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Severed Heads: the influence of Oscar Wilde on W.B. Yeats

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Submission for Ph. D.

University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin

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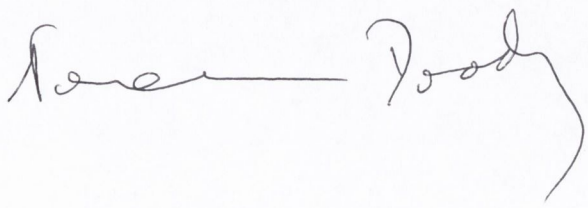
Signed: 

Summary

This thesis is concerned with the literary influence of Oscar Wilde in the work of W.B. Yeats. Yeats was influenced by the images and intellect of Wilde. He assimilated Wilde's concepts and symbols into his creative consciousness and developed them within his work until they became key factors within his creativity.

In the thesis I explore the process of influence within this literary relationship in terms of its social, psychological, historical, imaginative and metaphysical aspects. The method of research includes an examination of manuscripts, typescripts and various published editions of single works and involved the study of historical data such as letters, journals, newspapers, texts. The argument also relies upon the application of Harold Bloom's theory of poetry as influence and the disruption of this theory in considering the ludic element at play in the process of influence.

The political and personal background of both Wilde and Yeats encouraged the likelihood of Wilde's influence on Yeats. Yeats's susceptibility to the power of image increased his sensitivity to Wilde's projected image and the symbols within his work. Yeats's admiration for Wilde's "hard brilliance" and his own lack of a personal aesthetic ensured his interest in Wilde's concepts. The influence of Wilde is revealed in the changes Yeats made to manuscripts and earlier editions of his work as a consequence of his immediate contact with Wilde's work. Yeats used Wilde's material as the stuff of his creativity so that Wilde's concepts and images became an integral and essential part of Yeats's imaginative achievement. This thesis offers an important re-thinking of the role of Oscar Wilde in Yeats's creativity. In it I have shown that Oscar Wilde was a major precursor of W.B. Yeats.

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Severed Heads: the influence of Oscar Wilde on W.B. Yeats

Introduction

The integral importance of Wilde to Yeats's creativity has largely gone unacknowledged. While throughout the vast and prestigious scholarship on W.B. Yeats there are many references to instances of Wilde's influence,[1] by and large, critical attention to the Yeats/Wilde relationship has been in the form of unexplored statement. When it comes to attributing complex thought or philosophical precepts to a precursor of Yeats, Wilde's name is rarely mentioned. Richard Ellmann notes in his essay, "The Critic as Artist as Wilde", the propensity of critics to attribute to "more ponderous names" certain critical positions of Wilde.[2] Harold Bloom, himself an admirer and ephebe of Wilde's[3], is one of those critics who illustrate Ellmann's contention, denigrating Wilde to the advantage of Walter Pater and Friedrich Nietzsche.[4]

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[1] See A, Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (1957; rpt. London: Fontana, 1971); T.R. Henn, *The Lonely Tower; studies in the poetry of W.B. Yeats* (London: Methuen, 1950); Sylvia Ellis, *The Plays of W.B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

[2] Richard Ellmann, 'The Critic as Artist as Wilde' in *Oscar Wilde* edited and introduced by Harold Bloom (New York : Chelsea House, 1983), p. 92.

[3] Noreen Doody, "Precursor and Ephebe: Oscar Wilde, Harold Bloom and the theory of Poetry as Influence" in *Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies,* eds., Mireia Aragay and Jacqueline Hurtley (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2000), pp. 25-31.

[4] Bloom writes: "The guide in that dark region of the will is ... Nietzsche ... where our ultimate gratitude to art in "the cult of the untrue" falls short of the magnificence of Oscar Wilde's 'Decay of Lying'". However despite Wilde's "magnificence", Bloom allows greater intellectual weight to Nietzsche; he repeats this pattern in respect of Wilde and Walter Pater. *Agon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 31, 18.

The critical pioneers in the area of the Wilde/Yeats relationship are Richard Ellmann and Frank Kermode.[5] Their speculations, however, while astute and acutely relevant, are confined to particular observations and are to some extent uninterrogated; they do not proceed beyond a limited, though incisive, investigation. Ellmann notes that Yeats owes much to Wilde's aesthetics while Kermode emphasises Yeats's indebtedness to Wilde for the image of the dancer. Wilde's influence on Yeats, however, is far more pervasive and fundamental than individual instances would suggest. Wilde is a constant presence in Yeats's imagination throughout his creative life. His influence on Yeats is an on-going creative process in which Wilde's concepts and images charged Yeats's creative imagination and entered into his poetic and dramatic work having a marked and substantial effect on his creative output.

Wilde's contribution to Yeats's developing metaphysical doctrine is central to his impact on the poet and is a major concern of this thesis. Yeats's imaginative understanding of life which he systematises in his philosophical writings is crucially important as the dynamic underpinning his creative work. Even Ellmann, the most astute critic of the Wilde/Yeats relationship, while detailing how Yeats learnt from Wilde's concept of the imaginative nature of reality and the power of images to affect and direct life within this definition, does not allow the metaphysical nature of Yeats's debt of influence to Wilde.[6]

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[5] Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*.
Richard Ellmann, *Eminent Domain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967. See also, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987). *Yeats: the man and the masks* (New York 1948; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) and *The Identity of Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1954).
George Yeats, according to her daughter, Miss Anne Yeats, called Ellmann, "the first of the seekers". (Personal communication).

[6] Richard Ellmann, *Eminent Domain*, pp.16---21.

In a departure from the usual critical appraisal of the Wilde/Yeats literary relationship, Terence Brown, in his recent book, *The Life of W.B. Yeats* (1999), acknowledges the metaphysical aspect of Wilde's influence on Yeats. He states that Yeats perceived that Wilde "made the aesthetic a force for the spiritual transformation of human consciousness".[7] I intend to show that the various intellectual concepts, metaphysical speculations and artistic symbols and images which Yeats appropriated from Wilde enriched Yeats's creative process and built into a component within it which was integral to his philosophical theories: his artistic realisation of the unity of being and his perception of the interchanging pattern of Western socio-cultural order.

Mask and image are two of the basic concepts which Yeats works with in arriving at his final philosophical position and Yeats is heavily indebted to Wilde's concepts of both. Yeats's development of image and mask derived substance and direction from his earliest meetings with Wilde and his lifelong acquaintance with Wilde's work. Yeats first seriously played with Wilde's speculations on mask in his early drafts of *The Player Queen*; by the later versions of the play, Yeats developed the Wildean mask into the Yeatsian mask.[8] Yeats's creative transition from one mask to the other was enabled by further ideas of Wilde appropriated by Yeats in his philosophical treatise, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, which he wrote between finishing the first drafts of *The Player Queen* (1910) and the completion of its final version (1917). In this interchange we witness a

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[7] Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999), p. 31.

[8] W.B. Yeats, *The Player Queen* Ms. 8764, N.L.I. "W.B. Yeats Papers: *The Player Queen* – 11 folders and some notebooks". The mss. are labelled i- xi on micro-film 7492.

powerful creative process at work: Wilde's thought fuels Yeats's imagination, offers him initial concepts and facilitates the investigation and transmutation of those concepts.

Image is a powerful factor within the Wilde/Yeats scene of influence and Yeats benefited as much from Wilde's images as he did from his intellectual concepts. Wilde viewed image as a powerful disseminator of influence and Yeats concurred with him.[9] Wilde's influence was often prompted by varied images perceived by Yeats of Wilde and artistic images from within Wilde's work. The visual image acted forcefully on Yeats's imagination prompting new creations. Visual apprehension was strongly developed in Yeats:[10] his father, brother and sister were painters and he, himself, as a young man studied painting at art school. His interest in the occult involved him in the study of the visual image. Wilde's literary images set up creative rhythms within Yeats's visual imagination and found ultimate expression in his work.

Yeats looked on symbol as integral to a poet's work and constructed a network of symbols throughout his work which eventually form a viable language. This language is the stuff of his poetic expression; it reflects his creative mind; through it he communicates his imaginative truth. Yeats's system of interrelated symbols is infiltrated by symbols and images which originated with Wilde. Although Yeats develops and intensifies each one of

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[9] "That experience could never come – of that I was certain – until I had found the right image or right images. From what but the image of Apollo, fixed always in memory and passion, did his priesthood get that occasional power a classical historian has described, of lifting great stones and snapping great branches". W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (1955; rpt. London: Papermac, 1987), pp. 269, 270.

[10] See: Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, *Yeats and the Visual Arts* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1986). T.R. Henn, *The Lonely Tower: studies in the poetry of W.B. Yeats* (London: Methuen, 1950). Giorgio Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into poetry in the work of W.B. Yeats* (London, 1960; Westport (Conn.): Greenwood Publishers, 1979). Edward Engleberg, *The Vast Design: patterns in W.B. Yeats's aesthetic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Publishers, 1964). Bruce Arnold, *Jack Yeats* (New Haven: Conn; London: Yale University Press, 1998).

these symbols, re-imagines and re-sets them within a new context, they retain their primary signification and ensure that Wilde's thought inflects Yeats's creative language.

Wilde's influence was an on-going process which spanned Yeats's life-time. This thesis traces the chronological development of this process, although because of the thematic nature of the subject, it has been necessary at times to disrupt the time sequence. I have indicated the main time period dealt with in each chapter by including dates in the chapter headings. As chapter one illustrates the socio-historic background of both writers and so works within a wide time frame, I have not felt it necessary to include dates in the title heading.

Literary influence manifests itself in various ways and in the chapters of this thesis I will look at the evidence of Wilde's influence in the different forms it takes within Yeats's work. Wilde's influence can be discerned in action in the anxiety of influence Yeats exhibits towards him and in Yeats's critiques of Wilde's work encoded within his own creative work. It is apparent in the more personally oriented feelings of kinship experienced by Yeats towards Wilde which lead him to efforts at improving and perfecting Wilde's work. There are also, as in any influential engagement, socio-historic conditions which facilitate and encourage the growth of influence.

It has been suggested that influence proceeds from purely agonistic motives. Harold Bloom, himself influenced by Nietzsche's concept of the 'will-to-power', strongly supports this position. In his book, *Eminent Domain*, Richard Ellmann foreshadows Bloom's position in his description of literary influence:

> Writers move upon other writers not as genial successors but as violent expropriators, knocking down established boundaries to seize by the force of youth, or of age, what they require. They do not borrow, they override.[11]

While this agonistic pursuit undoubtedly applies to Yeats's relation to Wilde, the passage of influence is not as uncomplicated a process nor as viciously acquisitive a procedure as either Bloom or Ellmann would have it. Operating concurrently with this aggressive approach within the process of influence experienced by Yeats is a divergent, benign strain of influence. This second strand in the influence procedure, I will term *irenic*, as distinct and different from *agonistic*, after Mihai Spariosu's coining of *irenic* as "thought, behaviour and pathos grounded in the principle of peace" which is "inaccessible to the power principle".[12] Spariosu proposes this term as an alternative to the "might is right" ethos underlying Western thought for centuries and Nietzsche's "will –to-power" which he feels is all too often posed as the only possible means of progress in present day criticism, human behaviour and ideas. Spariosu's term, *irenic*, is useful in covering a non aggressive, non power centred strain of literary influence.

The influence of Wilde which Yeats experiences proceeds antithetically, that is by agonistic and by irenic means. These diametrically opposed positions are mediated through Yeats's individual consciousness, an entity that escapes the rigidity of any one theory and is somewhat analogous to the "unique" and "arbitrary" force that Yeats finds at

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[11] Richard Ellmann, *Eminent Domain,* p. 3.

[12] Spariosu believes that the irenic has yet to be established and put in place as the actual working principle of human relations and suggests that one way of doing this is through the liminal worlds created by literature. Liminal worlds are contingent on the actual and the imaginary and provide thresholds or passageways into alternative worlds. In these worlds ludic possibilities and possibilities of being and doing exist. However, although we have not yet achieved a fully blown irenic mentality, such an aspiration and the constituents necessary to its existence are available within the known world.
While, according to Spariosu, the creation of an irenic mentality in Western thought has far to go, a vital strain of the influence procedure originates in this discourse of irenic possibility. Mihai Spariosu, *A Wreath*

phase 13 of his philosophical system in *A Vision* which, of its nature, resists any attempt at mapping.[13] Wilde proposes individualism as the dynamic of artistic creation and Yeats bears out this concept in his particular approach to the influence of Oscar Wilde. Harold Bloom, despite the rigidity of his theory of influence, fully endorses the autonomous and dynamic agency of individual consciousness in the critical process when he states: "The only critical wisdom I know is that there is no method except yourself".[14]

There is evidence within Yeats's creative relationship with Wilde of the features which Harold Bloom regards as essential to literary influence.[15] Yeats experiences the anxiety of influence, described by Bloom, in which the later poet fears being engulfed by the influence of his precursor. There are moments when he attempts to individuate himself by disparaging Wilde's literary achievement while aggrandising himself through the appropriation of what he most values in Wilde's text.

Bloom's theory of influence sees the later poet (or ephebe) setting out to vanquish his precursor and to usurp his sublime force, taking all that he most values in his precursor's work. Bloom's theory works through what he describes as six revisionary ratios of interchangeable psychic defence mechanisms, tropes and images. Bloom has named these revisionary ratios which he sees as characterising poetic influence: Clinamen,

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of Wild Olives: play, liminality, and the study of literature (New York: State of University of NewYork Press, 1997), p. 303.

[13] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (1937; rpt. London: Papermac, 1981), p. 263.

[14] Harold Bloom in Imre Salusinszky, *Criticism in Society: interviews with Jacques Derrida, Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, Frank Kermode, Edward Said, Barbara Johnson, Frank Lentricchia and J. Hillis Miller* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 67.

[15] Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); *Poetry as Repression* (New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 1976); *Agon, (*New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Tessera, Kenosis, Daemonization, Askesis and Aphophrades. They describe how he sees the working of the imagination in the creative process, as the later poet consciously and unconsciously appropriates his precursor. Bloom's revisionary ratios work antithetically in pairs: in the first of these pairs, the later poet approves his precursor's work up to the point where he misreads him, swerves from the text and rewrites it as he feels it ought to have been written. The third and fourth ratios, Bloom explains as undoing the precursor's sublime and daemonizing the ephebe at his expense, while in the fifth ratio, askesis, the ephebe truncates both his own and his precursor's imaginings in a further effort at individuation. Finally, the ephebe establishes his own counter sublime in developing a style which "captures and oddly retains priority over their precursors",[16] so that time seems to be overturned and the precursor appears to be imitating the later poet, a procedure which Bloom describes as 'transumption'.

Yeats's final stance towards Wilde, in which he usurps his position as precursor and establishes priority, shows a ruthlessness worthy of the Bloomian ephebe. At the same time, this aggressive approach is tempered by a concerned, irenic strain of influence which is not fully accounted for by Bloom's first two revisionary ratios. In Bloom's theory the ephebe admires the precursor but attempts to alter his text through arrogant feelings of artistic superiority. In the irenic approach the emphasis is on the younger poet's perception of the precursor as potentially greater than his performance resulting in a ludic, creative urge to *extend* the precursor text to its full potential.

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[16] Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 141.

Brendan Kennelly suggests that there is a ludic quality inherent in creativity[17] and this is exactly the quality perceived by George Bernard Shaw when he declares Wilde "our only thorough playwright" whom he contends played "with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audience".[18] Yeats finds that the ludic quality is integral to Irish literary tradition;[19] he perceived artistic experimentation and playfulness as part of creative activity, the artist, he tells us, "will play with all masks".[20] In 1907 Yeats published a preface to "The Happy Prince" in which he openly praised the profundity of Wilde's thought and admired the intellectual strength of his prose poem, "The Doer of Good", naming it "one of the best poems in the world".[21] Some years later Yeats experimented with Wilde's poem converting it into a play, *Calvary*. Yeats had publicly documented his admiration for Wilde's poem and made no attempt to disguise the artistic relation of *Calvary* to its source. This type of behaviour runs contrary to the Bloomian theory which is in evidence throughout so much of the Wilde/Yeats literary relationship and indicates the unmappable element of individual consciousness at play within its parameters.

One of the forms, taken by the irenic procedure of Wilde's influence, is Yeats's considered critiques of Wilde's work within his own creative texts. Yeats experiences the text as the impetus for the creation of another text, just as Wilde believes the critic regards

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[17] Brendan Kennelly, Personal communication.

[18] George Bernard Shaw, "Two New Plays" rev. *An Ideal Husband* by Oscar Wilde in *Our Theatres in the Nineties* vol. 1 (London: Constable, 1931), p. 10.

[19] W.B. Yeats, "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time", in *Essays and Introductions* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1961), pp. 337, 338.

[20] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs* (Ed. Denis Donoghue. 1972; London: Papermac, 1988), p. 152.

[21] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* p. 270.

the text to be criticised. Wilde described criticism as an independent, creative art whose spirit of selection informs every other art. He believes that the critic in taking his inspiration from the text, stands in the same relation to it as the artist does to his subject matter.[22] Wilde's stance on criticism can be equally applied to literary influence. Wilde's perception of the text to be criticised as a lift-off point for the critic into his own creative work parallels the later poet's response to a precursor text. Yeats uses Wilde's *Salomé* as a point of departure for his own imaginings, taking from it, at recurring stages, that which he most values. His eventual revision of *Salomé* in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* offers a fuller critique of Wilde's play correcting the "errors" and energising his own play by his critique of the hidden text. This notion corresponds with Harold Bloom's contention that the strength of a text is the text which it represses. Bloom writes:

> Where repression is an unconsciously powerful forgetting in and by the psyche, a poetic text does curious tricks, odd turnings that render the unconscious only another trope as the poem both forgets to remember and remembers to forget.[23]

Influence proceeds at both a conscious and unconscious level and Yeats is sometimes more aware than at others of his critical or self-empowering aims. Yeats's conscious interest in Wilde's work extends to his comprehensive reading of Wilde's texts and books related to Wilde both during and after Wilde's lifetime.[24] Yeats closely followed Wilde's artistic development and recognised the maturing of his art in his play,

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[22] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist" in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, Collins Classics (rpt; 1948; Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 1124, 1127. All quotes from Wilde's work are from this edition of the Collected Works unless otherwise stated.

[23] Harold Bloom, *Agon: towards a theory of revisionism*, p. 226.

[24] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 270.

The Importance of Being Earnest.[25] He acclaimed Wilde's brilliance and credited him with some of the concepts which would become so important in his own creative consciousness, such as Wilde's juxtapositioning of Christ and Caesar. Historical and personal considerations, so important in facilitating influence, strongly bound both writers. Yeats felt a keen affinity with Wilde through their shared national background and their personal empathy. As a young man he looked on Wilde as something of a hero.

Many of Wilde's concepts became so familiar to Yeats that they became an integral part of his own creative thought. His familiarity with Wilde's ideas and his refurbishment of Wilde's creative output gave him a somewhat familial concern for his precursor to the point of identification with him.[26] Yeats's behaviour towards Wilde may stem from his need to repay and free himself from a debt of influence or it may spring from the burden of love. The identification Yeats seems to feel with Wilde suggests a proprietorial relationship born of the familiarity of admiration and kinship. Such a feeling of identification implies that for Yeats, Wilde's literary imaginings were legitimately his for the taking, without the stricture of indebtedness or bad conscience.

When editing *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* Yeats had the opportunity to publicly acknowledge the artistic importance of his precursor. Yeats selected for

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[25]W.B. Yeats, "Introduction", *The Happy Prince*, in *The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales.* Vol. III of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (New York: A.R. Keller, 1907), pp. ix-xvi. rpt., "Wilde: The Happy Prince" in *Prefaces and Introductions: uncollected prefaces and introductions by Yeats to works by other authors, and the anthologies edited by Yeats* by W.B. Yeats, ed. William H. O'Donnell (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 150. Hereafter referred to as: Introduction *The Happy Prince.*

[26] See Yeats's *Autobiographies* for his early regard for Wilde, particularly pp. 130—134 and ms. 30,356 N.L.I. See also Ellmann's *The Identity of Yeats* in which he quotes Yeats's account of his first meeting with James Joyce. Yeats recalls: "But the next moment he spoke of a friend of mine [Oscar Wilde]", p. 87. This line of critical investigation relies on Yeats's admiration and concern for Wilde and, given the near conditioned response to this type of discourse, will prompt Freudian family romance readings. I do not, however, find this theory a particularly useful method of enquiry in this case.

publication Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and proceeded to an implied criticism of it by editing and rearranging its stanzas. Yeats declared that he was ridding the poem of its "foreign feathers" and so giving the world "a great or almost great poem". Yeats steps into the author's shoes, as though it were hard for him to distinguish to whom they belonged, self or precursor. Such was the familiarity he felt, he professes that what he has done to the poem is no more than "what he himself [Oscar Wilde] would have done".[27] This statement combines agonistic usurpation with the interested critique of an irenic apologist. Wilde, as author, seems peripheral to Yeats's creative restructuring of his work. Yeats's attempts to perfect his precursor implies, despite his conscious intentions, his own creative superiority. Thus, although the aim may be irenic, its consequence is Yeats's empowerment.

Although, undoubtedly, there is an irenic process of influence at work alongside the more obvious agonistic movement so clearly theorised by Bloom, influence whether irenic or agonistic in its orientation, always implies admiration and appropriation either by the "kiss" or the "sword".[28] Whatever the procedure - that the process of influence empowers the younger poet and leaves the precursor vanquished or, at least somewhat diminished, seems certain. Oscar Wilde depicts influence as always weakening the

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[27] W.B. Yeats, "Introduction", *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. vii.

[28] ibid., p. vii.
Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard, ...
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

precursor and Harold Bloom endorses this position. Yeats's contention in his final play, *The Death of Cuchulain*, is apposite: "There must be severed heads".[29]

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[29] W.B. Yeats, *The Death of Cuchulain* in *Selected Plays of W.B. Yeats* ed., Richard Allen Cave (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 264.

"A provincial like myself": Yeats, Wilde and the politics of identity

Wilde and Yeats were born in Dublin in 1854 and 1865 respectively. The 19th century Ireland in which they were brought up was a society made complex by its colonial status. Actual political power did not rest in the country itself but was administered from Dublin by the Lord Lieutenant and British representatives working in Dublin Castle. Economic power was held by those who had settled in Ireland from Britain over a long period of time – Ireland having been colonised since the 12th century. London was the nerve centre of this colonial enterprise; social attitudes, educational dictates, all issued from there. This disjunction of power and the impositionof foreign attitudes fundamentally affected Irish identity. The Irish were, in many ways, dispossessedhaving lost place, status and self determination.

Culturally, the Irish position was complex: seven hundred years of continuous interaction between the imperialist power and its subordinated subject had given birth to a dual culture. The nature of colonialism is to embrace both the alien and native culture but while the acquisition of the coloniser's culture is invariably an imposition, its transposition cannot come about without the tacit consent of the native population, giving rise to further internal tensions. The bi-cultural situation of the Irish was fraught with ambiguity; guilt, pride, love and displacement united in a crisis of identity.

The Irish for many years had strained against a putative inferiority attributed to them by England who, assuming the role of pater familias with its implicit presumption of moral rectitude, demanded from its subordinated colony absolute allegiance in every sphere of life - social, economic, political and cultural. The resentment which such an

attitude engendered in the colonised subjects augmented the already complicated engagement with England.[1]

Resentment and acceptance necessarily characterised the Irish condition – resentment at their relegation to a realm of subservience and the denial of their right to self-determination, together with resentment at the disregard for native culture and tradition. Their acceptance, reluctant as this might have been, was of colonial rule and the conditions of life which this implied - structurally and culturally. The Irish lived the colonialists' culture and with that ambiguity, symptomatic of the colonised position, embraced it as though it were their own. Irish identity was ambivalent and confused.

Structurally Ireland was an adjunct of England, Dublin a disempowered capital. London was the centre of commerce and flourishing capital of the arts. It was commonplace for the career-minded and the literary-minded Irish to gravitate towards that vibrant city. Many Irish writers made their literary name in London and settled there as though they belonged there. Oscar Wilde, on completing his education at Oxford, came up to London in 1879 where he determined to pursue a career as poet and man of letters. W.B. Yeats who had spent a part of his childhood in London, returned there from Ireland with his family in 1887 and involved himself assiduously in literary activity.

W.B. Yeats first met Oscar Wilde in London in 1888 – Yeats was twenty three years of age and Wilde thirty four. Yeats described this meeting as an "astonishment". He

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[1] Frantz Fanon constructs this same phenomenon in terms of a *mater familias*: "On the unconscious plane, colonialism therefore did not seek to be considered by the native as a gentle loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence." Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture" in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1983), pp. 169,170.

was captivated by Wilde's image, his generous personality and what he called "the hard brilliance" of his mind.[2] Their friendship continued during the years of Yeats's twenties 1888-1894; Yeats expresses in *Autobiographies* his admiration for and sense of indebtedness to Wilde and writes of the kindness and consideration he showed to him in London at this time.[3]

Irish writers who settled in England, contrary to being fully assimilated into English society, were marked by difference – by their consciousness of a separate identity from the English. Their common background and heritage bound them together in the "privileged" understanding of experience. Indicative of the strength of this bond is the membership of "The Irish Literary Society" which was founded in London in the early 90s by W.B. Yeats with the help of T.W. Rolleston and which, Yeats says "was joined by every London-Irish author and journalist."[4]

However congenial Irishmen of letters may have found London as a centre of literary endeavour and cosmopolitanism, it also accentuated for them the ambiguous nature of an Irish identity brought about by the colonial predicament. Not only were these writers aware of the separateness of identity but for all their mastery of English language and literature, their English style education, they were on an unequal footing with their English counterparts. No matter how repressed such a notion might be, the underlying

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[2] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 130. *Memoirs*, p. 19.

[3] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* pp. 285, 135.

[4] ibid. p. 1.
Wilde, his brother, Willie, and his mother, Lady Wilde, were members of the I.L.S. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1985), p. 121.

premise on which the Irish position rested was that of a supposed inferiority and dependence.[5] While most English people may not have spent too much time actively contemplating this notion, the superior and despotic position of England as an imperial power would have been taken for granted by them, as would the certain knowledge that this was as it should be.[6]

England believed in the righteousness of its imperial rule and accepted its culture as unquestionably superior to those of its colonised subjects.[7] Its position as a dominant world force gave it a sense of importance and racial superiority which was still current in the late 19th century. On September, 18th 1880, the same decade in which Yeats met Wilde (1888), a leader article appeared in *The Times* which had been translated from an article by Gustave Mollinari in which he claimed that "England's largest newspapers allow no occasion to escape them of treating the Irish as an inferior race - as a kind of white negroes"[sic].[8]

At the time of his meeting with Yeats in London, Wilde confounded the current stereotypical English perception of the Irish by his projection of breeding, wit and charm. Yeats, at this time, was passionately engaged in the recovery and reinvention of an Irish

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[5] See the ambivalent position of the colonised who closely resemble the coloniser yet remain different in terms of "liberty, status and rights" in Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-colonial theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997), p. 131.

[6] Elizabeth Bowen captures this imperialist mindset in her novel, *The Last September* (1929; rpt. London: Vintage/Random House, 1998), pp. 92, 93.

[7] Edward Said states that in 19th century England "empire was a major topic of unembarrassed concern". Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 8.

[8] Molinari's phrase was, "une variété de negres blancs". Anne McClintock, "White Negroes and Celtic Calibans: antinomies of race" in *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the Colonial context* (New York/London: Routledge, 1995), p. 52.

cultural tradition; he was deeply interested in cultural nationalism and was keenly aware of his image as Irish poet;[9] nationalism and the occult were the informing "aesthetic" on which his work depended.[10] Yeats's enterprise involved the elevation of what it meant to be Irish so Wilde's high-profile image would have delighted him. It was common place for cartoonists in the 1880s to draw simian representations of the Irish; stereotype reaffirmed the coloniser's perception of self as superior to its subject.[11] Wilde was not immune to the imputation of the stereotype but he was quick to react to it and to subvert it. Following the production of *Lady Windermere's Fan* two actors, Charles Brookfield and Charles Hawtrey, wrote a burlesque of Wilde's play in which Wilde is caricatured as a stage Irishman, under his middle name of O'Flaherty. The opening song is sung to an Irish air,

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[9] Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (1954; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 4.
Yeats passionately condemns Professors Dowden and J.P. Mahaffy of Trinity College Dublin for their lack of interest in emerging Irish literature (1886): "The most cultivated of Irish readers are only anxious to be academic, and to be servile to English notions". Their critical ear, he finds, is exclusively attuned to "the faintest echo of English thought".
"The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson 11", in *The Dublin University Review* (1886), rpt. in *Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats; First reviews and articles, 1886-1896, 1* (London: Macmillan, 1970), ed. John Frayne. p. 103.

[10] Terence Brown suggests that these two doctrines, nationalism and the occult, may stem from a common impulse.
Brown finds: "There is something obviously analogous to occultism about cultural nationalism in general. Both occultism and cultural nationalism involve belief in hidden realities which must be made manifest. The idea that the spirit of the people ... which survives through countless ages and vicissitudes to link a modern democratic Christian people with their putative ancestors in pre-history involves a fair measure of simple credulity ..." "Cultural Nationalism, Celticism and the Occult" in *Celticism* ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1996), p. 222.

[11] Cartoons depicting the Irish as feckless, slovenly creatures were commonplace in 19th century English journals such as *Judy* and *Punch.*
"For late Victorian artists drew bigger and better Irish ape-men than *Judy's* principal cartoonist from 1868-1887, William Henry Boucher (1837-1906), whose arresting images of arrested Paddies rivalled the first ape-men ever produced by Leech and Tenniel". "During the 1880s Boucher produced scores of similar apelike Fenians and progualtinous Paddies". L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: the Irishman in Victorian caricature* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), pp. 131, 135.

"St. Patrick's Day". Wilde objected to the Licenser of Plays about the piece; he instructed that the script be read to Wilde by the writers. Wilde, refusing permission for the names "Oscar" or "Wilde" to be used, listened to the entire work and then commented:

> I felt, [sic] however, that I have been – well – Brookfield, what is the word? – what is the thing you call it in your delightfully epigrammatic Stage English? eh? Oh yes! delightfully spoofed.[12]

By its nature imperialism depended on a hierarchical system of beliefs, its justification for taking over and imposing itself on other countries being their moral and cultural inferiority, which culminated in a supposed inability to properly govern themselves. This sort of rationale was used by England against Ireland whose people were seen as ineffectual and child-like, a people who could not be taken seriously. Declan Kiberd points out that "Victorian imperialists attributed to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which a harsh mercantile code had led them to suppress in themselves."[13] Roy Foster further explains this phenomenon. He notes the ambivalent feelings towards Ireland held by writers such as Trollope, Froude and Churchill who display in some of their writings a real affection for Ireland while exhibiting in others a strong distaste. Foster discerns in the sexually inflected language used by Froude to depict the Irish, an insecure "Victorian over-reaction against something insidiously attractive".[14]

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[12] Charles Hawtrey, *The Truth at Last,* ed., Somerset Maugham (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1924)), 221-227. Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 350.

[13] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Cape, 1995), p. 30.

[14] Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.294.

Victorian England re-imagined Ireland as an opposing image, embodying the characteristics which it dared not reveal or did not possess, and found the attraction both alluring and repulsive. Ireland's identity became at once synonymous with a longed for relaxation of strictly held values and a despised amalgam of unworthy characteristics. This dubious image was recognised as such by W.B. Yeats who acknowledged that "the English like to credit Irishmen with all the virtues England despises."[15] It was because of this double edged image which England applied to Ireland of the 19th. century that they looked on Wilde with an ambivalent gaze of amused delight and dismissive distaste. England wholly failed to decipher in the work of Oscar Wilde what was immediately apparent to his fellow Irishman, W.B. Yeats. Yeats was culturally equipped to perceive that "behind [Wilde's] words was the whole power of his intellect". [16]

In this chapter I will discuss the effect of colonial identity on the literary relationship of Wilde and Yeats. I will address how 19th century England perceived Wilde and show that Yeats understood him in a way that was not available to the English because his perception of him was contingent upon the common experience of colonial subjects. Yeats was in a position to recognise Wilde's imaginative restructuring of identity and the destabilising of English cultural assumptions in his life and art as strategies in the negotiation of his identity as an Irish writer working in London. Yeats's perspective

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[15] E.H. Mikhail ed., "An interview with Mr. W.B. Yeats" by Hugh Lunn. first published in *Hearth and Home* (London: Nov., 28, 1912). Collected in *W.B. Yeats: interviews and recollections* Vol. 1, (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 88.

[16] W.B. Yeats, Introduction *The Happy Prince,* p. 148. See also Noreen Doody, "Yeats and Wilde: Nation and Identity" in *New Voices in Irish Criticism.* Ed. P.J. Mathews. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000 pp. 27-33.

sharpened his ability to perceive the intellectual strength of Wilde.

While Yeats considered Wilde's work deep and profound, this was not a reading usually accorded Wilde in Victorian London where he was seen chiefly as a brilliant talker and a writer of trivial, if clever, comedies.[17] Robert Ross, Wilde's great friend and literary executor, writing in his "Prefatory Dedication" to *De Profundis* (1907), alludes to the English establishment's failure in acknowledging Wilde's literary stature. Ross writes that Wilde's "literary position, [was] hardly recognised even in the zenith of his successful dramatic career".[18] In fact, Yeats believed that much about Wilde was unintelligible to the English and that this inscrutability was due to Wilde's nationality. Yeats writes - "*We* would not find him so unintelligible - for much about him is Irish of the Irish".[19] Yeats attributes a correct reading of Wilde's work to cultural difference and clearly identifies himself and Wilde as belonging within a distinct, Irish cultural context, seeing their relation to the English in terms of "them" and "us".[20] This position fostered feelings of empathy and kinship between the two writers which encouraged Yeats's favourable predisposition to the influence of Wilde.

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[17] "Plays that can seem simply clever, opportunistic exploitations of current theatrical fashions ... or simply vehicles for Wilde's epigrammatic wit, are amongst the most devastating of studies of the bases of English society at the moment when its masters ruled the world". Terence Brown, Introd., *The Plays* in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (1948; rpt. Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 351.

[18] Robert Ross, Prefatory Dedication, *De Profundis*, by Oscar Wilde (London: Methuen, 1908), p. x.

[19] W.B. Yeats, "Oscar Wilde's Last Book," in *Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats: First reviews and articles, 1886-1896*, 1, ed. John Frayne, (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 203.
Hereafter referred to as: "Oscar Wilde's Last Book".

[20] This mindset was equally applicable to the English. In *Apes and Angels* L. Perry Curtis writes: "Most respectable Victorians believed in a natural opposition between an Anglo-Saxon "Us" and a Gaelic or Celtic "Them", which was reinforced by the great religious divide between Protestantism and (Roman) Catholicism". pp. xi,xii.

Yeats implied a decisive difference between the people of both islands and an utter inability on the part of the English to comprehend the Irish. Yeats claimed that Wilde was also of the view that the English found it impossible to understand him and that he is "content to know that there are some [Yeats clearly means the Irish] who laugh with him" as he peppers "John Bull with his pea shooter of wit".[21]

England's lack of insight into the Irish psyche can be accounted for historically. In an effort to control and dominate its colony, England enacted many unjust laws and attempted to re-make Ireland in its own image; in the process existing traditions and culture were entirely disregarded; the colonial power had no need, nor inclination, to understand its subject. W.B. Yeats, writing on the poet, Edmund Spenser, (Oct. 1902), points to the English establishment's lack of interest in coming to an understanding of the Irish, seeing them only in accordance with its preconceptions:

> When Spenser wrote of Ireland he wrote as an official, and out of thoughts and emotions that had been organised by the State. He was the first of many Englishmen to see nothing but what he was desired to see.[22]

Yeats concludes that had Spenser, whose poetry he admired, not been blinded by bias and looked at Ireland with the eyes of a poet he would have been enthralled by the quick imagination of the native poets.

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[21] W.B. Yeats, "Oscar Wilde's Last Book," p. 204.
See also George Bernard Shaw: "Ireland is of all countries the most foreign to England". Review of *An Ideal Husband* in *Our Theatres in the Nineties* Vol. 1 (London: Constable and co. Ltd., 1931), p. 10.
Ian Small and Josephine Guy question the usefulness of critical enquiry into the cultural context into which Wilde was born. Rather than seeing the recent scholarship on Wilde's nationality as another means of exploring the writer's work, they somehow feel it threatens a total understanding of Wilde. Their views on his homosexuality disclose a similar mindset. "Wilde the Writer" in *Oscar Wilde's Profession – Writing and the Culture Industry in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-13.

[22] W.B. Yeats, "Edmund Spenser", in "The Cutting of an Agate" in *Essays and Introductions,* p. 372.

The separation which Yeats made between Spenser the English official, and Spenser the poet, is typical of many such divisions necessitated by the 19th century colonialist situation. Although the coloniser had no conception of the perplexing state of Irish identity and no interest in studying the Irish psyche, the Irish, on the other hand, had to consider the English character. This knowledge aided them in finding ways in which to live under the conditions imposed upon them by an outside force, these ways often included such pragmatic strategies as manipulation, dissimulation and evasion. So that while the colonial power in its dismissive attitude to the subordinated subject, often lost sight of that people's humanity, the colonised were always aware of the coloniser's character. The nature of Yeats's remarks on Edmund Spenser illustrates the negotiation of character necessary in claiming Spenser's fine poetry as part of a bi-cultural inheritance, despite his unacceptable views on Ireland. Oscar Wilde employed the same sort of mental selectiveness in his admiration of Ruskin and Carlyle. In order to follow his intellectual inclination regarding these writers, suppression of their imperialist notions was necessary.

This strategy of repression aided the colonised in adopting the coloniser's culture as their own; it did not, however, achieve a total and uncompromised appropriation. In their accomodation of an alien culture a residue of resentment against the imperialist remained. It was this inevitable clash of the inseparable opposing cultures that prompted Yeats to write:

> No people hate as we do in whom the past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life ... [but] I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate.[23]

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[23] W.B. Yeats, "A General Introduction for my Work," in *Essays and Introductions*, p. 519.

Unlike England, whose identity was taken as unambiguous and self-evident, Ireland's identity was compromised; England was always implicit in Ireland's image of self. Yeats's feelings were not uncommon; denial, selection and appropriation were often the response of a colonial culture. Wilde experienced similar ambivalent feelings towards his bicultural position; his facetious remark, "If one could only teach the English how to talk, and the Irish how to listen, society here would be quite civilised",[24] suggests not only the division between the two nations but, with his usual concern for reconciling opposites, a possible complementary relationship. Wilde pursued this possibility in attempting to reconcile his love for English culture with his nationalist feelings; he demonstrated this fusion of culture in a lecture which he delivered to Irish Americans in San Francisco (1882):

> And indeed I do not know anything more wonderful or more characteristic of the Celtic genius than the quick artistic spirit in which we adapted ourselves to the English tongue. The Saxon took our lands and left them desolate. We took their language and added new beauty to it.[25]

Wilde's admiration for the English language is implicit in his remark but in asserting the empowerment of the Irish through their appropriation of that language, he reverses the usual perception of the colonial bi-cultural exchange. To lose one's language would generally be regarded as disempowering or as David Lloyd puts it: "To take on another language is already to live as an exile, to lose one's identity and one's paternity, to be

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[24] Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, p. 564

[25] Oscar Wilde, "Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century: unpublished lecture notes of Oscar Wilde," in *University Review*, 1, No. 4 (Spring 1955), ed. Michael J. O'Neill, p. 29.

condemned to translate."[26] In his statement Wilde imaginatively deflates England's triumph over Ireland and supplants it with a vision of the Irish as creatively and intellectually superior to the English; he reverses the shame of subjugation, dispossession and loss of national language. This strategy of reversal is everywhere evident in Wilde's life and art and was seen by Yeats as integral to Wilde's response to the perplexities of Irish identity.

In his lecture, "The English Renaissance", Wilde writes with a natural appropriation of "our English Renaissance" and "our Romantic movement". The opportunity was there for the Irish to exploit colonial identity and occasionally adopt the coloniser's identity as it suited.[27] Wilde's claim on English culture, however, is not made without drawing a clear distinction between the individual English people, on the one hand, and official England, on the other. Wilde says: "Though I have English friends, I do not like the English in general".[28] The equivocal mental attitude of the colonised is evident in Wilde's statements. Both writers were acutely aware of the bicultural tensions inherent in being Irish: one was unquestionably Irish, resenting English rule but appropriating its literature and endeavouring to reconcile diversities in a way that would satisfy one's sense of integrity and one's expectations of an intact identity. Yeats was familiar with the

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[26] David Lloyd, Anomalous States: Irish writing and the post-colonial moment (Dublin: Lilliput, 1993), p. 45.
Yeats quotes Wilde's neat inversion of the coloniser's image of Ireland as a drunken, lewd people: "Beer, bible and the seven deadly virtues have made England what she is to-day". "Oscar Wilde's Last Book", p. 203.

[27] Oscar Wilde, "The English Renaissance of Art". Lecture delivered for the first time in the Chickering Hall, New York, Jan. 9th 1882. Collected in *Aristotle at Afternoon Tea: The Rare Oscar Wilde* ed. John Wyse Jackson (London: Fourth Estate, 1991), p. 3.

[28] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 352.

cultural practices that Wilde adopted in England to deal with his situation and this understanding aided his appreciation of Wilde's literary ability.

There were many ways, throughout the history of Ireland's occupation by England, in which the Irish dealt with the incongruities of a colonial identity. The Irish in England sometimes found it beneficial to collude in the stereotypical image allotted to them and carry on their "real" life behind the mask of servility or bombast expected of them. The poet, John Keats, noted in 1818 how "the Irish are sensible of the character they hold in England and act accordingly to Englishmen".[29] In a more sophisticated variation of this age old device of the Irish, Wilde colluded in the image allotted to him of trivial dandy; he knew that a mask elicits an expected response; the mask of a fool is greeted with laughter while that of a wise man demands serious attention. Writing to a friend in 1894, Wilde explained his collusion in his public image:

> To the world I seem, by intention on my part, a dilettante and dandy merely – it is not wise to show one's heart to the world – and as seriousness of manner is the disguise of the fool, folly in its exquisite moods of triviality and indifference and lack of care is the robe of the wise man. In so vulgar an age as this we all need masks.[30]

Wilde projected a suave and sophisticated image in London which perfectly reflected the notion of English elegance and breeding. Declan Kiberd notes that Wilde parodied the notion of Englishness in a "lifelong performance" and further contends that Wilde's stance constituted a challenge to English misconceptions of Ireland.[31] Wilde's trial in England

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[29] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* p. 29.

[30] Letter to artist, Philip Houghton, in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde,* eds. Rupert Hart Davis and Merlin Holland (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 586.

[31] Declan Kiberd, "Anglo-Irish Attitudes" in *Ireland's Field Day* (1983; rpt. London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 85.

(1895) for homosexual "offences" seems to bear out Wilde's success in the parody which Kiberd observes. Ironically, Wilde's counsel, Sir Edward Clarke, attempted to use the current Victorian view of the Irish in a last ditch effort to turn his client's trial in his favour. In his crucial summing up speech, Sir Edward alluded to Wilde as "a brilliant Irishman" and pleaded with the jury to allow him "to live among us ... and to give in the maturity of his genius gifts to our literature"[32]: the "them" and "us" strategy is significant. Wilde's nationality would have suggested to the Victorian jury the current image of the Irish as morally lax and somewhat exotic: an artistic if inferior race of people. By drawing attention to the Irish nationality of this "master of Englishness", Sir Edward Clarke appealed to the jury to judge him not as the equal he appeared to be but as the colonised other, not quite the genuine article, and therefore not wholly capable of abiding by the Englishman's high code of ethics. It was a ploy which was at least worth trying in such desperate circumstances. Unfortunately for Wilde, it failed. For one thing, it seems that Wilde had played too well at being an Englishman and his very polished performance challenged, not only English misconceptions of Irish identity, but the foundations of colonialism which derived its authority from the absolute difference between those who needed to be ruled and those who ruled.[33]

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[32] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 447.

[33] Homi Bhabha alludes to the threat to colonial power posed by mimicry. The coloniser sees traces of self in the colonised and this threatens the premise of absolute difference between "us" and ""them" on which colonial authority is based. "The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority ... through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry, [it] articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority". Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse", in *Location of Culture* (Aldershot: Scolar, c1995), p. 88. See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (London: Pluto, 1986).

From his first days in London, Wilde consistently behaved contrary to the assigned role of colonised subject and was eminently successful in his portrayal of nobility. Society hostesses vied with each other for his company and he accepted their invitations in the manner of a neighbouring aristocrat and this, indeed, is how he identified himself. In his last prose work, *De Profundis*, Wilde recalls the pedigree of his name:

> She [his mother] and my father had bequeathed me a name they had made noble and honoured not merely in Literature, Art, Archaeology and Science, but in the public history of my own country in its evolution as a nation.

In the same letter he recounts his attributes - characteristics befitting the role of an aristocrat – "I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring." He even gives himself a title, "Lord of language".[34] Wilde believed that "He who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world"[35] and it was at the tables of London's aristocratic society that he set about conquering the Empire. "Wilde was," Yeats tells us, "incomparably the finest talker of his epoch."[36] "He talked as good Irish talkers always do – though with a manner and music that he had learned from Pater or Flaubert – and as no good English talker has ever done".[37] Evening after evening Wilde triumphed at the dinner tables of these nobles, bringing his "extravagant crusade", in the manner of the Trojan horse, right into the very centre of the Englishman's castle and in the intellectual battle which ensued, Wilde had no equal.

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[34] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (1905; rpt. London: Methuen, 1922), pp. 23, 24, 33.

[35] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 294.

[36] Sybil Bristowe, "Mr. W.B. Yeats: Poet and Mystic". First published in *T.P's Weekly* (Apr. 4, 1913). Collected in *W.B. Yeats; Interviews and recollections* Vol. 1, p. 93.

[37] W.B. Yeats, Introduction, *The Happy Prince,* p. 148.

Yeats, with his insight into the fractured nature of Irish identity, discerned how Wilde wondered at his own self creation – he contemplates the image of Wilde waking every morning to recount to himself the pleasures of his yesterday: dining with the aristocracy, delighting in "his own beautiful house" and reading with delight Pater, Flaubert and "Homer in the original".[38] Yeats, familiar with the difficult and complex state of Irish identity, was well qualified to perceive his countryman's emotion at restoring to himself a fitting position among those who were firmly convinced of their natural superiority and of the inferiority of their subjects. "[Wilde] was", Yeats explained, "a provincial like myself"[39] and he noted the joy with which this colonial provincial cast his spell over the capital of Empire and how he exulted in his dominance of its illustrious society:

> [Wilde] was a parvenu, but a parvenu whose whole bearing proved that if he did dedicate every story in *A House of Pomegranates* to a lady of title, it was but to show that he was Jack and the social ladder his pantomime beanstalk.[40]

Yeats stresses the element of play in Wilde's assault on the English sense of social order with its attendant racial and class prejudices. He disclaims the idea that Wilde's attention to the English aristocracy springs from any base notion of self-ingratiation or snobbery.[41]

Although Wilde may have envisaged himself as socially equal to his English

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[38] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 138.

[39] W.B. Yeats, Introduction, *The Happy Prince,* p. 150.

[40] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 138.

[41] Yeats states categorically: "Wilde was not a snob." Hugh Kingsmill, ""Meeting with Yeats" in *Interviews and recollections,* Vol. 11, p. 295. Wilde was relentless in his critique of the faults and foibles of English society. Kiberd points out that Wilde's "strictures against English dullness" can be read as "an inflection on Arnold's critique of Philistine middle-class pragmatism and gradgrindery". Personal communication.

counterparts this was not ultimately how they viewed him, as would be illustrated at the time of his trial. It is evident from documents in the Home Office files that the establishment was aware of Wilde's aristocratic lover, Lord Douglas's complicity in Wilde's "crime". However, a decision was taken not to press charges against him. In a communication (19.4.'95) sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Hon. Hamilton Cuffe, Charles F. Gill, prosecutor at Wilde's first trial, states: "Woods and Chas. Parker suggest misconduct on the part of Douglas with them – these witnesses would clearly require corroboration and although this is ample against Wilde ... " Cuffe, in an answering letter (20.4'95) gives it as his opinion that "one of these young men is a person of the worst possible character".[42] No reason is given as to why the testimony of a witness "of the worst possible character" is seen as "ample" against Wilde. What is clear, however, is that Wilde and Douglas were perceived by representatives of the English establishment as unequal before the law. Differences in social status obviously contributed to this perception: Douglas was a member of the British aristocracy while Wilde was an artist from the colony of Ireland. This was the harsh reality; the narrative of the "neighbouring aristocrat" existed in the realm of the "exotic other" which Yeats depicts as the imagined image of England subscribed to by Wilde and by his countrymen in general: "Wilde was an Irishman: and England to an Irishman is a far strange land. To Wilde the aristocrats of England were as the nobles of Baghdad".[43] Yeats indicates in this statement the breadth of the cultural gulf which existed between Ireland and England.

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[42] File HO 45/24516, Public Records Office, Kew. The file is entitled "The Case of Lord Alfred Douglas" and marked "To remain secret 100 years". The letter is dated 19/4/95.

[43] Hugh Kingsmill, ""Meeting with Yeats" in *Interviews and recollections,* Vol. 11, p. 295.

The complexity of communication between colonised and coloniser is alluded to by Homi Bhabha in his theory of hybridity. Bhabha asserts that the coloniser's message is always received by the colonised from within their own cultural terms giving rise to a new and unintended signification. The coloniser's culture is re-interpreted and re-made.[44] However, there is also an opportunity for the colonised to exploit this area of incomprehension and misconception to their own advantage. Yeats perceived Wilde at play within this context; he pictured him within a continuum of Gaelic poets who consciously misconstrue and exploit this liminal space through the medium of humour. Yeats describes the humour as being characterised by a delight in "mischievous extravagance" which has overflowed throughout all of Irish literature; he emphasises its profanity and its inclusion of all things as the object of its ridicule. In fact, Yeats declares that the height of fun is achieved when the joke is incomprehensible to someone who then attacks it from a serious point of view. He further explains that no one apprises the uncomprehending attacker of his mistake but laughs all the more loudly, mocking his "solemnity". Yeats's observation projects the concept of humour as a site of empowerment.

> Our minds being sufficient to themselves, do not wish for victory but are content to elaborate our extravagance, if fortune aid, into wit or lyric beauty, and as for the rest, there are nights when a king like Conchobar would spit upon his-arm ring and queens will stick out their tongues at the rising moon. This habit of the mind has made Oscar Wilde and Mr. Bernard Shaw the most celebrated makers of comedy of our time.[45]

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[44] "Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that often 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition." Homi Bhabha, "Signs taken for wonders: questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817", *The Location of Culture,* p. 114.

[45] W.B. Yeats, "J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time", in *Essays and Introductions,* pp. 337, 338.

Wilde exhibited this sly and irreverent, style of wit in his society comedies. In Act Two of *Lady Windermere's Fan,* an English aristocrat, the Duchess of Berwick, wishes to see her daughter, Lady Agatha, become engaged to Mr. Hopper, an eligible young man from the colony of Australia. The Duchess addresses Mr. Hopper:

"Do you know, Mr. Hopper, dear Agatha, and I are so much interested in Australia. It must be so pretty with all the dear little kangaroos flying about. Agatha has found it on the map. What a curious shape it is. Just like a large packing case. However, it is a very young country isn't it?" Hopper replies:

"Wasn't it made at the same time as the others, Duchess?"[46]

These are funny lines in themselves no matter who the audience, but there is a double laugh for the colonised listener at the grand dismissiveness and disregard for a whole continent and its people. A stereotypical image is projected unto the country and the reference to its youth infers its lack of history and virtual non-existence until its colonisation by England.

Yeats listening to these lines was culturally aware of their encoded layers of meaning . "I see in [Wilde's] life and works," he said, " an extravagant Celtic crusade against Anglo-Saxon stupidity."[47] And, certainly, Wilde was of the opinion that England's rule of Ireland was characterised by a "stupidity ... aggravated by good intentions".[48]

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[46] Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan,* p. 433.

[47] W,B, Yeats, "Oscar Wilde's Last Book". p. 203.

[48] Oscar Wilde, "The Two Chiefs of Dunboyne". Review in *The Pall Mall Gazette,* (Apr. 13, 1889). collected in *The Artist as Critic: critical writings of Oscar Wilde* ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Allen, 1970), p. 136.

'Celtic Crusader' was one of the many imaginative images Yeats would apply to Wilde and he elaborated on this image: he labelled Wilde "a spiritual adventurer",[49] whose response to colonial imposition was an unorchestrated, individualistic campaign, a lone battle on the intellectual plane. He imagined Wilde a man of action, given to quick retaliation; someone who thrived on the immediacy of the moment. He pictured him in heroic terms: as daring leader of a cavalry charge or a valiant figure from15th century Italy.[50] However, when not imaginatively displacing Wilde into these foreign images, Yeats located him firmly within the history of his own country where he felt the restless, heroic nature he perceived in Wilde could best be explained.

Yeats identified dispossession and colonialist oppression as factors in the shaping of Oscar Wilde. The mid-nineteenth century, Yeats claimed, was a time when "the Ireland created by English politics reached its climax, and its products were men like Shaw, Wilde and George Moore ... They had no home in Ireland and England was always a foreign country."[51] He sees Wilde's anti-colonialist protest as analogous to the Irish swashbucklers of the 18th. century finding in him the same irresponsibility and rootlessness; they, too, had no place to call home, their Irish estates governed by an authority to which they owed no allegiance. Yeats describes these bucks who took their lives into their own hands, wandering gaily through the world, a curse mingled with their song. It is precisely in these terms that Yeats read Wilde's "crusade" acknowledging the personal nature of it. "[Wilde] had no practical interest," Yeats writes, "no cause to

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[49] E.H. Mikhail ed., *Interviews and Recollections,* 1, p. 89.

[50] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs,* p. 22. *Autobiographies*, p. 131.

[51] E.H. Mikhail ed., *Interviews and Recollections* Vol. 1, p. 86.

defend, no information to give, nor was he the gay jester whose very practical purpose is our pleasure".[52]

Yeats perceived Wilde's position as anarchic: Wilde called into question the rotten structures underlying the colonial system, but he had no ideology to offer in its place, no vision of a new Ireland with which to supplant it. He had no aim but protest itself. Yeats discerned Oscar Wilde's form of protest as being an attitude ingrained in his lifestyle and work and described his "weapons" as his rapier wit.[53] Yeats maintained that Wilde adopted a romantic art in which he did not believe so as to deliver to his imperialist audience "a few strokes of contemptuous wit in which he does believe."[54] This method of colonial protest under the cover of art is not unique to Wilde. Declan Kiberd describes how the colonised subjects of India used art as a means of expressing contempt for the imperialist system.[55] Davis Coakley instances the first night of *A Woman of No Importance,* (1893), as an occasion on which Wilde left the imperialist, in the persons of Arthur Balfour and Joseph Chamberlain who were in the audience, in little doubt as to his anti-colonialist inclinations. In Wilde's play Hester, a character from the former colony of America, uttered the lines "England lies like a leper in purple". The audience greeted the play with loud applause but booed the author on his stage appearance at the end of the play. Wilde may have felt he had been too forthright since the phrase was later deleted

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[52] W.B. Yeats, Introduction, *The Happy Prince* 111, p.148.

[53] W,B, Yeats, *Memoirs,* p. 79.

[54] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 294.

[55] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* p. 45.

from the play.[56] If, as Edward Said suggests, nationalism is the response which colonialism elicits from a native people, then Wilde's response was a nationalist one.[57]

Nationalism is often the medium through which colonised people rid themselves of the colonial presence; find their own authority; discover a space wherein it would be possible to create their own images of national identity. The colonial power, in as much as is possible, shapes the subject country to its own image - distorting its history, altering its place names. England had always discounted Irish nationality as an absurdity; to the colonial mind Ireland's place was as an adjunct of the imperial power; nationalist pretensions were seen as the whim of a wilful child. It was Shakespeare, as Declan Kiberd points out, who was the first writer to ridicule the notion of Irish identity. Kiberd describes Shakespeare's character as exhibiting "a rather unfocussed ethnic pride" which is met with a "faintly patronising amusement on the part of the portraitist that the Irish should be so touchy on questions of identity".[58]

This bemused attitude was still in evidence in the nineteenth century; Wilde had on more than one occasion been lampooned in terms of his national identity, such as the cartoon which appeared in *Punch* during the controversy over Wilde's play, *Salome* (1892). The play was banned by the Lord Chamberlain on the grounds that it contained

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[56] Davis Coakley, *Oscar Wilde: the importance of being Irish* (Dublin: Town House and Country House, 1994), p. 206.

[57] Said defines nationalism as "the mobilizing force that coalesced into resistance against an alien and occupying empire on the part of people's posessing a common history, religion and language". Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* p. 269.

[58] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* P. 13.

biblical material.[59] Wilde was infuriated by this and threatened to leave England and to take out French citizenship, declaring, "I am not English. I am Irish, which is quite another thing".[60] The cartoon in *Punch* depicts Wilde who is referred to as *The O'Scar,* dressed as a French army conscript. The caption reads: "A Wilde Idea: Or, More Injustice to Ireland".[61] The title, "The O'Scar" parodies the ancient Irish practice of prefixing the definite article before the name of the chieftain of a clan, as in The O'Neill or The O'Rahilly and the subtitle, "More Injustice to Ireland", suggests the prevailing image of Ireland as the victim of imagined slights.

Ireland's concept of itself as a nation was attacked by the nineteenth century historian, J.A. Froude, in his novel, *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy*, and is quoted by Wilde in his review of this book:

> The Irish race have always been noisy, useless and ineffectual. They have produced nothing, they have done nothing which it is possible to admire. What they are that they have always been, and the only hope for them is that their ridiculous Irish nationality should be buried and forgotten.[62]

Wilde reviewed Froude's book in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (13 Nov. 1889); he points up some of its more obvious barbarities and demonstrates its inaccuracies but, more importantly, he discloses his attitude to England's official treatment of Ireland by identifying Froude's preposterous fiction with official English parliamentary reports – the

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[59] At the time, it was forbidden for any stage production to contain material from the Bible. The Examiner of Plays, Edward F. Smyth, refused to grant the play a licence on these grounds. See William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Oscar Wilde: Salomé* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 22,23.

[60] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 352.

[61] Anonymous, "A Wilde Idea", *Punch* (July, 9, 1892), p. 1.

[62] Oscar Wilde, "Mr. Froude's Blue Book [on Ireland]", rev. of J.A. Froude, *The Two Chiefs of Dunboy. The Pall Mall Gazette,* (Apr. 13, 1889), p. 3. Collected in *The Artist as Critic: critical writings of Oscar Wilde* ed. Richard Ellmann (London: W.H. Allen, 1970), pp. 140, 136.

Blue Books – on Ireland. These documents, Wilde claimed, "form the record of one of the great tragedies of modern Europe. In them England has written down her indictment against herself, and has given to the world the history of her shame". Wilde is speaking without a mask; he is directly addressing the issue which so often underlies his actions and his words and which Yeats was so adept at recognising.

The strength of Wilde's nationalist sentiment is hardly surprising when one considers his upbringing. At the age of ten, his mother, Speranza, dedicated her *Poems* to Oscar and his brother with the words:

> Dedicated to My Sons/Willie and Oscar Wilde/I made them indeed speak plain the word COUNTRY. /I taught them, no doubt,/That a country's a thing men should die for at need![63]

Lady Wilde, poet, writer and translator, had inculcated in her son a love and respect for country, poetry and story. Yeats wrote of her:

> She was a great student, a lover of literature, a woman of the finest culture ... she came out of the tradition of her own class and joined herself to the people of Ireland and became Speranza, that famous woman.[64]

The name Speranza became a household word in Ireland in the mid 19th century. She wrote for *The Nation* whose readership at the time numbered a quarter of a million. Wilde, himself, contributed an article to this paper in 1879 (Nov. 12) and was designated by the editor, "son of Lady Wilde"; Owen Dudley Edwards remarks on the "essentially patriotic note" of Wilde's article which he states "must come as little surprise to those acquainted with the poems and prose of Speranza."[65]

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[63] Lady Wilde, *Poems by Speranza,* (Dublin/London: James Duffy, 1864).

[64] W.B. Yeats, "1903 American Lecture" (National Library of Ireland TS. W.B. Yeats Collection, Micro-fiche 30,627).

[65] Owen Dudley Edwards, "Oscar Wilde and Henry O'Neill" in *The Irish Book* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1959-'62), pp. 15, 18.

One of Speranza's prose works, "Jacta Alia Est", (1848) had resulted in the suppression of the paper by the government. In this article, written at the time when the potato famine in Ireland was at its height, Speranza, in a burst of revolutionary rhetoric, called on the people of Ireland to take up arms against England. She refers to England as "the foreign tyrant [who] has held his council of treason and iniquity against our people and our country for seven hundred years". Wilde referred to England's "seven hundred years" of misrule while in America in 1882. In his later denouncement of Froude (1889) he alludes to the "martyrdom of Ireland" and addresses its perpetration in words reminiscent of his mother's:

> That the Government should enforce iniquity, and the governed submit to it, seems to be to Mr. Froude, as it certainly is to many others, the true ideal of political science.

While Wilde's tone may be more temperate than Speranza's, the anger underlying the words is comparable.

From boyhood, Wilde was intensely aware of the situation in Ireland through his parents cultural and political involvement. His father, the celebrated surgeon, Sir William Wilde, was an enthusiastic scholar of Irish archaeology and folklore; his wife wrote of him:

> There was probably no man of his generation more versed in our national literature, in all that concerned the land and the people, the arts, architecture, topography, statistics and even the legends of the country.[66]

Oscar Wilde's knowledge of Irish folklore and antiquity was extensive; as a boy, he had accompanied his father to ancient Irish sites on digs and had, in later times, used his

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[66] Wilde was a Home Rule supporter; he attended meetings to hear Parnell speak and was a regular observer at the Parnell Commission; his interest extended to collecting many of the volumes of its published proceedings. *The Letters of Oscar Wilde,* eds. Rupert Hart-Davis and Merlin Holland (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), pp.348, 382n.

impressive knowledge of ancient artifacts in a number of articles and reviews; in one of these he praises the classical beauty of the Chalice of Ardagh and recommends a trip to Dublin if only to see the Cross of Cong.[67] Wilde's expertise and enthusiasm in discussing the plastic arts of his country extended to his interest in Irish folklore.

When Yeats published *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), a book of stories he had compiled and edited, Wilde commented with authority on his "very quick instinct in finding out the best and the most beautiful things in Irish folklore".[68] He also approved of Yeats's poem, *The Wanderings of Oisin*, (1889) and wrote two reviews of it. Wilde empathised with Yeats's handling of his folkloric material, praising the "nobility of treatment and nobility of subject matter". Wilde, well acquainted with the legends from which Yeats worked, considered that the poet had a proper regard and due respect towards them: "He does not rob of their stature the great heroes of Celtic mythology."[69] In recognising the "stature" of Irish mythology Wilde put the weight of his position as an established man of letters in London behind Yeats's endeavours to establish Irish mythology as potent subject matter for art. The young Yeats, then at the beginning of his career, appreciated Wilde's reviews, deriving great encouragement from them. In later years, Yeats recalled how he had felt, at the time, that "what was worth more than any review, [Wilde} had talked about it." Wilde and Yeats assigned to Irish mythology the

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[67] Oscar Wilde, a review of "Early Christian Art in Ireland" by Margaret Stokes. *Pall Mall Gazette* (Dec. 17, 1887). Collected in *A Critic in Pall Mall: being extracts from reviews and miscellanies by Oscar Wilde,* 2nd edition (London: Methuen, 1919), pp. 82, 83.

[68] Oscar Wilde, "Some Literary Notes". Collected in *The Rare Oscar Wilde,* ed. John Wyse Jackson, p. 153.

[69] Oscar Wilde, "Mr. Yeats' Wanderings of Oisin", review, *Pall Mall Gazette* (July 12, 1889). Collected in *A Critic in Pall Mall,* p. 161.

grandeur of the Greek legend; Wilde often asked Yeats to recount long, Irish stories and would compare his art of storytelling to Homer.[70] Their common perception of the status proper to Irish mythology was one of the strands which drew the poet to Wilde.

Yeats had specific ambitions in relation to Irish mythology: he intended using it in establishing a new and vibrant literature in Ireland. Writing to Katharine Tynan, in April 1897, he told her : "I feel more and more that we shall have a school of Irish poetry – founded on Irish myth and history – a neo-romantic movement".[71] Wilde favoured the use of the mythic in art and appreciated the quality of the source material concerned in Yeats's literary project. He also approved of the use of indigenous material in art but felt that a national literature, in the narrow sense, was no more possible than a national mathematics. Declan Kiberd refers to Wilde's more globally oriented belief that it would be "through contact with the art of other countries that a modern Irish culture might be reshaped".[72] While both writers agreed that one should aim for the universal in art, Yeats felt that this could and should be achieved through reuniting with a nation's cultural past. Yeats in his early work is chiefly concerned with the exaltation of Ireland and Irishness, believing that "From that great candle of the past we must all light our little tapers."[73] He believed that the re-instatement of a nation's cultural past was a necessary step in the process of re-

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[70] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* pp. 134, 135.

[71] Letter dated Apr. 27, 1887. W.B. Yeats, *Letters to Katherine Tynan* ed. Roger McHugh (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds Ltd., 1953), p. 26.

[72] "True nationality in art meant the people selecting the flowers and birds of their own countries and using them as a mode of expression" Oscar Wilde, "The Value of Art in Modern Life", *The Irish Times* (Jan. 7, 1885), p. 3.
Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland,* p. 2.

[73] W.B. Yeats, in *Letters to the New Island* ed. Horace Reynolds, (1934; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1989), eds. George Bornstein and Hugh Witemeyer, p. 66.

imagining national identity. Although Wilde did not fully share Yeats's aspiration, he understood the cultural conditions which prompted it.

It was these same conditions which contributed to the ready adoption of Celtic identity by both Wilde and Yeats. It was an identity which if not entirely fictive, certainly borrowed from the mythical and both Yeats and Wilde fully subscribed to it. Such an identity had the advantage of transcending the actual condition of their native country and conferring on them a status other than that damaged and divided by colonial imposition.

Wilde once suggested to a fellow Celt that a dinner should be held annually to celebrate the Celtic races and "to show these tedious Angles or Teutons what a race we are, and how proud we are to belong to that race."[74] Wilde's suggestion constructs Celticism in triumphalist and oppositional terms. Joep Leerson, in his essay, "Celticism", recognises this role played by Celticism in response to a country's marginalisation by a colonial power and sees in it the potential for exoticism and self definition.[75] Celticism often defined itself in binary terms: if the Saxon was one thing the Celt was its opposite.[76] Both Wilde and Yeats frequently constructed Celticism in this manner. Amongst the characteristics which they purported to see as being racially inherited by the Saxon are "stupidity" and "worldliness". In his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Wilde allows an English aristocrat exhibit his own stupidity and that of his people:

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[74] Letter to anthropologist and man of letters, Grant Allen, (Feb 1891). An article by Allen, "The Celt in English Art" had appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* (Feb. 1891) alongside Wilde's "The Soul of man under Socialism". Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde,* p. 470.

[75] Joep Leerssen, "Celticism" in *Celticism* ed. Terence Brown, p. 17.

[76] Declan Kiberd, "A New England called Ireland?" Chapter 1, *Inventing Ireland,* pp. 9 - 32.

> The inherited stupidity of the race – sound English common sense he jovially termed it – was shown to be the proper bulwark for Society.[77]

While Wilde writes here with amusement, he was deadly serious in his belief that racial characteristics were inherited and that the Saxon differed from the Celt in their lack of imagination; it was this lack, he believed, which caused the defectiveness in the English character.[78] Yeats, as a young man, concurred with Wilde in this belief. Writing in a review of the poetry of Dr. Todhunter, Irish man of letters, he compares the imaginative Celt, his sympathetic relationship to nature and profound graciousness with the unimaginative Saxon and his self-important, materialistic nature.[79] The uncomplimentary attributes which Wilde and Yeats applied to the English stem from their resentment at the implication that because England physically dominated Ireland it was, therefore, superior to it in every other way. Both writers, by asserting idealised Celtic characteristics and by mocking colonial authority, called attention to a proud, independent Irish identity.

The ultimate importance of Celtic thought and mythology for Yeats was the connection which he perceived between it and universal truths common to all mankind. Yeats believed that the Celtic imagination had sprung from the soil, from folk-art, and, that if only the means existed, its genealogy could be traced back to the beginnings of the

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[77] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* p. 131.

[78] Writing on prison reform (1898) Wilde draws the comparison between the inherited racial characteristics of both Celt and Saxon: "It is the lack of imagination in the Anglo-Saxon race that makes the race so stupidly, harshly cruel. Those who are bringing about Prison Reform in Parliament are Celtic to a man. For every Celt has inborn imagination". Letter to Georgina Weldon (31/05/1898) in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde,* p. 1080.

[79] "But in all, whether epopée or ballad, is the same charm of sincerity, of Celtic sympathy ... The Saxon is not sympathetic or self-abnegating; he has conquered the world by quite different powers. He is full of self-brooding ... He has to burden the skylark with his cares before he can celebrate it. He is always a lens coloured by self. But these poems are altogether different with their simplicity and tenderness. They rise from the same source with the courtesy of the Irish peasant ..." W.B. Yeats, "Dr. Todhunter's Latsest Volume of Poems" first appeared in *The Providence Sunday Journal,* (Feb. 10, 1889) under the heading, "The Literary World. Book Reviews and News". collected in *Letters to the New Island,* p. 89.

world. He imagined that the themes found in folk tradition are fundamental to life and are devoid of trivial artifice.[80] Yeats found that the difference between Ireland's legends and those of other European countries was that the Celtic myths were held in "unquestioned belief" by nobles and peasants alike as late as the end of the 17th century. Yeats worked to bring into being a national identity, a poetic ideal and a national literature, to reclaim myth and heritage; his agenda, however, was not bound by national frontiers. As poet and dramatist, he reached out through his nation to universalism, to man in his elemental nature in tune and in touch with existence. Yeats writes:

> 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, ... this universalism ... you can only attain through what is near you, your nation ... 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.[81]

Yeats claimed that he found his themes from John O'Leary. O'Leary introduced him to The Young Irelanders in whom Yeats admired not their poetry but that "they spoke or tried to speak out of a people to a people, behind them stretched the generations". This is the position Yeats covets: to belong within the tradition of a cohesive, historic community and through this context achieve the condition of the universal.[82]

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[80] "There is no song or story handed down among the cottages that has not words and thoughts to carry one as far, for though one can know but a little of their ascent, one knows that they ascend like mediaeval genealogies through unbroken dignities to the beginning of the world ... Folk-art is indeed, the oldest of the aristocracies of thought, and because it refuses what is passing and trivial, the merely clever and pretty, as certainly as the vulgar and insincere, and because it has gathered into itself the simplest and most unforgettable thoughts of the generations, it is the soil where all great art is rooted." W.B. Yeats, "By the Roadside" (1901) in *The Celtic Twilight* in *Mythologies* (1959; rpt. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), pp. 138, 139.

[81] W.B. Yeats, "The Poet of Ballyshannon" first appeared in *The Provedence Sunday Journal* (Sept. 2, 1888). collected in *Letters to the new Island,* p. 78.

[82] W. B. Yeats, "A General Introduction to My Work". Collected in *Essays and Introductions,* P. 510. Yeats's poem, "To Ireland in the Coming Times" expresses a similar sentiment.

Wilde, also, believed in racial inheritance. A child of his time, he was interested in ethnology and observed in his Common Place Book as an undergraduate at Oxford that "a savage is not only hurt when a man treads on his own foot, but when the foot of the tribe is trodden on". He further notes that "natural selection has left to survive only those tribes in whom a tribal sense is strong".[83] Wilde believed in the concept of race with its inherited characteristics and loyalties and understood the identification of the individual with the race through this shared inheritance. According to this way of thinking, the shame and pain felt by the collective at the subjugation of a country can be no less painful than that felt by an individual. Wilde's sense of identification with his country's situation can be seen in the answer he gave to an American journalist on being questioned about the murder of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Cavendish, by the Invincibles in the Phoenix Park, Dublin (1882). Wilde expressed repugnance at the crime but added: "We forget how much England is to blame. She is reaping the fruit of seven centuries of injustice".[84] While Wilde had no wish to justify the murder, his sense of identification obliged him to attempt an explanation.

Although positing the transmission of culture through national heritage, Wilde is careful to leave space for individuality. He maintains that the inherited characteristics are refined and enhanced by the critical temperament. He does not explain how this critical temperament is inculcated in "race or individual" but states, "It is sufficient to note that it exists" and is one with racial experience. Wilde contends that the true critic embodies all

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[83] Oscar Wilde, extracts: [119] and [121] from his Oxford Common Place Book in *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks: a portrait of mind in the making,* eds. Philip E. Smith and Michael Helfand, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 129, 130.

[84] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 186.

the emotions, thoughts and secrets of past generations. He maintained that the soul was the recipient of the ancient characteristics of the race and held that this store house of knowledge and feeling is acted upon, developed and added to by the critical faculty and in turn passed on down to the next generation and so on. Wilde held that the more sensitive one's temperament and the more "susceptible to beauty", the greater one's contribution to the common heritage – "[beauty] sense leads some to create, and others, the finer spirits as I think, to contemplate merely".[85] Wilde's perception has much in common with Yeats's belief in "a Great Memory passing on from generation to generation".[86]

In claiming direct access, through the Celt, to an ancient oneness, Wilde and Yeats are creatively empowered . Yeats writes: " We [artists] come from the permanent things and create them, and instead of old blood we have old emotions".[87] Their acceptance of Celtic identity admits them to a wider mythic context and validates their self-image and autonomy. It also gives them membership of a creative aristocracy. The artistic stature of this identity was ratified by eminent English poets and men of letters, such as Ruskin and Arnold, a ratification which in the tangled logic of colonial relationships was of great importance because the coloniser as authority figure, although resented as such, was also authenticating agent.

Perhaps most importantly for this literary relationship, Yeats's belief in the Celt's fine imagination, creativity and quick intelligence, allowed him to perceive Wilde within the strength of this context. Yeats writes that the Celt "loves to linger on images of

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[85] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist", pp. 1138, 1146.

[86] W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* in *Mythologies,* pp. pp. 318-366.

[87] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs,* p. 156.

persistence"[88] and perceived this Celtic quality in Wilde's work at a time when Wilde's work was seen by many as inconsequential.[89]

Wilde's nationality was an important factor in the influential relationship between Yeats and himself. Their attitude towards their country formed a common bond between them. Yeats believed that he understood Wilde in a way that was not possible for the English. This understanding enabled him to by-pass the received image of Wilde in London and to immediately perceive his intellectual ability and skill.

Yeats was aware that Wilde's role playing in England stemmed from the ambivalent situation experienced by the colonised Irish living in the capital of Empire. He also felt that Wilde never belonged in London, even when Ireland ceased to be his home. Wilde came to terms with this internal disjunction in adopting a part. It was not his intention in doing this to espouse English identity. On more than one occasion Wilde had publicly declared his Irish nationality and indicted England's misrule over its colony. In 1895, Yeats attributed Wilde's decision to remain in London and face his trial to his national identity: "Wilde was an Irish gentleman. It was with him a point of honour to face the trial. It could not have occurred to him to act otherwise".[90] Wilde's mother, his brother, Willie, and also George Bernard Shaw felt likewise. Interestingly, Yeats brought Wilde messages of encouragement from Irishmen of letters, not one of whom suggested that he

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[88] W.B. Yeats, "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson 11" (1886). Collected in *Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats,* p. 103.

[89] Grant Allen refers to Wilde within his Celtic context and declares him "a man of rare insight and strong common-sense". "The Celt in English Art" in *The Fortnightly Review* (Feb. 1891), in *The Oxford Notebooks,* p. 81.

[90] Hugh Kingsmill, "Meeting with Yeats" in *Interviews and Recollections,* 11, P. 295.

might run away.[91] It was obvious to his Irish contemporaries that it was impossible for Wilde, being as he was, to run before the "enemy". Their interpretation of his national identity was unambiguous. Shaw, reading *De Profundis*, Wilde's last great prose work and written during his term of imprisonment, allows himself to gloat at Wilde's ability to make "England appear insignificant and stupid, and himself noble, tragic and superior." Wilde had, Shaw wrote, "shouldered every insult with which England burdened him; he rejected every excuse which England tried to find for him".[92] Shaw understood the complexities of the engagement between the colonial power and its subject and like Yeats, he felt that in this unequal battle, the last great battle in Wilde's "extravagant crusade", Wilde had been the victor. Yeats's admiration at Wilde's heroic act in standing his ground and facing his trials was so great that he declared that this act had earned Wilde half his renown.[93] Whether it had or not, it had undoubtedly earned him Yeats's lifelong respect and a place within his iconography, this time as 'failed Romantic hero'.

Yeats's insight into the complexities of Wilde's identity was crucial in the grounding of this imaginative literary relationship. His image of insouciance and urbanity which bedazzled and irritated contemporary London, his persuasive pose of Englishness which effected his acceptance and rejection by English society, were fully understood by Yeats. He admired Wilde's ingenuity and was imaginatively secured by his image but he was neither confused nor puzzled by it; he applauded its splendid execution and

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[91] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* pp. 287, 288. *Memoirs,* pp. 79, 80.

[92] George Bernard Shaw, "Oscar Wilde", *The Matter with Ireland.* Translated by Dr. Felix F. Strauss and Mr. Laurence (London: Hart-Davis, 1962). p. 30.

[93] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 289.

appreciated its usefulness. Unaffected by misconceptions, he was drawn to the warmth of Wilde's personality and the "hard brilliance" of his intellect.

Chapter Two
(1888 – 1895)
"The Meek Galahad": precursor, ephebe and the dynamics of image

Although W.B. Yeats did not meet Oscar Wilde until 1888 in London, their families had been known to each other for many years prior to that in Dublin. As a child W.B. Yeats's father, J.B. Yeats, often dined with his parents at the home of Sir William Wilde.[1] Sir William once remarked of the family: "The Yeatses were the cleverest and most spirited minded people I ever met".[2] We have already seen in Chapter 1 the broad based affinity of Wilde and Yeats in their position as writers from a colonised Ireland; their family backgrounds – notwithstanding the Wildes' higher social position – were alike in many particulars. Similar experiences of childhood intensified Yeats's understanding of Wilde whom he looked on as something of a hero. Before ever meeting Wilde, Yeats at the age of 18, was so intrigued by his countryman that although he was ill at the time and had some distance to travel, he went to great effort and trouble to attend a lecture which Wilde was giving in Dublin (1883).[3] Two years later (1885) Wilde delivered a lecture on "Dress" at the Gaiety Theatre Dublin. In that year, Yeats was studying art at the Metropolitan School of Art and working on the newly established *Dublin University*

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[1] William Martin Murphy, *Prodigal Father: the life of John Butler Yeats 1832-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 31.

[2] Joseph Hone, *William Butler Yeats* (1943; rpt. London: Papermac 136. Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 5.

[3] W.B. Yeats attended Wilde's lecture on "The House Beautiful" (Nov. 22 1883). Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 230.
Wilde was living in London at this time and took the opportunity on his visit to Dublin to propose to his future wife, Constance Lloyd, who was staying at her grandmother's house, No. 1 Ely Place, Dublin.

Review in which a review of Wilde's lecture appeared (Feb. 1885). An account of the lecture in the *Irish Times* (Jan. 1885) reported Wilde as saying:

> Whenever art had really been an influence in a nation costume had been the great thing that had shown it; in any of the great artistic ages the principle that had inspired the architecture of the noble cathedral or stately palace would be traced in the ordinary dress of the citizen. This showed that art touched everything in life even down to the very simplest things.

The newspaper described Wilde as wearing a Byronic collar. It would seem that the young Yeats took the advice of his hero and, even at this early stage, began to construct his own image accordingly, for in that same year Yeats adopted the wearing of a Byronesque necktie. In later years, in the true spirit of the ephebe, Yeats would claim that his artistic response to the times had been totally his own idea: "When I was 20 (1885) the romantic movement was dying away. You saw it in your clothes, you heard it in your accents. I alone made a protest in the form of loose neckties".[4]

In this chapter I will show that Wilde's influence on Yeats was grounded in Yeats's early admiration and feelings of kinship towards Wilde and will identify two distinct socio-historical and psychological factors as crucial in determining the strength of Yeats's receptivity to Wilde's influence: the timing of their first meeting and Yeats's susceptibility to the power of image. I will show that Wilde's initial effect on Yeats was to introduce him to a way of imagining reality which prompted Yeats to refashion himself and to convert those around him into fictive images. This creative exercise would become a lifelong imaginative activity for Yeats and is of particular importance to this thesis in relation to the various images that Yeats created of Wilde.

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[4] Peter Kuch, *Yeats and A.E.: "the antagonism that unites dear friends"* (Totowa New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1986), p. 239.

Image is one of the most striking agents of influence within this creative, literary relationship. Images of Wilde himself as well as images within his work were hugely influential to Yeats's creative sensibility. In 1888, when Yeats first met Oscar Wilde, he was transfixed by Wilde's urbane and self-possessed image and, as the relationship progressed, Yeats's fertile imaginative faculty engendered multiple images of Wilde.[5] Some of these images I have indicated in chapter one: Wilde's trials rendered him "failed romantic hero" for Yeats, an image which built upon Yeats's previous romantic perception of him as leader of a cavalry charge or mediaeval Italian cavalier and which was to be given further resonance by Yeats. Yeats cast Wilde in the role of 'Celtic Crusader' on account of his response to colonialism. Yeats found himself equally affected by the other images he would discern in Wilde of 'Arbiter Elegentiae' and 'Man of Sorrows' which I will be discuss in later chapters. Images from within Wilde's artistic work such as the dancer, Christ and Caesar, the kiss of the severed head, eventually joined these images of the man himself in firing Yeats's creative imagination. Yeats did not confine this imaginative practice exclusively to Wilde. As Nicholas Grene notes, Yeats used a somewhat similar practice in relation to J.M. Synge: "From the beginning Synge was cast as a Yeatsian hero, an artistic model, and after his death he continued to recur as a key figure in Yeats's poetry and prose. This figure of Synge is created and recreated by Yeats, if not in his own image, in his own imagination".[6]

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[5] Terence Brown comments on the propensity of Yeats to create life as image: "a habit had established itself early whereby experience was interpreted in terms of its iconographic potentiality". *The Life of W.B. Yeats,* p. 42.

[6] eds. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 47. See also chapter 1, pp. 17, 18.

Yeats's creative receptivity to image was encouraged not only by his trained artistic eye but by his occult learning and practice. Susan Graf notes in her book, *W.B. Yeats: Twentieth Century Magus,* (2000) that "visualisation is a key practice in any magical working".[7] Yeats's belief in the integral power of image is seen in *Autobiographies* where he theorises on image as a facilitator of influence. Yeats explains that through the selection of and contemplation on certain images, one can access ideas and thoughts appropriate to them:

> That passionate experience could never come – of that I was certain – until I had found the right image or right images. From what but the image of Apollo, fixed always in memory and passion, did his priesthood get that occasional power a classical historian has described, of lifting great stones and snapping great branches.[8]

Yeats describes how ideas are passed from one person or from one age to another. This concept is echoed by critic, Herb Green, in his study of the relationship between mind and image. Green contends that "much of the richness of this experience, recorded and distilled into meaning by the feelings and intellectual activities of a lifetime, can be reached by an image presented at a given moment". Green further holds that "images are among man's primary means of communicating the seemingly ineffable".[9] Yeats believed that it was possible for an image to pass from mind to mind modifying or changing its shape in the transition and saw this form of communication as one of the most fundamental elements in being:

> Do not the thoughts of the scholar or the hermit, though they speak no word, or something of their shape and impulse, pass into the general mind? Does not the emotion of some

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[7] Susan Johnston Graf, *W.B. Yeats: Twentieth Century Magus* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weisser, 2000), p.91.

[8] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 269.

[9] Herb Greene, *Mind and Image: an essay on art and architecture* (Kentucky: 1976; rpt. London: Granada, 1989), p. xiii.

> woman of fashion, caught in the subtle torture of self analysing passion, pass down, although she speak no word, to Joan with her Pot, Jill with her Pail and, it may be, with one knows not what nightmare melancholy, to Tom the Fool?[10]

Yeats suggests here that image disseminates an unasked-for influence. Neither "the general mind", "Joan with her Pot", "Jill" nor "Tom" seek to be influenced but rather, thought and emotion "pass" into their minds. A similar position is proposed by Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where he depicts the passing on of an unsought influence from Sir Henry Wooton to Dorian. As Dorian listened to Lord Henry explaining how life should be lived to the full and strange sins and passions experienced, he "was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to have come really from himself".[11] Dorian's experience finds a parallel in Yeats's reaction to the image of his precursor.

Yeats's knowledge of the efficacy of image as disseminator of influence was matched by his personal sensitivity to its power. In *Autobiographies* he describes many instances where he relies on image, whether magical diagrams or physical objects, to stimulate his creative consciousness.[12] Yeats extended the public scope and definition of image; he contended that the force of image is so strong that a nation defines itself by its attraction to common images which act as a unifying force within it. Image, he believed, connected one with the dead generations through its ability to awaken and access that great national/global memory, the Anima Mundi. He ascribed the power of image to two

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[10] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 262.

[11] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 29.

[12] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 258, 259, 265, 270, 272.

major personalities of Irish history – Daniel O'Connel and Charles Stewart Parnell – who had had an immense influence on the people of Ireland.[13]

Yeats himself was attracted to great personalities. The cult of the personality was in vogue in the late 19th century and was subscribed to by many of Yeats's friends and contemporaries. Yeats's father, J.B. Yeats, was an ardent believer in the power and importance of personality, going so far as to say that a person with personality ought to be forgiven anything "though their sins be scarlet".[14] Yeats's regard for great personalities coupled with his sensitivity to image intensified his susceptibility to the influence of Oscar Wilde.

Wilde was a forceful and charismatic personality, the synthesis of intellect and expression; the quintessence of style, he was a striking and formidable image. Wilde could not have come into Yeats's life at a more apposite moment for the passing on of influence; Yeats's youth, awkward personality and avid hunger for polish and form made him an exemplary subject for the influence of Wilde. Yeats describes his initial reaction to Wilde: "I was abashed before him as wit and man of the world alone".[15] This historical moment was incisive for the strength of the influential relation which ensued. It was a particularly plastic stage in Yeats's development, a time of creative and personal turbulence. His family with whom he was living in London was in extreme financial difficulties, his mother seriously ill and his relations with his father volatile and strained. Yeats's frustration with his situation at this time was reflected in his creative output: he told

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[13] ibid. pp. 195, 263.

[14] William Martin Murphy, *Prodigal Father*, p. 31.

[15] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* pp. 93, 94, 136.

Katherine Tynan how he hid from life in his literary work and described its content as "a flight to fairyland", "the cry of the heart against necessity".[16] Besides the conflict in his creative and family life, Yeats was also perplexed by what he saw as his personal inadequacies: he was constantly struggling against his extreme timidity and attempting to correct his lack of poise and self-possession. He ardently wished to remake his image in keeping with his concept of a poet.

Wilde's image polarised for him his own want of form and unsettled state of being. Years later, when Yeats comes to record in his biography, *A First Draft* (1917), the significance of Wilde within his creative life, he vividly recalls the image of assurance and intellectual agility which Wilde presented in 1888 and the impact which his intelligence and his "dominating self-possession" made on him.[17]

The young Yeats responded eagerly to the image presented by Oscar Wilde. Wilde excited his intellect and addressed his preoccupation with the synthesis of style and content. At the time, Yeats intimated to his friend, the poet and mystic, George Russell (A.E.), that style creates content and "that it was the duty of everybody to have a conception of themselves and that he intended to conceive of himself". He explained his theory to his friend in terms of Wilde's style of living which Yeats perceived as a form of art.[18] Yeats was aware of the difference of the life which Wilde led in England compared to his upbringing in Ireland. Wilde's childhood and youth in Dublin corresponded in many ways to Yeats's own experience and increased the real possibility for Yeats of emulating

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[16] "To Katherine Tynan", Mar. 14, 1888. W.B. Yeats, *Letters to Katherine Tynan*, p. 47.

[17] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 285.

[18] John Eglinton, *A Memoir of A.E. George William Russell* (London: Methuen, 1937), p. 110.

Wilde and recreating himself in his image.[19] In *Autobiographies* he depicts Wilde's family home, 1, Merrion Square, Dublin as haphazard and untidy and by a choice of a few apocryphal stories he sharpens the contrast he wishes to make between Wilde's later created life and that of his early days. Yeats admits that because the Wildes were famous people legends grew up about them and quotes an old Dublin riddle: "Why are Sir William Wilde's nails so black? Because he has scratched himself."[20]

He pictures the Wildes as being people like those of Charles Lever's books, "dirty, untidy, daring" and Yeats adds, "very imaginative and learned". We do not have, as Yeats had, the advantage of fabled stories from the wags of Dublin to show the Yeatses as, "dirty, untidy, daring", "very imaginative and learned". However, it is not difficult to see that a house where there are four children with so many years between, a mother who is ill, great shortage of money, a father whose time is occupied by his painting and philosophy, cannot have been prim and decorous.

Like Wilde's family, the Yeatses had a sense of fun; they, too, were gifted in imagination and learning. Just as the Wilde children from an early age were allowed to attend adult dinner parties and their mother's afternoon salon where they heard the opinions and ideas of writers, actors, academics, political and notable thinkers of their time, the Yeats children were surrounded by ideas and philosophies from their father's circle of intellectual and artistic friends. So, although their social sphere may have differed

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[19] "The strength of the immediate experience of beholding an image depends on the availability in the stored experience of rich associations both with the detail and with the overview." Herb Green, *Mind and Image,* p. 10.

[20] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 137.

somewhat, intellectually and atmospherically, the domestic environment of childhood would have had great similarities for both writers.

Wilde and Yeats, as children, would have experienced feelings of difference from the immediate community occasioned by the behaviour and unorthodox style of their respective parents, Oscar, as a schoolboy in Portora Royal, would have been embarrassed by his father's involvement in a court case in which he was accused by a female patient of having seduced her. The case was the talk of Dublin at the time. His father, Sir William Wilde, was father, also, to three illegitimate children whom he supported and who spent the summers with his legitimate family.[21] A situation not without parallel in those times in Dublin yet not the usual family situation.

Although to adult sensibilities Yeats's father's occasions of embarrassing his son fall short of Sir William's the effect on their children is comparable. Yeats remembered his pained feelings when, as a child, a stranger stopped him outside his home in London and commented on his father's inability to finish a painting, continually working and reworking it. He recalls the unsettling effect his father's presence had on the crew of the boat that sailed between Ireland and England; they thought it unlucky to have John Yeats on board.[22]

John B. Yeats's unconventional position in rejecting the law for art resulting in his damaged relationship with his in-laws, reflected the position of Oscar Wilde's mother, Lady Wilde, and the strained relationship between herself and her family, the Elgees. Lady

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[21] Davis Coakley, *Oscar Wilde: the Importance of being Irish*, pp. 86-91, 16.

[22] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 31, 51.

Wilde's conflict with her family was caused by their disapproval of her nationalist writings. She had gained a wide reputation as Nationalist poet at home and in America. Yeats admired her solidarity with "the people of Ireland", and went so far as to name his beloved Maud Gonne "the New Speranza",[23] but the Elgees, were not as admiring of her public stance as Yeats. Nationalism would have been equated by many at the time with Catholicism, a likely reason for the family's hostility to their sister's actions.

Both Wilde's and Yeats's families could be described as dysfunctional Protestant: J.B. Yeats was an atheist and forbade his wife to teach prayers to their children[24] while Speranza's interest in the Catholic church extended to having her two boys baptised into that church.[25] Irish Protestant people suffered a form of dispossession through the near equation of Nationalism with Catholicism and were often cast in the role of persecutor, which estranged them from a national history and inhibited their expression of national identity.[26] Wilde was once asked by Asquith to what religion he belonged and replied facetiously, "I don't think I have any. I am an Irish Protestant".[27]

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[23] "But now Miss Maud Gonne, as eloquent with her tongue as was 'Speranza' with her pen, has made her voice heard where so many have failed." Yeats was speaking of Maud Gonne's championship in France of the Irish cause. W.B. Yeats, "The New 'Speranza'". First appeared in *The Boston Pilot* (July 30, 1892); collected in *Letters to the New Island,* p. 61.

[24] William M. Murphy, *Prodigal Father,* p. 71.

[25] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 18. First appeared in "People I have Met" by Rev. L.C. Prideaux Fox in *Donohoe's Magazine* (Boston, April 1905), p. 397.

[26] Declan Kiberd, "Yeats, Childhood and Exile" in *Irish Writing: Exile and Subversion* eds. Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells, (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 134.

[27] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 91.

Nevertheless, both Wilde and Yeats found expression of their nationality in terms, other than, but equal to the potent symbols of religion. Yeats, writing of his loneliness as a boy in London recalls:

> And I, without those memories of Limerick and the Yellow Ford that would have strengthened an Irish Catholic, thought of mountain and lake, of my grandfather and of ships.[28]

Estranged from his country's history Yeats found definition in the landscape, family and tradition.

Yeats's love of Sligo, his affinity with its landscape were heightened by the stories which he heard from his mother. The impact must have been the greater on the young boy as he noted that when his mother spoke of these stories, she became animated and filled with delight. This must have touched his heart for his mother was a solemn, deep person of few words whose inability to cope with a life she had not been led or bred to expect, distressed her greatly and most possibly her children. Yeats's associations with Sligo and its stories would have been deepened by their associations of, perhaps, a rare pleasure in his mother's company.[29]

Oscar Wilde's mother, too, provided her son with potent terms through which to express national identity. She taught him to love and respect the poets of Ireland and Wilde uses images of art and the artist as a focus for passionate feelings of nationality. In a lecture which he gave in April, 1882, Wilde says:

> I was trained by my mother to love and reverence them [Irish poets] as a Catholic child the saints of the Calendar.[30]

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[28] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 35.

[29] Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats,* pp. 16, 17.

[30] Oscar Wilde, ed. Michael J. O'Neill, "Irish Poets of the Nineteenth Century: unpublished lecture notes of Oscar Wilde" (*University Review*, 1, No. 4, Spring 1955), p. 29.

The similarity between their early personal experience furthered the empathy between these two writers and engendered feelings of kinship which fostered the influential relationship. Their eventual encounters in London at the salons of Lady Wilde, literary gatherings or Wilde's home were characterised by warm regard and personal empathy.

Wilde, almost eleven years Yeats's senior, presented a dashing, irreverent figure to the young man who later recalled him as the champion of youth.[31] Wilde's appeal for Yeats and his young contemporaries was exemplified in the interest he paid to them and in the generous encouragement for which he was noted. The poet, Richard LeGallienne, recalls that Wilde "said things all we youngsters had been dimly feeling" and claimed that his lasting memory of Wilde was not only of a brilliant talker but also of an attentive listener:

> One secret of the charm of Wilde's talk, apart from its wit and his beautiful voice, was the evidently sincere interest he took in his listener and what he also had to say ... What concerned him chiefly was their characters and minds, particularly what they were thinking, or, if they were artists, what they were doing. Naturally, this made him a very agreeable companion, and for a boy from the "provinces" to have this sophisticated man of letters listening so respectfully to his plans for poems and so forth ... was no little flattering.[32]

This, too, was the experience of the young Yeats; he appreciated Wilde's kindness and attention and agreed with LeGallienne that Wilde flattered the minds of his friends.[33] But, whereas, the chasm between this "sophisticated man of letters" and "a boy from the provinces" seemed immense to LeGallienne, this was not the case for Yeats whose shared

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[31] Wilde's put-down of Bernard Shaw: "Mr. Bernard Shaw has no enemies but is intensely disliked by all his friends" delighted Yeats who denoted Shaw a "notorious hater of romance". W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 133.

[32] Richard LeGallienne, *The Romantic Nineties* (1926; rpt. London: Robin Clark, 1993), pp. 141, 143.

[33] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 135.

background enabled him to empathise directly with Wilde.

Wilde's kindness meant a good deal to Yeats coming as it did in those early years of his twenties, when unsure, awkward, uncomfortable in London and harassed by family troubles, he first came upon Oscar Wilde. Yeats recalled this time some years later when first he heard of Wilde's court action: "I remember that I spoke that night of Wilde's kindness to myself".[34]

In Wilde's company the twenty-three year old Yeats grew in confidence and intellect. J.B. Yeats once said that his son, being sensitive, would only develop through kindness.[35] The young Yeats, who had so recently gone home from literary meetings and discussions where he had outspokenly voiced his opinions only to suffer relentless self-examination and misery, never left Wilde's company feeling "fool or dunce".[36] Wilde, acknowledged wit, man of letters and of intellectual brilliance, related to the young Yeats on equal terms. Having publicly declared his personal genius, Wilde had also acknowledged – "It is a kind of genius to be twenty-three!"[37]

Shortly after Wilde met Yeats his generosity and liking for the young man prompted him to invite him to his home for Christmas dinner with his family (1888). After dinner, Wilde read to his wife, Constance, and to Yeats, the proofs of his essay "The Decay of Lying", [38] thus inviting Yeats, not only to dinner, but to enter his discourse.

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[34] ibid. p. 285.

[35] William M. Murphy, *Prodigal Father,* p. 84.

[36] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 135.

[37] Richard LeGallienne, *The Romantic Nineties,* p. 143.

[38] Sybil Bristowe, "Mr. W.B. Yeats: poet and mystic" in *W.B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections, Vol. 1*, p. 93.

Yeats accepted this invitation, offering Wilde his thoughts on the essay. Yeats records in *Autobiographies* the objection he made to Wilde's use of the word 'melancholy' in the essay but, unfortunately, he does not divulge any further critical comments he made that day to Wilde.[39] He does, however, continue to discuss and critique "The Decay of Lying" within his own work for the rest of his creative life; the essay was seminal to Yeats's thoughts on the artistic fabrication of reality.

"The Decay of Lying" proposes the possibility that all reality is imagined, or more especially, that all reality is imagined for us by the artist:

> Where if not from the Impressionists, do we get those beautiful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge? ... At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects.[40]

Wilde points to truth as a matter of perspective; varying from different stand-points; it can be made to seem one thing or another. Wilde believes that it is not because a thing materially exists that it is so, but because it is thought to be one thing that it is that thing. Truth depends on who is perceiving and what one presents them with to perceive. It is all an enterprise of the intellect. This is how Oscar Wilde could say that truth is a matter of style since it is a projection of one's preferred image unto the receptor, prompting a specific response. In the same spirit of imaginative creativity, Wilde constructed his image and his habitat. Both the image and the concept imprinted themselves indelibly on the young Yeats's creative consciousness. In *The Life of W.B. Yeats* Terence Brown

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[39] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 135.

[40] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1086.

acknowledges the complex relationship between image and life perceived by Yeats and contends that Yeats achieved the "artistic transcendence" of everyday life "as image".[41]

Yeats recognised Wilde's conscious assertion of a newly fabricated identity and read it in the light of his avowal in "The Decay of Lying" that "truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style".[42] Yeats supported his reading of Wilde's projected image by comparing Wilde's style of life in England with that of his childhood in Ireland. In *Autobiographies*, he describes Wilde's house in Tite Street, his pretty family and the elegance of his setting and then contrasts this picture-book description with his rumbustious, passionate and colourful sketch of Wilde's childhood home. Yeats sees Wilde's mode of life in London as a careful emanation of Wilde's style, a mask of identity. He writes that Oscar Wilde lived "an imaginary life; perpetually performed a play which was in all things the opposite of all he had known in childhood and in early youth".[43] Yeats perceived that Wilde had not only re-invented himself but had also formulated an entirely new structure of existence. Just as Wilde's words had prompted a twenty year old Yeats to sport a Byronesque necktie, his personal example and more comprehensive suggestions on self and contextual invention in "The Decay of Lying", compelled Yeats to once again follow his direction.

Prior to meeting Wilde, the young Yeats was concerned with forging a personality informed by sincerity wherein the outer image reflected inner conviction. Wilde pointed him in another direction, showing him that style need not act in coincidence with inner

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[41] Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats,* p. 42.

[42] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1081.

[43] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 138.

feeling but as a mask, thus allowing freedom for the multiplicity of humours that make up the personality. Wilde claimed that form is seen to command content; that content will be perceived as following the pattern of form, enabling the personality to act behind it as it will. Wilde contended, and personified his contention, that one can fashion oneself to conform with one's conception of oneself, believing true disciples of a great artist to be "those who become like his work of art".[44]

In the 1890s the young Yeats, following exactly this theory of Wilde's, began according to George Russell "to do two things consciously, one to create a 'style' in literature, the second to create or rather to re-create W.B. Yeats in a style which would harmonise with the literary style." Russell elaborates on this insight and in so doing increases our awareness of Yeats's indebtedness to Wilde's theory of content following form:

> He [Yeats] seems to have also thought, though he never said so, that if you make a picturesque or majestic personality of yourself in appearance, you will become as wonderful inside as outside.

Russell continues with a conventional interpretation quite missing the spice of Wilde's scintillating theory:

> The error in his [Yeats] psychology is, that life creates the form, but he seems to think that the form, creates life. If you have style, he argued once with me, you will have something to say.[45]

Yeats, at this early stage, in his twenties was creating an identity through style under the direct influence of Oscar Wilde's suggestion that style begets content. Yeats would continue to do this throughout his life and the final result of this self-invention is wittily captured by Austin Clarke in his poem, *In the Saville Club,* where he writes of his meeting

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[44] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1083.

[45] John Eglinton, *A Memoir of A.E.,* pp. 110, 111.

with the elderly Yeats whose sense of his image as work of art is so strong that - "Head/Bowed low, he stood, respectful, for a few/Moments before himself."[46]

In putting Wilde's proposition on self-invention into practice, Yeats not only recreated his own image but also re-invented that of Wilde; Yeats, as we have seen, thought of Wilde in terms of the hero. In 1891, he wrote a review of Wilde's story, "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime", in which he delights in Wilde's heroic image and depicts him as an eighteenth century swashbuckler, finding in his intellectual wit the energy and devilry of these rakes.[47] Some years after Wilde's death in 1900, Yeats still looked on him as a reckless hero but emphasised the doomed nature of his quest and cast Wilde in the image of failed romantic hero. The shift in Yeats's perception of Wilde's heroic image as admirable to "failure tainted" had two main causes: his sympathy and personal view of Wilde's tragedy and his severe anxiety over the influence of Wilde. Wilde's trial for homosexual "offences" took place at the pinnacle of his success in his career as dramatist (1895). Success was instantly snatched from him; immediate social disgrace followed.

Yeats was deeply affected by Wilde's tragedy and sympathised with his position. He vaunted Wilde's personal courage and whenever he wrote of his trials emphasised his "manliness", using such phrases as: "he would prove himself a man"[48] or "showed great

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[46] Austin Clarke, *Collected Poems,* ed. Liam Miller (London:: The Dolmen Press/Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 399.

[47] W.B. Yeats, "Oscar Wilde's last Book" in *Uncollected prose of W.B. Yeats* ed. John Frayne, pp. 203-205.

[48] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 285.

courage and manhood amid the collapse of his fortunes".[49] It is as though Yeats were personally defending him against any charges of effeminacy or cowardice. Yeats numbered himself among those whom Wilde "loved", although he modifies the verb to "liked" in the published version of *Autobiographies.*[50] There was undoubtedly a sincere bond of friendship between both writers. Although Yeats never saw Wilde after his trial, he went to the court on the final day to deliver the messages of goodwill he had collected for Wilde from Irish men of letters. It seems that the crowd outside the courthouse was so great it prevented Yeats from gaining entry.

Yeats's admiration of how Wilde conducted himself during his trials increased his estimation of Wilde's heroic stature. However, what he now admired was the courageous conduct of a vanquished hero. While his fallen hero had all of his sympathy, Yeats was at pains to separate the images of Wilde the man from Wilde the artist. His regard for Wilde the man was never in question but Yeats was anxious to disclaim any creative indebtedness to Wilde the artist and eager to establish his own creative space. In keeping with the behaviour of a Bloomian ephebe, Yeats set about usurping the position of Wilde the artist. As part of this campaign he proceeded to distance himself from Wilde by

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[49] Inscription in Yeats's hand in John Quinn's copy of *The Land of Heart's Desire*: "This is the American edition of my first acted play. Wylde [Wilde] came late to the theatre and so missed the play, and to make amends he came up and was full of extravagant enthusiasm over a story of mine later, 'The Crucifixion of the Outcast'. This was the last time I had any conversation with him, though I saw him for a moment in the same theatre a few weeks later. [Possibly at the first night of G.B. Shaw's *Arms and the Man.*] He was an unfinished sketch of a great man and showed great courage and manhood amid the collapse of his fortunes. W.B. Yeats New York, 1904."
W.B. Yeats, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (Chicago: Stone and Kimball, 1894) in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library. *A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats* ed., Alan Wade, revised by Russel K. Alspach (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968), p. 32.

[50] "He [Wilde]alarmed me though not as Henley did for I never left his house thinking myself fool or dunce. He flattered the intellect of any man he ~~loved~~ liked, he made me tell him long Irish stories, and he

undervaluing his artistic achievement and re-imagining him as less than complete, as "an unfinished sketch of a great man".[51] Yeats called Wilde's literary standing into question, made harsh judgements of his creative work and reconstituted him as an inferior artist while at the same time making his own creative use of Wilde's artistic material.

Yeats's fear of being overwhelmed by Wilde's influence was so great that he felt the need to issue a comprehensive disclaimer of any imaginative indebtedness incurred by him from Wilde either in the past, present or future. Yeats writes:

> Neither then or later did I care greatly for anything in his writings but the wit – it was the man I admired, who was so loyal to the intellect. [52]

The young ephebe resents fiercely the influence of his precursor with whom he struggles for individuation and Bloom maintains, that in order "to avoid overdetermination", he must "forsake correct perception of the poems he values most".[53] This holds true for precursor and precursor text and is clearly demonstrated in Yeats's reconstruction of Wilde as failed romantic hero. Yeats observed that Wilde's trial occurred when he was just at the point of fulfilling his artistic promise:

> When his downfall came he discovered his natural style in *The Importance of Being Earnest* ... and was about to give to English theatre comedies which would have been to our own age what the comedies of Goldsmith and of Sheridan were to theirs.[54]

While Yeats's prophecy that had things been different, Wilde would have created further great dramatic works seems a likely prediction, he is nevertheless inferring that Wilde's

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would compare them and Homer." National Library of Ireland. Michael Yeats Collection. Ms. 536. Fiche 30,536, 2 of 3. W.B. Yeats, "Four Years", p. 34. *Autobiographies,* p. 135.

[51] W.B. Yeats, Inscription in John Quinn's edition of *The Land of Heart's Desire* in the Berg Collection, N.Y.P.L. *A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats* ed., Alan Wade, revised by Russel K. Alspach, p. 32.

[52] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs,* ed. Denis Donoghue, p. 22.

[53] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence,* p. 71.

[54] W.B. Yeats, "Wilde: the Happy Prince", p. 150.

masterpiece, *The Importance of Being Earnest,* has not sufficient merit to allow Wilde the status of a great dramatist. Although a lifetime of literary endeavour lay behind Wilde, Yeats makes it appear that he is at the beginning of a literary career.

While Wilde's influence continued to germinate within Yeats's imagination he resisted it at a conscious level throughout his career in the form of denial and a critical emphasis on the negative aspects of Wilde's work. In *A Vision* (1926) written many years after Wilde's death (1900), Yeats delineates much of what he considered were Wilde's failings. He perceives that, "behind [Wilde's] words was the whole power of his intellect, *but* that intellect had given itself to pure contemplation".[55] Yeats asserts Wilde's brilliance only to find it wanting by its having turned from receptive to abstracted thought, which was not, Yeats believed, the manner fitting to the thought of the artist. Yeats commends Wilde for always being true to the intellect yet while this is so, he also charges Wilde with abusing his intellectual powers by taking up positions in argument out of caprice rather than sincerity.[56] He is also critical of Wilde's desire to dominate and his lack of strong conviction. Yeats's account makes it appear that the distance between Wilde and himself was far too wide for any influence to have taken place. Yeats admired Wilde and never recovered from the initial impact of his image; he remembered him with affection but avoided any admission of artistic indebtedness. He pronounced Wilde "almost"[57] great, keeping him at a distance, refusing to be engulfed by either his image or his intellect.

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[55] ibid. p. 148.

[56] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision* (1937), pp. 148, 149.

[57] W.B. Yeats, *Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892,* p. vii.

Yeats so succeeded in creating his own image of Wilde, and in repressing the realisation that it was an imagined image, that he documented its authenticity with a conveniently apposite but inaccurate memory. When editing the anthology, *A Book of Irish Verse*,[58] Yeats wrote to Wilde for permission to include his poem, "Requiescat"; Wilde wrote back,[59] giving his permission but saying, that he thought that Yeats would be better choosing one of his sonnets: "on the sale of Keats's love letters or the one beginning "Not that I love thy children" ["Song to Liberty"]. Many years later, in *The Trembling of the Veil*, Yeats "mistakenly", quotes Wilde as saying that the poem, "Hélas!", is more characteristic of him and follows this claim with an excerpt from this poem:

> Lo! with a little rod
> I did but touch the honey of romance –
> And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

In the typescript of this section in *Autobiographies*, the lines from Wilde's poem are added in in Yeats's hand, showing that his mistake was not simply caused by his confusing the page numbers of the poems, "Hélas" and "Song to Liberty", which were placed on consecutive pages in Wilde's *Poems*. Yeats's selection was not made on the basis of the titles of the poems but on a particular reading of Wilde.[60] Furthermore, Wilde never mentioned "Song to Liberty" to Yeats by name but quoted its opening line. The lines

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[58] *A Book of Irish Verse* (London: Methuen: March, 1895).

[59] "To W.B. Yeats", "August-September 1894". *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, p. 605.

[60] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 286.
"I had asked leave to quote 'Tread gently [sic], she is near ['near', inserted in Yeats's hand] under the snow,' he had written that I might do so if I pleased, but his most characteristic poem was that with the lines [as above]". National Library of Ireland. Michael B. Yeats Collection. W.B. Yeats, Book iv. *The Tragic Generation*. Ts. 252 Microfiche 30,252. Fiche 3 of 4, p. 140.

selected by Yeats in Wilde's name, validate Yeats's thesis that Wilde had the capacity to achieve greatness but failed to do more than skirmish with it.

With similar ingenuity, Yeats copper-fastened his image of Wilde as failed Romantic hero by making even more direct use of Wilde's own words in support of his thesis. These words, Yeats never tired of repeating in article, book and lecture: "'We Irish are too poetical to be poets; we are a nation of brilliant failures; but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks'." Yeats interpreted these words as being Wilde's self-definition: "[Wilde] commended and dispraised himself during dinner by attributing characteristics like his own to his country".[61] As Yeats would have it, Wilde by his own admission, is acknowledging his failure to achieve greatness; he is artistically wanting - "an unfinished sketch of a great man". Yeats was impressed by Wilde's national and personal criticism and proceeded to amend its charges within his own person, becoming a great and successful poet and attaining the right to be classed one of the "greatest talkers since the Greeks".[62] In denigrating Wilde's creative achievement, Yeats empowered himself as an artist. He minimised any suggestion that Wilde had influenced his imaginative development by constructing Wilde as a romantic, sympathetic image but artistically flawed and so an unlikely source of influence for him. Yeats epitomised his conception of Wilde the failed hero in his assertion that Wilde had "all but seen the Grail". Yeats's

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[61] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 135.
W.B. Yeats, "The Celt in London" in *The Boston Pilot* (Apr. 18, 1891). Collected as "Some Recent Books by Irish Writers" in *Letters to the New Island,* p. 48.

[62] Many friends and acquaintances of Yeats testify to his power as a talker. See for example "Yeats at the Arts Club" by P.L. Dickinson; "Conversations with W.B. Yeats" by Louis Esson; "An Interview with Mr. W.B. Yeats" by Hugh Lunn; "Vacillation" by Henry W. Nevinson. *W.B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections, Vol. 1*, pp. 51-53; 137, 138; 50,51; 122, 123.

addendum to this statement, which he made in an interview in 1913 with Sybil Bristowe, tells a tale of usurpation. He states, "but the full vision was only for the meek Galahad".[63] It is not a difficult stretch of the imagination to recognise Yeats behind this mask of meekness. As a gauche, suggestible youth, he incurred Wilde's influence and experienced both astonishment and resentment at his precursor's intrusion. Wilde's image and intellect affected his creativity and altered his artistic perspective on reality. Under the direct influence of Wilde, Yeats proceeded to reinvent his own image and to imaginatively recreate Wilde into an image suited to his needs.

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[63] Sybil Bristowe, "Mr. W.B. Yeats: poet and mystic". First appeared in *T.P's. Weekly* (London: April 4, 1913). Collected in E.H. Mikhail, *W.B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections, Vol. 1,* p. 93.

Chapter Three
(1891 – 1906)
"Surface and Symbol"
Wilde's *Salomé* and Yeats's revisions of *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*

Oscar Wilde's symbolist play, *Salomé,* was staged for the first time in England on the 10th and 13th May 1905, and for a second time on 10th and 18th June the following year. Yeats attended both the 1905 and 1906 productions of this play.[1] The effect on Yeats was astounding. Wilde's intellectual concepts and visual images arrested his imagination. Immediately following the 1905 performance he began to revise three of his finished plays: *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre.* Each of these rewritten plays exhibit elements and concepts derived from Wilde's *Salomé.* This is especially noticeable in the play, *Deirdre*, which Yeats revised in 1906 and which benefited from his seeing both performances of *Salomé.*

The impact of the staging of the play on Yeats's imagination illustrates, yet again, his susceptibility to the visual image. Yeats was struck by the sensuality of Wilde's play and the subtle range of emotions registered by Salomé herself. Wilde's character changed Yeats's imaginative perception of the female psyche and the play's symbols became part

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[1]The first performance of *Salomé* in London was given at the Bijou Theatre in Archer Street, Westbourne Grove. It was staged on 10 and 13 May 1905 by the New Stage Club. *Salomé* was produced at the King's Hall, Covent Garden, London on 10 and 18 June 1906 by the Literary Theatre Society. Wilde's *A Florentine Tragedy* was performed as the first half of a double bill. It was Yeats who suggested producing this play to Florence Farr who along with Charles Ricketts and T. Sturge Moore were members of the Literary Theatre Society. Yeats, himself, was a "nominal member".
Yeats wrote to Florence Farr, Jan. 1906: "His [Synge's] play was done in Germany in association with a play in one act by Wilde called I think *Florentine Nights* [sic]. I don't think it has even been published in England. Why not get it and play it at your new theatre?"
Alan Wade ed., *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 468.

of Yeats's personal symbolic schema. He admired the construction of the play; he continued to play and experiment with the devices and with the metaphysical and emotional content of Wilde's play, eventually converting them into key elements within his own creativity.

His use of *Salomé* can be seen in his early plays: *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre* and also in *The Player Queen. Salomé* also informs *Four Plays for Dancers*, much of the poetry of the middle period and some of the later period and comes to its fullest outward expression in two late dance plays, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March* which is also, paradoxically, Yeats's fullest dramatic exposition of his achieved philosophy.

In her book, *The Plays of W.B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer,* Sylvia Ellis claims that in his Dance Plays Yeats was always trying to bring the same idea to perfection: "An examination of the [dance] plays has surely revealed that Yeats was forever perfecting a model, replicating elements of it elsewhere, adjusting and, thus, innovating and moving on."[2] Yeats's model, this thesis will demonstrate, was no imaginary paradigm but Wilde's play, *Salomé.* Wilde's play resonated within Yeats's work for some thirty years. *A Full Moon in March* is his final and complete re-making of it. He told Dorothy Wellesley, late in 1935: "[*A Full Moon in March]* is a fragment of the past I had to get rid of".[3] This final outcome of the influence of *Salomé* was, according to his own admission, almost a compulsion, as though he had to follow the process of influence to its final end. He began

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[2] Sylvia Ellis, *The Plays of W.B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer*, p. 319.

[3] Letter dated, Nov. 28 [1935]. Allan Wade, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 843.

by using quite obvious appropriations from *Salomé* and finished with the outward form of Wilde's play but a substituted meaning of his own.

This chapter will be divided into three sections which will discuss Wilde's and Yeats's involvement with symbolist drama and the changes that Yeats made in the structure, characterisation and symbolic content, to the various versions of *The Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre* as a consequence of his admiration for Wilde's *Salomé*.

1. Yeats, Wilde's *Salomé* and the symbolist movement

Yeats's engagement with *Salomé* goes back some twenty years prior to the performance of Wilde's symbolist play in the Bijou Theatre in 1905 and has as its background Yeats's deep rooted interest in symbolism and French Symbolist writing. In the 1890s, when Wilde was fraternising with the chief exponents of the Symbolist Movement in Paris and rivalling their achievements in writing his own symbolist play, Yeats was entering into this new movement and embracing it with all the enthusiasm and excitement of youth.

The Symbolist Movement originated in France; it had affiliations with but was a more serious literary movement than its immediate predecessor, Decadence, which although still in evidence during the 1890s was in decline. Decadence had promoted self absorption and a cult of the artificial; inclining towards moral perversity, it sought to find new sensations through the juxtaposition of the unexpected. Decadence had inculcated in art and literature an air of fatigue and restlessness. Oscar Wilde had intimated its demise in

his essay, "The Decay of Lying", (1889), poking fun at it as "The Tired Hedonists' Club".[4] Decadence had captivated him as it had many young writers of the period, never more so than in the literary persona of Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Huysman's *A Rebours* who delighted in the artificial, experiencing the pleasures of the spirit and of the senses.[5] Arthur Symons noted that the book "expressed not merely [the author] but an epoch".[6]

While retaining resonances of decadence symbolism was, as Oscar Wilde put it, "a new and fascinating disease".[7] The Symbolists reacted against a materialist culture which was as evident in the nineteenth century theatres of Paris as it was in those of London. The Symbolists aspired to an apprehension of a knowledge beyond the everyday concerns of ordinary life - to reach and show the Infinite through images and to evoke a sense of mystery in juxtaposing finite images with infinite apprehensions.

Arthur Symons defined Symbolism as the expression of "the unseen by the visible".[8] Essentially, the symbolist art was Gnostic; the sense of mysticism is strong in most Symbolist works. Ellmann offers a more secular, though basically similar formulation of it in adapting the words of J. Isaacs [*The Background of Modern Poetry*],

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[4] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1073.

[5] J. K. Huysmans, *A Rebours,* (1884 rpt., Paris: Fasquelle, 1972). *Against Nature: a new translation of A Rebours,* transl. by Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[6] Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature" in *Poetry and Prose.* Selected and introduced by R.V. Holdsworth (Cheshire: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1979), p. 78.

[7] Richard Ellmann, "Discovering Symbolism" in *Golden Codgers: biographic speculations* (London: Oxford Press, 1973), p. 105.

[8] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1899), p. 4.

"Symbolism is an attempt through a subtly articulated pattern of metaphors to offer hidden aspects of consciousness or experience".[9]

The Symbolist art involved the integration of all its constituent elements - movement, colour, lighting, costume, language, music. Richard Wagner, musician, composer, playwright (1813-1883), had evolved an idea of total theatre to which the Symbolists were somewhat indebted. He had proposed a form of theatre in which all the arts were unified. However, he privileged music above poetry - "The union of music and poetry must always end in subordination of the latter".[10] Most symbolist writers were not of this opinion.

The Symbolists were concerned with the correspondence of phenomena and sought to emphasise this philosophical perception in the convergence of all things. In a symbolist play the scenic elements and the language itself were interrelated and used as symbolic representations. For example, the landscape of the Belgian symbolist, Maeterlinck's *Salomé*-style play, *La Princesse Maleine*, interacts with the action on stage while changes in colour and sound accompany the characters' actions. Wilde employs this scenic technique in *Salomé*, having the changing colours of the moon coincide with related happenings on stage.

The Symbolist method of dramatisation was characterised by a deep sense of ritual: everything was deliberately performed to lead up to a cumulative, unified effect and

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[9] Richard Ellmann, quote from J. Isaacs in "The Background of Modern Poetry" *Golden Codgers*, p. 109.

[10] James Flannery, *W.B.Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: the early Abbey Theatre in theory and practice* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 103.

the exposition of one overriding emotion. Movement was often artificially contrived as in the puppet-like actions of Maeterlinck's characters. Words and their enunciation were often patterned on music, their delivery demanding a certain vocal virtuosity on the part of the performer. Colour had its symbolic significance and was also used in costume, scenery and lighting to consolidate the sense of overall unity. Oscar Wilde discussed with Charles Ricketts using blocks of colour in *Salomé* to accentuate the groupings of actors and enhance the visual unity of the play. He intended that "the Jews should be in yellow, the Romans were to be in purple, the soldiery in bronze green, and John in white".[11]

Recurring symbols, similar in their use to the leitmotivs employed by Wagner in his operas, were often a feature of Symbolist drama and acted as one of the unifying factors in the interwoven fabric of total theatre. Maeterlinck used the repetition of small words to induce a trance-like effect, Wilde employed this Maeterlinckian method in *Salomé*. He was particularly impressed by the Belgian playwright who succeeded more than any other writer of that time in portraying on stage the aspirations of symbolism - the musical qualities and mystical elements. Peter Raby, believes that Maeterlinck "offered Wilde a theatrical vocabulary more complete and more innovative than anything the London stage could demonstrate".[12]

Wilde, before travelling to Paris in October 1891, had been approached by William Heinemann to write the introduction for two of Maeterlinck's plays in English translation,

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[11] William Tydeman and Steven Price *Wilde: Salomé*, pp. 45, 46.

[12] Peter Raby, *Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 105.

one of them - *La Princesse Maleine.*[13] Wilde never actually wrote the prefaces but *La Princesse Maleine* was one of the sources used by him in writing his own symbolist play .

Wilde recalls beginning his play one evening during the winter months of 1891, having returned to his lodgings in the Rue des Cappucines from dinner with friends to whom he had been relating the Biblical story of *Salomé.* Finding a blank notebook lying on his table he began to write. Some hours later he left his writing and went up the street to the Grand Café where he told the leader of the café orchestra , "I am writing a play about a woman dancing with her bare feet in the blood of a man she has craved for and slain. I want you to play something in harmony with my thoughts". Wilde was satisfied with the response of the orchestra leader and later told Vincent O'Sullivan, "Rigo played such wild and terrible music that those who were there stopped talking and looked at each other with blanched faces. Then I went back and finished *Salomé*".[14] However accurate Wilde's story may be, he had substantially finished his play before leaving Paris, putting the final touches to it at Torquay in January 1892.

Salomé went into rehearsal at the Palace Theatre London in the second week of June of the same year, the great French tragedienne, Sarah Bernhardt, in the title role. Towards the end of the month the Lord Chamberlain, official licenser of plays, refused to grant a licence to *Salomé.* Despite the angry protestations of Wilde the refusal to allow the play's production remained in place. The matter was the talk of London; articles appeared

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[13] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 315.

[14] ibid., p. 324.

in journals on both sides of the Channel and Wilde gave interviews in French and English newspapers.[15]

Although the play was banned because it contained Biblical material the fact that it was a Symbolist drama may have also influenced the Lord Chamberlain in his assessment of its suitability for English audiences. In 1892, although very little of the actual work of the Symbolist Movement had reached England, rumours and stories abounded. The legacy of the Decadence and its association with perverse pleasures clung to the new movement.[16]

Although the French movement had not found a strong foothold in England, there was a keen interest in it among a certain section of literary people. George Moore, had written a number of articles on Laforgue, Rimbaud and Verlaine which he collected in his book, *Impressions and Opinions*(1891).[17] Moore would be replaced later by Arthur Symons who became French Symbolism's chief apologist in England. Already in 1889,

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[15] The controversy was a concern for all artists: a commission had lately sat on censorship reform, many actors including Irvine speaking in its favour. With the exception of the Scottish critic, William Archer, and Irish critic, George Bernard Shaw, who defended Wilde's play, all the others, according to Wilde "agree[d] with the Censor that there should be a censorship over actors and acting! This shows how bad our stage must be, and also shows how Philistine the English journalists are." "To William Rothenstein", "Mid-July 1892". *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, p. 532.

[16] The recent controversy (1890-1891) concerning Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* cannot have helped his position. The book was classed by many as immoral. *The Scots Observer* (5 July 1890) claimed that in the book "it is not made sufficiently clear that the writer does not prefer a course of unnatural iniquity to a life of cleanliness, health, and sanity." Footnote in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, p. 438.

[17] George Moore, *Impressions and Opinions* (London: 1891).

Symons had published his first piece on the Symbolists - an article on Villiers de Lisle Adam for *The Woman's World,* then edited by Wilde.[18]

Symons was a friend of Yeats. Both writers were members of *The Rhymers Club,* founded in early 1890. This group met regularly to read to each other from their poetic works and to discuss current literary matters. The French Symbolists fell into this category and were avidly discussed, many of the Rhymers being ardent supporters of the new movement.[19] Yeats brought interesting aspects from his earlier knowledge of symbolism to these discussions. He had read Swedenborg and Boehme in the 1880s while he and Edwin Ellis had brought out an edition of Blake (1889 –1893). Yeats was the primary writer of the section entitled, "The Symbolic System".[20] Yeats's interest in theosophy and the occult had also provided him with experimental experiences of symbol and its efficacy. French writers had been part of Yeats's literary education from his early youth - many of J.B. Yeats's friends, including Todhunter, York Powell and Ellis being keen Francophiles. York Powell had arranged for Paul Verlaine to lecture in Oxford in 1893 and in the same year assisted in the arrangements for Mallarmé's presentation of "La Musique et les Lettres" at Oxford.[21]

Wilde's *Salomé* was published in French in Paris in 1893 to the critical acclaim of the greatest Symbolist writers of the day. Its "symbolic force," Katharine Worth declares,

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[18] A footnote to the article reads: "since these words were written the curtain has fallen, leaving the play unfinished. Villiers de l'Isle Adam died on the 20th August ..." Arthur Symons, "Villiers de Lisle Adam" in *The Woman's World,* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd., 1889), ed. Oscar Wilde, pp. 657-660.

[19] E. Davis, *Yeats's Early Contacts with French Poetry* (Pretoria: The Folcroft Press inc., 1970), pp. 35, 36.

[20] Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: the apprentice mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 109.

[21] E. Davis, *Yeats's Early Contacts with French Poetry*, pp. 26, 27.

"was felt at once in Europe".[22] Foremost among the Symbolist dramatists, Maeterlinck, in recognising the strength of Wilde's play, called it "mysterious, strange and admirable". He found it a mesmerising force and claimed to have "emerged for the third time from this dream whose power I have not yet explained to myself".[23]

The ultimate source of Wilde's drama was the biblical story of Salomé. The story concentrates on Herodias, the wife of Herod, who in revenge for St. John the Baptist's denunciation of her, has her daughter, Salomé, dance before Herod and secure his promise to behead the prophet. Both Salomé and her mother, Herodias, had been popular images for art since they first appeared in the Bible. The artists of the nineteenth century found this slight but powerful story particularly fascinating and it inspired many and varied versions, including those by Heine, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Laforgue and Arthur Symons. Not only writers but sculptors and painters were arrested by this image, which led Wilde to remark, "The Prado is filled with Salomés" and to list, in proof of his remark, Titian, Stanzioni, Alessandro Peronese.[24]

Stéphane Mallarmé, the French Symbolist poet, on reading Wilde's *Salomé*, accorded him the highest accolade, asserting that of all the images of Salomé, Wilde had "definitively evoked" her.[25] At the time, Mallarmé himself was working on a long poem on the Salomé theme,"Hérodiade". He never actually finished this epic work but portions of it were

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[22] Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 71.

[23] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 354.

[24] Oscar Wilde to Carillo Gomez in Christa Satzinger, *The French Influence of Oscar Wilde: Dorian Gray and Salomé* (Salzburg: Salzburg University Studies, 1994), p. 195.

[25] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* p. 354.

published prior to the publication of Wilde's drama. Mallarmé's interpretation of the Salomé/Herodias character bears little resemblance to Wilde's complex protagonist. Wilde's *Salomé* was an amalgam of the Bible's innocent daughter and her venal mother, Herodias; she is a character compounded of lethal desire and innocent love. Mallarmé depicts his heroine as cold, chaste and unreflective, while Wilde's Salomé is strong and independent. Wilde asserted that he could not believe in a Salomé "who is unconscious of what she does; a Salomé who is but a silent and passive instrument".[26]

Wilde's play centres around the young Princess Salomé. It opens with a young Syrian captain of the Guards speaking with the Page of Herodias, wife of Herod, Tetrarch of Judaea. They are standing on a great terrace in the Palace, overlooking a banqueting hall. The moon is shining brightly, there is an old cistern behind them. The young Syrian is evidently in love with Herodias' daughter, the Princess Salomé. In the hall below them Herod and his wife entertain visiting dignitaries of various religious persuasions. Jokanaan, the prophet, is imprisoned in the cistern; he has spoken out against Herodias' incestuous marriage to Herod.

Salomé prevails on the young Syrian to allow her to see Jokanaan. Reluctantly, he does so. She is instantly attracted by the prophet but he rebuffs her advances. Salomé determines to have him, one way or another. Her overwhelming physical desire is expressed in her phrase: "I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan."[27]

Salome's step-father, Herod, desires her and begs her to dance for him. At first, she refuses him but when he promises her in return whatever she wishes - despite her

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[26] Christa Satzinger, *The French Influence of Oscar Wilde: Dorian Gray and Salomé,* p. 196.

[27] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 590.

mother's entreaties - she dances the Dance of the Seven Veils. On its completion, she asks Herod for the head of Iokanaan. He tries to persuade her from her desire but she insists and is eventually given the head of the prophet. She swears her love to the severed head and in consummation of this love she kisses the mouth of the head. At this, Herod orders the soldiers to kill Salomé, which they do.

The publication in 1893 of a Symbolist play written in French by his countryman was a matter of interest and excitement to Yeats. Like every other person interested in literature, he had been alerted to Wilde's drama by the furore created by the Lord Chamberlain's refusal to grant it a licence in the previous year. An illustration by Aubrey Beardsley of Wilde's play showing Salomé holding aloft the head of the Baptist appeared in *The Studio* in April of that year. The image so impressed Yeats that he assured Beardsley it was the finest thing that he had ever done.[28]

In 1894 the English version of *Salomé* was published and fully illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley's voluptuous black and white drawings.[29] The timing of the publication coincided with the highest moment in Yeats's enthusiasm for the art of symbolism. Yeats had just returned to London from Paris, where he had met the poet, Paul Verlaine, and was filled with excitement over *Axel*, Villiers de L'Isle Adam's symbolist drama. He was, now, more than ever enthusiastic and sympathetic towards the symbolist method of dramatisation. Yeats's mind was in tune with Symbolism, prepared ground in which *Salomé* would eventually flourish.

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[28] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 333.

[29] Wilde asked Lord Alfred Douglas to translate from the French. However, he found Douglas's translation wanting and the English translation though often attributed to Douglas owes more to Wilde. "Few today believe that Wilde had no hand in the translation which appeared in print". Tydeman and Stevens, *Oscar Wilde: Salomé*, footnote 1, p. 188.

Axel had lasted five hours on stage and although Yeats's command of French was poor, he had been enthralled by the performance. His interest was such that before leaving England he had ploughed through the French text of the play and on his return from France had tried, unsuccessfully, to have it performed. Yeats was enamoured of its symbolist representations - "the forest castle, the treasure, the lamp that had burned before Solomon" – and its aspiration to transcend the everyday and reach out to some fundamental truth. There was an aura of sacredness about the play. It had totally captivated Yeats's Parisian acquaintances including his host, the magician MacGregor Mathers, while Maud Gonne had accompanied Yeats to the theatre to see the play. Remy de Gourmont, writing at the time, describes the impact which Villiers' play had had on this young generation:

> Villiers de L'Isle Adam has opened the doors of the unknown with a crash, and a generation has gone through them to the Infinite.

Yeats felt this semi-religious power in *Axel,* as though he and his young contemporaries had been initiated into a "secret Order". They discussed and examined it in the context of their energetic enquiries into the fundamental questions of life and the nature of being. "It was about those things that most occupied my thought and the thought of my friends, for we were perpetually thinking and talking about the value of life", Yeats recalls.[30]

Axel was actually a rather overdone rendition of the symbolist method and as Marylin Gaddis Rose points out in her forward to *Axel*, it exploited and exaggerated symbolist tenets.[31] Although, in later years, Yeats was vaguely embarrassed at the

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[30] W.B. Yeats, Pref., to trans. H.P.R. Finberg's translaton of *Axel* (1924) by Villiers de L'Isle Adam, rpt., *Axel,* trans. Marylin Gaddis Rose (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1970), p. xiii.

[31] Marylin Gaddis Rose, Foreward, *Axel*, p. 22.

extremity of his youthful feelings for *Axel,* they were heart-felt and strongly held in 1894. Yeats was intoxicated by the play[32] and it fixed the place of symbolism forever in his creative imagination.

Wilde's play was in some ways similar to *Axel.* Both plays were sensually erotic and at the same time had the measured movement of ritual. Both achieved the Symbolist aim of an apprehension of the spiritual. The musical element was common to both, although while *Axel* employed orchestra and choir, *Salomé* coincided more with Mallarmé's Wagnerian aim that word, image and action combine in "visible music". Wilde did not, as Verlaine advocated, put "music first before all",[33] he used it in equal measure with the other elements of his drama, creating a more integrated, balanced composition than Villiers. *Axel* lacked the cohesive force of Wilde's play. Wilde achieved, as Katharine Worth believes "the first triumphant demonstration of the symbolist doctrine of total theatre".[34]

The progress of the play in its major and minor movements suggests a musical composition and this impression is intensified by the recurring leitmotivs;[35] the colours black, white, silver and red are interlaced through the action and images of the play and are reflected in the moon - symbolically and literally - involving an interplay of lighting,

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[32] W.B. Yeats in a review quoted by M. Gaddis Rose in her Forward to *Axel* p. ix.

[33] Mallarmé's Wagnerian aim that "the most complete work of the poet should be that which, in its final achievement becomes a perfect music, every word is a jewel, scattering and recapturing sudden fire, every image is a symbol, and the whole poem is visible music". Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 128.

[34] Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 73.

[35] Wilde noted that the "recurring motifs make *Salomé,* so like a piece of music and bind it together as a ballad". Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis, p. 740.

scenery and language. Wilde achieves a notion of the mystical in conveying opposing images of life and death, miracle and mundane, love and lust, innocence and desire, body and soul. He expresses these concepts through a network of inter-linked images which culminate in the great unifying image of dance. The play succeeds in expressing one principal emotion which accompanies the exposition of an intellectual theory and its symbolic metaphysical apprehension.

Wilde's play is the consummate expression of desire. Its presence is evoked through the various narratives within the play, the repetitive insistence of the language, its colour, movement and symbols - the moon, the sensuous dance, the climactic kiss. All action arises out of desire: Salomé leaves the banquet and goes to the terrace where she encounters the Young Syrian and hears the voice of Iokanaan because she is disturbed by Herod's desire. She asks the Young Syrian to open the cistern because Iokanaan's voice fills her with desire; the Syrian complies because of his feelings for her; he kills himself because of Salomé's desire for Iokanaan. Iokanaan thwarts Salomé's desire; his desire is for purity and his God. Her desire leads her to dance for Herod. Herod craves Salomé's dance and pledges his word because of the strength of his desire. She is killed because of it. Wilde's play is full bodied and passionate, and because of this it had greater appeal for Yeats than many of the French Symbolist works, even those by the foremost of them, Maeterlinck, who tended towards a certain evanescence in his expression of the intangible and insubstantial.

The critic, William Archer, writing in the journal, *Black and White* (1893), acknowledging *Salomé's* musical debt to Maeterlinck, compared both dramatists, highlighting the creative gulf between them:

> There is far more depth and body in Mr. Wilde's work than in Maeterlinck's. His characters are man and woman, not filmy shapes of mists and moonshine. His properties are far more varied, less conventional. His ... palette is infinitely richer. Maeterlinck paints in washes of water colour. Mr. Wilde attains the depth and brilliance of oils. *Salomé* has all the qualities of a great historical picture, pedantry and conventionality excepted.[36]

Yeats's mature view of Maeterlinck was somewhat in line with Archer's appraisal; he felt that his art lacked "the ceaseless revery about life which we call wisdom". Wilde's play had intellectual content, metaphysical interest and striking visual imagery and it perfectly realised all the tenets of symbolism. It was, therefore, eminently more appealing and relevant to Yeats than many of the contemporaneous symbolist plays.

When Lugné Poe's French company performed Maeterlinck's play, *Monna Vonna,* in London in 1902, Yeats attended, not out of interest in the play but to see its method of performance. By 1909, Yeats was practically sneering at the Belgian playwright, calling his play, *The Blue Bird,* "a rather meretricious pantomime" and claiming Maeterlinck was "struggling well beyond his nature" in writing "another of the gasping things ... to please his wife".[37]

There are, nevertheless, some similarities between Maeterlinck's *La Princesse Maleine* and Wilde's *Salomé*: both heroines are overwhelmed by passion and suffer violent deaths and there are elements of the setting and action in Wilde's opening scene which compare tellingly with *La Princesse Maleine.* However, all of these similarities are

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[36] William Archer, rev., of *Salomé*, by Oscar Wilde, *Black and White* (London: Black and White publishing Co., 1891-1911), March 11, 1893, p. xiv.

[37] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed. Allan Wade, pp. 255, 375, 541, 542.

incidental, the weak, little princess of Maeterlinck's drama contrasts strongly with Wilde's wilful and knowing protagonist. Wilde's debt to Maeterlinck remains the uncomplicated simplicity of his syntax and its musical effect.

Wilde's immediate source is said to be Gustave Moreau's series of paintings, in particular, his sensuous rendering of the voluptuous Salomé dancing and the image of her holding the Baptist's head, a look of horror and revulsion on her face.[38] These two pictures depict both aspects of Wilde's Salomé. Huysmans in *A Rebours* graphically details the image of Moreau's bejewelled Salomé.[39] His erotic depiction captures the sensual appeal of the dancer and its strength as an image. It was Wilde, however, whose ingenuity united both images -the craven and the innocent - into one complex and powerful character. It is this composite mixture and the fundamental wisdom of Wilde's drama which Yeats found so irresistible.

There are some details of similarity between Wilde's *Salomé* and Gustave Flaubert's *Hérodias* (1877).They both are set at a sumptuous feast, there is an extravagant decorative element and certain similarities in minute details of plot and character. Flaubert's short story, published as a section of his book, *Les Trois Contes,* is a clear historical account of the Baptist story and its main protagonist is a realistic rendering of Herodias.[40] Robert Ross is dismissive of Wilde having borrowed from *Hérodias*[41] but he is

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[38] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 321. Robert Ross, "A note on *Salomé*", *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde (London: John Lane, 1912), p. ix.

[39] J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature: a new translation of A Rebours* trans. Margaret Mauldon, pp. 44-50.

[40] Gustave Flaubert, "Hérodias", *Les Trois contes* (Paris : Garnier, 1988).

[41] Robert Ross, "A note on *Salomé", Salomé* by Oscar Wilde, p. ix.

in agreement with Yeats that Wilde had drawn considerably from the Oriental motifs in Flaubert's work, *La Tentation de St. Antoine.*

Writing to René Francis (1911), who had sent him a copy of his translaton of an early version of Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine,* Yeats remarks:

> It has been an exciting thing to me reading it, for it is many years since I have read Flaubert. How much of what is most typical in our generation, Wilde's *Salomé* for instance and much elsewhere in his work, has come out of it. Flaubert has made enough fabulous beasts to make the wilderness of romance terrible for another hundred years.[42]

The eastern resonance of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine,* as Ross suggests, resembles that of Wilde's *Salomé*. There are several circumstantial similarities, for instance Iokanaan and St. Anthony are holy men who have fasted in the desert while St. Anthony, like Iokanaan, is desired by a woman of royalty, the Queen of Sheba, who desires to kiss his lips. For all its similarities, however, the play is totally different in its depiction. Wilde's play is pervaded by a sense of impending terror and palpable sensuality; its characters are strong: St. Anthony does not have the powerful invective of Wilde's character, the Queen of Sheba is neither as intense nor as complex as Salomé. Sheba is teasingly playful, she takes her eventual rejection by St. Anthony with an air of insouciance: "You'll regret it fine hermit, you'll be sorry! and bored! But I don't care!"[43] This is a far different response to Salomé's desperate longing and determined covetousness. Wilde's protagonist, Salomé, outstrips her rivals in complexity. She is a mixture of confused innocence and craven desire. She embodies an advanced concept of proactive female desire and cannot be classed with vapid, Maeterlinckian heroines; she is a vibrant, developing character. This is

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[42] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed. Allan Wade, p. 562.

[43] Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* trans. Kitty Mrosovsky (London, 1980 rpt., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 89.

the type of woman who will fill Yeats's dramatic imagination from the strong willed Deirdre of the 1906 revision and the sexually aware Decima of *The Player Queen* to the austere venality of his later Queen in *A Full Moon in March.*

Doubtless, Wilde is indebted to the sensual paintings of Gustave Moreau and their subtly depraved interpretation by J.K. Huysmans, but these and Flaubert's Sheba or Salambo, like the other renditions of the Salomé image from the period, lack the intelligence, the drama, the concentrated precision and psychological depth of Wilde's play. His story of Salomé is grounded in a dynamic and challenging philosophical base and it is this version of *Salomé* and not any other, which had an enduring and energising effect on Yeats's imagination.

That Wilde succeeded in keeping his intellectual integrity, while expressing through his play a cumulative, single emotion, satisfied Yeats's exacting expectations of a Symbolist play. For while he agreed with Wagner's principle of total theatre, where sound, colour and form combine to express one emotion, he is dismissive of his notion that a play should appeal primarily to the emotions rather than to the intelligence.[44] He believed that an artist is concerned with all that is profound in life and not in passing trivialities. This is why an artist such as Wilde held his interest while Maeterlinck did not, for all his style and technique. As J.F. Flannery notes in *Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre* despite their similar aspirations "Yeats and Wagner were poles apart". Flannery pinpoints the underlying aim

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[44] W.B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry" in *Ideas of Good and Evil* in his *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 153-164.

of Yeats's work: "[Yeats] believed that the expression of profound philosophical convictions was of greater importance than simply stirring emotional responses".[45] Yeats held that philosophy is captured in symbols[46] and it is exactly this that appealed to him in Wilde's *Salomé*. Wilde's metaphysical probings conveyed through symbol transfixed him.

The metaphysical climax of *Salomé* is reached in the symbolic union of life and death, when Salomé's lips meet those of the dead Iokanaan. That moment reveals the hard core of Wilde's intellect in its symbolist apprehension of transcendence. In this moment Wilde has created a liminal space where life and death meet and he has suspended the known concepts of the temporal and spatial, assembling in this symbolic space the most potent forces of existence - sexuality, love, suffering, death, life. This moment has been foreshadowed earlier in the play: "God is in what is evil, even as He is in what is good".[47] Salomé desired Iokanaan and had him murdered; in the act of satisfying her lust and kissing his dead mouth, she experiences a spiritual epiphany and attains the mystery of love, thereby gaining self realisation. Wilde proposes the notion that the spiritual is attained through the carnal and from this fusion the transcendent is realised. At the symbolic moment of cohesion a transcendent knowledge of the complete nature of existence is at least possible, and is signified by Salomé's achievement of self-knowledge.

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[45] James Flannery, "A Dramatist in Search of a Dramatic Form", *W.B.Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: the early Abbey Theatre in theory and practice*, pp.108, 109.

[46] W.B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry", *Ideas of Good and Evil* in *Essays and Introductions*, pp. 160, 161.

[47] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 594.

Yeats was absorbed by the artistic and philosophical possibilities which symbolism offered. He felt it was the responsibility of the artist to unravel and expose the mysteries of existence and saw the symbol as the poet's ultimate means of discovery and of empowerment.[48] Yeats was interested in constructing a network of personal symbols that he intended to use and reuse throughout his work until each symbol would act and interact with one another as though they were deeply encoded words in a new and mystic language system.

The use of symbols within an interactive structure is apparent in Wilde's *Salomé*: each symbol sets in motion multiple suggestions, each taking something from the next, deepening its meaning while insinuating itself further into one fabric. Wilde uses the same image to suggest various meanings, for example, "wine" is compared to "blood", both are characterised by the colour red and interlinked as death with life, pleasure with pain. Soul and the mystical concerns of Christ are represented by wine; wine and blood have sexual connotations; Iokanaan speaks in Old Testament terms of Herodias's lustful activities as the "wine of her iniquities"; Herod, in his desire for Salomé, asks her to drink his wine; Salomé, enamoured of Iokanaan, tells him, "Thy voice is wine to me". She describes his lips as a band of scarlet. Salomé performs her sensual dance in the spilt blood of the man who killed himself for love of her. The moon, as she dances, becomes "red as blood". Wine and blood are symbolic of life, "wine of life", "life's blood".[49] Wine and blood call up images of the Christian sacrifice. Through the symbol, sensual and spiritual cohesion is

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[48] W.B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil* in *Essays and Introductions*, "Symbolism in Painting", p. 149.

[49] Oscar Wilde, *Salomè,* pp. 589, 600, 599.

achieved. The symbol of blood and wine is a composite symbol of life and death, mysticism and sexual desire and Wilde enmeshes it within a series of symbols that culminate in yielding a deep, philosophical revelation on the nature of existence and human nature. This is the direction that Yeats believed symbols ought to take. Yeats described the innate energy of symbolic language, explaining how "images took upon themselves what seemed an independent life and became a part of mystic language which seemed always as if it would bring me some strange revelation".[50]

He set out to evolve a system of symbols similar to Wilde's but one which would not be confined to one work but rather carry over from work to work. Yeats, in time, attained his objective and the system which he constructed relied heavily on symbols which he first appropriated from *Salomé*. Yeats first put these acquired symbols to tentative use in his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*. He carried over these symbols into *The Four Plays for Dancers*, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March* where he used them as interconnected signifiers and increased their signification within each new context. However, although Yeats's symbols changed and developed throughout his work they carried within them the original meaning assigned to them by Wilde.

Yeats was conscious of Wilde's fine achievement but it would be almost ten years from its publication before he would have the opportunity to see *Salomé* performed on stage. While this would not be as startling nor as heady an experience as his attendance

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[50] W.B. Yeats, Notes to *The Wind Among the Reeds* in *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats,* eds., Peter Alt and K. Russel Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 800.

with Maud Gonne at *Axel*, it would have a more focussed and potent effect on his creative work.

During the intervening years between seeing *Axel* and *Salomé*, Yeats's interest in symbolism increased. In 1896 he published *The Secret* Rose, a book of mystical, symbolic stories, and he also contributed poetry and prose to "The Savoy" (1896) an essentially symbolist journal edited by the poet and critic, Arthur Symons who, besides an interest in symbolism, shared rooms with Yeats in Fountain Court. Symons termed Symbolism "the paradoxical search by a troubled, doubting century for at least an ideal of spiritual consolation" [51] He collected his writings on French writers (1885-1898) into a book, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), which became one of the most influential works of the 1890s. Yeats, familiar with its contents long before its appearance in book form, benefited greatly from Symons' knowledge of European writers:

> Nor shall I ever know how much my practice and my theory owe to the passages that he [Symons] read me from Catulluis and from Verlaine and Mallarme, ... He was making those translations from Mallarme, and from Verlaine, from Calderon, from St. John of the Cross, which are the most accomplished, metrical translations of our time, and I think that those from Mallarmè, may have given elaborate form to my verses of those years, to the later poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds* and to *The Shadowy* Waters. [52]

In the same year as Symons published *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* Yeats published *The Wind Among the Reeds*, much of which was made up of symbolist poetry. Symons, drawing attention to Yeats's pioneer work in the Symbolist mode in the English language, dedicated *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* to his friend, calling Yeats "the

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[51] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* p. 102.

[52] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 319, 320.
Yeats makes no secret of his literary debt to Symons nor to Villiers de L'Isle Adam or Mallarmé but never acknowledges Wilde as a precursor. Bloom would have it: the stronger the influence, the deeper the repression.

chief representative of that movement in our country".[53] Yeats's knowledge of symbolist writing and his high expectations of what symbolism might achieve ensured his receptive response to Wilde's play and an enthusiasm to engage with it in its entirety.

2: Yeats's creative use of *Salomé* in terms of dramatic devices, ambience and characterisation in his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*

Shortly after he attended Wilde's *Salomé* (1905), Yeats's own symbolist play, *The Shadowy Waters,* was staged in London, on July 8th. An interesting connection highlights Yeats's involvement with the two plays. The actor, Robert Farquarharson,[54] who played the part of Herod in *Salomé* took the male lead in Yeats's play and, Florence Farr, who also worked on *Salomé,* played Yeats's heroine, Dectora.

Immediately after this performance of *The Shadowy Waters,* Yeats began a series of radical revisions of *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*.[55] He worked on *The Shadowy Waters* from July to November 1905 and on its completion began to rewrite the entire first half of *On Baile's Strand.* Having finished this work by April, 1906, he immediately set out to restructure *Deirdre*. The moment Yeats chose to do this revising and the time scale of the revisions (three plays following one after the other in little over a year from July 1905 to November 1906) indicate the catalytic effect of *Salomé* on Yeats's

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[53] Arthur Symons, Prefatory Dedication, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* p. v.

[54] "To Arthur Symons," "August 3, 1905": "Farquharson who seemed good in Herod was unendurable as Forgael". *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade, p. 459.

[55] See appendices i, ii, iii to chapter 3 for details of relevant versions of the three plays and their revisions and performances. I will also provide this information in the notes to the texts as need arises.

mind. The revised plays themselves also show clear evidence of indebtedness to Wilde's play.

Before seeing *Salomé,* Yeats had been satisfied that his three plays were complete. He had some misgivings about *The Shadowy Waters* which he had published in 1900, but even so he was confident enough in it as a finished work to allow Florence Farr to produce it at the Court Theatre for an International Theosophical convention (July 8, 1905). The audience included Maurice Maeterlinck.[56] Yeats spent twenty years on the writing of the first *Shadowy Waters* and the version of the play which was produced in 1905 had little added to it since its publication in 1900.[57] Yeats was totally dissatisfied with the play when he saw it performed in 1905, calling it an "execrable performance". He "spent the entire summer rewriting" it.[58]

The drafts of the 1900 version were filled with mythic creatures - Formors and Seabars - and laden with symbolism.[59] The play staged at The Court Theatre (1905)

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[56] Michael J. Sidnell, George P. Mayhew and David R. Clark, *Druid Craft: the writing of The Shadowy Waters: manuscripts of W.B. Yeats transcribed, edited and with a commentary* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1972), p. 302.

[57] Michael J. Sidnell, George P. Mayhew and David R. Clark, *Druid Craft: the writing of The Shadowy Waters,* p. 302.
Two prompt copies of this version of the play are held in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library. Prompt copy 1 is described as "Typewritten prompt copy, with additions in Miss Horniman's hand 38p." This is almost certainly from Jan 14, 1904 production. The first copy probably given to Florence Farr as the basis for the 1905 production. The second seems copied from the first and is described as: "Typewritten prompt copy, with the author's ms. corrections and additions in Florence Farr's hand 38p." Lola Szladits, "Addenda to Sidnell: Yeats's *Shadowy Waters*" in *Papers of the Bibliographhic Society of America, Vol. 62,* 1968, p. 617.

[58] "W.B. Yeats to Arthur Symons", Sep. 10, 1905, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed. Allan Wade, p. 460.

[59] Mss., Tss. and holographs of *The Shadowy Waters* are contained in folders 1 - 30 in the National Library of Ireland, Ms. 8761 & M/F 7491. All but one - Folder 30 - relate to the 1900 version of *The Shadowy Waters.* The published *Shadowy Waters* (London: Hoddard and Stoughton, 1900) is dedicated to

evolved through this background of dream filled mists and birdheaded men. The hero, Forgael, searches on the shadowy waters for the ends of the earth and some impossible, everlasting joy. This original version of *The Shadowy Waters* lacks force and reads more like a dramatic poem than a play. Indeed, it took Yeats some time to decide himself which it was he was writing, a play or a dramatic poem. Prior to seeing *Salomé* Yeats's symbolist play was as intangible and vague as Maeterlinck or Mallarmé whom Yeats accused in "Discoveries" (1906) of ascending "upward into evergrowing subtlety".[60]

The version that Yeats rewrote in the summer of 1905 was staged by the Abbey Theatre, December 8, 1906. While this is still rather ephemeral, it is yet a more vital play than that performed in 1905. All that remains intact of the original play is its theme. The new play has dramatic tension; its language is sharper, its characters and plot more impassioned; there are new dramatic devices which help dispel the passivity of the earlier play.[61] These changes are all the more striking in that they make a departure not only from the 1900 version of the play but from the thousands of words Yeats had previously written on *The Shadowy Waters* 1894-1900. The nature of some of the more important changes in *The Shadowy Waters* (Summer 1905) powerfully suggest Wilde's play as the model for change.

Lady Gregory. All quotes from the 1900 version of the play will be taken from the Hoddard and Stoughton edition.

[60] W.B. Yeats, "Discoveries" in *Essays and Introductions*, p. 266.

[61] "[*The Shadowy Waters*] has become a simple passionate play or at any rate it has a simple passionate story for the common sightseer, though I keep back something for instructed eyes". "To John Quinn, Sep. 16, 1905, Allan Wade ed., *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* p. 462.
N.L.I. Ms. 8761/M/f 7491, Ts. 30 was written in the Summer, 1905. I have compared typescript 30 with the version of *The Shadowy Waters* in *Poems 1899 – 1905* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1906) and have found them to be almost identical. All quotes are taken from *Poems 1899 – 1905.*

Having completed work on *The Shadowy Waters* in November 1905, Yeats turned to *On Baile's Strand. On Baile's Strand* concerns Cuchulain's slaying of his son and his consequent grief. The first published version appeared in 1903 in *In the Seven Woods*, the same version with minor emendations being published under its own title by Maunsel in 1905. The first version of *On Baile's Strand* was premiered in the Abbey on the opening night of the theatre, 27th. December 1904. Three days later, Yeats wrote to Augusta Gregory of his intention to rewrite the first half of the play as he believed that he could make "a great play out of it".[62] Yeats, using the skills which he had learned watching and editing plays for the Abbey, reconstructed most of the first half of the play. He claimed to have finished this revision by February 1905 and in the autumn of that year sent the proof pages of this revised play to his publisher, Bullen.[63] Yeats succeeds in achieving in this rewritten version a more direct style than the original and in increasing the dramatic tension. He does not, for example, as in the earlier version, disclose the identity and patricidal intention of Cuchulain's son at the beginning of the play but leaves this disclosure until the final moments of the play thereby heightening suspense. That Yeats sent this revision to his publisher indicates his satisfaction with it as a finished play. However, this version was never published. Yeats wrote yet another version of *On Baile's*

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[62] "From W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory", "Dec. 30, 1904". Suheil Badi' Bushru'i, *Yeats's Verse Plays: The Revisions 1900-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 47.

[63] National Library Ireland, Microfiche 30,017: "Page proofs of *Poems, 1899-1905* (1906). First proof dated 24 xi 1905. Contains part of *The Shadowy Waters* and *On Baile's Strand* pages numbered 65-96". Stamped on page 81 of *On Baile's Strand* Ts.: "Wm. Brendan & Son, Ltd. Plymouth. First proof: 24. xi. 05 Revise ( ) Please return to Publisher." [Date in pen.] These proof pages go from beginning of play to entrance of boy which tallies with Yeats's claim (Nov. 2, 1905) that "The first half of *On Baile's Strand* is entirely new"(Wade, p. 469). I can find no mention of Yeats working on this play between Feb. 1905 and Nov. 1905; it would appear that this proof copy is the version of his play Yeats claims to have "rewritten since performance" in February 1905 (Wade, p. 448). This version was never published.

Strand directly after he completed the revision of *The Shadowy Waters* (Nov. 1905).[64] The major change which he made in this, the final version of *On Baile's Strand*, can be seen as directly attributable to Wilde's *Salomé.*

Yeats's early completed version of *Deirdre* (1904) is faithful to its main source, Augusta Gregory's translation of *The Three Sons of Usnach.*[65] Yeats's creative involvement with Wilde's *Salomé* can be seen not only in the final version of this play (1906) but in the various preparatory manuscript drafts he worked on that year leading up to the completed play.[66] As with *The Shadowy Waters* and *On Baile's Strand*, prior to his seeing *Salomé,* Yeats was satisfied that *Deirdre* was a finished work. He first completed *Deirdre* on the 5th. October 1904 and announced it as a forthcoming Abbey attraction in December of that year.[67] By the end of the following May (1905), however, he had become uneasy about the completeness of his work and was reluctant to hand it over to Philip Carr for a London production.[68] Yeats's newly conceived perception of his play as

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[64] N.L.I., Ms. 21,498/Mf. 7466, *Abbey Acting Script*. The version in this ts. of *On Baile's Strand* played at the Abbey Theatre April 16, 1906. I have compared *On Baile's Strand* in *Abbey Acting Script* with the version of the play in *Poems: 1899-1905* (London: Bullen, 1906) and have found them to be similar except in some minor particulars. The emendations to *Abbey Acting Script* in Yeats's hand are included in Bullen version. All quotes are taken from *Poems: 1899-1905.*

[65] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* 1904, National Library of Ireland, Ts. 15, 40ff., inscribed "Oct. 5 1904". Augusta Gregory, "The Fate of the Three Sons of Usnach" in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902 rpt., Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970).

[66] W.B. Yeats, National Library of Ireland, Ms. 8760 & M/F 7491. Mss., Tss. and holographs of *Deirdre* contained in folders 1 – 20 and "*Deirdre* Mss. for John Quinn". Ms. 21,493, Abbey Acting script of *Deirdre*. Grey cover, scorched at edges. White label with red border. Kept in blue folder marked, "Abbey Theatre Papers. Typescript of Deirdre by W.B. Yeats (1906?)."

[67] In an interview which appeared in the Dublin *Evening Mail*, Dec. 31, 1904, Yeats said that *Deirdre* "may be ready for production in the early spring". *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, 1901-1904,* vol. 3, eds., John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), note 1, p. 691.

[68] "To Augusta Gregory", "May 30, 1905". *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 450.

unfinished is suggested again in his remarks to John Quinn in June 1905 about a change of scene in the "*Deirdre* play".[69] It was not, however, until April of 1906, having sent the final version of *On Baile's Strand* to the publisher, that Yeats found the time and opportunity to work on *Deirdre.*[70] Between April and November 1906 he completely rewrote the play entirely. The new version of *Deirdre* which evolved through many drafts and was acted by the Abbey company on the 25th November 1906, is a stronger and more dramatic play than that of 1904.

Yeats's revisions of his three plays, *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*, indicate their indebtedness to Wilde's *Salomé* in terms of emotion, intellectual content, image and structure. In this section I will discuss these issues and show how Yeats introduces sensuality into the revised plays and re-conceptualises his female characters along the lines of Wilde's Salomé. I will examine the dramatic devices of oath and the sexually informed bargain found in Wilde's play and incorporated by Yeats into the revisions of his three plays. From this exploration it will become evident that Yeats's plays became emotionally and structurally stronger as a result of his creative involvement with Wilde's *Salomé*.

Yeats uses the dramatic constructs of the oath and the sexually informed bargain in his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*. The oath is a solemn vow which binds men of honour, even more so when given by kings. The oath is

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[69] "To John Quinn", "June, 1905". *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 451.

[70] "What courage you have to begin a great work like *Deirdre* all over again – I don't think I could do tha". "From Maud Gonne to W.B. Yeats", "April 29, 1906". *The Gonne-Yeats Letters 1893-1938: always your friend,* ed. with an introduction by Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pinlico, 1993), p. 229.

sacred and inviolable. In *Salomé,* Herod is bound by oath to fulfil Salomé's demand for Iokanaan's head. As she dances the audience is aware that a terrible price might be exacted from Herod. A horrific anticipation heightens the intensity of the dramatic moment. The success of this device in creating tension has not been lost on Yeats who when he saw *Salomé* was still studying the craft of stage writing. The major change which he makes to *On Baile's Strand* in his post *Salomé* revision is the inclusion of an oath.[71] There is no oath in his early 1904 version, nor in his post December 1904 version nor in the version which he completed by February 1905 and sent to Bullen, the publisher, in November of that year.

The device of the oath in Yeats's final revision (1905) strengthens the structure of his play and gives to Cuchulain's actions a sharper focus. Yeats now gives the oath-taking ritual as the reason for the kings being at Baile's Strand. In the original legend as translated by Augusta Gregory, the kings gather here "to settle some business that belonged to the government of that district".[72] In Yeats's original published version, they gather for a similarly peaceful council meeting. In the proof pages of the February pre *Salomé* version, Yeats expressly takes out any coercion of Cuchulain by Conchubar. The kings have gathered for a council at which Conchubar tells Cuchulain that he would like to have him at all future council meetings, Cuchulain asks: "Do you command it, king?" The

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[71] The new inclusion was striking enough to be mentioned in a review of the play: "the oath scene being veirdly grand". *The Freeman's Journal*, April 17, 1906. Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, *The Abbey Theatre: the years of Synge, 1905-1909*, p. 64.

[72] Lady Augusta Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, p. 237.

king is quite adamant in his reply: "No, no, I would not lay commands upon you".[73] The concept of binding Cuchulain to Conchubar's word is unthinkable in February 1905, but it becomes the very reason for the crucial gathering of kings at Baile's Strand some months later in Yeats's post *Salomé* and final rewrite of *On Baile's Strand.*

Yeats uses the oath with the same intent dramatic efficacy as Wilde. He makes the oath a central device in the remaking of his play. It tightens the structure and increases dramatic tension; it supplies the purpose for the kings' assembly and it makes Cuchulain's reasons for taking up arms against his son clearer, more plausible and tragic. Cuchulain has wholeheartedly surrendered his will to Conchubar, as Herod did to Salomé, and so the inevitability of ensuing events is assured. This oath leads Cuchulain to fight and kill his son against his own inclinations. As in *Salomé*, the oath ends in obscene and unnatural death.

The inviolable status of the king's word is pivotal in Wilde's play since the fulfilment of Salomé's desires depends on it and as it makes the execution of Iokanaan inevitable, the plot relies on it. This same quality is inherent in Cuchulain's oath but in *Deirdre* Yeats makes antithetical use of an oath: Conchubar breaks his word. In the 1906 revision of *Deirdre* Naoise insists on trusting the word of a king. This word has always been the reason in Yeats's *Deirdre* why it was possible for the two lovers to return to Ireland but Conchubar's broken word almost passes unmentioned in his earlier work, being lost in the import of its consequences.

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[73] N.L.I., Microfiche 30,017: "Page proofs of *Poems, 1899-1905* (1906). First proof dated 24 xi 1905. Contains part of *The Shadowy Waters* and *On Baile's Strand* pages numbered 65-96". p. 92.

In 1906 Yeats sees the dramatic advantage of isolating the king's given word and giving it prominence. He makes the deception played on the lovers by Conchubar seem more vile by reminding the audience of the honourable nature of the given word. Naoise explains the sanctity of the male code of honour to Deirdre:

> I cannot weigh the gossip of the roads
> With a king's words and were the end but death
> I may not doubt him.

Fergus lends his weight to Naoise's conviction:

> ... He [Conchubar] is my friend
> I have his oath and I am well content[74]

The broken word invests the plot with a taut balance, acts as a corrective to Deirdre's fierce misgivings and increases dramatic tension and testifies to Yeats's careful reading of Wilde's play. Yeats's appreciation of Wilde's play is again evidenced in his revisions in the use he makes of a sexually compromised bargain similar to *Salomé's.*

While Wilde's play depends upon an oath it revolves around a bargain: Salomé dances and fulfils Herod's sensual longing in return for whatever she desires. Salomé asks the impossible, and, keeping his word, Herod grants her desire. Yeats attempted the formulation of this type of bargain in his revision of *The Shadowy Waters* (1905). Forgael declares that he will not kiss Dectora until she has admitted her love for him. Dectora thinks that he has some kind of seduction in mind and intends a physical exchange. Forgael, however, is engaged in a more ambitious enterprise: his aim is to kiss her lips only when her entire being, soul and body, has become enamoured of him. He tells her, "Your soul shall give the kiss".[75]

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[74] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, *Abbey Acting Ts.*, pp. 18, 7.

[75] *The Shadowy Waters* (1905) in *Poems: 1899-1905*, p. 40.

The bargain in *The Shadowy Waters* is incomplete - there is no agreement nor negotiation entered into yet it is significant because it is the first agreement involving sexual exchange attempted by Yeats in his drama. It is also important because it alters the dynamic of the play: the incipient bargain sets up a relation between Dectora and Forgael which is not present in the earlier play. The two characters are brought into a more confrontational, engaged relation with each other. The intended bargain attempts to structurally signpost the direction of the action which will follow.

There is, of course, a bargain in Yeats's earlier play, *The Countess Cathleen.* However, this transaction has nothing in it of a sexual/spiritual exchange. Cathleen barters her own soul for the souls of her people - these starving people had given their souls as the price of bodily comfort but, again, there is no sexual element involved. The bargain which Cathleen brokers with the Merchants does not increase dramatic tension in the play. If anything, the bargain, coming towards the end of the play, defuses the situation; it brings everything to a peaceful, downbeat resolution. Neither in its content nor aim is the bargain of Countess Cathleen similar to those in Yeats's dramatic work after the summer of 1905.

The central scene of Yeats's 1904 version of *Deirdre*, the capture of Naoise by Conchubar and his attempted recovery of Deirdre, is flat and ineffectual: no tension exists between Naoise and Conchubar and there is no sense of heroic splendour or high emotion. Yeats corrects this deficit in the 1906 play by using the Saloméan "bargain". Conchubar asks for Deirdre's sexual favours, "what is already mine" and asks her for the impossible in exchange for which Naoise may go free. Yeats clearly indicates the bargain in a preparatory manuscript to his 1906 revision of the play:

> I will not strike a bargain - I but ask
> What is already mine - you may go free.

If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes - that they may know
I have not taken her by force and guile
when I have put the crown upon her head
The doors are open - and the floors are strewed
The bridal chamber hung with ... curtain ...[76]

In both situations the audience is aware of the inevitable disastrous consequences of these ill-sorted bargains: Salomé will get her request because we have been shown that Herod will not break his word. Furthermore, we know that Conchubar is treacherous and that he will take Deirdre regardless of any agreement.

The bargain is entirely absent from Yeats's earlier version of *Deirdre* (1904) which is faithful to the Augusta Gregory translation where the king seeks Deirdre out after the execution of the three sons of Usnach. Deirdre, in the 1904 version, pleads for Naoise's life in return for this offering to give him up in return; in her distress she goes so far as to say to Conchubar - "I will give you ... No (*Shrinking away*) Not my love, I will not give you my love".[77] Conchubar asks for nothing and does not enter into a sexual agreement. Deirdre's supplications are converted by Yeats into the stuff of bargains in his later play, after experiencing *Salomé* and recognising the dramatic worth of the device.

The bargain necessitates an interaction among Yeats's characters that was wholly lacking in the 1904 play and succeeds in creating dramatic tension through the newly created situation. Yeats's use of oath and bargain underline his deep interest in Wilde's play and he creatively employs them in their antithesis.

The antithetical use of a precursor's material is seen by Bloom as a strong indication of influence. Wilde used the sacrosanct nature of the king's word as an essential

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[76] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, "*Deirdre* Mss. for John Quinn. The Penny Exercise Book, 80 pages". Chron. p. 39[r].

[77] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1904), Ts. 15, chron. p. 20.

construct of his drama. Yeats uses Wilde's perspective antithetically in *Deirdre* 1906, to highlight the awful violation inherent in the breaking of the king's word. The detail and negotiation of Yeats's bargain is also heavily similar to Wilde's but it, too, relies on an antithetical perspective. In Wilde's play it is Salomé who is empowered by the bargain, in Yeats's play it is the male protagonist, Conchubar. Herod is dependent on Salomé for sexual gratification and, of its nature, the dance depends on the dancer. Conchubar is not dependent on Deirdre's compliance to possess her legitimately, so that while Salomé is in a position to make a bargain, Conchubar points out to Deirdre that she has no bargaining power and makes her a "take it or leave it" offer.

Yeats has inverted the roles of the male/female protagonists but he has retained a context and content in the 1906 bargain which are strikingly similar to the bargain that Wilde depicts in *Salomé.* Deirdre's immediate response to Conchubar's offer closely echoes Herod's reaction to Salomé's request. Deirdre replies - "Oh No! Not that, not that. Ask any other thing but that one thing".[78] Herod had similarily exclaimed - "No, No!" "No, no, Salomé. You do not ask me that ..." "But I pray you, Salomé, ask me something else. Ask of me half of my kingdom, and I will give it you. But ask not of me what you have asked."[79] Yeats's character registers the same horror and dismay at the impossible request as that which Herod exhibits in Wilde's play, even the vocabulary Yeats's uses resembles Wilde's. Herod accedes to Salomé's demand, fulfilling his part of the bargain, as she had fulfilled hers by dancing before his covetous eyes and buying the death of her beloved with her body. Deirdre almost succumbs to the terms of Conchubar's request but

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[78] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, *Abbey Acting Ts.*, p. 33.

[79] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 600.

Naoise, in a deft inversion of the Salomé scenario, cuts short all bargaining and reduces it to its basic constituent, "And buy my life of Conchubar with your body."[80]

Yeats's bargain is of the same kind that he witnessed in Wilde's play. Both women must give sexual gratification to the king: Salomé in displaying herself before the voyeuristic Herod and Deirdre in making her way to Conchubar's bed chamber. In return for this the women are free to satisfy the demands of love in choosing the fate of their beloved, either life or death.

Yeats's introduction of sexuality into his work is one of the most notable changes in his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*. There can be no doubt of the major role played by *Salomé* as a model for change. While Yeats's pre 1905 versions of *The Shadowy Waters* and *Deirdre* and to a lesser extent, *On Baile's Strand,* are ostensibly about desire, it is not until Yeats saw Wilde's play that he energised them with sensuality. The shift in Yeats's plays is apparent in the language of desire, the Salomé-like character traits which he adapts to his heroines and in the active sexual presence symbolised by the 'kiss'. (The symbol of the 'kiss' will be discussed in section three of this chapter in the context of the symbols Yeats appropriated from *Salomé*.) Yeats uses this new note of sexuality tentatively in *The Shadowy Waters*; hints of sensuality can be discerned in his emendations to the language of love with terms such as "hearts' desire" and "imperishable fire"[81] being replaced by the more directly stated, "strange love" and

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[80] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, *Abbey Acting Ts.*, p. 35.

[81] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), pp. 27, 50.

"unheard of passion".[82] While still employing dreamy, romantic phrases such as "the soft fire/That shall burn time when times have ebbed away", Yeats injects a more sensuous strain with phrases like "the heady flavour of new wine".[83] There is a new vitality in Yeats's language of the senses: "You are not the world's core ... you are not its core. My teeth are in the world/But have not bitten yet".[84] Yeats previously used the words "core" in association with "eating" and sensuality in *Deirdre* (1904): "We have eaten life to the core/Kiss me Naoise".[85] However his juxtaposition of "teeth", "biting" and "core" are more explicit and direct in their intention and resonate with echoes of *Salomé*. Images of fruit, appetite and temptation are also intermingled. In Wilde's play, Herod calls to Salomé, "come and eat fruits with me. I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy little teeth." Towards the end of the play when Salomé is given the head of Iokanaan, she says, "I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit".[86] The language of *Salomé* clearly communicates its sexual content in its use of physical appetite as an image of desire; Yeats takes Wilde's lead by breaking into a more suggestive symbolic language.

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[82] National Library of Ireland, Ms. 21,506 & M/F 7466, Ts. the *Abbey Acting Script* of *The Shadowy Waters* 1906 with emendations in the hand of W.B. Yeats. I have compared this version with *The Shadowy Waters: as first played in the Abbey Theatre,* Dec. 1906 (London: Bullen, 1907) and have found them to be almost identical.
The texts of *The Shadowy Waters: as first acted in the Abbey* and in *Poems 1899 - 1905*, are substantially similar but have notable differences which I will refer to when necessary to argument.
Present quotes from *The Shadowy Waters* (1906). N.L.I. Ms. 21,506, *Abbey Acting Typescript* p. 4.

[83] *The Shadowy Waters* (1906), p. 18.

[84] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* in *Poems 1899 - 1905* (London: A.H. Bullen, 1906), p. 34.

[85] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, (1904). Ts. 15, chron. p. 15.

[86] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé,* pp. 593, 604.

The traces of sensuality which appear in the revised *Shadowy Waters* 1905 reverberate in Yeats's revisions of *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre.* The subject matter of *On Baile's Strand* has always been conducive to sensual interpretation but Yeats had not previously chosen to interpret it in this way. At the centre of this Cuchulain play is the vengeance of his former lover, Aoife, and Yeats acknowledges this relationship in the earlier versions by his treatment of love and hate as two sides of the one emotion. However, although he has always been aware of the emotional potential of this play, it is not until his final revision that Yeats expresses the double edged passion in a sensual, Saloméan way.

The expression of sensuality occurs in his revision of *On Baile's Strand* (February, 1906) in the song which is performed by "The Women" [87]who preside over Yeats's newly included oath taking ritual. It is evident from the song that *Salomé* is very much to the forefront of Yeats's creative imagination at this time. The song makes use of the image of unearthly women, possibly witches, who have been featured in the earlier version, "The women none can kiss and thrive". In the new version, he elaborates: "For they are but the whining wind,/Out of memory and mind.' In the earlier pre-Saloméan script the women taunt the Fool, and are identified as fairy women from ancient Irish mythology. However, the song gives these airy people characteristics which point towards a different identity. They might put in thrall those "That follow with desire/ Bodies that can never tire". This is strongly suggestive of Arthur Symons the poem, "The Daughters of Herodias", derived from Wilde's *Salomé* in which the tireless daughters pursue men

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[87] "I have just put three women into *Baile's Strand*", Letter from W.B. Yeats to Màire Garvey, "December, 18, 1905". N.L.I., Roberts Ms. 8320.

cruelly and relentlessly. Yeats further enforces the Salomé image in the lines, "...for they anoint/ All their bodies joint by joint,/With a miracle working juice/ That is made out of the grease/ Of the ungoverned unicorn."[88] It is an image he will use in *A Vision* of Salomé annointed with the fat of a beast, "Seeking images, I see her [Salomé] anoint her bare limbs according to a medical prescription of that time, with lion's fat, for lack of the sun's ray, that she may gain the favour of a king".[89]

Yeats's perception of the dual character of love is revitalised by his couching it between the image of Salomé as the archetypal revengeful, passionate female and an explicitly sensual vocabulary in which bodies are anointed "joint by joint" and "Those wild hands that have embraced/ All his body..."[90]

Like Symons, Yeats abstracts the love/hate/desire/ revenge aspect of Wilde's character apparent in his lines:

> They will give him kiss for kiss
> While they murmur, "After this
> Hatred may be sweet to the taste;
> Those wild hands that have embraced
> All his body can but shove
> At the burning wheel of love
> Till the side of hate comes up.

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[88] W.B. Yeats, *On Baile's Strand, Poems 1899 - 1905*, p. 103.

[89] W.B. Yeats, "Book v: Dove and Swan", *A Vision,* p. 273.

[90] This poem first appeared in *Shanachi*, (Spring Vol.), Feb. 16, 1906.
W.B. Yeats, *On Baile's Strand, Poems 1899 - 1905*, p. 104.

Yeats's use of sensual imagery in the revisions of his three plays increases within each one, so that when, at last, he comes to *Deirdre*, it is possible for Dublin architect and playgoer, Joseph Holloway to observe, "Sensuality is over the entire play".[91]

Yeats's perception of Wilde's play sexually liberated his own work and resulted in a new sensuality in his writing. This is nowhere more obvious than in his revisions of his heroines, Dectora and Deirdre. Dectora's newly found voice and the direct language of her desire vividly suggests Salomé. In *The Shadowy Waters* (1900) Dectora expressed her sexual desire in arid and muted terms, recalling in certain aspects Yeats's earlier attraction to *Axel*:

> The love I know is hidden in these hands
> That I would mix with yours, and in this hair
> That I would shed like twilight over you[92]

But now, in 1905, she proclaims the strength of her desire and hints at its obsessive quality:

> I would grow jealous of the ivory roof,
> And strike the golden pillars with my hands.
> I would that there was nothing in the world
> But my beloved - that night and day had perished,
> And all that is and all that is to be,
> All that is not the meeting of our lips.[93]

Dectora is no longer quite the pale, vapid woman of the earlier play. Dectora and Deirdre have undergone an enlightened restructuring in which sensuality is but one of the qualities for which Yeats is indebted to *Salomé*. In his final revision of *The Shadowy Waters* Dectora exhibits some of the passionate nature of Salomé and some of her royal assurance:

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[91] eds., Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre: a selection from his unpublished journal: Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer* (London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois University Press, Feiffer and Symons, inc., 1967), p. 77.

[92] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters*, (1900), p. 49.

[93] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* in *Poems 1899 - 1905*, p. 57, *Abbey Acting Ts.*, (1906), p. 25.

assuming a queenly stance, she calls out in challenging tones: "Who is there can compel/The daughter and granddaughter of a king/To be his bedfellow?"[94] This is an attitude not unlike that taken by Salomé in spurning the Tetrarch's entreaties to appease his desire or her proclamation: "I am Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judaea".[95] Dectora has grown in self-awareness; her entire emotional range has been broadened: she is jealous, desiring and vengeful. The passivity which characterised the earlier role has disappeared, Dectora not only declaims her regal status but demands vengeance for the death of her husband:

> I am a queen,
> And ask for satisfaction upon those
> Who have slain my husband and laid hands upon me.[96]

Vengeance had been referred to once in the 1900 version, not in any emotional way but as a reasonable, unimpassioned concept. The reference was made by a sailor: "And you swear never to be avenged/For those among your people that are dead?"[97] By the revision of 1905 Dectora has taken on an active role and is emotionally engaged; Aibric says of her: "It was this woman in her woman's vengeance/That drove you to it ..."[98] Vengeance is seen here as the particular property of woman and once again the spurned Salomé is brought to mind.

Dectora is the forerunner of the Deirdre whom Yeats will create in his revision of that play five months later, having completed *The Shadowy Waters*. None of his female

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[94] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* in *Poems 1899 - 1905*, p. 39.

[95] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, pp. 593, 604.

[96] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* in *Poems 1899 - 1905*, p. 39.

[97] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters*, (1900), p. 35.

[98] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters, Poems 1899 - 1905*, p. 62.

characters prior to the revisions (1905-1906) compare with either of these women: in *The Countess Cathleen* the protagonist, Cathleen, is an independent and chaste, young woman and Bridget an independent country woman; in *The Land of Hearts' Desire* Nora is a fanciful young woman. None of these women have the sensual innocence or destructive potential which Yeats develops in the character of Deirdre in 1906. Although Yeats's Deirdre does not quite achieve the depth of Wilde's character she is created in her image. Wilde's Salomé is an empowered character, the source of her power, like that in the cross-over state of life and death, comes from the transitional moment between adolescent and adult, girl and woman. She is both innocent and knowing, gentle and cruel; she is cold yet loving and child-like. She is proud, sensual and seductive and the strength of her desire is more fierce, more forceful and 'masculine' than any of the male characters in the play.

Critics often posit revenge as the principal motive in Salomé's wish for Iokanaan's decapitation. However, while, undoubtedly, revenge is a prime motivating factor her overwhelming motive in asking for his head is implacable desire, the will to possession. It is not to see him suffer that she orders his decapitation but to enforce her will, to override his rebuttal and have her satisfaction of him. The revenge for his disinterest, the loss of his head, is almost incidental to making him hers by force. The death of the Baptist, implicit in the means deployed to secure him is neither here nor there - her cruelty, as in the case of the Young Syrian, is gratuitous.

Yeats's heroine in his early version of *Deirdre* (1904) was bland and lacking in complexity; Yeats's conception of her is intimated in his preface to Augusta Gregory's *Cuchulainn of Muirthemne* (1902): "Deirdre who might be some mild modern housewife

but for her prophetic wisdom".[99] Having seen *Salomé* in May 1905 and already begun to characterize sensuality in his revision of *The Shadowy Waters*, Yeats saw *Salomé* for a second time in June 1906[100] which confirmed the effect the character of Salomé had upon him the previous year. In his 1904 version of the play, Yeats ignored the potential sensuality inherent in the story of Deirdre and Naoise. After he saw *Salomé* and altered Dectora along the lines of Wilde's heroine he began to use this potentiality to create a passionate character and play. Yeats, himself, made the connection between the new emotional depth which he accorded Deirdre and Wilde's heroine. Writing to W.G. Fay two months after seeing the 1906 production of *Salomé,* Yeats described the effect that seeing Florence Darragh in Wilde's play had on his writing:

> The moment I thought of her for Deirdre I began to write better. I thought of moments of her Salomé, and ventured and discovered subtleties of emotion I have never attempted before.[101]

Yeats decided to cast Florence Darragh as Deirdre in the new version of his play which he was in the process of writing. It was not just the talent of the actress which found its way into the 1906 revision of Yeats's play but the essence of Wilde's Salomé herself.

Yeats's prepatory drafts for the 1906 version of *Deirdre* reveal the infrastructure of

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[99] W.B. Yeats, Pref., *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* by Lady Gregory, p. 16.

[100] Yeats began rewriting *Deirdre* in April 1906; that *Salomé* was on his mind can be seen from a letter he wrote to Sturge Moore a month before seeing the play (May 1906). This letter reveals Yeats's in-depth knowledge of *Salomé*. He professes to a great abhorrence of the play on many levels but his sheer vehemence suggests that he may be protesting too much. *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed. Wade, pp. 8, 9.
A copy of *Salomé* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, New York; John Lane Company, MCMVI) is extant in Yeats's library. Yeats's name is inscribed in a hand I have ascertained is Annie Horniman's. She has scored out lines of the text and written: "The parts marked in red ink are those cut in the play set to music by Richard Strauss". The book is dated in Miss Horniman's hand, "Feb, '07". Strauss's opera was produced in New York, Jan. 22, 1907. Whether Yeats and Miss Horniman were considering producing a cut version of *Salomé* at the Abbey is uncertain but the presence of the book indicates Wilde's *Salomé* as a continuous presence in the poet's mind.

[101] Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, "From W.B. Yeats to W.G. Fay" "Aug. 13, 1906", *The Abbey Theatre: the years of Synge 1905-1909*, pp. 76.

Yeats's final realisation of Deirdre. In the drafts, Yeats experiments with various aspects of the Salomé psyche as presented in Wilde's play: her virginity and youth, the indifferent, destructive power of her beauty, her active desire, the obsessive nature of this desire, her knowingness and sensuality. Yeats even plays with the idea of the gratuitous cruelty of women; he depicts Deirdre's beauty as inherently dangerous; Fergus declares: "Truly a beautiful woman is a savage creation, a terrible thing." The obsessive nature of her passion is intimated in the words he flings at her: "Will you believe no one, no one but your own passion."[102] The intensity of Deirdre's desire rivals that of her precursor; it is so powerful that Fergus tells Naoise that he can never actually blame him as he understands:

> ... how hard a man is put to it
> When a fair stirring woman draws him up
> Into her labyrinth.[103]

Yeats combines in Deirdre innocence and knowingness, just as Wilde did with Salomé. He alludes to Deirdre's desire being grounded in her inexperience and innocence and attaches sin and pride to the image. The messenger declares that Deirdre, "this young queen", sinned in "the unsteady fire of youth".[104] Fergus, in the same manuscript draft, reiterates Deirdre's intemperate desire and its origin in the purity of girlhood; he condemns her passion as perverse and obsessive; his speech might have been written about Salomé:

> But not this passion that burns house and kin? ...
> What is it but the unnatural heat blown up
> Born out of the melancholy and virginity
> Of ignorant youth.

Fergus continues, emphasizing her strange, unnatural emotion:

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[102] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre,* (1906). Folder marked, "Prose treatment". Ts. 9, p. 5.

[103] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre,* (1906). Ts. 13, p.16 on left of double page 16.

[104] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre,* (1906). Ts. 13, chron. p.32, numbered 29.

I can respect a reasonable love
That leaves the mind unclouded, but not this ...[105]

Yeats's mixture of innocence, destruction and desire in this speech has obvious connections with Wilde's Salomé. Perhaps it is because the connections are so obvious that Yeats scored out this speech in his manuscript - too close for comfort.

In the 1904 version of *Deirdre* Yeats did not dwell on Deirdre's purity and sensuality; in this version Conchubar treats her like a helpless creature:

... but for you I have no anger. You are a bird out of the winds thrown down at my feet, you could not help yourself.[106]

He saw her as blameless, not because of her youth or innocence, but rather as a wild, irresponsible creature - not the stuff of heroic queens or physically desiring females. The Deirdre of 1904 partially deserved these judgments, her death is the one passionate and heroic feature of the 1904 play. Her pleadings on behalf of Naoise are feeble and ineffectual: "How could he help himself ... I was all shaken ... I headr [sic] afterwards that I turned crimson ... could he do less than take me away [sic] away?" [Yeats's elisions.][107] There is no sign of this weak and miserable creature in Yeats's drafts of 1906 although Conchubar still sees her as blameless and innocent and believes that she was seduced by Naoise -

~~You~~ [sic] He [Naoise] came to her with laughing and whispering
She listened and not knowing what she did
With a girl's folly, the lightness of a child
Went with ~~you~~ [sic] him, the quiver of an eye.[108]

However, he is not left labouring for long under his misapprehensions. Deirdre, herself, dispels his image of her passivity, telling him that it was she who actively desired

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[105] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, (1906). Ts. 13, in among pp. 21 & 16, p.7.

[106] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre,* (1904). Ts. 15, chron. p. 19.

[107] ibid., p. 19.

[108] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906). Ts. 11, (32 ff), p. 39.

Naoise.[109] The biddable Deirdre of 1904 does not reappear in 1906; she leaves Conchubar in no doubt that she was a responsible agent within her own story :

> It was my fault, I only should be punished
> The very moment these eyes fell on him
> I told him ... I held out my hands to him
> How could he refuse? At first he would not
> I am not lying – he remembered you
> What do I say? My hands ... no my lips
> For I had pressed my lips upon his lips
> I swear it is not false – my breast to his
> Until I woke the passion that is in all
> And how could he resist, I had my beauty.[110]

Deirdre admits her seduction of a somewhat reluctant Naoise and takes responsibility for her actions; she does not plead as in the older version but explains how her desire won her lover. She indicates the force of her passion and the strength of purpose with which she pursued it.

This speech of Deirdre as seductress is retained by Yeats in the final version of *Deirdre* (1906). Her demeanour is proud, majestical, passionate; she is prepared to give herself to Conchubar in return for Naoise's life or to convince Naoise that she loves Conchubar if it will save his life. However, in general, all overt references to the Saloméan qualities with which Yeats has been experimenting occur only in the prepatory drafts (1906); they have been greatly toned down in his final version of that year. In the final version Deirdre's active role in the seduction is subtly brought to our attention by the musicians: "And [Naoise] having wooed, or, as some say been wooed,/ Carried her off". All allusions to Deirdre's youth and innocence have become indirect; Yeats keeps his audience aware of Deirdre's youth by emphasising Conchubar's old age and the youth of

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[109] There is a basis in the *Deirdre* legend for Deirdre having been the more physically active in the initial courtship. However, Yeats did not use this version of the myth in his 1904 play.

[110] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906). Ts. 11, p. 42.

Naoise who came to woo Deirdre "in the laughing scorn of his youth".[111] Deirdre refers to the generic innocence of the female which could be read as a conscious piece of self-evaluation. The qualities which Yeats exploited in the drafts have become the psychological basis of Deirdre's character.

It may be that Yeats's oblique handling of appropriations from *Salome* point to this activity as artistically self-conscious or it may indicate his psychological need to repress the source of influence. It is clear, however, that Yeats was aware that he had created, with the help of Salomé, a complex and subtle heroine of his own, a character quite different from anything he had until then created. So different did he feel she was that he felt an experienced and sophisticated actress would be required to play her. So he turned to the art of Florence Darragh whose acting skill had so impressed him in *Salome,* to read his *Deirdre* accurately and bring out all the fine nuances of the final script which he had explicitly expressed in the preparatory manuscripts. Yeats was totally satisfied with Darragh's performance.[112]

He believed that Darragh was capable of an art which was "distinguished and passionate" [113] and saw her as part of a new school of acting which rather than depict what was common to queen and commoner, achieved a higher intellectual portrayal of character. He thought her portrayal of Wilde's character earlier that year "a magnificent

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[111] W.B. Yeats, *Abbey Acting Script*, (1906), *Deirdre*, p. 2.

[112] Florence Darragh also played the part of Dectora in the Abbey production of *The Shadowy Waters,* Dec. 8, 1906.

[113] W.B. Yeats, *The Arrow*, No. 2, vol. 1 (Nov. 24, 1906), p. 1.

performance"[114] and was equally enthusiastic about her performance as Deirdre. Yeats's enthusiasm, however, was shared by few. In Dublin Darragh's performance of Deirdre was disliked by critics such as Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge who found her somewhat repugnant and blamed the actress for a blatant and unacceptable show of sexuality, Gregory accusing her of putting into the part "something mean, ignoble and sexual".[115] Synge, too, found Deirdre's sensuality too explicitly displayed: "I greatly dislike the impression that 'Deirdre' or rather Miss Darragh has left on me. Emotion - if it cannot be given with some trace of distinction or nobility - is best left to the imagination of the audience".[116] Synge's reaction is reiterated in Gregory's summation of Darragh as "a degradation of our stage".[117] Yet Yeats was delighted with Darragh. It may be that the strong reaction of Gregory and Synge was caused by their expectation of the noble but modest Deirdre of Yeats's 1904 play who had so closely tallied with Gregory's own account of the character. They were not at all prepared for the full blooded, sexually alive Deirdre who had evolved through Yeats's post-*Salomé* revisions. Indeed, Gregory's and Synge's startling response to *Deirdre* testifies to an overwhelming new force in Yeats's work, the powerful force of sexuality. So overcome were Yeats's fellow directors with this new element that they entirely overlooked Yeats's achievement for he had created a vibrant, complex character by infusing her noble and highborn qualities with sensuality.

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[114] "To J.B. Yeats", "Jul. 21, [1906]". *The Letters of W.B. Yeats* ed., Allan Wade, p. 475.

[115] "Gregory to Yeats", "Jan. 18, 1907". Anne Saddlemeyer, *Theatre Business: the correspondence of the first Abbey Theatre Directors* (Colin Smythe: Gerard's Cross, 1982), p. 207.

[116] "Synge to Gregory", "Dec. 13 1906". Anne Saddlemeyer, *Theatre Business,* p. 179.

[117] "Gregory to Synge", "Jan. 15, 1907". Anne Saddlemeyer, *Theatre Business,* p. 197.

Darragh perfectly portrayed for Yeats the new Deirdre of his imagination: aloof, distinguished and sensual.[118] His sense of having realised this conception of her is corroborated by Joseph Holloway's comments on Darragh's performance, although, he too, was forcibly struck by the new sensual quality in Yeats's rendition of Deirdre:

> Miss Darragh's 'Deirdre' was consistent and beautiful, with an undercurrent of intense subdued emotionalism underlying her outwardly seeming calm. Her acting was always skilful, artistic and dramatically effective ... Miss Darragh's realisation of the part had too much of the flesh and too little of the *spirituelle* in its composition.[119]

Holloway perceived in Deirdre what Yeats transposed from Wilde's *Salomé*, a character whose spirituality is energised by her sensuality. He noted the "intense ... emotionalism" beneath the cool exterior of Deirdre but he, like Gregory and Synge, was too distracted by the erotic overtones of the character to fully appreciate the deeper complexities of Yeats's dramatic creation. Yeats's approval of Darragh's depiction of Deirdre signalled his satisfaction that in his final realisation of Deirdre he achieved what he aimed for in his preparatory drafts: the creation of a female character who combines sensuality and austerity, in other words a Salomé-like image.

Not only did Yeats give his heroine of the 1906 version of *Deirdre* greater emotional depth but he has shifted her former peripheral position of the 1904 version to centre stage. Deirdre becomes, like Salomé, the main adversary of the king. This is an acutely different position from the 1904 play. In 1904, Conchubar, a stereotypical, patriarchal figure, had no engagement with Deirdre. His fight was with Naoise; it was as if he acted from wounded pride rather than from any desire for Deirdre; he was not jealous

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[118] Max Beerbohm was of the same opinion as Yeats, believing her a "genuine tragedien" [sic.], and commenting on her ability in *Salomé* "to purge somewhat our physical disgust through spiritual terror". WilliamTydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salomé*, p. 55.

[119] eds. Robert Hogan and Michael J. O'Neill, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre,* p. 75.

of the dead Naoise nor suspected Deirdre of any heroic actions; he underestimated her. She was not accorded the role of Conchubar's adversary but was treated with indulgence and, at times, almost as an object. Naoise was held fully accountable for his actions by Conchubar who had him killed, not from any jealousy involving Deirdre, but for breaking the king's law. Conchubar treated Naoise as a worthy opponent.

In 1906 Yeats makes the relationship between Deirdre and Conchubar the central focus of the play. Deirdre's stature has radically altered. She is a forthright, fully accountable individual. Conchubar now suspects her of heroic suicidal intentions and believes in her passionate love for Naoise. She stands up to Conchubar on equal terms - she negotiates a bargain with him and confronts him with her seduction of Naoise. Such extreme revision by Yeats points to the catalytic force at work in his creative imagination. Deirdre has come alive. She is an active protagonist, no longer appealing to the King's sense of pity but unscrupulously using whatever weapons she has at hand to have her way. The situation is comparable to Salomé's: both women are successfully devious in their dealings with the king; both ask for their dead beloved; both of them use their sexuality to gain favour from an unwanted and older lover. Salomé is aware of the power she wields over Herod and uses it when he offers a price worth having - "whatsoever you desire".[120] For this favour she dances and gratifies his lust in exchange for the dead Iokanaan. Deirdre desires access to the dead Naoise so that, she tells Conchubar, she might lay him out and demands in the petulant tones of Salomé: "I will have this gift/ Because it is the first that I

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[120] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 598.

have asked".[121] Deirdre knowingly implies by the "first" a life of love and sexual exchange ahead, while having no intention of giving him such a life. The lover's gift recalls the "love token" requested of Herod by Salomé and like Salomé, Deirdre makes use of her would be lover's desire to manipulate him. Yeats has sexually empowered Deirdre not alone in her seductiveness and active desires but in her changed attitude to patriarchal hierarchy as embodied by Conchubar.

Deirdre, following Salomé, succeeds in the cold manipulation of her sexuality and becomes, like Wilde's heroine, a destructive and subversive force. This force owes much of its efficacy to the protagonists' indifference to accepted male order. *Salomé* reverses this order and *Deirdre* in 1906, in a significant shift from the earlier version, also attempts to reverse the accepted male code of behaviour through the attitude of its heroine. In both plays the heroine is the focal figure who disempowers, sexually and politically, the male protagonist. Wilde deploys Salomé as a disruptive force within a male power structure and the political and dramatic result is radical. There is danger in her uncontrolled sexuality, her unbounded desire which has its source in the innocence and cruelty of her adolescent personality. She is not only like the virginal cold moon, but out of control like the "mad woman"[122] also envisaged in the moon. There is a careless, disinterested destructive power in her sexuality but when she aligns her sexuality with her will, her desire for Iokanaan, she becomes a focussed, destructive force.

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[121] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906). Ts. 11, p. 45.

[122] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 592.

In this state Salomé usurps Herod's power and compromises his authority. He is ineffectual in stopping her carrying out her will in having the Baptist beheaded. Salomé humiliates Herod before his eyes and, through his agency, she has consummated her love of Iokanaan and in doing so she reduces him to a risible and impotent figure. Intimations of possible sexual impotence or at least sterility have already been made against Herod by Herodias. Although, a spiritual love develops from her desire, Salomé physically takes Iokaanan by rendering him powerless, and regardless of his protestations, sexually possesses him. In effect, she rapes him. Wilde not only undermines Victorian political and sexual male power structures but also the conventions of classical literature which allows the acceptable male possession of an unwilling female.[123] Through her act, *Salomé* becomes an object of horror, a grave threat and an intolerable affront to the very foundations of Herod's sexual and political authority and so, he has her killed.

Yeats's challenge to male convention in *Deirdre* is not quite so extreme as that of Salomé but it is no less a valid confrontation of male authority which would have been unthinkable in the far less sexually empowered Deirdre of the earlier version. Yeats highlights the convention of male honour in the 1906 *Deirdre;* Conchubar's word of honour has become a more important issue within the play. Deirdre places little faith in his word in the 1904 version of the play and continues to be sceptical of it in 1906 in the preparatory drafts and the finished version of the play. Naoise, however, in 1906, insists

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[123] Wilde read classics at Trinity College Dublin (1871-1874) where he was awarded a Foundation Scholarship (1873), the Berkeley Gold Medal for Greek and a Demyship in classics to Magdalen College, Oxford. At Oxford he gained first class honours in Classical Moderations (Mods.) (1876), won the Newdigate Poetry Prize and gained honours first class in Literae Humaniores (Greats) (1878). Wilde would have been fully aware of the literary conventions which he was subverting.

on the integrity of the code of honour among all honourable males and believes that Conchubar will keep his word.

Salomé relies on Herod's belief in his word being sacrosanct and she exploits this belief in making a request which is beyond the bounds of honour and holds him to the very letter of his word. Deirdre has not the same opportunity to make use of Conchubar's inviolate word as he ignobly breaks it but, she, like Salome, exploits his adherence to a male code of behaviour and a stereotypical concept of male/female relations. She flouts these orthodoxies and uses his belief in them against him. When Conchubar accuses her of intending to commit suicide and hiding a knife within her clothes for this purpose, she replies, "Bid one of these dark slaves/To search me for it". Conchubar signals his defeat in his abject answer: "Go to your farewells, Queen".[124] This is a brazen piece of sexual politics because Deirdre is aware that Conchubar would consider it an outrage to have her searched by foreign men and that for her to invite such a search proves her innocence to him beyond doubt. Conchubar, like Herod, but unlike the female protagonists, is trapped by a sense of propriety and by the male constructed convention.

Yeats created Deirdre in the image of Salomé. Both women operate outside the accepted code of behaviour and through its convictions subvert its authority. Yeats made a crucial development in his conceptualising of Deirdre of 1906. Conchubar's attitude to her testifies to this change as much as her own dramatic activities. Conchubar, in 1904, is "heartbroken" at seeing her dead and speaks to her with tenderness addressing her as a

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[124] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906), *Abbey Acting Ts.*, p. 41.

shy, wild creature - "O fawn ... bird ... "[125] Conchubar's reaction to Deirdre's death in 1906, however, is set in a more elevated context. Conchubar's speech prior to discovering her death indicates his view of Deirdre's capture as a victory and his wish that Fergus "learn my triumph from her [Deirdre's] lips". His exultation is shattered on seeing her dead but, far from dissolving in tears, he recognises that she has outwitted him. He acknowledges her triumph in recognising her as a worthy adversary - " ... I, being King, did right/ In choosing her most fitting to be Queen ..." Deirdre has triumphed over Conchubar and, perhaps, in a more subtle mode than Salomé, has disempowered him sexually as well as politically: "And every common man can keep his wife,/ But not the king".[126]

That Yeats, in his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*, used structural devices found in *Salomé*, indicate the sharpness of creative focus with which he viewed Wilde's play. Since seeing *Salomé* he had become more sensually explicit in his three plays, and in his fusion of the sensual and the spiritual qualities in *Deirdre,* more open to pursuing metaphysical possibilities which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.Yeats is indebted to Wilde's Salomé for the image which she fixed permanently within his creative imagination. Deirdre, in

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[125] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1904), Ts. 15, chron. pp. 24, 23.

[126] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906), *Abbey Acting* Ts., p. 44. This last line is one of the few which Yeats retains from the 1904 version of *Deirdre* (Ts. 15, chron. p. 18). He has, however, changed the context. In 1904 Conchubar patiently explains to Deirdre that he must kill Naoise, not out of anger but because it was against the law for Naoise to have stolen his wife. Yeats's stage directions read: "Deirdre clasps his [Conchubar's] knees" in supplication as he says, "Is every other man to keep his wife, but not the king?" Yeats has totally altered the emphasis in 1906; Conchubar utters the words in bitter irony and Deirdre is seen as the agent of his tragedy.

her noble bearing and sensuous being, signals an important creative moment which will enable Yeats's creation of the symbolic image of dancer.

3: Yeats's approach to the symbolist imagery and metaphysical aspect of Wilde's *Salomé* in his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*

Although Yeats's successful representation of Wilde's passionate yet removed female was a major contribution to the symbolic structure of his work, there were other less obvious, but nevertheless important, symbols which he imported from Wilde's *Salome* into his revisions: the gaze, the moon and the kiss. Again, these symbols will reoccur in his later creative work and increase in signification. In this section I propose to look at how Yeats introduces these symbols from Wilde's play in to his revisions of *The Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*. I also intend to show the early stages of Yeats's interest in the metaphysical content of Wilde's *Salome* apparent in his revisions of 1905 and 1906.

Throughout *Salomé* "looking" is used as a device to signify desire, it is an inter linking metaphor. The symbolic act of looking is basic to *Salomé.* The moon is "looking for dead things" as the play opens, that she finds dead things in the progress of the play, intimates the actual power in looking, the act implies its realisation. This is also true of the covetous looks of Herod and Salomé. Herod is warned by Herodias to stop gazing at her daughter. Salomé, herself, has noticed his looking and guessed at his intent, "Why does the Tetrarch look at me ... I know not what it means. In truth, yes, I know it."[127] The

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[127] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé,* pp. 583, 586.

looking builds into an intricate web of covetous glances and empowered gazing and leads to Salomé's dance. Finally, Herod blames the entire débacle on the act of looking.

There is no attempt to use "looking" as a concerted, inter-connected device nor as an empowered activity by Yeats prior to seeing Wilde's *Salomé*. In Yeats's early version of *The Shadowy Waters* (1900) looking is spoken of in its conventional association with love. There is "love in Aibric's eyes" and Forgael tells Dectora "if your eyes/ Should look upon his eyes with love ..."[128] Yeats comes closer to Wilde's method in his later revision of *The Shadowy Waters* (1905) where looking becomes a sign of direct engagement. Dectora challenges Forgael - "I would have you look into my face/ And know that it is fearless". She berates him that, "Although you have looked into my face/ You did not see my purpose".

Although, Yeats never quite aims in his revisions for the sensual fabric which Wilde achieves in the languorous, lascivious looking of his characters, he begins in 1905 to indicate desire through "looking". This is illustrated in the addition Yeats makes to Dectora's final speech in which she equates Forgael's desire with his looking at her:

> And I am left alone with my beloved,
> Who cannot put me from his sight forever.
> We are alone forever, and I laugh.
> Forgael, because you cannot put me from you.
> The mist has covered the leaves, and you and I
> Shall be alone for ever. We two - this crown ...[129]

Dectora's speech is similar in tone and style to Salomé's speech to the severed head in the closing stages of the play when at last she has it in her possession. Both women stress that desire is implicated in the act of looking. Salomé says:

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[128] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), p. 55.

[129] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters, Poems: 1899-1905,* pp. 40, 41, 67.

> Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now ... Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. I said it. Did I not say it? I said it. Ah! I will kiss it now ... But wherefore dost thou not look at me, Iokanaan? ... If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me.[130]

Both speeches are exultant (although Salomé's eventually gives way to grief). The heroine is triumphant because she has achieved her purpose; the beloved is in her absolute possession and she is in control. The note of girlish triumph is particularly discernible in Dectora's - "I laugh" and in Salomé's - "I said it. Did I not say it?" Dectora's impulsiveness and single-mindedness recall her precursor and underline the creative connection between the two plays.

As was the case with *The Shadowy Waters* Yeats makes little use of "looking" in *Deirdre* until the post *Salomé* revisions. It features in the 1904 text in Naoise's feelings of love for Deirdre and its reciprocation - "When Naoise came he looked at me ... I loved him the moment I saw him" [elision is Yeats's][131] "Looking", however, is a more active, widespread pursuit in 1906. There are mentions of "looking" as an important factor in love making; desire is expressed by looking and Naoise says that Deirdre has "found everywhere but covetous eyes".[132] In 1906 Yeats invests the act of looking with greater potency. Conchubar fears Deirdre looking at the dead Naoise. He accuses her of seeking to restore her dead lover to her through the act of looking at him whereas in 1904 Conchubar did not feel threatened by Deirdre taking a last look at Naoise.[133]

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[30] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé,* pp. 583, 586.

[31] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, (1904). Ts. 15, chron. p. 19.

[32] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906). Ts. 20, ("Rough typescript, corrected. 29 ff clipped together."), p. 8.

[33] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906), Ts. 11, pp. 43, 44, 45. W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, (1904). Ts. 15, chron. pp. 21, 22.

Love, as in the earlier version (1904), is shown by looking but it is Yeats's use of a new, empowered act of looking which suggests the use Wilde makes of it in *Salomé* . "Looking" can bestir a dead man, desire and its consequent battles for possession are ascribed to looking; power and control are depicted by looking. The revisions of 1905 and 1906 show Yeats beginning to use "looking" as an activity of consequence but it is far removed, at this stage, from Herod's scopophilic activity. The destructive quality inherent in Herod's gaze will become evident in Yeats's development of Wilde's symbol in his later plays.

The moon as symbol loses its passivity in Yeats's post *Salomé* rewrites. Although, the presence of the moon is discernible in the early version of *The Shadowy Waters* (1900) and was a favourite image of the Symbolists, the 1906 version of the play hints at a Wildean influence.

In *Salomé,* the moon is a composite symbol; it suggests virginity, cruelty, irrationality, lust, beauty; it is a priceless, powerful, mysterious image which creates a sense of the convergence of life with death, in which opposing forces are brought into one. The single image of the moon suggests purity and depravity, chastity and corruption. The moon reflects Salomé and is alternately "cold and chaste", "a mad woman seeking for lovers", "a dead woman", a mercenary "piece of money", wondrous "fantastic moons". It changes its colour in accordance with the mood of the play. Herod sees Salomé idealised "like the moon in the midst of a great white cloud" and in a more tarnished version of the image, he tries to bribe her with "moonstones" and pearls "like moons".[134]

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[134] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé,* pp.586, 592, 583, 589, 601.

The moon in Yeats's early version of *The Shadowy Waters* (1900) is fixed in its place; it is quite distinct from the action of the play. Generally, Yeats uses it to denote time, for swearing by or to increase descriptive effect or in his phrase, "where the moon makes a cloudy light in the mist", to suggest another realm.[135] However, in the revision of *The Shadowy Waters*,1905, Yeats begins to use the moon in a more interactive way, as Wilde did in *Salome.* The moon is drawn by Yeats into close association with the human, loses some of its distance and impinges on the characters and plot. Yeats depicts a relation between Forgael and the moon in which Forgael has a certain power over it. He develops this theme, insinuating the moon within the action of the play and eventually, identifies the moon with his protagonist. The second sailor says of Forgael - "He has put a sudden darkness over the moon". The same character cries - "He [Forgael] has caught the crescent moon out of the sky". The sailors imply that the light out of the moon has become magically entrapped in Forgael's harp. A little later, the harp is equated with the moon - "Though it be the moon/ That he is holding up between us there". Forgael plays upon the harp/moon and puts Dectora and the crew into a magical trance. Eventually, in this same text, Yeats equates Forgael with the moon - just as Wilde had identified his heroine, Salomé, with it. "Listen to that low- laughing string of the moon/ And you will recollect my face and voice".[136] However, when it comes to the Abbey acting version of the play the following year, 1906, Yeats ceased all play with the moon and becomes shy of its active presence in human affairs: he cuts the sailors' lines and eliminates the more

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[135] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), pp. 31, 45, 47.

[136] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters, Poems: 1899-1905,* pp. 43, 44, 51.

direct connections between moon/harp/Forgael. There remains only the suggestion that harp and moon are interlinked although Forgael's identification with the moon remains intact. In 1906 Yeats indicates Dectora's relationship with the moon; the darkening of the stage in 1905 affected Forgael and the sailors but in the Abbey Acting Script (1906) Forgael makes Dectora aware of an impending moment of transcendence by drawing her attention to the darkening moon while an emendation in Yeats's hand to the typescript reads, "There where the cloud creeps up upon the moon".[137] Yeats's change of emphasis from male to female protagonist at this moment suggests Wilde's play. As *Salomé* comes to a close Wilde's stage directions read: "The great black cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely".[138] The absence of the moon is ominous and signifies that an event of spiritual revelation is about to take place; Salomé is about to give the physical kiss. As she does so a moonbeam breaks through and she is illumined by it. In *The Shadowy Waters* Yeats darkens the moon as Dectora is made aware of the spiritual messengers - birds - and the other nature of her spiritual voyage with Forgael.

In having Salomé "pull down the moon" Wilde aligns her with women of magical power in classical literature. Yeats follows him in 1905 by using similar associations for his heroine when Dectora says, "I looked upon the moon/ Longing to knead and pull it into shape/ That I might lay it on your head as a crown".[139] Before he saw *Salomé* Yeats's

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[137] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters,* p. .A similar occurrence to that in *Salomé* takes place in Yeats's version of *The Shadowy Waters* published in 1911 (*Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*). The stage directions read: "The scene darkens but there is a ray of light upon the figures [Dectora and Forgael]" Dectora's response to the magical moment is heightened and brought closer to the Salomé model, she says: "Clouds have hid the moon/The birds cry out, what can I do but tremble", p. 336.

[138] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 605.

[139] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1905), p. 57.

moon was fixed in its place - a static, magical but distant presence shining down on the world. By the end of autumn, (1905), in contrast with *The Shadowy Waters* performed in the previous summer, Yeats is using the moon in an active way, as Wilde had done. Yeats's interest in the moon at this point of his creative development and its derivation from Wilde's employment of it in *Salomé*, is significant because it indicates that the later major position held by the moon within Yeats's metaphysics and poetic aesthetic was directed in its initial stages by Wilde's concept of it.

The "kiss" as a symbolic and dramatic device is one of the most striking elements that Yeats introduces into his revisions after seeing Wilde's *Salomé*. Prior to this he rarely mentioned it in his plays.[140] The kiss has obvious sexual connotations and reflects Yeats's exploration of the sensual within his revisions. The ultimate importance for Yeats of the kiss, as with the other symbols, is the permanent position which he allots it within his language of symbols.

The kiss figures prominently in Wilde's play in which it is a complex symbol. At its most obvious level, it represents desire and sexual consummation, Salomé's will to possession of the love object and empowerment. "I will kiss thy mouth Iokanaan",[141] is the refrain which rings out through the play, as Salomé, regardless of Iokanaan's distaste for her, vows to possess him. Structurally, the kiss provides a focal point of dramatic interest;

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[140] There are mentions of the "kiss" in *Diarmuid and Grania* by Yeats and George Moore. However, this play, completed in Dec. 1900, was not published at the time. The version in the *Variorum Edition* is a revised edition of the original and attributed mainly to Moore. In view of the radical changes which I have noted between the various versions of Yeats's plays, I do not think the extant version of *Diarmuid and Grania* can be considered a reliable source from which to make any useful conjectures for this thesis. Also, the uncertain provenance of the present version of the play compromises its integrity as a useful source of enquiry. See William Becker, "Introductory Note" to *Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, p. 1169.

[141] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 591.

all other devices in the play converge in achieving this objective. When Salomé finally kisses the mouth of the dead Iokanaan the kiss achieves its full symbolic complexity. At a metaphysical level, this is the profoundest moment in Wilde's play - a moment of transcendence and of existential completeness.

Yeats's use of the kiss after 1905 in the revision of his early plays, shows a new development in his dramatic art; he mentioned it only once in the early published version of *The Shadowy Waters* (1904) in a stage direction, where he used it as a sign of fealty. The direction reads: "(She takes the harp in her hands and kisses it.) "Dectora does this in response to Forgael who kneeling "holds the harp towards her" and says:

> Bend your head,
> And lean your lips devoutly to this harp,
> For he who gave it called it Aengus' harp
> And said it was mightier than the sun and moon.[142]

This "Bend your head/ And lean your lips devoutly" is the closest any character comes to using the word "kiss". There is an isolated moment in the early *Deirdre* (1904), when Yeats refers to the kiss. This is just before the sons of Usnach go out to face Conchubar's men in battle and Deirdre recalling the first night she and Naoise spent together, calls on him to kiss her, "Kiss me Naoise".[143] The kiss, an incidental bond of affection in the early *Deirdre* and a sign of reverence in the early *The Shadowy Waters,* takes on a whole new meaning in the later revisions of the plays where it becomes, as in *Salomé,* the emblem of desire and possession.

In the preparatory drafts of *Deirdre* (1906) Deirdre's active desire and the seductive role which she admits to in securing Naoise are symbolised by the kiss - "No my

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[142] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), p. 43

[143] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1904). Ts. 15, chron. p. 15.

lips/ For I had pressed my lips upon his lips".[144] In an act of possession she kissed Naoise and holds him to her. Naoise's and Deirdre's status as lovers is signified by Deirdre's allusion to the delirium of their passion as a "vehement, bewildering kiss"[145] which reduced all else to nothingness. Through this phrase, Yeats demonstrates the obsessive absorption of Deirdre's and Naoise's desire. Yeats's use of "kiss" in the 1906 *Deirdre* sharpens the passionate focus of the play and heightens the sensuality of his heroine. The connotations of his symbolic use of kiss give Deirdre and Naoise's love a sexual grounding which energises the play as classic love story ; Yeats's use of the kiss in *The Shadowy Waters* has a similar effect.

The kiss has become a concrete symbol succinctly expressing desire and passion and this elemental meaning is retained by Yeats in his later work as the symbolic meaning of the kiss gathers in complexity. Already in *The Shadowy Waters* there are intimations of the symbolic meaning Wilde confers on the kiss in *Salomé* in its association with the spiritual and with the transience of human love. In *The Shadowy Waters* (1905), Yeats creates a heightened sexual context in which Forgael proposes that Dectora makes a spiritual response to his love and proposes that she express this spiritual capitulation through the medium of a kiss.

Yeats associates the physical and spiritual in terms of opposing forces and connects them by use of the sensual metaphor of kissing. However, although he makes this symbolic link, Yeats limits any further exploration of their interdependence at this stage.

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[144] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906). Ts. 11, p. 42.

[145] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906). Ts. 13, p. 26.

Wilde's associations of spiritual and physical appear only as minor notes in Yeats's revisions of *The Shadowy Waters* but they are important because they are the kindlings from which his later, fuller treatment of Wilde's metaphysical position will develop.

Wilde contends that the spiritual is accessed through and is grounded in the physical. In *Salomé*, as we have seen above, the kiss symbolises this occurrence since it represents sexual consummation. It is the precise moment that the girl becomes woman, soul meets body, love and hate unite, pleasure combines with pain and death meets life. All of these occurences take place through the medium of the body. This moment of fusion releases an energy through which there is the possibility of attaining some divine apprehension.

At that climactic moment, certain metaphysical happenings occur: Salomé's personality is totally realised and the extremity of opposing states coalesce and express the unity of existence; perfection of the individual and of the state of being is achieved. Salomé fulfils Wilde's dictum that the aim of life is to be oneself, to realise what is within one and so achieve perfection of the personality.[146] Wilde believes that sin is a necessary concomitant of self expression because it enlarges experience, and in itself it is beautiful as it allows greater individual expression, providing unique opportunities of selection and ways of being. Salomé suffers pain and rejection in her quest for self realisation. This is in keeping with Wilde's view that pain is sometimes the only means by which perfection of the personality may be achieved. Salomé covets a holy man, whose only desire is his God; she tries to seduce him; she has him murdered, making love to him in death. Her sins are

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[146] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1178-1180.

the expression of her immature personality. She is in the becoming - a virgin about to put on the knowledge of a woman and about to realise the potential of her personality. At the moment of kissing she achieves both. Salomé remarks on the taste of blood in her kiss of the dead Iokanaan - "They say that love hath a bitter taste". Herod in calling for her death uses the word "woman"[147] for the first time - signifying the physical change wrought in her, through the consummation of her love for Iokanaan which is also symbolic of the change in herself. Soul and body are in harmony. Salomé's love feeds back into the kiss and signifies the replenishment of the body through the spiritual, both inseparable. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde posits this relationship of body and soul as "one of the great secrets of life - to cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul".[148] She is realised, existentially replete. Iokanaan, however, never reaches this position. Having refused to consider the importance of physical desire Wilde suggests the sterility of Iokaanan's achievement. Working only through the spiritual Iokaanan denies his sexuality, refuses to look at and so desire Salomé, while, she, working through the physical achieves a deeper spirituality in "the mystery of love". On the wider level, Wilde proposes not just the perfection of personality in the unity of being but a symbolic unity of the state of being as the realisation of soul and body, life and death.

While Wilde's play fulfils symbolist aspirations at every level, perhaps, its greatest achievement (and one most ignored by critics) is in the apprehension of transcendence. His purpose is not just the exposition of correspondences between opposites with which

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[147] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 605.

[148] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 30.

many of the Symbolists had been concerned but with the enabling of new possibilities of being through inter mingling of opposing forces. Wilde had written in *Dorian Gray,* "The way of paradoxes is the way of truth", and the very fabric of *Salomé* is formed of paradox. This is evidenced in the language of the play, in the character of Salomé and in the oppositional force of soul and body, of life and death. In *Dorian Gray* Wilde writes of the interdependent relationship of soul and body:

> The harmony of soul and body - how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an identity that is void.[149]

Throughout *Salomé*, Wilde weaves spiritual and sensual images alongside images of life and death, until each loses something of its definition and coalesces into a new force. Although Yeats will eventually come to Wilde's understanding of the interactive nature of life and death, spiritual and material, he treats them as separate entities in his early plays and for the most part in his revisions of these.

In *The Shadowy Waters*, 1900, Forgael seeks transcendence "where the world dwindles out".[150] He situates the action on mysterious seas, a liminal area where possibilities exist outside of those available in normal space. No elemental fusion takes place between Yeats's symbols; death and life are separate states of being; the birds who lead Forgael towards his goal are dead souls. Dectora has dreamt of their destination as a far off world reminiscent of Tír na nÓg, "where the children of Aengus wind/ In happy dances, under a windy moon". Forgael, too, sees this place as inhabited by neither the living or the dead but by immortals. He tells Dectora that "the undying send their eagles/

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[149] ibid., p. 24.

[150] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), p. 14.

To snatch alive out of the streams all lovers/ That have gone thither to look for the loud streams,/ Folding their hearts' desire to their glad hearts".

Yeats makes no attempt in the 1900 *Shadowy Waters* to intermingle the states of life and death, they are quite separate. Forgael accepts that in the new world he will be alive and immortal -although his pilots are the souls of the dead. Dectora is uncertain, she tells Forgael, "I will follow you/Living or dying".[151]

There is no change in *The Shadowy Waters*, 1905, in the characters' perception of the separate existence of being. Death and life are still seen by Yeats as separately existing states which do not impinge on one another. Aibric is convinced that Forgael's destination is "the country of the dead if there be such a country". Forgael is not so sure; those whom he has seen who inhabit this far off place, looked so alive with red lips and shining eyes. Dectora, at first , believes that Forgael is bringing her to some island teeming with life - the very opposite state to death: "where the life of the world/ Leaps upward, as if all the streams of the world/ Had run into one fountain".[152] There is no sense of an alternative world existing in the margins of life and death. Yeats has not yet come to an acceptance of the possibilities offered in Wilde's unlikely conjunction of life and death, of the spiritual and carnal.

However, after the publication of *The Shadowy Waters*, 1905, Yeats saw *Salomé* for a second time. In the Abbey acting script that followed (December 1906), Yeats has added two major speeches on the nature of transcendence. In the first of these speeches,

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[151] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), pp. 45, 48, 55.

[152] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters*, *Poems: 1899-1905,* p. 63.

Forgael explains his vision to Aibric. He tells him that sometimes the mystery of what lies behind existence seems clear to him and that when the pure vision leaves him he is left only with its symbols:

> The mystic bread, the sacramental wine,
> The red rose where the two shafts of the cross,
> Body and soul, waking and sleep, death, life -
> Whatever meaning ancient allegorists
> Have settled on - are mixed into one joy.
> For what's the rose but that - miraculous cries.
> Old stories about mystic marriages,
> Impossible truths.

Although, Yeats's hero has been seeking an impossible truth since 1894, this is the first time Yeats has described it in these terms which are not only familiar to Symbolists but drawn from the very fabric of *Salomé*. While the reference to Rosicrucian thought is obvious as also are the resonances of *Axel*, the life/death/soul/body conjunctions are the very kernel of Wilde's *Salomé*. The timing of Yeats's insertion of these speeches indicates his indebtedness to *Salomé*. The second additional speech affirms this position. In this speech Yeats moves from the concept of the harmony of existence to the union of opposites as a means of realising his desire. This is a break through. The opposing forces have become potent in their union; Yeats is looking beyond a general correspondence of opposites to possibilities contingent on their conjunction. Forgael listens to the birds, whom he believes, are the messengers of the immortals. They tell him how he might find his immortal love by means of opposing forces:

> 'From love and hate,' before the sentence ends
> Another breaks upon it with a cry
> 'From love and death, and out of sleep and waking,'
> And with the cry another cry is mixed
> "What can we do being shadows?' All mystery,[153]

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[153] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* (1906), *Abbey Acting Ts.*, pp. 8, 10, 11.

The birds are indicating the discovery of Dectora who boards Forgael's ship and comes into his sight as the speech ends ."Love and death" was the chosen way of Salomé and Yeats tentatively posits opposing forces as the way by which Forgael's desire might be attained and in doing so takes tentative steps in Wilde's metaphysical direction.

Opposing forces interested Yeats from the early revision of *On Baile's Strand* where he stressed the complimentary attributes of Conchubar and Cuchulain, depicting the intellectual capacity of the one and the physical strength of the other. Conchubar has political wisdom, cunning and intelligence; Cuchulain is life-loving, carefree and strong. Conchubar realises his need for Cuchulain and sees the advantage of harnessing his strength. Yeats's concept of opposites progresses from correspondence in this early version of his play to an intimation of Wilde's perception of the energy contingent on the fusion of opposing forces in his 1905/6 revision of *On Baile's Strand.* Yeats's awareness of the potency of the opposing forces within life is heightened and he reconciles these opposing forces in a unified image as he symbolically unites Conchubar and Cuchulain in a unified image of strength and intellect, mind and matter, in the one "fire".[154]

In *Deirdre*, Yeats takes steps towards the most extreme and basic of Wilde's concepts - the conjunction between life and death. In combining the two entities into one image Yeats moves closer to Wilde's position. Yeats distinguished between the state of life and the state of death and made little attempt to intermingle them in *The*

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[154] "We are one being, as these flames are one". W.B. Yeats, *On Baile's Strand, Poems: 1899-1905,* p. 106.

Shadowy Waters 1900 and 1905, all of the versions of *On Baile's Strand* and the early version of *Deirdre* (1904). In the revised *Deirdre* of 1906, he advances further towards Wilde's concept in his experiments with Wilde's extreme but basic concept of the interactive conjunction between life and death.

Deirdre asks Conchubar to allow her to lay out the dead Naoise and "Look for the last time" at him. Conchubar,[155] in the early version, makes no objection to her doing this. In 1906, however, Conchubar replies - "You long to look upon his face again /Why should I give you now to a dead man/That took you from a living?" He is suspicious and jealous of the dead man fearing him as a rival. This concern with the active power of the dead is redolent of *Salomé.* We are reminded of the dead Iokanaan, whom Salomé chose as her lover and of the fearful Herod, who partially because of his jealousy of the dead head, had her put to death.

Deirdre mocks at Conchubar's belief in the dead Naoise's power to make her love him. She ridicules this thought and tells him people will laugh and say, "He trembled at the thought of a dead face!"[156] The repetitive use of "dead face" recalls the death's head severed from the body of Iokanaan.

Deirdre's hollow mockery momentarily offsets Conchubar's fears, it underlines how bizarre and novel is the idea of death impinging on life and the power that might be exerted at such a juncture. In the end Yeats remains faithful to the symbolist, romantic notion of lovers united after death. Deirdre kills herself to enter into the same state as

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[15] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1904), Ts. 15, chron. p. 21.

[16] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (1906), *Abbey Acting Ts.*, p. 39.

Naoise. Yeats is not yet quite ready to adopt Wilde's notion of the potent union of both states, but he has approached this concept mingling death with life for a moment in Conchubar's suspicions of the dead Naoise's power over the live Deirdre and in her forced mockery of such a farfetched idea.

Yeats has begun to play with Wilde's theory a little and, as I will show in later chapters, he will experiment further with these concepts in *Four Plays for Dancers* and finally fully accept and express them in an artistically transfigured way in his last dance plays, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March.*

The revisions of Yeats's *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre* represent a tangible connection with Wilde's *Salomé* whose influence is clearly discernible in them. They represent the foundations of the Saloméan influence on Yeats. Wilde's *Salomé* was seminal for Yeats's work: the dramatic devices, symbols, characterisation, sensuality, metaphysics which have been discussed in this chapter were the beginnings of a force which would become a powerful creative drive in Yeats's imagination. He combined, remade and refined these elements and in the following chapters (5 and 6) I will show this process continuing and advancing in Yeats's work. I will also refer in these chapters to *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre* in the context of dance and implacable desire which I have only mentioned in this chapter but which figure prominently in Yeats's work and are integral to a full understanding of Wilde's place within Yeats's creative imagination.

Chapter 4
(1908 – 1917)
Metaphysics and Masks

From their first meeting Wilde's powerful intellect impressed Yeats. Yeats described Wilde's book, *Intentions,* (1891) as "[hiding] within its immense paradox some of the most subtle literary criticism we are likely to see for many a long day."[1] It is in this book that Yeats found the Wildean concept which was to become the basic tenet of his philosophical system: "The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks."[2]

The concept of the mask is basic to Yeats's philosophy, a key concept within his aesthetics and thus a vital energising factor in much of his creative work. Richard Ellmann writes: "The doctrine of the mask is so complex and so central in Yeats that we can hardly attend to it too closely".[3]

Yeats was predisposed from an early age to an appreciation of mask. Critics have detailed Yeats's experience of opposing situations in childhood and adolescence which relate to his understanding of face and mask, reality and appearance.[4] Masquerade was part and parcel of Yeats's young life; at school the conflicting views on education of his teachers and father obliged him to find means to facilitate both with the result that he later

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[1] W.B. Yeats, "Oscar Wilde's Last Book," in *Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats: First reviews and articles, 1886-1896*, 1, ed. John Frayne, p. 204. There is a copy of *Intentions* (1891) in Yeats's library.

[2] Oscar Wilde, "The Truth of Masks", p. 1173.

[3] Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: the man and the masks*, p.172.

[4] A.N. Jeffares, *W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet* (1949; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 13, 17.

declared that his schooldays had taught him "evasion" and "excuse".[5] Yeats also learnt as a youth to separate the various spheres of life; he was encouraged by his father to disregard the actual, impoverished circumstances in which they lived and experience the rich life of the mind. It was Wilde who provided Yeats with the form through which he could articulate this denial of circumstance and which enabled him outwardly to express an inner conception of self. Wilde's urbane pose instigated changes and growth in Yeats's awareness of the possibilities inherent in the pose or mask.[6]

Ellmann perceives Yeats's interest in mask as an elaboration of his earlier preoccupation with pose and recognises Wilde's continued significance in Yeats's theoretical investigations into mask.[7] Yeats defined the pose as "a mask laboured at all life long".[8] Ellmann suggests that Yeats adopted the word 'mask' as a more "virile" word than 'pose' and one which more readily reflected the profound proportions of the study which he proposed, 'pose' having too much of an aesthetic association.[9] Elmann's observation, by extension, implies Yeats's unease with his ideas on mask being too readily recognised as closely linked with Wilde, the aesthete. Writing in *Oscar Wilde* Ellmann says: "Most of Yeats's speculations derive encouragement from ["The Critic as Artist"].[10] Ellmann

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[5] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 59.

[6] Discussed in chapter 2, p. 6. See also Mary Colum on Yeats's use of pose; she attributes his style to Oscar Wilde. "The Yeats I Knew", *W.B. Yeats: Interviews and Recollections* vol. 2, ed., E.H. Mikhail, pp. 302, 303.

[7] W.B. Yeats, *Yeats: the man and the masks*, p.171.

[8] Joseph Ronsley, "Yeats's Lecture Notes for 'Friends of my Youth'" (Mar. 9, 1910) in *Yeats and the Theatre* eds., Robert O'Donnell and Lorraine Reynolds (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 77.

[9] Richard Ellmann, *Identity of Yeats*, p. 93.

[10] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 308.

indicates the precursory nature of Wilde's text and suggests that its philosophical direction is contiguous with Yeats's thought.

In this chapter I will look at how the concept of mask evolved in Yeats's work during the period 1908 – 1917 and show how Wilde was implicated in Yeats's initial interest in mask and in the creative direction that this interest took and its final outcome. In section one I will indicate Wilde's creative presence for Yeats, his interest in mask during the period 1908-1917 and his association of mask with Wilde. I will show in section two, through textual analysis of manuscripts of *The Player Queen*, the development of Yeats's concept of mask from a direct usage of Wildean theories in the early drafts (1908-1910) to a more complex creative engagement with Wilde in the later drafts (1915-1917). In section three I will explore *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* in its relation to *De Profundis* and indicate Wilde's contribution to Yeats's developing theory of mask and to the final importance he assigns to it.

1: Yeats's perception of Wilde and Mask

The idea of the mask preoccupied Yeats from 1908 when he started work on the play. *The Player Queen,* to its completion in May 1917. Yeats intended *The Player Queen* to be a play of ideas; his central working concept is the mask and it is through mask that he explores the meaning of reality. There is a striking resemblance between Yeats's theories on mask in the early drafts of the play, 1908 - 1910,[11] and those of Oscar Wilde.

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[11] W.B. Yeats, "A Note to *The Player Queen*" in *Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, p. 761.

In 1910 Yeats abandoned for five years the writing of *The Player Queen*. He explained this in later years as the result of his dissatisfaction with the play because of its preoccupation with allegory and because of his attempt to write it as a tragedy. But this rigidity which Yeats ascribed to his earlier drafts was more likely the result of his working with borrowed principles and failing to achieve any coherent doctrine of his own.

Yeats resumed work on *The Player Queen* in 1915, completing it in 1917. Yeats comes into his own in these later drafts; his earlier work on *The Player Queen* in its near representation of Wilde's work, signifies his preoccupation with Wilde and his theories. In the later drafts of *The Player Queen* (1915-1917) Yeats takes Wilde's concepts and through their creative revision constructs his own radical theories of mask: mask as instigator of civilisation and mask as the agency through which Unity of Being is achieved.

1915, the year in which Yeats returned to *The Player Queen*, was also the year in which he completed "Ego Dominus Tuus", a poem concerned with mask as self and anti-self. "Ego Dominus Tuus" is the introductory poem in Yeats's philosophical treatise, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, which he was writing during the same period as he was working on the later drafts of *The Player Queen* (1915-17) and which is also concerned with mask. *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* comprises the poem and two essays, "Anima Hominis" and "Anima Mundi". Yeats originally intended entitling this philosophical treatise *An Alphabet*,[12] a title which clearly indicates its fundamental relation to his art. *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* is the basic text on which *A Vision*, Yeats's expanded philosophical system,

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[12] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters,* p. 624.

is grounded. Yeats began working on *A Vision* shortly after he had completed *The Player Queen*, continuing to work on it until 1937. He attributed the composition of *A Vision* to certain psychic experiences which began four days after his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees (24th. Oct. 1917) with the discovery of his wife's skill at automatic writing. Through this automatic writing, Yeats says, he made contact with certain "communicators" who aided him with the composition of *A Vision,* the philosophy of which was the force behind so much of his creative work. However, the similarity between fundamental aspects of *A Vision* and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* are so strong that Yeats acknowledges: "The unknown writer took his theme at first from my just published *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*".[13] Yeats's themes of mask and image in P*er Amica Silentia Lunae*, like those in the final version of *The Player Queen,* are a development of his first thoughts on mask written in 1908-10 drafts of *The Player Queen.* Wilde's texts are so readily in evidence throughout this play, as in much of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, that one might almost agree with Harold Bloom's assessment of the creative universe as one made up exclusively of precursor and ephebe. It is generally believed, however, that Yeats's in-depth study of mask which he began in 1908 was instigated by his interest in Friedrich Nietzsche. This assumption of Nietzsche's primary instigatory role has never been comprehensively shown,[14] although his name is often imposed upon Yeats's thought before the poet has

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[13] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 8

[14] Otto Bohlman, for example tells us that "there can be no certainty as to exactly when it was W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) first encountered the ideas of Friedrich William Nietzsche (1844-1900)" but he is clear that Yeats's serious interest in Nietzsche's work began at the time Yeats wrote notes in the margins of his book on Nietzsche edited by Thomas Common. Bohlman writes: "it is with his reading of Common's anthology that his [W.B's] consuming interest in [Nietzsche] begins – as the notes he scrawled in the margins of his copy testify". Bohlman, through the art of suggestion, places this reading around 1903 but while there is evidence to show that Yeats read Nietzsche at this time there is no evidence to support Bohlman's claim that Yeats read this particular copy of Common at that time and, therefore, none to support his further claim that

reached the stage at which Nietzsche becomes pertinent to his study of mask.[15] Nietzsche is, of course, a large presence for Yeats and while he was in Yeats's mind around 1908 - his father, J.B Yeats, writes to him in that year warning him to avoid Nietzschean influence and his notions of self-importance[16] - there is little evidence in the years 1908–1910 within his creative writing on mask of a Nietzschean input. Otto Bohlmann in his book, *Yeats and Nietzsche,* suggests that Yeats adopts a "hardening tone" during this time and Terence Brown notes that during this period Nietzsche's influence on Yeats manifested itself mainly in action: "It was in his dealings with theatre business and management that Yeats was able to practice what he sensed Nietzsche had preached".[17]

Nietzsche's thoughts on mask are largely unsystematised and some time passed before Yeats fully assimilated them into his creative imagination.[18] Yeats's writings and musings of 1908-1910 were inspired by Wilde's image and informed by Wilde's ideas on mask.

When Yeats began his explorations into mask in 1908 Wilde's image was very much present to him; he read *De Profundis* in that year quoting from it in a letter to his

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Yeat's "serious interest" in Nietzsche occurred at this time. *Yeats and Nietzsche: an exploration of major Nietzschean Echoes in the Writings of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 1, 2.

[15] Yeats's subscription to Blake's and Nietzache's antinomial view of reality is in accord with Wilde's own mage of reality. Nietzsche's theatrical and tragic sense are an endorsement of Wilde's artistic concept of tragedy and his doctrine of life as a dramatic venture.

[16] Douglas N. Archibald, *John Butler Yeats* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1974), p. 64.

[17] Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats*, p. 153.

[18] Bernard Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins, "Nietzsche's works and their themes" in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)), p. 21.

father the following January (1909).[19] The "noble", "tragic"[20] image which Wilde created of himself in *De Profundis* creatively engaged Yeats and clearly indicated for him the transfiguring energy of mask. Yeats was, as we saw in chapter two, particularly susceptible to the influence of image. Writing from prison, Wilde describes in *De Profundis* how he refused to accept an imposed mask of despair and, transcending the literal bonds of circumstance, constructed for himself a mask which would express his new mode of being. As if in acknowledgement of Wilde's achievement, Yeats wrote (March 9, 1910) that the mask is "the result of some passionate victory over circumstance".[21]

Wilde's self imagining in *De Profundis* transcends a personal pose and makes claim to playing a central role in earlier times in generating the imaginative creativity of his era. Wilde's imaginings escape a Nietzschean egocentric elitism in its overt symbolism and in allowing a relation between himself and others; there is a benign inclusivity implicit in Wilde's words. Wilde writes:

> I was a man who stood in symbolic relations to the art and culture of my age ... I altered the minds of men and the colour of things; there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder ... I awoke the imagination of my century so that it created myth and legend around me. I summed up all systems in a phrase and all existence in an epigram. [22]

Wilde envisioned no less potency for his new image conveyed by the noble mask of tragedy which he assumed in *De Profundis* and his strategic alignment of this image with

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[19] Yeats mentions "Wilde's latest book" and quotes from *De Profundis* (1908). Yeats also had a copy of the 1905 edition of *De Profundis* which is extant in Yeats's library. "To J.B. Yeats", Jan., 1909. W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 524.

[20] George Bernard Shaw, "Oscar Wilde", *The Matter with Ireland.* Translated by Dr. Felix F. Strauss and Mr. Laurence (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 30.

[21] Joseph Ronsley, *Yeats and the Theatre,* p. 77.

[22] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 32.

that of Christ in this text testifies to such a perception. Wilde pronounces Christ one of the most powerful images the world has ever known, "and as such has fascinated and dominated art as no Greek god ever succeeded in doing". He further emphasises the affinity between his own and Christ's image by depicting Christ as an artist who imaginatively created himself, rising above his context as a poor Galilean peasant, just as the artist Wilde had conceived of himself, transcending his context both in London and in prison. Wilde claims that the aim of life is expression and that the artist is in an advantageous position to fulfil life's aim, the dynamic of art being expression. He intertwines the picture of Christ's suffering and those of his own and in so doing forges an indelible bond between both images – Wilde's image deriving a sublime strength from the historic achievement of Christ.

Wilde's parallel between his own recreation of self and his symbolic magnitude with that of Christ is so consummately drawn that it succeeds in giving substance and strength to his claim to powerful image. The appelation, "Man of Sorrows", which he applies to Christ, might equally be applied to himself . Wilde, who had styled himself the symbol of the culture of his age calls Christ the world's "most eternal Symbol".[23] Wilde is

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[3] The passion of Christ, which is suggestive in many ways of Wilde's own sufferings, is described by him in *De Profundis*. Wilde is aware of the comparison he is evoking. He tells the story of Christ, mentioning "the little supper with his companions" – resonant of Wilde's most characteristic "event", the dinner table. He brings to mind his great friend, Robert Ross, and the faithless Alfred Douglas, in labelling Christ's friends, "the friend who still believed in him" and "the false friend coming close to him so as to betray him with a kiss". Wilde's determination to accept in humility the suffering he endured in the isolation of prison echoes his sentiment on Christ – "his own utter loneliness, his submission, his acceptance of everything". The condemnation of Wilde by the courts of law for his homosexuality finds its parallel in Wilde's description of Christ's trial before "the high priest of orthodoxy rending his raiment in wrath", while the figure of the Marquis of Queensberry, the father of Lord Alfred Douglas, whose alleged libel of Wilde led to the first trial, is forcibly brought to mind in Wilde's description of "the magistrate of civil justice" attenpting to wash his hands of Christ's innocent blood as "the scarlet figure of history". Wilde had

not claiming to be Christ; he is proclaiming his own autonomous image. Wilde's Christ was not, as Declan Kiberd points out, "a model for imitation so much as an example of self-becoming".[24] The similarity Wilde is claiming is that of potent image standing in symbolic relations to humanity, emanating influence: the power to change or disturb.

That Wilde through his self crafted mask was projecting a new image and urging its influential strength and creative power would have been as clear as day to Yeats being himself convinced of the power which Wilde advocated for image/mask. Not only did he recognise this intention of Wilde but he validated it by the influence of Wilde's text discernible in his work.

Neither would Wilde's powerful imaging of Christ and himself have been lost on Yeats. Wilde and image are inexorably paired within Yeats's patterns of thought; many times during his life he quoted Wilde's words on the images of Christ and Caesar. He recalls in *Autobiographies* how Wilde imprinted on his mind the concept of image as a universal force when in 1888 he read to him those seminal words from "The Decay of Lying: "What does not the world owe to the imitation of Christ, what to the imitation of Caesar?"[25] Yeats is in no doubt as to the importance of Wilde's statement to his own

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refered to Queensberry as the "Scarlet Marquis" in a letter to his son, Alfred Douglas, in February, 1895

The comparison is continued; Wilde gives a litany of Christ's sorrows: "the coronation ceremony of sorrow, one of the most wonderful things in all of recorded time; the crucifixion of the Innocent One before the eyes of his mother and of the disciple whom he loved; the soldiers gambling and throwing dice for his clothes". Elsevhere in *De Profundis* Wilde had described his own analogous position, his public humiliation; the sale of his possessions by bankruptcy order; his anguish at the grief he had caused his mother. *De Profundis*, pp. 66-69.

[24] Declan Kiberd, "Anarchist Attitudes: Oscar Wilde" in *Irish Classics* (London: Granta Books, 2000), p. 330.

[25] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1085.

perception of image. It is not surprising, then, that Wilde's image in *De Profundis* is one of the "right images"[26] that would evoke the "truth of masks" for Yeats.

In 1908 Yeats used the word "mask" for the first time in his writings, implicating Wilde in his thought.[27] The reference appears in Yeats's *Journal* (13, Dec. 1908) where he observes that one takes control or authority over one's life by assuming a self constructed mask. Yeats uses the image of Wilde to illustrate his meaning:

> If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are, and try to assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of arduous full life. One constantly notices in very active natures a tendency to pose, or if the pose has become a second self a preoccupation with the effect they are producing. One notices this in Plutarch's "Lives", and every now and then in some modern who has tried to live by classical ideas, in Oscar Wilde for instance, and less obviously in men like Walt Whitman.[28]

Yeats's definition of "active virtue" is an astute observation of the self reliant stance adopted by Wilde in *De Profundis*. While prison may have been the stimulus in necessitating the creation of this new mask, the construction of the mask is actively directed by its author, in opposition to any "passive acceptance of a code", "consciously dramatic". Frank McGuinness notes the theatricality of *De Profundis* when he describes it as 'the act of a penitent performer".[29] Wilde writes: "I see quite clearly what I ought to do,

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[26] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 269.

[27] Bohlman claims that, "Yeats' concept of the mask, though subsequently much embellished, derives in subsance from Nietzsche's idea of the 'heroic mask' and its ramifications: a jotting Yeats made in his copy of Common's is his earliest reference to the mask".[Bohlman's conclusion is inaccurate. When Yeats wrote in the margins of Common's cannot be ascertained; while it is evident from Yeats's creative work of 1908 that he began in that year to take a serious interest in mask there is nothing to suggest, either in what we know of his reading of Nietzsche or in the evidence of the type of mask he composed in *The Player Queen*, that his interest was fuelled by Nietzsche. p.130, footnote p. ix]

[28] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs,* p. 15.

[29] Frank McGuinness, *Creativity and its Contexts* ed. Chris Morash (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995), p. 53.

in fact, must do. And when I use such a phrase as that, I need not say that I am not alluding to any external sanction or command".[30] Wilde adopts his mask through a self-imposed discipline such as Yeats observes in relation to his attempt to live by "classical ideas".

Given that Yeats in 1908 read Wilde's account of his reinvention of self in triumphant and tragic mode and was under no misconception about the self-discipline this necessitated, and given that Yeats cites Wilde as type in describing the need for discipline in the wearing of mask, it is disconcerting to find Wilde excluded from current critical evaluation of the evolution of Yeats's theories on mask. It is understandably difficult for critics to reconcile self discipline with Wilde when Wilde, himself, had invested so much energy in cultivating a flagrantly languid image. However, no pose can be struck without regard to discipline, by definition a mask calls for self sublimation, in some sense, and discipline. Terence Brown attributes Yeats's appreciation of self-discipline in 1907 to Nietzsche, a much more likely candidate, "Yeats's own Nietzschean awareness of the role of self-mastery in personal achievement". He also allows that this Nietzschean awareness helped Yeats realise "that the self could make effective use of its powers in the world only in as much as it recreated itself as one mask or another". This concept of Yeats's could equally be considered a particularly Wildean stance: that the personality thrives through its many masks and that only in giving voice through mask to the many aspects of one's

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Luke Gibbons' discussion of Sophie Bryant's psychological theory of the Irish as being "other-conscious as a matter of course" is interesting in this context as it relates to performance for or before others. Luke Gibbons, "This sympathetic bond: Ossian, Celticism and Colonialism" in *Celticism* ed., Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), p. 275.

[30] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 36.

personality does one arrive at a conception of truth and a realisation of being. While Brown's assertion of a Nietzschean awareness in Yeats pays no attention to a Wildean input, neither does it rule it out. According to Brown mask was a "developing idea" of the period from 1908. Indeed, his exposition of what he terms Yeats's "own conviction" on mask at this time applies directly to what Yeats observed of Wilde in *De Profundis*: "Yeats now added his own conviction that the Mask is a form of self-mastery, a nonchalant, even playful, achievement to be sure, but made necessary by the tragic realities of life and the pain of personal experience".[31]

The image of Wilde is clearly implicated in Yeats's *Journal* entry of 1908 yet when critics quote this passage they often follow Yeats's example in the version of it he places in "Anima Hominis", (1917).[32] In this version Yeats inserted an ellipses after "the wearing of mask", and so cut out his allusion to men of "active nature" with a "tendency to pose", and then reproduced the rest of the entry in faithful accord with the substance of the original *Journal* entry. Yeats's repression of Wilde's name indicates the progression of his ideas on mask: when Yeats reproduced his comments on mask complete with ellipses in *Anima Hominis* (1917) he had completed the theoretical journey of Bloom's ephebe from open admiration to the final stance of transumption and usurpation. When he first commented on mask in his *Journal* (1908), mentioning Wilde as his primary example of a modern exponent of mask, he was at the outset of his journey, content to play directly with the ideas of his precursor. His early writing of *The Player Queen* (1908-1910) abounds

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[31] Terence Brown, *The Life of W.B. Yeats*, p. 176.

[32] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis", p. 334.

with theories Wilde posed in "The Decay of Lying", the essay he read in proof form to the young Yeats and which Ellmann credits as having provided Yeats with a formative theoretical base to his writing.

2. *The Player Queen (1908-1910)*

The Player Queen reveals in its many drafts, 1908-1917, Yeats's imaginative engagement with Wilde; indeed the "psychic battlefield" envisaged by Harold Bloom as the scene of poetic influencecomes to life as Yeats struggles to individuate himself from his precursor.

In the early drafts of *The Player Queen* Yeats examines Wilde's concept of mask, probing its boundaries and testing its application. Among the manuscripts of the play extant from the 1908 - 1910 period, are three complete drafts which mostly lead up to a three act version which Yeats was completing in 1910.[33] There are, also, nine surviving scenarios of the play written during this time. With several alterations and varying versions along the way, the plot of these early drafts of *The Player Queen* is substantially

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[33] N.L.I. Ms. 8764: "W.B. Yeats Papers: *The Player Queen*, - 11 folders and some notebooks." N.L.I. Micro-film 7492: "i – xi". See also mss. of Yeats transcribed by Curtis Baker Bradford: *W.B. Yeats: the Writing of The Player Queen* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1977). Bradford divides the mss. and tss. of *The Player Queen* into 32 drafts, numbered 1 – 32.
In the footnotes I will number all quotes from the mss. and tss. according to both the N.L.I. and Bradford system. In the various drafts of *The Player Queen* Yeats uses different names for the same character. For the sake of clarity I have used the final name given to each one by Yeats. The following is a list of the final and other names of each of the characters from *The Player Queen*:

Final Name	Other Names
Septimus	Poet, Yellow Martin
Nona	Girl, Winny, Winnie, Friend, The Friend
Prime Minister	Bishop, Chancellor, Lord Chamberlain, Minister
Decima	Player Queen
Old Beggarman	Rat Hole, Old Man

as follows: A king has died some months previous to the opening of the play. His daughter, the Queen, who has been reared in a convent and so is unknown by sight to her subjects, is about to greet them in full royal regalia. Her prime minister, who is the only person of the town who knows her by sight, has persuaded the reluctant Queen to assume her royal robes in order that the power of her majestic mask might stop the townspeople from revolution. The reason for the threatened rebellion is the people's dissatisfaction with the heavy taxes being placed on them by the Church with the Queen's approval. (In some drafts, the Queen is directly responsible for these taxes; she has placed a tax on the committing of sin, the sin of lying being singled out in some instances.)

The Queen does not wish to assume her royal role and sees herself more as a nun than as a Queen; she contemplates the role of martyr.

A group of travelling players are assembled in the town to take part in a play, The Mask of Noah's Wife, to celebrate the Queen's return to the town from the convent. The chief player, Decima who is the Player Queen of the play's title, has gone into hiding as she does not wish to play the unimaginative role of Noah's wife. She desires to play the part of a queen but her lover, Septimus, who is also the players' manager, does not think her capable of such a role. Decima has discovered a play about queens written by Septimus many years earlier.

Decima believes Septimus to be in love with another woman, a player, Nona. In some drafts Decima decides that because of this she herself must die; she feels this would best be done as a queen, in a heroic manner.

Decima changes robes with the true Queen and immediately adopts the royal mask. This exchange occurs at the instigation of Decima as the rebels storm the castle, usually with the intention of putting the frightened Queen to death.

Decima faces the hostile crowd who fully believe in her regal mask. Septimus tries to save her from death by persuading the crowd that Decima is not the real Queen and is but playing a part, however the Player Queen denies his charge. The real Queen owns up to being who she is, but once again, Decima succeeds in making the people believe her to be their true sovereign.

In some endings Yeats has Decima die at her own hand, but in others including the more finished 1910 version of the play, she admits that she is not queen, and having played the part she will now move on to play Noah's wife. Before leaving she makes the prime minister king. The real queen declares her intention to re-enter the convent.

The Player Queen amid all its power struggles and love plots is essentially about mask; mask is the playwright's overriding concern. In *The Player Queen* the mask is shown to be more effective than reality, truth is perceived as mask; conceiving of oneself is an empowering act; life finds expression through the mask. All of these concepts which Yeats expounds are deeply indebted to Oscar Wilde. Yeats builds his play upon Wilde's contentions and perceptions of reality and mask.

Yeats's play depicts reality as an intellectual enterprise, a performance of masks. The Queen sums up what has taken place within the play:

> I can see that life is but deceiving and being deceived, that those who master it speak even to themselves in masks.[34]

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[4] N.L.I. Red ms. notebook, labelled "*Player Queen B.* act 111" with note: "Should play 30 minutes as it is here." Folder no. 3, act 111, p. 38.

These lines of Yeats contain two of Wilde's major concepts, the first is the notion of life as a play of masks and the second is his contention that one must conceive of oneself, create one's own image. Wilde perceived reality in terms of mask, seeing truth as changing and relative rather than constant and fixed.

The early drafts of Yeats's play operates on many levels of truth. It has an actual level - the threatened rebellion of the people belongs in this category - and the purely fictitious level would include the players' drama. Within these levels truth and fiction commingle. The play within the play is a fictitious rendering of realism as the prime minister plots to overthrow the actual rebellion by artifice, by inducing the Queen to quell it by means of a regal mask. The Queen, although real, must don an artificial mask if she wishes to be perceived as authentic. The real Queen and the Player Queen exchange roles and one becomes a player and the other a queen - reality and fiction merge together. "To be great one must seem so," says the prime minister, "and seeming that goes on for a lifetime is not different from reality."[35] Reality and fiction conflate and truth becomes the property of mask. The Queen's admission of her royalty is disbelieved while the mask of the Player Queen is seen as real. Yeats appropriates the claim Wilde makes for himself in *De Profundis*:

> To truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and I showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence.[36]

Microfilm: *Player Queen 111* (The description of this ms. "*Player Queen B* act 111" is given erroneously on title sheet of the previous ms., *Player Queen 11*.)
Curis Bradford Draft 8, p. 100.

[5] N.L.I. Folder 3. Folio 12, unnumbered. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 169.

[5] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 1017.

Wilde allows that it is the richness or paucity of one's imaginative faculty which informs individual perception - things are perceived in accordance with each individual's "imagination, or fancy, or cultural blindness".[37] Wilde would have it that art not only presents us with the mask but also teaches us the response. He proposes reality as a fabrication of the artist and all life as illusory. Art, he says, offers life the means of expression; reality is grounded in intellect while the artist has created ideas for life to enact. The artist's creation of reality is demonstrated by Wilde in "The Decay of Lying", where he proves that Japan does not exist but is a projection of the artist.

> The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists. If you set a picture by Hokusai or Hokkei, or any of the great native painters, beside a real Japanese gentleman or lady, you will see that there is not the slightest resemblance between them. The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them. In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people. One of our most charming painters went recently to the Land of the Chrysanthemum in the foolish hope of seeing the Japanese. All he saw, all he had the chance of painting, were a few lanterns and some fans. He was quite unable to discover the inhabitants, as his delightful exhibition at Messrs. Dowdeswell's Gallery showed only too well. He did not know that the Japanese people are, as I have said, simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art.[38]

The world of *The Player Queen* is illustrative of this theory since it is created by the artist and perceived with the help of art. The central event in the play is Decima's portrayal of a real queen and the people's belief in her projected mask. The people perceive her mask to be true because of the conception of royalty which the artist has created in myth, story and ancient plays. Decima in her anxiety to play the rôle of Queen quotes the names of great queens of myth and story who have been played by actors - Maeve, Herodias, The Queen of Sheba. It is the artist who has composed the mask and

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[37] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1071.

[38] bid., p. 1088.

who has created the stirring idea of noble royalty, the artist creates our perception of royalty. one cannot be born into royalty for it is an imagined state. The real queen is the same as everyone else; the real king, her father, was not so royal as the commoner Decima, who is told: "Your father was not so brave as you are. You are indeed a Queen."[39] The Player Queen fulfils everyone's expectations of royalty because she is playing a queen created by the artist. In the same way as the real Japan is unrecognisable to Wilde's traveller, so the real queen is unrecognisable to her people. Art creates the truth which perception seeks.

Yeats has shown truth, as represented by the mask of the Player Queen, to be the creation of the artist. Decima asks, "Who believes in anything but the dreams of others?"[40] In illustration of this, she finds an old play written by Septimus in his youth, in which he imagines fine queens and noble deeds. In some of his drafts, Yeats has the Player Queen use the dialogue from this play as her script in playing the part of a real queen. She steps into the dreams of Septimus' youth; he, the artist, has created an illusion of heroism which she enacts in a real life situation - heroically facing up to the mob. Decima makes Septimus' dreams concrete; reality has been created from imaginings. The situation finely illustrates Wilde's observation: "life holds the mirror up to Art and ... realises in fact what

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[39] N.L.I. Folder 9. Tablet ms. notebook, covers missing, wine coloured spine. This is the longest of the very earliest drafts. The notebook also contains list of appointments and astrology notes and a short piece entitled, "Meditations".
Ms. act 11, p. 25. Bradford: Draft 6, p. 54.

[40] N.L.I. Folder 2. Ms. book, purple cover, labelled "A_2". Folio 68, act 111, p. 7, unnumbered.
Microfilm: *Player Queen 11.*
Bradford: Draft 7, p. 73.

has been dreamed in fiction".[41] Yeats demonstrates how reality, in the manner which Oscar Wilde has described in "The Decay of Lying", is created by art. Yeats highlights Wilde's concept that truth is a matter of masks and perception and that life finds its expression in the mask composed by the artist. Of course, the artist is not confined by Wilde to creating a mask of others but is most aptly occupied in the recreation of self.

Yeats, in *Autobiographies*, recalls what Wilde had written in "The Critic as Artist": "What people call insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities."[42] Wilde explained in "The Decay of Lying" that the aim of life is expression and that it is art which offers life the means to express itself. The more artistic the individual the richer their outlet for expression. Wilde perceives the artist as capable of greater expression of self than others and therefore in a privileged position to fulfil life's aims. The self crafted mask is the perfect conduit of the diverse multifaceted nature of personality.

Wilde elaborates on this theory in *Dorian Gray*: Dorian has exchanged his soul for eternal youth and beauty, the progress of his corruption is depicted in the changing face of his portrait. While the portrait grows grotesque Dorian's face remains beautiful. His face is his mask, the portrait the reality which lies behind it. His face is false but it allows him to fulfil his many moods and inclinations. His mask is a method which enables him to "multiply" his personality.

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[41] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1085.

[42] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist", p. 1145.

The actress, Sybil Vane, Dorian Gray's beloved, assumes many masks through which she becomes a multiplicity of characters. She tells Dorian:

> Acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night, and Portia the other. The joy of Beatrice was my joy, and the sorrows of Cordelia were mine also. I believed in everything.[43]

The actor is the ideal illustration of the many facets of personality finding expression through the mask, and Yeats, like Wilde, uses this same illustration in *The Player Queen* to portray the multiplicity of personality made possible by mask.Yeats's character, Decima, is an actress, and she too takes her acting roles as reality. She continues, offstage, to play the part which she has acted onstage. In one of the first scenarios Yeats wrote for *The Player Queen* the other players complain of her playing the part of Jezebel in real life.[44]

When Decima decided that she wanted to play the part of a queen, she had no problem in assuming the role offstage. She had, however, no wish to remain in the part, - "For an hour, for a day, but then I change the mask."[45] It is not the real position of queen which has attracted her but the chance to fulfil a mood, to multiply personality through the agency of mask. "Did you think I wanted to be a countess or queen in earnest. Not I ... I am tired of it."[46]

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[43] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 71.

[44] N.LI. Typescript, loose sheets, 22 folios. First Scenario, labelled: "First Scene". Folio one, unnumbered.
Microfilm: *Player Queen 1.* Bradford: Scenario 1, p. 21.

[45] N.LI. Folder 1. Reddish-brown ms. book containing whole play. Inside cover has label: "Walker's Manuscript Transfer Case" and inscription in Yeats's hand: "Please return to W.B. Yeats/ 18 Woburn Buildings Euston Road".
Ts. Act 111, Sc.2, p. 25. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 243.

[46] N.LI. Ms. "Middle of Act 111" written in Yeats's hand. Folio 78 of complete ms. Verso, p. 2, unnumbered. Bradford: Draft 7, p. 77.

This attitude of Decima is further underlined in her refusal to accept Septimus' offer of continuing to act in the roles of queens. This had once been the height of her dreams, but now she has had the experience and is ready to move on to another mode of expression. She steps down from the position of royalty to take the part of Noah's wife - another part to play.

All of Yeats's characters are wearing masks which express aspects of their personalities, none of them are confined to one mask. Septimus speaks through the mask of poet as well as through the mask of lover; Decima seizes the heroic mask and wears the mask of beauty; the Queen, herself, espouses realism yet yearns for the martyr's idealistic pose. The mask gives expression to all traits of character: "She has reddened her face with raddle - that is why she has such courage. If you could only see perhaps she is very pale."[47] The heroic mask allows Decima express this facet of her personality, whether she is pale or not is immaterial.

Yeats accepted the virtuosity of mask as suggested by Wilde, apparent in Nona's remark: "what does it matter what part we play? We should take what comes."[48] In *The Player Queen* (1908-1910) Yeats endorsed Wilde's viewpoint that all masks, all forms of insincerity, offer a means of expression to the personality; he has not yet begun to use the mask to experiment with a rigorous application of self and anti-self. The queen seems to act as counterpoint to the theory that insincerity is the multiplication of the personality

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[47] N.L.I. Folder 9. Ms. Act 11, p. 36. Bradford: Draft 6, p. 59.

[48] N.L.I. Folder 9. Ms. Act 1, Sc. 2. Verso, p. 9. Bradford: Draft, 6, p. 49.

when she says: "being true to one's self and sincerity that is everything".[49] Yeats, however, places "The Mask" song directly after this exclamation giving in its apposition the lie to the Queen's reasoning.

"The Mask", Decima's song, appears in the drafts of the play from very early on and is the first creative piece Yeats publishes on mask:

> 'Put off that mask of burning gold
> With emerald eyes.'
> 'O no, my dear, you make so bold
> To find if hearts be wild and wise,
> And yet not cold.'
>
> 'I would but find what's there to find,
> Love or deceit.'
> 'It was the mask engaged your mind,
> And after set your heart to beat,
> Not what's behind.'
>
> 'But lest you are my enemy,
> I must enquire.'
> 'O no, my dear, let all that be;
> What matter, so there is but fire
> In you, in me?'[50]

This poem states succinctly Wilde's conviction in *The Decay of Lying* that the only thing of interest "is the mask that each one wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask."[51] Yeats was aware of Wilde's interest in the reinvention of personality and writes in *Autobiographies*:

> "Olive Schreiner", [Wilde] said to me once, "is staying in the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks on their faces, and I have told her that I live in the West End because nothing in life interests me but the mask."[52]

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[49] N.L.I. Folder 1. Loose sheets, 22 folios. Labelled: "Typed prose scenarios for *Player Queen*, several versions of possible tragic endings". First folio of four, entitled *Player Queen,* unnumbered. Microfilm: *Player Queen* 1. bradford: Scenario 9, p. 30.

[50] The following is the final 1910/11 version published in *The Green Helmet and other poems* in *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A.N. Jeffares, pp. 189, 190.

[51] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1075.

[52] N.L.I. Microfiche 30,536. Labelled "Ch. xv" in Yeats's hand. Loose folio inserted between folios 80 and 81. See also, *Autobiographies*, p. 165.

Wilde's concept has been reproduced intact in Yeats's play. The girl in "The Mask" tells her lover that it is the mask with which he has fallen in love and that that which lies behind it is of no importance. There is an interesting parallel to this situation in Dorian's attitude to Sybil in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

> I loved you, because you were marvellous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realised the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art.[53]

Dorian is not interested in the reality of Sybil; he loses all feeling for her when she, through love of him, loses her power to act and so to project the mask.

The language which Yeats's heroine uses to preserve the mask and by implication her lover's love is strikingly similar in kind to the language used by Sybil Vane to renounce her mask, an action which will lead to the loss of Dorian Gray. The girl of "The Mask" tells her lover that the reality behind the "burning mask of gold" does not matter "so there is but fire/In you, in me". Yeats's character expresses Wilde's feeling on the importance of mask, Sybil does not understand this importance and destroys "love":

> You taught me what reality really is ... You had made me understand what love really is ... I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot mimic one that burns me like fire.[54]

The mask in both texts has incited this fire, but while Yeats's heroine assumes a "burning mask" Wilde's heroine cannot assume a mask that "burns like fire"; the language, like the concept, is too close to be coincidental.

Wilde demonstrates the individuating power of mask; the importance of mask is not only that it is a thing of interest but that it is that which differentiates. Sybil Vane does not realise that the reality of her passion is commonplace and it is only the mask which has

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[53] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 72.

[54] ibid., p. 71.

distinguished it from similar passions. Wilde writes of the otherwise interchangeable nature of humanity in "The Decay of Lying" :

> We are all of us made out of the same stuff. In Falstaff there is something of Hamlet, in Hamlet there is not a little of Falstaff ... Where we differ from each other is in accidentals ... The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature.[55]

Against this bland, if egalitarian, consistency Wilde insists on the necessity of conceiving of one's self ; as a means of doing this he advocates the mask. Wilde carries this concept into an ideology of self, believing living to be an art which "has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it".[56]

The "mode of style" through which life expresses itself, of course, is the mask and Wilde claims "it is style that makes us believe in a thing".[57] Yeats was quick to understand this equation, noting Wilde's thought in his *Journal,* during the writing of *The Player Queen*, (Jan.14,1909): "Style, personality (deliberately adopted and therefore mask)".[58] Wilde had told the young Yeats that it was one's duty to conceive of oneself and Yeats eagerly took up this obligation and challenge of the imagination to realism.

Yeats, in *The Player Queen,* makes Wilde's point. He shows the dull universality of a homogeneous human nature and set against this each person's consciousness of being unique. Yeats demonstrates that this incipient individuality can only be projected through conceiving of oneself by assuming a mask. He makes the following note to one of his early manuscripts:

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[55] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1075.

[56] Oscar Wilde, "Pen, Pencil and Poison", p. 1095.

[57] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1089.

[58] W.B. Yeats, *Memoirs,* p. 139. See also chapter 2, p. 6.

> Noah tells them that [if] they are drowned it does not matter, there will be plenty to take their place, but each beast thinks [of] itself as unique.[59]

Decima fights against portraying an everyday, colourless character from the annals of reality: "I will not play a stupid woman no better than myself."[60] Decima understands the necessity of inventing oneself and desires to project herself as a noble queen but Septimus does not believe her capable of such a role; he sees her as ordinary, similar to everyone else. Decima, however, rises above this disbelief and is empowered by her ability to conceive of herself :

> But tell him that this day
> I shall [be] Sheba, Herodias, Maeve - all. He shall know what
> I can do.[61]

The Prime Minister is of the same opinion as Septimus; he sees Decima as one of the common herd; he fails to understand that it is the mask which confers power and that it is through self invention that individuation is achieved. He tells Decima -"Ah, it is a pity you haven't the right blood. They will know you are no queen."[62] Decima, however, assumes the queenly mask and in so doing individuates herself and becomes a voice of authority, a Queen. The Prime Minister is so impressed by the Player Queen's performance that when she later bestows on him the crown he admits to her that she has shown him how to achieve the mask through the conception of oneself: "I have learned my task from you and will know how to wear my mask."[63]

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[59] N.L.I. Folder 1. Ms. act 11, scene 1, p. 8. Microfilm: First item on *Player Queen 1*, untitled. Bradford: Draft 16. p. 222.

[60] N.L.I. Folder 3. Ms. book, reddish-brown cover: "Browne and Nolan's Exercise Books 1". Folio 18, unumbered. Microfilm: *Player Queen 111;* third ms. notebook on film. Bradford: Draft 15, p. 170.

[61] N.L.I. Folder 9. Act 11, p. 20. Microfilm: *Player Queen iv a.* Bradford: Draft 6, p. 53.

[62] N.L.I. Folder 1. Ts. Act 111, scene 22, p. 3. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 228.

[63] N.L.I. Folder 9. Ms. Act 11, p. 52. Bradford: Draft 6, p. 64.

In the meantime, the real Queen who has refused to reimagine herself in the role of Queen, is not recognised as queen by the people; she is seen as being the same as everyone else. The prime minister's words underline the position of those who refuse to recreate self and assume a mask: "Those who will not make deliberate choice are nothing."[64] Yeats teaches Wilde's lesson - the mask is the agency of individuation and it is the mask that makes us believe in a thing. These lines hark back to the disciplined reimagining of self which Wilde propounds in *De Profundis.*

The mask Wilde proposes is an empowering force, through its assumption it is possible to control one's reality. Wilde asserts the autonomy of mask in "The Decay of Lying" in his definition of the "fine lie"[65] as that which is its own evidence, totally reliant on its own assertion. Yeats repeats this contention of Wilde's in *The Player Queen* showing that the mask once assumed is its own authority. Decima having exchanged places with the Queen, tells her: "They [the people] will understand nothing but this crown and the glitter of it will keep them from you."[66]

Once again, we are confronted with Wilde's doctrine of the importance of the mask rather than the reality that lies behind it. Yeats binds this notion of Wilde's with another: that the "glitter", the mask, once assumed becomes one's accepted identity. He further applies Wilde's theories in showing that adopting mask implies the potential to become an image and this potent concept of Wilde's is of fundamental importance to Yeats's creative work. Yeats depicts this intrinsic power of mask in the Prime Minister's

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[64] N.L.I. Folder 1. Ms. act 1, scene 2, folio 14, unnumbered. Bradford: Draft 16, 208.

[65] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1072.

[66] N.L.I. Folder 9. Ms. Act 11, folio 23, unnumbered. Bradford: Draft 6, p. 54.

willingness to rely on a complete stranger to save the Queen and state, he tells Decima: : "I don't care who you are, all I want is a brave mask, a bunch of feathers on a stick."[67] In short, all he wants is an image and in conceiving of herself as queen and adopting the royal mask Decima has become that. Wilde in *De Profundis* explains that an idea becomes powerful when it becomes incarnate, when it takes on the stature of image and proceeds to illustrate this proposition in describing his own function as image before the society in which he lived. Yeats tentatively illustrates Wilde's theory of image in the early drafts of *The Player Queen*, making connections between mask as enabling force for image. The Prime Minister, showing his keen appreciation of the power and influence of which image is capable, addresses the Queen:

> Will your Majesty permit an old man to speak plainly? It is the Queen's duty to make the people greater by what she seems. She is the image of what they would be, a symbol, an image. It is her business to do it, [if] need be for a show, for a jewel, for an obsequy, for a piece of damask. She can grant to others the government as you have granted to me. She may sorrow over her sins, but she must always seem to be all power and haughtiness. Your state is a mask which you must wear always on your face.[68]

Yeats acknowledges the power of image in these early drafts and he will return to the concept in the later drafts where in its development it becomes one of the most important achievements of *The Player Queen.*

Yeats's admission to concealing secret elements within his texts and his propensity to cast his friends and acquaintances into imaginative roles[69] become apparent in *The Player Queen* in the sublimated image of Wilde himself. We find this hidden presence in

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[67] N.L.I. Folder 4. Loose pages, first page discoloured, marked by wedge shape in left hand top corner. ac 11, p. 16. Bradford: Draft 15, p. 178.

[68] N.L.I. Folder 9. Ms. Act 1, scene 2, folio 5, unnumbered. Br adford: Draft 6, p. 45.

[69] N.L.I. Ms. 8776(1). W.B. Yeats, "A Note on *Calvary*". See also Chapter two, pp. 2, 3. F.A.C. Wilson suggests that Yeats cast Wilde as Judas in *Calvary* and claims that such a creative act is

Yeats's allusion to Petronius Arbiter. This reference is more lengthy in its first appearance in 1915 and survives only in a sentence in the final play. Septimus is calling on the players to assume a pose in the face of death and in so doing triumph over it. He tells them to emulate a noble Roman, Petronius Arbiter, who told witty, scandalous tales while awaiting death. Petronius Arbiter was elegentiae arbiter to Nero and is described in the following terms by Tacitus:

> His days he passed in sleep, his nights in the business and pleasures of life. Others achieved greatness by the sweat of their brows; Petronius idled into fame, and he was reckoned not a debauchee and spendthrift, like most of those who squander their substance, but a man learned in luxury. And indeed his talk and his doings, the freer they were and the more show of carelessness they exhibited, were the better liked, for their look of natural simplicity. Yet as proconsul of Bithynia and soon afterwards as consul, he showed himself a man of vigour and equal to business. Then falling back into vice or affecting vice, he was chosen by Nero to be one of his few intimate associates - as Arbiter of Elegance - since the Emperor thought nothing charming or elegant unless it won the approval of Petronius.[70]

There is a strong parallel between Petronius and Yeats's conception of Wilde. Yeats describes in *Autobiographies* how Wilde slept late into the day. He depicts Wilde as a man of the world and a man of impeccable taste. Yeats describes with delight the natural fow of Wilde's conversation: "I never heard before a man talking with perfect sentences, as if he had written them all overnight with labour and yet all was spontaneous." Yeats always believed Wilde a capable man of action.[71] The imputation of vice to Petronius and his position as intimate of and personal aesthete to Nero are an obvious reflection of

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"characteristic of Yeats's method". *Yeats's Iconography* (London: Victor Gollancz ltd., 1960), pp. 176, 177.

[70] Tacitus, *Annals 16*. 18-19 in Petronius, *Satyrica* ed. R. Bracht Branham and Daniel Kinney (California: University of California Press, 1996), p. ix-x.
There are only three extant references to Petronius Arbiter from antiquity: Tacitus, Pliny, and Plutarch. For Putarch see: *Moralia* vol. 1, "How to tell a flatterer from a friend", transl. Frank C. Babbit (Massachusetts: The Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1927). Yeats refers to Wilde in his *Journal* (Jan. 1909) as trying to live by classical ideas; he mentions Plutarch's "lives" in the same sentence. Septimus refers to himself as being one of "Plutarch's people" - like them he adopts a mask.

[71] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 131, 130, 139, 286.

Wilde's standing in the 19th century as homosexual and aesthete.[72] Yeats writes in his *Journal* that Wilde was a man "who has tried to live by classical ideas". A translation of Petronius Arbiter published in Paris, 1902, two years after Wilde's death was purported, amid some controversy, to be the work of Wilde. This translation was considered to be a forgery by Wilde's literary executor, Robbie Ross. He sent a note to this effect to all booksellers in 1908. It is likely that Yeats would have known of this literary controversy. The year is significant - a reminder of Wilde, linked to Petronius Arbiter, during the writing of *The Player Queen.*[73]

In Tacitus' *Annals*, Tigellinus, a rival of Petronius, brought him into disrepute with Nero. Honour demanded that Petronius commit suicide; this he did by cutting his wrists and binding them up, releasing the bonds at intervals and dying at his leisure. Petronius then invited his friends to a party where they conversed in a witty and light vein.

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[72] Wilde mentions Petronius Arbiter in *Dorian Gray:* "[Dorian] found, indeed, a subtle pleasure, in the thought that he might become to the London of his own day what to Imperial Neroneon Rome the author of the "Satyricon" once had been, yet in his inmost heart he desired to be something more than a mere *arbiter elegantarium,* to be consulted on the wearing of a jewel, or the knotting of a necktie, or the conduct of a cane" (p. 99). In *Autobiographies* Yeats describes, with some amusement, Wilde being consulted by a missionary on what type of cloth he should purchase for the "smock frocks" of inhabitants of a far off land. Yeats describes how he came upon Wilde sitting in his house, deliberating solemnly on the issue with cloths of various colours spread out before him. p. 137.
In 1905 Yeats was involved in a controversial exchange of views in the pages of *The United Irishman* with Arthur Griffith on the propriety and origins of Synge's play, *In the Shadow of the Glen.* During the debate some comments were made on Petronius' character which indicate possible associations with Wilde's sorry reputation. Griffith suggested Synge's play was based on "a story invented by the wits of decadent Greece, and introduced, with amendments, into Latin literature by the most infamous of Roman writers, Petronius Arbiter, the pander of Nero" and calls Synge's play "a foul echo from degenerate Greece". Yeats replied: "You have wasted my time. There is no such story in Petronius".
The Abbey Theatre: the years of Synge, 1905-1909, eds., Robert Hogan and James Kilroy (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 10-13.

[73] *English Language in Transition 1880-1920*, vol. 38:1, 1995 (Dept. English, University of North Carolina Greensboro, 1995), pp. 9-49.

Yeats has Septimus say in a 1915 Draft of *The Player Queen* : "No, I will rather choose the death of Petronius Arbiter. That will be finer, more distinguished. I will tell stories, witty and scandalous stories. I will go on telling them while the doors are battered in, while the bolt of the crossbow rattles at the windows."[74] Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory from Paris, Dec. 1908, where he was working on *The Player Queen*. Lady Gregory gives an account of the letter in her Journal:

> Came upon a letter from Paris, December 1908 from W.B. Yeats. Says that he had met at Maud Gonne's place last night a friend of Oscar Wilde who told him a strange heroic story about Wilde. He died in great agony, thrusting his hand into his mouth to stop his cries. He was in great poverty, often without money for food, and declared that it was his wallpaper that was killing him. "One of us had to go," he said.[75]

Yeats's report of Wilde's death - its agony, heroism and nonchalance mirror the heroic suicide of Petronius Arbiter. Petronius Arbiter becomes but a mention in Yeats's final play but Wilde's covert presence in the guise of this image suggests his continuing creative presence in Yeats's imagination.

Yeats was affected by the man himself, as much as by Wilde's ideas and it may be that the very structure of *The Player Queen* owes its genesis to Wilde. Yeats claimed that when he first began writing *The Player Queen* he intended it to be a tragedy but when he came back to writing it in 1915 he decided to recast it as a comedy:

> At last it came into my head all of a sudden that I could get rid of the play if I turned it into a farce: and never did I do anything so easily, for I think that I wrote the whole thing in a month.[76]

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[74] N.L.I. Folder 6. Complete manuscript, marked "A" in Yeats's hand. Loose sheets, p. 36B. Microfilm: *Player Queen vi.* Bradford: Draft 21, p. 336.

[75] Lady Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Journals* 1916-1930 ed. Lennox Robinson (London: Putnam and co. Ltd., 1946), p. 330.

[76] W.B. Yeats, "A Note to *The Player Queen*" in *Variorum Edition of the plays of W.B. Yeats*, p. 761. There is some controversy as to why Yeats wrote *The Player Queen* as a comedy. Curtis Bradford suggests it may have been the influence of Ezra Pound, *W.B. Yeats: the writing of The Player Queen.*

This was not as radical a change as Yeats makes out, as the short space of time in which he claims to have made the conversion to comedy indicates. He had, in fact, already written quite a bit of comedy into the earlier drafts through wit, colourful language and farce. Indeed, in a comic move worthy of Wilde, Yeats placed a tax on lying, then inverting the righteous notion of a tax on sin, he has the Prime Minister declare a tax on virtue. Yeats was aware of possessing this skill in writing comedy as is clear from a letter he wrote in January 1909 to his father:

> I find that my talent as a stage manager is in the invention of comic business, in fact I am coming to the conclusion that I am really essentially a writer of comedy, but very personal comedy. Wilde wrote in his last book [*De Profundis*] "I have made my drama as personal as a lyric", and I think, whether he has done so or not, that is the only possible task now.[77]

Yeats declares his intention of following Wilde's lead in writing personal comedy and this he proceeds to do in *The Player Queen* expressing through it his personal philosophy of art and life. So when Yeats first began work on *The Player Queen* he was writing to his father that "personal comedy" was "the only possible task now". Yet, in later years, describing the difficulties which he encountered in the early drafts of *The Player Queen*, Yeats says:

> I wasted the best working months of several years in an attempt to write a poetical play ... and because a passion and not thought makes tragedy, what I had made had neither simplicity nor life. I knew precisely what was wrong and yet could neither escape from thought nor give up my play.[78]

Yeats tells us in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* how he overcame these difficulties: "I only escaped at last when I had mocked in comedy my own thought".[79] In the nine early scenarios of *The Player Queen* extant, Yeats toys with the idea of ending his play with the

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[77] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 524.

[78] W.B. Yeats, "A Note to *The Player Queen*", p. 761.

[79] W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* in *Mythologies*, p. 334.

tragic death of the Queen, but he soon abandons this notion. Yeats's lack of "simplicity" and "life" in his play was due not only to his thought hindering the writing of tragedy, as he claimed, but because of the constrictions of working with the intellectual ideas of another. Yeats's apparent surprise at the ease with which his play converted to comedy in 1915 betrays a self conscious awareness of his artistic situation. Since Wilde was celebrated as a writer of dramatic comedy, for Yeats to admit setting out to write *The Player Queen* as comedy while being conscious of having made use of Wilde's aesthetic principles in the writing of the play, would be to allow himself to become overly conscious of his own indebtedness to Wilde: such self-awareness could endanger his creativity.

Although the transition from tragedy to comedy is not as sudden as Yeats describes it, the later drafts are more comic than those of the earlier period and by 1917 he shapes his play into a finished comic form. Yeats having followed Wilde's advice in *De Profundis* in the matter of personal comedy, is also likely to have taken to heart another reflection of Wilde's from this book - Wilde describes how tragedy to him had always seemed a rigid, formal occurrence but how in fact it often occurs under the guise of comedy:

> I remembered that I used to say that I thought I could bear a real tragedy if it came to me with purple pall and a mask of noble sorrow, but that the dreadful thing about modernity was that it put tragedy into the raiment of comedy, so that the great realities seemed commonplace or grotesque or lacking in style.[80]

We have only to look at the profound words of prophecy in *The Player Queen* issuing as the braying of an ass from the Old Beggarman for illustration of this statement, or indeed, to the central tragedy of the play: the substitution of the glorious rebirth of mankind in the

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[80] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis,* p. 101.

union of image and world envisioned by the poet, with the farcical union of the self-serving Prime Minister and the wanton Player Queen.

Yeats describes T*he Player Queen* to his father (12 May 1917): "I have just made a revision of my Player Queen, a prose comedy ... It is very wild, and I think, amusing".[81] Yeats may have been admitting more than he intended in his choice of adjective.

When Yeats returns to the battle ground that is *The Player Queen* he does so with fresh creative vigour, and in classic Bloomian style, misreads the theories of Wilde to which he had so closely adhered in the earlier drafts of the play. Yeats proceeds in the later drafts to subvert the direction of Wilde's thought and to substitute his own, often antithetical, meaning.

The story line of *The Player Queen* has altered somewhat in the 1915 - 1917 drafts:[82] The townspeople decide to kill the Queen not because of high taxes but because they believe her to to be an evil witch. A young goatherd says that he has seen her couple with a unicorn. Septimus indicates the falsity of this story by defending the chastity of the unicorn. The image of the unicorn is an important addition to the play. Septimus believes that the union of the unicorn and a woman would bring about a new order of being.

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[81] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 625.

[82] N.L.I. Folder 10. "2nd Carbon" written on cover; loose sheets. Microfilm: entitled *Player Queen ix* "a late version of complete play". Bradford: Draft 29.
This is a substantially complete version of the later drafts of *The Player Queen*, Spring 1917. Yeats made two further drafts of the play and published it in 1919 and 1934 with some emendations; the difference between these later versions and this typescript are slight, alterations being mainly of a stylistic character. This substantially complete typescript is the main text from the 1915- 1817 mss./tss. under discussion in this chapter; it is made up of the ideas from the drafts of the previous drafts of this period together with new changes. As in the finished play it comprises two scenes: the first scene is almost exactly the same as the published 1922 play, while Yeats would do further work on scene two, it contains practically all the elements that appear in the finished play. Besides being a substantially complete text, more importantly for this study, Yeats finished this draft before his involvement with automatic writing and the communicators of

The play about Noah is still a part of the plot, only now it is being used not as a celebration but is used by the prime minister as a device to calm the civil unrest. Decima, as in the earlier drafts, goes into hiding because she does not want to play Noah's wife but would rather play the part of a queen. The position of the queen remains unchanged - she is a recluse and is reluctant to take her place as queen. The prime minister tries to persuade her to assume the royal mask. Decima discovers that her husband, Septimus, is Nona's lover, this is a development from the earlier drafts where the relationships of these characters is more ambiguous. Decima tries unsuccessfully to have Septimus throw Nona out of the company. Septimus believes that the townspeople want to kill the players but Decima is told by the prophet, an Old Beggarman, that Septimus is mistaken.

Decima takes on the role of queen and puts on her royal robes but the Queen, unlike in the earlier drafts, does not put on the dress of a player. The ending has also changed - the Prime Minister appeases the townspeople's anger by announcing his intention to marry Decima whom they believe to be Queen. Septimus objects and is driven out of town. The Old Beggarman is sentenced to death for prophesying the passing on of the crown. Decima is destined to remain queen.

While many aspects of the story remain unchanged, Yeats has altered the focus *of The Player Queen* in these later drafts. Earlier, Yeats in playing with Wilde's masks, was concerned with showing the many aspects of mask: the power of mask to command belief, the necessity of reimagining oneself, individuation through the assumption of mask, subjective perception and illusory reality, the triumph of image over reality and the

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A Vsion. It is, therefore, entirelly free of their influence and consequently a suitable text in which to see Oscar Vilde's influence on Yeats's philosophical thought.

expression of self through many masks. In the later drafts, however, these characteristics of mask have become acquired knowledge for Yeats. He now makes use of them as the raw material for his powerful imaginings of the Yeatsian mask.

Yeats succeeds in the later drafts in establishing the context of pure illusion which he strove to create in the earlier drafts; he has cleared away the uneven texture of the earlier work where reality and fiction mingle and has created an entirely fictive world. He achieves this development by converting Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" into the idiom of his drama and reinstating what Wilde describes as "the lost art of Lying".[83] Yeats weaves the play's reality from all types of intellectual imaginings: deception, rumour, misunderstanding, mythology and prophecy. This deliberate construction by Yeats in *The Player Queen* of Wilde's concept of life as Art powerfully translates into the mythic proportions of Byzantium which he will create in his later poetry and which he expands to become "the artifice of eternity" in "Sailing to Byzantium".[84] Wilde describes Byzantium in 'The Decay of Lying" as a place where "the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions, and the things that life has not are invented and fashioned for her delight."[85] These lines perfectly describe how Yeats renders Byzantium in his later poetry.

Wilde writes in "The Decay of Lying" that once imagination is restored to its postion of central importance to civilisation a cultural renaissance will occur. Yeats uses the context of illusory reality which he establishes in *The Player Queen* as a framework

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[83]Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1091.

[84]*Yeats's Poems,* ed. A.N. Jeffares, p. 301.

[85]Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1080.

in which cultural change takes place. It is not, however, the change to a state of Romance and autonomous art as envisioned by Wilde. Rather Yeats has moved further on from Wilde, empowering himself in the creative revision of his precursor. Yeats finds in the context of artificial reality the progress of civilisations: "between two forms of art lie differences of civilisation, the whole world of the years to come."[86] Yeats illustrates this situation in *The Player Queen* where in one deft move he shifts the basis of reality and inaugurates a new cultural era: a bogus queen and a self-serving Prime Minister unite as false image and man and take their place as sovereign rulers thus making the lie the premise for all civic life and bringing into being an antithetical era.

Yeats's theory of antithetical and of primary eras is essential to his system of belief outlined in *A Vision* and is grounded in Yeats's development of the Wildean mask in *The Player Queen.* Yeats explains in *A Vision* that civilisation moves cyclically, but perpetually forward, and that this movement is twofold, embracing primary and antithetical civilisations. Primary civilisation is represented by religious eras while the antithetical movements are secular, anarchical and masculine.

In Yeats's system a religious era has to succeed an antithetical civilisation; this pattern repeats itself until an eventual "concrete and sensuous unity"[87] occurs. Yeats explains this whole process as an endless recurrence in which the world goes through a period of discord, always reaching a certain point in its destruction at which it is restored. Yeats sees the primary act of creation from chaos as a world restorer. Noah, who saved

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[86] Ts. p. Bradford: Draft 18, p. 276.

[87] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p.255.

creation from the Great Flood, is also seen by Yeats as a world restorer. This is particularly interesting for *The Player Queen* as it reveals the seemingly pointless play within the play, "Noah's Deluge", as a muted testimony to Yeats's creative preoccupation at the time of creating *The Player Queen* with the concept of world restoration which he would elaborate in *A Vision.*

The approaching demise of the Christian era is depicted in *The Player Queen,* prefiguring Book V of *A Vision,* "Dove or Swan". Septimus refers time and again to the unchristian nature of the town. The Old Beggarman makes his prophecy by braying like an ass, this ass is said to be the donkey which carried Christ into Jerusalem. The Old Beggarman tells the Player Queen that the after-life may be one vast emptiness inhabited only by a braying ass. Christianity and all its promise is reduced to the ghostly emanations of a donkey. The end of the cultural era of Christianity is at hand; its death throes are symbolised in the Beggarman's rolling in straw as he utters his prophecy; like the Beggarman prophet, Christianity has been placed under sentence of death.

Just as Yeats proclaims, "Each age unwinds the thread another age has wound", so the union of the Queen and Prime Minister – "spirit and concrete"[88] – inaugurates an antithetical era. In the published versions of the play (1922 and 1934), Yeats indicates with greater clarity the consequences of this union; Decima says of herself in the final speech: "She was a bad, headstrong cruel woman, and seeks destruction somewhere and with some man she knows nothing of".[89] The lines are delivered to the players by Decima,

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[88] ibid. p. 270.

[89] *The Player Queen* (1922) in *Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 430. Yeats produced *The Player Queen* in 1919 at the Abbey Theatre and published it in 1922 and again in 1934. The changes he makes in both published versions are slight; the play remains essentially the same as the text

wearing a mask, and are given in explanation of her "disappearance". Her words are outwardly dismissive and, under the circumstances, self explanatory, but they carry within them a foreboding reminiscent of "The Second Coming". Decima's speech suggests a reign of chaos, like that of the anti-Christ, will ensue from her union with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is the "only substitute for the unicorn"[90] and their union a substitute for the primary era which would have followed from the marriage of the chaste unicorn and the holy queen. This event cannot take place in Yeats's play because according to his theory antithetical age must succeed primary era, the reign of Player Queen and Prime Minister must take the place of a dying Christianity. This theory of regeneration is fundamental to *A Vision* and underpins many of Yeats's great later poems.

Yeats perceives the cause of this great cultural recurrence as a single central moment; this moment marks the inception of the antithetical age which coincides with the climactic point of the *magnus annus* – the term he uses for the period of time covered by a civilisation. The conception of Christ by a woman and Dove was the central moment that brought Christianity into being, while the coupling of Leda and the Swan inaugurated an earlier antithetical civilisation.

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under discussion which was completed in Spring 1917; the finished play merely emphasises what has already been written in the earlier draft. The changes which Yeats made to his play after Spring 1917 are stylistic, a matter of sharpening profile and pointing to consequences, rather than altering content. His meaning, his philosophic ideas, remain unchanged. Yeats makes some adjustments to the language in the finished play which brings his intended meaning into sharper focus. He does this most noticeably when speaking of his hopes for cultural renewal and the role of the unicorn. When speaking of this phenomenon Septimus's voice is more emphatic and bold: "Gather about me, for I announce the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn but alas. He is chaste. he hesitates, he hesitates".

[90] N.L.I. Folder 6. Loose sheets; partial ms. of Act 11, Scene 2 which begins on p. 7, p. 31. Microfilm: *Player Queen vi.* Bradford: Draft 19, p. 286.

It is at this point of imagining (Yeats's understanding of the central moment which creates a new world order) that the concept of image which Yeats has worked out in *The Player Queen* becomes crucial to him.

We have seen in the earlier drafts how Yeats adopted Wilde's thinking on the power of image, he carries this idea through to the 1915 - 1917 drafts. Perhaps the most potent words Wilde ever spoke to Yeats were those he cited on the image of Christ and the image of Caesar as having a continuing and incalculable input into the life of the world. Yeats admits in *A Vision*: "Caesar and Christ always stand face to face in our imagination."[91] But Wilde's words on image in *De Profundis* also caught and powerfully held Yeats's imagination. In *De Profundis* Wilde declared that "an idea is of no use till it becomes incarnate and is made an image".[92] Wilde takes Christ as an example of this phenomenon and depicts him as having united in his own person concepts of suffering and redemption and in doing this became the incarnation of these ideas. Christ assumed the mask of Saviour of the World and became a powerful image whose strength has held for 2,000 years.

In *The Player Queen*, Yeats illustrates Wilde's theory that it is through the assumption of mask that image is created - the Player Queen conceives of herself as queen, adopts the mask of queen and in the fusion of idea and person becomes a potent image, personifying all the qualities the people expect of queen, becoming for them

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[91] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 244.

[92] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 77.

something greater than herself, something which raises them up. "Everybody who looks at me must say "that is the very fountain of life, that is all I have ever dreamed of."[93]

The unicorn is the central image of Yeats's play; it is not only an abstract idea but also a beast since it bled when shot by the goatherd. The unicorn combines in itself idea and beast: it is idea incarnate: the potent image. Yeats, however, having accepted Wilde's definition of image proceeds to radically alter it, making the stronger claim that - "Man is nothing till he is united to an image."[94] This is the sequential step from Wilde's concept in *De Profundis* that an idea is nothing until it is united with man and it is the kernel of Yeats's doctrine on mask. Yeats claims a generative force for image when it unites with the concrete. Wilde claimed that mask makes us believe in a thing; mask is the condition under which we see present reality. The claim which Yeats makes is far more extreme. He proposes mask as a power which *effects* real change and which is the condition through which eternal reality is perceived.

It is essential to Yeats's theory that image and matter combine into one. The central moment of cultural inception in *The Player Queen* should have happened in the union of beast and woman. The unicorn is an image of imaginative power but it is a beast besides being an idea and has, therefore, the power to engender. Septimus calls on it to trample the mob and "beget upon some woman a new mankind'.[95] But the unicorn remains virginal, he possesses potential power which cannot be transposed into the agency of change unless he physically unites with a woman. Yeats writes in *A Vision*, "antithetical

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[93] N.L.I. Folder 6. Ms. Act 11, sc. 2, p. 8. Bradford: Draft19, p. 279.

[94] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p. 31. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 387.

[95] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p. 28. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 385.

revelation" is "begotten from our spirit and history"[96]. Septimus laments the impotence of the chaste image, declaring he will "die railing upon the beast because, owing to a pedantic scruple or some congenital chill of the blood he will not become the new Adam".[97]

This concept of Yeats informs much of the later plays notably - *The Herne's Egg*, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March*. In this last play image is impotent unless it undergoes the physical union of image and humanity, "desecration and the lover's night".[98] The Player Queen hints at what is to come in Yeats's future doctrine, in the song she sings while choosing a lover from the players dressed in the "likeness of various beasts":

> Shall I fancy beast or fowl.
> Queen Pasaphae chose a bull
> While in passion for a swan
> Made Queen Leda stretch and yawn.[99]

Yeats first came to his vision of cyclical regeneration of human civilisation in *The Player Queen* through a creative progression which followed from his contemplation on the Wildean theory of masks. This doctrine of Yeats is a fundamental doctrine of *A Vision*, notably in Book iv, "The Great Year of the Ancients" where Yeats elaborates on the promise of eternal recurrence and in Book v of *A Vision*, "Dove or Swan". The basis for *A Vision* was put in place both in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and *The Player Queen*. The origination of Yeats's thought on mask and its evolution in the formulation of his

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[96] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 262.

[97] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p. 33. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 388.

[98] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March*, p. 630.

[99] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p. 28. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 384. ("Lido" is typed in error for "Leda".)

philosophical system can be identified in *The Player Queen* as having originated with Wilde's intellectual theories which continued to inform it.

Wilde is also a source of Yeats's dialectic on the primary and the antithetical from which Yeats develops his theory of anti-self and unity of being in the 1915-1917 drafts of *The Player Queen* and in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1915).[100] Yeats develops Wilde's proposition that mask expresses the multiple aspects of personality, the position embraced by him in the 1908-1910 drafts of *The Player Queen.* Yeats is no longer interested in mask as expression of the disparate aspects of personality, he is now seeking a mask which is in all things the opposite of self. Yeats reproduces Wilde's theory in its antithesis and proposes a stricter formulation: self seeks one mask only and that mask does not comes from within oneself but comes from an external force, the daimon. The daimon personifies antithesis, he is the anti-self who represents both the agency through which mask is achieved and the antithetical mask itself.

> I call to the mysterious one who yet
> Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
> And look most like me, being indeed my double,
> And prove of all imaginable things
> The most unlike, being my anti-self.

This progression of Yeats from mask as expression of all the moods of personality to mask as the galvanising agent of personality can be seen in its development in *The Player Queen.* He has moved away from Wilde's belief in all masks offering expression, to a theory where each individual seeks a particular mask, antithetical to self.

We have seen the many masks adopted by each of Yeats's characters in the 1908-1910 drafts of *The Player Queen.* The role of mask as conveyor of transient mood is

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[100] W.B. Yeats, "Ego Dominus Tuus", in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, pp. 321-324.

exemplified in Decima's admission that she had only wanted to wear the queenly crown "for an hour for a day" and that she no longer desires to play on stage the parts of queens. In the later drafts Decima's transition to queen is permanent. She tells Nona: "I have found the only part that I am fitted to play."[101] No longer is she looking for a pose that might express a certain mood and aspect, she is looking for the "only" role suited to her personally. Decima follows up this statement by singing the song of the harlot's daughter, whose mother believed she would be queen. Yeats poses the antithetical positions of harlot and queen; Nona points to a similar discrepancy between the circumstances of Decima and Queen: " You were born in a ditch between two towns and wrapped in a sheet stolen from a hedge - you play the queen! Low comedy is what you are fitted for. Here, put on this mask."[102] Nona offers Decima the mask of Noah's wife, a mask in keeping with her lowly birth. However, Decima aspires to a particular pose in that she aspires to her anti-self, to being queen.

The Queen had exchanged clothes with Decima in the 1908-1910 drafts, but Yeats has changed this so that now it is only Decima who takes the Queen's robes of state. The Queen attains to only one other mask: she seeks to imitate the image of saint and, in consequence, she does not change into the clothes of a player but wears beneath her robes "some kind of nun-like dress".[103]

From the beginning of the play the Queen has been presented in opposing terms. She is seen by the townspeople as evil while the countrymen say they have heard that she

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[101] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p. 20. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 378.

[102] N.L.I. Folder 9. Ms., Act 1, sc. 2, folio 2, unnumbered. Bradford: Draft 6, p. 45.

[103] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p. 37. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 391.

is holy. The Tapster tells the tale of her copulation with the unicorn and Septimus denounces this story with an account of the unicorn's chastity. The Queen, herself, says to Nona: "I am not naturally good."[104] She believes herself a sinner. She contemplates the image of St. Octema whose state she desires to attain. St. Octema was a martyr and is said to have owned a unicorn, the symbol of chastity.

The Queen dresses up in a queenly gown at the Prime Minister's bidding; the dress does not fit her very well which points to the role of queen as opposing state to her natural self. The queen hopes that by wearing the mask of queen, she will find the mask of martyr, or in other words, that through the agency of the anti-self she would reach unity of being.

> I will show myself to the angry people as you have bidden me. I am almost certain that I am ready for martyrdom.[105]

As we have seen, from an early age, Yeats endorsed Wilde's belief in the absolute necessity of conceiving of oneself and the subsequent assumption of mask which enabled one to both create and control reality. Yeats observed, as he tells us in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae,* that the conceived image which one projects is antithetical to the actual self. This observation forms the basis of "Ego Dominus Tuus" and is evident in *The Player Queen* drafts (1915-17).Yeats's characters are still conceiving of themselves in accordance with Wilde's theory, but they are doing it antithetically. Decima poses as an uncaring virago because her love for Septimus is so great, while promiscuous Nona wears the mask of virgin. Yeats has the Player Queen sing "The Mask" in which the wearer of the mask refuses to show what lies behind the mask:

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[104] N.L.I Folder 10. Ts., p., 37. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 391.

[105] N.L.I Folder 10. Ts., p., 18. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 376.

Put off that mask of burning gold,
With emerald eyes.
O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise
And yet not cold.[106]

On conclusion of the song Yeats reveals the infidelity of the lover, Septimus, and in so doing demonstrates that what lies behind the mask is its antithesis. Yeats used "The Mask" in the 1908-10 drafts to prove Wilde's contention that the only thing of interest is the mask, "not the reality that lies behind the mask". He is now eminently interested in what he believes to be the reality which lies behind mask namely, the mask's antithesis. This is a creative reversal of Wilde. The reconciliation of opposites in Unity of Being is one of Yeats's great concerns in *A Vision* where he writes: "The individual soul is awakened by a violent oscillation (One thinks of Verlaine oscillating between the church and the brothel) until it sinks in on that Whole where the contraries are united, the antinomies resolved."[107]

Bloom maintains that the propensity of the ephebe to recreate the precursor's work in its antithesis is a strong indication of creative influence. The early drafts of *The Player Queen* constitute an almost exact representation of Wilde's concept of mask while the later drafts expose Yeats's creative revision of Wilde in which his theory is reproduced in its antithesis. The mask is no longer the fulfilment of personality in the outward expression of an internal self but an extraneous imposition through which self-truth or unity of being is achieved.

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[106] N.L.I. Folder 10. Ts., p., 24. Bradford: Draft 29, p. 381 also Draft 16, p. 249.

[107] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 89.

3. *De Profundis*, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and the intricacies of mask

In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1915-1917) Yeats set out his thinking on mask as a coherent metaphysical base for his creative work, a system fundamental to his thinking. He viewed *Per Amica* as a logically worked out religious system and believed that the ordering of his thought had "helped his verse ... had given him a new framework and new patterns".[108] Although Yeats spent much time on metaphysical speculation during this time, he admitted to being ill at ease in his role as abstract thinker: "Having the concrete mind of a poet, I am unhappy when I find myself among abstract things, and yet I need them to set my experiences in order".[109] Yeats states that he "asked no help of books"; in his search for truth, he sought to be empowered by image.[110] Wilde's self-created image in *De Profundis* affected Yeats as no abstract argument could and, in some sense, Wilde became in himself, the precursor text of Yeats's *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

The Wildean origins of Yeats's thought on mask and image are evident in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*; his reflections and critique of the ideas he used in *The Player Queen* (1908-1910) illustrate his belief in this material as his own imaginative property. The influence of Nietzsche comes into play at this point in Yeats's reflections on mask. However, Yeats eventually comes to a concept of mask which in its spiritual involvement alone surpasses the Nietzschean view of mask and is more in line with Oscar Wilde's

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[108] He told his father, J.B. Yeats, that he looked on *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* as "a kind of prose backing to his poetry". *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, p. 625.

[109] W.B. Yeats, *A Critical Edition of Yeats's A Vision (1925)*, eds., George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 129.

[110] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 269. See also *A Vision*, p. 12.

thinking. Yeats's admiration of Wilde's intellect, his facility for seeing Wilde as image and the interest with which he read Wilde's texts strengthen the creative experience of *De Profundis* for Yeats.[111] In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* there is evidence of *De Profundis* as the repressed text on the nature and complexities of mask and image and the implication of tragedy for art. Through the dialectical engagement with Wilde's text Yeats links the dynamic of mask to the power of image and creates a force capable of attaining, at least artistically, that condition of absolute truth and integrity sought by humankind throughout time. I propose in this section to explore these aspects of mask in *De Profundis* and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

Per Amica deals with antithesis, its introductory poem, "Ego Dominus Tuus", shows the antithetical nature of being, as we have already seen, and Yeats's reliance on image to set events in motion: "By the help of an image/ I call to my own opposite".[112] Antithesis becomes a major concern for Yeats at this stage in his thinking on mask. He writes that he first began contemplating the phenomenon during the early composition of *The Player Queen* (1908-1910) which would coincide with his reading of *De Profundis;* he says that antithesis became such an obsession with him that he found it everywhere he looked This preoccupation, however, does not figure very much in his work until the later writings of *The Player Queen* (1915-1917), the poetry of *The Wild Swans* and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* itself. Yeats has, as background to his thinking, his earlier interest in Blake's view of reconciling polarities. Nietzsche's division of things into the Dionysian

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[111] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* pp. 283-287, 308.

[112] W.B. Yeats, "Ego Dominus Tuus", p. 321.

and Appolonian had contributed to Yeats's perception of the conflict-driven nature of being, however, Yeats need have looked no further for the antithetical than the "concrete" image Wilde presented to him in *De Profundis.* Indeed, speaking to Ashton Stevens in 1904, Yeats talks of conflict as integral to Wilde's personality.[113]

We saw earlier how Wilde's theory of the multiplicity of expression inherent in mask elicited an antithetical response from Yeats in the formulation of his theory of mask and the anti-self. We now see Yeats respond to the person of Wilde as an image of antithesis.

Reading Gaol, the surroundings in which Wilde wrote *De Profundis* presented Wilde in an extreme oppositional context to that former state in which Yeats had known him. Observing the conditions under which Wilde projected his image, Yeats must have been forcibly struck by the contrast between them and the charming house in Chelsea where in former times he had dined with Wilde. Wilde in *De Profundis* provided Yeats with a stimulating image of the antithetical nature of being. Not alone had Wilde's physical position utterly changed but he wrote in *De Profundis* that he was actively seeking an antithetical state of being in creating for himself a mask of humility. The mask of humility is totally opposed to Wilde's former mask of blasé assurance in which Yeats noted in *A Vision,* a touch of arrogance and insolence.[114] Wilde composed his latest mask fromall that had been alien to his nature and to his former life:

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[113] "The Poet Talks Drama with Ashton Stevens", *San Francisco Examiner*, Jan. 30, 1904. Appendix, R. F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: a life, vol 1: The Apprentice Mage, 1865-1914,* p. 533.

[114] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 150.

> Failure, disgrace, poverty, sorrow, despair, suffering, tears even ... all these were things of which I was afraid. And as I had determined to know nothing of them, I was forced to take each of them in turn.[115]

These things with which Wilde fabricated his mask were the things most feared by him and Yeats's observation in "Anima Hominis", (1917) that mask is comprised from all the characteristics "the man most lacks and maybe dreads" reads like a description of Wilde's activity. Yeats's further remarks on the hero in this text are also suggestive of a close observation of Wilde in *De Profundis.* Yeats maintains that the saint and hero, working in their own flesh and blood, attain to their anti-self.[116] The comments are persuasive when one thinks that Yeats had always thought of Wilde as hero, whether as leader of a cavalry charge, avenger of youth or failed romantic hero.[117]

Wilde, as Yeats knew, always perceived life in terms of its oppositional elements and Wilde reflects on this outlook in *De Profundis.* Inextricably bound up with his doctrine of masks is his theory of contradictory forces and one of the many forms of expression offered by Wilde is the oppositional mask which expresses the conflicting nature of personality. Wilde's novel, *Dorian Gray,* is based on this principle. The reality of Dorian's evil life is hidden behind his outward appearance of innocent beauty. The beautiful image painted upon the canvas will alter and assume the grotesque mask of his sins, "When the blood crept from its face, and left behind a pallid mask of chalk with leaden eyes, he would keep the glamour of boyhood".[118] Substance and appearance are transposed.

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[115] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 60.

[116] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis" in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, pp. 335.

[117] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies,* p. 131. See also chapter two, p. 3.

[118] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 84.

Wilde discerned the interplay of opposites running through all of life, in the sphere of ethics, metaphysics and art. On the level of metaphysics Wilde believed that the spiritual could be attained through the senses, that the spiritual and the material partake of each other: "The senses, no less than the soul, had their spiritual mysteries to reveal"[119] Wilde observed the play of opposites in human endeavour and pictured humanity ever fooling itself, claiming for its actions reasons diametrically opposed to the reality of their purpose. He illustrates this dilemma in *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* where the hero claims that he acts from motives of love and selflessness while hiding behind the mask of Narcissus:

> He had to choose between living for himself and living for others, and terrible though the task laid upon him undoubtedly was, yet he knew that he must not suffer selfishness to triumph over love.[120]

The basis of Wilde's doctrine of masks is his conviction that "A truth in Art is that whose contradictory is also true".[121]

In *De Profundis* Wilde explains the fundamental relevance of antithesis to self realisation. He poses the balance between opposing forces as the basis of all reality and in his radical interpretation destroys the boundaries between extremities and glimpses the oneness of being. His own predicament of incarceration, Wilde sees as arising out of the play of opposites:

> Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion.[122]

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[119] ibid., p. 101.

[120] Oscar Wilde, "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime", p. 170.

[121] Oscar Wilde, "The Truth of Masks", p. 1173.

[122] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, pp. 33, 34.

Yeats describes in "Ego Dominus Tuus" how Dante found a mask through which he could express all that was most opposed to his nature and which enabled him to fuse with the Daimon who is his anti-self. Yeats is of the opinion that life can be seen as a "struggle with the Daimon who would ever set us to the hardest work among those not impossible". Yeats says of Dante: "he set his chisel to the hardest stone", a phrase which recalls Wilde's situation in *De Profundis.* The encounter with the Daimon, Yeats says, necessitates struggle and suffering: "Being mocked by Guido for his lecherous life/ Derided and deriding, driven out/ To climb that stair and eat that bitter bread". Wilde might well have been Yeats's subject in these lines; it is through conflict with the anti-self, according to Yeats, that the self is disciplined and reality attained.

Yeats's aim in "Ego Dominus Tuus" is to apprehend *reality*; he aims to go beyond "our daily thought ...the line of foam at the edge of a vast luminous sea" .[123] Yeats's emphasis is on struggle or conflict, and while this is generally accepted as a Nietzschean concept, we have seen, difficulty and discipline were implicit in Wilde's construction of a personal mask. Wilde describes his struggle to attain this mask, declaring that:

> Then I must learn how to be happy. Once I knew it, or thought I knew it, by instinct. It was always springtime once in my heart. My temperament was akin to joy. I filled my life to the very brim with wine. Now I am approaching life from a completely new standpoint, and even to conceive happiness is often extremely difficult for me.[124]

Wilde states that happiness is absent from his present self; he realises the necessity for it in order to control his state of being; he implies that he will assume the mask of another self. Yeats knew Wilde when "it was always Springtime in his heart" so that it is easy for him to perceive that the energy with which Wilde creates this mask, antithetical to his

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[123] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Mundi" in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, p. 346.

[124] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 48.

present state, comes, as Yeats puts it: from "some other self". Yeats essentially repeats Wilde's concept in his consideration of "happiness" and mask in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, where he contemplates the vitality of the mask to being. He then reinterprets it and develops Wilde's predicament into a general theory.

> I think all happiness, [Yeats writes] depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other life or a re-birth as something not one's self, something created in a moment and perpetually renewed; in playing a game like that of a child where one loses the infinite pain of self realisation, in a grotesque or solemn painted face put on that one may hide from the terror of judgement [125]

In this extract Yeats follows Wilde closely, accepts his premise but proceeds to a misreading of his intention. Wilde's purpose in donning the mask of happiness is to confound the disabling forces of bitterness and blame which would interfere with the acceptance of his suffering as coming from his self and his final objective in the realisation of his nature. While still taking Wilde's theme of self-realisation, Yeats misreads him, he sees the mask, in this instance, as aiding the evasion of realisation rather than its exposition.

Misreading works in the text as a corrective movement and Bloom maintains that poets are divided from their precursor by an instance of creative revisionism. *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* abounds with such creative interpretations of Wilde's text. Wilde's struggle to achieve his antithetical mask is clearly evident to Yeats and it may be that Nietzsche's thoughts on the necessity of conflict to life feeds in conveniently at this time.

Wilde's theory posits the manifestation of truth in the coincidence of opposing forces in man and in nature. He believes that truth of being is to be found in the total exposition of fulfilled essence. Yeats accepts the fundamental importance of antithetical

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[125] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis" in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, pp. 334. *Journal*, p. 191.

forms to an understanding of truth. His creative "swerve" or misprision occurs in that Yeats's self seeks its opposite, not from what is already existent in its nature, but from outside of itself; he calls on the daimon, who encapsulates all that is most opposed to his self, and in the ensuing conflict between self and anti-self, Yeats discerns the nature of being. Accepting Wilde's original proposition and then diverging from it, Yeats, in the completion of a newly formed concept, "daemonises" himself at the expense of his precursor – enfeebling Wilde to the artistic advantage of himself.

Mask, for Yeats, is a step in the process of attaining realisation and transcendence- a disclosure of ultimate truth. Wilde is concerned with a similar aim. Wilde's endeavour entails the total acceptance of all experience, its expression in a new mode of being or mask which facilitates access to transcendence. A number of ideas of Wildean origin crystalise into, not only, Yeats's concept of how mask is achieved but also into the final purpose he envisages for it. Wilde's perception of the role of tragedy in art and its implications for mask and image are particularly relevant. It is as though Wilde's thought is the 'given' on which Yeats's material is based.

Yeats's interest in tragedy becomes obvious in 1909 when, as we have seen, he was very much preoccupied with the tragic figure of Wilde in *De Profundis* and in his theory on mask. Mask has a deep significance for Yeats's use of tragedy; the similarity between the particular images on which Yeats ponders in this context and the coincidence of his theoretical findings on tragedy with those of Wilde, testify to Wilde's input into Yeats's thoughts.

Wilde contends that art must take account of the vital element of tragedy which is a real force bound up in human achievement and artistic excellence. In *De Profundis*, he

points up the integrity of pain, allowing that it wears no mask and offers no false face. He posits its emotional strength in its continuous oneness and sees it as the informing principle of the profound image. He postulates suffering as mandatory to creation:

> I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art ... Behind joy and laughter there may be a temperament, coarse, hard and callous. But behind sorrow there is always sorrow. Pain, unlike pleasure, wears no mask ... out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star is pain ...[126]

Wilde's dissertation on the elemental importance of suffering finds its echo in Yeats's "Anima Hominis" where he writes that suffering is the key to creation, to art. Yeats claims that the poet finds his creative mask in the suffering of disappointment. He further believes that suffering is so vital to creation that rather than be without it, the poet must actively seek to suffer:

> A poet, when he is growing old, will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision without new bitterness, new disappointment ... Surely, he may think, now that I have found vision and mask I need not suffer any longer ... Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust.[127]

Yeats advocates the use of life's bitter experience to further creativity. Yeats had long expressed his distaste for abstract thought yet in 1915 he was constructing the mask of philosopher for himself. He fashions his mask from his disillusionment with life and disappointment in his former poetic themes: the world "broke faith" with him. Wilde, who loved the world is "broken by the world", he is in prison where he fashions his antithetical mask of humility from his position of defeat. Neither Yeats nor Wilde have done as Yeats proposed the saint did and renounced experience, rather, each is endeavouring to create

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[126] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 54.

[127] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis", p. 342.

from his life's experience the masks necessary to their own purpose. "To deny one's own experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's own life", as Wilde declares.[128]

In response to his personal tragedy Wilde created a mask and forged in himself an artistic image. Wilde maintained that happy art can be but the reflection of an image, its form not having a vital connection with the source from which it has sprung. In sorrow or tragedy outer form is in unison with its source of origin. In *De Profundis* Wilde recalls his prose poem, "The Artist" in which the image of "The sorrow that abideth forever" is wrought from the bronze of the image of "Pleasure that liveth for a moment".[129] While this prose poem delineates Wilde's belief that wholeness is shaped by synthesising antithesis, it also stresses his belief in the fleeting, fragile nature of "happy art" and the lasting power of tragedy as art's material.

Yeats's musings on "Happy Art" as "a hollow image of fulfilled desire"[130] in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and his thoughts on the debt art owes to tragedy and image have been foreshadowed in *De Profundis* and "The Soul of Man under Socialism". Nietzsche's eschewal of mere imitation which Yeats also finds of interest have readily been available to him in Wilde's reflections on the subject. Nietzsche classified the mere imitator as objective man who constantly polished his soul that it might better reflect others' opinions and beliefs. He sees this type as ineffectual and little more than a "reflecting apparatus".[131] Yeats takes up the mirror image in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and describes Saint Francis

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[128] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 43.

[129] ibid. p. 61.

[130] W.B Yeats, "Anima Hominis", p. 329.

[131] Otto Bohlmann, *Yeats and Nietzsche*, p.116. Nietzsche, Good and Evil, p. 207.

and Caesare Borgia as having "made themselves overmastering, creative persons by turning from mirror to meditation upon mask".[132] Nietzsche's *ubermensch* is echoed in Yeats's choice of words. However, the concept was available to him in *De Profundis.*

Wilde depicts Saint Francis in *De Profundis* as meditating on the image of Christ and through his meditation reinventing his life as an individualised work of art, "a poem". Unlike Nietzsche, Wilde's abstract thought is always accompanied by a vivid image which has the immediacy to appeal to the "concrete mind" of the poet. Yeats takes up Wilde's image of Christ in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and discusses the strength which the Middle Ages and Renaissance derived from "the imitation of Christ or of some classic hero"[133] – that is, contemplation on an image. Yeats is deliberating on one of his favourite themes, and one of the few he acknowledged as coming from Wilde. Wilde's exhortation, "Think of what we owe to the imitation of Christ, of what we owe to the imitation of Caesar".[134] Substituting "classic hero" for Caesar's name in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* may be an attempt by Yeats at distancing himself from his precursor. Although, Yeats's knowledge of Wilde's stance in this area would have come also from conversation and from his essay, "The Soul of Man under Socialism", where Wilde points to the suffering Christ of mediaevalism as the ultimate inspirational image for man:

> The ideals that we owe Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely or of the man who resists society absolutely ... Upon the other hand, the terrible truth that pain is a mode through which man may realise himself exercises a wonderful fascination over the world ...[135]

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[132] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis", p. 333.

[133] ibid., p. 333.

[134] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 270. See also Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1085.

[135] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism", p. 1196.

Wilde not only recognises pain and suffering as cut from the same stuff as pleasure but finds that, in some way, suffering is necessary to love and that it allows us a glimpse of spiritual reality. He contends that the energies of being are not circumscribed by logic or by moral expectations but are beyond good and evil. Whatever it is that takes place may be making a worthwhile, even "marvellous" contribution to a future civilisation. He writes in *The Critic as Artist:*

> If we lived long enough to see the results of our actions it may be that those who call themselves good would be sickened with a dull remorse, and those whom the world calls evil stirred by a noble joy.[136]

Wilde declares a democracy of ideas, emotions, actions. His thoughts on the possible equal value of tragedy and joy in human existence contributes to Yeats's imaginative work in this area. It is while writing *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, that treatise so bound up with Wilde's aesthetics. That Yeats posits suffering as being *vital* to creativity and continues to develop the relation between tragedy and mask. Yeats recognises the emotional energy of pain as similar to the emotional energy of pleasure and observes that it is through creating mask in *De Profundis* that Wilde has been able to exult in his sorrow. Yeats believes that for the artist "passion is his only business" and *De Profundis* is awash with passion: humility, love, suffering, pain, joy.[137]

Yeats's creative thought on tragedy and mask progresses from his reading of *De Profundis*: joy becomes possible in every circumstance and it is the mask that makes this a possibility. There is an emotional energy released through contemplation of horror, perhaps it is wonder. As with an abundance of pleasure, this energy propels one to the

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[136] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist", p. 1121.

[137] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis", p. 339.

edge of the abyss, to the rim of the "luminous" shore and transcendent knowledge. However, one can remain truly human and engage with tragedy only through the wearing of a mask of some other self. It seems that this mask allows one the ability to contemplate horror and partake in its energy.

In "The Gyres", written many years after *Per Amica Silentia Lunae,* we can see how Yeats implicates tragedy and mask. It is certain that horror will prevail; the procession of life in its antithetical movement proceeds; we cannot control it; we can only know that it is inevitable and it is a reality. The "We" of the poem assumes the mask of, perhaps, some pagan-like gods and so are enabled to access the tragic joy:

> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy
> We who look on but laugh in tragic joy.[138]

One humanly recoils from the "laughing" but it is possible through wearing a mask of some other self to revel in the sublime and the grotesque.

Yeats arrived at this thinking on the use of mask and tragedy through the circuitous route of influence. His concept derives, as I have demonstrated, in part from the ideas and image of Oscar Wilde. Yet Wilde takes the involvement of tragedy and joy to a further importance. He is vague as to how tragedy advances humanity but he is convinced that it somehow does so and consigns it to the mystery of creation and the unfathomable workings of the Creator. Indeed, Wilde perceives access to a transcendent knowledge of the spiritual through an equal acknowledgement of joy and pain:

> He who can look at the loveliness of the world and share its sorrow, and realise something of the wonder of both, is in immediate contact with divine things, and has got as near to God's secret as anyone can get.

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[138] W.B. Yeats, "The Gyres", *Yeats's Poems,* p. 411.

Wilde believes that one must accept oneself under all of one's guises and one must have humility: "the frank acceptance of all experience". In *De Profundis* he recalls the moment when he realised that he had lost everything and was entirely destitute but rather than surrender himself to his material circumstances, he used his tragedy to create a mask of humility and acceptance. It is through this artistic mask that Wilde finds it possible to negotiate his tragedy. The moment of revelation that Wilde describes was an instant of intense emotional pain in which he reached his "soul in its ultimate essence".[139] Yeats's apprehension of the "ultimate essence of soul" is achieved initially by means uncannily similar to Wilde's. He believes that the acceptance of all experience is necessary to the revelation of truth and writes:

> We must not make a false faith by hiding from our thoughts the cause of doubt, for faith is the highest achievement of the human intellect, the only gift man can make to God, and therefore it must be offered in sincerity. Neither must we create , by hiding ugliness, a false beauty as our offering to the world.[140]

Yeats seems to be repeating Wilde; he describes in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* as essential to his philosophical outlook the very type of moment which Wilde has experienced in *De Profundis*. Yeats explains that only through pain and the acceptance of all we fear, "all imaginative pangs", can we be receptive to the daimon, our anti-self. Yeats claims that the self in itself is powerless, but that in meeting the anti-self we are brought to a moment of crisis wherein it is possible not only to realise the soul's essence but to access some

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[139] "I had lost my name, my position ,my happiness, my freedom, my wealth. I was a prisoner and a pauper. But I still had my children left. Suddenly they were taken away from me by the law. It was a blow so appalling that I did not know what to do, so I flung myself on my knees, and bowed my head, and wept, and said, "The body of a child is as the body of the Lord: I am not worthy of either". That moment seemed to save me. I saw then that the only thing for me was to accept everything. Since then – curious as it will no doubt sound – I have been happier. It was of course my soul in its ultimate essence that I had reached. Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p. 71.

[140] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Hominis", p. 332.

intimation of the meaning and nature of existence. The crisis Yeats is speaking about is a moment of emotional intensity; he is speaking about passion and whether experienced through pleasure or pain it necessitates the donning of a mask and admits one to a vision of reality. Intense emotion is the threshold to another realm of experience and an exposition of the fullness of being. Yeats writes:

> I know now that revelation is from the self but from that age-long memoried self; ... genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind. There are, indeed, personifying spirits that we had best call but Gates and Gate-keepers, because through their dramatic power they bring our souls to crisis, to Mask and Image, caring not a straw whether we be Juliet going to her wedding, or Cleopatra to her death; for in their eyes nothing has weight but passion ... They have but one purpose, to bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle he may confront without despair.[141]

Yeats sees moments of passionate intensity, whether incurred through pain or pleasure, to which certain ones have been brought by union with daimon, as moments of great difficulty and conflict when one must adopt the mask and from where it is possible to evolve into image. These moments are thresholds, liminal spaces of revelation of mystery and understanding and are the final importance of mask. This is the moment of emotional crisis, and the breaking point which Wilde experienced and described in *De Profundis.*

In "Anima Mundi" Yeats delineates the condition of the soul in after-life. While much of Yeats's thinking here relies on his mystical learning and on the philosophy of Henry More, and in part Blake, his indebtedness to Wilde is instanced in the fundamental importance of mask and antithetical forces to his theories of transcendence. "There are two realities," Yeats explains, "the terrestrial and the condition of fire. All power is from the terrestrial condition, for there all opposites meet and there only is the extreme of choice possible, full freedom". Evil also exists in this condition as the "strain" of opposites. Yeats

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[141] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 272.

describes each Daimon as being drawn to the man or to the nation to which it most differs, for example, to the wealthy, supposedly "gold loving" Jews, the Daimon brings the incarnation of Christ. The Daimon, also, "brings man, again and again to the place of choice, heightening temptation that the choice might be as final as possible ..." The Daimon furnishes man with the means of adopting mask.

Yeats exalts the concept of mask into the means whereby the last condition is accessed by the soul. He says that we may pray to that last condition by any name "not as thing or thought" "most prayer calls it man or woman or child" and Yeats explains "the mask plucked from the oak-tree is but my imagination of rhythmic body". Yeats sees rhythmic body as that state of being in which the soul passes into the condition of Fire, which is "all music and all rest", and into the presence of the "hidden altar" of the "last condition".[142] Yeats will develop this concept in his later use of the image of the dancer.[143] Yeats made mask the powerful means of imaginative transit from a limited self to fullness of being.

In *De Profundis,* Wilde, depicts mask as a means of reaching perfection of nature, through the exploitation of its paradoxes. He also viewed sorrow as the sublime force illuminating mask. In "Anima Hominis", Yeats sees mask as the means of attaining all that which is most opposed to the self, and in the conflict of self and anti-self, the exposition of truth. Yeats's conception of masks was of "false faces": they were of the other - a means of completion, of strengthening the self by challenging its opposite. Wilde's mask

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[142] W.B. Yeats, "Anima Mundi", pp. 356, 362, 361, 364.

[143] Oscar Wilde refers to "rhythmic body" and its association with the dancer in "The Critic as Artist". "It is not merely in art that the body is the soul. In every sphere of life form is the beginning of things. The

expresses the multifariousness of essence and enables self realisation through the expression of experience, not in the form of crude reaction but through the controlling medium of artificial mask. Wilde's mask empowers the subject in its projection of a chosen image and it allows for the total realisation of being and ultimate control of personal truth. Through the agency of mask Yeats envisages the realisation of being and in the adoption of mask the possibilities of image. Yeats's mask takes one to the outer limits of human experience and facilitates a glimpse beyond.

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rhythmic harmonious gestures of dancing convey, Plato tells us, both rhythm and harmony into the mind." p. 1148.

Chapter Five
(1916 – 1921)
"Drama as personal as a lyric"
Dance, desire and the composite image

Wilde's influence on *The Player Queen* extends in directions other than mask. There are some striking resemblances between *The Player Queen* and Wilde's play, *Salomé*. This influence is particularly noticeable in the near complete draft of *The Player Queen* (1910). Many of the elements found in Salomé - voice of prophesy, dance, promise and desire - appear in this draft.

In Wilde's play we are first introduced to the prophet, Iokaanan, by the sound of his voice coming from within a cistern. Decima is introduced to us singing from within her hiding place - a large vat hung upon a wall. This vat appears in many of the drafts and is described as such by Yeats, except where he writes in the introduction to Act 1, Sc. 2: "Palace of Surrico, lit by a great window to R. At back a large fountain with huge ornamental cistern or vat above ..."[1] Decima's voice is heard by the soldiers, to whom the Prime minister says: "I'll have no tales of prophesying voices."[2] Use of the word "cistern" and Yeats's association of prophesying with the voice coming from within it suggests that Yeats was not unaware of his debt to Salomé.

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[1] N.L.I..folder 1. Act 1, scene 2, folio one (unnumbered). Bradford: Draft 16, p. 205.
As in the previous chapter, I will number all quotes from the mss. and tss. of *The Player Queen* according to both the N.L.I. (Ms. 8764) and Bradford system.

[2] N.L.I. Folder 1. Act 1, sc. 2, p. 12. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 196.

Wilde's play depends upon a promise. The promise which Decima seeks in *The Player Queen* is not so grim, but her wilful insistence recalls the Princess Salomé. Decima tries to exact two promises from Septimus. She desires Septimus to make a play for her "about the Queen of Sheba or Herodias, or somebody of that kind."[3] This draft ends with another mention of Herodias, the mother of Salomé, the only one of Yeats's plays in which she is mentioned.

The second promise which Decima desires to exact from Septimus is that he will "turn this woman [Nona] out of the company and to drive her away."[4] This desire is similar to, if not so extreme as, Salomé's. Decima seeks to destroy Nona, because of her own jealousy and her desire for Septimus. Salomé sought the death of Iokaanan because of frustrated desire.

There is even a dance of sorts in this draft and although it is not Salomé's dance of the seven veils, there is mention of the Queen wrapping herself in a "golden veil".[5] Decima dances upon the dress of Noah's wife, "dancing her scorn".[6] Salomé's dance, while danced in scorn, is a more sensuous affair.

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[3] N.L.I. Folder 1. Act 1, sc. 2, p. 24. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 202.

[4] N.L.I. Folder 1. Act 11, sc. 1, p. 12. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 224.

[5] N.L.I. Folder 1. Unnumbered page before p. 3. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 241.

[6] N.L.I. Folder 1. Act 1, sc. 2, p. 28. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 204.

There are many refrains threaded through Salomé as Wilde explains that he wanted the play to sound like a piece of music. Yeats uses a refrain in *The Player Queen*, "Her lips have never given kisses or drunk wine".[7]

In the later drafts of *The Player Queen* (1915-1917), Yeats's treatment of these similarities to *Salomé* indicates his progression away from the direct reproduction of Wilde in the earlier texts. He removes the connecting imagery between Wilde's play and *The Player Queen*: Decima no longer hides in a cistern nor is there any mention of veils. The concepts taken from Salomé remain but they have become unrecognisable as having originated with Wilde. The suggested prophecy has become explicit in the person of an actual prophet - the Old Beggarman; the dance has been integrated into Yeats's new theme of the unity of opposites - the players in the guise of animals dance before Decima that she might select from them a sexual partner; Decima still seeks Septimus' promise that he will abandon Nona; none of the refrains remain. These traces of *Salomé* represent Yeats's repression of Wilde's text. Wilde's play preoccupied him since 1905 and it would continue to be an energetic force within his creativity.

In chapter three I discussed the influence of Wilde's *Salomé* on Yeats's creative work in relation to his use of dramatic devices, sensuality, characterisation, symbols and metaphysics. In this chapter I will look at how Yeats developed these qualities and concepts in his work as seen in his *Four Plays for Dancers: At the Hawk's Well, The Only Jealousy of Emer, The Dreaming of the Bones* and *Calvary.* One of Yeats's finest images and perhaps the

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[7] N.L.I. Folder 1. Act 111, sc. 2, p. 20. Bradford: Draft 16, p. 24.

most effective symbol he used to express his metaphysical thought, is the dancer. The dance, a central symbol of Wilde's Salomé, made a tentative appearance in Yeats's three early plays, *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre* and I will be referring to these plays in this chapter. I will be showing that in his *Four Plays for Dancers* Yeats developed the image of dance within the context of the elements he found in Wilde's play, using one in conjunction with the other, so that together they form a substantial and distinctive creative unit or pattern within his imaginative work.

One of Yeats's major themes, human longing for completion or unappeasable desire, is integral to his *Four Plays for Dancers.* This theme was also of interest to Oscar Wilde. In showing how Wilde affected Yeats's thought in this area I will refer to Wilde's *Salomé* and his prose poem, "The Doer of Good" and once again, to Yeats's early revisions of *The Shadowy Waters*, *On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*.

The intellectual concepts, emotional content, symbolic images and dramatic devices which Yeats found in Wilde's creative work contribute to the expression and the fabric of his developing metaphysical position as shall be seen in the *Four Plays for Dancers.* In section one of this chapter I will discuss Yeats's interest in dance and his influences in this area, and show that the dance in Wilde's *Salomé* is his main source for the image of dance in his creative work. In section two I will examine Yeats's and Wilde's interest in the theme of unfulfilled desire and suggest areas where Yeats may have benefited from Wilde's thinking. In section three I will show Yeats's creative use of Wilde's symbols and ideas in expressing his developing philosophy in his *Four Plays for Dancers.*

1. Yeats, Dance and Wilde's *Salomé*

Dance becomes an increasingly important and complex image in Yeats's creative work and Wilde's *Salomé* provides him with his definitive model for the dancer. Sylvia Ellis, in her book, *Yeats and the Dancer,*[8] alludes to the rich sources of inspiration available to Yeats for his depiction of dance in the '90s. Ellis demonstrates the proliferation of dance at this time and cites many literary versions of *Salomé* which would have been in the public domain.

While this would have provided a background conducive to an awareness of dance, Yeats had no interest in dance for its own sake.[9] His use of dance had always an ulterior motive; he exploited the image of dance to metaphysical or illustrative ends. His interest lay in the dance of Wilde's Salomé because he valued its imagistic power and the thought implicit in this image.

Ellis assumes, in many cases quite rightly, that Yeats either read or was, at least, aware of many of the versions of *Salomé*. Certainly, he was acquainted with Flaubert's *La Tentation de Sainte Antoine*[10] and Huysmann's *A Rebours*;[11] he referred to Heine's *Atta*

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[8] Sylvia Ellis, "The Figure of the Dancer: Salome" in *The Plays of W.B. Yeats and the Dancer,* pp. 1-85.

[9] His daughter, Anne Yeats, said that while her father learnt to dance as a young man, his interest in dance was confined to the use he made of it in his plays. *Personal Communication* (April 13, 1999). Yeats noted, crossed out and later published the following sentence: "I know ~~nothing about dancing~~ ..." N.L.I. Ms. 8773, Pref., *Four Plays for Dancers* in *At the Hawkswell,* p. 1.

[10] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed. Alan Wade, p. 562

[11] E. Davis, *Yeats's Early Contacts with French Poetry* (Pretoria: Folcroft Press, 1970), pp. 29, 30.

Troll[12] in connection with Wilde's source for *Salomé* and was aware of Moreau's paintings of the Biblical princess.[13] However, despite Ellis's efforts to connect Yeats with models for his dance, it is only in regard to Wilde's *Salomé* that she establishes strong, direct links to Yeats's writing. She identifies some minor links in two other instances, Arthur Symons' poem, "The Daughters of Herodias"[14] and Mallarmé's poem, "Herodiade".[15] Although, Ellis shows Yeats's knowledge of Mallarmé's poem, the link which she makes between it and Yeats's work is slight, while Symons' poem is largely derived from Wilde's *Salomé*.

Music Halls and dance theatres enjoyed immense popularity at this time as ballet, free dance and speciality routines had their own followers. Artists like Arthur Symons, a lover of the ballet, frequented the Alhambra and Empire Music Halls in London and the Moulin Rouge in Paris. Symons' enthusiasm for dance finds full expression in his collection of poetry, *London Nights* (1895), published in the same year that Yeats moved into lodgings with him. Yeats was drawn into the maelstrom of dance by his friend whose obsessive delight in dance extended to his love of the dancers. Many of the members of the Rhymers'

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[12] W.B. Yeats, "Preface to 87", May 30, 1935 (*Full Moon in March*) in *Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, pp. 1310, 1311.

[13] Anna MacBride White and A.W. Jeffares eds. *The Gonne Yeats Letters*, p. 198 and note 3 to letter 147, p. 494.

[14] Arthur Symons, "The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias" in *Images of Good and Evil* (London: Heinenann, 1899), pp. 42-48.

[15] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Herodiade" in *The Savoy No. 8* (Dec. 1896), trans. Arthur Symons (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896), pp. 67, 68.

Club were also deeply interested in the dancers and dance. Dance was appreciated for its intrinsic theatrical excitement, its visual form, its grace and sensuality.

Apart from the sensual pleasure of dance, it had for some a deeper significance. The Rev. Stewart Headlam,[16] founder of the Church and Stage Guild who often joined the Rhymers in the Crown, believed that dance was sacred and he wanted to publicize it as a moral and religious activity. He grounded much of his thinking about dance on the liturgies of the primitive church and saw dancing as closely associated with the Divinity.[17] This religious connection with dance influences some of Symons' poems. The association of dance with sacredness was a concept familiar to Yeats not only through his immediate circle but also through his interest in the Symbolists.

The Symbolists accorded an important position to dance in their idea of art, it was highly regarded for its immediate spectacle and also for its aesthetic significance. They looked on it as the physical form of the creative idea or "the representation of the unseen by the visible".[18] Mallarmé described the dancer as poetic metaphor "dégagé de tout appareil du scribe".[19] The symbolists understood the dancer as writing with her body, identifying her

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[16] Rev. Stewart Headlam, Fabian Socialist and high-principled Christian, founder of the Church and Stage Guild (1879). He supplied half of Wilde's bail (May 7, 1895) and on his release from jail, met and gave him refuge to him in his home (May 19, 1897). Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: a life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 77. Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* pp. 438, 495.

[17] T.H. Gibbon, "The Reverend Stewart Headlam and the emblematic Dancer: 1877-1894" in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 5, (1965), p. 332.

[18] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, p. 4.

[19] Sylvia Ellis, *The Plays of W.B. Yeats and the Dancer*, p. 6.

with both form and meaning. Mallarmé, like Yeats, was impressed by the art of the American music hall dancer, Loïe Fuller and wrote an article in which he admired the release of passionate spirit through the artificial medium of Fuller's dance.[20] Loïe Fuller was a freestyle self-taught dancer and in 1892 she was the main attraction at the Follies Bergères and the favourite dancer of the Symbolists. Yeats believed her the epitome of the poetic image. Her free dance style depended solely upon her own body without the construction of convention or dependence on scenery and music for coherence. The dance and dancer were interdependent, the dance existed as art form in its execution, the artist integrally bound up with her art. Loie Fuller was the first dancer to perform on stage the dance of Salomé. She included it in her repetoire at the Comédie Parisienne, Paris in 1895, two years after the French publication of Wilde's *Salomé*.

Symons did not particularly admire Fuller's dancing. Writing in *Studies in the Arts*, his awareness of the significance of dance is evident: "nothing is stated, there is no intrusion of words used for the irrelevant purpose of describing; a world rises high before one, the picture lasts only long enough to have been there in, and the dancer with her gesture, all pure symbol evokes, from her mere beautiful motion, all that one need ever know of event. There before you, she exists in harmonious life, and her rhythm reveals to you the soul of her ... being".[21] Symons' enthusiasm and erudition provided Yeats with a rich context for his

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[20] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Considerations sur l'Art du Ballet de la Loie Fuller" in *The National Observer* (Apr. 13, 1893).

[21] Arthur Symons, *Studies in the Seven Arts* (1906; rpt., London: Martin Secker, 1924), p. 246.

interest in dance; so insightful is Symons' perception of dance that Ian Fletcher erroneously attributes Yeats's interest in *Salomé* solely to Symons' poem, "The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias". Fletcher writes: "But it is in turn through this poem that Salomé, and all that accompanies her, enters Yeats'own work."[22] Fletcher ignores the fact that the *Salomé* narrative and the character of Salomé and the dancers in Symons' poems are deeply indebted to Wilde's play. Symons' dancers "desire love and the desire of men". The dancers' active desire for love and to be desired - as opposed to the motives of revenge or death is peculiar to the *Salomé* created by Wilde. Symons' daughters of Herodias also emulate Wilde's *Salomé* in their disregard for the plight of their lover inherent in their desire to be loved. The claim of Wilde's *Salomé* that "the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death" is implied in Symons' lines:

> It is not well that they should suffer wrong;
> For beauty is still beauty, though it slay,
> And love is love, although it loves to death.[23]

Symons, like Wilde, depicts the total self absorption of the dancers, their awareness of the sexual power inherent in innocence. Symons' lines – "The swift eyes of men are made to be mirrors" - recall the covetous looking of Wilde's characters. The conjunction of innocence and cruelty in Symons' poem, the detatchment of the dancers and their confident sexual power had already been made available to Yeats, as it had been to Symons himself, in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*.

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[22] Ian Fletcher, "Explorations and Recoveries 11: Symons, Yeats and the Demonic Dance" in *The London Magazine: a monthly review of literature*, vol. 7, no. 6 (June, 1960), ed. John Lehmann, p. 58.

[23] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 604.

Much is made of Wilde's minimalist stage directions concerning the dance. There is no need, however, to go beyond Wilde's text to discern the intended shape of Salomé's dance. While Symons' Herod "labours to master his still thirsting lips" when Salomé completes her dance, in Wilde's play the dance fully satisfies the voyeuristic Herod.

Sylvia Ellis states that, "in his response to the dance Herod gives no inkling of its nature: he is simply pleased to have scored a point against Herodias who had forbidden Salomé to dance at all."[24] This is somewhat disingenuous. From the start of the play we are aware of Herod's desire for Salomé: she leaves the feast to escape the gaze of his eyes. His desire is symbolised by his constant looking at her.[25] Herod's infatuation with Salomé develops as he asks her to share with him the sensuous pleasures of eating and drinking. The sexual symbolism is apparent as Herod tells Salomé to "bite but a little of this fruit and then I will eat what is left". He also asks her to drink a little of his wine. He looks all the while at Salomé and as he devours her with his eyes, he asks her not just to dance but emphatically to "dance for me".

Three times he implores Salomé to dance but as Iokanaan rejected her, she rejects Herod's entreaties. As is the case with Salomé, rejection increases his desire. But pretending

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[24] Sylvia Ellis, *The Plays of W.B.Yeats and the Dancer*, p. 70.

[25] Laura Mulvey discusses Freud's interpretation of the scopophilic gaze. This discussion has some significance for Herod's obsession with Salomé. Mulvey writes: "Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instants of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones ... and associated [it] with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze". Mulvey continues: "Fetishistic scopophilia – building up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself". Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and the Cinema", eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: an Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 587, 591.

indifference to Salomé's rebuttal, he engages with Herodias in an interlude of bickering about sterility until, at last, his desire becomes more urgent and turning back to Salomé, he swears – "By my life, by my crown, by my gods"[26] - impassioned words, hardly those of a man just looking "to score a point". His sexual desperation implies the nature of the dance he wishes Salomé to perform and Herodias is aware of this: "I will not have her dance while you look at her in this fashion". Herod's climax is also the climactic point of the symbolic "looking" which has been in evidence from the beginning of the play. Wilde carefully maps the stages in Herod's escalating desire, increasing its urgency until the intensity of his passion brings him to make his reckless oath. Herod's oath is a measure of the extremity of his desire, which can only find resolution in Salomé's dance. His last words to Salomé before the dance indicate his personal desire - "Dance, Salomé, dance for me". When the dance ends Herod says, "She has danced for me", and is satisfied. He claims to "pay[s] the dancers well" but he will pay Salomé "royally". He is affectionate and indulgent towards her and no longer asks her to eat of his fruit and drink of his wine since he is replete and eager to spoil or pamper her: "Surely Yes, in a silver charger, she is charming, is she not? What is it you would have in a silver charger, O sweet and fair Salomé?"[27] Contrary to Ellis's remarks, Herod's response to the dance gives rather more than an "inkling of its nature".

While Herod's response indicates the erotic nature of Salomé's dance, the attitude of Salomé indicates its chilling reserve. Salomé dances with cold purpose, her mind divided

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[26] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, pp. 593, 597, 598.

[27] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, pp. 600.

from her movements. Incorporated in the dance is disembodied passion and the promise of destruction. The dancer is uncommitted; she dances before Herod intent upon her own objective. Her perverse request of Herod reveals the divided nature of her seamless dance.

Although Yeats's interest in dance dates from the 1890s, he does not make use of an actual sensual dance until *At the Hawk's Well.* While dancing featured in his earlier poems and plays it had been as a fairly conventional motif, often representing gaiety and associated with the fairy world. In the *Countess Cathleen* there is dancing "on the level shore"[28] and the dancers in "The Fiddler of Dooney"(1892) " dance like a wave of the sea".[29] The fairy child in Yeats's play, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894)[30] performs a more sinister dance. Through the dance she spreads her power - no mortal can come into or pass by the areas where she has danced. It is an empowering action but unlike the dance which will later appear in Yeats's work it is neither menacingly cold, sensually enticing nor philosophically charged. Yeats's interest in the alluring, seductive dance of Salomé, is not evident until his 1905 and 1906 revisions of the three plays - *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre*. There is no actual dance in any of these three plays but there are indications in language and movement which suggest that a reimagining of the Salomé-type dance is in process in Yeats's creative imagination. The earliest incidence occurs in *The Shadowy Waters* in the

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[28] W.B. Yeats, *The Countess Cathleen* in *The Variorium Edition of the Plays of W.B Yeats*, p. 57.

[29] W.B. Yeats, "The Fiddler of Dooney" in *Yeats's Poems* ed. and annotated by A. Norman Jeffares with an appendix by Warwick Gould (1989; Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997), p. 109.

[30] W.B. Yeats, *The Land of Heart's Desire* (London: Fischer Unwin, 1894).

1905 revisionary draft where the following speech occurs:

> ... and she and I
> Shall light upon a place in the world's core
> Where passion grows to be a changeless thing
> Like charmed apples made of chrysophar
> Or chrysoberyl, or beryl, or chrysolide,
> And there in juggleries of sight and sense
> Become one movement, energy, delight,
> Until the overburthened moon is dead.[31]

Yeats deletes this passage from the final text. "One movement, energy, delight" - the language passes easily from a description of love making to the relation between dancer and dance. The image represents a longed for transcendent pleasure and the fulfilment of earthly desire, and as such is the first trace of dance as metaphor for existential completeness in Yeats's work.

In December 1905, in his final rewrite of *On Baile's Strand*, Yeats introduced three new characters, three women Musicians into his play. Their chief function was to take part in the performance of the oath taking ritual. This ceremony became the centre piece of the play. This major change in the play's structure bears many echoes of *Salomé,* as we have already seen, including the oath itself, the song which the women sing and there is even a vague echo of dance. Ritual implies stylised movement and the suggestion of dance-like movement in the ritual sequence was strong enough for The Festival Theatre Cambridge to invite Ninette de Valois to choreograph movements for it in its production of 1927.[32]

Yeats's interest in movement on stage takes on the sensual dimensions of the Salomé

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[31] W.B. Yeats, *The Shadowy Waters* in *Poems 1899-1905*, p. 28.

[32] Ninette *DeValois, Come Dance With Me: a memoir* (London: Dance Books, 1973), p. 88.

dance in his revision of *Deirdre* where he suggests Deirdre's seductive movements in an early draft of the finished version:

> And was her life in the hazard that time when half a dozen years ago she put you at enmity with him, she who was all but his wife fixing her love upon you, staring into your eyes, crouched at your feet filling your imagination with the live movements of her body till she had set you at enmity with the king, with your duty and drawn you away.[33]

The "live movements of her body" seduced Naoise, filling him with desire. Holloway's description of Deirdre's actions (1906) show that Yeats was interested in gesture as part of the total effect of his play. Yeats took a keen and creative role in the rehearsal and production of his plays so his leading lady's movements on stage would have been overseen by him at rehearsal. Holloway writes of Florence Darragh's portrayal of Deirdre:

> Some of her movements were delicious - her description of how she would set out the body of her dead lover I thought particularly so. Here her gestures were exquisitely appropriate. The way she extended her two hands in front of her with entwined thumbs to express the laying out of her lover's feet was perfectly lovely in conception.[34]

Salomé danced as she awaited possession of her beloved's severed head. Deirdre's "delicious" movements occur as she awaits possession of Naoise's "dead face". Deirdre performs the mime in preparation for her betrothal bed - the shared grave with Naoise. The aspiration is symbolist but its circumstances, the stylised movement, the description of Naoise in "the dead face", her accompanying speech in which she claims her right to a "first gift" from the king, her would-be lover and the placing of this event just prior to her macabre union with her dead lover strongly suggest Wilde's *Salomé*. This moment in Yeats's play vibrates with the repressed dance. It is as if Yeats, aware of the similarity between his play

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[33] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre* (Unsorted mss. and tss. entitled "14 other pp. of t.s. draft"), p. 12[r].

[34] Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre*, p. 75.

and Wilde's, consciously avoided a tell tale dance.

Yeats's early interest and flirtation with dance developed through *The Player Queen* (1908 -1917) and at last, in 1916 he wrote the first of his plays in which dance featured as an integral part of the play, *At the Hawk's Well,* the first of his *Four Plays for Dancers.*

2: Yeats, Wilde and the Nature of Desire

Yeats's aesthetic interest in desire is apparent as early as 1886 when he depicts it in "The Wanderings of Oisin" as images of "the hornless deer" being pursued by the "phantom hound".[35] Through his creative involvement with Wilde the phenomenon of desire will develop into a crucial component of his philosophical system.

In *The Critic as Artist* Wilde writes of the origins of the unappeasable nature of desire explaining that the imagination, replete with the imaginings and collective soul of the race, fills us with "impossible desire and makes us follow what we know we cannot gain".[36] Some years later (1917) Yeats offers a similar explanation of the source of extreme desire. He claims in "Anima Mundi" that "the dead living in their memories are ... the source of all that we call instinct, and it is their love and their desire, all unknowing, that make us drive beyond

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[35] ed., A.N. Jeffares, *Yeats's Poems*, p. 9. See also W.B. Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1899), pp. 73, 74.

[36] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist", p. 1138.

our reason".[37] Yeats was convinced of the primal force of human desire and the impossibility of its appeasal. Crucial to Yeats's thinking was his reading of Wilde's prose poem, "The Doer of Good" which he first heard in March 1894. "The Doer of Good" is considered the precursor text of Yeats's play, *Calvary*, and is the only text of Wilde's which is generally acknowledged by scholars as having a direct influence on Yeats's work. Yeats records Wilde's poem in *Autobiographies,* as he first heard it:

> Christ came from a white plain to a purple city, and as he passed through the first street He heard voices overhead, and saw a young man lying drunk upon a window-sill. "Why do you waste your soul in drunkenness?" He said, "Lord, I was a leper and You healed me, what else can I do?" A little further through the town He saw a young man following a harlot, and said, "Why do you dissolve your soul in debauchery?" and the young man answered, "Lord, I was blind, and You healed me, what else can I do?" At last in the middle of the city He saw an old man crouching, weeping upon the ground, and when he asked why he wept, the old man answered, "Lord, I was dead, and You raised me into life, what else can I do but weep?[38]

Yeats found Wilde's text compelling and thought that it succeeded in showing the emptiness one feels when desire seems to have been satisfied: "It puts into almost as few as possible words a melancholy that comes upon a man at the moment of triumph, the only moment when a man without dreading some secret bias, envy, disappointment, jealousy, can ask himself what is the value of life."[39] This residual yearning which lingers in the wake of success re-echoes in Yeats's assertion in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* that there is no possible life which can fulfil our desires.[40]

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[37] W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, p. 359.

[38] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 286.

[39] W.B. Yeats, Introduction *The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales 111* by Oscar Wilde, p. 150.

[40] W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, p. 341.

But long before he made this statement in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* Wilde's concept of desire appeared in his creative work. Yeats's early play, *The Shadowy Waters,* deals with unappeasable desire and human longing for fulfilment. However, although Yeats was writing *The Shadowy Waters* from 1883, it was not until the drafts of 1894-1895 that he incorporated into the play the concept of the inadequacy of mortal beauty and a longing for lasting passion. In the drafts of August 1896 and Spring 1897 this notion is enlarged in Forgael's vision of limitless, but hopeless, desire.[41]

In *Deirdre* (1906) Yeats uses the kiss to demonstrate the desperate longing for appeasement of human desire. The musicians sing:

> Love is an immoderate thing ...
> Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
>
> All that mingling of her breath,
> When love-longing is but drought
> For the things come after death? [42]

It is in 1905 in *The Shadowy Waters* that Yeats fully illustrates the sentiments in Wilde's prose poem, showing the dissatisfaction which accompanies the seeming fulfilment of desire:

> If you will give me all your mind awhile -
> All, all, the very bottom of the bowl -
> I'll show you that I am made differently,
> That nothing can amend it but these waters,
> Where I am rid of life - the events of the world -
> What do you call it? - that old promise-breaker,
> The cozening fortune teller that comes whispering,
>
> "You will have all you have wished for when you have earned
> Land for your children or money in a pot."
> And when we have it we are no happier,

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[41] Michael J. Sidnell, George P. Mayhew and David R. Clark, *Druid Craft: the writing of The Shadowy Waters,* Note 4, p. 323.

[42] W.B. Yeats, *Deirdre*, *Abbey Acting Script,* p. 26.

> Because of that old draught under the door,
> Or creaky shoes. And at the end of all
> We have been no better off than Seaghan the fool,
> That never did a hand's turn.[43]

Yeats retells Wilde's message that our expectations lead us to believe that once we have achieved our ambition we will be happy and satisfied but "when we have it we are no happier". There is always something to detract from achievement. This passage appears nowhere in Yeats's early manuscripts of *The Shadowy Waters* nor in the later published versions; it may be that his attendance at *Salomé* that year (1905) rekindled his thoughts on Wilde's ideas on the nature of desire. Salomé, whose extreme desire has led her to have her lover killed that she might possess him, illustrates this hopeless human compulsion. Awaiting the head to be severed she declares:

> There is no sound, I hear nothing. Why does he not cry out, this man? Ah! If any man sought to kill me, I would struggle, I would not suffer. Strike, strike, Namaan, strike I tell you ... Hither ye soldiers get ye down into this cistern and bring me the head of this man. Tetrarch, Tetrarch command your soldiers that they bring me the head of Iokanaan.[44]

So great is Salomé's passion that she does not even wait for the executioner to fully emerge from the cistern with the severed head upon the silver charger but "seizes" it in a frenzy of excitement and expectation. In a mixture of triumph and love, she speaks to the head:"Ah! Thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now". The kiss signifies fulfilment of desire but Salomé becomes aware that the head is not alive: "I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my

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[43] W.B. Yeats, *Poems 1899-1905*, p. 21.

[44] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 603.

desire".[45] At this point in the play, Salomé illustrates the inadequacy of human fulfilment. She has gained what she wants but she is not satisfied.

In his *Four Plays for Dancers* Yeats explores the unappeasable nature of desire. In his play, *At the Hawk's Well,* Yeats conveys a desire every bit as obsessive as Salomé's: Cuchulain desires both hawk and dancer, "Of those things not impossible the most difficult".[46] Cuchulain not only desires hawk and dancer but seeks mastery over them, a will to power through possession; he says of the hawk: "Could I but find a means to bring it down/ I'd hood it".[47] Like Salome, he looks for control and power – mastery and triumph in possession. There is no heed taken of any will on the part of the object of desire. Cuchulain addresses the dancer: "Run where you will,/Grey bird, you shall be perched upon my wrist".[48] In an earlier version Cuchulain advises the dancer that this shall be the case: "Whether you will or no".[49] Yeats does not depict an artistic resolution to human imperfection in any of the *Four Plays for Dancers.* The persistence and extremity of *Salomé's* desire for Iokanaan reflects unrequited, human longing. Salomé's desire suggests her capacity for its fulfilment, and by its fulfilment her completion. The concept of implacable desire illustrated the

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[45] ibid., p. 604.

[46] W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, pp. 332, 336.

[47] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawkswell* in *Selected Plays,* ed. Richard Allen Cave (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 119.

[48] ibid., p. 120.

[49] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawkswell*. N.L.I., Ms. 8773(3), Fragment Typescript of Second Version, chron. p. 3.

incompleteness of the human condition for Wilde and Yeats. Wilde sees the way to total realisation of being in the powerful relation of the carnal and spiritual. He believes that the human is made up of body and soul and sees them as related and interdependent. He posited an integrated model of being in which spiritual and physical properties are of equal importance in realising the potential perfection of being. He believed that a new apprehension of being was possible through the fusion of opposing forces and "no one," Richard Ellmann writes, "had so clearly evoked the antinomies for Yeats as Wilde did".[50] Wilde's commendation that the only thing to do with temptation is to give into it, reflects his philosophy on the total expression of self. Wilde believed that there were many modes of expression through which one could realise oneself, that it was possible for one to be constantly becoming and reconstructing oneself. He did not, however, see this as a totally arbitrary process, rather it depended on one's imagination and one's critical faculty. His theory is both fluid and static. He affirms a belief in essence and posits a collective soul through which one accesses the inherited imagination of one's race. At the same time, he classes essence as change and growth. The individual soul partakes of the collective and selects through the individual critical faculty those passions which coincide with his/her personality and desire. This imaginative source offers many opposing ways of being. Wilde writes:

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[50] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 286.

> It [the collective soul] is something that has dwelt in fearful places, and in ancient sepulchres has made its abode. It is sick with many maladies and has memories of curious sins.[51]

Wilde held that it was possible to reach perfection of being in one moment of perfect realisation. He claimed that the . woman who poured precious oils on the feet of Christ may have in that moment achieved a synthesis of choice and personality which constituted perfect realisation of being. Realisation, for Wilde, depends on informed choice, on integration of expression and desire.

Yeats absorbed Wilde's notion of integrated oppositional forces, however, Wilde's concept is benign, while Yeats viewed being as conflict driven. He contended that the perfect realisation of personal existence involved a long process analogous with the 28 phases of the moon. It is desire, Yeats believes, which brings one into confrontation with the daimon and through the struggle between self and mask unity is sought. However, Yeats contends that perfection of being can only be achieved as image. In "Ego Dominus Tuus" he poses the question whether the hollow cheeked Dante is the man his friends knew or an image born from the intensity of his desire, from "a hunger for the apple on the bough/Most out of reach", In 1907 Yeats, unusually expansive in his praise, wrote about Wilde's "The Doer of Good": "It has definition, the simplicity of great sculpture, it adds something new to the imagination of the world, it suddenly confronts the mind – as does all great art – with the fundamental and the insoluble".[52] Wilde promotes individual choice as the means of realising one's potential.

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[51] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist", p. 1138.

[52] W.B. Yeats, Introduction *The Happy Prince and Other Fairy Tales 111* by Oscar Wilde, p. 150.

He shows in "The Doer of Good" that human life is impossible when one's choice and the chance of its fulfilment is taken away and one is given all one desires.

In *Four Plays for Dancers* Yeats develops Wilde's thoughts on desire in three distinct ways: he modifies the application of the impossibility of fulfilled desire to distinguish his archetypes, the artist, the saint and the hero, from the general body of mankind; he constitutes the bargain as integral to desire and he recasts desire in his philosophical theory of Chance and Choice.

Yeats contends that the common man is satisfied with nature and morality and limited aspirations: "the common dream". In *At the Hawk's Well* the Musicians decry the misspent life of the dreamer with his unappeasable desires. They sing that the dried up well and the withered tree admire those who are satisfied with their lot. In this context, Yeats designates the withered tree as representing morality and nature while the blossoming tree stands for the artist and desire. The Musicians sing:

> The man that I praise, ...
> Lives all his days
> With a hand on the bell
> Can call the mild cows
> To the comfortable door of his house.
> Who but an idiot would praise
> Dry stones in a well?[53]

Yeats's artist has awoken from the common dream and has, as he puts it in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, "found life out".[54] The artist cannot be satisfied with the life of which the Musicians

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[53] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawkswell* in *Selected Plays,* ed. Richard Allen Cave, p. 122.

[54] W.B. Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae", p. 331.

sing: "He might have lived at his ease,/ An old dog's head on his knees./ Among his children and friends."[55] Yeats writes in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* that "we can satisfy in life a few of our passions but a little".[56] He goes on to suggest that the poet and artist, because they cannot "shoot beyond the tangible", they "must go from desire to weariness and so to desire again and live but for the moment when vision comes to our weariness like terrible lightning".[57] Yeats dramatises his theory in *At the Hawk's Well* where the Old Man has spent his whole life in pursuit of the impossible dream, represented by the waters of immortality. As soon as he is about to snatch it he is distracted by the dancers and descends into sleep. The dancer represents the object of desire and in pursuing her the Old Man never drinks the waters of eternal life and finds completion. The dancer, like life, "cheats" and "deceives" until, at last, with her final deception he turns his back on the world: "For a hero loves the world till it breaks him, and a poet until it has broken faith".[58]

Implicated in the expression of unappeasable desire in *The Four Plays for Dancers* are the oath and the spiritual/sexual bargain which were a feature of Yeats's drama since seeing *Salomé* in 1905. In Wilde's play desire is brokered for desire and the oath is sworn for the sake of desire. Yeats formulates this association of desire and bargain in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* where he writes: "We can satisfy in life a few of our passions but a little, and our

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[55] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawkswell* in *Selected Plays,* ed. Richard Allen Cave, p. 121.

[56] W.B. Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae", p. 341.

[57] ibid., p. 340.

[58] W.B. Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae", p. 337.

characters indeed but differ because no two men bargain alike".[59] Yeats has progressed from his use of the bargain as a dramatic device in developing it into a philosophical concept. The bargain has become a means towards personal completion and of individuation. In *The Dreaming of the Bones* Diarmuid's and Dergorvilla's betrayal of Ireland lies at the centre of their tragedy. They try to make a bargain with the Young Man calling on him to compromise his heroic standing and to forgive them to enable them fulfil their desire – physical union in death. Emer, in *The Only Jealousy of Emer,* although heroic like the Young Man in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, differs substantially from him; her heroism is defined in forfeiting personal desire. Briciu insists that she buy Cuchulain's freedom from three Woman of the Sidhe by giving up all hope of his ever loving her. Ironically, it is only by renouncing her desire that she can save him. Briciu urges the bargain until, at the last possible moment, as Fand is about to enslave Cuchulain forever, Emer renounces her love of him and resolves the situation. Emer, in making this choice, reveals her heroic stature. Emer chooses to free Cuchulain and in doing so eliminates her chance of his love. Emer's decision reveals the theory which Yeats develops through his concern with desire – the theory of Choice and Chance which he will expand into one of his basic philosophical tenets.

The same balance between choice and chance is undermined in the bargaining sequence in *Calvary* – Judas cannot bear Christ's control; the only way in which he can make a choice of his own and exert his will, is by betraying Christ and in so doing putting himself

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[59] ibid., p. 341.

outside redemption: "if a man betrays a God/ He is the stronger of the two".[60] Choice is balanced by chance in the play by the roman soldiers who have no interest in bargain or betrayal. They desire nothing and are satisfied with a life of arbitrary chance where what will happen, happens.

In Wilde's prose poem, "The Doer of Good", the protagonists have had their desires miraculously fulfilled by Christ. The leper has been made whole, the blindman given his sight and the dead man restored to life. All three have since failed to find meaning in life. The leper and blindman have found only dissipation and the dead man despair. Yeats finds in this situation that striking stanza from "Ego Dominus Tuus" – "What portion in the world can the artist have/ Who has awakened from the common dream/ But dissipation and despair?"[61] The realisation of life's limitations induces this desperate way of life in the artist. Yeats gives Dowson and Johnson as examples of this in his *Autobiographies*.[62]

In his abstraction from Wilde's poem Yeats finds that all existence can be reduced to the two elements of choice and chance. Arbitrariness provides the dimension of freedom and prevents our chosen acts from being predetermined. Christ, in Wilde's story, intervenes in the lives of the leper, the blind man and the dead man and fulfils their needs, in doing this he robs them of their "chance"; their hopes of fulfilment are taken from them and they are left in

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[60] W.B. Yeats, *Calvary* in *Selected Plays*, ed., Richard Allen Cave, p. 161.

[61] W.B. Yeats, "Ego Dominus Tuus" in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, p. 323.

[62] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 310-315.

aimless pursuit of their lives. They represent what Yeats terms in "Per Amica Silentia Lunae" – "a hollow image of fulfilled desire".[63]

Yeats goes on to explain that God embodies chance and choice in equal measure, that "all he does must be both chanced and chosen", but that man only sees either his chance or his choice and some (such as artists) adore his chance while others worship the security of his choice – "for to know that He has willed for some unknown purpose all that happens is pleasant".[64] Some are obsessed with extreme desire while others are content to compromise and settle for the easily available, for the comfortable.

In *Calvary* Yeats substitutes Judas for Wilde's more general blind man and leper; he names the dead man , Lazarus. These two, as in Wilde's story, resent Christ's control and the limitations which he imposes on their choice. Yeats draws out the story: Lazarus desires to be dead to escape from the benign will of Christ; Judas knowingly betrays him as it is the only free act of choice available to him and in betraying a god becomes more powerful than one. Yeats introduces Roman soldiers into the story. The soldiers represent an objective form of life who feel no need for redemption and they see life only in terms of Chance:

> First Soldier: " ... what does it matter?/ One day one loses and the next day wins?"
> Second Soldier: "Whatever happens is the best, we say,/ So that it's unexpected."[65]

While the characters, Lazarus, Judas and the Roman Soldiers illustrate the separate elements of Chance and Choice, Yeats shifts the emphasis of Wilde's story. He examines the

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[63] W.B. Yeats, "Per Amica Silentia Lunae", p. 329.

[64] N.L.I. Microfiche 30,789. (Ts. 5pp.) "Note on the Symbolism in Calvary", p. 5.

[65] W.B. Yeats, *Calvary,* p. 162.

incompleteness of Christ, his unfulfilled desire to save all humanity and the devastating loneliness of his position. He admits to having surrounded Christ with those whom he cannot save – the birds, Judas, Lazarus (who projects an intellectual despair beyond his sympathy), and the Soldiers who embody "a form of objectivity that lay beyond His help".[66] He chooses to die for them in line with his Father's will but the element of Chance prevents the fulfilment of his desire. Christ claimed to be God as well as man, so Choice and Chance, according to Yeats's theory, operate in equal measure within his actions. The "world has broken faith with him" so that in his non-achievement of his desire, Christ falls within the category of artist. In *De Profundis* Wilde posited Christ as the supreme artist who reinvented himself through the power of his imagination.[67] In *The Four Plays for Dancers* Yeats works with these "fundamental", "insoluble" questions. He recognises the human need to be complete and that this need expresses itself in unappeasable desire. He believes that conflict is necessary to life and that completion and stasis is an impossible condition for the living. Yeats maintains that freedom to happen – chance – and the imposition of will – choice – are vital to the human condition. Without the tension between these two, as had been illustrated for him in Wilde's prose poem, life has no meaning and becomes impossible. In his poem, "What Then?", Yeats poses Wilde's question:

> All his happier dreams came true –
> A small old house, wife, daughter, son,

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[66] N.L.I. Microfiche 30,789. (Ts. 5pp.) "Note on the Symbolism in Calvary", p. 3.

[67] 'Out of his own imagination entirely did Jesus of Nazareth create himself." Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, p.103.

Grounds where plum and cabbage grow,
Poets and wits about him drew;
"What then?" sang Plato's ghost, "What then?"
"The work is done," grown old he thought,
According to my boyish plan;
Let the Gods rage, I swerved in naught,
Something to perfection brought";
But louder sang the ghost, "What then?"[68]

The poem enumerates his own life achievements and successes, each stanza ends with the same question that Wilde posed in "The Doer of Good": When all longing seems to be fulfilled and one is left unfulfilled , "What then?" Yeats's answer to his question lies in the transposition of human desire into the perfection of the artistic image, much like the poet's transubstantiation in "Sailing to Byzantium" or the dramatisation of this process in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March* which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3. Yeats's development of Wilde's symbols - dance, gaze, kiss - in the expression of being

The Salomé model of the dancer appears in each of Yeats's *Four Plays for Dancers*. Wilde's Salomé moves in an erotic, sensual dance yet she is totally disengaged from it; movement holds a contemplative presence.

Sensuality, in varying degrees, and the incomplete involvement of the dancers in their movement mark the dance in Yeats's *Four Plays for Dancers*. The distancing of the dancer from her dance in *At the Hawk's Well* is signalled in her possession by the Woman of the

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[68] W.B. Yeats, "What Then?" in *Yeats's Poems*, p. 420.

Sidhe whose eyes are vacant and "a terrible life/ Is slipping through her veins".[69] The Girl performs an alluring dance which resonates with the treacherous, destructive intentions of the Woman of the Sidhe.

The hawk and the dancer mirror each other's action; they are spoken about in the same terms and represent images of extreme desire. They are representations of the one image, at times interchangeable, indeed their identity is problematic also for Cuchulain who [1]addresses the dancer: "bird, woman or witch". The hawk spirals in the sky, the dancer dances "moving like a hawk".[70] The bird, like the dancer, incorporates danger and magnificence in itself " ... I have not seen its like. It flew/ As though it would have torn me with its beak"[71]

The dance danced by The Guardian of the Well is of the same type as Wilde's Salomé's dance. The Guardian of the Well, possessed by the Woman of the Sidhe whom Cuchulain has sighted in the shape of a hawk, dances before him, seductively distracting him from the immortal waters. In Yeats's early drafts of the play the seduction is more directly attributed to the purposeful action of the dancer than in the final version of the play:

> Ah, she stirs him now,
> The madness has laid hold upon him now,
> He has grown pale,
> He staggers to his feet.[72]

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[69] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawk's Well*, p. 119.

[70] ibid., p. 120.

[71] ibid., p. 120.

[72] N.L.I. Ms. 8773 (3). Ts. Second Version . W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawk's Well*, p. 3.
In *The Only Jealousy of Emer* The Woman of the Sidhe refers back to Cuchulain's desire for her in *At the Hawkswell*: "Hold out your arms and hands again;/ You were not so dumbfounded when/ I was that bird of prey,

The dancer rouses him and leads him to pursue her. Yeats gives the key note to the type of dance performed in his reference to the Woman of the Sidhe flitting about the mountainside to "allure and destroy".[73] The destructive, mesmeric quality of the dance is powerfully indicated in a speech which Yeats crossed out and deleted from an early draft of the play:

> Two feet seeming like two quivering blades,
> Eyes long withered and yet seeming young
> Keep from me those dancing feet and terrible eyes
> How should I bear those eyes.[74]

In this speech Yeats expresses the menace of the dance and the dancer's power to coerce and seduce. The destruction and violence of which she is capable is captured in the comparison of her "dancing feet" to "two quivering blades". Yeats juxtaposes youth with age. Like Salomé, whose actual youth belies her unnatural and sinister passion, Yeats's dancer's youthful appearance belies her ancient experience. Yeats's conflation of images - the "terrible eyes" which have played such a sensual, destructive role in *Salomé,* sharing the potency of the dance - attests to the strength of Wilde's repressed play as a powerful force in the creative process of Yeats's imagination.

Yeats again in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* positions the dancer as integral to her dance yet at a remove from its performance. The dance is performed by the Woman of the Sidhe

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and yet/ I am all woman now". To which Cuchulain replies: "I am not/ The young and passionate man I was". *Selected Plays*, ed., Richard Allen Cave, p. 153.

[73] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawk's Well*, p. 119.
Ninette de Valois "interpreted the text as requiring her to move through three distinct phases: from an evocation of brooding power, through suggestive seduction to the violent ecstasy of a wild bird". Richard Allen Cave, "Commentaries and Notes" in *Selected Plays*, p. 321.

[74] N.L.I. "Ms. 8773 (4). [1] + 16 ff., with manuscript corrections". W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawk's Well*, p. 13.

whose cold, unearthly cruelty is apparent in her depiction as a "beautiful image" who attempts to entice Cuchulain to his death. Yeats's stage directions advise that the dancer should look more like a golden or bronze idol than a human.[75] In this direction Yeats indicates the quality of removal – the cold stillness – at the heart of the sensual dance. The dance in *The Dreaming of the Bones* is performed by the dead shades of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla. The dance is sensuous but their desire projects beyond this immediate sensual ritual to a longed for union and redemption.

The dance in *Calvary* is performed by the Roman soldiers. They epitomise non-commitment – their dance acknowledges the primacy of chance in human affairs. They circle the cross in a promise of death. Yeats invests the dance in these four plays with varying degrees of the Saloméan qualities of sensual movement, menace and death. He attempts various types of distancing in these dances to simulate the disengaged attitude of Wilde's dancer from her action – a certain stillness in movement.

Already, in *Four Plays for Dancers*, Yeats interprets the ambivalence in Wilde's dancer as unearthly: the Guardian of the Well is inhabited by a ghostly presence, Fand is not mortal, the dancers in *The Dreaming of the Bones* are dead and the dancers in *Calvary* display a degree of objectivity which is hardly human. Yeats is sculpting a dancer who by *A Full Moon in March* will become the epitome of the beautiful image of Phase 15 of *A Vision*.

Dance, in *Salomé*, is the visual image of sensuality but it is also the imagistic presence of the metaphysical theories set out by Wilde within the play. The dance is an image of desire.

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[75] W.B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer* in *Selected Plays*, p. 153.

Wilde sees the senses as the dynamic which enables a fulfilled state of ecstasy in the soul. The dance contains within it diverse elements that combine in a powerful, synthesis of opposing energies: youth, age, innocence, experience, movement of body, stillness of intent, sensuality and destruction; life and death, soul and body coalesce within the dancing image.

Frank Kermode acknowledges the close relationship between Yeats's image of the dancer and Wilde's Salomé.[76] Wilde's Salomé is a reconciliatory figure who draws together many opposing states and is the embodiment of Wilde's theory on the necessary interactive relation of soul and body. Yeats accepts Wilde's theory of reconciliation of the antinomies but while Wilde's model is expository and depends on benign critical selection by the individual, Yeats's conception involves the struggle of personality with its opposite. Sometimes, Yeats envisions this opposing force as arising from within the personality and sometimes as being an outside force or daimon. Yeats writes in *A Vision*: "Man seeks his opposite or the opposite of his condition, attains his object so far as it is attainable, at Phase 15 and returns to Phase 1 again".[77] This is a more rigorous and disciplined approach towards perfection. Man wears a mask, not the chosen mask as Wilde explains it, but the mask of antithesis and incarnates towards perfection of being expressed in the beautiful image.

In his notes to *The Wind Among the Reeds*, Yeats proposes John the Baptist and the dancer, Salomé, as among the great images of the world: "a cross, a man preaching in the wilderness, a dancing Salomé ..." He labels them "an eternal act" but continues, "our

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[76] Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, p. 73.

[77] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 81.

understandings are temporal and understand but a little at a time".[78] Yeats accords great meaning to the image of the dancing Salomé. As Wilde had already intimated in "The Doer of Good" there is no way of living in such perfection of being and Salomé passes out of life at her moment of triumph. Yeats's final concept of Unity of Being draws on aspects of Wilde's work expanding and extending them. Unity of Being is achieved, in as far as it is possible, at Phase 15 in Yeats's system. The soul must incarnate through the various phases before reaching this stage. At this point there is no longer desire, there is no "struggle" and so no human life is possible. Unity of Being is symbolised by an image of perfect beauty which Yeats finds in the image of dancer. This stage recalls Wilde's insight in "The Doer of Good" and in *Salomé* that there is no way of living once perfect state of being has been realised. This final state of Unity of Being will be discussed more fully in Chapter 7 in the context of its realisation in Yeats's later dance plays: *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March*. No realisation of unity of being is fully achieved in Yeats's *Four Plays for Dancers*, however, the concept is in process in these plays and Yeats conveys the developing thought in his symbols.

Not only does Yeats conceal symbolic meaning in the visual image but hidden within the dance in his *Four Plays for Dancers* are ingenious spatial diagrams which depict Yeats's metaphysics. Giorgio Melchiori in his book, *The Whole Mystery of Art*,[79] draws attention to Yeats's interest in geometrical shape and design. Melchiori states: "Yeats conceived of

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[78] W.B. Yeats, "The Wind Among the Reeds", p. 94.

[79] Giorgio Melchiori, *The Whole Mystery of Art* (1960; rpt., London: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 7.

patterns (geometrical pattern – ovals and squares) as the basis of artistic expression as well as of thought. It little matters that he considered patterns to be important not in themselves, but as symbols: what counts is the fact that they ... had become associated in his mind with inspiration and aesthetic expression". Melchiori's assertion bears out my observations of the pattern of the four dances in Yeats's plays.

The pattern of the dance which Yeats depicts in the *Four Plays for Dancers* emulates the gyre which represents all life: the nature of man and of existence. He writes in *A Vision* that "life is ... no waterfall but a whirlpool, a gyre".[80] In "Demon and Beast" (Nov.1918) Yeats writes, "Though I had long perned in the gyre/ Between my hatred and desire"[81] – he had long vacillated. The falcon in "The Second Coming" (Jan. 1919) is "turning and turning in the widening gyre".[82] "All men," Yeats explains in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "are dancers"[83] and the dancer perns in the gyre of life. Yeats interprets the movement and pern and gyre, in a cancelled note on the play, *Fighting the Waves* (a dance version *of The Only Jealousy of Emer*):[84] "Vi Dionysius meant by the word "gyre" doubtless such spirals as are made by a mounting hawk, but the mosaic worker prefers the level circle of that dance Plotinus attributed to his Third Authentic Existant or soul of the world, our Holy

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[80] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 40.

[81] W.B. Yeats, "Demon and Beast", in *Yeats's Poems*, p. 293.

[82] W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming" in *Yeats's Poems*, p. 294.

[83] W.B. Yeats, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" in *Yeats's Poems*, p. 315.

[84] N.L.I. Ms. 8774 (4). W.B. Yeats, *Fighting the Waves*, "2 ff. typescript of cancelled note on the play".

Spirit.Acquinas [sic] was to employ both symbols. They make the distinction between a soul plunging into the immensity of God and the same soul in adoration, ~~between knowledge and love perhaps~~ or seeing that of all things love dreads a change of object".

Yeats makes use of both movements and in his *Four Plays for Dancers* ingeniously illustrates them. Yeats denies being a choreographer and admits to leaving the dance to the artist involved, however, he was certain of the purpose which he wanted to convey by dance. In each play Yeats deploys a composite image to indicate an imaginative configuration of an interlocking vortex [See appendix 4].This is the symbolic diagram which Yeats uses to demonstrate the structure and meaning of life: the explanation of human nature and the movement of civilisation.

The dancers in each of the plays move in a circular motion: the dancer in *At the Hawk's Well* imitates the circular movements of the hawk; the Woman of the Sidhe in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* dances "around the crouching Ghost of Cuchulain";[85] in *The Dreaming of the Bones* the Stranger and Girl dance "from rock to rock" ascending the mountain, moving three times "round the stage" as they ascend to the summit;[86] the Roman soldiers clasp hands in a ring around the cross, dancing. Yeats imaginatively draws these dancing circles upwards in a continuing gyre like motion: the hawk spirals above the dancer in *At the Hawk's Well.* Through the figure of the hawk the one vortex is imaginatively drawn towards its apex and represents the base of the opposing whirling vortex. This hawk is

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[85] W.B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, p. 152.

[86] W.B. Yeats, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, pp. 444, 437, 438.

mentioned in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* – "A woman danced and a hawk flew"[87] – and its verbal presence provides a similar imaginative configuration to the one it gives in *At the Hawk's Well.* The dancers in *The Dreaming of the Bones* reach for the summit of the mountain, extending the dance to its apex, "the eddying cat headed bird"[88] of which the Musicians sing subtly indicates an opposing vortex. The soldiers "wheel about"[89] the cross in perhaps the most amazing of all the spatial configurations – the shoulders of the cross dictating the narrowing of the conical shape to its apex at the top of the cross. Above the cross the ger-eagle flies into the sun providing the base of an answering objective vortex. In each play Yeats has inscribed the shape of the gyres, the double spiralling vortexes.

In the first three plays, starting from a single point and moving outwards, the dancers of phase 14 describe their circumference. These dances represent subjectivity, the narrow end of the vortex. In *Calvary*, however, the dancers hold hands and begin their dance from a widened circle – the wider end of the vortex which, like the soldiers themselves, represents objectivity.

Yeats's geometrical representation of thought reveals the extent of the symbolic burden he placed in the dancer. He has developed the concept of the double natured dance into a vehicle which expresses subjective nature, on the one hand, and objective , on the other. He has processed the Salomé-type dance into the underlying pattern of the movement of all

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[87] W.B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, p. 152.

[88] *The Dreaming of the Bones*, p. 134.

[89] *Calvary*, p. 456.

life. Dance is seminal to Yeats's vision; it not only depicts a theory of cultural movement but is used by Yeats, together with other major symbols used by Wilde in *Salomé*, to represent the nature of being and its final resolution.[90] Yeats is concerned with creating a symbology to express Unity of Being and he variously combines Wilde's symbols of dance, gaze and kiss in composite images to this end. In using Wilde's images from *Salomé,* Yeats first employed the symbols to which Wilde gave prominence: the kiss and the gaze, and then incorporated dance. Looking, as in Wilde's play, is a commodity of exchange upon which there are destructive consequences. There are instances of empowered looking in the final version of *At the Hawk's Well*: the "glassy look" about the Guardian's eyes which alerts the Old Man to the moment at which the immortal waters will fill the well. Looking is energised: anyone who gazes at the "unmoistened eyes" of the Woman of the Sidhe is cursed. The Old Man cannot bear those dry, staring eyes - "they are no girl's eyes". He feels their power when Cuchulain looks at her: "Ah, you have looked at her;/ She has felt your gaze and turned her eyes on us". Cuchulain, however, outbrazens her, intending to stay and drink the water in spite of her: "Why do you fix those eyes of a hawk upon me?/ I am not afraid of you bird, woman, or witch". The final song of the Musicians contains a reference to eyes representing malignant evil – "I have found hateful eyes/ Among the desolate places,/ Unfaltering, unmoistened eyes".[91]

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[90] T.R. Henn refers to Yeats's practice of "allowing images to beget fresh images, to multiply in clusters round a single nucleus". Henn continues "the more clearly the basic image is established and accepted in his mind, the greater is the vitality that coheres about the subsidiary image". *The Lonely Tower,* p. 250.

[91] W.B. Yeats, *At the Hawkswell,* pp. 116, 119, 120, 122.

There are a few references to looking in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and *Calvary* but it is in *The Dreaming of he Bones* that the combined metaphor of looking, dance and the longed for kiss recurs with all the force of Yeats's suppressed passage, cited above, from *At the Hawk's Well.*

The young man notes how "strangely" the couple look at each other – "strangely and sweetly". This looking signals the oncoming dance; the young man describes how the couple are totally committed to each other in these dances as their eyes engage. However, there is nothing as "bitter as that double glance", for this exchange of looks can only be achieved when Diarmuid and Dervorgilla's desire for unity reaches such extreme intensity that their hearts are at breaking point. Destruction is implicit in the composite symbol of desire – dance and looking. The lovers are unable to achieve their object: symbolic union in the climactic kiss.

Young Man: Why do you dance?
Why do you gaze, and with so passionate eyes,
One on the other; and then turn away,
Covering your eyes, and weave it in a dance?
Who are you? what are you? you are not natural.
Young Girl: Seven hundred years our lips have never met.[92]

Yeats brings the Saloméan elements of dance, gaze and kiss into a dynamic alliance within this play. While, essentially, they perform the same function as in *Salomé*, Yeats has regrouped them into a tighter dependency out of which they act as a powerful composite metaphor of unfulfilled desire. The longed for kiss, elusive symbol of completeness, would bring closure in a climactic moment of visual exchange within the dance.

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[92] W.B. Yeats, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, pp. 131, 133.

Yeats uses a similar method in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* to depict the image of unfulfilled desire. In this play, he again brings the kiss and the dance into an immediate relation. The woman of the Sidhe, Fand, executes the dance. Like its model in Wilde's *Salomé* it is a menacing, seductive performance. Fand hopes to captivate Cuchulain and lure him to his death. Yeats envisions this as a mildly erotic stylised dance of desire, patterned on a sexual model, a "dance that grows gradually quicker". Fand looks for completion in the kiss of Cuchulain. However, like the dancers in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, she does not achieve fulfilment. Fand comes to the point of kissing but stops there. Yeats's stage directions read: "she may drop her hair upon his head, but she does not kiss him".[93] Not only does he use Wilde's symbol but in using the kiss, Yeats employs a similar set of words to the refrain of Wilde's Salomé - "I will kiss thy mouth Iokanaan".[94] Fand demands - "Then kiss my mouth" or in a variation upon the phrase - " When your mouth and my mouth meet". The Ghost of Cuchulain takes up a foreshortened version of her phrase and makes as though to kiss her - "Your mouth!" Failing to carry out the gesture but enthralled, he follows her from the stage reiterating his desire – "Your mouth, your mouth!" This cry is later transposed into – "Your arms", as Cuchulain seeks the comfort of his mistress's embrace.[95]

Salomé kissed Iokanaan – licentious life met martyred death. The moment, when Salomé kisses Iokanaan, is frozen as a tableau on stage, an image of completion. Yeats's

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[93] W.B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, p. 152.

[94] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 591.

[95] W.B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, p. 155.

dancers desire the consumatory moment through which soul and satisfied desire would transmute into the beautiful image. Fand states that because she longs she is not complete. She would achieve unity of being if Cuchulain would kiss her mouth. Through the physical kiss the immortal, unnatural woman would meet her opposite in the human , physical man. She would live his death and he die her life satisfying all contraries. In the act of kissing, Fand says, time would be overcome – "All my round shall be complete/ Imagining all its circle run".[96] This would happen at the 15th phase when all becomes integrated within the most beautiful image possible.

The kiss was Wilde's central symbol of completion, the moment when life met death, illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley as "The Climax" in the English translation of *Salomé*.[97] As Salomé kisses the dead lips a moonbeam shines on her symbolising transcendence. In that moment Salomé, like the woman who bathes Christ's feet in perfumed oils, experiences perfect realisation of self. Yeats speaks of a similar moment of self awareness in his play, *Calvary*. The image of Salomé at the moment of transcendence is displaced by the heron who illustrates an intense state of subjectivity. The Musicians sing: "Motionless under the moonbeam ... the white heron/ Shivers in a dumbfounded dream".[98] The heron is

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[96] W.B. Yeats, *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, p. 154.

[97] Aubrey Beardsley chose to illustrate this particular moment of Wilde's play the year before the publication of *Salomé* in English. Wilde believed Beardsley an astute observer of his play (*The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 578n). Beardsley's illustration shows Salomé holding on high the severed head of Iokanaan and looking into his eyes. Wilde offered Beardsley the commission for the illustration of the English edition of his book (Feb. 9, 1894) after Beardsley's drawing appeared in *The Studio* (Apr., 1893), p. 19.

[98] W.B. Yeats, *Calvary*, p. 157.

representative of the soul in trance[99] and stands immobile under the influence of a moonbeam, as Salomé had done: "A moonbeam falls on Salomé, covering her with light".[100] The heron is in a removed state, although he is immersed in life – "up to his feathers in the stream;/ Although fish leap ..."[101] The heron standing beneath the moonbeam "shivers in a dumbfounded dream". The still, removed heron accesses self-knowledge, like Salomé, signified by the shiver from within the stillness. The shiver may also signify sexual consummation, a symbol of completion. The heron lived antithetically and, therefore, must pay the price; he is filled with fear and terror. The self knowledge of the heron dies into itself from where, as with the Salomé-like dancers of Yeats's later plays, he will transmute into image at Phase 15.

The dancers in the *Four Plays for Dancers* never enter Phase 15. In his poem, "The Phases of the Moon", Yeats explains: the full moon occurs at Phase 15, before this phase the soul seeks itself "and afterwards the world". It is desire at its most extreme as Phase 15 approaches, subjectivity is at its strongest – its release is into image where all, though separate, as in the Salomé-type dance, appears as one – "But while the moon is rounding towards the full? He follows whatever whim's most difficult/ Among whims not impossible" and "under the frenzy of the 14th Moon, /The soul begins to tremble into stillness,/ To die into

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[99] Yeats writes in *A Vision*: "Every image is separate from every other, for if image were linked to image, the soul would wake from its movable trance". p. 136.

[100] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé* p. 605.

[101] W.B. Yeats, *Calvary*, p. 157.

the labyrinth of itself!" At the 14th Phase the most complete form of self realisation and of subjectivity occurs and at Phase 15, soul and body are brought into a beauty of perfect image. It is not possible to be human at this point, it is an ideal condition. At this stage all is image. Yeats writes: "All thought becomes an image and the soul/ Becomes a body".[102] This last thought comes close to a paraphrase of Wilde's statement to the effect that "an idea is of no value till it becomes incarnate and is made an image".[103] Sensuality, spirituality condense into a bodily image which is most perfectly conveyed in the Wildean dancer. "All dreams of the soul," Yeats writes, "end in a beautiful man's or woman's body".[104]

At Phase 15 when beauty is achieved desire is no longer possible, this is the end to which unappeasable desire must come – a point where desire no longer exists and is transmuted into an image. At phase 15 Yeats writes in *A Vision*: "Thought and will are indistinguishable, effort and attainment are indistinguishable; and this is the consummation of a slow process; nothing is apparent but dreaming Will and the image that it dreams".[105] This fulfilled state is expressed by Yeats in his dance poetry of 1918 while the development of self through anti-self to unity of being and the incarnation of image is expressed in "Amongst School Children" (1926).

O body swayed to music! O brightening glance!

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[102] W.B. Yeats, "Phases of the Moon" in *Yeats's Poems*, p. 269.

[103] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, (1905; rpt., London: Methuen, 1922), p. 75.

[104] W.B. Yeats, "Phases of the Moon" in *Yeats's Poems*, p. 269.

[105] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 135

How can we know the dancer from the dance?[106]

These lines contain the metaphysical position at which Yeats arrived, and encapsulate all that he discovered in Wilde's symbolist play. In the final lines of this poem, Yeats unites the opposing states of the spiritual and the sensual and this fusion realises unity of being. Sensuality is depicted in the undulating movement of the dancer, the accompanying music and the covetous glance. In his poem, "Solomon and the Witch", Yeats writes, " ... all passion is in the glance".[107] With the word, "brightening", Yeats invests the sensual glance with the spiritual and creates the image of body quick with soul; the phrase, "brightening glance", also conveying a sense of body being spiritually illumined from within. The dancer is image and Yeats writes in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes": "So she had outdanced thought./ Body perfection brought".[108] The soul and body are visible as one indivisible image of perfect beauty.

The indivisibility of senses and soul is an achieved state of perfection. Full realisation of the nature of self is depicted as a dance in which there is no distinction between dancer and dance, between effort and its achievement. The image of the dancer and her dance symbolises Yeats's concept of unity of being which he arrived at through contemplation of Wilde's theories on unappeasable desire, symbols of his dancer, looking and kiss. While none of the dancers in *Four Plays for Dancers* have achieved image, Yeats continues the theme in *The*

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[106] W.B. Yeats, "Among School Children", p. 325.

[107] W.B. Yeats, "Solomon and the Witch", p. 284.

[108] W.B. Yeats, "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes", p. 277.

King of the Great Clock Tower and *A Full Moon in March* where the 15th. phase and image is finally dramatically attained.

Chapter Six
(1923 – 1939)
"There must be severed heads"
Yeats's final transumption of Oscar Wilde

There was a revival of interest in Wilde's *Salomé* in theatres in England and Ireland towards the end of the 1920s and in the early 30s.[1] Terence Gray of the Cambridge Festival Theatre intended to stage the play in October 1927 and engaged the Irish ballet dancer, Ninette de Valois, to choreograph Salomé's dance of the seven veils. de Valois had choreographed the movements in the ritual scene from Yeats's *On Baile's Strand* for Gray in January of that year. Yeats had not attended the production of *On Baile's Strand* but came to Cambridge in May to see his *Player Queen* which was included in the evening's performance with a dance programme produced and choreographed by de Valois.

Yeats took the opportunity to meet de Valois and to invite her to set up a school of dance at the Abbey Theatre in which dancers could be trained to perform in his *Dance Plays*. Yeats had last written a Dance Play in 1920, seven years previously. It is interesting that his revival of interest in this genre of play should coincide with de Valois' involvement with the proposed revival of Wilde's *Salomé*.

This particular revival of *Salomé* never actually took place. Gray was frustrated in his efforts by the Censor's office and only succeeded in staging a single private performance of

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[1] See Sylvia Ellis, *The Plays of W.B. Yeats and the Dancer*; William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Salomé* Kathrine Sorley Walker, *Ninette de Valois: Idealist without Ilusions* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987). Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me: a memoir, 1898-1956* (rpt., 1973; London: Hamilton, 1957).

the play in his theatre in June 1929. As was originally intended, de Valois choreographed the dance.

In the meantime, she had accepted Yeats's offer and towards the end of 1927 had set up a school of ballet at the Abbey Theatre. The school was based in The Peacock Theatre, a building near to the Abbey and acquired by the theatre directors in 1926 with the intention of using it as a small, experimental theatre.

The opening performance was given on June 30, 1928. That same year, on 12 December, in the Peacock Theatre the first public performance of Wilde's *Salomé* in Britain and in Ireland took place. The theatre had been rented from the Abbey by Hilton Edwards and Michael MacLiammóir for their newly formed theatre company, the Gate Theatre Studio. The part of Iokanaan in Wilde's play was taken by MacLiammóir while Edwards played Herod.[2]

Having choreographed Salomé's dance for the Cambridge revival of *Salomé* (1929), Ninette de Valois was invited by the Gate Theatre London to choreograph its production of the play in May 1931. The play was again performed by the Cambridge Festival Theatre in November 1931.

Whether or not Yeats actually saw any of these performances is not certain. He was in Rapallo at the time of the Edwards/MacLiammóir production and in Dublin for the 1929 Cambridge Festival Theatre performance while during the time of their second performance in November 1931, he was with the ailing Lady Gregory at Coole. It is likely that he saw the

[2] Richard Pine and Richard Cave, *The Dublin Gate Theatre 1928-1978,* (N.J.: Cambridge and Teaneck, Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 1984). Bulmer Hobson ed., *The Gate Theatre, Dublin* (Dublin: The Gate Theatre, 1934).

London Gate Theatre production in May 1931. He was, however, very much aware of the revival having been peripherally involved in them through his connection with Ninette de Valois and his close interest and association with the Peacock Theatre. His interest in Wilde at this time is apparent in a letter which he wrote to Olivia Shakespeare (July 2, 1929) in which he recommends her to read Alfred Douglas's account of his friendship with Wilde. Yeats was reading it himself at this time and deprecates Douglas as an untrustworthy hysteric.[3]

Yeats began work on a dance play, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, in 1933, which of all Yeats's previous plays comes closest to Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*.

When *The King of the Great Clock Tower* was first performed (July 30, 1934), its similarities to Wilde's *Salomé* were widely noted. Yeats's reaction was marked by a certain confusion. Publicly, he denied outright the allegations but privately he examines his text to ascertain the similarity. There is a sense of relief in his words to Olivia Shakespeare explaining the essential difference between his play and Wilde's:

> It [*The King of the Great Clock Tower*] is more original than I thought it for when I looked up *Salomé* I found that Wilde's dancer never danced with the head in her hands...[4]

It is hardly surprising that Yeats experiences this initial shock at the public comparison of *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *Salomé* since he had been using Wilde's *Salomé* as artistic material for so long that it had become, imperceptibly, a property of his creative imagination.

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[3] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, letter to Olivia Shakespeare, July 2 [postmark 1929], p. 764.

[4] "To Olivia Shakespeare", Aug. 7 [postmark, Aug. 9, '34], *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed., Wade, pp. 826, 827.

Yeats's denial of similarity is closely followed by other intimations of his anxiety of influence concerning Wilde. Yeats, in the classic fashion of a Bloomian ephebe, establishes the superiority of his own creation by disparaging the text of his precursor. Having formerly declared the centrality of the dance to Wilde's drama – "The dance with the severed head suggests the central idea of Wilde's *Salomé*" - Yeats now reduces it to an image of lewdness in Wilde's play – "a mere uncovering of nakedness".[5]

An examination of Yeats's manuscript of his *Introduction* to *A Full Moon in March* (1935) reveals his unease at the uncovering of a creative link between him and his unacknowledged precursor; it is evident in the faltering, uncertain formulation of words with which he attempts to erase the connection between Wilde's dancer and his own. Yeats's manuscript reads: "I had used the same symbol, as that which Wilde that which the ~~Wilde for *Salomé* as that which which like as that which Wilde~~ used by Wilde in his *Salomé*".[6] The eventual sentence simply reads: – "I had used the same symbol as was used by Wilde in *Salomé*". Yeats has had great difficulty in formulating his admission of influence.

On the following page of the same manuscript Yeats deletes the word, "symbol" from the sentence as if he finds it too great an admission to make and substitutes "suggests". He then deletes this word in favour of the more neutral "resemble". He writes: "The dance in my play ~~suggests~~ resembles the dance in Wilde's *Salomé*". Yeats's eventual published version of

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[5] W.B. Yeats, Prefaces 87, 91, "Notes on Plays" in *The Variorum Edition of Yeats's Plays,* pp. 1311, 1312.

[6] N.L.I. Ms./Micro-fiche 30,336. W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March and other material incl. essay on the Irish Theatre.* Description: red, loose leaf notebook circa 1934. Unnumbered, chronological pp. 5, 6.

the Introduction admits of no direct correlation whatsoever between his dance and that of Salomé but effects a more generalised relationship between the two plays. At first, Yeats's opening sentence on resemblance seems to claim a similarity between the main concepts of both plays. As we read on, however, it becomes clear that Yeats is "fudging" the issue. He suggests that what he describes as Wilde's "central idea" is but a universal convention which Wilde took from Heine and he, in turn, from a Jewish legend. Yeats adds, in an off hand attempt at establishing universality, "or it is part of the old ritual of the year, the mother goddess and the slain god". Yeats then proceeds to show how he himself used this type of legend in "The Secret Rose" and how in attempting to put this story into a dance play he had accidentally "gone close to Salomé's dance in Wilde's play".[7] Despite all of this extemporising and evasion, the dance in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, as Yeats had originally admitted, "suggests" "the central idea" in Wilde's play and remains essentially "the same symbol ... used by Wilde in his *Salomé*."

Yeats's anxiety is not disproportionate to the possible consequences of acknowledging influence. Bloom adduces disastrous creative impairment from such an acknowledgement. Although Yeats concentrates his denial on the use of dance and severed head, the more obvious Saloméan images in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, these are but indications of the culmination of a deeper, rich seam of appropriation. Yeats's avowed dislike of this play may have something to do with the glimpses he catches in it of obvious similarities to Wilde's play as much as for the artistic reasons he suggests: "I don't like *The King of the Great Clock*

[7] W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats,* p. 1312.

Tower which is theatrically coherent, spiritually incoherent".[8] His rewriting of the play as *A Full Moon in March* and the fundamental difference which he achieves in this play suggests a compulsion to escape anxiety of influence by establishing artistic difference and creative independence by using the material of imputed influence to forge a dissimilar and original drama. It is also Yeats's critique of his *King of the Great Clock Tower* and, ultimately, of *Salomé*.

The King of the Great Clock Tower reveals all the Saloméan elements with which Yeats had become so familiar and which he has established as part of his personal creative arsenal – the covetous look, a sexual/spiritual oath, the kiss of completion, the dance and, for the first time, the severed head and, in the high clock, a putative moon.

Although Yeats claims to have confined his philosophical theories to the songs in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, the play is overflowing with philosophical issues. These issues involve triumph over death, the search for artistic perfection, regeneration, the movement of civilisation and unity of being. He investigates these themes in terms of extreme desire, reconciliation of opposites and the negotiation of the spiritual through the senses, themes which he had earlier explored in and through Wilde's work.

It may be the multiplicity of intention and a certain lack of conceptual clarity in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* which gives rise to Yeats's artistic objection that his play is "spiritually incoherent". There is, however, a point at which all themes meet. Yeats describes

[8] 'To Edmund Dulac", Monday [December 10, 1934], *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed., Wade, p. 830.

in *A Vision* the moment of revelation signalled by the scream of "Juno's peacock"[9] and in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* he identifies this chaotic moment as the night the "gander gabbed".[10] The words signifying imminent revelation are uttered at the beginning of *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, prior to the philosophical revelations that will follow. This moment, Yeats had written in *A Vision,* always put him in mind of Salomé –

> When I think of the moment before revelation I think of Salomé – she, too, delicately tinted or may be mahogany dark – dancing before Herod and receiving the Prophet's head in her indifferent hands ...[11]

Yeats's underlying consciousness of Salomé is a unifying constant within the play. That it is Wilde's *Salomé* who occupies Yeats's imagination is clearly evidenced in the play's symbols and in its concepts. The covetous look is the first element in Stroller's, the main protagonist's, escalating order of demands towards the appropriation of the Queen. The sexual/spiritual oath and the dance follow and possession is consummated in the kiss between the Queen and the severed head of Stroller.

Arriving at the palace of the King of the Great Clock Tower, Stroller, a wandering artist, explains he has had an image of beauty in his head and has been scoffed at by a gander because he has never seen the original of this image, which is the Queen, and he asks that he "may look on its original".[12] This act of possession by looking is more forcibly apparent in the

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[9] V.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 268.

[10] V.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* in *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 636.

[11] V.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 273.

[12] V.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* p. 636.

prose manuscript version where he demands, "Show the Queen that I may look on her".[13] Stroller then in an economic use of Saloméan imagery of oath, dance and looking declares:

> I swore that I would see the Queen, and that –
> My God, but I was drunk – the Queen would dance
> And dance to me alone.[14]

The last phrase resounds with Herod's obsessive plea to Salomé – "dance for me".[15]

Stroller's extreme desire is free of sensual overtones yet it reflects the passionate need of Herod. Yeats has also inflected Stroller with characteristics of Wilde's other male protagonist, Iokanaan. Stroller claims to be a "sacred man" and upholds this claim in describing how he went to the holy "Boyne Waters" where he fasted as Iokanaan had done and was applauded by the gods for the oath he had taken to look at the Queen. He is given a prophecy by Aengus who foretells that the Queen will kiss him on the "mouth".

> On stroke of midnight when the old year dies
> Upon that stroke, the tolling of that bell
> The Queen shall kiss your mouth.[16]

The words are Salomé's – "I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan", and her object, the kiss of completion, becomes the focus of Stroller's desire.

The prophetic role of Wilde's Iokanaan is displaced in Yeats's play by the pagan gods. There is an air of ribald revelry about them; this sense of profanity attaches itself to Stroller who is flippant and cheeky in his outrageous demands, although deadly serious in intent.

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[13] N.L.I. Ms. 8769/micro-film 7493: *W.B. Yeats Papers: The King of the Great Clock Tower*, 13ff., ms., in one folder. Second numbered ms., p. 5.

[14] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* p. 636.

[15] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé,* in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde,* pp. 597, 598, 599, 600.

[16] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* p. 637.

The earlier manuscript version projects a more serious attitude towards Stroller's claim to sacredness. In this version he fasts by the river for some months rather than the risible few days in the finished play and although the gods shout their approval in both versions, it is followed by a sense of profoundness in the earlier script – "after that there was silence".[17] All outward show of seriousness disappears from the final text. Yeats undercuts any obvious similarity between Stroller and Iokanaan, by the use of humour. Stroller is bumptious and forthright, lacking the grandeur of Herod and the austerity of Iokanaan, he appears to be derivative, almost a comic synthesis of the two. Although equipped with Iokanaan-like properties – sacredness, fasting, associated prophecy and in time, a severed head – Yeats succeeds in having him appear an unlikely candidate for the saint.

In another inversion of *Salomé*, it is the King, a character with an even greater affinity to Wilde's Herod than Stroller, who demands the head of the holy man. Stroller has incurred his displeasure as he will not obey his will by ending his presumptuous requests. Unrepentant, Stroller persists in his belief that the Queen will dance and continues to echo Salomé's refrain that the Queen will "kiss [his] mouth".

The Queen resembles Salomé in her beauty and in her haughty demeanour. However, she is an abstract figure who lacks personal emotion and sensuality. Sensuality is conferred on her through the dance and the song she sings which indicates that she is consciously moving towards sexual consummation with Stroller's severed head: "He longs to kill/My body, until/That sudden shudder/And limbs lie still". In Wildean fashion, Yeats does not give

[17] N.L.I. Ms. 8769/M.film 7493, W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, p. 7.

directions for this dance but he indicates its narcissistic and alluring nature and the Queen's hauteur through the words of the King: "Display your beauty, spread your peacock tail". The Queen, like Salomé, is self-obsessed and her desire is fixed.

Yeats's interpretation of the dual nature of Wilde's Salomé is represented in the still image of the Queen within the movement of dance and in the Queen's remoteness from her sensual actions and intent. The King, like Herod, suffers from unrequited desire. He desires the Queen but she ignores him and like Herod, he mistakenly believes that her dance bears some relation to him, ironically he encourages it: "Dance, turn him into mockery with a dance".[18] The King fails to see the powerful act which is unfolding before him until it is too late. This is indicated more clearly by Yeats in the manuscript version of the play: "Dance, dance, you were nothing to him but an image in his head, and now he is nothing to you but what is the good of a lover that is but a head (he laughs) dance".[19]

The irony is palpable. The lover being dead becomes a potent force which will forge new unions and generate new births through the consummatory death kiss with the living Queen. This is the first time in a Yeats's play that the kiss of completion is achieved.

The kiss works as the climactic point of Yeats's various themes. It is the moment when the artist attains his muse and having gained her, sings. It also represents the fusion of the opposing objective and subjective ways of being into a synthesised unity of being. It is the

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[18] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* pp. 638, 639.

[19] N.L.I. Ms. 8769/M.film 7493, W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, p. 10.

moment at which life and death meet and bring into being a realm free of temporal and spatial constraints. It represents the point at which one form of civilisation gives way to another.

The play opens with the thematically unifying image of Yeats's imaginatively conjectured Salomé poised before revelation, it closes with the equally unifying image of the revelatory kiss of Salomé to the severed head of the holy man. This transcendental moment, as in Wilde's play, occurs through the agency of the senses. This wisdom passed on by Wilde to Yeats – "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses"[20] – is given to Stroller by Aengus, as though it were a secret of the gods. When Stroller brought his problem to the gods and told them of his desire, they approved his quest and Aengus intimated its appeasement forecasting that the revelation which Stroller seeks will come about through the senses: "The queen will kiss you upon the mouth". This act, Aengus says, will take place at a transitional moment, twelve midnight on "the last night of the year when the great clock strikes the last note of midnight". At this most magical of moments when body realises soul, the ultimate integration - that between life and death - takes place.

In Wilde's *Salomé* this moment of access to a liminal realm of life and death is symbolically indicated by a moonbeam. The outside symbolic agent of supernatural power in Yeats's play is represented by Aengus, god of beauty and art. In Yeats's theory of unity of being this outside agent is represented by the daimon. Wilde envisaged the transformatory power of this moment and sees in it the point at which desire might be fulfilled. Yeats

[20] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* p. 30.

perceives Wilde's point and extends it. He allows that in this liminal moment, free of time, the most extravagant human desires and sexual expectations are exceeded and satisfied.

> Crossed fingers there in pleasure can
> Exceed the nuptial bed of man,
> What of the hands on the Great Clock face?
> A nuptial bed exceed all that
> Boys at puberty have thought.

He hints at the mysterious wonder that can be accessed when and where these states meet as dead and living become one. The Head sings of such a space: "What's prophesied? What marvel is/Where the dead and living kiss?"[21]

This Wildean moment is also used by Yeats to express his theory of unity of being in which he avails of the oppositionary symbology which has been graphically depicted by Wilde. As Helen Vendler[22] suggests, this conception is also seen by Yeats as the act of artistic creation – the Queen represents the image and sings before dancing – "O, what may come/Into my womb/What caterpillar/My beauty consume?" The creative process is an exchange between artist and image. Stroller tells the Queen – "Dance and dance/Till I grow grateful, and grown grateful sing".[23] Unity of being is achievable at the artistic level in the fusion of image and artist. In the real conditions of living Yeats depicts the lot of the artist as despair and unfulfilment. Stroller awaking from the "common dream"[24] leaves his wife and

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[21] N.L.I. Ms. 8769/M.film 7493, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, p. 7.

[22] Helen Vendler, quoted in *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats,* ed. A. Norman Jeffares, p. 255, 256.

[23] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* pp. 638, 636.

[24] W.B. Yeats, "Ego Dominus Tuus", in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae,* in *Mythologies,* p. 323.

his comforts and follows the muse – "the image in [his] head". All he is left with is his art, the taunting image, and his unappeasable desire.

The dance in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* achieves the grand symbolic stature towards which Yeats has been working; it is an image of transcendence which overrides spatial and temporal barriers and it encompasses the movement of all existence. Within this greater movement, the Queen dances. The dance of the Queen, like that of Salomé, incorporates the physical and spiritual in one synchronic movement. The moment of consummation occurs as the dance comes to a close and one year is about to take the place of the last. The Queen before dancing, has wondered what she will conceive from this union. Yeats draws the analogy between the sexual act and the coming into being of civilisations. At the climactic moment of one era the next era is conceived and brought into being. Yeats is working with Wilde's concepts and working through his symbols but he is creating a personal and more radical vision.

The Queen, from the start of the play has been seen as an image, "Dumb as an image made of wood or marble." Life and death combine in the image. She is further described as, "A screen between the living and the dead".[25] Her stillness suggests total subjectivity which increases as the 15th phase approaches. Stroller, on the other hand, is her opposite. He is loud and extroverted. They seek their opposite in the kiss and come together achieving unity of being in as much as that is possible. At the 15th phase, according to Yeats, no human life is possible and unity of being is embodied in a beautiful image. It is, perhaps, this realisation

[25] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* pp. 636, 634.

which prevents the King from putting the Queen to death with his sword. He lays the sword at her feet as though suddenly aware that she has put on transcendent knowledge and is no longer mortal, but a perfect image of unity of being. He submits to her in this new state.

The play ends with the Queen "framed in the half-closed curtains", standing as the beautiful image of unity of being. Human life may not be possible at this stage but a prolongation of that realm of existence promoted by Wilde in *Salomé* and born of the conjunction between opposing orders – life and death – is envisaged by Yeats. The still image of the Queen is the visual representation of the liminal space forged by life and death and now developed into a concept of eternal time by Yeats and depicted by him in the final words of the play: "I have stood so long by the gap in the wall/Maybe I shall not die at all".

The notion of time as a barrier to existence is defeated in this play. The great clock, rather like Wilde's moon in *Salomé*, looks down on the action in the play. The moon in that play interacts with the characters on stage, changing colour in tune with the prevailing mood and completing the climactic moment to which the play leads. The clock marks the constant presence of time, the King of the Clock Tower is earth bound, mocked by his finiteness. Stroller breaks through the bonds of time. Yeats gives the sense of eternal existence going on before and after human life and life being but a particular portion of existence. "Oh what is life but a mouthful of air?" Just as he has framed his play within the two images of Salomé – poised and complete – Yeats frames his play within a dance. At the beginning of the play the attendants sing of "Tir nan nOge" [sic] and the happy, dancing lovers who live in this timeless land. Time is theirs – "lad and lass … Are bobbins where all time is bound and wound". In the

final song, the attendants sing of a ruined castle, Castle Dargan, in which those who no longer live human lives are dancing: "Yet all the lovely things that were/Live for I saw them dancing there".[26] These have escaped earthly time and dance in a timeless zone. Yeats had described human life in terms of dancers dogged by time in his poem, "Nineteen hundred and Nineteen": "All men are dancers/And their tread goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong".[27]

The overthrow of temporality constitutes a grand usurpation of power. All art is a challenge against death and the fusion of life and death to create a liminal, imaginative space is the ultimate denial of death. Yeats has done this also in the crafting of the liminal world of perfection in his holy city of Byzantium, a city of tropes and man-made beauty which rivals nature. In the poem, "Sailing to Byzantium", Yeats overcomes temporality – "the young in one another's arms" – and sets himself up as an eternal work of art of the highest achievement. Yeats's stance towards youth and death, in opposition to reality and its limitations, is splendidly heroic. Desire finds its fulfilment in such an imaginative setting, being becomes perfect, transposed into the beautiful image. Wilde had created in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and in his essay, "The Decay of Lying", such imaginative, liminal spaces. Both provided a rich imaginative context for the encouragement of Yeats's speculations on the imaginative nature of being. Wilde had posed the paradox – "The soul is born old but grows young. That is the comedy of life." "And the body is born young and

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[26] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* pp. 641, 640, 633, 640.

[27] W.B. Yeats, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" in *Yeats's Poems,* p. 314.

grows old. That is life's tragedy."[28] Yeats, in many of his later poems and plays, as in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, deals with this topic and seeks to confound life's logic by overwhelming the rigidity of our current concept of time.

A true ephebe, Yeats represses all knowledge of influence. However, having been alerted to the likeness between his play, *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, and Wilde's *Salomé*, he makes it an imperative to lay his precursor's ghost and, at the same time, assert his own creative priority. He does this by writing a new play. *A Full Moon in March* is self-consciously created; Yeats uses as the organic material of the play the same elements he has used in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and which he had long ago appropriated from Wilde but, this time, he takes meticulous care to indicate that the meaning they embody is entirely his own creation.

A Full Moon in March is a tour de force. In it Yeats achieves his early aspiration of establishing a pantheon of connected symbols, enclosing their own meaning and operating alongside the surface play at the level of another language. The intricacies of Yeats's metaphysics are represented by the various symbols. The play is the most perfect dramatic expression of these developed concepts. While Wilde's images and ideas have been integral to the germinating process of his thought and are a still discernible force, the play has out grown its origins. In *A Full Moon in March* Yeats shows himself a "strong poet" and usurps the position of his precursor.

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[28] Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance,* in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde,* p. 476.

Harold Bloom has depicted the passing on of influence as a "battlefield"; there are elements of this in *A Full Moon in March* but ultimately it is the last scene of play with his precursor in which Yeats delights in a show of his own virtuosity and master craftsmanship. He confidently uses Wilde's symbols and playfully includes words taken directly from Wilde's play. In the spirit of the artist, Stroller, he thumbs his nose at the hero of his youth. This is the Yeats of *Songs for Music Perhaps* – profane, confident, master of his art. Yet even at these heights the anxiety of influence is powerful.

Yeats's anxiety is all too apparent in the bold disclaimer of such an influence which prefaces *A Full Moon in March;* his denial continues into the text of the play, both in its style and in its covert references to Wilde and his work

In a deft move towards self-origination, Yeats attempts to erase all telltale traces of Wildean influence from *A Full Moon in March.* He incorporates into it the source which he claimed for *The King of the Great Clock Tower* in his defence against the charge of plagiarising Wilde. Yeats had maintained that *The King of the Great Clock Tower* was based on an old Irish legend of a slain deity[29] whose head was placed on a stick before his lover. The Second Attendant in *A Full Moon in March* asks what is to be sung and is answered by the First Attendant: "An ancient Queen/That stuck a head upon a stake". To which the Second Attendant replies: "Her lover's head'/But that's a different queen, a different story".[30] The manuscript version is even more emphatic - "But this has nothing to do with this place that

[29] Prefaces 87 and 91Preface to *A Full Moon in March,* in the *Variorum Edition Yeats's Poems*, pp., 1311, 1312.

[30] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* in *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats,* p. 627.

was quiet [sic] a different queen". Yeats emphasises the originality of his new play, its lack of Wildean influence and points to the source in ancient myth which he had claimed for *The King of the Great Clock* and this play itself as being totally different from *A Full Moon in March*.

Rejection of influence is further consolidated by Yeats in the substitution he makes for the song immediately following the reference to the play as "A different story". According to his manuscript version Yeats had indicated that the "other song of the severed head from ... *King of the Great Clock Tower*" is to be sung here by the Second Attendant. This is the song which begins –

> Saddle and ride, I heard a man say,
> Out of Ben Bulben and Knocnarea,
> What says the Clock in the Great Clock Tower?
> All those tragic characters ride
> Out from Rosses crawling tide,
> The meet's upon the mountain side.
> A slow note and an iron bell.[31]

However, by the final version of *A Full Moon in March* Yeats decided against borrowing this song and composes quite a different one. Deliberately and consciously encoded within the text of this new song is a witty refutation of Wilde's influence. At the same time as he was writing *A Full Moon in March* Yeats was editing *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, which, he admitted, meant concentrated work on each of its poets and rigorous "study of rhythm".[32] Yeats included Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol" in this anthology, radically rearranging it.

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[31] N.L.I. Ms. 8906/M.film 7493. "*W.B. Yeats: 13pp.* of *Full Moon in March* here called *The Swineherd*", pp. 10, 11.

The new song in *A Full Moon in March* bears a remarkable likeness to Wilde's ballad and in its rhythm and rhymes appears to be a cleverly humorous send-up of it. Yeats even uses internally rhymed lines - "They lie that say in mockery" or "And all men lie that say that I" - to parallel those internal rhymes of Wilde's – "He does not pray with lips of clay" or "But it is not sweet with nimble feet".

It is the second half of the song in which Yeats enumerates the various ways in which women have loved that is of particular interest as it reads like a parody of Wilde's poem. Yeats writes:

> O what innkeeper's daughter
> Shared the Byzantine crown?
> Girls that have governed cities,
> Or burned great cities down,
> Have bedded with their fancy-man
> Whether a king or clown;
>
> Gave their bodies, emptied purses
> For praise of clown or king,
> Gave all the love that women know!
> O they had their fling,
> But never stood before a stake
> And heard the dead lips sing.[33]

Yeats's women behave in a venal, self-interested fashion, taking what they can. They represent the universally abusive nature of love which Wilde suggests in his *Ballad of Reading Gaol* - "For each man kills the thing he loves". Yeats quotes two stanzas from "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. The first

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[32] See letters: "To Ethel Manin", "June 24 [Post-mark 1935]", p. 835; "To Lady Dorothy Wellesley", "Nov. 28 [1935]", p. 843. Wade, *The Letters*. Yeats completed work on *OBMV* in November 1935. A *Full Moon in March* was published in the same month.

[33] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 627

stanza below is one of these and in it Wilde instances the many ways in which lovers kill their beloved.

> Some kill their love when they are young,
> And some when they are old;
> Some strangle with the hands of Lust,
> Some with the hands of Gold:
> The kindest use a knife, because
> The dead so soon grow cold.
>
> Some love too little, some too long,
> Some sell, and others buy;
> Some do the deed with many tears,
> And some without a sigh:
> For each man kills the thing he loves
> Yet each man does not die.[34]

Both poems depict all lovers as guilty of similar behaviour. In the same way as in the second stanza of Wilde's quoted above, Yeats draws our attention to the exceptional fate of one individual. Most men, according to Wilde's concluding lines, manage to evade the ultimate penalty of death for their crime against love. Similarly, in Yeats's last lines, most women do not have to pay the ultimate price for love in witnessing their lover dead. Yeats's inversion, or female perspective, bears an obvious relation to Wilde's poem and illustrates a certain ludic delight on its author's part.

Yeats had stated in his preface to *Calvary* that secrets are contained in the songs of his plays and this is surely a cunningly secreted declaration of the obsolescence of his precursor and of his own creative superiority and independence.[35]

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[34] W.B. Yeats, *Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (rpt., Nov. 1936; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. vii and Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* p. 884.

[35] W.B. Yeats, *Notes to Calvary* collected in *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, p. 789. "I have written the little songs of the chorus to please myself, confident that the singer and composer, when the time

Yeats had justified his rearrangement of Wilde's ballad in the preface to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Writing in a manuscript version of the preface to the work, he says:

> I have stood in judgement upon Wilde, bringing into the light a great, or almost great poem, as he himself had done had he lived, my own work gave me that right.[36]

The word "right" is underlined in yet another draft of this statement.[37] There is a proprietorial ring to the word "right" and a certain arrogance bred of familiarity. Although, by "work" Yeats means the editing of the *Oxford Book*, it is more accurately his own creative work and the part Wilde plays in it that confers on him any creative "rights" over his precursor's work. In the published Introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* Yeats attempts to establish distance between himself and the rewritten poem of his precursor by substituting the more disengaged word, "privilege", for "right". The strong almost defensive terms, in which he had explained his re-arrangement suggests his realisation of the enormity of what he had done namely, the taking on of the voice of his precursor and writing his poem "as it should have been done". This is a fine illustration of Bloom's revisionary ratio of Tessera in which the ephebe completes his precursor. In *A Full Moon in March* Yeats carries on in this fashion remaking Wilde's *Salomé* in his own, often antithetical, terms.

Yeats reiterates the separateness of his text and Wilde's by the manner in which he chooses to write *A Full Moon in March.* Yeats's strikingly spare expression contrasts starkly

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came for performance, would certainly make it impossible for the audience to know what the words were. I used to think that singers should sing a recipe for a good dish, or a list of local trains, or something else they want to get by heart, but I have changed my mind and now I prefer to give him some mystery or secret".

[36] N.L.I. Micro-fiche 30,295. W.B. Yeats, *Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* Ts. (33 pp.) Ms. (3pp.) Ts. signed and dated in W.B.Yeats's hand "Nov. 15 1935", Ts., p. 3.

[37] N.L.I. Ms./ Micro-fiche 30,522. W.B. Yeats, *Introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* with ts. and corrected page proof, dated [erroneously] 4 June 1930. Ms., p. 1B.

with Wilde's more generous prose style, the asperity of Yeats's style effectively countering any immediate recognition of similarity between the two texts. The method is precise and there is no elaboration. The Queen's oath, for example, is briefly and effectively dealt with – in answer to the Swineherd's enquiry that she will be the wife and give her kingdom to him "that sings [her] best", she says: "I swore it".[38] There is no grand exposition; she mentions that whoever sings his passion best will win her, intimating that it is her desire which has led her to take such an oath, just as desire was the impetus for Herod's incautious promise.

Everything in Yeats's play is as Wilde said, "surface and symbol" and beneath each surface lies a wealth of anterior meaning.[39] Symbol mixes with the superficial and forms part of the surface action of the play which tells the simple story of a Queen who offers herself and her kingdom to any lover whose song pleases her most. She dislikes the disrespectful manner of the Swineherd who comes to try his luck and so she has him beheaded. She then dances, the head sings and she kisses his lips.

It is the underlying mesh of metaphysics which Yeats attaches to each of his images in this drama that makes it so particular to him. An understanding of the full import of the precise moment of events on stage, a particular moment in the month of March when the moon is full, is essential to an understanding of Yeats's philosophical purpose within the play. Yeats's temporal placement of the kiss, the central moment, invests it with such portentous

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[38] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 623.

[39] Oscar Wilde, "The Preface", *The picture of Dorian Gray*, p. 17.

philosophical meaning that he succeeds in making his appropriation of Wilde's climactic scene from *Salomé* seem insignificant and his own claim to originality persuasive.

A lunar March is critically important in Yeats's understanding of the progression of civilisations. It takes its widest contextual importance from its position as the month of the vernal equinox – 25th March at Rome – in which the constellation of Aries will return to its original position in the skies, so making the completion of the 26,000 year cycle of the Great Year of the Ancients, the *Magnus Annus*: "And then did all the Muses sing/Of *Magnus Annus* in the Spring".[40]

Yeats speaks of an intellectual "movement" which is already building and which will reach its climax at this point in the lunar March becoming fully systematised and signifying an antithetical influx and the full inauguration of a new antithetical dispensation which "must reverse our era and resume past eras in itself; what else it must be no man can say".[41] At this point Yeats says the 13th cone intervenes which represents the unique and the arbitrary. Yeats acknowledges the difficulty, through lack of experience and imaginative grasp, in building an historical symbolism which covers such a vast period of time but feels it is necessary unless we are to believe with Vico that the world returns constantly to the one point. In Yeats's system there is recurrence but, always, progression. The projector of change, Yeats believes, is antithesis,[42] major images of antithesis in his iconography being Christ and Caesar. Wilde

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[40] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 254.

[41] ibid., p. 263.

[42] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, p. 13.

set these images before the young Yeats in 1888: "Think what the world owes to the imitation of Christ, what to the imitation of Caesar".[43] The month of March figures again in this historical scheme of time. Christ was crucified and rose from death in that month; it is also the month in which Caesar was assassinated. Yeats designates it "the month of victims and of saviours".[44] Yeats tells us that the moon shone full when Christ rose from the dead and that the magical presence of the moon was once required for the celebration of the Ides of March – Caesar's fatal day.[45] It is at this moment the play takes place under the transforming power of a full moon in the month of birth and death and the fusion of antitheses, the month of the vernal equinox.

The Swineherd tells the Queen: "You must be won/At a full moon in March".[46] Yeats's theories about this "archetypal" month are subtly present in the final published version of the play but are indicated more directly in an earlier manuscript where the Second Attendant says - "All that I could get out of him was something about a full moon in March ... Christ upon the Cross, Caesar died ..."[47]

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[43] W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, p. 270. Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", p. 1085, 1086.

[44] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 245.

[45] ibid., p. 245.

[46] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 624.

[47] W.B. Yeats, Ms. 8906. M/F 7493, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 1.

At the point of intersection between the climax of one era and the inception of the next revelation occurs. Yeats writes that "antithetical revelation is an intellectual influx neither from beyond mankind nor born of a virgin, but begotten from our spirit and history".[48]

The Queen and Swineherd symbolise such a union. They are placed at a point within the Great Year, this is their historical context, as Helen's was Troy and as Troy was necessary to her being Helen. The plasticity of the moment of change, the dance before the "adored image", the climactic kiss, spirit united with its antithesis, the Great Year taking all eras in on itself and reversing the previous era: What will be begotten? Yeats says it is impossible to know for at that moment the "unique" always interferes and cannot be mapped. He guesses at the outcome in his poem, "The Second Coming", visualising the "uncontrollable mystery" on the stable floor.[49] The Queen in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* had posed the question as to what might come into her womb and a monstrous birth is presaged in *A Full Moon in March* in the story the Swineherd tells of the child begotten by the blood of a dead man.

Yeats, in *A Full Moon in March*, is alert to communicating his meaning; all haziness present in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* has been eliminated. Yeats is at pains to illustrate the originality and distinctiveness of his work and, indeed, he has invested the symbolic kiss of life and death with a magisterial power: the inauguration of a new era, the explanation of time and the movement of worlds. The historical moment supplied by Yeats – a full moon in March – intensifies the symbolic possibility of transformation and

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[48] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 262.

[49] W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming", *A Vision,* p. 263 and *Yeats's Poems,* ed., A. Norman Jeffares, p. 294.

transcendental attainment. It also has the effect of weakening this moment in Wilde's play which does not have the benefit of such intense symbolic back-up. He has outdistanced his precursor whose protagonist, Salomé, achieves merely individual progression, perfection of personality and personal transcendence.

Yet still recognisable within the very fabric of Yeats's radical conclusions are Wilde's now converted or reversed concepts which made such conclusions possible: Salomé poised before revelation is no longer an image of decadence but of "civilisation perfectly achieved".[50] Christ and Caesar are still representing the spiritual and temporal though much developed, while the antithetical images of life and death and their issue are powerfully compressed in a unified image of severed head, virginal dancer and kiss of completion.

Yeats espouses Wilde's theory that an idea is most effectively conveyed through image. Wilde had defined truth in art in *De Profundis* as "the unity of a thing with itself: the outward rendered expressive of the inward: the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit".[51] Yeats endorses this theory and treats it creatively – "Man can embody the truth but he cannot know it ... the abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence..."[52] Saint and Fool are images that defy logic. *A Full Moon in March* is the visual and symbolic rendering of Yeats's truths. In it

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[50] W.B. Yeats, *A Vision,* p. 273.

[51] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (London: Methuen, 1922), p. 78.

[52] "To Lady Elizabeth Pelham", "Jan. 4, 1939", *The Letters of W.B. Yeats,* ed., Wade, p. 922.

he explains nothing, exposition is so minimal as to be almost non-existent since the play is wrought entirely of image and symbol.

Yeats admitted to embodying his "private philosophy" within another of his plays, *The Death of Cuchulain*, and of intentionally hiding all signs within it. In *A Full Moon in March* he has already achieved this aim. The Head sings: "I sing a song of Jack and Jill,/Jill had murdered Jack;/*The moon shone brightly*;/Ran up the hill, and round the hill,/Round the hill and back,/*A full moon in March*." He sings of victims and saviours: "Had hung his heart beyond the hill./A-twinkle in the sky". This nonsense rhyme, embodies truth within its stanzas and its potent refrain: "A full moon in March". The play itself is such an image created from symbols.[53]

Visual impact was always important for Yeats in terms of influencing his creative imagination and in terms of his own presentation of ideas. Just as he deployed visual, imaginative configurations of his theory of personal and historical unity of being in *The Four Plays for Dancers*, Yeats depicts an abstract image of interlocking gyres in these two plays. The clock, high up in its tower in *the King of the Great Clock Tower* and the moon in *A Full Moon in March* call the eye upward to a fixed point – one figuratively winding and unwinding the loaded bobbin of time, the other executing its 28 phases fixed within its imaginary expansion of circular light. Below, on stage, the dancer reproduces this movement, moving

[53] W.E. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* pp. 628, 629.

outward from a fixed point. Each image sketches on the air the ever moving vortexes, each image "perns in a gyre".[54]

Yeats's images in *A Full Moon in March* are loaded with symbolic significance: the composite symbol of dance, severed head and kiss goes to the depths of Yeats's contemplative thought. Besides the public aspect of his theories, spirit and history, he invests it with his fundamental enquiries into personal transcendence and spiritual longing. Not alone is the symbol he uses directly attributable to Wilde, but Wilde's thought figures largely in the conceptual dynamics on which it depends. Moon and clock although static are symbols of motion and mount in abstract gyres of the type most graphically depicted by Yeats in the mounting hawk and which he attributes to the thought of Dionysius. On the other hand, Yeats ascribes the dancer to Plotinus's "soul of the world," dancing on a level circle. Yeats says that Aquinas used both symbols to illustrate the "soul playing into the immensity of God and the same soul in adoration". Yeats follows this statement with the explanatory words "between knowledge and love", crossed out and circled.[55]

There are various intimations in the play of the accepted presence of a deity. The Queen admits, "I owe my thanks to God ..."She tells the Swineherd to pray before being beheaded. Yeats writes of the Head as representing, under one of its aspects, a slain god

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[54] W.B Yeats, "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen", "Sailing to Byzantium", in *Yeats's Poems,* ed., A. Norman Jeffares, pp. 314, 301.

[55] N.L.I. Manuscript 8774 (4) 2ff. ty./s of cancelled note on *Fighting the* Waves.

figure. In *A Full Moon in March* the Queen dances before the head "a dance of adoration" as Yeats describes it in his stage directions. The dancer symbolises "the soul in adoration".

The Queen dances before the head in adoration, poised between "love and knowledge". She has just sung of her love for the Swineherd and like Wilde's Salomé, her passion as love only becomes clear to her after the beheading. The knowledge to which Yeats refers is the burden of the spirit which he acknowledges in "Michael Robartes and the Dancer" as the impotence of one without the other: "Did God in portioning wine and bread/Give man his thought or his mere body?"[56] Again, in "Leda and the Swan" he formulates the question, asking whether the knowledge of the spirit is transmitted to the body in the act of sexual consummation – "Did she put on his knowledge with his power/Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?"[57] Yeats's question is whether final and complete exchange takes place at the moment of symbolic interchange and consummation. Wilde's answer is "yes" and in *A Full Moon in March* Yeats clearly accepts Wilde's position.

Wilde had explained in *De Profundis* the conversion of bodily appetites into nutrition for the soul and vice versa. He described how the soul is often most fully revealed through debasement. This theory is at the nub of Yeats's thought in *A Full Moon in March.* The swineherd besmirches the Queen's image from the outset as he arrives befouled and speaks of rolling in the dung on hearing of her passion. She unveils her face in invitation of defilement and she, whose "emblem is the moon", steps down from the haughty niche to encounter the

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[56] W.B. Yeats, "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", in *Yeats's Poems,* ed. A. Norman Jeffares, p. 281.

[57] W.B. Yeats, "Leda and the Swan", in *Yeats's Poems,* ed., A. Norman Jeffares, p. 322 and in *A Vision,* p. 267.

Swineherd in "desecration and the lover's night".[58] Salomé has experienced such an encounter and thrown queenly hauteur to the winds in her abject pursuit of sexual gratification. In his unpublished stage directions, which are unusually explicit for Yeats, he indicates his adherence to Wilde's premise that fullest spiritual transcendence is achieved through the satisfaction of sexual appetites: "Her dance expresses the sexual act. She kisses the head. Her body shivers. She sinks slowly down – holding the head against her breast".[59] From this situation physical change takes place. Yeats's indebtedness to Wilde's philosophical position is further suggested in his prominent and repetitive use of the word "desecration" which is used by Wilde in *De Profundis* in a key passage on his theory of the relation of soul and senses:

> For just as the body absorbs things of all kinds, things common and unclean no less than those that the priest or a vision has cleansed, and converts them into swiftness or strength, into the play of beautiful muscles and the moulding of fair flesh, into the curves and colours of the hair, the lids, the eye; so the soul in its turn has its nutritive functions also, and can transform into noble moods of thought and passions of high import what in itself is base, cruel, and degrading; nay, more, may find in these its most august modes of assertion, and can often reveal itself most perfectly through what was intended to desecrate or destroy.[60]

Yeats writes in *A Full Moon in March*:

Second Attendant:	Why must those holy, haughty feet descend From emblematic niches ...What do they seek for? Why must they descend?
First Attendant:	For desecration and the lover's night
Second Attendant:	What can she lack whose emblem is the moon?
First Attendant:	But desecration and the lover's night.

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[58] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* pp. 629, 630, 629.

[59] N.L.I. Ms. 8906/ M/F 7493: W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 13.

[60] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis,* pp. 43, 44.

The attendants end the play in extending the Queen's lack and need of desecration to the ineffectiveness and incompleteness of the spiritual without the catalytic sexual opposite.

> Second Attendant: But look and look with understanding eyes upon the pitchers that they carry, tight
> Therein all time's completed treasure is:
> What do they lack? O cry it out again.
> First Attendant: Their desecration and the lover's night.[61]

The emergence of the word, "desecration" within Yeats's creative use of this very theory of Wilde's signals, yet again, the powerful creative force of repression. The flagrant use of the word could also be seen as an attempt by Yeats to indicate his indifference in respect of any imputed influence of Wilde's. This type of direct borrowing occurs earlier in the play in the context of another Saloméan appropriation – the role of prophet.

Prophecy is not as obviously dealt with in *A Full Moon in March* as it has been in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* where the god, Aengus, foresees that the Queen will kiss the mouth of Stroller. There is, however, a sense of inevitability within the play, as though the action were following a preordained plan. The Queen detests the Swineherd but surprises herself by not immediately killing him: "But for some reason that I cannot guess/I would not harm you. Go before I change". The Swineherd's indifference to death betrays this sense of taking part in a predestined scheme. The story of the Queen who conceived a child from a drop of blood of a dead man increases the sense of destiny and builds towards the culmination of these prophetic gestures in the final kiss of consummation.

While Yeats uses humour in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* to disarm the obvious resemblance between Stroller and Iokanaan, his approach to the Swineherd as a Iokanaan

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[61] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* pp. 629, 630.

figure in *A Full Moon in March* is even more sophisticated. Despite the very obvious differences between these two there are strong and definite links. The Swineherd is callous and venal yet Yeats deftly connects him to the chaste prophet. In what amounts to an aside, the Swineherd utters one prophetic line about the Queen: "She shall bring forth her farrow in the dung".[62] The biblical language of the sentence and its odious sentiment strongly suggests Iokanaan's defamatory remarks: "Back! daughter of Babylon! By woman came evil into the world". This link is further strengthened by Yeats's audacious borrowing of words from this section of Wilde's play.

This section concerns Salomé's first encounter with Iokanaan and her attempt to seduce him. She praises his hair and his body but he rejects her advances and her praise turns to scorn: "Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust".[63] The Swineherd speaks of his hair and his dismal condition having come through the wilderness, the fasting place of Iokanaan: "Queen, look at me, look long at these foul rags,/At hair more foul and ragged than my rags;/Look on my scratched foul flesh. Have I not come/Through dust and mire? There in the dust and mire/Beasts scratched my flesh"[64] Yeats's use of the exact words "dust and mire" relate the Swineherd with Iokanaan. It seems as if in making use of these words, Yeats is deliberately challenging contentions of plagiarism. He is fully confident of his own artistic achievement in *A Full Moon in March* and it is as if he is demonstrating that these

[62] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* pp. 624, 625.

[63] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 590.

[64] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* pp. 623.

"borrowings" from Wilde are but incidental to the real act of creation in progress within *his* play. Traces of influence are in fact indicative of the immensity of his repression of Wilde's influence and his attempt to topple him as precursor by reducing him to a level of inconsequence.

Interestingly, the words in question appear in the context of "looking" in Wilde's play. Salomé desires to look at the prophet; she had heard his voice and pleaded with the Young Syrian Captain of the Guards to allow her look at him: "Bring out the prophet, I would look on him". She promises the Syrian in return that she will bestow a look on him; she puts him in her power by commanding him to look at her: "Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! You know that you will do what I ask of you".

"Looking" is given greater prominence in *A Full Moon in March* than it had in *The King of the Great Clock Tower.* Yeats employs it as Wilde had done to signify the symbolic act of possession but also derives from it aspects of his theory on face and mask. The Swineherd, unlike Iokanaan, invites the Queen to look at him long and hard and she repeats his gesture and turns the passive act of being looked at into the empowering activity it is in Wilde's *Salomé.* In *Salomé* it is the power of her seen image which will effect the required response in the Young Syrian. Yeats's Queen is empowered by the active choice implied in her being looked at. She drops the veil from her face before the Swineherd, conscious that in doing so his act of looking will defile her. Iokanaan is also aware of the power of looking to contaminate,– "Who is this woman who is looking at me? I will not have her looking at

me".[65] The Queen shows her awareness of the import of her action – "... my face is pure/Had it but known the insult of his eyes/I had torn it with these nails". Some moments later, she very deliberately "turns towards him ... and slowly drops her veil".[66]

The veil suggests Salomé's dance of the seven veils and perhaps it was Yeats's re-reading of *Salomé* for his preface to *A Full Moon in March* which suggested the veil to him, given his reference in the preface to Salomé's dance as the "uncovering of nakedness". Iokanaan tells Salomé that to safeguard her innocence she should "cover [her] face with a veil". She had in the same excerpt, promised Narraboth: "I will look at thee through the muslin veils".

The Queen in raising her veil to the Swineherd welcomes her defilement. Salomé would welcome the passion of Iokanaan and persists in articulating her lust for him although he reviles her: "Daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom!" The Young Syrian pleads with her: " ...look not at this man, look not at him! ... I cannot endure it". He commits suicide rather than see her debase herself. He had thought of her as "a garden of myrrh", "the dove of all doves" and she desecrated the image.

Both texts are bound together. Yeats, of course, is justified in his creative confidence. He uses the imaginative apparatus which he has gained from Wilde's words, images and philosophical ideas. They have become integral to his own thought and he creates through

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[65] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 587, 588, 589.

[66] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 626.

them work that is distinctly his own. This procedure is well illustrated in Yeats's use and expansion of looking.

In Wilde's play, Herod finds that the act of looking lies at the base of all his misfortune and pours out his newly found wisdom that one should not disturb the surface but should contemplate only the mask one presents to the world: "One should not look at anything. Neither at images, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks".[67] Yeats's Swineherd contemplates his reflection in a stream and finds there his foul and inhuman mask: "But when I look into a stream, the face/That trembles upon the surface makes me think/My origin more foul than rag or flesh".[68] Yeats does not leave the Swineherd contemplating his image but situates this mask at the heart of his theory of unity of being. Yeats presents throughout the play opposing images of self and anti-self in their various aspects, finally drawing them together through mask into unity of being in the symbolic image of dance and kiss.

While Wilde recommends the contemplation of mask, Yeats believes that one should actively seek a mask most opposed to natural self. From the outset of *A Full Moon in March* Yeats sets up polarities. He has done away with the intermediary role which the King played in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* so that there is a clearer interaction between self and anti-self and their active seeking of the other. Unappeasable desire has shifted its shape and is presented by Yeats under the guise of a compulsive search for antithesis. The Queen calls up

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[67] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, p. 590.

[68] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 623.

the Swineherd, a venal lout most opposite to her cold austerity. She is cold and virginal and projects a Saloméan cruelty: "I am crueller than solitude ... Cruel as the winter of virginity".[69] As subjective being, her desire is sometimes unconscious and she is propelled towards her opposite: "The most unlike being my anti-self".[70] The Swineherd, on the other hand, represents the objective. It is the objective, according to Yeats, that re-unites one with the mass, as the song which opens the play illustrates: "Crown of gold or dung of swine". The Swineherd is indifferent to the individuality of the Queen and takes no interest in seeing her features. She acknowledges this objectivity: "Pray, if your savagery has learnt to pray". The Second Attendant draws attention to the objective nature of the Swineherd in referring to his "savage sunlit heart". The Queen's emblem of the moon is an opposing subjective image to the objective sun. Their union fully illustrates Yeats's contention on the two halves of man: she is representative of Phase 15 and he of Phase 1. Their union discloses an image of unity of being on a personal and universal level.

The Swineherd embraces chance as he trusts to the roulette wheel "as every lover must". The Queen embodies choice, rejecting some lovers and choosing to embrace degradation, taking the Swineherd as lover. Yet polarities are reconciled in the dance. Just as Yeats imagined Salomé poised before the moment of revelation, so the Queen stands, poised to dance. She "holds above her head the severed head of the Swineherd", as if she is about to don the mask of anti-self. The First Attendant sings as the voice of the Queen, and tells of her

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[69] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 624.

[70] "Ego Dominus Tuus", *Per Amica Silentia Lunae,* p. 324.

love for the Swineherd; mask and Queen coalesce. She dances to "drum taps"[71] as though the dance were the struggle of life between man and Daimon. The Second Attendant sings as though she were the voice of the Head and alludes to the transformatory moment of "a full moon in March". The queen in her dance "moves away from the head, alluring and refusing".[72] The Queen's action is sensual and flirtatious but, more importantly, it symbolises the struggle which ensues following the adoption of mask – the attraction towards it and the fear of it.

> Because the ghost is simple, the man, heterogeneous and confused, they are but knit together when the man has found a mask whose lineaments permit the expression of all the man most lacks, and it may be dreads, and of that only.[73]

When Yeats denied the influence of Wilde's *Salomé* and, as proof of the gulf between both plays, pointed to the execution of the holy man happening after the dance in Wilde's play as opposed to before it in his own play, he was not being as trivial as most critics have suggested. Nor was he protesting too much, as others believe. While Wilde's climactic moment of the kiss between life and death and resulting transcendence remains the same for Yeats, he has increased the symbolism carried by both it and the dance and has galvanised them into a powerful vehicle of his personal philosophy. The holding of the head before the dance is crucial to this newly attained symbolic metaphor. The holding of the head, representing the donning of opposing mask, the struggle between opposing states which follows in the dance and the final kiss of completion which takes place under the

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[71] W.B. Yeats, *A Full Moon in March,* p. 629.

[72] ibid., p. 629.

[73] W.B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, p. 335.

transformatory power of the full moon in March are conceived as a close progression through which Yeats achieves a graphic, visual depiction of his metaphysical position.

A Full Moon in March exemplifies Harold Bloom's theory of influence while accommodating Yeats's more playful tendencies in his covert parody of Wilde's ballad. Yeats's initial admiration for Wilde's work is evidenced in his use of it as creative material. Bloom's second revisionary ratio is present in Yeats's completion of Wilde's text. He completes Wilde's story in the male protagonist's reciprocal desire for the Queen. Yeats demonstrates Bloom's third revisionary ratiio, daemonization, in emptying *Salomé* of its meaning and completing this action by restituting a meaning of his own, in line with Bloom's fourth ratio. The outward story of *Salomé,* though somewhat changed, is immediately recognisable. Its meaning has undergone extreme change. Wilde's play was about personal transcendence, perfection of personality and the nature of desire. While Yeats's play involves all of these, he presents in it completed theories on cultural regeneration, the antithetical nature of change and a systematic approach to unity of being. Bloom's fifth revisionary ratio in his theory of influence, askesis, or self-discipline, is evident in the stark, spare style in which Yeats conducts his play in contrast with his earlier use of Wilde's material. The final ratio, apophrades, in which the poet subverts time and appears to have originated himself is also evident in Yeats's play. Wilde's symbols have been reconstituted as Yeats's images, carrying *his* meaning and merely suggesting their origins. Time has been overturned. It is as if Yeats's is the prior text.

A Full Moon in March combines the highest intellectual achievement and artistic accomplishment – something "to perfection brought".[74] Yeats still makes use of Wilde's symbols and his metaphysics of soul and body but he has arrived at the culminating moment, the completed process where outwardly, although all the Saloméan elements are present, Yeats has liberated his art unto itself.

[74] W.B. Yeats, "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes ", in *Yeats's Poems,* ed., A. Norman Jeffares, p. 277.

Conclusion

Wilde's influence affected Yeats's creativity throughout his lifetime, beginning even before both writers first met (1888) and ending in the last months of Yeats's life (1939) in *The Death of Cuchulain* where Yeats, once again, re-imagined the dance of Salomé: "Upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death". The process of influence is characterised by an agonistic and irenic impulse. Bloom would have it that admiration comes first followed by the struggle but, as we have seen, admiration and the ludic tendency are capable of disrupting at any moment, the resolute linear course of the agonistic pursuit.

Yeats assimilated Wilde's concepts and developed and expanded them throughout his work. He first experimented with mask in his early twenties when he adopted Wilde's artistic stance and liberated his constrained personality into style. Yeats faithfully applied Wilde's ideas on mask in the many drafts of *The Player Queen* (1908-1910). Five years later he creatively revised his earlier thinking on mask, in *The Player Queen* (1915-1917) and in his philosophical treatise, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. He responded to the antithetical image of Wilde in *De Profundis* and, in conformity with the behaviour of a Bloomean ephebe, he reproduced Wilde's theory on mask in its antithesis. Yeats's new perception of antithetical mask became one of the major entities in his philosophical system.

Yeats used the symbols he appropriated from Wilde's *Salomé* again and again within his work and increased their range and intensity by combining them in powerful composite images. Although in his later work he boldly developed the symbols which he

used tentatively in the early revisions of *The Shadowy Waters, On Baile's Strand* and *Deirdre* (1905-1906), they retained something of Wilde's original meaning. In Yeats's final dance plays his metaphysical conclusions are inscribed in this Wildean symbolic language.

Yeats was sensitive to the power of image and receptive to the varying images he perceived in Wilde and in his work. He appropriated Wilde's divination of the hugely influential imagistic role of Caesar and Christ in Western thought and also his proposition in *De Profundis* that the abstract only becomes powerful when it is embodied in image. Yeats creatively employs Wilde's theories in the same way as he uses his symbols, strengthening their potential in exploiting their catalytic relation. He interrelated mask and image and advocated their agency in achieving unity of being and in crossing the threshold of normal consciousness.

Yeats's concept of "the gap in the wall",[1] that liminal pregnant space between life and death, owes much to Wilde's potent mixing of the earthly with the spiritual and good with evil in a search for a fuller knowledge of being. Wilde's thinking on the unappeasable nature of human desire encouraged Yeats's own thoughts on this topic and impressed him as adding something new to human knowledge. Wilde's equation of the energies of pain and joy contribute to Yeats's position on tragic joy and his proposition that all life is created by the artist finds a voice within his creative work.

Wilde was a major precursor of Yeats. His ideas and images changed the poet's perspective and informed the imaginative system of beliefs Yeats formulated as the basis

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[1] W.B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower, The Collected plays of W.B. Yeats,* p. 641.

of his creative work and, consequently, his dramatic and poetic work. The dialectical relationship between these two writers discloses the empowerment of Yeats in whose work Wilde's sublime is manifest. Harold Bloom claims that a strong poet will always appear to have originated himself. Wilde's influence on Yeats and the significant contribution he made to Yeats's creative progress has never been accredited to him. Yeats successfully usurped Wilde's position and his images and concepts have been so assimilated into Yeats's creative consciousness that they have assumed his voice and become "echoes of someone else's music".[2]

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[2] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* p. 28.

Chapter Three: Appendix 1

The Shadowy Waters

Revisions

First version *The Shadowy Waters* (1900):

Ms. 8761 & m/f 7491, folders 1-29, National Library of Ireland, contain mss., tss. and holographs relating to the first version, *The Shadowy Waters* (1900).

Yeats worked on the revisions of the 1900 version of his play from 1883 - 1900.

Two prompt copies of this version of the play are held in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library. Prompt copy 1 is described as "Typewritten prompt copy, with additions in Miss Horniman's hand 38p." This is almost certainly from Jan 14, 1904 production. The first copy was probably given to Florence Farr as the basis for the 1905 production. The second prompt copy seems copied from the first and is described as: "Typewritten prompt copy, with the author's ms. corrections and additions in Florence Farr's hand 38p." (Lola Szladits, "Addenda to Schnell" in *Bibliographhic Society of America, Vol. 62,* 1968, p. 617.)

Revised version *The Shadowy Waters* (1906):

Ms. 8761 & m/f 7491, folder 30, National Library of Ireland, contains ts. of the revised version, *The Shadowy Waters* (1906), written in the summer of 1905.

Ms. 21,506 & m/f 7466, N.L.I., contain the "Abbey Acting script of *The Shadowy Waters* 1906 with emendations in the hand of W.B. Yeats".

Yeats worked on the revisions of the 1906 version of his play from July 1905 - November 1905. He made some emendations to typescript in 1906.

Performance

First version *The Shadowy Waters* (1900):

First performed: Jan.14,1904 in the Molesworth Hall Dublin by the Irish National Theatre Society. [Yeats in U.S., missed performance.]

Second performance: July 8, 1905 at the Court Theatre, London under the direction of Florence Farr, who also played Dectora, before members of an International Theosophical Congress.

Revised version *The Shadowy Waters* (1906):

First performed: December 8, 1906 at the Abbey Theatre. Florence Darragh played Dectora.

Published versions of *The Shadowy Waters* referred to in chapter 3:

First version *The Shadowy Waters* (1900):

The Shadowy Waters (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900).

Revised version *The Shadowy Waters* (1906):

The Shadowy Waters: Poems 1899-1905 (London: A.H. Bullen, 1906).

The Shadowy Waters: as first played in the Abbey Theatre, Dec. 8th 1906 (London: A.H. Bullen, 1907).

Note: (a) The Abbey acting typescript (1906) with emendations in the hand of W.B. Yeats and its later publication by Bullen (1907) compare almost exactly; some slight differences. (b) The 1905 revision in folder 30 (N.L.I.) is almost identical with the version published in *Poems 1899-1905* (Bullen, 1906). (c) The texts mentioned in sentence (a) are substantially similar to those mentioned in sentence (b) with some notable differences. I have mentioned differences where relevant in notes to text.

Chapter Three: Appendix 2

On Baile's Strand

Performance

First version, *On Baile's Strand* (1903):

First performed: December 27, 1904 at the opening night of the Abbey Theatre Dublin.

Third version, *On Baile's Strand* (1906):

First performed: April 16, 1906 at the Abbey Theatre.

Published versions of *On Baile's Strand*

First version, *On Baile's Strand* (1903):

1. *On Baile's Strand* in *In the Seven Woods* (Dundrum: Dun Emer Press, 1903). (Printed on back: "finished the 16th July in the year of the big wind 1903").

2. *On Baile's Strand* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1905).

Third version, *On Baile's Strand* (1906):

On Baile's Strand in *Poems: 1899-1905* (London: Bullen, 1906).

Unpublished versions of *On Baile's Strand*

Second version, *On Baile's Strand* (1905): unpublished typescript

1. National Library Ireland, Ms. 30,017: "Page proofs of *Poems, 1899-1905* (1906). First proof dated 24 xi 1905. Contains part of *The Shadowy Waters* and *On Baile's Strand* pages numbered 65-96". Stamped on this ts. p. 81: "Wm. Brendan and Sons, ltd., Plymouth. First proof: 24.xi.05 revise. Please return to publisher". These proof pages go from beginning of play to entrance of boy.

Third version, *On Baile's Strand* (1906): National Library Ireland, Ms. 21,498 and Micro/film 7466. *Abbey Acting Typescript* with emendations in the hand of W.B. Yeats

(April 1906). The *Abbey Ts.* corresponds almost exactly with *Poems:1899-1905.* The hand-written emendations appear in print in the published version.

Chapter Three: Appendix 3

Deirdre

Revisions

Ms. 8760 and m/f 7491, folders 1-20, National Library of Ireland contain manuscripts, typescripts and holographs relating to *Deirdre* 1904-1906.

Folder 15 inscribed "Oct. 5. 1904" contains a complete and finished version of *Deirdre* (1904).

All other mss. to which I refer in this chapter: 9, 11, 13, 15, 20 and that inscribed "mss. for John Quinn", were written in 1906 (between March and November, as accurately as I can ascertain).

Ms. 21,493, National Library of Ireland. Copy cover scorched at edges; ts. is in blue folder marked: "Abbey Theatre Papers. Typescript of *Deirdre* by W.B. Yeats [1906?]".

Performance

First version, *Deirdre* (1904):

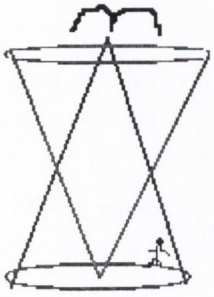
Never performed

Revised version, *Deirdre* (1906):

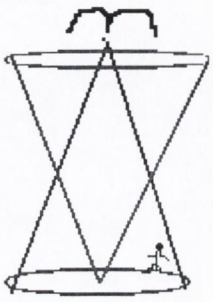
First performed: November 25, 1906 at the Abbey Theatre. Florence Darragh played Deirdre.

Pattern of the Dance in *Four Plays for Dancers*

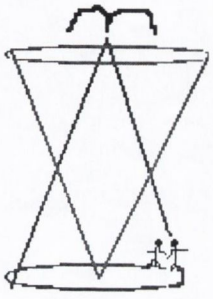
At the Hawkswell



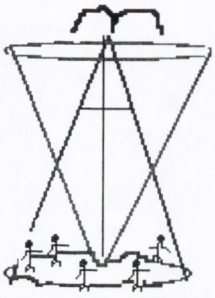
The Only Jealousy of Emer



The Dreaming of the Bones



Calvary



The figure while the soul is in the body, or suffering from the consequences of that life, is frequently drawn as a double cone, the narrow end of each cone being always in the centre of the broad end of the other ... the human soul is always moving outwardinto the objective -world or inward into itself; and this movement is double because the human soul would not be conscious were it not suspended between contraries, the greater the contrast the more intense the consciousness.
Sometimes this cone represents the individual soul ... sometimes general life. (Notes to *Yeats's Poems*, ed., A.N. Jeffares, pp. 572, 573)

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