RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE POETRY OF W. B. YEATS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Denton, Texas

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Previous critics have paid insufficient attention to the political implications of Yeats's life-long preoccupation with a wide range of Western and Eastern religious traditions. Though he always preserved some skepticism about mysticism's ability to reshape the material world, the early Yeats valued the mystical idea of oneness in part because he hoped (mistakenly, as it turned out) that such oneness would bring Catholic and Protestant Ireland together in a way that might make the goals of Irish nationalism easier to accomplish. Similarly, the later Yeats attempted to imagine universalist reconciliations between Western and Eastern principles partly as a means of countering what he increasingly saw as the narrowness and factionalism of Irish national and class politics. While the inclusivity of the politics implicit in the later Yeats's religious universalism is sometimes compromised by an Anglo-Irish, aristocratic desire to deride and exclude middle-class, Catholic Ireland, Yeats's celebration of mystical oneness does not reflect a pseudo-fascistic commitment to a static, oppressive unity. Like most mystics—and most modernists—Yeats conceived of both religious and political oneness not as a final end but rather as an ongoing process, a "way of happening" (as Auden put it).

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the period from 1885 to 1895, and examines the relationship between the early Yeats's mysticism and his nationalism. Chapter 2 examines Yeats's middle period (1895-1910) and shows how the
mystical content of this period's poetry and prose bear the marks of his increasing
disenchantment with nationalist politics and his skepticism about the possibility of unifying
Ireland. Chapters 3 and 4 explore Yeats's post-1910 poetry, tracing the development of
the inclusive political vision suggested by his universalist treatments of East and West, and
focusing particularly on the poems included in *A Full Moon in March* (1935).
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The following abbreviations have been used in citing Yeats's works:


INTRODUCTION

YEATS AND THE SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS OF THE WORLD

In a letter to Olivia Shakespeare dated May 25, 1926, William Butler Yeats wrote:

Do you remember the story of Buddha who gave a flower to some one, who in his turn gave another a silent gift and so from man to man for centuries passed on the doctrine of the Zen school? One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision—that the mystic way and sexual love use the same means—opposed yet parallel existences. (The Letters 715)

Yeats interprets the story of Buddha as representing a means of conveying a vision through the act of touching, but a Zen Buddhist reading of this legendary story about the origin of Zen reveals that its point does not lie in the act of handing over the flower ("a touch"), but in the idea behind the act: a silent smile or a distrust of a verbal communication. To explain this point further, I quote the story of Buddha which Yeats is referring to in his letter:

Sakyamuni was once engaged at the Mount of the Holy Vulture in preaching to a congregation of his disciples. He did not resort to any lengthy verbal discourse to explain his point, but simply lifted a bouquet of flowers before the assemblage, which was presented to him by one of his lay-disciples. Not a word came out of his mouth. Nobody understood the meaning of this except the old venerable
Mahakasyapa, who quietly smiled at the master, as if he fully comprehended the purport of this silent but eloquent teaching on the part of the Enlightened One.

The latter perceiving this opened his gold-tongued mouth and proclaimed solemnly, 'I have the most precious treasure, spiritual and transcendental, which this moment I hand over to you, O Venerable Mahakasyapa!'\(^1\)

Orthodox Zen followers, according to D. T. Suzuki, take this story to be the origin of their doctrines which are succinctly expressed as follows:

- A special transmission outside the Scriptures;
- No dependence upon words and letters;
- Direct pointing to the soul of man;
- Seeing into one’s nature and the attainment of Buddhahood.\(^2\)

In a word, the story of Buddha symbolizes the nature of supernatural experiences which transcend the domain of human rationality and the mediation of human language.

Apart from the validity of Yeats’s interpretation of this story, his attitude towards this spiritual text deserves our close attention, since it indicates two crucial points. First, Yeats’s interpretation of the story—touching as a way of conveying a vision—provides us with an idea about Yeats himself. His focus on the act of touching from the episode suggests Yeats’s rational mentality in that he follows the most concrete and rational part of the story, ignoring its basic but abstract and irrational emphasis on a silent communication. The story represents the supernatural quality of religious experiences, but Yeats digests its meaning by focusing his attention on the most rational part of the episode. Moreover, the fact that he interprets a touch as a means of conveying a vision,
which he further connects to the relationship between “the mystic way and sexual love,” reflects his attempt to materialize the transmitting of a supernatural concept of religious vision. Secondly, Yeats’s act of materialization of the supernatural elements of the story points to the fact that Yeats is a reader and a collaborator with the spiritual texts he reads. In other words, when he approaches spiritual texts, he creates his own meaning through his subjective reading of those texts.

In order to understand the issue of Yeats’s life-long relationship to the mystical traditions of the world, it is crucial to approach this issue from Yeats’s point of view, considering Yeats as a reader of and a collaborator with the spiritual meaning. The issue of Yeats’s preoccupation with mysticism and occultism cannot be fully understood without understanding his consciousness, character, experiences, and his position as a poet and Irish patriot. In Yeats scholarship, however, critics’ primary attentions have always focused on the spiritual texts rather than on Yeats’s reading of them. As a result, critics tend to discuss the issue of Yeats’s occult and mystical interests mainly in the context of their spiritual implications, assuming that the spiritual quality of mystical and occult texts controls and determines not only what Yeats received from the texts, but also how and why he read them. Hence, Yeats’s motivations for turning to various heterodox philosophical and religious traditions have been attributed exclusively to the spiritual atmosphere of the modern world and to Yeats’s religious nature. Richard Ellmann’s remarks in *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1948) are typical:

While personal reasons impelled Yeats to depart from his father’s incredulity, he would hardly have turned to occult research had a movement in that direction
not been under way. All over Europe and America young men dropped like him, and usually without his caution, into the treacherous currents of semi-mystical thought. They refused to accept the universe that their scientific, materialist, rationalist, and often hypocritically religious elders tried to hand to them. (58)

Similarly, Graham Hough in The Last Romantics (1947) connects Yeats's reason for studying the spiritual traditions of the world to the Romantic and Victorian writers' efforts to replace religion with art in dealing with the problems of rationalism, empiricism, and positivism which continuously undermined the authority of Christian religion as a means of reaching the truth and judging the morality of human beings. Yeats's religiosity and his superstitious nature are also discussed as another reason for his interest in occultism and mysticism. In a chapter dealing with Yeats's interest in the occult in Yeats's World: Ireland, England, and the Poetic Imagination (1995), David Pierce says that "as a child Yeats was superstitious, obsessed with correspondences, his imagination held by 'unaccountable things'" (31). The spiritual atmosphere of the period and Yeats's religious self are two points critics have most commonly used during the last fifty years to explain what motivated him to read books about occultism and mysticism.

Critics also emphasize the spiritual implications of Yeats's interest in spiritual traditions. There are usually two different readings of Yeats's reception of spiritual traditions. One argues the influence of occult and spiritual sources upon Yeats's poetry. This approach is adopted by most scholars. Here I introduce some of the most influential studies. Virginia Moore's The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality (1954) was the first systematic attempt to examine Hermetic, Rosicrucian, and Cabbalistic
influences on Yeats’s writing. Harbans Bachchan’s *W. B. Yeats and Occultism* (1965) deals not only with the Cabbala, but also with the doctrines of Swedenborg, Boheme, Madame Blavatsky, and Indian thought, showing their influence on Yeats’s poetry. M. C. Flannery’s *Yeats’s and Magic: the Earlier Works* (1977) is mainly concerned with Yeats’s preoccupation with magic and maintains that he employs the principles of ceremonial magic to structure his early poems. Remesh Chandra Shah concentrates on the relationship between Indian thought and Yeats’s poetry (as well as Eliot’s) in *Yeats and Eliot: Perspectives on India* (1983); he contends that Yeats’s encounter with Indian thought can be considered as a progression from the lower mythology of Karma and reincarnation towards the higher mythology of the Upanishadic Self. William T. Gorski’s *Yeats and Alchemy* (1996) is the most recent book of its kind, and focuses on Yeats’s fascination with alchemy, arguing that Yeats finds in alchemy a metaphor for spiritual transformation which actualizes his self-imposed imperative: “It is myself that I remake.”

The other major approach is to minimize the influence of spiritual and occult ideas on Yeats’s poetry, arguing that these ideas are mainly absorbed into Yeats’s *A Vision*. Richard Ellmann in *The Identity of Yeats* (1964) warns us that “there is danger in connecting him [Yeats] too closely with either MacGregor or Madame Blavatsky, for he quarreled and broke with both of them” (xvi). Graham Hough’s *The Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats* (1984), on the other hand, denies any impact of occult thought on Yeats’s poetry, interpreting Yeats’s mystical and occult interest in the context of the search for spiritual universalism that resulted in the spiritual system summarized in the two versions of *A Vision* (1925; 1937). Although every scholar deals with a different line of spiritual
tradition from Hermeticism to Zen Buddhism, the basic argument of each is the same in trying to show the connection between the spiritual quality of Yeats’s art (or, his theory of art) and his interest in these various spiritual traditions.

It seems to me that critical emphases on the spiritual implications of Yeats’s relationship to mysticism and occultism imply that the spiritual qualities of mystical and occult texts dictate Yeats’s reception of their meanings. Indeed, it is difficult to disagree with this approach to Yeats’s fascination with mysticism and occultism, but to approach these issues by privileging only the question of spirituality seriously limits our understanding of their importance, providing us with only a partial picture. I believe that Yeats’s fascination with occult and mystical traditions of the world can also be profitably approached by considering Yeats as a reader.

The most important elements in constructing Yeats as a reader of spiritual texts are his pragmatism, his politics, and his modern consciousness as a poet. Let me first discuss his practicality which I will examine in relation to his attitudes towards art, and spiritual knowledge. His attitudes towards art can be illustrated by his practical poetics, or his belief in the social function of art. In “Pages from a Diary in 1930,” Yeats wrote that “I disliked the isolation of the work of art. I wished through the drama, through a commingling of verse and dance, through singing that was also speech, through what I called the applied arts of literature, to plunge it back into social life” (EX 300). Although Yeats uses the past tense to suggest what he believed very early in his career, as I will discuss in a chapter dealing with his writings published during the thirties, his belief in the social function of art is unwavering throughout his whole poetic career. Yeats’s emphasis
upon the social function of art is based upon his belief that literature can work as a
powerful tool for awakening and enlightening the mind of the reader. As he wrote on
many occasions, Yeats was firmly convinced of the power of art to transform the reader
and society. In his critical review of Sir Samuel Ferguson’s poetry published in 1886,
Yeats proclaimed that “Great poetry does not teach us anything—it changes us” (UPR
84). In discussing Villon and Dante in The Trembling of the Veil (1922), he expressed a
similar idea: “We gaze at such men in awe, because we gaze not at a work of art, but at
the re-creation of the man through that art, the birth of a new species of man, and it may
even seem that the hairs of our heads stand up, because that birth, that re-creation, is from
terror” (AU 273). In Estrangement (1926), Yeats even suggests that the object of art is to
“create a model of a race to inspire the action of that race as a whole, apart from
exceptional individuals, when you and it share the same simple moral understanding of
life” (AU 494). After all, as Yeats wrote, it was the poems of David which converted
John O’Leary to nationalism. Hence, to Yeats, the role of art is “not, as a great English
writer has said, a criticism of life, but rather a fire in the spirit, burning away what is mean
and deepening what is shallow” (UPR 84).

His formation of a practical poetics centering on the social function of art is closely
associated both with the Victorian milieu in which he began his poetic career and his
practical character. His emphasis on a utility of aesthetics can be considered a response to
international politics as well as a typically modernist reaction to Victorian aestheticism’s
separation of art and society. Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens
all share Yeats’s rejection of art for art’s sake. In addition, we cannot ignore the influence
of John O'Leary and William Morris whom Yeats met 1885 and 1886, respectively. The influence of O'Leary and Morris upon Yeats's poetics has been well documented by Elizabeth Cullingford (Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism, 1981) and Phillip L. Marcus (Yeats and the Beginning of Irish Renaissance, 1987). Briefly stated, the spell of O'Leary is nicely summed up in Yeats's often quoted dictum, "there is no great literature without nationality, no great nationality without literature" (LNI 12, 30), which guided his poetics throughout his lifetime. Morris' influence is revealed in one quotation from Yeats's "Ireland and the Arts":

In England, men like William Morris, seeing about them passions so long separated from the perfect that it seemed as if they could not be changed until society had been changed, tried to unite the arts once more to life by uniting them to use. They advised painters to paint fewer pictures upon canvas, and to burn more of them on plates; and they tried to persuade sculptors that a candlestick might be as beautiful as a statue. (E & I 204)

Although we cannot dismiss Yeats's Victorian milieu and his debt to O'Leary and Morris in the formation of his practical poetics, such a formation would have been impossible without his own practical character.

Yeats's pragmatism is displayed in his approach to spiritual ideas, an approach which stands out when compared to George Russell's (A. E.). We know that it was actually A. E. who introduced Yeats to Indian mysticism in 1884 when they became friends after meeting at the Metropolitan School of Art. Although Yeats and Russell remained close during their lifetime, they often quarreled over Indian mysticism. Yeats's attitude was
that, as he asserts in *Autobiographies*, "I refused to read books and even to meet people who excited me to generalization, all to no purpose" (188). Yeats believed that Russell devoted his life to Indian mysticism for the sake of the spiritual life itself. For this reason, Yeats called Russell "a mystic of mediaeval type" in a letter to Catherine Tynan dated June, 1888. Yeats wanted his friend "to examine and question his visions, and write them out as they occurred" (AU 243). Russell’s refusal to do so led Yeats to write in his introduction to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*: "For some forty years my friend George Russell (AE) has quoted me passages from some Upanishad, and for those forty years I have said to myself—some day I will find out if he knows what he is talking about" (Later Essays 171). To Yeats, as he said in the same introduction, Russell’s study of Indian thought was nothing but “his ceaseless vague preoccupation with the East” (Later Essays 172). On the other hand, Yeats was constantly looking for actual experience of the supernatural (AU 400) for which, in his early twenties, he even visited a spiritual seance with Tynan. This search was an attempt to find a tangible evidence for spiritual phenomena. He required such evidence so that it could be used for some particular purpose. In his later years, Yeats remarked that “whenever I have been tempted to go to Japan, China, or India for my philosophy, Balzac has brought me back, reminded me of my preoccupation with national, social, personal problems, convinced me that I cannot escape from our *Comedie Humaine*” (E & I 448).

In the context of his demand for a pragmatic poetics, we can understand Yeats’s literature as the most important means by which to actualize the goal of Irish nationalism—the achievement of Home Rule—in his early poetic career. With his resolute
faith in the use of literature for this cause, Yeats time and again exhorts other Irish writers to deal with nationalism in their writings, since, "Ireland is the true subject for the Irish" (LNI 21). So he asks: "I would have our writers and craftsmen of many kinds master this history and these legends, and fix upon their memory the appearance of mountains, and rivers and make it all visible again in their arts, so that Irishmen, even though they had gone thousands of miles away, would still be in their own country" (E & I 205-6). "Art and scholarship like these I have described," Yeats continues in the same essay, "would give Ireland more than they received from her, for they would make love of the unseen more unshakable, more ready to plunge deep into the abyss, and they would make love of country more fruitful in the mind, more a part of daily life" (210). Consequently, Yeats commends those whose writing foregrounds such nationalism: "I am always especially pleased to come across anything that throws on the personal side of Irish history or literature in the way these Keegan letters do" (LNI 35). Noting Yeats's advocacy for the use of literature as a nationalist medium, however, does not mean to suggest that Yeats calls on Irish writers to compose the literature of political propaganda. In fact, he tirelessly attacks propagandistic poetry and plays by calling them rhetorical without having any artistic qualities. Yeats’s approach—the use of literature for nationalism placing the concerns of art before those of politics—frequently got him into trouble with the nationalists who believe that patriotism can make poetry. Throughout his life, therefore, Yeats tries to reconcile his artistic sensibilities with his practical temperament, knowing that, as David Pierce suggests in Yeats's World: Ireland, England and the Poetic Imagination (1995), art is basically opposed to politics, but is also part of it due to the
political situation of his country.

Yeats's practical attitudes towards spiritual thoughts likewise mean their uses for practical purposes. Yeats's letter to Florence Farr dated Feb. 1906 exhibits his typical approach to mysticism:

I have myself by the by begun eastern meditations—of your sort, but with the object of trying to lay hands upon some dynamic and substantialising force as distinguished from the eastern quiescent and supersensualizing state of the soul—a movement downwards upon life, not upwards out of life. (The Letters 469)

Here Yeats makes it clear that his use of meditation (meditation is a way of experiencing a mystical vision) is to control his life, implying his objection to Farr's way of using it to free herself from this life. Apart from who is right in the uses of meditation, what is important here is that Yeats views meditation as a practical means to accomplish his goal: to control his life. In fact, from a mystical sage's point of view (like a Zen leader's), Yeats's approach to meditation with a specific object in mind is anathema, since such sages believe meditation cannot be used as a means to achieve one's goal. The reason for such a belief is that from the moment one sets upon an objective to be achieved through a mystical vision, (s)he is actually removed from mystical vision: the experience of total oneness between subject and object. In other words, meditation is a way of training human consciousness and elevating it to a level of moment where one no longer discerns the difference between life and death, movement and stillness, holiness and profanity. The Katha-Upanishad comments on the idea of wholeness:
As rain-water that has fallen on a mountain-ridge runs down the rocks on all sides, thus does he, who sees a difference between qualities, run after them on all sides. As pure water poured into pure water remains the same, thus, O Gautama, is the Self of a thinker who knows.  

This pouring pure water into pure water is, as D. T. Suzuki explains, the viewing of all qualities in one thought which finally cuts off hopelessly entangling logic by merging all differences and likeness into the absolute oneness of the knower and the known. "The purpose of meditation," according to The Secret of the Golden Flower, "is not to dominate the lower, earthly forces, but to invite their powers into a harmonious, unified consciousness" (54-5). Hence, thinking about the object of meditation traps the meditator in the human binary logic which meditation purports to break. For this reason, Zen leaders distrust human intellect and reason because of its dualistic tendency to make an object distinct from the subject, and therefore emphasize the transmission of spiritual knowledge outside Scriptures. Eastern sages even say that there is no word for Enlightenment or Great Awakening because once it is called by its name, it is no longer Enlightenment. For Yeats, however, studying mysticism and practicing meditation without having its uses is nothing but what he calls "abstraction" which he believes caused the downfall of Indian civilization. Yeats's dedication of the first version of A Vision (1925) shows how consistent he is in emphasizing his practical approach to spiritual traditions as a poet:

Some were looking for spiritual happiness or for some form of unknown power.

but I had a practical object. I wished for a system of thought that would leave
my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul's. (XI)

When we discuss Yeats as a reader, we must mention his experience of numerous conflicts between two opposing forces which is not only conditioned by his Anglo-Irish background, but also by his participation in Irish politics as a poet. To begin with, when he began his poetic career in 1884, he was witness to the fact that the world was divided into two forces: colonizer and colonized. When he became actively involved in Irish politics in 1892, he saw that his country was again split into two parts: Catholics and Protestants. This division was as political as it was religious, since, with some notable exceptions, unionists were Protestants while nationalists were Catholics. Since Protestants were the descendants of English colonizers and Catholics were predominantly of the colonized Gaelic stock, this division had a racial tinge. Furthermore, this division contained the issue of class tension given that Protestants made up the majority of the privileged classes while constituting a minority of the population. At the heart of Yeats’s Irish experience lies the fact that, as Hazard Adams aptly points out in “Yeats and Antithetical Nationalism,” “Yeats was neither Celtic nor Catholic, neither English nor really Protestant.”

Not only was he born into this conflicted milieu, he also involved himself in further conflict between art and propaganda by joining in Irish nationalism as a poet. His artistic sensibility pursuing high and lofty art is always in conflict with hard-core nationalists who believe that the role of art is political propaganda. As if this were not enough, Yeats also found himself caught between Ireland and England because of his double allegiance to his native country and his English Romantic predecessors.
The premise of my study is that Yeats's pragmatism, experience of numerous conflicts, and his interest in politics dictate his approach to the spiritual traditions of the world. To put it more precisely, if Yeats's practical attitudes towards art and spiritual knowledge mean their uses, these uses are channeled towards the resolution of political and personal conflicts which he experiences during his whole poetic career. In this study, I will argue that Yeats was fascinated by the idea that the mystical vision of oneness and wholeness shared by various mystical and occult traditions of the world leads to salvation. Here I need to discuss the concept of oneness in detail, since, as Bede Griffiths aptly points out in his *The Marriage of East and West*, oneness "has often been interpreted simply as the bliss of pure consciousness, and again therefore can be conceived as a static mode of existence." Bede Griffiths comments that oneness between a human and a divine being implies relationship of knowledge and love. According to Griffiths:

By knowledge we receive the form of another being into ourselves, we become that other being, by a mutual 'co-inherence.' This is seen above all in personal relationship. By love we communicate ourselves to other persons and they communicate themselves to us. There is a mutual self-giving which is enjoyed in sexual union, but this takes place at a deeper level of consciousness, where there is a complete indwelling, I in you and you in me. In human life this communion is never fully realized but in the divine life this is realized in its fullness. Griffiths says that oneness as the dynamism of love between two conflicting forces is what is revealed in Bhagavad Gita and the Bible. In the last book of the Gita, Krishna speaks that "Give me thy mind, give me thy heart and thy sacrifice, and thy adoration. I give thee
my promise, thou shalt in truth come to me, because thou are dear to me.” In St John’s Gospel, Jesus prays for his disciples that “they may be one, as thou in me and I in thee, that they may be one in us.” Yeats believed this concept of oneness can be a metaphysical model to resolve not only the divisive politics of his country and of the world, but also his own personal conflicts between art and politics and England and Ireland. As I will discuss in detail later, but briefly here, Yeats turned to the mystical vision of oneness for his nationalist cause of unifying Ireland—a reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants—in his early involvement in nationalism, although his poetic expression of this unity is tinged by skepticism as to the possibility of its realization. His political idealism did not work as well as he wanted, and his involvement in Irish politics instead constantly threw him to vicious battles with other nationalists (largely because of Yeats’s ambivalence about the relationship between art and politics). In his later years, his political idealism usually transformed into universalism, reconciling East and West by means of the concept of oneness taken from spiritual traditions of the world. Yeats’s East-West reconciliation can be viewed as an evolved version of Catholic-Protestant unity since Yeats basically viewed the conflict between the two forces as an opposition between emotion and reason. By the same token, we may also argue that Yeats’s life-long pursuit of a reconciliation of political conflicts between Catholics and Protestants and East and West reflects his goal of realizing spiritual oneness. In other words, his pursuit of reconciliation can be discussed in both political and spiritual contexts. Nevertheless, we shall see that Yeats’s poetry is ambivalent towards this oneness, expressing skepticism about the unity of East and West equal to his skepticism about unifying Ireland. Yeats’s
skepticism is caused not only by his doubt of transcendentalism, but also by his Protestant bias which propels him to pursue a conflicting political agenda: his praise of the Protestant aristocratic class typified by Parnell, John O'Leary, and Lady Gregory. We will therefore see that although Yeats tries to resolve the persistent problem of a battle between two opposing forces during his whole poetic career for his political and spiritual ends, his poetry betrays his double adherence to both universalism and to the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition.

The plan of this study, which traces Yeats's study of the spiritual traditions of the world and his use of them to pursue his political and spiritual goals is as follows. Chapter 1 deals with the first phase of Yeats's relationship to the spiritual traditions (1885-1895). In these early years, one of the driving forces of Yeats's life is his nationalism. By analyzing his prose writings published around the 1890s, I show that one of the goals of Yeats's cultural nationalism is to promote the idea of Irish unity. To Yeats, the reconciliation of classes, religious beliefs, and political views is one of the most important steps towards attaining self-rule from Britain. As I have discussed later in detail, this political goal partly accounts for his study of Indian mysticism and Western occultism not only because these spiritual traditions predate both Protestantism and Catholicism, but also because they suggest a universal grounding for all differing religious beliefs. Studying the spiritual traditions of the world, Yeats learned that all religious doctrines emphasize the importance of reconciling conflicting forces as a means of achieving the Great Self or arriving at the kingdom of God. Taking a cue from the idea of oneness, Yeats formed his own philosophy of writing—the unity of literature, nationalism,
and religion—in these early years. This philosophy became a way of using religious ideas for political purposes. More precisely, Yeats used a vision of reconciliation, which is commonly shared by every mystical and occult tradition, as a metaphysical model for unifying Ireland. In short, religion's stress upon the union of antinomies is the very spirit Yeats felt his country needed. I will demonstrate how Yeats used this spiritual doctrine in his early poetry by analyzing *Crossways* (1889).

Chapter 2 is concerned with the second phase which takes place between 1890 and 1910. In many ways, this period shows Yeats's transition in terms of his attitudes towards Irish nationalism and the spiritual traditions of the world. The first ten years (1890-1900) can be characterized by his disenchantment with nationalism, partly because he was beginning to feel the limitations of nationalism—independence as isolation—not to mention his own skepticism about the possibility of achieving the process of oneness. He also constantly found himself mired in disillusioning political battles with hard-core nationalists because of his double allegiance to both England and Ireland and to both art and politics. At the same time, Yeats began to express the idea of universalism in many contexts of his writings. Although the idea of universalism was not fully developed at this period, we see that, as he wrote in his poetry and essays such as *The Rose* (1893), *Four Years: 1887-1891*, "The Celtic Element in Literature" (1897; 1902), "Ireland and the Arts" (1901), his universalism implicitly aims at reconciling East and West, which, as we shall see, reflects his anxiety of Romantic influences. So, we find two different faces of Yeats in this particular period: first, we find a Yeats ambivalent towards nationalism, simultaneously skeptical and optimistic, which I will demonstrate by analyzing some
poems of *The Rose* (1893) and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). At the same time, Yeats’s mention of universal unity shows where he is moving to as a result of experiencing disappointment in the provincial and exclusive nature of nationalism and the vicious political slanders he had to endure because of his position in the gray area in between art and politics. Pursuant to his changing view of nationalism and his disappointment in the pettiness and futility of Irish politics, Yeats withdrew from political activities by resigning from the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1899. During the next ten years from 1900 to 1910, Yeats was transformed from political activist to playwright and theater manager, putting most of his energy into the Abbey Theater. Although this transformation is viewed as a change not of aims but of methods, it cannot be denied that his involvement in Irish National Theatre played a major role in distracting him from reading spiritual texts.

Yeats, however, could not separate himself from Irish politics, finding himself once again at the center of political controversies during the *Playboy* riots in 1907, which further bred his bitterness and hatred of politics. Yeats’s experience of this incident led him to hate the urban, Catholic middle classes of Ireland who he believed mounted their opposition to Synge’s play out of ignorance and fanaticism. After the riots, Yeats vented his anger towards the middle class whom he called “the new ill-breeding of Ireland” and “all empty souls” not only because of their lack of cultivated life or education, but also because of their willingness to be the instruments of tyranny and violence. Yeats soon began to advocate the virtue of an aristocratic soul; the need for self-discipline, self-imposed duty, and self-sufficiency; and even the idea of class politics by expressing his antagonism against the middle class Catholics. Yeats’s pursuit of these political projects
(especially, his belief in the cultivation of mind which is impervious to external influences) has a part in redirecting his use of the spiritual traditions of the world in his poetry: the employment of a meditative scheme in his poetry. As we shall see, Yeats uses a meditative scheme to express his pursuit of universalism. The same scheme, however, also foregrounds the image of a solitary soul who goes through religious disciplines to achieve self-realization. The idealization of individual expression can be viewed as Yeats's intention to criticize the tyrannical frenzy of the majority. Hence, the mature Yeats's use of the spiritual traditions shows his internal conflicts which haunted him during the rest of his poetic career, since he advocated the principle of universalism, while attacking the Catholic middle class.

The focus of Chapter 3 will be the third phase of his relationship to the spiritual traditions of the world (1910s-1920s). In this period, we see a much more mature Yeats who started to develop the idea of universalism, which had begun with his rediscovery of the meaning of India. Yeats's interest in spiritual traditions, which had been dormant during the first decade of the twentieth century, was rekindled by his meeting with Tagore in 1912. One of the Bengal poet's most important contributions is, as I will discuss later in detail, that he provides Yeats with a chance to envision India as an imaginary place which enables the reconciliation between art and politics and Romanticism and nationalism. Although we cannot ignore the role of Ezra Pound, who introduced Yeats to the Japanese Noh play at that time, Yeats's meeting Tagore signaled the beginning of his intense interest in Eastern spiritual traditions, compared with his early years' preoccupation with both Western and Eastern spiritual ideas. By the time Yeats studied
Eastern spiritual thought with renewed energy during the 1910s, he also witnessed the most turbulent and dramatic political events of his life, including the 1916 Easter Rising, the Irish and English War (1918-21), and the Irish Civil War (1922). For Yeats, these catastrophic events were the culmination of hatred between two opposing parties. Yeats's rediscovery of the East and his political experiences during this period led him to pursue universalism, since the unity of East and West would not only provide a more inclusive political vision for human civilization, transcending the narrow concept of nation, but also functions as a political and psychological mask behind which he can hide Anglo-Irish unionism and his double allegiance to art and politics. As is the case with his pursuit of the Catholic-Protestant co-inherence, however, his project of fusing East and West is also tinged by skepticism as to the possibility of its realization. In addition, as I will discuss later in detail, beneath the facade of universalism lies Yeats's implicit intention to undermine the political position of middle-class Catholics. I will demonstrate how his ideological goal of attaining universalism is implied in his later meditative poems such as "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," "Sailing to Byzantium," "Among School Children," "Byzantium." However, a reading of these meditative poems in relation to other poems such as "The Wild Swan at Coole," "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," "A Prayer for my Daughter," "The Tower," "Meditations in Time of Civil War" reveals that Yeats could not resolve his own conflicting political agenda: adherence to both universalism and the Anglo-Irish aristocratic government.
Chapter 4 touches upon the final phase of Yeats's relationship to the spiritual traditions of the world during his last years. During this period when he was immersed in Eastern, especially Indian philosophies, Yeats affirms his desire to pursue the marriage of East and West for political and psychological reasons. An analysis of the poems from A Full Moon in March (1935) reveals that Yeats believes that the idea of the East-West marriage works as an antidote to the persistent political problems of Ireland—the battle between Catholics and Protestants—which again haunted Ireland after de Valera became the president of Ireland in 1932. As we will see, Yeats's Supernatural Songs is a testimony to his ideal of wholeness which he expresses through his persona-hermit Ribh. Yeats's attempt to reconcile the conflicting forces of East and West (evolved from Catholics and Protestants) reflects the poet's Romantic ideals so that the East and the West (the colonized and the colonizer) co-exist harmoniously by discarding one's own weaknesses and accepting the other's merits. His life-long efforts to pursue the political unity of his country and the world also show his practical character in that he is always thinking about the possibility of maximizing the potential of each component of a group. We will, however, also see that Yeats is not completely free from his Protestant prejudice even when he strongly urges the unity between two opposing political parties by making a subtle connection between a religious hermit and Parnell. It is no wonder that Supernatural Songs also has poems which express Yeats's skepticism about the possibility of conveying the idea of oneness to the everyday world, as well as his resistance to the mystical concept of oneness. In his final years (1938-9), he continues to deal with the idea of universalism in "Lapis Lazuli" and "The Statues," but we also see that many of his
poems written in this period such as “The Curse of Cromwell,” “Come Gather Round Me Parnellites” and “Under Ben Bullben” celebrate the Anglo-Irish tradition of aristocracy, clouding his own political project of universalism.

In a letter to Ethel Mannin sent only one month before his death, Yeats wrote: “Am I a mystic? No, I am a practical man” (The Letters 921). In a sense, these simple two lines sum up his practical attitude towards the spiritual traditions of the world which he studied throughout his life. Yeats approaches spiritual traditions with their practical uses in mind, and he tries to use a religious vision of reconciliation and the process of meditation as a way of resolving not only his personal conflict between art and politics, but also Irish political conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. In the course of pursuing the idea of unity and reconciliation, his consciousness slowly evolved from nationalist consciousness (the unity of Catholics and Protestants) to universalist consciousness (the unity of West and East) in his mature years. Both nationalism and universalism have the same goal of achieving unity, but the two are basically conflicting concepts. Nationalist consciousness tends to have a bellicose attitude towards colonizers and tends to pursue a linear discourse (starting from the past and continuing to the future), advocating the idea of separation. Universalist consciousness, on the other hand, has a more friendly attitude even towards colonizers and follows a circular discourse (there is no beginning and ending), celebrating the process of oneness and reconciliation. Hence, Yeats’s transition from nationalism to universalism points to his movement to a more inclusive and reconciliatory political vision which he felt Irish politics needed and which he needed to reconcile nationalism and Romanticism so that the hatred and bitterness fermented by his
political experiences as an artist could be purged. However, Yeats's pursuit of
universalism is often clouded by his skepticism and his Protestant bias. So, as we shall
see, his poetry glorifying universalism is also frequently tinged not only by his own doubt
as to the possibility of achieving the political (spiritual) unity, but also by his covert
adherence to the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition. Although his tendency to pursue
transcendental wholeness makes him susceptible to the accusation of fascist sentiments, his
skepticism about the transcendental state is what sets him apart from fascism. Therefore,
his politicization of the religious concept of oneness and his belief in a strong leader should
be discussed in the context of his modernist and Anglo-Irish consciousness rather than as
an example of fascism, since in the former we see not only a combination of
transcendentalism and realism, but also Yeats's celebration of a self and the Protestant
aristocratic tradition.
CHAPTER 1

NATIONALISM, MYSTICISM, AND YEATS'S EARLY POETRY

In a letter to John O’Leary dated May 1889, William Butler Yeats wrote:

I have been busy with Blake. You complain about the mysticism. It has enabled me to make out Blake’s prophetic books at any rate. My book on him will I believe clear up that riddle for ever. No one will call him mad again. I have evidence, by the way, to show that he was of Irish extraction—his grandfather was an O’Neal who changed his name for political reasons. Ireland takes a most important place in his mystical system. (The Letters 125)

In this letter, Yeats defends his preoccupation with mysticism against his political mentor’s criticism. Yeats’s defense is that his study of mysticism is not unrelated to Irish nationalism. Yeats implies that Ireland has been an important source for English spiritual traditions by pointing out that Blake had Irish blood, although he later admitted that Blake was English. To be sure, Yeats’s search for evidence proving the spiritual superiority of Ireland to England mirrors his passionate nationalism. I believe that this letter is a telling indication of his practical attitude towards religious, esoteric, and occult thought in general, practical in the sense that Yeats intends to use his study of mysticism for his nationalist cause.

By the time Yeats wrote this letter in 1889, his interest in mystical and occult thought
had grown intense enough to be criticized by O'Leary. Since 1884, when Yeats first began to develop his interests in mystical and occult traditions, following his friend George Russell (AE), he had read many books about occultism and Hindu religious thought such as The Buddhist Sutras (1881); The Bhagavat Gita (1882); the translations of the Upanishads (1884); Kalidasa, the ancient Sanskrit poet of India; A. P Sinnett’s Esoteric Buddhism (1883) and The Occult World (1891); Madame Blavatsky’s Isis Unveiled (1877) and The Secret Doctrine (1888); and Mabel Cook’s The Light on the Path (1894).

In addition, he had organized the Dublin Hermetic society with Charles Johnston (1885), received special tutoring in the Vedas and Upanishads from Indian students at Trinity College (1885), gone with Katharine Tynan to spiritualistic seances (1886), joined the Theosophical Society led by Madame Blavatsky (1887), studied Blake with Edwin Ellis in order to edit The Works of William Blake (1889), and met MacGregor Mathers of the Golden Dawn, which he joined in 1890. In 1896, Yeats began working on the Irish Mystical Order in collaboration with Maud Gonne, Mathers, George Pollexfen, AE, and, later, Lady Gregory, whom he met this year. In 1899, he proposed rituals for the Irish Mystical Order incorporating Indian Tattvas. I believe that Yeats’s fascination with Western and Eastern spiritual traditions in these early years cannot be dissociated from his political interests, in particular, his nationalism.

The main concern of this chapter is to explore the relationship between Yeats’s fascination with mystical and occult traditions and his nationalist cause in his early years (1885-1895). Here I argue that Yeats initially used mysticism and occultism for his nationalist cause of unifying Ireland, which he believed was the most important step
toward achieving Home Rule from Britain. I will begin my discussion by examining the political situation of the world and Ireland during the nineteenth century when Yeats began his poetic career to show what made Yeats pursue the unity of Ireland as one of his political goals.

In many ways, Yeats was born into a situation which forced him to experience the collision between two conflicting forces. A discussion of this condition should begin with a brief sketch of the colonial expansion the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed. It is worth noticing that the Berlin Conference in which imperial powers agreed to parcel Africa out for their economic gains, an emblematic event in imperialism's domination of the world, took place in 1884, one year before Yeats published his first lyrics in *Dublin University Review* at the age of nineteen. Since this Conference, the world saw that Western colonial powers led by England and France dominated the world, as Edward Said points out in *Culture and Imperialism*, by taking "a grand total of roughly 85 percent of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths" (8). Given the colonial relationship between England and Ireland at the turn of this century, we cannot separate the expansion of colonialism and the rise of nationalism in Ireland (as well as other African and Asian countries). "In 1885," as Richard Ellmann remarks in *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, "it was difficult not to be affected by the growing patriotic fervour of the times; the dynamites of the determined Irish Republican Brotherhood were blowing up English railways stations; Parnell had unified the Irish party in Parliament and was bringing great pressure to bear on Gladstone, who introduced a Home Rule Bill for Ireland in 1886" (45). In fact, the division of the
world into two conflicting forces—the colonizer and the colonized—provided a situation which conditioned Yeats's conversion to nationalism in 1886, although we cannot dismiss John O'Leary's influence upon the young poet.

At this time when Yeats began to become involved in political activities, he also saw the split of Ireland due to the division between Gaelic-Catholic-Nationalists and Anglo-Protestant-Unionists, which was conditioned by the long period of English rule over the Irish (which officially began in December 1494). Ireland has had a long history of fighting against England, but the battles, especially waged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were basically characterized by the religious conflicts between England's Protestantism and Ireland's Catholicism. The character of the Irish fight was beginning to change by demanding the sovereignty of Ireland as a nation after the rise of nationalism in Europe during the later eighteenth century. The patriotic efforts, however, were always frustrated by Irish internal divisions between Catholics and Protestants since each had a different political goal. Catholics demanded a complete separation from England, whereas Protestants, partly due to their English heritage, asked union with England with a right of self-rule. This conflict between the two religious and political groups resurfaced after Parnell's involvement in the O'Shea divorce case, which once again divided Ireland into two factions: the Parnellite and the anti-Parnellite, and his subsequent death in October 1891, when Yeats began to involve himself in more political activities.

To Yeats, naturally enough, the unity of Ireland became one of the top priorities in his nationalist agenda, along with the promotion of Irish culture. Although readers of Yeats generally acknowledge these two goals, they usually emphasize the latter. In Yeats,
Ireland and Fascism (1981), Elizabeth Cullingford argues that "nationalism, then, in Yeats's eyes, was not an outbreak of 'race pride', but an assertion of the value of particular traditions against the creeping uniformity of modern materialistic civilization, and a defense of the people against the values of the middle class" (11). To Seamus Dean, the value of particular traditions specifically means the Celtic vein of Irish culture. His Celtic Revivals (1985) explains that Yeats's efforts to revive the Celtic note "is a reaction against this attitude [a concept of Englishness], a movement towards the colony and away from the mother-country, a replacement of 'Englishness' by 'Irishness'" (48). Likewise, Denis Donoghue also believes that Yeats's nationalism is intended to differentiate Irish from English. So, in We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society (1986), he says:

In several contexts he [Yeats] asserted that while English thought in the eighteenth century was given over to mechanism, to Locke and Hobbes and the positivism they sponsored, Irish thought—from about 1690—was in every respect the reverse. To arrive at such an idea, Yeats had to regard Molyneux, Archbishop King, Berkeley, Swift, Burke, Goldsmith, and Grattan as defining, each of them, a particular type of consciousness. The intellectual problem of bringing these figures together in a single image didn't perturb him. It was enough that they were born in Ireland and therefore members of that ancient sect. (5)

Yeats's efforts to revivify "the value of particular traditions," "the Celtic note," and "particular consciousness" can be discussed in the context of differentiating Ireland from England and his eventual goal is to create a separate cultural identity in order to demand
political separation from England, following O'Leary's cultural nationalism.

Certainly, the promotion of Irish culture is one of the most important parts of Yeats's cultural nationalism, but the achievement of the unity of Ireland is also important to Yeats. The discussion of Yeats's attempt to attain national reconciliation between many divisive factions is especially critical, because his pursuit of unity is directly connected to his motivations to turn to Indian thought and occultism. To Yeats, the unity of Ireland was crucial to his cultural nationalism since he saw that his country was in disarray due to the divisions between the different religious groups and between political groups. In 1891, Yeats witnessed the split in the Irish Parliamentary Party after Parnell's involvement in the O'Shea divorce case. This split between Anglo-Protestant-Unionists and Gaelic-Catholic-Nationalists, to Yeats, amounted to a major obstacle to achieving Irish independence from British rule. Hence, Yeats, time and again, dealt with the problem of discord in many contexts of his writings in an effort to find a way to reconcile the two conflicting political and religious forces. On one occasion, he was thinking about the possibility of bringing Catholics and Protestants together:

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. (AU 101-2)
Here, as we see from Yeats’s choice of expressions (Catholics as political martyrs and Protestants as those who are getting on in the world), to Yeats, the idea of unifying Catholics and Protestants almost corresponds to the unity of emotion and reason, or, imagination and pragmatics.

On other occasions, he hoped to solve the discord between the unionists and the nationalists by finding a common ground between the two:

When we loathe ourselves or our world, if that loathing but turn to intellect, we see self or world and its anti-self as in one vision; when loathing remains but loathing, world or self consumes itself away, and we turn to its mechanical opposite. Popular Nationalism and Unionism so changed into one another, being each but the other’s headache. The Nationalist abstractions were . . . a part of the mind turned into stone, the rest a seething and burning; and Unionist Ireland had reacted from that seething and burning to a cynical indifference, and from those fixed ideas to whatever might bring the most easy and obvious success.

(AU 234)

Yeats’s first solution to reconcile this discord lies in the promotion of the concept of Irish nationality, as he wrote in 1892:

. . . and may not we men of the pen hope to move some Irish hearts and make them beat true to manhood and to Ireland? Will not the day come when we shall have again in Ireland men who will not lie for any party advantage, or traffic away eternal principles for any expediency however urgent—men like the men of ’48, who lived by the light of noble books and the great traditions of the past?
Amidst the clash of party against party we have tried to put forward a nationality that is above party... (LNI 65-6)

Although the idea of Irish nationhood was born in the later eighteenth century, Irish nationalists were still in the middle of shaping Irish nationality during the nineteenth century. We might say that the majority of Irishmen had a pretty loose sense of nationality at that time, and their first allegiance was still to their religious group rather than to Ireland as a nation. As a matter of fact, the very concept of nationality was a comparatively recent historical formulation, which is being defined and characterized during the nineteenth century. Hence, we find an unusually high number of essays and lectures dedicated to defining the meaning of a nation at that time (Among the most influential are: Johann G. Herder’s *Germans and Slavs* (1784-91), Hegel’s *The State* (1823-31), Mazzini’s *On the Unity of Italy* (1861), Lord Action’s *Nationality* (1862), J. S. Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* (1865), and Ernest Renan’s “The Meaning of Nationality” (1882), to name only a few).

It is Yeats’s belief that the nationality of Ireland should be based upon an intellectual life or a spiritual principle, which reminds us of Ernest Renan’s lecture in which the French historian asserted that “a nation is a soul and a spiritual principle” which transcends not only race and religion, but also language and different political interests. So Yeats along with Miss Maud Gonne, T. A. Finlay, John O’Leary, and John T. Kelly made a proposal:

In recent years we have heard much of the material needs of Ireland, and little or nothing of her intellectual and literary [needs]... Without an intellectual life of some kind we cannot long preserve our nationality. Every Irish national
movement of recent years has drawn a great portion of its power from the literary movement started by Davis, but that movement is over, and it is not possible to live forever upon the past. A living Ireland must have a living literature.

In “The De-Anglicising of Ireland” written December 17, 1892, Yeats again described the importance of a spiritual principle for Irish nationality:

Can we not build up a national tradition, a national literature, which shall be none the less Irish in spirit from being English in language? ... Mr. Hyde, Lady Wilde in her recent books, and Mr. Curtin, and the editor of the just-published “Vision of M’Comaile,” are setting before us a table spread with strange Gaelic fruits, from which an ever-growing band of makers of song and story shall draw food for their souls. ... Let us make these books and the books of our older writers known among the people and we will do more to de-Anglicise Ireland than by longing to recall the Gaelic tongue and the snows of yester year. Let us by all means prevent the decay of that tongue where we can, and preserve it always among us as a learned language to be a fountain of nationality in our midst, but do not let us base upon it our hopes of nationhood. When we remember the majesty of Cuchullin and the beauty of sorrowing Deirdre we should not forget that it is that majesty and that beauty which are immortal, and not the perishing tongue that first told of them. (UPR 255-6)

Here, Yeats is trying to defend and justify the use of English for writing Irish literature.
Obviously, Yeats’s intention was to shape and build Irish nationhood on a spiritual principle by which he might create a common sentiment among the Irish people to promote the solidarity of Ireland.

For Yeats, one of the main sources for an Irish spiritual principle is Celtic culture. Yeats time and again repeats the importance of going back to the Gaelic past, Celtic culture, and legendary and mystical Ireland. On the one hand, he wants to form an identity of Irishness which is radically distinguished from Englishness. On the other hand, Yeats’s efforts to revive Celtic culture can also be associated with one of his primary goals: the unity of Ireland. Yeats believed that reviving the Celtic note could help unify the Irish people because the Celtic spirit is one of the common denominators shared by all Irishmen whether they are Gaelic Irish or Anglo Irish, Catholics or Protestants, and Nationalist or Unionist. Hence, Yeats turned to Irish mythology and folklore:

Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering . . . the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design? (AU 194)

The point I am trying to make is that Yeats saw the necessity of promoting Irish nationality to attain the unity of Ireland. To Yeats, as he once said, nationality is like “all our central fire,” implying not only that it burns away the differences between the parties,
but also that it is the central soul for Irishmen. And his turn to the Celtic vein should be
considered not only in terms of his efforts to differentiate Ireland from England, but also in
terms of accomplishing the reconciliation of Gaelic-Catholic-Nationalist and Anglo-
Protestant-Unionist.

In fact, tracing the history of modern nationalism, we see that all nationalisms arose
out of a religious, cultural, and spiritual matrix. Hans Kohn explains the religious origins
of seventeenth-century English nationalism by pointing out that its essential traits were
based upon three main ideas of Hebrew nationalism: “the idea of the chosen people, the
emphasis on a common stock of memory of the past and of hopes for the future, and
finally national messianism.”

Eighteenth-century German nationalism is closely related to
the revival of folk traditions under the influence of Johann G. Herder; Germany turned to
her cultural heritage and past traditions such as folklore, legends, and myths to establish
the concept of nation. Folk language and folk traditions became the great manifestations
of community as a spiritual group. For these reasons, Seamus Deane argues that “all
nationalisms have a metaphysical dimension, for they are all driven by an ambition to
realize their intrinsic essence in some specific and tangible form.”

Likewise, Benedict
Anderson claims that “nationalism largely extended and modernized religious imaginings,
taking on religions’ concern with death, continuity, and the desire for origins.”

As is the
case with other European countries such as England, Germany, Italy, and Russia which
resorted to a religious and cultural heritage for their nationalism, Yeats also turned to both
the Irish Celtic past and the spiritual and religious traditions of the world such as occultism
and Indian thought.
The question this turning raises is why did Yeats turn to Indian thought and occultism for the spiritual dimension of his cultural nationalism. So far, the critics’ response to this question has been based upon Yeats’s awareness of the cultural connection between the Celts and the Aryans through his reading of de Jubainville’s *Irish Mythological Cycle* and Rhy’s *Celtic Heathendom*. Early critics have viewed his study of Hinduism and occultism as part of his effort to understand and reconstruct the Celtic vision. As early as 1926, John Eglinton commented in “Yeats and His Story”:

... it was Yeats who, without knowing a word of Gaelic, penetrated to the esoteric world of Druidic magic ... It was from the East that Yeats snatched the clue to the interpretation of the Druidic culture; it was Theosophy which was able to supplement the scanty hints of Druidic mysteries ... and to furnish a living system of arcane teaching. Yeats’s early poems are in fact as full of Hinduism as of Celticism ...  

In *W. B. Yeats and Tradition*, F. A. C. Wilson says that Yeats was also “remarking on parallels between Celtic and Indian, and even ancient Assyrian symbolism” (29). In a similar vein, F. F. Farag points out in “Oriental and Celtic Elements in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats” that “Yeats is reconstructing the Celtic Vision, as Russell did, from the quarries of Theosophy and the East.”

But recent critics are beginning to align Yeats’s study of Indian thought with his nationalist agenda. Phillip L. Marcus’s *Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance* sees Yeats’s interest in mysticism and occultism as part of his project of reviving the Celtic vein for his nationalist cause. So, Marcus argues, “the spiritual, the visionary, and the
occult are fit subjects of concern for Irish writers because they are essentially related to the true Celtic nature.” In other words, according to Marcus, “there was, then, no clear boundary between the ‘real voice of Ireland’ and the occult tradition and Eastern religions in which the ancient beliefs were also preserved.” Seamus Deane in *Celtic Revivals* notes that “Yeats began his career by inventing an Ireland amenable to his imagination” (38). To support his vision of Ireland, Deane argues, Yeats turned to occultism, ransacking the fields of history and magic, but his poetry demonstrates the dilemma of reconciling his occultist views with his vision of an actual Ireland. By extension, these recent ideas argue that Yeats’s recourse to the spiritual traditions of the world is associated with his ambition to promote a spiritual principle of Ireland so that his country becomes a spiritual leader of the world, as he mentioned in an 1887 letter to Katherine Tynan. Yeats’s emphasis upon a spiritual principle is part of his cultural nationalism in that its spiritual value can differentiate Ireland from what England stands for: rationalism, capitalism and colonialism.

Although I basically agree with all of these explanations, I believe these are not all Yeats found himself attracted to when he turned to Indian thought and occultism. My point is that Yeats’s turn to the spiritual traditions of the world is prompted not only by his need to understand, reconstruct, and promulgate the spiritual principle of the Celtic Ireland, but also by his goal of unifying Ireland. What is important to Yeats’s nationalist agenda is that he had to pursue the spiritual and religious traditions of the world due to its universal appeal because contemporary Ireland was torn between Catholics and Protestants. Consequently, Yeats carefully tried to bypass sectarian controversy: “If our
craftsmen were to choose their subjects under what we may call, if we understand faith to mean that belief in a spiritual life which is not confined to one Church, the persuasion of their faith and their country, they would soon discover that although their choice seemed arbitrary at first, it had obeyed what was deepest in them" (E & I 208). In this sense, Yeats's choice of Indian thought and occultism is suitable because they have universal appeal. Yeats believed that Indian thought would provide Ireland with the common spiritual tradition which predated both Catholicism and Protestantism. So he wrote in “Irish Wonders,”: “The earliest poet of India and the Irish peasant in his hovel nod to each other across the ages, and are in perfect agreement” (LNI 97), implying the cultural similarities between the Celts and the Aryans. In short, to Yeats, Indian thought amounts to a common reservoir of the two different religious traditions of Ireland. Yeats's recourse to occultism can be interpreted in the same context. In fact, it is inevitable for Yeats to study occult thought when he developed his interest in Indian thought because they share many spiritual creeds. For this reason, in The Secret Doctrine Madame Blavatsky calls Theosophy “universally diffused religions of the ancient and prehistoric world” (xxxiv). When he was attracted to Indian thought and occultism, we have to understand that his interest is not in a religion of a particular ethnic group, but in spiritual creeds of the oldest traditions of the world and the universal appeal that all Irish could tap. More significantly, Yeats turned to Indian thought and occultism because of his belief in the spiritual power of religion as a means of transforming people’s mind, as he asserted:

Then gradually the attitude towards religion of almost everybody but Morris, who avoided the subject altogether, got upon my nerves, for I broke out after
some lecture or other with all the arrogance of raging youth. They attacked
religion, I said, or some such words, and yet there must be a change of heart and
only religion could make it.” (AU 148)

Needless to say, to Yeats, a change of heart specifically means a transformation from the
divisions and dissonances of Irish politics to the unity and harmony of the Irish nation.
Yeats trusted the transformative power of religion because it actually provided him with a
vision of reconciliation which could be used as a metaphysical model for unifying Ireland.
What appeals to Yeats, therefore, is not so much the different philosophical speculations
and religious ideas diffused through Hindu scriptures and other religious sacred books as
the concept of unity which his finds in these spiritual texts.

I believe that there are two religious concepts which Yeats thought spoke to his
nationalist goal: pantheism and mysticism. In pantheism, a key Hindu religious doctrine,
Yeats saw the idea of unity between the one and the many. Basically, pantheism stresses
the identity between God and the world. Thus, although there are some exceptions even
within the same Hindu tradition (for example, the gods [sic] Prajapati, Lord of Creatures),
the gods who appear in the Vedas represent for the most part natural forces. In other
words, although all natural forces are different in their appearances, they share one
common image of God. This concept of the unity between the one and the many is
explained in the creation myth of Rigveda X. Purusa, the Cosmic person, is sacrificed by
the gods in order to supply (from his body) the pieces from which all things of the world
arise. From this standpoint the ground of all things lies in a Cosmic Self, and all of life
participates in the personhood of Purusa. The Vedic hymn to Purusa may be regarded as
the starting point of Indian pantheism. This concept of the unity between the one and the
many provides Yeats with a spiritual model for the unity between what he later called “a
dozen broken minds.”

Mysticism—the desire for union of the self with something greater than the self,
whether that be defined as a principle that pervades the universe or as a personal God—
also offered Yeats a vision of reconciliation for the unity of Ireland. It seems to me that
the concept of mysticism is especially important to Yeats’s plan of reconciling his
country’s religious and political differences because it is common to all spiritual and
religious traditions of the world, unlike Hindu’s pantheism. In Rigveda, Purusa epitomizes
the mutual co-inherence of conflicting forces or the process of oneness. The Hindu
scripture explains that Purusa is the cosmic person, who contains the whole creation in
himself and also transcends it. He is the spiritual principle, which unites body and soul,
matter and conscious intelligence in the unity of a transcendent consciousness. The same
concept of union we see in the Indian scripture also comes from one of the apocryphal
gospels. In the Gospel of Thomas 22, when asked about when the kingdom of God
comes, Jesus answered: “when you make the two one, and when you make the inside like
the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you
make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male be not male nor the
female female . . . ; then will you enter the Kingdom.”

The mystical marriage between
antinomies such as God and human beings, one and many, and body and soul is also the
ultimate goal of the Cabbala and of Tantric Buddhism, the difference being that they use
explicitly sexual terms to express this union. According to Adolphe Franck’s discussion of
the Cabbala:

In one of the most mysterious and exalted parts of heaven there is a palace of love. The most profound mysteries are there; all the soul’s well-beloved by the Celestial King, the Holy One, praised by He, together with the holy spirits with whom he unites in kisses of love. Hence the death of the righteous is referred to as God’s kiss.14

“The same principle,” Franck continues, “explains why all the interpreters of mysticism prize the tender but often profane expressions of the Song of Songs” (136). Gershom G. Scholem’s On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism illuminates the idea of sexuality in the Cabbala, as well as its striking parallels with the Tantric system:

The patriarch Enoch, who according to one tradition was taken from the earth by God and transformed into the angel Metatron, is said to have been a cobbler. At every stitch of his awl he not only joined the upper leather with the sole, but all upper things with all lower things. In other words, he had accompanied his work at every step with meditations which drew the stream of emanation down from the upper to the lower (so transforming profane action into ritual action), until he himself was transfigured from the earthly Enoch into the transcendent Metatron, who had been the object of his meditations. This tendency toward the sacral transformation of the purely profane forms the opposite pole in the Kabbalistic conception of human action as cosmic action. It is interesting to note that a very similar legend is to be found in a Tibetan Tantric text, the “Tales of the Eight-four Magicians.”15
Tantric Buddhism's sexual principle and the Cabbala's corresponding concept are all based upon the same idea that the union of antinomies leads to the palace of God, enlightenment, or self-awakening.

In this context, Yeats's interest in alchemy seems apropos, given the fact that alchemy's aim is "to transform base metals into gold; to extract the fine from the coarse; to redeem spirit from the matter; to unite the opposites; to discover the secret of matter, and hence, the mystery of creation; and, to perfect the human soul" (Yeats and Alchemy 3). Yeats believed in alchemy, as he writes in "Rosa Alchemica": "I had discovered, early in my research, that their doctrine was no mere chemical fantasy, but a philosophy they applied to the world, to the elements, and to man himself" (MY 267). Yeats's interest in alchemy has usually been attributed to his goal of spiritual refinement, but, as we see from this statement ("a philosophy they applied to the world"), it is equally possible to relate it to his aspiration for political refinement.

To sum up, the religious concepts of pantheism and mysticism were the very ideas Yeats needed to bring the conflicting religious and political parties into perfect harmony and balance. Furthermore, it is all the more appropriate for Yeats to turn to a religious concept of reconciliation between antinomies considering Yeats's belief that Catholics have the imaginative and contemplative side of temperament, while Protestants are of more pragmatic and active nature, as he suggests in his Autobiographies. Namely, Yeats tries to find a metaphysical model for the unity of Catholics and Protestants through the mystical union which he often compares to the marriage of sun and moon, since, as he remarks, solar means "elaborate, full of artifice, rich, all that resembles the world of a
goldsmith,” while lunar means “all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional” (AU 371). When he remarks about the mystical union of sun and moon in his introduction to Lady Gregory’s book, God and Fighting Men, I believe he expresses his fascination with mysticism for its concept of bringing the two different halves (Catholics and Protestants) together:

Old writers had an admirable symbolism that attributed certain energies to the influence of the sun, and certain others to the lunar influence. To lunar influence belong all thoughts and emotions that were created by the community, by the common people, by nobody knows who, and to the sun all that came from the high disciplined or individual kingly mind. I myself imagine a marriage of the sun and moon in the arts I take most pleasure in; and now bride and bridegroom but exchange, as it were, full cups of gold and silver, and now they are one in a mystical embrace.\(^{16}\)

An interaction between Yeats’s practical character and the spiritual traditions of the world resulted in a formation of his philosophy of writing—the unity of literature, nationalism, and religion—which became a main way of using spiritual thoughts for his nationalist cause of unifying Ireland. Or we may also argue that he pursued political goals for his spiritual ends; he wanted Ireland to unite politically to further the achievement of spiritual goals. His idea of the unity among the three different areas begins with his belief in the inseparability between art and religion, an idea which he stresses time and again:

... for there is only one perfection and only one search for perfection, and it sometimes has the form of the religious life and sometimes of the artistic life; and
I do not think these lives differ in their wages, for 'The end of art is peace,' and out of the one as out of the other comes the cry: Sero te amavi, Pulehritudo tam antiqua et tam nova! Sero te amavi! (E & I 207)

On another occasion, he reiterates the same idea:

... the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation that it demands. Somebody has said, ‘God asks nothing of the highest soul except attention’; and so necessary is attention to mastery in any art, that there are moments when we think that nothing else is necessary, and nothing else so difficult. (EX 199)

In his Autobiographies, Yeats makes it clear that his goal is to pursue the fusion of religion and poetry:

I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians. I wished for a world where I could discover this tradition perpetually . . . (115-6)

Here his goal of establishing “an infallible Church of poetic tradition” “with some help from philosophers and theologians” expresses nothing less than his pursuit of the unity between art and religion. In other words, the role of the writer is the same as that of the priest, “We who care deeply about the arts find ourselves the priesthood of an almost
forgotten faith, and we must, I think, if we would win the people again, take upon
ourselves the method and the fervour of a priesthood” (E & I 203).

In “The Poet of Ballyshannon,” Yeats reiterates the importance of pursuing the unity
of art and religion, but he goes on to insert nationalism into this mystical unity:

To the greater poets everything they see has its relation to the national life, and
through that to the universal and divine life: nothing is an isolated artistic
moment; there is a unity everywhere; everything fulfills a purpose that is not its
own; the hailstone is a journeyman of God; the grass blade carries the universe
upon its point. But to this universalism, this seeing of unity everywhere, you can
only attain through what is near you, your nation, or, if you be no traveller, your
village and the cobwebs on your walls. You can no more have the greater poetry
without a nation than religion without symbols. One can only reach out to the
universe with a gloved hand—that glove is one’s nation, the only thing one
knows even a little of. (LNI 78)

Actually, as far as Yeats is concerned, the unity of art and religion is meaningless if it does
not serve the good of country; subsequently, he asks the rhetorical question, “Can we not
unite literature to the great passion of patriotism and ennoble both thereby?” (LNI 65)

Finally, Yeats formed his philosophy of writing by unifying literature, nationalism, and
religion, stating in “If I were Four and Twenty”:

I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and
a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the
other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came
together. Then for years I said to myself that these two had nothing to do with my form of philosophy, but that I had only to be sincere and to keep from constraining one by the other and they would become one interest. (EX 263).

As Yeats made it clear in the same essay, his reason to pursue the unity of art, religion, and nationalism is associated with his diagnosis of the Ireland problem: "We are a religious nation. . . . Yet is there any nation that has a more irreligious intellect, or that keeps its political thought so distinct from its religious thought? It is, indeed, this distinction that makes our priests and our politicians distrust one another" (EX 263-4). That is, the division between intellect and religion, and between religion and politics, and between art and the religion of contemporary Ireland results in the fragmentation of the Irish mind. Yeats believed that the pursuit of the unity of art, religion, and nationalism could weld together the disparate fragments of the Irish mind. Now I will discuss how Yeats made his earliest poetry embody his concept of the unity by analyzing Crossways.

II

In the introduction to The Celtic Twilight (1893), Yeats talks about his purposes for writing the book:

I have desired, like every artist, to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my own people who would look where I bid them. (1)
Here we see that Yeats’s primary purpose is to unify Ireland by presenting a visionary world through literature. When he says that he desires “to create a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, significant things of this marred and clumsy world,” the little world seems to suggest the legacies of the Irish past—folklore, legends, and mythologies—which constitute the main components of his book. Judging from his view of his contemporary world (“this marred and clumsy world”), we see that his literary world of ancient legacies is intended as an antidote to the problems of this world. The healing power of the world of ancient Ireland involves a political vision of unity since by “this marred and clumsy world” Yeats refers not only to the spiritually decadent modern world, but also, more specifically, to the discordant world of Ireland: the split between Anglo-Protestant-Unionists and Gaelic-Catholic-Nationalists. The idea of using ancient Ireland as a solution to the problem of discord is more clearly revealed in the next phrase: “to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland.” “Something of the face of Ireland” seems to suggest some common denominator of the Irish which will awaken them to their sensibility of Irishness. Yeats believes some common denominator or “the face of Ireland” can be found in the legacies of ancient Ireland as he articulates: “Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?” (AU 194) Yeats believes that national unity is possible if his people look at “something of the face of Ireland,” or ancient Ireland in which the Irish enjoyed autonomy. Hence, Yeats’s ambition to establish “the face of Ireland” through his little world of beautiful things ultimately communicates his nationalist desire to see Ireland unified in a way that will allow it to stand independently of Britain. And it is crucial to notice that Yeats desires to show the
face of Ireland "in a vision." His use of "a vision" indicates the fact that something of the face of Ireland is expressed in terms of religious modes of thought, implying his attempt to integrate ancient Ireland and religion. Or, we may also argue that Yeats tries to convey the fusion of religion and ancient Ireland because he believes that there was no division between the two in the past. Yeats's unification of his purposes—"to create a little world" and "to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland"—in one sentence mirrors his purpose in writing *The Celtic Twilight* to unify literature, religion, and nationalism.

Yeats's desire to unify literature, religion, and nationalism is reflected not only in *The Celtic Twilight*, but also in *Crossways* (1889), exemplifying his nationalist goal of Irish unity by providing a religious vision of reconciliation. A survey of critical studies on *Crossways*, however, leads us to see that critics are prone to focus exclusively on the spiritual aspects of Yeats's quest for unity. As early as 1948, Richard Ellmann concluded that "[Yeats] keeps asking the same questions over and over until they have become profound: what is truth? What is reality? What is man? His answers are symbolic, but fully in harmony with one another, for they spring from a rich, unified consciousness."[18] His *The Identity of Yeats* (1964) makes a similar point: all of Yeats's work "can be read as a concerted effort to bring such contrasting elements as man and divinity, man and woman, man and external nature, man and his ideal into a single circle" (7). In a similar vein, rejecting the view that Yeats pursues escapism in these early poems, Frank Hughes Murphy argues that "underlying the Crossways poems, and indeed all of Yeats's work, is the assumption that there is some transcendent unity which will embrace the seemingly
irreconcilable antinomies of the real and the ideal” (8) in Yeats’s Early Poetry: The Quest for Reconciliation (1975). Thomas L. Byrd, Jr’s The Early Poetry of W. B. Yeats: The Poetic Quest (1978) presents a similar opinion, adding that the transitory world is the place where Yeats can find the unity:

The seeker often feels that he is somewhere between the natural and the supernatural, and metaphorically he is pictured as such. Yet, the mists, the obscurity, the lyrical, trancelike language, the presence of the landscape and the small creatures of earth, show him to be in the world of the dream, the world in which realities of both natural and supernatural become mingled, the world of vision leading to the true reality of being (51).

This view of Yeats’s search for spiritual unity is reiterated by William T. Gorski who says in his recently published Yeats and Alchemy (1996) that it is still difficult not to arrive at similar conclusions about Yeats, although he adds that “Ellmann’s assertion regarding the harmonic answers issuing from a unified consciousness is easily deconstructed by the poet’s own work. Harmonic here is actually a euphemism for contradictory . . .” (xi)

Crossways (1889) is the first collection of poems which links Yeats’s nationalist concern for the unity of Ireland to the concept of a religious vision. Before discussing how he constructs the connection between religious vision and his nationalist message, we first need to understand that the present form of Crossways is the result of his reworking of poems he previously had published. Although it is dated 1889, the present form of Crossways first took shape in Poems (1895) with poems mostly written before 1887. When he published Poems, sixteen poems made their way into the present form of
Crossways: fourteen poems out of *The Wandering of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889), two from *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892). The completion date of this collection of poems deserves our attention, because it will lead us to understand one of his criteria for the selection and alignment of the sixteen poems. By the time he assembled the 1895 edition, we see that Yeats devoted himself to the study of Indian thought, Blakean mysticism, and occultism and to more political activities. More significantly, it is also at this time when Yeats firmly established his philosophy of writing: his belief in the unity of literature, religion, and nationality. My point is that his philosophy of writing became one of his criteria when he reworked the poems that he had previously written. The changes he made for the present form of *Crossways* were the result of Yeats's conscious efforts to create a message: the use of religious vision for the unity of Ireland.

I believe that Yeats expresses the linkage between religion and nationalism through the relationship of the whole sixteen poems. In fact, talking about the relationship between poems in *Crossways* is nothing new; its basic idea is nicely explained by Frank Murphy:

The companion poem to “The Song of the Happy Shepherd” is the second *Crossways* poem, “The Sad Shepherd.” There are several such pairs of companion poems in this section, the first of each pair bearing approximately the same relation to the second that Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* bears to his *Songs of Experience*. This arrangement suggests that Yeats was deliberately posing opposite forces against each other, and that his final thematic intention for any
one of these poems cannot be determined without considering its companion—any more than Blake's can be determined without the same consideration.19

Yeats's intention to pose opposing forces against each other through pairs of companion poems has usually been viewed as an effort to seek a spiritual unity, since one of the basic meanings of creating this kind of balanced relationship between conflicting forces is that we cannot think of the body without considering the soul, meaning we need both for our spiritual growth. Although this basic relationship in Crossways, which I will call, for want of a better term, the principle of balance, has been recognized and discussed, critical attention has been focused upon the relationship between individual poems, and its implication has also been confined within a spiritual context. An examination of the make-up of the sixteen poems, however, reveals that Yeats produces a balanced relationship not only between individual poems, but also between groups of poems. Yeats carefully selects and divides his sixteen poems into two groups of poems creating each with a different contextual meaning: the first group of eight poems implies a religious context and the second group of eight poems a political context.

My argument is that the establishment of this balanced relationship between groups of poems is intended to signify the unity between religion and nationalism. To be more precise, as I shall discuss in detail, Yeats uses a religious concept of pantheism as not only a means to reconcile the oppositions described in the first group, but also as a metaphysical model for unifying the political, religious, and class differences of Ireland which are portrayed in the second group. In short, the principle of balance governs the whole sixteen poems in such a way as to reconcile body and soul, low class and high class,
unionists and nationalists, and Catholics and Protestants, and, then ultimately, religion and nationalism. The order of sixteen poems is as follows:

1. The Song of the Happy Shepherd 9. The Madness of King Goll
2. The Sad Shepherd 10. The Stolen Child
3. The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes 11. To an Isle in the Water
4. Anashuya and Vijaya 12. Down by the Salley Gardens
5. The Indian upon God 13. The Meditation of the Old Fisherman
6. The Indian to His Love 14. The Ballad of Father O’Hart
7. The Falling of the Leaves 15. The Ballad of Moll Magee
8. Ephemera 16. The Ballad of the Foxhunter

Let me first discuss how Yeats creates a religious context with the first group of eight poems, and what Yeats means by this context. The overall atmosphere of the first group of eight poems is often characterized as Arcadian or Indian, but, I believe, it is equally possible to say that it is religious in the sense that six poems (the first and the last three poems) discuss Manichaean or Gnostic ideas of antinomies with two poems placed in the middle dealing with a religious model for integrating conflicting forces. The first two poems are selected and juxtaposed to present the concept of duality between the ideal and the real, between stasis and action, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between imagination and actuality. The beginning poem, “The Song of the Happy Shepherd,” talks about the beauty of stasis and subjectivity, declaring that truth lies in one’s world of dream and imagination. The enemy of the Shepherd is action which is portrayed in a negative way:
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good.

(VP ll. 6-10)

Here we see that the idea of movement ("changing things" and "dancing") connotes disease and confusion ("sick children" and "whirled"). Yeats's deliberate use of cacophonous sounds such as k, p and t reinforces the bleak image of movement. The speaker proclaims that the age of deeds is gone: "Where are now the warring kings? . . . Chronicling chimaeras are fled" which Yeats later changed into "The kings of the old time are dead" for clarity of meaning. Hence, he advises not to worship "dusty deeds." The Shepherd's enemies also include the starry men, implying scientists and astronomers, since "dead is all their human truth." The Shepherd instead recommends seeking the world of stasis: dream and imagination. So, he says in the concluding stanza:

I must be gone—there is a grave
Where daffodil and lily wave,
And I would please the hapless faun,
Buried under the sleepy ground.

. . .

Dream, dream for this is also sooth,
As early as 1965, F. F. Farag noticed here the influence of Sankara philosophy which Yeats learned from Mohini Chatterji (whom he met in 1885) who taught that "the external life of action is illusory, ephemeral and unreal. The real life was that of dreaming, imagination and contemplation." Although it is difficult to deny the influence of the Indian Brahmin upon this poem, we cannot say that the worship of imagination is Yeats's ultimate message, because the next poem, "The Sad Shepherd," is intended to counter the message he conveys in the opening poem by presenting the powerlessness of imagination. So we see that the Shepherd in the second poem finds himself completely out of harmony with his environment as a result of following the world of imagination and dream. Hence, when he "called loudly to the stars to bend / From their pale thrones and comfort him," all he receives for an answer is their indifference since "they / Among themselves laugh on and sing alway." Neither do the sea nor the gentle valley mind the demands of the Shepherd. At the end we see that the song of the Sad Shepherd eventually turns into "inarticulate moan." In these two poems, thus, we have a juxtaposition of antinomies such as action and stasis and the ideal and the real, which Yeats balances by not privileging either side of either issue.

The third poem, "The Cloak, the Boat, and the Shoes," also deals with the concept of duality, but unlike the preceding two poems, it is presented in one poem. The poem begins:

'What do you make so fair and bright?'
'I make the cloak of Sorrow:
O, lovely to see in all men's sight
Shall be the cloak of Sorrow.
In all men's sight.'

(VP ll. 1-5)

Yeats implicitly compares his poem to the cloak (and the boat and the shoes), but his work of art causes the problem of duality between within and without. In other words, people perceive it as fair and bright, not understanding its reality: "the cloak of Sorrow."

The last three poems in the initial grouping of eight, "The Indian to his Love," "The Falling of the Leaves," and "Ephemera," on the other hand, deal with the polarity between transience and eternity through the theme of human love. The first poem hints that despair is in store for the lovers:

The island dreams under the dawn
And great boughs drop tranquillity;
The peahens dance on a smooth lawn,
A parrot sways upon a tree,
Raging at his own image in the dim enamelled sea.

(VP ll. 1-5)

Here, the picture of a parrot's raging at his own image implies the future trouble of human lovers, since the parrot is the legendary vehicle of kama: the Indian Cupid. Given the revision of the first two lines which were "Oh wanderer in the southern weather, / Our isle awaits us, on each lea,"28 we see that in revision Yeats more effectively delivers his
message of contrast between the beauty of nature and the despair of human lovers, while also making the poem more suitable to the dreamy atmosphere of the Crossways world. Although the poem begins with the primitive atmosphere of idyllic romance which we feel through the image of the dreaming island under the dawn and the great boughs, we see that behind its beauty lurks the problems of human lovers which are described at the end of the poem:

While our love grows an Indian star,

A meteor of the burning heart,

One with the glimmering tide, the wings that glimmer and gleam and dart;

The great boughs, and the burnished dove

That moans and sighs a hundred days:

How when we die our shades will rove,

Where eve has hushed the feathered ways,

And drop a vapoury footfall in the water's sleepy blaze.

(YP II. 13-20)

The problem of human love takes its expression through its evanescence which is clearly illustrated by Yeats's word choice: "a meteor," "our shades," and "vapoury footfall." The moans and sighs of human lovers in "The Indian to his Love" turn out to be a premonition of their future which is dealt with in the next poem, "The Falling of the Leaves." In the second poem, thus, we see lovers who are being separated from each other:
The hour of the waning of love has beset us,
And weary and worn are our sad souls now;
Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,
With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.

(VP ll. 5-8)

The same theme of the ephemerality of human love continues in the next poem, "Ephemera," which begins:

'Your eyes that once were never weary of mine
Are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
Because our love is waning.'

(VP ll. 1-3)

Unlike the preceding two poems, however, this poem offers a solution for the problem of evanescence at the end with an affirmation of eternity:

'Ah, do not mourn,' he said,
That we are tired, for other loves awaits us:
Hate on and love through unrepining hours;
Before us lies eternity; our souls
Are love, and a continual farewell.'

(VP ll. 20-24)

In this way, Yeats again pursues the principle of balancing the conflicting ideas of evanescence and eternity.
The two Indian poems at the center of the initial groupings of eight lyrics, “Anashuya and Vijaya” and “The Indian upon God,” play crucial roles in creating the contextual message of the group: a religious concept of reconciliation can be a model for the idea of integrating opposing forces. “Anashuya and Vijaya” dramatizes a love triangle between two women and one man. Yeats specifically commented on his intention in this poem:

The little Indian dramatic scene was meant to be the first scene of a play about a man loved by two women, who had the one soul between them, the one woman waking when the other slept, and knowing but daylight as the other only night.

It came into my head when I saw a man at Rosses Point carrying two salmon.

‘One man with two souls,’ I said, and added, ‘O no, two people with one soul.’

Yeats particularly underlines the fact that two women share the one soul. The idea of having the one soul between two different men and women seems to suggest Yeats’s attempt to provide an experimental model of reconciling conflicting elements. The next poem, “The Indian upon God,” varies the same idea of reconciliation, adopting the Indian religious concept of pantheism. The speaker sees that the image of God is reflected in the moorfowl (“Who holds the world between His bill and made us strong or weak / Is an undying moorfowl”),30 in the lotus (“Who made the world and ruleth it, He hangeth on a stalk, / For I am in His image made”),31 in a roebuck (“The Stamper of the skies, / He is a gentle roebuck”),32 and a peacock (“Who made the grass and made the worms and made my feather gay, / He is a monstrous peacock”).33 What is suggested here is the idea of reconciliation between the one and the many in that the image of God (one) is reflected in
all kinds of natures from the moorfowl to a monstrous peacock (many). The idea of sharing one soul between two people and of sharing one image of God by different kinds of natures is especially crucial when we think about the position of the two Indian poems in between the first three poems and the last three poems. The preceding three poems are a juxtaposition of two opposite forces with no attempt to reconcile the two; the following three poems mirror the antinomian conflict between evanescence and eternity. My point is that the two Indian poems play the role of a metaphysical model of reconciliation.

The second group of eight poems, on the other hand, seems to be more geared towards generating a patriotic, nationalistic, and political atmosphere. Overall, these eight poems are organized around the same principle of balance that we see in the first group of poems, but what Yeats is pursuing is not a spiritual balance, but a political balance. As we shall see, as the collection progresses to the end, the overall poetic mood evolves from patriotic feeling to the establishment of a balance between different political and religious groups. The first two poems of the second group, “The Madness of King Goll” and “The Stolen Child,” set up Irish national elements in the beginning by basing their stories upon an Irish legend and an Irish folk tale. That is, looking at the two poems in the overall context of the second group, we see that they generate the idea that Yeats’s concern in this part of the collection is more objective and public than that of the first group of poems. Basically, the two poems are placed together according to the principle of balance, as is the case with the first two poems of the first group. “The Madness of King Goll” traces the life of King Goll who had once ruled the world as king but has become a wandering poet. His life from king to poet epitomizes the transformation from action to
stasis, from objectivity to subjectivity, and from the public to the private. The following poem, “The Stolen Child,” however, calls the idea of espousing the subjective world into question:

*Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand.*

Away with us he’s going,
The solemn-eyed:
He’ll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside;
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal chest.

*(VP ll. 38-49)*

At the moment of being lured away by the fairies to the spiritual and imaginative world, the child looks back at the tumult of this world with endearing eyes. In short, Yeats does not endorse the world of imagination over that of the ordinary. When considered separately, the two poems, like other companion poems, talk about the importance of pursuing both the ideal and the real. However, looked at in terms of the overall context of
the second group of poems, the two poems suggest the importance of the public role of poet, not only because the second poem shows the child's reluctance to go to the land of fairies, but also because the third poem supports the idea of remaining in this ordinary world by talking about the speaker's sense of patriotism:

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room;

(LP II. 5-10)

Here the speaker's beloved embodies the concept of order ("lays them in a row") and religious and spiritual guidance ("lights the curtained room"). Although the speaker does not specify the name of the place which he wishes to go, "an isle in the water" seems to symbolize Ireland, reminding us of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." Thus the poem implies that the speaker desires to provide an order and guidance to Ireland with the help of his beloved. In this way, a sense of patriotism is subtly embedded in this poem. Hence, implied in the speaker's strong wishes to go to Ireland with his beloved (which he repeats twice for emphasis) is his sense of the public role of the poet. Looking at the next five poems in this sense of remaining in this world and grappling with the problems of disorder, we see that the following poems treat the contemporary political problems of Ireland.
“Down by the Salley Gardens” and “The Meditation of the Old Fisherman” are placed right after “To an Isle in the Water” and seem to be intended to introduce the problems of present (contemporary) Ireland in contrast to the Irish past. The first poem begins by describing the speaker’s good old days when he was happy with his sweetheart (“Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet; / She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet”), but ends with his sorrow due to the loss of love (“But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears”). The second poem also repeats this contrast between the past and the present which causes pain on the part of the Old Fisherman. The speaker clearly senses the difference between the present and the past by saying: “In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves were more gay,” and “The herring are not in the tides as they were of old” and “And ah, you proud maiden, your are not so fair when his oar / Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and apart.” Naturally enough, he is longing for the past because, unlike the present, he was fine in the past: “When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.” It seems to me that “with never a crack in my heart” in the past, which he repeats three times for emphasis, especially implies the unified state of Ireland. But his sense of the discord of the present Ireland is clearly expressed: “My sorrow! For many a creak gave the creel in the cart / That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold.” The Old Fisherman’s lamentation, which is filled with cacophonous sounds, is an emblem of the contemporary Ireland torn between Catholics and Protestants and unionists and nationalists, a riven country which is presented through the next three ballads.
A juxtaposition of the next three ballads ("The Ballad of Father O'Hart," "The Ballad of Moll Magee," and "The Ballad of the Foxhunter") points to the contemporary discord between political groups, religious groups, and social classes. However, as I shall show, ending Crossways with these three poems does not just present the problem of Ireland but also suggests its solution: we need a balance between classes, religious beliefs and political views. Hence, here we have the peasant class (the peasant Moll Magee in "The Ballad of Moll Magee") and an upper-middle class representative of the Protestants Anglo-Irish Ascendancy (the foxhunter in "The Ballad of the Foxhunter"), and a Catholic (Father O’Hart in "The Ballad of Father O’Hart"). Although Yeats does not explicitly present different political groups (Nationalist and Unionist) through these poems, I want to believe that, running the risk of affirming stereotypes, the majority Gaelic-Catholics represent Nationalists, whereas most Anglo-Protestants are Unionists, since it is the Catholics who support a separation from Britain, while the Protestants back unionism.

"The Ballad of Father O'Hart" dramatizes the conflict between Catholics and Protestants during the time of the penal laws:

Good Father John O'Hart

In penal days rode out

To a shoneen who had free lands

And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands;
Sleiveens were all his race;
And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,
And they married beyond their place.

(YP II. 1-8)

Here we see that Catholics are treated differently from Protestants in that they are not allowed to own land because of penal laws, which Yeats specifically commented on in a revised version of this note published in 1892:

The robbery of the lands of Father O’Hart was one of those incidents which occurred sometimes, though but rarely, during the time of penal laws. Catholics, who were forbidden to own landed property, evaded the law by giving some honest Protestant nominal possession of their estates.41

As a result of trusting a Protestant, Father O’Hart lost his property and led a poor life (“And he wore small holes in his shoes, / And he wore large holes in his gown”). 42

“The Ballad of Moll Magee” deals with the predicament of the peasant class due to their extreme poverty. Here we see that the peasant Moll Magee of “The Ballad of Moll Magee” is separated from her husband and her townspeople because of her involvement in the death of her own child (“He drove me out and shut the door, / and gave his curse to me; / I went away in silence, / No neighbour could I see”).43 We pity Moll Magee because the death of her baby is basically caused by her poverty which she can’t help:

My man was a poor fisher
I'd always been but weakly,
And my baby was just born;
A neighbour minded her by day,
I minded her till morn.

(VP ll. 5-16)

"The Ballad of the Foxhunter" seems to imply the decline of the aristocracy by describing the process of fox hunting which turns out to be a funeral ceremony for the foxhunter. Throughout the poem, the Foxhunter carefully administers the process:

'Now lay me in a cushioned chair
And carry me, you four,
With cushions here and cushions there,
To see the world once more.

(VP ll. 1-4)

Although his last remaining energy is slowly drained from him ("His eyelids droop, his head falls low, / His old eyes cloud with dreams"), he does not forget a procedure and demands: "My Huntsman Rody, blow the horn, / And make the hills reply."

By reenacting this process of fox hunting for the last time in his life, the speaker champions the world of formality tinged with dignity, showing his endearing attitudes towards worldly experiences. The death of the foxhunter ("The servants bear the body in; / The hounds wail for the dead") represents the process in which the upper-middle class is separated from this ceremonious and dignified aristocratic experience, suggesting the
decline of aristocracy.

Although the three ballads present different political groups, religious beliefs, and social classes, we have one common characteristic shared by each group: a feeling of isolation and loneliness. The act of crying in which all of the three representative characters become involved in one way or another represents their protest against their isolation. Hence, when Father O'Hart forbids keening, he seems to express his anger against the unjust treatment of Catholics (in other words, the living person suffers more than the dead). A silent and lonely crying of Moll Magee ("And keenin' to mysel") seems to be directed to her forlorn situation ("I went away in silence, / No neighbour could I see"), as well as to the death of her baby. The crying of the foxhunter ("Huntsman Rody, blow the horn, / Make the hills reply. / 'I cannot blow upon my horn, I can but weep and sigh."") is different from that of the priest and the peasant because it does not result from his anger but from his yearning for the state of aristocratic ceremony, dignity, and worldly experiences. In a sense, his cry implies his helpless anger against the demise of aristocracy.

Crossways, then, consists of two groups of poems, each with a religious and political context, respectively. In the first group, Yeats balances the conflicting forces of action and stasis, the ideal and the real, imagination and actuality. The second group balances private and public, past and present, Catholic and Protestant, high and low classes, and unionists and nationalists. It seems to me that Yeats's efforts to balance opposite forces communicate his nationalist desire for Irish unity, as well as his search for spiritual unity. That is, as Yeats keeps insisting throughout Crossways, we cannot think of one particular
state without considering the other. This work is a symbolic way of emphasizing the importance of accepting both sides. As we see in the way Yeats controls the relationship of each component of the poems, the principle of balance can be applied to the dynamic relationship not only between stasis and action, body and soul, and love and hate, but also between low and high classes, Catholics and Protestants, and unionists and nationalists. In other words, just as we need both the ideal and the real for spiritual maturity, so we need both sides of the Irish for Irish political future: self-government. Yeats firmly believes that a new Ireland can be established by the reconciliation of political divisions, as a new self can be created by a mental power to realize the reconciliation of antinomies. By creating two different contexts, Yeats offers yet another message: we cannot think of the first context without considering the second context, and vice versa. A religious context is needed to unify Ireland. Precisely speaking, Yeats presents a model of reconciliation by means of a religious concept through the first group of poems to solve the problem of dissonance in Ireland, which is suggested in the second group of poems. In this way, Yeats strongly advocates the fusion of religion and nationalism in his early years.
CHAPTER 2

YEAT'S DISENCHANTMENT WITH NATIONALISM AND HIS UNIVERSALIST CONSCIOUSNESS

In “The Folly of Being Comforted,” written in 1902, Yeats grieved, referring to his unfulfilled love with Maud Gonne:

But heart, there is no comfort, not a grain
Time can but make her beauty over again
Because of the great nobleness of hers;
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs
Burns but more clearly; O she had not these ways,
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.

O heart O heart if she would but turn her head,
You would know the folly of being comforted.

(VP II. 7-14)

In “Words” written almost eight years later, Yeats protested, again referring to the indifference of his former lover:

I had this thought awhile ago,
My darling cannot understand
What I have done, or what would do
In this blind bitter land;

(VP II. 1-4)

Included in In the Seven Woods (1904) and The Green Helmet and Other Poems (1910), these two poems are but two of sixteen poems in these two books dealing with his frustration as a rejected lover. As these two poems indicate, the poems written in the first decade of the twentieth century show a sharp contrast to the poetry written during the 1890s not only in content, but also in style. Unlike the poems of the nineties in which we see Yeats’s vague desire, these two verses along with other poems in In the Seven Woods and in The Green Helmet and Other Poems portray his setbacks, unfulfillment, and unhappiness due to his failure in getting the hand of Maud Gonne in marriage. These two books of poems also reflect a change of Yeats’s poetic style. Unlike the poems of the 1890s which show his preference for a symbolic language, the poems of the new century adopt a more realistic and dramatic language. According to David Holdeman, this stylistic change signaled “an undoubtedly tentative but very significant turning point in Yeats’s career.”

By the time he wrote “The Folly of Being Comforted,” we witness many significant changes in Yeats’s poetic career. First of all, Yeats resigned from the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1899, ending his most explicit form of involvement in Irish nationalism. Secondly, he had lost interest in the idea of an Irish Order of Mysteries around this time. Although he continued to practice Eastern meditation during this period, he no longer
showed as much enthusiasm for studying the spiritual traditions of the world. Thirdly, he began to direct most of his energy towards the Abbey Theater where he actively participated as playwright, director, producer, and fund raiser during the first decade of the new century. As has often been pointed out, it is difficult not to connect these changes in Yeats's life with Maud Gonne's rejection of Yeats's marriage proposals, if only because his resignation from practical politics, loss of interest in the Irish Mystical Order, and commitment to the Irish Literary Theatre all coincided with Maud Gonne's marriage to MacBride in February 1903. As David Pierce aptly points out in Yeats's World: Ireland, England and the Poetic Imagination, "charting Yeats's attitude towards Ireland in the period from 1900 to 1910 is especially difficult, partly because of the overlap between his attitude towards Ireland and his feelings for Maud Gonne" (158).

Although we cannot dismiss the role of Maud Gonne in Yeats's change of attitude towards nationalism and mysticism, and his subsequent devotion to the Abbey Theatre, his writings in the nineties demonstrate that these changes had been incipient from as early as 1890. In this chapter, I will show that these changes stem not only from his understanding of the limitations of nationalism—dependence as isolation—but also from his skepticism about his own nationalist agenda and about the realization of a mystical vision by analyzing some poems in The Rose (1893) and The Wind Among the Reeds (1899).

Besides, Yeats shows on many occasions his weariness at political skirmishes into which he was constantly dragged because of his double allegiance to art and politics and to England and Ireland. Although he turns to the Irish Literary Theater, announcing a need to separate art from politics, his place in Irish modern history makes it difficult to keep
himself from engaging in political battles which gradually instill bitterness and hatred into his poetry. I will also show that Yeats talks about universalism during this period when he expresses his skepticism about the possibility of achieving the state of oneness and his frustration about needless political fights. Certainly, Yeats's dealing with universalism and his disappointment in nationalist politics due to its provincial nature and their tendency to fight with each other leads us to see where Yeats is eventually moving to in the future: the pursuit of universalism by reconciling East and West. Yeats's gradual movement towards universalism is necessary and inevitable to deal not only with the narrowness of nationalism and nationalist politics, but also with his ambivalence towards England and Ireland and his bitterness caused by his involvement in vicious political fights. Our understanding of Yeats's gradual transition from nationalist to universalist is crucial in our later discussion of his evolving attitude towards the spiritual traditions which he resumes to study in 1912 and his use of them for his later political objectives: a realization of a unified world. As we shall see, however, Yeats's pursuit of universalism is sometimes clouded by his hatred of the urban Catholic middle class. After experiencing the Playboy riots staged mainly by Catholic middle-class nationalists, Yeats began to not only preach the importance of cultivating, purifying, and disciplining mind and soul, but also to praise the virtues of the Anglo-Irish aristocratic class, insinuating his distrust of what he called the uncultivated and uneducated middle class and celebrating the advantages of aristocratic government.

I begin a discussion of Yeats's gradual disillusionment with nationalism by analyzing some poems in The Rose and The Wind Among the Reeds. Although he still pursues his
Irish nationalist cause of Irish unity using a mystical vision in these poems, he is also beginning to see the limitations of nationalism (independence as isolation). His ambivalent attitudes towards nationalism are reflected in his continuing use of religious concepts for the unity of Ireland and his skepticism about the results of his nationalist agenda at the same time. One of the dominant concerns of *The Rose*, as is the case with *Crossways*, is to balance mysticism and nationalism. In the beginning poem, "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," Yeats announces his desire to pursue mystical knowledge and nationalism at the same time that he ultimately tries to integrate mysticism and nationalism into the poetic world of *The Rose*. His goal is repeated twice for emphasis when he opens the poem with "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days! / Come near, while I sing the ancient ways," and ends it with almost identical lines: "Come near; I would, before my time to go. / Sing of old Eri and the ancient ways: Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days." Here, as critics generally agree, the Rose suggests eternal beauty related to mystical knowledge, while ancient ways point to Irish folklore. What they disagree on, however, is the meaning of "Come near," the importance of which can be easily sensed by his repetition of the expression six times in the poem. Harold Bloom sees "Come near" as a sign of the poet’s vacillation between occult knowledge and common things by pointing out that the poet asks the Rose "to come near, but to leave him still ‘a little space’ for the natural odor of less occult roses to pervade. Come near, but not too near; this is the start of a characteristic pattern of vacillation." Frank Hughes Murphy, on the other hand, contends that "Come near, but not too near" is not vacillation but about the artist’s need for balance by which he means that "He [Yeats] must not allow himself to be so
completely consumed by the fire of beauty that he neglects its humble sources, nor must
he become so engrossed in the commonplace that he loses sight of the beauty he seeks
there." To Murphy, therefore, this poem concerns two sources from which Yeats expects
to discover eternal beauty (or, mystical knowledge): folklore and all poor foolish things
that live a day.

It seems to me that the meanings of "the ancient ways" and "Come near," like the
Rose, are flexible enough to imply Yeats's mission: the unity of mysticism and nationalism.
Although "the ancient ways" may mean Irish folklore, Yeats's implication cannot be
limited to this designation. Our understanding of "the ancient ways" cannot be complete
without connecting it to Yeats's nationalism. "The ancient ways" suggests, as Yeats
explains in the poem, the heroic past ("Cuhoollin battling with the bitter tide")\(^6\) and the
innocent past ("The Druid, gray, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed./ Who cast round Fergus
dreams"),\(^7\) which Yeats strongly believes will revivify the sensibility of the Irish to form a
sense of spiritual community. I think "Come near" basically points to Yeats's desire to
maintain a balance, not only in order to keep two sources of eternal beauty, but also in
order to do the two things at the same time. That is, he wants to pursue mystical
knowledge ("Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!")\(^8\) and nationalism ("Come
near me, while I sing the ancient ways")\(^9\) concurrently. The reason is that there is a
mystical connection between the two which Yeats deals with not only in the following
poems, but also in The Wind Among the Reeds poems. In this sense, "Come near me"
seems to convey Yeats's entreaty for help from the realm of mystical and magical
knowledge to achieve his cause of nationalism.
Yeats deals with his pursuit of the unity between mysticism and nationalism in *The Rose*. I will introduce one poem which represents Yeats's nationalist cause of unifying Ireland employing a religious vision. In “The Dedication to a Book of Stories Selected from the Irish Novelists,” we see Yeats’s longing for ancient Ireland as a possible solution for the present Irish discord. The poem (I am quoting the 1895 version) begins with a description of the harmonious past:

There was a green branch hung with many a bell
When her own people ruled in wave-worn Eire;
And from its murmuring greenness, calm of faery,
A Druid kindness, on all hearers fell.

* (VP II. 1-4)

Here a tree image (“a green branch”) is emblematic of Ireland. More specifically, a green branch seems to suggest a harmonious Ireland of the past in spite of its disparate elements (“with many a bell”). What makes such a harmony possible is its closeness to nature and supernatural elements (“Its murmuring greenness” and “calm of faery”) and the wisdom of a ruler who epitomizes the union of religion, politics and poetry (“a Druid kindness”).

Hence, all walks of people in ancient Ireland are united:

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,
And turned the farmer’s memory from his cattle,
And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of battle,
For all who heard it dreamed a little while.
This harmonious past is sharply contrasted with the discord of contemporary Ireland which he calls “wave-worn Eire” in which Yeats witnessed sorrow and wanderer (“The willow of the many-sorrowed world. / Ah, Exiles, wandering over many lands!”). As we see in the last stanza, Yeats’s mind was in ancient Ireland which he believes can bring back the unity of Ireland:

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

Although one of the central concerns of The Rose is to provide a message for the unity of mysticism and nationalism, one poem, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” seems to unsettle Yeats’s nationalist position, giving us an inkling of skepticism: the nationalist goal of independence means isolation. When Raymond Williams remarks that “Nationalism is like class” in his Second Generation, Terry Eagleton interprets this dictum as representing nationalism’s impossible irony in the sense that social class is itself a form of alienation, canceling the particularity of an individual life into collective anonymity. It seems to me that Williams’s assertion involves another form of alienation in that having social class itself implies living on a kind of island, which separates its class members from other classes.
Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" represents the impossible irony of a nationalist ethos—freedom from oppression as isolation—which the young poet began to feel in 1890's. "Innisfree" reflects Yeats's nationalist consciousness not only because his pursuit of freedom in the poem is prompted by his hatred of the oppressive atmosphere of London, but also because his freedom is tightly bound up with mystical ancient Ireland. This poem, as has often been discussed, pursues Yeats's longing for freedom, but, I believe, Yeats's idea of freedom can also be stretched to suggest his aspiration for the self-rule of Ireland. In other words, Yeats's idea of freedom in this poem points not only to his individual freedom, but also to the freedom of his country. This is not simply to say that the personal state of the poet represents that of Ireland, but to say that Yeats's expression of freedom itself becomes inseparable from the nationalist ethos. As Hans Kohn reveals in his Nationalism: Its Meaning and History, the twentieth-century nationalist aspiration for freedom from the colonizer has roots in the seventeenth-century English Civil War in which the Cromwellian forces fought for freedom from the authority of a willful and tyrannical monarchy. Looking into the psychological state of Yeats at the time of composing "Innisfree," we see that he strives to free himself from the oppressive atmosphere of England which he associated with capitalism and colonialism. He tells in his autobiographies how the poem was composed "when walking through Fleet Street very homesick," and how he was called back to Sligo by a jet of water seen in a shop window. It is not that difficult to see in his letters of the 1890s that one of the main causes of Yeats’s homesickness is related to British capitalism and colonialism. In a letter to Father Matthew Russell dated March 6, 1888, he wrote: "What a horrid place this
London is! I wonder at that water for overflowing and drowning all those poor Chinamen busy with their opium dreams, and leaving this horrid black place alone.” (The Letters 62).

In a similar vein, he also wrote that “It was pleasant, however, to hear her [Maud Gonne] attacking a young military man from India who was there, on English rule in India” (The Letters 108). A relentless search for markets, resources, and material gains by the English makes Yeats feel as if he were in a desert, because he knows very well that his country is another victim of British imperialism. So, he wrote his desire to escape from the London desert in a letter sent to Katharine Tynan dated March 1889, months before he composed “Innisfree”: “Hey ho, I wish I was out of London in order that I might see the world.

Here one gets into one’s minority among the people who are like one’s self—mystical literary folk, and such like” (The Letters 116). Here the world may mean his country Ireland. And, as he further specifies, the world is related to spiritual and poetic Ireland, which is in sharp contrast with British materialism. Hence his yearning for freedom symbolizes his desire to separate himself from the oppression of English capitalism, materialism, and colonialism.

Naturally enough, as we see in “Innisfree,” Yeats tries to find his refuge in Ireland. But one of the possible gestures of the poem is that what he is dreaming of is not only the contemporary Ireland divided between the Catholics and the Protestants, but also the mystical ancient Ireland. In this way, this poem expresses his nationalist cause. According to Hugh Kenner, the whole world came to agree that this poem is Celtic. By Celtic, of course, critics refer to Yeats’s nationalist sensibility. Yeats’s nationalist feeling is reinforced by his mention of Innisfree’s wattled cottage. “When Oisin breaks away from
Niamh," as Michael North comments, "longing to rejoin his Fenian brotherhood if only for a day, it is ‘the Fenian’s dwellings of wattle’ that figure the whole ancient way of life." In addition, we also see that the ancient Ireland is permeated with mystical aura when he writes: “Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings; / There midnight’s all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow.” “The veils of the morning,” “midnight,” and “a purple glow” all suggest images created by blending conflicting colors, thereby relating the images to the mystical atmosphere of Celtic Ireland. In Yeats’s poetry, as I will further discuss later, the integration or juxtaposition of gold / silver, red / white, and black / white is intended to symbolize the state of mystical union. This poetic world of the Celtic Ireland is nicely contrasted with the capitalistic and materialistic landscape of England (“while I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray”). Without a doubt, “Innisfree” prefigures some poems of The Wind Among the Reeds in which, as we shall see, Yeats communicates his nationalist cause by expressing his longing for the mystical ancient Ireland.

To be sure, “Innisfree” expresses Yeats’s patriotic feeling and his nationalist cause, but the poem also contains his doubt on the result of his nationalism. In other words, the conflicting consequences of nationalism—freedom from oppression on the one hand and freedom as isolation on the other hand—are subtly imbedded in the poem. Yeats stresses the idea of living alone by saying that “Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,/ And live alone in the bee-loud glade.” Although the idea of living alone points to individualism, it also suggests self-reliance and self-rule in the form of the hive and the nine bean-rows. Especially, Yeats’s choice of nine bean-rows connotes self-
reliance. In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats wrote that "My father had read to me some passage out of *Walden*, and I planned to live some day in a cottage on a little island called Innisfree . . ." (73) and we know that his "nine bean-rows" is borrowed from Thoreau who affirms the concept of self-reliance in his essay. In the poem, however, the idea of self-reliance or self-rule means a complete isolation which is implied in the image of the island which is itself placed in the middle of the lake. Furthermore, a sense of isolation on the part of a nationalist is further reinforced by the loneliness of the speaker who is dreaming of going there alone. In other words, Yeats's nationalist aspiration for freedom is described in a partly negative way: freedom as isolation.

Consequently, although this poem hints at the desire for the freedom from British capitalism, materialism, and colonialism, it also implies Yeats's unionist consciousness: desire for self-government without cutting all ties between Ireland and England. His choice of title, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," further reinforces his unionist sensibility in the sense that the title consists of both Irish (Innis: Irish for island) and English (free). This linguistic component seems to indicate Yeats's double allegiance to both Ireland and England, not to mention the impossible irony of nationalism: independence as isolation.

Yeats's next book of poems, *The Wind Among the Reeds*, continues to deal with the unity of mysticism and nationalism, but we see Yeats's growing concern for nationalism accompanied by stronger skepticism about its results. Thematically, *The Wind Among the Reeds* is both an intensification of what he has pursued in the previous poems—the state of unity—and a judgment on such a unified state. In this work, Yeats pursues not only the unity between mysticism and nationalism, but also a mystical and a sexual union, and he,
for the first time, affirms the blissful state of unity because it can solve the problem of life and death, provide a shelter to hide from an apocalyptic end, and cleanse the woes of contemporary Ireland. But he also admits that it is impossible to accomplish the state of unity. Technically, his poetic style becomes more dramatic by projecting the metaphor of searching for a woman on to the idea of pursuing unity. In fact, in this volume of poems, as we will see, the woman stands for a kind of catalyst not only for the unity between religion and nationalism but also for the state of mystical union, thereby offering us a notion that the woman plays the role of a temptress to those states. For this reason, I believe, Yeats’s way of expressing the pursuit of unity is much more dramatic and appealing because of its association with the idea of searching for a woman. As is demonstrated by the poems, however, all the main characters of the poems either keep losing track of or are rejected by the woman of their love. The failure to possess the woman indicates Yeats’s doubt as to the possibility of achieving unity.

Yeats’s use of the image of a beautiful woman as a seducer on behalf of the state of union in The Wind Among the Reeds may be connected to his personal experience with Maud Gonne and Olivia Shakespeare. The connection between fiction and reality may be further evidenced by the fact that the poems of this volume express his agony and despair due to the unattainable union with his lover, reflecting his real life miseries caused by Maud Gonne’s refusal to marry him and his involvement in a passionate but guilt-ridden love relationship with Mrs. Shakespeare. We cannot, however, say that his quest for and ultimate failure at arriving at a state of unity is prompted by his frustrated love experience alone, although we suspect some connection between reality and fiction. As I have
discussed in the previous chapter, Western and Eastern occult traditions adopt sexual images to convey the concept of the union between opposing forces. Considering the fact that Yeats was steeped in occultism at the time of writing the poems of The Wind Among the Reeds, we may argue that Yeats’s quest for a sexual union transcends the personal experience to pursue a mystical union that provides a vision of salvation for contemporary Ireland’s disunity. By the same token, Yeats’s failure is not only a reflection of his personal setbacks, but a showcase of his understanding of the difficulties of achieving a unified state, and of his intuitions about the negative aspects of nationalism.

Five poems in The Wind Among the Reeds (“The Host of the Air,” “The Fish,” “The Unappeasable Host,” “Into the Twilight,” and “The Song of Wandering Aengus”) show Yeats’s ambivalence towards nationalism by expressing the need to unify nationalism and mysticism and his skepticism about such a goal. Here, as we shall see, Yeats consolidates mysticism as a religious vision with a number of mystical images, and he is beginning to convey his concept of the unity between mysticism and nationalism through the mystical image of ancient Ireland. In other words, he is convinced that the problems of discord between political groups and between religious groups can be solved by having Irishmen turn to ancient Ireland which epitomizes the unity of religion, poetry, and politics. As I briefly mentioned above, an idea for longing for a mystical ancient Ireland is expressed through a motif of looking for a woman, who is later connected to the mystical past of Ireland.

The first poem, “The Host of the Air,” presents O’Driscoll’s loss of his bride, Bridget, thereby setting up the motif of searching for the woman:
The bread and the wine had a doom,
For these were the host of the air;
He sat and played in a dream
Of her long dim hair.

He played with the merry old men.
And thought not of evil chance,
Until one bore Bridget his bride
Away from the merry dance.

(VP ll. 25-32)

Here Yeats makes it clear that the bride is abducted by the spirit of the wind, or the mystical power of the bread and wine. Considering the color of bread (white) and wine (red), we can connect this combination with a marriage of sun and moon, and gold and silver, which suggests the idea of energy created by mystical union. Yeats does not specify the time and place when and where this abduction takes place, but his way of describing the scene leads us to see that ancient mystical Ireland is the place to look for the lost bride. Yeats first creates a mystical atmosphere by providing a concept of antinomies such as “gay” and “sad” (“And never was piping so sad, / and never was piping so gay”), and red wine and white bread; and then connects the mystical atmosphere to the past Ireland by introducing old men “playing at cards / With a twinkling of ancient hands.” At casual reading, the next poem, “The Fish,” (which was originally titled “Breasal the Fisherman”) seems to be not related to the previous poem since its scene has
been shifted to the contemporary period, portraying the imagery of catching a fish which has usually been connected with Maud Gonne:

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

(VP II. 1-8)

But looking at its thematic concern—the idea of searching and losing the fish which is emblematic of a woman—in terms of the context of the five poems, we see that this poem is a continuation of the previous poem, in which we see the disappearance of Bridget.

The next poem, "The Unappeasable Host," (which was originally titled "A Cradle Song") expresses Yeats's conviction that ancient mystical Ireland is the place to look to save contemporary Ireland. The poem begins:

The Danann children laugh, in cradles of wrought gold,
And clap their hands together, and half close their eyes,
For they will ride the North when the ger-eagles flies,
With heavy whitening wings, and a heart fallen cold:
I kiss my wailing child and press it to my breast,
And hear the narrow graves calling my child and me.

(VP II. 1-6)

Here the image of a woman has transformed into that of a mother protecting her children, which reminds us of the idea of a caring country. To Yeats, the country points not only to ancient Ireland, but also to mystical Ireland, which he tries to build in “The Host of the Air.” The image of ancient Ireland is implied in “the Danann,” which Yeats explains as “the gods of ancient Ireland” in his notes to “The Hosting of the Sidhe.” The mystical atmosphere of ancient Ireland is supported not only by the contrasting image of gaiety and sadness of children (“The Danaan children laugh” and “my wailing child”), but also by gold cradles and whitening wings of the eagle. The juxtaposition of these antinomies shows that Yeats tries to express the mystical union of sun and moon in a number of ways in The Wind Among the Reeds. Yeats’s picture of the ger-eagle carrying children who are protected by a mother figure in the poem, therefore, conveys an image of ancient mystical Ireland. Yeats’s choice of this mystical ancient Ireland carries his political message in the sense that the unity of religion (mysticism) and politics (guiding children) in ancient Ireland provides a protection of the Danaan children from desolate winds which is associated with death in the poem (“Desolate winds that beat the doors of Heaven, and beat / The doors of Hell and blow there many a whimpering ghost”).

Yeats’s goal of making Irishmen turn to ancient mystical Ireland to unify Ireland is again asserted in “Into the Twilight.” Here Yeats also uses the image of a mother to embody the mystical atmosphere of ancient Ireland, linking this poem to the previous
poem. The poem begins:

Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn,
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
Laugh heart again in the gray twilight,
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,
Dew ever shining and twilight gray;
Through hope fall from you and love decay,
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

(VP II. 1-8)

Here we have two conflicting images: one is negative due to a fight between two opposing forces ("out-worn heart," "the nets of wrong and right") and the other is positive, harmonious and pleasing which is associated with nature ("the grey twilight," "the dew of the morn"). These conflicting images remind us of "this marred and clumsy world" and "a little world out of beautiful things" in his introduction to The Celtic Twilight. By stating "again" twice, Yeats stresses the necessity of recovering the glory of harmonious Ireland. In the second stanza, Yeats makes his case that "the nets of wrong and right" represents contemporary Irish discord, while "the gray twilight" suggests mystical ancient Ireland. The image of contemporary Ireland is nicely captured by his description of "Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue," whereas the image of mystical ancient Ireland is carried by his choice of words, "always young" and "ever shining." His use of "gray
"twilight" is especially important since it not only signifies the picture of beautiful Irish landscape, but also symbolizes mystical moods in that it shows the harmonious integration of antinomies, that is, darkness and light. Hence the choice for Yeats is clear:

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

And God stands winding His lonely horn,
And time and the world are ever in flight;
And love is less kind than the gray twilight,
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

(VP ll. 9-16)

So, Yeats urges Irishmen to turn to mystical ancient Ireland where they have a harmonious integration between mysticism ("the mystical brotherhood of sun and moon") and nature ("hill is heaped upon hill"). In short, Yeats is firmly convinced that the vision of mystical ancient Ireland may cleanse the internecine problems of contemporary Ireland.

The next poem, "The Song of Wandering Aengus," seems to play the role of coda to the preceding four poems. The overall atmosphere of this poem is a continuation of the mystical and primitive mood which governs all five poems with its red ("a fire was in my head") and white ("white moths"), another variation of the mystical union of sun and moon, and its specific presentation of nature ("The hazel wood," "a stream"). Moreover,
this poem recapitulates the idea of searching for a girl whose acquaintance the speaker once briefly enjoyed, linking it to the first pairs of poems, "The Host of Air," and "The Fish." Their connection is strengthened by the fact that the girl in "The Song of Wandering Aengus" is transformed as a little silver trout, reminding us of "The Fish." Here in "The Song of Wandering Aengus," the image of a glimmering girl is associated with the legendary and mystical Ireland, which he talks about the second pair of poems, "The Unappeasable Host," and "Into the Twilight." Yeats provides two important clues with which we can understand his association of the legendary and mystical past as a female figure. In the middle stanza, Yeats describes the girl:

It had become a glimmering girl

With apple blossom in her hair

Who called me by my name and ran

And faded through the brightening air.

(VP II. 13-6)

Critics usually point out that Yeats had Maud Gonne in mind when he wrote this poem, since he describes her complexion as "the blossom of apples." Examining the full quotation of Yeats's description of Maud, we see that Yeats is connecting her image with legendary past of Ireland:

I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the blossom of apples, and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and a
stature so great that she seemed of a divine race. Her movement were so worthy of her form and I understood as last why the poet of antiquity, where we would but speak of face and form, sings, loving some lady, that she paces like a goddess. (Mem 40)

Although the girl in this poem is more like a fictional figure, Yeats's word choice of "apple blossom" has a part in his conscious attempt to associate it with "some legendary past" and "a divine race." The girl's connection with the legendary and mystical past is again hinted in the last stanza:

> Though I am old with wandering
> Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
> I will find out where she has gone,
> And kiss her lips and take her hand;
> And walk among long dappled grass,
> And pluck till time and times are done,
> The silver apples of the moon,
> The golden apples of the sun.

(VP II. 17-24)

Here, the image of plucking "the silver apples of the moon" and "the golden apples of the sun" with the girl should be considered as a continuation of the preceding poem's "the mystical brotherhood of sun and moon," which, as we have discussed, points to the mystical past of Ireland. Needless to say, the old man's desire to find and kiss the girl symbolizes Yeats's longing for Ireland's golden age in the mystical past. His desire to go
back to ancient Ireland is part of his nationalist cause since that time will solve the
problem of contemporary Ireland which he describes as “hollow lands” and “hilly lands.”

An idea of looking for a woman who is related to ancient Ireland resumes after a
group of poems which deal with sexual and mystical union. In “He remembers Forgotten
Beauty,” we also see that Ireland’s mystical past is represented by beautiful ladies who
wear a combination of roses and dew-cold lilies, another variation of sun and moon. The
speaker’s memory of caressing her (“When my arms wrap you round I press / My heart
upon the loveliness / that has long faded from the world”)\textsuperscript{21} and of his dreaming of her
(“For that pale breast and lingering hand / Come from a more dream-heavy land”)\textsuperscript{22}
strongly suggest his wish to go back to the mystical past of Ireland. The idea of beauty as
the past or heroic past continues in the following two poems, “A Poet to his Beloved,”
and “He gives his Beloved certain Rhymes.” But we see that the speaker keeps losing
track of a woman (“I will find out where she has gone”\textsuperscript{23} in “The Song of Wandering
Aengus”) or only feels her through memory or dream (“He remembers Forgotten
Beauty”), suggesting the difficulty of returning to the mystical past Ireland, a token of
Yeats’s doubt about his own efforts.

When Yeats expressed his skepticism about his own nationalist agenda, not to
mention his concerns about the limitations of nationalism, he was also beginning to realize
that his involvement in nationalism was nothing but frustrating, constantly finding himself
mired in political fights and slanders. In a letter to Lady Gregory, dated 10 February,
1897, Yeats talks about his frustration: “I find the infinite triviality of politics more trying
than ever. We tear each other’s character in pieces for things that don’t matter to
anybody.” Pursuant to his changing view of nationalism, Yeats resigned from the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1899. In May 1901, Yeats confided in a letter to Lady Gregory: “I imagine that as I withdraw from politics my friends among the Nationalists will grow less, at first at any rate, and my foes more numerous” (The Letters 350).

One of the main reasons for Yeats’s unwanted involvement in political dog fights, as he implied in a letter to Robert Bridges dated Oct. 15, 1915, is his double allegiance to art and nationalism:

At half a dozen times in the last twenty years my own fellow countrymen would have said (and always when I was most right) that I had lost their confidence.

The position of a man of letters in a patriotic movement is always very difficult. (The Correspondence of Robert Bridges and W. B. Yeats 45-6)

Here we see that Yeats’s frustration is basically related to his involvement in political activities as a man of letters. Yeats incessantly found himself engaging in a battle against other hard-core nationalists because his own artistic beliefs—art as a vehicle of carrying profound religious truths which inspire and consequently transform the reader—were constantly in conflict with the concept of art shared by the majority of the nationalists: art should directly and explicitly serve the purpose of achieving their political goal. Phillip L. Marcus’s Yeats and the Beginning of the Irish Renaissance (1970), Elizabeth Cullingford’s Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism (1980), and David Pierce’s Yeats’s Worlds: Ireland, England and the Poetic Imagination (1995) provide us with well-documented discussions of Yeats’s battles against political propagandists. Certainly, Yeats attempted to overcome this problem of double allegiance by reconciling literature and nationalism, but his efforts
either went unnoticed or were considered to be not enough by other patriots. Hence, he had to defend himself in “To Ireland in the Coming Times” which was written in 1892:

Know that I would accounted be

True brother of a company,

Who sang to sweeten Ireland’s wrong,

Ballad and story, rann and song;

(VP ll. 1-4)

In one way or another, Yeats had to come up with a solution to deal with the problem of his double allegiance to art and politics, but he was not sure about how to solve it.

As has often been discussed, Yeats attempted to establish his own literary voice at the end of the nineteenth century. Richard Ellmann’s The Identity of Yeats (1964), Harold Bloom’s Yeats (1970), and George Bornstein’s Yeats and Shelley (1970) all offer us insight into Yeats’s struggles to get away from his Romantic precursors. Bornstein argues that Yeats started to look for his literary identity as early as 1890, judging from Yeats’s letter sent to Katherine Tynan on March 14, 1888 in which he wrote that “I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before . . . it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight . . . it is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint” (The Letters 63). Bornstein also convincingly shows that “in the early nineties Yeats felt the impulses which eventually drove him beyond Shelley” by analyzing some of The Rose poems. In discussing the issue of Yeats’s attempt to find his literary voice, however, what has not been properly emphasized is Yeats’s political reason for doing so. This reason is worthy of our
consideration because it is partly responsible for Yeats’s eventual turn to universalism.

Yeats’s position as a nationalist writer caused him difficulty—his problematic sense of literary identity—a product of his double allegiance to both Ireland and England. As a nationalist, on the one hand, he directed most of his energy towards a fight against English colonialism. As he wrote on many occasions, one of his main goals of writing was to stimulate anti-British passion. In a letter to John O’Leary dated Nov. 19, 1888, he wrote that “I have to get to work at my story—the motif of which is hatred of London” (94-5). In his Autobiographies, Yeats struck a similar chord: “To transmute the anti-English passion into a passion of hatred against the vulgarity and materialism whereon England has founded her worst life and the whole life that she sends us, has always been a dream of mine . . .” (431-2). Yeats’s anti-English passion cannot be ignored in discussing his efforts to establish his literary identity. In “What is ‘Popular Poetry’?” (1901), Yeats stressed that popular Irish poetry should have Irish national character. In the essay, he first talked about his dissatisfaction with English poets: “I had read Shelley and Spencer and had tried to mix their styles together in a pastoral play which I have now come to dislike much, and yet I do not think Shelley or Spenser ever moved me as did these poets [the Irish poets who wrote in English]” (E & I 3). As he later made himself clear, part of his dissatisfaction was resulted from his nationalism:

I had a conviction, which indeed I have still, that one’s verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colours of one’s own climate and scenery in their right proportion; and, when I found my verses too full of the reds and yellows Shelley gathered in Italy, I thought for two days of setting things right, not as I should now by
making my rhythms faint and nervous and filling my images with a certain coldness, a certain wintry wildness, but by eating little and sleeping upon a board. (E & I 5)

To Yeats, thus, what was important was to throw off the influence of English poetry since, as he remarked in the concluding part of the same essay, English “literary ideal belongs more to England than to other countries” (E & I 11).

As a writer, on the other hand, Yeats found it difficult to cut himself off from his Romantic predecessors. His ambivalent feelings towards his poetic precursors are nicely expressed in “William Blake and The Imagination” written in 1897, placed after “What is ‘Popular Poetry’?” and “The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry,” both of which were Yeats’s farewell salute to English writers, especially, Shelley. In the short essay about Blake, however, Yeats revealed that the English poet took a central part in his art. By writing that Blake “announced the religion of art, of which no man dreamed in the world he knew” (111), Yeats revealed the English source of his concept of art as religion. Moreover, Yeats even implied that the Blakean concept of the imaginative arts as the greatest of Divine revelations was what he needed for unifying Ireland:

The reason, and by the reason he [Blake] meant deductions from the observations of the senses, binds us to mortality because it binds us to the senses, and divides us from each other by showing us our clashing interests; but imagination divides us from mortality by the immortality of beauty, and binds us to each other by opening the secret doors of all hearts. He cried again and again that everything that lives is holy, and that nothing is unholy except things that do
not live—lethargies, and cruelties, and timidities, and that denial of imagination
which is the root they grew from in old times. (E. & I 112-3)

Due to his debt to Blake, Yeats awarded the English poet a special place by describing
him as “more simply a poet than any poet of his time,” separating him from other English
poets such as Tennyson and Wordsworth in the same essay. Given Yeats’s fascination
with Blake, we can understand Yeats’s wishes that Blake had had Irish ancestry, so strong
that he finally declared that he had found evidence to show that the English poet was of
Irish extraction, as I have discussed in the beginning of the first chapter.

It is interesting to see that Yeats, later in his life, even felt a necessity to clarify his
position towards England, because his ambivalent attitudes actually caused confusion
among his readers and friends. In a letter sent to Ethel Mannin postmarked December 11,
1936, he wrote:

My dear: Of course I don’t hate the people of England, considering all I owe to
Shakespeare, Blake, Morris—they are the one people I cannot hate. I remember
old John O’Leary, the Fenian leader, saying ‘I think the English have finer
native characters than we have, but we cannot become English.’ I hate certain
characteristics of modern England, . . . (The Letters 872)

This letter evinces that Yeats’s ambivalence towards England resulted from his
participation in nationalism as a man of letters; he hates English capitalism, materialism,
and colonialism; he loves the English literary tradition. Naturally enough, we see Yeats’s
dilemma: he had to find his own Irish voice, but he could not evade Blake’s Romanticism.
During the same period when Yeats showed growing disillusionment with nationalism, we see that Yeats also began to express the idea of universalism.

In the section of *Four Years: 1887-1891* in his *Autobiographies*, Yeats for the first time talked about the idea of universalism beginning with the oneness of Europe: "Had not Europe shared one mind and heart, until both mind and heart began to break into fragments a little before Shakespeare's birth?" (191) A few pages later, Yeats developed the idea of one Europe into that of one world by talking about the unity between East and West:

> A powerful class by terror, rhetoric, and organized sentimentality may drive their people to war, but the day draws near when they cannot keep them there; and how shall they face the pure nations of the East when the day comes to do it with but equal arms?... 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 theologians, poet, sculptor, architect, from 11th to 13th Century. (AU 195)

Yeats's idea of universalism stems from his nationalist consciousness—his desire to unify Ireland—as he revealed in the same essay: "I thought that the enemy of this unity [Unity of Being] was abstraction, meaning by abstraction not the distinction but the isolation of occupation, or class or faculty" (AU 190).

*The Rose* (1893) and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) reflect that Yeats was also beginning to adopt the idea of universalism in his poetry. Unlike *Crossways* in which he uses Indian pantheism as a religious vision, for *The Rose* and *The Wind Among the Reeds* he chooses a more universalized religious concept—mysticism—by using the rose as a
symbol of unity. I regard Yeats's employment of a rose symbol as a means of simplifying
the idea of the unity between nationalism and religion; his choice of the rose symbol also
signifies his movement towards universalism. As is known, a rose symbolizes the mystical
concept of integrating antinomies—a feminine principle and a masculine principle—in
Western mystical traditions such as Cabbalism and Hermeticism. Certainly, Western
mystical ideas are much more appealing to Irish readers than pantheism, simply because
they are rooted in Western spiritual traditions. Yeats's use of a rose symbol, however,
cannot be viewed as his commitment to one particular tradition. His aim is more geared
toward having the Western flower represent both Western and Eastern spiritual tradition,
as we see in his note to The Wind Among the Reeds (1889), in which Yeats stresses the
fact that his conception of the Rose has its counterpart in the Lotus, "the flower of Life,"
which is imagined "blossoming upon the Tree of Life" in some Eastern countries. Yeats's
adoption of universalism is part of his nationalist agenda: the unity of Ireland through a
religious vision.

Yeats again mentioned the idea of universalism in "The Celtic Element in Literature"
which was first published in 1897. This essay was written in response to Matthew
Arnold's The Study of Celtic Literature in which he called the Celtic nature passionate,
imaginative, and magical. Although Graham Hough has already pointed out that the essay
promulgates the universal character of the Celtic nature, we need to be reminded of
Yeats's universalism implied in "The Celtic Element" especially in relation to his
nationalist stance. The purpose of Yeats's essay is to expose Matthew Arnold's lack of
knowledge about the Celtic nature, thereby criticizing his imperialistic stance against
Ireland which lurks behind his characterization of Celtic literature. Yeats's main strategy for his attack on Arnold is that the Celtic nature is not limited to the Celts, but has universal qualities. Yeats specifically contests that Matthew Arnold's misunderstanding of the scope of Celtic magic: "our natural magic is but the ancient religion of the world" (E & I 176). By using "ancient," Yeats promotes the idea that the Celtic magic has a long tradition which goes back to primitive ages. It is also important to notice that by "religion," Yeats means that the magic is not a black art but a basis for a spiritual communion. Needless to add, his choice of "the world" is intended to announce the idea that the Celtic magic is a universal activity, refuting Arnold's contention that the magic is limited to Ireland. By the same token, "when Matthew Arnold quotes the lamentation of Llywarch Hen as a type of the Celtic melancholy," he said that he "prefers to quote it as a type of the primitive melancholy" (E & I 183). And again, when "Arnold asks how much of the Celt must one imagine in the ideal man of genius," Yeats corrects the English critic by saying that "I prefer to say, how much of the ancient hunters and fishers and of the ecstatic dancers among hills and woods must one imagine in the ideal man of genius?" (E & I 184) In short, Yeats is trying to underline the universal character of Celtic nature by using "primitive" and "ancient," opposing Arnold's attempt to link the characteristics of the Celts to those of Ireland. Yeats's main point is that Celtic magic mingled with the excessive passion and imagination of the Celts produced the literature of Europe.

According to Yeats:

... of all the fountains of the passions and beliefs of ancient times in Europe, the Slavonic, the Finnish, the Scandinavian, and the Celtic, the Celtic alone has
been for centuries close to the main river of European literature. It has again and again brought 'the vivifying spirit' 'of excess' into the arts of Europe. (E & I 185)

Yeats revisited the foundation of universalism on which he believed Irish literature should be based in “Ireland and Art” published in 1901. According to Yeats:

I would have Ireland re-create the ancient arts, the arts as they were understood in Judea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, in every ancient land; as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people who have grown up in leisured class and made this understanding their business.

(E & I 206)

Thus, we see that part of Yeats’s complexity is caused by his Anglo-Irish background, as well as by his participation in politics as artist. Yeats, on the one hand, began to experience the incompatibility of art with politics. He also started to see the limitations of cultural nationalism, resulting in his ambivalence toward nationalism. His troubled relationship with hard-core nationalists left him disenchanted with nationalist politics, but he could not separate himself from Irish politics which continuously hurt his sensitive mind. On the other hand, he also began to express the idea of universalism which is closely related to his nationalist agenda of pursuing Irish unity in that the idea of unity between East and West originated from the idea of unifying Catholics and Protestants.

When we consider Yeats’s complex mind in relation to his later years’s pursuit of universalism, we see that this period (1890s to 1900s) represents a process of transition from nationalism to universalism. My belief is that this transformation is basically related
to his political experiences: his problem between art and politics and his understanding of the limitation of cultural nationalism. Yeats's need to reconcile art and politics ultimately made him move towards universalism which I will discuss in the next chapter. Yeats's moving towards the universal can be explained by Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence as a swerve, but, in Yeats's case, we have to emphasize his political reason for swerving away from his English precursors. Yeats's ambivalent attitudes towards nationalism are also partly responsible for his developing a universal consciousness. That is, he needed to remedy the limitation of cultural nationalism which amounts to provincialism, not to mention his own doubts as to the possibility of achieving the unity of Ireland, by pursuing the unity between East and West. As we will see, the later Yeats devoted himself to the pursuit of universalism which indicates a change in his approach to and use of Eastern religious thought.

Withdrawing from more overt political activities, Yeats began to channel his energy into the Irish Literary Theater at the beginning of the new century. As we see in a proposal for the Irish Literary Theatre prepared by Yeats, Lady Gregory, O'Grady, Martyn, and Fiona Macleod, Yeats's turn to the Theater movement betokens his weariness with politics:

We propose to have performed in Dublin in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays. . . . We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is
not found in theaters of England, and without which no new movement in art or
literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery
and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient
idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of
misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political
questions that divide us.28

During the next ten year period (1900-1910), Yeats directed most of his energy towards
the Abbey where he actively participated as playwright, director, producer, and fund-
raiser. Yeats's enormously time-consuming labors at the Abbey distracted him not only
from pursuing spiritual knowledge, but also from writing poetry. During this period,
Yeats wrote only a meager number of poems, compared with other periods. Yeats wrote
sixty poems in the 1890's, and nearly a hundred in the 1910's, but in the first decade of the
new century he managed to complete only thirty poems or so, nearly half of which came in
1909 and 1910. Eight of his plays received their first performance in these years, but for
the lyric poet the period was so dry that in 1904 and 1906 he wrote no poems he wished
to preserve for posterity. Yeats was so consumed by the theatre in these years that in his
diary for 1909 he wondered if his talent would ever recover from the heterogeneous
labour of those last few years.

Although he declared a need to separate art from politics when he turned to the Irish
Literary Theater, his active involvement in the Abbey Theater led him to engage in another
unwanted political controversy: the Playboy riots in January 1907. We see that at the
heart of this political turmoil lies the problem of art and politics. Because of Yeats's
steadfast defense of the freedom of artistic expression and of Synge's play, which patriots believed disgraced the dignity of the Irish, he was charged with anti-nationalism. The riots also represented a confrontation between Protestants and Catholics since the accused (Synge and Yeats) originated from Protestant Ascendancy families and the accusers were Catholic nationalists who belonged to the lower middle class of Ireland. This incident led Yeats to feel that his goal of building a harmonious society based upon Celtic culture as a naïve idealism. So, he wrote on August 1907:

We were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end re-establish the old, confident, joyous world. All the while I worked with this idea, founding societies that became quickly or slowly everything I despised, one part of me looked on, mischievous and mocking, and the other part spoke words which were more and more unreal, as the attitude of mind became more and more strained and difficult. (E & I 249)

In the same essay, Yeats implicitly ascribed the failure of re-establishing a unified Ireland to the rise of lower middle-class small shop keepers and clerks “who had risen above the traditions of the countrymen, without learning those of cultivated life or even educating themselves” (E & I 260). Hence, Yeats began to preach the importance of self-sufficiency, self-discipline and self-cultivation, as he wrote in his 1909 journal:

Ireland has grown sterile, because power has passed to men who lack the training which requires a certain amount of wealth to ensure continuity from generation to generation, and to free the mind in part from other tasks. . . . For without culture and holiness, which are always the gift of a very few, a man may
renounce wealth or any other external thing, but he cannot renounce hatred, envy, jealousy, revenge. Culture is the sanctity of the intellect. (AU 489)

As we guess from Yeats's expression ("which are always the gift of a very few"), Yeats also tried to make his case for aristocratic government.

In many ways, his involvement with the theater merely stirred his disillusionment with the present, frustration with colleagues, anger with audiences, and, more than anything else his hatred against petty partisan politics. The Playboy riots affected Yeats so deeply that he developed his class politics by turning to the idea of aristocracy as an antidote to the fanaticism aroused in him by the long battle with middle-class Dublin. Besides, as David Pierce argues, Yeats's experience of the Playboy riots "underlined for Yeats the need not for an audience but for distance" which later developed into a theory of mask.

Yeats wrote about the idea of mask two years after the riots:

To oppose the new ill-breeding of Ireland, which may in a few years destroy all that has given Ireland a distinguished name in the world . . . I can only set up a secondary or interior personality created by me out of the tradition of myself, and this personality (alas, to me only possible in my writings) must be always gracious and simple. It must have that slight separation from immediate interests which makes charm possible, while remaining near enough for fire. (Mem 142)

As far as I am concerned, Yeats's frustration and bitterness due to the attack on the Playboy ultimately led him to redirect his use of the spiritual traditions of the world. That is, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Yeats begins to foreground the disciplining, purifying, and cultivating of mind and soul, patterning the structure of his poems after the
process of religious meditations. Hence, Yeats is moving towards universalism during his middle years, but his pursuit of universal unity is also clouded by his own political agenda of celebrating the virtues of the Anglo-Irish aristocratic class—self-discipline, tradition, holiness, solitude, and the greatness of soul—which indirectly conveys his hatred of the urban Catholic middle class.
CHAPTER 3

YEATS'S REDISCOVERY OF INDIA AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSALISM

In *A Vision* (1937), Yeats writes: “Is that marriage of Europe and Asia a geographical reality? Perhaps, yet the symbolic wheel is timeless and spaceless” (205). Although *A Vision* reflects Yeats’s elaborate system of spiritual thought—reconstructing one’s being and history by integrating two opposing pairs of principles such as self and anti-self, Will and Mask, Creative Mind and Body of Fate, and primary and antithetical—as he suggests here, he also seems to extend his scheme to politics by talking about East and West as part of dichotomous pairs such as yin and yang, objectivity and subjectivity, and sun and moon and their possible fusion. In other words, for Yeats, just as a harmonious integration of Will and Mask, and Creative Mind and Body of Fate leads to the equilibrium of Unity of Being, so a reconciliation of East and West ushers in a millennium. Although Yeats’s attitude towards the possibility of a reconciliation between East and West is somewhat reserved and avoids a definite answer, I believe his expression of the possible marriage of West and East indicates his work on the concept of universalism. The main concern of this chapter is to discuss how his interest in universalism, which had been dormant since his involvement in the Abbey Theater business, was rekindled at this time in his career, and, more significantly, what his pursuit of universalism implies.
My basic argument is that his interest in universalism was resuscitated by his rediscovery of the East through Tagore, whom he met June 1912. At the same time, his political experiences during the 1910s also influenced his pursuit of universalism. I will first discuss the significance of Yeats's fascination with Tagore in relation to the rediscovery of the importance of the East, particularly India, not only for spiritual reasons, but also for political reasons. That is, Tagore ultimately gave Yeats an opportunity to see India as a place to reconcile his split allegiance to both Romanticism and nationalism, and to art and politics. The East, for Yeats, is the place to swerve from his Romantic predecessors for political reasons. At this time, a return to the East was especially important to him because it also offered a psychological vindication for his political setback—being attacked for his anti-nationalism—during the Playboy riots. That is, the pursuit of Eastern values, particularly Indian values, became his way of fighting colonialism, as well as for finding spiritual wholeness. By the time Yeats returned to the East, Yeats also began to witness the most turbulent and dramatic political events of his life such as the 1916 Easter Rising, the Irish and English War, and the Irish Civil War, which Yeats viewed as the culmination of the hatred between political groups and parties. His rediscovery of Eastern values through Tagore and his political experiences at that time slowly led Yeats to develop a concept of universalism: the unity of East and West. In other words, Yeats's continuous movement towards universalism during this period was the necessary and inevitable course to deal with his political experiences: his psychological need to purify the bitterness and hatred Irish politics bred into his mind, and his need to offer a more inclusive political vision to the Irish politicians who fight out of hatred of
opposing parties.

Our discussion of Yeats's gradual movement towards universalism should begin with his meeting with Rabindranth Tagore. In the introduction to Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912), Yeats writes:

I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics—which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. (*E & I* 390)

This passage is a good indication of Yeats's fascination with Tagore. Out of his tremendous respect for the Bengal poet, Yeats not only helped Tagore publish *Gitanjali* (1913) for which he wrote this enthusiastic introduction, but also arranged for the production of Tagore's *The King of the Dark Chamber* at the Little Theatre in London in 1913 and his play *The Post Office* at the Abbey Theater in the same year. Yeats even suggested to Edmund Gosse that Tagore be made a member of the Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature. Yeats's fascination with Tagore and his decision to be a Tagore propagandist involve significant spiritual and political implications, the understanding of which is crucial in following his evolution towards universalism.

Although scholars usually emphasize the spiritual implications of Tagore's influence on Yeats's poetic career, his contribution to Yeats's politics is also significant. In the first place, Yeats's support of Tagore is politically motivated since the Bengal poet represents
the voice of the colonized nation. When Yeats recommended Tagore as a member of the
Academic Committee of the Royal Society of Literature in a letter to Edmund Gosse
dated Nov 25, 1912, Yeats underlined the need to honor India:

I have asked the India Society to send you a copy of Tagore’s poems. Will
you please read it, and think over a suggestion I now make. I think it would be
an imaginative and notable thing for us to elect him to our Committee. He is the
great poet of Bengal though eligible for election because of his English
translation of his work alone. I think from the English point of view too it would
be a fine thing to do, a piece of wise Imperialism, for he is worshipped as no
poet of Europe is... I believe that if we pay him honour, it will be understood
that we honour India also for he is its most famous man to-day. (The Letters
572-3)

Although he foregrounds “a piece of wise Imperialism” as a reason for recommending the
Bengal poet, I believe that this is nothing but rhetoric to persuade the English Gosse. As
he reveals later in the letter, Yeats’s more important reason is to honor India by honoring
Tagore. When he asserts a need to honor India, it is difficult not to see the connection
between India and Ireland, not only because of their cultural and spiritual ties, but also
because of their political situations as British colonies. Yeats’s support of India is
designed to undermine the political position of British colonialism, which he has attacked
over the course of his whole life. In “A General Introduction for My Work” published in
1937, Yeats testifies against the political and intellectual enslavement of Indian people:
Some four or five years ago I was invited to dinner by a London society and
found myself among London journalists, Indian students, and foreign political
refugees. An Indian paper says it was a dinner in my honour; . . . I should have
paid and been paid conventional compliments; then they would speak of the
refugees; from that on all would be lively and topical, foreign tyranny would be
arraigned, England seem even to those confused Indians the protector of liberty;
I grew angrier and angrier; . . . I denounced the oppression of the people of
India; being a man of letters, not a politician, I told how they had been forced to
learn everything, even their own Sanskrit, through the vehicle of English till
the first discoverer of wisdom had become bywords for vague abstract facility. I
begged the Indian writers present to remember that no man can think or write
with music and vigour except in his mother tongue. I turned a friendly audience
hostile, yet when I think of that scene I am unrepentant and angry. (E & I 519-
20)

In a letter to Ethel Mannin dated Feb 11, 1937, Yeats wrote that he even supported a
Fascist nation, if such a country would weaken British imperialism, thereby helping
Indians:

I am an old Fenian and I think the old Fenian in me would rejoice if a Fascist
nation or government controlled Spain, because that would weaken the British
empire, force England to be civil to Indians, perhaps to set them free and loosen
the hand of English finance in the far East of which I hear occasionally. (Letters
881)
Although these were written almost at the end of Yeats's life, his sympathetic attitude towards the colonized countries and his hostility towards the colonizer is consistent throughout his life. From Yeats's point of view, then, to honor India is a way of forming a spiritual alliance with India so that they can establish a common ground of attacking their enemy: the British.

For Yeats, honoring India involves other political and spiritual implications. In his introduction to Gitanjali, Yeats suggests that his admiration for Tagore is due to the fact that the Bengal poet creates a world of which he has dreamed ever since the beginning of his poetic career. This dream world is a world of spiritual companionship between God and common people and the union of sensuality and spirituality, which Yeats describes later in the same essay as the state of wholeness: "A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination" (F & I 392). Yeats reasoned that the glorification of wholeness by Tagore was the product of Indian culture which he called "supreme":

The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few
generations, to the beggar on the roads. (E & I 390)

For Yeats, the Hindu concept of the unity between art and religion was the backbone of the cultural unity of Indian civilization, playing a decisive role in forming what he perceived as the common mind of the Indians. Western civilization, however, had abandoned this idea of unity: “but how can we, who have read so much poetry, seen so many paintings, listened to so much music, where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seem one, forsake it harshly and rudely?” (E & I 392) Although he mentions Blake’s efforts to revive this concept of wholeness in Western culture by saying that “we go for a like voice . . . to William Blake,” he suggests that the English poet could not be a model for his country since Blake “have seemed so alien in our violent history” (E & I 393), implying the colonial relationship between England and Ireland. Naturally enough, Yeats swerved to the East which retained the same concept of the oneness between art and religion which he first learned from his Romantic predecessors whom he wanted to distance himself from for political reasons. Hence, Yeats’s efforts to promote Tagore’s poetic works serve both spiritual and political purposes, not just because Tagore represents the voice of spirituality and that of the colonized country, but also because his poetic world epitomizes the wholeness of a supreme culture which Yeats strives to introduce in Ireland as an antidote to chronic Irish fragmentation.

Yeats’s meeting with Tagore played an important role in the development of Yeats’s spiritual and political views, as well as in his psychological vindication. Tagore’s most important contribution to Yeats was to provide with a vision of India as an imaginary place which enabling the reconciliation between art and nationalism. This is important in
many ways. First of all, by supporting Eastern values, Yeats reaffirms Irish nationalism, redeeming himself from accusations of anti-nationalism by his political opponents during the Playboy riots. For Yeats, the East becomes a place to project his spiritual and political imagination.

After meeting Tagore, therefore, we see that Yeats began to change the direction of his study of spiritual traditions. On the one hand, as Norman Jeffares notes in his W. B. Yeats: A New Biography (1988), Yeats lost his interest in occult symbolism, taking more interest in spiritualism:

The occult symbolism, however, no longer supplied the dynamic he had previously drawn from it and in 1911 he turned to spiritualism with increasing intensity. He wanted evidence that the soul survives the body’s death, that there is another world; also he hoped to get guidance about his own life. His desire for experiment was strong and had led to his leaving the Theosophists. (193)

Yeats’s interest in spiritualism is reflected in his reading of Henry Moore, the seventeenth century Platonist, in his “Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places” (1914) dealing with spiritualism, and in his visit to France with Maud Gonne and Everard Feilding for investigating a modern miracle. On the other hand, after meeting with Tagore, Yeats began to study Eastern thought with renewed energy which was further fueled by Ezra Pound who introduced Yeats to Japanese Noh plays in 1913. Yeats began to study Tantric Buddhism in 1913 which taught him the connection between sexual experiences and the ecstasy of union with the Great Self. In 1914, Yeats read The Yoga System of Patanjali, published with commentaries from Harvard University. 
Although scholars point out that Yeats’s reading of Tantric Buddhism influenced the composition of the Crazy Jane poems, in which he elevates sexuality to the level of holiness (Sankaran Ravindran, W. B. Yeats and Indian Tradition), while his reading of Patanjali’s Yogic system helped him to formulate his four Faculties and Principles in A Vision (Naresh Guha, W. B. Yeats: An Indian Approach), I believe that his study of Eastern thought during 1910s also helps him to understand the importance of meditation (or, yoga) as a way of realizing the process of oneness, as well as the more theoretical aspects of meditation. Yeats’s study of Indian meditation as transmitted by Patanjali (who compiled a practical handbook of very ancient techniques of meditation) deserves our attention since, he soon used his knowledge of meditation in composing his poetry.

As we shall see, his employment of a meditative scheme during his middle period implies a significant change not only in terms of using the spiritual traditions of the world, but also in terms of establishing his political vision of universalism.

By the time Yeats resumed his studies of Eastern thought, he also witnessed the most turbulent and violent political events in Irish and in European modern history. In April 1912 just two months before Yeats met Tagore, the English Liberals introduced a moderate Home Rule Bill, which again divided Ireland into two opposing camps. For the Irish party, then led by John Redmond, the opportunity seemed heaven-sent: Home Rule by legal and parliamentary means. On the other hand, the Ulster Protestants, led by Edward Carson, fanatically opposed Home Rule, fighting for the exclusion of their Six Counties from Home Rule, a position supported by the English Tories. Marie and Conor Cruise O’Brien in A Concise History of Ireland characterize this period as that of bitter
class struggle both in England and Ireland which eventually drifted towards the Irish Civil War. Although Home Rule reached the Statute Book in September 1914, its operation was suspended because of the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. Taking advantage of England’s difficulty during its war against Germany, the IRB planned to strike a blow against England in the spring of 1916, a blow which became known as the Easter Rising. The Easter insurrection eventually led to the Anglo-Irish war (1918-21), and, after the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in December 1921, the Irish found themselves again divided between a Republican Army opposing the Treaty and Free State forces supporting the Treaty. Put simply, the Irish Civil War had begun. Although the Free State government was established in 1922 after the civil war, Ireland still remained divided because the IRA refused to acknowledge the authority of the new government.

During these years of Irish political turbulence, Yeats maintained a somewhat non-committal attitude (until he strongly indicted the British treatment of Ireland in 1920). Even after the Easter Rising, which deeply moved Yeats, his political attitude was somewhat non-committal, puzzling Lady Gregory. In August, the month when Casement was executed, Lady Gregory wrote to him: “I had been a little puzzled by your apparent indifference to Ireland after your excitement about the Rising.” She followed this in September: “I cannot but be glad all this trouble turns you back to Ireland.” However, Yeats reiterated his non-committal attitude towards Irish political situation:

I feel strongly against speaking or writing on the political situation at this moment. I will say nothing unless I find I have something to say which is quite clearly my own thought. I will never take any position in life where I have to
speak but half my mind & I feel that both sides are responsible for this whirlpool of hate. Besides only action counts or can count till there is some change.  

He wrote poems such as "Easter 1916," "Sixteen Dead Men," "The Rose Tree," "On a Political Prisoner" which have the most explicit bearing on contemporary politics. "Easter 1916" registers paradox and ambiguity which can be viewed as another mark of his non-committal attitude. As David Lloyd aptly points out in "The Poetics of Politics: Yeats and the Founding of the State," the image of the stone in "Easter 1916" gestures at once towards the grave stone—a terminus for both nation and poet—and towards the foundation stone, which is a more benign, forward-looking trope. According to Elizabeth Cullingford, Yeats's non-committal attitude "was not the result of indifference to human suffering, but deliberate Irish policy." That is, "had he written a war poem it would have placed him on Redmond's side in the recruiting controversy," and he had no desire to act as a propagandist for the Irish Parliamentary Party. Nor, however, did he identify himself with the anti-recruiting and pro-German stance of Pearce." Conor Cruise O'Brien aligns Yeats's act of prudence (delaying the publication of "Easter 1916," "Sixteen Dead Men," "The Rose Tree," and "On a Political Prisoner until 1920) with his political calculation and David Pierce sees merit in the argument that Yeats delayed the publication of the four political poems "for fear of fueling the situation" since "his historic task since the fall of Parnell was to free 'Irish literature and criticism from politics'."  

Yeats's non-committal attitude towards Irish politics can also be discussed in another context. On one level, Yeats tries to refrain from supporting a certain party because of his earlier bitter political experience. For this reason, he tends to choose an indirect way of
expressing his political opinion: turning to East and supporting India. On another level, Yeats sees the necessity of providing a bigger political vision which can function as an antidote to the toxic effects of partisan politics, given his observation that these political movements were held together more by what they hated than by what they loved. Hence, his non-committal attitude finds its political expression in the form of universalism, suggesting a reconciliation of East and West. By turning to universalism, Yeats attempts not only to purify his own bitter feelings about politics, but also to heal deep-seated antagonisms between two opposing forces. To promote universalism, Yeats turns to a meditative pattern for the structure of some of his poetry during this middle period because meditation means a practical way of achieving the process of wholeness (universal unity), an example of the kind of practicality that Yeats believed Ireland needed during the time of Civil War. As I will demonstrate later in detail, however, the same meditative scheme he employed to pursue his idea of universalism sometimes implicitly betrays his Anglo-Irish bias against the Catholic middle class, thereby making himself vulnerable to the criticism of double dealing.

*Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917) is an expression of Yeats's attempts at purification and reconciliation. In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* Yeats first deals with the idea of the mask and the anti-self intended to protect himself from the criticism of his political enemies, and then writes about the universal mind as a way of healing his personal bitterness, as well as the problem of Irish divisiveness. At the end of the first part of the essay which he titled "Anima Hominis," Yeats mentions the role of the mask as a way of protecting himself: "A poet when he is growing old, will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision
without new bitterness, new disappointment” (342). In “Anima Mundi,” written as a second major part of the essay, Yeats’s idea of the universal mind functions in a similar fashion. The second essay begins:

I have always sought to bring my mind close to the mind of Indian and Japanese poets, old women in Connacht, mediums in Soho, lay brothers whom I imagine dreaming in some mediaeval monastery the dreams of their village, learned authors who refer all to antiquity; to immerse it in the general mind where that mind is scarce separable from what we have begun to call ‘the subconscious’; to liberate it from all that comes of councils and committees, . . . (MY 343).

Here Yeats talks about his desire to realize oneness in mind or what he calls “the general mind,” dissolving all the differences in the world: space, time, gender, and class. His pursuit of the universal mind results from his need to find a common ground which can dissolve differing political opinions (“to liberate it from all that comes of councils and committees”) which always lead to vicious slanders and fights. More significantly, he later connects his experience of oneness as a way to free himself from his feeling of hatred:

It may be an hour before the mood passes, but latterly I seem to understand that I enter upon it [Anima Mundi] the moment I cease to hate. I think the common condition of our life is hatred—I know that this is so with me—irritation with public or private events or persons. (MY 365)

It is unmistakable that Yeats celebrates the idea of universal mind as a way of purifying his hatred caused by political experiences. His desire for universalism is again emphasized at the end of the essay: “Have not my thoughts run through a like round, though I have
not found my tradition in the Catholic Church, which was not the Church of my childhood, but where the tradition is, as I believe, more universal and more ancient?’ (MY 368-9)

In “If I Were Four-and-Twenty” (1919), Yeats again pitches his idea of universalism, but his political project of universalism is somewhat tarnished by advocating the privileged role of aristocracy at the end of the essay. When Yeats wrote “If I were Four-and-Twenty,” one year before he publicly came back to Irish politics, there is no denying that Yeats suggested universalism as one political vision to which Ireland should look. Yeats begins the essay with his most frequently quoted dictum: ‘Hammer your thoughts into unity.’ When he was twenty-three or twenty-four, Yeats’s concept of unity was expressed as the unity between literature, religion, and nationalism which I have discussed in the first chapter. At this point, Yeats again sees the importance of such unity for an Ireland that makes “our priests and our politicians distrust one another” because of their distinctions between political thought and religious thought (264). Here he again asks Ireland to turn to the idea of unity; Yeats’s principle of unity, however, reflects that his consciousness has expanded from nationalism to universalism, as he suggests:

I would try to create a type of man whose most moving religious experience, though it came to him in some distant county, and though his intellect wholly personal, would bring with it imagery to connect it with an Irish multitude now and in the past time. (EX 267-8)

Yeats wants to create a citizen of the universe whose consciousness transcends the distinction between one and many, present and past, and East and West. Although he does not directly say East and West, his mention of “some distant country” may point to
India, while "an Irish multitude" represents the West. At the end of the essay, however, his tone slips into a gray area by championing the virtue and gift of a selected people:

With Christianity came the realisation that a man must surrender his particular will to an implacable will, not his, though within his, and perhaps we are restless because we approach a realisation that our general will must surrender itself to another will within it, interpreted by certain men, at once economists, patriots, and inquisitors. As all realisation is through opposites, men coming to believe the subjective opposite of what they do and think, we may be about to accept the most implacable authority the world has known. (EX 279-80)

It goes without saying that Yeats has the Anglo-Irish aristocratic class in mind when he talks about "certain men" and "the most implacable authority." This connection is easily evidenced by a reading of his poems written after 1919. So he wrote in "The Tower":

The pride of people that were
Bound neither to Cause nor to State
Neither to slaves that were spat on,
Nor to the tyrants that spat,
The people of Burke . . .

(VP ll. 128-32)

Yeats's celebration of autocracy and aristocracy is again repeated in "Meditations in Time of Civil War":

Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,
Life overflows without ambitious pains
And rains down life until the basin spills,
And mounts more dizzy high the more it rains,
As though to choose whatever shape it wills,
And never stoop to a mechanical,
Or servile shape, at others beck and call.

(VP ll. 1-8)

As we see in the Coole Park poems and in "Modern Ireland" (which I will discuss in the next chapter), Yeats implicitly and explicitly associates the gifts and virtues of aristocracy and autocracy with the Protestant aristocratic tradition represented by Lady Gregory, Parnell, and himself.

Poems such as "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes," "Sailing to Byzantium," "Among School Children," and "Byzantium," written after 1919 express Yeats's universalist idea of reconciling East and West employing a meditative scheme. However, a reading of these meditative poems in relation to other poems written in the same period such as "The Wild Swan at Coole," "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," and "A Prayer for my Daughter" shows that Yeats's outcry for universalism is sometimes undermined by his glorification of the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition and virtues. Here I will first discuss how the meditative poems convey Yeats's universalism, and show how the same poems betray his conflicting political agenda.
As we will see, "The Double Vision" "Among School Children" and Byzantium poems embody Yeats's philosophy of writing (the unity of literature, religion, and nationalism), but the way he fuses these three basic interests of his life and his ultimate goal of their fusion has evolved from the more narrow methods and goals of his early years. Unlike his earlier method which I have discussed in the first two chapters, Yeats patterned the basic structure of the poem after meditation to express a fusion between literature (poetry) and religion (meditation), suggesting that the goal of the poem or meditation is to achieve the process of wholeness—a mystical vision, which includes a reconciliation of East and West. So far, scholars have tended to discuss Yeats's poems in the context of Western meditative traditions. Bornstein identifies "The Double Vision" as a greater Romantic lyric reflecting the Romantic meditative process, which Meyer Abrams defines as an out-in-out pattern. Louis Martz, on the other hand, places "Sailing to Byzantium," and "Byzantium" in a three step Christian meditative procedure which he calls "composition of place," "analysis," and "colloquy." My belief is that it is also possible to discuss the meditative process of Yeats's poems in the context of Eastern meditation, more specifically, Indian meditation or yogic meditation, which Yeats not only practiced from his youth, but also studied through The Yoga System of Patanjali. The point I am trying to make is that Yeats tried to universalize a meditative structure by fusing Western and Eastern meditative elements.

Before discussing the poem's Indian meditative stages, we first need to understand the basic process of yogic meditation and its goal as expounded by Patanjali. Yogic meditation consists of ten-step techniques each of which is specifically designed to train
the physiological and spiritual part of the meditator to liberate the person from the bondage of human life. The point of departure of yogic meditation is concentration on a single object which is called *ekagrata*. The meditation then proceeds into the next key steps: the training of the attitudes and positions of the body (*asana*), controlling of respiratory rhythm or breathing technique (*pranayama*), the emancipation of sensory activity from the mastery of external objects (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana*) which finally leads to *samadhi*, or the experience of oneness. It is unnecessary and beyond the scope of this study to explain what each of these different stages means. What is important for our discussion of Yeats’s use of this meditative scheme in his poetry is to understand what the beginning (*ekagrata*), the middle (*asana, pranayama*, etc.) and the end (*samadhi*) stands for because Yeats employed these three steps in his meditative poetry. My point is that Yeats’s meditative poetry is basically an aesthetic rendering of a meditative process based upon his understanding of the meaning of each phase.

The beginning step of meditation (*ekagrata*) is intended to correct the present confused state of human consciousness. According to Patanjali, human consciousness is basically passive and is controlled by psychomental automatisms, sensations, associations, and memory. Even human intellectual efforts are considered to be passive because one allows oneself to be thought by objects which is very similar to a Marxist view of human being. In addition, ordinary human consciousness tends to make an object distinct from the subject, constantly creating a world of duality and destroying the original paradise in which man had lived in the state of oneness. The act of dividing and separating is viewed by Eastern religious leaders as the source of human suffering. The first duty of the
meditator is to re-claim his body by redirecting his thinking process in such a way as to control his consciousness by practicing ekagrata. The act of concentrating on a single object is the initiating step towards the rediscovery of the original unity, the Great Self. The main goal of the beginning step thus can be talked about in the context of understanding the problems of the human condition and of clearing up the sources of confusion. The second step consists of various techniques which help the meditator to control human consciousness. Indian psychology recognizes four modalities of consciousness: waking consciousness, sleeping consciousness with dreams, sleeping consciousness without dreams, and consciousness beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, or the state of the Great Self. For ordinary persons there is a discontinuity among these various modalities; the yogi should preserve the continuity of consciousness, penetrating each of these states. In other words, asana is the first concrete step taken with a view to the abolition of the modalities of human consciousness. The third step is the end of meditation: the experience of the state of fourth consciousness or the Great Self where antinomies dissolve. At this moment, the meditator steps outside the profane modality of existence and begins to become autonomous in relation to the cosmos; he is no longer troubled by outer tensions, in fact has gone beyond opposites, he is equally insensitive to heat and to cold, to light and to darkness; sensory activity no longer projects him outward toward the objects of the senses; the psychomental stream is no longer governed by distractions, automatisms, and memory. In brief, he achieves the goal of meditation: what Patanjali calls "the absolute cessation of agitation by opposites." The Siva Puranas tells us that the successful mastering of meditation invites the vision of the
Dancer, a symbol of cosmic unity:

After speaking to the yogins, the blessed supreme lord began to dance, revealing his supernatural divine nature. The yogins witnessed the lord Mahadeva, the ultimate abode of splendor, dancing with Visnu in the cloudless sky. They saw that lord of creatures who is really known only by those yogins who have mastered the principles of Yoga. The brahmins watched the dance of the universal soul himself, the god who impels the world and who is the source of the universal illusion. It was indeed the lord of creatures whom they saw dancing, at the recollection of whose lotus feet one loses all fear born of ignorance. They witness that Yogin whom yogins behold as light, those meditators who are always alert and serene, who have mastered their breath and are filled with devotion.¹⁹

For the convenience of my discussion, I will call the three-step meditative process confusion, immersion, and union. The beginning step is confusion—meditation is designed to eliminate mental confusion or spiritual chaos which is the result of the passivity of human consciousness and its tendency to divide and separate. The second step is immersion in meditation where one tries to penetrate his four modalities of consciousness to eliminate multiplicity and fragmentation, to reintegrate, to unify, and to totalize. The meditator sets out on his meditative journey into his body and mind to search for clues. The third step is the experience of union. Although these three account for the basic steps of meditation, I will add one more step—return—to the process to explain that the meditator returns to his origin as a more mature person (who is often
referred to as Bodhisattva) blessed with the power to save his fellow human beings.

Let me first analyze “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” (1919). So far, major Yeats critics—Ellmann, Bloom, Henn, and Bornstein—have analyzed “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” in the context of *A Vision*, focusing on the poet’s attempt to fuse phase one and phase fifteen which he designates as conflicting states: antithetical and primary, death and life, and plasticity and complete beauty. What has not been recognized is that the poem is patterned after a meditative process in which Yeats’s meditator-persona sets out on a meditative journey to experience the fourth state of consciousness. Yeats intends this spiritual quest to imply his political message by equating the process of expanding the limitation of human consciousness with that of enlarging a political vision: from nationalism to universalism. The setting of meditation is chosen in order to incorporate the element of nationalism, and the meditator’s final destination is expressed in the form of reconciliation not only between antinomies but also between East and West. As we shall see, however, for Yeats, the state of wholeness (or, the idea of universalism) is placed beyond human ability, a testimony to his skepticism about transcendentalism.

The first part of the poem reminds us of the first stage of meditation—confusion—without an understanding of which a process of meditation cannot be initiated. “The Double Vision” begins with the state of confusion of spiritual darkness:

On the grey rock of Cashel the mind’s eye
Has called up the cold spirits that are born
When the old moon is vanished from the sky
And the new still hides her horn.

(VP ll. 1-4)

This is the scene of elemental chaos where total darkness prevails. Yeats continues:

Under blank eyes and fingers never still
The particular is pounded till it is man,
When had I my own will?
Oh, not since life began.

(VP ll. 5-8)

The meditator tries to come to terms with his mental chaos, confusion, and spiritual darkness. His mental chaos is also related to the lifeless state which deprives him of his will reminiscent of the total passivity of human consciousness. His rebirth as a new person with his own will will enable him to illuminate darkness and set aside his confusion. Until then, the state of chaos goes on:

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

(VP ll. 9-12)

Here we have the state of confusion which is associated with existence without either will (“obedient”), or consciousness (“Knowing not evil and good”). The meditator maintains his living death, because the cold spirits “do not even feel, so abstract are they, / So dead beyond our death.”
In the first section of "The Double Vision," it is also crucial to notice that the meditator's initiation into a meditative journey—consciousness of one's confusion—begins at a place: "On the Grey rock of Cashel." In fact, this beginning with a specific place or symbolic landscape is in keeping with one of the basic paradigms of a meditative poem (based upon Western meditation) which Louis Martz calls "a composition of place" in *The Poetry of Meditation*. (In a sense, the incorporation of an element of Western meditative structure into "The Double Vision" is Yeats's attempt to universalize the structural basis of the poem.) A beginning with a description of a particular place is a symbolic expression of the first meditative stage. The physicality of landscape symbolizes the limited state of a human being from which the meditator tries to escape to attain the experience of the unlimited state or the Unity of Being. Yeats’s choice of a setting, however, is distinctive in that the Grey rock of Cashel has two important functions in the poem as an image of unity and nationalism. First, Yeats chooses "the grey rock of Cashel" as a setting because the ancient stone retains the image of unity. In "Cashel Revisited: W. B. Yeats: 'The Double Vision of Michael Robartes,'" Carmel Jordan maintains that "the grey rock of Cashel" signifies cultural union (16). Jordan explains Cashel as a landscape symbolic of union because the magnificent Cashel round tower epitomizes not only the union between soaring human imagination and artistic perfection, but also the union of pagan and Christian religion. The image of union reflected in the ancient stone can be connected to the dissolution of duality which the meditator strives to achieve to clear his confusion. Second, the Rock of Cashel is at once a symbol of the spiritual and artistic outburst of the Irish Byzantium and Irish cultural renaissance of
In other words, Cashel signifies the glory of ancient Irish culture which Yeats chose to represent his belief in nationality: "I had a conviction, which indeed I have still, that one's verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colours of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportion" (E & I 5). Hence, Yeats's reason to choose the Rock of Cashel as his setting for meditation is twofold. First, the spiritual goal of meditation—a realization of unity—is hinted from the beginning. Second, by encapsulating the goal in a symbol of the ancient Irish glory, Yeats also sends his political message: the promotion of the cultural unity as symbolized by ancient Ireland. As the poem progresses, we see the concept of unity expand from the level of nation to that of the world.

The second section of the poem starts with the meditator's search for a clue to solve his confusion, a search which I call "immersion," and ends with a vision that parallels the third stage in meditation. Here, the meditator first comes to see the faint trace of the unified image he needs for rebirth. First, he sees "A Sphinx," and "A Buddha":

On the grey rock of Cashel I suddenly saw
A Sphinx with woman breast and lion paw,
A Buddha, hand at rest,
Hand lifted up that blest;

(YP II. 17-20)

Next he sees:

And right between these two a girl at play
That it may be had danced her life away,
For now being dead it seemed
That she of dancing dreamed.

(VP ll. 21-4)

Here, the image of the Dancer provides the meditator with a key to his confusion. It is worth noticing that he sees the Dancer “by the moon’s light / Now at its fifteenth night” which indicates the loss of conflict, according to Yeats’s esoteric book, A Vision. In other words, the girl reconciles conflicting forces—the Sphinx and the Buddha—which leads to a complete unity both in spiritual and political terms.

As Yeats suggests in the next two stanzas, the reconciliation of “a Sphinx” and “a Buddha” implies the unity of conflicting forces: intellect and love. The Sphinx, as the Grecian image of the female Sphinx, represents reason and intellect:

One lashed her tail; her eyes lit by the moon
Gazed upon all things known, all things unknown,
In triumph of intellect
With motionless head erect.

(VP ll. 29-32)

On the other hand, “a Buddha” represents intuition and love:

That other’s moonlit eyeballs never moved,
Being fixed on all things loved, all things unloved,
Yet little peace he had
For those that love are sad.
Yeats's primary concern is the spiritual unity between intellect and love through the reconciling image of the Dancer. Love and intellect should be integrated because love without intellect is fertile but blind; intellect without love is intelligent but sterile.

Furthermore, he extends the idea of unity to a politics of universalism since "a Sphinx" and "a Buddha" also symbolize Western civilization and Eastern civilization, respectively. The harmonious reconciliation of the two invites the power of salvation. Gradually, the meditator comes close to the state of unmoved moving which is nicely expressed by the image of a spinning-top.

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.

Finally, the eighth stanza of the second section highlights the experience of oneness:

In contemplation had those three so wrought
Upon a moment, and so stretched it out
That they, time overthrown,
Were dead yet flesh and bone.

Yeats's image of "time overthrown," suggests that the operation of the meditator's mind should be free from the limitation of finite being. Only in a timeless state can the
mediator attain the mystical marriage of dichotomous factors. The image of the Dancer who reconciles a Sphinx and a Buddha transcends time ("time overthrown") and overcomes the duality of life and death ("they were dead, yet flesh and bone"). Through this paradoxical expression, like the mystics of the great religions, Yeats indicates the blissful state of union between intellect and love, as well as between West and East.

The third section of "The Double Vision" is loosely similar to the fourth stage in meditation in terms of dealing with the meditator's return to the mundane world. The return stage in meditation points to the meditator's success in transforming the experience of union into self-awakening, but this poem demonstrates that the meditator cannot translate the vision into enlightenment. The vision of the Dancer instead disorients him. Initially, the contact with the vision allows the meditator to experience physical exhilaration: "A crazy juice that makes the pulses beat." But such a joyous moment is completely depreciated since it is linked with his frustration:

As though I had been undone

By Homer's Paragon

\((VP II. 55-6)\)

His frustration is followed by a mental lapse: "To such a pitch of folly I am brought." After the return, he finds himself again being trapped between duality:

Being caught between the pull

Of the dark moon and the full,

\((VP II. 59-60)\)
Although the meditator ultimately fails to achieve spiritual freedom, his glimpse of the vision of the Dancer expands his consciousness:

The commonness of thought and images

That have the frenzy of our western seas.

\[(VP \text{ ll. 61-2})\]

This “commonness” is completely different from the commonness of the meditator before experiencing the vision because after this experience it has “the frenzy of our western seas.” which is powerful enough to sweep the earth. With his new awareness of the tension between oneness and duality, the meditator arranges his experience in a song.

Employing a three step meditative process as a basic structure of “The Double Vision,” Yeats dramatizes the transformation of the meditator’s consciousness from confusion to union, although he cannot free himself from skepticism about the transcendental state. Yeats’s spiritual quest is fused with his political consciousness: the expansion from nationalist consciousness to universalist consciousness by reconciling West and East.

“Among School Children” is another great example of Yeats’s pursuit of the unity between art, religion, and universalism (which he substitutes for nationalism) which he encapsulates in the form of meditative poetry. As with “The Double Vision,” the persona-meditator moves from the problems of this world (confusion) to their solution (union), but the culminating moment of meditation is ambiguous: disappointment from not achieving the process of union and/or affirmation of an ecstatic experience of oneness.\textsuperscript{26} As we shall see, a perfect balance between skepticism and optimism testifies to Yeats’s ambivalence towards a transcendental state.
The first stanza of "Among School Children" is modeled after the first stage of meditation, setting up the poet's sense of physical limitation (confusion) as an object for contemplation. Yeats's use of the schoolroom, along with his choice of language and present tense, nicely supports the image of the physical domain of a human being as human limitation. It is significant to notice that Yeats intertwines literal meaning with symbolic meaning through his skillful description of the setting in the first stanza.

To begin with, the schoolroom literally refers to part of the real school which Yeats visited. We know that the school in the poem is the Philip Street National School, which Yeats as an Irish senator visited on a Monday morning in February 1926. Hence, what we have here is a realistic picture of a scene in which we see that the poet walks questioning, a kind old nun replies, and the children learn. Needless to say, the use of present tense helps to form the lively atmosphere of the setting. By portraying the real place and actual experiences in the present tense, Yeats establishes in the beginning of the poem the reality of this present life.

A closer examination of the meaning of the real place, however, leads us to see its symbolic implications. That is, the place ("the long schoolroom") has the generic sense of physicality, corporeality, and confinement. The image of physicality and corporeality of place is a symbolic manifestation of the corporeal domain of a human body, which is subject to decomposition. In addition, the image of an enclosed space solidifies the atmosphere of psychological and mental limitation. The image of the place as the finite state of a human being is also nicely reinforced by the poet's careful choice of language for the first stanza. Almost all the words in the beginning stanza are very specific, concrete,
objective, lucid, and simple ("the long schoolroom," "a kind old nun," "the children," "a public man," "walk," "replies," "learn," and "stare upon"). The specificity and concreteness of these words not only helps to form a vivid setting, but also contributes to the image of physicality and palpability, which is associated with an idea of limitation.

The use of present tense in the opening stanza, in addition to making the setting lively, vivid, and immediate, also strengthens the image of human limitation. Present tense itself points to limitation because it confines human experience within the boundary of the present, blocking a human being's aspiration to transcend time. Thus, present tense in "Among School Children" plays the metaphorical role of placing real but limited experiences in a cage, implied by "a schoolroom." Not only does the moment of present limit our experience within the now, but it also significantly confines our experience by forcing us to think in a dualistic way. That is to say, as long as we are governed by this present moment, we are destined to be controlled by a principle of duality. That is, we live in a world in which we have to deal with life and death, body and soul, movement and stasis, and the masculine and the feminine. Needless to add, this division is one of the main sources of human suffering and limitation. In "Among School Children," the sense of duality is clearly stated: "--the children's eyes / In momentary wonder stare upon / A sixty-year-old smiling public man." The presence of young children forces the poet to think about his old age. The introduction of a pair of duality--young and old--at this point seems to highlight the poet's consciousness of limitation.

Setting up the place as an embodiment of human limitation (the physical limitation of the human body and a psychological sense of being caged in an enclosed space) in the
introductory stanza leads the meditator to move toward the next step: how to transcend such a human domain. As we see in the poem, the meditator begins a meditative journey, contemplating the problem of limitation—the finite state of a human being, the problem of duality in this life, and the imprisoning role of time—in an effort to search for a clue by which he might transcend human limitation.

Stanzas two through seven echo the second step of meditation (immersion in one’s consciousness). As human beings cannot overcome their psychological weakness, so the poet is frustrated and disappointed to face the harsh reality that he cannot transcend physicality. Briefly analyzing stanzas two to seven, we see that the meditator contemplates four different antinomies which can be linked to the dichotomous elements of youth and age in the first stanza. First (stanzas two through four), the meditator dwells upon the relationship between the male and female which critics regard as an allusion to his relationship with Maud Gonne. Second (stanza five), he comes upon the world of true love between mother and son; this relationship implies another duality: creator and creation. Third (stanza six), he enters into the world of philosophy, suggesting another pair of dichotomous elements: creators (philosophers) and creations (their own system of philosophies). Fourth (stanza seven), he reaches towards the religious world in which we see another dichotomy: worshipper and worshipped ("both nuns and mothers worship images"). Whenever he contemplates antinomies, however, he experiences heart-break because of the fundamental limitation of the body: flesh decays as time passes. Hence, all his contemplation ends with the image of an "old scarecrow," "with sixty or more winters on its head," and "old clothes upon old sticks." At the end of the seventh
stanza, consequently, he writes that all human beings (nuns, mothers, philosophers, and the poet) are mocked by their Platonic ideals, which, in Yeats's expression, are “self-born mockers.”

The last stanza is a recapitulation of the third stage of meditation (union), indicating the final step to spiritual rebirth, although the last sentence points to Yeats's ambivalence about the possibility of realization of oneness. So, the eighth stanza begins with paradoxes in an attempt to convey the state of timelessness or what Yeats calls “time thrown” in “The Double Vision,” a condition for reaching into the state of oneness. The first line, “Labor is blossoming or dancing,” implies a paradoxical state since labor implies physical toil, relating back to the second line, “The body is not bruised.” The paradoxical state is possible only where there are none of the antinomies of human existence. In this world, the body is sacrificed to please soul; beauty is the product of agony or despair; human wisdom comes out of long, endless nights. That is to say, this world is governed by the fundamental principle of duality. We have the young because of the old. In this world, you cannot have both body and soul. However, outside of this world of time, you can have both because you don't have to bruise the body to please the soul. In this state, labour (agony) becomes dancing (trance), as we see at the end of “Byzantium.” Reaching the paradoxical state, the meditator sees a vision of unity. Yeats declares: “O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer, / Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?/ O body swayed to music, O brightening glance.” It is impossible to call the leaf a chestnut-tree. Only in the integration of the three things—a leaf, a blossom, and a bole—can we call it a chestnut-tree. Likewise, we should see and have life not as a part but as a whole. If we harmonize
oppositions such as body and soul, we get what Buddhists call "a third eye" with which we can see life as a unified process. Yeats carefully builds up the images to prepare for his final moment of meditation: an experience of oneness. However, Yeats reveals ambivalence toward the possibility of achieving the ecstatic process by writing: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" If we take this sentence as a rhetorical question, this line declares Yeats's affirmation of reaching the process of oneness. On the other hand, the same line states frustration and dismay rather than works as a triumphant affirmation. The answer to his meditative journey, given by means of the question about the dancer, is that there is really no help: we will never "know the dancer from the dance."

Yeats's two Byzantium poems ("Sailing to Byzantium" (1927), and "Byzantium" (1930)) also communicate universalism. Although scholars see the importance of the meaning of Byzantium in interpreting the two poems, they tend to equate Byzantium with a timeless aesthetic realm in which the poet accomplishes artistic completion. However, in my view, the world of art is but a part of Byzantium. In A Vision, Yeats himself reveals the true nature of Byzantium: "I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one" (279). For Yeats, hence, Byzantium stands for the unity of art and religion which can perform a practical function of saving the world. In addition, Yeats's choice of Byzantium as a model place also suggests his universalist consciousness, given that Byzantium is the place where the difference between East and West dissolves. Hence, Yeats's sailing to Byzantium epitomizes his efforts to pursue the unity of art, religion, and universalism (which he substitutes for nationalism).
Unlike "The Double Vision," in which the fusion of art and religion is expressed in the form of meditative poetry, the two Byzantium poems blur the difference between art and religion by equating the deifying moment of spiritual union with the power of artistic imagination. In other words, the meditator of the Byzantium poems moves towards the moment of the fourth consciousness, to rebirth as an enlightened artist ("the golden smithies of the Emperor")\textsuperscript{40} transcending time ("what is past, or passing, or to come")\textsuperscript{41} and space ("Byzantium"). Hence, the meditator's quest for unity also implies Yeats's more inclusive political principle: universalism. By depicting the enlightened artist as helpless in the last stanza of "Byzantium," however, Yeats raises a question as to the saving power of oneness, betraying his skepticism about the use of transcendence. Because both "Sailing to Byzantium" and "Byzantium" are patterned after the process of meditation,\textsuperscript{42} it may be redundant to discuss both poems' meditative pattern, so I will concentrate on the latter which I believe is not only more faithful to the four step meditative process, but also more rich in its suggestive meanings.

The first stanza of "Byzantium" exhibits some typical features related to the meditative scheme. It also begins with the description of a specific place (a starlit or moonlit dome of Byzantium) and a state of confusion ("the unpurged images of day," "drunken soldiery," "all mere complexities," and "the fury and the mire of human veins").\textsuperscript{43} The negative connotation of these words is sharply contrasted with the positive image of a simple circle (a starlit or a moonlit dome) which Yeats inserts as the goal of meditation. That is, the meditator strives to purge these images of confusion by achieving
the process of oneness. Thus, in the first stanza, we have a familiar setting as the
foreground of meditation in terms of a specific place, confusion, and a hint for a solution.

The second to the fourth stanzas are analogous to the second stage (immersion) and
the third stage (union or seeing the vision) of meditation. As meditation begins, the
meditator tries to grasp the image which floats from his mind. He is not sure about the
exact nature of that image:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
Shade more than man, more image than a shade;

(VP II. 9-10)

The meditator’s verbal expression cannot convey the exact image which operates in his
meditative world. Thus, he falters; his language cannot exactly signify whether it is image
or shade or man. The meditator’s effort to capture the image in language means his acts
of redirecting his consciousness in such a way as to control it. As is the case with Michael
Robartes, the meditator gradually catches the image of the ghost with the aid of a
symbolic clue:

For Hades’ bobbin bound in mummy cloth
May unwind the winding path,
A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
Breathless mouths may summon;

(VP II. 11-4)

The ambiguity of the first two lines can lead us to interpret them in either a negative or
positive way. These lines may connote in “Hades’ bobbin” the predicament of the poet
who is trapped in the two opposing gyres. Yet, as Unterecker suggests, "Hades' bobbin" indicates "the purified spirit which has already unwound the winding path of its human incarnations." And he speculates that the image of the ghost "may breathlessly summon the breathless mouths of those spirits about to be freed from life's complexity and the round of reincarnations." Similarly, Whitaker remarks that "the speaker moves on his winding path or whirlpool-turning toward the timeless, through the sea of generation toward the condition of fire, which descends to meet him by way of its own gyre or winding path." I would further affirm these positive interpretations by associating "Hades' bobbin" with the fourth self, or the Great Self which the meditator strives to penetrate. Hades is the classical underworld to which spirits pass after death. By Hades, Yeats seems to mean a spiritual life after death. The spirit escapes from the bondage of time (bound) by unwinding "the winding path." The Great Self comes into being when the meditator escapes the limitation of time. The ghost-like image summons the meditator to enter the world of the Great Self by his "breathless mouths." The meditator tries to respond to the summons of the ghost, endeavoring to proceed into the fourth stage.

When he finally seizes the image, he comes to see a vision of unity. Here, the vision of unity is expressed as a mummy because the mummy integrates life and death. The mummy in this poem is dead, yet alive. When the mummy is bound in mummy-cloth, it is dead. But, the meditator sees the mummy unwind the winding path meaning the mummy cloth. Moreover, the mummy summons the meditator with its breathless mouth. In this living/dead mummy, the meditator captures the image of the superhuman transcending the limitation of life and death. The image of the superhuman may be linked with that of the
Dancer. The dissolution of dichotomous elements is the moment of mystical marriage which perplexes human logic and understanding. The contact with the mystical union of death and life, as we see in meditative stage three, invites miracle (the liberation from the restraint of time), creative power, rebirth, and the ability to bless. In this poem, the meditator dwells upon the moment of miracle and rebirth longer than in other poems by stretching it from stanzas three to four. To begin with, the meditator experiences a "Miracle," a freedom from the limitation of time, because "Miracle" scorns "aloud / In glory of changeless metal." After "Miracle" comes a "bird" which can crow "like the cocks of Hades." As D. J. Gordon and Ian Fletcher comment, the image of a "bird" seems to be linked with the idea of rebirth. And finally, the meditator can tap the artistic creativity implied by "golden handiwork," which is eternal, reigns over nature, and scorns "all complexities of mire or blood."

In the fourth stanza, the meditator finally attains his enlightening rebirth, which is again expressed through paradoxes. Thus, most of the poetic diction in the fourth stanza indicates paradoxical ideas:

Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,

Dying into a dance,

An agony of trance,

An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

(VP II. 26-32)
Here we have paradoxical fire which burns without fuel. We also have such paradoxical expressions as “Dying into a dance” and “an agony of trance.” And a final paradox: a flame which “cannot singe.” In this poem, the image of fire reinforces the enlightened state of the meditator. The function of fire, as Yeats reveals in his Diary, is to purify. However, the image of fire operates on another symbolic level: the moment of ecstasy which the meditator feels when being purified. Having studied the history of meditation, Willard Johnson connects the rise of meditation with the image of fire:

I imagine these long-distance proto-human ancestors of ours being drawn into the dancing flames of their fires, being entranced by their protector and falling into the first ecstatic state, the first ‘meditatively’ altered states of consciousness. That so many early religious used fire in ritual and symbolism confirms the powerful sway this element holds over human consciousness, a remnant of those first confrontations with this mystery revealing “substance.”

Gaston Bachelard, the French phenomenological philosopher, echoes Johnson’s idea. Bachelard analyzes the psychological impact of fire in The Psychoanalysis of Fire:

We are almost certain that fire is precisely the first object, the first phenomenon, on which the human mind reflected; among all phenomena, fire alone is sufficiently prized by prehistoric man to wake in him the desire for knowledge, and this mainly because it accompanies in him the desire for love. No doubt it has often been stated that the conquest of fire definitely separated man from the animal, but perhaps it has not been noticed that the mind in its
primitive state, together with its poetry and its knowledge, had been developed in meditation before a fire.⁴⁹

Although it is not easy to verify these hypotheses about the relationship between fire and meditation, these scholars' explanations provide a plausible rationale for the origin of meditation. Apart from the validity of these ideas, we can think of the fire image as an apt carrier of the notion of ecstasy, which the meditator experiences when he reaches the process of unity. From that moment on, "all complexities of fury" of the human world disappear. There no longer exists a difference between the agony of death and the trance of dance because agony is trance. The meditator is reborn as a result of meeting the superhuman or Purusa who, like the Dancer, reconciles death and life.

Finally, the last stanza is based upon the final stage of meditation (return). The images of the "flood," and the "dolphin-torn" and "gong-tormented sea" of the last stanza are connected to the unpurged images of this world and great cathedral gong of the first stanza, the beating of which could torment or disturb. Here, however, the meditator sees it impossible to save the world from suffering, a testimony to Yeats's skepticism about the power of transcendence. The final stanza begins with:

A straddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,

Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,

The golden smithies of the Emperor,

Marbles of the dancing floor

Break bitter furies of complexity,
It is worth noticing that this poem ends with the image of troubled water ("the flood"), a
dolphin, and enlightened artist ("the golden smithies of the Emperor"), a Yeatsian
combination of Western and Eastern elements. The troubled water represents the idea of
suffering of this world which Yeats alludes to the unpurged imagery in the beginning
stanza. The role of the enlightened artist is compared to that of dolphins. That is, just as
dolphins play the mystical role of escorting the dead to the Islands of the Blest ("astraddle
on the dolphin's mire and blood / Spirit after spirit"), so the enlightened artist could
purify the unpurged image of the world ("The smithies break the flood"). This image
unmistakably points to Bodhisattva whose role is described in Vajradvaga Sutra:

For with the help of the boat of the thought of all-knowledge, I must rescue all
these beings from the stream of Samsara, which is so difficult to cross, I must
pull them back from the great precipice, I must free them from all calamities, I
must ferry them across the stream of Samsara.\(^{50}\)

Yeats's belief is that the artist who penetrates the ecstatic experience of oneness, which is
suggested by "Marbles of the dancing floor" assumes the role of rescuer, because at this
stage, the artist is blessed with the power to save his fellow human beings. However, we
see that the enlightened artist is overwhelmed by an endless cycle of troubles of the world.
The art of religious experience breaks "bitter furies of complexities," but he is beset by
another and another:

Those images that yet
Fresh images beget.

That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

(VP ll. 38-40)

In short, the enlightened artist cannot save the world.

It is unmistakable that all three poems encapsulate Yeats’s universal consciousness, but we also see that they are also tinged by Yeats’s skepticism about transcendentalism, as well as about universalism, in one way or another. Yeats’s doubt about universalism betrays his conflicting political agenda: his belief in Anglo-Irish aristocratic government.

In fact, we can see behind the facade of universalism lurks Yeats’s internal conflicts when we consider the meditative scheme he adopted for these poems in comparison with the thematic concerns of other poems published during the same period. When Yeats employs this meditative pattern, he not only pursues universalism, but also champions the process of disciplining, purifying, and cultivating mind and soul which is the basic goal of meditation. In addition, the meditative poems project the image of a solitary soul who seeks self-realization though reconciliation of contraries. My point is that Yeats’s foregrounding of self-discipline, the inner world of mind and imagination, and solitude reveals his covert allegiance to the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition. So it is deliberate for Yeats to open The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) (which ends with “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes”) with “The Wild Swans at Coole,” “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory,” and “An Irish Airman Foresees his Death,” in which Yeats values the purity of an aristocratic soul which he compares to “swans”\(^5\); valorizes the idea of self-discipline, the cultivation of intellect, and aristocratic tradition by summarizing the virtues of Major
Robert Gregory as "soldier, scholar, horseman," and prizes the image of solitude by writing: "A lonely impulse of delight / Drove to this tumult in the clouds." When Yeats articulates a Blakean concept of innocence ("The soul recovers radical innocence / And learns at last that it is self-delighting, / Self-appeasing, self-affrighting") in "A Prayer for my Daughter," he privileges the state of self-control and self-expression which is impervious to external influences. By writing "How but in custom and in ceremony / Are innocence and beauty born?" in the last stanza of the same poem, Yeats implicitly links the virtue of self-control to the privileges of the aristocratic class. Yeats's political project of promoting the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition is further exemplified by "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" in which he even parodies the idea of universalism:

That blest souls are not composite,
And that all beautiful women may
Live in uncomposite blessedness,

(YP II. 44-7)

Here Yeats implicitly negates his idea of pursuing a political (spiritual) combination of East and West and of Catholics and Protestants by arguing for the bliss and beauty of purity. Looked from this perspective, Yeats's use of a meditative scheme for "The Double Vision," "Among School Children," and "Byzantium" lays bare his internal conflicts between the union between Catholics and Protestants and his belief in Anglo-Irish aristocratic government.
In a letter sent to Ethel Mannin dated June 24, 1935, Yeats wrote:

I want to plunge myself into impersonal poetry, to get rid of the bitterness, irritation and hatred my work in Ireland has brought into my soul. I want to make a last song, sweet and exultant, a sort of European geeta, or rather my geeta, not doctrine but song. (The Letters 836)

In this passage, written only a few years before his death, Yeats affirms his desire to achieve universalism in his poetry by reconciling East and West. Yeats associates his reason for pursuing universalism with his wish “to get rid of the bitterness, irritation and hatred my work in Ireland has brought into my soul.” Certainly, this desire is the result of his disappointment with Irish politics, which he vented in “Remorse for Intemperate Speech”:

Out of Ireland have we come.

Great hatred, little room,

Maimed us at the start.

I carry from my mother’s womb

A fanatic heart.

(VP II. 11-5)
By the time Yeats wrote this poem, he had witnessed the political turbulence caused by de Valera's Fianna Fail Government. Although he cites a need to purge his bitterness as one reason to pursue universalism, his desire to reconcile East and West also represents his political vision for the Ireland of the 1930s. Universalism epitomizes the idea of harmonious reconciliation ("a last song, sweet and exultant, a sort of European geeta") of two opposite forces which will constitute a political vision by which Ireland can dissolve the enmity and hostility between political groups. Yeats's desire to make "a European geeta" represents his belief that Ireland should turn not only to universalism's broad-mindedness, but also to its inclusiveness, its willingness to accept both sides (Europe and Geeta), discarding nationalism's tendency to divide ("us" from "them") and, consequently, exclude others. Yeats's political vision of reconciling East and West indicates a direction he wants for a New Ireland: a world of unity.

Yeats's pursuit of a European geeta also suggests that he approaches the spiritual traditions of the world with a view of integrating Eastern values into Western civilization, reflecting the expansion of his consciousness from nationalism to universalism over the course of his whole life. Although scholars usually separate Yeats's study of Eastern philosophies during the thirties from his politics, as I have discussed throughout this study, his interest in Eastern religious and philosophical ideas is also political. In this chapter, I will first examine Yeats's experiences with Irish political problems and his preoccupation with Eastern philosophies during the thirties in order to show a close connection between the two. And then I will analyze poems collected in A Full Moon in March (1935) with emphasis on Supernatural Songs to demonstrate that his efforts to make a European Geeta
reflect his political vision for his country. As we shall see, however, *Supernatural Songs* also betrays Yeats's strong skepticism about the possibility of getting the message of harmonious integration to the Irish people. I believe Yeats's skepticism is the result of his conflicting political goals—need for universalism and his belief in aristocratic government—which had haunted him since the *Playboy* riots.

Yeats's disparagement of the political situation of the thirties is mainly the result of political events in Ireland which dictated a direction for the nation to which Yeats was strongly opposed. One of the most significant political events of that time involves the 1931 victory of de Valera's Fianna Fail over the Free State government of William T. Cosgrave, under which Yeats served as a Senator from 1922 to 1928. After his election, de Valera immediately moved Ireland on a collision course with England, thereby producing another civil war atmosphere in Ireland. He set about dismantling the peace treaty with England, withholding the land annuities the Free State had been paying to England, thus provoking an economic war. He also attempted to abolish the Oath of Allegiance to the king of England which the Irish were required to take during a formal ceremony. These separatist policies again divided Ireland into two opposing camps: Catholics and Protestants. This new political development made Yeats furious, not only because de Valera fomented civil strife, but also because, as Paul Scott Stanfield demonstrates in *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, Fianna Fail's vision of Ireland based on economic prosperity was in direct opposition to Yeats's vision of a country based on intellectual and spiritual power.

An examination of his writings about Eastern philosophies during this period reveals that Yeats's preoccupation with them is also political. From these preoccupations, Yeats attempted to cure the disease of Irish politics by prescribing universalism, even though he could not free himself from his own doubt about the possibility of realizing such a unity. In “An Indian Monk,” Yeats once again presents the idea of an East / West marriage, considering East as the opposite of West:

The greatest saints have had their books examined by the Holy Office, for East and West seem each other’s contraries—the East so independent spiritually, so ready to submit to the conqueror; the West so independent politically, so ready to submit to its Church. The West impregnated an East full of spiritual turbulence, and that turbulence brought forth a child Western in complex and in feature. (F & I 432)
Given the political context of the period in which Yeats saw the revival of Irish civil strife, we cannot but judge that his intention to write about the idea of the fusion of antinomian forces is also politically motivated, since, as he wrote to A. E., unity is his political goal for post-Treaty Ireland:

I hope you will do that essay on Unity and Culture. . . . If we can present this one idea from many sides we might affect the future of Ireland! . . . The idea has been forced again into my mind, after a long interval of apparent individualism, by my present philosophy. . . . We should be the first to express the idea of unity in a practical form.

Yeats's letter to Olivia Shakespeare dated March 9, 1933 also shows how his religious beliefs are translated into the political ideal of unity which even smacks of his Fascist tendency:

Yet why not take Swedenborg literally and think we attain, in a partial contact, what the spirits know throughout their being. He somewhere describes two spirits meeting, and as they touch they become a single conflagration. His vision may be true, Newton's cannot. When I saw at Mrs. Crandon's objects moved and words spoken from some aerial centre, where there was nothing human, I rejected England and France and accepted Europe. Europe belongs to Dante and the witches' sabbath, not to Newton. (The Letters 807)

Here Yeats first addresses the idea of unity as resulting from the meeting of two spirits, which he later connects to the idea of one Europe by rejecting the difference between England and France. Likewise, when he says that his study of Indian thought is equivalent
to a return to his ancestors in his Introduction to *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, he not only suggests spiritual ties between Ireland and India, but also conveys the political message that we need to look to the idea of oneness once enjoyed by Easterners and Westerners:

> It pleases me to fancy that when we turn towards the East, in or out of church, we are turning not less to the ancient west and north; the one fragment of pagan Irish philosophy come down, 'the Song of Amergin,' seems Asiatic; ... that our genuflections discover in that East something ancestral in ourselves, something we must bring into the light before we can appease a religious instinct that for the first time in our civilisation demands the satisfaction of the whole man. (*Later Essays* 173-4)

An analysis of Yeats's "Modern Ireland," which he delivered on his last lecture tour of America in October and November of 1932, corroborates this evidence of Yeats's belief in the spiritual idea of wholeness as an antidote to Irish political problems in the thirties. Yeats began his lecture comparing de Valera's Ireland with Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, and Mussolini's Italy. Contemporary Ireland, he claims, passes "into a similar [era] in its intensity and fanaticism." Yeats then locates the origin of fanaticism in the conflict between two opposing forces in Irish history, citing three major historical moments as his examples. The first moment, according to Yeats, "began when at the end of the seventeenth century the victorious Protestant governing class quarreled with England about the wool trade." The second moment came at the close of the eighteenth century when "the Irish peasantry, who had obeyed now this master now that, began
under the influence of the French Revolution to assert their will and in the process
discovered constitutional agitation and democratic Catholicism. The fall and death of
Parnell at the close of the nineteenth century initiated the third moment, which he goes on
to analyze in detail in the rest of his lecture. Yeats asserts that the fall of Parnell split
Ireland in two:

All over Ireland the old Fenians and the young men discussed Parnell, praised his
pride, his loneliness, and denounced not only the party that deposed him, but the
country that slandered and betrayed. Families were broken up, father and son,
brother and sister, brother and brother were divided by furious hatred. . . .
Everywhere I saw the change take place, young men turning away from politics
altogether, taking to Gaelic, taking to literature, or remaining in politics that they
might substitute for violent speech more violent action.

Later in the lecture, Yeats argues that contemporary Ireland inherits the old legacy of
disputes and rivalries by saying that "there are old men and women in Dublin today whom
I avoid because they seem to incarnate the ill-temper, the casual malice of that time." Although Yeats does not specify a way of resolving these chronic conflicts, his praise of
Lady Gregory, John Synge, and James Stephens, and his quotation of a strange Eastern
tale as his conclusion to this lecture illuminates where he is looking to for a possible
solution: a revitalization of spiritual oneness. It is worth noticing that Yeats assesses their
achievements in Irish literary history by saying that "our discoveries were the heroic
legends and the form of English spoken by the peasantry," right after presenting the third
moment in the Irish history of conflicts. His efforts to promote Irish dialects cannot be
dissociated from his political purposes of providing the idea of spiritual harmony for the divided Ireland, since the language of the Irish peasant not only retains the rhythmic and linguistic components in that it "is sometimes Gaelic in construction, Tudor in vocabulary," but also symbolizes the reconciliation of God’s mind to the everyday mind because it exemplifies magnificence, greatness of soul, and dignity incarnated in the form of nameless flowers and plants of the Irish countryside. Hence, Yeats adds that his use of dialect in his Cathleen Ni Houlihan and Lady Gregory’s use in The Gaol Gate "have had great popular effect—written without any thought of politics they have shaped political emotion, although they were written without any thought of politics." In a similar vein, Yeats commends James Joyce, Sean O’Casey, and Liam O’Flaherty not only because they gave him "a religious emotion," but also because they present the idea that "characters themselves, no matter how powerfully defined, are here the object or the life of the nation seen as something ancient and mysterious." When he adds that "I remembered the saying of the Indian mystic Vivekenanda, that God was the sum total of all lives, human and non-human," we see how he wants to resolve the political conflict engendered by de Valera. Yeats’s spiritual and political intentions are unmistakable when he concludes his lecture with an Eastern tale: "when I would represent the finding of the theme, I think of a strange Eastern tale, of the Japanese boy who ran screaming from an abbot who had cut off his fingers, then, standing and looking back, suddenly attained Nirvana." This conclusion may be as oblique and strange as the story itself, but its implication is in keeping with his basic argument of the lecture in its religious idea of "an agony of trance," which implies a reconciliation of opposite forces.
The poems collected in *A Full Moon in March* (1935) reveal Yeats's bitterness about the civil strife generated by de Valera's policy and Yeats's turn to universalism by synthesizing antinomian elements. Although scholars tend to discuss the poems by separating its political section (from "Parnell's Funeral" to "Church and State") and its religious section (*Supernatural Songs*) without connecting the two, focusing on one section of the poems from *A Full Moon in March* does not do any justice to Yeats's meaning, especially considering the ideas he delivered on his last lecture tour in America, not to mention in his articles and introductions about Indian philosophies published during the thirties.

The first group of poems from *A Full Moon in March* is an expression of Yeats's bitterness, loneliness, and helplessness as results of the political chaos of Ireland in the thirties. Yeats blames de Valera's government's economy-first policy and its tendency to please the mob (Catholics) for the rancor that attends this chaos. Yeats was not happy about the de Valera government's decision to reduce the annual subsidy to the Abbey by a quarter (from £1000 to £750), which was based upon de Valera's plan to make Ireland an economic unit by balancing between agriculture and other essential industries. Moreover, Yeats also believed that de Valera's economy policy was partially responsible for the atmosphere of civil strife. When de Valera announced that one of his political goals was to distribute the land of Ireland so as to get the greatest number possible of Irish families rooted in the soil of Ireland, he betrayed his economic policy as containing a veiled sectarianism which actually hurt more Protestants than Catholics, setting the stage for confrontation between the two groups. By opening the volume with a funeral poem,
“Parnell’s Funeral,” Yeats locates the origin of contemporary Irish political problems in the death of Parnell, who Yeats believed was a strong leader. Yeats specifically writes in his Preface to *The King of the Great Clock Tower*: “in ‘At Parnell’s Funeral’ (which he later retitled as ‘Parnell’s Funeral’) I rhymed passages from a lecture I had given in America” (v). In doing so, Yeats vents his anger against the mob which he believes is responsible for the death of a true leader whose death he compares to the sacrifice of Christ (“Can someone there / Recall the Cretan barb that pierced a star?”). Yeats believes the sacrifice of Parnell, like that of Christ, produces a positive result for Ireland as he explains in “Commentary On A Parnellite at Parnell’s Funeral”:

As we discussed and argued, the national character changed, O’Connell, the great comedian, left the scene and the tragedian Parnell took his place. When we talked of his pride; of his apparent impassivity when his hands were full of blood because he had torn them with his nails, the proceeding epoch with its democratic bonhomie, seemed to grin through a horse collar. He was the symbol that made apparent, or made possible... that epoch’s contrary: contrary, not negation, not refutation; the spring vegetables may be over, they have not been refuted. I am Blake’s disciple, not Hegel’s: ‘contraries are positive. A negation is not a contrary.’ (*The King* 30-1)

By mourning the loss of a true leader who can resist the mob, he also attacks the powerlessness of de Valera’s government:

Had de Valera eaten Parnell’s heart
No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day,
No civil rancour torn the land apart.

(*VP II ll. 2-4*)

The next poem, "Three Songs to the Same Tune" (which he wrote as a result of his brief involvement in General O'Duffy's Blue Shirt movement and later, realizing the emptiness of its fantasy, extravagance, and obscurity, altered so "that no party might sing them"(*V*, 837) communicates Yeats's strong desire to overthrow the mob, as well as his wishes for a strong leader:

When nations are empty up there at the top,
When order has weakened or faction is strong,
Time for us all to pick out a good tune,
Take to the roads and go marching along.

(*VP ll. 11-4*)

The following poem, "Alternative Song for the Severed Head in 'The King of the Great Clock Tower'" satirizes de Valera for his economy-first policy which Yeats believes is not only suffocating the art of Ireland, but also has a part in bringing about the ambiance of civil strife. In this poem, we can see a symbolic meaning of a decapitated head of a poet, a setting of the Clock Tower, and a king who has feathers instead of hair. When the poet's head is severed from his body by the order of the king, we feel not only the helplessness of the poet, but also the death of art. In a sense, a body without a soul is also an appropriate emblem of an Ireland which de Valera directed towards materialism. For Yeats, then, de Valera is like the king of the Great Clock Tower, who runs a mechanical
world without any imagination, a cankerous world filled with gong sounds, and a world of limitation. In this poem, the comical image of the king who has feathers instead of hair is clearly contrasted to the tragic image of the poet who is associated with symbolic figures of Irish heroic imagination: Cuchulain, Niamh, Aileel, and Hanrahan. The severed head of the poet, however, also implies Yeats’s desire for the renewal of dead art when he writes in “Commentary on ‘The Great Clock Tower’”:

The dance with the severed head, suggests the central idea of Wilde’s Salome.

Wilde took it from Heine who has somewhere described Salome in hell throwing into the air the head of John the Baptist. Heine may have found it in some Jewish religious legend for it is part of the old ritual of the year: the mother goddess and the slain god. In the first edition of The Secret Rose there is a story based on some old Gaelic legend. A certain man swears to sing the praise of a certain woman, his head is cut off and the head sings. (The King 21)

Yeats’s mention of John the Baptist, a religious ritual, and old Gaelic tradition indicates that the story of the severed head is associated with a Christian doctrine of a fall and a resurrection and a vegetation myth of death and regeneration, indirectly conveying Yeats’s hope for the rebirth of the decapitated poet (dead art).

As he writes in “Two songs Rewritten for the Tune’s Sake,” however, Yeats’s sense of loneliness and helplessness continues because he sees that his poetry cannot even change the mind of a lady:

Or anything else but a rhymer
Without a thing in his head
But rhymes for a beautiful lady,
He rhyming alone in his bed.

(*VP II. 9-12*)

The last poem, "Church and State," conveys Yeats's sense of futility in the face of mob rule. He is thinking about the strong and powerful government in the first stanza:

Might of the Church and the State,
Their mobs put under their feet.
O but heart's wine shall run pure
Mind's bread grow sweet.

(*VP II. 3-6*)

But he cannot trust the authority of the state and church because:

What if the Church and the State
Are the mob that howls at the door!
Wine shall run thick to the end,
Bread taste sour.

(*VP II. 9-12*)

In this political section of the volume, Yeats builds up the images of howling rancor and violence describing the chaotic state of Ireland, about which Yeats feels not only helpless and lonely, but also angry and arrogantly defiant. When we look into Yeats's "Commentary on the Three Songs," however, we see how he wants to break the rule of the mob:
I felt but was helpless: the mob reigned. If that reign is not broken our public life will move from violence to violence, or from violence to apathy, our Parliaments disgrace and debauch those that enter it; our men of letters live like outlaws in their own country. It will be broken when some government seeks unity of culture not less than economic unity, welding to the purpose museum, school, university, learned institution. (The King 37-8)

For Yeats, the only way to save Ireland from the mob is to appeal to unity of culture. Here he mentions unity of culture on a small scale, talking about economy, history, education, but Supernatural Songs, which ends the poems from A Full Moon in March, pursues a similar idea of cultural and spiritual unity on the grand scale of reconciling East and West, which he implies is the antidote to Irish political strife.

Scholars usually treat Yeats's Supernatural Songs as an unorthodox religious gesture. In “New Wine in Old Bottles: Yeats’s Supernatural Songs,” Helen Vendler comments:

"By replacing, within a religious genre, the Christian saints to which his audience was accustomed by strange new saints like Baile and Aillinn; by replacing St. Patrick with an anti-Trinitarian monk; by rendering angels in copulation; ... Yeats created a set of recognizable, yet arrogantly distorted, religious gestures.”17 In a similar vein, Hazard Adams reads Yeats’s Supernatural Songs as a vehicle for expressing antithetical religiosity and theology: spiritual love is sexual and the Christian trinity is false. Indeed, no one can deny the fact that Yeats’s main concern in Supernatural Songs involves a religious gesture, but I contend that his religious gesture is geared towards celebrating oneness which contains universe transcending time and space. In a word, he taps a cosmic theology of
oneness through twelve sequence poems in which the persona freely moves between past and present, East and West, natural and supernatural. Yeats’s intention to make a cosmic theology accessible to the Irish can be understood in the context of the poet’s efforts to heal the political problems of Ireland. In other words, a cosmic theology of oneness functions as a cure to the divisiveness of Irish politics.

The first half of Supernatural Songs deals with Yeats’s cosmic theology of oneness mostly from the viewpoint of Rhib, Yeats’s imaginary persona-hermit who is a contemporary of St. Patrick. Although Yeats does not specify the time and setting for the first six poems, his intention to use Rhib as the main persona of the first four poems limits space and time to one period and one country: early Christian Ireland. In these six poems, Yeats presents two clearly divided worlds: one is the supernatural world, in which one sees the vision of oneness; the other is the natural world to which Yeats tries to send the message of oneness. As we shall see, however, Yeats casts a strong doubt as to the possibility of getting the message to the public.

The first poem “Ribh at the Tomb of Baile and Aillinn” expresses Yeats’s desire to communicate a harmonious union between conflicting forces. Yeats’s setting this poem at the tomb is a deliberate allusion to “A Parnellite at Parnell’s Funeral,” which also begins with the scene of the tomb. The two tomb scenes, however, are sharply contrasted since the tomb of Baile and Aillinn functions as a stage for providing light (“for the intercourse of angels is a light”)18, while the Tomb of Irish politicians functions as a stage for darkness and sorrow (“a brighter star shoots down”).19 Hence, Yeats presents this religious section as a corrective to the political problems of Ireland outlined in the political
section of the volume. Yeats creates two characters to carry the message of oneness. One is Ribh, a hypothetical religious hermit; the other is a listener (you) who is asked to carry Ribh's message to the public. The poem begins:

Because you have found me in the pitch-dark night
With open book you ask me what I do:
Mark and digest my tale, carry it afar
To those that never saw this tonsured head

(YP ll. 1-4)

The beginning of the poem points to two levels of existences. One is the world of the listener or the natural world in which one sees dark as dark and light as light (so the listener cannot understand what is going on with the hermit who is eclipsed by darkness); the other is the world of the persona-hermit or the supernatural world in which one sees dark as light, and light as dark (so he can read a book in the pitch-dark night). Ribh's ability to penetrate darkness (gaining his mental vision) is the result of his experience of oneness which is expressed in the second stanza:

The miracle that gave them such a death
Transfigured to pure substance what had once
 Been bone and sinew; when such bodies join
There is no touching here, nor touching there,
Nor straining joy, but whole is joined to whole;
For the intercourse of angels is a light
Where for its moment both seem lost, consumed.

(VP ll. 10-6)

Hence, Rhib wants to convey the illuminating power of wholeness to the world by means of his listener (you). Although scholars emphasize Yeats's use of sexual imagery ("the intercourse of angels") either as his criticism of Christian asexuality in this poem or as his antithetical theology,20 his message is more geared towards accentuating the idea of oneness. That is, just as darkness is light and light is darkness, so sexuality is holiness and holiness is sexuality ("for the intercourse of angels is a light"). This wholeness is emphasized to break down logic which tends to choose one state (holiness, light) over another (sexuality, darkness). Although Rhib's message is clear throughout Supernatural Songs, it is also clear that he is not sure about the possibility of his message being accepted by the public.

The second poem, "Rhib Denounces Patrick," recapitulates the principle of wholeness which is introduced in the first poem. Although scholars also tend to focus on Rhib's repudiation of Patrick who preaches an asexual Greek God (one who is purely masculine, and who begets himself on himself in a masculine trinity), the object of Yeats's attack is aimed not only at asexual theology, but also at its tendency to privilege one particular force (masculine) over the other (feminine). Hence, what is important is not just the sexuality of theology, but the idea of wholeness (sexuality as spirituality) which governs not only the natural world but also the supernatural world: "natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed."21 So Rhib's cosmic theology emphasizes the importance of a circle and the idea of togetherness and oneness:
The mirror-scaled serpent is multiplicity,

But all that run in couples, on earth, in flood or air, share God that is but three,

And could beget or bear themselves could they but love as He.

(VP ll. 10-2)

Rhib, however, is skeptical about the listener’s ability to understand his meaning, as we read in the next poem “Rhib in Ecstasy:”

What matter that you understood no word!

Doubtless I spoke or sang what I had heard

In broken sentences.

(VP ll. 1-3)

Rhib’s strong skepticism about the possibility of sending the message to the ordinary world is further strengthened by the next lines:

My soul had found

All happiness in its own cause or ground.

Godhead on Godhead in sexual spasm begot

Godhead. Some shadow fell. My soul forgot

Those amorous cries that out of quiet come

And must the common round of day resume.

(VP ll. 3-8)

Yeats’s choice of “my” (which he repeats twice for emphasis) and “own” strongly suggest the distinctively private domain of Rhib’s experience—in other words, its ineffable reality.
Although Rhib is awakened ("some shadow fell"), and resumes his normal life, we feel that his world is detached from the rest of the ordinary world.

The following three poems deal with Rhib’s cosmic theology of total oneness and Yeats’s skepticism about human ability to achieve that state. "There" presents an image of a circle and oneness, a symbol of unity, which is encoded in various ways:

There all the barrel-hoops are knit,
There all the serpent-tales are bit,
There all the gyres converge in one,
There all the planets drop in the Sun.

(VP II. 1-4)

The next poem, "Ribh Considers Christian Love Insufficient," is another variation of the idea of wholeness. In this poem, Yeats preaches that hate is love and love is hate because "hatred of God may bring the soul to God." For Yeats, there is no difference between hatred and love; he repeats the same idea in "A General Introduction for my Work:" "my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. I am like the Tibetan monk who dreams at his initiation that he is eaten by a wild beast and learns on waking that he himself is eater and eaten" (E & I 519). The poem’s logical conclusion: a celebration of the state of oneness which is expressed in the form of a total submission to God,

What can she take until her Master give!
Where can she look until He make the show!
What can she know until He bid her know!
How can she live till in her blood He live!

(\textit{VP II. 21-4})

The next poem, "He and She," however, again expresses skepticism about the mystical state, rejecting the idea of oneness: ("His light had struck me blind / Dared I stop").

So the poem exults in the happiness of individual existence in the second stanza:

She sings as the moon sings

'I am I, am I;

The greater grows my light

The further that I fly.'

All creation shivers

With that sweet cry.

\textit{VP (ll. 7-12)}

Yeats not only emphasizes her individuality ("I am I, am I"), but also makes it clear that her presence is shining only by protecting her individuality ("The greater grows my light / The further that I fly"). This celebration of a self ("that sweet cry") reminds us of "A Prayer for my Daughter" in which Yeats desires the state of self-control: "The soul recovers radical innocence / And learns at last that it is self-delighting, / Self-appeasing, self-affrighting." In a mystical experience, the "I" is thought to be the "knot" which ties together different universal faculties or energies (otherness) in indefinite space as particularized existence. This notion of absorbing individuality into oneness always baffles Yeats as much as it fascinates him. Hence, his poetry defends individuality as often as it celebrates absorption into oneness.
The next six poems continue to deal with Yeats's cosmic theology of oneness; he presents the oneness which embraces the whole universe transcending time and space. Yeats thus adopts an omniscient point of view for the second half of the poems, dropping Rhib's single point of view, so that the unidentified persona can freely move between past and present, East and West, and the natural and supernatural. So, a line which separates the supernatural world of oneness from the natural world becomes blurred, which indicates that there is a close connection between the two worlds, but we see that Yeats privileges the supernatural world over the natural world not only because the former controls the latter with its mysterious power, but also because the former lasts forever compared with the transitoriness of the latter.

"What Magic Drum?" (seventh in the sequence) presents the concept of oneness from the perspective of Indian mysticism, signifying that oneness is not confined within the realm of Rhib's time and place:

He holds him from desire, all but stops his breathing lest
Primordial Motherhood forsake his limbs, the child no longer rest,
Drinking joy as it were milk upon his breast.

(VP ll. 1-3)

The main idea of the poem is also in keeping with Rhib's cosmic theology of oneness in that this poem presents a perfect alliance of God, man, Primordial motherhood, and child which leads to ecstasy. The idea of oneness in this poem, however, is basically associated with Indian mysticism, since Yeats drew his theme for this poem from Bhagwan
Shri Mansa who retold his mystical experience: “My master lifted me up like the Divine
Mother and hugged me to His breast and caressed me all over the body.”

In the next two poems, “Whence had they Come?” and “The Four Ages of Man”
eighth and ninth in the sequence), and we see the superiority of the supernatural world
over the natural world and the helplessness of a human being. The former poem presents
a panoramic view of human history, while the latter pursues a person’s life history. In
either case, human beings are mere marionettes and powerless. In “Whence had they
Come?,” whether they are unknown persons (“girl or boy”) or historic figures (“world-
transforming Charlemagne”) and no matter what they do (“cry at the onset of their
sexual joy” or “beat down frigid Rome”), they do not know that they are controlled by
Dramatis Personae, a messenger from the supernatural world, who speaks through human
beings. As the title of this poem suggests, however, no one knows the origin of Dramatis
Personae, which points to the mystery and superiority of the supernatural world. In “The
Four Ages of Man,” an unnamed character’s life is summarized in four different stages.
Although he wages a battle to overcome the problem of duality in each stage (the battle
between self and body; self and heart; self and mind; and self and God), we see that he
always turns out to be the loser. Yeats tells us that human beings are destined to live in
the state of duality, revealing their helplessness.

“Conjunctions” and “A Needle’s Eye” (tenth and eleventh in the sequence) come
back to the idea of oneness, but in these poems Yeats pursues this idea by disrupting the
concept of space and time. In other words, Yeats’s cosmic theology of oneness is
expressed in the form of anthropological and cultural union between East and West as well as in the union of past, present, and future. In “Conjunction,” we read:

If Jupiter and Saturn meet,

What a crop of mummy wheat!

The sword’s cross; thereon He died:

On breast of Mars the goddess sighed.

(VP ll. 1-4)

Here Yeats forges an idea that life is death and death is life, arresting the difference between death and life. A confrontation of two male principles (“Jupiter” and “Saturn”) in the first stanza yields the element of death (“a crop of mummy wheat”) but we see that death also represents life because “wheat” is a life-giving force, believed to come from grain discovered in ancient Egyptian tombs. The next stanza repeats the idea of death as life, which begins with the death of Christ which Yeats blasphemously connects with a life-giving force represented by an erotic embrace between the masculine and feminine principles (Mars and Venus). Yeats’s idea of oneness (life as death) also contains the idea of cultural, anthropological, and religious union by his use of words suggesting Roman, Egyptian, Christian, and Greek religions and cultures. In “A Needle’s Eye,” the concept of oneness incorporates past, present, and the future:

All the stream that’s roaring by

Came out of a needle’s eye;
Things unborn, things that are gone,
From needle’s eye still goad it on.

(*VP ll. 1-4*)

The epilogue poem “Meru” offers the logical conclusion of *Supernatural Songs*: the transitoriness of the natural world and the eternity of the supernatural world of oneness. The persona of the poem considers human civilization, a representation of the natural world, as illusion (“Civilization is hooped together... by manifold illusion”) so he says good-bye to such an illusory world: “Egypt and Greece good-bye, and good-bye Rome!” He instead hails the supernatural world of oneness:

> Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest
> Caverned in night under the drifted snow,
> Or where that snow and winter’s dreadful blast
> Beat down upon their naked bodies, know
> That day brings round the night, that before dawn
> His glory and his monuments are gone.

(*VP ll. 9-14*)

Yeats’s portrayal of the hermits’ struggles against night and snow conveys the image of a Hindu Yogi’s or a Buddhist monk’s efforts to penetrate the world of oneness by trying to resolve oppositions as represented by darkness and light. Finally, the speaker realizes the eternity of oneness asserting that before “dawn,” which fuses night and day, human civilization or the natural world (“glory and monuments”) quickly disappears. The last poem is an affirmation of Yeats’s belief in the eternal power of wholeness.
Lastly, we see a close connection between the first poem and the last poem which forms a cyclical pattern in *Supernatural Songs*. First, both poems introduce us to the world of hermits who reside in a similar setting, a setting which represents the duality of this life: "darkness and light" at the tomb of Baile and Aillinn and "night and snow at the cavern of Mount Meru." Second, both hermits experience the vision of oneness. Rhib can see darkness as light; a hermit on the mount Meru realizes that "before dawn" (oneness) "his glory and his monuments are gone." Thirdly, both hermits stand for a cultural, religious, and anthropological concoction between East and West. In the opening poem, Yeats makes Rhib embody the idea of blending by placing him at the period of early Christian Ireland which, as Yeats puts it in his "Commentary on Supernatural Songs," represents a reconciliation between West and East:

In course of time the Church of Ireland would feel itself more in sympathy with early Christian Ireland than could a Church that admitted later development of doctrine. I said that for the moment I associated early Christian Ireland with India; ... A famous philosopher believed that every civilisation began, no matter what its geographical origin, with Asia, certain men of science that all of us when still in the nursery were, if not African, exceedingly Asiatic. Saint Patrick must have found in Ireland, for he was not its first missionary, men whose Christianity had come from Egypt, and retained characteristics of those older faiths that have become so important to our invention. (*The King* 45-6)

On the other hand, the hermit on Mount Meru in the ending poem asserts that such differences between East and West should disappear: "Egypt and Greece, Good-bye, and
Good-bye, Rome!” Although the two hermits are placed in different periods (Rhib in ancient times and a hermit on Meru in present times), their manifold similarities link them together, transcending time.

The effort of *Supernatural Songs*, then, is to create a cosmic theology of complete oneness which dissolves not only the difference between life and death, stasis and movement, and masculine and feminine, but also the difference between East and West, past and present, and supernatural and natural. Yeats later recapitulates his pursuit of oneness in “A General Introduction for my Work:”

I am convinced that in two or three generations it will become generally known that the mechanical theory has no reality, that the natural and supernatural are knit together, that to escape a dangerous fanaticism we must study a new science; at that moment Europeans may find something attractive in a Christ posed against a background not of Judaism but of Druidism, not shut off in dead history, but flowing, concrete, phenomenal. (F & I 518)

His formulation of a cosmic theology of oneness transcending time and space is clearly intended as a vision for an Ireland bedeviled by fanatical and sectarian politics.

As is the case with his meditative poems which we have discussed in the previous chapter, however, we also see that *Supernatural Songs* does not completely resolve Yeats’s internal conflicts. In other words, Yeats’s aspiration for the unity of Catholics and Protestants coexists with his Anglo-Irish prejudice which is subtly embedded in the poetry. Although the religious hermit embodies the concept of oneness Yeats pursues, the same hermit also retains the image of superman which he implicitly connects with Protestant
aristocrats. Yeats’s choice of a religious hermit is in keeping with his celebration of the idea of solitude, magnificence and greatness of soul, self-creation, and self-discipline which he consciously upholds in opposition to the idea of the uncultured and undisciplined lower middle class whom he calls mob. In addition, we cannot ignore a subtle connection between Parnell (a Christ figure) and a religious hermit. When Yeats condemns the de Valera’s government’s tendency to work for the mob by showing nostalgia for the dead king, Parnell, whom he believes was strong-willed and impervious to external influences in “Parnell’s Funeral,” he is explicitly celebrating aristocratic independence which he believes is typical of the Protestant ruling class. Hence, when Yeats makes Rhib refute his listener (“What matter that you understood no word!”), he is not only skeptical about the getting the message to the public, but also not concerned about the opinion of the external world. Simply put, he glorifies “a point of view not made for crowd’s sake but for self-expression” (AU 209) which can be associated with aristocratic independence. So, when Yeats shows his reluctance to surrender his individuality to the mystical concept of oneness in “He and She,” he also resists his own political agenda of the unity between Catholics and Protestants. As we see his last two collection of poems, New Poems (1938) and [Last Poems (1938-9)], Yeats never fully resolves his conflicting political projects. Hence, although Yeats continues to maintain his ideology of universalism in “Lapis Lazuli” and “The Statues,” he also wrote poems (“The Curse of Cromwell,” “Come Gather Round Me Parnellites,” and “Under Ben Bulben”) which undercut his efforts for the unity by attacking the urban, Catholic middle class and celebrating the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition.
CONCLUSION

FASCISM AND MODERNISM

Yeats's politicization of the religious concept of oneness, his life-long commitment to the pursuit of political wholeness, and his belief in a strong leader, eventually made him vulnerable to the charges that he was a Fascist. Ever since Conor Cruise O'Brien accused Yeats of Fascist sentiments in "Passion and Cunning: An Essay of the Politics of W. B. Yeats" (1965), Yeats's putative fascism has been a focal point of scholarly debate. Elizabeth Cullingford in Yeats, Ireland, and Fascism (1981) defends Yeats, classifying the poet as a nationalist of the "'individualist and libertarian' school of John O'Leary." Augustine Martin, Hazard Adams, and Ronald Bush, on the other hand, argue that the dialectical nature of Yeats's thinking makes the very act of giving a name to his political identity a hazardous enterprise given that what Yeats pursues is not one side of the dialectic, but rather maintenance of conflicts and contrariety.¹ For this reason, as Jonathan Allison remarks in his introduction to Yeats's Political Identities (1996), it may be more appropriate to think of Yeats as having numerous political identities because of "the multifaceted nature of the poet and his work" (11).

Yet there seems to be another perspective possible. Certainly, we can connect Yeats's pursuit of political oneness to fascism, but our difficulty in deciding on his political identity comes from the fact that he pursues totality within the framework of his
own skepticism, which is caused not only by his antagonism against Catholics, but also by his realistic view of transcendentalism and his own fears of losing the self in a mass. My suggestion, therefore, is that we should align Yeats's pursuit of wholeness with his modernist consciousness (and with his Anglo-Irish bias), rather than with a fascist consciousness, since what sets apart these two is skepticism and an attraction to individual freedom and the idea of self-control and self-creation. It is helpful to remember Art Berman's distinction between modernism and fascism:

Between fascism and modernism there is, then, an important relationship of inverse proportions: modernism gradually relinquishes the transcendentalist tendencies that fascism increasingly appropriates for itself.  

As we have seen in his meditative poems, Yeats is skeptical about the possibility of achieving the state of spiritual (political) wholeness. He is also uneasy about the idea of surrendering the self to transcendental wholeness which is associated with one of the most important characteristics of modernism. According to Berman:

Modernism endeavours to use the aesthetic experience to enhance the kind of freedom that functions as an essential component of an individualized personality or self-sufficient ego with (ideally absolute) political and economic independence. "Freedom" applies to the individual; the person is free.  

A reading of Yeats's poetry reveals that he is always looking at both ways: transcendental universalism and skepticism; political unity and the exclusion of Catholics; celebration of a mystical union and his reluctance to surrender a self to the Great Self. In his early
years, Yeats tried to present a political vision for his country—a mutual co-inherence of Catholics and Protestants—based upon the religious concept of a transcendental union of two conflicting forces, but he soon came to cast a doubt upon the possibility of achieving such a political (spiritual) unity. Although he later moved towards a more inclusive political vision by pursuing the unity of East and West, his universalism was also marred by his celebration of the Anglo-Irish aristocratic tradition. He continued to show his fascination with a mystical union, but he was also uneasy about the idea of giving up his individuality. During his poetic career, he tried to resolve these conflicts which he himself thought impossible. So he writes in “Vacillation:”

Between extremities

Man runs his course;

A brand, or flaming breath,

Comes to destroy

All those antinomies

Of day and night;

The body calls it death,

The heart remorse.

But if these be right

What is joy?

(VP I. ll. 1-10)
Introduction: Yeats and the Spiritual Traditions of the World


3 The importance of understanding Yeats as a reader is further supported by Walter Benn Michaels’s “The Interpreter’s Self: Peirce on the Cartesian ‘Subject’” in which, using Peirce’s theory of cognition, he argues that the self not only interprets but also is an interpretation. (*Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (ed Jane P Tompkins Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 185-200.

4 Let me introduce more works devoted to the same area. In “Yeats and the Upanishads (1952),” A. Davenport discusses the influence of the Upanishads upon Yeats’s poetry. Kathleen Raine explains the Tarot image in Yeats’s poetry in *Yeats, the Tarot, and the Golden Dawn* (1972) by using her expertise as a Platonist and Blake scholar. William A. Gordon’s “Eastern Religion and the Later Yeats” (1976) talks about three important Indian beliefs which came to be significant for the poetry of Yeats. First, the sense of the manifest world (reality as a manifestation of some substratum which is itself
unknowable); secondly, the relationship between individuality and the ground of existence
(a continuity between self and nature); thirdly, the union of opposites, especially as
symbolized in Siva-Shakti (the god and the goddess in sexual union). In W. B. Yeats: An
Indian Approach (1978), Naresh Guha details the influence of Indian thought on Yeats,
particularly tracing his relationship with three Indian sages: Mohini Chatterji, Tagore, and
Purohit Swami. Guha documents how these sages helped Yeats move from the asceticism
reflected in his early poetry, such as some of Crossways poems, to the life-affirmation of
such later poetry as the Crazy Jane poems, which praise sexuality and physicality. Bruce
M. Wilson’s ‘Mirror After Mirror’: Yeats and Eastern Thought” (1982) treats Yeats’s
connection with Hinduism and Zen Buddhism, emphasizing the aesthetic nature of Yeats’s
fascination with Eastern thought. In W. B. Yeats and Indian Tradition (1990) Sankaran
Ravindran tries to explain Yeats’s interest in Indian thought in terms of the vital aspect of
Indian tradition—a unity among art, religion, and philosophy—and the poet’s attempt to
make some of his art embody that tradition.

5 Quoted in Yeats’s “An Acre of Grass.” (VP, 575 l. 2).

6 The Upanishads Part One, trans. various oriental scholars, ed, Max Muller.

7 D. T. Suzuki, Essays in Zen Buddhism : First Series (New York: Grove Press,
Inc., 1961), 126.

8 See Naresh Guha’s W. B. Yeats: An Indian Approach (The Arden Library, 1978),
88. Yeats specifically calls Indian tradition the sinking flame in Autobiographies (London

10 By politics I refer to Aristotle’s understanding of the political as that which concerns the highest good in human affairs.


12 AU, 463.

13 Ibid., 469.

Chapter 1: Nationalism, Mysticism, and Yeats’s Early Poetry

1 For this chronology I have consulted Thomas L. Dume’s unpublished dissertation “William Butler Yeats: A Study of His Readings” (Temple University, 1950).


11 ibid., 25.

12 Quoted in Yeats's "Introduction to Gitanjali" in which he writes that "if the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which—as one divines—runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other [italics are mine]... (E & I 390)


20, VP, 65.

21 VP, 65 (l. 17).

22 VP, 65 (l. 22).

23 VP, 66 (l. 34)


25 VP, 68 (ll. 5-6).

26 VP, 68 (ll. 6-7).

27 VP, 69 (l. 27).

28 VP, 77.


30 VP, 76 (ll. 6-7).

31 VP, 76 (ll. 10-1).

32 VP, 76 (ll. 14-5).
Chapter 2: Yeats’s Disenchantment with Nationalism and His Universalist Consciousness

2 VP, 100 (ll. 1-2).

3 VP, 101 (ll. 22-4).


6 VP, 100 (l. 3).

7 VP, 101 (ll. 4-5).

8 VP, 100 (l. 1).

9 VP, 100 (l. 2).

10 VP, 130 (ll. 16-7).


14 VP, 117 (ll. 6-7).
15 VP, 117 (l. 11).

16 VP, 117 (ll. 3-4).

17 VP, 144-5 (ll. 11-2, 43-4).

18 VP, 144 (ll. 23-4).

19 In The Book of Yeats’s Poems (Tallahassee: The Florida State UP, 1990), Hazard Adams points out that “the decision is for Ancient Ireland against Holy Ireland, the choice of Oisin” (66).

20 VP, 147 (ll. 9-10).

21 VP, 155 (ll. 1-3).

22 VP, 156 (ll. 15-6).

23 VP, 150 (l. 19).


29 In Yeats, Ireland and Fascism (New York and London: New York UP, 1981), Elizabeth Cullingford argues that the Playboy crisis prompted Yeats to develop his class politics by turning to the idea of aristocracy as an antidote to the fanaticism aroused in him.
by the long battle with middle-class Dublin.


Chapter 3: Yeats’s Rediscovery of India and Development of Universalism

1 For this idea, I am indebted to Richard Ellmann (*The Identity of Yeats’s* 1964) and to Bede Griffiths (*The Marriage of East and West* 1982).


3 ibid., 109.


5 ibid., 548.

6 Quoted in Elizabeth Cullingford’s *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (New York and London, 1981), 112.


8 Cullingford, 86.

9 When the First World War broke out, England launched a recruiting campaign in Ireland. John Redmond, leader of the constitutional nationalists, made speeches for
English efforts to recruit, while the IRB was vehemently opposed to them. Although Yeats showed non-committal attitude at first, he later joined in the anti-recruiting campaign.

10 Cullingford, 86.


16 Claudio Naranjo remarks on the fundamental difference between Western meditation and Eastern meditation. According to Naranjo, Western meditation dwells upon certain ideas, or is engaged in a directed intellectual course of activity. On the other hand, Eastern meditation concentrates on anything but ideas in order to attain an aconceptual state of mind that excludes intellectual activity. Certainly, Yeats’s meditative poetry can be discussed in both meditative traditions.
17 Theodor Adorno's view in Negative Dialectics (1990) is typical of a Marxist concept of a human being:

The universal domination of mankind by the exchange-value—a domination which a priori keeps the subjects from being subjects and degrades subjectivity itself to a mere object—makes an untruth of the general principle that claims to establish the subject's predominance. The surplus of the transcendental subject is the deficit of the utterly reduced empirical subject. (178)

Marxists believe that the objectification of a human being is the result of the capitalistic mode of economy.


21 In "Cashel Revisited: W. B. Yeats's 'The Double Vision of Michael Robartes'," Carmel Jordan writes: "Yeats makes it quite clear, in "If I Were Four-and-Twenty," that he wished to claim Cashel not only for the Christian faith, but for the pagan faith as well: 'In Many little lyrics I would claim that stony mountain for all Christian and pagan faith in Ireland'." (25)
22 In the same essay, Jordan explains that “the eleventh and twelfth centuries constituted a prolific period in the history of Irish art. Although the fine arts had suffered a setback during the Viking invasions, they experienced a renaissance when more peaceful conditions returned. Such masterpieces as the Cross of Cong, the Shrine of St. Patrick’s Bell, and the Shrine of St. Lachtin’s Arm were all created during the twelfth century, and painters, metal workers and stone sculptors all contributed to this artistic flowering” (22).

23 VP, 383 (ll. 27-8).

24 VP, 384 (l. 54).

25 VP, 384 (l. 58).

26 Criticism of Yeats’s “Among School Children” over the last few decades has revealed two diametrically opposed interpretations of the poem’s last line: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” One camp of critics (Cleanth Brooks’s The Well Wrought Urn, George S. Lensing’s “Among School Children”: Question as Conclusion,” and Rachel V. Billigheimer’s “The Dance as Vision in Blake and Yeats”) argue that the last line reflects an affirmation of the poet’s power of imagination, realizing the union of oppositions. The other camp of critics (Abraham Verhoeff’s “A Comparative Analysis of W. B. Yeats’ ‘Among School Children’” and Evan Radcliffe’s “‘Among School Children’ and Unity of Being”), on the other hand, see the last line as a statement of frustration and dismay rather than as a triumphant affirmation.

27 VP, 443. (l. 1).

28 VP, 443. (l. 1, 2, 3, 7, 8).
T. R. Henn remarks in The Lonely Tower that Byzantium "stands for the unity of all aspects of life, for perhaps the last time in history. It has inherited the perfection of craftsmanship, and more than craftsmanship, perhaps, the 'mystical mathematics' of perfection of form in all artistic creation" (223). In "Hades' Bobbin and the Mummy-Cloth: Images of Poet and Language in Yeats's 'Byzantium,’” Laurie Oldfield argues that "much as "Sailing to Byzantium" reaches toward the world of art, "Byzantium" represents that world" (72). Harold Bloom, however, sees Byzantium as "a state of inspiration, a kind of death, and an actual historical city, all at once" (Yeats 390).

Elizabeth Huberman summarizes critical debates concerning the integrity of the poem's
structural pattern.

43 VP, 497.


45 ibid., 218.


51 VP, 322. (l. 6)

52 VP, 327 (l. 70, 78, 86).

53 VP, 328 (ll. 11-2).

54 VP, 405 (ll. 66-8).

55 VP, 406 (ll. 77-8).
Chapter 4: Universalism and Yeats’s Later Poetry

1 Quoted in Cullingford’s *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 166.

2 For Yeats’s Fascist tendencies, read his letter to H. J. C. Grierson dated November 6, 1922, in which he specifically wrote that “The Ireland that reacts from the present disorder is turning its eyes towards individualist Italy” (*The Letters*, 693).


4 ibid., 256.

5 ibid., 256.

6 ibid., 257-8.

7 ibid., 262.

8 ibid., 259.

9 ibid., 260.

10 ibid., 261.

11 ibid., 264.

12 ibid., 264.

13 ibid., 268.

14 Quoted in Yeats’s “Byzantium.”

15 A reading of Richard Ellmann’s *The Identity of Yeats*, T. R. Henn’s *The Lonely Tower*, Harold Bloom’s *Yeats* and James Boulger’s “Moral and Structural Aspect in W. B. Yeats’s *Supernatural Songs*” reveals that critics do not pay attention to the connection
between *Supernatural Songs* and the first section of *Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems*.

16 *VP*, 541 (ll. 6-7).

17 Helen Vendler’s “New Wine in Old Bottles: Yeats’s *Supernatural Songs*,” *(SoR* 27.2 (1991)), 415.

18 *VP*, 555 (l. 15).

19 *VP*, 541 (l. 4).

20 See Helen Vendler’s “New Wine in Old Bottles: Yeats’s *Supernatural Songs*”;


21 *VP*, 556 (l. 4).

22 *VP*, 559 (ll. 5-6).

23 Quoted in Helen Vendler’s “New Wine in Old Bottles,” 408-9.

24 *VP*, 560 (l. 1)

25 *VP*, 560 (l.12).

26 *VP*, 560 (l. 2).

27 *VP*, 560 (l.10).


29 *VP*, 563 (ll. 1-3).

30 *VP*, 563 (l. 8).

31 *VP*, 557 (l. 1)
Conclusion: Fascism and Modernism

1 Read Augustine Martin's "What Stalked through the Post Office? (Reply to Seamus Deane)"; Hazard Adams's "Yeats and Antithetical Nationalism"; and Ronald Bush's "The Modernist Under Siege."

2 An examination of Arthur O. Lovejoy's *The Revolt against Dualism* (1955), Michael H. Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism* (1984), Art Berman's *Preface to Modernism* (1994), Georg Lukacs's "Marx and the Problem of Ideological Decay," and Frederic Jameson's "Modernism and Imperialism" reveals that their explanations of the modern period and modernism point to one common ground, although each of these scholars approaches this ground from different intellectual perspectives. That is, the modern period witnessed a conflict between two opposing forces and modernism is a way of responding to the conflict by either trying to reconcile them or represent them in their works. Lovejoy's *The Revolt Against Dualism* describes early-twentieth-century philosophical activity as a rebellion against seventeenth-century philosophy, more particularly a rebellion against Locke and Descartes. Locke and Descartes, like Newton, divided nature into two realms—the subject and object; mind and matter—and assumed that "all apprehension of objective reality is mediated through subjective existent, that ideas forever interpose themselves between the knower and the objects which he would" (3). Lovejoy shows that modern intellectuals such as Freud, Heisenberg, Picasso, Joyce, and Eliot have regarded this bifurcation of nature as repellent and untenable, attempting to escape from the dualism of subject and object and from the parallel dualism of mind and
that “all apprehension of objective reality is mediated through subjective existent, that ideas forever interpose themselves between the knower and the objects which he would” (3). Lovejoy shows that modern intellectuals such as Freud, Heisenberg, Picasso, Joyce, and Eliot have regarded this bifurcation of nature as repellent and untenable, attempting to escape from the dualism of subject and object and from the parallel dualism of mind and matter. In their attempts to dethrone Locke and Descartes, modern philosophers came to see that the subject and object were connected in a systematic relationship and that the opposition between subject and object is a mutually defining dichotomy; in other words, the very notion of mind and matter would be meaningless without each other. This attempted rejection of dualism and corresponding reach for monism are of the essence in understanding the revolutionary nature of twentieth-century science and art.

Art Berman’s definition of modernism espouses the idea of reconciling dualism. In his Preface to Modernism, Berman maintains:

Admittedly, modernism becomes a variety of aesthetic practices rather than a coherent shared philosophical system. Nevertheless, modernism can be understood as a practice depending for legitimation on the romantic aesthetic and on the empirical environment. It would be appropriate to call modernism, even if as an oxymoronic aphorism, a transcendental realism, at least when it began. Modernism detaches or uncouples romanticism from its source in idealism and attaches it to a realism that is at least not incompatible with the empiricist environment in which modernism must operate (22).
Hence, for Berman, the central tenet of the modernist theory of poetry and art is the union of irreconcilables: romantic idealism and realism.

Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism* arrives at a similar view of modernism in terms of its tendency to reconcile opposing forces, although his area of research is confined to English literary doctrines published in between 1908 and 1922. In a section of his last chapter which he calls "The painful task of unifying," he writes:

The history traced in this study has been a history of oppositions, disproportions and asymmetries, a history of distinctions drawn then dramatized, a doctrinal struggle waged often between mutually excluding extremes. Apostles of freedom contended with guardians of order, realists with abstractions, sceptics with dogmatists, subjectivists with anti-humanists. The instability of the movement, its persistent doctrinal revisions, must be linked to the incompatibility of these rival imperatives. If Eliot has come to prominence in these pages, if he came to prominence in the twenties, it was in large part because he revised this habit of the modernist mind. His critical efforts ought to be seen as attempts to restore equilibrium, to effect a satisfactory poise among competing aesthetic demands, to achieve, in Eliot's phrase, "a moment of stasis." (186)

Although Georg Lukacs's and Frederic Jameson's view of modernism is basically related to the impact of the capitalist mode of economy on human beings and the politics of the modern world, their ideas also reflect the modern experience of dualism—fragmentation and totality—and its efforts to deal with it. In "Marx and the Problem of Ideological Decay," Lukacs offers a Marxist view of modernism by arguing that in the face
of capitalism’s movement toward greater and greater expansion in the period of imperialism, we lose the ability to grasp the totality of the relations structuring social life. (Fascist Modernism 72) One can respond either by mistaking the partiality and fragmentation of one’s own experience for an experience of the totality, or plod away positivistically gathering details whose connections one cannot fathom, but which one hopes might someday lead to a picture of the totality. Jameson discusses modernism in parallel terms in “Modernism and Imperialism”:

What is determined by the colonial system is now a rather different kind of meaning loss than this one: for colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world—very different from that of the imperial power—remain unknown and unimaginable of the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they may belong to. Such spatial disjunction has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole. This new and historically original problem in what is itself a new kind of content now constitutes the situation and the problem and the dilemma, the formal contradiction, that modernism seeks to solve; or better still, it is only that new kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place. (Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature 50-1)
Although Lukacs and Jameson identify a different reason (the capitalist mode of production vis-à-vis the economic system under imperialism) as the cause of the problem of fragmentation and totality, they both view modernism as representing or dealing with the modern experience of bifurcation. One common ground of modernism, then, is the modern artists' sense of panic and urgency in dealing with the problems of conflicting forces which were so unprecedented in human history that they threatened the very foundation of human civilization.

Postmodernism, the meaning of which is no less confusing than that of modernism, can also be viewed as an effort to understand and deal with the problem of dualism. In Of Grammatology, Jacques Derrida attacks the dominant western tradition of thought for its tendency to privilege the center at the expense of the margin by demonstrating that the binary logic of center and margin cannot be established because of the instabilities of language which he calls “difference.” When Julia Kristeva argues that the whole concept of gender is metaphysical—a violent stabilizing of the sheer precariousness and ambiguity of sexual identity to some spuriously self-identical essence, she is actually rebelling against the false dichotomy of masculine and feminine established and perpetuated by the patriarchal culture. In a similar vein, Edward Said’s Orientalism calls into question the distinction between East and West which was promoted by the Western Orientalist. He stresses that he wrote this book to eliminate the polarization of East and West:

But what I should like also to have contributed here is a better understanding of the way cultural domination has operated. If this stimulates a new kind of dealing with the Orient, indeed if it eliminates the “Orient” and “Occident”
altogether, then we shall have advanced a little in the process of what Raymond Williams has called the "unlearning" of "the inherent dominative mode." (28)

In short, these post-modern thinkers, following Nietzsche, believe that binary logic is in fact an instrument of hierarchy and a tool of oppression.

However, we see that there is a notable difference between a modern way of solving this problem of binary logic and a postmodern way. Postmodern philosophers try to reorient our habitual acceptance of false dichotomies by leading us to think about the limitless vitality of human language, by trying to subvert the monolithic and totalizing procedures of formalist theory, and by pointing out the problems of a culture which perpetuates the polarity between man and woman and East and West. Modernist poets, on the other hand, attempt to destabilize the dominance of one particular force or a particular point of view by reconciling empiricism and transcendentalism, object and subject, fragmentation and unity, and East and West. Modern idealistic solutions of reconciliation can be regarded as a legacy of Romanticism, as well as modern poets' interests in spiritual traditions of the world.

3 In The Concept of Modernism (1990), Astradur Eysteinsson defines modernism as skepticism by saying that "modernism is a mode of skeptical hermeneutics, critical of habitualized practices handed down to us by tradition" (229).


5 ibid., 249.
6 In *The Birth of Modernism* (1993), Leon Surette discusses modernism in the context of universalism, claiming that "Modernism did—as postmodernism alleges—adhere to Enlightenment universalism. In this respect it shared an ideological component of scientific materialism . . . But its universalism was Platonic and metaphysical rather than empirical and rational like modern scientific universalism" (290).
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