"HEART MYSTERIES": THE LATER LOVE LYRICS OF W. B. YEATS

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I

In the love lyrics of his last decade, Yeats, the critics would have it, finally turned from a disembodied and sterile courtly ideal to "desecration and the lover's night." The last stanza of "Among School Children," for example, with its famous assertion that "Labour is blossoming or dancing where/ The body is not bruised to pleasure soul," can be viewed, as it is by Donald Davie, as the rejection of the Romantic tradition of sexual passion which comes from the courtly love of the Middle Ages through the Vita Nuova to the Platonism of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, the tradition in which carnal consummation is delayed indefinitely or excluded altogether in the attempt to transform sexual love into something "purer"—more intellectual and spiritual.\(^1\) Yeats's early love poems from The Rose (1893) to The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) were clearly in this mode, but after his marriage in 1917, so the theory goes, Yeats gradually came to reject the soul in favor of the body. In an essay on the "Words For Music Perhaps" sequence which appeared in its final form in The Winding Stair of 1933, Denis Donoghue argues that the "biological imperative"

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is the "principle of structure or myth of the Crazy Jane poems corre-
spanding to the anthropological myth of The Waste Land. This posi-
tion, downward-tending in its images, is close to that of Lawrence in
Lady Chatterley's Lover."2

Whether or not this new "mythology of earth" is a good thing
has been hotly debated, but the pervasive presence of the sexual
theme in the later poetry has been accepted as axiomatic. In part
Yeats himself is to blame for what I hope to show is a misconception
about his love poetry. The letters of his final decade are generally
addressed to the women in his life—Olivia Shakespear, Dorothy
Wellesley, Ethel Mannin—and in these Yeats frequently refers to his
renewed sexual energy and to his preoccupation with sexual matters.
In 1926, for example, he wrote Olivia Shakespear, "My moods fill me
with surprise and some alarm. The other day I found at Coole a repro-
duction of a drawing of two charming young persons in the full stream
of their Saphoistic [sic] enthusiasm, and it got into my dreams at night
and made a great racket there." A year later he declared that "only two
topics can be of the least interest to a serious and studious mind—sex
and the dead," and in 1933, when he was correcting the proofs of
The Winding Stair, he explained that "Sexual abstinence" prompted
the new love lyrics: "I was ill and yet full of desire." Dorothy Welles-
ley concluded from Yeats's letters and conversations that "Sex, Philos-
ophy and the Occult preoccupy him."

The poems themselves, however, reflect these prose statements
only partially, and one remembers that Yeats was fond of striking
poses even in his letters, essays, and autobiographical writings, and
that the face he presents to his female correspondents is not neces-
sarily his only one. Accordingly, the reader must be wary when Yeats
tells Mrs. Shakespear that the poems in "Words For Music Perhaps"
are "all emotion and all impersonal . . . all praise of joyous life, though
in the best of them it is a dry bone on the shore that sings the praise."
What is immediately striking about the later love lyrics is that those
that do celebrate sexual energy, if not quite the "joyous life," are
invariably dramatic monologues: the speaker is Crazy Jane, or the
Woman Young and Old, or the Chambermaid, or the Irish mystic
Ribh, or Solomon, or the Wild Old Wicked Man. Such extensive
use of personae is the exception rather than the rule for Yeats who,
in his greatest poems from "The Wild Swans at Coole" through

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2 "The Vigour of Its Blood: Yeats's 'Words For Music Perhaps,'" Kenyon
Review, XXI (1959), 379.
"Byzantium" and "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" to "Lapis Lazuli" and "The Circus Animals' Desertion," uses the mode of the dramatized, autobiographical "I"—the "I" of the poet himself. In a letter of 1935, Yeats told Dorothy Wellesley that he had learned to "make a woman express herself as never before. I have looked out of her eyes. I have shared her desire." This boast is made good in the "Three Bushes" sequence and in "A Woman Young and Old," but, interestingly, although the Chambermaid and the Young Woman know sexual satisfaction, the "I" of the poet never does. I do not think that such "masking" is to be attributed to the poet's reticence; Yeats speaks freely enough of his personal problems and of the private lives of his friends and relatives in his great occasional poems such as "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," "Easter 1916," and "All Souls' Night." Rather, it would seem that Yeats's personal experience in love, which is reflected in those poems that dramatize the poet's own self, was the opposite of Donne's, whose love poetry is often linked to that of Yeats. Despite the fact that Yeats, like Donne, makes much of the fusion of body and soul in the achievement of true love, of Unity of Being, there is none of Donne's sense of joyous conquest in Yeats, for whom "one little roome" never becomes "an every where," and who can never tell his sweetheart that "reverend love" has made them "one another's hermitage."

"A Dialogue of Self and Soul," which stands as a kind of headpiece to the "little mechanical songs" of "Words For Music Perhaps," contains Yeats's most famous and clear-cut statement of his commitment to life, to the rebirth that characterizes the whole Winding Stair volume. But what precisely is it that the speaker wants to relive? The relevant stanza is the following:

I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man battering blind men;
Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
The folly that man does
Or must suffer, if he woos
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.

The sensuous imagery ("frog-spawn," "fecund ditch") should not obscure the fact that the experience which the speaker most wants to relive is his painful and frustrating courtship of the "proud woman not kindred of his soul," the woman who does not and cannot return his
love and who is, of course, Maud Gonne. Yeats's preference of Self to Soul is thus not a simple matter of preferring the active sexual life to the contemplation of "that quarter where all thought is done," earth to heaven, Swordsman to Saint. Rebirth, it turns out, can take many different forms.

The love lyrics of Yeats's later years fall into two classes, which may be called Will and Mask, or Contemplation and Action, or the Ideal and the Real. The ballads on Crazy Jane, the lyrics in "A Woman Young and Old," and the "Three Bushes" sequence fall into the latter class, which might be called the Love Poetry of the Mask. It is interesting to note that in A Vision Yeats insists that "sexual passion" is not the Will but the Mask of the Man of Phase 17 (Yeats's own phase). The realistic love poetry of the Mask is epitomized by the all-too-often-quoted stanza in "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop":

'A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent.'

Much space has been devoted to discussion of this and related passages; my own concern in this essay is with the other mode, the Love Poetry of Self. This mode encompasses a fairly large group of lyrics written between 1919 and 1939, forming what might be called Yeats's Second Maud Gonne Cycle, the first having culminated in the elegiac love poems found in The Wild Swans at Coole (1919), such as "Broken Dreams" and "The People," and, more specifically, in the bitter "Owen Aherne and his Dancers," in which the Heart, unable to bear the "burden" of rejected love, goes "mad." This allegorical poem, written a few days after Yeats's marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees in 1917, marks the poet's final despair at the thought that both Maud Gonne and her daughter Iseult had rejected his offers of marriage, a despair punctuated by his wife's discovery that she could perform automatic writing. For a few years, the "Image from a Past Life" is absent from Yeats's poems, but by 1919 Maud Gonne reappears in "A Prayer for My Daughter" as the object of the speaker's love-hate: her opinionated mind and intellectual hatred are rejected in a prayer for their opposites, custom and ceremony, but the poet is obsessed by that which he rejects. The same obsession is at the heart of "Among School Children" (1926). Despite its affirmative last stanza
with its insistence that the body should not be “bruised to pleasure soul,” the speaker’s meditation originates in the painful recollection of the “youthful sympathy” which once blended the natures of himself and his beloved into a “sphere,” the “yolk and white of the one shell.” The “heart” of the “sixty-year-old smiling public man” is driven wild by the mere thought of her Quattrocento face, of her “Ledean body.”

In the first two poems of “A Man Young and Old” (1926–27), Maud Gonne appears in the guise of moon goddess, tempting the poet-lover (“She walked awhile and blushed awhile/ And on my pathway stood”), and transfiguring him with her smile which turns out to be the same smile she bestows on all men: “Like the moon her kindness is, / If kindness I may call/ What has no comprehension in’t, / But is the same for all.” When the lover tries to touch her, he discovers that her “heart is made of stone,” an insight that nearly drives him wild and ultimately reduces him to a “bit of stone” as well. In the third poem in this sequence of mythic ballads, Maud Gonne plays the role of mermaid:

A mermaid found a swimming lad,  
Picked him for her own,  
Pressed her body to his body,  
Laughed; and plunging down  
Forgot in cruel happiness  
That even lovers drown.

Thomas Parkinson has argued that Yeats’s love poetry composes a complete recension of the concept of La Belle Dame Sans Merci, but surely the convention behind this little poem is the Romantic one of the Belle Dame or vampire. The mermaid demands the love of the “swimming lad” but cannot return it; she feeds on his body and ultimately destroys him.

The Second Maud Gonne Cycle thus begins in bitterness and resentment. But gradually the demon is exorcised and in the ’thirties Yeats returns to the courtly mode of the Rose and Green Helmet poems, tempered by forgiveness and understanding. To the end, Maud Gonne is La Belle Dame Sans Merci, but the poet can finally renounce all claims to her mercy or even to her attention; he is satisfied with contemplation and memory. In Dramatis Personae (1925), his autobiography of the period 1896–1902, Yeats insisted that he hated


270 | CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE
George Moore's disclosures of "promiscuous amours" because he himself was "A Romantic, when romanticism was in its final extravagance." "I thought," he explained, "one woman, whether wife, mistress, or incitement to platonic love, enough for a lifetime." Although Yeats is, of course, talking of his former self here, the remark reveals his bias. Other women might provide the joys of family life, of companionship, or of sexual pleasure; when it came to love, however, one woman was enough for the poet's lifetime.

II

During the autumn of 1931, the period in which Yeats wrote those two poems of the "biological imperative," "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop" and "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman," he also wrote three short personal poems: "Quarrel in Old Age," "The Results of Thought," and "Remorse for Intemperate Speech." Both in the Cuala Press edition of Words For Music Perhaps (1932) and in The Winding Stair of 1933 these three poems, together with "Stream and Sun at Glendalough," which was written in 1932, were placed by Yeats immediately preceding the twenty-five-poem sequence of "Words For Music Perhaps." Contrary to what is commonly held, the sequence itself is rather loosely organized. Since only the first seven of the twenty-five lyrics deal directly with Crazy Jane, it is rather inaccurate to refer to the whole series as the Crazy Jane poems. Poems VIII–XIV represent the antithesis of Crazy Jane's earthy sensuality; they celebrate the idealistic, romantic love of a young girl and a young man, and then the memory of this love that torments the same two people in old age. The rest of the lyrics in the sequence vary as to speaker, theme, and plot. "Three Things" (XV), one of Yeats's personal favorites, is the song of the "dry bone" in praise of the "joyous life." "Lullaby" (XVI), which Yeats describes in a letter of 1929 as a song a mother might sing to her child, is a paean for the great lovers Helen and Paris, Tristram and Isolde, and Zeus and Leda—a poem in the heroic tradition of the ruling passion. "After Long Silence" (XVII), by contrast, is a personal meditation occasioned by Yeats's perception that he and his beloved can talk about love only now that they are too old to experience it.4 The next three poems, "Mad as the Mist and Snow," "Those Dancing Days are Gone," and "I Am of Ire-

4 The poem was addressed not to Maud Gonne but to Olivia Shakespear, but it is generalized enough to be applicable to any woman who has been loved by the poet and fits tonally into the Second Maud Gonne Cycle.
land," are experiments in blending the conventions of folk ballad and mad song. To argue, as does Walter Houghton, that the speaker of "I Am of Ireland" is Crazy Jane, and that she is being propositioned by Jack the Journeyman, does not seem to be warranted by the text itself. Poems XXI–XXIV introduce a new speaker, Old Tom, but again I cannot agree with Houghton and Donoghue that Tom is Jane's counterpart. His concerns, like those of his model, Poor Tom in King Lear, are philosophical rather than sexual; no particular woman haunts his dreams. Rather, Old Tom is Yeats's Plotinian, the "insane" oracle who knows that "All things remain in God," that "The stallion Eternity/Mounted the mare of Time,/ 'Gat the foal of the world." Finally, "The Delphic Oracle Upon Plotinus," the last poem in the so-called Crazy Jane sequence, is less a love poem than a generalized image of Plotinus' journey to the paradise of his more venerable predecessors, Plato and Pythagoras, an image perceived by the slightly disenchanted "I," who is none other than Yeats himself.

"Words For Music Perhaps" does not, then, have a single plot, theme, or speaking voice. If one takes the unifying theme to be what Peter Ure calls "the heroic justification of sexuality in a naked world," one must eliminate poems VIII–XIV, the Old Tom poems, "After Long Silence" and "Mad as the Mist and Snow," which is not a love poem at all. On the other hand, if one generalizes and takes the theme to be something like the frustrations of old age, one might just as well include "The Tower" or "Sailing to Byzantium." Nor is the unity formal: it is often assumed that what Yeats called his "mechanical songs" are all ballads with refrains, but in fact these poems have a great variety of stanza forms and many do not have refrains. At best, then, the sequence of short lyrics and ballads known as "Words For Music Perhaps" may be regarded as a chronological unit. If this is the case, the four short lyrics that precede the twenty-five-poem sequence can be seen as complementary poems on related themes. The first one, "Quarrel in Old Age," epitomizes what I have called Yeats's love poetry of Self, of the Ideal, and is perhaps the best example of the kind of poem found in Yeats's Second Maud Gonne Cycle:

Where had her sweetness gone?
What fanatics invent

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In this blind bitter town,
Fantasy or incident
Not worth thinking of,
Put her in a rage.
I had forgiven enough
That had forgiven old age.

All lives that has lived;
So much is certain;
Old sages were not deceived:
Somewhere beyond the curtain
Of distorting days
Lives that lonely thing
That shone before these eyes
Targeted, trod like Spring.

The occasion that prompted this autobiographical lyric must have been one of a series of quarrels that arose between Maud Gonne and Yeats after he was elected to the senatorship of the newly formed Irish Free State in 1922, thus becoming a charter member of the Establishment while Maud Gonne persevered in her revolutionary politics. She herself writes, “We had quarrelled seriously when he became a Senator of the Free State which voted Flogging Acts against young republican soldiers still seeking to free Ireland from the contamination of the British Empire, and for several years we had ceased to meet.” On the surface, it is a rather slight poem: the speaker in old age wonders how his beloved has been so utterly transformed from sweet young girl to shrewish old woman. The change seems hard to forgive until the poet remembers that “All lives that has lived,” that the idea of beauty remains no matter what happens to the person who embodies that beauty. As such, the poem has been labelled “Platonic” or “Plotinian” when it has been discussed at all and is generally dismissed as a marginal occasional piece. This is unfortunate, for “Quarrel in Old Age” represents the triumph of style of the later Yeats quite as much as do the more “daring” Crazy Jane poems.

It is easy to be misled by the diction of the poem; if one looks at isolated words and phrases, one is bound to be disappointed, for almost every line contains phraseology used in Yeats’s earlier Maud Gonne poems and which therefore strikes one superficially as conventional and hackneyed. A few examples will illustrate this point:

7 “Yeats and Ireland,” Scattering Branches, Tributes to the Memory of W. B. Yeats, ed. Stephen Gwynn (New York, 1940), p. 25.
Quarrel in Old Age

1. sweetness
2. blind bitter town
3. lonely thing
4. trod like Spring
5. Lives that lonely thing

Earlier Poems

1. ‘Such a delicate high head, All that sternness amid charm, All that sweetness amid strength?’ —“Peace” (1910)

2. ‘My darling cannot understand What I have done, or what would do In this blind bitter land.’ —“Words” (1909)

3. Under the passing stars, foam of the sky Lives on this lonely face. —“The Rose of the World” (1892)

I mourn for that most lonely thing; and yet God’s will be done: I knew a phoenix in my youth, so let them have their day. —“His Phoenix” (1915)

4. For she had fiery blood When I was young, And trod so sweetly proud As ’twere upon a cloud. . . . —“A Woman Homer Sung” (1910)

A crowd Will gather, and not know it walks the very street Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning cloud. —“Fallen Majesty” (1912)

5. When the wild thought . . . Set all her blood astir And glittered in her eyes. —“To a Young Girl” (1915)

Time’s bitter flood will rise, Your beauty perish and be lost For all eyes but these eyes. —“The Lover Pleads with his Friend” (1897)
With respect to its diction, then, "Quarrel in Old Age" seems to be no more than a late specimen of the pre-Raphaelite love lyric in which the young Yeats celebrates his Rose of the World, his Phoenix, his Goddess who walks on clouds, his Sun whose blaze blinds the eye and lights up the soul. Here surely is a courtly love lyric that harks back to The Wind Among the Reeds of 1899, the reader surmises and impatiently hurries on to Crazy Jane. But the poem repays study. Its distinguishing feature, as in the case of most of Yeats's later poems, is not its vocabulary or its overt theme but its principle of organization—the poetic structure itself.

The reader is immediately drawn into the dramatic situation of the poem by the abrupt opening question with its unexpected verb tense: "Where had her sweetness gone?" The use of had where one would expect has immediately pushes the quarrel into the past; it indicates that the speaker had asked himself this question at a moment prior to the present time of the poem—he is asking it no longer. It is as if, after the event, the poet is trying to remember the steps leading up to the quarrel. The casual reference to "her" implicates the reader in the poet's drama; we feel that we must know all about her, the poet's intimate.

In lines 2-6, the initial question is answered with an absolute minimum of words: whatever (the heavily stressed indefinite pronoun "what" suggests the emptiness of the charge) the fanatic mob of Dublin can think of by way of slander or petty gossip has been brought to Maud Gonne's attention and has "Put her in a rage." But she is not, of course, only raging at the "fanatics"; as the title of the poem suggests, it is the fact that Yeats himself had evidently sided with the "blind bitter town" that precipitated the great quarrel. In this context, the last two lines of the first stanza are puzzling; there is no logical connection between them and what comes before. If it is the woman who has lost her sweetness, why must the speaker be the one to forgive her, and what does "old age" have to do with it? The condensation of the passage is marked, but what Yeats means, I think, is that as former lover, the speaker finds it difficult enough to accept the sheer fact of Maud Gonne's old age with the concomitant loss of beauty that "distorting days" have brought, without having to "forgive" as well the bad temper and rage of an angry old woman.

The drama of the poem is that, against all better judgment, he does forgive her. The tense shifts abruptly to the present in the second stanza as the poet announces, "All lives that has lived;/ So much is certain." The sharp reversal that has taken place is the result of a
mental state frequently met with in the Winding Stair poems—the casting out of remorse—but here the act is only implicit. In a sudden moment of insight, the poet is able not only to forgive Maud Gonne but also to recover the essence of what she once was and the assurance that this essence is permanent. Somewhere behind the wrinkles, gray hair, and dimmed eyes of the old woman (“beyond the curtain/Of distorting days”), her former self survives.

The last three lines of the poem are extremely elliptical. There is nothing very unusual about the Spring image; in describing his first meeting with Maud Gonne in The Trembling of the Veil (1922), Yeats used the same personification: “Today, with her great height and the unchangeable lineaments of her form, she looks the Sybil I would have had played by Florence Farr, but in that day she seemed a classical impersonation of the Spring, the Virgilian commendation ‘She walks like a goddess’ made for her alone.” The inspiration for this image was most probably Botticelli’s “Primavera,” a painting Yeats knew well, in which the goddess Spring has the “Hollow of cheek as though it drank the wind” which Yeats attributed to Maud Gonne in “Among School Children.”

The difficulty of the passage is caused not by its imagery or diction but by its very peculiar syntax. Since Yeats omits both connectives and punctuational clues in the last three lines, it is impossible, in the first place, to determine whether “Targeted” modifies “lonely thing” or “eyes.” In 1935 when Maurice Wollman, who was editing an anthology of modern poetry, asked Yeats if “Targeted” meant “protected as with a target, a round shield,” Yeats replied, “Your note on targeted is quite correct,” thus suggesting that the participle must modify “lonely thing”: Maud Gonne’s beauty, in other words, is that of the archetypal love goddess; it is “Targeted” or protected from the frenzy of the common people, the mob. But the syntactic construction of lines 15–16 makes it equally possible to take “Targeted” as a modifier of “eyes,” and in this case one can read the passage in two ways, depending on whether “before” is read as an adverb of place or one of time: (1) the poet recalls the time when the “lonely thing”—Maud Gonne’s unique beauty—shone in front of his “Targeted” eyes, eyes which were, in other words, “hit” by the rays of her brilliant sunshine; or (2) the poet recognizes that the “lonely thing” shone even before Yeats’s own eyes were “Targeted” by it.

8 See Yeats’s “The Arrow” (1904), which begins with the lines, “I thought of your beauty, and this arrow,/Made out of a wild thought is in my marrow.”
Both these readings, like the first one, yield conventional Petrarchan images, and they do not really contradict one another. Maud Gonne’s beauty is protected from common life and cannot be contaminated; her eyes shoot arrows at those of her lover; her immortal beauty existed even before her lover was “struck.” The radical condensation of the passage suggests that Yeats would have it all three ways. “Targeted” is, in any case, the key word here; it is emphasized not only by its range of meaning but also by the complex alliteration of “Targeted, trod” and by the heavy stress on its first syllable.

“Quarrel in Old Age” is, then, a new variant of the Neoplatonic love lyric which Yeats had supposedly renounced in his later years in favor of the “biological imperative,” “All lives that has lived”: the Platonic form of Maud Gonne’s beauty exists outside time and space, compensating for the “curtain of distorting days” that temporarily obscures it. This is not to say, however, that the poem points back to the mode of Yeats’s earlier love lyrics; in terms of tone and structure it is, as we have seen, anything but simplistic. Thus a seemingly simple declarative statement like “Old sages were not deceived” has, in the context of the whole poem, a nice ironic edge: one suspects that Yeats is here thinking not only of Plato and Plotinus but of another old sage—the poet himself. It is, after all, he who has not been “deceived” in his instinctive love for Maud Gonne, he who has willed into existence the grand truth that “All lives that has lived.”

If “so much” were really “certain,” there would be no need for the sweeping assertion, for the brave effort to be convincing and convinced. “Quarrel in Old Age” is thus a poem of the Will rather than the Mask; it celebrates feeling itself but manages to do so without the note of self-pity found in some of the earlier Maud Gonne poems. In “Words,” written in 1910, the poet felt sorry for himself because his “darling” could not understand “What I have done, or what would do/ In this blind bitter land. . . .” In “Quarrel in Old Age,” on the other hand, the poet is content to contemplate Maud Gonne’s essence without asking anything in return. The “sweetness” that seemed to have “gone” returns, only it is now not Maud Gonne’s sweetness but the poet’s own. The reversal is complete.

Sound repetition and rhythm emphasize this reversal. In the first stanza, the speaking voice almost sputters: after the initial question the lines are run on, there are numerous anapestic feet, and the combination of end rhyme, internal rhyme, and alliteration of f’s, b’s, t’s, s’s, and n’s creates a cacophonous sound pattern. The fourth line deviates from the three-stress norm of the poem; it contains four stresses.
in what might be described as two amphimac feet (/x/) with an unstressed middle syllable: “Fántasý/ or/ incideînt.” Since the primary stresses in this line tend to fall on unimportant prefixes or suffixes, the rhythm itself implies the futility of the mob’s fantasies.

In the second stanza the rhythm slows down and becomes emphatic. Three-stress lines continue to be the norm, but there are fewer unstressed syllables, the stresses accordingly clustering together as in “All lives that hás líved,” “Só múch is cértaîn,” and “Líves that lónely thing.” Voiceless stops and spirants give way to voiced ones and to liquid ï’s.

“Quarrel in Old Age” is thus a triumph of the late style quite as much as are the Crazy Jane poems, but it has received no more than passing comment from critics. “The Results of Thought” has been similarly slighted, although W. H. Auden cites the entire poem as an example of Yeats’s metrical mastery in his famous essay on Yeats. “The Results of Thought” is thematically linked to “Quarrel in Old Age”; again, the poet is able to cast out remorse about the “bitter glory” which has wrecked the lives of Maud Gonne and of his other women friends by a sheer act of will:

But I have straightened out
Ruin, wreck and wrack;
I toiled long years and at length
Came to so deep a thought
I can summon back
All their wholesome strength.

Again, memory obliterates “time’s filthy load” and can “Straighten aged knees.” And again Yeats does astonishing things with the three-stress line. The opening couplet, for example,

Acquaintance, companion
One dear brilliant woman . . .

juxtaposes two six-syllable lines, one of which contains only two words and two primary stresses while the second contains four words and four primary stresses, the implication being that the “one dear brilliant woman” (Maud Gonne) is worth dozens of acquaintances and companions. A glance at the earlier drafts of this stanza, reproduced by Jon Stallworthy in his study of the manuscript revisions,9 indicates

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9 In Between the Lines: Yeats’s Poetry in the Making (Oxford, 1963), Stallworthy gives the first draft of Stanza I:

Friends ignorant and blind

278 | CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE
how thoroughly Yeats reworked the basic material for this poem.

The "summoning back" of Maud Gonne is found again within the "Words For Music Perhaps" sequence itself. In the first stanza of "Young Man's Song" (IX), the speaker is one who cannot, in the language of "Quarrel in Old Age," "forgive" his sweetheart for growing old. But, as in "The Results of Thought," he manages to straighten out "Ruin, wreck and wrack." His heart opposes the rational judgment that "She will change . . . into a withered crone" and asserts that all lives that has lived:

Uplift those eyes and throw
Those glances unafraid:
She would as bravely show
Did all the fabric fade;
No withered crone I saw
Before the world was made.

Again, Yeats is less interested in establishing Platonic truths than in insisting that, for the lover, the image of the loved one is eternal. In the third stanza, not only the poet but all men must "bend the knee" to his "offended heart," for "the heart cannot lie." As in "Quarrel," the implication is that feeling, instinct, emotion—the heart—gives us a truer view of things than can any rational philosophy. We are not, after all, very far from the Romantics in this poem.

"His Confidence" (XI), for that matter, contains the Shelleyan image of the fountain. Even though the poet's heart has been hit so hard that it has broken in two, he rejoices because he knows that "out of rock,/ Out of a desolate source,/ Love leaps upon its course." As in Shelley's poetry, the fountain, miraculously rising from "desolate rock," is a symbol of generation, rebirth. The speaker of "His Confidence" does not pity himself; he rejoices in his suffering. And in the third "Young Man" poem, "His Bargain," the poet insists that, unlike those crass lovers Dan and Jerry Lout who "change their loves about" at random in a never-ending circuit, his own love is beyond such whirling.

Yeats, then, was never exclusively the poet of earth and of commitment to the body. The love poetry of his final volume, the Last
Poems of 1939, ranges from the “Three Bushes” sequence with its rather over-insistent phallic symbolism—even Dorothy Wellesley was amused by “The Second Chambermaid’s Song,” referring to it as “the worm poem”—to “A Bronze Head,” Yeats’s final Maud Gonne poem, written during the last year of his life, which has nothing whatever to do with sexual possession.

“A Bronze Head” is an occasional poem inspired by Laurence Campbell’s bust of Maud Gonne in the Dublin Municipal Gallery.10 By 1938 all of Yeats’s remorse and bitterness at his former sweetheart had been “cast out”; the quarrel in old age was over. In her memorial essay on Yeats, Maud Gonne describes her last meeting with the poet which took place in June of that year:

One of our early dreams was a Castle of the Heroes. It was to be in the middle of a lake, a shrine of Irish tradition where only those who had dedicated their lives to Ireland might penetrate; they were to be brought there in a painted boat across the lake and might only stay for short periods of rest and inspiration. . . . Our Castle of the Heroes remained a Castle in the Air, but the last time I saw Willie at Riversdale just before he left Ireland for the last time, as we said goodbye, he, sitting in his armchair from which he could rise only with great effort, said, “Maud, we should have gone on with our Castle of Heroes, we might still do it.” I was so surprised that he remembered, I could not reply. . . .

A few weeks after this visit, Yeats wrote to his friend, the painter William Rothenstein, “I wish you would find some way of making a drawing of Maud Gonne. No artist has ever drawn her, and just now she looks magnificent.” But nothing ever came of this project and Yeats had to be satisfied with Campbell’s “bronze head.”

In the poem that commemorates this work of art, Yeats finally drops the mask of Wild Old Wicked Man completely; here the body is willingly “bruised to pleasure soul” and La Belle Dame Sans Merci is forgiven. The bronze head in the gallery is less a symbol of art than of Maud Gonne’s impending death. Everything in the decor of the first stanza is redolent of the tomb—“withered and mummy-dead.” The speaker wonders whether, in death, anything of Maud Gonne’s spirit will remain to haunt the tomb. “Which of her forms,” he asks in Stanza II, “has shown her substance right?” The “dead” bronze head with the conventional round, staring eye of Byzantine sculpture,

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or her bodily incarnation—"her form all full/ As though with magnani-
nimity of light." Perhaps, the poet decides, "substance can be com-
posite"; perhaps, as the Hegelian philosopher McTaggart thought,
both forms contain her substance so that she is at once "human,
superhuman," mortal and immortal.

In the third stanza, that quality of Maud Gonne which Yeats had
formerly called her "intellectual hatred" or her "opinionated mind"
comes to be regarded as simply her fate. Even as a young colt, "all
sleek and new," she had, the poem declares, a "vision of terror" of
what she would have to live through in the future. As for her lover,
"Propinquity had brought/ Imagination to that pitch where it casts
out/ All that is not itself." In memory, in other words, the poet identi-
fies completely with the "dark tomb-haunter," and by an act of imagi-
nation he makes her fate his own. Such identification can drive a
man mad: "I had grown wild/ And wandered murmuring every-
where, 'My child, my child!'" But whereas "Among School Children"
moves in the direction of the "great-rooted blossomer," the chestnut-
tree whose leaf, blossom, and bole are one and indivisible, "A Bronze
Head" moves toward dualism:

Or else I thought her supernatural;
As though a sterner eye looked through her eye
On this foul world in its decline and fall. . . .

F. A. C. Wilson writes of these lines, "Maud Gonne is possessed by
an angel, which descants through her lips and with the terrible unsen-
timentality of heaven, on the degradation of spirit in the modern
world."11 But it is not necessary to read the lines quite so allegorically:
Yeats says only that it is "As though a sterner eye looked through her
eye." Maud Gonne is "supernatural" in the same way that the lady of
the Elizabethan sonneteers is supernatural—a supreme being, a god-
dess, a sublime spirit. In the last stanza, Yeats implies that Maud
Gonne ultimately has the last word. She is beyond criticism, a heroic
figure removed from "this foul world in its decline and fall." Many
of Yeats's earlier Maud Gonne poems celebrated her beauty, her
strength, her pride, her arrogant brilliance. But in "A Bronze Head"
Yeats surprisingly calls her "a most gentle woman." The "great tomb-
haunter," an image of transcendence, here replaces the "great-rooted
blossomer," Yeats's symbol for Unity of Being.

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III

"I must be satisfied with my heart," the poet announces in the most famous poem of his last years, "The Circus Animals' Desertion." The circus animals, the stilts and ladders of poetic language, the outward shows are stripped away, revealing the disreputable origins of poetic inspiration:

A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

This passionate declaration of the poet's allegiance to what he calls in "Remorse for Intemperate Speech" "my fanatic heart," might serve as an epigraph to a volume of Yeats's love poetry, for it is the heart rather than the soul or the body that is at the center of the poems. The new Yeats Concordance bears out this generalization in quantitative terms: the word heart is listed as one of the ten most frequently found words in the Variorum text of Yeats's poems, and heart occurs at least twice as often as either soul or body not only in the earlier poetry but in such later volumes as The Winding Stair as well.12

For Yeats the "joyous life"—what Richard Ellmann has called "secular blessedness"—can never be the domain of the Soul alone; such poems as "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" and "Vacillation" make this point emphatic. But the Self in the former poem is by no means equivalent to the Body; its emblem, the sword, is covered with "Flowers from I know not what embroidery—/ Heart's purple," and in Part VII of "Vacillation" the debate is specifically between Soul and Heart. Again, in "Sailing to Byzantium," he prays to the holy sages to "Consume my heart away; sick with desire," and Helen of

12 A Concordance to the Poems of W. B. Yeats, ed. Stephen Parrish (Ithaca, N. Y., 1963), provides the following figures. Heart is the tenth most frequently found word in the Variorum text of the poems; together with its derivates hearts and heart's, it occurs 350 times as compared to 168 instances of soul and 138 of body. This ratio holds true not only for the earlier volumes but also for the two great volumes of Yeats's maturity, The Tower (1928) and The Winding Stair (1933). The figures for these two volumes are: heart—64; soul—36; body—37.
Troy is characterized in “The Tower” as the woman who had “all living hearts betrayed.” So too, in “Words for Music Perhaps,” the emphasis is less on what Denis Donoghue calls “the irreconcilable claims of soul and body” than on what Crazy Jane herself calls “the heart’s truth.” The lover of “Young Man’s Song” insists that “the heart cannot lie,” and he is willing to kneel in the dirt “To my offended heart/ Until it pardon me.” Transformed into the old man of “Love’s Loneliness,” he describes how in old age “Dread has followed longing,/ And our hearts are torn.”

From first to last, Yeats’s love poetry centers on the “fanatic heart.” But the milieu of the heart changes. In The Wind Among the Reeds of 1899, the poet is likely to refer to his “out-worn heart in a time out-worn,” or to his “trembling heart,” or he complains that words are “hurting through” his heart like lightning. The wisdom of the later love poetry is that, even when the heart is broken in two as it is in “His Confidence,” the poet can rejoice in his knowledge that “out of rock,/ Out of a desolate source,/ Love leaps upon its course.” Love, even imperfectly returned, cannot die; all lives that has lived. It is this faith that places the Yeatsian “I” in a very different world from that inhabited by Lady Chatterley or, for that matter, by Donne’s enlightened lovers. The “religion of the heart” of the later Maud Gonne poems suggests that, for all Crazy Jane’s insistence on “bodily lowliness,” Yeats himself knew that “Love has pitched his mansion” in more than one spot.

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