

¹ Yeats, 'Leda and the Swan', CP, p. 241.
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The bibliography is divided into the following sections:

a) Yeats: primary works
b) Yeats: criticism
c) Eliot: primary works
d) Eliot: criticism
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