

## Chapter 2 : SHADES AND ANGELS 1916–1917

The Irish are essentially a dramatic people as the French are, as the English and Germans are not. When Mr W. B. Yeats created the Irish Theatre it was with an almost uncanny knowledge of the needs and capacities of the Irish.

*Daily Chronicle* on the Easter Rising, 9 May 1916

### I

ON 15 APRIL 1916 Elizabeth Asquith organized what sarcastic observers described as a ‘seance’ in aid of charity: poets, including wBY, read their work to a paying audience of 400 in a hall off Piccadilly. The occasion was chaired by Augustine Birrell, the literary-minded chief secretary of Ireland, who for most of the event ‘sat with his head buried in his hands’.<sup>1</sup> Within ten days, he would bury his head from more than mere embarrassment. On Easter Monday, April 24, a group of Irish Republican Brotherhood revolutionaries led by wBY’s old adversary Patrick Pearse marched into Dublin and took possession of several central locations – notably, the General Post Office in O’Connell Street. Dublin Castle had heard of plans for an impending Fenian coup with German aid but had thought the enterprise aborted or postponed – as, indeed, it was, at least in its original form. Those who led the doomed ‘Rising’ were opposing their own leadership, and knew they represented a minority of a minority. They were, however, possessed by a transcendent Pearsean idea: in taking arms, they would redeem Ireland’s ‘soul’ from the compromises and collaborations of the constitutional movement, and confront the ancient oppressor on the field of battle.

This *démarche* failed to address the real reason why independence had not been granted, but it reflected discontent with Redmond’s pro-war stance, as the conflict dragged on, and also disillusionment at the postponement of Home Rule for the war’s duration. The rebels were further frustrated by Unionist Ulster’s refusal to agree a *modus vivendi* with Home Rule triumphant – an intransigence encouraged by the apparent inability of Asquith’s government to cut the Gordian knot. The war had strengthened the Unionist hand; it had also presented the IRB strategists with a traditional opportunity to strike in Britain’s hour of need. But their counsels were divided, and the cataclysm burst on Dublin from an apparently clear sky.

There had nonetheless been rumbles offstage, relayed to wBY in London. From the summer of 1915 Gregory had heard rumours of rebel encampments in the Galway hills, drilling by night, and preparations ‘to fight the English’.<sup>2</sup> As the fear of conscription mounted, she had learned from her housekeeper that ‘reservists in Limerick are deserting to America, afraid of going mad as some have done by all the horrors of the war. The [missioners], as you know, are emphasising these, as an illustration of the torments of hell. I think Redmond’s difficulty will be getting the priests to support him, and he certainly won’t get many of the farming class to go.’ She also attributed the fomenting of discontent to Sinn Féin, led by the Abbey’s ancient enemy Arthur Griffith, and denounced their local representatives as ‘corner boys’. wBY, always politically interested, had noted in November 1915 that the atmosphere in Dublin had turned antagonistic, reflected in the probable reaction of the Abbey audience to a viceregal visit: ‘our Pit in which all the ancient suspicions are alive again in all probability will either desert the theatre or boo the viceroy’. A month later he told Gregory that nationalists were now interfering with the mail of well-known Unionist sympathizers, like the land commissioner and Abbey trustee W. F. Bailey.<sup>3</sup> But neither he nor Gregory, in common with the doomed Birrell and most of the Irish population, expected the Rising to happen as and when it did.

Misinformation was general. Griffith in fact had opposed the idea of a Rising, as had the Volunteer leader Eoin MacNeill, and been kept in ignorance; the leadership came from a dissident IRB wing, not from Sinn Féin as such. But as Dublin blazed, and troops were hastily poured in to douse the conflagration, wBY was reliant on rumour, speculation, and what letters could get through to London. He heard the news when staying at Oakridge, Will Rothenstein’s idyllic farmhouse overlooking a Cotswold valley near Stroud; strangely, his sister Lolly was also marooned in Gloucestershire, spending Easter with Sir William Wedderburn a few miles away. ‘How many years will Ireland take to recover?’ she wrote in her host’s visitor-book. ‘The bitterness on both sides will be hard to bear.’<sup>4</sup>

For the transfigured participants, Easter Week ‘seemed one long, sleepless, fantastic space of time fused into one’;<sup>5</sup> but observers saw it differently. Bitterness at what appeared a wanton and destructive assault indeed dominated the initial reactions of the Yeats circle. ‘Did you ever hear or know of such a piece of childish madness – clever children – there is not one person in the whole of Ireland that is not the worse for this last fortnight’s work,’ Lily wrote to Quinn.<sup>6</sup> Gregory too, who was friendly with both Birrell and his under-secretary, Sir Matthew Nathan, initially blamed the event on Sinn Féin. But both she and wBY were shocked by the fact that several of the leaders had been personally known to them. Pearse, after early attacks

on their theatre, had come to admire their work (and wBY allowed St Enda's School to act his plays for nothing); Thomas MacDonagh, the critic and university lecturer, had dedicated a book of poems to wBY; Joseph Plunkett came from an affluent nationalist family well known in Dublin cultural circles. Constance Markievicz had been a figure in wBY's life since his Sligo youth, much though he disapproved of her later incarnation as the most strident of republican socialists. Several Abbey and Cuala employees turned out to have been involved as well. So, notably, did Maud Gonne's estranged husband, John MacBride.

By 1916 wBY's ideological and political disagreement with such people was clear-cut: he had disassociated himself from Pearse's politics on a public platform, and written scathingly of the mystical schoolteacher and his Gaelic League colleague Eoin MacNeill as 'flirting with the gallows-tree'. As for Griffith, he was 'a mischievous personality & better out of the country'.<sup>7</sup> As Pound put it to Quinn, wBY had 'said for years that Pearse was half-cracked and that he wouldn't be happy until he was hanged. He seemed to think Pearse had Emmet mania, same as some other lunatics think they are Napoleon or God.' Pound looked forward wolfishly to 'chaffing Yeats about the Dublin Republic. He dont like republics. He likes queens, preferably dead ones, but he has been out of town for three days and I shall assume that he was at Stephen's Green.'<sup>8</sup>

In fact, when wBY returned from the Cotswolds his mood was cautious. He wrote to Lolly:

I am writing for news of the Abbey & shall not go over unless it has been burned or badly damaged. There is nothing to be done but do one's work & write letters. That 'introduction' [to Pound's *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*] by the by is somewhere in the post on its way to Dundrum.

I know most of the Sinn Fein leaders & the whole thing bewilders me for Conolly is an able man & Thomas MacDonough both able & cultivated. Pearse I have long looked upon as a man made dangerous by the Vertigo of Self Sacrifice. He has moulded himself on Emmett.<sup>9</sup>

To St John Ervine of the Abbey he wrote about ten days later: 'I have been a good deal shaken by Dublin events – a world one has worked with or against for years suddenly overwhelmed. As yet one knows nothing of the future except that it must be very unlike the past.'<sup>10</sup>

When wBY visited Ricketts four days after the Rising, his host noted his 'strange Irish impartiality' on the subject, 'as it was all a sort of game'. Following this cue, the artist assured him 'that a paternal government would discover that Roger Casement was insane, imprison the leaders during the war pending the investigations over the extent of German intrigues in the

matter, discover that these men were misguided dupes, and probably amnesty them after the war'.<sup>11</sup> But this is exactly what did not happen. All WBY could rely on was reports from Ireland, in newspapers or – more vividly and influentially – from friends; and through these the shift of opinion can be gauged, as the government declared martial law and began to execute the rebel leaders after brief trials for treason. Damning anecdotes also began to circulate about the behaviour of the security forces, notably the murder of the pacifist Francis Sheehy Skeffington, a popular Dublin figure, well known to the Yeats circle. As news seeped out, it was relayed to WBY through a series of letters from Gregory in Galway – long, urgent, and intense. These swayed many of his own reactions. If a letter from Gonne supplied the central idea that 'tragic dignity had returned to Ireland', his changing sense of what the rebellion represented followed the trajectory traced out in his correspondence with Coole.

In the immediate aftermath of the Rising, Gregory, reporting on 27 April, was still distracted by accounts of guns landed at Kinvara, armed men marching by night, barricades and encampments cutting off Gort from Galway. But she also astutely anticipated what would happen in Dublin. 'It is terrible to think of the executions or killings that are sure to come,' she wrote to WBY, 'yet it must be so – we had been at the mercy of a rabble for a long time, both here and in Dublin, with no apparent policy, but ready to take any opportunity of helping on mischief.' As the executions were carried out, however, Ascendancy prejudices were sapped by doubts and regrets. On 7 May she heard that MacBride had been executed,

the best event that cd. come to him, giving him dignity – And what a release for her! a smoothing away of confusion, which I have come to think is the worst thing that can come into any body's life – Perhaps I think it because now that the railways are mended, & the barricades on the Galway road have been thrown down, papers & letters of the last fortnight are rushing in, & we had learned to do so well without them . . . I am sorry for Pearse & MacDonnough [*sic*], the only ones I knew among the leaders – they were enthusiastic –<sup>12</sup>

A week later, with the news of more executions, her thoughts had crystallized further.

Thank you for your letter & the papers – I haven't looked at them yet, but they wouldn't make any difference – because my mind is filled with sorrow at the Dublin tragedy, the death of Pearse & McDonough, who ought to have been on our side, the side of intellectual freedom – & I keep wondering whether we could not have brought them into that intellectual movement – Perhaps those Abbey lectures we often spoke of might have helped – I have a more personal grief for Sean Connolly, [the Abbey actor] who I had not only admiration but affection for – He was shot on

the roof of the City Hall – there is no one to blame – but one grieves all the same – It seems as if the leaders were what is wanted in Ireland – & will be even more wanted in the future – a fearless & imaginative opposition to the conventional & opportunist parliamentarians, who have never helped our work even by intelligent opposition – Dillon just denounces us about Playboy in his dull popular way.<sup>13</sup>

The ‘papers’ which WBY had sent her included the current *Westminster Gazette*, which carried an antagonistic analysis of the Irish political outlook. Gregory preferred to take her position on a text from the Coole library, which was calculated to appeal strongly to WBY too – Shelley’s political testament.

I have read those papers you sent, but they are hardly worth considering, in questions like this one must go to one’s own roots – I think Shelley right & that he goes to the roots when he says we know so little about death that we have no business to compel a person to know all that can be known by the dead . . . to punish or reward him in a manner & a degree incalculable and incomprehensible by us – And he says what is very applicable to this moment Persons of energetic character, in whom as in men who suffer for political crimes, there is a large mixture of enterprise and fortitude & disinterestedness, and the elements, though misguided & disarranged, by which the strength & happiness of a nation might have been cemented, die in such a manner as to make death appear not evil but good – the death of what is called a traitor, that is, a person who, from whatever motive would abolish the government of the day, is as often a triumphant exhibition of suffering virtue as the warning of a culprit –<sup>14</sup>

She went on to remark that the government would ‘suffer for the stupidity’ of giving over their own business to soldiers, though she inveighed against ‘armed bullies’ and ‘village tyrants’, and felt that the military authorities were taking a carefully lenient line with ‘terrorizing gangs’ in the country at large. As often before, her attitude towards the world that centred on Gort was notably less nationalistic than her stance in Abbey matters. And here, she regretted that St John Ervine was about to produce *The Playboy of the Western World*, which Sinn Féin had attacked nine eventful years before.

On the other hand, what I am rather upset by today, is the putting on of ‘Playboy’ at this moment – Our managers have shirked it for years – now it seems as if we were snatching a rather mean triumph in putting it forward just as those who might have attacked it are dead or in prison – I don’t know if this is folly, & I suppose we can’t remonstrate with Ervine anyhow for fear of shaking his nerves – But I don’t like it – And I wish we could have won that ‘enterprise & fortitude and disinterestedness’ to our side – I believe we should have done so but for the rising –

‘I see the whole affair through as it were two glasses,’ she confessed to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt in late May. ‘I don’t know if [the executions] were

necessary from an English point of view – probably they were – But I grieve, because these men were more akin to us than the politicians, or the Ancient Order of Hibernians – I knew MacDonagh – Pearse a little – John [Eoin] MacNeill (being tried today 23rd) I knew & liked & respected – They were all enthusiasts, brave, sincere – Beside them we seem a little insincere, we have all given in to compromise –<sup>15</sup> She signed a circular letter of sympathy for James Connolly’s family organized by AE, though she worried it was too sympathetic ‘to what he considers Sinn Feinism’:<sup>16</sup> her own view of the movement continued to be considerably less benign. But the individual heroes, more and more clearly seen as martyrs, were another matter. A terse letter from Edward Martyn (who had spent Easter Week trapped in his Leinster Street house, saved from starvation by food from the Kildare Street Club) said what many were feeling: ‘I am as well as a man can be who has had a lot of his friends executed & deported.’<sup>17</sup> While the ambivalence caught in Gregory’s letters persisted, Dublin’s literati were shocked by the immediacy of what had happened: people they had known with familiarity, and even regarded with contempt, had joined, at a stroke, the mythic company of Emmet, Fitzgerald, Tone. Whatever was felt about Sinn Féin’s political programme (let alone that of the IRB), the contempt WBY had expressed in ‘September 1913’ rang hollowly now. The ‘romantic Ireland’ of O’Leary’s sacrificial nationalism had returned from the grave.

Further barometric readings might be taken from Lily’s letters, the only member of the family to be in Dublin for the Rising. Before the executions had completely run their course, she was as caustic as ever:

What a pity Madame Markiewicz’ madness changed its form when she inherited it. In her father [Sir Henry Gore-Booth, the Arctic explorer] it meant looking for the North Pole in an open boat, very cooling for him and safe for others. Her followers are said to have been either small boys or drunken dock workers out of work, called the citizens army. I don’t think any others could have followed her. I would not have followed her across a road. I often heard the elder Pearse speak at his school prize days and such things. I though he was a dreamer and a sentimentalist. MacDonagh was clever and hard and full of self conceit. He was I think a spoilt priest.

Maud Gonne is at last a widow, made so by an English bullet. It must have been some humorist who got him the post of water bailiff to the corporation.<sup>18</sup>

In early May, MacBride’s drunkenness, MacDonagh’s egocentricity, Pearse’s impracticality, Markievicz’s eccentricity could all still be seen as material for a good Dublin story. But Lily’s subsequent reaction to the government’s draconian policy was stupefaction, followed by fury. ‘This whole work here is so horrible I hate to write of it, this shooting of foolish idealists, not a vicious man among them except perhaps MacBride, Maud Gonne’s

husband.' By mid May she thought the situation ruled out any possible accommodation with Britain: it had been a catalogue of folly and blunder. 'We can never understand each other. I felt like that when I was a girl and an Englishman wanted me to have him. I felt we could never understand each other. He would have thought he understood me the whole time, which would have been maddening, I cannot believe they make good colonist[s], it is impossible.'<sup>19</sup>

Among all wBY's friends the reaction was the same. Pound, who had begun by seeing the Rising merely as something to 'give that country another set of anecdotes to keep it going another hundred years', was among the most vehement. 'Damn it all the government, i.e., the executive, must *know*. I mean they must understand *why* things happen if they are to act intelligently. In the case of the Irish outbreak they didn't know. Nobody seems to have known. Yeats certainly didn't know. He thought as Birrell thought, that it was all fireworks.'<sup>20</sup> By 29 May, W. K. Magee noted that 'the barbarities of the military and chivalrous conduct of the insurrectionists are the universal topic in AE's circle'. Opinions were setting towards radical nationalism, and only 'the aegis of Plunkett's respectability' kept even the saintly AE out of hot water.<sup>21</sup> Out of fury at the government's ineptness, a slow recognition began to stir: that what had happened might be, in Lily's words, 'the beginning of Ireland'. The shock of the executions was followed, as her sister put it, by 'a queer undercurrent of excitement everywhere – not expressed – but there nevertheless'. By the end of June, AE judged 'Ireland a political corpse with lively atoms: a disintegration before a new synthesis'.<sup>22</sup>

## II

wBY's reactions developed against this background of echoes from Ireland. He started like Gregory, from a point of distinct antipathy to the Sinn Féin ideologues who were generally supposed to have planned the Rising. In January 1916 Arthur Griffith's latest newspaper, *Nationality*, attacked wBY as an 'imperialist' who had 'gone over to the enemy': 'a poseur in patriotism precisely as Chesterton is a poseur in Catholicism'. This was the issue that reprinted AE's sharp parody of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, first published at the time of the *Playboy* riots:<sup>23</sup> the reverberations of those old battles never fell quite silent. Nor were wBY's opinions of Pearse, MacDonagh, Markievicz, and MacBride substantially different from those retailed by Lily, before her change of heart; he told Ricketts that Ireland was 'like a man diseased who can only think of his disease', obsessed by 'the folly of one idea'.<sup>24</sup> By 11 May, however, the news of the executions and 'many miscarriages of justice'

preoccupied him. Disturbed and ill, he kept largely to Woburn Buildings, too unwell to attend the funeral of Mabel Beardsley on 10 May, and worriedly seeking consultations through Elizabeth Radcliffe with her spirit instructors.<sup>25</sup> He was also in more prosaic communication with Gregory. Not all of his letters survive, but on 11 May he wrote of his ‘sorrow and anxiety’ at seeing so many of their colleagues and acquaintances undergoing imprisonment and worse, while the political outlook – so optimistic before the war – was uncertain and gloomy.

If the English conservative party had made a declaration that they did not intend to rescind the Home Rule Bill there would have been no rebellion. I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me – & I am very despondent about the future. At this moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of Irish literature & criticism from politics. Maud Gonne reminds me that she saw the ruined houses about O’Connell St & the wounded & dying lying about the streets, in the first few days of the war. I perfectly remember the vision & my making light of it & saying that if a true vision at all it could only have a symbolical meaning. This is the only letter I have had from her since she knew of the rebellion. I have sent her the papers every day. I do not yet know what she feels about her husband’s death. Her letter was written before she heard of it. Her main thought seems to be ‘tragic dignity has returned to Ireland.’ She had been told by two members of the Irish Party that ‘Home Rule was betrayed.’ She thinks now that the sacrifice has made it safe.<sup>26</sup>

Already, however, Maud Gonne’s comment that the rebels had ‘raised the Irish cause again to a position of tragic dignity’ was working in his mind. ‘I am trying to write a poem on the men executed – “terrible beauty has been born”.’

By 23 May, sending Quinn the typescript of *Reveries* in accordance with the arrangement worked out to support JBY, WBY could describe the late rebels as ‘the ablest & most fine natured of our young men’. He also confessed a desire to return to Dublin to live, ‘& begin building again’, despite the fact that he had extended his empire in Woburn Buildings to the floor below. His letters to Quinn also show that he was increasingly preoccupied by an issue close to the lawyer’s heart too: the cause célèbre gathering around the figure who would become the last of the Easter martyrs – Roger Casement.<sup>27</sup>

Casement was a uniquely dashing figure. Born to an Irish Protestant background, he had entered the consular service and become celebrated (or execrated) for revealing the horrific exploitation of South American Indians in the rubber trade and of native workers in the Belgian Congo. His conversion to Irish nationalism rapidly followed, and he had pursued the cause with characteristic impetuosity: after the outbreak of war he had tried to

recruit a revolutionary force for Fenian purposes from Irish prisoners of war in Germany. This enterprise resoundingly failed in its set purpose, but succeeded in establishing him in the eyes of British officialdom as the worst kind of traitor. Casement's general lack of success in galvanizing a decisive level of German support for Irish revolution convinced him that the Rising must be cancelled. Ironically, he had landed secretly in County Kerry to advocate caution but was arrested. His trial, and condemnation to death, took place in July. At once a strong campaign was set in motion, led by several prominent Irish people such as Bernard Shaw – no friend to Sinn Féin but convinced that Casement did not deserve the death penalty.

The condemned man had not been part of wBY's circle; only a few months before, Gregory had written to wBY wondering who Casement was. wBY was, nonetheless, brought on board for the campaign, though he preferred to pursue it his own way. When Eva Gore-Booth, Constance Markievicz's sister, wrote to him in late July asking for his support, he replied from Gonno's Normandy house that he had already written to the home secretary, with a copy to Asquith. In fact, he sent a cable to the prime minister the following day, pleading clemency for Casement. The case was, wBY felt (and told Quinn and Eva), overwhelmingly strong. But already the waters were being muddied. Members of the government were attempting to defuse the campaign for clemency by circulating portions of Casement's alleged diaries, which obsessively recounted homosexual exploits on his travels abroad. wBY would not learn of this whispering campaign until much later, but it certainly produced the desired effect in some quarters, and Casement was hanged on 3 August. The hangman remembered him as 'the bravest man it fell to my unhappy lot to execute'.<sup>28</sup>

wBY's reply to Eva, expressing sympathy for the trouble brought to them by Constance's arrest and imprisonment, strikes an anticipatory echo of a poem written much later: 'Your sister & yourself, two beautiful figures among the great trees of Lissadell, are among the dear memories of my youth.'<sup>29</sup> The tension of the politically charged summer after the Rising and the executions was translated, almost at once, into creative energy. He was not alone in this: AE swiftly wrote his 'Salutation' to the dead rebels and circulated it privately, while wBY's old acquaintance from Dublin, Dora Sigerson, married to the editor of the *Sphere*, Clement Shorter, was working on the verses which would be printed as *Poems of the Irish Rebellion, 1916* and sent to wBY later that year. (Two were about Casement; one was called 'Sixteen Dead Men'.)

As early as 1 May, H. W. Nevinson's account of a conversation with wBY at the Kardomah Café shows that the images of his poems about 1916 were building up:

Talked the whole time about the Irish Sinn Fein rising: does not know Casement personally: deeply laments part of other leaders – James Connolly (who as half-hearted working man could be easily deceived by vague hopes & promises), the Countess whom he knew with her sister as the toasts of Sligo, beautiful as gazelles, Pearse that schoolmaster who ran the model lay-Catholic school . . . & especially MacDonagh: a professor of literature & author of an excellent book on English prosody: thought MacNeill realised the folly & tried to stop it at last moment: supposed they had expected a German landing, or were otherwise deceived: had heard nothing about the Skeffingtons: said he went on with his writing & other work every day through all the stress and turmoil: was anxious to hear whether the Abbey Theatre was burnt down.<sup>30</sup>

On 23 May wBY told Quinn he was ‘planning a group of poems on the Dublin rising but cannot write till I get into the country’. He had already accumulated enough poems before the Rising to make the Macmillan edition of *Responsibilities* far more substantial than the Cuala version of two years before: he was even keeping back poems to provide a brand-new small book for Cuala the following winter. This would become *The Wild Swans at Coole*. But the poetic energy infused by the Rising would take him in a different direction, and publishing the work which it inspired raised more difficult questions yet.

He had, moreover, still not been to Dublin since the cataclysm a month before. But he could not postpone it for ever, and in late May he was summoned firmly by Gregory to come back and put ‘new life’ into the stricken Abbey.<sup>31</sup> The players were furiously opposed to St John Ervine’s dictatorial ways; ‘cocksure and ill-mannered and thick-skinned’, as Lily put it, he had tried to sack several actors for refusing to rehearse two plays a day and then tried to impose his wife as a leading actress. But here too post-Rising trauma had exacerbated matters. Arthur Sinclair, one of those dismissed, declared that the company also disapproved of Ervine (an Ulster Unionist) ‘dabbling in politics’, and the players rebelled openly on 29 May. Ervine remained for some weeks, but by early July Gregory was determined that he must go, and that wBY must sack him ‘as you engaged him’.<sup>32</sup> Ervine was forced to resign; after Ezra Pound was briefly floated as his successor, J. Augustus Keogh was appointed, on the firm understanding that Gregory and wBY were the sole directors (‘which seems to have slipped from peoples’ minds’) and kept entire control over all dramatic and artistic matters. Had Pound actually been appointed, there would certainly have been problems on this score, since at this very moment he was embroiled in a savage quarrel with his publisher Charles Elkin Mathews over the alleged obscenity of the poems in his forthcoming collection, *Lustra*. Though wBY manfully weighed in on his side, quoting Donne to the effect that ‘a man ought to be

allowed to be as indecent as he liked', this would not have augured well for the sensibilities of Dublin audiences.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, Irish public opinion was now poised on a hair-trigger over issues even more explosive than sexual frankness. On his visit during the first week of June, wBY stayed in the Stephen's Green Club, and surveyed the wreckage of much of the city centre; he needed a pass from the Dublin Metropolitan Police to travel even as near as Greystones, just outside the city on the Wicklow coast, where Jack was recovering from his nervous breakdown. All in all it was a sobering visit, dominated by talk about the late Risings; but it helped fix in wBY's mind the idea of irrevocable change as a subject for his own poetic commentary. 'He is writing a series of poems on things here,' Lily told Quinn.<sup>34</sup> The correspondence with Gregory had taken him back, not only to his abiding love of Shelley, the eternal revolutionary, but to his own memories of the '98 centennial organizations, and the row over the *Playboy* when he had apparently watched 'the dissolution of a school of patriotism that held sway over my youth'.<sup>35</sup> The Irish earthquake entailed a reckoning with his past, and particularly with those elements from which he had thought himself liberated. Since the news of MacBride's execution his thoughts (as his letter of 11 May shows) had been with Gonne; he swiftly decided to spend the summer in France. Gregory was disappointed, 'for I feel the need of a talk with you, a new beginning as it were'. But, for wBY, Gonne's changed position after MacBride's death meant a new beginning too. He had discussed with Gregory in Dublin his intention to travel to France and propose marriage once more. The day after he left his old friend wrote resignedly, 'Coole seems lonely without the certainty of your summer here . . . I hope all may go well with you whatever happens.'<sup>36</sup>

He had already consulted another, equally inevitable oracle: a few days after MacBride's execution he was sending urgent letters to Elizabeth Radcliffe. There were sessions on 14 and 17 May. wBY wrote, as a query to Radcliffe's 'Instructors' (but hidden from the medium), 'should I marry MG. Is this the torches splendour.' The answer was vague enough: 'Not misjudged. Meeting point abridged.'<sup>37</sup> But it was enough to send him to France with Iseult, who had been staying in London, on 22 June.

The atmosphere at Gonne's seaside house in the aftermath of the Rising is best conveyed by a letter from wBY to his old friend Florence Farr, now terminally ill in Ceylon.

I am writing in France, where I am staying with Maude Gonne . . . She belongs now to the Third Order of St Francis & sighs for a convent. She & her family are returning to Ireland in October. When she heard the news of her husband's execution she went to Iseult, paper in hand & looking pale and said 'MacBride has been shot' & then went to her little boy who was making a boat & said 'your father has died for

his country – he did not behave well to us – but now we can think of him with honour’ and then said to Iseult ‘Now we can return to Ireland’. Thereon a hanger on, a Miss Delaney began ‘May a soul of an English man be lost for every hair upon his head’ and the like till Iseult took her by the shoulders & shook her and said ‘Delaney this is nonsense’ & then Delaney wept & said ‘You have no heart’.<sup>38</sup>

This account must have been relayed to wBY by Iseult. The year before, trying to encourage her translations of Tagore into French, wBY had ruefully concluded ‘she is too young and beautiful to be industrious’.<sup>39</sup> But for about three years she had been sending wBY letters mingling self-doubt and self-dramatization, thanking him for caring whether ‘I am going to waste sordidly my life in futility or to make a great task of it.’<sup>40</sup> She appealed for advice, railed against the ennui of life, and between the lines gave him news of Maud. But by late 1915 she was making it clear that her reliance on him extended beyond ancient family friendship. ‘You are the only person who has encouraged me to work, in the real sense of the word. You are the person in whose mind I trust and believe in most.’ She sent him her efforts at writing, which he closely criticized; she poured out her exasperation with her mother, whose powerful character and dramatic way of life perhaps accounted for many of Iseult’s insecurities. Now twenty-one, she was lazy, neurotic, and beguiling: despite her haunting beauty, she was touchingly awkward (at six feet tall), shy, and increasingly dependent on wBY. Their relationship had been considerably strengthened by her visit to London in May, to try to arrange a passport which would enable her mother to travel to Ireland. wBY had taken her around the salons of his friends, and to the opening of Rothenstein’s exhibition at the Leicester Gallery, where she had been much noticed. Her looks had attracted the attention of admirers as diverse as G. B. Shaw, W. T. Horton, and Ezra Pound: on a visit to Stone Cottage both Dorothy Pound and George Hyde Lees were struck by her originality and distinction, set off by a charming Franco-Irish accent.<sup>41</sup>

By 1916 her interests had moved on to the new generation of French Catholic poets – Francis Jammes, Paul Claudel, and Charles Péguy, whose *Le Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d’Arc* was Iseult’s latest translation project (doomed, like much else in her life, to remain unfinished). wBY proclaimed his interest in her was avuncular at most, but his friends were interrogating him closely about it: histrionic and nonchalant by turns, Iseult was already affecting the world-weary sarcasm which wBY had found appealing in Olivia Shakespeare. In London she had told wBY she would ‘bring him back to Colleville with her’;<sup>42</sup> and even though wBY accompanied her to France, in order to propose to her mother, Iseult’s presence provided a powerful secondary reason. When he duly asked Maud to marry him, and

was duly refused, his thoughts shifted with surprising speed to her daughter. A long letter to Gregory made this unabashedly clear.

I have little to report. I asked Maude to marry me, a few days ago. She said that it would be bad for her work & mine, & that she was too old for me. 'I have been always ten years older than you. I was when we were both twenty & I still am.' Next day she said 'were you not very much relieved that I refused you?' & then 'I dare say it would be better for the children if we married but I do not think it would work'. Perhaps she was hesitating, perhaps not. I have not returned to the subject and she has not. I think she would find it hard to give up politics & I have given her a written statement of my political creed. Probably she has finally decided. She says 'I have always thought a woman of my years should not marry.' I am very much taken up with Iseult, not in the way of love or desire, but her joyous childhood absorbs my thought, & I hardly know what I feel. It makes Madam Gonne seem older than she is. Should my feeling change towards Iseult I shall leave at once, as I think 30 years too great a difference for her happiness, but I have little fear. I am more & more convinced of her genius. I find the little boy attracts me too. He is very gentle & well bred & intelligent – rather a surprize to me. Every one is indeed peaceful & gentle. Madam Gonne helps the servant with the housework in the morning & spends her afternoon drawing flowers. She does nothing with these drawings, but packs them away in portfolios, or loses them. Today she eat her lunch with a bird in a cage on the table beside her. The little boy had his white rabbit beside him. We have three & thirty singing birds, a green Parrot, a white Japanese cock which perches on the back of our chairs at lunch, two dogs, two guinea pigs, two rabbits & a black Persian cat. Our one anxiety is how we are to limit Iseults ciggarettes.<sup>43</sup>

The denial that 'love or desire' came into his feelings for Iseult is unconvincing. It was also disingenuous to describe someone approaching her twenty-second birthday as a 'joyous child'; writing to Maud in May, he had remarked that Iseult was 'quite a commanding person now, no longer a fanciful child'. In any case, Gregory was not taken in, quickly replying:

I am relieved on the whole – I was growing more & more doubtful of the possibility of its going well – it sometimes seemed as if it wd separate you from the Ireland you want to work for [rather] than bringing you nearer – As to the other matter I dont think the difference of age an objection, you are young in appearance & in mind & spirit – she may look on you as but a family friend – but I have always thought it possible another feeling might awake & in that case I see no reason why happiness might not come of it –<sup>44</sup>

wBY may have been influenced by this explicit encouragement. He stayed on into the summer, lulled and magnetized again by the world Gonne created wherever she went. But it was the lure of Iseult's company, rather than her mother's political fixation, that bound him to the large house on the bare Normandy beach. After that summer, Iseult would write to him: 'I wish we

were both on the shore now, outlining pentagrams in the sand, counting on our fingers 12345 (5 was the right number I think), seeing some yellow come into the sky and our shadows lengthen and discussing with the greatest seriousness whether the sea could really be paler than the sky and what we should say when we came in late for dinner.<sup>145</sup> She conjured up intimacy; they discussed their respective tendencies to depression, and he taught her mantras to induce resignation. By mid August he could write to Gregory a much fuller account of the developing relationship, though he still presented his role as that of a therapeutic presence in the life of a difficult child, in conflict with an equally difficult mother.

I think by your silence that you may blame me for staying on here – & I know that my last letter was not quite candid – there are things it is easier to say. However that is only a conventional idea. I am staying on here for the sake of that young girl, in whom we are both interested. (I will not give the name to a possible censor). To look at her dancing on the shore at the edge of the sea or coming in with her arms full of flowers you would think her the most joyous of creatures. And yet she is very unhappy – dying of self-analysis. Everything becomes food for an accusation on sin. Last night we had a painful scene. ‘I hear a voice always’ she said ‘saying “worthless, worthless, worthless”’. A moment ago she brought in a pack of cards & asked me to keep it & never let her have it again. She has been accustomed to play ‘patience’ after lunch in her room, & Maud Gonne has very probably made a sin of it – there has been a contest of will over it. Yet the worst is not these definite sins (‘Patience is sensuality’ she says in her quaint English) but metaphysical sins – she has not enough love for God & enough love for others & so on. And then there is the real trouble of cigarettes – she is getting nicotine poisoning, & Maud Gonne by allowing the little boy to taunt her constantly about it at meals (till I stopped that) has armed the craving against her reason. She put that matter in my charge, & now after some rebellions she seems to be really trying to conquer the craving herself. I am dealing with the metaphysical sins in a way I learned from you. ‘If you do not love so & so enough, do something for them, sacrifice something & you will love them.’ Maud Gonne has feared she was going into melancholia, & supports my belief that I can do more for her than others & so I stay on. My own relation with her is now perfectly candid. She is really a child & when she trusts trusts comple[te]ly. She has told me that when she was in Dublin four years ago – the time you met her – she wished to marry me (‘You were the only person of my own race I had met’ she means the only person of culture) & that she had this wish for two years. She has shown me in her diary such sentences as ‘I have an affection for him; he has, I think, an affection for me’ (I had given her books since she was a child) and a record of a conversation, in which I said I would like, if I married, to live in some out of the way place like Bayeux in an old house. She took this quite seriously & chose the house at Bayeux. This thought lasted two years, & then she made up her mind she was not in love, & that perhaps she would fall in love with someone of her own age. I need hardly say that I told her that she might marry me if she would & that there were

exceptional cases where even 30 years difference would not prevent happiness. We discussed it nearly without emotion as we might any other problem – her usual analysis – ‘Ah if you were only a young boy’ she said & I left it there & am now established not as husband not as father (though she rejects the word ‘father’ which has I imagine no very pleasant associations). She has grown to be a great beauty & has had many proposals and so is all quite natural. She says however ‘do not tell Lady Gregory that it is quite certain I am not going to marry you for if you do she will not be kind to me’. I think my own feelings are those of kindness & affection, natural to my years.<sup>46</sup>

This time, Gregory’s reply took a firmer line. She now understood his ‘apparent indifference to Ireland after your excitement after the rising’, but he must come back and bring his great weight of cultural influence to bear on the unrest and discontent. ‘There is nowhere for the imagination to rest – but there must be some spiritual building possible just as after Parnell’s fall, but perhaps more intense, & you have a big name among the young men – I daresay your being away & having time for thought & your thinking of the ’98 time may be all a help in the end.’<sup>47</sup>

At the end of August WBY wrenched himself away from the caged singing birds, the wide beach, kite-flying with Seán, and Iseult’s seductive moodiness; her mother’s passport had finally come through, but would permit her to travel to England only. He arrived back in London on the 31st. On 15 September he went to Dublin, where he met Gregory to attend the Abbey’s first production of *John Bull’s Other Island*, which Shaw had mischievously written to launch their theatre so many years before. The next day they proceeded straight to Coole.<sup>48</sup>

There he stayed until early October. He wrote to Iseult asking if she was ‘too young to know what a test of affection letters are’; she replied ‘now I am in great gloom and oppressed by that old sense of sinking and failure. You are one of the very few whose thought brings me a life giving power.’<sup>49</sup> She also told him how much she had missed him during the early autumn at Colleville; they were soulmates, and he was the voice of her daimon. Her long letters employed a romantic shared language, and repeated the rules of life and thought she had learned from him. ‘Only the fool or the saint can stand serene amid the discordance of modern civilisation, for the first is part of it and the other stands above.’<sup>50</sup> If she was in part testing her own sexual powers upon her legendary mother’s famous admirer, she was also expressing an intoxicating dependence on him. He was deeply affected. And, as always, romantic excitement fuelled his imaginative powers. At Coole, on 25 September, he finished the poem on the Rising which he had been meditating upon since May, and writing in Colleville. In a provisional contents page for *The Wild Swans at Coole* (where it did not appear) he placed

it first – with the bare title ‘1916’. But it was first published, to a privately circulated audience, as ‘Easter, 1916’.<sup>51</sup>

The roots of the poem stretch back, not just to the revelation of May that ‘terrible beauty has been born again’, but also to the quarrels with conventional nationalism which had convulsed the life of Dublin’s avant-garde in the rows over Synge’s plays, and to WBY’s own experience of hardline political attitudes in the ’98 centennial movement. All these conflicts and memories had been thrown into sharp relief by the transformation of his political and intellectual antagonists into the martyred heroes of Easter Week. The poem analyses the way that this has come about, but also the extent to which WBY’s own ambivalence about fanaticism had really been overcome. In its intellectual complexity, subtly modulated argument, and tightly controlled changes of mood and form, ‘Easter 1916’ reached a new level of achievement among WBY’s political poems: the ringing declamations of ‘To a Wealthy Man . . .’ and ‘September 1913’ have been replaced by something much closer to the dramatic dialogue of a meditation like ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’. Here, however, the dialogue is not only with, but within, the uncertain self. Transcending politics, it is also a last, elegiac love-lyric to Gonne. The poem circulated in samizdat form the following spring begins, in *diminuendo* mode, by conjuring up Dublin before the revolution; the city’s Georgian squares and terraces are inhabited by bureaucrats from the nationalist petite bourgeoisie, whose strict Sinn Féin platitudes seem bathetically ill attuned to the necessities of modern compromise – political and cultural – in a dwindled world.

I have met them at close of day  
 Coming with vivid faces  
 From counter or desk among grey  
 Eighteenth-century houses,  
 I have passed with a nod of the head  
 Or polite meaningless words,  
 Or have lingered awhile and said  
 Polite meaningless words,  
 And thought before I had done  
 Of a mocking take or a gibe  
 To please a companion  
 Around the fire at the club,  
 Being certain that they and I  
 But lived where motley is worn:  
 All changed, changed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born.

The tone suggests expiation for having trivialized the subjects of the poem, before they had translated themselves into heroes. The second stanza

memorializes selected revolutionaries: oddly, the same four referred to in Lily's sardonic letter, but they are celebrated in a very different sense. At the same time he conveys a certain restraint, especially where Constance Markievicz is concerned:

That woman at while would be shrill  
In aimless argument;  
Had ignorant goodwill;  
All that she got she spent,  
Her charity had no bounds:  
Sweet voiced and beautiful,  
She had ridden well to hounds.

The version eventually published in the *New Statesman* was more graceful, inverting the last description into a classical Yeatsian rhetorical question; but the effect was hardly less impatient. Pearse and MacDonagh were more kindly treated:

This man had managed a school  
An[d] our wingèd mettlesome horse.  
This other his helper and friend  
Was coming into his force;  
He might have won fame in the end,  
So sensitive his nature seemed,  
So daring and sweet his thought.

But a real, and surprising, penance was done in the lines on MacBride, for so long seen by WBY as the betrayer of Gonne and molester of Iseult, both now 'near to his heart'.

This other man I had dreamed  
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.  
He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,  
Yet I number him in the song;  
He, too, has resigned his part  
In the casual comedy;  
He, too, has been changed in his turn,  
Transformed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

Following a private logic, the introduction of Maud and Iseult leads into the third stanza, where the tone of memorial invocation suddenly yields to meditation.

Hearts with one purpose alone  
 Through summer and winter, seem  
 Enchanted to a stone  
 To trouble the living stream.  
 The horse that comes from the road,  
 The rider, the birds that range  
 From cloud to tumbling cloud,  
 Minute by minute change.  
 A shadow of cloud on the stream  
 Changes minute by minute;  
 A horse-hoof slides on the brim;  
 And a horse splashes within it  
 Where long-legged moor-hens dive  
 And hens to moor-cocks call.  
 Minute by minute they live:  
 The stone's in the midst of all.

A year before, writing to Ernest Boyd, he had attacked 'Dublin talkers' who 'value anything which they call a principle more than any possible achievement. All achievements are won by compromise and these men wherever they find themselves expell from their own minds – by their mind's rigidity – the flowing & living world.'<sup>52</sup> The image and the thought find their way into the poem, but the 'talkers' had now opted for action. Simultaneously this stanza reprises, yet again, his enduring plea to Gonne over the years. Most vividly, it recalls the great passage in 'J. M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time' six years before, also composed at Colleville, where he had written of the sterility that comes from giving oneself to an abstract idea of the nation: 'till minds, whose patriotism is perhaps great enough to carry them to the scaffold, cry down natural impulse with the morbid persistence of minds unsettled by some fixed idea'. In that essay he had argued for 'intellectual innocence, that delight in what is unforeseen, in the mere spectacle of the world, the mere drifting hither and thither, that must come before all true thought and emotion': now symbolized in 1916 as cloud-shadows on water, a rider splashing though a stream, the flux of life. Those who renounce the world 'no longer love, for only life is loved, and at last, a generation is like a hysterical woman who will make unmeasured accusations, and believe impossible things, because of some logical deduction from a solitary thought which has turned a portion of her mind to stone'.<sup>53</sup>

In 1910 this had been implicitly addressed to Gonne; in 1916 she knew that the third stanza of 'Easter, 1916' was another appeal. Twenty-three years later, she recalled her guest working all night on the poem that Colleville summer.

Standing by the sea shore in Normandy in September 1916 he read me that poem, he had worked on it all the night before, and he implored me to forget the stone and its inner fire for the flashing, changing joy of life, but when he found my mind dull with the stone of the fixed idea of getting back to Ireland, kind and helpful as ever he helped me to overcome physical and passport difficulties and we travelled as far as London together.<sup>54</sup>

But she must have noticed that his romantic attention had been deflected, and there are also less important inaccuracies and conflation here. He left Colleville before September, and the journey back together happened a year later. He finished the poem in Gregory's house, not Gonne's; the transformation of his own opinions about the Rising had been heavily influenced by Gregory. Above all, the appeal to share his life, and thus to embrace the living world rather than intellectual abstractions, had been directed most recently towards Gonne's daughter rather than to herself. Nonetheless she stands at the centre: all the more so, as the values of uncompromising, 'advanced', Anglophobic nationalism which she had always personified had been spectacularly embodied by the 1916 martyrs. And the last stanza of the poem took up the question of martyrology. While the names are 'told' at nightfall like the beads of a rosary, the poem subtly links the rebels' sacrifice to a life of dreams and delusion, and reminds the reader (now as then) that Home Rule had after all been passed into law, and the crisis over its implementation was still awaiting resolution.

Too long a sacrifice  
 Can make a stone of the heart.  
 O when may it suffice?  
 That is heaven's part, our part  
 To murmur name upon name,  
 As a mother names her child  
 When sleep at last has come  
 On limbs that had run wild.  
 What is it but nightfall?  
 No, no, not night but death.  
 Was it needless death after all?  
 For England may keep faith  
 For all she had done and said.  
 We know their dream; enough  
 To know they dreamed and are dead.  
 And what if excess of love  
 Bewildered them till they died?  
 I write it out in a verse –  
 MacDonagh and MacBride  
 And Connolly and Pearse

Now and in time to be,  
 Wherever green is worn,  
 Are changed, changed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born.<sup>55</sup>

It was this last stanza which Gonne seized upon, in a magnificently defiant letter that November, when she had been sent the final version. 'Your poem on the Easter week has been the cause of great argument in our household as to the nature and value of sacrifice,' Iseult warned him. 'Moura who cannot admit Art for art's sake would willingly admit sacrifice for sacrifice's sake, and I have come to admit neither exactly.'<sup>56</sup> But her mother's certitude was uncompromising.

My dear Willie,

No I don't like your poem, it isn't worthy of you & above all it isn't worthy of the subject – Though it reflects your present state of mind perhaps, it isn't quite sincere enough for you who have studied philosophy & know something of history know quite well that sacrifice has never yet turned a heart to stone though it has immortalised many & through it alone mankind can rise to God – You recognise this in the line which was the original inspiration of your poem 'A terrible Beauty is born' but you let your present mood mar & confuse it till even some of the verses become unintelligible to many. Even Iseult reading it didn't understand your thought till I explained your [retribution] theory of constant change & becoming in the flux of things –

But you could never say that MacDonagh & Pearse & Conally were sterile fixed minds, each served Ireland, which was their share of the world, the part they were in contact with, with varied faculties & vivid energy! those three were men of genius, with large comprehensive & speculative & active brains the others of whom we know less were probably less remarkable men, but still I think they must have been men with a stronger grasp on Reality a stronger spiritual life than most of those we meet. As for my husband he has entered Eternity by the great door of sacrifice which Christ opened & has therefore atoned for all so that praying for him I can also ask for his prayers & 'A terrible beauty is born'

There are beautiful lines in your poem, as there are in all you write but it is not a great WHOLE, a living thing which our race would treasure & repeat, such as a poet like you might have given to your nation & which would have avenged our material failure by its spiritual beauty –

You will be angry perhaps that I write so frankly what I feel, but I am always frank with my friends & though our ideals are wide apart we are still friends.<sup>57</sup>

She had unerringly spotted the poem's central ambivalence, missed by those who concentrate on the images of terrible beauty and rebirth through sacrifice. Throughout the mounting rhetorical questions, WBY's doubts about the utility of self-immolation and the dangers of fanaticism beat an insistent

rhythm. Nonetheless, in 1916 it would have read principally as a passionate endorsement of the rebels' cause, and wBY was extremely cautious about releasing it. Copies were sent to selected friends in the autumn (Gonne, Gregory, Ernest Boyd), and on 7 December he read it to a small group at Lindsey House, where Gregory was staying;<sup>58</sup> Gregory found it 'extraordinarily impressive', and had to read some Hilaire Belloc afterwards to lessen the tension. At some point that winter wBY drew up a contents page for his next Cuala volume, placing '1916' first, but he abandoned the idea, deciding instead on a private printing with Clement Shorter, to whom he sent a copy the following March. The delay, as he told Shorter, was at Gregory's request. She 'asked me not to send it you until we had finished our dispute with the authorities about the Lane pictures. She is afraid of it getting about & damaging us & she is not timid.'<sup>59</sup> This, indeed, seems the principal reason for discretion, though the conditions of the war also imposed a certain inhibition. On 10 September 1916 he wrote to Gregory that there had been a proposal to take away his pension, on the grounds that he was pro-German: 'Is it not a curious Russian state of things when one's private, or supposed private conversations, are reported to government . . . I am rather afraid I will find that the Dublin rising has brought suspicion on us all.' She replied wrathfully, telling him to go straight to Asquith.<sup>60</sup> It is likely that his support of Casement (hanged in August) was being held against him in some political circles; and a year later, in May 1917, wBY told Quinn that the forthcoming *Wild Swans at Coole* would be '24 or 25 lyrics or a little more if the war ending enables me to add two poems I have written about Easter week in Dublin'.<sup>61</sup> But above all hovered the matter of Lane's contested bequest, which dominated Gregory's and wBY's London lives in the winter of 1916/17.

'There are no politics in the matter,' wBY wrote in a letter to the *Spectator* yet again setting forth the arguments for honouring Lane's unwitnessed codicil leaving his modern collection to Dublin.<sup>62</sup> But in a private letter to Ellen Duncan in Dublin he directly contradicted this: since parliamentary action would be needed, 'it will certainly be a political matter': Lloyd George now had to be cultivated rather than Asquith, and the moment seized when he would take it up.<sup>63</sup> Since the débâcle of the Rising, Birrell (who had swiftly and inevitably resigned) lost influence. With Lloyd George's coup of December 1916, Asquith was also relegated. And, as Birrell warned Gregory, after Easter 1916 the National Gallery could count on 'the present unpopularity of Ireland & the Irish in both Houses of the country'.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the matter of supporting the Easter Rising was all the more difficult, since the only government minister unequivocally in favour of Gregory's campaign happened to be the Unionist leader Edward Carson, who promised to work

on his Trinity College constituents; his Ulster colleague in the Unionist cause, James Craig, was equally committed.<sup>65</sup> But their support was unlikely to survive their ally's publication of a poem extolling the Easter Rising.

From late November, when wBY joined Gregory in London, they were engaged in a round of intrigue. wBY wooed Strachey of the *Spectator* and Robinson of *The Times*, setting up the publication of a 'statement' by Gregory. Meanwhile she laid siege to hostesses like Margot Asquith and Leonie Leslie, pursued Redmond to his gloomy Kensington flat, and bearded Lord Northcliffe. By January Birrell's successor as chief secretary, H. E. Duke, was being cultivated relentlessly. But by then the enemy were advancing into the open. The National Gallery would only hint at a loan arrangement covering part of the collection; wBY wrote angrily to *The Times* denouncing the idea. Robert Witt had now been identified as an arch-opponent.<sup>66</sup> The ex-viceroy Wimborne warned Gregory that the National Gallery was determined to fight; they disingenuously claimed the pictures were worth only £6,000, but rapidly put them on display. Most damaging of all, the distinguished critic D. S. MacColl, who had been retained to write Lane's life, revealed that he was in the National Gallery camp, arguing that the matter should be decided on the basis of Lane's opinions and wishes in 1914, not 1915. MacColl's letter to the *Observer* in mid December was, wBY confided, the only salvo of importance fired against them; his own reply appeared on 21 December, and he also planted an interview in the paper, as well as writing copious letters to other journals. Though a Dublin committee was set up to agitate for the pictures' return, Gregory and wBY kept the operation in London firmly under their control. 'I am doing nothing but this dispute,' he gloomily told Duncan in January.<sup>67</sup>

There were faint signs of hope in February, with T. P. O'Connor mediating approaches to other MPs; but wBY's visit to the House of Commons on 9 February to try to organize a committee of Irish Parliamentary Party members was a disappointment, and a note from Lloyd George's secretary, saying that the question of the pictures would be pursued, was scant comfort.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, all this unproductive lobbying and organization had a direct effect on wBY's work. In the 1917 printing of *Responsibilities*, for instance, two paragraphs about the struggle over Lane's gallery were dropped from the notes, at Gregory's request, and he threw himself into composing a pamphlet stating the case. Though nominally under Gregory's name, it was largely written by wBY.<sup>69</sup> Above all, this level and intensity of political wire-pulling required tact, discretion, and an avoidance of controversy. Little wonder that 'Easter 1916' was withheld from both the Cuala and Macmillan versions of *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917 and 1919 respectively) and stayed out of public circulation until its publication in the

*New Statesman* on 23 October 1920 – when the political situation in Ireland, and Anglo-Irish relations with it, had changed more utterly than anyone could have foreseen.

III

Through the summer at Colleville WBV had been writing hard: not only 'Easter 1916' and drafts of other poems, and 'patching' *The Player Queen*, but the next instalment of his memoirs. He arrived determined to get them down on paper, and by 1 August had written more than half. They were not, however, for immediate publication, as he made clear to Quinn.

It will be published 20 years after my death & I hope to find some public institution – T.C.D. library perhaps – to take charge of it till then. It is my life from the close of 'reveries' to about 1900. I am using Maud Gonne's memory as well as my own. It is perfectly frank & containing besides my own life studies of Henley, Symons, Wilde, Maud Gonne of course & of all the little group in Dublin.

The same message went to Farr: 'Do you want to go in over a non-deplume or not? It is a very candid book & will be quite unpublishable unless the world grows more free spoken.' He stressed his wish for complete psychological honesty. 'I will lay many ghosts, or rather I will purify my own imagination by setting the past in order.'<sup>70</sup> He read instalments aloud to the Colleville household as the work progressed – Iseult being 'interested & impressed', while Gonne objected to much that he said about Dublin. This was hardly surprising: 'it is so far almost as much a study of Maud Gonne as of myself'.

Thus he was writing about the first agonies of his youthful love for her, and his repeated proposals, at the very time when – both past fifty – he was proposing to her all over again. The draft ended, in fact, with his exhausted inability to pursue her further, after the traumatic revelations of December 1898. It was indeed published posthumously in 1972, as *Memoirs*, and it is frank and direct on some sexual matters: he was now acquainted with the ideas of Freud and Jung, and wrote about his first experiences of sexual arousal and masturbation 'that some young man of talent might not think as I did that my shame was mine alone.'<sup>71</sup> But, as with all his autobiographical writing, it is also a masterpiece of reordering and manipulation: 'getting in all the characters is rather like writing a play', he told Quinn. He was determined to choreograph his varied acquaintances of the 1880s and 1890s against the backdrop of their times, and write his own history of the literary revival along with it, to rival or dispute those of W. P. Ryan and Boyd. The sexual frankness forbade publication of the most personal passages: he

would recycle much of the political and literary material from it in his later autobiographical writing. But in those personal passages lie the distinctiveness and intensity of *Memoirs*. The very first sentence plunges into a quarrel with his father (over Ruskin), when 'he broke the glass in a picture with the back of my head'. Bedford Park in the late 1880s frames his ideas: the nervous boy of *Reveries* is deliberately teaching himself to debate, and measuring his lack of self-possession against figures as theatrical as Morris, Wilde, Blavatsky, Mathers, the astonishing cast who marched through the drama of his early life. Occult studies and mystic insights are introduced early on. His shyness is extended to a self-confessed dread of the subject of sex, and a persistent inability to act as he wishes. The recollected personality is not the impetuous, charismatic figure who is reflected in his early letters, and who entranced the people who met him at that time. Yet when his fate appears, in the person of Maud Gonne, he recognizes it at once. If the passage where he describes the impact of her appearance ('I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty') was among those he read out at Colleville in the summer evenings, she cannot have been displeased. But her revolutionary ruthlessness, and their abiding disagreements, are sharply delineated from the start, and so is the vulnerability which bewitched him as much as her beauty. If he read her the passages describing her grief after her first son's death in 1891, she must have been unbearably moved. Unsurprisingly, she objected to the draft being located in a library in Britain or Ireland; she also declared an (unfulfilled) intention to add a corrective political appendix.<sup>72</sup>

Above all, *Memoirs* is written with the sharp consciousness that politics in the years after 1891 were in the crucible, and WBY claims to have recognized that 'the young, perhaps for many years to come, would seek some unpolitical form for national feeling'. Thus the circumstances of 1916 permeate the memory of the nineties. He returned yet again to the conflict between the *parti pris* propaganda of conventional nationalism and the intuitive imperatives of the artist's development: this may have been one of the issues disputed by Maud Gonne while *Memoirs* was being written. (Another may have been his statement that in November 1895 'she had secretly wished to take me for her husband': it is deleted in the manuscript, possibly after he read it to her.) Recalling the intrigues, miseries, and uncertainties of the 1890s, at a time when Irish politics were in flux once more, added a particular vividness. And the self-critical, regretful description of the way his obsession with Gonne ended his affair with Olivia Shakespear (disguised as 'Diana Vernon') owes something to the fact that during that summer of 1916 he was once more preoccupied by the desire for love, and the limits of passion. 'All our lives . . . [we] long . . . for our destruction, and

when we meet it in the shape of a most fair woman, can we do less than leave all others for her? Do we not seek our dissolution upon her lips?’

The patina of anecdotes recalling the sexual exploits of Dowson’s or Symons’s would-be bohemianism is polished through retelling; though chronology is sometimes reversed or telescoped (the account of the ’98 centennial movement is particularly distanced and disjointed), *Memoirs* is written as fluently and excitedly as *Reveries* had been two years before. Some images and ideas would transfer directly into the mystical reflections which were written shortly afterwards and published as *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. The ending is particularly powerful, introduced by another bewildering chronological reverse, which this time seems to be a deliberate dramatic effect. The controversy over *The Countess Kathleen* in 1899 is recounted as a bravura set-piece, using Martyn and Moore as brilliantly and mercilessly as Moore himself had satirized Gregory and WBY five years earlier. Then, in an abrupt change of perspective, the telescope swings to the apocalyptic fervour of 1897–8, that time of shared visions and passionate hopes – which, in the narrative of *Memoirs*, seems to follow (rather than precede) the imbroglio over the Irish Literary Theatre. This brings Maud Gonne back to centre stage, at her most entrancing, and it ends, breathtakingly, with their shared visions of December 1898, her revelations, by the fireplace in the Crown Hotel, of her secret life with Millevoe, the death of her first child, and her agonies of confusion and guilt. As for himself, he recalled his own determination only ‘to touch [her] as one might a sister’:

If she was to come to me, it must be from no temporary passionate impulse, but with the approval of her conscience. Many a time since then, as I lay awake at night, have I accused myself of acting, not as I thought from a high scruple, but from a dread of moral responsibility, and my thoughts have gone round and round, as do miserable thoughts, coming to no solution.

A few pages before, he declares that he did not summon her image in erotic dreams: ‘I think I surrounded her with too great reverence and fear.’ Here speaks once again the uncertain, self-analysing, irresolute boy. Though they are vouchsafed a final double vision, the sexually implicit ‘initiation of the spear’, *Memoirs* ends with his own insufficiency. Gregory, as ever, urges decisiveness on him, offers him money, tells him to pursue his advantage with Gonne ‘till I had her promise of marriage, but I said, “No, I am too exhausted; I can do no more.”’

Though he had finished the draft, ‘setting the past in order’, by 19 August,<sup>73</sup> it is unlikely that he read this final section to Iseult and her mother that August in Colleville; but writing it against a background of a marriage proposal repeated and refused, with a certain air of ritual exhaustion on both

sides, must have strongly influenced its composition. There is a hint of this in a letter from Iseult later in the year:

It is very curious indeed that prophecy of Horton ‘Your sins have found you out . . .’ I do not quite understand: and you say it is a version of what you have been going through. Now when I think of last summer I see what I did not realise at the moment, that you must have gone through a terrible deal. While you were writing your biography I was merely interested in those evocations of the past, but little did I think of the agony of it and of the courage it needs to settle memories into a definite order. You did it to give a lasting life to the soul, but did you not at the same time have to give the last death stroke to many old pathetic illusions? I read the other day: ‘All confession is a destruction.’ And it is true and nothing hurts as much as to destroy – I don’t understand about your sins finding you out: but you have found out your delusions to be sins: and that is a great suffering. Do not think to[o] much of me Willie you might find me out also.<sup>74</sup>

*Memoirs*, written that summer, is a vivid and vital guide to the turmoil of wBY’s life in the 1890s, but it also enshrines the ending of a phase in his relationship with his ‘phoenix’ which occurred in the summer of 1916.

The emotional and intellectual excitement of the summer was sustained by avid reading as well as writing: notably the modern French Catholic writers beloved of Iseult, who sent him long extracts from Péguy and Claudel. Pound told Quinn that since ‘staying in bigoted circles in France . . . [wBY] has got a new mania. French *Catholic* dramatists. Gosh!’ George Moore also reacted in character, furiously denouncing wBY for affecting to understand verse in a language which he could not speak.<sup>75</sup> Though wBY had reservations about the school of Jammes, Claudel, and Péguy, he was struck by Irish parallels and potentialities – or so he claimed – when trying to find a publisher for Iseult’s projected translation of Péguy’s *Le Mystère de la charité de Jeanne D’Arc*. ‘For various reasons I am very anxious to introduce the French school of Catholic writers to Ireland, & look upon this book as a start.’<sup>76</sup> But his own writing was still dominated by the surge of autobiographical energy which brought *Memoirs* to completion by 19 August. A few days later he sent Lily a draft poem commemorating their Uncle Alfred Pollexfen, the latest of their mother’s great clan to die. It is an awkward elegy, studded with fine phrases in an uncertain and slightly banal catalogue, and one quatrain, recalling George Pollexfen’s funeral, would be used against him for the rest of his life:

And Masons drove from miles away  
To scatter the Acacia spray  
Upon a melancholy man  
Who had ended where his breath began.<sup>77</sup>

That aspect of George's splendidly archaic funeral had appealed greatly to wBY's hieratic sense, at the time and later. But to his enemies like Moran and Griffith, Freemasonry stood for a secret Protestant conspiracy running Irish business life and leagued together in a specifically anti-Catholic alliance. The tactless boast about George's connections fuelled the campaign waged by pious nationalism to identify wBY with reactionary – even Orange – Protestantism. His current interest in the fervently nationalist, and fervently Catholic, writers introduced to him in France by Iseult, and his wish to proselytize on their behalf in Ireland, owed something to the change of national mood which he sensed after the sacrificial Easter Rising; but it may also have represented one of those public demonstrations, periodically necessary but never wholly effective, that his soul was in the right place. In any case, Catholic Ireland remained as unconvinced as ever.

His credentials for conventional piety would have carried even less weight if the depth of his current supernatural involvements had been generally known. Since May he had been bombarding Elizabeth Radcliffe with requests for insights into his personal dilemmas. After his return from Colleville on 31 August he resorted to seances with various mediums, following through the preoccupations which had sustained him since Lane's death. (Prolonged exposure had shaken even Gregory's stout-hearted scepticism: reading Oliver Lodge's *Raymond* that autumn helped her to accept 'proofs' of life after death, though she added the characteristic rider that the Catholic Church should now stop 'asking for money to get a soul out of purgatory when it is saying that it is well & happy'.<sup>78</sup>) As for wBY, he spent the weeks up to Christmas visiting mediums like Alfred Vont Peters, accompanied by like-minded friends. One was Dulac; another, recently encountered, was Una, Lady Troubridge, the discontented young wife of a distinguished admiral. wBY addressed excited letters to her throughout this winter, and consulted her about 'private psychic matters'. His interest clearly went beyond the spiritual, but he was fated to disappointment. Her inseparable companion in these experiments was the lesbian poet and novelist Radclyffe Hall, and the two women would sustain a scandalously open liaison for most of their lives.<sup>79</sup>

As so often during critical periods in wBY's life, sexual excitement, supernatural investigations, and artistic creativity reacted in a potent fusion. The atmosphere of that winter of seances is preserved in two long pieces of experimental prose, where wBY interrogated the beliefs and inferences which sustained him, mining the vein which he had explored in the reflective essay 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places', written two years before (though as yet unpublished). A conversation recorded by

Nevinson at a Woburn Buildings Monday on 30 October clearly shows his preoccupations:

Yeats was in most interesting mood: talked of his entrance into Spiritism fr. the magic of old days: his attendant spirit Leo Africanus, a man of the 14th cent. who converses in Italian: also the spirit of a policeman Emerson who drowned himself fr. Putney bridge [in] 1850, as he found in Somerset House records: also Louise Kirsch, the friend of Goethe, fr. whom he had messages. All this he absolutely believes. Then talked of Freud & Jung and the subconscious self, applying them to art; said the great thing is to reduce the conscious self to humility, as by imitation of some ancient master, leaving the unconscious free to work: said all reading of contemporaries & imitation of them was bad. The self in poetry must be a dramatist, regarded by poet as spectator, & have a universal outlook or appeal. This I have always vaguely thought. Some discussion also of *Vers Libres*, with sidelong shots at Ezra Pound. Much praise of Pater's *Marius*, which he has just re-read with intense admiration for sentence & style. He traces English prose only through Pater, Landor, & Sir T. Browne, but admitted parts of Swift. The man himself is full of interest – a fine mind in every sense.<sup>80</sup>

Some of these ideas about drama in art are preserved in his revealing but long unpublished dialogue 'The Poet and the Actress'. It is an imagined exchange between a Poet, who wants to reform the language of the stage, and a sceptical Actress, who, though unnamed, speaks in the unmistakable accents of Mrs Patrick Campbell; the impulse may have been WBY's current dissatisfaction with the 'stage-struck types' frequenting the Abbey.<sup>81</sup> His established preferences for Japanese-style formalism, dance, and masks are given full rein, and so is his dislike of 'plays of the new scientific kind'. (This apparently included James Joyce's *Exiles*, which the Abbey turned down in 1917.) Dramatic art must focus on the unwinnable 'battle with reality itself'. This was not new, but the dialogue also explored ideas just beginning to take possession of him. Certain artists (Keats, Shelley, Dante) are discussed as archetypes rather than as individuals, placed in a scheme much as in 'Ego Dominus Tuus', and the Poet also introduces the concept of 'a whole phantasmagoria' to express the fundamental antagonisms of life. 'There must be fables, mythology, that the dream and the reality may face one another in visible array.'<sup>82</sup>

Those who try to create beautiful things without this battle in [the] soul, are mere imitators, because we can only become conscious of a thing, by comparing it with its opposite. The two real [or new?] things we have are our natures, and the circumstance that surrounds us. We need in both a violent antithesis, nor do I believe that art has anything to do with happiness. When we say we are happy we mean that we are doing all kinds of pleasant things, that we have forgotten all painful things. The end of art is ecstasy, and that cannot exist without pain. It is [a] sudden sense

of power and of peace, that comes when we have before our mind's eye a group of images, which obeys us, which leaves us free, and which satisfies the need of our soul.

The 'passion for reality' can be expressed only through the use of a mask, and the Poet tells the Actress at the outset that she must act in one, which he has brought her from Fez. At the end, she laughingly repudiates it, but he turns the tables on her once more: 'There is no mask. I have never been to Fez.'

However, Leo Africanus had, and several of the ideas in the dialogue, as well as the introduction of an exotic Moorish city, anticipate another unpublished meditation written at this time. In December 1916, inspired by a supposed command in a seance, WBY composed a 'letter' to his established familiar and alter ego Leo Africanus, and also supplied an answer, written as from Leo himself. Like *Memoirs*, but for different reasons, this was fated to remain unpublished in his lifetime. It is a strangely irresolute text, admitting at the end not only that Leo may be an impostor (even if the euphemism 'secondary personality' is used), but that WBY himself has remained unconvinced since the first clear revelation in 1912.<sup>83</sup>

The genesis of the 'letter' was in a session of automatic writing at Woburn Buildings on 22 July 1915, when a friend of Sturge Moore had relayed a demand from Leo. 'He asked me to write him a letter addressed to him as if to Africa [?] giving all my doubts about spiritual things and then to write a reply as from him to me.'<sup>84</sup> In fact, this agenda was dictated through WBY's 'conversation with the control'. Given that his habit was to ask extremely leading questions in such circumstances, and he had already 'several times' thought of constructing an 'imaginary dialogue' with Leo, the idea probably owed much to Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, and WBY's ancient habit of creating dialogues between literary personae in order to clarify his own mind on abstract difficulties. The intensity of his psychic investigations in late 1916 concentrated his mind on this project: it seems likely that Leo (conjured up for him by the obliging Olivia Shakespear, among others) had recently manifested himself by courtesy of Peters. The 'letter', as constructed in late 1916, assembles the history of WBY's pursuit of his 'daimon', but it also places that phenomenon firmly in the context of self and anti-self, explored by 'Ego Dominus Tuus'. The 'curious doctrine' that a spiritual alter ego could be psychically established, whose opposite qualities and identifications would complete WBY's own personality, was clearly inspirational: but so was the historical Leo's *Description of Africa*, which WBY had now tracked down and read.

Yet he returned to the question of doubt, instancing the possibility that the medium had created Leo out of a biographical dictionary: the proofs

that reassured him are not particularly persuasive. In discussing the arguments for the spirit-Leo's independent existence, wBY ranged back to youthful Dublin experiments at Dr Sigerson's, remembered his own early readings in folk and faery lore, and rehearsed many examples from the profuse records of mediumistic investigations. The very awkwardness and circuitousness of the language suggest feelings which were not fully resolved, for all his claims that spirit existence was now irrevocably demonstrated.

Can in fact a secondary personality draw from many sources & so build up a complex knowledge, & even of different languages. Certainly I am incredulous, but maybe that is only a dolts reason abashed by the unknown. [Have] I not after years of investigation accepted the most incredible facts. You may have built up a being as complex as my own & yet require from me an intermitted attention, & a measure of belief to keep you from dying.

Later, he posed a more general question:

Does in fact the human mind possess a power like that of the amoeba of multiplication by division? Perhaps every mind has originated at conception so, & the seance room but uses in a new way, a faculty necessary to nature, & thereby looses upon the world a new race of bodiless minds, who after they are first created grow & change according to their own will & continually seek a more solid and hard being [&] are in the end dependent not upon an individual body, but upon the body of the human race as a whole. The thought has some support from antiquity.<sup>85</sup>

Spirits, in fact, may be a kind of succubus needing to ransack and fasten on to the 'thoughts and images' by which the living construct biographies. Thus the Leo who speaks to wBY is partly created by the research wBY has put into 'proving' his existence – and by wBY's own hard-won belief. 'Does he even know that he deceives, when the definition has gone so far, that he has divided himself, from the thoughts & activities of the mind where he was born.'

At one level, this seems an extremely elaborate rationalization of auto-suggestion: but it presupposes, even at an attenuated level, the independent existence of the wandering spirit mind. In the much longer 'answer' which wBY drafted from Leo himself, that independent existence is unequivocally stated, while his daimon scolds him for adhering to a dogged belief in literal proofs. 'You insist on considering spirits as unknown causes, though they have interfered in your own life often enough.' Further admonitions suggest that the function of this experimental dialogue was, as so often, a therapeutic analysis of wBY's personal life at a disquieting juncture:

You are sympathetic, you meet many people, you discuss much, you must meet all their doubts as they arise, & so cannot break away into a life of your own as did

Swedenborg, Boehme, & Blake. Even the wisdom that we send you, but deepens your bewilderment, for when the wisest of your troop of shades wrote you through the ignorant hand of a friend 'Why do you think that faith excludes intellect. It is the highest achievement of the human intellect, & it is the only gift that man can offer to god. That is why we must leave all the winds of time to beat upon it'[,] you but sought the more keenly to meet not your own difficulties but the difficulties of others. Entangled in error, you are but a public man, yet once you would put vague intuition into verse, & that insufficient though it was might have led you to the path the eye of the eagle has not seen. I will speak to you & not your friends, & will therefore begin by assuming the existence, of myself & of the shades that are my fellows.<sup>86</sup>

The ancient reassurance came again: 'All living minds are surrounded by shades, who are the contrary will which presents before the abstracted [?] mind & the mind of the sleeper ideal imerges'. Patterns, pre-existence, assonances confirm to the mind of the adept (or artist) a fuller meaning to life rooted in the common mind. The Neoplatonist Henry More is much invoked, to help build up this notion of 'Spiritus Mundi', 'the place of images & of all things [that] have been or yet shall be'. By this point, the simulated voice of Leo has effectively become that of 'Ille' in 'Ego Dominus Tuus', reaching out to his alternative daimon. 'I have shared in your joys & sorrows & yet it is only because I am your opposite, your antithesis because I am in all things furthest from your intellect & your will, that I alone am your Interlocutor.' When he adds 'yet do not doubt that I was also Leo Africanus the traveller', it is hard to feel that the creator of the dialogue believes him. The final coda, written as from WBY, admits 'I am not convinced that in this letter there is one sentence that has come from beyond my imagination': in writing it he has tried to make his mind blank (almost as if preparing to receive messages through automatic writing) and to avoid the smooth 'railway tracks' of argument. But there has been no sense of special spiritual illumination or guidance. The imaginary conversation with Leo Africanus ends as irresolutely as it begins. Yet it remains a centrally important examination (if not clarification) of the difficulties besetting him at the end of 1916 – not least because it prepares the way, and rehearses the arguments, of a much more important testament which he wrote immediately afterwards.

The text in question is *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, written early in 1917 and published the following year, as a short and elegant series of *pensées*. The original name, 'An Alphabet', suggests the basic building-blocks of his personal philosophy, but the chosen title, suggesting reflections in the friendly silence of moonlight, is more apposite. These thoughts, philosophical, speculative, and occasionally autobiographical, are placed between a Prologue and Epilogue addressed to Iselt. Thus his starting-point is

alleged to be their joint readings in Catholic writers: but the theme of *Per Amica* is really to be found in a sentence earlier addressed to Leo. 'I do not doubt any more than you did when [among] the alchemists of Fez the existence of God, & I follow tradition stated for the last time explicitly in Swedenborg & in Blake, that his influence descends to us through hierarchies of mediational shades and angels.'<sup>87</sup> WBY himself described it as 'an explanation of the religious convictions & philosophical speculations that I hope govern my life'. It was carefully framed to move from considering the individual creative soul to the world's 'great memory', and to try to define the relationship between the two. The style recalls Pater's lapidary paragraphs, and the book itself is in some ways a return to the question raised in the similarly constructed *Discoveries* a decade before. 'Doing it is a kind of cleansing of one's soul.' 'I used to think', WBY told Gordon Craig when he was writing it, 'when a boy, that no man should be permitted to public life till he had written first: an account of the world to come; second: a practicable scheme for the perfection of this world and sworn to the two.'<sup>88</sup>

*Per Amica* is also a distillation of the ideas trailed in 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places' and the manuscript of 'Leo Africanus', building in material from lectures given in America.<sup>89</sup> In its original form, it confronted the ideas of Freud and Jung more specifically than he had done before (though their names were excised for the published versions). It also forecasts the astrological pattern-making on which he would shortly begin to construct *A Vision*.<sup>90</sup> *Per Amica* is constructed, like *Discoveries*, in short aphoristic reflections, and divided into two sections. The first, 'Anima Hominis', is dated 25 February 1917. It begins with the old question of the origins of artistic inspiration, and its relationship with spiritual life: Dante (again, an interest stimulated by his summer readings with Iseult) is a brooding presence. The poem 'Ego Dominus Tuus' is printed as a kind of dedication at the beginning of the volume, and a famous passage on the making of poets reprises some of the queries it raises:

Nor has any poet I have read of or heard of or met with been a sentimentalist. The other self, the anti-self or the antithetical self, as one may choose to name it, comes but to those who are no longer deceived, whose passion is reality. The sentimentalists are practical men who believe in money, in position, in a marriage bell, and whose understanding of happiness is to be so busy whether at work or at play that all is forgotten but the momentary aim. They find their pleasure in a cup that is filled from Lethe's wharf, and for the awakening, for the vision, for the revelation of reality, tradition offers us a different word – ecstasy.<sup>91</sup>

But he also declares, more clearly than ever before, the need to override the passivity induced by Romantic doctrines of 'sincerity and self-realisation',

and to cultivate an alter ego that will be masterful and heroic. This can be achieved by meditating on an opposing mask: his reflections on the seeking of opposites, the sense of destiny, and the truth that comes through dreams refine and extend ideas tried out in (and on) 'Leo Africanus'. Here too he draws upon ideas and theories encountered in the course of psychic research. While he had long been conscious of Freud's and Jung's work (initially through Ernest Jones's writings in the *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*), the ideas he had been reviewing during his reading for 'Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places' and 'Leo Africanus' rang some clearer bells: notably, the belief that 'the most minute particulars which enter the memory remain there and are never obliterated'.<sup>92</sup> wBY, however, principally related this to the Platonic theory of recollection, and its employment – or unlocking – through poetry. His long-standing preoccupation with the revelation that comes through dreams (or between waking and sleeping) raised Freudian echoes, but was also a commonplace of occultist experimentation. Section XII confronts the discovery by 'the doctors of medicine . . . that certain dreams of the night, for I do not grant them all, are the day's unfulfilled desire, and that our terror of desires condemned by the conscience has distorted and disturbed our dreams'. In the first draft, this reflection is attributed to 'Dr Freud and his pupils', and Jung's observations on group hysteria are further instanced. However, wBY adds:

I did not get my thought from Freud but from my own observation, & letters from my father that I shall quote presently. Now however that I skim through a couple of books of the Psycho Analysts I find no great difference except in what they call the censor – The dreams they have studied express [?] which the waking man thinks shameful . . . But the dreams of the poet are an illumination of the conscience, & the censor tries rather to exclude our waking life.<sup>93</sup>

wBY prefers to follow unfulfilled spiritual passions into the realm of vision, which brings inspiration: but, again, the path cannot be an easy one. The final section masterfully compresses his ideas of self and anti-self, his reading in Stone Cottage, and his own sense – in his fifty-second year – of incipient age and past experience.

A poet, when he is growing old, will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision without new bitterness, new disappointment. Could he if he would, knowing how frail his vigour from youth up, copy Landor who lived loving and hating, ridiculous and unconquered, into extreme old age, all lost but the favour of his Muses?

The Mother of the Muses, we are taught,  
Is Memory; she has left me; they remain,  
And shake my shoulder, urging me to sing.

Surely, he may think, now that I have found vision and mask I need not suffer any longer. He will buy perhaps some small old house, where, like Ariosto, he can dig his garden, and think that in the return of birds and leaves, or moon and sun, and in the evening flight of the rooks he may discover rhythm and pattern like those in sleep and so never awake out of vision. Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust.

With the second section, 'Anima Mundi', the theme moves from the personal to the collective unconscious, employing the concept of a common mind, explored through psychic investigation and Neoplatonic reading: 'great memory', as WBY put it, 'passing on from generation to generation'. This was, however, an inadequate concept to express the specificity and familiarity of the images which drifted up from that 'vast luminous sea', at whose shallow edge 'our daily thought was but the line of foam'.<sup>94</sup> Henry More's Platonism, adventures with mediums, spirit photographers, and the folk beliefs of Connacht are all instanced: once again, the ideas aired in 'Leo Africanus' and the essays written for Gregory's book have been polished and faceted into these reflections – brief, beautiful, and obscure. Here too he considers the ideas of 'dreaming back', recurrence and repetition on the spiritual plane, which he had learned about long before, encountered again in Japanese ghost-plays, and would utilize in his own work until the end of his life.

Spiritism, whether of folk-lore or of the séance-room, the visions of Swedenborg, and the speculation of the Platonists and Japanese plays, will have it that we may see at certain roads and in certain houses old murders acted over again, and in certain fields dead huntsmen riding with horse and hound, or ancient armies fighting above bones or ashes. We carry to *Anima Mundi* our memory, and that memory is for a time our external world; and all passionate moments recur again and again, for passion desires its own recurrence more than any event, and whatever there is of corresponding complacency or remorse is our beginning of judgment; nor do we remember only the events of life, for thoughts bred of longing and of fear, all those parasitic vegetables that have slipped through our fingers, come again like a rope's end to smite us upon the face . . . The soul can indeed, it appears, change these objects built about us by the memory, as it may change its shape; but the greater the change, the greater the effort and the sooner the return to the habitual images.<sup>95</sup>

The argument recapitulates the ideas in 'Leo Africanus' about the dependence of disembodied spirits upon their own memories and the energies and intuitions of the living. Pound had drawn his attention to a resonant line in *The Odyssey*, 'the departing soul hovers about as a dream', and WBY was also struck by the connection between spirit existence and memory postulated in Henry More's *The Immortality of the Soul*, which he was reading at this

time.<sup>96</sup> One section of *Per Amica* that was written later echoes the thought of 'The Cold Heaven':

Awhile they live again those passionate moments, not knowing they are dead, and then they know and may awake or half awake to be our visitors. How is their dream changed as time drops away and their senses multiply? Does their stature alter, do their eyes grow more brilliant? Certainly the dreams stay the longer, the greater their passion when alive: Helen may still open her chamber door to Paris or watch him from the wall, and know she is dreaming but because nights and days are poignant or the stars unreckonably bright. Surely of the passionate dead we can but cry in words Ben Jonson meant for none but Shakespeare: 'So rammed' are they 'with life they can but grow in life with being.'<sup>97</sup>

Much of this seems sonorously plangent but deliberately vague. It eventually becomes clear that wby is finding reasons for the unsatisfactory nature of much mediumistic communication, and the openness of seances to accusations of imposture. The state of the disembodied minds, slipping in and out of different time-systems, the volatile and malleable nature of their memories as they interpenetrate those of the living, the sense of repetition, familiarity, and déjà vu, make the spirits vulnerable rather than authoritative. 'We bewilder and overmaster them, for once they are among the perceptions of successive objects, our reason, being but an instrument created and sharpened by those objects, is stronger than their intellect, and they can but repeat, with brief glimpses from another state, our knowledge and our words.'<sup>98</sup> Towards the end, inevitably, he reverts to autobiography and self-analysis, circling around a particular instance of grace, which he would remember again fifteen years later in 'Vacillation'.

At certain moments, always unforeseen, I become happy, most commonly when at hazard I have opened some book of verse. Sometimes it is my own verse when, instead of discovering new technical flaws, I read with all the excitement of the first writing. Perhaps I am sitting in some crowded restaurant, the open book beside me, or closed, my excitement having over-brimmed the page. I look at the strangers near as if I had known them all my life, and it seems strange that I cannot speak to them: everything fills me with affection, I have no longer any fears or any needs; I do not even remember that this happy mood must come to an end. It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from *Anima Mundi*, embodied there and drunk with that sweetness, would, like a country drunkard who has thrown a wisp into his own thatch, burn up time.

It may be an hour before the mood passes, but latterly I seem to understand that I enter upon it the moment I cease to hate. I think the common condition of our life is hatred – I know this is so with me – irritation with public or private events or persons.<sup>99</sup>

Reading *Per Amica* a year later, AE was unimpressed. 'It has a kind of distinguished remoteness from reality, but I do not think for all its distinguished style the philosophy is either fine or deep. He is best at poetry.' JBY despaired of ever understanding it, 'at least with my reason – but in time I shall get his "points of view".' Gordon Bottomley, writing to Sturge Moore, was more effusive. 'He enchants, entrances, charms me and makes me feel on every new occasion as I did twenty years ago, how grateful I am to him for showing me of what an exquisite, enriched yet mystery-stirring precision my native language is capable'.<sup>100</sup> This was another way of saying that WBY employed exact and didactic language to convey extremely cloudy concepts. 'Precision' might not seem the *mot juste* to everybody.

But the book, while it casts forward and back through WBY's supernatural preoccupations, is also about his life in the early spring of 1917.<sup>101</sup> Strikingly (and here too the influence of Colleville rather than Coole is ascendant) the language approaches more closely to religiosity than is usual for WBY, particularly in the first draft. As published, Section V of 'Anima Hominis' begins with one of his most famous aphorisms: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.' In the manuscript it continues 'or if we have a moral sense, sanctity', but this is later cancelled. In an early draft too the phrase 'Anima Mundi' often appears as 'Spiritus Mundi', which was perhaps changed to tilt the tone towards Jungian psychology rather than religion. And the concluding paragraph of the Epilogue (originally a 'Prologue') dedicated to Iseult (called by her chosen pseudonym 'Maurice') addresses the question of religion and tradition. Iseult's love of Péguy and Claudel reminds him of his own early devotion to Mallarmé and Verlaine, and WBY recalls his encounters in 1890s Paris with initiates and would-be magi; and though the new Catholic poets look to 'Mother France and Mother Church' rather than to 'the soul, self-moving and self-teaching', he can understand this too. However, he originally wrote, 'I have not found my tradition in the Catholic Church, for in Ireland to a man of my descent the Catholic Church with its Guido Renyi [*sic*] and its manuals does not now seem very traditional.' This did not quite pass muster at Colleville. Iseult warned him that she found his remarks 'extremely puzzling', while 'Moura, of course, was a little shocked by what you say of Catholic tradition in Ireland.'<sup>102</sup> For publication WBY accordingly watered it down: 'Have not my thoughts run through a like round, though I have not found my tradition in the Catholic Church, which was not the Church of my childhood, but where the tradition is, as I believe, more universal and more ancient?' Finished April–May 1917, the Epilogue stamps this book (magical in more ways than one) as a gift to Iseult, rather as he had dedicated his poetic notebook 'The Flame of the Spirit' to her mother before she

was born.<sup>103</sup> And, by another strange stroke of symmetry, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* would play an important part in dictating a new body of occult revelation, which would come to him through another woman before the year was out.

The writing of *Per Amica* may be mapped through wBY's search during the early spring of 1917 for proofs of psychic certainty. On 8 February Arnold Bennett encountered him at a seance with Peters, organized by Madame Lalla Vandervelde: Roger Fry was also one of the party, and Bennett was deeply impressed by Peters's telepathic recognitions associated with selected objects.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, wBY had just embarked upon one of his most bizarre and credulous involvements yet. He discovered that David Wilson, a mildly deranged chemist (and part-time solicitor) in St Leonards-on-Sea had constructed a machine which received and amplified voices from the spirit world. 'It seems', wrote Wilson with modest pride, 'to constitute a kind of ear-hole into the unknown region.'<sup>105</sup> The Society for Psychical Research commissioned an investigative report. By early February wBY had visited Wilson and been instantly converted. 'The more I think it over the more clear is it to me that you may have made the greatest discovery of the modern world. Even the elixir of life seems possible.'<sup>106</sup>

The cause of this excitement was an apparatus which Wilson described as 'a kind of syntonizer between and [*sic*] incarnate and discarnate intelligences', by means of electricity and 'metallic medium'. wBY christened it 'the metallic homunculus'. It could allegedly 'listen in' to messages and overheard conversations from the Other Side, identify secretly marked playing-cards, produce coded sounds, and make pictures, but it was unfortunately prone to interference from mischievous spirits ('little beasts', Wilson briskly called them).<sup>107</sup> The inventor had been an assistant to the Nobel Prize-winning physicist and inveterate psychic sleuth, Sir William Crookes, which may have enhanced his credibility in wBY's eyes. However, Wilson's chief obsession was financial rather than spiritual: he was convinced the homunculus would make his fortune, and wBY readily agreed to help raise money for its development. But there were complications. An article about Wilson in *Light*, the journal of the College of Psychic Studies, recklessly revealed that he had received a message in German. The police descended and impounded the machine as an illegal wireless, forcing wBY to intercede with Gerald Balfour and highly placed contacts at the Home Office. But the chief need was to convince others. wBY told Wilson that the opinion of Dulac would carry great weight and so would that of Radclyffe Hall – 'a rich, able woman who is giving all her time to psychic research' and who was considering putting money into the invention. On 13 February he tried to get the formidable novelist, known to her intimates as 'John', to invest, but

she was not an easy proposition. Her lover Una Troubridge fondly recorded, 'Yeats writhing like an unhappy Irish beetle upon the pins of John's business attitude,' and he came away empty-handed.<sup>108</sup> Dulac, wBY, and Sir Edward Denison Ross (a scholar of Persian, who founded and directed the School of Oriental Languages) all inspected the apparatus, and Ross addressed it in varieties of Arabic. The homunculus proved to be well connected, introducing John Dee, Paracelsus, Oscar Wilde, and the inevitable Leo. To wBY's pleasure, 'all seemed anxious for us to know that there was a universal mind and that if we spoke to them, it was as but links with this mind'.

In late March wBY worked through his notes; on 4 April he lectured to the Ghost Club in London about Wilson; but he was becoming less convinced that the invention was 'the greatest event of the modern world' after checking the credentials of various tests it had been put through. Wilson himself remained 'in a state of violent excitement and thinks that his machine is going to make an immense Fortune'.<sup>109</sup> His plans were, however, short-circuited by conscription, and he subsequently disappeared from history, without becoming rich. 'His instrument is now out of reach till the war is over,' wBY wrote regretfully in the summer. 'It did wonderful things but I was only just starting my investigation to prove what degree of independence it had from David Wilson's own organism. Did personal mediumship act through it, as through a moving table which moves without physical contact with the medium, or was the machine as David Wilson believes, it self the medium? I do not know.'<sup>110</sup> But the strange adventure demonstrates that the questions which he had raised in 'Leo Africanus' and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, especially the reflections on muffled or scrambled messages from the dead, were not only for philosophical discussion. They dominated his everyday life, and he lived in the hope and prospect of revelation.<sup>111</sup>

#### IV

These frenzied enthusiasms coincided with a burst of creative energy, and possibly sustained it: at the very time wBY was telling David Wilson that his invention might change the world, he was writing to Gregory that he could send her a new poem called 'The Swans' 'in a day or two'.<sup>112</sup> This became 'The Wild Swans at Coole' ('Wild' being added at a comparatively late stage), the title poem of his next collection and one of his supreme achievements. By early April he would provide Pound with no less than eight new poems for the American *Little Review* – later reduced to seven, appearing in the June number, but all in Pound's view 'Excellent'.<sup>113</sup> Cannily, they were

also placed with Clement Shorter in the *Sphere*. The suite of poems on Mabel Beardsley were offered to Harriet Monroe, but – to her annoyance – wBY decided the payment she offered was inadequate; and they appeared in the *Little Review* in August.<sup>114</sup> (The incident helped close Pound's stormy but influential career as 'Foreign Correspondent' for *Poetry*.) wBY now knew his worth, and others knew it too. When Macmillan published the extended version of *Responsibilities* late in 1916, JBY noted the reaction. 'I can see by these critiques that Willie is now a classic, a sort of sovereign poet & anointed King. This is new to me in criticism of his work.'<sup>115</sup> But 'Easter 1916' stayed unpublished, and so did the other 'Rebellion poems', such as 'The Rose Tree', which he wrote in April 1917. In May, when AE tried to get his backing for the initiative which produced a 'Convention of Irishmen' determined to negotiate the continuing political impasse, wBY stayed cautious. 'I do not want to take a political part however slight in haste so he will perhaps have to do without my name.'<sup>116</sup>

Still, he was possessed by the need to fix himself. 'The Wild Swans at Coole', drafted in February 1917 and published in the June *Little Review*, is a poem – written in sublimely plain language – about alienation, belonging, companionship, and love. The lyric's apparent simplicity emerged from intensive redrafting and distillation, and its intellectual descent is also more complex than might appear: the central theme and image echo a passage of *Alastor*, and reflect the attention wBY had been paying, yet again, to Shelley and, perhaps, less typically, to Wordsworth.<sup>117</sup> But, more personally, the lyrics commemorate the passing of time and the fact that he had been seeking solace by Gregory's lake among the seven woods for nearly twenty years.

The trees are in their autumn beauty  
 The woodland paths are dry  
 Under the October twilight the water  
 Mirrors a still sky  
 Upon the brimming water among the stones  
 Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me  
 Since I first made my count.  
 I saw, before I had well finished,  
 All suddenly mount  
 And scatter wheeling in great broken rings  
 Upon their clamorous wings.

As written, and first published in the *Little Review*, the next stanza runs:

But now they drift on the still water  
 Mysterious, beautiful;  
 Among what rushes will they build;  
 By what lake's edge or pool  
 Delight men's eyes when I awake some day  
 To find they have flown away?

The last two verses focus on the observer, his loneliness, and – implicitly – his lack of a mate.

I have looked upon these brilliant creatures  
 And now my heart is sore.  
 All's changed since I, hearing at twilight  
 The first time on this shore  
 The bell-beat of their wings above my head,  
 Trod with a lighter tread.<sup>118</sup>

Unwearied still, lover by lover,  
 They paddle in the cold  
 Companionable streams or climb the air;  
 Their hearts have not grown old,  
 Passion or conquest, wander where they will,  
 Attend upon them still.

Thus the original poem ends on the note of the poet's lost youth and passion; whereas, when WBV rearranged it for subsequent publication, he shifts the attention to the mysterious swans, and the impossibility of eternalizing the present. The climax of the poem now invokes the poet's future, rather than his past. It is a decisive change, not only radically improving the poem but signalling an alteration in WBV's mood between the summer of 1917 and the autumn. This in turn reflected a change of circumstances.

He felt the need to root himself, and had done so in the most concrete way possible by at last buying a house. He had already extended his holding at Woburn Buildings. 'The drunken lady in the rooms under Yeats set the place on fire and has been kicked out,' Pound had reported in May 1916, 'so he has taken on the floor, painted the stairs sky blue, ordered a large board table like mine, and Woburn Blds. is shaken to its foundation.'<sup>119</sup> The aesthetic effects did not stop there: in his new study the floor and woodwork were promptly painted black, and the room hung with orange. But the lease of the whole building had only a few years to run, and the neighbouring Gwalia Hotel wanted to take it over. WBV was already reflecting on the need to return to Ireland 'and begin building again'. Edward Martyn offered him Dungory Castle for nothing, if he repaired it, but WBV had already fixed his interest on the abandoned castle keep built

by the powerful de Burgo clan three miles north-east of Gort, with its attached cottage.

By the autumn of 1916 he was negotiating directly for Ballylee with the Congested Districts Board, which now owned it, the farmland having been disposed of to the tenants. The tower is probably sixteenth century, though its origins may go back to the fourteenth century and wBY certainly liked to date it earlier ('The Normans had form, Gogarty, the Normans had form').<sup>120</sup> Up to the turn of the twentieth century the old tower had been the home of the Spellman family; before that, the adjoining cottage had been built by a nineteenth-century master of Loughrea Workhouse for his young family, while he occupied two floors of the tower. It had been inhabited when wBY discovered it in 1898 or 1899, searching for stories about the local beauty Mary Hynes. But by 1916 it had fallen heavily into disrepair. For a derelict tower with no acreage, in the wake of a rebellion and in the midst of world war, it was hardly a seller's market. In October he had written to the ubiquitous W. F. Bailey, clearly stating his position, and Bailey forwarded the letter to Sir Henry Doran at the Land Commission.

For years I have coveted Ballylee Castle, on this property [Coole], or what was this property and which has now been bought by the C. D. B. It has got a tolerably good roof on it, good rough old Elizabethan chimney pieces, and I could restore it to some of its original stern beauty and have a place to keep my pictures and my books. At present it is worth nothing to anybody, and will soon become ruinous, and that will make the neighbourhood the poorer of romance. Now I want to know if I could get it from the Congested Districts Board. The tenant who had possession of it says he hears they are going to lock it up. He says also that a couple of acres have been kept with it, which would be useful to keep a few trees which are there now from being cut down. I might not be able to live there for some little time, but I should be sorry if I found it had been possible to get it and that it had slipped away. You would do me a great service if you would find out informally if such a purchase was possible. I need not say I could not give much for it, especially as I should have to lay out money in doing it up.<sup>121</sup>

Doran authorized the purchase, and by November wBY was negotiating with the Congested Districts Board about boundaries and price. He went over the castle with a local builder on 19 November, and by the end of the year knew that he would need to spend twice as much as he had intended – £200 or £300 to put on a roof and make it habitable.<sup>122</sup> The romantic position, down a small valley on a tiny island made by a tributary of the rushing river variously called the Ballylee, the Turra, and the Cloon, meant that floods were endemic; floor levels had to be raised and doors altered. Pound, unforgivably, referred to it as wBY's 'phallic symbol on the bogs – Ballyphallus or whatever he calls it with the river on the first floor'.<sup>123</sup> Though two of the floors were sound, another needed rebuilding, and it was

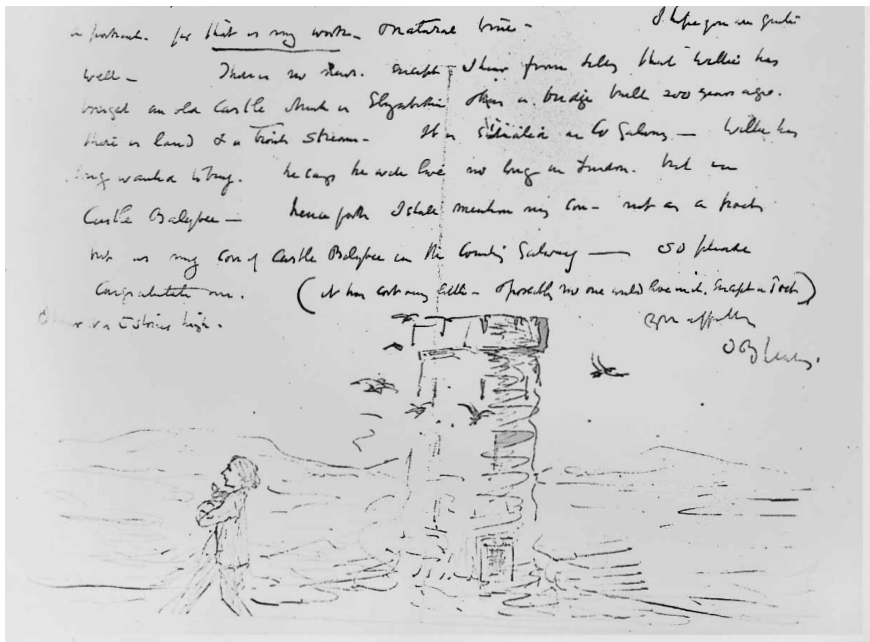
roofless; but, to wBY's delight, the 'winding stair' (which he mentioned frequently in describing the building) was perfect, and there was a gargoyle's head fixed high on one wall. The cost of the fee simple was estimated at no more than £25, since the building was effectively a ruin, but the Board wanted £80.

Obsessed though he was, wBY bargained as hard as he knew: a romantic Yeats gesture was pursued with Pollexfen hard-headedness. He was suffering 'an attack of nerves financially', since his publishing income had declined with the war. He had already had to borrow from Gregory again, to tide over an awkward patch. His extended Woburn Building holding cost £50 a year. An inheritance of £35 from Uncle Alfred was earmarked for Ballylee, but got swallowed up by the cost of his election to the Savile Club and the plates for the illustrations to *Reveries*.<sup>124</sup> But he knew he could sell something, or make money by an American tour; the tower could be done up slowly 'but rather well, that I may keep the sentiment of the past'. Dulac offered to decorate the rooms for nothing. The negotiations dragged on through February and March, complicated by the Board's wish to bring a road across the island by two bridges, establishing a right of way. wBY was driven nearly demented: 'I did not sleep till seven this morning with worrying over Ballylee,' he told Gregory on 1 March. However, he accepted the new road for the aesthetic reason that it meant 'some picturesque old stepping stones' could be kept: they appear in Robert Gregory's atmospheric drawing of the castle, which wBY had reproduced as a postcard in April.<sup>125</sup> More pragmatically, since the bridge interfered with the property, the price came down. On 27 March he accepted it for £35, exactly the sum of Alfred's legacy. Sligo had made possible a purchase on Galway.

He delegated the final negotiations to Gregory. By the beginning of June she had taken formal possession on his behalf and sent on to him the 'seisin', or symbols of possession: a bunch of grass from the field, a handful of thatch from the cottage, a stone from the castle wall, and two florins from the sale of a fallen tree. At the Savile Club on 30 June 1917, wBY signed the deed of sale, which stipulated a public right of way through the yard. Ballylee also gave him a purchase on Coole. Gregorys had owned it, Robert had drawn it, even the Gort builder was Michael Rafferty, whom wBY decided must be related to Raftery, the great local poet whose life Gregory and wBY had commemorated in the distant early days of their relationship twenty years before. And from early April he deluged her with inquiries and suggestions. Should the cottage be saved by a buttress ('Margaret seems to have a prejudice against buttresses whereas I having seen them upon cottage walls in Ireland, all my life, think of them as an added beauty, a gift of antiquity')? Could Margaret provide a scale-drawing, which he could bring to the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings to get free advice? Could

a temporary tarpaulin roof be made ('they put a tarred tarpaulin upon Wagner's theatre in '75 and it is still there')? Would his books be safe?<sup>126</sup>

Gregory's less romantic demurrals were briskly rejected ('You certainly cannot wash your face from the Castle walls in summer. All those heavy old walls "sweat" a little'). His bank could advance £200, which would enable a floor, a roof, doors, and windows. He had chosen a Dublin architect, William Scott, an Arts and Crafts enthusiast who specialized in restorations, was approved of by Martyn (the local expert on castles), and had executed several ecclesiastical buildings around Galway. By July the roof was going on. WBY found that the bank could now give him an overdraft of £300, after he had spent £200 making the cottage habitable; and he had £90 in the bank after paying the Board their £35 in June. 'He already feels such an Irish landlord that he has begun by putting a mortgage on it,' Gregory remarked drily to Quinn.<sup>127</sup> So he suddenly had an overwhelming reason to make money. He gave fee-paying lectures in Dublin, and started planning an American tour, possibly speaking on Blake, Calvert, and Palmer – with illuminated slides. 'Binyon lectured with slides in America – it is quite dignified.'<sup>128</sup>



2. 'He says he will live no longer in London but in Castle Ballylee – henceforth I shall mention my son – not as a poet but as my son of Castle Ballylee in the County Galway – so please congratulate me. (It has cost very little – & possibly no-one could live in it. Except a Poet.)' JBY to Julia Ford, 21 November 1916.

His family watched with amused pleasure. ‘So Willie owns landed property – & a castle,’ JBY wrote delightedly to Gregory. ‘Lolly sends the words, is he asking “Where are the Butlers now?”’<sup>129</sup> There was, indeed, a sense of historic repossession in this great step. And though he could not yet know the wealth of symbols and associations Ballylee would provide, its possession clarified a sense of insufficiency in his personal life. This was clearly expressed by WBY in a letter to Farr: ‘I am fifty one myself & do not like it [at] all & keep thinking of all the follies I have committed not to have somebody to talk to after night fall & to bring me gossip of the neighbours. Especially now that I am going to own a castle and a whole acre of land.’<sup>130</sup> On several occasions he mentioned spending the summers in his castle with ‘a friend’. In March he expanded on the subject to Gregory: ‘Ballylee may be very necessary to me. The truth is my domestic arrangements here seem to be broken up. I have had a slight difference with G. W. [?] & this brought things to an end (you might if you keep this letter blot out this part).’<sup>131</sup> The ‘G. W.’ is not blotted out, but it clearly began life as other initials, and was tactfully disguised by Gregory. It does not seem to fit Iseult. Given his renewed visits to the Tuckers at this time, it could be a reference to his on-off flirtation with Nelly’s daughter, Georgie Hyde Lees. But he had continued his association with Alick Schepeler: the initials have been read as ‘O. S.’, and could be ‘A. S.’. Through spiritualist investigations he had met Lalla Vandervelde (wife of the Belgian ambassador), with whom he had a dalliance, but his thoughts came back to a more settled relationship, and he as usual confided in Coole. On 13 June Gregory wrote about his Ballylee plans: ‘With the prospect of your marriage question being settled within the next few months, it seems a pity not to consult your “comrade’s” inclinations before plunging into expense.’ His reply reiterated his commitment to the castle above all. ‘If I marry’, he wrote on 20 June, ‘my London arrangements will depend on my wife, if I do not I should take two rooms at £25 a year.’<sup>132</sup> And as the summer of 1917 approached, so did the prospect of a reunion with the Gonnes by the Normandy seaside.

And if Ballylee stood for a more settled future life, it also meant a fuller commitment to Ireland: a feeling that had grown upon him since the news of the Rising the eventful year before. He was anxious not to be drawn too far into Abbey matters, wanting to withdraw to ‘a slight connection . . . getting a Dublin board of governors to take over the general management and the financial management. I would then be free to raise some money to carry out, on the Abbey boards, experiments that interest *me*, and belong to my own art.’<sup>133</sup> But this old dream would remain, for the moment, unfulfilled. Political tensions in Dublin necessitated careful selection of productions. The Convention continued to meet, but public opinion was tilting in

Sinn Féin's direction: the barometer was set by election of the 1916 survivor Eamon de Valera as MP for Clare in July. wBY was – as he had warned – a notable absentee from a letter to the *Irish Times* supporting AE's 'Thoughts for a Convention' – a manifesto on behalf of a pluralist solution to the national problem, 'aiming at a diversity of culture, and the greatest freedom, richness and diversity of thought'.<sup>134</sup> He had endorsed exactly these principles on numerous past occasions, but caution ruled in the summer of 1917. He would 'risk' putting on *The Parnellite* at the Abbey because it was agrarian in theme, rather than a Sinn Féin tract; but *Cathleen ni Houlihan* would be, under present circumstances, politically electric. His own politics were to be kept private, he told Ellen Duncan, while he was 'in negotiation' over the Lane pictures;<sup>135</sup> but he had by now written 'The Rose Tree', a ballad about the Easter sacrifice which endorsed Pearse and Connolly more clearly than had 'Easter 1916', and he would shortly begin his play *The Dreaming of the Bones*, which linked the rebel cause back to the twelfth-century Norman invasion – Fenian teleology in Noh form. 'The best play I have written for years,' he told Gregory: '& I am afraid only too powerful politically.'<sup>136</sup>

Much of it had been written at Coole, where he settled in late April, staying on through May. William Scott came down to prepare drawings for Ballylee, and the legal transfer of ownership took place in June. wBY had planned to renovate the cottage first, but Scott was impatient to get to work on the castle (fortunately, since he drank heavily and had only a year to live). There were four floors in the tower, of one room each, connected by the celebrated winding stair embedded in the seven-foot-thick wall; an additional flight of steps led to the battlemented roof level. A second cottage was planned, and furniture and ironwork commissioned locally. All this would be expensive, and wBY threw himself into work. He was revising, yet again, *The Player Queen*; Mrs Patrick Campbell complained that he had delayed it 'till her jaw sagged with age'.<sup>137</sup> But he was also working on the new play, rewriting the second part of 'Anima Mundi' for the book which he still thought would be called *The Alphabet*, and planning the arrangement of his new collection, to be called 'The Swans at Coole'. 'It will be published in Autumn and be among my best books.' 'The book of poems you must not send for review,' he warned Lolly, 'about the other I am not quite sure yet. I might have to take advice.'<sup>138</sup>

The traditional routine of 'order and labour' at Coole was enhanced by the plans for renovating Ballylee, so his return to London at the end of May was all the more debilitating. He had firm instructions from Gregory to lobby James Craig and other Irish MPs about the Lane pictures, which he dutifully did, even visiting the House of Commons in hopes of an unscheduled interview – though he dolefully warned her 'this is a technique I do not

understand & I feel helpless'. Though Craig was helpful, others were not. Lloyd George remained elusive, and wBY was driven to considering an approach through 'Julia James his very pretty light comedy actress'.<sup>139</sup> But his mind was elsewhere: renaming his philosophical treatise, choosing illustrations for a projected book of his verse plays (Dulac's masks and costumes for *At the Hawk's Well* had been glamorously reproduced in *Harper's Bazaar* for March 1917), and longing to return to Galway. Afflicted by exhaustion, the London heat, and indigestion, at the end of June he gloomily warned Gregory that he 'might break down like my brother unless I get back to routine'.<sup>140</sup> He was also deeply saddened by the news of Florence Farr's death, after her long struggle with cancer. She had told him of her mastectomy in one of her inimitable letters, but assured him the tumour was benign; only to her other old friend and lover, Shaw, did she outline the seriousness of her condition. Ceylon had, in the end, given her much of what she wanted. She had, she told Shaw a year earlier, spent her time there liberating herself from 'barriers' including 'my secret horror of death, I mean of the death-bed scene – I have been through it once or twice & it's nothing after all'.<sup>141</sup> Her death, like Mabel Beardsley's, marked a divide between wBY's present life and his 1890s youth, soon to furnish another section of the memorial frieze of his autobiography.

In the immediate present he was under pressure to make money for Ballylee. At the end of May he was excited by an approach from the University of Edinburgh: a lectureship at £300 a year, for six lectures only, which could be given over a few weeks. It would be a guaranteed income and remove the need for American tours.<sup>142</sup> However, nothing came of it, and with the imminent prospect of America entering the war, the New York agent James Pond warned him that there was no point in arranging a tour. He made some money by selling some of his own first editions to Yale University, but he needed more. Another prospect was raised in late June by his old acquaintance, the journalist George Mair, who had married Synge's fiancée Molly Allgood in 1911 and was now a publicity officer at the Foreign Office. He suggested a series of four lectures in France under the auspices of the FO, to be given in September, for a fee of £40. There was the additional inducement of facilitating a wartime passport.<sup>143</sup> wBY offered three trusty familiars – one on 'Synge and Ireland', and two on the poets of his own generation – but proposed a fourth on 'Ireland Today': he explained it as a political, literary, and social survey of modern Ireland, which would 'clear up my own mind'.<sup>144</sup> This intriguing project never came off, though wBY was still planning it in the autumn. For one thing, the Foreign Office took fright at 'Ireland Today' and suggested a lecture on Blake instead, to wBY's relief. But it supplied yet another reason for caution on wBY's part when it came to

publishing 'Easter 1916' (now privately printed by Shorter), 'The Rose Tree', or *The Dreaming of the Bones*.

In early July he managed to return to Ireland. In Dublin he stayed, for the first time, with Gogarty in his large town house at Ely Place, adjacent to the premises that had once housed AE's Theosophist commune, which the two young mystics had decorated with murals so many years before. AE, indeed, called in on him at Gogarty's and so did Douglas Hyde and James Stephens; and WBY sat for a bust by the young sculptor Albert Power, commissioned by his host. The subject found it 'admirable . . . I look rather humorous and intellectual than poetical'.<sup>145</sup> Fortified, he went on to Coole and his castle, where he spent a fortnight. He also attended a committee meeting for the founding of a new 'Society of Irish Tradition', an ecumenically inclined organization celebrating matters like folklore and Gaelic culture in a determinedly unpolitical way and, given the temper of the times, doomed to speedy extinction.<sup>146</sup> But he was back in London on 27 July, arranging publication of a distinguished group of poems in the *Sphere* – they included the 'Dying Lady' sequence about Mabel Beardsley, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', 'Presences', and 'A Thought from Propertius'. The Macmillan publication of *Per Amica* was planned, with a beautiful Sturge Moore cover depicting a mystic rose. But his sojourn in London was intentionally brief. On 3 August he travelled to Paris; by 7 August he was once again in Gonne's house at Colleville, drawn there – and possibly summoned – by Iseult rather than by her mother.

Her letters through the winter had continued – lengthy, introspective, expressing ardent friendship and literary homage in between earnest discussions of Rudolf Steiner. 'Whatever happens, Willie, you are wrong to say that I shall gradually forget that I am your pupil (and your teacher??)'.<sup>147</sup> Their 'common memory' kept them near while apart; it provided 'gold' that she played with in solitude, like a miser; she thought of him 'continually'. He must have arrived in a fever of expectation. While he worked on the lectures he expected to give in September, and his head throbbed 'full with poems',<sup>148</sup> his reasons for being there were primarily emotional, as Gregory well knew. 'It will be a great excitement to you going to France', she wrote, '& being fetched in so romantic a way – I am sure you will be glad to be out of London for a while and see things in perspective – and I hope the expedition may be all for the good'.<sup>149</sup> Rumours that WBY and Iseult were to marry had been circulating in Dublin since the previous winter, but WBY told Gregory on 12 August that though they were 'on our old intimate terms', she was disinclined to accept him. All would remain undecided until they parted. Gonne, moreover, 'is no longer bitter and she and Iseult are on good terms now and life goes on smoothly'.<sup>150</sup>

But beneath the surface tensions were building; nor was WBY as resigned as he claimed to be. In the third summer of the war, conditions were deteriorating. The Colleville household depended for food on the vegetable garden planted at Easter, and torpedoed fish washed up on the beach, while at night the house shook with the reverberations of naval bombardment. Gonne was temporarily exhausted. ‘You I believe still see beauty in war,’ she wrote to Quinn. ‘I did once but hospitals and broken hearts and devastation and destruction of all art and beauty have changed me and I bow to any peace advocate.’<sup>151</sup> She set herself to planning her return to Ireland, bringing a resentful Iseult with her: WBY’s suggestion that the latter would be better off in London caused, he admitted, one of the few violent outbursts from Gonne. On 28 August the household removed to Paris: the Gones to their temporary flat in Passy, WBY to the Hôtel Gavarni near by.<sup>152</sup> From here he wrote urgently to Elizabeth Radcliffe for guidance: had her controls received messages about him? While Gonne tried to arrange her return to Ireland, against the reluctance of the authorities to release such a well-known ‘agitator’ into the political crucible, WBY continued to agonize about his future. After a week in Paris he wrote to Gregory:

I am really getting ready a mass of work to start on in Dublin and London if I can make some settlement in my life. I am just now too restless. Iseult has always been something like a daughter to me & so I am less upset than I might have been – I am chiefly unhappy about her general prospects. Just at the moment she is in one of her alarming moods – deep melancholy & apathy, the result of having left the country – and is always accusing herself of sins – sins of omission not of commission – She has a horoscope that makes me dread melancholia. Only in the country is she amused & free of this mood for long. Maud Gonne on the other hand is in a joyous & self forgetting condition of political hate the like of which I have not yet encountered. As soon as I reach London I shall be in the midst of another crisis of my affairs, (about which I need not write for the possible eye of the censor,) so you must not expect to get much good of me for a while.<sup>153</sup>

On 14 September the Gonne–MacBride family, accompanied by WBY, set off for London.<sup>154</sup> Gonne, still considered a severe security risk, was detained and humiliatingly searched at Southampton, while WBY raged and complained – an incident she remembered with fury all her life. Under the Defence of the Realm Act they were forbidden to travel on to Ireland. So they stopped in London. The Gones occupied Woburn Buildings, while WBY stayed at the Arts Club, in Dover Street. On 20 September Pound could report to Quinn: ‘Yeats is back from Paris bringing Maude Gonne, 10 canary birds, 1 parrot, 1 monkey, 1 cat, two members of MG’s family, and the hope that she will lead a tranquil life.’<sup>155</sup>

Pound, as usual, was slightly off the mark. Maud was no longer uppermost in wBY's thoughts, and he was still uncertain where he stood with Iseult. But the 'crisis of my affairs' which he had expected to break on his return to London was located elsewhere. As soon as he returned his old acquaintance Nelly Tucker invited him to a house she had rented near Ashdown Forest – prompted by a letter he had sent her from France. They had kept in touch through Olivia Shakespear and had encountered each other at Eva Fowler's Kent cottage in the summer of 1915; while Nelly's daughter, Georgie Hyde Lees, had helped wBY's occult researches the following winter, met him regularly through her closest friend, Dorothy Pound, and drawn close to him in the spring of 1917. After a summer of rebuffs and dislocations, and temperamentally exhausted by the proximity of the raging Maud and irresolute Iseult, it is not surprising that wBY took refuge in these supportive and admiring circles, wrapped in seances and reassurances, rather than in the histrionics of Colleville and Passy.

But Gregory alone seems to have been prepared for just how decisive that turning away would be. On 18 September, just after the traumatic journey from Paris, he wrote to her of Iseult's depression: at Le Havre she 'went off by herself & cried. Because she was so ashamed "at being so selfish" "in not wanting me to marry & so break her friendship with me." I need hardly say she had said nothing to me of "not wanting". Meanwhile she has not faltered in her refusal of me but as you can imagine life is a good deal at white heat.' He added that he now was uncertain about going to Mrs Tucker's, since the prohibition on Iseult's travelling to Ireland changed matters: 'I wrote to Mrs Tucker from France thinking that Iseult was going to Dublin & that I would not see her for months', but now she would need his presence in London, as 'Maud Gonno will certainly do something wild'. He asked for a letter of advice, which Gregory obligingly provided.

You are certainly in a muddle, but 'it's well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new' and I don't feel as if you could go straight off and engage yourself to another in the present state of affairs. You could not do so with a quiet mind, & that would be a bad beginning. I rather think you ought to tell Mrs Tucker simply of the political difficulty, and that you do not like to leave while you may be needed or of use.<sup>156</sup>

It crossed with a short and agonized note, dated 19 September, bearing the news which she alone among wBY's friends may have expected.

I wrote you a very disturbed letter yesterday. Since writing I have decided to be what some Indian calls 'true of voice'. I am going to Mrs Tuckers in the country on Saturday or Monday at latest and I will ask her daughter to marry me. Perhaps she is tired of the idea. I shall however make it clear that I will still be friend and

guardian to Iseult. Last night Maud Gonne returned to that strange conviction of hers that Iseult is my child because when Iseult was born she was full of my ideas. Perhaps at that time Maud Gonne was in love with me. I have seen Iseult today and am doing as she wishes. All last night the darkness was full of writing now on stone, now on paper, now on parchment but I could not read it. Were spirits trying to communicate? I prayed a great deal & beleive I am doing right.<sup>157</sup>