

MOUNT ABIEGNOS AND THE MASKS

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A STUDY OF OCCULT IMAGERY IN WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS AND FERNANDO PESSOA

In the last half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, a revival of interest in arcane sciences took place in Europe, perhaps as a reaction against the reigning Darwinist and Positivist beliefs and middle-class Christianity. In France, The Abbe Constant wrote a series of books on the occult arts under the name of Éliphas Lévi. He aroused much interest in the Kabala, a collection of Hebrew writings which mystics consider their sacred Bibles. The doctrines of the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, and the Swedenborgians enjoyed a considerable following. In 1887, Madam H.P. Blavatsky(the Russian traveler and mystic, founded her Theosophist Society in London, based on Eastern wisdom she culled on her arduous journeys through Asia. The following year, the Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn stablished their lodge in London. In the early twentieth century French Surrealists, in the words of Jacques Maritain, attempted to overthrow beauty as the corollary of verse and enthrone magic knowledge as the highest aim of poetry (1).

A similar wave of occultist activity swept Europe during and after the Renaissance, when Pico della Mirandola, Henry More, Paracelsus, J. V. Andrea and others delved in the hermetic doctrines of early Christian cults, Hebrew kabalistic literature, and Egyptian and Chaldean numerology, angelology and astrology.

(1) Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, Meridian Books 1961, Cleveland and N. Y. p. 143.

In this melange of occultism, two tendencies could be noted: the mystical and the magical. The mystic sought arcane knowledge that he might free himself from his self and be united with the unifying force of the world. The magician employed symbols, charms, incantations and numerological calculations that he might ascend the stairs of occult knowledge and gain control over the natural forces of the world, like Doctor Faustus. The mystic attempted to break the bonds of his constricting, orthodox faith and experience an epiphany, a direct communion with the Godhead. The magician, however limited himself to uttering the traditional incantations rigorously imposed by his cult.

From this fountain of opaque water, two of Europe's leading poets came to drink: Ireland's William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) and Portugal's Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935).

In Pessoa's veins ran the mystic blood of the crypto-Jews of Portugal, the Marranos. His remote ancestor Sancho Pessoa da Cunha, had been condemned by the Inquisition for "judaizing" in Coimbra in 1706. (2) It will be remembered that the Jews of Portugal directly influenced the mystic trend of that nation. In the 1490s the Jews flooded into Portugal, fleeing the Inquisition in Spain. The Inquisition was soon established in Portugal, and the Jews who could not flee were forced to become New Christians, or Marranos. Menaced by death at the stake and other tortures of the Holy Office, these Jews waited ardently for the Messiah to save them from their suffering. Suffering was a prerequisite for the coming of the Messiah, and one Jewish scholar described the Inquisition as the "birth pangs of the Messiah". This messianic fervor, via Solomon Molcho and David Reubeni, spread to the Portuguese, especially the shoemaker of Trancoso, Bandarra, and developed in the cult of Sebastianism. Dom Sebastian was a megalomaniacal, virgin king of Portugal who died in a crusade against the Moors at Alcacer Kebir in 1578. Pessoa brilliantly evoked this messianic longing in **Mensagem** and, in the last year of his life, declared his nation was in need of a "new Sebastianism". (3)

(2) João Gaspar Simões, *Vida e Obra de Fernando Pessoa*, Livraria Bertrand, Lisboa, Vol. 1, p. 22.

(3) *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 361.

Pessoa's nearer kin also had a mystic bent. His aunt, Ana Luisa Nogueira de Freitas, a spiritist, initiated him in the occult arts. He attended seances in her home in 1915 and 1916 and composed horoscopes. By tracing horoscopes, he believed he had foreseen the apoplectic stroke which attacked his mother, in Pretoria, South Africa, at the end of 1915. The stroke and the suicide of his best friend, Mario de Sa-Carneiro, early in 1916, plunged him into a severe depression. In this desolate emotional state he succeeded in "communicating" with the Beyond. (4)

Pessoa translated into Portuguese C.W. Leadbeater's **Compendium of Theosophy**, and Annie Besant's **Ideas of Theosophy** and **Theosophic Conferences**, the latter book under the pseudonym Fernando de Castro. (5) Annie Besant was one of the leaders of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophist movement to which Yeats belong for a time in 1890.

The Portuguese poet also took up automatic writing, or, to be more specific, automatic writing took up him. One night, after returning home from his favorite haunt, the Cafe Brasileira, he felt a sudden compulsion to sit down at the table and write. He wrote "Cousas sem relevo, nem interesse, nem importância", through the interventions of a medium who signed his name "Manuel Gualdino da Cunha", so the poet writes to his occultist aunt. "Manuel Gualdino da Cunha" was one of his uncles. (6) Pessoa also was actively interested in the Rosicrucians and the Knights Templars of Portugal, although the latter had been dormant for centuries.

In a letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro, Pessoa expounded his attitude toward the arcane sciences:

Creio na existência de mundos superiores ao nosso e de habitantes desses mundos, em experiências de diversos graus de espiritualidade, subtilizando-se até se chegar a um Ente Supremo, que presumivelmente criou este mundo. Pode ser que haja outros Entes, igualmente Supremos, que hajam criado outros universos, e que esses universos coexistam com o nosso, interpenetradamente ou não... Há três caminhos para o oculto: o caminho mágico (incluindo práticas como as

(4) *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 225.

(5) *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 226.

(6) *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 225.

do espiritismo, intelectualmente ao nível da bruxaria, que é magia também), caminho êsse extremamente perigoso, em toões os sentidos; o caminho místico, que não tem própria-mente perigos, mas é incerto e lento; e o que se chama o caminho alquímico, o mais difícil e o mais perfeito de todos, porque envolve uma transmutação da própria personalidade que a prepara, sem grandes riscos, antes com defesas que os outros caminhos não têm.

In March, 1890, Yeats joined the Hermetic Student of the Golden Dawn, an experience which, to use his own words, "shaped and isolated" him. (8) He had also been a member of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophist lodge for a time. The Golden Dawn stressed the importance of occult magic, whereas the Theosophists tended toward Eastern mysticism. Yeats also interested himself in the Rosicrucians and, like Pessoa, wrote a poem on Christian Rosenkreuz in his grave, called "The Mountain Tomb".

The Irish poet also experimented in automatic writing. Yeats wife, George, began an automatic writing experiment during their honeymoon in 1917 to distract him from some worries. The sentences she wrote aroused his interest, and he took it up as well. Though both had been acquainted with automatic writing previously, the results had not been so amazing. After a few days, the writings Yeats had collected were of such value, he dedicated several years to classify and explain them. (9) The result was **A Vision**, a book first published in 1925, which splains Yeats doctrine of the soul, as well as his concept of the cyclical nature of history, symbolized by the twenty eight phases of the moon.

Yeats employed images and spells to put himself into a trance. In this state of exaltation, according to his own account, he would receive visions whose source was beyond his individual mind. They might have been wishful thinking and apprehensions, but he chose to believe they were emanations from the Universal Memory and the incorporeal in-

(7) Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 233.

(8) Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, Faber, London, 1949 p. 89.

(9) A. G. Stock, *W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 122.

telligences that floated through the world. (10) In an essay on "Magic", Yeats wrote:

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depth of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundation of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:

- (1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
- (2) That the borders of our memories are shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
- (3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. (11).

Owing to their common interests, Yeats and Pessoa employed common hermetic images in their art: Mount Abiegnos, the Rose and the Cross, the Initiation into the Hidden Truths, the illusory nature of death, and the Mask.

Of the images, perhaps the most exotic and the least familiar is Mount Abiegnos. Abiegnos was an ancient nomad village of Scythia on the banks of the Yaxartes River. In Greek mythology, it was considered a type of terrestrial paradise, similar to the fabulous land of the Hyperboreans, the happy blessed folk who lived in the far north. Homer in the *Iliad* (XIII 4-7) called the Abians the "justed of mankind". They were fierce fighters in the Trojan War. Strabo said that the Abians were nomadic Scythians who lived on the banks of the Danube. (12)

(10) *Ibid.* p. 81.

(11) William Butler Yeats, *Collected Works in Verse and Prose*, Chapman and Hall, 1908, Vol. VI, p. 23.

(12) *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo Americana*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid-Barcelona, p. 415, Vol. I.

Homere, *Iliade*, traduction par Eugène Barette, Lavigne Libraire, Paris, 1843, pp. 281-2.

Iliad and Odyssey, translated by Samuel Butler, Great Books, Encyclopaedia Britannica 1952, U.S.A., p. 88.

To the Golden Dawn and other secret mystic lodges, Mount Abiegno became the mount of mystic ascension through purification of the soul, the mountain of infinite knowledge. In Fernando Pessoa's poem, "Na Sombra do Monte Abiegno", the poet attempts to reach the castle atop the mountain, but cannot even find the path. Perhaps the "Castle" is the "inner castle" of the great Spanish mystic Santa Teresa de Avila, the goal of her ardent quest toward unification with God. In Pessoa's poem, the poet, having freed himself of all longing and desires and having renounced all the pleasures of the world, rests in the shadow of the mountain:

Na sombra do Monte Abiegno
Repousei de meãitar.
Vi no alto o alto Castelo
Onde sonhei de chegar.
Mas repousei de pensar
Na sombra do Monte Abiegno.

Quando fôra amor ou vida,
Atrás de mim o deixei,
Quando fôra desejá-los,
Porque esqueci não lembrei.
À sombra do Monte Abiegno
Repousei porque abdiquei.

Lacking the strength and the will to attain the mountain, the poet rests without really resting, for he cannot enjoy repose in sight of the Castle that lures him with its promise of infinite knowledge, purification, and unity with God. The poet dreams of discovering the route to the castle of knowledge, and in the final stanza, suggests that the lack of this knowledge condemns him to a life of ignorant sleep:

Talvez um dia, mais forte
Da força ou da abdicação,
Tentarei o alto caminho
Por onde ao Castelo vão.
Na sombra do Monte Abiegno
Por ora repouso, e não.

Quem pode sentir descanso
Com o Castelo a chamar?
Está no alto, sem caminho
Senão o que há por achar.
Na sombra do Monte Abiegno
Meu sonho é de o encontrar.

Mas por ora estou dormindo,
Porque é sono o não saber.
Olho o Castelo de longe,
Mas não olho o meu querer.
Da sombra do Monte Abiegno
Quem me virá desprender?

(1932)

Sometime before 1926, Yeats wrote a poem about Mount Abiegno, entitled "Images". This unfinished work was published in 1949, ten years after the poet's death, by Richard Ellmann in his perceptive study *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*. Yeats' Mount Abiegno is not so much a station of mystic ascension as a paradise where humans, after having been animals, are restored to their original form by a magic wine and laugh lustily. Still part animal, they acrouch on all fours and Howl when the wind blows. Is their miraculous wine the mare's milk Strabo said the Abians drank? (13) These inhabitants, Yeats tells us, were the genitors of the sages. According to Ellmann, Yeats had originally intended to use Mount Abiegno to symbolize that ideal land where the fury of human passions is united with the spiritual, a land he later called "Byzantium". (14)

Images

I

On Abiegno's side a multitude
Restored by drinking that miraculous wine
To human form; Day beats upon their eyes
Sounds of unfinished battle on their ears;
One sways his head and laughs, another weeps,
Then all laugh out, discovering in laughter
That the dark valey at the mountain foot
Where wold must war on walk, abounding grass
Grow out of that foul blood, is magical;
That they imagined it and bound themselves
Therein contented with that bitter-sweet;
But the wind changes and the valley howls;
One howls his answer back and one by one
They drop upon all fours, creep valley-wards.
Question that instant for these forms O heart
These chuckling & howling forms begot the sages (15).

(13) apud Homere, *Iliade*, op. cit. footnote, p. 281.

(14) Ellmann, op. cit., p. 273.

(15) *Ibid.* pp. 273-4.

In Yeats' poem the mountain does not appear to assume the significance of ascension and purification. However, Annie Besant, a fellow Theosophist in London, described the mountain of spiritual initiation, without giving it the name Abiegnos. Origen, also spoke of the mountain Jesus ascended, from which he came down again to help "those who were made to follow Him whither his disciples went." (16)

Annie Besant taught that every man is a potential Christ, and the development of the spirit of the Christlike man follows the pattern of the Gospel. There are five initiations in the life of a Christ, each one of which is a station in the Unfolding of the Life of Love:

1) The birth of Christ inside the disciple. He feels the flow of God's love and becomes transformed, feeling one with all that lives. This is called the Second Birth, which takes place in the Cave of the Initiation. Above the cave the Star of Initiation shines whenever a Christ child is enointed with the chrism of the Second Birth.

2) The baptism of a Christ by Water and the Spirit. These give him the powers required to labor in the world as the "beloved son".

3) The ascension of the Mountain of Initiation. Here he is transfigured and meets some of his great forerunners, the Mighty Ones of Old. On passing this initiation, the Shadow of this coming Passion falls on him, and he steadfastly sets his face toward Jerusalem.

4) The Triumph into Jerusalem. He is ready for the Sacrifice. Crucified, the Initiate descends from the Cross and harrows Hell, then rises to earth and teaches his disciples how to unveil the mysteries.

5) The final and greatest initiation: his ascension to the Father. He becomes the "Master Triumphant", the link between the human and the divine. (17)

In 1907, Yeats rewrote the play "Where There is Nothing", with the help of Lady Gregory, Irish playwright and Maecenas. In one passage, the hero, Martin Hearne, in his dying speech, exclaims,

(16) apud Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity or the Lesser Mysteries*, John Lane the Bodley Head, New York, 1902, p. 90.

(17) *Ibid.* pp. 184-8.

"Ah that is blood! I fell among the rocks. It is a hard climb. It is a long climb to the vineyards of Eden. Help me up. I must go on. The Mountain of Abiegnos is very high — but the vineyards — the vineyards!" (18).

In this drama, Yeats' symbol of the mountain, unlike that of his poem, represents the spiritual struggle, the depuration of the soul. The hero's longing for the mountain is the poet's own hunger for ascension.

Between 1906 and 1909, Yeats renewed his activities with the Golden Dawn, after an interruption of several years. In 1909, he wrote a rough draft of a study, connected with the work of the Golden Dawn, a key document that explains, not only his interpretation of Mount Abiegnos, but of Christian Rosenkruz as well:

Imagine yourself as being led through a forest or other wild place at nightfall by the light of a star — the only star visible — this is the morning or evening star [Venus] the star of the side of the vault through which the initiate enters — you come to a mountain side. This mountain the central mountain of the world, is represented in old prints as having a flat top on which is Eden, a great walled garden. The birds of the night cry one by one. You can go no further but are lost among confused cries of birds in the night and in the gathering darkness. You make the sign of the rending of the veil and say Pawketh. There is a light suddenly and mouth of cave appears which shines with light. You approach the cave and cry out the word SHIEH and make the sign O and T. The cave is seven sided and the walls are carved with Egyptian or earlier figures. In the middle of that cave is a sarcophagus. You make the sign of 5 equals 6 and lie down in the pastos. Around are three figures, one of whom places on the breast the rose, one places in the right hand the tree sign and one in the left the lotus. You gaze upward at the rose and say, 'O Rose of Rubies grant to me the knowledge of 7 earth keys and the power over these. Let me know what I have been what I am and what I shall become.' Then think of yourself as passing into deep sleep and as you sleep cry out 'O rose take me up into thy joy'. Think of the soul as ascending into a world of light and knowledge where the meaning of life will become clear. Rise into the supernal Eden. (19).

The sarcophagus in the cave is that of Christian Rosenkruz, the sacred figure of the Rosicrucians, whose sym-

(18) Yeats, "The Unicorn from the Stars", *Collected Plays*, London, Macmillan, 1934, p. 382.

(19) Ellman, *op. cit.*, pp. 191-2.

bol is the Rose and the Cross. Both Yeats and Pessoa were drawn to this cult. Valentin Andrea (1586-1654), chaplain of the court of Wurtemberg and leader of the Fraternity of the Rosicrucians, "revealed" the origins of Christian Rosenkreuz. He was born in Germany in 1378, journeyed to the East where he reached the Sanctuary of the Kabala in Damascus, then returned to Germany with a marvellous baggage of occult knowledge. He retired to his village and lived the life of a hermit in a cave. Death forgot him until 1484. When his sepulchre was discovered in 1604, his followers found this inscription:

After one hundred and twenty years I shall be discovered. (20)

Numerous societies called Rosicrucians existed throughout Europe in the fifteenth century, long before his sepulchre was "discovered". Martin Luther, Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus were members of Rosicrucian fraternities, as well as the German Philosophers of Fire and the Pan-sophists. Paracelsus described the Rose as a multifoliate flower with the fraternal letter F embedded in the middle. (21) The Rose was perhaps the Rose of Hermes Thot, of Egypt and Chaldea. Its perfume was the revelation of life; the multiplicity of its petals symbolized multiplicity and perfect unity wedded together in harmony. The Rose symbolized the blood of Christ, and was an ancient emblem of secrecy. Its petals enclose each other, as walls enclose a garden of contemplation.

In 1893, Yeats published a book of poems entitled "The Rose", in which he constantly employed the symbol: "incorruptible rose", secret and inviolate rose" "multifoliate rose", the "red-rose-bordered hem" of Ireland. In one poem, "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time", he links the Rosicrucian symbol to Celtic myth:

I would before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.

In a similar vein, Pessoa links the Rose and the Cross to Portuguese mythology, in "O Encoberto", from *Mensagem*. The

(20) Francois Ribadeau Dumas, *Historie de la Magie*, Les Productions de Paris, pp. 238-40.

(21) *Ibid.*

“Encoberto” or “Hidden One” is Dom Sebastian, who will return from the mist-enshrouded Blessed Isles and establish the Fifth Empire on the earth, with Portugal as the Holy See :

Que símbolo fecundo
Vem na aurora ansiosa?
Na Cruz Morta do Mundo
A Vida, que é a Rosa.

Que símbolo divino
Traz o dia já visto?
Na Cruz, que é o Destino,
A Rosa, que é o Cristo.

Que símbolo final
Mostra o sol já desperto?
Na Cruz morta e fatal
A Rosa do Encoberto.

Philo the Younger and the Venerable Bede taught that Adam willed his own Fall. The Rosicrucians interpret the sacred letters on the Cross I N R I to mean: **In Necis Renascor Integer** (I am reborn intact and pure through death) (22). These doctrines help to explain Pessoa's reference to Adam's Fall, which he likens to Christ's descent to flesh and blood, in the poem **No túmulo de Christian Rosenkreutz**:

Deus é o Homem de outro Deus maior:
Adão Supremo, também teve Queda
Também, como foi nosso Criador,

Foi criado, e a Verdade lhe morreu...

We are mere shadows in search of bodies in this world, a key tenet of Pessoa's Neoplatonism:

Sombras buscando corpos, se os achamos
Como sentir a sua realidade?
Com mãos de sombra, Sombras, que tocamos?
Nosso toque é ausência e vacuidade.

At the end of the poem, Christian Rosenkreuz, falsely dead, his body unstained by corruption, fails to open his mouth and reveal the secret knowledge of the universe:

Calmo na falsa morte a nós exposto,
O Livro ocluso contra o peito pôsto,
Nosso Pai Roseacruz conhece e cala.

(22) Ibid.

In Yeats' poem, "The Mountain Tomb", Father Rosicross, though he has seen the secrets of the world, fails to open his onyx eyes. His death, is a source of great merriment, typical of an Irish wake, where the peasants dance and drink and laugh and cry when a close friend or kin is laid in the ground:

Pour wine and dance if manhood still have pride,
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;
The cataract smokes upon the mountain side,
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet
That there be no foot silent in the room
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet;
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain; the cataract still cries;
The everlasting taper lights the gloom;
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes,
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

Another occultist doctrine common to both poets is the rite of Initiation. Perfection in the arcane arts comes from self-depuration, solitude, concentration and study. The neophyte in the occult lodge undergoes a series of progresses or initiations which lead him further from his own personality, until he attains magic knowledge by which he can control the material and spiritual forces of the universe. When the initiate passes through the first steps of his ordeal, he becomes, so to speak, purified and begins a new life. He often assumes a new name, which only the other members of the order know.

Yeats attempted to change his self, without fully succeeding. He wrote to a fellow member of the Golden Dawn that he had undertaken "Eastern meditations but with the object of trying to lay hands upon some dynamic and substantializing force as distinguished from the Eastern quiescent and supersensualizing state of the soul — a movement downwards upon life, not upwards out of life" (23).

In Pessoa's "Eros e Psique", the initiate undergoes severe trials and, after overcoming them, discovers the road that leads him to the Sleeping Princess, the long-sought goal who is actually himself. Pessoa's French translator, Armand Guibert, suggests the poem is an allegory, a medieval legend ins-

(23) Ellmann, op. cit. p. 190-1.

pired by the “trobar clus” poetry, in which the initiate, after undergoing the rigors of the mystic quest, becomes identical with the object of his search, an image employed by Spenser in his *Fairie Queene*. (24) Hence the presence of the epigraph:

...E assim vêdes, meu Irmão, que as verdades que
vos foram dadas no Grau de Neófito, e aquelas que
vos foram dadas no Grau de Adepto Menor, são, ainda
que opostas, a mesma verdade.

*Do Ritual do Grau de Mestre do Atrio
Na Ordem Templária de Portugal*

Conta a lenda que dormia
Uma Princesa encantada
A quem só despertaria
Um Infante, que viria
De além do muro da estrada.

Ele tinha que, tentado,
Vencer o mal e o bem,
Antes que, já libertado,
Deixasse o caminho erraço
Por o que à Princesa vem.

A Princesa Adormecida,
Se espera, dormindo espera.
Sonha em morte a sua vida,
E orna-lhe a fronte esquecida,
Verde, uma grinalda de hera.

Longe o Infante, esforçado,
Sem saber que intuito tem,
Rompe o caminho fadaço.
Ele dela é ignorado.
Ela para ele é ninguém.

Mas cada um cumpre o Destino —
Ela dormindo encantada,
Ele buscando-a sem tino
Pelo processo divino
Que faz existir a estrada.

E, se bem que seja obscuro
Tudo pela estrada fora,
E falso, ele vem seguro,
E, vencendo estrada e muro,
Chega onde em sono ela mora.

E, ainda tonto do que houvera,
À cabeça, em maresia,
Ergue a mão, e encontra hera,
E vê que ele mesmo era
A Princesa que dormia.

(24) Pessoa, *Fernando Pessoa, Presentation par Armand Guilbert, poètes d'aujourd'hui*, Editions Pierre Seghers, Paris, 1960, p. 86.

Proclus taught that the Initiates in every generation are very few, and the "saved", those who purify their souls of all imperfections, are freed from the circle of generation. (25) According to Annie Besant, an old Jewish belief asserts that all imperfect souls return to live again on earth. (26.) Yeats himself entertained Proclus' thought in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul". The Soul, speaking to the Self, declares that the process of procreation is a crime from which it can be liberated if the mind, instead of dwelling on past loves and wars, would contemplate the ancestral night of the soul:

Why should the imagination of a man
Long past his prime remember things that are
Emblematical of love and war?
Think of ancestral night that can,
If but imagination scorn the earth
And intellect its wandering
To this and that and t'other thing,
Deliver from the crime of death and birth.

Yeats and Pessoa have a remarkably similar outlook on death. Both consider death as a mere illusion, a false idea of the mind. To Pessoa, death reintegrates man in the Unity from which he was separated on birth. (27) Writing under the name "Fernando Pessoa", he considers death as a mere curve in the road, after which we are not seen, but exist just the same.

A Morte é a curva da estrada,
Morrer é só não ser visto.
Se escuto, eu te oiço a passada
Existir como eu existo.

A terra é feita de céu.
A mentira não tem ninho.
Nunca ninguém se perdeu.
Tudo é verdade e caminho.

In "**Iniciação**", the initiate, after passing through the night of death and the Hostelry of Fear, enters the final dark cavern and discovers that death does not exist:

Por fim, na funôa caverna,
Os Deuses despem-te mais.
Teu corpo cessa, alma externa,
Mas vês que são teus iguais.
.....
Neófito, não há morte.

(25) Annie Besant, op. cit. p. 41.

(26) Ibid.

(27) João Gaspar Simões, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 260.

The "heteronym" Alvaro de Campos assumes a double outlook on death in "**Se te queres matar**", written on the tenth anniversary of the suicide of Pessoa's close friend Mario de Sá Carneiro. This death, looking back on it from a distance of ten years, was only a "**tragedia um pouco maçadora**". Though stone dead on earth, he was very much alive Beyond:

Em tu mera causa ocasional daquela carpidação,
Tu verdadeiramente morto, muito mais morto que calculas...
Muito mais morto aqui que calculas,
Mesmo que estejas muito mais vivo além...

Yeats believed that the mind of man had such powers, it could create reality and control the forces of the universe. In "**The Tower**", he brazenly suggests that the mind of man created life and death and Paradise:

Death and life were not
Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of this bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that
That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar Paradise.

He later changed his attitude toward death. In a letter to Ethel Mannin, he wrote: "All things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other's life, live each other's death. That is true of life and death themselves." (28)

The idea of the Mask, however, is what links Pessoa most directly to Yeats. A mask has several functions. It may be the face one wears for society. It may be a shard of one's fragmented personality. It may be the personality one strives to become—one's opposite or counter self.

Yeats, in "**The Mask**", suggests the mask is more fascinating and important than the face behind it. The lover is lured by the beloved's mask, not her face:

Put off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes.'
'O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not sold.'

(28) Ellmann, op. cit., p. 285-6.

'I would but find what's there to find,
Love or deceit.'
'It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind."

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Pessoa, through the heteronym Alvaro de Campos, expresses the anguish with which he seeks his own identity—putting on masks and dominos to find out who he really is:

O dominó que vesti era errado.
Conheceram-se logo por quem não era e não desmenti, e
[perdi-me].
Quando quis tirar a máscara,
Estava pegada à cara.

The mask was a common symbol floating in the poetic circles of the nineteenth century and early twentieth. Oscar Wilde, explaining his preference to live in the elegant section of London, wrote in a letter to Yeats: "Olive Schreiner is staying on the East End because that is the only place where people do not wear masks upon their faces, but I have told her that I live on the West End because nothing in life interests me but the mask." (29)

Yeats' theory on the subject is succinctly explained by Ellmann in *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*:

"The mask is the difference between one's own and other people's conceptions of one's personality. To be conscious of the discrepancy which makes a mask of this sort is to look at oneself as if one were somebody else. In addition, the mask is a defensive armour: we wear it, like the light lover, to keep from being hurt. So protected, we are only slightly involved no matter what happens. This theory seems to assume that we can be detached from experience like actors from a play. Finally, the mask is a weapon of attack; we put it on keep up a noble conception of ourselves; it is a heroic ideal which we try to live up to. As a character in "The Player Queen" affirms, 'To be great we must seem so...Seeming.

That goes on for a lifetime is no different from reality". (30).

(29) Yeats, *Selected Prose*, edited by Norman Jeffares, London, Macmillan, 1964, p. 2.

(30) Ellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 175-6.

A fundamental theme in Pessoa's poetry is this very equation of pretending with reality. In "Autopsicografia", the poet must be a pretender in order to tell the truth. Ernesto da Cal, in a perceptive analysis of the poem, likens Pessoa's outlook to Nietzsche's idea that "Only the poet who is capable of lying, consciously and voluntarily, is capable of telling the truth". (31)

O poeta é um fingidor.
Finje tão completamente
Que chega a fingir que é dor
A dor que deveras sente.

Pessoa once said that to simulate is to know oneself. This simulation is the source of his heteronyms.

Lawrence Sterne wrote in *Tristram Shandy* that a man, merely by the influence of the name given him, may be Caesared to greatness or Nicodemused to nothing. Pessoa perhaps fulfilled a destiny embodied in his name, derived from the Latin word "persona", which means a character in a play or a mask. Pessoa invented three poet-personalities which he called "heteronyms" who wrote poems whose form and content did not necessarily reflect the author's ideas. He gave them individual names, styles and biographies: Alberto Caeiro, the naturalist pagan poet; Ricardo Reis, the classicist imitator of Anacreon and Horace; and Alvaro de Campos, the frenetic neurasthenic naval engineer in voluntary inactivity, anxiously seeking his own identity. Aside from this trio, he wrote poetry under his own name, and created prose writers whom he named Barão de Teive and Bernardo Soares. Pessoa insisted on his right as an artist to create these fictitious characters who wrote ideas he might not accept as his own, just as Shakespeare's characters do not necessarily express the playwright's views.

Se assim é das personagens fictícias sem drama, pois que é lícito porque elas são fictícias e não porque estão num drama. (32)

(31) Ernesto da Cal, notes to Fernando Pessoa's poem, "Autopsicografia", in *The Poem Itself*, edited by Stanley Burnshaw, Meridian Books, Cleveland and New York, 1962, pp. 198-99.

(32) Fernando Pessoa, *Obras Poéticas*, edited by Maria Aliete Dores Galhoz, Editora José Aguilar, Rio, 1960, p. 132.

Are these heteronyms the poet's masks? Pessoa, even in his moments of greatest sincerity, still is a master pretender. Just as Hamlet expresses, though not always, certain fundamental thoughts of Shakespeare, so Alvaro de Campos, Ricardo Reis and Alberto Caeiro echo ideas of their maker.

In *A Vision*, which Yeats wrote as a result of his automatic writing experiments, the Irish poet sums up his principal beliefs about life, the supernatural and the process of history. The Mask is a central concept of the book. To Yeats, each man's destiny is shaped by the "four faculties of the soul", which he calls "Will", "Mask", "Creative Mind", and "Body of Fate". (33) The Will is force, energy, the vital impulse toward selffulfillment. The Will sets as its goal that which it considers worthy of admiration, that which is opposite to its own nature, its counter-self. The goal it seeks is its Mask. Through the Will and the Mask the soul is formed. The Creative Mind is general knowledge, innate knowledge in man, and the principles he learned in his previous existences. The Creative Mind strives to understand all the causes and effects of the universe. These are the Body of Fate. (34)

Both Yeats and Pessoa, like the French Surrealists, attempt to establish magic knowledge as the corollary of poetry. Dissatisfied with existing religions, both sought mystic ascension through art. Yeats uses the image of the alchemists to express what he sought to achieve in his poetry:

All art in the last analysis is an endeavor to condense as out of the flying vapour of the world an image of human perfection, and for its own and not for the art's sake, and that is why the labor of the alchemists, who were called artists in their day, is a befitting comparison for all deliberate change of style. (35)

Unable to believe in the simple peasant faith of the Irish masses because of the discoveries of Darwin and other scientists, Yeats created his own religion "almost an infallible church of poetic tradition", based on folk legends, various imaginary personalities and emotions which poets and painters, and a few philosophers and theologians, handed down from

(33) Yeats, *A. Vision*, Macmillan, London, 1961, pp. 71-74

(34) A. G. Stock, op. cit. p. 124.

(35) Ellmann, op. cit. p. 189

generation to generation. "I had even created a dogma," he write: "Because those imaginary people are created out of the deepest instinct of man, to be his measure and his norm, whatever I can imagine those mouths speaking may be the nearest I can go to truth."

For Pessoa, poetry is the only reality he finds in this world and the vehicle by which he may find the reality of the other world. In "Livro de Desassossêgo, the poet, writing under the heteronym Bernardo Soares, declares: "... **A poesia, enfim, em que o poeta, como o iniciado em uma ordem oculta, é servo, ainda que voluntário, de um grau e de um ritual**". (36)

Alvaro de Campos, in the pamphlet *Ultimatum*, deprecates the early Yeats, poet of the languid, misty "Celtic twilight". He calls him "**bruma à roda de poste sem indicações, saco de poderes, que veio à praia do naufrágio do simbolismo inglês!**" (37) Yet Campos' creator had too much in common with the Irish poet to reject him so brazenly. Pessoa, when he wears the mask of the mystic, believes, like Yeats, in the purifying nature of art and the rejoining of the soul to the universal Unity upon death. Both affirm that the soul, to use Yeats' words, is made from "the imperishable substance of the stars".

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