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**W.B. YEATS ON 'ASIA'
(AND 'IRELAND'):
AN IDEOGRAMMIC APPROACH**

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Resumen

Si bien para algunas personas la asociación entre W.B. Yeats y Asia implica referencias a Bizancio, otros sugieren que esta asociación apunta hacia la India. Y aún hay otros que se refieren a Japón y China. Yeats hizo referencias explícitas e implícitas a Asia en su obra. Muchos expertos ponen en entredicho que Yeats entendiera “correctamente” las referencias culturales a Asia que tanto le influenciaron y argumentan que el autor seleccionaba aquellas referencias que más se adecuaban a sus propios objetivos. Sin embargo, para otros esto carece de relevancia puesto que, de todas maneras, Yeats usaba cualquiera referencia de manera idiosincrática. La obra de Yeats es abundante y diversa y su “Asia” impregna buena parte de su producción. Siguiendo el ejemplo de Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound propuso “el método ideográfico (el estudio y la yuxtaposición de especímenes particulares – por ejemplo obras particulares, pasajes de literatura, etc.) en tanto que herramienta para la adquisición y la transmisión del conocimiento”. Este artículo tiene como objetivo recopilar las referencias a Asia en las cartas y publicaciones de Yeats a lo largo de su vida para proporcionar material acumulativo que permita entender del significado de Asia para Yeats.

Palabras clave

W.B. Yeats, Asia, Irlanda, Ezra Pound, método ideográfico, orientalismo

Abstract

For some people the association of W.B. Yeats with Asia will suggest references to Byzantium, for others it will suggest India, and others still will think of Japan and China. Yeats made both explicit and implicit references to Asia. Many experts doubt that Yeats really or “correctly” understood the Asian cultural references that he found inspiring for his work and that he cherry-picked for his own purposes. Others doubt that it really mattered, since he turned everything he touched to his own idiosyncratic use anyway. Yeats’ work is abundant and varied and Yeats’ “Asia” pervades much of it. Ezra Pound, following the lead of Ernest Fenollosa, proposed “the ideogrammic method (the examination and juxtaposition of particular specimens—e.g. particular works, passages of literature) as an implement for acquisition and transmission of knowledge”. This study collates Yeats’ references to Asia from letters and publications throughout his life in order to provide an accumulated base for what Asia meant for Yeats.

Keywords

W.B. Yeats, Asia, Ireland, Ezra Pound, ideogrammic method, orientalism

W.B. YEATS ON 'ASIA' (AND 'IRELAND'): AN IDEOGRAMMIC APPROACH

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Dispassionate examination of the ideogrammic method (the examination and juxtaposition of particular specimens—e.g. particular works, passages of literature) as an implement for acquisition and transmission of knowledge.

Ezra Pound, 'The Teacher's Mission [1934],' *Literary Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 61.

1884

While [W.B. Yeats] was discovering the world of nationalist intelligentsia, he was serving another apprenticeship – spiritual rather than political. Like his literary explorations, it began as he finished at the High School ... In late 1884 WBY's aunt Isabella Pollexfen Varley ... sent WBY a copy of A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. ... WBY lent the book to his friend Charles Johnston ... [who] went to London to interview the founders of the movement, and on his return introduced Theosophy to Dublin. A craze began, much to the chagrin of the Headmaster, who saw 'his most promising students [touched] with the indifference of the Orient to such things as college distinction and mundane success'.

Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats. A Life. I The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45.

[W.B. Yeats'] interest in Buddhism and the occult was increasing, much to his father's annoyance. There is a nice irony in the fact that it was Isabella [Pollexfen], whom John [Butler Yeats] had taken great delight in encouraging to pursue her interest in art against her family's will, who encouraged

Willie in his minor rebellion against his father by sending him a copy of *Esoteric Buddhism*. ... Lily even began to take an interest in the Buddhist doctrines he was excited about because the ideas seemed to her to have some affinity with the tales and beliefs of the people of Sligo which were so important to her.

Joan Hardwick, *The Yeats Sisters. A Biography of Susan and Elizabeth Yeats*, (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 45.

1888

My novel or novelette draws to a close.* The first draft is complete. It is all about a curate and a young man from the country. The difficulty is to keep the characters from turning into eastern symbolic monsters of some sort which would be a curious thing to happen to a curate and a young man from the country.

W.B Yeats letter to John O'Leary, 8 October [1888], *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, Electronic Edition, Volume 1 (1865-1895), 105.

**John Sherman*.

1892

'He is no poet who would not go to Japan for a new form,' wrote a distinguished member of the Gosse, Lang and Dobson school.

'The Rhymers Club,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume VII. Letters to the New Island*, edited by George Bornstein & Hugh Witemeyer (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 58.

1898

Some dozen years ago a little body of young men hired a room in Dublin, and began to read papers to one another on the Vedas and the Upanishads and the Neo-Platonists, and on modern mystics and spiritualists. They had no scholarship, and they spoke and wrote badly, but they discussed great problems

ardently and simply and unconventionally, as men perhaps discussed great problems in the medieval Universities.

'AE,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume VI. Prefaces and Introductions*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 113.

1901

Examples like this are as yet too little classified, too little analysed, to convince the stranger, but some of them are proof enough for those they have happened to, proof that there is a memory of Nature that reveals events and symbols of distant centuries. Mystics of many countries and many centuries have spoken of this memory; and the honest men and charlatans, who keep the magical traditions which will some day be studied as a part of folk-lore, base most that is of importance *in* their claims upon this memory. I have read of it in *Paracelsus* and in some Indian book that describes the people of past days as still living within it, 'thinking the thought and doing the deed. '

'Magic,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume IV. Early Essays*, edited by Ricard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), 37.

I would have Ireland re-create the ancient arts, the arts as they were understood in Judaea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, in every ancient land; as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people who have grown up in a leisured class and made this understanding their business.

'Ireland and the Arts,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume IV. Early Essays*, edited by Ricard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), 152.

1905

'A widow mourning on the tomb of her husband surrenders to the love of a soldier who has been sent to watch over the hanged body of a robber. In the night the robber's friends steal

his body away, and the widow hangs her husband's body in its place to save the life of the soldier who had otherwise been executed for neglect of duty.' This is a bare summary, and does no justice to a fable that has gone through the whole world. It was not invented by the decadent Greeks, for you will find, if you look in Dunlop's 'History of Fiction,' that it is one of the oldest of Eastern tales. It is in that most ancient book of fables, 'The Seven Wise Masters,' and is extant in a very vivid form in old Chinese writings. Ireland may, I think, claim all the glory of Mr. Synge's not less admirable tale. The only parallels I can remember at this moment to the husband who pretends to be dead that he may catch his wife and his wife's lover, are Irish parallels. One is in a ballad at the end of 'The Love Songs of Connacht,' and the other in a ballad taken down in Tory Island by Mr. Fournier.

W.B. Yeats letter to the Editor of the *United Irishman*, 4 February 1905 [CL 108]

Mr. Synge has in common with the great theatre of the world, with that of Greece and that of India, with the creator of Falstaff, with Racine, a delight in language, a preoccupation with individual life. He resembles them also by a preoccupation with what is lasting and noble, that came to him, not, as I think, from books, but while he listened to old stories in the cottages, and contrasted what they remembered with reality.

'Preface to the first edition of *The Well of the Saints*,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume IV. Early Essays*, edited by Ricard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), 219.

1906

I think you have changed too — is it that those eastern meditations have fired you — made you free of all but the holy church — now alas steering its malignant way, I suppose, through the Indian Ocean — a sort of diabolical Aengus carrying not a glass house for Etain — as did the Irish one — but a whole convent, alter lights, vegetarian kitchen and all.

I have myself by the by begun eastern meditations of your sort, but with the object of trying to lay hands upon some dynamic and substantialising force as distinguished from the eastern quiescent and supersensualizing [sic] state of the soul — a movement downwards upon life not upwards out of life.

W.B. Yeats letter to Florence Farr, 6 February 1906 [CL 343].

Alas that the hangman 's rope should be own brother to that Indian happiness that keeps alone, were it not for some stray cactus, mother of as many dreams, immemorial impartiality.

'Discoveries. The Subject Matter of Drama,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume IV. Early Essays*, edited by Ricard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), 206.

1910

The food of the spiritual-minded is sweet, an Indian scripture says, but passionate minds love bitter food.

'J.M. Synge and the Ireland of his Time,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume IV. Early Essays*, edited by Ricard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), 237

1912

Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilisation itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity.

'Introduction to *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)*, by Rabindranath Tagore,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume V. Later Essays*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 169.

1913

Your letters are charming & make me long for a like life. Perhaps I too in a few years may drift into Asia.

W.B. Yeats letter to Florence Farr, 12 June 1913 [CL 2179].

1914

We knew that he had been in many parts of the world, for there was a great scar on his hand made by a whaling-hook, and in the dining-room was a cabinet with bits of coral in it and a jar of water from the Jordan for the baptizing of his children and Chinese pictures upon rice-paper and an ivory walking-stick from India that came to me after his death.

¹‘Reveries over Childhood and Youth (w. 1914, pub. 1916),’ *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume III. Autobiographies*, edited by William H. O’Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 42.

Presently my elder sister came on a long visit and she and I went to a little two-storeyed house in a poor street where an old gentlewoman taught us spelling and grammar. When we had learned our lesson well, we were allowed to look at a sword presented to her father who had led troops in India or China and to spell out a long complimentary inscription on the silver scabbard.

Ibid., 54

1915

I have found a mass of material, some in a book on China and some in a book on Japan.* Ezra has read these books to me since I came down.

W.B. Yeats letter to Lady Gregory, 20 January 1915 [CL 2585].

*Yeats could be referring here to the Irish expert on Japan, Francis Brinkley --*Japan and China* subtitled *Their History Arts and Literature* [Boston and Tokyo: J. B. Millet Company, 1901; 12 volumes: 8 on Japan, 4 on China]. Both Yeats and Pound were delighted by the section in Vol. 3 on the Samurai pastime of ‘listening to incense’. He could also be referring to the Ernest Fenollosa manuscripts that Pound was reading to him.

1916

In fact with the help of these plays 'translated by Ernest Fenollosa and finished by Ezra Pound' I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pay its way—an aristocratic form.

'Certain Noble Plays of Japan [1916],' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume IV, Early Essays*, edited by Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein (New York et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2007), 163.

It may be well if we go to school in Asia, for the distance from life in European art has come from little but difficulty with material. In half-Asiatic Greece Kallimachos could still return to a stylistic management of the falling folds of drapery, after the naturalistic drapery of Phidias, and in Egypt the same age that saw the village Head-man carved in wood, for burial in some tomb, with so complete a naturalism saw, set up in public places, statues full of an august formality that implies traditional measurements, a philosophic defence. The spiritual painting of the fourteenth century passed on into Tintoretto and that of Velazquez into modern painting with no sense of loss to weigh against the gain, while the painting of Japan, not having our European Moon to churn the wits, has understood that no styles that ever delighted noble imaginations have lost their importance, and chooses the style according to the subject. In literature also we have had the illusion of change and progress, the art of Shakespeare passing into that of Dryden, and so into the prose drama, by what has seemed when studied in its details unbroken progress. Had we been born Greeks, and so but half-European, an honourable mob would have martyred though in vain the first man who set up a painted scene, or who complained that soliloquies were unnatural, instead of repeating with a sigh, 'we cannot return to the arts of childhood however beautiful.' Only our lyric poetry has kept its Asiatic habit and renewed itself at its own youth, putting off perpetually what has been called progress in a series of violent revolutions.

Therefore it is natural that I go to Asia for a stage-convention, for more formal faces, for a chorus that has no part in the action, and perhaps for those movements of the body copied from the marionette shows of the fourteenth century.

Ibid., 166.

These Japanese poets, too, feel for tomb and wood the emotion, the sense of awe that our Gaelic-speaking countrypeople [sic] will sometimes show when you speak to them of Castle Hackett or of some holy well; and that is why perhaps it pleases them to begin so many plays by a traveller asking his way with many questions, a convention agreeable to me, for when I first began to write poetical plays for an Irish theatre I had to put away an ambition of helping to bring again to certain places their old sanctity or their romance

Ibid., 171.

When I remember that curious game which the Japanese called, with a confusion of the senses that had seemed typical of our own age, 'listening to incense,' I know that some among them would have understood the prose of Walter Pater, the painting of Puvis de Chavannes, the poetry of Mallarme and Verlaine.

Ibid., 173.

Yone Noguchi quotes Yeats as saying, 'I am pleased with the Japanese *No* [sic] plays, specimens of which I have seen through the late Fenollosa's posthumous translation which my friend, Ezra Pound, is just now editing. I confess my mind is perfectly saturated now with the plays.'

Yone Noguchi, 'A Japanese Poet on W. B. Yeats,' *Bookman* (New York), 43:4 (1916): 431.

Yeats linked Japanese *Noh* to Irish culture through the role of ghosts, a key element of *Noh* theatre. Commenting on the play, *Kayoi Komachi*, Pound wrote: 'The crux of the play is that Shosho would not accept Buddhism, and thus his spirit and Ono's are kept apart. There is nothing like a ghost for holding to an *idée fixe*. In *Nishikigi*, the ghosts of the two lovers are kept apart because the woman had steadily refused the hero's offering of charm sticks. The two ghosts are brought together by the piety of a wandering priest. Mr. Yeats tells me that he has found a similar legend in Arran [*sic*], where the ghosts come to a priest to be married.'

Ezra Pound, 'Kayoi Komachi', in *The Classical Noh Theatre of Japan*, edited by Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 16.

1917

I have always sought to bring my mind close to the mind of Indian and Japanese poets, old women in Connaught, mediums in Soho, lay brothers whom I imagine dreaming in some medieval monastery the dreams of their village, learned authors who refer all to antiquity; to immerse in the general mind where that mind is scarce separable from what we have begun to call 'the subconscious'; to liberate it from all that comes of councils and committees, from the world as it is seen from universities or from populous towns; and that I might so believe I have murmured evocations and frequented mediums, delighted in all that that displayed great problems through sensuous images, or exciting phrases, accepting from abstract schools but a few technical words that are so old they seem but broken architraves fallen amid bramble and grass, and have put myself to school where all things are seen: *A Tenedo Tacitae per amica silentiae lunae*.

'*Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917),' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 16.

1918

I shall, I think, publish about Xmas a couple of new Noh plays with my sister & immediately after the book with the three Noh plays with music and if you will, designs through Macmillan. If war is then over I will get to work up performances.

I am charmed with several of the Toys. The best of them are like translations masterpieces. To be masterpieces they require finality of form. It is like a great man of letters describing a picture, or perhaps for there is no change of medium a hasty sketch from memory of a great picture. Whaley has the advantage over you because in his case there is the original picture. You have helped me however to understand the Chinese [sic] mystery; I have been making up in my head modern poems in the Chinese [sic] manner. It is the art less of creators than of great connoisseurs. To write it one must live in a beautiful house & a beautiful place for as there are it seems no metaphors one must constantly mention beautiful things & associate these things with ones' emotions.

W.B. Yeats letter To Edmund Dulac, 22 July [1918] [CL 3464].

1920

Years afterwards I was to stand at [Douglas Hyde's] side and listen to Galway mowers singing his Gaelic words without their knowing whose words they sang. It is so in India, where peasants sing the words of the great poet of Bengal without knowing whose words they sing, and it must often be so where the old imaginative folk-life is undisturbed, and it is so amongst schoolboys who hand their story-books to one another without looking at the title-page to read the author 's name. Here and there, however, the peasants had not lost the habit of Gaelic criticism, picked up, perhaps, from the poets who took refuge among them after the ruin of the great Catholic families, from men like that O'Rahilly, who cries in a translation from the

Gaelic that is itself a masterpiece of concentrated passion:- The periwinkle and the tough dog-fish Towards evening time have got into my dish.

'Ireland After Parnell (w. 1920-1922, pub. 1922),' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume III. Autobiographies*, edited by William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 181.

1921

Though I have been so long in writing, your Hiroshige has given me the greatest pleasure. I take more and more pleasure from oriental art, find more and more that it accords with what I aim at in my own work. European painting of the last two or three hundred years, grows strange to me as I grow older, begins to speak as with a foreign tongue. When a Japanese, or Mogul, or Chinese painter seems to say 'Have I not drawn a beautiful scene?' one agrees at once, but when a modern European painter says so one does not agree so quickly, if at all. All your painters are simple, like the writers of Scottish ballads or the inventors of Irish stories but one feels that Orpen and John have relations in the patent office who are conscious of being at the forefront of time. The old French poets are simple as the modern are not, and I find in Franscois [sic] Villon the same thoughts, with more intellectual power, that I find in the Gaelic poet Raftery. I would be simple myself but I do not know how. I am always turning over pages like those you have sent me, hoping that in my old age I may discover how. I wish some Japanese would tell us all about the lives — their talks, their loves, their religion, their friends, — of these painters. I would like to know these things minutely, and to know too what their houses looked like, if they still stand, to know all those things that we know about Blake, and about Turner, and about Rossetti. It might make it more easy to understand their simplicity. A form of beauty scarcely lasts a generation with us, but it lasts with you for centuries. You no

more want to change it than a pious man wants to change the Lord's Prayer, or the Crucifix on the wall — at least not unless we have infected you with our egotism.

W.B. Yeats letter to Yone Noguchi, 27 June [1921] [CL 3933].

If you do my 'Noh plays' it might be wise to emphasise this special technique [sic] & so keep them apart from other work of mine. I would however be greatly guided by you. 'The Dreaming of the Bones' is the simplest but is most damnably Irish & 'The Only Jealousy of Emer' the most interesting one technically [sic]. I feel no great confidence in my work at present except as short technically [sic] curious experiment. I write for a non-existent [sic] audience who know my symbols — I would like a studio or drawing room of my own readers but shall probably never get it.

I feel that I know the stage now, but have no longer the heart to write (my own theatre being all comedy). Very possibly your Elizabethan Theatre will give me the heart. I should really like — present tasks once finished — to try my hand at a bustling play in the manner of Shakespeare's historical plays with 'trumpets' & 'alarums and excursions', & resounding defiance, everybody murdered at the end and no damned psychology.

W.B. Yeats letter to Nugent Monck, 6 September [1921] [CL 3976].

I had found when a boy in Dublin on a table in the Royal Irish Academy a pamphlet on Japanese art and read there of an animal painter* so remarkable that horses he had painted upon a temple wall had slipped down after dark and trampled the neighbours' fields of rice. Somebody had come into the temple in the early morning, had been startled by a shower of water drops, had looked up and seen painted horses still wet from the dew covered fields, but now 'trembling into stillness.' ... We

had in Ireland imaginative stories ... Perhaps even these images, once created and associated with river and mountain, might move of themselves and with some powerful, even turbulent life, like those painted horses that trampled the rice-fields of Japan.

‘The Trembling of the Veil,’ *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume III, Autobiographies*, edited by William H. O’Donnell and Douglas Archibald (New York et al.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1999), 161, 167.

*The ‘animal painter’ was Kanaoka (Japan, 9th century).

1922

Even if ‘Unity of Being’ is not for you that does not exclude ‘Union with one’s Higher Genius’ which is a different problem altogether, though it will affect the method of it. In reading passages of mine, such as that which has puzzled you, remember that in them I use for literary purposes a thought which I am compelled to separate [sic] from its proper context. It is sufficiently clear for the particular criticism I am making at the moment, but it needs much fuller exposition before it can be a safe guide to a student who is setting out upon what some Eastern writers have called, I think, ‘the small old path’.

W.B. Yeats letter to Maria C. Chambers, 29 August [1922] [CL 4165].

1924

Now that I have read through the poems in this little book, I renew an impression, especially from the ‘Cat and the Moon,’ which I have received much more powerfully from the last act of Synge’s ‘Well of the Saints’ and from your ‘Gaol Gate’ and as powerfully from ‘The Grasshopper’ by Mr. Padraic Colum, and from a play of Mr. Daniel Corkery’s —an odour, a breath, that suggest to me Indian or Japanese poems and legends. I get no such impression from the powerful art of Mr. T.C. Murray, nor from that of Mr. Macnamara, or of Shiels, or of Mr. Lennox

Robinson, nor from that of any other dramatist, poet or novelist that I can remember. Why has our school, which has perhaps come to an end, been interested mainly in something in Irish life so old that one can no longer say this is Europe, that is Asia?

‘Preface’ [to *The Cat and the Moon*; addressed to Lady Gregory], *Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, edited by Russell K. Alspach (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 1308.

The Japanese labour leader and Christian saint Kagawa, perhaps influenced by Vico though his millennium-haunted mind breaks Vico’s circle, speaks of that early phase of every civilization where a man must follow his father’s occupation, where everything is prescribed, as buried under dream and myth. It was because the Irish country people kept something of that early period (had they not lived in Asia until the Battle of the Boyne?) that I wrote my *Celtic Twilight*, that Lady Gregory wrote her much richer *Dreamers and Poets*, that she wrote and I annotated those *Visions and Beliefs* in whose collection I had some share.

‘Introduction’ [to *The Cat and the Moon*], *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats. Volume II: The Plays*, edited by David R. Clarke and Rosalind E. Clark (New York: Scribner, 2001), 699.

When Lady Gregory's *Visions and Beliefs* had all been collected I began, that I might write my notes, to study spiritualism, of which I had hitherto known nothing. I went from medium to medium, choosing by preference mediums in poor districts where the questioners were small shopkeepers, workmen, and workmen's wives, and found there almost all that Lady Gregory had recorded, though without some of its beauty. It seemed at first that all was taken literally, but I soon found that the medium and some of the questioners knew that something from beyond time was expressing itself in whatever crude symbols they could best understand. I remembered a Sligo visionary who could neither read nor write and said her

fairies were big or little according to something in her mind. I began taking notes, piecing together a philosophy resembling that of the villages and of certain passages in the *Spiritual Diary* and *Heaven and Hell* of Swedenborg, and to study natures that seemed upon the edge of the myth-haunted semi-somnambulism of Kagawa's first period. Perhaps now that the abstract intellect has split the mind into categories, the body into cubes, we may be about to turn back towards the unconscious, the whole, the miraculous; according to a Chinese sage* darkness begins at midday. Perhaps in my search, as in that first search with Lady Gregory among the cottages, I but showed a first effect of that slight darkening.

Ibid., 700-701.

*The 'Chinese sage' is a reference to the 'Ten Theses' or 'Ten Paradoxes' of 惠施 Hui Shī (380–305 BCE) quoted in the 天下 *Tiānxià* chapter of 莊子 *Zhuāngzǐ* (ca. 369-286 B.C): 日方中方睨, 物方生方死 *Rì fāng zhōngfāng nì, wù fāng shēng fāng sǐ*, translated by Burton Watson as 'The sun at noon is the sun setting. The thing born is the thing dying'; Yeats' source as yet unidentified. (Oscar Wilde reviewed Herbert Giles translation of 莊子 *Zhuāngzǐ*, which includes this passage, although Wilde does not cite it in his review.)

1926

(I) always fascinated [sic] me for I learnt it from a Brahman when I was eighteen & believed it till Blake drove it out of my head. It is early Buddhism & results in the belief still living in India, that all is a stream which flows on out of human control — one action or thought leading to an other [sic]. That we ourselves are nothing but a mirror and that deliverance consists in turning the mirror away so that it reflects nothing, the stream will go on but we not know.

(2) This is Zen Buddhism. Shen-hsiu said — see Whaley's 'Introduction to the Study of Chinese [sic] Painting' page 221 — 'Scrub your mirror lest the dust dimn it' — I shorten the sentence — but Huineng replied 'Seeing that nothing exists how can the dust dimn it.' Zen art was the result of a contemplation that saw all becoming through rhythm a single act of the mind.

W.B. Yeats letter to T. Sturge Moore, 5 February [1926] [CL 4830].

For the moment he [Russell] advocates 'objectivism,' that is to say substantially what I described to you as the philosophy of early Buddhism, as distinguished from that of Zen (which is I think Berkeleian).

W.B. Yeats letter to T. Sturge Moore, [before 29 March 1926] [CL 4855].

Do you remember that story of Buddha who gave a flower to some one, who in his turn gave another a silent gift & so from man to man for centuries passed on the doctrine of the Zen school? One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision — that the mystic vision & sexual love use the same means — opposed yet parallel existences (I cannot spell & there is no dictionary in the house).

An old beggar has just called I knew him twenty years ago as wandering piper but now he is paralyzed & cannot play. He was lamenting the great houses burned or empty — 'The gentry have kept the shoes on my feet, & the coat on my back & the shilling in my pocket — never once in all these forty & five years that I have been upon the road have I asked a penny of a farmer'. I gave him five shillings & he started off in the rain for the nearest town - five miles — I rather fancy to drink it. The last I gave to was at Coole & he opened the conversation by saying to Lady Gregory — 'My Lady you are in the winter of

your age' — they are all full of contemplation & elaborate of speech [sic] & have their regular track.

W.B. Yeats letter to Olivia Shakespear, 25 May [1926] [CL 4871].

I have read your brother [G.E Moore] ... He says there is no such thing as 'timeless consciousness' & does not even discuss the evidence for prevision given by people like Richet & Myers. If I can see the future my consciousness is in that degree exempt from a condition of Time. Part of the trouble is that your brother like the ecclesiastics does not examine evidence because he is satisfied with faith or thinks evidence impossible; & another part is that your brother has that English University habit which made it possible for the editors of 'the Cambridge Ancient History' to ignore India & China, & that keeps all English Universities entirely ignorant of the arts. Shadwell, the translator of Dante thought Dores [sic] Dante Illustrations magnificent works. This is English provincialism. That damned 'silver sea.'

W.B. Yeats letter to T. Sturge Moore, 26 June [1926] [CL 4887].

1927

Every year I find more beauty and wisdom in the art and literature of your country. I am at present reading with excitement Zuzuki's [for Suzuki's] Essays in Zen Buddhism. I have also read Toyohiko Kagawa's Novel which is translated into English under the title 'before the Dawn', and find it about the most moving account of a modern saint that I have met, a Tolstoyan saint which is probably all wrong for Japan, but very exciting to an European, and of course I have been reading Arthur Waley's Translation of 'The Tale of Genji', but that is one of the great classics of the world, and I have too much to say about it to say anything.

W.B. Yeats letter to Shotaro Oshima, 19 August 1927 [CL 5014].

You have not put the issue between a certain Church philosophy & modern philosophy fairly though nobody could in a sentence. The Orthodox church philosophy made God so self sufficing [sic] that it left no reason for the creation of man, while the modern philosophers like the great Indians & Chinese [sic] make God & Man necessary to one another. A Dominican monk of the 13th century — Eckhart — said ‘The eye with which man sees God is the same eye as this with which God sees man.’ That is the modern thought. It is in that eye that things are ‘percieved’ [sic] & so ‘exist’.

W.B. Yeats letter o Maud Gonne McBride, [c. 25 October ? 1927] [CL 5039].

I may send you a letter to the author of ‘Zen Buddhism’ when my energy has recovered. No book I have read of recent years has meant as much to me as that book.

W.B. Yeats letter to Kazumi Yano, 18 November [1927] [CL 5049].

1928

I do not think my interest in your country will ever slacken, especially now that I have found this new interest — its philosophy. Whether I shall ever see Japan is another matter. I do not know to what extent I shall recover my old state of health. If the doctor here is right, I can hardly hope to do so. Since I have met you I have felt a door open into Japan; you have told me so much, and given to me the means of further knowledge.

W.B. Yeats letter to Kazumi Yano, [after 14 January 1928] [CL 5066].

From Buddha's time there have always been the two paths to reality that of knowledge & that of will. (Zen Buddhism, like Blake & Kant thought the path of knowledge was closed, that of will open.)

W.B. Yeats letter to T. Sturge Moore, 23 February [1928] [CL 5080].

I am now back in Ireland & in good health again, & have found the book I promised to send you 'Time & the Western Man'. It is by a cubist artist (not to be confused with a Daily Mail journalist of the same name) long considered the friend & fellow-believer of the writers he now attacks. He has a great gift for vivid extravagant invective. He is constantly wrong but almost always amusing. The importance of the book is that it is one point of view in the quarrel which is now influencing so many of the young writers in England & France. He intervenes between the individualist & the New Thomists. I thank you very much for the 'Eastern Buddhists' which I greatly appreciate. The little poems* you have translated in Zen Buddhism are constantly... [?] my life.

W.B. Yeats letter to D.T. Suzuki, 22 May [1928] [CL 5114].

*The 'little poems' were Zen *koans*.

1931

Since we met I have married. I have now two children, a boy & a girl, & feel more knitted into life; and life, when I think of it as separated from all that is not itself, from all that is complicated & mechanical, takes to my imagination an Asiatic form. That form I found first in your books & afterwards in certain Chinese poetry & Japanese prose writing. What an excitement it was that first reading of your poems which seemed to come out of the fields & the rivers & have their changelessness.

W.B. Yeats letter to Rabindranath Tagore, 7 September [1931] [CL 5509].

Sometime ago hearing of Ricketts death I wrote to Sturge Moore to condole & to offer help with the Autobiography of that Indian I told you of. You will see by his letter of Oct 21, that Sturge Moore is as I expected busy or about to be busy with Ricketts affairs & so must abandon the Swami. I cannot help, as it turns out that I should have to get the Swami over to Dublin for a fortnight or more, & I cannot leave this for so long; & that I should have to do more writing than my cramped method makes possible, or my <very ignoran> pre-occupations, which are Greek not Indian make <desirable> pleasant. I said I would suggest that you might care to do this work. ... I think you could make a great thing of this Ind[i]an Book & that with an Introduction by you it might go all over Europe. The work actually done is probably better than Sturge-Moore thinks. Durgu Das said it was 'fascinating' though in need of 'being looked over'. It is the first time a man who has been wandering nine years with a begging-bowl after seven years meditation under a master, has written his life. He saw on a mountain in western India a tall beautiful woman leaning against a tree, recognised her as a 'Master' recieved [sic] her blessing but was told to leave the mountain. She was perhaps such a form as you see. It will be a great thing if you can get this man to write his experience, the concrete events of his life. In Europe we have ideas in plenty but <no actual> little experience <of the spiritual life> to give them reality. He has lived with his idea under the open heavens & amidst the most ancient beliefs of mankind. Once the experience is recorded in all its simplicity & detail, his ideas will be full of meaning, until this is done what is it but one idea the more?

W.B. Yeats letter to George Russell (AE) 29 October [1931] [CL 5533].

Would you write the name of the Chinese book — golden flowers or whatever it is — on the enclosed postcard and post it.

W.B. Yeats letter to Olivia Shakespear, [22 November 1931] [CL 5539].

My dear Olivia: Probably you wrote me a charming letter the moment you got mine (enclosing that lyric which should take its place with 'Innisfree' in the popular anthologies), probably you even undertook to celebrate your seventieth birthday the moment I get to London, but if you did your letter has gone astray. I know mine did not because the invaluable Chinese [sic] book* has come. Now that I write, you will write at the same moment & our letters will cross again & we will never know who owes the other a letter.

I have begun a longish poem called 'Wisdom' in the attempt to shake off 'Crazy Jane' & I begin to think that I shall take to religeon [sic] unless you save me from it. The Chinese [sic] book has given me something I have long wanted, a study of meditation that has not come out of the jungle. I distrust the jungle.

W.B. Yeats letter to Olivia Shakespear, 15 December [1931] [CL 5549].

*The book in question was *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, a Chinese text on alchemy, translated by Richard Wilhelm, with a preface by Carl Jung.

1931

The sense for what is permanent, as distinct from what is useful, for what is unique and different, for the truth that shall prevail, for what antiquity called the sphere as distinct from the gyre, comes from solitaires or from communities where the

solitaries flourish, Indians with a begging-bowl, monks where their occupation is an adventure, men escaped out of machinery, improvident men that sit by the roadside and feel responsible for all that exist

‘Introduction to *Bishop Berkeley*, by Joseph M. Hone and Mario M. Rossi (1931),’ *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O’Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 106-107.

1932

When I meet English and American writers, I find them toiling with great sincerity to discover through philosophy and criticism perfect and novel forms, but though discovery helps when the theme is found, it cannot give the theme. When I would represent the finding of the theme, I think of a strange Eastern tale,* of the Japanese boy who ran screaming from an abbot who had cut off his fingers, then, standing and looking back, suddenly attained Nirvana. The poetic theme is found, like sanctity, through desire and humiliation.

‘Modern Ireland. An Address to American Audiences 1932-1933,’ in *Irish Renaissance. A Gathering of Essays, Memoirs, and Letters from The Massachusetts Review*, edited by Robin Skelton and David R. Clark (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1965), 25.

*Although he defines this as ‘a strange Eastern tale’ linked to Japan, Yeats does not reveal its source -- a Zen *koan* he harvested from D.T. Suzuki’s *Essays on Zen Buddhism*:

Gutei did or said nothing but just holding up a finger to all the questions that might be asked of him concerning Zen. There was a boy in his temple, who seeing his master’s trick imitated him when the boy himself was asked about what kind of preaching his master generally practiced. When the boy told the master about it showing his lifted little finger, the master cut it right off with a knife. The boy ran away screaming in pain, when Gutei called him back. The boy turned back, the master lifted his own

finger, and the boy instantly realized the meaning of the 'one-finger Zen' of Tenryu as well as Gutei.

D.T. Suzuki, *Essays on Zen Buddhism: First Series* (London: Luzac, 1927), 36.

The attach[é], born into a Jewish family that had lived among Mohammedans for generations, seemed more Christian in his point of view than [Sturge] Moore or myself. Presently the attach[é] said: 'Well, I suppose what matters is to do all the good one can. 'By no means,' said the monk. 'If you have that object you may help some few people, but you will have a bankrupt soul. I must do what my Master bids; the responsibility is His.' That sentence, spoken without any desire to startle, interested me the more because I had heard the like from other Indians. Once when I stayed at Wilfrid Blunt's I talked to an exceedingly religious Mohammedan, kept there that he might not run himself into political trouble in India. He spoke of the coming independence of India, but declared that India would never organise. 'There are only three eternal nations,' he said, 'India, Persia, China; Greece organised and Greece is dead.' I remembered too that an able Indian doctor I met when questioning London Indians about Tagore said of a certain Indian leader, 'We do not think him sincere; he taught virtues merely because he thought them necessary to India.' This care for the spontaneity of the soul seems to me Asia at its finest and where it is most different from Europe, the explanation perhaps why it has confronted our moral earnestness and our control of Nature with its asceticism and its courtesy. We sat on for a couple of hours after lunch while the monk, in answer to my questions, told of his childhood, his life at the University, of spiritual forms that he had seen, of seven years 'meditation in his house, of nine years 'wandering with his begging-bowl.' Presently I said: 'The ideas of India have been expounded again and again, nor do we lack ideas of our

own; discussion has been exhausted, but we lack experience. Write what you have just told us; keep out all philosophy, unless it interprets something seen or done.’ I found afterwards that I had startled and shocked him, for an Indian monk who speaks of himself contradicts all tradition, but that after much examination of his conscience he came to the conclusion that those traditions were no longer binding, and that besides, as he explained to Sturge Moore, a monk, a certain stage of initiation reached, is bound by nothing but the will of his Master. He took my advice and brought his book, chapter by chapter, to Sturge Moore for correction.

‘Introduction to *An Indian Monk, An Indian Monk: His Life and Adventures*, by Shri Purohit Swami (1932),’ *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O’Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 130-131.

Some dozen years later Lady Gregory collected with my help the stories in her *Visions and Beliefs*. Again and again, she and I felt that we had got down, as it were, into some fibrous darkness, into some matrix out of which everything has come, some condition that brought together as though into a single scheme ‘exultations, agonies,’ and the apparitions seen by dogs and horses; but there was always something lacking. We came upon visionaries of whom it was impossible to say whether they were Christian or Pagan, found memories of jugglers like those of India, found fragments of a belief that associated Eternity with field and road, not with buildings; but these visionaries, memories, fragments, were eccentric, alien, shut off, as it were, under the plate glass of a museum; I had found something of what I wanted but not all, the explanatory intellect had disappeared. When Shri Purohit Swami described his journey up those seven thousand steps at Mount Gimar, that creaking bed, that sound of pattens in the little old half-forgotten temple, and fitted everything into an ancient discipline, a philosophy that satisfied the intellect, I found all I wanted.

Ibid., 132.

[T]he Russian's prayer implies original sin, that of the Indian asks for an inspired intellect; and this unlikeness is fundamental, the source perhaps of all other differences. The Russian, like most European mystics, distrusts visions though he admits their reality, seems indifferent to Nature, may perhaps dread it like Saint Bernard, who passed the Swiss Lakes with averted eyes. The Indian, upon the other hand, approaches God through vision, speaks continually of the beauty and terror of the great mountains, interrupts his prayer to listen to the song of birds, remembers with delight the nightingale that disturbed his meditation by alighting upon his head and singing there, recalls after many years the whiteness of a sheet, the softness of a pillow, the gold embroidery upon a shoe. These things are indeed part of the 'splendour of that Divine Being.' The first four Christian centuries shared his thought; Byzantine theologians that named their great church 'The Holy Wisdom' sang it; so, too, did those Irish monks who made innumerable poems about bird and beast, and spread the doctrine that Christ was the most beautiful of men. Some Irish saint, whose name I have forgotten, sang, 'There is one among the birds that is perfect, one among the fish, one perfect among men.'

Ibid., 133.

The English hymn-writer, writing not as himself but as the congregation, is a rhetorician; but the Indian convention, founded upon the most poignant personal emotion, should make poets.

Ibid., 135.

Our moral indignation, our uniform law, perhaps even our public spirit, may come from the Christian conviction that the soul has but one life to find or lose salvation in: the Asiatic courtesy from the conviction that there are many lives.

Ibid., 136-137.

Certain Indian, Chinese, and Japanese representations of the Buddha, and of other Divine beings, have a little round lump on the centre of the forehead; ecstasies [sic] have some times received, as it were from the seal of the God, a similar mark. It corresponds to the wounds made as though by nails upon the hands and feet of some Christian saint, but the symbolism differs. The wounds signify God 's sacrifice for man- 'Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us' --that round mark the third eye, no physical organ, but the mind's direct apprehension of the truth, above all antinomies, as the mark itself is above eyes, ears, nostrils, in their duality-- 'splendour of that Divine Being.'

Ibid., 137.

1933

I wish I could put the Swami's lectures into the Cuala series but I cannot. My sisters books are like an old family magazine. A few hundred people buy them all & expect a common theme. Only once did I put a book into the series that was not Irish — Ezras [sic] Noh plays — & I had to write a long introduction to anex [sic] Japan to Ireland.

Joyce & D H Lawrence have however almost restored to us the Eastern simplicity. Neither perfectly for D H Lawrence romantacises [sic] his material, with such words as 'essential fire' 'darkness' etc, & Joyce never escapes from his Catholic sense of sin though he is not aware of it.

W.B. Yeats letter to Olivia Shakespear, 9 March [1933] [CL 5836].

1934

A Japanese describes the attainment of Nirvana in these words 'something delightful has happened to the young man but he can only tell it to his sweetheart.'*

W.B. Yeats letter to William Force Stead, 26 September [1934] [CL 6102].

*This comes from D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (First Series); cf. Gerard Doherty. 'The World That Shines and Sounds: W. B. Yeats and Daisetz Suzuki'. *Irish Renaissance Annual* 4. Edited by Zack Bowen, 1983, 57-75; cf. the quote from the 1937 edition of *A Vision* cited below.

'I know nothing but the novels of Balzac, and the Aphorisms of Patanjali. I once knew other things, but I am an old man with a poor memory.' There must be some reason why I wanted to write that lying sentence, for it has been in my head for weeks. Is it that whenever I have been tempted to go to Japan, China, or India for my philosophy, Balzac has brought me back, reminded me of my preoccupation with national, social, personal problems, convinced me that I cannot escape from our *Comedie humaine*?

'Introduction to *The Holy Mountain*,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 139.

As he awoke he knew that Dattatreya had in his sleep accepted him, and when he felt his forehead, he found in the centre the first trace of that small mound that is the Indian equivalent to the Christian stigmata.

Ibid., 142.

Much Chinese and Japanese painting is a celebration of mountains, and so sacred were those mountains that Japanese artists, down to the invention of the colourprint, constantly recomposed the characters of Chinese mountain scenery, as though they were the letters of an alphabet, into great

masterpieces, traditional and spontaneous. I think of the face of the Virgin in Siennese painting, preserving, after the supporting saints had lost it, a Byzantine character.

To Indians, Chinese, and Mongols, mountains from the earliest times have been the dwelling-places of the Gods. Their kings before any great decision have climbed some mountain, and of all these mountains Kailas, or Mount Meru, as it is called in the *Mahahharata*, was the most famous.

Ibid., 143-144.

In 1818 Hegel, his head full of the intellectual pride of the eighteenth century, was expounding History. Indifferent, as always, to the individual soul, he had taken for his theme the rise and fall of nations. Greece, he explained, first delivered mankind from nature; the Egyptian Sphinx, for all its human face, was Asiatic and animal; but when Oedipus answered the riddle, that Sphinx was compelled to leap into the abyss; the riddle, 'What goes first on four legs, then upon two, then upon three?' called up man. Nature is bondage, its virtue no more than the custom of clan or race, a plant rooted outside man, a law blindly obeyed. From that moment on, intellect or Spirit, that which has value in itself, began to prevail, and now in Hegel's own day, the climax had come, not crippled age but wisdom; there had been many rehearsals, for every civilisation, no matter where its birth, began with Asia, but the play itself had been saved up for our patronage. A few years more and religion would be absorbed in the State, art in philosophy, God's Will proved to be man's will.

Ibid., 152-153.

Siennese painting, preserving, after the supporting saints had lost it, a Byzantine character. To Indians, Chinese, and Mongols, mountains from the earliest times have been the dwelling-places of the Gods. Their kings before any great decision have climbed some mountain, and of all these mountains Kailas, or Mount Meru, as it is called in the *Mahahharata*, was the most famous.

Ibid., 154.

Wondering at myself, I remember that when I first saw that house I was so full of the mediaevalism of William Morris that I did not like the gold frames, some deep and full of ornament, round the pictures in the drawingroom; years were to pass before I came to understand the earlier nineteenth and later eighteenth century, and to love that house more than all other houses. Every generation had left its memorial; every generation had been highly educated; eldest sons had gone the grand tour, returning with statues or pictures; Mogul or Persian paintings had been brought from the Far East by a Gregory chairman of the East India Company, great earthenware ewers and basins, great silver bowls, by Lady Gregory's husband, a famous Governor of Ceylon, who had married in old age, and was now some seven years dead

'Dramatis Personae (w. 1934, pub. 1935),' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume III. Autobiographies* edited by William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 291-292.

The mezzotints and engravings of the masters and friends of the old Gregorys that hung round the small downstairs breakfast-room, Pitt, Fox, Lord Wellesley, Palmerston, Gladstone, many that I have forgotten, had increased generation by generation, and amongst them Lady Gregory had hung a letter from Burke to the Gregory that was chairman of the East India Company saying that he committed to his care, now that he himself had

grown old, the people of India. In the hall, or at one 's right hand as one ascended the stairs, hung Persian helmets, Indian shields, Indian swords in elaborate sheaths, stuffed birds from various parts of the world, shot by whom nobody could remember, portraits of the members of Grillion's Club, illuminated addresses presented in Ceylon or Galway.

Ibid., 292-293.

My great-grandmother Corbet, the mistress of Sandymount Castle, had been out of Ireland but once. She had visited her son, afterwards Governor of Penang [for the East India Company], at his English school ... Born in 1852, [Lady Gregory] had passed her formative years in comparative peace, Fenianism a far-off threat; and her marriage with Sir William Gregory in her twenty-ninth year, visits to Ceylon, India, London, Rome, set her beyond the reach of the bitter struggle between landlord and tenant of the late 'seventies and early 'eighties.

Ibid., 295.

The distant in time and space live only in the near and present. Lady Gregory's successful translations from Moliere are in dialect. The Indian yogi sinks into a trance, his thought, like his eye, fixed upon the point of his tongue, symbolical of all the senses. He must not meditate upon abstractions, nor, because unseen, upon eye and ear.

Ibid., 325-326

The romantic movement with its turbulent heroism, its self-assertion, is over, superseded by a new naturalism that leaves man helpless before the contents of his own mind. One thinks of Joyce's *Anna Livia Plurabelle*, Pound's *Cantos*, works of an heroic sincerity, the man, his active faculties in suspense, one finger beating time to a bell sounding and echoing in the depths

of his own mind; of Proust who, still fascinated by Stendhal's fixed framework, seems about to close his eyes and gaze upon the pattern under his lids. This new art which has arisen in different countries simultaneously seems related, as were the three telegrams to the three bodies, to that form of the new realist philosophy which thinks that the secondary and primary qualities alike are independent of consciousness; that an object can at the same moment have contradictory qualities. This philosophy seems about to follow the analogy of an art that has more rapidly completed itself, and after deciding that a penny is bright and dark, oblong and round, hot and cold, dumb and ringing in its own right, to think of the calculations it incites, our distaste or pleasure at its sight, the decision that made us pitch it, our preference for head or tail, as independent of a consciousness that has shrunk back, grown intermittent and accidental, into the looking-glass. Some Indian Buddhists would have thought so had they pitched pennies instead of dice.

Ibid., 109.

1935

I notice that you have much lapis lazuli, some body has sent me a present of a great piece carved by some Chinease [sic] sculptor into the semblance of a mountain with temple, trees, paths & an ascetic & pupil about to climb the mountain. Ascetic, pupil, hard stone, eternal theme of the sensual east, the heroic cry in the midst of despair. But no, I am wrong the east has its solutions always & therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry.

W.B. Yeats letter to Dorothy Wellesley, 6 July 1935 [CL 6274].

Last night arrived from Harry Clifton a most lovely piece of Lapis Lazuli carved into a mountain with temple, trees & [?] sizes by some old Chinease [sic] sculptor.

W.B. Yeats letter to Lennox Robinson, 6 July [1935] [CL 6283].

Mrs Elliott is the result of the vulgarization of mystical philosophy by the theosophists, it has gone among people who should never have heard of it. The west is not the east. Among us the ignorant are not blessed nor are the poor simple. I once planned out a story to explain why Christ on his second coming must have the Last Supper at The Ritz.

W.B. Yeats letter to Gwyneth Foden, 28 July [1935] [CL 6304].

When the ascetic meditates upon the tip of his tongue, let us say, he begins with an object, and this object slowly transforms and is transformed by his thought until they are one. When he meditates upon an image of God, he begins with thought, God subjectively conceived, and this thought is slowly transformed by, and transforms its object, divine reality, until suddenly superseded by the unity of thought and fact. Yet he is not aware of all this, there is a voice that would persuade him to open his eyes too soon, the event is unforeseen, has taken place in what we call, because we sit in the stalls and watch the play, the unconscious. The Indian, upon the other hand, calls it the conscious, because, whereas we are fragmentary, forgetting, remembering, sleeping, waking, spread out into past, present, future, permitting to our leg, to our finger, to our intestines, partly or completely separate consciousness, it is the ‘unbroken consciousness of the Self,’ the Self that never sleeps, that is never divided, but even when our thought transforms it, is still the same. It is the Universal Self but also that of a civilisation ...

‘Introduction to “Mandukya Upanishad”,’ *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O’Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 159-160.

It is *Chitta*, perhaps, which most separates Indian from European thought. We think of man, his ideas and concepts facing external nature, or as fashioning that nature according to those ideas and concepts from unknown material or from nothing. *Chitta* is mental substance-mind-stuff is the more usual translation-and this substance must always take its shape from something; it is, as we would say, suggestible, it must copy some external object or symbolise the universal Self. If I shut my eyes and try to recall table and chair, I see them as transformations of the *Chitta*. Indeed, the actual table and chair are but the *Chitta* posited by the mind,--the personality, in space, where, because two things cannot occupy the same place, there is discord and suffering. By withdrawing into our own mind we discover the *Chitta* united to Heart and therefore pure.

Ibid., 161.

An Indian devotee may recognise that he approaches the Self through a transfiguration of sexual desire; he repeats thousands of times a day words of adoration, calls before his eyes a thousand times the divine image. He is not always solitary, there is another method, that of the Tantric philosophy, where a man and woman, when in sexual union, transfigure each other 's images into the masculine and feminine characters of God, but the man must not finish, vitality must not pass beyond his body, beyond his being.

Ibid., 162-163.

1936

The poem Lapis Lazuli is almost the best I have made of recent years, I will send it when I can get it typed. To-morrow I write a story to be added to the Michael Robartes series (a prelude to A Vision which I am now revising in proof). I have for

years been creat[ing] a group of strange disorderly people on whom Michael Robartes confers the wisdom of the east.

W.B. Yeats letter to Dorothy Wellesley, 26 July [1936] [CL 6622].

I have been in bed unable to do anything but sleep, yesterday I got up for the first time. I made this poem, out of a prose translation of a Japanese Hokku in praise of Spring.

A most astonishing thing,
 Seventy-years have I lived
 (Hurrah for the flowers of Spring,
 Spring is here again)
 Seventy years have I lived
 No famished beggar man,
 Seventy years, man & boy,
 Seventy years have I lived
 And never have I danced for joy.

My son has returned with your gift. I thank you for those charming things which I have placed beside my blue mountain, where the chinease [sic] musicians climb to the little guest house or temple. I think the locket may be a luck charm, and certainly this morning I am perfectly well & have still another subject for poetry

W.B. Yeats letter to Dorothy Wellesley, [30 December 1936] [CL 6764].

1937

I am an old Fenian & I think the old Fenian in me would rejoice if a Fachist [sic] nation or government controlled Spain because that would weaken the British Empire, force England to be civil to India perhaps to set them free, & loosen the hand of English finance in the far East, of which I hear occasionally. But this is

mere instinct. A thing I would never act on. Then I have a horror of modern politics — I see nothing but the manipulation of popular enthusiasm by false news — a horror that has been deepened in these last weeks by the Casement business. ... I must return to the day's business — correcting the final proofs of Shree Purohit Swami's & my translation of the Upanishads.

W.B. Yeats to Ethel Mannin, 11 February [1937] [CL 6806].

In a few days I shall send you the Translation of the Upanishads made by Shree Porhuit Swami with my help. Later in the year a curious book of spiritual philosophy by my self [sic]. This winter amid gloom & ill health you have come several times into my mind. Once I thought I had some kind of communication from you. I have thought of going to India with my own book of spiritual philosophy in my hand & hiding my self [sic] there for a time. But there is a practical difficulty of a personal kind which seems under present circumstances to make that impossible.

W.B. Yeats to Bhagwan Shri Hamsa, 12 March [1937] [CL 6855].

I went on Friday to the Indian Ballet & preferred it to the Russian even for behind the Indians were three thousand years of skill. There were no dreams, no passion in any personal sense, but a perfect union of body and intelligence [sic] - always bright sunlight.

To Lady Ottoline Morrell, 14 March [1937] [CL 6860].

I must give up India for the present. I was ready to risk going so far from my doctor but I now find that if I did so it would cause my wife great anxiety. She has not tried to prevent me in any way; but I have found out in various ways how great her anxiety would be.

I most sincerely hope to go later. I find myself thinking out plans for next year. My recovering from that nearly fatal illness has been slow & gradual — it will I think continue.

Before the end of the summer A Vision will be out & only in India can I find any body [sic] who can throw light upon certain of its problems.

To Shri Purohit Swami, 15 May [1937] [CL 6932].

I understand what you feal [sic] about those indean [sic] books. The teaching of English in India is the worst imaginable. Sturge Moore & I cut out of the Indean [sic] Monk & I cut out of the Holy Mountain 'dear readers' & like phrases without end. Yet in spite of all I find in both books an experience not described elsewhere & occupied with things of the first importance. I felt that I must get that experience recorded without interfearence [sic] from me or from my time. Every writer should say to himself every morning 'who am I that I should not seem a fool?' Certainly no European, & no Indian living in Europe, should attempt to live by an Indian ethic. Every civilization must create its own ethic.

To Edith Shackleton Heald, 6 August [1937] [CL 7036]

I had a delightful dream three nights ago in which I had simultanious [sic] affairs with an unknown eastern lady & the wife of Ezra Pound & then the Sultan, who was interested in both ladies, found out & when I woke up I was envolved [sic] in expanations [sic]. The next day I fell asleep beside the fire & a crackle from a larch log interrupted a visit from a third lady. Fortunately you will not hold me responsible for my dream that is only done in Tibet. I am at work on the Patangali aphorisms for the Swami & when this is done, as it should be this week, will take to writing verse,

W.B. Yeats letter to Edith Shackleton Heald, 14 November [1937] [CL 7116].

Months ago I received from Purohit Swami a series of drawings by an Indian artist illustrating the Yogi postures. I got him to have these made because as no translation of the Patanjali has contained them they are of obvious importance. With each drawing he sent the name and general use of each position. They were to form an appendix and like him I have been expecting that appendix.

To Richard de la Mare, 9 December 1937 [CL 7133].

When Lady Gregory asked me to annotate her *Visions and Beliefs* I began, that I might understand what she had taken down in Galway, an investigation of contemporary spiritualism. For several years I frequented those mediums who in various poor parts of London instruct artisans or their wives for a few pence upon their relations to their dead, to their employers, and to their children; then I compared what she had heard in Galway, or I in London, with the visions of Swedenborg, and, after my inadequate notes had been published, with Indian belief. If Lady Gregory had not said when we passed an old man in the woods, 'That man may know the secret of the ages,' I might never have talked with Shri Purohit Swami nor made him translate his Master's travels in Tibet, nor helped him translate the Upanishads. I think I now know why the gamekeeper at Coole heard the footsteps of a deer on the edge of the lake where no deer had passed for a hundred years, and why a certain cracked old priest said that nobody had been to hell or heaven in his time, meaning thereby that the Rath had got them all; that the dead stayed where they had lived, or near it, sought no abstract region of blessing or punishment but retreated, as it were, into the hidden character of their neighbourhood.

'A General Introduction for My Work (w. 1937),' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 209-210.

I recall an Indian tale: certain men said to the greatest of the sages, ‘Who are your Masters?’ And he replied, ‘The wind and the harlot, the virgin and the child, the lion and the eagle.’

‘An Introduction for My Plays [1937],’ *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume II, The Plays*, edited by David R. Clarke and Rosalind E. Clarke (New York: Scribner, 2001), 24-25.

Passages written by Japanese monks on attaining Nirvana, and one by an Indian, run in my head. ‘I sit upon the side of the mountain and look at a little farm. I say to the old farmer, ‘How many times have you mortgaged your farm and paid off the mortgage?’ I take pleasure in the sound of the rushes.’ ‘No more does the young man come from behind the embroidered curtain amid the sweet clouds of incense; he goes among his friends, he goes among the flute-players; something very nice has happened to the young man but he can only tell it to his sweetheart.’ ‘You ask me what is my religion and I hit you upon the mouth.’ ‘Ah! Ah! The lightning crosses the heavens, it passes from end to end of the heavens. Ah! Ah!’*

*I have compared these memories with their source in Suzuki’s Zen Buddhism, an admirable and exciting book, and find that they are accurate except that I have substituted here and there better sounding words. [Yeats’ footnote.]

The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume XIV. A Vision. The Revised 1937 Edition, edited by Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine E. Paul (New York: Scribner, 2015), 158, 399.

Hegel identifies Asia with Nature; he sees the whole process of civilization as an escape from Nature; partially achieved by Greece, fully achieved by Christianity.

The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume XIV. A Vision. The Revised 1937 Edition, edited by Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine E. Paul (New York: Scribner, 2015), 149.

In their pursuit of meaning, Day Lewis, MacNeice, Auden, Laura Riding have thrown off too much, as I think, the old metaphors, the sensuous tradition of the poets:

High on some mountain shelf
Huddle the pitiless abstractions bald about the neck,**

but have found, perhaps the more easily for that sacrifice, a neighbourhood where some new Upanishad, some half-Asiatic masterpiece, may scare up amid our averted eyes ... It pleases me to fancy that when we turn toward the East, in or out of church, we are turning not less to the ancient west and north; the one fragment of pagan Irish philosophy come down, 'the song of Amergin', seems Asiatic; that a system of thought like that of these books, though perhaps less perfectly organized, once overspread the world, as ours today;* that our genuflections discover in that East something ancestral in ourselves, something we must bring to the light before we can appease a religious instinct that for the first time in our civilization demands the satisfaction of the whole man.

*All Indian clerks in Government offices have just been ordered to wear trousers, so at any rate declares a London merchant, an exporter to India, who has decided to specialize in trouser-stretchers. It follows the flag. [Yeats' footnote.]

**From 'Eclogue for Christmas' by Louis MacNiece.

'The Ten Principal Upanishads,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Later Essays, Volume V*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York: Scribner's, 1994), 172-174, 389-390.

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I am out of sorts & will be while this weather lasts. Yesterday I reminded my self [sic] that an eastern sage had promised me a quiet death & hoped that it would come before I had to face On the Boiler No. 2.

W.B. Yeats letter to Dorothy Wellesley, 22 June [1938] [CL 7259].

I enclose the poem you asked for. In reading the third stanza remember the influence on Indian sculpter [sic] & upon the great seated Buddha of the sculptors who followed Alexander. Cuchulain is in the last stanza because Pearce [sic] & some of his followers had a cult of him. The Government has put a statue of Cuchulain in the rebuilt post office to commemorate this.

W.B Yeats letter to Edith Shackleton Heald, 28 June [1938] [CL 7262].

Painters of the Zen school of Japanese Buddhism have the idea of the coincidence of achievement & death & connect both with what they call 'poverty.' To explain poverty they point to those paintings where they have suggested peace & loneliness [sic] by some single object or by a few strokes of the brush.

W.B. Yeats letter to Ethel Mannin, 9 October [1938] [CL 7312].

Among those our civilization must reject, or leave unrewarded at some level below that co-ordination that modern civilization finds essential, exist precious faculties. When I was seven or eight I used to run around with a little negro girl, the only person at Rosses Point who could find a plover's nest, and I have noticed that clairvoyance, prevision, and allied gifts, rare among the educated classes, are common among peasants. Among these peasants there is much of Asia, where Hegel has said every civilization begins.

'On the Boiler,' *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume V, Later Essays*, edited by William H. O'Donnell (New York et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 238.

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