

## Yeats's Early Masks and Identity

—With Reference to His Later Works—

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“The Sad Shepherd,” that is, the companion to “The Song of the Happy Shepherd,” the first poem in the *Collected Poems*, suggests that the man alienated from nature should aspire to the pearl which seems to mean both his mask and his identity, but which, as his identity, gets to look obscure or not clear in meaning.

In the first chapter these two “shepherd poems” are investigated in terms of masks and identity, especially in the light of the process of composition of Yeats's other early works. The author concludes that the masks depend on the self-consciousness of the poet: his self-conscious pursuit of his own identity results in the production of the masks, such as the pearl in “The Sad Shepherd.”

In the second chapter, Yeats's early poetic play “The Island of the Statues” is investigated referring to the characterizations, of the people in the play, especially of Almintor whose character is ambiguous: he can be regarded as either the mask or the identity. Readers may have been satisfied with him as a symbol of the identity, but Yeats seems to have left that problem, which should be solved through his understanding of Daisetz Suzuki's Zen thought as described in the author's *Yeats and Zen*. In this Island the stony statues also mean either the masks or identities of the

heroes : they are ambiguous.

In the third chapter “ The Wanderings of Oisín, ” the most well-known of Yeats’s narrative poems, is referred to. The main theme of this chapter is the problem of the relations between Mask and Identity. Yeats adopted for this story of Oisín the well-known hero in Celtic mythology, for, after noticing the difference between the masks and the identity, he found in Oisín a Celtic hero, that mask which can be united with the identity of an Irishman. In order to make such an identity his mask, he chose the form of narrative poetry, for the form of narrative can go along with the memory of the past and the form of poetry is more amenable to the mood of reverie or day-dream : the memory and such a mood can give the play a unified world and the hero with his own identity. Besides, that mood of reverie along with symbols or images can transfer the past events in the narrative poem to the present. The Cabbalistic images also contribute to such a transference. In fact the influence of the Cabbala in this narrative poem helps the readers to enter more easily the meditative world or the dream world with its “ dateless leisure and unrepining peace ” (Yeats : “ Edmund Spenser ”), which Yeats was soon to avoid and exchange it for the influence of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* : Marlowe’s poetry “ is more energetic in its sensuality, more complicated in its intellectual energy than this languid story ” (*Ibid.*). In addition the author considers the influence of Blake upon Yeats, and Blake seems to have taught him “ seeing reality through vision, ” which later led to his discovery of the seeing of Zen. In the fourth chapter, “ Where There Is Nothing, ” an early play composed in 1902-3, is investigated in detail. This play is very important in that it seems to have prepared

Yeats for the composition of “ The Player Queen, ” a middle play composed in 1907-22. In the former play (Act I, Sc. 2) Paul points out the difference between the masks and the identities in the people around him. Paul cannot stand those people who suggest the Self in Yeats. Paul’s aspiring to the masks seems to be ironical ; they are at first tinkers and then “ disfroked monks, ” although the children of the tinkers are apparently horrible, and the priests inclined to become outdated. Paul’s words before his martyrdom suggest that Identity should be confirmed and established individually or in one’s own mind, and not in a group. Such an individual or personal establishment of Identity may lead to that internal inclination of the masks, especially in Yeats’s later works. Earlier, he conceives the antithesis of Self and Mask. Such an antithesis is found in “ The Player Queen ” as referred to in the fifth chapter. In Yeats’s later period and in his last phase, he seems to find in Suzuki’s Zen thought that identity which should be made one with masks. Identity is to masks what the root of a tree is to the leaf, the blossom, or the bole.