## CHAPTER II

"THINGS FALL APART, THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD"

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## "THINGS FALL APART, THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD" "The Second Coming"

In the light of the theoretical discussion of alienation and self-alienation in the preceding Chapter, we will now, in this Chapter and onwards, concentrate our attention on the emergence of the theme of self-alienation in Yeats's later poetry. We will discuss here the poems from Yeats's The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) and Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921). These two Volumes are bunched together, firstly because they chronologically fall close to each other, and secondly because they have a consistent philosophical tone from A Vision binding them together, and also the recurrence of themes and characters in them.

The collection of poems The Wild Swans — At Coole (1919) was first published by the Cuala Press in 1917, along with Yeats's play At the Hawks' Well. But when it was next published by the Macmillan's in 1919; the play was dropped, and instead seventeen more poems were included. One among these seventeen poems is "The Phase of the Moon."

All the volumes of his poems after 1914 show Yeats gaining a final authority and self-pessession. The poems of

1914, show this volume, written after the psychological states of his mind. At that he was above fifty and hence he shows the signs of maturity and development. His late marriage in 1917 proved fruitful in so many ways in his life. Apart from the company she gave him, she was a great help to him in his writings, particularly A Vision. He could then enjoy serene moods in his personal as well as poetic life. About the title of this volume, Daniel Albright writes: "The Wild Swans at Coole derives its title from a poem about the presence and absence of swans - and commingled themes of absence and presence keep arising through the volume: absence of dead friends, presence of fulfilled love; absence of full comprehension, presence of hair-raising suggestions of truth. Yeats continually evokes images in which exaltation and depression combine into a kind of wonder."1

The following poems from of this volume are selected for the detailed discussion of them: "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", "Men Improve With the Years", "The Living Beauty", "The Scholars", "On Woman", "The People", "Ego Dominus Tuus", "The Phases of the Moon" and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes."

"An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" (1919) was inspired by the death, in an aerial combat with the enemy of

his friend, of Major Gregory (Son of Lady Gregory) who was in the Royal Air Force. Thus we are to imagine that the speaker in the poem is Major Robert Gregory who was an air pilot.

The poet expresses the feelings of his dead friend before his daring, calculated act. These sentiments are characteristic of Yeats himself. The Airman's "lonely impulse' and his 'divided sensibility' reveal the poet himself. The Airman does not hate his enemy or love his people whom he is going to protect. His countrymen are Kiltartan Cross who will be affected in no way by the consequences of this war. Neither law nor patriotism has prompted him to fight. No desire for fame or public applause has driven him to the war. It is the lonely impulse of delight which has led him to the war. Before stepping into the air fight he has made calculations concerning the years of his future life and about the ones already spent. It was all a waste of breath in both ways. In the balance of this life is Death in the action, which perhaps is better.

Another side of the poem is this if he had not joined the Air Force, the coming years of his life would have been as dull and empty as the past years. He was aware that, by joining the Air Force, he would die in the air one day but that did not matter. Instead of living a dull life, he accepted death. His fighting in the war was just a causeless

ritual for him. His action was deprived of any real and clear motivation, some mystical thought, 'the lonely impulse of delight' seems the reason why he was risking his life. The following last lines of the poem bring out his self-alienation:

"The years to come seemed waste of breath, A waste of breath the years behind In balance with this life, this death."

"Men Improve with the Years" (1916) is about Yeats's awareness of growing old and his love for Iseult Gonne. His proposals to Maud Gonne and Iseult Gonne were rejected; he had an intense sense of growing old. Growth in age brings wisdom but Yeats felt that mere wisdom was not enough. He had on intense passion in spite of the fact that he was growing old. The poet was torn between desire and dream on one side and his mature awareness on the other. The poem opens thus:

"I Am worn out with dreams; A weather-worn, marble triton Among the streams;"

The young beauty of Iseult filled his eyes. The hesitant poet, confounded asks: "Is this my dream, or the truth?" At that time he felt that she should have met him when he was young, with "burning youth!": His sense of weariness and exasperation indicative of his self-alienation is expressed in the following concluding line: "But I grow

old among dreams." The image of a triton, a merman, half-man and half-fish, throws light on his superhuman quality and indicates and enhances his self-alienation. The attributive 'marble' indicates coldness. In his life the poet became old only in waiting and seeing the dreams of his beloved but this poem shows the loss of Yeats's strong love and frustrated mood and the adverse effect of love on his life. The following comments of Richard Ellmann substantiate the preceding arguments:

"He was a many-sided man who by dint of much questioning and inner turmoil achieved the right to speak with many voices and to know completely the incompleteness of life. And if, as seems likely, his works will resist time, it is because in all his shape-changing he remains at the centre tenacious, solid, a-marble triton among the streams."

"The Living Beauty"<sup>5</sup>, a very short poem, resumes the theme of the old poet confronted with a young beauty. The poem shows the poets loss of power and his inability to do things in his old age. The poem opens thus:

"I Bade, because the wick and oil are spent And frozen are the channels of the blood, My discontented heart to draw content ----"

These lines show that the poet is old, he has lost his power and that there is neither fire nor flame, neither oil nor fuel in him. His blood is frozen; obviously, there is utter loss of his physical faculties. The poet is actually nervous and his heart discontented, yet he bids his heart to draw or

derive content from the beauty in bronze and in dazzling marble of the artistic statues, knowing full well that it is a counsel of despair:

"...O heart we are old;
The living beauty is for younger men:
We cannot play its tribute of wild tears."

This poem is a very good example of Yeats's self-alienation caused by his growing old. This self-alienation at this stage in his Life becomes aggravated in the light of his self-alienation in his youth, when he was deprived of the beauty he loved and liked. At the end of the poem the poet's resignation intensifies his alienation from his present self.

"The Scholars" is a brief, terse and contemptuous comment on the scholars who, ignorant of creative process and pains involved in it, devote themselves to the critical work of the young poets who have composed their poems in love's despair in order to flatter "beauty's ignorant ear." In this poem we have triple self-alienation. In the first place, the poets in particular and the creative artists in general, are alienated from the intended meanings and implications of their works. The scholars edit, annotate and interpret the poems without going to the roots or the deeper reality of them. What they see and think of is a series of words, segregated from the poet's actual experiences and moods which

have given rise to them. Not surprising, the poets feel upset and alienated from their poems which are now in the hands of the scholar; now their destiny depends on them. They can either make or mar them, the latter being more possible. In the second place, the scholars are also alienated from themselves in the sense that they are unable to understand poems in their proper spirit and just edit or annotate the lines. According to Yeats, they are sinful because they spoil the poems and distort their meanings: "Bald heads forgetful of their sins,/Old, learned, respectable bald heads/Edit and annotate the lines" composed by the young poets in fury and fire of human heart. The poet further comments on the scholars in the lines which express their self-alienation:

- "All shuffle there; all cough in ink;
- All wear the carpet with their shoes;
- All think what other people think;
- All know the man their neighbour knows."

In the third place, the beautiful girl about whom the poem is written is ignorant of the poet's love and sincerity; her ignorance itself speaks for her alienation from herself.

Yeats has written several poems with the word 'Woman' in the title itself. In them he has explored various traits of women some of whom are sublimated. "On Woman" (1914) is one such as points out the superiority of the woman's wisdom of heart to man's wisdom of head. Women by nature are

sociable, hard-enduring, loving and so on. At the very outset of the poem the poet admits that God must he praised for having created women with self-sacrificing nature; they are true friends. Man may not find in man such a devoted heart and dedicated mind. The poet says that Soloman, the Just and Wise, learnt more wisdom in the company of women than elsewhere and that he counted all things in the world except the praises due to his beloved whose company gave him pleasure. He admits that he is not so bold as Solomon and knows that he is growing old, but wishes that after his physical death he may be able to follow the experiences of his present existence, in his renewed life. His self-alienation is voiced in his very desire,

"To find what once I had And know what once I have known, Until I am driven mad, Sleep driven from my bed, By tenderness and care, Pity and acting head, Gnashing of teeth, despair;"

The present lack of something, something he had in the past, an aching head, the loss of sleep, and his despair highlight the pangs of his self-alienation.

The poem "The People" is an informal dialogue between the poet and his phoenix, presumably Maud Gonne. The poet disgusted with 'the daily spite of this unmannerly town' yearns for a life in the aristocratic court of the Duke Ferrara of Urbino, where 'passion and courtesey' were mixed in the night-long talk of the courtly people. The poet, frustrated and upset by the behaviour of the people, asks, "What have I earned for all that work(?)" and further continues,

"For all that I have done at my own charge?
The daily spite of this unmannerly town,
Where who has served the most is most defamed,
The reputation of his lifetime lost
Between the night and morning ----"

His intense agony, ill-treatment of him by the people, the sense of the loss of his reputation, (which echoes Cassius in <a href="Othello">Othello</a>) speak for the loss of his self and consequent self-alienation.

The poet trotted out an excuse that he was a speculative man of analytic mind; yet in the heart of his hearts he felt ashamed of his bitterness before that forbearing woman. This feeling of being abashed and ashamed in the presence of the woman who never "complained of the people" enhances his self-alienated condition.

Lastly we will discuss two philosophical poems from this volume - "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "The Phase of the Moon." "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1915) is in the form of dialogue between Hic, the defender of subjectivity and Ille, the defender of

objectivity in art. Ille here is a representative of Yeats who wanted art to be a depiction of Reality. Here, as elsewhere in Yeats, the dialogue form helps the poet to look at a particular issue or an object from two different and opposite view-points to fathom the complete reality of that issue or an object. The view-points presented or represented by both Hic and Ille are correct and convincing. For Hic, the opening speaker, art is the expression of the artists life and he gives the examples of Dante the Italian poet and of Keats the nineteenth century Romantic poet in whom life and literature came closer to each other, sometimes become one. He also points out to Ille that lovers of life and impulsive men looking for happiness and singing of it after finding it have made their art out of their own acute and actual experiences in life. In order to refute and repudiate the arguments of Hic. Ille taking the sides of Yeats says that "art/Is but a vision of reality." The artist's personality must be suppressed, extinguished before he comes to create something. He can do so by presenting brief, evocative images and symbols which may bring in and encampass the artist's opposite self or anti-self or what he is not in actuality. He says: "By the help of an image/I call to my own opposite, summon all/That I have handled least, least looked upon." In other words, the artist has to hold or wear the Mask, the idea discussed earlier in this chapter. The very idea of the opposite self or the anti-self or the Mask speaks for the artist's alienation from his own self because instead of depicting what he is, he is in search of what he is not. Is it not another version of Shelleyan looking before and after and pining for what is not?. At one place in reply to Hic, Ille says,

"Whether we have chosen chisel, pen or brush, We are but critics, or but half create, Timid, entangled, empty and abashed, Lacking the countenance of our friends."

According to Ille, whatever the artistic mode or manner, artists are but critics, they only half-create things as they cannot grasp the whole of reality (In Platonic terminology they are removed from reality). They are all timid, empty, entangled and abashed. The easy inference that can be drawn from this sort of argument is that the arts are nothing but the vanities of human wishes; they are self-alienated people. The following remarks of Louis MacNeice bring out the point in this way:

"Where he most nearly approaches psychology is in his basic principle that a man desires his opposite; he had observed this in himself - the contemplative man envying the life of action. This being so, a man's poetry, which is the expression of his desires, tends to be in a sense the contradiction of his life. He had written earlier, in PerAmica Silentia Lunae: 'When I think of any great poetical writer of the past ---- I comprehend, if I know the lineaments of his life, that the work is the man's flight from his entire horoscope, his blind struggle in the network of the stars.' In a sense then the poet as poet can escape up to a point from

determinism. There is a curious parallel in Schopenhauer who makes art the only escape from the wheel of willwork (will, for Schopenhauer, implying necessity). Yeats goes on: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.' This principle, of a man desiring his opposite, is worked out in detail in <u>A Vision</u>. For example, the man of Phase III, which is almost without intellect, ..... a phase of perfect bodily sanity, becomes a persona for poets of the opposite phase, phase XVII, which Yeats calls the phase of the Daimonic man, exemplified by Shelley and Landor; such poets, themselves confused and violent persons harassed by their own intellects and desires, look to the man of Phase III for patterns of idyllic innocence."

Ille, the poet Yeats's self-alienation is voiced in the following concluding lines of the poem:

"Because I seek an image, not book.

Those men that in their writings are most wise

Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts.

I call to the mysterious one who yet

Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream.

And look most like me, being indeed my double,

And prove of all imaginable things

The most unlike, being my anti-self."

The desire for the search of one's double, the alter ego or the anti-self is a cause and also and consequence of one's self-alienation.

"The phases of the Moon" (1918) was written at Ballylee tower when the Yeats were in residence there. It was first published in <u>The Wild-Swans at Coole</u>. Yeats's note to the poem, in the section <u>The Wild Swans at Coole</u> of his <u>Collected Poems</u> (1933) tells us something about the interlocutor and the theme of the poem. Yeasts here talks about the relation of human nature to the phases of the moon, as discussed by him in <u>A Vision</u>.

In this beautiful dialogue-poem in which two speakers, Aherne, an old man, and Robartes, speak about the phases of the moon, with which the soul's cycle of reincarnation corresponds. It has a close relation to Yeats's 'system' in his highly individual doctrinal work A Vision (1925). Already there are some oddities and difficulties in the 'system' but Yeats here has succeeded in making this poem readable and in making his doctrine understandable. The dialogue form in which Aherenes' is keenly interested in knowing the phases of the moon provides Robartes an opportunity to explain them to him.

The two speakers, in their returning home have come to the bridge where they are engaged in a give-and-take of ideas knowing that their homes are still at a considerable distance. The bridge becomes the spot where the views of these two speakers, perhaps two poles apart, are linked to one another. Robartes from this bridge shows Aherne the tower in the distance where the poet, presumably Yeats himself, is struggling with the book of mysticism. The book has perhaps proved to be too much for him and hence he is seen waking up at the night time. He is lonely, as Milton's' Platonist in "Il Penserose or Shelley's visionary prince was. The tower thus has become to the poets the symbol of wisdom and height one can achieve in life only at the cost of one's life-blood

or sweat. Intellectual pursuits are not easy ones, wisdom presupposes a series of pains and hard endeavour.

Aherne wants to know the phases of the moon and asks Robartes to enlighten him in this respect. Then Robartes, the off-hand philosopher, suddenly brusts out in words that he speak his mastery of matter and manner. His knowledge of the subject put forth with all the minute details which even a school boy may understand is just impressive. He tells Aherne that though theoretically there are twenty-eight phases of the moon, actually there are only twenty-six since "there's no human life at the full or the dark." Phase one is that of complete objectivity, whereas Phase Fifteen is the opposite of it, complete subjectivity. From the second phase to the eighth man is dominated by animal spirits, is happy and careless. The hero's crescent is the twelfth phase. The self-alienation of the hero, who becomes helpless, at this Phase Twelve is expressed in these line spoken by Robartes:

"... Eleven pass, and then
Athena takes Achilles by the hair,
Hector is in the dust, Nietzsche is born,
Because the heroes' crescent is the twelfth,
And yet, twice born, twice buried, grow he must,
Before the full moon, helpless as a worm."

The soul's division against itself, its struggle to dominate the body and its consequence loneliness are voiced in the concluding lines of Robarte's speech:

"The thirteenth moon but sets the soul at war In its own being and when that war's begun There is no muscle in the arm, and after, Under the frenzy of the fourteenth moon The soul begins to tremble into stillness, To die into the labyrinth of itself!"

From Phase 16 the journey of the soul towards objectivity begins and body gets its domination over the soul. It then becomes the servant of the world and passes from Phase 17 to 22, as reformer, merchant, statesman, scholar and dutiful husband and wife. In the last three stages, man becomes a Hunchback, Saint and Fool, who represent the deformity of body or of mind.

Robartes points out to Aherne that at Phase 1 and 15 no life of the soul is possible, the soul assumes the form of a spirit rather than of a man. At Phase 15, when the moon is full, body and soul get separated from each other, consequently the unity of Being is lost, as man is not only body or soul but both. Robartes says,

"When the moon's full those creatures of the full Are met on the waste hills by country men Who shudder and hurry by: body and soul Estranged amid the strangeness of themselves, Caught up in contemplation, the mind's eye Fixed upon images that once were thought; For separate, perfect, and immovable Images can break the solitude of lovely, satisfied, indifferent eyes."

At Phase 1, when the moon is new, there is all darkness. All men are lost here in the darkness of death, they are beyond

desire and hence beyond what is good or bad. Their dehumanization and eventual self-alienation are powerfully reflected in the simile of bats crying in a cloud. The following lines spoken by Robartes merit attention in this context:

"Because all dark, like those that are all light,
They are cast beyond the verge, and in a cloud,
Crying to one another like the bats;
And having no desire they cannot tell
What's good or bad, or what it is to triumph
At the perfection of one's own obedience;
And yet they speak what's blown into the mind;
Deformed beyond deformity, unformed,
Insipid as the dough before it is baked,
They change their bodies at a word."

Man's becoming, in the end, the dough to be shaped before it is backed enhances his alienation from his self or soul.

Yeats pursued the theme of the phases of the moon, of course, partially or slightly in another poem "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" (1919), which concludes the volume, The Wild Swans at Coole but not the pursuit of Robartes, who again appears at the opening of the following volume. The adjective 'double', qualifying the noun 'vision', gives a clue to the divided vision and self-alienation of Michael Robartes. Michael Robartes, the speaker of this poem, is caught between the two extremes of his vision - self-debasement and self-exaltation. In the first section of the poem we have Robartes' first vision at the dark moon, the vision of self-obliteration. He sees here the cold spirits

which are will-less, helpless, and abstract; they do not know evil and good and are utterly dead. The second section illustrates his second vision at the full moon of self-exaltation, made up of three images of the self, the Sphinx, the Buddha and the dancing girl, representing intellect, heart and the reconciliation of the two respectively. The outcome of the double vision of Michael Robartes can be seen in the third section in the lines which express the dilemma of his self-alienation.

"To such a pitch of folly I am bought, Being caught between the pull of the dark noon and the full."

Richard Ellman comments on Michael Robarte's condition thus:

"At the poems' end he recovers from the vision and makes his moan because he is himself caught, not between pure intellect and pure emotion, but between the less attractive antinomy of self-exaltation and self-obliteration. Yet he gives thanks for having been permitted to transcend his moment in time if only for the instant of vision." 13

II

It is not a matter of mere chance or coincidence that the last poem of <u>The Wild Swan at Coole</u> and the first poem of <u>Michael Robarte and the Dancer</u> are about Michael Robartes. Yeats certainly desired that they should be read continuously and so established the link by means of the character of Robartes. It also speaks for Yeats's haunting interest in his

character, which has almost become a Yeatsian poetic metaphor. The following poems are culled from this volume for detailed discussion: "Easter 1916" and "The Second Coming."

Michael Robartes And the Dancer (1921) includes Yeats's mature poems which are very rich in suggestiveness and depth of thought, complex in imagery and intricate in construction and meaning. His various experiences of occultism, symbolism, imagery and philosophy are effectively employed here. While reading the poems of this volume we notice the influence of Blake and Shelley. Poems are very tough and loaded with Yeats's effective writing style and presentation of new thoughts. A Norman Jeffares writes about this collection of poems thus:

"Some of the poems in this volume were written in 1916 but not publicly circulated until 1920. His early mockery - 'Romantic Ireland's dead and gone' - has vanished, and he records in these poems his clear preception of what was achieved by the Rising, by the leaders who have joined the long procession of Ireland's martyrs. The magnificent poems based on AV's (A Vision's) thought blend imaginative experience and explanation in a manner which imparts a sense of revelation."

The title of this volume derives from the title poem "Michael Robartes and the Dancer." The concept of the Dancer is based on Iseult Gonne, and that of Michael Robartes "was originally an unwordly persona associated with the imagination's pride in its images then a code name for the

instructors who presented Yeats with supernatural revelation, and at last simply an emphatic and self-confident disquise of Yeats himself." 15

"Easter, 1916" is one of Yeats's most successful public poems that deal with the actual events that took place in Ireland. It was written on September 25, 1916 to commemorate the 1916 uprising that happened in April, 1916. Though Yeats was all for the national cause, here he looks at this event from an objective view-point as a result of which he is able to see comedy in tragedy and vice versa. The rebels, who were executed after the event, certainly made a great sacrifice but the poet suggests that they should have been a little tactful and practical. At the same time he admits that they are from the blame because free their purpose was pious and praiseworthy. The note of self-criticism that rings constantly in the poem, the poet's attempt to see the opposite of the issue and his vacillation between the two opposed view-points do speak for his severance from the right and proper assessment of the political situation of the time. His reactions to the event are expressed in "Being certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn :/ All changed, changed utterly :/ A terrible beauty is born." The poet recalls that those people who were executed had flints in their hearts, determination A.Norman Jeffares writers: "hearts enchanted to a stone were Yeats's symbol for those who had devoted themselves to a cause without thought of life or love. The stone was a symbol of how politics had affected, in particular, Maud Gonne." 17

In the last stanza the poet probably speaks of the immense sacrifice made by the sons and daughters of Ireland, keeping, in particular, Maud Gonne in his mind. He says that Maud Gonne suffered long and this suffering transformed her soft heart into a stone: "Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart." The image of 'stone' does speak for Maud Gonne's hard heart that rejected the poet's proposal about three times. The poet suggests that her unnatural behaviour and her pride consequent on her sacrifice betrayed her self-alienation in that her heart was not capable of natural responses and reactions.

"The Second Coming" 18 (1919) is one of the most famous poems of Yeats. The poem was written in January 1919, at a time when the poet was passing through intense apprehension of the Irish Civil War that followed the First World War, along with the several continuing disturbances throughout Europe. It is a superbly controlled powerful poetic comment not only on World War I and the

decline of traditional standards but also on the twentiethcentury man and the new inventions of horror.

first eight lines of the poem neatly effectively sum up the situation of the world after the First World War as it was seen by Yeats: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer." The falconer has lost control over the falcon, or the falcon has ceased to listen to the falconer. There is a wide gap of communication the distance between the owner and the owned, the maker and the made. The centre cannot hold its parts together and absolute anarchy is let loose in the world. Traditional and aristocratic values of life have been damaged and denounced. The falcon has soared up in everwidening spirals beyond the control of the falconer, which means that mind and heart or soul are divided. The centre which kept the parts together has dissolved and things are falling apart and away, like splinters and fragments. Both Time and the world are out of joint. In the moral sphere also the good has lost their faith, conviction and energy of action, while the bad are not only powerful but also possessed of certain ideas to which they cling with all the intensity of their hearts. The atmosphere of fanaticism and violence has overtaken everything. The good in the world of today are alienated from themselves because they don't find any faith or strength in their goodness, as their

goodness has become ineffective amidst the wicked, violent forces of the warring world.

As the emotional approach towards society is lost, there is no understanding between man and man. The number of liars, imposters, and hypocrites is ever increasing. We feel that man is not a rational or social animal, but only a beast wanting a beastly god, crawling towards Bethlehem.

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