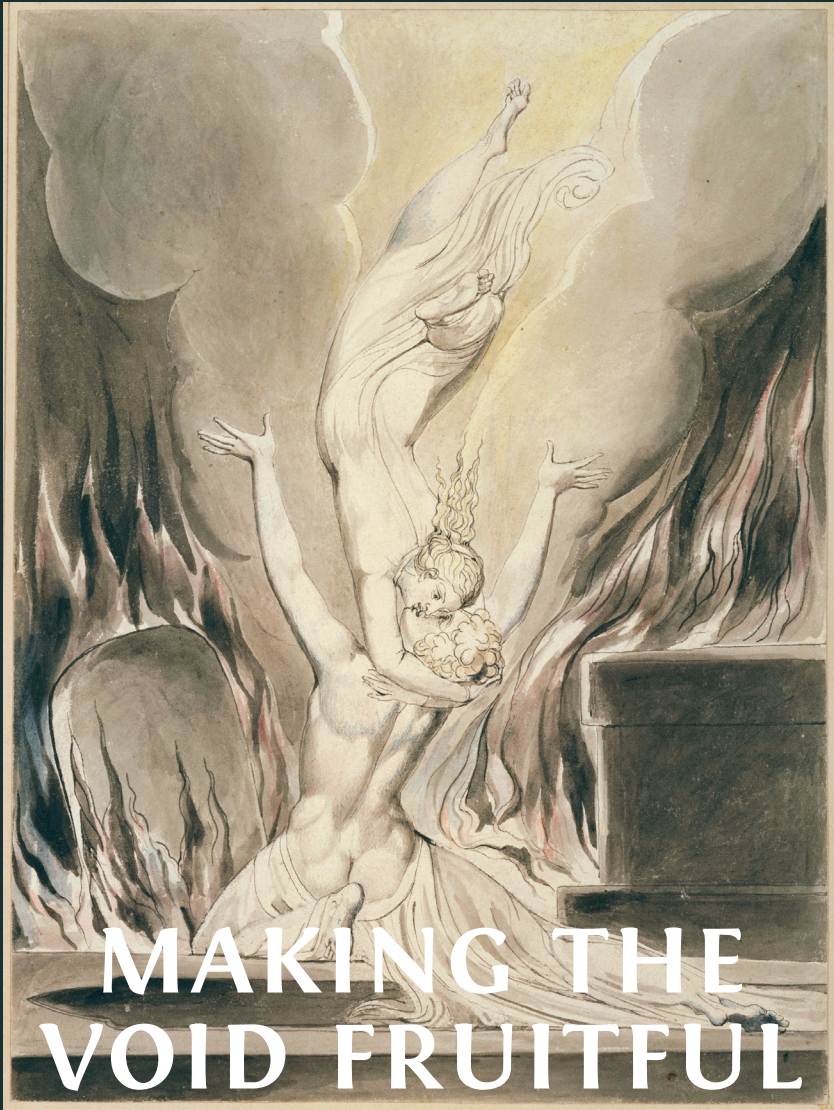


PATRICK J. KEANE



Yeats as Spiritual Seeker
and Petrarchan Lover



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1. Introduction: Bodily Decrepitude and the Imagination

Contemplating the Irish poet's occultism, W. H. Auden puzzled publicly, 'How on earth, we wonder, could a man of Yeats's gifts take such nonsense seriously?' However sympathetic I may be personally to that famous, or infamous, rhetorical question, or to William York Tindall's less well-known but equally memorable dismissal of the poet's collaboration with his wife in the automatic writing that culminated in *A Vision*—'a little seems too much, his business none of ours'—the time is long since past when serious readers of Yeats could cavalierly dismiss the intensity of his imaginative, intellectual, and spiritual engagement in the supernatural.¹ Far removed from the late nineteenth-century context of recoil from increasing materialism and scientific skepticism, a recoil that flowered in a notably widespread Victorian interest in spiritualism, sophisticated readers have tended to be condescendingly tolerant of, even as they were enchanted by, the evocations of Fairyland by the poet of the Celtic Twilight (whose Irishness only intensified the contrast between Celtic imagination and British empiricism), and either puzzled or put off by his early and sustained interest in magic and the occult.

At the same time, Yeats's literally enchanting early fairy-poem 'The Stolen Child' remains for many readers the gateway to his later, more complex quests for an Otherworld, shadowed by an awareness of the potential human cost. There is abundant evidence that the interest in magic, the occult, and even fairies is back in fashion. Not to mention the Harry Potter books, there is the almost equally astonishing success of Susanna Clarke's thousand-page novel of magicians in Regency

1 Auden, 'Yeats as an Example' (1948), in Hall and Steinmann, 345. W. Y. Tindall, *W. B. Yeats*, 27.

England, *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norell*, the 2004 *Time Magazine* Book of the Year, with over four million copies sold. The novel's copiously footnoted backstory features a race of malicious fairies who kidnap mortals, transporting their unhappy victims to 'Other Lands' of 'Lost-hope': Yeats's 'The Stolen Child' writ large.

That resonance and the magic of Yeats's language explain why one can still admire and love his poetry while acknowledging what Auden, referring not only to Yeats's occultism and interest in fairies but to his sexual dalliances in old age, called his 'silliness.' We will get to the late sexuality. But it is no longer possible, if it ever was, to deny the centrality to his life and work as a poet and playwright of Yeats's engagement, early and late, in the supernatural—especially in the wake of George Mills Harper's work on the now multi-volume *Vision* papers, on the Golden Dawn, and on Yeats's engagement in the occult in general, pioneering studies continued by his daughter, Meg. Their work, and that of others, including Kathleen Raine and F. A. C. Wilson, Warwick Gould and Deirdre Toomey, was buttressed by the publication of the multi-volume Oxford edition of Yeats's letters, and by two massive and deeply researched biographies: Ann Saddlemyer's life of Mrs. Yeats, *Becoming George* (2002), and 'The Apprentice Mage,' the first volume (1997) of R. S. Foster's magisterial *W. B. Yeats: A Life*.²

Yeats's early interest in Theosophy and Hermeticism, which led to decades of membership in the Order of the Golden Dawn, was always mixed, under the auspices of Helena Blavatsky and her emissary to Dublin, Mohini Chatterjee, with Eastern mysticism—an interest to which Yeats returned in his final years. And Yeats retained a lifelong fascination with the revelations that emerged from his wife's automatic writing—for which, to her own surprise, George Yeats, who had initially turned to it to stimulate the flagging interest of her new and troubled husband,

2 The collaboration between George and Yeats is also discussed by Margaret Mills Harper in *Wisdom of Two* (2006). That same year, Harper laid out four 'quadrants' of Yeats's esoteric interest: Theosophy; Magic; Spiritualism; and Hindu mysticism. In her endnotes, she supplies a concise guide to scholarly work on the subject, not least that of her father, a mentor and friend to me as well. Harper, 'Yeats and the Occult,' in Howes and Kelly, 144–66. See also Wayne Chapman's "'Something Intended, Complete": Major Work on Yeats, Past, Present, and to Come,' the splendid introductory chapter to *Yeats, Philosophy and the Occult*, ed. Matthew Gibson and Neil Mann (2016). This volume also contains Mann's lengthy (64-page) and important essay, 'W. B. Yeats, Dream, Vision, and the Dead.'

found she had a genuine gift. Whether or not that marriage—which was to prove so crucial to his later, and greatest, creativity—would take place at all hung on the shifting indications of their astrological charts. In short, to revert to Auden's glib dismissal, Yeats 'took such nonsense' very 'seriously' indeed. It all becomes considerably less nonsensical when we understand that his inextricable, and primary, interest, amid all the esoterica, remained his poetry. For Yeats, Seamus Heaney rightly insisted, 'True poetry had to be the speech of the whole man. It was not sufficient that it be the artful expression of daylight opinion and conviction; it had to emerge from a deeper consciousness of things and, in the words of his friend Arthur Symons, be the voice of "the mystery which lies all about us, out of which we have come and into which we shall return"'.³

It is not my purpose, in this first of a two-part exploration, to engage in a sustained contemplation of Yeats and the occult. His wife's 'Communicators' told Yeats, or so he claimed, 'we have come to bring you metaphors for poetry' (Vis, 8); my principal interest is in that poetry, and in the various ways in which the tension plays out between this world and the other, the Here and the There, the *antithetical* and the *primary*. Second only to the poetry, I emphasize, following Yeats, the importance he assigns, even in pursuit of the spiritual, to the physical senses, to the body, and to sexual desire.

Two formulations illuminate my dual emphasis, and in fact link the two parts of the present book. The first is from Graham Hough, from his *The Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats*. Combining three of his 1983 lectures with a fourth chapter on *A Vision*, Hough, in this concise book offers an illuminating introduction to the subject. But while he provides a humane counterweight to crabbed studies threatening to bury Yeats in esoteric commentary, Hough, though a fine reader, discusses very few of the poems, and none at length. Among many insights, Hough perceptively observes of Yeats: 'His aim was to redeem passion, not to transcend it, and a beatitude that passed beyond the bounds of earthly love could not be his ideal goal.'⁴

3 Heaney, 'William Butler Yeats,' *Field Day*, II. 783–90. Heaney cites (784) Symons's *Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), a book that meant as much to T. S. Eliot as it did to Yeats.

4 *The Mystery Religion of W. B. Yeats*, 119.

The second formulation is from Harold Bloom, contrasting Yeats's mentor William Blake with 'the Anglo-Irish Archpoet' posing as an old codger singing to 'maid or hag: / *I carry the sun in a golden cup, / The moon in a silver bag.*' Aware that he was on the threshold of death, Bloom was haunted, as Yeats was, by Blake's questions (in the motto to the *Book of Thel*), 'Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod? / Or Love in a golden bowl?'⁵ Both Blake and Yeats were echoing Ecclesiastes 12, where we are told that even before the body breaks down (before the 'silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken'), 'desire shall fail,' and soon, 'the dust return to the earth as it was.'

Those lines are recalled by T. S. Eliot in his Dantean encounter with the 'familiar compound ghost' (essentially that of the recently deceased Yeats) in 'Little Gidding,' the last and greatest of *Four Quartets*. In the most dramatic section of the poem, Eliot puts in the breathless mouth of the ghost inexorable and comfortless wisdom fusing language of Ecclesiastes and Yeats with, surprisingly, that of Shelley, a poet loved by Yeats but usually despised by Eliot:

Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
 To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
 First, the cold friction of expiring sense
 Without enchantment, offering no promise
 But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
 As body and soul begin to fall asunder. (II, 129–34)⁶

The ghost's grim disclosure is cast in an unrhymed replica of the *terza rima* pioneered by Dante, employed once and magnificently by Yeats (in 'Cuchulain Comforted'), and in the ironically titled *The Triumph of Life* (the one Shelley poem Eliot admired). The dark wisdom and nobility of these lines justify Eliot's audacious act of ventriloquism in using Yeats's own ghost to refute the living poet's emphasis, especially as he aged, on the body. Since that emphasis informs much of Yeats's poetry,

5 Bloom, *Possessed by Memory*, 192. The book was published posthumously.

6 The Shelley parallel is discussed below. Eliot's echoes of 'Vacillation,' 'Man and the Echo,' and 'Cuchulain Comforted,' in the ghost-encounter confirm that the spirit is primarily that of Yeats, as Eliot acknowledged in letters. See Gardner, 64–67, and Diggory, 115–17. That Swift is also part of the compound ghost reaffirms Yeats's presence; Eliot's reference to 'lacerating laughter at what ceases to amuse' echoes Yeats's poem 'Swift's Epitaph,' and nods toward the presence of Swift's own ghost in Yeats's *The Words upon the Window-pane*. For Eliot's responses to Yeats over the years, evolving from patronizingly dismissive to reserved but respectful to largely admiring, see Donoghue, 'Three Presences: Yeats, Pound, Eliot,' 563–82.

even beyond the love poems to and about Maud Gonine; and since the emphasis becomes more pronounced as he ages and the body fails, I've chosen, violating chronology, to address the issue early on, as Yeats does in one of his best-known poems, 'Sailing to Byzantium':

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

Though the aged man is ostensibly sailing in quest of a spiritual life to replace that of the deteriorating body, Yeats's Byzantium was not only a 'holy city,' but a city of imagination and art, aesthetic monuments of soul's magnificence. In this stanza, Yeats combines two passages from Blake, both emphasized in Yeats's Preface to his and Edwin Ellis's 1893 edition of Blake's *Works*. The tactile image of the soul clapping its hands and singing, and singing louder for every tatter in the body's mortal dress, recalls Blake's vision of his beloved brother Robert's liberated soul at the moment of his death in 1787. As Yeats noted, Blake, refusing to leave Robert's bedside, 'had seen his brother's spirit ascending and clapping its hands for joy.' Four months before his own death forty years later at the biblical age of seventy, Blake, who had been ill, began a letter to a friend: 'I have been very near the Gates of Death & have returned very weak & an old man feeble & tottering, but not in Spirit & Life [,] not in the Real Man [,] The Imagination which Liveth for Ever. In that I am stronger & stronger as this Foolish Body decays.'⁷

That inverse ratio, imagination waxing as body wanes, exemplified in 'Sailing to Byzantium,' was stressed three years earlier in his 1923 Nobel Prize acceptance speech. Examining the Nobel medal, depicting a young man listening to a Muse, Yeats thought, 'I was good-looking once like that young man, but my unpractised verse was full of infirmity, my Muse old as it were; and now I am old and rheumatic, and nothing to look at, but my Muse is young. I am even persuaded that she is like those Angels in Swedenborg's vision and moves perpetually "towards the day-spring

7 Yeats, Preface to Blake's *Works*. The letter, dated 12 August 1827, was written to George Cumberland.

of her youth''' (Au, 541). That persuasion seems demonstrated in the trajectory of his career as a whole, Yeats being prominent among lyric poets whose imaginative power survived into advanced age. 'The poetry of later years is a small, select genre. Yeats is no doubt its master.'⁸ One of his masterpieces, 'Cuchulain Comforted,' was written virtually on his deathbed. But it might not have been so had it not been for something even more unseemly than Yeats's occult preoccupations: the famous or infamous Steinach sexual rejuvenation operation.

§

After the pinnacles of *The Tower* (1928) and the two editions of *The Winding Stair* (1929, 1933), there had been a falling off in imaginative power, which Yeats associated with a parallel decline in sexual energy. As his life and poetry demonstrate, Yeats was always at least as painfully aware as Harold Bloom and T. S. Eliot of fleshly limitations and mutability, of 'bodily decrepitude.' Now, with imagination failing, he knew precisely what Blake meant by a 'Foolish Body.' In the opening lines of 'The Tower,' the lines immediately following 'Sailing to Byzantium,' Yeats cried out, 'What shall I do with this absurdity—/ O heart, O troubled heart—this caricature,/ Decrepit age that has been tied to me/ As to a dog's tail?' But that was in 1925/26, when he was at the height of his imaginative powers. Thus, he can boldly claim (recalling Blake's assertion that 'I am stronger & stronger as this Foolish Body decays'), that 'Never had I more/ Excited, passionate, fantastical/ Imagination, nor an eye and ear/ That more expected the impossible.' He has the strength to be playful even about the prospect of succumbing utterly to his pre-eminent spiritual guides and to the dreaded 'abstract':

It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
Until imagination, ear and eye,
Can be content with argument and deal
In abstract things; or be derided by
A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

8 Peter Filkins, 'A Reckoning,' 225. A remark made in the course of a review of the 2020 volume, *So Forth*, by Rosanna Warren, a poet working, at the age of sixty-seven, at the height of her powers.

In the late 1920s, bodily decrepitude was largely though not completely compensated for by the imaginative power so exuberantly on display in this title poem and elsewhere in *The Tower*. By the mid-1930s, however, Yeats, his Muse gone packing, felt the full weight of Shelley's lines on sexual decay and impotence, in the long *terza rima* poem sardonically titled *The Triumph of Life*—a masterpiece interrupted by Shelley's death by water, drowned at the age of twenty-nine. Eliot felt the desolate power of those lines as well, registered, as I've already suggested, in what he called in 'Little Gidding,' the 'bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit/ As body and soul begin to fall asunder.'

Eliot's glib dismissal of Shelley (his emotions adolescent, 'his ideas repellent') had a notable exception. In one of his 1932/33 Norton lectures, Eliot conceded that 'in his last, and to my mind greatest though unfinished poem, *The Triumph of Life*, there is evidence not only of better writing than in any previous long poem, but of greater wisdom.' As revealed, I believe, by those lines earlier quoted from 'Little Gidding,' Eliot remained impressed by the terrifying passage in which Shelley dramatizes the 'destruction' and 'desolation' attending sexual love, in particular, the dance of death of still sex-tormented 'Old men, and women,' who 'shake their grey hairs,' straining 'with limbs decayed/ Limping to reach the light which leaves them still/ Farther behind and deeper in the shade,' surrounded by 'impotence' and 'ghastly shadows' as they sink 'in the dust whence they arose.'⁹

Having experienced symptoms of premature impotence at sixty, a condition all but acknowledged in 'Sailing to Byzantium,' Yeats, convinced that sexual potency and imaginative creativity were connected, underwent in 1934 the famous Steinach operation, as had Freud before him. Yeats's surgery was performed by the celebrated sexologist Norman Haire, who, eager to test its efficacy, immediately introduced Yeats to the exotically beautiful and accomplished Ethel Mannin, having suggested that she dress provocatively for the occasion. Though his erectile dysfunction persisted, the psychological result was what Yeats called his 'second puberty,' a phrase lifted a half-century

9 *The Triumph of Life*, 143–74. Though Eliot's shallow comments on Shelley were demolished by C. S. Lewis, in his brilliant 'Dryden, Shelley, and Mr. Eliot,' Eliot's dismissal of Shelley, reinforced by F. R. Leavis, had lasting influence, explaining much, though not all, of Bloom's antipathy to Eliot.

later by Richard Ellmann in his 1984 Library of Congress lecture, 'W. B. Yeats's Second Puberty' (published in 1986).

The poet himself insisted that the vasoligature 'revived my creative power,' which may be demonstrated in the outburst of poetry in his final five years. Minor surgery, even if it became in some Dublin circles the occasion of jokes, seems a small price to pay if it helped in any way to produce poems like the perhaps appropriately titled sequence, 'Supernatural Songs,' 'Lapis Lazuli,' the matched poems 'An Acre of Grass' and 'What Then?,' 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited,' 'Cuchulain Comforted,' 'News for the Delphic Oracle,' 'Long-legged Fly,' 'A Bronze Head,' 'Man and the Echo,' 'The Circus Animals' Desertion,' 'Politics,' and at least the opening and final movements of the flawed 'Under Ben Bulbin.' The operation, Yeats continued, 'revived also sexual desire; and that in all likelihood will last me until I die.'¹⁰

Whatever Yeats's actual capacity, his sexual 'desire' did not fade in his final years. 'Those Dancing Days Are Gone' (1930), the pre-Steinach poem Bloom cites, insists that even a man who 'leans upon a stick' may 'sing, and sing until he drop,/ Whether to maid or hag:/ *I carry the sun in a golden cup,/ The moon in a silver bag.*' It takes a great deal to bring Harold Bloom and T. S. Eliot into agreement; but on this aspect of Yeats, the old man's preoccupation with sex, they concur. Though he does not turn to his *bête noir* Eliot for support, nor to Shelley, Bloom writes that Yeats, in 'swerving' from his other Romantic precursor, Blake, 'renders as triumph what Blake regards as a rhetorical question ['Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?/ Or Love in a golden bowl?'] with an implied answer in the negative mode.' For Yeats, Bloom continues, 'the wisdom of the body had to be sufficient, despite all his occult yearnings. Blake finds a great unwisdom in all those who seek to reason with the loins. D. H. Lawrence shares Yeats's heroic vitalism, but for Blake, more is required than sexual exaltation if we are to become fully human.'¹¹

That is true, and yet Yeats, trying to 'put all into a phrase' in his final letter, written in the month he died, insisted, 'Man can embody truth but

10 Diana Wyndham offers a psychological analysis in 'Verse-making and Lovemaking,' 25–50. On Haire's near-solicitation, see Ethel Mannin, *Privileged Spectator*, 80–81.

11 *Possessed by Memory*, 193. Despite his hostility to Eliot, Bloom excepted 'Little Gidding,' which he admired, just as Eliot, despite his general hostility to Shelley, admired *The Triumph of Life*.

he cannot know it.' He continued, allying himself with *both* the *primary* and the *antithetical* in the struggle against a shared enemy: 'The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence' (L, 922). Yeats rejects all those 'thoughts men think in the mind alone,' since he that 'sings a lasting song/ Thinks in a marrow-bone.' That is from a poem, 'A Prayer for Old Age,' written in 1934, in the wake of the Steinach operation: a prayer that he 'may seem, though I die old,/ A foolish, passionate man.' 'Seem' is a crucial qualifier, though some, even his friend and former fellow-Senator Oliver St. John Gogarty (Joyce's Buck Mulligan), thought he'd become a sex-obsessed fool confusing himself with his own 'Wild Old Wicked Man' (1937), 'mad about women' and 'a young man in the dark.'

But Yeats, unwilling to divorce imagination from the senses, often cited Blake as an ally in repudiating the abstract in favor of embodied wisdom. In 'The Thinking of the Body,' he insists that 'art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories and emotions of the body' (E&I, 292–93). Blake, for whom the body lacking 'The Imagination' is 'Foolish,' surrounded his Laocoön engraving with visionary axioms: 'The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION,' and 'Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed.'¹²

In the magnificent third and final movement of 'The Tower,' writing his 'will' in vital, pulsing trimeters, Yeats declares his 'faith' by mocking 'Plotinus' thought' and crying 'in Plato's teeth.' Instead, he tells us, even amid 'the wreck of body,/ Slow decay of blood,' 'dull decrepitude,' or worse:

I have prepared my peace
With learned Italian things
And the proud stones of Greece,
Poet's imaginings
And memories of love,
Memories of the words of women.

¹² *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 271–72.

And at the end, there is still a vestige of the natural world, faint but audible: 'a bird's sleepy cry/ Among the deepening shades.'

At the opposite pole, the mystical ideal has never been more austere expressed than by St. John of the Cross: 'the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union until it has divested itself of the love of created things.' T. S. Eliot employed the statement as an epigraph to *Sweeney Agonistes* (a performance of which Yeats attended on 16 December 1934). When challenged by a friend who regarded the sentiment expressed in the epigraph 'with horror,' Eliot replied that 'for people seriously engaged in pursuing the Way of Contemplation,' and 'read in relation to that way, the doctrine is fundamentally true.'¹³ For Yeats, in stark, or, rather, 'fruitful' contrast, the 'Way' of St. John and of Eliot, 'a sanctity of the cell and of the scourge,' was the most perverse form of the *primary*, 'objective' tendency. 'What is this God,' he asked in a cancelled note to his play *Calvary*, 'for whom He [Christ] taught the saints to lacerate their bodies, to starve and exterminate themselves, but the spiritual objective?' Since 'the Renaissance the writings of the European saints [...] has ceased to hold our attention.' We know that we must eventually forsake the world of created things, 'and we are accustomed in moments of weariness or exaltation to consider a voluntary forsaking. But how can we, who have read so much poetry, seen so many paintings, listened to so much music, where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seem one, forsake it harshly and rudely? What have we in common with St. Bernard covering his eyes that they may not dwell upon the beauty of the lakes of Switzerland?'¹⁴

The cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seem one in much of Yeats's later poetry: a poetry celebrating embodied wisdom. As we have seen, Yeats's surrogate, Michael Robartes, tells the Dancer that women can achieve 'uncomposite blessedness' and lead men to a similar state, if they 'banish every thought, unless/ The lineaments that please their view/ When the long looking-glass is full,/ Even from the foot-sole think it too.' In 'Among School Children,' the 'body swayed to music' is swept up into such Unity of Being that we cannot 'know

13 Bonamy Dobrée, 'T. S. Eliot: A Personal Reminiscence,' 81.

14 This cancelled but thematically crucial note is cited by F. A. C. Wilson, *Yeats's Iconography*, 323n41.

the dancer from the dance.’ In *Words for Music Perhaps*, featuring the ‘Crazy Jane’ and ‘Woman Young and Old’ sequences, we have frequent distinctions between, and final fusions of, spirit and flesh. In Poem IV of the sequence ‘Vacillation,’ in a climactic moment foreshadowed at the conclusion of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (Myth, 364), the sixty-six-year-old poet recalls sitting, a decade and a half earlier, ‘solitary’ in a crowded London shop, a receptively ‘open book and empty cup’ on the tabletop. Echoing the equally climactic moment in ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul,’ when ‘sweetness flows into the breast,’ and ‘We are blest by everything,/ Everything we look upon is blest,’ epiphany and reciprocal blessing occur. But, more explicitly than in the prose passage in *Per Amica*, or even in the secular beatitude attained in ‘Dialogue,’ it is the *body* that is set ablaze:

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.

In what follows, after a preamble establishing context, I intend to focus on specific poems, often quest- or dialogue-poems, which tend to reassert the wisdom of the body, putting in contention the provisionally opposing claims of the temporal and spiritual worlds, body and soul. More often than not, these opposites turn out to be Blakean Contraries, polarities without whose dialectical friction, Blake tells us in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Plate 3) ‘no progression’ would be possible. The second part of the book focuses on Yeats’s poems to and about Maud Gonne, arguably the most remarkable, though somewhat scattered, sequence of love poems in Western literature since the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch, in whose spiritual-erotic tradition of obsessive and unrequited love Yeats was consciously writing.

Here, too, the spiritual and the erotic are in fruitful if often bittersweet polarity and confluence. For all his ‘occult yearning,’ as Bloom notes, the body and sexual exaltation mattered enormously to Yeats, and had to be ‘sufficient.’ Part of Yeats realized that it wasn’t sufficient and, in fact, could never suffice; that it took more than sex, even more than sexual love, to resolve what he called, borrowing from Kant, ‘the antinomies.’

He endorsed that dark truth by synopsisizing, in a resonant phrase, a passage to which I will return: Lucretius as translated by Dryden: 'The tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the soul.'

And yet, it also remains true, as Hough observes, and the poems demonstrate, that for Yeats, passion was to be redeemed rather than transcended, and that 'beatitude' required, more than Eliot's 'shadow fruit,' earthly consummation. That 'ideal goal' doomed the actual relationship of W. B. Yeats and Maud Gonne, while giving birth to what Maud called, in a 1911 letter to Yeats, their 'children,' who 'had wings' (G-YL, 302). She was referring, not to human offspring, but to the poems that had emerged from unfulfilled love, fecundity replacing barrenness and frustration. In the pursuit of both occult wisdom and of Maud Gonne, the void is somehow made fruitful.