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ТЕМА НА БРОЯ: СЪВРЕМЕННИ ФИЛОЛОГИЧЕСКИ ПРЕДИЗВИКАТЕЛСТВА

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НОВИ ИЗВОРИ НА ЖИВОТ: СТИХОТВОРЕНИЯТА „СПИРАЛИТЕ“, „ЛАПИС ЛАЗУЛИ“ И „ИМИТАЦИЯ ОТ ЯПОНСКИ“ НА УИЛЯМ БЪТЛЪР ЙЕЙТС

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NEW SOURCES OF LIFE: WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS'S "THE GYRES", "LAPIS LAZULI" AND "IMITATED FROM THE JAPANESE"

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923 by the Royal Swedish Academy "for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation"[1]. The article focuses specifically on three poems from Yeats's "modernist" period which he included in the cycle *New Poems* (1938): "The Gyres", "Lapis Lazuli" and "Imitated from the Japanese". These later writings emerge as a logical consequence of his previous engagement with philosophy and occultism, mythology and history, art and reality. Yeats's strenuous efforts to forge mythopoeic stereotypes seem to transcend mere personal versions of myth in an attempt to discover deeper levels of meaning, and to complete the self-image he developed throughout his life. In his later works he managed to make meaningful pronouncements on key moral and philosophical issues relating to the human condition.
Keywords: *W. B. Yeats; gyres; lapis lazuli; Rocky Face; stylistic masks; rhetoric of sarcasm; dramatization of the speaking self.*

Ирландският поет Уилям Бътлър Йейтс е удостоен с Нобелова награда за литература от Кралската шведска академия „за неговата вдъхновена поезия, която с изключително изящната си форма дава израз на духа на цяла една нация“. Настоящата статия се фокусира детайлно върху три стихотворения от т.нар. „модернистичен“ период в творчеството на Йейтс, които той включва в цикъла „Нови стихотворения“ (1938 г.): „Спиралите“, „Лапис лазули“ и „Имитация от японски“. Тези късни творби се явяват като логическо следствие на предходните му занимания с философия и окултизъм, митология и история, живот и изкуство. Усилените опити на поета да изгради митопоетически стереотипи надхвърлят индивидуалните версии на мита в търсенето му на един по-дълбок смисъл, за да представи в завършен вид онзи желан образ, който е градил през целия си живот. В по-късните си произведения Йейтс успява да артикулира значими идеи за ключови морални и философски проблеми, свързани с човешката същност и човешкото битие.
Ключови думи: *Уилям Бътлър Йейтс; спиралите; лапис лазули; Каменното лице; стилистични маски, реторика на сарказма; драматизация на спикера.*

Nobel Prize winner for literature, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats produced his later modernist poems as a logical consequence of all his previous engagement with philosophy and occultism, mythology and history, art and reality. His modernist attempts to forge mythopoeic stereotypes seem to transcend

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[1] The Nobel Prize in Literature 1923. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2021. Wed. 3 Nov 2021. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/summary/>

mere personal versions of myth in an attempt to discover deeper levels of meaning. As a result, the stylistic norm which emerges as a characteristic trait in his later works is the rhetoric of sarcasm, disbelief and self-irony. This device comes to subvert the idea about "absolute truth", and, logically, brings to the fore the dramatization of the speaking self. The technique finds expression in various stylistic masks such as the Rocky Face from "The Gyres", or Hamlet and Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia from "Lapis Lazuli".

My article focuses specifically on three poems from this period, which demonstrate in a most emblematic way his strenuous effort to complete the self-image he developed throughout his life: "The Gyres", "Lapis Lazuli" and "Imitated from the Japanese". In these works he managed to make meaningful pronouncements on key moral and philosophical issues relating to the human condition.

The Gyres

"Gyres" is a word commonly used by writers (mostly poets) to denote a spiral or circular motion. W. B. Yeats's poem "The Gyres", in which he employs this idiosyncratic symbol (taken from his cosmological "system" *A Vision*[2]), connects explicitly with some poems written earlier, such as "The Second Coming", "Daemon and Beast", "All Souls' Night", "The Tower", "Sailing to Byzantium", but there is an implicit link with the greater part of the poems from *The Tower* and *Winding Stair*, as well as with poems written before 1917[3]. The gyres, whose multiple sources have been tracked down by many critics, appear to be a complex symbol of multiple and varied values. Vivienne Koch suggests that as early as the nineties Yeats might have used sources which influenced him to evolve later this symbol into his system *A Vision*. "Back in the nineties", she writes, "Yeats may have been struck by the word "gyre" in a poem of Francis Thompson" (Koch 1969: 95). Another possible source for these figures may be Mrs Strong's "Apotheosis and After-Life" (in Koch, 96), as well as Spengler's "Decline of the West". There is also a wide range of critical interpretations and comments on the *meaning* of "gyre." Prof. Stauffer's idea is to connect it exclusively with intellect, art and old age as opposed to passion, life and youth, symbolized, in his view, by the sea and animal blood (in Koch, 93). This view seems to have gone too far because the gyres in Yeats's cosmological system suggest interpenetration and interaction rather than division of the opposing principles of youth and old age, passion and dispassionate detachment, intellect and emotion, self and anti-self, stone and blood. Therefore, their interpretation should be rather associated with the internal "Hegelian" motion in a dynamic universe in which the process of creation itself is carried out. Yeats employed the historical cones and their double spiral-like expansion and contraction to signify the rise, development and downfall of civilizations as the natural flow of history, but he also believed in the creative power of the individual, who, although "trapped" within these expanding and contracting movements, could, with the help of his/her strong will and character, change, or at least affect the course of time.

Most probably, however, the gyres give ultimate expression to Yeats's eclectic mixture of ideas formed from different levels of mythology, literature, philosophy, science and occultism. These various levels are eventually synthesized so as to provide the grounds for the growth of a poem. In this particular case it is the eponymous "The Gyres." Here is the first stanza:

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[2] In A Vision Yeats unfolds his cyclic views of history.

[3] This is the year when A Vision was started, due to Yeats's wife's gift for automatic writing. I will use here only a summary concerning the meaning of gyres in A Vision to throw some light on the ideas in the poet's "system", rather than show a close connection between the poet's exposition and the poem itself. Yeats wrote: "The end of an age, which always receives the revelation of the character of the next age, is represented by the coming of one gyre to its place of greatest expansion and of the other to that of its greatest contraction. At the present moment the life gyre is sweeping outward, unlike that before the birth of Christ which was narrowing, and has almost reached its greatest expansion. The revelation which approaches will however take its character from the contrary movement of the interior gyre. All our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre and prepares not the continuance of itself but the revelation as in a lightning flash, though in a flash that will not strike only in one place, and will for a time be constantly repeated, of the civilization that must slowly take its place", in Unterecker, p.166.

The gyres! The gyres! Old Rocky Face look forth;
Things thought too long can be no longer thought
For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
And ancient lineaments are blotted out.
Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
Empedocles has thrown all things about;
Hector is dead and there is a light in Troy;
We that look on but laugh in tragic joy. (Yeats 1997: 152)[4]

Although the tone of the poem is conditioned by a mood of subjective contemplation directly set by the poetic speaker (unlike i. e. "The Three Bushes" and the group belonging to it), we get the impression, as both Vivienne Koch (Koch, 99) and Unterecker (Unterecker, 265) argue, of philosophical detachment. This is what makes Unterecker qualify "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli" as "objective philosophical poems" (Unterecker 1975: 265), and Koch as poems of "philosophical gravity" (1969: 99). One could logically conclude that a contradiction arises between the general mood of introspection and self-observation, on the one hand, and the "detachment" argued for by these critics, on the other. A closer look, however, will help us to identify the characteristic Yeatsian device of the "split persona", a stylistically complex way to convey, through multiple perspectives and layers of meaning, an intensely subjective experience, which is, however, philosophically contemplated and thus represented as a distanced reality.

"The Gyres!" from the first line is an exclamation evoked not so much out of admiration or surprise, but suggestive of "tragic joy"[5] springing from some quintessence (or rather revelation), which had blazed into the speaker's head: "Things thought too long can be no longer thought/ For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth, /And ancient lineaments are blotted out". Everything that is exhausted, the poet suggests, is ultimately transformed to its opposite: this is the fate of civilizations within the widening/ contracting gyres. Consequently, neither beauty, nor things thought too long can live forever, they have to be emptied of their content by themselves, and not by some outer agency.

"The ancient lineaments" are unquestionably those of Pythagoras's perfectly proportioned human body seen as the restraining form imposed on the "the irrational streams of blood" that at the present moment had been profusely "staining earth". The word "blood" in this stanza not only dominates the poem but it also connects with a number of key apocalyptically prophetic poems, with the emblematic Byzantine ones and with several others which are concerned with the issues of violence and apocalypse. The alternative (why not additional?) word which emphasizes this atmosphere and is aligned with blood is "stain" from the second stanza. The emotional tightness of their semantics is further enhanced through the metrical pounding of the strong stress on the vocals: *O* in "body" and *A* in "stain".

The end of a historical cycle, the poet argues, is drawing to its close and the association of this cycle with antiquity when Troy had been set on fire is made explicit: "Hector is dead and there is a light in Troy"[6]. "Rocky Face" which emerges in this section, however contentious its status may be, is one that has discovered the secrets of all tragedies and joys and, due to its mysterious knowledge of something beyond the capacity for rational human understanding, becomes a dominant agency in creating an atmosphere of omniscient detachment. The sculpted image of Rocky Face is interpreted in various ways. Henn's suggestion is that the source for this poetic symbol is a real stony face, the carving on the wall of Thoor Ballylee (which was the Tower of Yeats) (Henn, 321). Yeats's own association of it, through his poem "Ego Dominus Tuus", is with the "hollow face of Dante" (Yeats 1997: 73); a number of critics draw parallels with Shelley's sage Ahasuerus in his shell-strewn cavern. Another group, i.e. prof. Stauffer, offer a link to the sphinx-like beast of "The Second Coming"; a very often repeated connection

[4] The quotations from the three poems "The Gyres", "Lapis Lazuli" and "Imitated From the Japanese" will be referenced to the same edition.

[5] Most literary critics agree that "tragic joy" is the dominant theme of both "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli".

[6] In Greek legend Hector, son of king Priam of Troy, is killed by the Greek hero Achilles during the Troyan War. Subsequently the Greeks sack and burn the city. See notes to pages 153-7, W. B. Yeats, The Major Works.

is with the Delphic Oracle, "Ribh the heretic Hermit-Saint" (Henn 1965: 320) or, ultimately, its identification with the poet's own antithetical self. Vivienne Koch testifies to this view:

> It is Old Rocky Face who is enjoined to watch. Old Rocky Face is the poet wearing a very transparent mask. It is he, Yeats, who is old, rocky; it is he, Yeats (stanza 2) who is the 'lover of horses and women' and not Shelley's Jew. And the voice that is calling Rocky Face is that 'antithetical self', the poet in his other prophetic guise (1969: 99),…the voice of 'The Gyres' is a single one which, by a narrative rhetoric, talks for the suppressed aspect of the self here called 'Old Rocky Face'. A dialogue of the Self and the anti-self, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', written in 1915, shows how early this strategy of dramatizing the conflicts of personality by splitting off the warring elements into fictive personae suggested itself to Yeats. (100)

In my opinion, all these interpretations can be accepted as long as the prophetic and sculpted status of this figure, neither dead, nor alive is not impaired. The characteristic Yeatsian play with tricky perspectives may admit the co-existence of completely different, mutually contradictory, yet associated views. For what we are interested in, in this case, is the perspective of detachment, the cohering principle that holds together those manifold associations. The particular symbol, however unidentified by its source, has a particular function as well: to provide absolute freedom for the detached personality, which, incorporating both tragedy and joy, is capable to triumph over a time-ridden world through the fatal intervention of what Yeats labels "the Thirteenth Cone"[7]. Therefore Harold Bloom's view that the question "What matter?" is to be subsumed under the pattern "of the darkest of bondages to the idols of determinism" (Bloom 1970: 436) can be challenged. "Rocky Face" is the mystery, the enigma which the poet himself faces. Nor is he "playing at desperation", as Bloom further suggests (437) but rather accepts despair as a result of his own incapability to change the events of history. Consequently, the poetic speaker's response is the following:

> What matter though numb nightmare ride on top
> And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
> What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,
> A greater, a more gracious time has gone;
> For painted forms or boxes of make-up
> In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
> What matter? Out of Cavern comes a voice
> And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice.' (152)

The end of the cycle has ultimately brought so much despair that it has died of despair, as "beauty die[d] of beauty" and "worth of worth". And if "the sensitive body" is stained by its own blood, this does not imply any tragic concern. Rather, the statement is suggestive, as Dr Jeffares rightly points out, of an inhuman remotedness from ordinary life…with its insistence achieved by a repetition of key words: 'The gyres! The gyres! For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth. 'What matter?' [repeated four times] (in Koch 1969: 95).

Evidently, "remotedness" is used as a rhetorical device to emphasize the opposition human/ superhuman, the superhuman lineaments being those of the familiar Old Rocky Face. The oracular face, although petrified, has a voice, superior and imperious, and the whole tomb atmosphere (the initial draft was "Old Cavern Face") is rent by "that one word: 'Rejoice'". "Rejoice" should be seen as analogous in its meaning to "life", the seed enveloped in the cavern (womb). It is the voice of Life which is wrapped in the womb, the word "rejoice" itself leading to an unconscious but strong association with Christ's Resurrection, the vanquishing of stony death: "Rejoice!" The gyres, although whirling away "painted

[7] "At the critical moment the Thirteenth Cone, the sphere, the unique intervenes". Yeats, The Major Works, p.441.

forms or boxes of make-up" from "ancient tombs", they still preserve, or rather create, out of terror and chaos, the image of immortal art, immobilized by stone but re-vitalized by the joy of creation. The end of a cycle might have set in, the irrational streams might have been staining earth (this is the inevitability of cosmic disasters), yet those who look on "but laugh in tragic joy" because this is the only possible choice for them. That "Rocky Face" should be associated with the unconscious areas of personality as exemplified by "cavern" is beyond any contention, but that its meaning should be pushed further onto the level of, to use Jung's terms, the "metaphysical archetype", is yet another significant point made by Vivienne Koch:

> The 'cavern' represents that layer of personality most accessible to consciousness, but which yet increases itself by this neglect, pushing its way into the conscious mind and there dictating its demands seemingly 'against' reason (102). … And further on ... the deep subconscious impulses welling up from the 'cavern' check the denying intellect which has renounced the 'painted forms and boxes of make-up' sought in ancient tombs. (105)

An apocalyptically mantic atmosphere is introduced with the last stanza:

> Conduct and work grow coarse, and coarse the soul,
> What matter! Those that Rocky Face holds dear,
> Lovers of horses and of women, shall
> From marble of a broken sepulchre
> Or dark betwixt the polecat and the owl,
> Or any rich, dark nothing disinter
> The workman, noble and saint, and all things run
> On that unfashionable gyre again. (152)

The enduring "Rocky Face" is, in the long run, invulnerable, for it is fixed in the image of immobile posture. It is visualized and thereafter frozen, like many of Yeats's sculpted faces and statues which now haunt him from the very depths of the unconscious caverns. The status of "Rocky Face" is one associated with timelessness, while the cyclic time brings about "conduct", "work" and "soul" which "grow coarse". The subsequent superimposition of the rhetorical but indifferent "What matter?", now repeated for the fourth time, is the greatest flux of this desperate gradation. The "marriage" of body and soul had engendered the Rocky Face and thus the "apocalyptic embrace" is brought to pass within the frame of the poem itself. The last stanza prophesies the new order which will be "disinterred" "from marble of a broken sepulcher", or from "any rich, dark nothing", and set in the place of "this filthy modern tide" (Yeats 1997: 172). This will be the new-old gyre with its spiritual aristocratic values held in so high an esteem by the poet throughout his poetic and prose works from this period[8]. Henn sheds some light on the point:

> The tradition of aristocracy of the great virile men, will return. The tone drops, labours with the complexity of its meaning, full of its allusions; 'from marble' – the enduring thing – 'of a broken sepulchre' – suggests the Second Coming ('I have a series of dramatic poems – very short – of Christ coming out of the tomb') or the Second Resurrection, or a city rebuilt from the masonry of tombs; all this complexity is there (Henn 1965: 323).

Therefore the exclamation of the first stanza "the gyres! the gyres!" connects with the last section in order to round off the structure of the poem: despite the fact that there is no direct invocation in this last stanza, the gyres, whose principles of energy revolve the inexorable course of time, as well as personal destinies within a world full of "coarse" values, will gyrate downward into the tomb ("the marble of a broken sepulcher"), and will disinter their "unfashionable" opposites: the "unfashionable" cycle which

[8] "The words "noble", "workman", and "saint" are connected not so much with a social rank or status, but with graciousness, a morality of a generous and aristocratic spirit". Koch, p.107.

holds dear the “workman”, the “noble”, the “saint”. “A more gracious time has gone”, states the poetic speaker, yet the disintegration and falling apart of his contemporary era will disappear in the “dark”, in “any rich dark nothing”.

A difficulty arises when we try to give a precise rendition of the meaning of “dark betwixt the polecat and the owl”. Henn suggests the connection of polecat and owl with desolate places and ruins and thus with destruction, yet the double association of owl with eeriness and wisdom is also evident from his argument (Henn, 324). In my view, “the dark betwixt the polecat and the owl”; “the rich dark nothing” may be seen as the area of, in Jungian terms, the irrational subconscious, or “the mummy-cloth” of “Byzantium” (analogous to the tomb of death). It can be interpreted either as the “black out” when “heaven blazes into the head” (“Lapis Lazuli”), or as the Tartarus where the human mind, seduced by the criminal psychological experiments of the soul, sinks, like the widening gyre itself, downward to the very bottom of the abyss, which emerges as frightening and magnetic at the same time.

The whole poem “The Gyres” ultimately presents a combination of deliberate coincidencies, of seemingly unimportant accidents which, in their final relation towards one another, create an atmosphere of dreaminess and ghostliness, yet by way of “machinery” so tangible and undisputed, a language so simple, detached and colloquial, that we cannot differentiate between the real and the illusory.

Lapis Lazuli

We begin to live when we have conceived of our life as tragedy
W. B. Yeats

Yeats’s preoccupation with tragic art in this period, when close to the imminent gates of death, finds its particular expression in “Lapis Lazuli”. This commitment appears as the relevant response of his final poetic exertion to the compelling issues of mortality.

“Death and life were not/Till man made up the whole”, he argues in one of his poems[9] with the perfect detachment and superiority of one who is convinced that what he had created will survive bodily decrepitude and, ultimately, death itself. Thus in a show of impeccably outlined forms the poet has these last tragic characters, his personal archetypes, defile in front of our eyes, and we, as spectators, become eventually witnesses of the enlargement of their ghostly silhouettes to a degree when they are at once dying their tragic deaths and enjoying, through the ecstasy of “the soul and body embracing” (Mulrine, 150), tragic dying. These tragic personae bear something of the frustrated genius yet they, however confused, rediscover and repossess their own reflected image of immortality. “There may be in this or in that detail painful tragedy”, writes Yeats, “but in the whole work none. I have heard Lady Gregory say, rejecting some play in the modern manner sent to the Abbey Theatre, ‘Tragedy must be a joy to the man who dies!’” (in Mulryne 1965: 149).

Although Yeats might have been mistaken about the source of this thought[10], the proposition unmistakably suggests Yeats’s idea about merging of tragedy and joy. “Tragic joy” is the mighty theme that dominates “Lapis Lazuli”.

Contemplating a lapis lazuli, Yeats is putting forward the issues which he intends to convey through the poem itself: the poem is dedicated to Harry Clifton who presumably might be the one who had given him the lapis lazuli (Dyson, 178). Yeats writes:

> Someone has sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinese sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths and an ascetic and pupil about to climb the mountain. Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong, the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry (in Dyson 1981: 178).

The poem consists of five sections which are seemingly disconnected. Yet this is a false perspective: these sections present a structure as tight as it is loose, for there is a network of implicit links constructed by the poet himself who, being consistent in his meditations, offers also various interpreta-

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[9] The poem is “The Tower”.

[10] It is not Lady Gregory’s but Nietzsche’s, in Birth of Tragedy.

tions for the reader. "The 'form' of Lapis Lazuli", writes Unterecker, "is, in this respect, a sort of 'do-it-yourself poem. We are given sections of poetry which we must ourselves bolt together into final shape" (1975: 258).

The first section introduces "hysterical women" who "are sick of the palette and fiddle bow, / Of poets that are always gay", and are enormously distanced from art through their rejection of painting ("palette"), music ("fiddle bow") and poetry ("poets that are always gay"). The shrillness of their hysteria eventually appears to signify an atmosphere of destruction, chaos and disorder, and is suggestive of a concrete impending disaster:

Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,
Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
Until the town lie beaten flat. (153)

In poems from an earlier period Yeats would compare these hysterical women and, specifically, their empty political rhetoric to "an old bellows full of angry wind" or "to a blind and leader of the blind"[11]. This hysteria is due, in Yeats's view, to their reluctance to face death heroically. For the poet the rejection of "tragic gaiety" is in fact identical with the fear of death (death seen as a crowning achievement of a brave and glorious life). Harold Bloom elaborates the point by suggesting the discriminatory logic of such thinking:

Not to find admirable Yeats's notion of 'tragic joy', not to be among those who 'know that Hamlet and Lear are gay' is to risk being classed with those hysterical women who open Lapis Lazuli by fearing the possibility of aerial bombardment. (Bloom 1970: 437)

Bloom, similar to his previous rejection of creative freedom regarding "The Gyres" and Yeats's "Thirteenth Cone" (see my comments on 'The Gyres'), here, too, doubts the poem's success to transfigure deterministic necessity and dread into pure heroism and tragic joy. Furthermore, he is evidently skeptical about the notion of aligning those who do not approve of "tragic gaiety" with "hysterical women". In my own view, this does not demonstrate any inhuman or barbarous act on the part of the poet, but it rather exemplifies his characteristic device, already familiar from earlier poems, to deliver an eulogized speech on art, this time, however, deprived of the emotional rhetoric of his earlier verses. The actual misunderstanding concerning this attitude of apparent discrimination is due to the various entangled perspectives whose strenuous disentanglement might lead us to the point of Yeats's conceptual intention.[12]

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[11] These poems are, respectively, "A Prayer For My Daughter" and "On a Political Prisoner":

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

and

Did she ['she' is Countess Markiewicz] in touching that lone wing
Recall the years before her mind
Became a bitter, an abstract thing,
Her thought some popular enmity:
Blind and leader of the blind
Drinking that foul ditch where they lie?

[12] "Lapis Lazuli considers", writes Dyson in Riding the Echo, "where art really is, and what value it has. The life of the artefact is no longer identified with the actual moment of conception (which is transient), nor with the object itself (since even 'monuments of unageing intellect' are after all, ageing), nor with its creator (who is

The second section is centred on a specific kind of art: theatre. The dramatic characters on stage, Hamlet, Lear, Ophelia and Cordelia are now in the foreground:

> All perform their tragic play,
> There struts Hamlet, there is Lear,
> That's Ophelia, that Cordelia;
> Yet they, should the last scene be there
> The great stage curtain about to drop,
> If worthy their prominent part in the play,
> Do not break up their lines to weep. (153)

The implication here is that although they are tragic personae, they cannot and would not weep. Consequently, their "immortality" comes as a result not only of their theatrical play, their pompous strutting on stage, but it also from the fact that after incorporating, absorbing life's tragedy, they are able to re-create it, to enact it. They are as much fictional characters as they are real ones. And when Yeats depicts these heroes and heroines, with an almost fanatic feeling for their personal value, he is able to "rejoice" with them. Yet the source of the poet's joy is his own imaginative representation of them, his impeccable capability to penetrate not only into their psychological experiences but also into the psychomachia waged in the deepest recesses of their subconscious mind. His capability for masterful realistic and mystic representation is undoubted, and we acquire the feeling that life is only a shroud under which things that human reason cannot grasp or reach are hidden forever. By deliberately annihilating the boundary between the real and the illusory, he can eventually state:

> They [the poets] know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
> Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.
> All men have aimed at, found and lost;
> Black out; Heaven blazing into the head:
> Tragedy wrought to its uttermost. (153)

In these lines the presence of fate is strong and this exactly lends an air of tragic pathos to the scene. "Passive suffering", writes Yeats, "is not a theme for poetry. In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies; in Greece the tragic chorus danced" (in Smith 1990: 81). The impression is one of unity of time, place and action in the classical sense of the word (similar to ancient tragedy), however different the characters or the stages might be. The manifold "accumulation" of different acts from a number of tragedies into an idiosyncratic cohesion accelerates the development of the "plot" of this stanza. All happens in an instant full of passionate, energized intensity which leads powerfully to a thunder-like climax-apocalypse: "Black out; Heaven blazing into the head: / Tragedy wrought to its uttermost." This is exactly the point when gaiety, identified with ecstasy at the approach of death,[13] is

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mortal), nor with the original inspiration (the real life Chinamen, if there were such, who once caught an artist's eye). The totality of its life is to be looked for, rather, in the dance of creativity and recreation – at the point, in fact, when, for Yeats looking at the lapis lazuli or for ourselves reading this poem, imagination comes into play" (see Dyson, p.179). See also Unterecker, p.260: "To emphasize the imaginative nature of his scene, Yeats deliberately offers the reader a choice…The 'meaning' of the work of art exists not in the artist alone but, as well as in the interpreter. 'Meaning' hinges finally on the interplay that takes place between artist and art object, and between art object and audience…For while Yeats offers tentative 'meanings', we, reading the poem, must give them their final shape".

[13] "The metaphor is reversible", writes Mulryne, "ecstasy is a kind of death" (E&I 71); to conflate, confuse, the two experiences is the outcome of Yeats's heady logic; death will be ecstasy, apocalypse – not an enemy – to the man who conceives of life as tragedy. Meditating on such a fittingly tragic death, that of Hamlet, Yeats tells us: "This idea of death suggests to me Blake's design'of the soul and body embracing" (Mulryne, p. 150).

brought to life, and these characters, imaginatively appropriated, might, from now on, rotate in never-ending cyclicality. Stan Smith further elaborates the point:

These figures have been 'reborn as an idea, something intended, complete', or in the words of 'Poetry and Tradition' *(C. pp. 160, 161)* they are 'reborn in gaiety'. They have made themselves into their antiselves, assumed the tragic mask. (Smith 1990: 81)

Apparently this gaiety achieved through both theatrical and real configurations, has the quality of detachment and superior nonchalance. The "terrible beauty" from the earlier poem "Easter 1916", is transfigured into "tragic joy", the latter thus acquiring an invulnerable status, a sculpted form which is not susceptible to the time-dominated world of mortality. A prose passage by Yeats from his *Essays and Introductions* may help us to elucidate this section:

Neither scholars nor the populace have sung or read anything generation after generation because of its pain. The maid of honour whose tragedy they sing must be lifted out of history with timeless pattern, she is one of the four Maries, the rhythm is old and familiar, imagination must dance, must be carried beyond feeling into aboriginal ice. Is ice the correct word? I once boasted, copying the phrase from a letter of my father's, that I could write a poem 'cold and passionate as the dawn'. (Yeats 1961: 523)

Taking into consideration Yeats's thoughts in this prose passage, we may conclude that, in the discussed stanza, he was successful in turning subjective contemplation into objective aloofness. Actor or artist, who experience pain and suffering in a similar way, should they perform their roles properly, will be rewarded with gaiety. Pain will not lead them to despair and self-destruction. They will be eventually crowned with laurels for their masterful play and theatrical transformations.

The third section presents the already familiar theme from "The Gyres": the rise, decline and fall of civilizations and the role of art in their defeat and renewal. Here is the stanza itself:

On their own feet they came, or on shipboard,
Camel-back, horse-back, ass-back, mule-back,
Old civilizations put to the sword.
Then they and their wisdom went to rack:
No handiwork of Callimachus
Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
Made draperies that seemed to rise
When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
His long lamp chimney shaped like the stem
Of a slender palm, stood, but a day;
All things fall and are built again
And those that build them again are gay. (153)

Grim skepticism and destructive disbelief haunt this part of "Lapis Lazuli". The inevitable looming of the theme of mortality is as central to the alteration of historical cycles and changes as to the art itself. The paradoxical appearance of this section after the previous one is evidently intended to convey the poet's own doubts about the longevity and invulnerability of art: "No handiwork of Callimachus… stands"[14]. The Athenian sculptor's handiwork, however perfectly wrought, is doomed to perdition: it "stood but a day". The co-existence of immortality, however, is reintroduced implicitly: how shall we know about Callimachus's long lamp chimney shaped like the stem of a slender palm if someone did not make a record of that event? The "machinery" of the words absorbs for one more time the gloomy mood

[14] There is, however, some contradiction in this statement by Yeats, for one work of Callimachus has survived: a marble chair. Apparently this does not fit in with Yeats's design to convey an atmosphere of total chaos and destruction when one civilization replaces another.

to survive in gaiety the rotation of civilizations. The words of the poem thus appear as a means of "preserving" the work of the sculptor. Furthermore, they have the power to re-create the marble "draperies"[15] "that seemed to rise / When sea-wind swept the corner or the long lamp chimney shaped like the stem/ Of a slender palm". Dyson offers a similar view:

> Yet in this section Yeats not only asserts his theme but enacts it, as the lost work of Callimachus returns to life in his own lines. The evocations call back to the lost marble and bronze not in arid description, but in new art which brings them, living, into our mind…. To the dance of recreation which takes place in acting, in close reading in 'Delight to imagine' (the poet's own role in the poem's climax), is added a demonstration of one art (poetry) recalling another (sculpture in marble) from the dead. (Dyson 1981: 182)

The gaiety of the artist, whether of visual arts or of words, triumphs over the time-ridden world of decay and annihilation: "All things fall and are built again/ And those that build them again are gay", the line reads.

The lapis lazuli medallion contemplated by the poet is described in the short fourth section:

> Two Chinamen, behind them a third,
> Are carved in Lapis Lazuli,
> Over them flies a long-legged bird
> A symbol of longevity;
> The third, doubtless a serving-man
> Carries a musical instrument.(153)

Three figures can be observed on the lapis lazuli: two Chinamen and a third carrying a musical instrument. Undoubtedly this is the static configuration of these participants, reminiscent of the geometrical design of a perfect sculpture. The musical instrument is about to play and thus ready to introduce another kind of art which will round off the structure of the poem together with the two other arts described previously: music. The syntax itself emphasizes the rigidity of the 'subject-object' location: the words are short and serve only to fix our attention, through a concise description, to the scene itself. There are no surplus adjectives, nor anything else that shows the poetic speaker's intentions concerning these figures. There is, rather, his striving to suggest immobility, conveyed by a frozen instant of the immediate picture. The first half of the last stanza sticks to this objectivity, yet a number of details concerning the nature of the lapis lazuli itself could be detected:

> Every discolouration of the stone,
> Every accidental track or dent
> Seems a water-course or an avalanche,
> Or lofty slope where it still snows
> Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch
> Sweetens the little half-way house
> Those Chinamen climb towards…(154)

Yet, however objectively conveyed, this first part of the last section shows the poet who meditates on mortality for one more time. "Discolouration of the stone" or "accidental track or dent" are signs of decay detected on a piece of art. They hint at the fatal meeting of life and art, in which time has imprinted on the face of the lapis lazuli its stubborn erosion. Then, in the second half, this static character is set in motion through the poet's powerful imagination and thus, ultimately, the configuration acquires different dimensions:

[15] Callimachus invented the running drill, thereafter widely used to simulate the folds of drapery in marble.

…And I
Delight to i m a g i n e them seated there;
There, on the mountain and the sky,
On all the tragic scene they stare;
One asks for mournful melodies;
Accomplished fingers begin to play;
Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay. (154)

What the poetic imagination actually does is to infuse life into this dead stony setting until these figures are both freed from their arrested postures and captured by the poet's own phantasmagoria, his personal imaginings. Unlike Keats's Grecian Urn[16] which is an aesthetic object, the perfect artifact of beauty's truth, the lapis lazuli, comes to possess three dimensions that interact with one another: life, art, imagination. Keats's urn is not tragic because it is immobile. Yeats's Lapis Lazuli is tragically gay because it is neither invulnerable, nor timeless: it is dynamic. In *On the Boiler* Yeats wrote:

Some Frenchman has said that farce is the struggle against a ridiculous object, comedy against a movable object, tragedy against an immovable; and because the will, or energy is greatest in tragedy, tragedy is the more noble; but I add that 'will or energy is eternal delight' and when its limit is reached it may become a pure aimless joy, though the man, the shade, still mourns his lost object. (in Henn 1965: 325)

Ultimately, those Chinamen appear to stare on "all the tragic scene" with superior detachment because their position is transferred elsewhere: they are now residing in the plane of the poet's imagination. Thus "the mournful melodies" played by "accomplished fingers," however tragically touching and moving for us, for them are transfigured into fearless gaiety. As, by the way, are their eyes changed: "their eyes/ Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay".

Imitated From the Japanese[17]

The phenomenon of a poet who enjoys a continual development into the beginning of old age is in itself rare. Goethe, Sophocles, and, in a lesser degree, Milton come to mind as men whose last works burned with the gathered fuel of their lives. More often development, in a poet, comes to a full stop; and it is frequently a negation of the ideals of his youth, as well as a declination of his powers, that throws a shadow across his final pages.

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The work of a poet like Yeats who enjoys a continued development into the beginning of old age, may be said to possess something of the figure of the self-devouring serpent. This, however, does not in the least mean that I argue for Yeats work's impeccability, but what I am saying is that it has successfully achieved a finished state. The outcome of the poet's strenuous effort to put a final touch to the self-image which he developed throughout his life, through steady arrangement of essential parts and specific details, accomplishes the desired outlines of a Solomonian silhouette, and allows for a godlike view of superior detachment and philosophically contemplated wisdom on the issues of mortality.

[16] For similarities and differences between this poem and Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", see Dyson, p. 183.

[17] Unterecker argues that this is an adaptation from a prose translation of a Japanese Hokku (see Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to W. B. Yeats, p. 261). Notes to Yeats's The Major Works, however, read that the source is not known for certain (p. 513).

Similar to the two previous poems "The Gyres", and "Lapis Lazuli", this short lyric re-establishes the mood of "gaiety" as exemplified by "Never had I danced for joy," and connects it with the theme of old age ("Seventy years have I lived") in a way that they do not offer two contradictory values but, rather, they seem to complement their intended meanings. If we dismiss the statement in brackets ("Hurrah for the flowers of Spring / For Spring is here again"), we might have doubts that the old man really "danced for joy". The lyric might have taken a completely different direction such as: though "seventy years he had lived", he had never experienced joy, not even now at the age of seventy. But a close reading forces us to consider it otherwise: he had never danced for joy except for now when he is seventy. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of youth and old age as exemplified by "seventy years man and boy" makes the topic of physical exhaustion irrelevant: now he is seventy but he had been all this time both "man and boy", that is, man and boy at once. Evidently the only impression the poet wants to suggest is freedom of joy achieved through contemplated detachment. Coldness and passion, inherent in the image of stone, constitute the essence of his own self, observed from a safe distance.

"Dance" had always been, in Yeats's view, a supernatural means of attaining knowledge by way of the perfect form, inseparable from content: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?", (1997: 113) he wrote in "Among School Children." Here the dance pattern emerges for one more time to emphasize the old man's joy. Now, at the age of seventy, he is at last capable "to dance for joy".

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