

W.B. Yeats and Indian Thought

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*A Man Engaged in that Endless
Research into Life, Death, God*

By

Snežana Dabić

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*To my mother and father,
and to Dorde with love*

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PREFACE

This book seeks to examine the nature of Indian philosophical influence throughout his prolific life on the poetic works of William Butler Yeats, a literary giant of the twentieth century. A peculiar passion for Sanskrit, sacred and literary Hindu texts, and an equally peculiar fascination with *The Herne's Egg* and Yeats's mature verse prompted me to engage in an exploration of potential links of the two, and later extend the analysis to Yeats's other poetic works. Being aware of the dangers of focusing on a solely extrinsic method, I do not offer a finite Eastern conceptual framework for investigating Yeats's poetic canon. Rather, the presented approach points to the East as a source of inspiration and has, to an extent, become intrinsic to the poet, allowing him to syncretise and synthesise, which has earned him conflicting names from being Orientalist, colonialist, anti-colonialist, modernist, nationalist, revivalist and even traditionalist in his attitude and writing. Such multi-labelling is in itself evidence enough to prove how complex Yeats's opus and life are, defying easy classification. Many texts have been written about Indian influence on the poet, and I wish to build on them and expand the field, as there is still uncovered ground, without strictly categorising (and thereby limiting) Yeats and his output. Barely half way through the research, I realised what a daunting task this is, and now can only hope that this approach to appreciating his East-bent poetic gaze does justice to the poet and leaves space for a multiplicity of future constructive critique of the Yeats masterpiece.

In the Introduction, I state the guiding principles and methodology of the enquiry and identify a number of Indian philosophical concepts. These largely focus on the notion of *the self*, and contribute directly to several of Yeats's works, but they are of value also as analytical tools where no direct contribution is apparent. A list of Yeats's reading on Eastern lore, his interest in the occult, as well as my use of critical literature related to Yeats and India, also form part of the Introduction. Successive chapters then trace out three major phases of the poet's creative life, coinciding with his encounters with the three exponents of Hindu thought in literature and philosophy.

Chapter One deals with the poet's initial occult interests, esoteric experimentation and the meeting with Mohini Chatterji, which encouraged him to further his Eastern readings and introduce Indian ideas into his early poetry. This phase marks the beginning of serious literary and spiritual quests, reflected in some of his early lyrics, as well as his overtly "Indian poems", though Indian ideas and themes here seem to be more impressionistic and conventional than truly philosophical.

Chapter Two focuses on Yeats's middle phase and his complex relationship with Rabindranath Tagore and diverse Orientalist views. The use of Eastern concepts at this time evinces a deeper understanding of Indian philosophy. A remarkably elaborate text of *A Vision* is dealt with in brief, within the context of the poems, as an expression of a synthesis of Yeats's thought that integrated his interest in magic and mysticism and his idiosyncratic personal philosophy along with a mixture of both Western and Eastern metaphysical notions. The influence of Tagore's *Gitanjali* and more intricate Indian ideas is examined in the lyrics of this period, in his "beggar poems" in particular, and briefly in Yeats's poetic play, *The Shadowy Waters*.

Chapter Three concentrates on a single work, *The Herne's Egg*. Investigation of the ambivalence of the text points to parts in which Yeats consciously drew upon Indian philosophical concepts and themes for plot material. I argue that Yeats also employed some of the same concepts in the characterisation of the protagonists. These ideas reveal themselves again in the structure of the play. At this stage, Yeats reaches a deeper understanding of Indian thought, and shows greater skill in incorporating it in his poetry. In the play, there are also certain traces of the influence of Japanese aesthetics and the Noh dramatic art.

Chapter Four deals with the last phase of Yeats's poetic expression, and examines the lyrics in which he used Indian concepts maturely, and at times elaborately. His life and work were deeply touched by his associate and friend, Shri Purohit Swami. The translation of the Upanishads and his "Indian essays" confirm the poet's final position on matters of life and death and the degree of an Eastern spell on his thinking, which is inevitably reflected in his mature verse. In addition to the philosophical concepts used earlier (*trigunas*, *avidya*, *maya*, the stages of consciousness, *atman*, *Brahman* etc.), Yeats here embodies Tantric ideas in the *Supernatural Songs* and Crazy Jane poems.¹

¹ I intend to explore Indian philosophical concepts in stages, as they reveal layers of meaning to Yeats, informing and shaping his poetic idiom, or as they appear relevant to our analysis throughout the discussion.

In Conclusion the discussion comes full circle from Yeats's early Eastern metaphysical interest to his ultimate choices, still related to India as a source of wisdom for shaping and re-shaping his themes, motifs, symbols and metaphors. Finally, it is the refusal to accept that part of Hindu metaphysics, which insists upon abandoning the cycle of rebirths, that defines his poetic vocation as one pledged to living life as it is and foregoing any promise of ultimate freedom.

It should be pointed out that the Indian philosophical concepts upon which I draw in the discussion come from different sources and a range of translations—and consequently their meanings (of the same concepts)—when compared, sound, and occasionally are, disparate in English. One reason for this is partly the synthetic nature of the Sanskrit language, and various historical influences. More importantly, this is also due to a wide range of beliefs and discursive practices used by different authors, commentators and translators who, naturally, belong to various schools of thought, social and historical periods and/or Indian philosophical systems. The Upanishadic texts I originally read in Sanskrit are not quoted in Devanāgarī, since Yeats was not well versed in the original text and script, but instead had relied on translations until he met a Hindu monk, Purohit Swami.²

Furthermore, my intention is not to engage in debating the manifold meanings of these concepts with their interpreters, as classical Indology or philology are not at the heart of this study, but rather to put Yeats's text at the centre of discussion and focus on discovering what role, if any, the concepts play in his poetry. In so doing, I shall concentrate on Sanskrit terminology (however confusingly complex or contradictory at times) and the ideas it engenders, which, in my view, shed light and offer revealing insights into Yeats's text. He was familiar with some of that terminology through his avid reading, as will be demonstrated here. English transliteration may differ for the same concept or text throughout the book, as I have followed the original transcription of each author. For example, Bhagavad-Gita and Bhagavad Gītā, but this does not change the meaning.

Throughout this study, the terms "East" and "Eastern" will be used in the sense of what is generally considered to be Indian philosophical tradition (often specifically Hindu), and occasionally Japanese, in the Yeatsian canon, touching upon art and religion and blending certain tenets

² While engaged in the translation of the Upanishads, Yeats relied on his Indian friend and associate, Purohit Swami. They met through Sturge Moore and Olivia Shakespeare. See R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, II: The Arch-Poet*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 435.

of Indology with literature and metaphysics. There is no reference to the East and West in the twenty-first century geopolitical or cultural sense.

In writing this book, I am deeply indebted to Mr Francis King and Dr Peter Naish, formerly academics at Monash University in Melbourne who expertly supervised my research with critical insight and stimulating advice, while in its original PhD form. The manuscript has been transformed since then. Dr Peter Naish sadly passed away before the book was published. Monash University also deserves my gratitude for awarding me an Australian Postgraduate Research Scholarship. I am particularly fond of, and grateful to, my Sanskrit teacher, a Serbian mathematician and polyglot linguist, the late Radmilo Stojanović, who has opened new, inspiring linguistic and philosophical dimensions to me. Many thanks go to authors mentioned throughout the book and all those passionate Yeatsians around the world, too, whose texts and ideas have engaged me in stimulating discussions, recorded on the pages that follow. Finally, my greatest debts are to my parents, who nurtured my love for storytelling and literature, and to my husband for his patience and continuing support.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The italicised abbreviations below are used for citations in the main text and the footnotes alike.

- AU* Yeats, W.B. 1961 (1955), *Autobiographies*, Macmillan & Co. Ltd, London.
- BACH* Bachchan, H.R. 1974 (1965), *W.B. Yeats and Occultism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi (with foreword by T. R. Henn).
- BG* *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* 1972, trans. & com. A.C.B.S. Prabhupada, Collier Books, New York, & Collier Macmillan Publishers, London.
- E* Yeats, W.B. 1937, *Essays by W.B. Yeats. 1931 to 1936*, The Cuala Press, Dublin (reprinted by T.M. MacGlinchey, Publisher, 1971).
- EI* Yeats, W.B. 1974 (1961), *Essays and Introductions*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, London.
- GUHA* Guha, N. 1968, *W.B. Yeats: An Indian Approach*, Jadavpur University, Calcutta.
- ID* Ellmann, R. 1975 (1954), *The Identity of Yeats*, Faber & Faber, London.
- L* Yeats, W.B. 1954, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. A. Wade, Rupert Hart-Davis, London.
- MM* Ellmann, R. 1973 (1949), *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, Faber & Faber, London.
- RAV* Ravindran, S. 1990, *W.B. Yeats and Indian Tradition*, Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd, Delhi.
- U* *The Ten Principal Upanishads* 1971 (1937), trans. S.P. Swami & W.B. Yeats, Faber & Faber, London (with preface by W.B. Yeats).
- UNT* Unterecker, J. 1975 (1959), *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats*, Reader's Guides, Thames & Hudson, London.
- VE* 1957 (1903), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, eds P. Allt & R.K. Alspach, The Macmillan Company, New York. (All the titles and citations taken from *VE* are given as printed in this edition)

- V* Yeats, W.B. 1978 (1937), *A Vision*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, London.
- ICO* Wilson, F.A.C. 1960, *Yeats's Iconography*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London.
- YT* Wilson, F.A.C. 1958, *W.B. Yeats and Tradition*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London.

INTRODUCTION

Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.

William Butler Yeats states his poetic credo in “the first principle” of “A general introduction for my work”, which is a starting point for my discussion of his poetry. Yeats asserts that a “poet writes always of his personal life; in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness”. But he never writes of it directly, for he creates with the transformative power of his imagination: “there is always a phantasmagoria...Even when the poet seems most himself...he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete” thus “He is more type than man, more passion than type”.¹ This seeming duality of the poet’s identity is resolved in the process of poetic creation, which for Yeats, I believe, is close to what James Hillman has described as an “act of soul-making”. Hillman further elaborates:

By *soul* I mean, first of all, a perspective rather than a substance, a viewpoint toward things rather than a thing itself. This perspective is reflective; it mediates events and makes differences between ourselves and everything that happens. Between us and events, between the doer and the deed, there is a reflective moment—and soul-making means differentiating this middle ground.²

¹W.B. Yeats, “A general introduction for my work”, in E. Callan, *Yeats on Yeats, The Last Introductions and the “Dublin” Edition*, New Yeats Papers, vol. 20, gen. ed. L. Miller, The Dolmen Press in assoc. with Humanities Press Inc., Mountrath, 1981, pp. 40–41. From this point on referred to as “General introduction”.

²J. Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1977 (1975), p. x. Hillman, the archetypal psychologist, took the term *soul-making* from the Romantic poets, Blake and in particular Keats, turning it into a process with therapeutic traits. Hillman’s notion of the soul is akin to Yeats’s stance. Yeats expressed it, though, in a more poetic way, in “The symbolism of poetry” (as “soul-making” happens between us and our actions—according to Hillman, so is an emotion evoked by verse, gathering other emotions and becoming a perspective between us and life—according to Yeats): “A little lyric evokes an emotion, and this emotion gathers others about it and melts into their being in the making of some great epic; and at last, needing an always less delicate body, or symbol, as it

According to Yeats, the poet expands his individual being (or the self which for Yeats, here, equals personality) into the universal one out of “his own phantasmagoria and we adore him because nature has grown intelligible, and, by so doing, a part of our creative power”. The poet illuminates the world for his readers and enables them to merge, through their own experience of his work, with the Self posited in the Upanishads. The Self in which “mind is lost”, but which “a wise man seeks”, striving for the privileged knowledge that is denied to the world, the world that “knows nothing because it has made nothing; we know everything because we have made everything”.³ Thus, his readers become willing co-creators of a cosmos through the poet’s vision of a discontinuous universe, the vision that lasts as long as his own state of phantasmagoria.

This immediately brings us to the key concepts that need clarifying. I have chosen to use “the self”/“the Self” as a translation or, rather, a more or less fitting equivalent, of the complex metaphysical notions of *atman* and *Brahman* (in that order) from the philosophical texts, hymns and parables of the Vedas. Over the centuries during which the Upanishads were composed, these concepts developed multiple meanings. For example, *Brahman* originally referred to *varṇa*, a social division of traditional Indian society, generally known as a caste or class (much more complex than a simple division),⁴ particularly Brahmins (Brahmans),

grows more powerful, it flows out, with all it has gathered, among the blind instincts of daily life, where it moves a power within powers, as one sees ring within ring in the stem of an old tree”, in W.B. Yeats, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, A.H. Bullen, London, 1903, p. 245.

³“General introduction”, pp. 41–42. Yeats here refers to Prashna and Chandogya Upanishads.

⁴*Varṇa* literally means “colour”, indicating a very complicated system of a broadly stratified social structure that traditionally has kept privileges and duties of peoples in balance. *Varṇa* consists of four groups (their main occupations summarised in parenthesis): Brahmins (priestly nobility), Kshatriyas (military elite), Vaishyas (artisans and farmers) and Shudras (labourers and servants). Each one of the groups has multiple *jātis* or sub/castes, and outside the system are the historically disadvantaged outcastes or untouchables, today referred to as Dalits. *Varṇa* and *jāti* are intertwined ideological categories that still define Indian society these days, but their complexity is difficult to fathom. For extra information, see also R. Iveković (compiler, translator, and commentator) *Počeci indijske misli*, BIGZ, Beograd 1981, pp. 5–34. Yeats would have been interested in Brahmins as corresponding to the aristocratic class in Britain.

F.M. Müller warns against using the term “caste” as it is misleading and can confuse, being a Portuguese import in sixteenth-century India where it was applied to mean a pure breed (!); see F.M. Müller *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*, Associated Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984 (1899), pp. 8–9.

priests and theologians, who had risen to the top of the societal hierarchy. The term also designated a formula, a sacred word, then power, the absolute reality and the ultimate truth. *Atman*, on the other hand, initially denoted a breath, body, life and later *the self*, i.e. integrating the physical and spiritual body, so that it could finally equate with *Brahman* as the individual aspect of the universal principle.⁵

Heinrich Zimmer, interestingly, refers to “the Self” as *atman*—which is the transcendental Self, “independent, imperishable entity, underlying the conscious personality and bodily frame”—and employs “holy power” for *Brahman*, describing it as “cosmic power...the essence of all that we are and know”, and “the true Self” for *atman* and *Brahman* in a philosophical sense. Similarly, A.L. Herman compares *atman* to “the Christ and the Light”, as “impersonal God, Godhead, or holy Power in the universe”, and identifies it with *Brahman*.⁶

It is not surprising that misconceptions and misinterpretations occur when translating the above concepts into English (or any other language for that matter), considering that societies and languages have changed over centuries. There are a few reasons, I think, for most differences in the translation of these concepts. Firstly, they depend on grammatical expression (e.g. whether *Brahman* is a neuter or masculine gender, which guides meaning and commentary); then, on the knowledge and allegiances of commentators and translators; also, on the discourse of a historical period, reflecting societal changes, when translations and interpretations take place and, finally, whether the source language (in this case Sanskrit) as a highly synthetic language is easily translatable into an analytic language (here English). These reasons have partly steered me towards the choice of what I regard as the appropriate terminology (*the self/the Self*) for discussing that part of Yeats’s poetic opus that is influenced by Indian thought.

⁵For further commentary on the concepts of *Brahman* and *atman* (along these lines), refer to R. Iveković op. cit. pp. 6–8, and P. Olivelle, “Introduction”, in *The World’s Classics, Upaniṣads*, OUP, Oxford & New York, 1996, pp. xxiii–lvii.

⁶H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1967 (1952), pp. 3, 74 & 80.

A.L. Herman, *An Introduction to Indian Thought*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1976, p. 110. Herman deems *atman* hidden in all beings, and equates the two concepts (*Brahman* and *atman*), giving the following parallels: “Throughout the Upanishads the *Atman* is curiously identified with life, breath, God, and *Brahman*; in fact, *Atman* is seen as the totality of all that is”. Herman’s interpretation seems, somewhat confusingly, to put *atman* above or inclusive of *Brahman*, oddly enough, even when emphasising their oneness or unity.

The poet's phantasmagoria, which for Yeats originates in his poetic power, is a changing perspective of a dream, image, and fantasy with elements of "fable, myth, symbol, and figurative devices whereby an artist shapes common language and experience into the permanent forms of art",⁷ and that phantasmagoria "completes not only life but imagination" (*V*, p. 230) as well. Every poetic utterance comes from that ever-shifting well that makes the "middle ground", mediating events that deepen into poetic experiences. Hence, "the poetic persona"⁸ recognises all influences as essentially symbolic or rather metaphorical, and integrates them in poetry only after reshaping and rearranging them. By accepting *persona* as a fitting term, which for Yeats carried both empirical and transcendent aspects of the Self, as Schricker remarks, I am employing it here primarily for its dynamic structure, and for allowing effective, fluid shape-shifting and, finally, for reasons of "interdependence and imprecise boundaries of these two aspects of self" that "make for a true process of self-discovery within the persona of Yeats's lyric canon".⁹ Thus, it seems to me that his "poetic persona" is, however ambivalent, undoubtedly deeply rooted in the "psychic reality", to which Hillman refers as the reality of the soul where images occur, those images being "the basic givens of psychic life".¹⁰

Out of the poet's phantasmagoria emerges a new, transformed poet, a seer whose individual self has reached God (the ultimate) in an enlightening act of creation. At that point, Yeats the poet pushes a trusting reader closer to God where the reader either gropes in the blind void of an illusion, or finds bliss, knowing all, in total unity with the Self—such seems to be the poet's personal experience and intention for his readers and audiences. Both states of mind, and the process that leads to them, I

⁷"General introduction", p. 40 (in Callan's Commentary).

⁸Gale Schricker suggests that Yeats's use of the concept of *persona* is constructive and "as character and director, body and spirit" for him it encompasses "the dual aspects of the poet's identity", in G. C. Schricker, *A New Species of Man, The Poetic Persona of W.B. Yeats*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, & Associated University Presses, London, 1982, pp. 24–25. The term cited in the main text is from p. 186. For further discussion of the terms, *persona* and *poetic persona*, see pp. 18–27 of the same book.

⁹Schricker, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.

¹⁰Hillman, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 & xi. Hillman further suggests "*a poetic basis of mind* and a psychology that starts...in the process of imagination", p. xi. For my use of Hillman's concepts of soul and psychic reality, as applicable to Yeats, it is helpful to mention his modifications to the third qualification of soul: "by 'soul' I mean the imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image, and *fantasy*—that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic or metaphorical", p. x.

deem Eastern at heart (more precisely, related to Indian philosophy); they reflect Yeats's impulse for synthesising the individual with the universal to reach the ultimate. The reader's enlightenment depends on the degree of proximity to the Creator, and on the subtlety of personal experience—not necessarily critical—of the work of art. The former condition allows the reader a certain control over his or her own actions, whereas the latter puts the poet temporarily in charge of the reader's soul, as Yeats would have it. As far as he can let go of his attachment to the reader, his attitude becomes more truly Indian in the philosophical sense (read "selfless"). Alternatively, as B. Rajan succinctly states, it is ego being "*shed* in the process of attaining selfhood",¹¹ which we could call the Self. This seeming paradox of selfless selfhood merely has the purpose, I would say—if not a clear authorial intention—of connecting the artist with the reader through a sublime experience of Yeats's artefacts, be it with ecstatic or tragic joy.

In the first section of his essay, written in 1937 as a general introduction to his work, though not published until 1961, Yeats affirms the idea of the wholeness of the poetic self, which reconciles the apparent antinomies of the dualistic nature of experience, and achieves a universal structure in the identity of the Self. Yeats uses this unifying concept of the Self in Section II of his "Introduction", on "subject-Matter", to signify the ultimate perfection of being conceived of in his credo, in which are combined Christianity and Hinduism and a trans-historical spirituality he refers to as "phenomenal":

I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it; my Christ, a legitimate deduction from the Creed of St. Patrick, as I think, is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's "Imagination", what the Upanishads have named "Self"....¹²

In stating his fervent conviction, Yeats demonstrates a deep sense of rootedness in the faith, which declares the universality of the supreme being, "differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness",¹³ but having organic unity.

My aim is to investigate this variously conceived and discussed concept of "the Self", along with other related ideas and themes of primarily Indian origin, which had an impact on Yeats's poetic writing.

¹¹B. Rajan, *W.B. Yeats, A Critical Introduction*, Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, London, 1972 (1965), p. 16.

¹²"General introduction", pp. 58–59.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 59.

With *The Herne's Egg*, discussion narrows down to a special study of the theory of the three *gunas*, as the attributes or manifestations of primal matter, and then focuses on *sushupti*, *turiya* and *samadhi*, as the stages of meditative absorption.¹⁴ These concepts are also present in Yeats's later poetry, where he applies them with refined nuance, sometimes bending their original meaning according to his own liking or artistic needs.

The term "poetics" which I intermittently use throughout the book, also needs clarifying. I do not pretend to employ it in the Aristotelian sense of a treatise on aesthetic expression, or in the manner literary criticism uses it when focusing on trends and theories of text interpretation or the study of genres and literary discourse. Poetics here simply centres on Yeats's idiosyncrasies, the sense of intrinsic values of style and textual elements, which are pervasive in the poet's creative opus, affecting the reader's appreciation of his poetry. Such a perception of poetics, to my mind, reveals the poetic sensibility of an artist whose work displays subtle but passionate bursts of imagination.

Now I wish to elaborate further on the guiding principles of my enquiry: firstly, I endeavour to investigate Indian, philosophical and religious concepts,¹⁵ which Yeats accepted deliberately or sub- or

¹⁴Since the later Upanishadic cosmology, the *gunas* are generally known as the three qualities of nature or primal matter, *prakrti*, consisting of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, symbolising, in brief, goodness/truth, energy/emotion and darkness/inertia, etc., respectively. For more, see also Olivelle, op. cit., p. xlvi; further, see P. Jevtić (trans), *Bhagavad-Gita, Pesma o božanstvu*, Grafos, Beograd, 1981, pp. 30 & 72. To explain more clearly, *sushupti*, *turiya* and *samadhi* refer to the awareness or understanding of the main states of non-dualist consciousness as transcendental cognition, which we shall explore in more detail later as the discussion progresses.

¹⁵H. Zimmer draws our attention to a fascinating debate that was still being carried out in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about the reluctance of the Western academic world to accept Indian and Chinese thought in their pantheon of "proper" philosophies (as developed by the Greeks), claiming their lack of connection to rational sciences, and that philosophy was confined to Europe. Zimmer comments that apart, mainly, from Paul Deussen and Wilhelm Dilthey, the others saw no discrepancy in recognising Hobbes, St. Augustine, Pascal, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart as philosophers and not thinkers such as Confucius, Lao-tse, Śankara and Rāmānuja. Apparently, Western philosophy monopolised critical thinking and rejected Indian thought as traditionalist and submissive (to authorities with transcendental claims), without clearly understanding the difference in method, culture and their way of thinking. Zimmer positions Indian philosophical tradition within the four major aims or ends of life—for "material possessions", "pleasure and love", "religious and moral duties", and "redemption, or spiritual release", pp. 35–41. For more on this engaging discussion, see Zimmer, op. cit., pp. 27–34.

unconsciously in the course of his career, and to explore how they were integrated or re-created in his work. Next, I intend to identify the poems and plays in which Yeats used these concepts as tropes, symbolic tools or structural devices, as distinct from those writings in which, in my view, these notions and ideas may have been incorporated subconsciously, as there is no way of knowing for certain. In the first case, I shall look at various ways in which the Indian subject matter is exposed and how it functions within Yeats's cosmic pattern. In the second case, my argument will rest on establishing the point that some of the concepts, though only existing at a subconscious level, can still apply to the work as a useful revelatory means of exploring the texts with critical lens. In Yeats's early and middle periods, I further claim that complex Indian ideas were present in his poetics at a subliminal level if no evidence proves otherwise; here, then, I shall use them as analytical tools. It will emerge, however, that during that same time Yeats consciously incorporated certain less intricate concepts in his poetry and aesthetics. Furthermore, I shall strongly argue that in Yeats's late phase he purposely used these Eastern concepts and introduced others of greater complexity, both in his poetry and *The Herne's Egg*. In both cases, I intend to use close analysis as an interpretative tool and deciphering key for treating the poems and the play, which, in my opinion, deeply reflect Yeats's encounter with Indian philosophy, literature, and religion.

Investigation of the influence of Indian thought upon Yeats calls for an elaborate study, and hence a selective one. It is impossible to include all his poetic works here, and that is why certain lyrics and poetic dramas will not be discussed, primarily those where Eastern thought figures superficially or repetitively, or where it has been explored at length by other researchers. One such example is a discussion of the plays, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March*, in which Kimberly R. Myers elaborately argues that they are linked to Yeats's Steinach operation and his interest in Hinduism.¹⁶

Comments by Yeats scholars and critics about his debt to the East vary considerably, from those who exaggerate the Eastern influence to those who almost deny it. A somewhat elusive truth about the general degree and nature of that influence would most probably lie in striking a delicate balance between these diametrically opposed views. What the present study seeks to demonstrate is where, in the case of particular poems, the balance seems to have tipped unduly on either side, in order to shed whatever light it can upon any poem involving Indian philosophical ideas.

¹⁶See K. Myers, "W.B. Yeats's Steinach Operation, Hinduism, and the Severed-Head Plays of 1934–1935", *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 28, no. 1, Spring 2009.

A major point on which most commentators agree is a motivation or the reasons behind Yeats's interest in the East. The overarching claim concerns the India Yeats imagined or read about in literature, or heard about from inauthentic and authentic Indians he met throughout his life. Yeats's concept of that India, especially the one he derived through meeting Tagore, fitted neatly with his dream of Irish Revival and anti-colonial attitude. He seems to have sought Irishness in the India where, he believed, the simplicity of the past and the love for one's people had been preserved, and found in it a common cause for anti-imperial resistance. For such expression of positively conceived nationalist feelings, Edward Said holds him in high regard,

Despite Yeats's obvious and, I would say, settled presence in Ireland, in British culture and literature, and in European modernism, he does present another fascinating aspect: that of the indisputably great *national* poet who during a period of anti-imperialist resistance articulates the experiences, the aspirations, and the restorative vision of a people suffering under the dominion of an offshore power.¹⁷

Said considers Yeats a non-Oriental poet, notwithstanding his occasionally confused "Irish loyalties" of "Protestant Ascendancy" that instigated tension, which then "caused him to try to resolve it on a 'higher', that is, non-political level"; and his later abandonment of politics, deeper interest in mysticism and flirtation with fascist ideas did not diminish his status of a great poet.¹⁸

John Rickard, on the other hand, comments on Yeats's "Indo-Irishness", which combined some irrational, mythical and stereotypical views of both peoples and traditions to create an ideal Ireland with the most ancient past, to oppose European modernity, which he saw as a threat to his country. Rickard cogently argues that "Indian philosophy and literature provided Yeats with what he liked to see as viable alternatives" to the Western way of life against the "rationalism, empiricism, materialism, and modern urban culture" that he disliked. Yeats turned to

¹⁷E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1993, p. 220. Said continues his praise, "Yeats rises from the level of personal and folk experience to that of national archetype without losing the immediacy of the former or the stature of the latter", p. 237.

¹⁸Said, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 & 230. He links Yeats's interest in mysticism with "incoherence", but still regards him "as a poet of decolonization", p. 230. Adding to all the above, it seems that Said's one gentle objection to Yeats is that "he stopped short of imagining full political liberation, but he gave us a major international achievement in cultural decolonisation nonetheless," p. 238.

India for answers in the mistaken belief that Indian culture fully preserved its purity, unity and spirituality in the face of the merciless coloniser.¹⁹ However, Rickard does not label Yeats's discourse as Oriental or Celtic Orientalist. Yet I am not altogether convinced that embarking on the translation of the Upanishads with Purohit Swami was motivated by Yeats's idea of finding ancient Celtic roots in Indian scriptures, i.e. India and Asia, as Rickard claims. Rather, it seems reasonable to believe that, while initially looking for models in the Orient (mainly India), Yeats got much more than he bargained for, profound knowledge and understanding of Indian philosophy, and that his search was a genuine thirst for learning about certain truths that he felt might have eluded him. New knowledge brings new insights, change happens—as his poetic work demonstrates—and so, the mature Yeats was indeed not the same man in search of new literary models in Asia.

We can better understand Yeats's interest and schooling in Eastern thought, Hindu in particular, in the context of the Western intellectual tradition, historic and cultural, which has been explored in depth by many a Yeats scholar, and at the same time as part of the drama of his spiritual and poetic quests. Current pervasive approaches to studying Yeats's opus in relation to the East seem to come from the Orientalist perspective (as envisaged by Said and Rickard), and in the case of John Lennon, from what he refers to as Irish Orientalism, as discourses on Celticism and Orientalism and their representations spread widely in polemics and scholarly debates. Lennon's analysis is most useful for this study as he situates Yeats within Irish Orientalist discourse. He discusses connections between the Celt and the Oriental throughout centuries, looking for semiotic connections, long before Yeats sought Celtic roots in Asia. Irish Orientalism has been considered an offshoot of Anglo-French Orientalism, not so long ago, as its discourse was denied distinctiveness and thus deemed unacceptable.²⁰ However, Yeats's position as an Anglo-Irish

¹⁹ See J. Rickard, "Studying a New Science: Yeats, Irishness, and the East" in *Representing Ireland: Gender, Class, Nationality* ed. S. Shaw Sailer, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1997, pp. 96, &105. Rickard insists that India was Yeats's "utopian, blank space" which "remained fundamentally connected with pre-Christian, pre-rational, pre-modern culture that had originally animated the now-degenerate Celts and, indeed, all of Indo-European culture", p. 101. Further, he says that Yeats's "Indian essays" were written in the attempt to "reanimate Irishness by connecting it once more with its ancient sources in Asia", p. 100.

²⁰J. Lennon makes a case in favour of distinct Irish Orientalism, "...the linking of the Oriental with the Irish has been understood as an extension of the logic of Empire, a mutual 'othering' of the colonized periphery, which at times it was. But representation depends not only upon a dominant discourse such as Orientalism;

writer enabled him to draw on both literary traditions, of the colonising Britain and the colonised Ireland, and thus to reshape the narratives, contributing to Irish Orientalism but not strictly limited to it. Lennon asserts that “the central purpose of Yeats’s Orientalism” was to “borrow from the Orient to refurbish an ancient Celtic sensibility” and his dream of Irish Revival, so even when not engaged in politics, “he still aligned his work with anti-colonial Irish-Indian narratives”.²¹ While this last assertion seems reasonable, the previous one may be limiting Yeats’s poetic goals to a single purpose, and surely a writer of his stature would go beyond it, into a plurality of goals.

Yeats’s literary aspirations were often in conflict, creating tension between his saintly, personal and artistic desires. Yet, such ambivalence found a common denominator in his metaphysics. His aesthetic speculation and visionary aspirations, not always subject to temporal events, we may regard as an alternative, timeless aspect of his experience, a non-historical context for the creative work, if feasible, that we see from the perspective of the Western tradition as texts of their day. It is at the point of interface between these two perspectives that the Eastern influence upon Yeats takes place, and for this reason it assumes significance in the poet’s act of creation and in the reader’s evaluation.

The analytical procedure here will be to concentrate more on the context within which Yeats’s visionary and poetic aspirations largely dwell while keeping in mind a wider social and historical framework. His preoccupation with metaphysical questions, albeit his secular interests, was another reason (in addition to his goals for Irish Revival) that led him to Hindu thought, some of which collects its meaning on an esoteric level, but should not be regarded as the occult.²² The pervasive atmosphere of

the wielders and weavers of narratives have agency, however unacknowledged, however occasionally employed. Cultural nationalists were inspired by an Irish-Oriental connection; they created anti-imperial and cross-colonial narratives from this ancient semiotic connection...” J. Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2004, p. xvii. Lennon further wisely proposes differentiating between anti-colonial aspects of Orientalism (Irish) and imperial aspects of Orientalism (British), the former focusing on “sameness” rather than “otherness”, as the latter does. See p. 264.

²¹Lennon, *op. cit.* pp. 248 & 288–89.

²²I concur with the point Brian Arkins makes about the occult (the term often misinterpreted or misused), not relating to Hinduism (as a religio-philosophical system), but rather to supernatural experiences and movements such as alchemy, magic, theosophy, etc. See B. Arkins, *The Thought of W.B. Yeats*, Peter Lang, Bern, 2010, pp. 40–41. These movements may have used some of the concepts and ideas that originated in Hinduism—it is more than likely. Hence, we can say that

the times penetrated the culture with agnostic quests and supernatural currents, occultism, mysticism, magic, and every kind of irrationalism (in the latter part of the nineteenth century and turn of the century) typically as a reaction against a rational thought, science and institutionalised religion, which failed to explain the mystery of life. Comparative studies of Oriental and Occidental mythologies flourished,²³ offering new or re-imagined knowledges to the inquisitive and the dissatisfied, and consequently affecting the social and political life of that period. Along with his diverse occult interests, which Laura Swartz considers “meaningful, insightful, wide-ranging, and evocative renderings of the complex cultural web in which Yeats lived and worked”,²⁴ Yeats was greatly inspired and stimulated by Indian ideas, the flavour of the day, which he learned about through his avid reading as well as from prominent Easterners whom he actually met.

His intense focussing on these ideas commenced in his late teens with an awakened interest in occultism under the influence of his friend, the mystic and poet George Russell (A.E.), and out of a need to break away from his father’s domineering intellect. Russell was well versed in Eastern literature and influenced by Indian philosophy. He shared his knowledge

the occult has generally been referred to as special esoteric knowledge outside the realm of mainstream religion, philosophy and science such as the above mentioned, as well as astrology, mystical sects and groups, etc.

²³See N. Meihuizen, *Yeats and the Drama of Sacred Space*, Rodopi, Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA 1998.

See also R.F. Foster’s engaging discussion about the interest of the Irish Ascendancy in the supernatural, and particularly the Irish Protestant writers in the occult, related to their relationship with Catholicism, peasantry, and a sense of belonging and escapism. He writes, “Folklore and anthropological interests merged with occult investigations—not just in the case of Yeats—in order to open a way into national tradition from a marginalized base, and a claim on intuitive, organic, traditional forms of wisdom”. R.F. Foster, *Words Alone, Yeats and his Inheritances*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 102–103.

²⁴L. Swartz, op. cit., p. 224. Swartz discusses the many meanings of the occult in her dissertation and looks at occult revival during Yeats’s time. Given its influence on cultural life, she rightly insists that occultism cannot be dismissed or merely ignored, as most intellectuals of his time were involved in some form of esoteric or spiritual movement or practice. Swartz asserts that “the occult was not at the fringes of culture”, and as such was no longer an embarrassment to anyone studying Yeats seriously—especially today, we should add. She also demonstrates how the occult groups have given voice to women and contributed to reasserting national identities. For more on this topic, see L. Swartz, *Occulture: W.B. Yeats’ prose fiction and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occult revival*, PhD thesis, Ball State University 2009.

with Yeats, and they often discussed their visions, on which they agreed or disagreed, and mystical experiences and ideas arising from their occult readings and the Upanishads.²⁵

Young Yeats searched for a philosophy that would leave imagination free, yet satisfy his curiosity about the nature and existence of God and soul, life and death. In June 1885, he helped organise The Dublin Hermetic Society with a select group of friends including Charles Johnston, as Yeats's biographers inform us.²⁶ The idea for the society came from reading Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, which had profoundly impressed Johnston, and Yeats, too, to some extent. The aim of the members of the Hermetic Society was to discuss and promote Eastern systems of thought. Theosophy, a novel doctrine of a controversial and remarkable personality, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,²⁷ became a tempting and fashionable preoccupation of young intellectuals at the time. Already himself immersed in mystical research, Yeats decided to join the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society in London, at the end of 1887. By that time, he had already encountered theosophical thought through his activities in the Hermetic Society, which in 1886 changed into the Dublin

²⁵See Peter Kuch, *Yeats and A.E.*, "The antagonism that unites dear friends", Colin Smythe, Gerrards Cross, & Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa, 1986, pp. 17–20. Kuch beautifully sums up their relationship despite occasional conflicts, "Yeats saw Russell as a generous friend and ally: in their youth as a fellow Romantic who gave him unstinted encouragement and who was also in revolt against the drabness of Victorian actuality; in their middle years as a Celt and fellow-believer in the world of Fairy; and in their old age as an equally prominent citizen of the republic which they had in part helped to create". Kuch, *ibid.*, p. 238.

²⁶See J. Hone, *W.B. Yeats, 1865–1939*, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, 1971 (1943), pp. 23–56; see also R. Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, Faber & Faber, London, 1975 (1954), pp. 12–38; and R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life I: The Apprentice Mage 1865–1914*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–48.

²⁷Madam Blavatsky (1831–1891), regarded *theosophy* as eternal truth and world religion that combined and investigated esoteric knowledge of philosophy, science and religion, to remind the reader of what sources Yeats had. The meaning of the term comes from the late Greek *theosophia* which consists of two words, *theos* (God) and *sophia* (wisdom), thus pertaining to the "wisdom of God". Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925), a renowned Austrian anthroposophist and philosopher, initially thought of *theosophy* in a broader sense as veiled wisdom related to human kind and universe. However, he broke away from Madame Blavatsky's teaching to establish his own theory—see: R. Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Spiritual Processes in Human Life and in the Cosmos*, trans. C. E. Creeger, Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1994.

Theosophical Society.²⁸ With theosophists, Yeats engaged in research in the theory of correspondences, focusing on what they saw as two parallel worlds, the natural and spiritual ones. By then he had read A.P. Sinnett's *The Occult World* (1881) and *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), which excited his poetic imagination and curiosity a great deal. Becoming a theosophist prompted him to read Madam Blavatsky's books *Isis Unveiled* (1887) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and to study further the legendary Christian mystics, Boehme and Swedenborg.²⁹ It is important to mention Yeats's mystical readings, including theosophical texts, within the context of biographical information, for some of the thinkers he studied there had incorporated Eastern ideas and concepts into their teachings, modifying them to blend with their own principles and systems. Yeats disagreed with teaching the abstract doctrine³⁰ of the theosophists without experimenting and obtaining evidence because that, in his opinion, led to dogmatism. Before leaving the Theosophical Lodge, Yeats was initiated into an order of Christian cabalists, the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn, in 1890, by MacGregor Mathers. Yeats the initiate and his alchemical interests are

²⁸See *MM*, p. 67. Both Ellmann's books, mentioned above, as well as Hone's and Foster's books, served as the source of biographical data.

²⁹Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), a German cobbler and a mystic philosopher, was a visionary who created his own esoteric theories and symbols of the zodiac, and wrote spiritual literature—his famous poetic saying was: “For whom time is like eternity/And eternity is like time/he is free/Of all adversity”. See A. Weeks, *Boehme, An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991, p. 219; see also F. Hartmann, *The Life and Doctrines of Jacob Boehme*, K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co. Ltd, London, 1891; and R. Gray, *The German Tradition in Literature 1871–1945*, CUP, 1965.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) was a Swedish philosopher, scientist, engineer and a theologian who wrote about his revelations, scientific ideas, the second coming, spiritual concepts, etc. Ursula Groll compares his ideas to those in the Upanishads, pointing to the theory of correspondences. See U. Groll, *Spiritual Unity of East & West*, Swedenborg Association of Australia, Sydney, 2008; K. Raine discusses Swedenborg and his influence in “Yeats and the after-life”, in: J. Genet (dir.), *Studies on W.B. Yeats*, pp. 181–207, Presses universitaires de Caen, Caen, 1990, <http://books.openedition.org/puc/388>.

³⁰Yeats had dramatic experience at twenty-two in his first séance with a medium: “he acted like a man possessed”, see B. Maddox, *George's Ghosts*, Picador, London, 1999, p. 13. In his essay on Swedenborg Yeats asserts how the Swedish philosopher disliked abstract reasoning, and from that it is clear how much influence Swedenborg had on Yeats's thinking over the years. See W.B. Yeats, “Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places”, Sacred Text Archive, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/vbwi/vbwi21.htm>.

well documented by William T. Gorski.³¹ What Yeats learned in these occult societies helped him develop an intricate pattern of his own individual symbolism. Under the cabalistic influence, he explored dreams and visions, flirting with syncretistic experimentation. Esoteric practices Yeats engaged in included “sexual magic” as “a part of the occult philosophy that informed Yeats’s world view from the 1880s on, as was his belief in an imminent avatar”, as Susan Johnston Graf remarks. She argues how his esoteric beliefs and experiments about “marriage, the conception of children, and reincarnation facilitated his elitism and, thus, his later reactionary views—including his glorification of the Ascendancy and his interest in eugenics”.³²

By the time he was thirty years old, Yeats’s reading included J. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890), A. de Jubainville’s *Le Cycle Mythologique Irlandais* (1896), A. Besant’s *The Ancient Wisdom* (1897), and literary and other books on Eastern thought, such as Kālidāsa’s *Shakuntala*, *The Buddhist Sutras* (1881), *The Bhagavad Gita* (1882) and *The Upanishads* (1884), the last three edited by Max Müller in a series called *The Sacred Books of the East*.³³ It is evident that Yeats, as a young man, possessed certain knowledge of Eastern philosophical notions and icons he learned from European occult and theosophical texts (while a member of occult societies). These are not to be ascribed to Indian sources directly: for example, the idea of rebirth and transmigration of the soul, the law of *karma*, and the concepts of *maya* and *nirvana*. However, it is not my intention in this study to investigate these sources in detail or to inquire into Yeats’s Western heritage, with which specialist scholars have dealt methodically; but, rather, to attempt an analysis, from the perspective based on new insights I have arrived at through close analysis of those poems and plays in which the elements of Indian literature, religion and philosophy, often inseparable from each other, can be traced as recurring themes, structural devices or the symbolic matrix of imagery. Such a discussion should turn out more fruitful, I hope, as Yeats scholarship to

³¹See W. Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1996.

³²Graf claims that, given Yeats’s diverse experimentation, his views “arose from a curious admixture of history, passion, literature, current events, and occult philosophy”; this makes sense to claim for any poet’s development and individuation, I think, not necessarily Yeats alone. However, Graf further states how Yeats’s interests and occult actions “all grew from his concerns about the future of humanity, particularly in Ireland”, a view I fully support. See S.J. Graf, “An Infant Avatar: The Mature Occultism of W.B. Yeats”, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2005, p. 99.

³³The years given in parentheses refer to the publication dates of the books.

date somewhat lacks a fuller, systematic, in-depth analysis of his use of Indian material, which proves upon examination to be rather idiosyncratic.

To a certain degree, this study also examines Yeats's association with three exceptional Indians in three different phases of his poetic career: a Brahmin, Mohini Chatterji, a Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore; and an Indian monk, Shri Purohit Swami. There is evidence to show that the teachings of these remarkable figures deeply inspired Yeats, however much he adapts what he takes from them in order to make it meet his own aesthetic needs.

For insights into Yeats's understanding of Eastern subject matter, and for his remarks on his Indian friends in the poet's so-called "Indian essays", the reader should refer to his Introductions to Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912); Swami's autobiography, *An Indian Monk* (1932); *The Holy Mountain* (1934), an account of Shri Hamsa's pilgrimage to Mount Meru; *The Mandukya Upanishad* (1935); Patañjali's *Aphorisms of Yoga* (1938); and to a Preface to *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937). Yeats also collaborated on translating the Upanishads with Shri Purohit Swami, who knew Sanskrit. A discussion of that translation would go beyond the scope of the present work, as it would entail an elaborate linguistic and philosophical analysis and inevitably a comparative one, considering various translations and interpretations of the scriptures by both Eastern and Western scholars. For this reason, and out of the need for continuity while tracing out sequences in the poetry, *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, as the most literary translation, will be consulted (albeit deemed sketchy)³⁴ only when closely related to the discussion of Yeats's poetic works.

Similar reasons apply to my treatment of the published and unpublished critical commentary alike, as sources of information and insight, not as systems or theories; but, primarily, it is the method I have chosen—the chronology of the poems' composition and Yeats's advancing acquaintance with Eastern thought—that precludes a more complex discussion of scholarly commentary as the study proceeds. Such a chronological reading of Yeats follows the flourishing of his poetic genius, through his manifold intricate changes, tensions and ambivalences that incorporated a lasting interest in Eastern philosophy. However, not wishing to deny the reader access to critical statements from the

³⁴R.F. Foster, however, notes that Swami's interpretation of the Upanishads was inadequate "due to Swami's carelessness and ignorance of the texts", Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life II*, p. 538. In a footnote (p. 751) to his text Foster relies on J. Masson's comment about the translation being ridden with errors due to Swami's imprecise work. We cannot say with certainty whether Yeats was aware of it, but it is unlikely that he was, since there is no evidence for it.

substantial mass of discussion of my topic, some consideration of the critics, who have contributed to that discussion, and are thus of interest to this enquiry, is called for at the close of this introduction. Several authors are listed in order of how much importance and space they give to exploring the subject of Yeats and India in their writing. The list is by no means exhaustive, but acknowledges my choices at the time of writing, and it does not include those scholars who influenced my thinking and discussion from a non-Eastern perspective.

It is not surprising that some of the most comprehensive and helpful studies related to Yeats and Indian thought have been written by the Indians who were well versed in Sanskrit and Indian lore. Upon reviewing the critical literature on this subject, I have singled out the two authors whose books, to my knowledge (until 2015), are exclusively and comprehensively devoted to Yeats and India. Naresh Guha's *W.B. Yeats: An Indian Approach* (1968), based on his PhD thesis, deals with Eastern aspects in Yeats's poetic works throughout his career. He argues that Yeats was mainly interested in Indian mythology and Tantric systems. In his enlightening book, Guha establishes the key Indian concepts of interest to Yeats, and somewhat overrates the influence that Madame Blavatsky's theosophical teaching had on Yeats, his poetry and *A Vision*. He gives a brief discussion of Yeats's early "Indian poems" and points out Kālidāsa's influence. In *The Wanderings of Oisín* he finds the concept of the three *gunas*, as symbolised by the three Islands. Guha also compares the personalities of Yeats and Tagore and their dramas, Tagore's *The King of the Dark Chamber* with Yeats's *The Herne's Egg*, arguing that Yeats took the plot from Tagore's play. This critic attempts to demonstrate that Patañjali's *yoga* greatly influenced Yeats's mode of thinking and consequently his poetry. Apart from rather elaborately explicating and emphasising certain Indian ideas and symbols such as the swan, the gyres, the *trigunas*, Shiva and Shakti, the main stages of meditation and *maya*, Guha does not discuss Yeats's major works in great detail.

Another full-length study of Yeats and India is Sankaran Ravindran's most illuminating book, *W.B. Yeats and Indian Tradition* (1990), also based on a PhD thesis. Ravindran examines Yeats's writings to discover how far the poet absorbed ideas from the Indian tradition, namely art, philosophy and religion. He believes that Yeats discovered harmony among these ideas, which helped him assimilate them and encouraged him to use them in his own writing. Ravindran's book centres on Yeats's relationship with Chatterji and Purohit Swami, which marked distinctively Eastern phases in the poet's career. He argues that what Yeats learned from Tagore about the Upanishadic concept of the self, a dual concept that