A Time to Reason and Compare

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International Modernism Revisited One Hundred Years After

Edited by

Jorge Bastos da Silva
and Joana Matos Frias

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8602-5
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8602-4

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MADALENA LOBO ANTUNES is a PhD candidate at the Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (Faculty of Social and Human Sciences) of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Her MA thesis (2010) was a study of the influence of Walt Whitman on the poetry of Álvaro de Campos. She is a Fellow of FCT (the Foundation for Science and Technology), and researcher at the Elab – Laboratório de Estudos Literários Avançados (Laboratory for Advanced Literary Studies), a study group of IELT – Instituto de Estudos de Literatura e Tradição (Institute for Literature and Tradition), and also a member of the IFIL – Instituto de Filosofia da Nova (Nova Institute of Philosophy), where she is part of the "Estranging Pessoa: an inquiry into the heteronymic claims" research team. At present, she is writing her PhD dissertation on consciousness in Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*.

JORGE BASTOS DA SILVA teaches in the Department of Anglo-American Studies, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Porto. His main fields of research are English Literature and Culture, Intellectual History, Utopian Studies, and Translation and Reception Studies. He is the author and editor of a number of works, among which: *O Discurso sobre a Tradução na Literatura Portuguesa (Classicismo e Romantismo)* (2015); *Tradução e Cultura Literária. Ensaios sobre a Presença de Autores Estrangeiros em Portugal* (2014); *The Epistemology of Utopia: Rhetoric, Theory and Imagination* (2013); *A Instituição da Literatura. Horizonte Teórico e Filosófico da Cultura Literária no Limiar da Modernidade* (2010); *Vasco José de Aguiar, Utopista Português do Século XIX* (2010); *Shakespeare no Romantismo Português. Factos, Problemas, Interpretações* (2005); *Utopias de Cordel e Textos Afins. Uma Antologia* (2004); *O Véu do Templo. Contributo para uma Topologia Romântica* (1999).

JEFFREY CHILDS is currently Assistant Professor of English and American Studies at Universidade Aberta and a researcher at the Center for Comparative Studies at the University of Lisbon. His current research interest lies in the restructuring of the field of rhetorical studies, insofar as the work carried out in this domain allows for the articulation of older

disciplinary areas (literature, history, philosophy) with more recent artistic and multidisciplinary practices.

GUALTER CUNHA is a Professor in the Department of Anglo-American Studies of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Porto. His main fields of research are the literatures of the English-speaking countries, especially of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, with a strong emphasis on Modernism, and translation. He has edited several collections of studies, and has translated poems by S.T. Coleridge, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Charles Tomlinson, as well as several plays by Shakespeare.

FERNANDA LUÍSA FENEJA is a PhD in American Literature (Universidade Aberta, Portugal, 2007) and holds a Master's degree in American Studies (2000). She is an Assistant Professor of English at ISLA (Lisbon). Her research interests in the field of twentieth-century American Literature include fiction, literary theory, and several aspects of American culture.

TIAGO SOUSA GARCIA is a PhD fellow at the University of Kent and the University of Porto in the TEEME programme – Text and Event in Early Modern Europe. He previously completed a BA in Portuguese and English languages, literatures and cultures, and an MA in Anglo-American Literatures and Cultures, both in the Universidade do Porto, Portugal. His MA thesis dealt with Catholicism and the character Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as seen from a post-colonial perspective. His current research concerns the first English translation of Luís de Camões' *The Lusiad*, by Sir Richard Fanshawe (1655). The project focuses on the possible political influence of the translation of a sixteenth-century Portuguese national epic during the Interregnum period in Britain. Garcia has also worked in publishing and as a free-lance translator of Portuguese and English.

MIGUEL RAMALHETE GOMES is a post-doctoral research fellow working on the theme of Shakespeare and presentism. He is the author of *Texts Waiting for History: William Shakespeare Re-Imagined by Heiner Müller* (Rodopi, 2014). He has also published articles on Shakespeare, James Joyce, twentieth-century German drama, and in the field of Utopian Studies. He is based at CETAPS (the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies), at Universidade do Porto, in Portugal, and teaches at Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico do Porto (ESE–IPP). He is associate co-editor of the Portuguese section of

Reviewing Shakespeare, powered by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the University of Warwick. At present he is also translating *Henry VI, Part 3* into Portuguese.

MARIA INÊS EVANGELISTA MARQUES has a BA degree in Languages, Literatures and Cultures (Portuguese/English) and an MA in English and American Studies (Faculty of Arts, University of Porto), with a dissertation on Arthur Miller. She has contributed to research projects at CETAPS – the Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (University of Porto) – and the Centre for Comparative Studies of the University of Lisbon. Having worked with theatre companies, at the moment she is an MFA/DFA candidate in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism at the Yale School of Drama.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors wish to acknowledge the support of CETAPS (the Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies) and ILCML (the Instituto de Literatura Comparada Margarida Losa). Both research centres are based at the University of Porto and funded by FCT (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia).

Thanks are also due to Fuselog for permission to use the image on the dustjacket.

INTRODUCTION: CRISES AND CONTINUITIES

JORGE BASTOS DA SILVA AND JOANA MATOS FRIAS

This collection is intended to commemorate the centenary of decisive events in the history of international Modernism, hence of modernity itself. The second decade of the twentieth century witnessed an extraordinary burst of creativity and inquiry which left an indelible mark in literature, music and the visual arts, as well as in their respective theoretical frameworks. As with other moments of crisis, like the 1790s, and certainly even more so, it was exceptionally rich in innovation and experimentation. For literature and the arts, it was also a time of great clashes, both contextually, most obviously because authors were faced with the events of the Great War, and internally, through radical contestation of the aesthetic and intellectual legacies of the past. And yet, the decade was not lacking in peculiar forms of conservatism. While Marinetti was hailing war as "the great hygiene" of civilization and Álvaro de Campos was proclaiming "death to all the mandarins of Europe", Pound and Eliot looked obsessively to and into the past, through quotation, translation and criticism. Again, paradoxically, the extreme aesthetic and moral stances of Futurism itself tended to coexist with the regressive political tenets of Fascism.

The lapse of one hundred years, it is hoped, provides opportunity for homage as well as critical assessment of intentions and accomplishments. In retrospect, the diversity and boldness of the cultural climate of the period are astounding. Those qualities are shown in the contents as well as the forms of intervention. Manifestoes and magazines evince a striking plurality of voices and orientations, ranging from the innocuously-titled *Poetry* and *Georgian Poetry* to the Russian cubo-futurist manifesto "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste". The 1910s saw the emergence of Imagism and the first futurist exhibition outside Italy, in Paris in 1912. Almost simultaneously, the *Der Blaue Reiter* exhibitions were held and *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* was published, the Brazilian writer Oswald de

Andrade made his decisive trip to Europe, and there was the beginning of Fernando Pessoa's acquaintance with Mário de Sá-Carneiro. The publication of *Responsibilities* in 1914 marks Yeats's turn from the aesthetics of the fin-de-siècle, and coincides with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. The rest, as one is wont to say, is history.

The title *A Time to Reason and Compare* merges a passage from William Blake with a line from T. S. Eliot. In *Jerusalem*, Plate 10, the reader is faced with the resounding lines:

> "I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's.
> "I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create."
> (Blake 1992: 629)

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, on the other hand, we are told (it is hard to say whether dolefully or hopefully): "There will be time to murder and create" (Eliot 1974: 14). Our title seeks to express the notion that the past is always involved in the present, regardless of all bravura performances that may claim to dismiss it. At the same time, by resonating with Blake and Eliot both, it attempts to convey a blend of self-confidence and melancholy that seems to pertain to the age of Modernism.

The present volume brings together the work of scholars who focus on both early and late Modernism and its long-ranging cultural and literary reverberations, in order to widen our perspective of the significance of the modernist movement for contemporary art, theory and criticism. Contributions range from the Little Magazines and James Joyce to post-World War II theatre of the absurd; from literature in English to literature written in other languages, such as French and Portuguese (both Brazilian and European). The collection covers poetry, drama and narrative, and its emphases include the depiction of cities and everyday life in modernist literature: London, Dublin, New York, Lisbon. Essays emphasize the ways in which the works of Modernism often rely on a texture thickly laden with cultural references as much as imply a change or strive to break all ties with the past. This is, indeed, a collection about *continuities*, but it is also, and inevitably, a collection about *crisis* which recognizes the full array of meanings of the word: a decisive moment, one in which choices are made; an opportunity for rupture, for criticism and critique; the turning-point of a disease.

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PART I

ANGLO-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

"From Desire to Weariness and so to Desire again": W. B. Yeats and the Romantic Conversation Poem

Jorge Bastos da Silva

> I think that we who are poets and artists, not being permitted to shoot beyond the tangible, must go from desire to weariness and so to desire again, and live but for the moment when vision comes to our weariness like terrible lightning, in the humility of the brutes.
>
> Yeats, "Anima Hominis",
> *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*

I

In his rather controversial book on William Butler Yeats, published in 1972, the critic Harold Bloom, who considers Yeats to be quite consciously an heir of British Romanticism, states that "Yeats's immediate tradition could be described as the internalization of quest romance, and Yeats's most characteristic kind of poem could be called the dramatic lyric of internalized quest, the genre of *Sailing to Byzantium*, *Vacillation*, and many of the *Supernatural Songs*, and indeed of most of Yeats's major works" (Bloom 1972: 4-5). Underlying this broad claim there are a number of assumptions plainly set forth by Bloom only in a 1988 essay entitled "The Internalization of Quest Romance" (Bloom 1988a), which posits the centrality of the topic of internalized quest to an understanding of Romantic literature, the internalized quest providing a narrative pattern according to which the poet strives to overcome his imaginative inhibitions in order fully to assume his visionary powers and so achieve a kind of spiritual redemption. This pattern, Bloom claims, was adapted from the overall structure of medieval quest romance by turning its defining motifs into subjective stances of the inner life of the self. Taking William Wordsworth's own words in *The Prelude*, one might say that the

Romantic quest poem dramatizes the process by which

> the mind of man becomes
> A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
> On which he dwells, above this frame of things [...]
> In beauty exalted, as it is itself
> Of substance and of fabric more divine
>
> (Book XIII, lines 446-452)[1]

– a passage, incidentally, in which Wordsworth speaks of himself and of Coleridge as "Prophets of Nature" who will hopefully share with men their "lasting inspiration, sanctified / By reason and by truth", "Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe" (see lines 428-452 for the whole passage).

As it happens, Bloom's influential readings of Romantic literature have fostered approaches to the works of, say, Blake, Wordsworth or Shelley which bear in mind the pattern of quest romance; Coleridge's work, however – which I shall try to connect with Yeats's here –, has largely failed to be perceived as a relevant instance of that imaginative pattern, starting with Bloom himself, who, to my knowledge, has never attempted to apply his model to Coleridge. It is indeed a striking feature of Bloom's criticism of High Romantic poetry as well as of his general surveys of Western literature that he does not rank Coleridge on the same level as his abovementioned counterparts. Coleridge is hardly admitted into *The Western Canon* except as one in a list of "crucial poets" of the eighteenth century and Romanticism, mentioned only in passing (see Bloom 1995: 28), or as a reader of the work of other poets (see 184, 210, 244), while he does not make it into the pantheon of the "one hundred exemplary creative minds" of *Genius* (Bloom 2002). He figures only marginally in "The Internalization of Quest Romance", probably because he is seen as having disappointingly "renounced his own demonic version of the Romantic quest [...], his wavering Prometheanism early defeated not so much by his Selfhood as by his Urizenic fear of his own imaginative energy" (Bloom 1988a: 38). As editor of an anthology of essays on Coleridge, on the other hand, Bloom offers a reading of Coleridge's writing according to his own (i.e. Bloom's) concepts of influence and of the strong and the weak poet; he applies the six revisionary ratios put forward in *The Anxiety of Influence* (Bloom 1975) to Coleridge's work – namely clinamen, tessera, kenosis, daemonization, askesis and apophrades – but he does not establish any relationship with the concept of quest romance (see Bloom 1986a: 7-17). For a critic as prolific as Bloom, this is little more than a cursory approach to an author.[2]

Given Bloom's comparative neglect of Coleridge's poetry in this respect, the present essay is aimed at performing two tasks. On the one hand, it will try to show that certain significant aspects of Yeats's poetry are connected with the Romantic conversation poem, most distinctively through Coleridge. On the other hand, it will submit that Coleridge's conversation poetry realizes Bloom's archetype of the quest (in fact, doing so in ways which are more subtle and original than Shelley's *Alastor*, for example), in that its thematic and structural characteristics point to a state of restlessness or weariness, caused by the incompleteness of a potential identity, which is instrumental to the quest narrative.

In a manner, this essay will vindicate Bloom's thesis on the internalization of quest romance, but it will follow a different path from the Romantics to Yeats. I shall be focusing on poems about poetry, vision, the imagination – poems which not only convey a poetics but also place it at the core of life as it is worth living. Consequently, I shall refer to the speakers in the poems as "the poets" – not out of naivety, of course, but because both Coleridge's and Yeats's texts operate within a rhetoric of authenticity and disclosure of self, and I accept the fiction of personal display as a significant aspect of the idiom of the reflective poem and of the general relationship much of Romantic poetry aims to establish between author and audience. If this amounts to proving Bloom right, within the bounds of my argument I will also be showing that he may have been right unadvisedly, considering his blatant downplaying of the relevance of Coleridge's reflective poetry and its connection with Yeats.

In this spirit, the essay will largely develop as a commentary of Yeats's "A Prayer for my Daughter" alongside Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight".[3] It is worth noticing that a similar connection can be detected between the earlier poet's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and Yeats's "Coole Park, 1929", although it will not be possible to explore this relationship in the present study.

II

Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" presents to us an image of the poet meditating by the cradle where a small child, his son, is sleeping. The poem starts by mentioning the surrounding landscape (sea, hill, wood and so forth), but soon the contemplation of a film which is fluttering on the grate reminds the poet of an ancient superstition and this takes him back to the circumstances of his childhood.[4] By contrast to his painful recollections, the poet expresses the hope that his son will grow up in an environment which will allow him to develop his potential to the full:

For I was reared
In the great city, pent ’mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But *thou*, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

(lines 51-64)

The poem ends with the vision of a peaceful, happy life led in despite of natural contingency and vicissitude.

The hope that is thus projected onto the poet’s son, of quasi-mystical identification with nature which is the emanation of the divine, obviously accords with Wordsworth’s conception of the human predicament as expressed in *Tintern Abbey* and in the more ecstatic passages of *The Prelude*. That hope for a natural and mystical accomplishment of the fullness of one’s humanity reflects the need to resist what in *The Prelude* Wordsworth calls

The tendency, too potent in itself,
Of habit to enslave the mind – I mean
Oppress it by the laws of vulgar sense,
And substitute a universe of death,
The falsest of all worlds, in place of that
Which is divine and true.

(Book XIV, lines 138-143)

Also, while it takes up one of the recurring tenets of Wordsworth’s poetry, namely the concept of life in the country and in the city as two opposing existential situations, “Frost at Midnight” can be seen as a lyric expression of the ideal of the union of the individual with nature – which ultimately coincides with *his own* nature – stated in chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria*, the doctrine of the imaginative relationship with the world as a path to the “infinite I AM” (Coleridge 1983: I, 304), the revelation of the divine in the individual which is craved by the poet – although, in “Frost at Midnight”, no longer craved for himself, as he is forced to acknowledge his inadequacy, rather on behalf of his son.

Poetic discourse thus very much assumes the status of a will: it is simultaneously a testimony and a testament. Faced with his own powerlessness, the poet bequeaths to his son a mission which entails a promise of self-fulfilment, the Romantic search for a connection with God through nature, in hope that his son will be able to complete the quest. This handing down of a legacy is doubly narcissistic: on the one hand, the poem is the locus for the realization of an authoritarian, unilateral process of identification of the poet with his son which invests the latter with the former's sense of purpose as well as personal inadequacy; on the other hand, the poem betrays an anxiety towards death, a reaching for a mode of perpetuity of the self beyond the natural limits of human life.

Or, to put it another way: The vicarious fulfilment of the poet's will (in the several senses of the word, including the volitional) amounts to a subjection of the child to the rationales of wish-fulfilment. The child is as much the poet's creature as the poem itself. In a sense, the child *is* the poem. The poem defines what the poet-father wills the child to become, what vision or destiny he wishes the child to fulfil.

Meanwhile, it is clear that this double narcissism is always already undermined by its implicit disavowal. By choosing to transfer his personal ambitions to his son, the poet recognises his own shortcomings and limitations as a human being, so the psychological effect of such transfer is a mere relative appeasement of his anxiety. The discourse of the poem is therefore sown by the ironic awareness of one's mortality itself. It arises from the implicit denial of that which it is meant to assert. Through poetic discourse, the poet faces death as his personal destiny; through it, he also envisions a life of election that he has failed to reach and which he hopes is not ultimately unreachable.

As it moves backwards and forwards in time, and as it develops freely between different sets of circumstances, the poem effects the subversion of linear time by the power of memory and by the power of imaginative vision. This subversion conversely implies the acknowledgement that time is irreversible outside the poem. The poem is therefore a work of fiction, and what it fictionalizes is an existence abstracted from death, as compensation for the poet's deeply-felt anxiety for a life which he no longer believes can be brought to true fulfilment. In this respect, one of the interesting features of Coleridge's conversation poetry is the way it equates disappointment *and* promise with the passing of time. Specifically, I wish to point out that the way "Frost at Midnight" brings together past, present and future is strikingly similar to the workings of the imagination as described by Sigmund Freud in the essay "Der Dichter und das Phantasieren" ("The Poet and the Imagination"). Freud observes:

> The relationship between imagination and time is very significant. It is possible to say that imagination connects three moments of time. The spirit captures a present impression which happens to evoke one of the person's greatest wishes; from there it proceeds to recall an earlier experience, mostly from childhood, in which that wish was fulfilled; and it creates a future situation which once again makes the fulfilment of that wish possible. That future situation is a form of day-dreaming or fantasy, and it bears the traces of the past and present experiences which gave rise to it. So past, present and future become linked by the wish which pervades them all. (Freud 1972: 217-218; my translation)

Freud's description of day-dreaming as wish-fulfilment provides an exact parallel to the psychological operations underlying, and dramatized in, a poem like "Frost at Midnight". The poem is ostensibly grounded in the here-and-now but gestures towards the past and the future without relinquishing a register of intimacy and immediacy; indeed, intimacy and immediacy are the qualities it crucially strives to impose on its objects, both present, past and future. As the poem oscillates between different times, it also fluctuates between feelings of deprivation and ecstasy, explores sensation and recollection, and confronts anxiety and the desire of plenitude. In its Coleridgean version, the reflective poem typically starts from specific experiences and circumstances (often conveyed in the title: "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement", "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison"), which initiate and fashion the subject's flights of imagination. In other words, by means of its very structure, the poem tends to harmonize its embeddedness in the present with psychological and rhetorical modes of remembrance, suggestion and symbolization which point to the transcendence of self. In Coleridge's terms, the conversation poem is organic and esemplastic. In Yeats's terms, how can you tell the dancer from the dance?

Taken as a whole, these aspects make Bloom's disregard for Coleridge's conversation poetry all the more surprising, given the fact that some of his most important conceptual frameworks are derived from the work of Freud – an author he once called the "prose-poet of the Sublime", a Bloomian superlative if there is one (Bloom 1983: 108).[5]

III

Coleridge's poem provides a useful background for an analysis of "A Prayer for my Daughter". The similarities are obvious. The situation repeats itself: the poet, grown weary with the passing of time, contemplates the ideal existence by the cradle of his child. (This time, the child is a daughter

– Anne Butler Yeats was born in 1919. In Coleridge's poem it can with probability be inferred that a son is meant, although in fact ambivalent terms such as "infant" and "babe" are used.) The poem starts with building up a setting by referring to elements that match those mentioned in Coleridge's poem: the hill, the forest, the wind and the sea. Yeats's poem, however, contrasts with Coleridge's in that the landscape has a different emotional value. In "A Prayer for my Daughter" the wind is linked to the sea; it comes from the sea and it is therefore as much of a menace as the sea. The sea itself, which in "Frost at Midnight" is mentioned only in passing, it turned into an allegory: Yeats's poet depicts himself as

> Imagining in excited reverie
> That the future years had come,
> Dancing to a frenzied drum,
> Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.
>
> (lines 13-16)

In the face of the traditions of Romantic imagery, this passage in fact inverts the meaning most often attached to the sea. In the ode "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", Wordsworth writes:

> Hence in a season of calm weather
> Though inland far we be,
> Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither,
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the Children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.
>
> (lines 165-171; Wordsworth 1990: 462)

The concept of childhood as a fortunate, in-between condition, a state in which land and sea, finite and infinite, are brought together, is a recurring topic in Wordsworth's ode. The sea represents the ideal immensity of pre-natal existence, the unity which is broken and lost in or through birth and from which the individual grows ever more detached in the course of time. No longer the sea of completeness (albeit *lost* completeness), Yeats's is the sea of death.[6]

The metamorphosis of landscape is a result of the very structure of the Romantic conversation poem, as it is characterized by a permanent negotiation of the subjective and the objective, that which is present and that which is absent, what is and what ought to be, in a dialectic which both makes present the real, textually, and hints that the poem itself, or its

constitutive vision, is real (that it is reality).[7] The conversation poem problematizes the borderline between the two assumptions unceasingly. According to Paul de Man, “[a]n abundant imagery coinciding with an equally abundant quantity of natural objects, the theme of imagination linked closely to the theme of nature [...] is the fundamental ambiguity that characterizes the poetics of romanticism. The tension between the two polarities never ceases to be problematic” (De Man 1984: 2). As will be seen, it is not too bold a claim to suppose that the metapoetic dimension of the conversation poem amounts to a form of literary theory – theory *in the act*, as it were.

From this perspective, the melancholy which pervades Yeats’s poem is correlative, at a metatextual level, with a definite, if only implicit, anxiety concerning the potential of language. It is worth noticing that while the speaker in “Frost at Midnight” is talking *to* his child, the speaker in “A Prayer for my Daughter” is talking *about* his child – she is the subject of the discourse, but she is not addressed. In other words, Coleridge’s discourse establishes a direct, me-to-you connection between the poet and his son; by its very existence, it therefore appears confidently to enable communication. Quite differently, Yeats’s speaker remains uncertainly on the verge of communication with his daughter.

This, however, does not prevent the poet from conveying in a style which could be termed experimental (that is, in a mode of discourse which appears to be always testing and checking itself) the ideal of life which he ascribes to his daughter, and which is made explicit largely by mention of the obstacles that must be overcome and the mistakes that must be avoided.[8] In short, the obstacles and mistakes in the course of moral growth may be itemized as excess of beauty, which curtails what Yeats calls “heart-revealing intimacy” (see lines 17-32), and “intellectual hatred” and “opinion” (see lines 49-64), that is, involvement in the petty quarrels of the present day, which Yeats quite obviously despises. Conversely, courtesy is praised as the main virtue, along with ceremony, innocence, a sense of tradition – a set of notions which point to a feeling for a cultural heritage which must be preserved at all costs (see lines 33-48 and 73-80). Indeed, the importance of grace, of a kind of heroic style, of a genteel courtesy which is to be retrieved from legend, is a recurring feature in Yeats’s oeuvre as a whole. Here as elsewhere, it is useful to gloss the poetry with the author’s prose. In the essay “Poetry and Tradition” the following statement can be found: “In life courtesy and self-possession, and in the arts style, are the sensible impressions of the free mind, for both arise out of a deliberate shaping of all things, and from never being swept away, whatever the emotion, into confusion or dullness” (Yeats 1971a:

253).[9] To the extent that "A Prayer for My Daughter" is a poem about an attitude to life (an ethics), and a poem which exemplifies a specific way of talking about life (a poetics), it becomes clear that the terms are interchangeable: in life style, in the arts courtesy and self-possession, all in the name of the free mind and a deliberate shaping of one's relationship to reality.

The imagery of the upward, winding movement which plays such a significant role in Yeats's poetic imagination is closely associated with the vindication of the aristocratic ideal, from the horn of plenty in "A Prayer for my Daughter", the whirlwind in "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" and the twisted shell in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd", to the self-defining passage in "Blood and the Moon":

> I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare
> This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral stair;
> That Goldsmith and the Dean, Berkeley and Burke have travelled there.
> (lines 16-18)

Linked to the tower, the vortex is a figure for an ascetic continuity, for a tradition which keeps perfecting itself, at the same time as poems such as "The Gyres" and "The Second Coming" express a sense of the broader crisis that affects this idealized vision of the world.[10]

On the other hand, "A Prayer for my Daughter" makes use of the image of the tree, in the lines "O may she live like some green laurel / Rooted in one dear perpetual place" (lines 47-48). This image may be traced back to Romantic writing. As a trope for the workings of the imagination, the tree is a favourite Romantic metaphor for the poem as an organic entity (see Abrams 1976: 166-177, 184-225). Keats, for instance, in a much-cited passage of the correspondence, states his belief that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all".[11] And in another letter he expresses his confidence in the value of poetry as revelation in the following words:

> Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees.[12]

It is in this line of thinking that Yeats closes "Among School Children" with the lines:

> O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance?
>
> (lines 63-64)

Both the tree and the dancer are emblems of artistic fulfilment in the writing of Yeats and in his poetic tradition, which partakes of Romanticism and Symbolism, as was shown long ago by Frank Kermode in his groundbreaking study of the *Romantic Image* (1957).

Finally, in the closing movement of the poem, having made use of images of life and fruitfulness like the tree and the horn of plenty, and having pointed out the dangers and temptations which beset the quest, the poet of “A Prayer for my Daughter” sets forth his solipsistic conception of the human soul in a state of beatitude:

> Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
> The soul recovers radical innocence
> And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
> Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
> And that its own sweet will is Heaven’s will;
> She can, though every face should scowl
> And every windy quarter howl
> Or every bellows burst, be happy still.
>
> (lines 65-72)[13]

This conception is very much in keeping with the Romantic apology of the self-fulfilling striving of the soul, of the spirit which “Frost at Midnight” describes as “every where / Echo or mirror seeking of itself” (lines 21-22), of the “pure of heart” discussed in another of Coleridge’s poems, “Dejection: An Ode”, which contends that

> from the soul itself must there be sent
> A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
> Of all sweet sounds the life and element!
>
> (lines 59, 56-58)

There is a passage in Yeats’s essay “The Two Kinds of Asceticism” in which he states: “The imaginative writer [is] an ascetic not of women and wine, but of the newspaper” (Yeats 1971a: 286). Performing, and in a sense commemorating, the time-honoured rituals of a state of personal serenity to be achieved by a process of raising oneself from out of the turmoil of history, “A Prayer for my Daughter” concludes with yet another

definition of its ideal, linking its ethical values and its imagery explicitly:

> How but in custom and in ceremony
> Are innocence and beauty born?
> Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
> And custom for the spreading laurel tree.
>
> (lines 77-80)

These lines are the final stage of an attempt at inscribing the subject matter of the poem in terms which imaginatively coincide with the ideal aspired to by the poet. Upon reading "A Prayer for my Daughter", we are therefore faced with a type of discourse which is driven by a search for an adequate symbolic expression which would be able to emerge synthetically from common speech thanks to its definitive quality. From this struggle with the precariousness of language arise the genteel tranquillity of the tree and the seemingly unbounded fertility of the horn of plenty.

Such symbols, and their production in the text, are clearly meant to play a double role in the poem: they refer to the object of the quest as much as the conditions or stages of the quest itself, the accomplishment as much as the process, life's transcendence as much as life itself. In "Frost at Midnight" the poet operates with a dialectics which is entrusted with the same function, the terms of which are deployed in the opening lines: "The Frost performs its secret ministry, / Unhelped by any wind". The wind does not partake of the action of frost because it is functionally opposed to it (that there is wind is made clear by that "sole unquiet thing" – just as the poet is the sole unquiet person – the fluttering film mentioned in lines 15-16). As has been noted by M. H. Abrams in his essay "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor" (1977), Romantic poetry often resorts to the imagery of wind to express the faculties of imaginative vision and poetic discourse. It is therefore consistent that the poet in "Frost at Midnight" conveys the wish that his son may "wander like a breeze" (line 54) in touch with nature and with God, seeing and hearing "The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of [the] eternal language" (lines 59-60). Coleridge's subject expresses the hope that the child may become the poetic spirit incarnate – that he may attain fullness and salvation – and it does so by relying upon a pattern of imagery that is paralleled (among many other possible examples) in the passage in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* which describes the effusion of imagination as "a gift that consecrates my joy":

For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A corresponding mild creative breeze,
A vital breeze which travelled gently on
O'er things which it had made, and is become
A tempest, a redundant energy,
Vexing its own creation. 'Tis a power
That does not come unrecognised, a storm
Which, breaking up a long-continued frost,
Brings with it vernal promises, the hope
Of active days, of dignity and thought,
Of prowess in an honorable field,
Pure passions, virtue, knowledge, and delight,
The holy life of music and of verse.

(Book I, lines 40-54)

In this light, it appears legitimate to state that "A Prayer for my Daughter" partakes of the anxiety of signification with which not only Coleridge's poetry is imbued but also, in a variety of ways, his memoirs and other writings – the predicament implied in the passage of *Biographia Literaria* where he mentions "the various requests which the anxiety of authorship addresses to the unknown reader" (Coleridge 1983: I, 233). This anxiety translates as intense self-reflexivity of discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a pervasive hesitancy between the competing possibilities offered by silence and by allegory – competing insofar as they may both be intrinsically flawed and therefore neither can cancel the other out. Accordingly, the poem is composed on the edge of vertigo, and is forced to retrace its steps over and over again. In effect, "A Prayer for my Daughter" is engaged in a cyclic revision of its imagery and motifs (the wind, the sea, the tree, the horn of plenty, beauty, innocence, ceremony); it rediscovers, or perhaps recreates, them, in new and renewed relationships. By the same token, it is also engaged in rewriting "The Second Coming", the poem which precedes it in the collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*.

IV

"The Second Coming" expresses distress caused by the apparent collapse of the general order of the world. In view of Yeats's beliefs and concerns, this awareness is obviously dependent on an international context which may be defined with reference to the Anglo-Irish situation, the First World War and the Soviet Revolution of 1917.[14] The grim realization of chaos in the opening of the poem is followed by an