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**STUDI IRLANDESI**  
**A JOURNAL OF IRISH STUDIES**

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*Yeatses*

The Yeatsian Multiverse

edited by  
Arianna Antonielli





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# Yeatses: The Yeatsian Multiverse

## Issues of Non-linear Time and Alternate Realities in W.B. Yeats's Literary World

Arianna Antonielli

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The second issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, published in 2012, was the first to be entirely devoted to W.B. Yeats's work. We have since felt the urgency to shed new light on the vast and multifaceted body of work he authored. This issue of *Studi irlandesi* aims to explore the layers of complexity and richness that define the Yeatsian universe, both in its poetic and thematic dimensions, which Fiorenzo Fantaccini and I have enthusiastically termed the “Yeatsian multiverse”.

The multiverse theory reveals a rich interplay of ideas that challenge our understanding of reality and inspire new ways of thinking about the universe and our place inside it. The theory draws from Hugh Everett III's (1957) Many-Worlds Interpretation (MWI) of quantum mechanics, suggesting that all possible outcomes of quantum measurements are realized in separate branches of the universe. Each random event creates a new branch, leading to a vast multiverse of possibilities. This concept helps us encompass both the existence of multiple, potentially infinite, artistic universes crafted by Yeats and the expansive, profound nature of his poetic lines – *multiverses*.

All the contributions included in this issue focus on one – or more – of Yeats's multiple poetic and literary realms: nationalism and political engagement, esotericism and occultism, theatrical stances and diverse forms of translation, as well as Yeats's insights into the human condition. His engagement with the esoteric and the occult, for instance, is not just an artistic endeavor, rather it is a profound exploration of the spiritual dimensions of human existence. His involvement with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and his fascination

with mysticism deeply influenced his poetry and plays, infusing them with layers of symbolic meaning that resonate with the universal themes of life and death. Similarly, his political writings and activities, deeply rooted in the cultural and national identity of Ireland, offer a rich tapestry of historical and cultural reflections that continue to inspire critical thinking.

To explore the Yeatsian multiverse is to venture into a maze where the boundaries between reality and imagination are blurred, and human experience is woven into the fabric of myth, history, and personal introspection. Here, Irish culture, political engagement, materiality, spiritual transcendence, artistic immortality, and apocalyptic imagery intertwine, creating an intricate narrative that challenges and enriches our understanding of his production. Such plurality is reflected in the contributors' approach to Yeats's corpus, by showcasing a committed engagement with his diverse styles, themes, and perspectives. This deeper, more nuanced look at Yeats's literary worlds allows readers to appreciate the full scope of his genius and the enduring relevance of his work in contemporary literary discourse.

This multifaceted exploration aims not only to revisit Yeats's contributions but also to engage with his work in a way that reflects the dynamic nature of contemporary scholarship. Encompassing the manifold complexity of the Yeatsian multiverse opens up new pathways to understand and interpret Yeats's works, thus ensuring that Yeats's legacy continues to evolve and inspire future generations of readers and scholars.

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In terms of Yeats's system, is this beast the avatar of the new dispensation? Its herald? Its symbol? A symbol of preceding disorder? Its Daimon? How do other images and symbolic figures in Yeats's later work relate to it? (Mann 2024, *infra*, 27)

Neil Mann's essay, "Yeats's Daimonic Birds and Beasts of Apocalypse", looks at the complex symbolism in Yeats's works, particularly the daimonic elements represented by birds and mythical beasts. With its dual nature and its varying representations in animal form, the Daimon is a central figure in Yeats's poetic and philosophical framework. Mann combines textual analysis and historical/biographical material to connect Yeats's automatic writing sessions conducted with his wife George and their literary and symbolic developments. As Neil Mann shows, the Daimon is an evolving concept in Yeats's work, which shifted from an antagonistic counterpart to an archetype spanning multiple lives. This evolution is also mirrored in Yeats's poetic symbols, such as the swan, the dove, the unicorn, and the sphinx, each embodying different aspects of the Daimon and its influence on individual and collective realities. Mann's close reading of "The Second Coming" and "Leda and the Swan" offers a nuanced understanding of Yeats's visionary system, illustrating how the daimonic element is represented on a macrocosmic level through the figures of the dove and the swan in the annunciations to Mary and to Leda.

As in a kaleidoscope where various colored glass pieces mix to form ever-changing images with each rotation of the cylinder, Yeats's poetry shines with colors, images, illuminations, sudden epiphanies, and the irruption of forms and figures that seem to emerge from the rich, hypertrophic deposit of symbols that the poetic word brings forth in a readable form each time. (Serpillo 2024, *infra*, 39)

In "*Jeux de Cartes: i tarocchi e la poesia di W.B. Yeats*", Giuseppe Serpillo discusses

the profound influence of Tarot imagery and symbolism on Yeats's poetry. Serpillo begins by recounting Yeats's well-known fascination with the occult, noting his involvement with several mystical societies, such as the Hermetic Society and the Golden Dawn, as well as his connections with prominent occult figures like Madame Blavatsky. For Serpillo, Yeats's interest in the Tarot became an essential tool for meditation and symbolic exploration within these circles. In his autobiographical writings, Yeats frequently incorporates Tarot imagery to create a sense of mystery and suspense while also exploring themes of love, death, and rebirth. Serpillo highlights how several poems are permeated with Tarot symbolism, such as "Ego Dominus Tuus", where the presence of the Tower, the Moon, and Water imagery mirrors the cards' symbolic meanings, or "The Phases of the Moon", where the Tarot's influence is palpable in the characters of Michael Robartes and Aherne, who seem to embody certain Tarot figures. Serpillo's essay also discusses how the lunar imagery and the theory of lunar phases, as discussed by Yeats, reflect the cyclical nature of life and history, resonating with the esoteric teachings he was familiar with. It also draws parallels between the dynamic figures in Byzantine mosaics and the suggestive imagery in the Tarot cards. This visual analogy extends to Yeats's fascination with capturing moments of timeless significance in his poetry.

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all: [...]. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry. (W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats", 1939)

Arianna Antonielli's essay, "*Make it new*: When Luigi Meneghello transplanted 'silly Yeats'", discusses Meneghello's translation of Yeats's poems into Vicentine dialect. Yeats's vision of different aspects of life and art resonated deeply with Meneghello, whose translations cover several phases of Yeats's poetic vision and capture the essence of Yeats's connection to the Irish landscape, as well as providing insight into his spiritual quest. In his collection, *Trapianti*, Meneghello included seventeen compositions by Yeats, showcasing his ability to preserve the essence and rhythmic tension of the original texts while giving them new life and meaning. The translated, or transplanted texts, are characterized by a fairly colloquial tone, and they feature unique structures to capture the essence of Yeats's thematic and symbolic issues. All this is given new life in the Vicentine dialect. Meneghello's translations are not merely linguistic exercises; rather, they appear as profound cultural and interpretive actions. By bringing Yeats's poetry into his own cultural context, Meneghello creates original, vibrant works that resonate with the original's themes while offering fresh perspectives.

For what are our animal spirits or vehicles if not the condensation of the vehicle of the anima mundi? What else do they do but give substance to its images "in the faint materialisation of our common thought, or more grossly when a ghost is our visitor? (Yeats 1994, 22)". (Bondi 2024, *infra*, 67)

In "The Yeatsian Henry More", Roberto Bondi addresses Cambridge Platonist Henry More's influence on William B. Yeats. His essay showcases Yeats's engagement with More's ideas and, in particular, with the *anima mundi* concept. More's description of the spirit of nature as incorporeal substance pervading the universe influenced Yeats considerably. The poet linked this idea to the idea of a universal memory enriched by individual memories and experiences. Yeats's belief in a great mind and memory transcending the individual consciousness is articulated in his essay on magic. This belief underpins much of his poetic and philosophical exploration, revealing a deep-seated conviction in the interconnectedness of all minds and memories.

The orchestra brings more elaborate music and I have gone over to the enemy. I say to the musician: “Lose my words in patterns of sound as the name of God is lost in Arabian arabesques. They are a secret between the singers, myself, yourself. The plain fable, plain prose of the dialogue. Ninette de Valois’ dance are there for the audience. They can find my works in the book if they are curious, but we will not thrust our secret upon them”. (John Harbison 1977, <<https://www.wisemusicclassical.com/work/24194/Full-Moon-in-March--John-Harbison/>>)

Richard Allen Cave’s contribution looks at the challenges and nuances of staging W.B. Yeats’s late dance play *A Full Moon in March* through using John Harbison’s operatic adaptation as lens. Yeats’s work is difficult to interpret, and Cave emphasizes how recent performances have both illuminated and struggled to render the unique demands of his dramatic style. The recent production of *A Full Moon in March*, for example, highlighted both the strengths and pitfalls of interpreting Yeats’s unique dramatic style. Cave points out that this rendition emphasizes the necessity of preserving the intellectual and mythological integrity of Yeats’s work. The poet’s lasting impact on drama is affirmed through his innovative blend of myth, ritual, and intellectual depth, inspiring ongoing exploration and adaptation in the theatre world.

I see *Purgatory* as the Old Man’s attempt to heal a trauma and turn it into memory; yet the son’s reactions bring in some of the main risk factors for a trauma becoming unhealed, thus transgenerational. (Balázs 2024, *infra*, 86)

Zsuzsanna Balázs’s “Patrilineage and Transgenerational Trauma in Yeats’s *Purgatory* (1939)” offers an innovative dramaturgical reading of Yeats’s renowned verse play. It explores patrilineage through the lens of transgenerational trauma, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of Yeats’s drama. Balázs draws from the rich field of trauma studies to highlight how Yeats’s *Purgatory* is not just a narrative of familial conflict; rather, it can be seen as a profound exploration of unhealed trauma reverberating and affecting whole generations. The play’s “Dreaming Back” episodes reflect the Old Man’s struggle with his internalized trauma, which calls for validation and understanding from his environment. Balázs’s contribution provides a challenging perspective on Yeats’s work, situating it within contemporary discussions of trauma and its transgenerational impacts. Yeats’s play is further revealed as a poignant commentary on the lasting impacts of familial and societal trauma.

[...] a feature of Yeats’s later career is his “intention to memorialise his friends, and himself by association” [...], in response to an “impulse to make monuments or to erect tombs”. (Cotta Ramusino 2024, *infra*, 101)

Elena Cotta Ramusino’s essay, “William Butler Yeats and Monumentalisation”, looks at how Yeats uses poetry to celebrate and memorialize friends, peers, and himself. Yeats’s 1923 Nobel Prize lecture, during which the poet paid homage to the Irish Dramatic Movement and to key figures like John Millington Synge and Lady Gregory, is the starting point for Ramusino’s investigation. From there, she traces the development of Yeats’s tone, whose roots can be traced back to his early poetry, which then evolved in subsequent collections, such as *The Green Helmet*, *Responsibilities*, and *The Wild Swans at Coole*. The 1937 poem “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”, which reflects on significant figures in Yeats’s life, occupies a special place in this analysis. Yeats’s assertive and celebratory style served to cement his legacy and that of his contemporaries within the cultural and historical narrative of Ireland.



I have in this essay sought to move between Descriptive Bibliography of unique objects and the human ‘messiness, muddle and irrationality’, but offer in closing Edwards’s caution against the ‘growing reliance, particularly by graduate students, on virtual forms [which] has created a diminished interest in the detailed analysis of material aspects of the book and of any sense of why it matters’. During my own lifetime, ‘English’ or ‘Literature’ as a ‘subaltern’ discipline has endured the condescension of Historians. As ‘Humanities Computing’ asserts its presumptuous suzerainty in Literature and Bibliography, ‘the book’ in its materiality risks becoming more alien to future students. (Gould 2024, *infra*, 139)

Warwick Gould’s essay, “Bibliophilia and Descriptive Bibliography: the Case of Yeats’s Books”, explores the significance of copy-specific research in descriptive bibliography and its role within the broader context of historical bibliography. Gould contrasts the traditional view of connoisseurship, which is associated with private contemplation of rare and valuable books, to its democratization through virtual reading rooms. Such technological advancements enable the comparison and collation of different copies of the same book from libraries across the world, as if they were side-by-side on a single, physical desk. The essay looks at how value is recreated in the rare book trade, in particular, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the transition of auctions and salesrooms to the online environment. Gould highlights the importance of reassessing and justifying the collection and valuation of rare books in this new landscape, taking W.B. Yeats’s work as case study. Yeats was often bewildered at collectors’ fascination with the first editions of his works. This essay focuses on how copy-specific antiquarian studies can enhance our understanding of the Irish author’s legacy, through his interactions with prominent figures in the book trade and unique inscriptions that enriched his works. Drawing from Ulinka Rublack’s analysis of the relationship between art, collecting, and commerce in early modern Europe, it takes Albrecht Dürer’s self-advertising altar-piece as a lens to question the idea of “value”. Yeats’s books show the complexities of bibliographical research and the challenges posed by physical and historical intricacies in the writer’s oeuvre.

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## Yeats's *Daimonic* Birds and Beasts of Apocalypse

Neil Mann

Independent Scholar (<njmann@gmail.com>)

### *Abstract:*

Much from George and W.B. Yeats's channelling sessions left little or no trace in *A Vision* yet provided important material for the poet. The *Daimon*, an antagonist spiritual counterpart, though unclear in *A Vision*, was a vital concept to Yeats, and could be symbolised in bird or animal form; similarly, the dove and swan that appear in the annunciations to Mary and Leda embody the *daimonic* on a macrocosmic scale. Another *daimonic* beast at both individual and world level is the unicorn; one related to the new religious age is the sphinx, which embodies a complex conjunction of ideas, including the reawakening of ancient ways of thought. The *Daimon* brings crisis to human life, and the *daimonic* beasts are associated with crisis in world history, the irruption of the irrational divine.

*Keywords:* Avatar, Daimon, Millennium, Sphinx, Unicorn

Writing about the first attempts that he and his wife made with automatic writing, W.B. Yeats remembered offering “to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. ‘No’, was the answer, ‘we have come to give you metaphors for poetry’” (*AVB*, 8; *CW14*, 8). Given this statement, Northrop Frye thought that “it seems obvious that *A Vision* should be approached as a key to the structure of symbolism and imagery in Yeats's own poetry, as what Yeats calls in another connection ‘the emergence of the philosophy of my own poetry, the unconscious becoming conscious’”, yet Frye found it “a fragmentary and often misleading guide to the structure of imagery in Yeats” (1976, 251). Frye is far from being alone in wanting *A Vision* to be what it is not, but he also rightly comments that, in mining the automatic script, Yeats seems to have concentrated on “schematic elaboration” in *A Vision* rather than creating an exploration of symbol and image in the vein of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917) that it could almost equally well have yielded. Alongside the rules for placing the *Faculties* or the revolutions of the gyres, the automatic script is full of metaphors and symbols that were never used in *A Vision* – and no doubt many more were written or spoken that do not survive.

If *A Vision* is fragmentary, the automatic script and the “sleeps”<sup>1</sup> from which it arose were even more so, very the much “scattered sentences” that Yeats offered to piece together, and recalling the “mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street” that Yeats saw as the origin of “masterful images” in “The Circus Animals’ Desertion” (*VP*, 630; *CW1*, 355). Out of the mass of material assembled, some ideas and images never left the script itself, some were rejected as misleading “frustration”<sup>2</sup>, but most were organised into notebooks and a card file from which Yeats then synthesised his drafts, many of which went through multiple recastings and revisions<sup>3</sup>. Part of this was the search for language to express his ideas better, but Yeats’s understanding of the system’s elements and meaning also evolved significantly over the years from the first scripts, through the early dialogues he created for exposition, to *A Vision A*, and then through his later reassessment and reformulation leading up to *A Vision B*. The constant work with this material, sifting it and wrestling with ways of creating a coherent version for presentation left marks on Yeats’s thinking and creative expression that are the hidden bulk of an iceberg of which *A Vision* is the visible part. In the introduction to *A Vision* written in 1928, “I will never think any thoughts but these, or some modification or extension of these; when I write prose or verse they must be somewhere present though not it may be in the words” (*PEP*, 32). Yet Yeats’s immersion in these “thoughts” goes far beyond what is contained in the book, and if *A Vision* is to be “a key to the structure of symbolism and imagery” (Frye 1976, 251), then the term needs to embrace the system as Yeats knew it, not just the published versions – though they must have priority – and the art of any given period must be looked at along with his understanding in that period<sup>4</sup>.

An example of the development of Yeats’s ideas is the *Daimon*. The concept emerged from earlier ideas of the anti-self and mask, and came to the fore in the meditations on “Anima Hominis”, the soul of man, in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*<sup>5</sup>. The fragmented picture of the *Daimon* that emerged in the question and answer of George Yeats’s automatic script and sleeps was recognisably related to this earlier formulation but significantly different in role and attributes, and the script introduced different types of *Daimon*, as well as collective *Daimons* in connection with schools of thought and art, as well as countries<sup>6</sup>. The *Daimon* that is presented in *A Vision*

<sup>1</sup> The communications started as automatic writing in 1917 and shifted to “Sleeps” in the spring of 1920 (Harper G.M., Martinich, Harper M.M., 1992, vol. 3, 9; see also Mann 2019, ch. 2 and <[www.yeatsvision.com/AS.html](http://www.yeatsvision.com/AS.html)> (05/2024). The sleeps involved W.B. Yeats waiting for his wife to enter a form of trance in sleep, during which he would question her and she would answer, the voice being that of the Communicator or Instructor. He would make notes, which GY or he would then write up the following day. These sleeps continued sporadically into the late 1920s, though the later ones are not included in *Yeats’s ‘Vision’ Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> The “Frustrators” were a group of anti-Instructors, apparently centred on the figure that W.B. Yeats had originally fancied his personal *Daimon*, Leo.

<sup>3</sup> The automatic script and sleeps, as well as the first drafts preceding *A Vision A*, are collected in *Yeats’s ‘Vision’ Papers* under the general editorship of George Mills Harper (1992, 3 vols); volume 4 appeared later (Harper 2001). Later drafts, both for *A Vision A* and, more importantly, for *A Vision B* are less easy to access, but the series of essays by Neil Mann and Wayne Chapman on the Rapallo Notebooks includes some important intermediate drafts (see Mann 2022; Chapman 2023; Chapman and Mann 2024 (forthcoming); Mann and Chapman 2025 (forthcoming)).

<sup>4</sup> In a headnote to his essay on *A Vision*, Frye mentions having abandoned a “project of tracing its development for its sketchy first edition” (1976, 245).

<sup>5</sup> In 1901 W.B. Yeats had quoted a colleague in the Golden Dawn that “myths are the activities of the Dæmons, and that the Dæmons shape our characters and our lives” (*CW5*, 80-81, cf. *Ec&I*, 107; the source *CW3*, 281, *Au*, 373), and contact with the “Leo Africanus” ca. 1912 (see Adams, Harper 2013).

<sup>6</sup> These collective *Daimons* have some kinship with the Golden Dawn’s idea of the *egregore*, the psychic entity created as a thoughtform by a group of collaborating people, except that the collective *Daimon* or Coven seems to precede and bring the group into being. See W.B. Yeats, “Is the Order of R.R.&A.C. to remain a Magical Order?” (1901) (Appendix K) of Harper 1974, 261.

*A* differs significantly from that of *A Vision B*, but neither presentation is fully clear. I have examined elsewhere how Yeats's conception and thinking continued to shift and evolve as he developed a fuller understanding of the system, so that from anti-self, the spiritual counterpart of a human, acting as a lover and antagonist, it developed over the 1920s into an archetype of the individual embracing multiple lives over millennia (Mann 2019, 153ff).

The *Daimon* also stands out against the geometric schemes and regular cycles that dominate most of *A Vision*, operating through fleeting moments of crisis and the irregular lightning flash, such that Graham Hough considered it "a relic of an earlier formulation" that "cannot properly be fitted into the system", but "too vivid and imaginatively living to be abandoned" (1984, 111-113). The picture given by the manuscript drafts is fuller and makes it clear that Yeats still considered the *Daimon* "the chief person of my drama", but he appears to have found it impossible to deal with adequately<sup>7</sup>. As a poet, Yeats perhaps felt easier expressing it in symbolic form, and he used a variety of symbols for the *Daimon*, representing the *Daimon* itself and the individual's contact with the *daimonic* or personal divine most commonly through birds and beasts<sup>8</sup>.

Such symbolism had already been central to Yeats's poetic practice for many years, but it was reinforced and refocused by material from the automatic script, such as drawings of birds, animals in emblems of the phases, and their symbolism<sup>9</sup>. An aspect of the symbolism was clarified when Yeats was told in May 1921 that "Daimons or spirits when acting in connection with daimons take animal or bird forms" (Harper, Martinich, Harper 1992, vol. 3, 278-279; cf. 76)<sup>10</sup>. Yeats used this idea and illuminates some of the symbolism of *Calvary* by quoting a fictional letter from Michael Robartes, telling of *daimonic* animal forms in the context of his Arabian travels. A young Judwali shows him "certain marks on the sand" outside the tent of a visitor with "a reputation as a wonder-worker"; to Robartes, they look like "the marks of a jackal", but he is told that "they were made by the wonder-worker's 'Daimon' or 'Angel' " (*VPI*, 789, *CW2*, 696). Robartes is told that, because the man is an extroverted traveller, "his Daimon has the form of a beast, but your Daimon would have a bird's shape because you are a solitary man" (*ibidem*). Importantly, unlike the *Daimon* itself, this animal form is not an image of opposition but of likeness: the gregarious *primary* person has a beast that runs in a pack, while the *antithetical* person has a lonely bird (*ibidem*)<sup>11</sup>. Robartes writes that "Certain

<sup>7</sup> NLI MS 36,272/18/1, corrected typescript titled "Book I | Dramatis Personae", page numbered 2; cited in Mann 2019, 157; Adams 1955, 281. In another draft, he complained that "what [the Instructors] said of the daimon, & it was little, long seemed unintelligible. I once said 'Will I ever understand' & the spirit replied 'Not while you live'" (NLI MS 13,582 [Rapallo Notebook E, ca. 1929], [9r], page numbered 23; cited in Mann 2019, 155).

<sup>8</sup> The adjective "daemonic" features in "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (*VP*, 427; *CW1*, 209), and the *Daimon* itself appears in a poem that remained unpublished (see Mann 1992), but otherwise W.B. Yeats avoided direct reference in poetry or drama.

<sup>9</sup> The number of sketches of birds is particularly striking (e.g. Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 1, 57, 123, 179, 368, 427, 435, 445, 449-450, 487; Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 302, 304, 310, 319, 377, 424, 452, 458); animals are also used in emblems of the phases (e.g. Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry, vol. 1, 138, 148), and their symbolism is explained (e.g. Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 1, 251; Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 312-313).

<sup>10</sup> When not associated with a *Daimon*, more mutable spirits, such as those of the Instructors, might take other forms, but "they took cat form by day owl form by night, when acting in connection with daimon. Always animal or bird for daimon" (Harper, Martinich, Harper 1992, vol. 3, 76).

<sup>11</sup> At the date this introduction was written (*Four Plays for Dancers*, 1921), W.B. Yeats held that a "man's Daimon [...] is of course of opposite in sex to the man" (13 August 1920, Harper, Martinich, Harper 1992, vol. 3, 32) and, for instance, GY's "male daimon" and WBY's "female daimon" used the "spiritual memory" of the other human "in all matters of this script" (14 April 1919, Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 248, 247; see also Harper G.M., Martinich, Harper M.M. 1992, vol. 3, 291); cf. "The Daimon, the Sexes, Unity of Being, Natural and Supernatural Unity" in *AVA*, 26-30; *CW13*, 24-27.

birds, especially as I see things, such lonely birds as the heron, hawk, eagle, and swan, are the natural symbols of subjectivity” (*ibidem*)<sup>12</sup>, and in *Calvary* the musicians sing that “God has not appeared to the birds” (*VPI*, 787-788; *CW2*, 335-336), referring to the *antithetical* or subjective portion of humanity. More personally, the Yeatses were told that “Anne’s daimon”, expressing her *antithetical* Phase 16 would be a “Wild white swan” (Harper G.M., Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 386) and Michael, at Phase 14, was represented by a black eagle (e.g., Harper G.M., Martinich, Harper M.M. 1992, vol. 3, 65; *AVB*, 17; *CW14*, 13)<sup>13</sup>.

If birds and beasts represent individual *Daimons*, they can also be symbols of the collective union of all *Daimons* or the divine<sup>14</sup>. This is particularly important when dealing with the moment that the *daimonic* or divine breaks through into human life and history. On the microcosmic scale this is the special moments of crisis that allow the “expression of *Daimonic* thought” (*AVA*, 75; *CW13*, 63; *AVB*, 140; *CW14*, 105) or the recognition that “genius is a crisis that joins that buried self [the *Daimon*] for certain moments to our trivial daily mind” (*Au*, 272; *CW3*, 217). On the macrocosmic scale this is the contact of the divine with the mundane world of history at the special moments of influx when a new dispensation is inaugurated every two thousand years, and Yeats represents this confluence of human and divine in the encounter of woman and bird. More ambiguously, he also adopts mythical beasts, especially phoenix, unicorn, and sphinx, to represent the avatar or the *daimonic* counterpart. Even more ambiguous is the “rough beast” that features at the end of “The Second Coming”, which is also connected to the transition from one dispensation to another, but in a manner that is unclear.

### 1. *Bird and Woman*

In paralleling the classical and the Christian dispensations, Yeats adopted the double symbol of bird and woman to represent an annunciation (DeForrest 2012). The *antithetical* annunciation made to Leda is a rape by Zeus in the form of a swan, which contrasts with the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary in the form of a dove that heralds the *primary* dispensation. This duality is never made explicit, however, and even the import of title of “Dove or Swan” remains unexplained in *A Vision*. The second element is made clear in the comment “I imagine the annunciation that founded Greece as made to Leda...” (*AVA*, 181; *CW13*, 151; *AVB*, 268; *CW14*, 195) and presented in the opening poem “Leda and the Swan” (“Leda” in 1925), where the rape is brutally detailed and realised<sup>15</sup>. In contrast, the dove and its role are insubstantial: the bird never appears outside the title itself<sup>16</sup>; there is no sentence to match “I imagine the annunciation that founded Greece...” (*AVA*, 181; *CW13*, 151; *AVB*, 268; *CW14*, 195); nor is

<sup>12</sup> W.B. Yeats can, of course, also write of more companionable “nine-and-fifty swans” at Coole (*VP*, 322; *CW1*, 131), but is selective in symbolism, while the sociable doves are perhaps appropriate to a *primary* annunciation.

<sup>13</sup> Younger readers are most likely to have encountered the concept of the “Daimon” first in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* novels (1995-2000), where the “dæmon” takes on an animal form, usually of the opposite sex. There is no evidence, however, that Pullman draws on W.B. Yeats rather than the idea of the witch’s familiar taking animal form or of the popularised version of North American traditions of a “spirit animal”. There is a further echo in J.K. Rowling’s use of an animal “Patronus” in the Harry Potter novels.

<sup>14</sup> For God as the collective of *Daimons* or congeries, see Mann 2019 ch. 10, esp. §10.6 and §10.4; Gibson 2012, esp. 112-115; Mann 2012b, esp. 170-171.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Cook 2021; Cullingford 2021; Groarke 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Doves are (surprisingly) rare in W.B. Yeats’s writings: there is one in “The Indian to his Love” (1886, *VP*, 78; *CW1*, 12), and “doves” in “How Fencz Renyi Kept Silent” (1887, *VP*, 710; *CW1*, 729 var) and *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889, *VP*, 3ee), all early works. In the plays, ‘dove’ occurs only once, as a term of endearment in *The King’s Threshold* (1904, *VPI*, 305).

there any reference to an annunciation or a miraculous birth, as Yeats relies upon his readers' general knowledge and familiarity with Christian traditions and art to make the – potentially shocking – connection between the two images and to fill in the implications.

The violent physicality of Yeats's description in "Leda and the Swan" is partly attributable to the Hellenistic bas-relief he knew from Élie Faure's *History of Art* (Fig. 1), rather than the often softened artistic depictions he also knew (such as those of Leonardo or even Michelangelo, see Melchiori 1960, 151ff.), but it also embodies an *antithetical* emphasis on sensuous experience, image, and form. The sonnet's sestet looks forward to the impact of Leda's children on mythic history, before returning to the post-coital moment and the paradox of the "brute blood of the air" representing divine "power" and "knowledge" (*VP*, 441; *CWI*, 218).

In "The Mother of God", "the great wings beating still" of "Leda and the Swan" are paralleled by the "Wings beating about the room", yet here they are disembodied and almost illusory (*VP*, 499; *CWI*, 253). The Virgin is, however, aware of her child's transcendence – she speaks of bearing "The Heavens in my womb" and of feeding a "fallen star" (*VP*, 499; *CWI*, 253) – implying that she has shared in some divine knowledge, if only from the Archangel Gabriel. The two poems thus partially enact the differences of the two dispensations, the immanent and human *antithetical* opposing the transcendent and spiritual *primary*<sup>17</sup>.



Fig. 1 – Relief carving of Leda and the Swan from Élie Faure, trans. Walter Pach, *The History of Art: Ancient Art*, page facing chapter 1, Public Domain

<sup>17</sup> Though the *primary* is referred to as "humane", in the sense of compassionate, the *antithetical* is connected with humanity and multiplicity, the *primary* to the divine and unity (see Mann 2012a 5ff; see also Mann 2019, Table 4.1, 66-68).

These birds represent the divine influx of a whole religious era. Elsewhere, without any obvious millennial aspect, Yeats presents an Irish version of the myth in *The Herne's Egg* (1938), where the priestess Attracta is the bride of the Great Herne and claims to “share his knowledge” (*VPL*, 1033; *CW2*, 528): “I lay with the Great Herne, and he, / Being all a spirit, but begot / His image in the mirror of my spirit” (*VPL*, 1039; *CW2*, 534), though Congal is sure that he and six companions “lay with her last night” instead (*VPL*, 1031; *CW2*, 527).

We might expect the coming influx to be symbolised by a bird too, and Michael Robartes speaks of taking Mary Bell to the desert with “the lost egg of Leda, its miraculous life still unquenched [...] where she must lay it and leave it to be hatched by the sun’s heat” and wonders “what would break the third shell” (*AVB*, 51; *CW14*, 37). This delayed hatching emphasises that the influx “which dominates an *antithetical* dispensation” is “not so much a breaking out of new life as the vivification of old intellect” (*AVB*, 208; *CW14*, 153-154), yet it seems to deny the coming transition its divine impetus.

In drafts from 1928, Yeats also considered calling the Masters of each cycle after a mythical bird, the phoenix: “The Twelve beings who start the twelve months of my year are called incarnations of Buddha in the east but as we have [no] name for them I shall call them the twelve Phoenixes because a Phoenix rises from its predecessors ashes” (see Mann 2022, 85, 132). Yet, in portraying the coming avatar, Yeats had long thought in terms of other mythical beasts.

## 2. Unicorn

Yeats tried, against the expressed preferences of the automatic script’s Instructors, to represent the avatar as both the unicorn and the sphinx. These beasts, particularly the unicorn, are also symbols of the *Daimonic* dimension. Yeats wrote of the unicorn depicted on George Yeats’s bookplate (see Fig. 2): “that beast is the daimon” (27 May [1926], *CL InteLex*, 4875); this may imply that it is a specific symbol his *antithetical* wife’s *Daimon*<sup>18</sup>, but it seems that it is a general symbol for the *Daimon* as a concept, especially coupled with the lightning flash – the script for 31 May 1919 had answered “What is Unicorn” with “Daimon” (Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 294; see Mann 2012c).

<sup>18</sup> A charging unicorn appears in Edmund Dulac’s portrait of George, and Ann Saddlemyer examines the symbol fully in Saddlemyer 2013.





Fig. 2 – George Yeats's bookplate, designed by Thomas Sturge Moore, Public Domain<sup>19</sup>

Looking for a symbol for the avatar of the coming dispensation, Yeats sought to extend this symbolism further, and despite being told in the same session that he could not “apply symbol of Unicorn to New Avatar” (Harper G.M., Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 295), almost two years later he writes of having “to abandon the term Unicorn for an Avatar” (11 January [1921], Harper G.M., Martinich, Harper M.M. 1992, vol. 3, 65), which implies that he still thought of it as such. Yeats clearly wanted to find a broader role for the symbol, proposing to use “UNICORN’ for group mind” on 26 November 1920, and even differentiating between Red and White Unicorns (57), only to decide a day later that he wanted “ ‘Group mind’ to be called a Dragon, red or white. | Unicorn to be kept for Daimon” (58)<sup>20</sup>. Since a group mind is embodied as a single *Daimon*, there was some logic to the connection, and Yeats evidently wanted to harness the association of the unicorn with the *daimonic*, but he evidently ran the risk of diluting or confusing the symbol itself with his other associations, including destructive purification and the divine avatar.

<sup>19</sup> For GY's bookplate, see also Saddlemyer 2013 and *Yeats Annual 18* Plate 12. W.B. Yeats refers to it as “that admirable faun or stag springing from the broken tower”, which seems a strange mistake, but it might have become confused in his mind with the stag from the complementary dream (see G.M. Harper, Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 162, 176) that he writes about in “Towards Break of Day” (*VP*, 398-399; *CW1*, 187).

<sup>20</sup> The “group mind” refers to “Cones of Nations and Movements of Thought”, named in *A Vision A* neither *unicorns* nor *dragons* but “Covens”; “I myself chose the name Coven, that being the name of the groups of Scotch Witches described in the witch trials, for I imagine the Nations and Philosophies as having each, as it were, a witches’ cauldron of medicinal or devil’s broth in the midst” (*AVA*, 171; *CW13*, 139). The term was dropped from *AVB*.

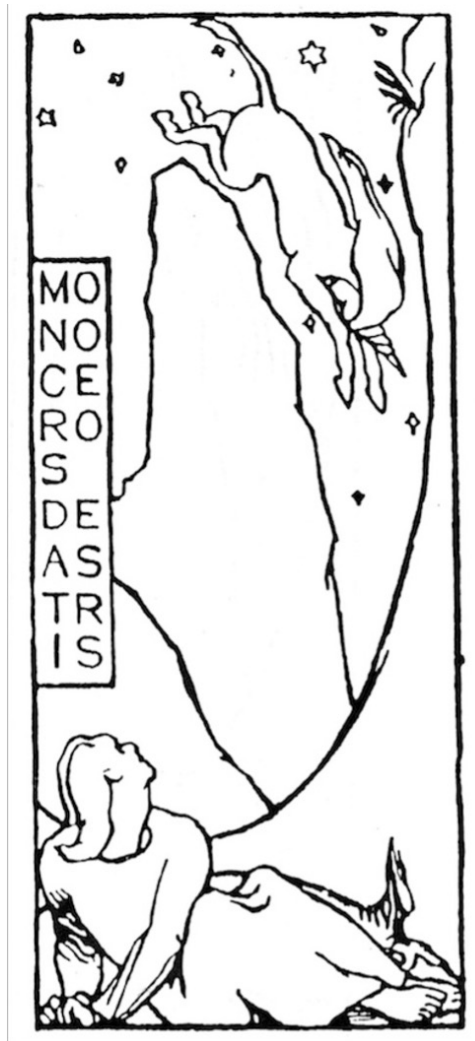


Fig. 3 – Design by Thomas Sturge Moore, used by the Cuala Press in 1915, Public Domain

Yeats had already associated the symbol with cleansing destruction in *Where There Is Nothing* (1902) and *The Unicorn from the Stars* (1908), where the unicorn features as a symbol of purity and iconoclasm, breaking the moulds to establish a new order. It figures in Golden Dawn symbolism, with the initiate of the Practicus stage being given “the mystic title of MONOCERIS DE ASTRIS, which means ‘the Unicorn from the Stars’”, and Yeats used a version of the title in a woodcut he commissioned from Thomas Sturge Moore, which featured without explanation on the title page of the Cuala Press’s printing of Yeats’s *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* (1915)<sup>21</sup>. In *Where There Is Nothing*, Paul Ruttledge recounts a vision where he is beset by beasts that symbolise “the part that builds up the things that keep the soul from God”:

<sup>21</sup> Regardie 1937, vol. 1, 118. W.B. Yeats corrected the GD’s *monocris* to *Monoceros de Astris* in the design he commissioned from Thomas Sturge Moore (Fig. 3). See also *CL4*, 342-343, note 6.

Then suddenly there came a bright light, and all in a minute the beasts were gone, and I saw a great many angels riding upon unicorns, white angels on white unicorns. They stood all round me, and they cried out, 'Brother Paul, go and preach; get up and preach, Brother Paul'. And then they laughed aloud, and the unicorns trampled the ground as though the world were already falling in pieces. (*VPI*, 1131-1132; *CW2*, 650)

The unicorns' association with worldly things falling apart and spiritual revival was further emphasised when Yeats and Lady Gregory rewrote this play as *The Unicorn from the Stars*. Martin has a vision similar to Paul's, in which "the horses we were on had changed to unicorns, and they began trampling the grapes and breaking them", and they are said to mean "virginal strength, a rushing, lasting, tireless strength" (*VPI*, 659-660; *CW2*, 209). He later says they "were breaking the world to pieces – when I saw the cracks coming I shouted for joy! And I heard the command, 'Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver! destroy'" (*VPI*, 669; *CW2*, 214).

*The Player Queen* was first started ca. 1908, but it had a protracted gestation, and the figure of a unicorn enters into the drafts in 1915 or 1916, associated with chastity and its opposite. After the automatic script sessions began, its association with shattering and renewal reappears, along with more millenarian associations in *The Player Queen*, where Septimus announces "the end of the Christian Era, the coming of a New Dispensation, that of the New Adam, that of the Unicorn", and says that he "will bid him trample mankind to death and beget a new race" (*VPI*, 745-746; *CW2*, 359). Now a single beast rather than the groups of *Where There is Nothing* or *The Unicorn from the Stars*, the unicorn is thus viewed as destroying the outmoded order, indifferent to human desire, and repeatedly associated with trampling human structures or the grapes of wrath<sup>22</sup>.

In "The Adoration of the Magi", the three simple but learned peasants from the west of Ireland figure as the complement to the "wise men from the east" of St Matthew's Gospel (2:1). The middle brother enters a trance and, while the god Hermes speaks to his brothers through him, he has a vision of the Christian nativity with the magi adoring Jesus and hears Hermes scorning them for abandoning their heritage – "Foolish old men, you had once all the wisdom of the stars" (*VSR*, 169; *M2005*, 204). In the revised 1925 version of the story, in place of the revelation of the old gods' secret names, Yeats added a mystic nativity. Hermes, speaking through the middle brother as medium, declares that:

The woman who lies there has given birth, and that which she bore has the likeness of a unicorn and is most unlike man of all living things, being cold, hard and virginal. It seemed to be born dancing; and was gone from the room wellnigh upon the instant, for it of the nature of the unicorn to understand the shortness of life. (*VSR*, 168-169; *M2005*, 203)

In choosing the unicorn to symbolise an avatar, Yeats was harking back to the beast's role as a symbol for Christ in the Middle Ages, in a tradition that drew on references in the Psalms and the legend that its wildness was tamed by a virgin (see Beal 2019). In his updated version, the unicorn, still virginal and unique, is hard and alien, joyfully destructive of barriers and illusions.

The brothers fail to see the new avatar (if it exists) and seem closer to the shepherds than the magi<sup>23</sup>, yet such is the reversal of the ages: virgin and whore, magi and shepherds, compas-

<sup>22</sup> In *The Unicorn of the Stars*, the word "trample" certainly appears to be linked to Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic", coupled with the image's source in Revelation 14:19-20, though this may indicate Augusta Gregory's associations more than W.B. Yeats's as "her share in it is so great" (*VPI*, 1309).

<sup>23</sup> In the notes to *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), W.B. Yeats associates the figure of Hanrahan with "the simplicity of an imagination too changeable to gather permanent possessions, or the adoration of the shepherds" of Luke's Gospel, whereas "Michael Robartes is the pride of the imagination brooding upon the greatness of its possessions, or

sionate and pitiless, Christ mourned “over the length of time and the unworthiness of man’s lot to man, whereas his forerunner mourned and his successor will mourn over the shortness of time and the unworthiness of man to his lot” (*AVB*, 136-137; *CW14*, 102)<sup>24</sup>. The unicorn, understanding “the shortness of life” (*VSR*, 169; *M2005*, 203), symbolises this successor.

In its blithe destructiveness, the unicorn recalls Shiva dancing the destructive *tandava*, and in his notes on *The Resurrection*, Yeats recalled his own early engagement with “a sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin” as the antithesis to the surrounding Victorian myth of progress (*VPL*, 932; *CW2*, 722). In hindsight, he saw this feeding into a notion that “Our civilization was about to reverse itself, or some new civilization about to be born from all that our age had rejected, from all that my stories symbolised as a harlot, and take after its mother; because we had worshipped a single god it would worship many or receive from Joachim de Flora’s Holy Spirit a multitudinous influx” (*VPL*, 932; *CW2*, 723; see Reeves, Gould 1987). In connection with this sense, in the early 1900s, he “began to imagine, as always at my left side just out of the range of the sight, a brazen winged beast that I associated with laughing, ecstatic destruction” and which he said was “Afterwards described in my poem ‘The Second Coming’ ” (*ibidem*; see Melchiori 1960, 37ff)<sup>25</sup>.

### 3. *Sphinx*

Though the figure that actually appears in “The Second Coming” can hardly be described as “a brazen winged beast”, the comment from the introduction to *The Resurrection* indicates that its emotional affect must have been similar for Yeats himself, including the association of “ecstatic destruction”. In fact, the poem’s vision describes “somewhere in sands of the desert / A shape with lion body and the head of a man”, a figure most readers picture as an Egyptian sphinx<sup>26</sup>. This figure comes to view specifically in answer to the conviction that a “revelation is at hand... the Second Coming is at hand”, suggesting the imagery associated with the Revelation or Apocalypse of St John. Yet the poem uses little or none of that symbolism, unless the figure of the “rough beast” that “Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born” (*VP*, 402; *CW1*, 190) at the poem’s close is seen in terms of one of the beasts in Revelation, a position that is not usually adopted by critics but is probably the understanding of many readers<sup>27</sup>. Though the poem, therefore, uses the language of Christian eschatology (see Martin 1990), Yeats’s view is closer to that of Madame Blavatsky when she wrote:

the adoration of the Magi” of Matthew (*VP*, 803). The old brothers have more in common with Hanrahan.

<sup>24</sup> The reference to “one whom the things that are to-day have cast out” echoes Jesus’s quotation from Psalm 118, “The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner” (Mark 12:10), which was the basis of the Golden Dawn “Mystic Title of PORAIOS DE REJECTIS which means ‘Brought From Among The Rejected’” (Regardie 1938, vol. 2, 88), conferred at the second grade of Theoricus.

<sup>25</sup> This Introduction for *The Resurrection* was written ca. 1931, so a long time after the perceptions described and even a dozen years after “The Second Coming”.

<sup>26</sup> In Persian and Indian tradition there is a human-headed lion called a mantichore, which also usually has a scorpion’s tail (see Bull 1995). It is worth remembering that the god Vishnu’s earlier avatars were in animal forms, and that the fourth, Narasimha or Nara-sing, is a man with the head of a lion (see Bhowani Sethi 1973).

<sup>27</sup> The dragon or Satan (Revelation 12:9) gives power to a beast that rises “up out of the sea” or abyss (Revelation 13: 1-10; 11:7); a second beast comes “up out of the earth” (Revelation 13:11-18), subordinate to the first beast and causing people to worship it. There is also the beast of the abyss (Revelation 11:7), usually identified with the “scarlet-coloured beast” ridden by a harlot that appears later (Revelation 17:18). If W.B. Yeats’s “rough beast” is the same as the shape “in sands of the desert” – which is far from clear – it would seem to be a version of the second beast from the land, also called the false prophet (Revelation 19:20, 20:10), though significantly different in appearance. The reference to its birth in Bethlehem implies recapitulation or parody of Christ’s birth, thus aspects of the “antichrist”, a term found in the Epistles of John, often associated with Revelation’s Beast of the Sea.

at no time since the Christian era, have the precursor signs described in Matthew [ch. 24] applied so graphically and forcibly to any epoch as they do to our own times [...] Millenarians and Adventists of robust faith, may go on saying that 'the coming of (the carnalised) Christ' is near at hand, and prepare themselves for 'the end of the world.' Theosophists – at any rate, some of them – who understand the hidden meaning of the universally-expected Avatars, Messiahs, Sosioshes and Christs – know that it is no 'end of the world', but 'the consummation of the age', i.e., the close of a cycle, which is now fast approaching. (1887, 174)

Many readers find the figure of the rough beast a menacing embodiment of vaguer fears about the state of the world, and indeed "The Second Coming" has given a potent group of symbols to the century that has followed its publication in 1920 and been quoted frequently to convey disquiet and foreboding about news events or the near future<sup>28</sup>. Several writers have teased at the poem's multiple layers of meaning and the significance of this "rough beast". In terms of Yeats's system, is this beast the avatar of the new dispensation? Its herald? Its symbol? A symbol of preceding disorder? Its *Daimon*? How do other images and symbolic figures in Yeats's later work relate to it?

In the automatic script of June 1918, Yeats had proposed calling "the new initiate of the next" cycle, Christ's successor, "the Sphynx" and was told that this was "possible but many" (Harper G.M., Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 1, 468), suggesting that any symbol should indicate the plural or multitudinous nature of the coming influx and avatar. He was still using the symbolic name in January 1919 (Harper G.M., Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 2, 190) and, as with the figure of the unicorn, Yeats continued to view the sphinx as a possible representation of the coming avatar for some years, at least artistically, indicating that it retained this association for him personally. Both figures are evidently mythical, solitary and supernatural.

It appears that at a relatively early stage, Yeats considered representing the avatars or Masters who usher in the successive ages as Buddha, Christ, and Sphynx respectively (May 1920; see Harper G.M., Martinich, Harper M.M. 1992, vol. 3, 18). The dating of Buddha's life may be what rendered this scheme unviable<sup>29</sup>, but for a while Yeats viewed the three as a form of triptych, and this view probably informs "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes"<sup>30</sup>: a female sphinx faces the figure of Buddha, with the two "like heraldic supporters guarding the mystery of the fifteenth phase" (*AVB*, 207; *CW14*, 153), and the central phase of the full moon is represented by a dead girl dancing<sup>31</sup>. Yeats later explained that one of them represented the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn – the sphinx – while the other represented the conjunction of Venus and Mars – Buddha, but incorrectly, as "I should have put Christ instead of Buddha, for according to my instructors Buddha was Jupiter-Saturn influence" (*AVB*, 208; *CW14*, 153). The probable cause of the confusion is that Yeats sees Christ's birth as taking place at the pivotal Phase 15 of the twenty-six-thousand-year cycle, so in the poem he placed a predecessor, Buddha, and a successor, the sphinx, on either side of the full moon. In the scheme with the conjunctions, the start of each two-thousand-year religious cycle

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. Lehman 2015; Tabor 2015; Chakravarty 2019, Lynskey 2020; Simon 2020; Sennott 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Though the chronology varies, in W.B. Yeats's day Gautama Buddha's birth was generally placed around 560 (BCE) (for instance in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* 2:881, which W.B. Yeats relied on when writing *A Vision* [*WBGYL*, 864; *YL*, 855]). His lifespan preceded Periclean Athens by a century, but was not early enough to initiate the prior dispensation.

<sup>30</sup> "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" is dated to 1919 in Ellmann 1954 and Jeffares 1984 but the poem is probably from 1918, see Chapman 2002.

<sup>31</sup> This figure, "a girl at play / That, it may be, had danced her life away, / For now being dead it seemed / That she of dancing dreamed" (*VP*, 383; *CW1*, 173), prefigures the image of "death-in-life and life-in-death" of the second stanza of "Byzantium" (*VP*, 497; *CW1*, 252), also associated with Phase 15. For the "heraldic supporters", see MacDowell 1993.

also takes place at Phase 15 of a civilisation, but with a *primary* dispensation starting a little later, under the influence of Mars and Venus, while an *antithetical* dispensation starts earlier under the influence of Jupiter and Saturn<sup>32</sup>. This ties back to the children, Anne and Michael Yeats, and their astrological birth charts, as symbols of the alternating ages. Michael at Phase 14 is the Jupiter-Saturn influence that initiates an *antithetical* age, the mummy wheat of Egypt and its sphinx.

Yeats explains in *A Vision* that, among many other things, the Saturn-Jupiter conjunction is subjective and “introspective knowledge of the mind’s self-begotten unity, an intellectual excitement”, while that of Mars and Venus is objective and “outward-looking mind, love and its lure” (*AVB*, 207; *CWI4*, 153). “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” characterises the Saturn-Jupiter sphinx as “triumph of intellect” contemplating “all things known, all things unknown”, in contrast to the Mars-Venus teacher’s focus on “all things loved, all things unloved” (*VP*, 383; *CWI*, 173). In the short poem “Conjunctions”, the meeting of Jupiter and Saturn is accompanied by “a crop of mummy wheat!” (*VP*, 562; *CWI*, 294) and much had been made in the nineteenth century of supposed experiments in which “Ancient Egyptian wheat could germinate after millennia buried in tombs” (see Moshenka 2017; see also DeForrest 2012, 154). In Yeats’s thinking, the influx “which dominates an *antithetical* dispensation” is “not so much a breaking out of new life as the vivification of old intellect” (*AVB*, 208; *CWI4*, 153-154) and the legend of mummy wheat represents the renewal of the *antithetical* current after twenty centuries of *primary* dominance, or the “triumph of intellect” represented by the sphinx reawakens.

This is the image represented in “The Second Coming” with the revivification of the *antithetical* current that has been dormant for the two thousand years following the birth of Christ:

[...] now I know  
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (*VP*, 402; *CWI*, 190)

Whether the “rough beast” of the last lines is the same as the figure seen in the preceding vision or as the sleeper (or both) is left unresolved, yet they are evidently associated. The “stony sleep” seems particularly appropriate if the human-headed lion is connected with the limestone Sphinx at Giza<sup>33</sup>.

It is indeed likely that Yeats was drawing on an idea that the Egyptian sphinx represented the astrological symbolism of Leo and Virgo or Leo and Aquarius, which became popular in occult circles at the beginning of the twentieth century. The sphinx’s form was frequently explained in

<sup>32</sup> The Mars-Venus influence is equivalent to the beginning of the zodiac, where Aries is ruled by Mars and Taurus by Venus; the Jupiter-Saturn influence is the end of the zodiac, where Aquarius is ruled by Saturn and Pisces by Jupiter. Starting after the beginning, therefore, the *primary* comes under Mars-Venus, while the *antithetical* starts before the end of the previous cycle, under Saturn and Jupiter. See Mann 2019 §14.4.1. The details are complicated by the fact that the conjunction relates to the position of *Creative Mind* (symbolic sun) rather than *Will* (symbolic moon), thus Anne, with *Will* at Phase 16, represents this *primary* conjunction of Mars and Venus, while Michael, at Phase 14, represents the Saturn-Jupiter conjunction. This article is adapted from a longer treatment that deals more fully with the children as representatives of the ages, “Second Comings: W.B. Yeats and the Avatars of the New Age” (<[www.yeatsvision.com/Yeats\\_Avatars\\_of\\_New\\_Age.pdf](http://www.yeatsvision.com/Yeats_Avatars_of_New_Age.pdf)>, forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> In the earliest extant draft of these lines, Anne Brannen and Thomas Parkinson read: “The darkness drops again – but now I know | weary of the [?Egyptian] sleep at last all things | Sleep stony” (NLI MS 13,588[14], 6r), in Brannen, Parkinson 1994, 158-159. The words are uncertain, though a capital E can be discerned, and Jon Stallworthy summarises these lines as “illegible scribble”, in Stallworthy 1963, 23.

Renaissance Europe as a symbol of the Nile's flooding, taking the hind parts of the lion and the head of a maiden, as "in those two months Leo and Virgo have dominion" (Bellonius 1553, 3r, my translation). This idea was developed further by certain nineteenth-century researchers, who were looking to date Egyptian antiquities and thought that the creation of the sphinx might refer to a particular juncture in the precession of the equinoxes or solstices<sup>34</sup>. This connection was taken up with enthusiasm by some esotericists. For instance, in 1901, the Boston-based magazine *The Sphinx* contained the following meditation in "The Mystery of the Sphinx":

'I am the Sphinx [...] I am the fabled monster of the desert, having the head of Virgo and the body of Leo [...] When the finger of time points into the Cycle of Aquarius, then will the Sphinx of the heavens arrive at the Autumnal Equinox. I am the Sphinx and the key to time in the heavens, and thus do I unlock the cycles of time [...]'. (Hatfield 1902, 94)<sup>35</sup>

The equinoxes are the usual marker for measuring the Great Year of precession, giving rise to the term the "precession of the equinoxes". As the vernal equinox passes from Pisces to Aquarius, the autumnal equinox passes from Virgo and Leo, so that at the period around the boundary point could be symbolised by the sphinx. Yet this version of the sphinx has a woman's head<sup>36</sup>, and the figure of "The Second Coming" is clearly with "the head of a man" (*VP*, 402, *CWI* 189). However, this hybrid too was susceptible to astrological interpretation, since the Water Carrier, a male human figure, is the constellation opposite to Leo in the sky, and as the vernal equinox passes into Aquarius, the autumnal equinox passes into Leo<sup>37</sup>. The Yeatses' 1920s library list contains a work by J. Henry Van Stone that examined the symbolism of the zodiac, and includes in its description of Aquarius:

The Egyptian Sphinx combines in its form the pictorial symbols of Aquarius and its opposite sign Leo. The Great Sphinx of Gizeh, that most ancient and mysterious monument, is to-day a grim and solitary figure... The Egyptian colossus has the body of a lion with a bearded man's head (not a *woman's* as in Greece), and upon the forehead is placed the uraeus serpent... In later days the Greek philosophic writers refer to it as the Agathodaemon, 'the good spirit', and nearer our time the Bedouin has looked upon its marred and age-worn image with fear and awe and called it Abu'l Hawl, 'the Father of Terrors' [...] In the power and strength of the lion's body controlled by the human intelligence guided by the asp of Divine Wisdom, the Sphinx is seen to be the personification of Aquarius-Leo. The potentialities of Leo, which in their higher aspect, are very great, become manifested in the polar opposite, Aquarius. (Van Stone 1912, 80-81, listed in O'Shea 1986, 289)<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Among the authorities cited by esotericists, see, for example, Drummond 1821, 138-141; Lockyer 1894, 337.

<sup>35</sup> The attributions of vernal and autumnal are also reversed for the southern hemisphere.

<sup>36</sup> The very first mention of this figure in draft was, however, like that of "Michael Robartes and the Dancer", "a shape with lion body & with woman's breast & head" but replaced in that same draft by "And the head of a man", (Brannen and Parkinson 1994, 156-157).

<sup>37</sup> The Golden Dawn also used the name of Sphinx to represent a conjunction the four classical elements. These are symbolised by the four faces of the Cherubim or Four Living Creatures bearing the Chariot of Jehovah in Ezekiel's Vision: "As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle" (Ezekiel 1:10, cf. Revelation 4:7). These are identified in turn with the four "fixed" signs of the zodiac, Aquarius, Leo, Taurus, and Scorpio (claiming the Eagle as a "higher" form of the Scorpio). In the Theoricus Ritual (2=9), the Hieres recites: "The Sphinx of Egypt spake and said: 'I am the synthesis of Elemental Forces. I am also the symbol of Man. I am Life and I am Death. I am the Child of the Night of Time' ", before the challenges of the four elements: first Aquarius, "the Sign of the MAN", then "the Sign of the LION, Child of Fire", with Leo, before moving on to "the EAGLE, Child of Water" and "the Sign of the Head of the OX, Child of the Elements" or "the Bull of Earth" (Regardie 1938, vol. 2, 75-78).

<sup>38</sup> In "The Mystery of the Sphinx: An Astrologer's View of the Image and Constellations Leo and Aquarius; the Sign

Van Stone seems unsure whether the Sphinx is a “a grim and solitary figure”, “the Father of Terrors”, or “the Agathodaemon, ‘the good spirit’ ”, an ambiguity that is potentially also present in Yeats’s “rough beast”. The gaze of this androsphinx may be “blank and pitiless”<sup>39</sup>, but harshness is to be expected of the *antithetical* avatar and the age’s *Daimon* and, although the reeling birds, the vexed sleep, and the slouching beast may cause the reader unease, they are not in themselves evil. Indeed, if they are seen as such it is perhaps because “The *antithetical tincture* is noble, and, judged by the standards of the *primary*, evil, whereas the *primary* is good and banal” (*AVB*, 155; *CW14*, 115; cf. *AVA*, 89; *CW13*, 73).

The beasts and birds associated with the annunciations are symbolic of the agathodaemons, the spirits accompanying the avatars that represent or initiate an age. Yet just as the individual’s *Daimon* does not have “the pure benevolence our exhausted Platonism and Christianity attribute to an angelic being” (*AVB*, 230; *CW14*, 167) and seeks to “bring our souls to crisis” (*Au*, 272; *CW3*, 217), in the macrocosm, the advent of the new dispensation and its avatars is a crisis connecting the spiritual centre with the historical and mundane level of human action.

#### 4. *Revivifying the Old*

For Yeats, the advent of the *primary* dispensation at the beginning of the Common Era “blotted out” the *antithetical* age of the heroic ancient world with “that fabulous formless darkness” of Christianity described by the philosopher Antoninus (*AVB*, 278; *CW14*, 202 and note 60, 447-448), and “blotting out” implies a forceful supplanting that cannot erase but can obliterate what went before. Similarly, two thousand years earlier, with the *antithetical* annunciation to Leda, Yeats sees “bird and woman blotting out some corner of the Babylonian mathematical starlight” (*AVB*, 268; *CW14*, 195). The Christian *primary* dispensation was, in some ways, a return to this earlier *primary* age of Babylon, as the song from *The Resurrection* makes clear:

The Babylonian starlight brought  
A fabulous, formless darkness in;  
Odour of blood when Christ was slain  
Made all Platonic tolerance vain  
And vain all Doric discipline. (*VP*, 438; *CW1*, 216)

The *primary*, represented by the astronomy of Babylon and the Crucifixion, drowns out the virtues of the classical world. The growing power of the *primary* gyre is seen as the triumph of irrationality, of miracle and blood sacrifice, over philosophical reason and artistic light (*AVB*, 274-278; *CW14*, 199-202). And as the returning *primary* of Christendom drew on the archetypes of its Babylonian predecessor, so the returning *antithetical* will draw on the archetypes of its ancient predecessor. This is expressed in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” as the whirling return of the old order:

of the Son of Man”, Anna Pharos sees the sphinx as the axis of sun and Earth opposite each other in Leo and Aquarius: “In the equinoctial cycle of 25,000 years, are two grand occasions when at the equinoxes, the sun and earth, in the signs of Leo and Aquarius, form the figure of the Sphinx: one of which grand phenomena occurred some 12,500 years ago... and strange to say, that *we* are the generation destined to see the Sphinx phenomenon again in the heavens; for at this present time the Sun, having reached the opposite point occupied 12,500 years ago, is now entering Aquarius, while the Earth is entering Leo [...]”, *The Sphinx* 3 (November 1900), reprinted in *The Flaming Sword* 14:52 (16 November 1900), 12-13.

<sup>39</sup> Early in the automatic script, *primary* or “objective pity and despair” (Harper G.M., Adams, Frieling, Sprayberry 1992, vol. 1, 174) emerged, later associated with Christ (291-292).



So the Platonic Year  
Whirls out new right and wrong,  
Whirls in the old instead [...]. (*VP*, 430; *CW1*, 211)

What has been right and wrong in the waning system will be replaced by a return of what preceded it. In “The Gyres”, the old classical order of Empedocles and Hector once gave way to the new, as “Things thought too long can be no longer thought [...] And ancient lineaments are blotted out” by *primary* “Irrational streams of blood”. These new things in their turn become the old order, and eventually the *antithetical* returns, so that “all things run / On that unfashionable gyre again” (*VP*, 564-565; *CW1*, 299).

The “vivification of old intellect” (*AVB*, 208; *CW14*, 154) can be represented by germinating mummy wheat from Egypt or from Asia Minor, the “old mummy wheat” and the “full-flavoured wine out of a barrel” from the cave where the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus passed centuries unconscious (“On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac”, *VP*, 442; *CW1*, 219). In “Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends”, Yeats presents another symbol for this *antithetical* archetype: “the lost egg of Leda, its miraculous life still unquenched”, which Michael Robartes plans to carry to the desert to “leave it to be hatched by the sun’s heat” (*AVB*, 51; *CW14*, 37). Dormant for “twenty centuries”, the egg’s life will come forth, like the human-headed lion, “somewhere in sands of the desert”.

The emergent being(s) will symbolise the influence that inaugurates the coming *antithetical* age whether as the multiple avatars or their *Daimon*. They may be human, like the progeny of Leda’s first two eggs – the avatars themselves – or bestial, whether bird, unicorn, or sphinx – the *Daimon* of the avatars, whether individual *Daimons* or the single collective *Daimon* of a group (at one stage called a Unicorn). The *Daimon*, though represented by a form that is like its human – sociable beasts for *primary* people and solitary for *antithetical* – is in fact the human’s opposite, a *primary* person having an *antithetical Daimon* and an *antithetical* person a *primary Daimon*<sup>40</sup>. The Sphinx as antagonist of Oedipus could thus be seen as either his *Daimon* or as a manifestation of *Daimonic* crisis in his life. Yeats notes that “Oedipus – Greece – solved the riddle of the Sphinx – Nature – compelled her to plunge from the precipice” (*AVB*, 202-203; *CW14*, 149), and this may be part of the reason why Yeats substituted the children of Leda with Oedipus as the representative of the pre-Christian *antithetical* avatar(s) in “A Packet for Ezra Pound” (*AVB*, 27-29; *CW14*, 20-22)<sup>41</sup>, thus foreshadowing the coming *antithetical* avatars. The Sphinx as a *Daimon* inspires the human, hero or avatar, to action and creation, though it will also be indifferent to whether it brings comedy or tragedy to their life.

As commented earlier, most readers of “The Second Coming” register a feeling of threat in Yeats’s description of the shape with its “gaze blank and pitiless as the sun... moving its slow thighs” and the “rough beast” that “Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born” (*VP*, 402; *CW1*, 189-190). The echoes of the biblical Apocalypse or Revelation would imply that this is the Beast that will be defeated by the Lamb, which is the true Second Coming. Yet, within the construct of *A Vision*, there is little reason to expect the new avatar to be the unifying, humane, peaceful influence seen in Christ, as the coming age is “expressive, hierarchical, multiple, masculine, harsh, surgical” (*AVB*, 263; *CW14*, 192).

<sup>40</sup> This is far clearer in *A Vision A* (see “The Daimon, the Sexes, Unity of Being, Natural and Supernatural Unity” esp. *AVA*, 29-30; *CW13*, 26-27). The distinction is less pronounced in *AVB* (see Mann 2019, ch. 9, esp. §9.3 and §9.4).

<sup>41</sup> Originally published in 1929 as *A Packet for Ezra Pound* (1929, 35-37).

What should the previous *antithetical* avatars lead us to expect? Putting aside the impossibility of the dates and treating them solely as mythic archetypes, the children of Leda and Oedipus were not bringers of peace. Castor and Pollux were loving brothers and part of the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece, becoming the Dioscuri, patrons of travellers and athletes; Helen was beauty personified and the cause of the Trojan War; and Clytemnestra's vengeance on Agamemnon continued the curse of the House of Atreus. Oedipus's intelligence and wit helped him solve the riddle of the Sphinx, but his arrogant rage led him to kill an old man who turned out to have been his father; his incestuous marriage was partially expiated by his horror and self-exile from Thebes, epitomising tragic fall, and ending with his earthy crucifixion at Colonus (*AVB*, 27-29; *CWI4*, 20-22).

Within Yeats's myth, the future avatar should have more kinship with these figures than with the divine teachers. Yeats foresees a similarly turbulent and contentious future:

I imagine new races, as it were, seeking domination, a world resembling but for its immensity that of the Greek tribes – each with its own *Daimon* or ancestral hero – the brood of Leda, War and Love; history grown symbolic, the biography changed into a myth. (*AVA*, 214; *CWI3*, 176)

The divisive tribalism of the new age that Yeats appears to envisage positively is what Rudolf Steiner sees as the deception of Ahriman:

All that comes from old differences of family, race, tribe, peoples, is used by Ahriman to create confusion. 'Freedom for every nation, even the smallest [...]' These were fine-sounding words. But the powers hostile to man always use fine words in order to bring confusion and in order to attain the things that Ahriman wishes to attain for his incarnation. (2006, 25-26)

This Theosophical strand is significant because George Yeats was interested in Steiner's work<sup>42</sup>. Steiner envisaged a series of physical incarnations or avatars of good and evil, which parallel Yeats's system in certain respects. The principles of evil were two: Lucifer, the over-reacher, and Ahriman, the constrictor. Lucifer was said to have incarnated in the East (China) in the third millennium before Christ; Christ's incarnation in the Near East and the Mystery of Golgotha was viewed as the crucial pivot of the ages; then Ahriman was expected to incarnate in the third millennium after Christ, in the West (probably the Americas). However, in Steiner's view neither Lucifer nor Ahriman was simply an incarnating being, being rather tendencies or forces that act on humanity, both fundamentally evil but conferring some benefits on humankind, whether Lucifer's wisdom or Ahriman's science, especially if mediated by Christ and largely rejected.

There are no simple equivalents between Steiner's ideas and Yeats's. If the "rough beast" of the "The Second Coming" is the *Daimon* of a new era, the pitiless face and the stony sleep seem to indicate something close to Steiner's cold Ahriman as a new sphinx to face a new Oedipus. Yet for Yeats the "rough beast" relates to the *antithetical* revelation of the religious gyre, while the materialism and scientism associated with Ahriman are a manifestation of the dominant secular *primary*, specifically the "widening gyre" (*VP*, 410; *CWI*, 189), which "is sweeping outward" and "All our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre" (*VP*, 825; *CWI*, 659)<sup>43</sup>. Though Yeats is definitely a partisan for the *antithetical*

<sup>42</sup> George Yeats was part of an Anthroposophical discussion group (Saddlemeyer 2002, 58). Though Steiner first used the dichotomy of Lucifer and Ahriman ca. 1908, his lectures on Lucifer, Christ, and Ahriman come mainly around 1919.

<sup>43</sup> The *primary* influences also include reaching the last phases of both the two-thousand-year gyre of religion, and of the one-thousand-year gyre of history as described in *AVA*, 213-14; *CWI3*, 176-77; see Mann 2019, ch. 14.

age foreseen in the system and might even regard himself as a prophet of that dispensation, in the shorter term, he acknowledged to Olivia Shakespear that his “own philosophy does not much brighten the prospect, so far as any future we shall live to see is concerned” (9 April [1921], *CL InteLex*, 3899; *L*, 668). And certainly from our current *primary* perspective, the rough beast appears threatening, because “The *antithetical tincture* is noble, and, judged by the standards of the *primary*, evil” (*AVB*, 155; *CW14*, 115; cf. *AVA*, 89; *CW13*, 73).

Following a crisis in relations between the United Kingdom and the United States in 1895, Yeats wrote to enquire of Florence Farr:

Has the magical armageddon begun at last? [...] The war would fulfill the prophets and especially a prophetic vision I had long ago with the Mathers's, and so far be for the glory of God, but what a dusk of the nations it would be! for surely it would drag in half the world [...] Could you come and see me on Monday and have tea and perhaps divine for armageddon? (*CL1*, 477)<sup>44</sup>

He seems to have viewed the prospect with some equanimity, with relish almost. While Augustine Martin has pointed out the need “to distinguish between Yeats’s early intimations of apocalypse from his later”, he also traces “the continuity between them”, and that, as the earlier Armageddon would be followed by an alchemical transformation to a golden age, so the convulsions of the end of one cycle and birth pangs lead to a new *antithetical* order (Martin 1990). The *Daimons’* perspective views the world as a theatre, seeing human life in aesthetic terms, “caring not a straw whether we be Juliet going to her wedding or Cleopatra to her death; for in their eyes nothing has weight but passion” (*Au*, 272; *CW3*, 217). Similarly, at a more global level, Yeats asks why Shelley’s Demogorgon bears “so terrible a shape” when its arrival frees Prometheus and ushers in a new world (*E&I*, 420; *CW5*, 118), concluding that “we must not demand even the welfare of the human race, nor traffic with divinity in our prayers. Divinity moves outside our antinomies, it may be our lot to worship in terror; ‘Did He whom made the lamb make thee?’ ” (*E&I*, 425; *CW5*, 122). Yeats’s divinity will not listen to prayers or even concern itself with human well-being, so for those born at the transition between cycles, their lot may be to live in difficult times.

Despite some provocative postures on Yeats’s part, such as “The Great Day” or *On the Boiler* (1938), Yvor Winters is surely wrong to conclude that “Yeats admires violence in general and has little use for Platonic tolerance, Doric discipline or the civilization produced by Christianity” (1960, 7)<sup>45</sup>. Yeats values “Platonic tolerance” and “Doric discipline” but sees them blotted out by “a fabulous, formless darkness” that answers the question of the Syrian in *The Resurrection*: “What if there is always something that lies outside knowledge, outside order? What if at the

*AVA*’s image of the end of the cycle, “that vast plaster Herculean image, final *primary* thought” (*AVA*, 214; *CW13*, 177) derives from a vision of George Yeats’s in April 1921 when she “seemed to look at a double cone & at the far narrow end [she] saw a seemingly herculean christ” which was “all... appearance”, later interpreted as: “Objective strength where created by the outward gyre is a delusion, the deceptive christ at the end of the cone, but there is objective strength which has a subjective origin, which is produced by the forerunners of the second master” (Harper G.M., Martinich, Harper M.M. 1992, vol. 3, 87). Christ was the First Master, so the Second Master is the coming *antithetical* avatars; this raises further questions of whether the “rough beast” could be either a delusive manifestation of strength or is a forerunner of the Second Master.

<sup>44</sup> Years later, W.B. Yeats remembered that Mathers “began to foresee changes in the world, announcing in 1893 or 1894 the imminence of great wars”, and questioned whether “this prophecy of his, which would shortly be repeated by mediums and clairvoyants all over the world” was “an unconscious inference taken up into an imagination brooding upon war, or was it prevision?” (ca. 1922, *Au*, 336; *CW3*, 257-258).

<sup>45</sup> On W.B. Yeats and violence, see, for example Farag 1978; Nally 2009; Wood 2010.

moment when knowledge and order seems complete that something appears?... What if the irrational return? What if the circle begin again?" (*VPI*, 925; *CW2*, 490). Christ's miraculously beating heart represents the irrational that lies outside our antinomies and outside our knowledge, "the terror of the supernatural" (*VPI*, 935; *CW1* 726).

The unicorn seems to embody the part of Yeats that could, as mentioned earlier, feel "a sort of ecstasy at the contemplation of ruin" (*VPI*, 932; *CW2*, 722) or of the revolution of the gyres that brings "the desolation of reality: / Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!" ("Meru", *VP*, 563; *CW1*, 295). As in "The Gyres", however, "We that look on but laugh in tragic joy" (*VP*, 564; *CW1*, 299), taking the *Daimons'* view of life as drama, but maybe also finding the beginning of the new germ with the *daimonic* familiars where there is nothing, in the "dark betwixt the polecat and the owl" ("The Gyres", *VP*, 565; *CW1*, 300) or where the cat "Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness" ("The Statues", *VP*, 611; *CW1*, 345).

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*Yeats’s Works: Abbreviations*

<i>Au</i>	<i>Autobiographies</i> (London, Macmillan, 1955).
<i>AVA</i>	<i>A Vision: An Explanation of Life Founded upon the Writings of Giraldus and upon certain Doctrines attributed to Kusta Ben Luka</i> (London, T. Werner Laurie, 1925).
<i>AVB</i>	<i>A Vision</i> (1937; revised, London, Macmillan, 1962).
<i>CL1</i>	<i>W. B. Yeats. Collected Letters. Volume I, 1865-1895</i> , ed. John Kelly and Eric Domville (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986).
<i>CL4</i>	<i>W. B. Yeats. Collected Letters. Volume IV, 1905-1907</i> , ed. John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2006).
<i>CL InteLex</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats</i> , gen. ed. John Kelly, Oxford University Press (InteLex Electronic Edition) 2002; letters cited by accession number.
<i>CW1</i>	<i>The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats. Volume I, The Poems (Second Edition)</i> , ed. Richard J. Finneran (1989; New York, Scribner, 1997).
<i>CW2</i>	<i>The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats. Volume II, The Plays</i> , ed. David R. Clark & Rosalind E. Clark (New York & London, Palgrave, 2001; New York, Scribner, 2001).
<i>CW3</i>	<i>The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume III, Autobiographies</i> , ed. William H. O’Donnell, Douglas N. Archibald, J. Fraser Cocks III, Gretchen L. Schwenker (New York, Scribner, 1999).
<i>CW5</i>	<i>The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume V, The Later Essays</i> . William H. O’Donnell with Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994).
<i>CW13</i>	<i>The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume XIII, A Vision, The Original 1925 Version</i> , ed. Catherine E. Paul & Margaret Mills Harper (New York, Scribner, 2008).
<i>CW14</i>	<i>The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume XIV, A Vision, The Revised 1937 Edition</i> , ed. Catherine E. Paul & Margaret Mills Harper (New York, Scribner, 2015).
<i>E&amp;I</i>	<i>Essays and Introductions</i> (London and New York, Macmillan, 1961).

<i>L</i>	<i>The Letters of W.B. Yeats</i> , ed. Allan Wade (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954; New York, Macmillan, 1955).
<i>M2005</i>	<i>Mythologies</i> , ed. Warwick Gould & Deirdre Toomey (London, Macmillan, 2005).
NLI	Manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland (followed by MS number).
<i>VP</i>	<i>The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats</i> , ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1957). Cited from the corrected third printing of 1966.
<i>VPI</i>	<i>The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats</i> , ed. Russell K. Alspach assisted by Catherine C. Alspach (London and New York, Macmillan, 1966). Cited from the corrected second printing of 1966.
<i>VSR</i>	<i>The Secret Rose, Stories by W.B. Yeats: A Variorum Edition</i> , ed. Phillip L. Marcus, Warwick Gould, and Michael J. Sidnell (1981; 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. and enlarged, London, Macmillan, 1992).







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## *Jeux de Cartes:* i tarocchi e la poesia di W.B. Yeats

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### *Abstract:*

This essay explores the relationship between the Tarot and the poetry of W.B. Yeats. It argues that Yeats was deeply fascinated by the Tarot, and that this fascination is evident in many of his poems. The essay begins by discussing Yeats's interest in the occult. Yeats was a member of several occult societies, including the Hermetic Society and the Golden Dawn. He was also a friend of Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society. The essay then goes on to examine the ways in which the Tarot is used in Yeats's poetry. Yeats often uses Tarot imagery to create a sense of mystery and suspense. He also uses the Tarot to explore themes of love, death, and rebirth. The Tarot provides Yeats with a way to explore the hidden depths of the human psyche. It also helps him to create a poetry that is both beautiful and profound.

*Keywords:* Fool, Moon, Tarot, Tower, W.B. Yeats

Come in un caleidoscopio diversi vetrini colorati si mescolano a formare immagini sempre diverse ad ogni rotazione del cilindro dell'apparecchio, la poesia di Yeats brilla di colori, immagini, illuminazioni, improvvise epifanie, irruzione di forme e figure che sembrano provenire dal ricco, ipertrofico deposito di simboli che di volta in volta la parola poetica fa emergere in forma leggibile. Alcune di queste suggestioni rimandano a un'intensa meditazione sui significati magici e simbolici dei Tarocchi capace di accrescere la dimensione metafisica, apocalittica del testo, creando nel lettore lo stesso senso di attesa e stupore da cui viene colto l'interrogante davanti alla misteriosa disposizione sulla tavola delle colorate figure a cui chiede un responso, una risposta, lo scioglimento dei quesiti che l'hanno condotto fin lì. Come quelle carte, le parole sono simboli e ben lo sapeva Yeats, frequentatore per anni di circoli esoterici, e magici, come la Dublin Hermetic Society, l'Order of Christian Kabalists, la Golden Dawn e la frequentazione di Madame Blavatsky. La meditazione, spesso condotta su immagini, di cui i Tarocchi, soprattutto gli Arcani Maggiori, facevano parte, era pratica

essenziale e diffusa di tali rituali. “Un mazzo di Tarocchi è prima di tutto un trattato di filosofia espresso per immagini”, avvertiva Oswald Wirth (1973 [1966], 12), e McGregor Mathers dell’Order of Christian Kabalists, The Hermetic Students, rassicurava il poeta, sospettoso di qualsiasi pratica o rituale che incoraggiasse quell’astrazione capace di “deaden the nerves of the soul: ‘We only give you Symbols [...] because we respect your liberty’ ” (Yeats 1972, 27).

Yeats non menziona spesso direttamente i Tarocchi, ma riferisce di sovente nella sua autobiografia, di incontri e sedute con amici o semplici conoscenti, in cui le parole *image*, *meditation* e *symbol* compaiono in continuazione. Molti si rivolgevano a lui perché li inducesse in una condizione tale da procurare loro immagini e visioni simboliche, creandogli una reputazione, come lui stesso dichiara scherzosamente, quasi di mago<sup>1</sup>. Nell’*Autobiografia*, di cui possediamo una prima redazione non revisionata e perciò più affidabile, però, si accenna quasi di sfuggita e con qualche imbarazzo a un episodio, che dimostra come il poeta ricorresse ai Tarocchi in momenti di forte disagio o perplessità. In una circostanza Yeats era rimasto colpito dalla bellezza della futura Countess Markievicz, ma soprattutto dalla delicatezza di sua sorella Eva, che dichiara di aver frequentato “for a couple of happy weeks” (Yeats 1972, 78). Indeciso se dichiararsi a lei, chiede l’aiuto dei Tarocchi. Sfila dal mazzo una carta e quello che compare è il Matto (The Fool), il numero zero della serie dei Grandi Arcani, o Arcani Maggiori; e ciò – certamente non per una scelta razionale – lo induce a lasciar perdere, nella consapevolezza che qualunque scelta, comunque, non potrà che condurre a un fallimento<sup>2</sup>.

Quello che è certo è che i Tarocchi, i grandi come i piccoli Arcani, inducono nella sua mente una forte tensione emozionale, sia nella loro qualità di figure, sia in quella di creazione di valori simbolici. Che la ricerca e l’uso delle immagini fosse fondamentale per Yeats lo si deduce non soltanto dalla frequenza con cui esse compaiono nella sua poesia, ma da esplicite dichiarazioni sia nella prosa, sia nei suoi versi. In “Ego dominus tuus” (Yeats 1952, 180-183), per esempio, all’affermazione di Hic (che rappresenta la parte solare, oggettiva dell’individuo), secondo il quale uno stile si acquisisce attraverso un lungo e sedentario lavoro sulle opere degli antichi maestri, Ille (che ne rappresenta invece la parte più inquieta, *lunare*) risponde “because I seek an image not a book / Those men that in their writings are most wise / Own nothing but their blind, stupefied hearts” (182). Il dialogo fra Hic e Ille si svolge ai piedi di una torre (your old wind beaten tower) abitata da Ille. Quest’ultimo medita passeggiando accanto a un ruscello alla luce della luna. Sono presenti qui, in pochi versi, tre immagini-simbolo che compaiono su diverse lame dei grandi Arcani: la Torre (Arcano numero 16), la Luna (Arcano numero 18), e l’Acqua, che compare in vari Arcani: nella Temperanza (Arcano numero 14), versata da una figura femminile da un recipiente a un altro; nella Luna, dove compare in forma di pozzanghera o tratto di corso d’acqua; nella Stella (Arcano 17), dove una figura femminile svuota due brocche d’acqua in un ruscello.

Lo stesso contesto: una torre, un lume che brilla in una delle sue stanze, segno e segnale di qualcuno che si affanna a leggere e interpretare un libro misterioso ivi lasciato da Michael Robartes – personaggio inquietante che ricompare anche successivamente nella poesia di Yeats – l’atmosfera notturna, lo stesso vecchio che continua, insoddisfatto, a cercare risposte, che non troverà, ritorna in “The Phases of the Moon” (Yeats 1952, 183-184) con alcune varianti particolarmente significative che si possono far risalire a una delle figure fondamentali dei Grandi Arcani dei Tarocchi: la Luna. Quest’ultima è appena menzionata in apertura di “Ego

<sup>1</sup> “I found I had the reputation of a magician” (Yeats 1972, 78).

<sup>2</sup> “I threw the Tarot, and when the Fool came up, which means that nothing at all would happen, I turned my mind away” (78-79).

Dominus Tuus”, ma permea di sé tutto il poemetto successivo, dandogli quella coloritura misteriosa, metafisica, che crea nel lettore la tensione di un’attesa destinata a non sciogliersi neppure negli ultimi versi. Due uomini venuti da lontano, dal Connemara, la regione più occidentale dell’Irlanda e più tradizionalmente legata, almeno per Yeats, al mondo magico delle leggende fra umano e super-umano, giungono nei pressi della stessa torre del testo precedente alla luce di una “late-risen moon” (184). I due uomini sono il mago Michael Robartes e Aherne, a cui sono in parte affidati gli stessi compiti di Hic e Ille. Mentre osservano il vano affaticarsi del vecchio sul senso oscuro del testo visionario che gli sta di fronte, espongono, ovvero Michael Robartes espone, sollecitato dalle domande di Aherne, la teoria delle fasi della luna, che trova più esteso e discorsivo sviluppo in *A Vision*. Senza l’atmosfera lunare che si insinua nella rappresentazione delle caratteristiche delle varie fasi lunari, dalla luna nuova al plenilunio per tornare all’oscurità della luna nuova, e nell’esposizione di come ciascuna fase operi positivamente o negativamente sui destini individuali e sulla Storia stessa, il rischio – e Yeats lo sapeva bene – sarebbe stato quello, freddo, didascalico, di una teoria esoterico-filosofica. Ma il poemetto è intriso di una coloritura e di alcuni segnali che si ritrovano chiaramente nell’Arcano XVIII dei Tarocchi: i suoni di una vita animale invisibile e inquietante, come il gigantesco gambero semi-immerso in una pozza d’acqua di cui si ignora la provenienza, o i due cani – ma potrebbero essere icone di una presenza fantasmatica di vita notturna<sup>3</sup>, e la figura di Robartes, che mostra la stessa ambiguità del volto della luna disegnato nella lama omonima dei Tarocchi, indifferente e lontana, consapevole ma non coinvolta nelle vicende umane. Il vecchio nella torre, che ha trascorso la vita alla ricerca del senso della vita e della relazione di questa con il tempo e il senza tempo, è ironicamente proiezione dello stesso Yeats. Quando Robartes ha concluso il suo discorso sulle fasi della luna e sui complicati meccanismi che in esse e da esse vengono attivate, Aherne ride perché capisce che l’uomo nella torre non coglierà mai il senso di quel percorso “so simple”, perché ha cercato razionalmente di comprendere ciò che si rivela immediatamente e con chiarezza solo in un’epifania. La Torre, che per l’insonne, per l’intellettuale, ma anche per il poeta, è proiezione e insieme simbolo del proprio orgoglioso isolamento, diventa in seguito il centro del dubbio, dell’incertezza, della contraddizione, come bene espresso nella lunga poesia “The Tower”, che fa parte della raccolta (1928) dallo stesso titolo. Sarebbe un azzardo vedere in quella torre colpita dal fulmine, che ne frantuma la cima, e nelle due figure che precipitano dall’alto nel Grande Arcano, la Torre appunto, i dubbi e i tormenti che continuamente si ripropongono per Yeats stesso nel corso degli anni?

Quella della luna è probabilmente la più inquietante figura dei Grandi Arcani per il suo colore serotino e l’assenza assoluta di esseri umani: una carta che mostra sostanzialmente sempre le stesse caratteristiche di ambiguità e attesa, come, per esempio, nella breve poesia della stessa raccolta, che segue immediatamente “The Phases of the Moon”, ossia “The Cat and the Moon” (Yeats 1952, 188-189) dove l’unica muta conversazione che avviene è quella fra il gatto Minnaloushe e la luna, con le pupille del gatto che mimano le fasi della luna:

Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils  
Will pass from change to change,  
And that from round to crescent,  
From crescent to round they range? (188)

<sup>3</sup> “I was convinced that all lonely and lovely places were crowded with invisible beings and that it would be possible to communicate with them” (124).

Ma non potrebbe forse essere il contrario? Ironicamente, nella danza che i due intrecciano nel loro vagabondare notturno, potrebbe essere la luna stessa ad apprendere qualcosa dal gatto: “Maybe the moon may learn / Tired of that courtly fashion, / A new dance turn” (*ibidem*).

Altre suggestioni, quasi frammenti, sgarci di lontane emozioni suscitate dalla contemplazione di ciascuna carta dei Tarocchi nel corso delle sue esperienze esoteriche, si insinuano in versi, strofe o intere poesie che con i Tarocchi sembra non abbiano nulla a che fare. Un interessante esempio è fornito da “The Magi” (141), una breve composizione, che fa parte della raccolta *Responsibilities* (1914). Questi Magi sembrano davvero usciti da un mazzo di Tarocchi. Gli stessi aggettivi che li qualificano sono quelli che caratterizzano le figure disegnate su un mazzo di carte: “stiff”, “painted”. I vestimenti sono rigidi, non hanno la morbidezza dei panneggi rinascimentali (non parliamo qui di mazzi di Tarocchi dipinti da artisti rinascimentali e successivi, ma di quelli più essenziali in uso ancora prima del Rinascimento, la cui funzione cominciava a virare dal puro gioco al valore simbolico e magico); i movimenti sono come fissati in un fotogramma: una compresenza ambigua di staticità e movimento, una staticità che suggerisce un movimento destinato però a mai realizzarsi. Nelle lame dei Grandi Arcani, le poche figure che accennano al movimento – il Matto, la Ruota, la Stella, il Carro – appaiono come cristallizzate in un attimo atemporale, ossia un attimo paradossalmente mai realizzato o realizzabile in un tempo reale. I Magi, che nella tradizione cristiana giungono alla grotta e sostano in adorazione davanti al bambinello, nella poesia di Yeats vengono definiti *unsatisfied*, insoddisfatti dal momento epifanico non accolto, e la loro meta non è il ritorno al proprio paese, ma la ricerca di un'altra “Culla epifanica”<sup>4</sup>. Ma sono figure umane, davvero si mettono in moto verso un'altra destinazione? Ancora una volta questi personaggi vivono in un'ambiguità che li rende più simili a figure ritagliate su carta stagnola e collocate su uno sfondo predisposto di cielo colorato di blu (“all their helms of silver hovering side by side”): proprio come le figure immobili, misteriose, fissate in un gesto, in una postura, in una pantomima di azione, contro lo sfondo neutro o indifferente di certi Arcani.

La fissità delle figure che compaiono nelle lame dei Tarocchi, soprattutto gli Arcani Maggiori, trova un suo corrispondente visivo nell'analogia fascinazione del poeta per le figure ossimoricamente rappresentate in immobile movimento nei mosaici bizantini. Gli sguardi fissi, inespressivi di quelli<sup>5</sup>, non si discostano molto dai volti indifferenti di figure come La Papessa e L'Imperatrice o di quella che afferra senza apparente fatica o motivazione le fauci di un leone nell'arcano XI, La Forza.

La figura più complessa e più problematica del mazzo dei Tarocchi, però, è quella del Matto (The Fool). È l'unico dei Grandi Arcani a cui non sia attribuito alcun numero, talvolta indicato con uno zero; si discute se sia da collocare all'inizio o alla fine dei Grandi Arcani e non c'è accordo su chi sia il personaggio raffigurato, dove stia andando, se non senta o non si curi dell'animale (una lince, un cane?) che gli morsica un polpaccio o una natica, se l'inevitabile caduta nell'abisso che gli si apre davanti rappresenterà la sua salvezza, la sua metamorfosi o la sua morte<sup>6</sup>. Ma poi il Matto sta davvero muovendosi verso quel nulla invisibile? In qualunque modo sia stato disegnato, il suo movimento è come cristallizzato;

<sup>4</sup> La nascita di Cristo, infatti, nella visione yeatsiana rappresenta l'inizio del ciclo dell'oggettività, ossia di quel ciclo destinato a crollare per essere sostituito dal suo opposto, quello della soggettività, di cui il poeta credeva di scorgere i segni premonitori nei tempi violenti che l'Irlanda e l'intera Europa stavano attraversando. È l'epifania di questo nuovo ciclo che i suoi Magi avevano pensato di trovare nella culla di Betlemme, ed è per questo che si allontanano “unsatisfied”.

<sup>5</sup> “The round bird-like eyes of Byzantine sculpture” (Yeats 1962 [1937], 18).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. anche Douglas, che ne illustra soprattutto le qualità positive e redentrici della società e Gatto Trocchi (1995, 88-91), che ne evidenzia la duplice natura (1982 [1972], 42-44).

come nei casi precedenti, “un movimento destinato a mai realizzarsi”. Questa figura era certamente presente al poeta: il lettore la vede spuntare come in un mazzo di carte, talvolta semi-celata da quella che gli si sovrappone. Nel Fool yeatsiano convergono altre memorie e suggestioni, “from the village fool to the Fool of Shakespeare” (Yeats 1962 [1937], 182)<sup>7</sup>, senza dimenticare che il Fool entra di prepotenza anche nel complicato meccanismo delle fasi della luna, puntigliosamente descritto in *A Vision*, in cui compare alla ventottesima fase, cioè l’ultima prima della Luna Nuova, dove, come nella quindicesima fase, quella della luna piena, la vita umana è impossibile: “there’s no human life at the full or the dark”<sup>8</sup>. Anche nel mazzo dei Tarocchi il personaggio è sfuggente e contraddittorio. Oswald Wirth lo descrive sprezzantemente come “un personaggio che non conta affatto, in considerazione della sua inconsistenza intellettuale e morale (Wirth 1973 [1966], 266), ma poi, solo alcuni paragrafi più avanti, è costretto ad ammettere un’altra prospettiva: “Il Matto rappresenta [...] tutto ciò che sta al di là dell’intelligibile, quindi l’Infinito esterno al finito, l’assoluto che avvolge il relativo” (267). Questa figura duplice, contraddittoria, caratterizza pressoché tutti i personaggi che Yeats distribuisce nella sua opera poetica, investendo di sé la personalità del poeta stesso. Una di tali figure è quella del vecchio, che in un saggio precedente ho definito “ossimoro vivente” (Serpillo 2001, *passim*) in quanto capace di suscitare un’energia altrettanto improvvisa quanto terribile, o di esprimere, in un comportamento apparentemente stolido, una saggezza inaspettata. In “The Three Hermits” Yeats ci presenta tre vecchi “By a cold and desolate sea”: il primo farfuglia una preghiera, il secondo si gratta in cerca di pulci; “On a windy stone, the third, / Giddy with his hundredth year / Sang unnoticed like a bird” (Yeats 1952, 127). Ci vengono mostrati qui due raffigurazioni di vecchiezza, una – riferita ai primi due eremiti – tradizionalmente associata al degrado fisico e intellettuale della tarda età, l’altra a quella connessa con la demenza senile. Ma è proprio questo che il poeta vuole mostrarci, tre manifestazioni di *molesta senectus*? Il Matto, perché tale è il terzo eremita, canta ed è felice, come il Matto dei Tarocchi mentre si avvia verso il baratro in cui tutti e tre comunque cadranno, ma lui solo avendo appreso, come il Fool della ventottesima fase della luna, l’intimo segreto dell’esistenza. Lo si potrebbe considerare come un’anticipazione degli “wild old men” a cui Yeats affiderà il compito di annunciare la fine di un ciclo, quello dell’oggettività e l’inizio del violento ciclo soggettivo.

In *The Wild Swans at Coole* le ultime tre poesie<sup>9</sup>, sono affidate alla voce di un Fool: “Two Songs of a Fool” e “Another Song of a Fool” (Yeats 1952, 190-191). La raccolta è del 1919: sono passati trent’anni dai giorni della frequentazione della Hermetic Society e della Golden Dawn, eppure la presenza dei Grandi Arcani dei Tarocchi conserva per Yeats il fascino di quelle figure misteriose su cui ha meditato a lungo e intensamente. Il Fool che parla in queste tre poesie sembra quasi una descrizione del Matto dei Tarocchi: una mente incapace di focalizzare l’essenza dei problemi (lui stesso si definisce “a wandering-witted fool” (191) nella prima canzone); la sua sostanziale solitudine; e la farfalla, che nel Tarocco il Matto insegue senza raggiungerla e che qui, in “Another Song of a Fool”, ha catturato investendola di una conoscenza che il suo povero cervello non riesce a comprendere:

<sup>7</sup> Si veda anche l’articolo di Joan Weatherly (1986), in cui la figura del Fool è esaminata nelle sue numerose implicazioni, da quelle esoteriche a quelle relative alla funzione poetica, anche in relazione con altri Arcani del mazzo dei Tarocchi.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. “The Phases of the Moon” (Yeats 1952, 185).

<sup>9</sup> Che precedono l’ultima, “The Double Vision of Michael Robartes” in cui compare ancora quel personaggio ambiguo, collocato agli estremi limiti delle fasi della luna nuova e della luna piena.

This great purple butterfly,  
 In the prison of my hands,  
 Has a learning in his eye  
 Not a poor fool understands (Yeats 1952, 191)

“Fair and foul are near of kin, / And fair needs foul” (294), esclama Crazy Jane, a cui Yeats affida ben sette poesie nella raccolta *Words for Music Perhaps* (1932), dove il personaggio passa senza soluzione di continuità dalla collera ai ricordi, dallo sconforto alla riflessione, dal confronto apparentemente rispettoso per il Vescovo, con cui accetta di parlare, all’esplosione di collera per affermare il suo diritto di essere donna e amante in qualsiasi condizione.

My friends are gone, but that’s a truth  
 Nor grave nor bed denied,  
 Learned in bodily lowliness  
 And in the hearts pride.  
 A woman can be proud and stiff  
 When on love intent (“Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop”, Yeats 1952, 294)

Il continuo vacillare fra sconforto e euforia, perfezione e senso amaro e violento dell’imperfezione è una costante della poesia di Yeats, particolarmente evidente nelle poesie visionarie da *The Tower* (1928) a *Last Poems* (1936-39): da “Sailing to Byzantium” a “Among School Children”, da “The Tower” a “An Acre of Grass”.

Sì, ma cosa c’entra questo con il Matto dei Tarocchi? Sarebbe un errore pensare a un influsso diretto di quel misterioso Grande Arcano ogni volta che tale discrasia viene percepita in questa o quella particolare poesia; eppure sarebbe anche una diminuzione non tenerne affatto conto: le memorie delle esperienze degli anni formativi lasciano un segno permanente nel pensiero e nella sensibilità dell’uomo adulto. Per tornare alla metafora iniziale, il mazzo dei Tarocchi, e particolarmente alcune delle raffigurazioni su cui l’attenzione può essersi posata più a lungo, come L’Eremita, L’Appeso, La Torre, la Luna, Il Mondo, sono come quei frammenti di vetro colorato, che mischiandosi con altri creano le figure magiche, sempre cangianti, di un caleidoscopio. A volte però la memoria di quel “wicked pack of cards”<sup>10</sup> sembra indiscutibile. Ne trovo un esempio in “The Cap and Bells”, inserita nella raccolta *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899). Qui un buffone, The Jester, innamorato di “the young queen” le offre l’anima, il cuore, ma la regina ignora entrambi, le finestre e la porta della sua casa restano inesorabilmente chiuse. Disperato, the jester decide allora che le manderà l’unica altra cosa che possiede, il suo berretto a sonagli. E il miracolo avviene: porta e finestre si aprono e viene dato accesso al cuore e all’anima che erano rimasti fuori:

She opened her door and her window,  
 And the heart and the soul came through,  
 To her right hand came the red one,  
 To her left hand came the blue. (Yeats 1952, 72)

<sup>10</sup> Il riferimento è ovviamente a T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922), in particolare alla prima sezione, “The Burial of the Dead”.

Solo quando il buffone, ossia il poeta, offre alla “young queen” – che altri non è che la Poesia – tutto sé stesso (il berretto a sonagli non è che la rappresentazione oggettiva dell’intuizione poetica, di quella che Coleridge definiva “imagination”) la giovane regina se lo stringe al petto e apre finalmente porta e finestre. Quel che è particolarmente interessante, però, è in che modo anima e cuore sono fatti entrare nella casa della poesia. L’anima e il cuore sono distinti da colori diversi, il blu colore freddo per l’anima, il rosso colore caldo per il cuore. Forse non è un caso che Yeats abbia usato proprio i due colori prevalenti nei grandi Arcani esattamente con le stesse funzioni.

Nella poesia di Yeats la parola stessa evoca il simbolo. Come accade per le carte dei Tarocchi, il cui senso e valore cresce o diminuisce a seconda della posizione che ciascuna assume nella pratica della divinazione, allo stesso modo ciò avviene, più o meno direttamente, nelle poesie che si riferiscono ai Grandi Arcani su cui l’indagine è stata condotta, creando in chi legge le stesse attese e turbamenti, ma anche il piacere di colui che si accinga a scoprire nella sequenza di figure misteriose il senso di un percorso che di là dagli interessi puramente pratici, diventa sostanzialmente un esercizio dell’immaginazione.

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## *Make it new:* When Luigi Meneghello transplanted “silly” Yeats

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### *Abstract:*

The essay explores how Luigi Meneghello translated some of W.B. Yeats’s poems into the dialect of Vicenza. Yeats’s compositions became a source of sustenance for the poet from Malo, offering profound insights into various aspects of life and art. Meneghello’s fascination with Yeats led him to undertake the translations of his works into the Vicentine dialect, resulting in the collection *Trapianti*, consisting of seventeen compositions by Yeats, and showcasing Meneghello’s skill in capturing the essence and rhythmic tension of the originals while infusing them with new life and meaning.

**Keywords:** Dialect, Luigi Meneghello, Translating, “Transplanting”, W.B. Yeats

Eppure la poesia è splendida.  
(Meneghello, *Il turbo e il chiaro*, 1995)

### *1. From Translating to Transplanting*

If one has something to say, better say it with simplicity and clarity<sup>1</sup>. With these words, Meneghello recounts his apprenticeship in England, during which he learned to write simply and clearly, as his English friends recommended. He discovered a society where writing prose meant writing it plainly, serving the sole purpose of conveying one’s thoughts directly. Thus, the poet from Malo identified his profound debt to England, where he discovered what he calls “the taste for a certain type or kind of relationship with the written page”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Meneghello 1986, 22: “Se si ha qualcosa da dire, più chiaramente e semplicemente lo si dice, meglio è”.

<sup>2</sup> Meneghello 2006a, 1074: “il gusto di un certo tipo di relazione con la pagina scritta”.

From the English language, Meneghello absorbed various elements, both stylistic and rhythmic, and qualities such as grace, irony, and wit, that may have had some indirect influence on his way of seeing things and attempting to write them, as he stated in *Il turbo e il chiaro*<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, Meneghello grasped the importance of “dialect”, which he defined as an extraordinary reservoir of linguistic resources, in particular regarding translations of texts from English to the dialect of Vicenza. He realized that by translating a few fragments of some notable works of English literature into his dialect, the resulting text turned out to be livelier and at times imbued with a force comparable to that of the original. Conversely, when he opted for a more literary style, albeit not too formal, he came up with a writing that seemed flat and rigid. According to Carola Gandelli, translating into the Vicentine dialect was for Meneghello “a life-giving force that restores vigor to the original. The perfect transplant is subject to mastery of the language into which it is translated, but above all to the evocative power of the mother tongue”<sup>4</sup>.

During an international conference held in Florence on the 100th anniversary of Meneghello’s birth (19 May 1922), organized by Ernestina Pellegrini and Diego Salvadori, Franco Marengo discusses how, in his writings, Meneghello constantly blended ingredients derived from two worlds he calls the “land of toys” and the “land of angels”, clearly referring to Italy and England. In *Trapianti*, this duality is manifested as a convergence we could call “ironic”. Originally published in 2002 by Rizzoli, then republished in 2021, *Trapianti* is a collection of forty-one translations of works by seven English poets into the Vicentine dialect. As Meneghello explains in a note, his purpose was not to translate them “but almost to ‘remake’ them [...] in Vicentino”<sup>5</sup>. They are not actual translations, even though they appear as such in form, alongside their original text, thereby deceiving the reader into line by line readings; rather, they are autonomous, original poems, “a comparison of linguistic fantasies [the Vicentino and the original]”, so as not to betray by translating *verbatim*, but to “transplant” into another ground, as Meneghello himself admitted in an interview with Ernestina Pellegrini in 2002. This requires “[hitting] the neuralgic points of the text” and bringing out “aspects that were not prominent”<sup>6</sup>.

Meneghello’s *Trapianti* are a valuable linguistic exercise between source language and target language, and as an interpretive and cultural practice where attention is shifted towards the target text. Although *Trapianti* from English to Vicentino feature the originals in English indeed, readers are bound to think of and to read them more as autonomous poetic texts. This peculiar method allows Meneghello to maintain the rhythmic and phonological tension of the original composition and its expressive energy. This strategy also opens new scenarios, making the composition almost a new autonomous entity, since the latter must win over faithfulness to the original. As pointed out by Diego Zancani, “Meneghello’s ability to sculpt, to focus on an essential element of the English discourse, and transport it into a familiar, recognizable, perhaps domestic expression, yet no less expressive than the original, is unparalleled, stemming

<sup>3</sup> Meneghello 2006b, 1543: “Garbo, ironia, Wit, le qualità ‘inglesi’ che poi forse hanno avuto un qualche influsso indiretto sul mio stesso modo di vedere le cose e di provare a scriverle”.

<sup>4</sup> Gandelli 2020, 92: “la traduzione verso il dialetto vicentino è una forza vivificatrice che ridona vigore all’originale. Il trapianto perfetto è sottoposto alla padronanza della lingua in cui si traduce, ma soprattutto alla forza evocativa della lingua materna”. Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are mine.

<sup>5</sup> Meneghello 2002, 135: “L’idea immodesta, era quella di rinnovare l’accesione lirica degli originali: non veramente tradurli, dunque, ma quasi rifarli, in devota emulazione, in vicentino”.

<sup>6</sup> Meneghello 2006, 1539-1540: “Si va, traducendo, a colpire punti neuralgici del testo; si fanno emergere aspetti che non erano in rilievo”.

from extensive study and, obviously, great love”<sup>7</sup>. Ernestina Pellegrini observes a stronger affinity between dialect and English than between dialect and Italian. Both languages exhibit a practical and pragmatic approach towards literary language, characterized by its elements of indeterminacy and abstraction (1992, 102).

## 2. *W.B. Yeats transplanted by Meneghello*

Meneghello drew inspiration from a multitude of authors originating from the “land of angels”; some of them were mentioned and “transplanted” in *Trapianti*, such as Shakespeare, Coleridge, Wordsworth, G.M. Hopkins, and William Empson. Among these authors, one in particular is a recurring name within the volume: he is undoubtedly the most beloved and widely translated (Pellegrini 2022, 7). Irish nationalist poet, central figure of the Irish Literary Revival, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923, symbolist, and seeker of esoteric knowledge, W.B. Yeats deeply influenced Meneghello. He was “silly”, states the poet from Malo in *Il turbo e il chiaro*, adding that “his poetry is splendid”<sup>8</sup>. It is a “gift” able to survive everything around it. Meneghello is well aware that poetry, especially Yeats’s, is “food for thought”, sustenance, fodder he loves to consume. Beyond any possible reservations about the ideological and cultural contents of Yeats’s work, and surely Meneghello had some, he also perceives in the Irish poet “a profusion of extraordinary insights into the most varied aspects of the world, youth and old age, the nature of poetry and beauty, the stark power of fanaticism... These are lightning illuminations, flashes of light that go to the heart of things... And there are also some splendid examples of a light touch”<sup>9</sup>.

In 1997, Meneghello decided to “renew his Yeats” and to remake it “in devout emulation”, first in *Le biave* (1997)<sup>10</sup> then in *Trapianti*, although some translations date back to an earlier time. In *Trapianti*, Meneghello transplanted seventeen compositions by Yeats, or eighteen (if we want to count as different the two versions of “The Coming of Wisdom with Time”), into Vicentino. His choice was accurate, carefully elaborated, in that he did not focus only on a particular phase of Yeats’s poetic vision, but rather he embraced it almost entirely (except for some collections<sup>11</sup>).

Meneghello was fascinated and influenced by the places that marked Yeats’s biographical story, so he decided to open and to close his poetic itinerary in the small town of Sligo, Yeats’s

<sup>7</sup> Zancani 2015, 123: “La capacità di Meneghello di scolpire, di concentrarsi su un elemento essenziale del discorso inglese e trasportarlo in una espressione familiare, riconoscibile, magari domestica, ma non meno espressiva dell’originale è senza pari, perché dovuta a un lungo studio e ovviamente un grande amore”.

<sup>8</sup> “[E]ppure la poesia è splendida”.

<sup>9</sup> Meneghello 2006b, 151: “una profusione di intuizioni straordinarie, intorno ai più vari aspetti del mondo, la gioventù e la vecchiaia, la natura della poesia e della bellezza, la potenza ossuta del fanatismo... Sono illuminazioni fulminee, luce di lampo che va al cuore delle cose... E c’è anche qualche splendido esempio di leggerezza di tocco”.

<sup>10</sup> The individual translations in the transition from the 1997 edition to the 2002 edition undergo no significant changes. Except for changes in punctuation, diacritical marks (grave and acute accents, apostrophes, interverbal dashes), some new spellings (reintroduction of double letters, different word divisions), and a few revisions of stanza division, only six corrections remain, some of which respond to a search for more archaic forms, while others aim for a closer approximation to spoken language. In *Le biave* Meneghello had already published the following *trapianti*: “Innisfri”, “La me passion de cuel che zé diffissile”, “El giudissio vien co’l tempo”, “A cuela che ’l so lavoro l’è nda a ramengo”, “Podin”, “Su cuei che no ghe zé piasso el “Playboy de l’Occidente”, “Un tabaro”, “El balón de la mente”, “Na biuti teribile”, “Sédase morti”, “I cavai de Colono”, “Oio e sangue”, “Epitafio”, “Go sigà”, “Le aparission”, “Do’ che nasse l’ispirassion”, “Sota la gropa nuda”.

<sup>11</sup> The most important works of Yeats’s early phase that Meneghello does not translate in *Trapianti* are poems from the collections *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889), *Crossways* (1889), *The Rose* (1893), *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) and *In the Seven Woods* (1903).

*Land of Heart's Desire*. Furthermore, he did this on both an imaginative and a poetic level, notably starting his *trapianti* with "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" of 1888 and closing them with the mountains of "Under Ben Bulbin", which was the last composition Yeats wrote before his death, and which was published posthumously. In the collection, we find poems highlighting what is most dear to Yeats, namely, the complementary nature of the unity of being and the unity of culture, which also surfaces in the work of Meneghello in the form of a moral, intimate, familiar relationship between life and writing.

Published first in *The National Observer* in 1889 and then included in *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* in 1892, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is not only an example of the Celtic Revival, but also a spiritual journey to the center of the Irish experience. As we will delve deeper in the following section by analyzing Meneghello's "trapianto", we can perceive how the poem captures the essence of Yeats's deep connection to the Irish landscape and his longing for a simpler, more spiritual existence. The peaceful setting of Innisfree, with its evocative imagery of nature and solitude, reflects Yeats's desire for a retreat from the hustle and bustle of modern life and a return to the primal rhythms of the natural world. Beyond its lyrical beauty, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" symbolizes a spiritual quest, a journey inward to rediscover the essence of Irish identity and experience. Similarly, for Meneghello, transplanting it into his dialect is a reinforcement of his own identity and origins.

The following Yeatsian poems which Meneghello translates in *Trapianti*, in the order they appear in the collection, are "The Fascination of What's Difficult" (13 lines; "La me pasión par cuel che zé difisile", first four lines) and "The Coming of Wisdom with Time" ("El giudissio vien co'l tempo"). "The Fascination of What's Difficult" is condensed in only four lines in Meneghello's translation, highlighting the challenging yet alluring nature of life's complexities. This poem underscores Yeats's fascination with the enigmatic and elusive themes that are central to his poetic vision. "The Coming of Wisdom with Time", already translated by Meneghello in a previous version within the *Carte*, reflects Yeats's evolving perspective on life and the passage of time. In Meneghello's text the four lines of the original are expanded to five in the *Trapianti* version (they were three lines in *Le Carte*). Originally published in Yeats's collection *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* in 1910, these poems mark a transition in Yeats's poetic style and thematic concerns, as he moves away from his earlier, more introspective works and embraces a more public-facing role.

In *Trapianti*, Meneghello reworks four poems from Yeats's collection *Responsibilities* (1914): "To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing" (16 lines; "A cuela che 'l so lavoro 'l è 'nda a ramengo", 18 lines), "Paudeen" (8 lines; "Podin", 12 lines), "On those that hated 'The Playboy of the Western World'" (6 lines; "Su cuei che no ghe zé piasso el 'Playboy de l'Occidente", 7 lines), and "A Coat" (10 lines; "Un tabaro", 9 lines). This last collection echoes Yeats's experience in secret societies and his public commitment, although both themes emerge as bitter, disillusioned political rhetoric<sup>12</sup>. Through his translations of these poems, Meneghello captures the essence of Yeats's introspection and disillusionment with the political landscape of his era.

The following poem selected by Meneghello from *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917) is "The Balloon of the Mind" (4 lines; "El balón de la mente", 4 lines), where the leading themes are the effort of artistic creation and disillusionment with the world of school. It is worth remembering that this collection dates to the time of Yeats's marriage to Georgie Hyde Lees, therefore it coincided with the exercise of automatic writing he practiced with her, and the first experiments of *A Vision*, whose specific "system" first appeared in this poem. The poem was also the

<sup>12</sup> Yeats lived in a delicate phase between the 19th to the 20th century, during which he engaged in verism, and he cultivated his interest in symbolism of esoteric derivation.

combination of the poet's different readings of Blake, Swedenborg, and Boehme as well as the well-known theosophical, magical and occult experiences that accompanied him as his knowledge of history and philosophy were also growing. A case in point are the two compositions, "Ego dominus tuus" and "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes".

The selection continues with two poetical texts from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), specifically seven lines from "Easter, 1916" ("Na biuti teribile") and two sestets from "Sixteen Dead Men" ("Sédase morti"), the latter published in *The Dial* in November 1920. The inclusion of excerpts from this collection offers insight into Yeats's exploration of Irish nationalism and the aftermath of the Easter Rising. From the period following the watershed represented by Yeats's being awarded the Nobel Prize in 1923, Meneghello chooses "Colonus' Praise" (5 lines; "I cavai de Colono", 5 lines) from the collection *The Tower* (1928); and three poems from *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933), namely: "Oil and Blood" (6 lines; "Oio e sangue", 6 lines), "Swift's Epitaph" (6 lines; "Epitafio", 6 lines), "Remorse for Intemperate Speech" (11 lines; "Go sigà", 10 lines). They offer glimpses into Yeats's exploration of personal and societal themes, showcasing his ability to blend lyrical beauty with profound philosophical insights.

Finally, there are three poems from the *Last Poems* (1939): "The Apparitions" (24 lines; "Le aparissión", 25 lines), five lines from "The Circus Animals Desertion, III" (5 lines; "Do' che nasse l'ispirassión", 4 lines) and finally eleven lines from "Under Ben Bulbin, VI" (11 lines, 1938, published posthumously in the collection *Last Poems and Two Plays*; "Soto la gropa nuda", 12 lines).

The selection made by Meneghello in *Trapianti* does not seem to stem from an apparent chronological rigor. He identified those lines in which he probably managed to feel more capable of eliciting unexpected and novel acoustic harmonies. The storyline within Meneghello's poetical "transplants" unfolds through linguistic revelations that serve as the starting point for the episodes being recounted. Pellegrini uses a metaphorical image, likening these revelations to "word-hooks", which act as baits that Meneghello uses to narrate experiences, stories, and situations. In Pellegrini's interview published in *Luigi Meneghello* (2002), in response to the question:

E.P. [...] Can we say that everything stems from a set of seed-words, or from the phonetic suggestion of certain terms? And sticking to language, if I told you that sometimes you give the impression of coagulating events and people around a center of words you have inside, how would you comment on that?

Meneghello answered:

L.M. I would say that it is very close to what seems to me to happen when I write something that truly interests me: it's a set of seed-words... In the first book, I realized it with surprise, because I didn't know that the deposit of meaningful words we have inside worked in this way. Later, I understood that it is like this. Sometimes, I have happened to search for the seed-word and, as soon as I found it, to build around it three lines or thirty lines, depending on the case [...]. (Pellegrini 2002, 145-146)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "E.P. [...] Si può dire che tutto nasca da un insieme di parole-semi, o dalla suggestione fonetica di certi termini? E sempre sul linguaggio, se ti dicessi che alle volte dai l'impressione di coagulare eventi e persone intorno a un centro di parole che hai dentro, come commenteresti? L.M. Direi che è molto vicino a ciò che a me pare che succeda quando scrivo qualche cosa che veramente mi interessa: è un insieme di parole-semi... Nel primo libro me ne sono accorto con sorpresa, perché non sapevo che funzionasse in questo modo il deposito di parole significative che abbiamo dentro. In seguito, ho capito che è così. Mi è capitato a volte di andare in cerca della parola-seme e, appena trovata, di farci attorno le tre righe o le trenta righe, secondo il caso [...]" (Pellegrini 2002, 145-146).

### 3. Case Studies

#### 3.1 “Innisfri”

As previously hinted, Meneghello’s decision to translate “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” should come as no surprise, as this is one of Yeats’s poems where the richness of visual elements is almost overshadowed by the variety of sounds, stronger than the noise of the city in which the poetic ‘I’ finds itself.

##### “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes  
dropping slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the  
cricket sings;  
There midnight’s all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet’s wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,  
I hear it in the deep heart’s core.

##### “Innisfri”

E desso ciapo e vago, e vago a Innisfri

(e vui farme na capaneta co le cane e la crea, nove file de  
Bisi, un gnaro de ave e vivere li da me posta te ‘l praeselo  
Do’ che le sbùsina. E podarò catare un po’ de pace,  
perché li la pace la sgiossa pian-pianelo, la vien zo da i  
velari de la mattina fin do’ che canta i grii; a mesanote tuto  
quanto slùsega, el mesodì zé na propora che rde, de sera  
sfrecia i zoli d’i feganèi)

Si, ciapo e vago, perché de note e de dì  
Senpre sento acua de lago che discore  
Su la riva; co’ so’ in strada, drio i marciapie,  
la sento te ‘l buso profondo del core.

“Innisfree”, the heather island, turns into “Innisfri”: such is the title of Meneghello’s transplant, whose “minimalist” rendering focused solely on the toponym, hinting at his real intentions from the outset. Indeed, Meneghello does not seem to be interested in echoing the smooth, almost fairy-tale-like sounds of the original, as shown by the alliteration of the “l” in “lake” and “isle”, and the “i” in “Innisfree”, in Yeats’s poem.

Yeats’s division into three four-line stanzas – three hexameters and one tetrameter – with alternate rhyme, gives way, in Meneghello, to an irregular scanning: the Italian author isolates the first line, respecting its internal partition given by the comma and the anaphora of “go”, here rendered as “vago”, then he moves away again from the musicality of the original. This music, which Yeats reproduces using a metric form typical of the ballad (see Yeats 2005, 999), is further enhanced both by the recurring caesuras in the hexameters – which arguably slows down the rhythm thanks to the commas – and by the juxtaposition of some diphthongs, for example, in the play of the vowels of the first line (“ui”, “ai”, “ou”, “au”: “I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree”). This play on words ultimately seems to project the scene described by the poem into a distant future, despite the time-reference “now”. An interesting semantic choice operated by Meneghello involves restoring “the conventional archaism” (these are Yeats’s words in his *Autobiography*) and the indeterminacy that accompanies the action of “going”, exemplified by Yeats’s use of the future tense, with the verb “vagare”, conjugated in the Italian present indicative. The action of “going” becomes immediate and almost imperative in Meneghello,

and it is even stronger due to the syntactic break between the first line, the subsequent part in parentheses, and the concluding quatrain.

Unlike other translations, where Meneghello maintains the stanza division of the original, “Inisfri” presents a different structure compared to that of the original text: indeed, instead of the three quatrains of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, there is a single isolated first line, a central parenthetical in rhythmic prose, and a final quatrain. Meneghello combines lines 2 and 4 of the first quatrain and 5 and 8 of the second in the original composition into a long period of “poetry in prose or rhythmic prose”, distinct from the first and the last four lines from both a structural and a semantic perspective. It is worth noticing Meneghello’s restitution of what can be ascribed to the certainty of the present and, on the other hand, to what is attributable to the dreamlike sphere of the Yeatsian original. The latter is related to what the lyrical self will do once gone, and which is rendered in the form of poetry-in-prose. Meneghello recreates the certainty of going or wandering in the first line, through using the present indicative instead of the future. This certainty is thus reproduced in the last quatrain, while the parentheses in the *trapianto* serve to circumscribe that dreamy future of the physical journey, once it is completed – a consequence of the very act of going which pertains to the present time. The final quatrain is taken up in the concluding 4 lines, where Meneghello focuses on the rhythm of the assonance (“ciapo” and “vago”) and the internal rhyme (“vago” and “lago”), while also concentrating on the play between the English “core” and the Vicentino “core”, as two words that are homographic but not homophonic.

The poem opens and ends with the seed-word “ciapo”, serving as the focal point around which Meneghello weaves the narrative of the event, relating it to the isle of “Inisfri”, the latter being the main and unique element that allows us to understand its intimate connection with the original Yeatsian version.

### 3.2 “*Un tabaro*”<sup>14</sup>

“A Coat” is a brief composition where trimeters and dimeters are used by Yeats with remarkable freedom. The poem opened a new phase in the poetic and personal life of the Irish poet, following his political disappointments and the romantic ideals of his youth; it was in this period that he also went on to embrace Blake’s admonition: “art can never exist without the *naked beauty displayed*” (*Laocon* 1820, 776; my emphasis).

<sup>14</sup> In 1956, Meneghello also attempted the translation of “A Coat” into Italian: “Col mio canto mi sono fatto / un pastrano con gli arredi / di mitologie vecchiotte, / lungo dalle spalle ai piedi. / Gli imbecilli me lo presero / per far colpo sulla gente / se ne vollero adornare, / come fosse roba loro. / Se lo tengano, o mio canto! / C’è più merito a girare/ per strade nudo infante (Gallia 2015, 141). However, it is noticeable that, compared to the translation into dialect, the Italian text seems to lack expressive force.

## “A Coat”

I MADE my song a coat  
 Covered with embroideries  
 Out of old mythologies  
 From heel to throat;  
 But the fools caught it,  
 Wore it in the world's eyes  
 As though they'd wrought it.  
 Song, let them take it,  
 For there's more enterprise  
 In walking naked.

## “Un tabaro”

Par le me poesie  
 ghea fato un tabaro de strasse  
 coverto da capo a piè  
 de bei ricami, mitologie;  
 ma 'l ne zé sta ciavà da sti monasse  
 ch'i se lo mete dosso e arie i s'in dà tante.  
 Lassémoghelo luri, scrittura mia,  
 che ghe vol pì fantasia  
 a nare in volta nudo infante

The coat is a metaphor for Yeats's poetry, seen as both the process, or act of writing, and as the result. In particular, the coat exemplifies the influence of Celtic mythology on Yeats's poetry, albeit revisited in a personal way. The poet's desire to wear no coat expresses his commitment to abandon the mythological apparatus he has nurtured for a long time, and which fueled the compositions in his early collections (Yeats 2006, 1135). As communicated in the concluding lines, walking naked is a choice that explicitly articulates the oppositional dualism between the false lyrical self who wears the coat (i.e., the mask), and the 'true' lyrical self, reborn naked and clothed in such nudity.

In his *trapianto*, Meneghello immediately uses a seed-word – “tabaro” – transforming Yeats's cloak into a “tabaro de strasse”, that is, a cloak made of rags, where the ambiguity of the Yeatsian original (“embroideries”), is strongly connoted, referring phonetically to rhinestones and semantically to the term “stracci” (*rags*). If Yeats's cloak is woven with embroideries, Meneghello's is threaded with rags, or rhinestones, which are false stones, and therefore imitations of the pure ones. Yeats's metaphorical use of “song” instead of “poems” or “poetry” is not taken up by Meneghello, who decides to move beyond the metaphor and to explicit Yeats's focus, by using the word “poesie” (“par le me poesie”, l. 1). In other words, Meneghello attempts to disambiguate the original, explicating that Yeats's attention is of a poetic nature.

The Yeatsian legacy of the last three lines is rendered by Meneghello with two evocative words, charged with great expressive power. The expression “enterprise” (l. 9) from the original, which could also be read as “courage”, is translated by Meneghello as “fantasia”, while the final line “walking naked” is rendered in the transplant as “nudo infante”: “a nare n volta nudo infante”, where the alliterations amplify Yeats's original. By doing so, Meneghello's text “becomes a specific system in which the level of expression is an independent, self-referential and culturally connoted paradigm”<sup>15</sup>. In such a system, “the native language allows one to perceive the contents in a more intimate and profound way” as if in a sort of “darkroom” (Chinellato 2012, 143). Yeats's painful confession and testament (“Song, let them take it”) given through the rhymes of this poetic narrative, is interiorized by Meneghello through an intimate and colloquial storytelling, where he once again shows his subtle skill in *taming his* Yeats.

<sup>15</sup> Chinellato 2012, 149: “la lingua materna permette di percepire i contenuti in modo più intimo e profondo” come se si fosse in una sorta di ‘camera oscura’”.



## 3.3 “Podìn”

The aforementioned paradigm is also visible in Meneghello’s own version of Yeats’s “Paudeen”:

## “Paudeen”

Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite  
of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind  
among the stones and thorn trees, under morning light  
until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind  
a curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought  
that on the lonely height where all are in God’s eye,  
there cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,  
a single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.

## “Podìn”

Me son rabià co ’l nostro Piarreto de la Bia,  
te la so botegheta,  
suca un po’ da bronbólo, e radegheta.  
Vo fora, fo cualche passo da meso-orbo  
soto la luce de la matina, fra piere e russe,  
e a un serto punto na perùssola la tira un sigo  
e in meso al vento che slusega na perùssola ghe risponde;  
e tuto un trato me vien namente sto pensiero, che se  
su ’l cucùssolo  
do che tuti se inpunara ai oci del Signore,  
no pol èssarghe, se se dismèntega ’l casin  
d’i nostri sóni, un’ànema, una sola  
che no la mola el so dolse segnale de cristalo.

During Yeats’s era, “Paudeen” and “Biddy” were disparaging nicknames for Irish Catholic men and women, respectively. The poem opens with a sharp satirical edge, where the lyrical I is “indignant” at the shopkeeper, Paudeen, casting the latter name as a symbol of mental limitations. He is unintelligent and rude, where rudeness is probably given by the influence of commercialism. The scenario abruptly changes and the poet envisages a rural landscape characterized by “stones”, “thorn-trees”, and “morning light”. Within this environment, the poet experiences a sudden transformation of consciousness, metonymically represented by the crying of a curlew. On the World Curlew Day, Seamus Heaney (2019) remembered Yeats’s curlew figure in “Paudeen”: “the curlew’s ‘crystalline cry’ represents the moment of epiphany for Yeats, the realisation that he and Paudeen are both human after all”<sup>16</sup>. At the end of the poem, the poet realizes that both “Paudeen’s” soul and his own are equally beautiful and worthy.

Meneghello puts into practice his cultural interpretive practices by naming the parallel character of “Podìn” (title) “Piarreto de la Bia” (l. 1) and turning the “curlew” into a “coal tit” (perùssola). The lyrical “I” that in Yeats makes his explicit entrance only at the end of the second line, in order to introduce the epiphanic section which makes clear the change of his perspective and vision, in Meneghello’s text immediately captures the scene by showing his “anger” (stronger than Yeats’s indignation) towards “Piarreto de la Bia”. While the poet’s indignation remains to some extents an interior feeling in Yeats’s poem, in Meneghello’s *trapianto* it appears to have been unleashed. Thus, Paudeen’s “fumbling wits” turns into “Piarreto de la Bia”’s “zoca de bronbólo” and “radegheta”, whereas the authorial form “I thought” is replaced by an impersonal one, “me vien namente sto pensiero”. As accurately pointed out by Mozzato:

From the very beginning, the speaker’s voice is emphasised. A whole spectrum of emotions ranging from affectionate reproach to elation is thus made more explicit than in Yeats’s poem. Meneghello’s use of tenses at the end is also highly telling: while the poem’s progress toward its climax is rhythmically reproduced, the unfolding of the absolute participle in lines 11-12 commands the readers’ emotional

<sup>16</sup> <<https://seamussweeney.net/2019/04/23/a-curlew-cried-and-in-the-luminous-wind-a-curlew-answered-paudeen-wb-yeats/>> (05/2024).

response. The impersonal pronoun, ‘se se dismèntega’, actually constructs the reader as addressee, thus suggesting the speaker’s trust on a choral, communal audience. (2012, 132)

What is also worth noticing is the atmosphere of the *trapianto* first lines, which is immediately concretized by action. Just like “Inisfri”, in “Podìn” Meneghello suddenly shifts to the present tense in “vo fora, fo cualche passo da meso-orbo” and his peculiar use of the *passato prossimo* (“Me son rabià”) lends the poetry a colloquial flair. Meneghello’s endeavor to make lines “sound like speech” (Vendler 2007, 1) and to confer on the poem a quite discursive flow is also reinforced by an additional lowering of the register. In the *trapianto*, he uses a strong colloquial and idiomatic tone as, for example, in the rendering of the expression “I stumbled blind” (l. 2) as “Vo fora, fo cualche passo da meso-orbo”, facilitating an oral reproduction.

As in other *trapianti*, Yeats’s rhymed hexameters are evoked by Meneghello’s interplay of assonances, consonances, and paronomasia and the blending of low vowels with sibilants hints at a mystical and euphoric unity. Meneghello’s handling of linguistic shifts strikes a balance between adhering to the original and enriching Yeats’s poem with subtle nuances. Thus, Mozzato suggests “by replacing “chiasso” (“noise”, “racket”) with “sóni”, the translator adheres to the original but also crucially departs from it. This word actually retains the detached, already non-human quality of “sound”, yet Meneghello’s use of the plural form blunts Yeats’s more markedly disembodied “sound”: “sóni” almost becomes a synonym for lives” (2012, 132).

Meneghello’s “Podìn” does not adhere to the regularity of the versification of the original text. The new *trapianto* turns into a “sound-box” (130), to adopt Mozzato’s definition, where phonetics seems to unlock additional layers of resonance between the original and Meneghello’s rendition. By the way, the *trapianto* does not only concern linguistic, phonological, and structural aspects, but also more properly semantic and cultural ones. By bringing the Irish context closer to his own, that of Malo, Meneghello incorporates Yeatsian themes into the fabric of his own land and cultural background, restoring them in all their strength and expressive power. This demonstrates an intimate and profound understanding of Yeats’s symbolic and thematic issues.

### 3. Conclusions

Popular culture, marginal perspectives, and bodily and material reasons are never considered by Meneghello as ontological and privileged perspectives to express truth. The irony that arises from the estranged contact between the two languages is profound, and it leads back to the dialect, to the mother tongue, which, as Cesare Segre asserts, is imbued with sensations, memories, and is linked to nature, life, and feelings. It is in these “creative interactions”, “clash of different things or planes” (2005, 24), confrontation between languages that the sense of that “creative shock” can manifest and generate irony. This return to the maternal language allows readers to find the meaning and importance of Meneghello’s experience with the English language.

Throughout his journey, Yeats did not invent new forms distant from the previous tradition, but rather, he revisited them without losing his roots. In *Trapianti*, Meneghello appropriates the compositions of the Irish master and transports them into his own garden; he transforms them to let them take root in a new soil. Quoting *en passant* the skilled gardener poet of Shakespeare’s *Sonnet XV*<sup>17</sup>, this grafting is made possible and it is somehow authorized by Meneghello’s profound understanding of Yeats’s complex symbolic and metric system, which the Italian poet

<sup>17</sup> See the couplet of Shakespeare’s *Sonnet XV* (“I engraft you”).

challenged in these Vicentino linguistic-cultural fantasies - as he himself liked to call them. As evident in “Innisfri”, “Un tabaro” and “Podìn”, as well as in the other transplants, Meneghello’s endeavor to achieve linguistic harmony with Yeats is notably demonstrated through his employment of intricate webs of rhymes, assonances, and consonances. These elements effectively transpose on the new texts the effects elicited by the original poems.

Meneghello’s poems are a tribute to Yeats, a way of expressing his gratitude for having “fed” him during his 57 years spent in the land of Albion, and also for helping him understand that the original “attempt to recreate Yeatsian rhythms” produced mere “fairground ditties”, which were far from the actual power of Yeats’s poetry. *Trapianti* are the mature fruit of Meneghello’s research, initiated many years earlier, the garden where he succeeded in “shining new light” on Yeatsian poetry, in being in “consonance” with him in a “singular, intense, and inebriating” way, as Meneghello himself explains in his short autobiographical essay, *Il turbo e il chiaro*<sup>18</sup>. They are exercises in understanding, decoding, and prose-poetic rendering that Meneghello can achieve through exploring his own language; through that “Kernel of primordial matter where associations are free and fundamentally crazy. The dialect is therefore in some ways reality and in other ways madness”<sup>19</sup> (my emphasis).

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<sup>18</sup> Meneghello 2006, 1554: “La mia consonanza con Yeats è singolare, intensa e inebriante”.

<sup>19</sup> Meneghello 1975, 43: “nòcciolo di materia primordiale dove le associazioni sono libere e fondamentalmente folli. Il dialetto è dunque per certi versi realtà e per altri versi follia”.

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# The Yeatsian Henry More

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## Abstract:

Henry More, a Cambridge Platonist, was a significant influence on William B. Yeats, the greatest English-language poet of the 20th century. The aim of this essay is to show the presence of some Morean philosophical themes, particularly that of *anima mundi*, in Yeats's work.

**Keywords:** *Anima Mundi*, Great Memory, Henry More, Unconscious, W.B. Yeats

If Homer were abolished in every library & in every living mind the tale of Troy *might* still emerge as a *Vision*.  
(George Yeats, November 1919)

## 1. Under the Influence of Cambridge Platonism

It has been almost a century since Ernst Cassirer brought to light a previously neglected group of thinkers known as the “Cambridge Platonists”: Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), Henry More (1614-1687), Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), and John Smith (1618-1652). Cassirer's study, titled *Die platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge* (1932), was praised by Koyré as an excellent continuation of the great book *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Cassirer 1927). It seemed to Koyré that this study – which was not without criticism but was full of original and new ideas and penetrating analysis – was born out of an interest in the history of ideas (1935).

Since then, the literature on the Cambridge Platonists, in particular Henry More, has grown a great deal. Especially in recent decades, reprints (Cudworth 1995a; More 1997), new editions and translations (More 1987; More 1991, 1995; Cudworth 1995b, 1996; More 1998), and many studies have been published (Pacchi 1973; Cristofolini 1974; Micheletti 1984; Walker 1986; Hall 1990; Hutton 1990; Fouke 1997; Rogers, Vienne, Zarka 1997; Bondi 2001; Crocker 2003; Lotti 2004; Reid 2012; Hedley, Leech 2019). A far from marginal role played by this group of thinkers in the scientific revolution and in some

of the major philosophical and theological discussions of the time has emerged. These authors enriched the philosophical lexicon, coining and using many terms and expressions in a modern sense: materialism, hylozoism, Cartesianism, monotheism, theism and philosophy of religion. Long considered in the shadow of their alleged cultural backwardness, they exerted, as is now acknowledged, a decisive influence in the area of philosophy of religion and philosophy of mind.

Somewhat less well known, especially among historians of philosophy, is the influence that Henry More in particular exerted on the greatest English-language poet of the 20th century: William B. Yeats, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923. Of the Cambridge Platonist, Yeats possessed the work in verse and prose (“Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places”, in Yeats 1994, 67, and Yeats 1920b, 328)<sup>1</sup>, as scholars of the poet are well aware, who nevertheless in some cases failed to realize and in other cases underestimated Yeats’s reference to More. But who was Henry More to Yeats? What notions of More and Cambridge Platonism, in general, did Yeats, who had also read Ralph Cudworth, appropriate? How did he interpret and what use did he make of those notions?

## 2. *Premodern and Anti-modern*

“We were the last romantics – chose for theme / Traditional sanctity and loveliness” (Yeats 1956, 491)<sup>2</sup>. Yeats was the heir to a great poetic tradition and – as Harold Bloom pointed out in a now-dated monograph – he knew very well that he was. He knew he was the heir of “visionaries who have sought to make a more human man, to resolve all the Sunderings of consciousness through the agency of the imagination” (Bloom 1970, 471). Those lines in “Coole Park and Ballylee”, written in 1931, contain probably the clearest expression of what Yeats thought he was (that “we” included Lady Gregory, who had been for nearly forty years his “strength” and his “conscience” (Yeats 1954, 796)<sup>3</sup>. In those lines and those that follow there was undoubtedly a rejection of the realism and naturalism of the second half of the nineteenth century, but there was also, and perhaps above all, a reference to tradition. “I have never said clearly that I condemn all that is not tradition”, he wrote two years before his death, and he reiterated: “Talk to me of originality and I will turn on you with rage. I am a crowd, I am a lonely man, I am nothing” (Yeats 1961, VIII, 522; Yeats 1999, 212). Yeats’s tradition is certainly not reducible to Romanticism as a specific historical period. According to Bloom, Yeats actually “occulted” the Romantic tradition and “merely gave birth to the bad line of pseudo-scholars who have been reducing Blake, Shelley, Keats, Spenser, and of course Yeats himself to esoteric doctrine in recent times”. The references to Henry More and the Platonists, for Bloom, would instead have been devoid of any particular significance, mere frills that make one lose sight of the properly romantic matrix of Yeats’s themes. Contrary to what Bloom thought, Yeats’s references to Cambridge Platonism, which are insistent and the result of intense study, are anything but frills.

Yeats recognized himself in a pre-Cartesian tradition, steeped in Platonism and Neo-Platonism (Arkins 1994, 279-289, 1990, 2010). Speaking of his philosophical book, *A Vision*, he wrote: “This book would be different if it had not come from those who claim to have died many times and in all they say assume their own existence. In this, it resembles nothing of philosophy from the time of Descartes but much that is ancient” (Yeats 1978, XI). Yeats’s interests, which permeated his poetry and without which his poetry would be incomprehensible, were, in many cases from

<sup>1</sup> Yeats also knew the works of Ralph Cudworth and Joseph Glanvill.

<sup>2</sup> “I was a romantic in all”, Yeats wrote at the beginning of the first draft of his *Autobiography* (1972, 19).

<sup>3</sup> Letter To Mario M. Rossi, June 6, 1932. For the relationship between Yeats and Italian culture, see Fantaccini 2009.

the outset, oriented towards magic, Kabbalah, occultism, mysticism, spiritualism, theosophy, parapsychology, as well as oriental cultures and Celtic imagination. At twenty he founded the Dublin Hermetic Society which soon became the Dublin Theosophical Society, at twenty-one he attended his first séance, at twenty-two he met Madame Blavatsky and at twenty-five he was initiated into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. When founding that Society, Yeats had proposed “for our consideration that whatever the great poets had affirmed in their finest moments was the nearest we could come to an authoritative religion, and that their mythology, their spirits of water and wind, were but literal truth” (1999, 97)<sup>4</sup>. In 1901, in an essay entitled *Magic*, to which we will return, where the poet, musician, and artist were presented as the successors of the masters of magic, he made his profession of faith:

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 depths of the mind when the eyes are closed. (Yeats 2007, 25)

Yeats was a pre-modernist, but he was also, fiercely, anti-modern. As George Orwell wrote in 1943, in a text in which he underlined the connection between the Irish poet’s style and his political and philosophical views, Yeats was “a great hater of democracy, of the modern world, science, machinery, the concept of progress – above all, of the idea of human equality”. If there is one thing constant in his works – Orwell added – it is “his hatred of modern Western civilization” (69, 71)<sup>5</sup>.

In *On the Boiler*, which he finished composing a few months before his death, Yeats wrote in clear letters: “Instead of hierarchical society, where all men are different, came democracy; instead of a science which had re-discovered *Anima Mundi*, its experiments and observations confirming the speculations of Henry More, came materialism” (1994, 237, italics in original). But Yeats did not give up and was convinced that the illusory nature of mechanical theory and the existence of the link between natural and supernatural would soon be realized.

### 3. *Yeats Reader of Henry More*

A few months before his death, Yeats had also finished composing “Under Ben Bulben”, which closes with the famous epitaph written for himself (“Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!”) (Yeats 1956, 636-640, 1954, 914). It is certainly one of his most Platonic poems, opening with the theme of the immortality of the soul, on which Yeats never tired of insisting (Yeats 1994, 237, 1956, 636-637). It is certainly no coincidence that one of Yeats’s favourite More texts was *The Immortality of the Soul*, first published in 1659, in a second edition in 1662 – in the collection also owned by Yeats (O’Shea 1985, 181) – and in Latin translation, with scholia, in 1679.

The first decades of the 20th century were for the Irish poet years of in-depth study of the Platonic tradition and of More in particular. In a letter to Lady Gregory dated 31 January 1912, he wrote: “I am deep in my ghost theory [...] I have now found a neoplatonic statement of practically the same theory. The spirit-body is formalist in itself but takes many forms or only keeps the form of the physical body ‘as ice keeps the shape of the bowl after the bowl is broken’ (that is the metaphor though not quite the phrase)” (Foster 1997, I,

<sup>4</sup> For the relationship, in general, between Yeats and the occult, see Harper 1975.

<sup>5</sup> On these issues see Nally 2010.

464). Yeats was referring to Henry More<sup>6</sup>, of whom Coleridge had said that he “had both the philosophic and the poetic genius, supported by immense erudition” (1836-1839, vol. 3, 157). Yeats had been dealing with this immense erudition during the summer of 1915, as he wrote in a letter to his father on September 12 (“Henry More, the seventeenth century platonist whom I have been reading all summer” (1954, 588). Yeats agreed with his father that “the poet seeks truth, not abstract truth, but a kind of vision of reality which satisfies the whole being” and added that “it will not be true for one thing unless it satisfies his desires, his most profound desires” (*ibidem*).

Yeats attributed to More the belief in a close link between deepest desires and truth: “Henry More the Cambridge Platonist so wisely explains that all our deep desires are images of the truth. We are immortal & shall as it were be dipped in beauty & good because he cannot being good but fulfill our desires” (2013, 321)<sup>7</sup>. More – Yeats wrote in the aforementioned letter to his father – “argues from the goodness and omnipotence of God that all our deep desires must be satisfied, and that we should reject a philosophy that does not satisfy them”. Yeats declared himself convinced that “the poet reveals truth by revealing those desires” (1954, 588). Of our deepest desires More had spoken in the philosophical poems, specifically in the section devoted to refuting “the all-devouring Unitie of Souls” and showing “how they bear their memorie with them when they remove”. Discussing, in the footsteps of Plotinus (IV, 3, 25-32), the memory of the soul, “the very bond of life”, More asks: “But can she here forget our radiant Sunne? / Of which its maker is the bright *Idee*, / This is His shadow; or what she hath done / Now she’s rewarded with the Deitie?”: “Suppose it: Yet her hid *Centralitie* / So sprightly’s quickned with near Union / With God, that now lifes wished liberty / Is so encreas’d, that infinitely sh’has fun / Herself, her deep’st desire unspeakably hath wonne”. That “deep desire” – More adds – “is the deepest act, / The most profound and centrall energie, / The very selfnesse of the soul, which backt / With piercing might, she breaks out, forth doth flie / From dark contracting death, and doth descry / Herself unto herself; so thus unfold / That actuall life she straightwayes saith, is I. / Thus while she in the body was infold, / Of this low life, as of herself oft tales she told” (1878, 130, 133: *Antimonopsychia, Or The fourth part of the Song of the Soul, Containing A confutation of the Unity of Souls*, italics in original).

Yeats’s immersion in More’s writings, during the summer months of 1915, was only an appendix, however significant, to a study that had been going on for a long time, as a letter of 3 May testifies: “I have been moping because day after day I was reading Henry More & a lot of old witch trials [...]” (Finneran 1977, 30).

#### 4. *Pilgrim Spirit*

The reflections of Yeats’s reading of More during these years can be seen in a series of texts from 1914 to 1932. In “Witches and Wizards and Irish Folk-lore” (1914), published in the first of Lady Gregory’s two volumes devoted to *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (Yeats 1920a, 245-262), one of the themes at the heart of Yeats’s interest in the Cambridge Platonists and the Platonic tradition, in general, emerges clearly: the theme of the soul leaving the body and the vehicles of the soul (248-249)<sup>8</sup>. More had dealt with this, especially in *The Immortality of the*

<sup>6</sup> Not to Thomas More, as Angela Leighton mistakenly writes: see Leighton 2007, 146.

<sup>7</sup> On “Leo Africanus”, see Hennessey 2004, 1019-1038; Nally 2006, 57-67.

<sup>8</sup> Yeats’s references to More and the Julian Cox witch affair, see Glanvill 1681, 200. On the general theme of the soul leaving the body and the vehicles of the soul, the bibliography is now endless, but Klein’s work (1965) remains fundamental.



*Soul*, a text which, as already mentioned, Yeats knew very well, and which, in contrast to that “disease incurable”, to be pitied or laughed at, which is called “perfect *Scepticisme*”, dealt with a topic defined as one of the most relevant: the immortality of the soul and its “*Independence on this terrestriall body*” (More 1659, 1, 5, italics in original). The point of interest here had been addressed by More from the very first pages, in which he had taken care to defend his opinion on the “Vehicles of Daemons” and the “Souls separate” from the possible accusation of offending the “authority of the Schooles”. It is the “Schooles” – More pointed out with a syncretism with which Yeats felt in tune – who violate an authority older than themselves: that of the Pythagoreans, the Platonists, the Jewish Doctours and the Fathers of the Church, “who all hold that even the purest Angels have corporeal Vehicles” (More 1659, Preface, §6).

The part of *The Immortality of the Soul* specifically devoted to the subject is contained in a few chapters of Book II (but the theme will also return in Book III). The discussion of the migrating soul and its vehicles comes after certain theoretical cornerstones have been established. One of these is presented at the beginning and concerns the need to conceive of anything as extended:

For, to take away all Extension, is to reduce a thing onely to a Mathematical point, which is nothing else but pure Negation or Non-entity; and there being no *medium* betwixt extended and not-extended, no more then there is betwixt Entity and Non-entity, it is plain that if a thing be at all, it must be extended. (§3)

Even angels were to be thought of as compound beings, consisting of soul and body, “as that of Men and Brutes” (More 1659, 49). This is a decisive point in More’s metaphysics, which openly placed itself in an apologetic perspective (“For assuredly that Saying was nothing so true in Politicks, *No Bishop, no King*; as this is in Metaphysicks, *No Spirit, no God*”, More 1653, 164, italics in original). It was a matter of rejecting the idea that “the very notion of a *Spirit* or *Substance Immaterial* is a perfect Impossibility and pure Non-sense” (More 1659, 55, italics in original) because from that idea derived the impossibility of the existence of God, of the soul, of angels, of good and bad, of immortality, of life to come. More’s apologetic perspective, however, coexisted with a deep conviction of the real omnipresence of God in the world<sup>9</sup>. More thus intended to contrast himself with Descartes, *princeps nullibistarum*, i.e. those who, while admitting the existence of incorporeal realities, assert that they are nowhere to be found. On the contrary: “*Spirits* are as truly in Place as *Bodies*” (72, italics in original). The existence of incorporeal substances was for More an object of “demonstration” (“Let inconsiderable Philosophasters hoot at it, and deride it as much as their Follies please”, 108).

More thus ended up proposing a radical alteration to Cartesian metaphysics with surprising results in terms of the definition of substance. The nature of spirit appeared to him as conceivable and as easy to define as the nature of anything else. If “the very essence or bare substance” (1653, 11) of anything is utterly unknowable, the same cannot be said of its “essential and inseparable properties” (*ibidem*): *self-penetration, self-motion, self-contraction* and *dilatation, indivisibility*; to these properties must be added the power of *penetrating, moving* and *altering* matter (More 1653, 11). Whereas the body is an *impenetrable* and *discerpible* substance, the spirit is therefore a *penetrable* and *indiscerpible* substance that has the specific capacity to contract and dilate thanks to what More calls *essential spissitude*. This is a *mode* or *property* of the substance “that is able to receive one part of itself into another” (More 1659, 13): “Which fourth Mode is as easy and familiar to my Understanding, as that of the Three dimensions to my Sense or Fancy” (*ibidem*).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, More 1659, 22-23. In general, on the subject of omnipresence, see above all Funkenstein 1986, 23-116.

By *spissitude* – More emphasizes – is to be understood nothing other than “the redoubling or contracting of Substance into less space than it does sometimes occupy” (*ibidem*).

At the heart of More’s metaphysics, theology, and philosophy of nature, and imposed according to him by evidence of reason, is the *spirit of nature* (or *principium hylarchicum* or *inferiour soul of the world*), which was an enormous source of inspiration for Yeats. It is, for the Cambridge Platonist, not simply a “notion”, but a “real being”, i.e. an incorporeal substance “pervading the whole Matter of the Universe, and exercising a plastical power therein”. More precisely, according to the “rude description” taken up by Yeats, “*The Spirit of Nature* [...] is, *A substance incorporeal, but without Sense and Animadversion, pervading the whole Matter of the Universe, and exercising a plastical power therein according to the sundry predispositions and occasions in the parts it works upon, raising such Phaenomena in the World, by directing the parts of the Matter and their Motion, as cannot be resolved into mere Mechanical powers*” (More 1659, 450, italics in original). The *spirit of nature* also has the power “of transporting of particular Souls and Spirits in their state of *Silence* and *Inactivity* to such Matter as they are in a fitness to catch life in again” (More 1659, 450, 469). The *spirit of nature* is always the same everywhere and always acts in the same way in similar circumstances, “as a clear-minded man and of a solid judgment gives alwaies the same verdict in the same circumstances” (466). In More’s view, the introduction of this principle, which takes the form of the *vicarious power of God* upon matter, would not have prejudiced the search for the mechanical causes of natural phenomena but would have prompted greater caution in distinguishing, in nature, what results from the mere mechanical powers of matter and motion from what is produced by a higher-order principle.

The themes of the soul leaving the body and the vehicles of the soul, addressed by More in Book II (and later in Book III) of *The Immortality of the Soul*, presuppose all this and leave the field open to the topic of apparitions. Those that are referred to by this term – More emphasizes – “are so far from being merely the Dreams and Fancies of the Superstitious, that they are acknowledged by such as cannot but be deemed by most men over Atheisticall” (More thinks here of Pomponazzi, Cardano, and Vanini). Undeniably demonstrating the existence of spirits and incorporeal substances in the world are those extraordinary effects, certainly not natural, that are omnipresent in everyday life and that we can generically call apparitions: “Such are speakings, knockings, opening of doores when they were fast shut, sudden lights in the midst of a room floating in the aire, and then passing and vanishing; nay, shapes of Men and severall sorts of Brutes, that after speech and converse have suddainly disappeared” (66, 98-99). On this theme, in which Yeats showed a profound and pervasive interest, More had dwelt a few years earlier in *An Antidote against Atheism* (Book III), as he now recalls in *The Immortality of the Soul*, presenting it as “the last proof of Incorporeall Substances”, and had cited “so many and so unexceptionable storyes concerning *Apparitions*, that I hold it superfluous to adde any thing here of that kind” (90). More now preferred “exercising” his reason rather than “recording” history. But the subject of apparitions was, in general, too important to take for granted: later in Book II, he takes it up again.

Books II and III are, as already mentioned, the places where More addresses the theme of the migrating soul and its vehicles. We can now, finally, dwell on this. The notion of vehicles of the soul is considered by More to be fundamental to understanding how the soul enters into the terrestrial body; the union of soul and matter is representable in terms not of a *mechanical way*, but of a *vital congruity*, which, identified with a faculty in the plastic part of the soul, does not indicate the presence of life in matter, but only that matter is rendered “a congruous Subject for the Soul to reside in, and exercise the functions of life” (More 1659, 253). That notion of vehicles of the soul is considered by More to be in essence a Platonic notion: it was the Platonists who posited the existence of three vehicles, *aethereal*, *aerial* and *terrestrial*, distinguished only

by *purity, consistency, and duration*. But More is well aware that the notion was also traced back to Aristotle, in particular the endlessly discussed passage from *De generatione animalium* (II, 3, 736b33-737a1). According to More's interpretation "the full and express meaning therefore of *Aristotles* text must be this, that in the spumeous and watry or terrene moisture of the seed is contained a Body of a more spirituuous or aëreal consistency, and in this aëreal or spirituuous consistency is comprehended [...] *a nature that is analogous or like to the Element of the stars*, namely that it of it self *aethereal* and *lucid*": "And it is this *Vehicle* that *Aristotle* seems to assert that the Soule does act in, separate from the Body; as if she were ever either in this *terrestrial* Body, or in her *aethereal* one" (More 1659, 259-260, 263, 270, italics in original). Given that the Platonists' is a "more orderly conceit", the fact remains that the soul can live and act in both an *aerial* and *aethereal* vehicle. And just as there are three vehicles, there are also three *vital congruities*, namely *terrestrial, aerial* and *aethereal* or *celestial*.

More takes up the Platonic theme, which was so successful in the Renaissance, of the absence of envy in the divine, and emphasizes that "it is not to be thought but that He has framed our Faculties so, that when we have rightly prepared our selves for the use of them, they will have a right correspondency with those things that are offered to them to contemplate in the world". Having ascertained that it is evident that those three *congruities* are to be found in "severall Subjects", what prevents us from thinking of the co-presence of all three in a single subject, that is, in the human soul, and more precisely in the plastic part of the human soul? It is precisely because of those three *congruities* that the soul is able to unite livingly with the body whether *celestial, aerial, or terrestrial*. The denial to the soul of the ability to live in these different vehicles amounts to "a reproach to Providence" (272-273). Here More can close the circle in the sign of what appears to him to be perfect intelligibility, to such an extent that it will be possible to express himself through axioms, such as the one according to which "the *Soule* separate from this *Terrestrial* Body is not released from all *Vital Union* with Matter" (328). It, therefore, becomes perfectly understandable how the soul leaves the body. The cessation of one vital congruence is simply the awakening of another congruence. The testimony of history and the reason show to the unprejudiced that human souls subsist and act after they have left earthly bodies. Not only that. The soul has the power to change "the *temper* of her *Aiery Vehicle*, but also of the external *shape* thereof" (338, italics in original).

These theses are borne in mind by Yeats in various writings, including a 1914 text, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places", published in the second of Lady Gregory's two volumes devoted to *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920) (see Yeats 1920b, 295-339)<sup>10</sup>. Quoting passages from More's philosophical poems dealing with the pre-existence of the soul, Yeats insists on the existence of the airy body or spirit body, which was, before birth, and will be, after death, our only body<sup>11</sup>. And quoting passages from *The Immortality of the Soul*, he compares More with Philoponus and insists on the plastic power of the soul and the *figure* or *shape* of the vehicles of the *genii* (More 1659, 384).

<sup>10</sup> In a note in the first of Lady Gregory's two volumes devoted to *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, Yeats referred to More and his *spiritus mundi*. After quoting Cornelius Agrippa, Yeats wrote: "Henry More is more precise and philosophical and believes that this air which he calls *Spiritus Mundi* contains all forms, so that the parents when a child is begotten, or a witch when the double is projected as a hare, but as it were, call upon the *Spiritus Mundi* for the form they need" (Gregory 1920, I, 278; Yeats 1994, 271). See More 1659, 387-397; Glanvill 1681, 199-200.

<sup>11</sup> See More 1878, 127 (*The Praeexistency of the Soul, Added as an Appendix to this third part of the Song of the Soul*): "Wherefore who thinks from souls new souls to bring / The same let presse the Sunne beams in his fist / And squeez out drops of light, or strongly wring / The Rainbow, till it die his hands, well-prest".

But Yeats's great poetry is also steeped in these themes. Yeats scholars often fail to realize either the presence of these themes or, above all, their philosophical source. In the autumn of 1926, he wrote "Sailing to Byzantium" with that incipit ("That is no country for old men") that was so successful outside the poetic sphere. Commenting on this poem for a radio programme in 1931, Yeats states: "Now I am trying to write about the state of my soul, for it is right for an old man to make his soul, and some of my thoughts upon that subject I have put into a poem called "Sailing to Byzantium". Byzantium appeared to him as the centre of European civilization and the source of its spiritual philosophy. The journey to that city was the symbol of the quest for "spiritual life"<sup>12</sup>. This extraordinary poem closes like this: "Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing, / But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling / To keep a drowsy Emperor awake; / Or set upon a golden bough to sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (Yeats 1956, 408). The first two verses are incomprehensible if one disregards what is said in this paragraph. In the important exegesis of Yeats's poems by Alexander Norman Jeffares, who is also familiar with Yeats's prose passages on the subject of the vehicles of the soul (Jeffares 1968, 355), we surprisingly find no comments whatsoever on the two verses in question (256-257).

##### 5. *Yeats and Henry More's Anima Mundi*

The theme of the vehicles of the soul is also present in the "little philosophical book" (Yeats 1954, 624) that Yeats wrote in 1917 and which came out the following year under the title *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918)<sup>13</sup>. It consists of a "Prologue", a poem entitled "Ego Dominus Tuus", two parts entitled "Anima hominis" and "Anima mundi" (but another title considered was "Spiritus Mundi"), and an "Epilogue" from which the major legacy that the Cambridge Platonist left Yeats emerges: the *anima mundi*. The text is not by chance dominated by the figure of Henry More, "who was called during his life the holiest man now walking upon the earth" (Yeats 1994, 20)<sup>14</sup>. Yeats writes that when with More and with the Platonists in general we attribute to all souls a vehicle or body, we avoid the abstract schools and find ourselves with great poetry, and with superstition which is nothing but popular poetry, and we find ourselves "in a pleasant dangerous world". Drawing on the reflections and quotations (e.g. Hippocratic<sup>15</sup>) contained in *The Immortality of the Soul*, Yeats dwells here on the relationship between the vehicle of the human soul and the animal spirits (the vehicle of the human soul is what used to be called the animal spirits), which "fill up all parts of the body and make up the body of

<sup>12</sup> Yeats's note is quoted in Jeffares 1968, 253-254.

<sup>13</sup> The title is taken from Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 255 and was translated by Yeats as "Through the friendly silences of the moon" (Yeats 1994, 293).

<sup>14</sup> For the definition, see Ward 2000, 54.

<sup>15</sup> See More 1659, 200-201: "That this *thin* and *Spirituos Matter* is the immediate engine of the Soule in all her operations, is in a manner the generall opinion of all Philosophers. And even those that have placed the Common *Sensorium* in the *Heart*, have been secure of the truth of this their conceit, because they took it for granted, that the left Ventricle thereof was the fountain of these pure and subtile Spirits, and please themselves very much, in that they fancied that Oracle of Physitians, the grave and wise *Hippocrates*, to speak their own sense so fully and significantly, [...] *That the mind of man is in the left Ventricle of his Heart, and that it is not nourished from meats and drinks from the belly, but by a clear and luminous Substance that redounds by separation from the blood:* which is that which happens exactly in the Brain. For the Spirits there are nothing else but more pure and subtile parts of the blood, whose tenuity and agitation makes them separate from the rest of the mass thereof, and so replenish the Ventricles of the Brain". For the Hippocratic quotation, see Hippocrates 1825, 490.

air” (*ibidem*)<sup>16</sup>. He insists on the plastic power of the soul and its ability, after death or even in life, when the vehicle should leave the body for some time, to shape it at will by an act of imagination. Above all, he introduces the theme that is the greatest legacy of More’s thought, the theme of the *anima mundi*.

The vehicle once separate from the living man or woman may be moulded by the souls of others as readily as by its own soul, and even it seems by the souls of the living. It becomes a part for a while of that stream of images which I have compared to reflections upon water. But how does it follow that souls who never have handled the modelling tool or the brush, make perfect images? Those materialisations who imprint their powerful faces upon paraffin wax, leave there sculpture that would have taken a good artist, making and imagining, many hours. How did it follow that an ignorant woman could, as Henry More believed, project her vehicle in so good a likeness of a hare, that horse and hound and huntsman followed with the bugle blowing? Is not the problem the same as of those finely articulated scenes and patterns that come out of the dark, seemingly completed in the winking of an eye, as we are lying half asleep, and of all those elaborate images that drift in moments of inspiration or evocation before the mind’s eye? (Yeats 1994, 21-22)

Yeats, thus, based on precise Morean suggestions, foregrounds the theme of the *anima mundi*. For what are our animal spirits or vehicles if not the condensation of the vehicle of the *anima mundi*? What else do they do but give substance to its images “in the faint materialisation of our common thought, or more grossly when a ghost is our visitor”? (Yeats 1994, 22)<sup>17</sup>. Yeats thus welded the idea of *spirit of nature*, of *anima mundi*, of *spiritus mundi* with the idea of a *great memory*, understood as a universal memory, a kind of Jungian collective unconscious<sup>18</sup>. Yeats sometimes spoke of the *subconscious* (as a synonym for *unconscious*), distinguishing it from the *mind of the race* (Yeats 1999, 280). At other times he used the term *unconscious*: “Henry More saw but the like problem in the formation of a child in the womb, believing [that] the imagination [of] the unborn but gave an impulse towards form completed by ‘Spiritus Mundi’

<sup>16</sup> In 1924, Yeats adds this note: “This passage, I think, correctly represents the thought of Henry More, but it would, I now believe, have corresponded better with facts if I had described this “clear luminous substance” [see previous note] as a sense-material envelope, moulded upon “the body of air”, or true “vehicle”; and if I had confined to it the words “animal spirits”. It must, however, be looked upon as surviving, for a time, the death of the physical body. The spirits do not get from it the material from which their forms are made, but their forms take light from it as one candle takes light from another”. Rather, to make More’s position clear, Yeats should have emphasized that for the Cambridge Platonist animal spirits are not the “common percipient” in our bodies, are not capable of “sensation”, “imagination and rational invention” or “memory” (and should have recalled More’s insistence on animal spirits in the fourth ventricle of the brain).

<sup>17</sup> “Henry More will have it that a hen scared by a hawk when the cock is treading, hatches out a hawk-headed chicken (I am no stickler for the fact), because before the soul of the unborn bird could give the shape ‘the deeply impassioned fancy of the mother’ called from the general cistern of form a competing image. ‘The soul of the world’, he runs on, ‘interposes and insinuates into all generations of things while the matter is fluid and yielding, which would induce a man to believe that she may not stand idle in the transformation of the vehicle of the daemons, but assist the fancies and desires, and so help to clothe them and to utter them according to their own pleasures; or it may be sometimes against their wills as the unwieldiness of the mother’s fancy forces upon her a monstrous birth’”. (Yeats 1994, 21-22). See More 1659, 391 (*chickens with hawks heads*), 395 (*the deeply-impassioned fancy of the Mother snatches away the Spirit of Nature into consent*); 397 (*the Soul of the Word... Monstrous birth*, my italics). Yeats adds another quotation here: “Though images appear to flow and drift, it may be that we but change in our relation to them, now losing, now finding with the shifting of our minds; and certainly Henry More speaks by the book, in claiming that those images may be hard to the right touch as “pillars of crystal” and as solidly coloured as our own to the right eyes”. See More 1659, 348. See also Yeats 2013, 327-328.

<sup>18</sup> On the affinities between Yeats and Jung see Oliva 1989. See also Ellmann 1954, 151.

which is perhaps that world, your century has named the unconscious”; “We are the unconscious as you say or as I prefer to say the animal spirits freed from the will, & moulded by the images of Spiritus Mundi” (Yeats 2013, 328, 334). Retracing the path that had led him to these convictions, he emphasized that, faced with the emergence of images, although he had no clear answer as to their nature, he knew that he was faced with the *anima mundi* of which the Platonists spoke, and in particular Henry More, who attested to its existence using the bird’s instinct as an example; that *anima mundi* “which has a memory independent of embodied individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and their thoughts” (Yeats 1999, 210). In *My Friend’s Book* More becomes a truly decisive source:

But what if Henry More was right when he contended that men and animals drew not only universals but particulars from a supersensual source? May we not be compelled to change all our conceptions should it be proved that, in some crisis of life perhaps, we have access to the detailed circumstantial knowledge of other minds, or to the wisdom that has such knowledge for a foundation; or, as Henry More believed – unless I have forgotten his long essay on *The Immortality of the Soul*, toiled through some fifteen years ago – that the bees and birds learn to make nest and comb from that *Anima Mundi* which contains the knowledge of all dead bees and birds? (Yeats 1994, 114-115)

Yeats had by no means forgotten the content of More’s *The Immortality of the Soul*, who had set out his views on the subject in a passage in Book III. After clarifying what was to be understood by spirit of nature and proving its existence, More referred to nesting (1659, 467-469). Now instead Yeats “knew” that “revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind” (Yeats 1999, 216-217). In the 1901 essay on magic, however, Yeats had clarified the meaning of his belief in the existence of a *great mind* and a *great memory* within the sort of profession of faith that has already been mentioned (“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 depths of the mind when the eyes are closed”). Yeats claimed to believe “in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices”. The first doctrine is that “the borders of our mind 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”; the second is that “the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself”; the third is that “this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols”. Here, Yeats spoke of visions and evocations of spirits, quoted Joseph Glanvill and William Blake, insisted on the power of symbols and emphasized the existence of a *memory of nature* that brings to light events and symbols from remote centuries. At the same time, he was aware that he engendered “a most natural incredulity” and ended up among “those lean and fierce minds who are at war with their time”. And he affirmed the duty to cry out that “imagination is always seeking to remake the world according to the impulses and the patterns in that great Mind, and that great Memory”. His belief was indeed that “our most elaborate thoughts, elaborate purposes, precise emotions, are often [...] not really ours, but have on a sudden come up, as it were, out of hell or down out of heaven” (Yeats 2007, 25, 33, 38, 41).

The Cambridge Platonist was not quoted here. In the “little philosophical book” of 1917, however, he was called upon, especially through the aforementioned “rude description” of the *spirit of nature* contained in *The Immortality of the Soul* (More 1659, 450), and placed among

the sources of these doctrines: “Our daily thought was certainly but the line of foam at the shallow edge of a vast luminous sea; Henry More’s *Anima Mundi*, Wordsworth’s ‘immortal sea which brought us hither [...] and near whose edge the children sport’ ”. (Yeats 1994, 18; Wordsworth 1807, II, 156). In sleep or wakefulness, images surface that one ends up finding in books one has never read before: it was impossible, in Yeats’s opinion, not to arrive at the belief in a *great memory* that is transmitted from one generation to the next. There is no reason to distinguish between mental images and apparitions: in all cases, it is a matter of “forms existing in the general vehicle of *Anima Mundi*, and mirrored in our particular vehicle”, of that *anima mundi* which is to be thought of as “a great pool or garden”. With it, we communicate through “the association of thoughts or images or objects”. Yeats refers to the Morean notion of *vital congruity* and defends the idea that, through changes in this *congruity*, the soul attracts “a certain thought, and this thought draws by its association the sequence of many thoughts”. He insists that “we carry to *Anima Mundi* our memory, and that memory is for a time our external world”, and closes with melancholic tones:

I look at the strangers near as if I had known them all my life, and it seems strange that I cannot speak to them: everything fills me with affection, I have no longer any fears or any needs; I do not even remember that this happy mood must come to an end. It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from *Anima Mundi*, embodied there and drunk with that sweetness, would, like a country drunkard who has thrown a wisp into his own thatch, burn up time. (Yeats 1994, 22-23, 27, 31)

In the same years, Yeats gave these themes poetic expression. “The Second Coming” is from 1919: “The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out / When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi* / Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert / A shape with lion body and the head of a man, / A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, / Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it / Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds” (Yeats 1956, 402). From the same year is “An Image from a Past Life”, accompanied, in the 1921 edition, by a long note in which Yeats dwells on the relationship between dreams and memory and, above all, on the *spiritus mundi*, defined as “a general storehouse of images which have ceased to be a property of any personality or spirit” (389-390, 822). The references could be multiplied. An in-depth study, on these themes, of Yeats’s entire poetry would be interesting.

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## Revisiting Yeats's *A Full Moon in March*

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### *Abstract:*

A recent re-staging in London of John Harbison's opera based on Yeats's late dance play raises serious questions about a fitting style of staging and performance and an appropriate directorial approach to what is a quite unique and challenging drama.

*Keywords:* Dada and Symbolism, Dance Drama, Directorial Approaches, Myth and Mythologising, W.B. Yeats

When from 1933 to 1935 Yeats was composing his two late dance plays, *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March*, he was anxious lest on their publication he was accused of imitating or copying Wilde's *Salome*. All three plays involved the central female character dancing with a severed head. In the event he had nothing to worry about: parallels with Wilde were not drawn and no intimations of plagiarism were forthcoming. The most significant parallel was drawn elsewhere: in January 1935, *The Times Literary Supplement* carried a review of Yeats's *Wheels and Butterflies* and *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, which drew an interesting comparison between Yeats's late work and "the Surréalistes", noting especially their similar preoccupation with "the night-side of life" (Buchanan 1935, 37). The critic, however, drew attention to a marked difference between Yeats and his continental contemporaries: "unlike them, Mr. Yeats works with a great intellectual control" (38). A recent staging (April 26 to May 4, 2024) of John Harbison's operatic version of *A Full Moon in March* alongside Bohuslav Martinů's *Les larmes du couteau* (a one-act opera composed when Martinů was resident in Paris and befriended Georges Ribermont-Desaignes, the dadaist playwright and librettist) made a testing of this comparison possible.

The Martinů is on the surface a wild fantasmagoria in which a young girl pursues marriage to a hanged man in preference to her mother's favoured suitor, Satan. Even when Satan revivifies the corpse, the Hanged Man fails to rise to Eleanor's passion,

provoking her to commit suicide; Satan now revives Eleanora, then impersonates the Hanged Man to the mother's horror before departing, leaving the girl in despair. Her anguished cry, "I am a poor misunderstood woman!" ends the opera. The music throughout is for a fourteen-piece jazz orchestra and is clearly influenced by Kurt Weill and his cabaret-operas. Beneath the dadaist clamour and games with audience-expectations, there is (as Eleanora's final cry makes clear) a fierce satire on the emotional and social pressures confronting women and this creates a kind of thematic logic within the mayhem. It is unashamedly a theatre piece, but not devoid of intellectual intent. Beside the rarified, mythical world of Yeats's *A Full Moon in March*, with its narrative deriving from traditional folk-lore, however, that intellectual intent seems thin and overly cerebral, almost a creative after-thought.

The two operas were staged at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, to mark the graduation of the current group of singers studying under the Jette Parker Artists Programme: the demands, particularly of the Yeats, were challenging and they were only half-met for want, sadly, of greater experience on the part of cast and directors. To the point where the Queen orders the Swineherd's execution, the production of the Harbison/Yeats was suitably compelling and strange (in Yeats's sense of the word as meaning "awesome", "eerie", "otherworldly"); but thereafter it fell to pieces, since the staging began increasingly to lose contact with just that tight "intellectual control" that the critic for the *TLS* admired as the distinguishing quality of Yeats's artistry (Buchanan 1935, 37). Harbison was in part responsible for this, as his imprint on the dialogue/libretto was marked from the first: his version begins by cutting Yeats's opening exchange between the two Attendants. In retrospect one realises how Yeats deploys that seemingly offhand, arbitrary tone at the start ("Sing anything, sing any old thing") (Yeats 1977 [1934], 621) to draw attention by contrast to the meticulously exacting precision that is enforced as the action then develops. The Attendants were presented by Harbison less as observers of the action and commentators on its development, than as the organisers and guides of cast and spectators through an established ritual, designed to achieve a specific outcome. (Is this perhaps why at first in this production the Swineherd was aggressively resistant to the Attendants when they dragged him onto the stage, as if he were already foreseeing and fearing his death as *required*?) These Attendants set the scene, placed the actors within it, then retired to the side of the stage to watch the outcome. Their songs in this context became less troubled quests for meaning, exploring the possible significance of what they were seeing, than satisfied appreciations that matters were proceeding in accordance with their plan. Their costuming, reliance on exaggerated, overly theatrical posing, their knowing looks to the audience and their general air of assurance were at a far remove from Yeats's Attendants: one, an experienced, older woman, full of quiet understanding; the other, a young, uncertain but curious man, growing in awareness. It was less the staging as a total entity that captivated one's engagement than the commitment and power these Attendants (Valentina Puskás and Jonah Halton) brought to their singing. Once Queen and Swineherd (Veena Akana-Makia and Edmund Danon) occupied the stage, however, the performance moved onto a different plane, one more akin to Yeats's conception.

This is the third production to date in England of Harbison's setting of Yeats's play, which he describes on the title page of the score as an "emblematic, ritual opera" (2009), a chamber work, scored for eight players, including a wide range of percussion instruments and a "prepared piano" in the manner of John Cage's dance works, which brings a sharply brittle tone to the keyboard's range. Harbison's style shows a fondness for cross-rhythms and propulsive, onward-thrusting blocks of sound rather than any distinct forms of lyricism. (Audiences were left in no doubt from the start of the performance that the end of this ritual would be violent and fatal.) This style of invention sat in uneasy tension with Yeats's poetic rhythms, the pro-

pulsion at odds with the verbal simplicity but intense allusiveness of Yeats's text, where ritual in the poet's imagining is both otherworldly and disturbingly immediate. The exception to this over-riding quality to Harbison's sound palette were passages where certain instruments were combined together to intimate the special timbre and sonority of the gamelan. These occurred in those moments in the action where the Queen seemingly abandons her distant, aloof formality, her "virgin cruelty", and briefly comes close to recognising the humanity of the Swineherd. (The gamelan is a brilliant choice here, implying through its timbres both "otherness" and a radiant sensuality). If Harbison's overall approach seemed unaffected by the poetic implications of Yeats's play, this criticism was not true of the central, extended interview between the two protagonists, which received by far the most satisfying musical interpretation of Yeats's intricate dramaturgy. This is where Queen and Swineherd steadily reveal tantalising glimpses of their hidden selves: her refusal to harm him "for a reason which I cannot guess" (Yeats 1977 [1934], 624); his unrelenting truth to self, his courage before the threat of execution, and belief in a future mystical union. It is at that precise instant where he envisions a reality within the story he has heard of a Queen who "sank in bridal sleep" (626) while she, momentarily sharing that vision, imagines how "Her body in that sleep conceived a child" (*ibidem*), that they reach towards the possibility of a potential union beyond the merely physical.

It was here that the production seemed to be moving wholly at one with the psychological progression of the characters. In addition to the two sets of curtains that Yeats's stage directions require, the stage floor was painted with two black bands that came from the rear stage corners to meet in the centre downstage, enclosing within its bounds the Queen's world (presented here as a vast bed with suspended hangings, where she first appeared capriciously playing with a fanciful toy creature). Initially the Swineherd roamed freely in the outer space while the Queen stayed reclining in the bed, but as their interaction moved cautiously towards communicating alternate, less combative selves, so both stepped slowly towards that dark dividing line until they hovered dangerously close to each other. This matched her reaching the climactic question: if she were to leave all that her realm contains which defines her status, "What do I gain?" (625) With his curt answer: "A song – the night of love, /An ignorant forest and the dung of swine" (*ibidem*), he finally crossed the boundary between them and with that invasion of her space (he passed her by and revelled in her bed: "She shall bring forth her farrow in the dung") (*ibidem*), the Queen retreated inexorably into her cruel self, insisting he be beheaded instantly. Here stage direction, music and dramaturgy worked perfectly in sympathy and the inexorability of it all proved both compelling and full of sensitivity for Yeats's dramatic methods: the economic but powerfully allusive setting working to illuminate the psychological turmoil and conflict defining the action, all designed to give tentative access to a myth situated within a distinct cultural inheritance.

This was an instance of creative empathy and synthesis; but then things fell apart, as if the director, Harriet Taylor, suddenly lost her creative stamina. There were no masks, presumably because of the needs of the singers, though to judge by photographs both earlier productions of the opera in England used masks as prescribed by Yeats. Instead of the ritualised execution that avoids sensationalising the death where a mask takes the place of the severed head, the Swineherd was strangled by the male Attendant within the royal bedclothes and in full view of the audience. Presumably taking his cue from Yeats's direction that the dance be accompanied by drum-taps getting ever more rapid, Harbison's music grew unrelievedly declamatory and insistent, becoming less the ritual of Yeats's conception than a Seventies- or Eighties-style "rave", an overwhelming, pounding tumult of sound (the opera was completed in 1977). Most surprising of all, there was no dance, even though the directions for the opera actually require such a climax to the action. The Queen became as if drained of animation, her central placing on stage now being

occupied by a female boxer, tying her gloves before aggressively attacking a punch-bag till the stage curtains closed for the final song: "Why must those holy, haughty feet descend..." (629). She was described in the programme as "The Queen (Boxer)". Whatever inspired the image, it was certainly in keeping with Harbison's equally aggressive music. Did the director find the implications of Yeats's ending (the descent into post-orgasmic sleep of a Queen covered in the Swineherd's blood) for all its careful, abstract processes of stylisation overly challenging to her sympathies or mores and in need of feminist reclamation? Perhaps; but why take this form? Was the Boxer to be seen as a symbol of the inner state of the Queen's psyche (warring against the imposed, constricting values of her regal status and her gender)? If this last were the case, was Harriet Taylor aiming to bring the end of Yeats's piece in line with the conclusion of Martin's opera to achieve a form of unity within the evening's programme overall? The impact in the theatre was simply baffling. This was not the kind of fertile ambiguity Yeats pursues by engaging a spectator's involvement in the drama before steadily carrying it into uncharted, often ominous territory where that spectator must decide the parameters of her or his private response to what is best defined as theatre as poetry, drama as total, all-embracing symbol.

These shortcomings aside, the pairing of the two operas did illuminate a number of Yeats's strengths as a playwright. The contextualising that resulted from placing his dance play alongside a dadaist/surrealist conception by one of his European contemporaries illustrates Yeats's perennial awareness of a larger cultural scene than that obtaining in Ireland but a response that resists imitation or appropriation: Yeats rather sees a potential only to transcend it. *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, for example, the earlier companion piece to *A Full Moon in March* that shares much of its narrative incident, draws not on surrealist roots nor on Wilde's *Salome*, but on the symbolist vision of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas and Mélisande* in terms of structure, situation and relationships; yet Yeats does this only to enter a decidedly different mythological world, less evanescent and psychologically more defined and nuanced. It is a significant distinction between Maeterlinck and Yeats's plays that *Mélisande* fades at the conclusion of her tragedy into an indeterminate pathos, whereas the Queen in *The Great Clock Tower* comes into a new-found power that attends complete self-possession, as she politically and emotionally dominates both King and Stroller, who have each sought to shape her being.

There is a similar cultural and folkloristic palimpsest beneath *A Full Moon in March*: here the Chinese-derived fable of Turandot. Gozzi had first dramatised this in 1762 in the style of *commedia dell'arte*, influencing a future dramatic version by Schiller (1801), an opera by Busoni (1917, though this had been preceded by the composition of incidental music for a revival of the Gozzi play in 1905) and finally the opera by Puccini that premiered in 1926. All these dramatic or operatic versions have one marked difference from Yeats's play: they all enjoy the expansiveness of a developing narrative allowing for contrasting sub-plots and techniques of verisimilitude, whereas Yeats prefers to refine, paring away such amplifications along with the dramaturgy that realises them in theatrical terms. In doing this, he reaches the core of a myth that he seeks to comprehend. The result is a consciously ambiguous engagement with the myth of the seemingly cold, destructive queen. Where other treatments of the tale of Turandot develop the narrative in terms of her unexpectedly "melting" on finding fulfilment in love, a traditional, masculinist power-fantasy, Yeats investigates the possibility of the Queen achieving consummation beyond her innate destructiveness. By deploying dance as his prime medium of expression, he avoids making a direct statement of his own response to the material; instead he leaves each spectator to make his or her own interpretation and judgement based on a personal interpretation of what he or she watches. It is notable too that instead of accompanying the dance with a musical score (as in the manner of the climactic dance sequence in *The King of the Great*

*Clock Tower*, for the Abbey premiere of which in 1934 Arthur Duff composed original music) he gives instruction merely for drum-taps of varying speeds. These would give the dancer the necessary rhythm to shape her performance, yet that percussive sound would carry no lyrical or emotional overtones that might evoke a particular expectation or response in a spectator. Yeats prefers to take no control over his audience that would either suggest or, worse, dictate a specific reaction. What is performed is on many levels disturbing, but the organisation of the performance would not appear to give spectators any retreat back into their known comfort zones. The myth compels attention on its own terms. The imposition of the boxing imagery in the recent performance of *A Full Moon in March* inevitably proved reductive by contrast.

Yeats submits completely to the myth and the discipline that ensues results in a focused integrity controlling both the conception of the play and the play's execution. The remarkable consequence is that out of that submission comes release into a new form of drama that owes nothing to conventional tenets of realism. The play has excited a wealth of critical exposition, led by Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* of 1957, that examines *A Full Moon in March* as an allegory or extended metaphor for the relation of writer to inspiration. The dance play can signify that, but not exclusively so. Always the critic or spectator must submit to the discipline in shaping an interpretation. This has become a special feature in the work of a number of Irish playwrights in following Yeats's example: Beckett's whole canon, for example, shapes such an independent world, exerting a hold over spectators and performers before releasing them into new states of awareness, whatever the particular dramatic medium the plays are designed for; Friel's plays in the manner of *Faith Healer* or *Wonderful Tennessee* likewise; Frank McGuinness's most recent work, since he has explored his creativity in poetry more extensively alongside his theatre writing; and Marina Carr's major output, but particularly *By The Bog of Cats* and *Woman and Scarecrow*. These plays demand courage in the writing and courage in the interpretation. Always the discipline of the over-riding myth must obtain, if the freedom enshrined within it is to be found.

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## Patrilineage and Transgenerational Trauma in Yeats's *Purgatory* (1939)

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### *Abstract:*

This paper offers a novel dramaturgical reading of Yeats's 1939 verse play *Purgatory* to explore the representation of patrilineage from the point of view of transgenerational trauma. In psychological studies, there is a growing body of evidence attesting to the fact that trauma experienced by an individual can significantly affect their children and even grandchildren, although these generations have not had a first-hand experience of the initial trauma. This paper, therefore, not only offers a close dramaturgical reading of Yeats's *Purgatory* in light of patrilineage, but it also employs cultural trauma theory and some aspects of clinical trauma studies as a new frame of reference to gain a more thorough and topical understanding of what Yeats's drama has to offer to contemporary audiences.

*Keywords:* Filicide, Patricide, Patrilineage, Transgenerational Trauma

### *1. Introduction*

This paper offers a new dramaturgical reading of Yeats's verse play *Purgatory* (1939) through three highly interconnected themes: patrilineage, trauma, and more specifically, transgenerational trauma. Conducting a dramaturgical analysis means that the playwright's intentions, biographical events, and the historical context in which the play was composed are replaced with a close examination of what the script conveys to contemporary audiences. This allows new layers of interpretation to emerge and therefore it helps situate Yeats's drama in more global and topical contexts, making it more accessible and relatable to a wider spectrum of audiences. Through this dramaturgical approach, this paper contributes to the paradigm shift that can be witnessed in Irish studies, where queer, dramaturgical, and biopolitical readings of plays text have begun to increase, complementing previous postcolonial, literary, and intentionalist readings of scripts. More specifically, this essay employs

cultural trauma theory to offer new avenues of understanding Yeats's drama today, and within that, it examines the patterns of transgenerational trauma in the play. Within psychology and psychoanalysis, transgenerational trauma is a relatively new area of analysis, which has been constantly and dynamically evolving over the last ten years. However, it is worth noting the crucial difference between clinical trauma studies and cultural trauma theory. This paper draws on some observations of clinical trauma studies regarding specific symptoms of transgenerational trauma as observed by psychologists and psychoanalysts. However, since it is not a psychology paper, its contribution is predominantly to cultural trauma theory rather than clinical trauma studies.

Irish studies abounds in articles and books about representations and manifestations of trauma in Irish history, literature, film, and music. Considerable research (literary as well as anthropological) has been conducted on the topic of trauma and transgenerational trauma regarding the Troubles. Papers in clinical trauma studies include, for instance, research conducted by the School of Psychology at Queen's University Belfast, examining young people's transgenerational issues in Northern Ireland, which was prepared for the Commission for Victims and Survivors (Hanna, Dempster, Dyer, *et al.* 2012). In addition, it is worth highlighting the study conducted by Damien McNelly at the WAVE Trauma Centre in Belfast, titled *Transgenerational Trauma: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland* (2014), and a psychology research paper investigating the intergenerational transmission of conflict-related trauma in Northern Ireland through a behaviour analytic approach (Fargas-Malet, Dillenburger 2016). Besides these clinical approaches to the topic of transgenerational trauma, Irish theatre and literature have been widely explored through the framework of cultural trauma theory thanks to the works of Síobhra Aiken, Patrick J. Mahoney, Kathleen Costello-Sullivan, Anthony Roche, Alexander Coupe, Eva Urban, and Melania Terrazas Gallego among others<sup>1</sup>.

Despite this abundance of trauma research within Irish studies, psychological readings of Yeats's play texts have been limited so far, except for studies by Chu He, who has recently analysed Yeats's *Purgatory* through the lens of generational trauma (2021). In her article, she claims that thanks to *Purgatory*'s hybrid form (some elements of Japanese Noh theatre, symbolism, minimalism, cyclical structure, and even realism), the play conveys some of the underlying features of later trauma plays. The novelty of her approach lies in placing *Purgatory* in dialogue with Yeats's *A Vision* (his prose writing on philosophy and spiritualism) which, the author believes, offers significant insights into trauma, too (2021, 343). Augmenting what Chu He avers in her article, this paper furthers the investigation of transgenerational trauma in Yeats's play text, but it does not attempt to bring the play into any dialogue with Yeats's other writings, his thoughts, intentions, or his historical contexts. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how literature can expose trauma transmission; to discern the dynamic intersection between text, subject, and society; and to flag that such literary testimonies of transgenerational trauma have global, social, and political implications. This paper equally offers a novel and more practical understanding of Yeats's concept of "Dreaming Back" which is central to *Purgatory*. What I contend here is that Dreaming Back which the Old

<sup>1</sup> An excellent and rich volume on Irish cultural trauma studies is titled *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* (edited by Melania Terrazas Gallego, 2020), offering insights into literature, film, history, music, digital archives, and creative writing. Another seminal book on trauma and Irish history is Síobhra Aiken's monograph *Spiritual Wounds. Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War* (2022). The main areas of focus in existing research on trauma and Irish culture as well as history mostly include the Irish Famine, the Magdalene Laundries, the Easter Rising, the Irish Revolution, the Irish Civil War, the Troubles, and the devastating impact of the Mother and Baby Homes on survivors.

Man (the father) experiences repeatedly in *Purgatory* is not the flashback of past memories but his present reality, that is, the transgenerational atmosphere which obstructs the healing of the traumatic event. The Old Man's Dreaming Back, as we shall see in what follows, is in fact the creation of his own intrapsychic experience for the sake of his own survival. In other words, Dreaming Back in the play corresponds to that extended intrasubjective field (internal space) for the Old Man to live out feelings, which is called "transgenerational atmosphere" in clinical trauma studies (see Bakó, Zana 2020, 16-17).

## 2. *Patrilineage, Trauma, and Transgenerational Trauma*

Modern as well as contemporary Irish drama abounds in so-called family plays, including plays that highlight the pressure the normative family imposes on its members; plays which position the rule of the father (and by extension, the rule of the state or nation), as the main axis around which the family and the national gender order is arranged; and plays which centre on problematic father-son relationships. Yeats's *Purgatory* is one of those modern Irish plays which interrogate the patriarchal violence inherent to the Irish family cell and its impact on generations to follow. As we learn about the Old Man's (the father's) various layers of trauma, the play gradually displays those strategies of emotional and even physical violence through which the Old Man's father maintained familial control in the past, thus pushing his son (the Old Man) to commit patricide. However, what makes *Purgatory* even more striking from a psychological point of view is that it includes filicide as well, which is very rare in Irish drama. In my close reading of the script, I shall demonstrate the cause-and-effect relationship between the patricide and the filicide tropes that appear in Yeats's *Purgatory*.

Through patricide and filicide, as well as through the events that lead to these tragic decisions, the integrity and harmony of the family cell that has been so central to the Irish state is completely dismantled in the play, due to the Old Man's (the father's) inability to heal the traumatic past caused by his violent father. In *Locked in the Family Cell*, Kathryn Conrad has observed that "the centrality of the family cell to social, economic, and political organization defines and limits not only acceptable sexuality but also the contours of the private sphere, the public sphere, and the nation itself" (2004, 4). David Cairns and Shaun Richards describe familism as a post-famine phenomenon in Ireland which consolidated strict codes of behaviour not merely between men and women, husbands and wives, and the gendered roles within the family, but also between fathers and sons (1988, 42). The centrality of the family cell is still present today not only in Ireland, but in other countries too, especially in those countries which have recently taken an authoritarian turn. It is important to stress that the idealisation of the family cell has required a lot from individuals, forcing them to marginalise the needs of their body and soul, thus obstructing the healing of traumatic events. Cairns and Richards further explain that

[f]or familism to operate it was essential that the codes of belief and behaviour upon which it depended, particularly the regulation of sexuality, and unquestioned patriarchal authority guaranteed by the Church's sanctions and underpinning stem inheritance, should be accepted by the family and the whole community. Only widespread acceptance could make it possible to perpetuate a system which demanded so much of individuals. (59-60)

However, what we can so often witness in Irish plays, including Yeats's drama, is the ways in which characters turn their back on such demands and expectations. As Cormac O'Brien has explicated, the father-son trope in Irish drama and theatre has predominantly been understood as a metaphor for Ireland's anti-colonial struggles, or as the everyman's protest against an au-

thoritarian Church-State complex (2021, 93). This paper complements these understandings with a new layer of interpretation, which explains the problematic father-son relationship in the play through the parent's unhealed trauma. O'Brien's emphasis of patrilineage, namely, "the inheritance of patriarchal epistemology as passed down from father to son" (*ibidem*) bears relevance for my reading of *Purgatory*, too, as it is the pressure of such patrilineage that prompted the Old Man to oust his own father in the past and eventually, it is what it pushes him to kill his own son. According to O'Brien, there are three main routes of patrilineage that can be observed in Irish drama and theatre: 1) the father is emulated by the son; 2) the father is ousted by the son; 3) the father is replaced by the son. In *Purgatory*, there is no sign of the first route, as the hostility between fathers and sons is so palpable that the sons (the Boy and the Old Man in his youth) do not even attempt to emulate their fathers. The third route (the son replacing the father) bears some significance for *Purgatory*, as the Old Man ruins his son's life just as his father had ruined his life, but it is the second route (ousting the father) that is crucial for interpreting Yeats's script.

The trope of ousting the father as a means of putting an end to the pressure of patrilineage can always be perceived as symbolic of the failure of the nation or the state, not merely within the Irish context but also in more global and topical interpretations of the script. As O'Brien has articulated, "[e]ach dramatic epoch has presented a newer version of Irish sons ousting their father as symbolic of the failures of church, state, or nation" (98). The patricide in Irish plays often remains an attempted one, such as in J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), where father and son reconcile after the conflict. Yeats's *Purgatory* twists the patricide trope that haunts Irish theatre by complementing it with filicide and offering details about the psychological reasons that induced these tragedies. When O'Brien discusses the trope of ousting the father in contemporary Irish drama, he identifies three main patterns within that trope. The first one is the aforementioned patricide attempt, that is the rejection of the father followed by reconciliation – this pattern does not appear at all in *Purgatory*. The second pattern is characterised by a subconscious inheritance of patrilineage in spite of the son's efforts to evade it, which is often facilitated by the mother figure. This is much more relevant to *Purgatory*, as in the Old Man's Dreaming Back periods when he recalls the painful events of his past, it is clear that he partly blames his mother for giving so much power and control to the husband. What is more, due to her sudden passing, she left the son alone with a violent and irresponsible man under whose yokes the son (the Old Man) turned out to be very similar to his despised father, and he treated his own son with the same neglect and hatred with which his father had treated him.

The third pattern discerned by O'Brien is even more pressing for a deeper understanding of Yeats's *Purgatory*, whereby the son discovers that there exists an inescapable psychic connection which is impossible to sever (*ibidem*). The only difference is that in *Purgatory*, the son does not seem to display any awareness of this psychic connection. He merely rejects and ridicules his father, demonstrating hostility and an utter lack of understanding towards his father's past and present. In *Purgatory*, it is the father (the Old Man) who, through his son's hostile behaviour and answers, gradually realises the inescapable psychic connection between him and his son, and therefore the inevitability of transmitting his own traumas to his son and further generations, hence he decides to oust his offspring. This psychic connection between the Boy and the Old Man is indicated to the reader right at the beginning of the play, which begins with the Boy claiming that he is fed up with listening to his father talk while carrying a "pack" (a bag of money) that his father had given to him:

*Boy.* Half-door, hall door,  
 Hither and thither day and night,  
 Hill or hollow, shouldering this pack,  
 Hearing you talk. (*VPl*, 1041)<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the play, there is a moment when the son attempts to escape from his father, but it is noteworthy that although he (the son) feels that he has a chance of severing the bond with his father, he tries to escape with the bag of money that his father gave him previously. The Old Man demands the son to give him back the bag of money, yet the son refuses to obey, which leads to a physical struggle between them, ending with the bag dropping and the money being scattered all around (see *VPl*, 1047). It is this event, as we shall see later in more detail, that serves as one of the main triggers for the father's decision to end the life of his only offspring. Interestingly, O'Brien has observed that such dysfunctional father-son relationships are so profoundly embedded in Irish playwriting that, in fact, they have become self-perpetuating (2021, 102) similar to, I would add, the traumas that individuals carry and transmit from generations to generations. O'Brien equally discerns that even though the dysfunctional father-son dyad may act as a metaphorical critique of certain dysfunctional establishments (neoliberal governments, a new-disgraced Church, the authoritarian state complex, or nationalism), in contemporary Irish theatre this dyad "still carries primary weight as a signifier of and paradigm for the successful patrilineage of patriarchy" (103). This means that Irish plays, which seemingly interrogate the pressure imposed on individuals by patriarchal rule, in fact, still end up displaying the successful inheritance of masculine power and dominance from fathers to sons. Bearing this in mind, *Purgatory* is a striking play, as its main character (the Old Man) is so aware of the dangers of transmitting the traits of his violent father and the resulting trauma as to decide to put an end to patrilineage by killing his son, and thus he is left alone to deal with the traumas caused by his father.

As indicated earlier, patrilineage is closely related to and is part of the trauma that haunts the Old Man in *Purgatory*. The term "chronic trauma" was coined by clinical trauma theorist Judith Herman who has described chronically traumatised people as isolated individuals who experience acute loneliness, disconnection from the present, and social alienation, and whose feelings permeate every relationship of their lives, including familial bonds as well as affiliations with the community they are part of (1997, 37). In her book, *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*, Meera Atkinson focuses her analyses on familial trauma – which is also at the centre of Yeats's *Purgatory* – and claims that "familial trauma tends to run in multigenerational cycles, and it does so in a vacuum: social connection, disconnection, and historical events are contributing factors" (2017, 4). Transgenerational trauma, of course, is not limited to familial trauma, but familial traumatic events are less often examined through the lens of transgenerational trauma. Atkinson explicates that "[t]rauma is related to an overwhelming or sudden experience, and it is characterized by a delayed response that features involuntary and often repetitive disturbing phenomena, such as nightmares and flashbacks" (5). However, trauma is not merely an upsetting memory of a past event instead, it "involves a complex psychic operation that challenges the notion of a distinct psychic past and present" (*ibidem*) and more pressingly, when trauma haunts someone's present, it assumes a "dreamlike quality" (17). The representation of Yeats's Dreaming Back in his plays is often interpreted as disturbing flashbacks of past memory. Since

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I employ *VPl* as an abbreviation for *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*, edited by R.K. Alspach and C.C. Alspach (1966).

in *Purgatory*, it is evident that the Old Man (the father) is still deeply traumatised by his violent father's actions and behaviour, the Dreaming Back flashbacks that appear in the play should not be reduced to flashbacks of past memory. When something becomes memory, it means that the human mind has managed to digest the traumatic experience. The Old Man's present is hindered and haunted by the unhealed past, and the tragedy of his life lies exactly in the pathological processing of transgenerational trauma. This is what Hungarian psychodramatist Tihamér Bakó and psychotherapist Katalin Zana have described as the main factor leading to the creation of the so-called transgenerational atmosphere:

The unshareable experience is captive in the intrasubjective space. The traumatized individual feels they have no narrative that corresponds to the experience they have gone through. A traumatic experience that surpasses the individual's processing capacity is not integrated, and does not become a past memory; it remains present. The events of the past are present not as memories, not *as-if* realities, but as reality itself. (2020, 15, italics in the original)

If we observe those passages in Yeats's script in which the Old Man "dreams back", it becomes clear that for him, it is not a memory at all – he perceives those events as if they were happening in real time, which, in turn, prevents him from building any bond with his own son and from standing even the slightest chance of healing the trauma. As we shall see in the following section, what we witness being created by the Old Man in *Purgatory* is his own intrapsychic reality (internal space) which is crucial for him to survive. Hence, he gradually shrinks away and retreats from the external world and, at the same time, from his own uncontainable feelings and experiences, thus remaining locked up in that intrapsychic reality.

In what follows, I provide a dramaturgical reading of Yeats's *Purgatory*, outlining the various layers of trauma that appear in the play and analysing the script through the main characteristics of pathologically processed transgenerational trauma. These features include but are not limited to the utter lack of mirroring and containment by the traumatised individual's environment; the presence of "basic fault", that is, profound mistrust; the inability to turn the trauma into memory; primitive functions working against the traumatised individual's integration; the perception of the present as menacing; and the inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. What I wish to demonstrate by close reading the script through transgenerational trauma symptoms, is that the Old Man's Dreaming Back experiences function here as an intrasubjective field, an internal space for him to live out hurts, wounds, and feelings that he has not been able to share with anyone. Although the intrasubjective field is created for the sake of survival and a sense of safety, it hinders the healing process and facilitates drawing the next generation (the Boy) into his own undigested experiences.

Bakó and Zana have referred to this intrasubjective field or internal space with various terms: crypt, inner deposit, locket, transgenerational atmosphere, and internal capsule (16-17). The term 'loket' appears to be the most illustrative of this phenomenon, as it helps us imagine unhealed traumatic events as lockets within the personality that continuously block and sabotage every single relationship they try to form or maintain: "[t]hese lockets within the personality, though isolated from it, store the traumatic experience and the undifferentiated, undigested memories of the traumatic experience: unintegrated, overly painful feelings, the memories of relationships with lost and unmourned family members" (17). What is more, these lockets may also store concrete images, such as the image of the aggressor (Volkan 2013, 233). The Old Man's Dreaming Back matches exactly these descriptions of the intrasubjective field (loket), and it is crucial that the Dreaming Back sessions serve in the play as futile attempts to integrate and process deep hurts and to mourn painful familial bonds. More pressingly, the

feelings that are stored in these lockets within the self are completely cut-off from the external world and environment: “They form an intrasubjective experience complex (a mass) in which feelings cannot be distinguished one from the other, or from the traumatic event itself. Since they are shut away, *their intensity remains unchanged*, they are untamed and unprocessed” (Bakó, Zana 2020, 17, my emphasis). In what follows, I shall outline how this intrasubjective field is gradually built by the Old Man and how it leads to the final tragic act of filicide.

### 3. *Pathological Processing of Transgenerational Trauma in Purgatory*

The dialogue that we witness in *Purgatory* between father and son (the Old Man and the Boy) is a remarkably unbalanced one, given that the two parties talk through each other in most of the play. This means that while the Old Man is trying to tell the story of his traumatic past, the son’s brief, dismissive and often unrelated answers make the Old Man’s words seem like an inner monologue. However, from his narrative, it becomes clear that his trauma is multilayered and consists of several different painful factors. Before the Old Man begins talking about his violent and irresponsible father, he directs the focus to the house he used to live in and to his mother’s responsibility. The fact that he blames his mother also indicates that the trauma he is trying to explain to his son has not been processed at all. As the Old Man explains, even though her mother was a “grand-dam” who owned a big house, she married “a groom in a training stable” (*VPI*, 1043). What he describes is not merely about her mother marrying below her social status, but choosing a man who later squandered everything they had (thus, their son’s future, too) on gambling, horse race betting, excessive drinking and on other women. In the passage below, the father tries to mourn the future he could have had, had it not been for his father, including the safety of a great house, proper education, and the presence of her mother while growing up:

*Old Man.* Looked at him and married him,  
And he squandered everything she had,  
She never knew the worst, because  
She died in giving birth to me,  
But now she knows it all, being dead.  
Great people lived and died in this house;  
[...]  
They had loved the trees that he cut down  
To pay what he had lost at cards  
Or spent on horses, drink and women;  
Had loved the house, had loved all  
The intricate passages of the house,  
But he killed the house; to kill a house  
Where great men grew up, married, died,  
I here declare a capital offence. (*VPI*, 1043-1044)

In this excerpt, we learn that the passing of his mother, his primary caretaker, and the only one from whom he had any chance of receiving love, constitutes the centre of his complex trauma. The Old Man feels that he was left completely alone to deal with a man who did not love him or care about him: because she passed away, in his formative years he had no one to share the difficulty with. Noting that “[s]he never knew the worst” is a clear indication that the Old Man wishes he could have shared the horrific experience with someone and blames his mother for something beyond her control, namely, her tragic and sudden death. Moreover, when he calls his father’s act of “killing” their house as a capital offence it is more about the

destruction of the safety and the warmth of a home that any child needs while growing up. Because of his irresponsible father, the Old Man has never experienced a sense of home and safety, which adds significantly to the underlying trauma.

After the above-cited passage in which the Old Man seems to focus on his mother's role in destroying his life, he shifts the emphasis to the father, who tried to keep him on his own level, therefore he was never sent to school and did not receive proper love from him, merely some "half-love" because of her mother: "That he might keep me upon his level / He never sent me to school, but some / Half-loved me for my half of her" (*VPI*, 1044). The first line of the passage is crucial to the understanding of this play, as it indicates that the Old Man is aware that his father deliberately hindered his development, education, sense of safety, and a loving home. It is an indication that his father intentionally transmitted his own trauma package to his son, so that he would not be alone with his miserable life. During the play, as we shall see, the Old Man gradually realises that his son (the Boy) in many ways resembles his grandfather, which considerably contributes to his decision to kill him.

Besides the loss of his mother, the fact that he had to cope with hardship alone, the gradual destruction of their home, and the lack of education and therefore proper socialisation, another layer of the Old Man's trauma can be traced back to his teenage years (when he was sixteen), when one day he witnessed his father coming home drunk again and burning down their house. This was the day when the Old Man became a murderer, stabbing his father with a knife that he still uses today for eating, then leaving him in the fire. The Old Man also recounts that even though no one witnessed the patricide, his father's drunken friends kept threatening him with trial, which forced him to run away and thus he ended up being "a pedlar on the roads" (*VPI*, 1045). What is striking in this part of the Old Man's story is that after all he has recounted, he still identifies with his father, which indicates that he has fully internalised those negative traits that his father deliberately transmitted to him.

What I have described above constitutes the Old Man's multilayered trauma experience, which he desperately tries to share with his only social connection (his son); yet his story remains ignored, unvalidated, trivialised, questioned, ridiculed, and even pathologised. I see *Purgatory* as the Old Man's attempt to heal a trauma and turn it into memory; yet the son's reactions bring in some of the main risk factors for a trauma becoming unhealed, thus transgenerational. Bakó and Zana point out five main risk factors which are closely related: 1) the unshareability or silence; 2) the absence of others sharing the same or similar fate; 3) the lack of a safe broad and close milieu (society, friends, family); 4) the absence of a narrative; 5) and the damage to the mourning process (2020, 14). All five risk factors bear relevance to what happens in *Purgatory*, but I would centre on the most crucial one, the unshareability of the experience, given that *Purgatory* can be seen as a futile attempt to share a trauma and turn it into past memory.

Unshareability happens when either the fact or the gravity of the trauma is questioned by the traumatised individual's immediate or broad environment (13). In this case, the fate of the father's trauma depends entirely on one family member, the son, whose responses question the father's narrative in several different ways. It is already telling that although in most of the play, it is the Old Man who speaks, the play begins with the Boy's words, which clearly express that he sees his father as a burden, an annoying figure whom he must, for the time being, obey. The Boy is fed up with carrying the bag his father gave to him and more importantly, he states his annoyance with hearing his father talk – he restates this shortly after his father's first attempt to talk about his former home and parents: "I have had enough! / Talk to the jackdaws, if talk you must" (*VPI*, 1043). This sets the tone for their entire conversation which, as I have indicated before, is more like a monologue with minor interruptions from the son. What is crucial about the son's



interferences is that they do not resonate at all with the content of his father's speech. Some of them are insults: "A silly old man" (*VPl*, 1041), "Your wits are out again" (*VPl*, 1042), "You have made it up. No, you are mad! / You are getting madder every day" (*VPl*, 1045). Other reactions include more direct questionings of what his father is experiencing in the present: "There's nobody here" (*VPl*, 1042), "I cannot hear a sound" (*VPl*, 1045), and "There's nothing but an empty gap in the wall" (*VPl*, 1045). What is more, when the Old Man opens up about how his mother and father met and describes what his father did, the Boy seems to defend his grandfather against his traumatised father by asking, "What's right and wrong? / My grand-dad got the girl and the money" (*VPl*, 1043), which soon turns into a direct menace: "What if I killed you? You killed my grand-dad, / Because you were young and he was old. / Now I am young and you are old" (*VPl*, 1047). The way the Boy summarises his father's reasons for committing patricide after all the details he has been told indicates that he has not been listening to his father, or, that he has deliberately distorted the story out of pure resentment for and mistrust in him.

Finally, another type of the Boy's replies includes accusations which make it clear that the Old Man, just like his father, has been trying to keep his son on his own level, so that he would not be alone in his misery and hardship. When the Old Man complains about his father not having given him any education, the Boy refutes: "What education have you given me?" (*VPl*, 1044). This is one of the rare instances when father and son address and respond to each other. The Old Man's answer helps us understand the profound mistrust and hostility that has been transmitted from the Old Man's relationship with his father to the Old Man's relationship with his son. This is also the first time the Old Man expresses his feelings about his son, which helps us understand where the son's unwillingness to validate his father's story comes from: "I gave the education that befits / A bastard that a pedlar got / Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch" (*VPl*, 1044). This indicates that the Old Man intentionally held back his son's development, just like his self-development had been hindered intentionally by his father. Later in the play, the son's accusations continue:

*Boy.* You never gave me my right share.

*Old Man.* And had I given it, young as you are,  
You would have spent it upon drink.

*Boy.* What if I did? I had a right

To get it and spend it as I chose.

*Old Man.* Give me that bag and no more words.

*Boy.* I will not.

*Old Man.* I will break your fingers. (*VPl*, 1047)

This passage displays not only deep resentment in the two men towards one another, but also defiance, disobedience, and the threat of physical violence. It is after this passage that the two men begin fighting for the bag of money the Boy has been carrying. It is also after this passage that the Boy threatens to kill his father, but their heated quarrel is interrupted by a Dreaming Back episode – the only one in which the son also participates, as I shall detail later.

I have found it important to outline the types of the Boy's answers and reactions and the underlying reasons for the deep hostility between father and son, as this is what makes the father's trauma hopelessly unshareable in the play. The so-called mirroring and containment by the traumatised individual's environment are two crucial factors needed for any trauma to become a processed past memory. Bakó and Zana explicate that people do not merely need functioning relationships – they also need a social mirror or milieu "in which they see themselves reflected, and which is able to contain them. The role of the social 'mother-mirror' is among

other things to reflect how the external world interprets what the individual has experienced, what for him is a traumatic experience” (2020, 10). As noted before, one of the Old Man’s trauma experiences is that his mother was not there for him as a social mirror to help him digest his father’s behaviour and action, and now that he tries to position his son as a social mirror, the son rejects this position. The phenomenon of mirroring is not to be confused with the similarities between the Old Man and the Boy – indeed, they mirror each other’s behaviour, but what transgenerational trauma studies imply by mirroring is the environment’s willingness to validate the traumatised individual’s experience, which is missing from the father-son relationship in the play. For the healing process to begin, it is indispensable that the individual’s immediate family, friends, community, or society reflect to the traumatised individual that what they have experienced is indeed traumatic, hence they have every right to feel what they feel. As Bakó and Zana observe, in case “the social mirror is blind, insensitive, or if society itself is the perpetrator, then the traumatised individual or group is left alone with the experience. If the social processing of the trauma, the mourning process, fails to happen later too, there is a high chance the trauma will become transgenerational, and affect not only the victims, but the whole of society, for generations” (*ibidem*). Therefore, if the trauma can be shared and narrated to a certain environment, there is a much greater chance for correction – however, it is also evident that sharing and narrating are not enough. In *Purgatory*, the trauma is clearly shared and narrated, even if in a hectic and non-linear manner, the environment (the son) though listens to it, refuses to validate it and, through that validation, help his father’s (and, in fact, his own) processing of their family’s transgenerational trauma.

When society or the individual’s immediate environment fail to fulfil their “container” function, it often leads to the emergence of violent actions or other primitive functions that further hinder the possibility of healing to begin. In *Purgatory*, the son refuses to act as the container of his father’s undigested feelings, and thus he obstructs the processing and re-integration of the experience. At the same time, his recurring and consistent rejections act as triggers of the Old Man’s violence. When the environment cannot operate as a container, “[d]ominance is given to more primitive functions working against integration – such as splitting, projection, and pathological projective identification. Without a container, the undigested experiences overwhelming the self find an archaic path for themselves, or are projected onto the external world” (11). In the Old Man’s behaviour, we can observe both types of archaic path as a reaction to his son’s dismissive conduct: first, he projects his own fears and hurts onto his son only to use these projections as justifications for stabbing him with the same knife he used to kill his own father. The above-mentioned “containers” are also referred to as witnesses in clinical psychology. It is crucial to note here that witness does not imply eye-witness – rather, it means someone who is willing to listen and validate the experience. This witness figure, as Bakó and Zana have pointed out, is most often the child of the traumatised individual who thus becomes part of the traumatic experience (16). This validation by a witness or container is necessary for the individual’s intrasubjective reality to become intersubjective, and therefore transformable, healable. The Dreaming Back episodes that pervade the play and make the father-son relationship even more dysfunctional serve as proof of the Old Man’s inability to turn his intrasubjective reality (Dreaming Back flashbacks) into an intersubjective one.

Bound up with the play’s Dreaming Back episodes, another explanation for the son’s unwillingness to understand his father’s story lies in the “dreamlike nature” of the Old Man’s self-narrative in the Dreaming Back episodes. The Old Man perceives these events as his present reality which, however, is impossible to grasp for his son. Although the vast bulk of the play consists of the Old Man’s factual description of what happened in his past – which equally

annoys and bores his son – what confuses the Boy is when his father claims to see his parents in the house they are staring at from a distance. It is important to note that a traumatic event can be shared in two ways with the witness: as a narrative memory and as a transgenerational atmosphere: “A crucial difference between the two ways of sharing the experience is that while in the case of narrative memory the traumatic event is transmitted in a digested, symbolized form, in the field of the atmosphere it is undigested feelings that are shared” (*ibidem*). While narrative memory exists in the past, the transgenerational atmosphere haunts the present and, more importantly, it is temporally unstructured, which means that past, present, and future are not clearly demarcated – instead, they seem to exist simultaneously for the traumatised individual (*ibidem*). I contend in this paper that the Dreaming Back episodes that appear in the play function as the Old Man’s intrasubjective field, an internal space where he can live out and seemingly share uncomfortable feelings: “He is able to share the internal world he inhabits, the atmosphere he lives in, by creating an extended intrasubjective state or field of experience, through which he is able to relate to and communicate with others. This extended intrasubjective field can be called a ‘transgenerational atmosphere’ ” (*ibidem*). Traumatized individuals tend to create such an internal space for themselves, because it feels safer for them than the external world which they often find threatening, as the Old Man perceives his own environment as a constant threat to his existence. This permanent sense of the external world as menacing is due to the loss of the so-called basic trust – more specifically, the individual’s sense of trust in the world (the basic trust) is replaced entirely with mistrust. In his research, psychoanalyst Michael Balint called the lack of basic trust “basic fault” which would eventually lead to a lack of equivalence between the individual and the external world (1979). The traumatised individual is thus characterised by a permanent state of preparedness and danger, because “the danger experienced in the past becomes timeless and infinite, and is projected onto the present day and the future, unable to become memory” (Bakó, Zana 2020, 19). Whether this sense of danger and vigilance is integrated or mitigated depends on whether there are any relationships which help the individual rebuild their trust in the environment. In *Purgatory*, however, this trust is shattered completely from the beginning and is gradually deepened during the script as the mutual hostility between father and son becomes painfully palpable.

There are three Dreaming Back episodes in the play that demonstrate the characteristics of the transgenerational atmosphere and the Old Man’s mistrust in the external world. The beginning of the first Dreaming Back episode is indicated with a stage direction that says that the house’s window is suddenly lit up, and it ends with an indication that the light in the window has faded out. The first Dreaming Back follows the Old Man’s confession of patricide and how that murder made him a pedlar without a proper home or sense of safety. In this episode, the Old Man witnesses the night of his own conception in his mind’s eyes, and judging by the intensity of these passages, the line between past and present, fantasy and reality, has been completely blurred for him. Strikingly, the Old Man attempts to talk to his mother’s younger self in this episode to prevent his own conception, and thus eliminate the beginning of the transgenerational trauma that he has fallen victim of:

Do not let him touch you! It is not true  
That drunken men cannot beget,  
And if he touch [*sic*] he must beget  
And you must bear his murderer.  
Deaf! Both deaf! If I should throw  
A stick or a stone they would not hear;  
And that’s a proof my wits are out. (*VPI*, 1046)

This passage attests to much guilt experienced by the Old Man in relation to the traumatic sequence of events in his past. Although in his earlier descriptions, he clearly seems to blame his mother and his father for everything that has been happening to him, this passage suggests that he considers his own existence as the root of the problem. The last line, however, is in stark contrast with the rest of his words – within the intensity of this intrasubjective reality that he clearly perceives as happening in real time, the Old Man seems to be drawn back a bit, noting that he must be mad to say such things. But immediately after stating that he thinks his “wits are out”, he continues to observe his mother and the night of his conception with the same desperate intensity. Interestingly, before this Dreaming Back episode ends (that is, before the indication that the light in the window has faded out), the Old Man begins to order his son around, demanding that he fetch him a book to help find a solution to how to stop the process of “begetting” him. This is when the Old Man notices that while he has been witnessing that tragic night, his own son has tried to slip away with the bag of money. This is what drags the Old Man back to the present and puts an end to the first Dreaming Back episode. But the fact that during the episode, he is alternately addressing his mother, his father, and his own son, is proof that the Old Man cannot distinguish between past and present – because of his undigested trauma, what happened in the past still haunts him as if it was his present.

The second Dreaming Back episode follows shortly after the first one – it is triggered by the Boy’s demands and defiance towards his father, as the Boy refuses to give his father the bag of money, which leads to a physical struggle between them for the bag as well as the Boy’s threat to kill him as a revenge for having killed his grandfather. This episode begins with the Old Man first staring at the window, then pointing at it. This moment represents a significant shift in the play, as for the first time, the Boy sees what his father has been witnessing:

My God! The window is lit up  
 And somebody stands there, although  
 The floorboards are all burnt away.  
 [...]  
 A dead, living, murdered man!  
 [...]  
 A body that was a bundle of old bones  
 Before I was born. Horrible! Horrible! (*VPl*, 1048)

This passage is symbolic of the inevitability of the father’s unprocessed trauma to be transmitted to the following generation. At this point, the Boy also begins to confuse past with present, and is so terrified by the experience that he covers his eyes, as the stage direction indicates (*VPl*, 1048). While the Boy is at his most vulnerable (terrified and with his eyes covered), his own father stabs him three times with the same jack-knife that he used to stab his father. This is the moment when the stage direction indicates that the window has grown dark, that is the second Dreaming Back episode has ended. What is interesting about this second episode is that here the Old Man seems much less involved or agitated than in the previous one – however, this is only a semblance, as the anger is there, which erupts at the end of the episode, culminating in filicide. The Old Man believes that by killing his own son, he will be able to put an end to the Dreaming Back episodes, and thus to his and his own mother’s suffering:

Dear mother, the window is dark again,  
 But you are in the light because  
 I finished all that consequence.

I killed that lad because had he grown up  
 He would have struck a woman's fancy,  
 Begot, and passed pollution on.  
 I am a wretched foul old man  
     And therefore harmless. When I have stuck  
 This old jack-knife into a sod  
     And pulled it out all bright again,  
 And picked up all the money that he dropped,  
 I'll to a distant place, and there  
     Tell my old jokes among new men. (*VPL*, 1049)

This passage reaffirms that the Old Man, due to his undigested and unhealed feelings about the past, has projected his father's and his own traits onto his son, generating in himself a significant amount of disgust for his only offspring, whom he calls "the lad" and a "sod" here. He describes the murder in the same factual, unemotional, and detached manner as he described the stabbing of his father to the Boy earlier in the play. This indicates the Old Man's inability to form any sort of connection with the present and the individuals who inhabit it. This is a significant symptom of individuals stuck in a transgenerational atmosphere in which "the parent's self is seriously damaged, 'unviable'" (Bakó, Zana 2020, 18), and thus it is unable to contain difficult feelings and to form mature relationships.

The function of triggers might help us better understand what happens at the end of this second Dreaming Back episode. It is noteworthy that the violence takes place right after the son would begin to understand that what his father has been talking about is indeed valid. In this episode, the Old Man witnesses how his own son dreams back and sees for the first time his murdered grandfather. In my interpretation of the script, this is what acts as the trigger that eventually leads to filicide. As Bakó and Zana explain it, when a traumatised individual is affected by a trigger, it can instantly recall the original experience which, suddenly, bursts into consciousness. This bursting into consciousness following a trigger is also called flash experience:

the flash experience is the undigested memory of the traumatic event, which as a consequence of the trigger experience overwhelms the self. The reaction and feeling in the given situation are not only disproportionately intense and destructive, but may also contain feelings such as shame, guilt, or aggression, which are impossible to understand in connection with the given event or the life history. (17)

Given that this is a script which includes the Old Man's detailed narrative of his past, we can easily see the connection between the destructive act and the life history, which, however, is not normally the case when such flash experiences happen in real life. The mention of a disproportionately intense and destructive reaction is crucial here and it can help us understand where the Old Man's sudden fury comes from: he does not merely stab his son: he impulsively stabs his three times.

Bakó and Zana equally highlight that in such flash experiences, the related emotions are often completely split off and considered not to have happened at all (*ibidem*). What we see in the Old Man's reaction after the filicide is that his related emotions are indeed split off, yet he is very much aware of what has just happened. Traumatized individuals are often characterised by feelings of emptiness or apathy, and these feelings reappear intensely after a flash experience too: "within his own self there are parts and feelings shut away that he is unable to connect to, as if these feelings did not exist or were lost to him" (*ibidem*). These shut off feelings in *Purgatory* could include remorse, empathy, sorrow, or affection for his son – but the Old Man is not familiar with such feelings, as there was no one in his past to demonstrate such feelings

towards him. Also, in the first Dreaming Back episode, it becomes clear that the Old Man has a significant amount of self-hatred – if he could, we would prevent his own conception. It is important to note that those who are stuck in an intrasubjective space or transgenerational atmosphere, possess a divided self-state, a so-called “we-self” (18). This means that once they are in such an intrasubjective space, they are no longer able to separate their own self from those closest to them. In this space, the traumatised individual “is able to relate to others, to share experiences and memories, and even to exist, only by making the partner, the child, a part of [their] self” (*ibidem*). Therefore, they inevitably interpret their immediate environment (in this case the Boy) as part of their own self – for the Old Man, the son does not constitute a separate self-state as would be the case in healthy relationships, but he sees him as part of his own self. Therefore, the impulsive filicide (three violent stabs following one another) can also be perceived in light of the Old Man’s inability to love himself and his wish for not having been born at all.

The Old Man seems to believe that the intrasubjective reality that he has created can offer him a sense of safety and stability, especially after killing “all that consequence,” yet the third Dreaming Back episode following the stabbing of his son shatters his hopes for freeing himself from mental suffering. The beginning of the third Dreaming Back episode is signalled with the sound of hoof-beats:

Hoof-beats! Dear God,  
 How quickly it returns – beat – beat – !  
 Her mind cannot hold up that dream.  
 Twice a murderer and all for nothing,  
 And she must animate that dead night  
 Not once but many times!  
 O God,  
 Release my mother’s soul from its dream!  
 Mankind can do no more. Appease  
 The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead. (*VPL*, 1049)

This passage elucidates the Old Man’s emotional identification with his mother whom he never knew, yet in her absence, he has formed that crucial bond with her that, had her mother survived his birth, would have helped him navigate the hardship generated by his father. In the first and in this final Dreaming Back episode, the Old Man addresses his mother, but given that he has lost his ability to differentiate between past and present, the realm of the living and the dead, and between fantasy and reality, it is more likely that he is talking about and to himself in these passages. He wishes to be released from the dreamlike state that has been haunting him, and it is his own misery that he wants to see appeased by his old age. In 1996, it was psychologist Teréz Virág’s book titled *Emlékezés egy szederfára* (*Memory of a Mulberry Tree*) that first discussed the interconnected nature of the parents’ and their child’s problems. The contention that “the child’s problems cannot be understood independently of its parents and the circumstances in society” (1996, 5) seems particularly apt here with the Old Man being the child who sees his problems as identical to the ones his mother had to endure before she had given birth to him. This is one of the main symptoms of transgenerational trauma, which is so visibly and tangibly depicted in *Purgatory*: “In the child’s symptoms is reflected the terrible past, often unspoken, of the parents and grandparents” (13). It is true that the Old Man in the play is not technically a child anymore, but those with unresolved traumas, especially with undigested familial traumas, are doomed to stay in a child-like state for their entire life whenever the trauma flashbacks overwhelm them – these trauma flashbacks, the Old Man’s

intrasubjective field, are the three Dreaming Back episodes that frame the play and determine its characters' tragedy.

It is, in fact, no surprise that the dysfunctional father-son dyad in *Purgatory* ends with a violent tragedy. The basic fault or mistrust mentioned earlier in this section has characterised their family for generations, therefore the Old Man's and the Boy's default state was already a deep mistrust in each other. The Old Man was forced to create an isolated intrasubjective space, a sort of "deadened state" (Bakó, Zana 2020, 20) in order to shield himself from unprocessable internal and external reality, but by doing so he also inevitably shut himself away from the possibility of a functional relationship between him and his son. This is a way of filtering reality for the sake of survival: "The traumatized person creates this intrasubjective reality in order to protect himself from the destructive threat which he ascribes to the outer world, but which is actually internal. Paradoxically, however, he preserves and stores it, maintaining the internal capsule that threatens him" (*ibidem*). Therefore, even if *Purgatory* seems to be about a father's and a parent's attempt to share a trauma with his son to help him begin to digest it, this mission and their relationship are doomed to failure because of the parent's seriously damaged state, who has locked himself up in the cage of his own unresolved trauma. The internal capsule that threatens him, the intrasubjective space, is what I have equated with the Dreaming Back episodes of the play. Whatever the Old Man does, this internal capsule cannot be dismantled, as there is no one to mirror his trauma experience and there has never been anyone, hence with the third and final Dreaming Back episode, the internal capsule continues to threaten him – as he admits it, too, there is no escape from this cycle; he is left alone in his misery, as he has always been.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has offered a new avenue of interpreting the motif of Dreaming Back in Yeats's drama. Even though it seems that the Dreaming Back episodes in *Purgatory* concern the dead (the Old Man's parents) rather than the living, I have argued that these moments in the play stem from the Old Man's unresolved familial traumas which prevent him from establishing a functional relationship with his son and with his own self. Instead of viewing *Purgatory's* Dreaming Back episodes as flashbacks of the Old Man's past memories, I have proposed that their presence in the play is proof of the pathological processing of the Old Man's traumas, namely that he has not been able to turn them into past memories, therefore these flash experiences continue to haunt his presence and prolong his misery. The tropes of patricide and filicide that appear in the play (the former in the subtext and offstage, while the latter onstage) are also closely related to the topic of patrilineage. What we can observe in *Purgatory* is that the Old Man is so aware of the dangers of transmitting the traits of his violent father and the resulting trauma that he opts for evading the consequences of patrilineage (the passing down of masculine power and dominance from fathers to sons) through filicide, and thus he is left alone to deal with the traumas caused by his own patrilineal inheritance. The three Dreaming Back episodes in the play can be regarded as the Old Man's intrasubjective space which prevents him from making his traumatic past intersubjective and thus healable. I have also proposed that one of the main reasons for the Old Man's trauma remaining unresolved and unprocessed is his environment's (his son's) refusal to act a social mirror, a container, or witness of his traumatic past. Even though the Boy in the play rejects this role due to a deep and mutual mistrust (basic fault) between him and his father, texts, images, music, or other works of art can play the role of witness for people who see themselves or parts of their lives mirrored in such works. Yeats's drama has an immense potential for more comprehensive and stimulating psychological readings

which, I believe, would be yet another way to make Yeats's works, and especially his play text, more relatable for contemporary audiences.

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## William Butler Yeats and Monumentalisation

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### *Abstract:*

At the Nobel ceremony in December 1923, W.B. Yeats chose to speak about “The Irish Dramatic Movement”. In his lecture the poet paid homage to the efforts which brought about modern Ireland and focused his attention on the achievement of a group working together closing, most notably, on the contribution of close friends J.M. Synge and Lady Gregory. The Nobel Lecture represents a crucial step of the poet’s process of recognition of their and his own work, but also of his ability to mythologise and celebrate those he admired, mostly his circle of friends. The present work aims to explore the memorialising, rather, monumentalising process in W.B. Yeats, a remarkable aspect of his production, conspicuous in his late production, and to analyse the poetic and linguistic strategies adopted by him to this end. The article will conclude focussing on “The Municipal Gallery Revisited” as a monument poem.

*Keywords:* Friendship, Ireland, Irish Dramatic Movement, Monument, Poetry

### *1. The Nobel Lecture*

Slightly over a hundred years ago, in December 1923, William Butler Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Lecture he delivered to the Royal Academy of Sweden was on “The Irish Dramatic Movement”<sup>1</sup>: the poet chose to tell the Royal Academy “of the labours, triumphs and troubles of my fellow-workers” (Yeats 1999, 410) in a project that contributed

<sup>1</sup> The complete title is “The Irish Dramatic Movement: A Lecture delivered to the Royal Academy of Sweden”. As W.H. O’Donnell writes in the textual introduction to W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, edited by him and Douglas Archibald, “The lecture was reprinted [...] in the Cuala Press volume *The Bounty of Sweden: A Meditation, and a Lecture* [...] in July 1925. The Lecture has been included in all subsequent editions of *Autobiographies* that contain *The Bounty of Sweden*, except the Macmillan, New York, volume *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats*, published 30 August 1938 [...] and its re-issue in 1953 [...]” (1999, 22-23).

to the shaping of the “modern literature of Ireland” (*ibidem*). The lecture as well as *The Bounty of Sweden* – what Yeats calls “a meditation” (515), “a kind of diary, impressions of Stockholm” (394) – commemorates and pays tribute to the Irish Dramatic Movement and its two major exponents and his own friends, John Millington Synge and Lady Gregory. This essay will take the Nobel lecture as a starting point from which, moving backwards chronologically, to analyse Yeats’s celebratory or monumentalising manner, tracing its antecedents in time, while also outlining its development to arrive at the memorable poems of his later period. It will conclude with and focus on the analysis of “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”, that most celebratory of poems, in which the couple of friends evoked in the Nobel Lecture stand out among many other friends and connections and take centre stage, being celebrated as monuments of Irish culture.

As the poet writes in *The Bounty of Sweden*, his subject is “the work of my generation in Ireland, the creation of a literature to express national character and feeling but with no deliberate political aim” (394). He also claims that he believes that his nomination for the prize is due more to his work for the theatre – as “the representative of a public movement” (405) – than to his lyric production; “I consider that this honour has come to me less as an individual than as a representative of Irish literature, it is part of Europe’s welcome to the Free State” (Foster 2003, 245). Roy Foster emphasises Yeats’s awareness of the political implications of the award: “An Irish winner of the prize, a year after Ireland gained its independence, had a symbolic value in the world’s eyes, and he was careful to point this out” (245). This awareness was also reinforced by the fact that, by the end of the previous year, the poet had been appointed Senator of the Irish Free State, whose first meeting was held in December 1922.

Yeats concludes his Nobel lecture with these words: “when I received from the hands of your King the great honour your Academy has conferred upon me, I felt that a young man’s ghost should have stood upon one side of me and at the other a living woman sinking into the infirmity of old age” (Yeats 1999, 418). The same couple of friends will be commemorated in a masterful, late poem, “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”, which will be discussed later in this work.

The celebration of his friends is a widely recognised characteristic of Yeats’s writing. In the conclusion to his 1965 volume, Jon Stallworthy claimed that the personal emotion from which Yeats’s poems generally developed, “was commonly generated by a relationship with someone else. [...] in Yeats, more than most poets, kinship and friendship had the power to spur him into song” (2000, 97).

Much earlier than the Nobel lecture, on 4 February 1909, confounded on hearing of Lady Gregory’s serious illness, the poet had written in his *Journal*: “All day the thought of losing her is like a conflagration in the rafters. Friendship is all the house I have” (Yeats 1972, 161). If friendship is remarkably so important for him, the commendation of his friends or, more inclusively, of a community in which he recognises himself, is also a way in which the poet indirectly celebrates himself.

## 2. Antecedents

Before focussing on the relationship between friendship and Yeats’s celebratory manner, it is necessary to explore what can be considered antecedents or precursors of this mode, which develops as a process in which the poet gradually masters a growing assertiveness. In an early poem, “To Ireland in the Coming Times” (1892), the poetic subject establishes himself as “True brother of a company” (l. 2), a company “That sang, to sweeten Ireland’s wrong, / Ballad and story, ran and song.” (ll. 3-4). The lyric “I” re-states the concept giving the names of some members of this company at the beginning of the second stanza: “Nor may I less be counted

one / with Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,” (ll. 17-18). Therefore, with uncharacteristic confidence, he claims his position among major personalities in the then deeply uncertain contest for what, in the Nobel lecture, he would define as the “modern literature of Ireland” (Yeats 1999, 410). This is probably the only poem showing such a forceful public attitude<sup>2</sup> in Yeats’s early period, when the dominant mode is one of uncertainty, liminality, of not fully belonging in the here-and-now of the utterance<sup>3</sup>. In this poem Yeats claims that his interests in symbolic art, literature and politics are not mutually exclusive. This is a subject he would openly go back to years later, in 1919, in “If I were four-and-twenty” remembering his youth:

I had three interests: interest in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality. None of these seemed to have anything to do with the other, but gradually my love of literature and my belief in nationality came together. Then for years I said to myself that these two had nothing to do with my form of philosophy [...] Now all three are [...] a discrete expression of a single conviction.<sup>4</sup>

Hints of the process of developing and gradually mastering an assertive tone can be gathered in Yeats’s different collections. This process was also characterised by the abandonment of the decadent style that characterised his early poetry with its archaisms and evocative adjectives, in favour of ordinary speech. *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910) collects poems written in the first decade of the new century which bear traces of the struggle of those years that hardened the poet and “dried the sap out of my veins, and rent / Spontaneous joy and natural content / Out of my heart.” (ll. 2-4): that is, mainly, “Theatre business, management of men” (l. 11)<sup>5</sup>. After cursing some of the difficulties he has had to face, the concluding couplet opens with a performative speech act, “I swear”, which enacts the resolution of the poet’s statement. A similar awareness of the strength of his utterance returns in “Words”, the third poem of the collection, in which the poet acknowledges that “I have come into my strength, / And words obey my call” (ll. 11-12), a statement that testifies to a further step in this process. In “All Things can Tempt Me” published in the same volume, the poet somehow mockingly reflects on his earlier style and proclaims a change of attitude:

When I was young,  
I had not given a penny for a song  
Did not the poet sing it with such airs  
that one believed he had a sword upstairs;  
Yet would be now [...]  
Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish. (ll. 5-10)

Coldness is a quality he envisages as necessary for his aesthetics, an equivalent of the “traditional metres” (Yeats 1989, 522) he needs to adopt in order to master passions, not to lose himself, as “all that is personal soon rots; it must be packed in ice or salt” (522), as he wrote in 1937. The poet authoritatively returns to this idea in “The Fisherman”, written in

<sup>2</sup> “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, finished in 1890, and defined by the poet as “my first lyric with anything in its rhythm of my own music” (Yeats 1999, 139) shows, also through the skilful use of future auxiliaries, an uncharacteristic decisiveness. This is, however, a private poem, in which the lyric subject speaks to himself.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of Yeats’s early poetic production see Cotta Ramusino 1997.

<sup>4</sup> “If I were four-and-twenty”, in Yeats 1962, 263. Anthony Johnson has pointed this out in his accurate notes to the poems in Yeats (2005, 1014).

<sup>5</sup> These quotations are from “The Fascination of What’s Difficult” (Allt, Alspach 1968 [1957], 260).

June 1914 and collected in *The Wild Swans at Coole*, where he imagines the fisherman, “A man who does not exist, / A man who is but a dream;” (ll. 35-36), as the ideal dedicatee of a “Poem maybe as cold / And passionate as the dawn” (ll. 39-40).

The path to assertiveness becomes clearer in *Responsibilities*, which collects forceful poems in which the poet strongly opposes the philistines of contemporary Ireland. The introductory and the closing lines, both untitled and both in italics to set off their interconnectedness, are instances of a changed attitude. In the “Introductory Rhymes – *Pardon old Fathers*” the poet apologises with his ancestors<sup>6</sup> – whom he decidedly praises – for presumably interrupting the family line “*Although I have come close on forty-nine, / I have no child*” (ll. 20-21) he states, thus showing an assumption of responsibility – the central issue of the collection – towards his family. He also claims his role as a poet: “*I have nothing but a book, / Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine*” (ll. 21-22, italics in original). In 1940, inaugurating the first annual Yeats Lecture in Dublin, T.S. Eliot defined these lines “great”, seeing in them the strength of the poetic voice: “More than half a lifetime to arrive at this freedom of speech. It is a triumph” (1975, 252). The “book”, as David Holdeman aptly reminds us, the “1916 Macmillan edition of *Responsibilities* [...] is the first of Yeats’s poetic volumes to be distributed by a major global publisher” (2023, 50), a considerable improvement for “one that ruffled in a manly pose / For all his timid heart” as the poet retrospectively saw himself in “Coole Park, 1929”, (ll. 11-12), and a recognition. The lines closing the collection show *sprezzatura* or disdain towards his detractors, again introduced by a performative verb: “*I can forgive even that wrong of wrongs, / [...] / till all my priceless things / Are but a post the passing dogs defile*” (ll. 9 and 13-14, italics in original).

What is undeniable is that *Responsibilities* marks a change in W.B. Yeats’s production: after this collection his poetry increasingly offers major examples of an assertive tone. As Stephen M. Parrish claims, the two collections of *The Wild Swans at Coole*, 1917 and 1919, “arch over the decisive events in Yeats’s life and mark the opening of the poetic voice in which his late work was cast” (1994, xxxiv). *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) is a composite collection, in which the poet skilfully merged the poems published in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1917) – the poems written out of despair for unrequited love and fear of imaginative sterility – and the poems written after his marriage in October 1917. The new poems the poet added to the 1919 edition show a new and assertive voice which would become the distinctive mark of Yeats’s mature poetry.

Marjorie Perloff has argued that “the two great poems that Yeats wrote during the autumn of 1916 – ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’ and ‘Easter 1916’ – stand out as extraordinary achievements. Followed in 1918 by ‘In Memory of Major Robert Gregory’ and in 1919 by ‘A Prayer for My Daughter,’ they herald a new mode in Yeats’s poetry” (1975, 530)<sup>7</sup>. Thoor Ballylee, the first house the poet acquired, on 30 June 1917, a medieval tower not far from Coole, on former Gregory property, makes its first appearance in “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” in *The Wild Swans at Coole*. If this acquisition was exciting for the poet, it made him all the more aware of his personal solitude as expressed at the end of the “Introductory Rhymes” in *Responsibilities* and in the poems of the 1917 edition of *The Wild Swans at Coole*. Several elements contribute to strengthen its importance: ever since his first journey to Italy in 1907 W.B. Yeats had considered the tower as a suitable dwelling for a poet. In addition to its poetic appropriateness and the poetic suggestions it evoked, Thoor Ballylee attested his rootedness,

<sup>6</sup> This dialogue would be reprised and continued in “Are You Content”, in *New Poems* (1938), in which he addresses his ancestors “To judge what I have done”, l. 4.

<sup>7</sup> The first poem opens the eponymous collection, and the third one is collected in the same volume, while the second and the fourth ones are collected in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921).

a condition Yeats had tended to since his youth and especially over the previous, personally stormy, years: he needed to settle and root himself, and the Tower would give him this opportunity. As a matter of fact, as Nicholas Grene has remarked, “[i]t is particularly in the Coole Park and Tower poems that the poetic voice is most fully embedded [...]. It is only in Thoor Ballylee that Yeats is to be found fully at home in his poems” (2008, 46)<sup>8</sup>, that the poetic “I” is no longer dislocated. What has here been defined as the path to assertiveness is another aspect of what Roy Foster and Nicholas Grene have termed the poet’s drive to rootedness and runs parallel to what David R. Clark has defined the poet’s ability, in his later poetry, to “mak[e] the abstract concrete” (1995, 28).

Some years later, in 1927, Yeats wrote to Thomas Sturge Moore, when discussing the book cover for *The Tower*, that “I like to think of that building as a permanent symbol of my work plainly visible to the passer by. As you know all my art theories depend upon just this – rooting of mythology in the earth” (Yeats 2022). Thoor Ballylee would indeed come to embody a complex knot of intertwining ideas and symbols<sup>9</sup>, but what is relevant here is its concrete, material presence, standing out in the landscape, that contributes to give strength to the poet’s words, a sort of correlative of the poet’s voice.

In “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” the setting is established in the first stanza “[...] we’re almost settled in our house / [...] / Beside a fire of turf in th’ ancient tower,” (I, ll. 1 and 3). There with his wife, he cannot entertain friends, because “All, all are in my thoughts to-night being dead” (I, l. 8). Notably, among these dead friends “that come into my mind” (II, l. 8) is also “that enquiring man, John Synge” (IV, l. 1), who would be conjured up again in the Nobel lecture and in “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”. The elegy for Robert Gregory is interesting from several points of view: it is a due tribute to Lady Gregory’s son, shot down in Italy the previous January; it is also written in octave-stanzas, adopted, as Helen Vendler points out, from Abraham Cowley’s “On the Death of Mr. William Hervey” (2007, 291). This form represents a sort of forerunner of the ottava rima the poet would inaugurate with “Sailing to Byzantium”, “one of Yeats’s favorite stanza forms” (Perloff 1970, 22)<sup>10</sup>. Vendler claims that “Yeats [...] established *ottava rima* as a viable modern form, fit for everything serious – valediction, ode, historical meditation, fantasy” (2007, 263), but she concludes her analysis of the form asserting that “he made it sympathetic to intellectual and emotional autobiography” (289). He attributed to this form, “first brought into English by Edward Fairfax’s translation of Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1600)” (262), a “Renaissance Aura”, as Vendler titles her chapter on it, with its attendant “‘courtliness’, ‘stateliness’, ‘aristocratic personhood’, ‘a patronage culture’ ” (263). The poet used it from the mid-twenties as a form suitable for solemn autobiographical

<sup>8</sup> Holdeman rejects Grene’s statement, writing that “Contra Grene, [Yeats] is never ‘fully at home’ at Thoor Ballylee”, (2023, 65). Actually, it rather seems that the two scholars refer to different things: Grene focusses on the poetic subject that at last no longer feels liminal, or unfocused, and has found what Grene defines roots, a sort of anchoring, while Holdeman seems to interpret ‘fully at home’ in the proper or more usual sense of a home with its attendant objects and furniture, which are the focus of his article on material culture.

<sup>9</sup> As the lyric subject would proclaim in “Blood and the Moon”, in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, “I declare this tower is my symbol”, II, l. 4.

<sup>10</sup> The poems in ottava rima are: “Sailing to Byzantium”, “Among School Children”, “I. Ancestral Houses” and “IV My Descendants” in “Meditations in Time of Civil War” and Section “I” in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”, all included in *The Tower*. “The Choice”, “Coole Park, 1929”, “Coole and Ballylee, 1931”, Sections “II” and “III” of “Vacillation”, Section “VIII” of “A Woman Young and Old”, all included in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*; Section “I” of “Parnell’s Funeral”, included *A Full Moon in March*; “The Gyres”, “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”, “The Statues” and “The Circus Animals’ Desertion”, all included in *Last Poems*. See Helen Vendler “The Renaissance Aura: Ottava Rima Poems” (2007, 262-289).

reflections, as it enabled him to emphasise his meditative mood, contributing to his monument making: of his friends and himself, of the country they moulded, as well as of his own work.

It is in “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory”, as Vendler maintains, that “Yeats first successfully undertakes the sort of sweeping and [...] random reminiscence that will pervade ‘The Tower’ (II), ‘All Soul’s Night,’ and ‘The Municipal Gallery Revisited’”. In these poems he establishes a powerful new genre of Yeatsian lyric: a ‘realistic’ autobiographical meditation that expresses both ordinariness and dignity” (295). Reflecting on Yeats’s autobiographical writing, on which the poet was at work in 1914 – *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* was finished on Christmas Day 1914 – but in which he was immersed at least until August 1916, Marjorie Perloff ponders on the poem “The Wild Swans at Coole”, written in 1916, the poem which opens both the 1917 and the 1919 collections. She underlines that

‘The Wild Swans at Coole’ is the first of the great autobiographical poems in which Yeats’s protagonist – a projection of the poet himself – recalls and implicitly judges those experiences in his past which reveal something essential about his personality as it responds to the outside world. Although the structure of ‘Wild Swans’ is not the only one that Yeats devised for his longer lyrics (the *débat* structure, for example, is used in many poems from ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’ to ‘A Dialogue of Self and Soul’ and ‘Vacillation’), it is the prototype of such famous poems as ‘The Tower’, ‘Among School Children’, ‘Coole Park, 1929’, and ‘The Circus Animals’ Desertion’. (1975, 531-532)

*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, the collection that follows *The Wild Swans at Coole*, closes with “To Be Carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee”. In a letter to John Quinn dated 23 July 1918, Yeats informs him that “I am making a setting for my old age, a place to influence lawless youth with its severity & antiquity” (Yeats 2002). He sends him an earlier draft of this poem writing that it “will be inscribed” “On a great stone beside the front door” (*ibidem*), as is indicated by the poem’s title. In this poem the poet first proclaims his name – “I, the poet William Yeats” (l.1) – then recalls his restoration of the tower, and the person for whom this was done “Restored this tower for my wife George” (l. 4), and concludes expressing that most daring wish, that his words may resist time: “And may these characters remain / When all is ruin once again” (ll. 5-6). As David Albright observes in the Notes to this poem, “The poem’s text is a theme of the poem itself: its inscribing on the rock is an act of physical construction comparable to (and competing with) the rebuilding of the tower itself” (1992, 628). The act of having his words – “these characters” – carved on stone is a most assertive one for a poet, as it marks his words’ transition from text to the real world; it is a challenge to time to gain timelessness, and thus a decisive step in his process of monumentalisation, echoing the effort of the poetic voice’s struggle with time in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Four years later, at the end of the fourth section of “Meditations in Time of Civil War” in *The Tower*, the poet would reprise again this idea of the tower representing a monument that triumphs over time even if in ruin. “My Descendants” represents a sort of sequel to the “Introductory Rhymes” opening *Responsibilities*: there the poet talks to his ancestors, who came before him in his family, here he thinks of his children in the future and concludes that “And know whatever flourish and decline / These stones remain their monument and mine” (ll. 23-24). By then, although deeply immersed in “my philosophy”, as Yeats used to refer to the work that resulted in *A Vision*, the poet’s grip on reality is unwavering.

The poet’s “inscribing” attitude, as if writing on monuments, or using writing as a monument, would climax in “Under Ben Bulbin”, 1938, where the lyric subject ends the poem giving dispositions for his burial: “Cast a cold eye / On life, on death. / Horseman, pass by!” The words to be cut – “By his command” (l. 8), thus emphasising the speaker’s strength, with verbs in the imperative mode – go back to a quality already foregrounded in this work, a quality

long valued by the poet, coldness. Assertiveness and monumentalisation, which had appeared sporadically and increasingly more frequently with time, become the dominant mode for the poet by the time of the publication of *The Tower* in 1928, where the poetic I, though raging against old age, is master of himself and of the discursive process, celebrates his imaginative power, declares his pride and his relationship to the noble forefathers of the best Anglo-Irish tradition, celebrates the tower's nature of permanent monument to his children and to himself.

### 3. "The Municipal Gallery Revisited"

Wayne Chapman has observed that a feature of Yeats's later career is his "intention to memorialise his friends, and himself by association" (2010, 210), in response to an "impulse to make monuments or to erect tombs" (*ibidem*). A very interesting case in point is "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", started in August and finished by 5 September 1937.

"The Municipal Gallery Revisited" was written in response to a donation given to the poet by a group of Irish-American nationalists – "A poem about the Ireland that we have all served, and the movement of which I have been a part" (Allt, Alspach 1968 [1957], 839) – celebrated by a Banquet in Dublin on 17 August 1937 where the poet gave a speech and introduced the poem he had in mind to write<sup>11</sup>. It is a public poem, prompted by a visit Yeats paid to the Dublin Municipal Gallery, for which he had struggled forcefully<sup>12</sup> several years before, and for whose missing paintings he had canvassed for years with Lady Gregory. The visit was therefore a reason of strong personal emotion which called forth past friends: some whose portraits were displayed in the Gallery, others who were the painters of some of the paintings exhibited there; there were also portraits made by Yeats's father. Images of protagonists of the Irish Revival, as well as moments of Irish history and Irish life hung on its walls. This mix of emotions transformed what might have been a private moment of "contemplation [into] an occasion for a very public address" (Gardiner 1995, 69). Deirdre Toomey claims that "Wherever he looked, he saw the dead" (2005, 132), many of whom had been close to him. These paintings recalled the recent Irish past – "the images of thirty years" (l. 1) – in which the poet and his friends had had a prominent role, and many of the subjects depicted were people who also appeared in his poems.

In the first two stanzas, the events or people portrayed are either unnamed or unspecified<sup>13</sup> or they are politicians, people belonging to the public world. They recall the "glory" of Ireland's "passions", as the poet said in his speech, – soldiers, Casement, Griffith, O'Higgins – while at the same time also recalling his own role in that past as well as the role of his works. Looking at the

<sup>11</sup> Yeats's speech continues: "For a long time I had not visited the Municipal Gallery. I went there a week ago and was restored to many friends. I sat down, after a few minutes, overwhelmed with emotion. There were pictures painted by men, now dead, who were once my intimate friends. There were the portraits of my fellow-workers; there was that portrait of Lady Gregory by Mancini, which John Synge thought the greatest portrait since Rembrandt; there was John Synge himself; there, too, were portraits of our Statesmen; the events of the last thirty years in fine pictures: a peasant ambush, the trial of Roger Casement, a pilgrimage to Lough Derg, event after event: Ireland not as she is displayed in guide book or history, but, Ireland seen because of the magnificent vitality of her painters, in the glory of her passions. For the moment I could think of nothing but that Ireland: that great pictured song" (*A Speech and Two Poems*, Dublin, The Three Candles Press, 1937, pp.4-5 quoted in Allt, Alspach (1968 [1957] 839-840).

<sup>12</sup> The controversy over the construction of a gallery of modern art in Dublin is the subject of five poems in *Responsibilities*: "To a Wealthy Man...", "September 1913", "To a Friend whose Work has come to Nothing", "Paudeen", "To a Shade".

<sup>13</sup> "An ambush, pilgrims at the water-side", l. 2; "An Abbot or Archbishop", II, l. 1. They are unnamed or unspecified in the poem, but the portraits have been identified by critics.

paintings displayed on the walls around him, the poet claims: “‘This is not,’ I say, / the dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland the poets have *imagined*, terrible and gay.” (II, ll. 2-4, emphasis added) thus assessing the primacy of poetic imagination: the reality portrayed in the paintings is the fruit of the poets’ imagination. Then, he shifts from the outer to the interior world, evoking his own past: “not simply the people of his past, but the creations of his past” (Bergmann Loizeaux 1979, 135).

The turning point in the shift from the exterior to the interior world is represented by the latter half of the second stanza: “Before a woman’s portrait suddenly I stand” (II, l. 5), where the time adverb “suddenly” signals the poet’s having been caught off guard. Deirdre Toomey convincingly argues that this woman is not, as accepted by most critics, either Lady Beresford as portrayed by Sargent, which would hardly move the poet so much, or a portrait by Lavery of an Austrian Baroness (Toomey 2005, 134-5), but rather, of Muriel Broadbent, ‘Mu’, or ‘Ryllis’, a young woman who, in the early 1890s had had a “close relationship with Symons” (142)<sup>14</sup>. Helen Vendler also agrees that this woman is “the fulcrum on which the poem turns” (quoted in Toomey 2005, 134, n. 4). This portrait plunges the poet back into his youth and at the beginning of the following stanza he acknowledges the strength of this emotion<sup>15</sup>, after which the poet reprises the focus on the intensity of poetic imagination, asserting: “Wherever I had looked I had looked upon / My permanent or impermanent images” (III, ll. 3-4): the use of the possessive, as suggested by Jahan Ramazani (see Ramazani 1990, 49), conveys the primacy of his mind’s work over the paintings around him.

Bergmann Loizeaux emphasises in “The Municipal Gallery Revisited” the echoes, from a prosodic and from a verbal point of view, of other Yeatsian poems: the ottava rima recalls some of his great poems, like “Sailing to Byzantium”, and some of the vocabulary<sup>16</sup> echo previous poems by Yeats. Thomas Parkinson has criticised the presence of these echoes defining them as the poem’s “sense of quotation” (quoted in Bergmann Loizeaux 1979, 1345). Actually, it is not only or not just “a sense of quotation” which is at stake here, rather, this is a strategy which the poet uses to mirror and amplify his own work through hints or references to several others of his poems: “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”, started as a celebration of the portraits and of the history and the people they portray, moves on to a reflection on the poet’s own works, on his personal history and on himself. Moreover, the placing of this poem, an ever significant element in Yeats’s collections, also reinforces this reading. Set between “Those Images” and “Are You Content?”, both, according to Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux, “about the imagination’s conjuring of images, it forms part of a meditation on the poet’s craft and creations” (135) which is also a questioning of their value and therefore of their possible permanence. The poetic voice asserts that the poet and the poetic imagination are at the origin of “the Ireland the poets have imagined” while resisting, in Ramazani’s words, “the eye’s dominion over the imagination” (1990, 50).

While facing the portraits of the dead, the poet inevitably faces his own death, a recurrent motif in the poet’s mature production. According to Ramazani, in this poem Yeats “recasts his usual contest with the dead as a contest with the visual images of the dead” (49), as in “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” or “All Souls’ Night” in *The Tower*.

<sup>14</sup> In her article Toomey motivates this statement explaining that she also “became a favourite model of Shannon’s” (145) who repeatedly painted her as Delia “from elegy VI of Tibullus’s first book of poems” (150-151), a subject previously painted by Rossetti, Rickett and Shannon’s “idol” (151), and in which the painter portrays himself as the lover: “The considerable artistic investment in this subject [...] suggests a parallel “emotional investment” (*ibidem*) on the part of the painter.

<sup>15</sup> “Heart smitten with emotion I sink down, / My heart recovering with covered eyes” (III, ll. 1-2).

<sup>16</sup> “‘The dead Ireland of my youth’, ‘terrible’, ‘gay’ recall ‘September 1913’ and ‘Easter 1916’ among others” Bergmann Loizeaux (1979, 135).



His reflection on the past and “the images of thirty years” (I, l. 1), as well as his assertion of the role of the poet, make this poem a literary celebration of the poet’s place in a society increasingly shaped by De Valera’s new Constitution, approved in July 1937. The nation devised by the new charter is very different from Yeats’s ideals and from the country he and his friends had laboured to shape, something the poet is strongly aware of.

The focus zooms in from unspecified people or events and politicians at the beginning, to friends who crowd around him – Robert Gregory, John Shawe-Taylor (Lady Gregory’s other nephew), Hugh Lane, Hazel Lavery, George Russell, not mentioned in the poem, but whose portrait was there – to the IV stanza, in which the crowd disappears as Mancini’s portrait ushers in Lady Gregory, which is the focus of stanza IV and V. She, John Synge and the poet dominate the last four stanzas of the poem.

In fact, in the following stanza, Yeats evokes Coole Park, a pre-eminent symbol of Renaissance values for him – patronage, culture, courtesy –, values which again recall the poems on the municipal gallery of modern art controversy in *Responsibilities* where the poet juxtaposed the Dublin middle class to the Italian Renaissance patrons. The link with the Renaissance is reinforced by the reference, respectively, to Shakespeare, in connection with Hugh Lane, defined as “the only begetter”, from Thomas Thorpe’s dedicatory words in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, and to Edmund Spenser. The latter is quoted in the last line of the V stanza – the only stanza with 7 lines instead of 8, but also alluded to in the reference in the following stanza, stanza VI, to the figure of Antaeus who appears in *The Faerie Queene* (II., ix, 45-6).

The contents of Coole were sold a few months after Lady Gregory’s death in May 1932. Although Yeats would not live to see its destruction in 1941, he knew by the time he wrote this poem that it was doomed: “but never foresaw its end, /and now that end has come, I have not wept” (ll. 6-7). Spenser’s misquotation – “No fox can foul the lair the badger swept” – is in keeping with the Renaissance status of Coole, and, as Chapman claims, “Implicit, then is Yeats’s intention to memorialise his friends, and himself by association, so they may be spared the fate of Leicester – of being merely replaced and forgotten in the scheme of things” (2010, 210). As Roy Foster acutely observes, although the gift was welcomed by the poet, the two references to Spenser in front of the Irish-American benefactors, is somehow a challenge to them, as Spenser is “seen by Irish nationalists not as the master of Elizabethan allegorical poetry but as the advocate of genocidal colonial policies” (2003, 596).

With the VI stanza the imaginary trio Yeats evoked in his speech in Stockholm is reassembled: John Synge, the poet, and Augusta Gregory. It is on this group, of which he writes in Summer 1910 in his *Journal*, “We three have conceived an Ireland that will remain *imaginary* more powerfully than we have conceived ourselves” (Yeats 1972, 251, emphasis added) that the poem closes. The first two lines of stanza VII are dedicated to “John Synge himself, that rooted man” (VII, l. 1), where the status Yeats had so valued and needed for himself in the middle years of the second decade of the century, rootedness, is used to qualify the friend and monument of the Irish Dramatic Movement.

The invitation, in the last stanza, to “come to this hallowed place” (VII, l. 4) before judging him indicates both the Gallery and the poem: the Gallery displays the portraits of people consecrated by history, which gives them a holy status. Their presence makes this a holy place, but also, as by now “the Yeatsian Gallery has gradually superseded the Municipal Gallery” (Ramazani 1990, 51), Ramazani points out that “the deictic phrase ‘this hallowed place’ must signify at least in part the poem itself. Although Yeats acknowledges that the Gallery is an extra-poetic place, he does so only after he has proven the primacy of his immaterial cenotaph” (51). In an anticipation of his death, in the last stanza the poet suggests the words with which to judge him:

“Think where man’s glory most begins and ends / And say my glory was I had such friends” (VII, ll. 7-8). A monument to his friends, but at the same time a monument to himself, “an implicit epitaph for himself” (Foster 2003, 598). As Seamus Deane has perceptively noted, “the last six lines are an address to the audience, containing six imperatives” (1989, 40)<sup>17</sup>, a verbal mode which marks the poetic subject’s voice as definitively asserting and commanding.

This work has examined the emergence of an assertive tone in Yeats’s poetry and its strengthening over time, which enabled the poetic subject to memorialise and celebrate his friends, himself and his works. The acquisition of this ability took him a long time, and the poet’s full mastering of this mode pervades *The Tower*. After having traced the development of this manner, the present article has finally provided a close reading of “The Municipal Gallery Revisited”, a poem which well represents the embodiment of such a celebratory mode. Attention has been cast on examining the strategies Yeats uses in this poem to make a monument of his friends, of his work and through it of himself and of the country they worked to shape, the Ireland they “imagined”, although the poet is aware that his country is different at the time of writing and has not lived up to that ideal.

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<sup>17</sup> The six imperatives are: “Do not judge” l. 50, “come” l. 51, “look” l. 52, “trace” l. 53, “Think” l. 54, “say”, l. 55.

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## Bibliophilia and Descriptive Bibliography: the Case of Yeats's Books

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### *Abstract:*

The essay, with evidence of Yeats's inscriptions and ownership of his rarest books in its Appendices, argues that connoisseurship enhances readership as well as creating value. In the coming era of "Virtual Reading Rooms" for research libraries, collectors, and the antiquarian book trade, Yeats's books as the symbolical embodiment of his endlessly revised texts, will be examined more often in online form. As access to digital representation of rare editions widens, students will have even more need to understand the materiality of the book. Copy-specific provenance data-bases will be an essential tool of online bibliography if we are to understand the motives of collectors with which Yeats himself remained baffled.

**Keywords:** Connoisseurship, Copy-specific Censuses, Descriptive Bibliography, Gosse, Provenance, Quinn, W.T.H. Howe, Inscription, Yeats, James Carleton Young

What is the place of copy-specific research in Descriptive Bibliography?<sup>1</sup> And how, does Descriptive Bibliography play into the wider field of Historical Bibliography? Connoisseurship implies the "slippered Contemplation"<sup>2</sup> of finer points of expensive and elusive books in private and research libraries. Now, however, the possibility opens that we might "Zoom" into democratization with "Virtual Reading Rooms" in research libraries all over the world, whereby various copies of a single book in say, Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Dublin, Edinburgh, London, Los Angeles and New York could be compared and collated, page by page, as if they sat side-by-side on a single desk.

Connoisseurship implies the continual recreation of value. It is timely, then, that rare book collecting and assessment should justify themselves anew. The imperative has been felt across the high-end,

<sup>1</sup> The great bibliographer G. Thomas Tanselle has collected his essays on this topic in *Descriptive Bibliography* (Charlottesville, The Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 2020). See his opening essay, "A Description of Descriptive Bibliography" (1992), 3-36.

<sup>2</sup> See "Ancestral Houses" in the sequence "Meditations in Time of Civil War", *VP* 418.

antiquarian book trade, especially after the Covid 19-inspired, AI-developed, displacement of auctioneers and salerooms into the online realm<sup>3</sup>.

Above all, what does copy-specific antiquarian study contribute to the wider evaluation of W.B. Yeats who, despite his profound engagements with the designers of his books and their symbolical embodiments of his work, was so driven by textual revision of his past works that he would openly show his puzzlement with the motives of collectors of his own first editions?<sup>4</sup>

Ulinka Rublack discerns a “new relationship” between “art, collecting, and commerce in Europe in the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries”, and illustrates her point with a now lost (though copied) altar-piece in which Dürer incorporated a self-advertising self-portrait. This work is Rublack’s “lens” through which she questions the meaning of “value” in relation to works of art and artefacts current in Dürer’s times, not only through money and materials but also through “the power of such works to embody philosophical ideas, cultural movements, and changing fashions”<sup>5</sup>. My point of departure is also a single copy of a famous work, one which recently and briefly emerged on the market, and just as quickly disappeared from it. The booksellers rightly reserve the identity of the purchaser.

### 1. POEMS (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), Copy no. 17 of 25 copies on Japan vellum

Riverrun Books of Ardsley, New York offered the collection of the late Bart Auerbach in 2022 with the above item priced at \$12,500. Numbered and signed by Yeats out of the total edition of 775<sup>6</sup>, it had been sent to Yeats in 1902 for an inscription by the Minneapolis-based

<sup>3</sup>The annual cycle of sales has become a continual process and an armchair obsession for some book-collectors. On the responsibilities of antiquarian book cataloguers, see Lauren Hepburn’s interview with Adam Douglas, chief cataloguer at Peter Harrington, “Why Do We Use Catalogues in the Rare Book World?”, *Why Use A Book Catalogue? - Peter Harrington - The Journal* (<<https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/blog/why-use-a-book-catalogue/>>). On the Democratization of Rare Book Collecting, see the blog by the *viaLibri* founder, John Hincks based on a lecture at the Institute of English Studies, London, 11 March 2014, <<https://blog.vialibri.net/taste-and-technique-in-book-collecting-updated-for-the-digital-age/>>.

<sup>4</sup> See below, Plate 1 and transcription of note inscribed on “Mr. Young’s” copy of *Poems* (1895). As David McKitterick points out in his wonderfully comprehensive *Readers in a Revolution: Bibliographical Change in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2022), Richard Herne Shepherd (1840-95) “[...] invented a new genre in England, the bibliography of contemporary authors” and “introduced a new aid in tracing authorial revisions and to understanding” (pp. 225 & ff.). McKitterick also gestures to the detective work of John Carter and Graham Pollard for *An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth Century Pamphlets* (London, Constable, 1934, 99-109) as revealing *inter alia* that the decade 1885-1895 was the key period for the emergence of interest in modern first editions (*ibidem.*, 225 & ff). Hereafter “Carter and Pollard”.

<sup>5</sup> I quote from the blurb for *Dürer’s Lost Masterpiece: Art and Society at the Dawn of a Global World* (New York, Oxford UP, 2023). See *Dürer’s Lost Masterpiece: Art and Society at the Dawn of a Global World* a book by Ulinka Rublack (<<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2024/02/22/in-search-of-the-rare-and-strange-durers-lost-masterpiece/>>) and also see Jenny Uglow, “In Search of the Rare and Strange”, *The New York Review of Books*, February 22, 2024 (nybooks.com). For a reproduction of the copy of Dürer’s lost Heller altarpiece by Jobst Harrich, depicting Dürer himself in the background, centre-left (Image: Horst Ziegenfusz / Historisches Museum Frankfurt am Main), see Francesca Peacock, “Death of an Altarpiece”, *Prospect Magazine*, September 6, 2023 (<<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/culture/62850/albrecht-durer-death-of-an-altarpiece>>).

<sup>6</sup> See *The Bart Auerbach Collection: Riverrun Books and Manuscripts*, 2022, 446 (212), <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Z7JHv6042DFhsJwa-78DYE9kb0dQ8bc/view?usp=sharing>>. Auerbach’s information came from a Grolier Club Exhibition Catalogue of Irish Books, of which the organiser and owner of the items exhibited was the prodigious collector, James Gilvarry. Entitled “The Indomitable Irishry”, the exhibition showed the range of Gilvarry’s Irish collection including Quinn’s Japon vellum copy of Wade 15, inscribed by Yeats, copy 11 of the 25-copy vellum issue: see Wade 37. See *The Gazette of the Grolier Club*, 2 October 1966, 4-7, where further Yeats items

magnate and collector, James Carleton Young<sup>7</sup>. Since 1895, Yeats had reversed his opinion of H. Granville Fell's designs for the book's covers and title-page, his enthusiasms now being wholly given over to the symbolical cover designs of Althea Gyles for A.H. Bullen, as found on *The Secret Rose* (1897), *Poems* (1899), *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), *The Celtic Twilight* (1902) and *The Shadowy Waters* (1903). He duly inscribed the book on the front free endpaper, but not without a certain asperity:

M<sup>r</sup> Young why do you like first editions. This edition is much less agreeable than the later ones. It has a cover which has nothing of the beauty or meaning of Althea Gyles's covers, some misprints & none of the dramatic verse is in its final shape. Some day will not writers have a mortal quarrel with their readers over this business of first editions. I wonder was it I put that stain on the cover. WB Yeats June 1902.<sup>8</sup>

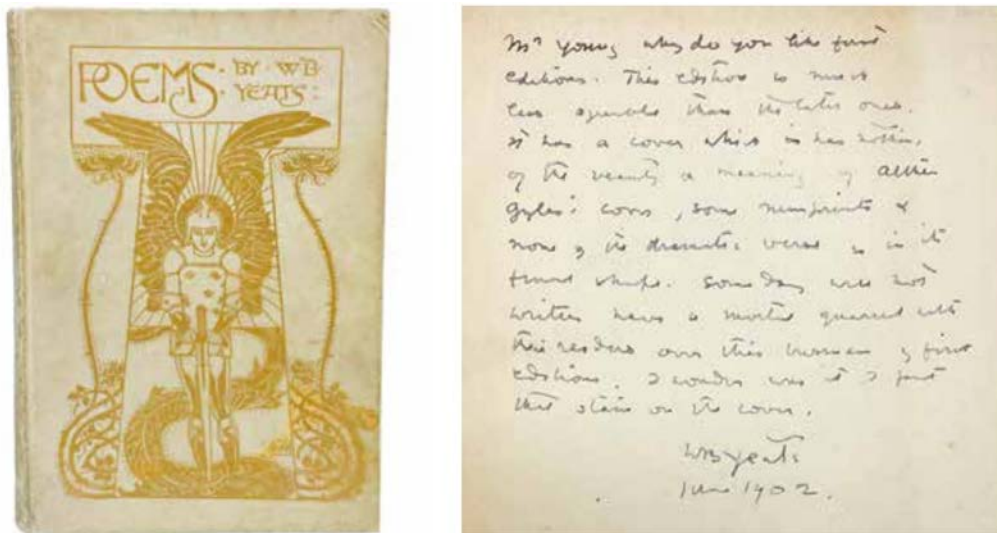


Fig. 1 - Japan Vellum Copy 17 of *Poems* 1895  
with inscription by W.B. Yeats to James Carleton Young, June 1902

also exhibited by Gilvarry are listed. The exhibition was accompanied by talks on or by Irish writers by, inter alia, William York Tindall, Pádraic Colum and Denis Johnston. I thank Dr Kevin McKinney of the Club's library for disintering a copy. Confirmation that this was the copy thus exhibited may be found in the renowned catalogue from Christie's, New York, 7 February 1986, *Modern Literature from the Library of James Gilvarry*, item 474 (181)

<sup>7</sup> James Carleton Young and his mania for having authors sign their books is discussed below. For a list of books signed for Young, see Appendix 1, below pp. 140 & ff.

<sup>8</sup> See *The Bart Auerbach Collection Riverrun Books and Manuscripts*, 2022, 212, item no. 446. The booksellers rightly reserve the identity of the purchaser. McKitterick also gestures to J.H. Slater's observations in his *Early Editions: A Bibliographical Survey of the Works of Some Modern Authors* (London, Kegan Paul, 1894), on a change of emphasis towards textual development and correction in modern, revising authors, the *edition princeps* being no longer the preferred choice as it had been in 19<sup>th</sup> C. attitudes to Classical texts (v), quoted in McKitterick pp. 225 & ff.

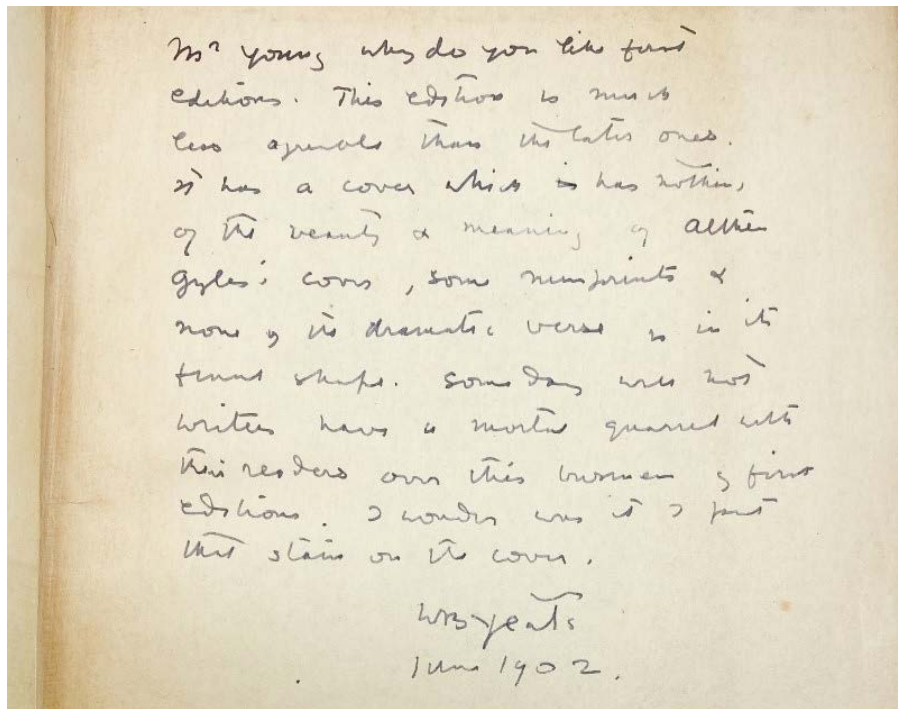


Fig. 2 - Close-up of Inscription by W.B. Yeats to James Carleton Young, June 1902

Born in Marion, Iowa, James Carleton Young (1856-1918), had become a land-speculator in Minneapolis, Minnesota<sup>9</sup>. His gargantuan ambitions for his library embraced virtually all contemporary literatures and languages. By instinct a Leavisite if *avant la lettre*, and with an added twist, he sought to “bring[”] together under one roof “the best literature of the present age”, but sent copies of their books to chosen authors for them to sign so that “each volume [would be] characteristically inscribed by the author”<sup>10</sup>. At the height of his collecting mania he had some seven secretaries and librarians working for him on this project.

Young rather breezily distinguished between authors on merit:

[I]n cases of authors who have apparently attained a firm place in literary history, all their books have been included; but where an author has written but one book with any claim upon immortality, that book has been admitted, and his other books excluded.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See “Collection: Celia Olney Goodale Collection on James Carleton Young”, Hennepin County Library (<[https://archives.hclib.org/resources/celia\\_olney\\_goodale\\_collection\\_on\\_james\\_carleton\\_y](https://archives.hclib.org/resources/celia_olney_goodale_collection_on_james_carleton_y)>).

<sup>10</sup> Undated Printed Circular quoted by Elaine J. Zinkhan in “An American Bibliophile and Some Australian Writers”, *Antipodes* 5, 2 (Dec. 1991), 135-140; and “James Carleton Young: Biblio-Canon Consolidation and Australian Writers”, in the *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand* 13, 3 (Nov. 1990), 101-119. Zinkhan reports that Young’s collection eventually included several hundred volumes of Emile Zola’s own library, scores of Zola’s autograph letters, as well as *Anna Karenina*, inscribed 30 November 1903 by Leo Tolstoi. Other eminent writers in Young’s collection included Gabriele D’Annunzio, John Galsworthy, Richard Garnett, Ellen Glasgow, Maxim Gorky, Edmund Gosse, Thomas Hardy. On the association between book-collecting and the new fashion for autograph collecting see McKitterick, pp. 233 & ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Zinkhan, *Antipodes*, cit., 135.



Although Young seems never to have questioned the “ideological soundness” – or the sheer feasibility of his aspiration – he was not unaware of potential minefields. An uninformed and often embarrassingly naïve enthusiast, he did at least seek some advice from writers, critics, academics and others in his attempt at what Zinkhan calls “biblio-canon consolidation”.

Yeats fell into the first category and duly signed and returned to Young a number of his books<sup>12</sup>. As Yeats’s question indicates, Young preferred to have an author’s first editions inscribed, partly for the sake of uniformity, but principally because he felt that first editions represent the “author’s first thought on his subject”<sup>13</sup>. In his opinion, revising authors’ later versions fell away from some Platonic ideal, whatever they might themselves have thought.

## 2. ENTER JOHN QUINN, FOLLOWED BY SOME COLLECTORS

Somewhat to the annoyance of John Quinn (1870-1924), who was busying himself on Yeats’s behalf among Americans who felt themselves to be of Irish origins and sympathies, Yeats rather took to Young when they met in Minneapolis on 22 January 1904<sup>14</sup>.

In a lost letter, Quinn had “cold-called” Yeats as a point of entry to the Irish Renaissance. Yeats responded on 28 December 1901<sup>15</sup> and they finally met on 20 August 1902 at a *feis ceoil* in Co. Galway where *An Posadh (The Marriage)* by Douglas Hyde and Lady Gregory was performed. Quinn then met most of the key artists and writers of the Irish Literary Movement at Coole Park where he signed Lady Gregory’s autograph tree, and commissioned paintings from John Butler Yeats, Jack Yeats, George Russell and others. Long before he became the greatest art collector of his day, then, Quinn’s famed patronage had started when he had pressed himself on Irish writers by buying their books and manuscripts and on Irish painters by buying their works.<sup>16</sup> His agency among Americans of Irish origin or with Irish political and cultural interests was indefatigable. He had turned in disgust from Tammany Hall politics in New York City to practical work on behalf of his new friends among Irish makers. A highly successful lawyer and a “fixer”, Quinn at 32 was already rich enough to gamble on an American market in Irish books, manuscripts, paintings and other art works that he had himself created.

One of his “fixer” activities was that of ensuring that US copyrights were secured for their UK or Irish published works in an era in which an American copyright demanded US publication of a US-typeset and printed artefact. The following letters recently offered for sale by Peter Harrington Rare Books in London show the thoroughness of Quinn’s backing for what is now known as *Wade 55*, a 100 copy, numbered edition of *The King’s Threshold* (1904), commissioned and funded by Quinn, and printed on special Italian hand-made paper by the UP, Cambridge (USA)<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on Young, see Appendix 1 below.

<sup>13</sup> *Minneapolis Journal* 18 October 1902, quoted by Zinkhan *Antipodes*, cit., 135.

<sup>14</sup> Quinn had advised Yeats not to “waste much time” on or ‘spend a day’ with Young; see *ChronY92*; *CL3* 533-34, n. 2.

<sup>15</sup> *CL3*, 140.

<sup>16</sup> See L.W. White, “Quinn, John”, *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (<<https://www.dib.ie/biography/quinn-john-a7561>>). The New York Irish Literary Society had been founded by Yeats but came to grief when “New York’s catholic archbishop refused to serve as an honorary vice-president alongside [...] a protestant and, according to the archbishop, author of heretical works” (*ibidem*). Quinn’s was later renowned as patron of Joseph Conrad but it was not until 1911 that he began to buy his MSS.

<sup>17</sup> See YEATS, W.B., *The King’s Threshold*, 1904. “First edition of a rare publication with a presentation card from the author” (<<https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/the-king-s-threshold-151855.html>>). I thank Sammy Jay of that

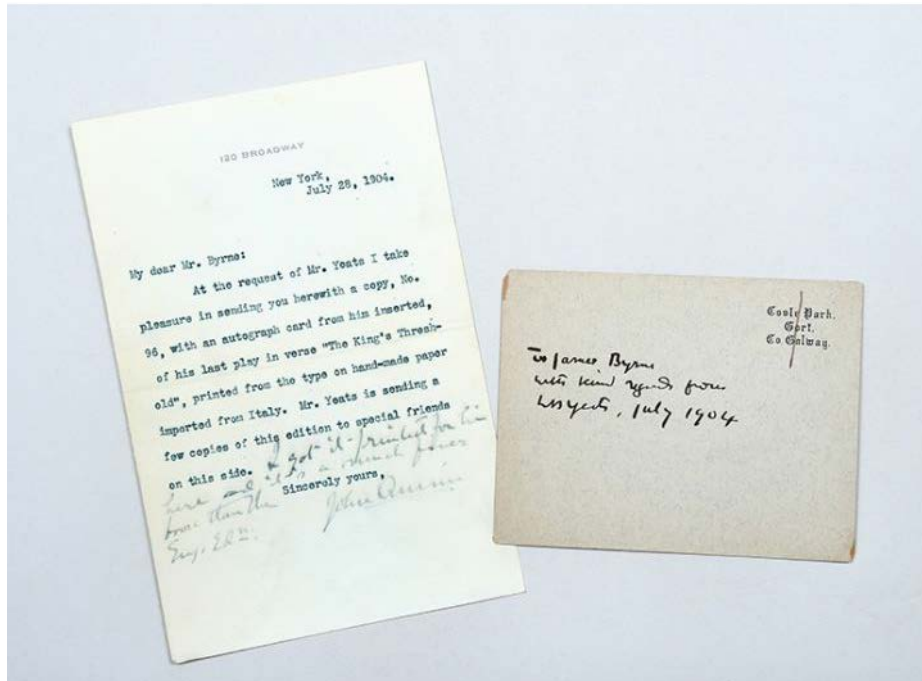


Fig. 3 - TLS from John Quinn to James Byrne 28 July 1904 to Byrne, with card in Yeats's hand also to Byrne, dated July 1904 with cancelled Coole Park address

These then are relics of Quinn's work in stirring Irish-identifying Americans on Yeats's behalf. In sending cards pre-signed by Yeats, Quinn as agent functions as a precursor to the online signing machine<sup>18</sup>.

Quinn organised Yeats's first North American lecture tour (1903–4) that earned the poet some \$3,200, and arranged similar tours for other Irish writers e.g., Douglas Hyde in 1905. His most practical work lay in the American copyrighting of works by Irish writers. He would quickly circumvent potential piracies with limited edition publications entered for copyright with the Library of Congress. By intimate association with Lady Gregory and with her circle including Yeats, he sought to buy an Irish identity for himself. By amassing his vast library of books and MSS of leading writers. He dictated profuse letters, compiling thereby a blow-by-blow transatlantic record of the Irish Renaissance. He had become a necessary man, and thereby the Patron of the Irish Renaissance<sup>19</sup>. Sharp criticism of Quinn, his methods and manners can be found among those he helped and patronized<sup>20</sup>. While other

distinguished firm. James F. Byrne (1857-1942) was a New York corporation lawyer whose wife, Helen Byrne (1865-1945) was a patroness of the arts and bought a Jack B. Yeats painting. See A.B. Humber (ed.), *The Letters of John Quinn to W.B. Yeats*, with the assistance of George Mills Harper (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1983), 61, 5. Hereafter *LJQ*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> L.W. White, "Quinn, John", *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (<<https://www.dib.ie/biography/quinn-john-a7561>>). It was not until 1911 that Quinn (1870-1934) began to support Joseph Conrad by buying his MSS.

<sup>20</sup> An excellent example is found in Mary Colum's *Life and the Dream* (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday & Co., 1947). On Quinn's provincial manners diet, taste and "dictatorialness", see 214-217.

great collectors – notably James Augustine Healy (1891-1975) – followed him, none had his shaping influence<sup>21</sup>.

His “bought” friendship with Yeats became a genuine one. From 3 February 1918 the Yeats / Quinn correspondence focuses amid all Quinn’s volubility upon the business of paying John Butler Yeats’s extensive debts racked up living in New York. He was determined not to be repatriated to Ireland. By March 1918, Yeats and Quinn were discussing how Yeats’s manuscripts, if purchased on a regular basis by Quinn, might support the feckless old man<sup>22</sup>.

Yeats was to inscribe John Quinn’s own copy of *Poems* (1895):

The man who made this cover made a beautiful design, which I saw at an exhibition, but after I saw it Dent had spoilt him, with all kinds of odd jobs & when he did this the spirit had gone out of him. I hate this expressionless angel of his. W.B. Yeats, 1904 [...].<sup>23</sup>

This copy of *Poems* (1895) reached \$95 in the Anderson Galleries sale of Quinn’s library in 1923. Comparison with other prices at the same series of sales suggests that the uniqueness of this inscribed item had been fully appreciated<sup>24</sup>.

Also at the Quinn sale, two inscribed copies of the 110 copy edition of *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (London, privately printed, 1897, Wade item 24) changed hands. One of these was the copy Yeats had straightforwardly inscribed for Lionel Johnson at an unknown date (presumably at or before publication)<sup>25</sup>.

This was a golden age for “market-makers” and wealthy collectors<sup>26</sup>. One such was W.T.H. Howe (1868-1939) of “Freelands”, Cincinnati, whose dominant leather book label inflicted severe staining on the front free end-papers of those of Quinn’s books which he bought. A “Cincinnati textbook executive ... [who] took delight in his broad literary connections and brought many English and Irish writers to Cincinnati [and was] ... interested in advancing the cause of poetry in the Cincinnati area<sup>27</sup>, Howe was also a manuscript collector, and as an “Associate” of the Cincinnati little magazine, *The Gypsy*, printed poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Thackeray, and Tennyson from his manuscript collection in the magazine. He

<sup>21</sup> James A. Healy was a New York stockbroker and bibliophile. For an obituary, see *The New York Times* 24 July 1975, 27. See J.A. Healy, *Guide to the James A. Healy Collection of Irish Literature M0273* (<[https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf6f59n8gm/entire\\_text/](https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf6f59n8gm/entire_text/)>), now at Stanford, and based around Yeats and the Dun Emer and Cuala Presses”. None of this archive is available online. See also Appendix 1 below.

<sup>22</sup> See LJQ 177-180. See also Colm Tóibín’s essay, “W.B. Yeats: New Ways to Kill Your Father” in his *New Ways to Kill Your Mother: Writers and Their Families* (London, Viking, 2012) 48-49. The initial manuscript purchases under discussion included *The Swans at Coole* [sic] *The Alphabet* i.e., *Per Amica Lunae*; *At the Hawk’s Well*; *The Player Queen* and the two essays in Lady Gregory’s *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920), viz., “Witches and Wizards and Irish Folklore” dated 1914, and “Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places” dated 14 October 1914.

<sup>23</sup> Wade 15 (37) and above n. 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Quinn Cat.*, Lot 11363, p. 1132, as well as unpaginated price index.

<sup>25</sup> Lot 11371 in the *Quinn Cat.*, (p. 1133 and unpaginated price index), it fetched \$89.00, and is now in the Berg Collection, NYPL as “Copy 1”. W. T. H. Howe bought both copies of this book at the Quinn sale.

<sup>26</sup> That this was a golden era for wealthy American collectors of English literary books and manuscripts of all kinds including highly suspect items is a story admirably told in Joseph Hone’s account of T. J. Wise and his forgeries, *The Book Forger: The True Story of a Literary Crime that Fooled the World* (London, Chatto and Windus, 2024), hereafter “Hone”. See especially Ch. 9, “The Moral Position”.

<sup>27</sup> See S.J. Gores, “Building Cincinnati’s Poetry Community in the Period between the Wars: George Elliston, W.T.H. Howe, and *The Gypsy*”, *Ohio Valley History*, 21, 3, 2021, 48-68. See also *Project MUSE*, <[muse.jhu.edu/article/806814](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/806814)>. Hereafter “Gores”. Howe became President of the company in 1931, and owned a large country house, “Freelands” about 25 miles out of Cincinnati, over the Kentucky border.

funded prizes for poetry by living poets published in *The Gypsy*, and ran a small press from his house, “Freelands”<sup>28</sup>. Such was the scale of his collecting that he had to use agents to do it for him<sup>29</sup>. Though not a native Cincinnati, Howe ensured that its local literary culture thrived and was of wider significance. If “Everything [was] up to date in Cincinnati”, Howe and his swelling collections were in part responsible.

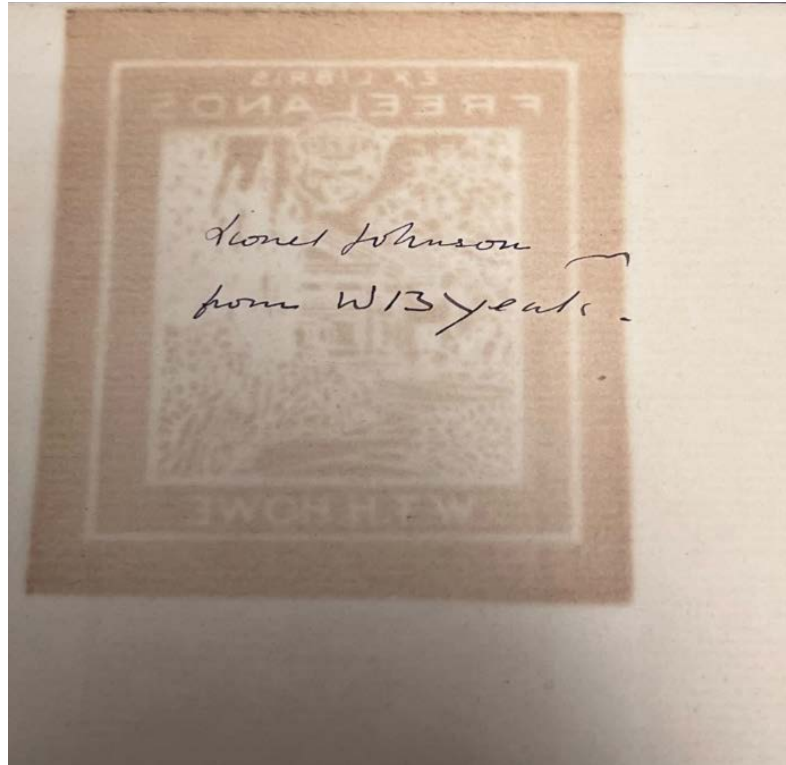


Fig. 4 - Yeats's Inscription to Lionel Johnson, in W.T.H. Howe's copy of *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (privately printed, 1897)

Lot 11370 was the rather more interesting copy, also stained by the offsetting of Howe's impractical leather book label rudely usurping Jack B. Yeats's bookplate for Quinn on the fixed endpaper:

<sup>28</sup> Howe “largely supported” *The Gypsy*, a quarterly magazine edited by George Elliston (1883-1946), who assumed for Cincinnati the role played by another female editor, far better-known Harriet Monroe with *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* in Chicago. Howe seems to have started in the American Book Company, in Cincinnati as a “lowly [...] sales agent”, having come to the Mid-west intending to be a high school science teacher. His archives are held into the Bird Library, University of Syracuse and in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library which houses his library. See also Appendix 1 below.

<sup>29</sup> \$100 for the best lyric, \$50 for the best sonnet, and \$50 for the best free verse piece: quoted in Gores, 53.

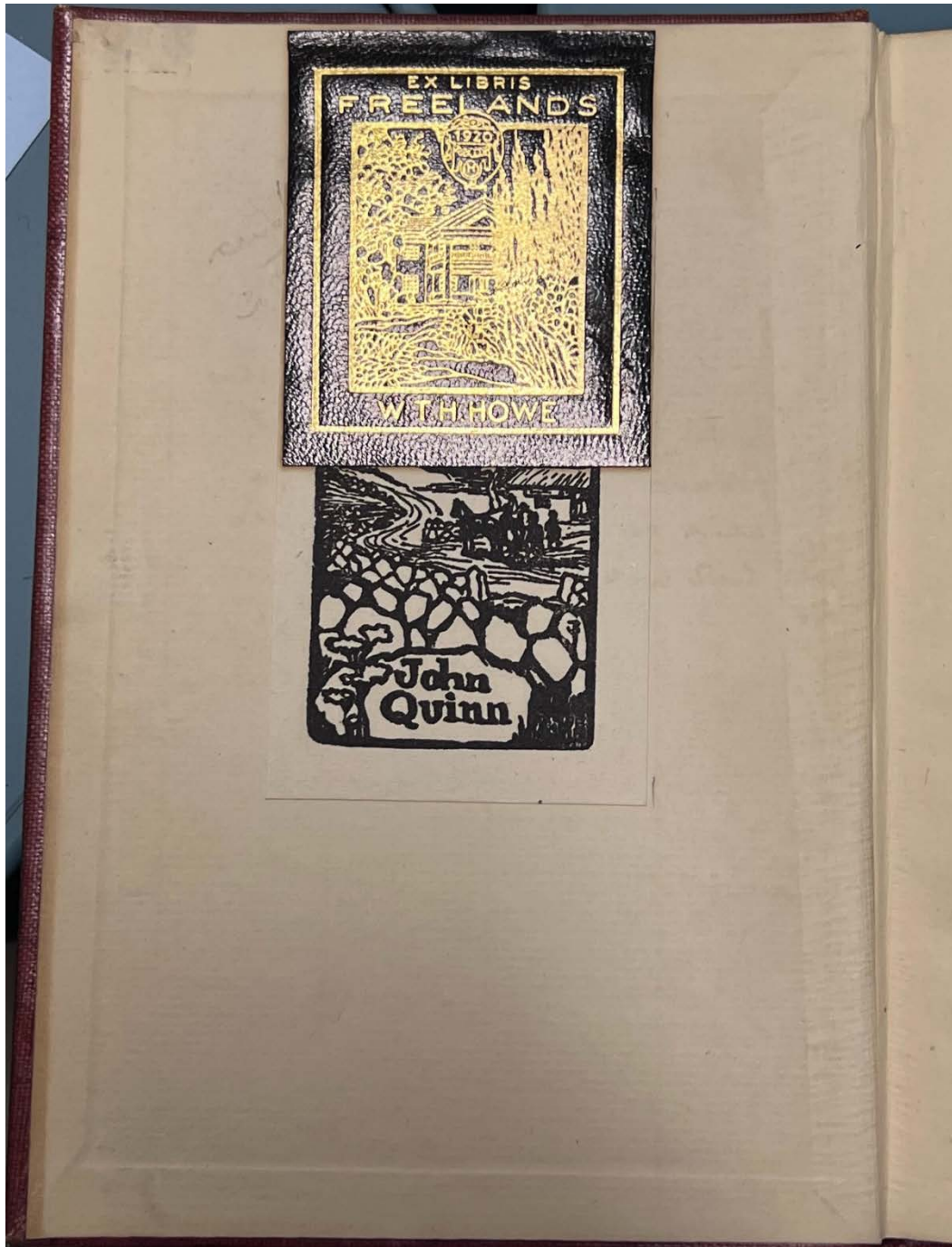


Fig. 5 - W.T.H. Howe's leather bookplate (over John Quinn's bookplate by Jack B. Yeats) in *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (privately printed, 1897)





Fig. 6 - John Quinn's bookplate (by Jack B. Yeats) in W.T.H. Howe's *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (privately printed, 1897)

This copy is inscribed by Yeats on the front free recto:

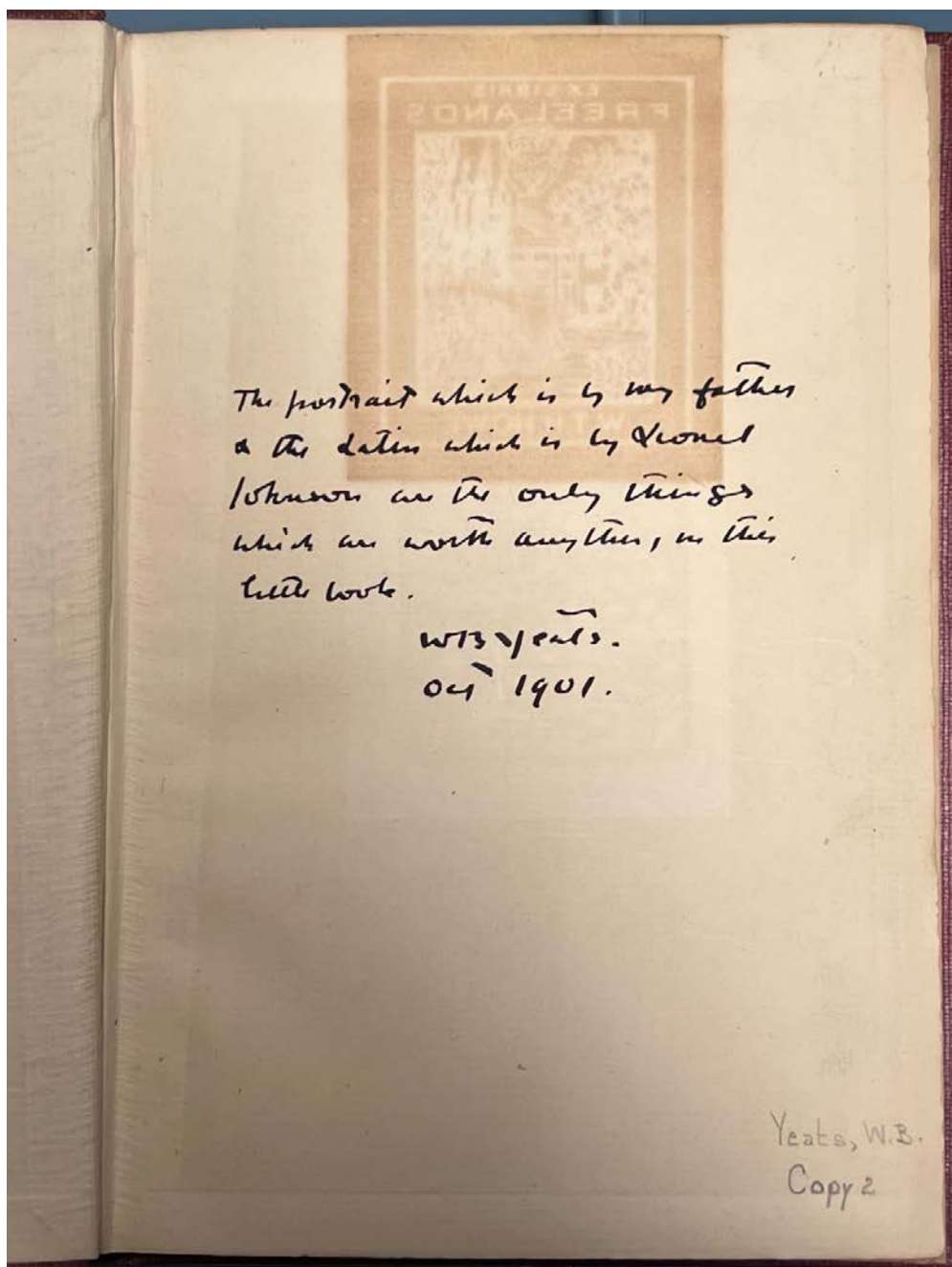


Fig. 7 - Yeats's October 1901 Inscription in W.T.H. Howe's 2<sup>nd</sup> Copy of *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (privately printed, 1897)

The Quinn Catalogue was to have a major impact upon the pioneering "Soho Bibliographies" of Allan Wade, and confirms the extent to which Wade worked from that Catalogue, rather than

from inspection of actual copies of the books themselves<sup>30</sup>. Images of Yeats's wording shows that the punctuation in both the Young and the Quinn Catalogues was inaccurate, but Wade, without access to books by then in American research libraries or still in the hands of private collectors such as Howe, followed them.

### 3. *THE HOUR-GLASS | A MORALITY* (London, Wm. Heinemann, 1903)

This has long been reputed to be Yeats's rarest book, with Quinn's claim that just twelve copies had been printed in a "unique" private copyright edition. I retell its story to show how entangled the history of a book and of its descriptions can become, especially in the absence of publishers' archives, and why scrappy catalogue entries frustrate provenance research.

*The Hour-Glass | A Morality* first appeared in *The North American Review*, September 1903<sup>31</sup>. Heinemann's humble pamphlet, a 16 pp. off-print in the *Review* type is date-stamped for copyright purposes in the Library of Congress as early as 13 August 1903 and in the British Museum Library on 29 August 1903<sup>32</sup>. Its prior history is unknown except through the writings of John Quinn. The Heinemann Archive has disappeared, though a few items were souvenired in the process of disposal<sup>33</sup>.

Allan Wade evasively noted in 1908 that "A few copies only of this edition [were] printed, for purposes of copyright". John Quinn was precise and emphatic in Wade's *Bibliography*<sup>34</sup>:

Of the first separate edition of *The Hour-Glass*, described in Part I under date 1903, only twelve copies were printed. Of these, six went for English copyright, two were lost in the post, the printer kept one, one belongs to Mr. W.B. Yeats, one to Lady Gregory and one to Mr. John Quinn.<sup>35</sup>

Wade takes up the story in later editions of his *Bibliography*, 1951-68:

Quinn was adamant in 1908 that "there were twelve copies only, of which six went for English copyright; two others were lost in the mail; the printer kept one; one belongs to Mr. W.B. Yeats, one to Lady Gregory and one to Mr. John Quinn".

Quinn is precise: *six* copies for *English* copyright. There were at the time only *five* copyright libraries and to this day the sixth, the National Library of Wales, founded in 1907 and which did not become a copyright library until 1911, has no copy<sup>36</sup>. The mystery of this sixth "English

<sup>30</sup> Cf., the readings of Yeats's annotations as printed in *Wade* 1951, 41; 1968, 43.

<sup>31</sup> *The North American Review*, September 1903, vol. 177 (562), 445-456.

<sup>32</sup> The British Museum (now British Library) copy's shelf-mark is now reclassified C. 58. H.7. I have inspected it several times, most recently on 22 May 2024. See Appendix 2, Provisional Census, below 147.

<sup>33</sup> According to the late Keith Sambrook, a senior Publisher with Heinemann Educational and a Book Historian at the Institute of English Studies, London, the Heinemann Archive was disposed of many years ago, and, but for a few souvenired items relating to Hall Caine, and no early author contracts survive. There remains therefore no record of dealings with Quinn, or Yeats, who was never otherwise published by Heinemann. Starting at Trübner & Co., Heinemann grew his own firm from a spectacular start with Hall Caine. See John St. John, *William Heinemann: a Century of Publishing, 1890-1990* (London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1990; hereafter "St. John"). St. John does not mention Quinn, or Yeats.

<sup>34</sup> *CWVP* 8 222. Also separately repaginated in an edition of just 60 copies as *A Bibliography of the Writings of William Butler Yeats* by Allan Wade (Stratford on Avon, Shakespeare Head Press, 1908). Both editions henceforth *Wade* 1, for which Quinn compiled the list of American publications.

<sup>35</sup> Quinn's note can be found at *CWVP* 8 287.

<sup>36</sup> The six copyright libraries for the UK are the British Museum Library, the National Library of Scotland, Trinity College (Dublin), the Bodleian Library (Oxford), Cambridge University Library, and the National Library of Wales. Founded in 1907 and a copyright library from 1911, it does not contain a copy of the 1903 published volume, merely the periodical text. I thank Manon Foster Evans of the National Library of Wales for the information (email, 14-05-2024): see also "The National Library of Wales, the art of the book, and Welsh Bibliography" by Gwyn Walters in *A Nation and*



copyright copy”, is explored below in my account of Sir Edmund Gosse’s copy.

In the 1923 Anderson Galleries John Quinn Sale Catalogue, Quinn adds to the story:

The author lost or mislaid his copy; the printer many years ago lost or gave away his copy. This copy [“i.e., that being sold as Lot 11430 in the Quinn sale] and the one in the possession of Lady Gregory are therefore in all probability the only copies in existence, and may rank perhaps as the rarest of all Yeats items.

To return to Wade’s account of these matters:

In July 1909, that is, after the publication of Quinn’s first note, Lady Gregory wrote to me that her copy also had been lost by the binders<sup>37</sup> and that she had mentioned this to Quinn when my 1908 bibliography reached her, saying that now his copy was the only one extant. She had just received from him, she wrote, his copy “in a beautiful case.” Nevertheless a copy appears in his sale catalogue, and there was one also in Edmund Gosse’s library, inscribed by Yeats: “Never heard of this edition before”. Oct. 13, 194 [year?]: this copy appeared in the Buhler sale. A copy was also sold at Messrs Hodgson’s on November 30, 1950.

Quinn was mistaken in saying that the author had lost or mislaid his copy; it remained in his library and is now in the possession of Mrs. Yeats. But Yeats cared little for his own first editions and was, no doubt, sincere in saying, on the Edmund Gosse copy, that he had never heard of this edition.

Quinn omits two copies received by the Library of Congress on 13 August 1903. These were deposited to secure American copyright. As instigator of this private edition, Quinn must have been the consigner<sup>38</sup>. Yet in 1923 when he described a copy offered in the Anderson Galleries sale of his library, he stuck to his former tally of copies:

*First Separate Edition* of which only 12 copies were printed. Of this number, six went for English copyright; two were lost in the post, one belongs to Mr. W.B. Yeats, one to Lady Gregory, one to Mr. Quinn, and the printer kept one. The author has lost or mislaid his copy; the printer years ago lost or see gave away his copy. This copy and the one in possession of Lady Gregory are therefore in all probability the only copies in existence, and may rank perhaps as THE RAREST OF ALL YEATS ITEMS.<sup>39</sup>

Despite his air of lawyerly qualification, Quinn was spruiking – even “goosing” – his stock<sup>40</sup>. Where Wade had been vague in 1908, the Quinn Catalogue was precise – 12 copies. If Quinn’s enthusiasm was disingenuous, it bore fruit. As Lot 11430, the modest, not to say wretched, Heinemann booklet book fetched an enormous price, \$190.00, a price to be compared to that of Lot 11429, the revised play’s 37 page autograph manuscript in a crushed green

*its Books: A History of the Book in Wales*, edited by Philip Henry Jones and Eluned Rees (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 1998). The copyright libraries themselves and publishers sometimes grumble about the burdens that copyright deposit places upon them, especially in the era of digital editions, but Hone’s *The Book Forger* lays out in simple terms what guarantees such a system offers, and how they have been subverted in the past. See esp., Chapter 9 “The Moral Position”.

<sup>37</sup>The binders were Bradstreet’s of 61 Elm St., Lower Manhattan, New York, “a small fine bindery that was part of the larger reference-book publishing firm of the same name.” It produced deluxe bindings for such collectors as J. Pierpont Morgan: see <<https://www.metmuseum.org/articles/alfred-launder>>; “BOOKTRYST: American Rare Book Trade Ads From 1902” (<[http://www.booktryst.com/2012/07/american-rare-book-trade-ads-from-1902\\_23.html](http://www.booktryst.com/2012/07/american-rare-book-trade-ads-from-1902_23.html)>). See below Appendix 2, pp. 147 & ff.

<sup>38</sup>I thank Dr Amanda Zimmerman of the Library of Congress: see below Appendix 2, pp. 147 & ff.

<sup>39</sup>*Quinn Cat.*, Lot 11340 (cf., the paraphrase of this passage in *Wade* 4 (1968), item 51, 68-69. Bart Auerbach usefully adds from auction records that “only five copies of this limitation (one unnumbered and unsigned, presumably retained by the publisher) have sold in the past fifty years. See above, n. 6.

<sup>40</sup>*OED Online* cites the following example of “goose” in the sense of “to goad, spur, or provoke (someone)”: “While the chains were goosing the independent booksellers into a more competitive posture [...] they simultaneously provoked similar shifts in the world of publishing.” (*Newsweek*, 16 July 1957, 2).

levant Morocco solander case, with a laid-in copy of the play's first edition (\$170) at the same sale, where the annotated periodical text (Lot 11431) fetched \$3.00<sup>41</sup>.

Quinn never states that his underlying intention was to arrange a unique off-print edition from the *North American Review's* periodical version of the play in order to secure its *American* as well as its U.K. copyright. This accounts for the two copies date-stamped by the Library of Congress on 13 August 1903 and never admitted by Quinn.<sup>42</sup> These copies had been deposited more than a fortnight before the British Museum date-stamped its copy on 29 August 1903. The American Copyright copies are never mentioned by Quinn in his various tallies of the size of the edition.

In a letter of 25 June 1909 to Lady Gregory, Quinn recalls his actions of the summer of 1903, i.e., before Yeats had ever been to America and when Thomas Mosher's piracy of *The Land of Heart's Desire* was a painful matter, causing a loss of revenue for Yeats<sup>43</sup>.

For weeks and months I have had here a Morocco solander case which I had made for the unique edition of "The Hour Glass". If you will look in the American Bibliography which I prepared for the collected edition you will see in a note there that I stated that there were only six copies of this edition printed.<sup>44</sup> It was printed from the same plates as were used for the North American Review number which contained the play. It was separately paged, however, and it is paged as a separate book and has the imprint of William Heinemann. Twelve copies were printed. Six were sent by the publishers for the English copyright. I got four originally. Two I mailed to you, one I mailed to Yeats, and I kept one. Yeats got his. I saw it with his books in London The two that I mailed to you were lost in the mails.<sup>45</sup> I finally got the last one the publisher had and have had these two here for months. They were at the binders for months, and yours has been back from the binders and carefully wrapped for a long time. Yours I had put in with the number of the Review itself.<sup>46</sup> There are therefore only three extant copies of this separate publication, and I made a note of its rarity in the American Bibliography. I have had your case carefully wrapped in boards, and am sending it to you at Coole by registered mail and am having it insured at \$100 (£20) I hope it will reach you safely I think registered mail with insurance is safer than expressage.<sup>47</sup>

As so often with Quinn's dictated, garrulous letters – confusion threatens. I read him as saying that, apart from the copyright copies (8, including those for the Library of Congress) Quinn "got four originally", for Yeats (1), Lady Gregory (2), and himself (1). The printer had, and had mislaid, one more, and when Lady Gregory's copies were lost in the post, he scrounged another from Heinemann, ["I finally got the last one the publisher had"]) and have had these two [i.e., that copy and his own] here for months" [to be bound]. So, in 1909, a total of 14 copies. But there may have been more<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Lots 1129-31 in the *Quinn Cat.*, vol. 2, pp. 1140 & unpaginated price list in same volume.

<sup>42</sup> I am grateful to Dr Amanda Zimmerman of the Library of Congress for scans of these items.

<sup>43</sup> *The Hour-Glass* had been first performed at the Molesworth Hall, Dublin, on 14 March 1903. For full details see VPI 640. This was before Yeats first went to the USA, where his travels, lectures, and readings vastly increased the risk of piracy. See Warwick Gould, "Yeats in the States: Piracy, Copyright and the Shaping of the Canon", *Publishing History* 51, Summer 2002, 61-82.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix 2, pp. 147 & ff., where Quinn's various computations are challenged.

<sup>45</sup> This sentence is added as an afterthought, inserted between lines in the double-spaced typescript.

<sup>46</sup> The Berg Collection Card Catalogue states that this copy, together with two copies of the *North American Review* 177, 3, September 1903 and a corrected clipping from the same journal, "came with Lady Gregory's papers".

<sup>47</sup> TLS, from John Quinn to Lady Gregory, 5 July 1909, NYPL.

<sup>48</sup> Quinn's correspondence leading to a contract with William Heinemann is evidently lost. If Quinn kept carbon copies of his letters to Heinemann, they have not come to light. I thank Dr Declan Kiely of the NYPL for searching the John Quinn typescript collection.

4. THE BOOK OF GOSSE<sup>49</sup>

Despite its reasonably complete provenance, the “Gosse copy” poses unresolved problems<sup>50</sup>. Gosse’s close association over many years with the publisher William Heinemann may perhaps explain why Yeats, who had no great admiration for Heinemann, came to be published by him at all, and uniquely, for *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (1903)<sup>51</sup>. Long before Heinemann published Gosse’s initially anonymous memoir, *Father and Son* in 1907, he had established himself as London agent for the American *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, and as a “go-to fixer” of literary connexions for Americans seeking outlets in London, and had been appointed by Heinemann as editor of Heinemann’s International Library, a series of translations from foreign literatures<sup>52</sup>.

Gosse’s copy is enigmatically inscribed by Yeats on the inside cover:

Never heard of this edition before | W.B. Yeats. Oct. 13, 1914.<sup>53</sup>

and Gosse himself has pencilled an ambiguous note:

This is one of 6 copies published to secure English copyright in 1903. E.G.<sup>54</sup>

Gosse as Librarian of the House of Lords would have known that in 1903 there were only five copyright libraries<sup>55</sup>. In 1941, Gosse’s copy turned up as Lot 151 in the C. Walter Buhler sale. Bulked out with extra blank pages and bound in dark green cloth top edges gilt, fore and bottom edges trimmed<sup>56</sup>, it also bears a note, perhaps by a librarian – reading “Quinn Catalogue # 11430” which might imply that this is that very copy – but as it has only Gosse’s bookplate I believe this merely to be a cross-reference for comparison purposes. The full Buhler description of Lot 151 reads:

<sup>49</sup>This was the name of the Gosse family’s visitors book, which now resides in Cambridge University Library.

<sup>50</sup>Now in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, PR 5904 H6 1903. See “The hour-glass: a morality / by W.B. Yeats. - University of Texas at Austin” (<<https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?kw=Hour+Glass&x=21&y=4&eadid=00248&showrequest=1>>). Sir Edmund William Gosse C.B. (1849-1928), minor poet, man of letters, Librarian of the House of Lords, and author of the renowned autobiography, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (1907). Gosse seems to have been easily gulled by T.J. Wise, rather than a co-conspirator in Wise’s astonishing career of literary forgeries and thefts from the British Museum Library. See Carter and Pollard *passim*, and also Nicolas Barker and John Collins, *A Sequel to An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain XIX<sup>th</sup> Century Pamphlets by John Carter & Graham Pollard: The Book Forgeries of H. Buxton Forman and T. J. Wise Re-examined* (London and Berkeley, Scolar Press, 1983), *passim*. Summarizing the detailed work of Carter, Pollard, Barker, and Collins, Joseph Hone admirably describes Gosse as “a literary hanger-on, second-rate poet, slapdash critic, and devout Browning enthusiast” a “vain and notoriously muddleheaded critic” (Hone, 109, 148). Hone ultimately exonerates him of complicity in Wise’s crimes (266). Ann Thwaite, Gosse’s biographer also quashes the rumour that Gosse was a co-conspirator in Wise’s forgeries in her *ODNB* piece, “Gosse, Sir Edmund William (1849–1928), writer | Oxford Dictionary of National Biography” (<<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-33481>>). Though a visitor at the Gosses’ Sunday evening “At Homes”, Yeats had no high opinion of Gosse’s poems, nor of his proud Saxonism: see *CL1* 476, n. 1 & *CL2* 26-27 nn. & *passim*.

<sup>51</sup>Yeats, though fair to William Heinemann, remarked on his pro-Boer stance: see *CW2* 617 n. 3.

<sup>52</sup>See Ann Thwaite, *Edmund Gosse: A Literary Landscape 1849-1928* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1984; hereafter “Thwaite”), pp. 241 & ff., and *passim*. Thwaite, however, does not refer to any dealings between Gosse and Quinn.

<sup>53</sup>Yeats’s copy was merely mislaid. It is now in the Yeats collection (NLI): see *WBGY* 2381; *YL* 2359; *Wade* 4, 51.

<sup>54</sup>Gosse’s annotation presumably refers to Quinn’s note in *CWVP8* 287, quoted in fn. 35.

<sup>55</sup>See above n. 39.

<sup>56</sup>Dr Lincoln Howard of the HRHRC (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center), to whom I am grateful, confirms that this copy is “not bound with staples”, but “in a dark green fabric hard cover”.

YEATS, WILLIAM B. *The Hour-Glass. A Morality.* 8vo, cloth.

London, 1903

FIRST SEPARATE EDITION OF WHAT APPARENTLY IS THE RAREST OF THE AUTHOR'S WORKS. ONE OF 12 COPIES PRINTED. Of this number, six went for English copyright, and two were lost in the mail.

The work was issued without covers.

On the front end-leaf the author has inscribed: "*Never heard of this Edition before. W.B. Yeats. Oct. 13. 1914*". Sir Edmund W. Gosse's copy, with the following penciled inscription by him beneath the author's note: "*This is one of 6 (six) copies published to secure English copyright in 1903. E. G.*" With the Sir Edmund Gosse bookplate.<sup>57</sup>

I venture, however, to ask "What if the Gosse copy is a T.J. Wise forgery?". Gosse was a close friend of the notorious pamphlet/book forger, Thomas James Wise, whose corruption of the book trade extended to "planting out" forgeries of scarce pamphlets upon friends before using the existence of such works as "evidence" of their genuineness. The counter-argument would be that given that Quinn was still alive and that publicity surrounding the strict limitation of the edition had entered into the bibliographical record as early as 1908, Wise would have had severe difficulties in palming off a cache of hitherto unknown copies without suspicion or challenge<sup>58</sup>. Nevertheless, Zoom now permits close comparisons with copyright copies. Watermarks – if there are any – and typographical peculiarities such as the "kernless f" used by Wise in his forgeries, are now subject to off-site investigation. Only chemical analysis of the paper stock would require invasive intervention. Did Wise run off a single copy, plant it out on the apparently blameless Gosse and then draw back? The enigmatic Yeats inscription would be indeed ironical.

## 5. RE-ENTER QUINN

What if Quinn had not merely omitted the Library of Congress copyright deposit copies, but also had excluded one or two extra copies from his tally? If so, the lively sense of *The Hour-glass's* rarity communicated by Quinn in the Catalogue would have had to be kept up<sup>59</sup>. Wade, later Wade and Alspach, in paraphrasing Quinn in *Wade 2-4*, 1951-68, confer a bibliographical "objectivity" onto Quinn's account, a pseudo-objectivity wholly lacking in Quinn's 1923 description of Lot 11340. Dr Colin Smythe paraphrases Quinn in his forthcoming revision and enlargement of Wade and Alspach, *A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats* (1968), and adds his own new researches<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> *The Important Collections of First Editions of William B. Yeats: Property of C. Walter Buhler, Westport, Conn. Sold by His Order ... Public Sale Thursday, May 1, at 2 pm* New York, Parke-Bernet Galleries, 1941. This sale catalogue offers these inscriptions by Yeats and Gosse in a slightly different wording: see Lot 151 (27).

<sup>58</sup> For Gosse's private holdings of Yeats, including his inscribed copy of *The Hour-glass* (1903) see E. H. M Cox, *The Library of Edmund Gosse: Being a Descriptive and Bibliographical Catalogue of a Portion of his Collection*, with an Introductory Essay by Edmund Gosse (London, Dulau, 1924). The catalogue is dedicated to Thomas J. Wise. For a fulsome review of Hone's *The Book Forger*, see Gill Partington, "Every Watermark and Stain", *The London Review of Books*, 20 June 2024, 23-24.

<sup>59</sup> Appendix 1 below lists the known facts about all inscribed James Carleton Young copies of Yeats's books I have so far traced. However, I offer the example of an unnumbered copy of the 1904 Macmillan New York edition of *Wade 52*, the American edition of *The Hour-glass and Other Plays*, extant in a Private Collection in London. This Large Paper edition was financed by Quinn, and supposedly limited to 100 numbered copies on Japon vellum. The London copy is unnumbered, and therefore one of perhaps several "overs".

<sup>60</sup> On which endeavour see Colin Smythe's "Some Aspects of Yeats Bibliography", in *Serving the Word: Essays in Honour of Maurice Harmon*, a special issue of *Irish University Review* Spring 1992, 101-106; and his "Errata and Addenda to the 3rd Edition of Allan Wade's *Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats*", in *The Long Room* (Trinity College, Dublin), 8, Autumn-Winter 1973, 41-42.

In July 1909, Lady Gregory wrote to Wade that her copy also had been lost by the binders and that when Wade's 1908 bibliography reached her, she had mentioned this to Quinn, saying that now his copy was the only one extant. She had just received from him, she wrote, his copy "in a beautiful case".<sup>61</sup>

This particular copy is now in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library. Carolyn Vega of the Berg Collection has kindly sent me images of its holdings related to *The Hour-glass* (1903), which all appear to have come with a bundle of Lady Gregory's books and manuscripts, and received on 13 January 1964<sup>62</sup>. The following images display the catalogue cards for, and individual items of, a "bundle" of items, in a brown crushed levant morocco solander case by Bradstreet's, which includes this particular Quinn/Gregory copy.

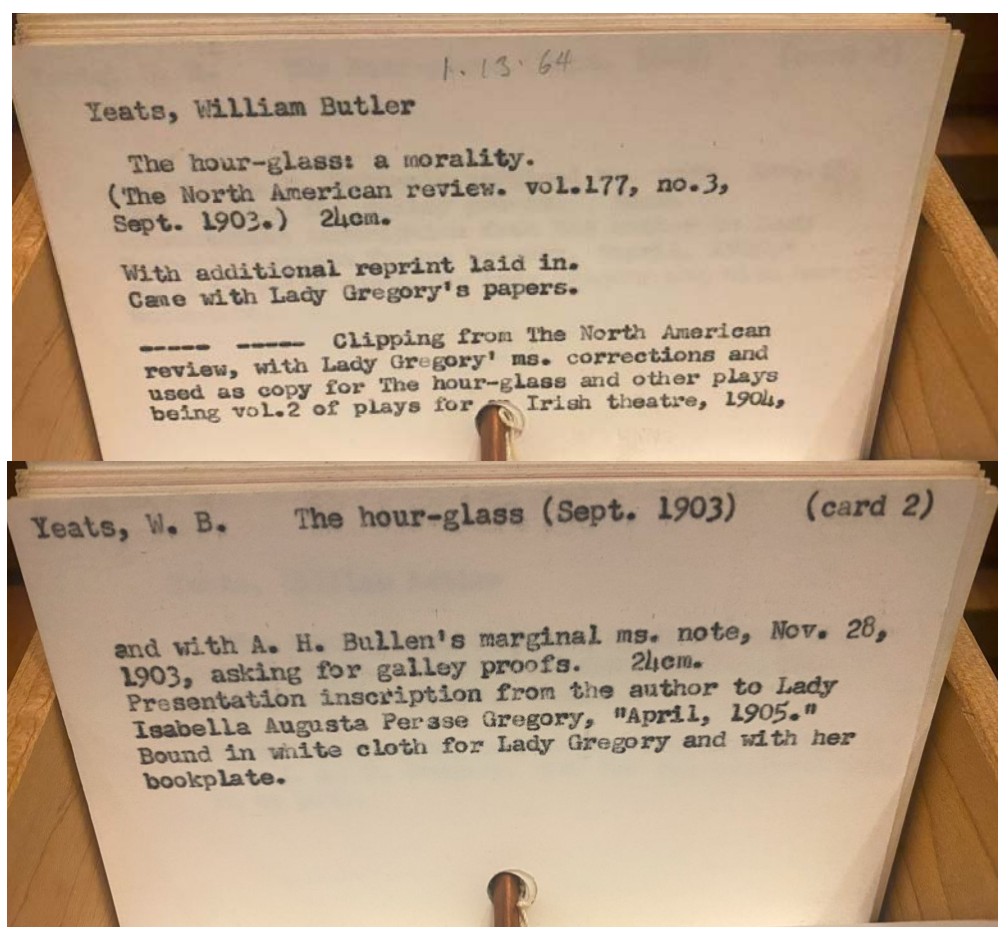


Fig. 8-9 - First and second of two Berg Collection, NYPL Catalogue Cards for the 13 January 1964 Deposit by Major Richard Gregory of Lady Gregory's materials relating to *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (1903)

<sup>61</sup> I thank Dr Colin Smythe for access to and permission to quote from this work in progress.

<sup>62</sup> See also the "W.B. Yeats collection of papers" finding-aid. Carolyn Vega kindly reports that this solander case holds one copy of the *North American Review*, and one copy of *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (1903). *The Hour-glass* pages clipped out of the *North American Review*, with Lady Gregory's corrections, and later bound in white cloth with her book plate and a presentation inscription from Yeats to Lady Gregory, dated 1905 are now shelved separately in the Berg Collection.

The words “With an additional reprint laid in” on the first card are ambiguous. Carolyn Vega of the Berg Collection concurs in thinking that they refer to the 1903 edition enclosed.

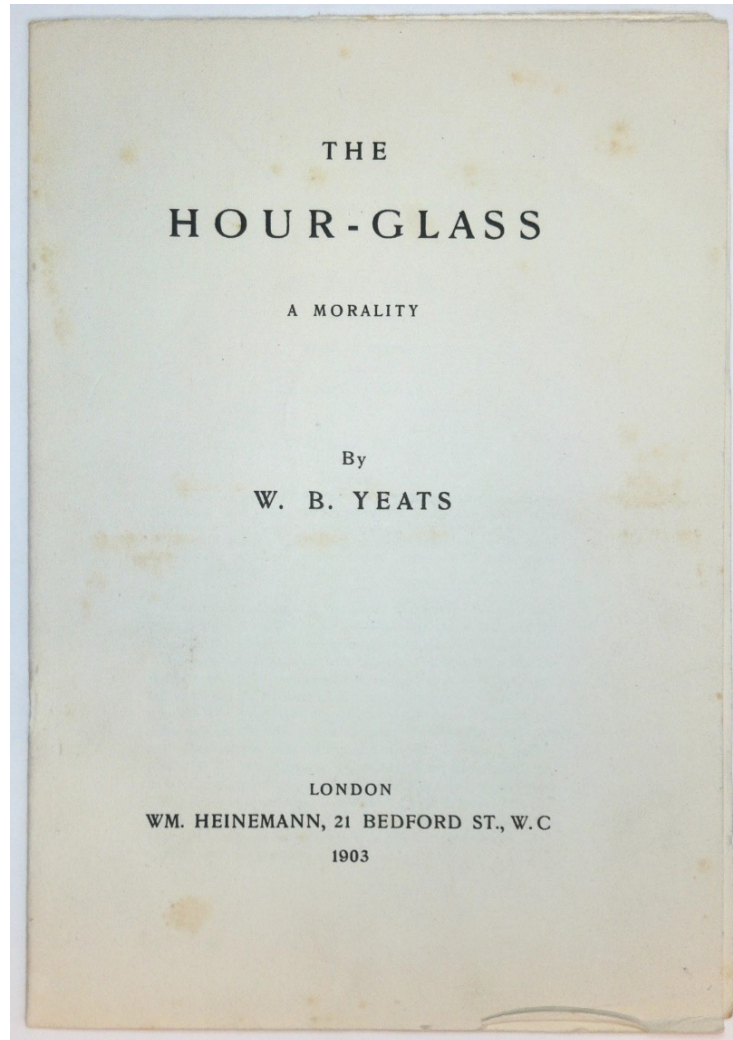


Fig. 10 - Lady Gregory's copy of W.B. Yeats's *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (London: William Heinemann, 1903)

The bundle numbered by the Berg Collection 65B4800 also includes a copy of the *North American Review* and the published 1903 edition.



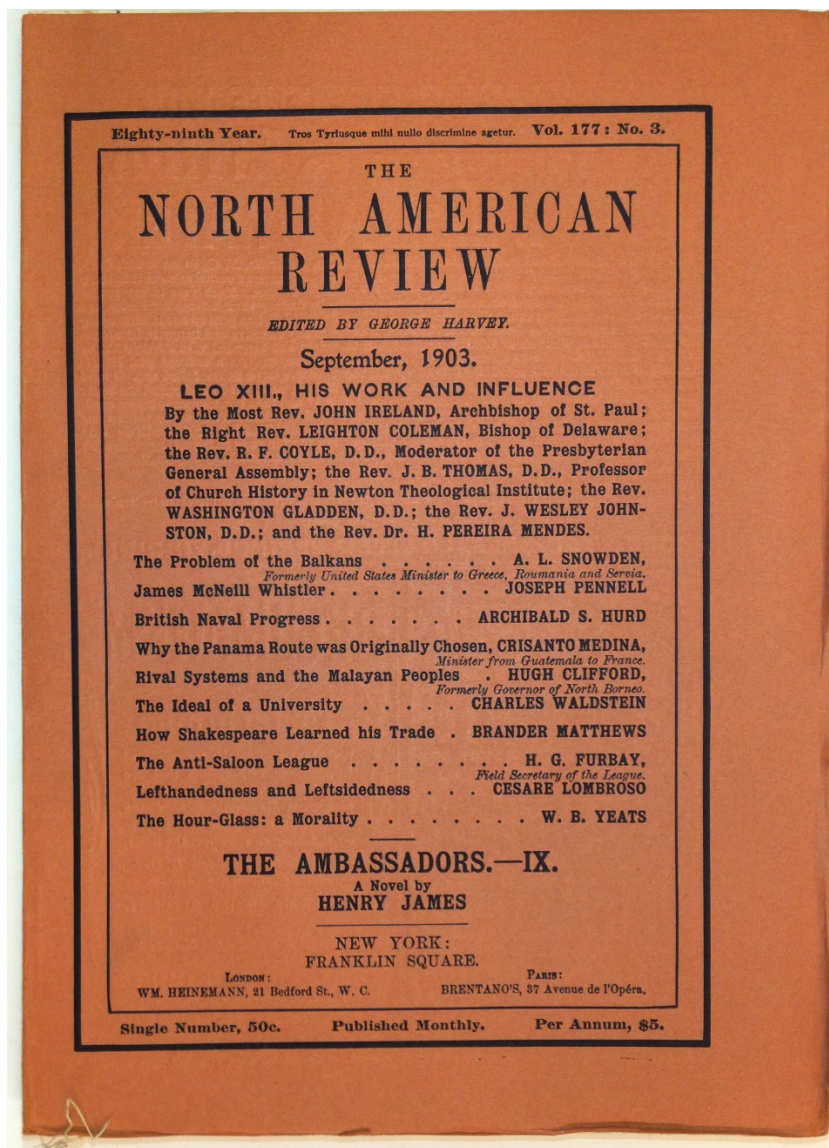


Fig. 11 - The September 1903 issue of *The North American Review* containing W.B. Yeats's *The Hour-glass: A Morality*

The following are images of the box made by Bradstreet's labelled THE HOUR-GLASS | A MORALITY | W.B. YEATS | NORTH | AMERICAN | REVIEW | 1903



Fig. 12 - The crushed Morocco Solander Slipcase for Lady Gregory's materials for and copies of *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (1903), made by Bradstreet's of New York

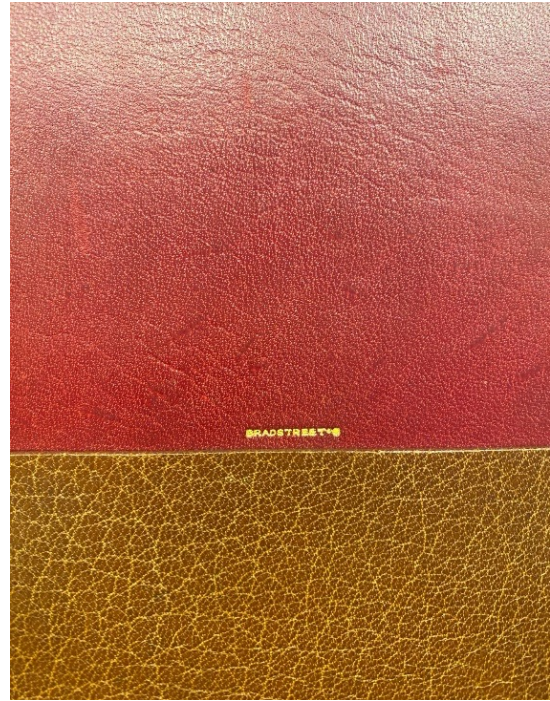


Fig. 13 - The crushed Morocco Solander Slipcase by Bradstreet's of New York, for Lady Gregory's copies of *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (1903), with top removed

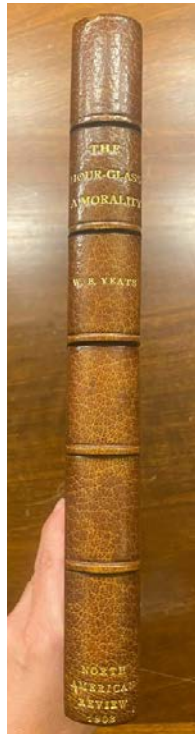


Fig. 14 - The Spine of the crushed Morocco Solander Slipcase by Bradstreet's of New York, for Lady Gregory's copies of *The Hour-glass: A Morality* (1903)



## 6. THE 1979 SOTHEBY'S SALES OF MAJOR RICHARD GREGORY'S COLLECTION

The majority of Lady Gregory's Yeats collection was sold to Emory University's then Robert W. Woodruff Library<sup>63</sup>, at the Sotheby's London sales of Major Richard Gregory's Yeats/Gregory collection on 24 July and 17 December 1979<sup>64</sup>. Early that year, Emory University had received \$105 million in Coca-Cola stock from Robert and George Woodruff<sup>65</sup>. The inaugural ambition of the new President, James Laney, was to "create a great Emory University research library". Professors Richard Ellmann and Ronald Schuchard advised him of the upcoming Richard Gregory sales and Laney authorised the venture to buy the collection. Tom Taylor, the young bookdealer and bidder helping the Librarian Ted Johnson, and the Head of Special Marella Walker takes up the story:

I remember her scrambling to raise money, and she did. I had a fixed total sum to spend; she gave me a list of priorities. In those days I usually stayed with John Boyle, who was a close friend, and on the morning of the sale he accompanied me to keep a running total of what I was spending. Arthur [Freeman], as I suspect you already know, was representing the California collector/bookseller Maurie Neville. It was the first time, and the only time, I dominated an auction. Marella was in the room, at the back, and she was quite pleased. I was quite pleased myself, if a bit hung over from the night before. As I recall, when the printed price list arrived from Sotheby's, it listed John Taylor, the English autograph dealer, as the dominant buyer. *Sic transit gloria* [...] I'm pretty sure I spent most all of Emory's money at the sale.<sup>66</sup>

When news came back of Emory's triumph at the first sale, Professor Schuchard addressed a celebratory gathering of librarians, "This is such a fabulous windfall for Emory, that I hope we can make the teaching mission it inspires as important as the research mission, including the training of our undergraduates in archival research for their honours theses and related projects."<sup>67</sup>

I record this sale not just because it the origin of Emory's outstanding Modern Literature collections, but also because the Richard Gregory Collection did not all go to Emory. One of the mysteries is Lot 412 in the 24 July 1979 sale. Sotheby's catalogue displays a title-page image from a corrected copy of the *North American Review* printing, with Yeats's cancellation of his printed name with his hand-written signature.

<sup>63</sup> Now named the Stuart Rose Library.

<sup>64</sup> See Ronald Schuchard, "The Lady Gregory – Yeats Collection at Emory University" and "Yeats's 'On a Child's Death': A Critical Note", *YA* 3, 153-166 and 190-192.

<sup>65</sup> "During the 1980s, under the presidency of James Laney and with the support of the Woodruff gift, Emory achieved national prominence as one of the nation's top research institutions. A key marker of this success was the election of Emory into the Association of American Universities (AAU), a select group of leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada" ("Chapter 1: Emory University Overview | Emory University | Atlanta GA", <<https://provost.emory.edu/faculty/policies-guidelines/handbook/university.html>>).

<sup>66</sup> Email from Tom Taylor to Warwick Gould, 17 July 2024. Taylor was, however, unable to recall anything about bought-in lots.

<sup>67</sup> Email from Ronald Schuchard, 18 July 2024. Schuchard himself had been trained in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center by the great bibliographer William B. Todd (1918-2911), Mildred Caldwell and Baine Perkins Kerr Centennial Professor Emeritus in English History and Culture at the University of Texas at Austin, a great believer in the application of archival research to teaching.

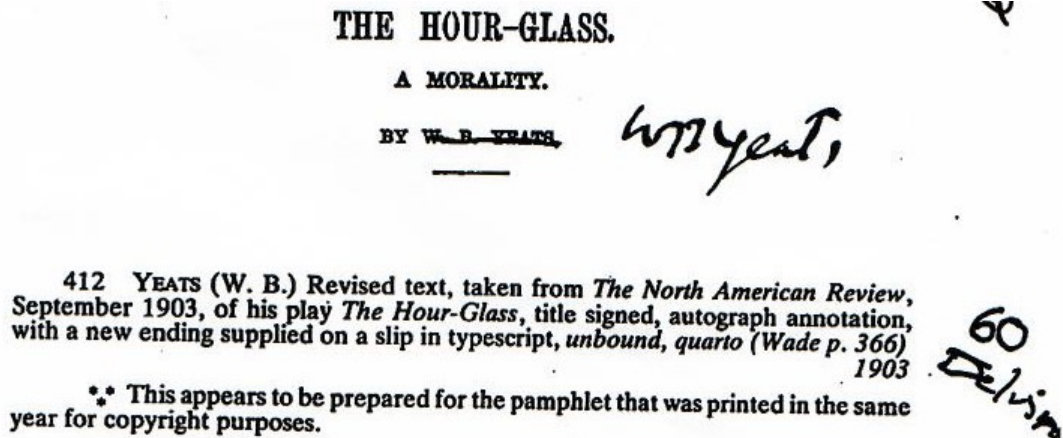


Fig. 15 - Lot 412 of Sotheby's Catalogue, 24 July 1979 Sale, showing Title Page of the *North American Review* printing, with Yeats's Cancellation of his Printed Name with Hand-written Signature. Annotated with price £60.00, to 'Delisma' or 'Delvoise'

Of this sale, Colin Smythe reports "As to Delisma (which I scribbled illegibly down at the time), he appeared not to buy anything else in the sale. Sorry I can't help: the tendrils of memory do not stretch over so many decades".<sup>68</sup> Ed. Maggs of Maggs Bros. concurs "[Lot] 412 was probably bought in [...] Sotheby's used fake names to cover up unsold lots – our marked copy records a variant 'Delvoise'".<sup>69</sup>

Way back at the 1923 Anderson Galleries Quinn sales, two consecutive lots had fetched sharply contrasting prices.

- 11430 THE HOUR-GLASS. A Morality. 8vo, sewn, uncut. In a crushed brown levant morocco solander case. London: Wm. Heinemann, 1903  
*First Separate Edition*, of which only 12 copies were printed. Of this number, six went for English copyright, two were lost in the post, one belongs to Mr. Yeats, one to Lady Gregory, one to Mr. Quinn, and the printer kept one. The author has lost or mislaid his copy; the printer years ago lost or gave away his copy. This copy and the one in the possession of Lady Gregory are therefore in all probability the only copies in existence, and may rank perhaps as the RAREST OF ALL YEATS ITEMS.
- 11431 THE HOUR-GLASS: A Morality. In the *North American Review* for September 1903. 8vo, wrappers. In a half blue morocco slip case. First publication of this play. New York, 1903

Fig. 16 - Lots 11430 and 11431 in the Anderson Galleries, New York, Sales of the Library of John Quinn showing Quinn's claims for 'THE RAREST OF ALL YEATS ITEMS.'

<sup>68</sup> Email to Warwick Gould, 29 June 2024.

<sup>69</sup> Email to Warwick Gould, 1 July 2024.

Fuelled by Quinn's spruiking, Lot 11430 had fetched \$130.00. Lot 11431 had fetched only \$3.00. In the absence of detail on Lot 11431 it is impossible to say whether it was a revised text, but the low price suggests it was probably just a copy of the *North American Review* text, and, if it stayed in its "half blue Morocco slipcase", it is not one of the two copies of the September 1903 periodical now in a "crushed brown levant solander case" in the Berg collection.

Quinn had been correct in suspecting that Yeats had mislaid his copy. As Smythe suggests, Yeats was no doubt, sincere in saying, on the Edmund Gosse copy, that he had never heard of it. But it turned up in his library and is now in the Yeats Collection of the National Library of Ireland. Another copy was also sold at Messrs. Hodgson's on 30 November 1950.

Only a provisional census of such surviving copies as are known will help flush out those possibly still hidden in private collections, and which might suggest if Quinn had printed but not counted further copies. The processes involved can be protracted as the reticulation of such hidden treasures through the antiquarian book trade can be very slow. I illustrate with two fugitive copies of *Mosada* (1886).

## 7. MOSADA

### THE DELURY MOSADA

Only 15 copies of *Mosada* were known to their census-taker, Dr Colin Smythe, who has inspected the cover types of 14 of these, and hypothesizes that up to 23 copies might survive out of an edition of 100 copies<sup>70</sup>. Wade 2-4 (1951, 1958, and 1968) which Smythe is extending and updating, all call it "exceedingly rare"<sup>71</sup>. Its rarity was probably recognized when it became known by word of mouth that Yeats had decided to delete it from his canon. He had included it in *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems* (1889) but dropped it thereafter. Given that *The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* (1892) was all newer work, that moment must have been 1895, when the first of his retrospective self-canonizations appeared in *Poems* (1895)<sup>72</sup>. His own comments inscribed in John Quinn's copies of *Mosada* are nostalgic for the poet he had himself once been, not for the text he had so firmly suppressed.

When the family of Alfred Tennyson DeLury donated his Irish Collection to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library in the University of Toronto after his death, they withheld his copy of *Mosada*<sup>73</sup>. At the London Book fair of 2016, it surfaced in the display mounted by the dealer, Rick Gekoski.

<sup>70</sup> See Colin Smythe, "W.B. Yeats's *Mosada*", *YA* 20, 239-261.

<sup>71</sup> Allan Wade's first bibliography had been published in the 8<sup>th</sup> volume of *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose* (1908), as *A Bibliography of the Writings of William Butler Yeats, 197-267*. A repaginated separate edition of just sixty copies, was published by the Shakespeare Head Press in the same year. Wade's prefatory remarks record "a kind of wonder that I see my notes taking the form of a book or part of a book at Mr. Bullen's beautiful Shakespeare Head Press" (*CWVP8* [198]). For Wade's latest list of "exceedingly rare" copies of *Mosada*, see *Wade* 1968, 20.

<sup>72</sup> "This book contains all that the present writer cares to preserve out of his previous volumes of verse" wrote Yeats in the Preface to *Poems* (1895): see *VP* 845.

<sup>73</sup> After a century with one family, Gregg's copy surfaced, inscribed in Yeats's early hand "To F. Gregg from his friend the Author". See Smythe, "W.B. Yeats's *Mosada*", Census, Copy 3, *YA* 20, 239-261. Alfred Tennyson DeLury, mathematician and bibliophile (1864-1951) Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1922-34) an "avid collector of Irish Literature" whose extensive collection came to the University of Toronto's Fisher Rare Book Library. DeLury became a friend of the Yeats family. See "British Literature | Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library" (<<https://fisher.library.utoronto.ca/collections/subject-strengths/british-literature>>). His family, however, had withheld *Mosada*.

It turned out to be Frederic Gregg's copy, and it had remained in the DeLury family for nearly a century<sup>74</sup>.

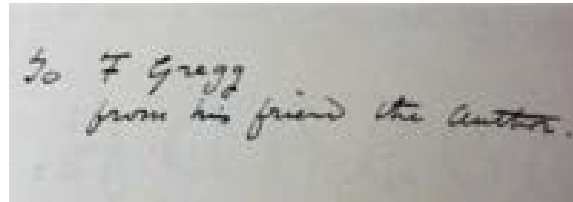


Fig. 17 - W.B. Yeats's Inscription to Frederick Gregg in a Copy of *Mosada* (1889)

The recovery of elusive pamphlets is momentous enough, especially when deliberately sequestered. Such are the slim dimensions of such objects that they were very likely to be lost or mislaid until their value, as with that of the Sibylline Books, became swollen by their increasing rarity<sup>75</sup>.

With the recovery and reassessment of such books as they pass through the hands of expert dealers comes refinement of their provenances, as my second rediscovered *Mosada* shows.

#### THE ZENA VOWELL *MOSADA*

Censuses of surviving copies require constant refinement and updating. Copy No. 9 in the Smythe Census of *Mosada* was identified as the “Zena Powell” copy because Yeats’s inscription had been read as “Miss Zena Powell from her friend the Author”<sup>76</sup>. No connexion between Yeats and a Zena “Powell” could be identified. When Dr Smythe was constructing his census, we had tried vainly to connect Zena Powell with the Yeats family’s friend Professor York Powell (1850-1904)<sup>77</sup>. It had passed to a noted Dublin collector, Dr F. S. Bourke, who, in 1956 loaned it to a Trinity College Dublin Library for an exhibition. There, it had been listed as with the “lower wrapper missing”. It was offered for sale by Mrs M. Whitley as “from the collection of the late Dr F. S. Bourke” at Sotheby’s London on 3 December 1962. From the marked-up sale catalogue retained by Sotheby’s there is a suggestion that the reserve was £700 and the copy was bought in. Nevertheless, the published listing of prices and buyers for the sale notes

<sup>74</sup> Frederick J. Gregg’s copy is 21.6 × 13.7, with a cover of silurian paper, lined white. Gregg (1864–1927) had been a contemporary of WBY’s at the Erasmus Smith High School and in late 1886 was living at 6 Eccles St., Dublin. He published poems in the *Irish Monthly* and two were later in *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888). However, “El Greggo” (as John Quinn later termed him), emigrated to the U.S. in 1891 where he became a journalist on the *New York Evening Sun*: see *CLI* 7–8 esp. n. 1. DeLury purchased his copy from C. Gerhardt & Co. Rare Books, New York, in May 1916 for \$25.00. See above n. 71 and *YA* 20, Pl. 34, Yeats’s inscription in his presentation copy to Frederick J. Gregg of *Mosada: A Dramatic Poem* is © Colin Smythe and courtesy of a private collection. All rights reserved.

<sup>75</sup> See <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibylline\\_Books](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibylline_Books)>.

<sup>76</sup> See Colin Smythe, “W.B. Yeats’s *Mosada*”, *YA* 20, 239-261 (250).

<sup>77</sup> The polymath and Old Icelandic scholar Frederick York Powell became Regius Professor of Modern History in Oxford on the death of J.A. Froude in 1894. He was responsible for bringing Stéphane Mallarmé to lecture at the Taylorian Institution in February 1894 where Yeats heard Mallarmé, and the Belgian poet Verhaeren was Powell’s guest at Christ Church. He was one of the presidents of the Irish Texts Society and on 7 April 1902 lectured in Dublin to the Irish Literary Society on Irish influences in English literature. He was a neighbour of the Yeatses in Bedford Park. John Butler Yeats’s oil portrait of him hangs in Oriel College. He had one daughter, Mariella, b. 1884. See *ODNB* and Oliver Elton’s *Frederick York Powell*, 2 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1906).

a figure of £580 for its sale to one “Wright”. It is likely that the copy in the “private collection in Dublin” mentioned in the 1951 and 1958 editions of *Wade* (*Wade 1 & 2*) was Dr Bourke’s, and that Russell Alsop had not been aware of its subsequent history when editing *Wade 3*. Page 18 of *Wade 2* and *Wade 3*, relate wholly to owners of *Mosada* and are unchanged between the editions. Sotheby’s records give no idea as to its subsequent fate<sup>78</sup>.

The “Zena Powell” copy turned up at Harrington’s in 2023, and with the opportunity to examine and photograph the inscription at first hand, my doubts grew. Closer examination of Yeats’s hand led me to wonder if the name might in fact not be Miss Zena Powell but “Mrs Zena Vowell”.

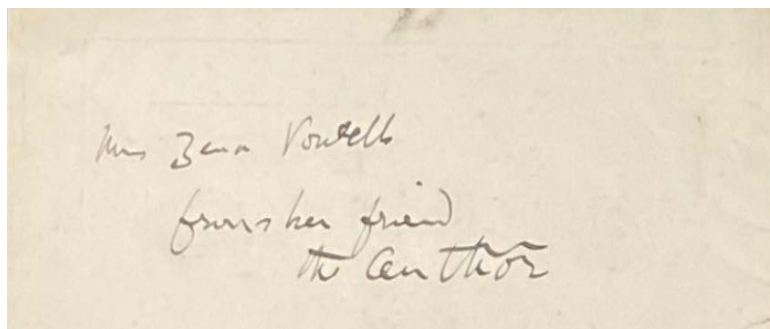


Fig. 18 - W.B. Yeats’s Inscription to Mrs Zena Vowell in a Copy of *Mosada* (1889)

I began a wide internet search for the name “Vowell” if only to eliminate that name. Only one of the initial searches turned up anything, Google directing me via Google Books to a page in Portuguese

Uma voz que se anunciou como sendo Zena Vowell dirigiu-se a Mrs. Travers Smith, que soube manter o colóquio em marcha. Vinha de uma distância de dois pés de Mrs. Smith. Sentado perto dela, eu ouvi tudo. MRS. SMITH - Quando ocorreu o seu passamento? ZENA VOWELL - Há oito anos. MRS. SMITH - E onde nos encontramos pela última vez? ZENA VOWELL - Em Hill of Howth.<sup>79</sup>

The names ZENA VOWELL, TRAVERS SMITH, and Hill of Howth had Yeats, though not present, triangulated. I had by chance hit a bullseye in the vast word-hoard of Google Books, the text being a translation of H. Dennis Bradley’s *Towards the Stars* (1924), a personal history of psychical research amongst mediums and members of the Society for Psychical Research including a number well-known to W.B. Yeats<sup>80</sup>. According to Bradley, Zena Vowell had come out of the

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*. As the Smythe Census indicates, the “repeated catalogue description of the torn condition of the back cover makes it likely that this is the same copy sold at Hodgson’s on 7 December 1933 (Lot 426) to Lee for £27–10–0, and again by them on 17 July 1935 (Lot 167) to Radcliff for £19–0–0, the drop in value perhaps indicating a further deterioration of the back cover, later lost in its entirety” (250).

<sup>79</sup> H. Dennis Bradley, *Rumo às estrelas*, tradução de Monteiro Lobato, Saga Egmont, 2021 (<[https://books.google.it/books/about/RUMO\\_AS\\_ESTRELAS.html?id=hZB4PgAACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.it/books/about/RUMO_AS_ESTRELAS.html?id=hZB4PgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y)>).

<sup>80</sup> Herbert Dennis Bradley (1878-1934) was, at the time of writing *Towards the Stars* (London, T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1924), both a direct voice medium following training with the American George Valiantine and a member of the largely sceptical London-based Society for Psychical Research, with which he later quarrelled. See *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, “Bradley, H(erb)ert Dennis (1878-1934)” (<[https://archive.org/details/isbn\\_9780810349155/page/214/mode/2up?q=bradley](https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780810349155/page/214/mode/2up?q=bradley)>). Other psychical researchers known to Yeats and present at the séance included Eric Dingwall and Everard Feilding, the last-named being the co-investigator with Yeats and

aether in the midst of There I found her in the midst of a “*A disappointing séance – A coldness in the room*”<sup>81</sup>. After the “indistinct” spirits who had addressed the room through Eric Dingwall and Everard Feilding were requested to “retire”, the medium Mrs Hester Travers Smith, daughter of another Yeats family friend, Professor Edward Dowden, was given her chance to summon new spirits<sup>82</sup>. Immediately, the ghost of Zena Vowell saw her chance to get back among human voices:

Announcing itself as Zena Vowell, a voice addressed itself to Mrs Travers Smith, who at once kept the conversation going. The voice was heard to be speaking about two feet in front of Mrs. Travers Smith. I [i.e., H. Dennis Bradley] was seated next to her and heard it.

MRS. TRAVERS SMITH – When did you pass away?

ZENA VOWELL – Eight years ago.

MRS. TRAVERS SMITH – Where did we last meet?

ZENA VOWELL – The Hill of Howth.

Mrs Travers Smith said that she had Spent two summer holidays at the Hill of Howth some years ago with a friend of hers, named Zena Vowell, who had passed away eight years back.<sup>83</sup>

Despite this identification, Zena Vowell remains a shadowy figure in Yeats’s acquaintance. The General Editor of Yeats’s *Collected Letters* and great expert on Yeats’s handwriting concurs in the reading “Mrs Zena Vowell” and believes that she was probably Mrs Tamsine [sometimes Thomasina] Vowell (b. 1831, Cork, d. Dublin 31 July 1918) widow of Revd. William Richard Vowell (d. 1869). If so, given her age, she may well have been one of the contributing patrons of *Mosada*: in short, the change from “Miss” to “Mrs” is every bit as important as the correct transcription of the surname “Vowell”<sup>84</sup>.

This discovery garnered some press attention for Peter Harrington’s in the *Observer* 29-

Maud Gonne of the “Bleeding” Oleograph of the Sacred Heart belonging to the Abbé Vachère in Mirebeau, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France, in 1914. See George Mills Harper, “‘A Subject of Investigation’: Miracle at Mirebeau” in *Yeats and the Occult*, edited by George Mills Harper (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1975), 172-89, esp. 175-76. Yeats, who wrote an untitled and, in his lifetime, unpublished report of the investigation, with Feilding submitted the results to the Lister Institute in London which reported that the oozing substance was “not human blood”. Feilding’s “The Case of Abbé Vachère” was first published in the *Transactions of the Fourth International Congress for Psychological Research*. Athens, 1930, and may be found at <<http://www.survivalafterdeath.info/articles/feilding/vachere.htm>>.

<sup>81</sup> Bradley, *Towards the Stars*, Ch. XV, 193-95. There is no indication that Yeats himself was present at this séance.

<sup>82</sup> Hester Dowden (1868–1949), Mrs Travers Smith, was an Irish medium best known her claimed contact with the spirits of various writers. *Voices from the Void* (1919) and *Psychic Messages from Oscar Wilde* (1923) were the chief works over her name. The daughter of the Irish literary scholar Edward Dowden (1843-1911), John Butler Yeats’s friend and fellow-student at TCD, and later Professor of English at TCD. She may have been the model for the medium in Yeats’s *The Words upon the Window Pane*, first produced at the Abbey Theatre on 17 November 1930.

<sup>83</sup> Howth Head or Ceann Bhinn Éadair is a peninsula northeast of Dublin. The Yeats family had lived at the village of Howth on the north-eastern face, 181-84, and Howth Hill was later a place to which Yeats had taken Maud Gonne when courting her. Most of Howth Head is occupied by the Hill of Howth.

<sup>84</sup> Kelly observes that Yeats did not begin to use the superscripted “M<sup>rs</sup>” until c. 1889. While the 1901 Irish Census records also offer a Mrs Thomasina M. Green, b. Thomasina Vowell, aged 40 and married to a Gage Green, aged 38, the householder at 148 Dartmouth Square. At the time of the Census her mother had been visiting, also Thomasina Vowell, a widow aged 70, born in Co. Waterford, and an elder sister Elizabeth R. Vowell, unmarried, aged 45. Kelly is of the view that the “Mrs” is conclusive, and that Hester Travers Smith had met her on Howth in the mid-1880s and that they could at the time have called on Yeats who, with his father, was at the time still very friendly towards Professor Dowden and his family.

10-2023: “Yeats” play on sale for £125,000 – thanks to message from the dead: A 1924 seance has solved the mystery surrounding a signed copy of the dramatist’s first play” wrote David Barnett. The price was achieved and *Mosada* rapidly went to a new and undisclosed home at a price some £27,000 in excess of that of the DeLury copy.

With the help of leading, scholarly antiquarian book dealers as Maggs Bros and Peter Harrington, and the top auction houses, *Yeats Annual* plans further censuses of fugitive, or rare Yeats publications, including the vellum bound copies of *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899-1904), *Is the Order of R.R. & A.C. to remain a Magical Order?* (March 1901) and its *Postscript to Essay called “Is the Order of R.R. & A.C. to remain a Magical Order?”* (May 1901), *Wade 33* and 34<sup>85</sup>. Arrington and Maggs Bros.

## 8. PROVENANCE STUDIES, PRICE, AND VALUE

In recent years’ provenance research has become very fashionable in the Descriptive Bibliography of author-inscribed printed books, following the methods developed by historians of manuscript culture such as the late Peter Beal FBA, the Sotheby’s auctioneer turned manuscript indexer<sup>86</sup>. Many author-inscribed books are author-corrected, and so witnesses to textual states essential to textual editing. But their place of signing and subsequent provenance provide pointers to geographical dissemination and ownership. Such studies are essential if we are to measure the growth of a reputation if, as I have endeavoured to show, rare book collectors are often in the vanguard when it comes to spreading the news about new writing.

Beyond commercial reasons for provenance research, there are idealistic ones<sup>87</sup>. In an earlier era, the scholar Conrad Balliet had as his sole aim the assembly of a *Census* of Yeats’s MSS. Volumes lacking marginalia or other inscriptions by WBY were of no interest to his necessary but infuriating compilation, created too early in the history of Humanities Computing. Outdated, it is not yet superseded<sup>88</sup>.

<sup>85</sup>To a would-be bibliographer in the late 1930s Yeats was abrupt. “Dear Mr McMichael: | No, on no account mention the pamphlet “Is the order of RR ...etc”. I have never stated that I am the author. | I am afraid I have made so many inscriptions in books that it would be impossible for me to remember them, nor have I the time to comment upon them, in any way that would be interesting. | It would be a @@@discussion of old friendships. I am sorry not to be more helpful” [signed] Yours | W B Yeats (TLS, Private).

<sup>86</sup>For a brief account of the achievements of the great scholar of English Literary Manuscripts in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see Sir Brian Vickers’s eulogy for him at “Peter Beal eulogy.pdf” (sas.ac.uk). See also Beal’s autobiographical essay, “Lost”, on “the destruction, dispersal and rediscovery of manuscripts,” during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (eds), *Books on the Move – Tracking Copies, through Collections and the Book Trade* (London, The British Library, 2007), 1–15. See also *Out of Print & Into Profit: A History of the Rare and Secondhand Book Trade in Britain in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Giles Mandelbrote (London, British Library & New Castle, DE, Oak Knoll, 2006).

<sup>87</sup>The distinguished London bookseller Dr John Valdimir Price whose catalogues always contain learned detail on provenance cautions that while “a lot of British booksellers are more interested in provenance now ... [m]y own impression is that it seldom increases the possibility of a sale” (private email communication, 12-06-24). The Leo Baeck Institutes in Jerusalem and London are jointly tracing the dispersed library of the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Berlin (1872-1942) in order to reunite it virtually. Looted by Nazis, the c. 60,000 books in Jewish studies are scattered all-over the world. The project “encompasses education about a German-Jewish community” and “places provenance research in classrooms across the globe”. The project includes “exhibitions illustrating the paths of people and books in places where parts of the library have resurfaced, e.g., Germany, Czech Republic, Israel, USA, and Britain”. See <www.libraryoflostbooks.com>.

<sup>88</sup>“Staff Sergeant, student, high school teacher, college professor, scholar, world wanderer, friend, gentleman farmer, curmudgeon, codger, pilot, writer” he says in a self-obituary “Conrad Balliet Obituary - Littleton & Rue Funeral Home and Crematory - 2018” (<<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/dayton/name/conrad-balliet-obituary?id=1780285>>). See also



For all books catalogued since 1998, the Rare Books Department of Cambridge University Library has indexed online the “donors, annotators and previous owners of books ... with the following identification labels: former owner; donor; depositor; annotator; inscriber; associated name; owner. All such names can be found in iDiscover”<sup>89</sup>.

The University of Delaware’s copy of Richard Le Gallienne’s *Robert Louis Stevenson: An Elegy and Other Poems* (1895) offers a pertinent example of such an approach. Dr Mark Lasner the doyen of collectors of *fin de siècle* books, kindly provided me with these images and his subtended Delaware Special Collections catalogue entry<sup>90</sup>.

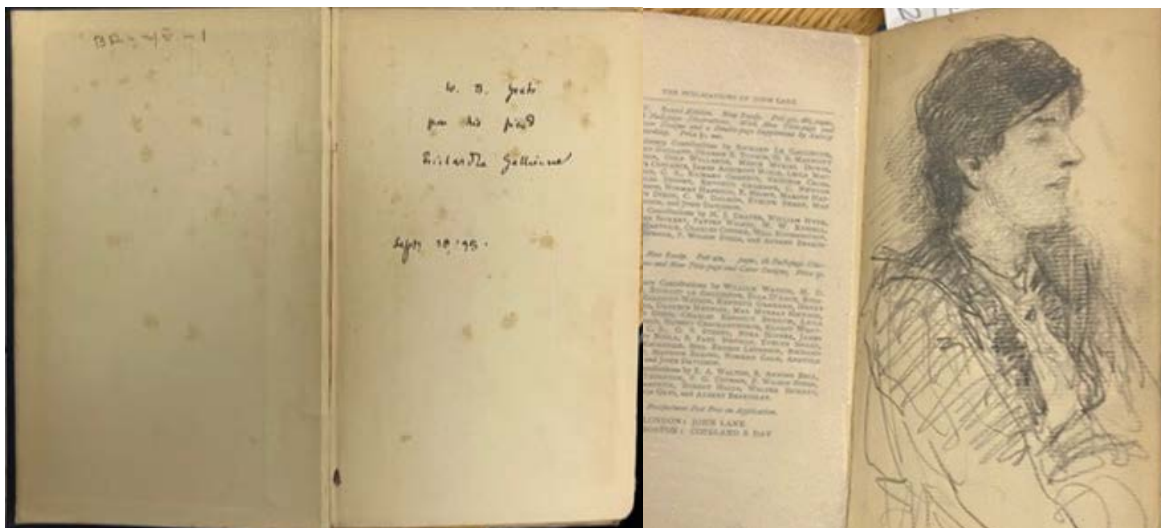


Fig. 19 - Richard Le Gallienne’s Presentation Inscription to W.B. Yeats in a copy of his *Robert Louis Stevenson: An Elegy, and Other Poems, Mainly Personal* (1895)

Fig. 20 - Pencil drawing by of John Butler Yeats of his daughter Lily Yeats. on rear free endpaper of Richard Le Gallienne’s *Louis Stevenson: An Elegy, and Other Poems, Mainly Personal* (1895)

### Title

*Robert Louis Stevenson; an elegy, and other poems mainly personal*

### Creator

Le Gallienne, Richard, 1866-1947.

Cameron, David Young, Sir, 1865-1945, illustrator.

Egerton, George, 1859-1945, former owner.

Krauss, Clinton K., former owner.

Secker, Martin, 1882-1978, former owner.

Lowndes, Marie Belloc, 1868-1947, former owner.

Copeland and Day, publisher.

Mark Samuels Lasner Collection.

“Passing On A Love Of Poetry | Wittenberg University” (<<https://www.wittenberg.edu/news/06-20-17/passing-love-poetry>>). His small private plane took him from research library to research library compiling his census. Neither close page-by-page or volume-by-volume comparison was central to his task. He will be outflown by “Virtual Desk” projects”.

<sup>89</sup>“Rare Books provenance | Cambridge University Library” (<https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?cat=5>>).

<sup>90</sup> Silently corrected.



**Subject**

Stevenson, Robert Louis, 1850-1894

**Genre**

Poems -- English -- 19th century

**Contents**

Robert Louis Stevenson: an elegy -- An ode to spring -- Tree-worship -- A ballad of London -- Paris day by day: a familiar epistle -- Alfred Tennyson -- Professor Minto -- On Mr. Gladstone's retirement -- Omar Khayyam -- The second crucifixion -- An impression -- Natural religion -- Faith reborn -- Hesperides -- Jenny dead -- My books -- Mammon -- Art -- To a poet -- A new year letter -- Snatch -- My maiden vote -- The animalcule on man -- Come, my Celia -- Time's monotone -- Cor cordium: O golden day! O silver night! -- Lover's exchange -- To a simple house-wife -- Love's wisdom -- Home -- Lover's landmarks -- If, after all ...! -- Spirit of sadness -- An inscription -- Song.

**Related titles**

Available in other form: Online version: Le Gallienne, Richard, 1866-1947. Robert Louis Stevenson. London, John Lane; Boston, Copeland & Day, 1895

**Series**

Belles lettres

**Publication/Production Details**

London, John Lane; Boston, Copeland & Day

**Creation Date**

1895

**Physical Description**

viii, 99, [1], 16 pages 21 cm

8vo.

**Source**

Library Catalog

**General Note**

Title vignette.

Title vignette. Title page is an original etching by D.Y. Cameron.

Publisher's advertisements: 16 p. (at end).

**Local Note**

1st ed.

Spec copy: Shelved in v. 20 cm.

Spec copy: Author's autograph copy, inscribed: "W.B. Yeats from his friend Richard Le Gallienne."

Spec copy: From the library of W.B. Yeats.

Spec copy: Pencil drawing on rear free endpaper by of John Butler Yeats of his daughter Lily Yeats.

Spec copy: Publisher's advertisements: 16 p. (at end). P. 9-16 unopened.

MSL copies 1-2: Shelved in Books A-Z.

MSL copy 1: Bookplate of Martin Secker.

MSL copy 1: From the collection of Clinton Krauss.

MSL copy 1: Author's autograph presentation copy, inscribed "George Egerton from her friend Richard Le Gallienne May 16, '95." For details about Le Gallienne's relationship with Egerton at this time--certainly a romantic one, if not an actual affair--see Terence De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book: The Correspondence of George Egerton*, London, The Rochard Press, 1958, 44-55. Le Gallienne was, of course, the reader for the Bodley Head who recommended the publication of *Keynotes* in 1893--the ms. of his report is in the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection.

MSL copies 1-2: Bound in original blue cloth.

MSL copy 2: Author's autograph presentation copy, inscribed "Marie Belloc from Richard Le Gallienne, May, 20, '95."

**Citation/References**

McKay, G.L. Beinecke Collection of Robert Louis Stevenson, 1611

**Identifier**

LC: 12036144

OCLC: (OCoLC)00384447

9. A NEW DATABASE?

I therefore suggest as a new research tool, an online provenance framework for censuses of surviving copies of books by individual authors. Its users would also be its compilers – antiquarian booksellers, scholars, collectors, auctioneers and rare book librarians. A conference might initially establish guidelines, followed by a proposal to a charitable foundation with an interest in Book History. Backing for the maintenance of such a site might be sought from such bodies as the Antiquarian Booksellers Association, the Grolier Club, Abebooks, the major auction houses and other organisations with an interest in the future – dare one say the futures – of provenance recovery.

A research collection such as the National Library of Ireland would be a more appropriate institutional home, and ensure more continuity than an academic department, regularly uploading approved additions according to established guidelines offering that widest usefulness. The thesis behind such a census is that we could better understand the spread and growth of a writer's esteem if we knew who bought his books and took the trouble to have them signed<sup>91</sup>.

The counter-arguments to this are easily mounted and demolished, especially for authors who published before the age when mass publisher-driven bookshop book-signings revived the age of autograph hunting with the issue of the pre-signed mass edition. This chimed admirably with the cult of celebrity in the age of Seamus Heaney or J.K. Rowling. Now in the age of online, world-wide auctions,

Celebrity Provenance Powers the Luxury Market [...] Provenance is the x-factor that can give something a staggering, and difficult to forecast, boost on the auction block [...] statement Selects, our latest curated collection of game-worn jerseys from NBC stars [...].<sup>92</sup>

Thus Sotheby's tries to sell Sylvester Stallone's watch, or sweaty clothing discarded by some basketball player, or, taking advantage of the Paris Olympics, Florence Griffith Joyner's running shoes<sup>93</sup>. The world-wide exposure proffered by online auctions has focused commerce in objects once never considered destined for the auction-room, and spilled downwards into book auctions. A recent remark on the SHARP List alleged that

<sup>91</sup> See, Karin Margaret Strand, "W.B. Yeats's American Lecture Tours", PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1978. It is not clear from Strand's monumental work that Major Pond's Agency did drum up Yeats's publishers to be in attendance at his lectures and readings. The second chapter of Robert Volpicelli's *Transatlantic Modernism and the US Lecture Tour* (Oxford, Oxford UP, 2021) focuses on Yeats's lectures in the US and Canada, and Quinn's agency in initiating and organising the tours undertaken before Quinn's death (55-80). Volpicelli draws most of his material from Karin Strand's thesis, and is silent upon Yeats's book signings on these tours.

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., Paula Mejía, "How Celebrity Provenance Powers the Luxury Market", 5 June 2024 (<<https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/the-power-of-provenance-how-celebrity-drives-the-luxury-market>>); NBA Auctions: Statement Selects Luxury Sotheby's (sothebys.com).

<sup>93</sup> <[https://www.sothebys.com/en/videos/florence-griffith-joyner-world-record-gold-medal-winning-shoes?lid=08a3sgj4oqct&cjs\\_aid=9850eff3-36b6-4d9a-a54d-94edc918418d&utm\\_campaign=Auction-Series](https://www.sothebys.com/en/videos/florence-griffith-joyner-world-record-gold-medal-winning-shoes?lid=08a3sgj4oqct&cjs_aid=9850eff3-36b6-4d9a-a54d-94edc918418d&utm_campaign=Auction-Series)>.

Charlie Watts [...] [the late] Rolling Stones percussionist, was probably more of a collector than a real reader.<sup>94</sup>

There are readers who wish to collect and read every state of a revising author's works and I number myself among that class of reader-collector, preserving the uncut copy in its clamshell box, while generally using a shabby old dog of a reading copy. Viscount Esher's Preface sums up with lordly reasonableness the questions arising from the motives of the selective bibliophiliac:

The plan on which I have founded my library is a combination of investment and speculation. I invest in the established classics; I speculate in the living authors. The former are a gilt-edged security, safer than Consols, firmly based on the sanctions of time. The latter are the expressions of my individual opinion and taste, the value of which only the future can justify. Having chosen my author, I buy a first edition of every book or pamphlet that has ever been printed of his work. So simple and comprehensive a scheme sounds easy enough. Collectors know that it is not.<sup>95</sup>

Esher selects his purchases in pristine condition, and keeps them in the country, away from "urban dirt", having cases made for the rarest or most expensive or most fragile items, among which he includes 'special pamphlets in papers wrappers'. His copy of *The Hour-glass* (1903), however, is listed in the 1930 catalogue as "12 copies printed, wrappers, quarto, Heinemann 1903" i.e. with no mention of a solander box or slipcase, but Esher had had a half-Morocco slipcase made for it before the library was sold in 1946<sup>96</sup>. Sotheby's catalogued the book as

Lot 2039 The Hour-Glass, a Morality ONE OF 12 COPIES PRINTED FOR COPYRIGHT PURPOSES, *unbound and uncut*, in a half-morocco slip-case. 8vo Heinemann 1903.<sup>97</sup>

While the evidence of a "half-morocco slip-case" is admittedly slender, it may be significant in filling out the provenance of Viscount Esher's copy which is now in the William Andrews Clark Library, UCLA. Provenance study of rare books requires records of slipcases, and boxes, as well as of inscriptions and drawings. Further speculation on the Esher copy will be found below in the Provisional Census, Appendix 2.

Are there connexions between descriptive bibliography, provenance studies, and research into an author's own library? The answer is, in the case of a family as uniquely gifted as the Yeates, is emphatically affirmative. The evidence is there in such collections as the "Healy (James A.) Collection of Irish literature" (<<https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf6f59n8gm/>>). A "bibliography of unique copies" would also take in all volumes and associated papers missing from the library, not merely Chapman's details of copies not transferred from Yeats family ownership to the National Library of Ireland in recent years, such as the Le Gallienne *Robert Louis Stevenson: An Elegy* now in the University of Delaware as discussed above. "Missing" covers such a multitude of different acts. Books and papers, covers and backstrips, lost, stolen, strayed, given away, deaccessioned and under what

<sup>94</sup> See <<https://www.christies.com/en/auction/auction-21924-cks/overview>>. On Robin Kinross see <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin\\_Kinross](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin_Kinross)>.

<sup>95</sup> See Oliver Brett, Viscount Esher, *The Modern Library Collected by Viscount Esher at Watlington Park* (London, Curwen Press, privately printed, 1930), xi. Esher's pioneer collection of twentieth century literature was sold at Sotheby's in 2134 Lots on 25-26 March, 20-21 May, and 18-20 November 1946, with his Yeats items towards the end: see S.C. Sotheby at the British Library.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem.*, xii, 317.

<sup>97</sup> As found in the British Library at S.C. Sotheby, Seventh Day of Sale, 20 November 1946 (156). Lot 2039 was sold to "Libris" for £20.0.0.

circumstances? And where now to be found – in private collections, in bookseller’s catalogues, in publishers’ archives, in research libraries? It would find in Wayne K. Chapman’s *c.* 140 usages of the word “missing” in his online catalogue of the Yeats Library new foci for enquiry<sup>98</sup>.

To the editor of this issue of this journal, W.B. Yeats is “*Yeatses*” – a “multiverse”<sup>99</sup>. A word, therefore of caution. When invited to contribute to this volume, I was flattered, but had to locate my interests outwith the editors’ range of preferred topics. I was surprised and grateful when my outline for this piece was welcomed into their *tenda grande*.

“Pluralities” are now a “Rhetoric of Discourse” which, to self-declared, self-identifying groupuscules, valorise “diversity” and declare a commitment to “interdisciplinarity”. “Digital space” itself complicates and dominates such a “Rhetoric of Discourse”. Yet digital libraries are undeniably transforming the inspection and textual comparison of copies of books in research collections and public libraries which, in the real world, are thousands of miles apart. The commercial exploitation of the mass digitization of books by Google Libraries and the Hathi Trust has transformed bookselling and Historical and Descriptive Bibliography just as AI is transforming the student experience in other ways. Tools such as Harvard’s Mirador Viewer bring images from disparate sources to one’s desk<sup>100</sup>. Commercial bundlers – bunglers perhaps? – of such data-sets are rolling them into new and ever-larger packages for the touch-screen and skyping generation so that the “student experience” of texts, criticism and commentary is becoming less and less material and more and more preselected and packaged.

It seems to me that this new digital commerce is not unconnected with the growing abstraction of commentary. Yeats himself was as wary as Blake of abstraction and was later agreeably surprised that Pound’s advice to “go in fear of abstraction” had taken up his own fore-warning<sup>101</sup>. One giant Urizen is ProQuest, which atomizes digital data even as it itemizes it<sup>102</sup>. I close with a few remarks about this “trendency”, too rarely seen for the looming problem that it is.

And so back to G. Thomas Tanselle. He once remarked that “Books are physical objects made by human beings”<sup>103</sup>. A.S.G. Edwards glosses the remark to remind us that the ‘study of “physical objects” is also one of “the motives of the “human beings” who shape the ways in which books

<sup>98</sup> <[https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=cudp\\_bibliography](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=cudp_bibliography)>.

<sup>99</sup> The word originated in 1895 with William James describing “[v]isible nature” as “all plasticity and indifference, a multiverse, as one might call it, and not a universe”. See *OED Online*.

<sup>100</sup> Mirador is a configurable, extensible, and easy-to-integrate image viewer, which enables image annotation and comparison of images from repositories dispersed around the world”: see “Mirador” (<<https://iif.harvard.edu/mirador-viewer/>>).

<sup>101</sup> As found in Ezra Pound’s “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste”, *Poetry*, March 1913, 201. See “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste by Ezra Pound | Poetry Magazine” (<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/58900/a-few-donts-by-an-imagiste>>). Abstraction was inimical to the Blake-trained Yeats and his lifelong campaign against it is chronicled in *Autobiographies*. In a note added to “William Blake and his Illustrations to *The Divine Comedy*” in 1924 Yeats wrote ‘some seven or eight years ago I asked my friend Mr. Ezra Pound to point out everything in the language of my poems that he thought an abstraction, and I learned from him how much further the movement against abstraction had gone than my generation had thought possible. Now, in reading these essays, I am ashamed when I come upon such words as “corporeal reason,” “corporeal law,” and think how I must have wasted the keenness of my youthful senses. I would like to believe that there was no help for it, that we were compelled to protect ourselves by such means against people and things we should never have heard of.” (*E&I* 145; *CW*4 107).

<sup>102</sup> The title of this current volume and its conspectus are another example of how a growing abstraction currently steers literary criticism and scholarship.

<sup>103</sup> See G. Thomas Tanselle, “A Bibliographer’s Creed”, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, vol. 25, 1, 2014, 1-17 (1-2 and *passim*), “HLB 25\_1 Book to UW 2014-1016.indb” (<<https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/42672707/A%20Bibliographer%e2%80%99s%20Creed.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>>). For Tanselle, “there is a profound difference between verbal works and the physical objects by means of which we try to apprehend them” (3). “*The branch of bibliography that focuses on books in society (sometimes called “history of the book”) – encompassing author-publisher relations, copyright, censorship, book distribution (by publishers and by dealers in new and old publications), and book reception (by collectors, librarians, and readers) – makes its distinctive contribution only when its treatment of verbal works grows out of their representation in the texts of specific physical objects.* [italics in original] (11).

are created, and “require the bibliographer to have the instinct of a psychologist and to probe the human capacity for messiness, muddle and irrationality that can affect the book at every stage in its creation”<sup>104</sup>. I have in this essay sought to move between Descriptive Bibliography of unique objects and the human “messiness, muddle and irrationality”, but offer in closing Edwards’s caution against the “growing reliance, particularly by graduate students, on virtual forms [which] has created a diminished interest in the detailed analysis of material aspects of the book and of any sense of why it matters.” During my own lifetime, “English” or “Literature” as a “subaltern” discipline has endured the condescension of Historians. As “Humanities Computing” asserts its presumptuous suzerainty in Literature and Bibliography, “the book” in its materiality risks becoming more alien to future students.

A suitable emblem for the concept “Yeateses” would be Lady Gregory’s inscribed bookplate copy of Yeats’s *Poems 1899-1905* (1906), which has relentlessly climbed in value since Major Richard Gregory sold it at Sotheby’s, London, in 1979<sup>105</sup>. Unlike so many of Lady Gregory’s books released into the market in 1979, it continues to elude a research library destination. With its bookplate, its inscription, and a draft of “The Friends that have it”; it is a mighty emblem of Yeats’s remaking of himself in his own books, and in a material world.

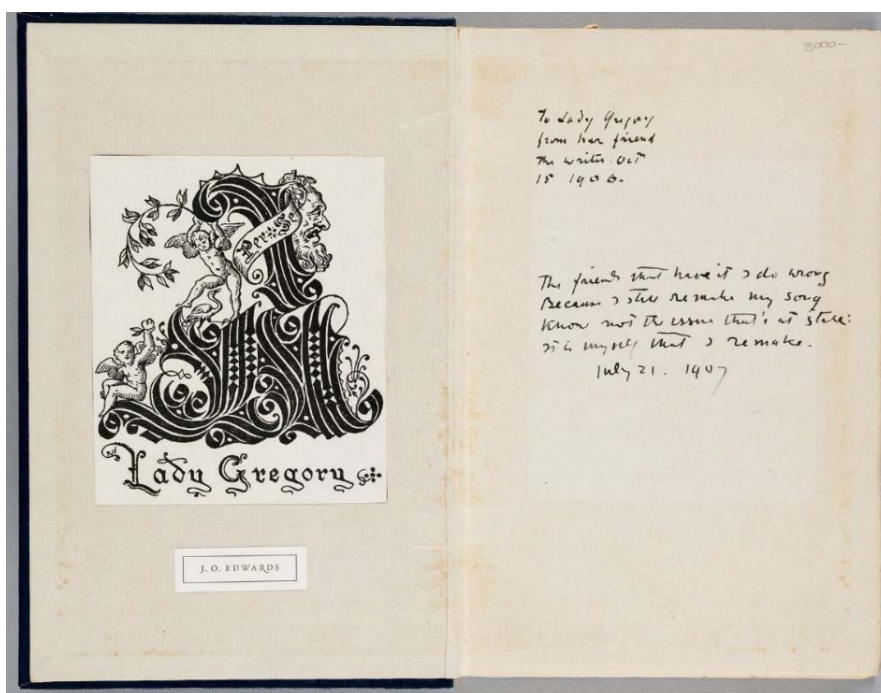


Fig. 21 - Lady Gregory’s Bookplate Copy of Yeats’s *Poems 1899-1905* (1906), inscribed by Yeats and with his autograph draft of “The Friends that have it”, formerly in the Collection of James O. Edwards

<sup>104</sup> A.S.G. Edwards, “G. Thomas Tanselle at ninety”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 February 2024 (<<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/living-on-paper-essay-a-s-g-edwards>>).

<sup>105</sup> Lot 351 at Sotheby’s Sale of 24 July, 1979 was sold to Quaritch for £850, i.e., c. £4,057.52 at 2024 prices according to the Bank of England’s Inflation Calculator. At some point it was sold on to James O. Edwards, and on 27 June 2024, via Peter Harrington, on consignment to another private buyer.

Appendix One:  
WBY's Inscribed Books in W. T. H. Howe's Collections  
and in James Carleton Young Sales  
at the Anderson Galleries, 1916-17

**W. T. H. Howe Collections<sup>106</sup>**

*The Augustan Books of English Poetry, Second Series, No 4, W.B. YEATS* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1927, Wade 155 [157-58]). Inscribed. NYPL<sup>107</sup>.

*Autobiographies: Reveries over Childhood and Youth and The Trembling of the Veil* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926 Wade 151 [134-35]). Inscribed. NYPL<sup>108</sup>.

*Poems* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895, Wade 15, [35-37]) Inscribed "With pleasant memories" and dated 1 December 1932, NYPL<sup>109</sup>.

**James Carleton Young Sales, Anderson Galleries, 1916-17<sup>110</sup>**

**Sale 1**

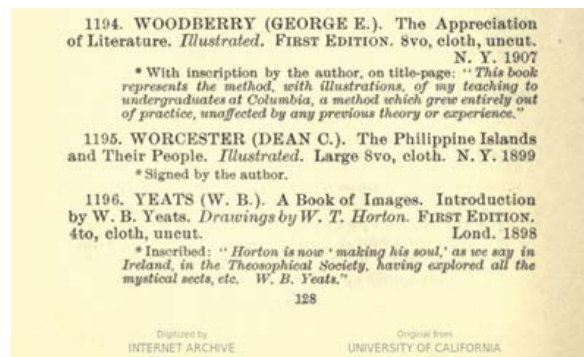


Fig. 22 - W.B. Yeats's Inscribed Books in James Carleton Young Sales at the Anderson Galleries, 1916-17

1196. YEATS (W. B.). *A Book of Images*. Introduction by W.B. Yeats. *Drawings by W. T. Horton*. FIRST EDITION. 4to, cloth, uncut. Lond. 1898.

\*Inscribed: "*Horton is now 'making his soul,' as we say in Ireland, in the Theosophical Society, having explored all the mystical sects, etc. W.B. Yeats*".

1197. YEATS (W. B.). *Ideas of Good and Evil*. FIRST EDITION. 12mo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Lond. 1903.

\*Inscribed: "*All art is, indeed, a monotony in external things for the sake of an interior variety. W.B. Yeats*"<sup>111</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> See above pp. 113 & ff. for discussion of the Howe collections.

<sup>107</sup> See *W.B. Yeats: A Census of the Manuscripts*, by Conrad A. Balliet, with the assistance of Christine Mawhinney (New York and London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 81. Hereafter *CM*.

<sup>108</sup> *CM*, 81.

<sup>109</sup> *CM*, *ibidem*. It is possible that other items signed for both Howe and James Carleton Young are among a substantial number of books listed by Balliet as inscribed for "Unknown Recipients": see *CM* 93.

<sup>110</sup> See above pp. 109 & ff. for discussion of the Young collections. The order is that of the two sales and their lots. Transcription of entries is *literatim* and my own footnotes attempt to create "provenance chains" where possible by cross references (some necessarily conjectural, others certain) between the lot numbers and descriptions in the Young Sale, the Quinn Sales, and, where possible, the shelf marks of those volumes which have come to rest in research libraries.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. "**All art is, indeed, a monotony in external things for the sake of an interior variety**, a sacrifice of gross effects to subtle effects, an asceticism of the imagination." (Speaking to the Psalter) [1902]," emphasis added: see *Ideas Of Good and Evil* (London, A.H. Bullen, 1903, hereafter *IGE*), 25; *CW*4,16. Yeats returns to what he saw as his discovery in "The Symbolism of Poetry": "The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of con-



1198. YEATS (W. B.). *The Celtic Twilight. With a Frontispiece by J. B. Yeats* FIRST EDITION. 12mo, cloth, uncut. Lond. 1893.

\*Inscribed: "*A little out of a great store of stories I got in Galway in three or four summers lately. I like it among the best of my books, for I got it all in good summer weather. W.B. Yeats*"<sup>12</sup>.

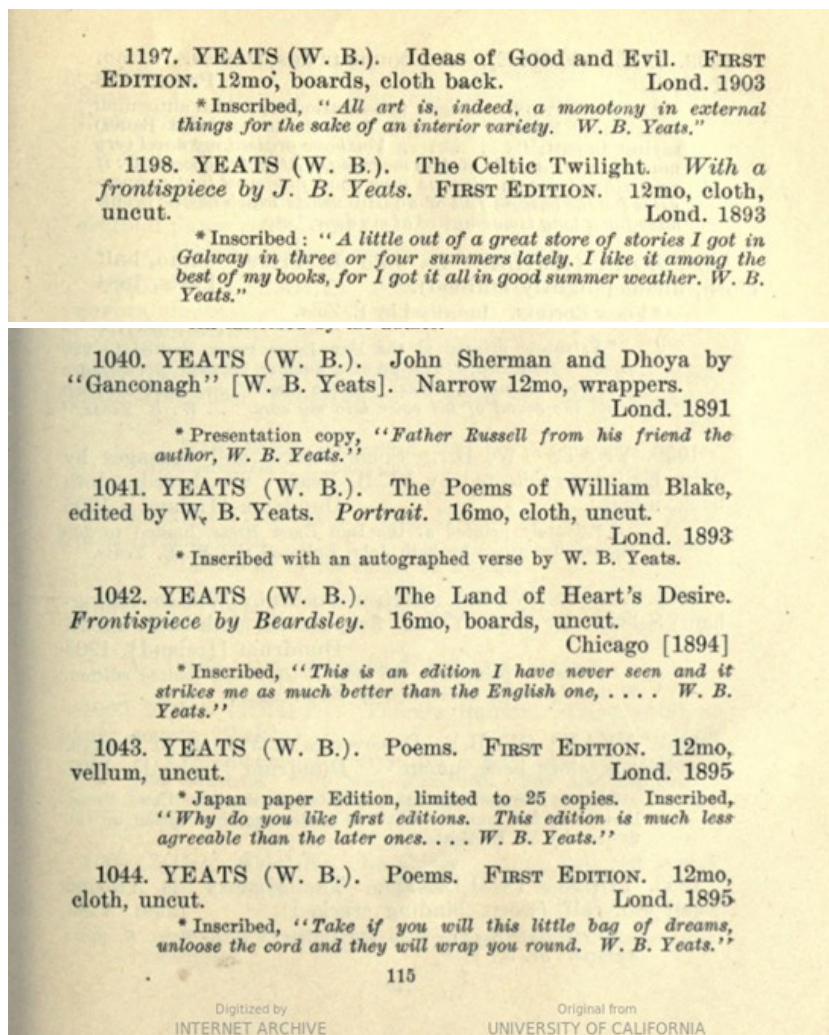


Fig. 23-24 - W.B. Yeats's Inscribed Books in James Carleton Young Sales at the Anderson Galleries, 1916-17

templation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with **an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety**, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols." (*IGE* 247; *CW4* 117). For a comparable passage on "monotony", see e.g., "Lionel Johnson [...] spoke with so much music that what had been in another monotony, became nobility of style. His reading or speaking of poetry befitted his own particularly, that had from scholarship and from the loneliness and gravity of his mind an air of high lineage [...]" See Yeats's Preface to Lionel Johnson, "Poetry and Patriotism", in *Poetry and Ireland: Essays by W.B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson* (Churchtown, Dundrum, Cuala, 1908) [19].

<sup>112</sup>Yeats was not bringing his full attention to bear on the task of signing. Indeed, it may have become a bit of a chore. This first edition of *The Celtic Twilight* contains no Galway stories. They were added in the 1902 edition! "[L]ately" suggests it may have been signed c. 1903 or thereabouts. This copy is one of three books signed for Young now in the Yale University Library, Ip.Y34.893c. See also *CM* 98.

1040. YEATS (W. B.). John Sherman and Dhoya by “Ganconagh” [W.B. Yeats]. Narrow 12mo, Wrappers. Lond. 1891.  
 \*Presentation copy, “*Father Russell from his friend the author; W.B. Yeats*”<sup>113</sup>.
1041. YEATS (W. B.). The Poems of William Blake, edited by W.B. Yeats. *Portrait* 16mo, cloth, uncut. Lond. 1893.  
 \*Inscribed with an autographed verse by W.B. Yeats<sup>114</sup>.
1042. YEATS (W. B.). The Land of Heart’s Desire. *Frontispiece by Beardsley* 16mo, boards, uncut”. Chicago, [1894].  
 \*Inscribed “*This is an edition I have never seen and it strikes me as much better than the English one, ... W.B. Yeats*”<sup>115</sup>.
1043. YEATS (W. B.). Poems FIRST EDITION 12mo. vellum, uncut. Lond. 1895.  
 \*Japan paper Edition, limited to 25 copies, Inscribed “*Why do you like first editions. This edition is much less agreeable than the later ones. ... W.B. Yeats*”<sup>116</sup>.
1044. YEATS (W. B.). Poems FIRST EDITION 12mo. Cloth, uncut. Lond. 1895.  
 \*Inscribed “*Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams*”;  
 Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you round. W.B. Yeats<sup>117</sup>.

<sup>113</sup> The implication must be that Young purchased the copy presented to Fr. Matthew Russell SJ (1834 – 1912) the founding editor of the Catholic magazine, the *Irish Monthly*, 1873 – 1954. Russell must have relinquished it and at some point it was sold on to Young. There is no evidence that Yeats reinscribed it for Young.

<sup>114</sup> Unlocated. Is the “an autographed verse by W.B. Yeats” a “verse by Yeats in Yeats’s autograph”? Or is it a quotation from another writer – e.g., Blake – in Yeats’s hand? It is undated, a feature of Yeats’s despatch when dealing with Young’s requests. If Yeats’s library retains gifts from Young his name does not turn up in the library catalogues.

<sup>115</sup> Does this mean that Stone & Kimball, the Chicago co-publisher did not send the author’s copies on publication, or were they lost in post? This was not a pirate edition. Now in Yale University Ip.Y34.894.b. See *CM* 98.

<sup>116</sup> As sold by riverrun books, 2022, item 446, 212. This firm kindly informed me by email that it “bought the book in 2019 from a New York area owner – the descendant of the buyer, perhaps he who bought it in the Young sale. Bart Auerbach bought it from [riverrun books] at that time, and then [riverrun] got it back for sale as part of his estate in 2022. It is now in a U.S. private collection.”

Item 409533 refers to my inventory numbering system. Riverrun is “not sure where the following numbers come from. They are not numbers assigned here. It was number 446 in the Auerbach catalogue.

The printed catalogue is now out of print. But see the PDF at: <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Z7JIH-v6042DFhsJwa-78DYE9kb0dQ8bc/view?usp=sharing>>.

<sup>117</sup> Yeats quotes his own Druid’s words in ll. 29-30 of “Fergus and the Druid”, *VP* 102.



1045. YEATS (W. B.). *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi. Portrait.* 8vo, cloth, uncut.

Privately Printed, 1897

\* Inscribed, "*The portrait which is by my father and the latin which is by Lionel Johnson are the only things which are worth anything in this little book. W. B. Yeats.*"

1046. YEATS (W. B.). *The Secret Rose. Illustrated by J. B. Yeats.* FIRST EDITION. 12mo, cloth, uncut. Lond. 1897

\* With an interesting inscription by the author.

1047. YEATS (W. B.). *The Shadowy Waters.* FIRST EDITION. Royal 8vo, cloth, uncut. Lond. 1900

\* Inscribed, "*This play took me the better part of two years to write. . . . W. B. Yeats.*"

1048. YEATS (W. B.). *In the Seven Woods: Being Poems Chiefly of the Irish Heroic Age.* 8vo, cloth, uncut.

Dundrum [Ireland], 1903

\* Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press. Inscribed with an autographed verse by the author.

1049. YEATS (W. B.). *Twenty-One Poems. Written by Lionel Johnson: Selected by W. B. Yeats.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland], 1904

\* Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited to 220 copies. Inscribed, "*The greater number of these poems have been read to me by Lionel Johnson himself and some of them bring the sound of his voice into my ears. . . . W. B. Yeats.*"

1050. YEATS (W. B.). *Some Essays and Passages by John Eglinton; Selected by W. B. Yeats.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland], 1905

\* Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited to 200 copies. Inscribed by both John Eglinton and W. B. Yeats.

1051. YEATS (W. B.). *Sixteen Poems by William Allingham: Selected by W. B. Yeats.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland], 1905

\* Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited edition. With a full-page inscription by W. B. Yeats.

1052. YEATS (W. B.). *Discoveries: a Volume of Essays.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland], 1907

\* FIRST EDITION; privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited to 200 copies. With an interesting inscription on the fly-leaf by W. B. Yeats.

1053. YOUNG (WILLIAM). *The History of Athens.* Small 4to, calf (worn, binding cracked). Lond. 1786

\* Presentation copy from the author, "*Ben. Way., E. don: Autoris. Sr. W. Y.*"

Fig. 25 - W.B. Yeats's Inscribed Books in James Carleton Young Sales at the Anderson Galleries, 1916-17

1045. YEATS (W. B.). *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi. Portrait.* 8vo, cloth, uncut. Privately Printed, 1897.

\*Inscribed. *The portrait which is by my father and the latin which is by Lionel Johnson are the only things worth anything in this little book. W.B. Yeats.*

This became one of John Quinn's copies, viz., *Quinn Cat.* Lot 1137 (p. 1133). He perhaps acquired it at one of the Young sales (1916-17). *Wade* 1951 (p. 41) adds a date after signature "Oct., 1901" and inserts commas after "father" and after "Lionel Johnson" and replaces "and" with "&". Young had extracted the quoted words from Yeats but someone else catalogued for him, possibly hastily. For the actual wording in the inscribed copy, now in the Berg Collection, NYPL, see above pp. 123 & ff.

1046. YEATS (W. B.). *The Secret Rose Illustrated by J. B. Yeats* FIRST EDITION 12mo, cloth, uncut Lond. 1897.

\*With an interesting inscription by the author<sup>118</sup>.

1047. YEATS (W. B.). *The Shadowy Waters* FIRST EDITION Royal 8mo, cloth, uncut. Lond. 1900.

\*Inscribed "*This play took me the better part of two years to write. . . . W.B. Yeats.*"

1048. YEATS (W. B.). *In the Seven Woods: Being Poems Chiefly of the Irish Heroic Age* 8V0, cloth, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland] 1903.

\*Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press. Inscribed with an autographed verse by the author.

1049. YEATS (W. B.). *Twenty-one Poems. Written by Lionel Johnson: Selected by W.B. Yeats* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut, Dundrum [Ireland] 1904.

\*Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited to 220 copies. Inscribed "*The greater number of these poems have been read to me by Lionel Johnson himself and some of them bring the sound of his voice into my ears . . . . W.B. Yeats*".

1950. YEATS (W. B.). *Some Essays and Passages by John Eglinton; Selected by W.B. Yeats.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland] 1905.

\*Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited to 200 copies. Inscribed by both John Eglinton and W.B. Yeats.

1951. YEATS (W. B.). *Sixteen Poems by William Allingham; Selected by W.B. Yeats.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland] 1905.

\*Privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited edition. With a full-page inscription by W.B. Yeats.

1952. YEATS (W. B.). *Discoveries: A Volume of Essays by W.B. Yeats.* 8vo, boards, cloth back, uncut. Dundrum [Ireland] 1907.

\*FIRST EDITION; privately printed at the Dun Emer Press, limited to 200 copies. With an interesting inscription on the fly-leaf by W.B. Yeats.

This copy has for many years been unnoticed and not fully catalogued in the Beinecke Library at Yale. How and when it got there is as yet unclear. Conrad Balliet merely supplies its date and gestures to its being about the "origins of the book". He doesn't identify the medium (pencil, indicative of a note Yeats has hastily made for himself, towards correction of the book in preparation for its collection in *CWCP* 8, 13-14), the former owner (Young), nor the location of the note (as indicated in the Young Sale item 1952, i.e., on the fly-leaf i.e. the front free endpaper)<sup>119</sup>. This item offers allows us the opportunity to initiate a chain of ownership and so the biography of the volume.

In what follows, I try to reconstruct the known facts. First, however, an image and a transcription of Yeats's autograph note<sup>120</sup>.

<sup>118</sup> Perhaps the elusive copy noted in *VSR* 270 as Quinn 11367.

<sup>119</sup> I.e., copy Ip Y34 907d, Beinecke Library, Yale. Yeats's note is described by Balliet as "dated Dec. 16, 1907" and as "about the origins of the book" *CM* 81.

<sup>120</sup> The Beinecke's catalogue does not record this inscription, or volume's provenance nor its date of acquisition by the library. I am profoundly grateful to Dr Tom Cahill of the Beinecke, a prince among librarians, for cutting through a thicket of automated sites, examining the book, and sending the image for my use.

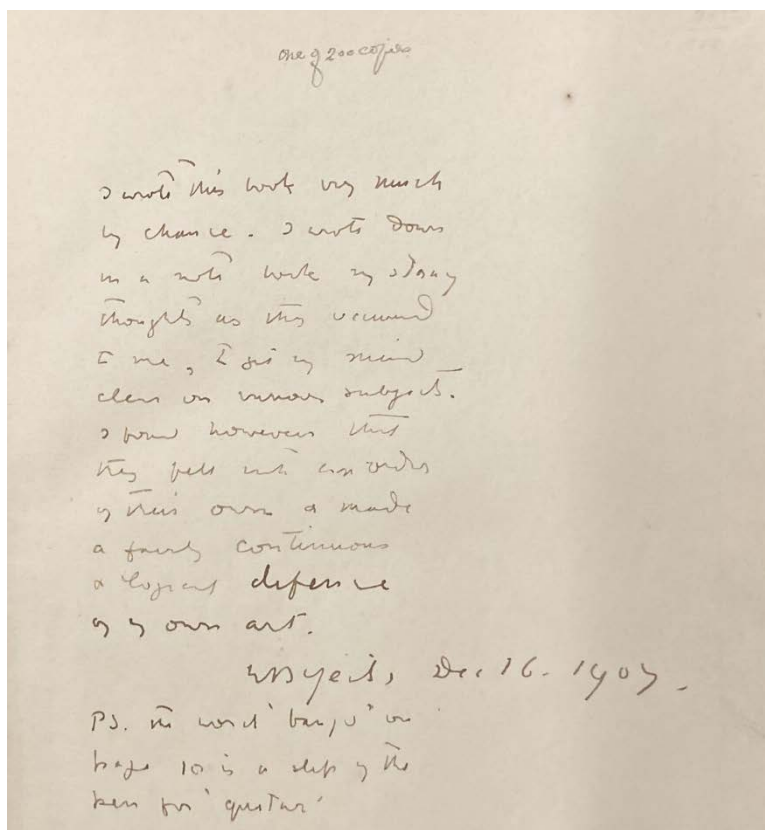


Fig. 26 - W.B. Yeats's Note in a Copy of his *Discoveries* dated 16 December 1907, formerly in the Collection of James A. Healy

one of 20 copies<sup>121</sup>

I wrote this book very much by chance. I wrote down in a note book my stray thoughts as they occurred to me, to get my mind clear on various subjects. I found however that they fell into an order of their own & made a fairly continuous & logical defence of my own art.

W.B. Yeats Dec 16. 1907.

PS. The word "banjo" on page 10 is a slip of the pen for "guitar"

<sup>121</sup> A librarian's pencilled addition.

On 15 December 1907, *Discoveries* had been published by the Dun Emer Press in Churchtown, Dundrum<sup>122</sup>. Yeats wrote and signed this note the next day in London, where he was working in the British Museum Library, studying astrology with Ralph Shirley. We might perhaps conjecture that this copy awaited his arrival at Woburn Buildings. Portraits, self-reflection and the origins of his work were very much on his mind, as he was in the process of choosing the images for the frontispieces of Vols 1, 3, 5, and 7 of *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose* (1908)<sup>123</sup>. He was also coping with Annie Horniman's dislike of portrait drawings of him by Augustus John<sup>124</sup>, and talking to Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon about the latter's new portrait of him, for which John Quinn was paying<sup>125</sup>. Yeats was sorely tempted to include among the portraits an "ugly, gypsy" etching by Augustus John, which he thought

a very fine thing ... [which] has made me sheer tinker, drunken, unpleasant and disreputable, but full of wisdom, a melancholy English Bohemian, capable of everything, except of living joyously on the surface.<sup>126</sup>

Much later, he had recalled that John wished to do what Oliver Gogarty commended as a new "serious portrait"<sup>127</sup> whether John would record certain "lines" on his face

marks of recent illness, marks of time, growing irresolution, perhaps some faults that I have long dreaded [and] [...] lay great emphasis upon them, and [...] insist that those lines show character. [...] my character is so little myself that all my life it has thwarted me. It has affected my poems, my true self, no more than the character of a dancer affects the movement of the dance. When I was painted by John years ago, and saw for the first time the portrait (or rather the etching taken from it) now in a Birmingham gallery, I shuddered. [...] Always particular about my clothes, never dissipated, never unshaven except during illness, I saw myself there an unshaven, drunken bar-tender, and then I began to feel John had found something that he liked in me, something closer than character, and by that very transformation e it visible. He had found Anglo-Irish solitude, a solitude I have made for myself, an outlawed solitude.<sup>128</sup>

Inspecting the book, he notes the error whereby he had misnamed his portrait of "A Banjo Player"<sup>129</sup>. guitar which he has called a banjo. On the same day he inscribed on the title page of another copy "W B Yeats, Dec 16 1907" adding there

<sup>122</sup> The volume of critical discussion on *Discoveries* is very small: see, however, Curtis B. Bradford, *Yeats at Work* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois UP, 1965) Ch. 11; as well as his edited transcripts of the unpublished "*Discoveries*: Second Series" essays, "The Doctor in Site of Himself", "The Return of the Stars", "[Pantheism]", and "[Changing Canons of Form]", *The Massachusetts Review*, Winter 1964, 297-306.

<sup>123</sup> The frontispieces respectively for vols 1, 3, 5, and 7 are from a John Singer Sargent charcoal, a new oil by Charles Shannon (see next fn.), a new pastel by Antonio Mancini, and a drawing by John Butler Yeats (1896), used as frontispiece in *The Tables of the Law. The Adoration of the Magi* (1897) and in *The Celtic Twilight* (1902). See *Explorations*, selected by Mrs W.B. Yeats (London, Macmillan, 1962; New York, Macmillan, 1963), 307-08; hereinafter, *Ex*.

<sup>124</sup> See letter to A.H. Bullen, 8 July 1907 about the origins of the Dun Emer volume, *Discoveries* and how it was planned to be incorporated into vol. 8 of *The Collected Works in Verse and Prose* (1908). "A Banjo Player" was the fourth of "My Thoughts and Second Thoughts 1. - X." commissioned by A.H. Bullen and published anonymously in his *The Gentleman's Magazine* Sept.-Oct. 1906.

<sup>125</sup> See *LJQ* 87, and n. 15 (91).

<sup>126</sup> See letter to Quinn of 7 January 1908 (*CL5* 16-17). He had received two copies of this etching on 16 December, to which Annie Horniman had taken exception See *ChronY* 115.

<sup>127</sup> See *Pages From A Diary Written In Nineteen Hundred And Thirty* (Dublin, Cuala, 1944), XXV, collected in *Ex* 289-340 (307-08).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibidem*. See also WBY to Lady Gregory, 18 December 1907, *CL4* 803 and to Augustus John, 20 Dec. 1907, *CL4* 817.

<sup>129</sup> He does not, however correct the cross-reference back to the "banjo-player" [*sic*] in "The Tree of Life" a meditation upon Verlaine, a few pages on (*Discoveries* 1907, 13). Both banjos are replaced by guitars in *CWVP8*, and the uncertain hyphen removed (13, 16).

“banjo” on page 10 is a slip of the pen for “guitar”

The full provenance of this copy is unknown. It may have been a file copy, for there is now no copy of *Discoveries* 1907 in Yeats's own library. Nor was there a copy in the “1920's partial catalogue of that library”<sup>130</sup>. There is, however a single, unannotated copy in the separate Yeats family collection of Dun Emer and Cuala books<sup>131</sup>. I consider it likely that this annotated copy had been Yeats's file copy (in his role as General Editor of those presses), and that at some point it “got away” from his library before being purchased by Healy, who bought many items in his collection from Yeats's sisters. At any rate, Healy incorporated it into his “special set” of Dun Emer and Cuala books<sup>132</sup>. When Healy sought further inscriptions for this ‘set’, the book once again crossed Yeats's desk, and he further annotated his correction of “banjo” to “guitar” with the words

Yes a “slip” though not of the pen – probably from ignorance.

The player was the Countess of Cromarty.

W B Y 1931<sup>133</sup>

Appendix 2:  
Provisional Census of Copies of  
*The Hour-glass: A Morality* (London, Wm. Heinemann, 1903)

As argued above (pp. 118 & ff.), it is likely that John Quinn's “unique” copyright edition was larger than the twelve copies to which he always claimed it was limited, a claim which has resulted in its being seen as Yeats's rarest book.<sup>134</sup> Following Quinn's and Wade's extensive letters and notes on this edition – again, quoted above – the following copies can be confirmed and more may be hypothesized. Quinn's tallies of copies being emphatic, and confusing if not obfuscatory, this provisional census can but attempt to reconcile his memories by counting confirmed surviving copies, and allowing also for the possibility that a copy or copies he claimed had been “lost” might have resurfaced.

**Part 1. The Copyright Deposit Copies**

Copies 1 & 2 –>John Quinn –>Library of Congress shelf-mark PR5904.H6 1903, entered for copyright 13 Aug 1903, copies date-stamped 15 Aug. 1903.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup> For this catalogue, see *YA* 4, 279-290.

<sup>131</sup> See Wayne K. Chapman's awkwardly titled “*Something that I read in a book*”: *W.B. Yeats's Annotations at the National Library of Ireland*, vol. 2, *Yeats [sic] Writings* (Clemson, Clemson and Liverpool UPes, 2022), Appendix V, “A List of Dun Emer and Cuala Press Items in the Library”, 208. To judge by a book bill inserted, this copy might have been formerly owned by John Butler Yeats.

<sup>132</sup> See *The James A. Healy Collection Guide to the James A. Healy Collection of Irish literature M0273*, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford 1999; revised 2022, <<https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf6f59n8gm/>>).

<sup>133</sup> Sibell Lilian, Countess of Cromartie (1878-1962), was the niece of the Duchess of Sutherland and a writer with an interest in the occult who “occasionally” came to Yeats's Monday evenings at Woburn Buildings. See *CL4* 133-34. In an inscription in James A. Healy's copy of *Discoveries* (Stanford) WBY identifies her as the model for “A Guitar Player”. See *W.B. Yeats & the Irish Renaissance: An Exhibition of Books and Manuscripts from the James A. Healy Collection*, with an Essay by Michael Stanford (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Libraries, 1990). The copy of *Discoveries* 1907 which Yeats inscribed for Healy on 30 July 1938 is Item 11 in a selection from Healy's “special Set” of Dun Emer and Cuala books, the exhibition of which this book is a record (60-61). It is baffling that this identification of his guitar player is “untraced” in the annotation to “A Guitar Player” (*CW4 Early Essays* 436, n. 1).

<sup>134</sup> *Wade* 51 (69). All copies were printed off in the US by the printers of *The North American Review*.

<sup>135</sup> The Library of Congress requires two copies for U.S. copyright purposes. Dr Amanda Zimmerman kindly supplied an image of the date stamp. These copies are not mentioned by Quinn.

- Copy 3 → John Quinn → British Museum shelf-mark C. 58 H. 7, date-stamped 29 Aug. 1903.  
 Copy 4 → John Quinn → Bodleian Library, Oxford, shelf-mark M. adds. 43 d.3, date-stamped 13 Oct. 1903<sup>136</sup>.  
 Copy 5 → John Quinn → Cambridge University Library, shelf-mark XXI 74. 44, date-stamped 12 Oct. 1903<sup>137</sup>.  
 Copy 6 → John Quinn → Trinity College Dublin, shelf-mark 64.e.72 no 4<sup>138</sup>.  
 Copy 7 → John Quinn → National Library, Scotland, shelf-mark 4.215 (6)<sup>139</sup>.

As indicated above (p. 118 fn. 33) Quinn always maintained that there had been six copies for “English” copyright purposes, despite there being at the time only five copyright libraries in the UK<sup>140</sup>.

## Part 2 “Personal” Copies

- Copy 8 → John Quinn → ?? → Edmund Gosse → [?? →] C. Walter Buhler, sold by Parke-Bernet Galleries 1941<sup>141</sup> → [?? →] William M. Roth → Ransom Center, Texas (purchase from Roth, May 1950). Shelf-mark PR 5904 H6 1903.

Though perhaps not complete, this provenance is impressive<sup>142</sup>. Gosse annotated this copy “One of 6 copies published to secure English copyright in 1903. E.G.”. This has been interpreted to mean that he thought this is the ‘sixth copyright’ copy. It is countersigned by Yeats himself, “Never heard of this edition before | W.B. Yeats. Oct. 13, 1914”, which raises further questions<sup>143</sup>.

At the time Librarian of the House of Lords, Gosse probably did have a role to play on Quinn’s behalf in placing the UK copyright copies in the five libraries<sup>144</sup>.

- Copy 9 → W.B. Yeats → Mrs Yeats → Yeats Family → National Library of Ireland<sup>145</sup>.

<sup>136</sup> I thank Dr Dunja Sharif of the Bodleian for this information and an image of the Bodleian copy’s stamp on the verso of the title-page. On the seeming delay in stamping regional UK deposit library copies, see above 118, fn. 36, & ff.

<sup>137</sup> I thank Claire Welford-Elkin for an image of the Cambridge copy’s stamped title-page.

<sup>138</sup> TCD’s copy 64.e.72. N<sup>o</sup>.4. has been bound with 4 items in a binding with an inked date, “Jan. 1907”. I am grateful to Anna Bielenberg for images of the binding and catalogue entry.

<sup>139</sup> The NLS catalogue dates accession to 1904 but there is no date stamp in the copy itself. I thank Dr Kaye Galloway of the NLS for this information.

<sup>140</sup> Whether Quinn thought that, as with the Library of Congress, two copies were required at, e.g., the British Museum, is unknowable.

<sup>141</sup> See *The Important Collection of First Editions of William B. Yeats*: Property of C. Walter Buhler, Westport, CT. Sold by His Order etc. New York, Parke-Bernet Galleries, 1941, Lot 151. The catalogue entry reads “FIRST SEPARATE EDITION OF WHAT APPARENTLY IS THE RAREST OF THE AUTHOR’S WORKS. ONE OF 12 COPIES PRINTED. OF THIS NUMBER, SIX WENT FOR ENGLISH COPYRIGHT, AND TWO WERE LOST IN THE MAIL. THE WORK WAS ISSUED WITHOUT COVERS.

On the front end-leaf the author has inscribed: “*Never heard of this Edition before. W.B. Yeats, Oct. 1913, 1914.*” Sir Edmund W. Gosse’s copy, with the following penciled inscription by him beneath the author’s note: “*This is one of 6 (six) copies published to secure English copyright in 1903. E. G. “With the Sir Edmund Gosse bookplate”.*”

<sup>142</sup> That Yeats mislaid and forgot his own copy perhaps confirms his indifference to his first editions. See above pp. 119 & ff.

<sup>143</sup> See above pp. 122 & ff. on the not yet eliminated possibility of forgery.

<sup>144</sup> On the absence of any dealings between Gosse, Quinn and Heinemann, see above pp. 118, fn. 33. Gosse had been a chief Literary Advisor for William Heinemann and Editor of Heinemann’s International Library.

<sup>145</sup> Because Quinn’s was a private edition for copyright deposit purposes, Yeats did not receive the author’s usual six copies from the publisher, just the one from Quinn. I am grateful to Emanuela Turani an image of the stamped title-page of this item, shelf-marked YL 2359.

- Copy 10 → Quinn's bookplate copy → Anderson Galleries sale Lot no. 11430 in a "crushed brown levant Morocco solander case" → [??] → Huntington Library "in brown cloth protective folder, inserted in brown morocco solander case, by Bradstreet<sup>146</sup>. Uncut and unopened." Call-number 129188.
- Copy 11 → Heinemann's file copy → Quinn → Quinn's binder → Lady Gregory → ?Major R. G. Gregory? → Berg Collection, New York Public Library (the Lady Gregory replacement copy)<sup>147</sup>.
- Copy 12 Quinn → Lady Gregory → Major Richard Gregory → Sotheby's, London, Lot 412 in the 24 July 1979 sale → ??
- Copy 13 another of the two copies said by Quinn to have been lost in the post to Lady Gregory.
- Copy 14 → Quinn → [?? →] → Schuyler B. Jackson<sup>148</sup> by 12-08-1922 → [??] → Major W. Van R. Whitall Lot 1438, 1927 sale (\$260) → [??] → Viscount Esher by 1930 and until 1946 → "Libris" → → William Andrews Clark Library, UCLA. This copy remains unbound, but within a green cloth folder, in half dark green morocco slip case.<sup>149</sup>
- Copy 15 → Printer's file copy as Quinn claims, "lost or given away".

Further precision in identifying and listing the copies of this edition becomes more difficult. Cataloguing which does not include provenance increases the possibility – indeed, the near certainty – of the "double-counting" of copies. By way of example, I turn to the copy to which Wade refers as sold at "Messrs. Hodgson's on November 30, 1950". According to Hodgson's Sale Catalogue of that date, the copy had been in the library of "A.G.B. Randle Esq., of Cheam" in Surrey, but its prior and subsequent provenance are otherwise unknown.

Copy 16? → ? → A.G.B. Randle → Hodgson 1950 → ? → ?

It is possible that Randle, of whom little is at present known, purchased Viscount Esher's copy and sold it on in 1950, in which case it is Copy 11 above and in the William Andrews Clark Library at UCLA. Further, if Schuyler Jackson, an early owner as we have seen of the Esher copy, speculated correctly that this copy was one of the two copies Quinn had reported as lost in the post, we arrive fairly neatly at a "jackpot" hypothesis: copies 13, 14, and 16 are the same copy, as in

Copy 14 → Quinn → [?? →] → Schuyler B. Jackson by 12-08-1922 → [??] → Major W. Van R. Whitall Lot 1438, 1927 sale (\$260) → [??] → Viscount Esher by 1930 and until 1946 → "Libris" → [?] → A.G.B. Randle → Hodgson 1950 → ? → William Andrews Clark Library, UCLA.

If so, the provisional total would be 14 copies: Quinn's claimed 12 plus the two he always omitted from his total, i.e. Copies 1 and 2 above, the two Library of Congress copies. Certainly 14 is a rather strange number to have had privately printed. Could it have been 15? Was Quinn's memory simply at fault? Or had he confused himself because he was disingenuous? The possibility that there could be a small, unspecified number of copies still lurking in private collections, as the DeLury *Mosada* did for so long, cannot be eliminated.

<sup>146</sup> In this Census I also cite details of bindings and casings because they were made for and so tend to travel with their frail contents.

<sup>147</sup> See above pp. 120 & ff. for Quinn's 1909 letter to Lady Gregory. I am profoundly grateful to Professor James Pethica of Williams College for sharing this letter with me, and to Dr Declan Kiely and Dr Carolyn Vega of the NYPL for further work in the Berg Collection, NYPL, and for the images supplied courtesy of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library and the Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

<sup>148</sup> In 1941, Jackson (d. 1968) married the poet Laura Riding (1901-91). *Inter alia*, they wrote *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words*, published by the UP of Virginia, in 1997.

<sup>149</sup> To help me in this enquiry, Dr Nina Schneider to whom I am very grateful, reviewed the history of this copy within the Clark and rewrote its catalogue entry. She confirmed the year of acquisition and that it was the Schuyler Jackson and later the Esher copy.

I offer by way of example another of Lady Gregory's signed gifts from Yeats, her copy of the first (1902) edition of *Where There is Nothing*<sup>150</sup> inscribed by Yeats:

Handwritten inscription by Yeats to Lady Gregory on the title page of *Where There is Nothing*. The text is written in cursive ink. The first part reads: "Lady Gregory from her friend W. Yeats." Below this, the printed title "WHERE THERE IS NOTHING" is visible. Underneath the title, there is a second handwritten note: "only ten copies printed of the first edition, which was printed to secure American rights." At the bottom of the note, the initials "W.S.Y." are written.

Fig. 27 - Yeats's Inscription to Lady Gregory in her copy of his *Where There is Nothing* (1902), Sotheby, London Catalogue, 24 July 1979, lot 410

Despite Yeats's "only ten copies printed ... to secure American rights", John Quinn wrote "Fifteen copies printed for copyright of which not over eight are now known. Printed for Mr. John Quinn from the author's first draft and contains some errors corrected in the large paper edition", an estimate so divergent from Yeats's as to call for a future census for *Where there is Nothing*<sup>151</sup>.

My tally therefore remains provisional. The current "final" destinations include those for the seven Copyright Library Deposit Copies, plus "personal" copies now in the Ransom Center, the National Library of Ireland, the Berg Collection, NYPL, the William Andrews Clark Library, UCLA, and the Huntington Library.

#### Disclaimer

The texts from Yeats's inscriptions and letters are all either out of copyright or are reproduced with the permission of the Yeats Estate, via the General Editor of Yeats's *Collected Letters* (of whom I am one). The first three images are supplied for use by Riverrun Books, Ardsley, New York. Image 4 supplied for my use by Peter Harrington Rare Books, London, as was access to the Zena Vowell inscription, the photograph of which is my own, and the image at the end on the main text of Yeats's inscription of *Poems 1899-1905* to Lady Gregory. The image of the Gregg Mosada inscription is taken from *Yeats Annual* 20, 2016. Of which I am editor. All images of entries reproduced from book catalogues are my own, and from copies of catalogues which I have purchased over the years, except the images of Lot 410 and Dr Colin Smythe's hand annotation "Delisma", next to Lot 412, 24 July 1979, kindly supplied for publication by Dr Colin Smythe. Images of books, inscriptions, texts and objects from the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library were supplied to me by Dr Declan Kiely and Dr Carolyn Vega, of the Library. These include Images 5-15, for which I have credited "the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library and the Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations". The remaining images in Appendix 1 are from the freely available internet archive of the University of California and can be found on Project Gutenberg.

<sup>150</sup> New York, Knickerbocker Press, for John Lane, 1902 *Wade* 42. See the Sotheby Parke-Bernet, London Catalogue for 24 July 1979 Lot 410 (292). It was sold to Taylor for the then extraordinary price of £1900.

<sup>151</sup> *CWVP* 8, 283. Quinn immediately issued a 30-copy large-paper edition fully described at *Wade* 43 (61), with the corrected texts.



*Abbreviations*

ABA	Antiquarian Booksellers Association.
<i>ChronY</i>	<i>A W.B. Yeats Chronology</i> , by John S. Kelly (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
CL	<i>The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats. Volume I, 1865-1895</i> , ed. by John Kelly and Eric Domville; <i>Volume II, 1896-1900</i> , eds. Warwick Gould, John Kelly, Deirdre Toomey; <i>Volume III, 1901-1904</i> , and <i>Volume IV, 1905-1907</i> , eds John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, 1997, 1994, 2005).
CM	Conrad A. Balliet, with the assistance of Christine Mawhinney, <i>W.B. Yeats: A Census of the Manuscripts</i> (New York and London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990).
CW2	<i>The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats. Volume II: The Plays</i> , eds David R. Clark & Rosalind E. Clark (New York & London, Palgrave, 2001; New York, Scribner, 2001).
CWCP8	<i>The Collected Works in Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats</i> (Stratford-on-Avon, The Shakespeare Head Press, 1908), 8 vols.
<i>E&amp;I</i>	<i>Essays and Introductions</i> (London and New York, Macmillan, 1961).
EX	<i>Explorations</i> , selected by Mrs W.B. Yeats, London, Macmillan, 1962; New York, Macmillan, 1963.
HRHRC	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
IGE	<i>Ideas of Good and Evil</i> , London, Bullen 1903.
LJQ	<i>The Letters of John Quinn to W.B. Yeats</i> , edited by Alan B. Himber, with the assistance of George Mills Harper (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1983).
NBA	National Basketball Association.
NBC	National Broadcasting Company.
NLI	National Library of Ireland.
NLS	National Library of Scotland.
NLW	National Library of Wales.
NYPL	New York Public Library.
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.
<i>Quinn Cat</i>	Complete Catalogue of the Library of John Quinn sold by auction in five parts [with printed prices] (New York, The Anderson Galleries, 1924), 2 vols.
SHARP	Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing.
TCD	Trinity College Dublin.
TLS	Typed Letter, Signed.
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles.
VP	<i>The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats</i> , ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1957). Cited from the corrected third printing of 1966.
VSR	<i>The Secret Rose, Stories by W.B. Yeats: A Variorum Edition</i> , ed. Warwick Gould, Phillip L. Marcus, and Michael J. Sidnell (1981; 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. and enlarged, London, Macmillan, 1992).
Wade	Allan Wade, <i>A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats</i> , third ed. rev. by Russell K. Alspach (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968). Cited by item no. and/or page no. preceded by 'p.'. First ed.: London, Rupert-Hart Davis, 1951; second ed. rev: London, Rupert-Hart Davis, 1958.
YA	<i>Yeats Annual</i> (London, Macmillan, nos. 1-17, 1982-2007; Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, nos. 18-, < <a href="https://www.openbookpublishers.com/section/39/1">https://www.openbookpublishers.com/section/39/1</a> >), cited by no.
YL	Edward O'Shea, <i>A Descriptive Catalog of W. B. Yeats's Library</i> (New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1985).



## Miscellanea





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## A Woman of Irish Ancestry in the Cultural History of Italian Diplomacy

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### *Abstract:*

Starting from the Irish Manor and the Italian Villa a fil rouge connects Italian and Irish political situation in the eighteenth-century with the fragmentation of the Italic peninsula and its economic decline, and the fact of the post-British plantation system in Ireland with its own monarch and a Parliament controlled by Westminster. A historical account of the life of Mr. and Mrs. Vesey follows that creates a strong cultural link between the two nations. Next steps are Elizabeth Vesey's interest in Lucan House, her role in the creation of literary Salons, and her lifespan in the House. A true Italophile, she had the privilege as the first resident of Lucan House and her ability to create relationships between politicians and literati, of playing a role in the history of Italian diplomacy when the word had not yet appeared in Johnson's *Dictionary*.

*Keywords:* Bluestocking, Cultural Diplomacy, Gothic, Lucan House, Palladian Architecture

### *1. The Gothic Manor and The Italian Villa*

In 1746 The Right Honorable Agmondisham Vesey got married and lived in the Lucan Manor (10 miles from Dublin) with his wife and cousin Elizabeth Vesey, nicknamed Sylph. In 1776 Elizabeth Carter, the wife's close friend, wrote to their correspondent, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu:

Mr. Vesey is made a Privy Counsellor in Ireland, which I believe is very satisfactory to him; but probably our poor dear Sylph would have preferred his being made a constable or churchwarden in England. She has this afternoon been looking over the plan of the new house at Lucan, and seems greatly disturbed to find she is to inhabit a round room, where she conceives she shall be like an old parrot in a cage; upon which Mrs. Handcock and I have promised to add scarlet trimmings to her green gown. (Carter to Montague, Letter, London, May 15, 1776, in Pennington 1817, vol. 2, 357).

The next year, Mrs. Carter addresses the same issue:

I have heard from our dear Sylph [...] As to the house, it seems very little adapted to her genius. It is, I believe, a mere prosaic house, full of mortal comforts and conveniences, without the least particle of romance or sylphery in its whole composition. In short, a house much better adapted to the ordinary wants and purposes of the Right Honorable Agmondisham Vesey, Esq. and privy counsellor, than to those of his aethereal partner. Indeed by every description I have heard or saw of the old castle, the exchange of its irregular and solemn gothic form, for the present display of Mr. Vesey's correct Grecian taste, must be very grievous to her poetical imagination, which at all times was sufficient to prevent any languor from the want of rational conversation; but mere rational conversation is not all she wants; and unfortunately for her, a fine imagination in all its exercises, has a perpetual reference to the affections of the heart, and they reciprocally strengthen each other. With all these feelings, the dear old castle, with the niches in its walls, and a thousand other gothic beauties was to her inestimable; but alas! Mr. Vesey understands not. God mend her health, and give her better spirits, and return her to us next winter, not the worse for all her vexations, imaginary and real. (Carter to Montague, Letter, Deal, September 20, 1777, in Pennington 1817, vol. 3, 39)

The long quotes from Carter's letters say – jokingly – a lot about the old house and the new one, the Vesey couple, and Elizabeth's feelings, imagination, and yearning<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, what Carter conceived, thought or anticipated, is not always a genuine account of the situation (but of this anon).

It is only within the last few years that English and American critics have deigned to recognize any architectural school in Italy later than that of Vignola and Palladio, and even these two great masters of the sixteenth century have been held up as examples of degeneracy to a generation bred in the Ruskean code of art ethics [...] It is only in Germany that Italian architecture from Palladio to Juvara [*sic*] has received careful and sympathetic study. (Wharton 1904, 231)<sup>2</sup>

That is how, in “Villas of Venetia”, Edith Wharton (1862-1937), a scholarly advocate of the “vital moments” of the villa, is censuring the bulk of critics who would bow to John Ruskin's auspicated return from Neoclassicism to the earlier Gothic style, a verdict that springs from his belief that nature and beauty are bound up with concepts of the divine. It is not easy to deduce the different meanings attributed to “English” and “British” (that would include “Scottish” and “Welsh”); as to “Irishness”, the time referred to being before the 1916 proclamation of Irish independence from Britain with the Easter Rising, its Celtic history would often be overlooked. Scottish and Irish critics, independently minded as they were, would entertain, in many cases, different opinions from the English; the former, sometimes, as a matter of principle, the latter, assuredly, because of the links strengthened in the previous centuries, between Italy and Ireland since the welcome in Rome and the Italic territory of Irish political and religious refugees, of the Earls flown from Ulster, and later, of Daniel O'Connell, whose dying wish after his lifelong campaign against British absolutism was traditionally: “My body to Ireland, my heart to Rome, my soul to God” (Reiley 2014). In the next paragraph, Wharton argues that Italian architecture from Palladio to Juvarra has received “careful and sympathetic study” (231) only in Germany, through Swiss born historian Jacob Burckhardt, Gustav Ebe's book on the late Renaissance throughout Europe, and Cornelius Gurlitt who identified in Palladio and Sansovino the sources of the Venetian “villa-architecture” (*ibidem*).

<sup>1</sup> For Carter's relations with Elizabeth Vesey and Ireland see Haslett 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Wharton's work is significantly quoted in Ackerman 1990, 12.

The argument over the *villa* will direct this discussion towards the purport of the Palladian Irish country house, its historiographical origin, its socio-cultural value, and its significance, across the centuries, for the Irish-Italian diplomatic relations.

## 2. *Italy and Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*

After the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Renaissance, Italy experienced an economic and cultural development. The seventeenth century, instead, gradually saw a decline of the industrial structure and the standard of living. By the second decade of the eighteenth century, because of wars and political fractionalization, the peninsula was divided into different powerful dynasties: the Medici in Tuscany, the Farnese in Parma, the Este in Modena, and the Savoy in Piedmont; a Duke with hereditary title ruled the Duchy of Milan; the Spanish Empire ruled the kingdoms of Naples, Sicily, Sardinia; the Papal State ruled the remaining central part of the peninsula. Given the political situation, then, the economy had become exclusively agricultural and resources insufficient for the population.

In the sixteenth century Ireland had been colonized by the English. After the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 which saw the deposition of the catholic King James II of England, Mary II became Queen, then Joint Sovereign with William of Orange III. The heirs of the Protestant Ascendancy who had conquered Ireland in the Elizabethan age, the Anglo-Irish landed gentry, had control over the island. Ireland was nominally an autonomous kingdom with George I and its own Parliament; in fact, it was a state dominated by the King of Great Britain and supervised by his government in London. As of 1714, the island was ruled by the Hanoverian Kings until the 1798 Rebellion that was followed, in 1800, by the Acts of Union with which Ireland was formally annexed to the United Kingdom and its Parliament abolished (1 January 1800).

Eighteenth-century Ireland, a self-ruled region with its own King and Parliament, was a *de facto* state. In its autonomy, then, it should have been able to adopt its own laws and foreign policy; on the contrary, it was, to some *great* extent, dependent on Britain and on laws that could bind her own politics. “Italy”, instead, was not united but subject to the different Signori, the Pope, or the foreign Powers. Both nations were submitted to a coercive authority exerting power and were prevented from becoming unified. They were also both prevented from earning their independence until 1861, Italy, and 1922, Ireland as Irish Free State.

On the cultural-artistic level, Italy and Ireland were linked through the aftermath of the Grand Tour, the journey of formation of the European ruling class and their descendants (Italians as hosts, Irish as guests). The experience aimed at reforming the arts in Ireland. Such was the call of the ancient roots that a grant was proposed in Ireland, by Reverend Thomas Campbell, for native artists to study abroad so that, “England, nay Ireland, might yet vie with Italy” and would “bring Rome home to us” (Campbell 1767, in Stefanelli 2023, cxxv). Although the recommendation was not approved, the habit became established of buying works by art excellencies like Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Pompeo Batoni, Canaletto, or copies of Salvator Rosa’s masterpieces to bring back to Ireland and exhibit in galleries and public establishments. Acquiring pieces from Italy to put on show or sell was a way of popularizing the culture sprung from the Mediterranean.

Both nations shared a condition of hegemonic power exercised, for Italy, by noble families, the Papal authority, or a foreign invader, for Ireland, by the Protestant Ascendancy and foreign authorities on the island. The elite of both would connect with upper class members at home and broaden transnational contacts with members of other nations’ elitarian dignitaries via diplomatic channels or by crossing international borders. In the period under scrutiny the

Grand Tour was considered an initiation rite that became, as has been suggested, *un'istituzione* (De Seta 2014). The “Dream of Italy”, as a recent exhibition recites, was the dream of many Europeans, and of course the dream of the Irish, too<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. *Lucan House*

After several difficulties that included legal proceedings, the great demesne with the white house, in 1560, came into possession of Sir William Sarsfield, who became Lord Mayor of Dublin and sheriff of County Dublin (where the demesne belonged). When he died in 1616, his body buried in Lucan, the property went to his namesake, who died in 1642. His heir was his cousin Patrick, the father of General Patrick Sarsfield, first Earl of Lucan, considered by many a national hero for his role in the siege of Ballyneety (county Limerick) during the Williamite war of 1689-1691.

A neoclassical Monument (designed by James Wyatt) in the demesne is a memento of that Irish leading figure (1660-1693). With the death of Patrick Sarsfield's son in 1719 the male line of the family became extinct. William Sarsfield's daughter Charlotte, who had married Agmondisham Vesey senior, retrieved the property in the course of 1696 upon her husband's claim that, on the death of William Sarsfield in 1675, the Sarsfield estates had passed to his brother Patrick Sarsfield (created Earl of Lucan by King James in 1691) and, on the latter's attainder, were forfeited to the crown. Charlotte was allowed to purchase the estates at a low valuation. At her death in 1699, Agmondisham Sr. continued to live in Lucan, first as one resident, then with his second wife, Jane Butler, and their son, Agmondisham Jr. At Vesey Sr.'s death in 1738, Mrs. Vesey-Butler erected a shrine for him in the cemetery of the Lucan demesne. She lived there with her son, the Anglo-Irish descendant from the Sarsfield-Vesey family who would become the husband of the salonière Elizabeth Vesey<sup>4</sup>.

A quarter century after his marriage, Mr. Vesey, an amateur architect, started thinking seriously on the new Italian inspired mansion that was completed around 1777-1778. It was thanks to the new Lucan House and Mrs. Vesey's role in the intellectual society on both sides of the kingdom (London and Dublin) – referred to in what follows – that a first germ was planted of a cultural bridge between the Irish and the Italian culture to inform and perpetuate the diplomatic links between the two nations. In the mid-nineteen-fifties the Italian government acquired the demesne with the Lucan House as residence of the Ambassador of Italy in Ireland (Laffan, Rooney 2009, 180-181)<sup>5</sup>.

A short detour will draw attention to the fact that, during the long eighteenth-century, diplomacy in the modern sense was non-existent. Since the compilation of the six books' in-

<sup>3</sup> An exhibition, *Grand Tour. Dream of Italy from Venice to Pompeii*, took place in Milan, Gallerie d'Italia, Piazza Scala, from Nov. 19 to March 27, 2022. Curators of the exhibition were Fernando Mazzocca with Stefano Grandesso and Francesco Leone, coordinated by Gianfranco Brunelli.

<sup>4</sup> The Sarsfield-Vesey family, as can be gathered from above, started with the marriage of Charlotte Sarsfield and Agmondisham Vesey Sr., the second son of the Reverend John Vesey, Archbishop of Tuam (County Galway). Agmondisham Vesey Jr. kept the property until his death (1727-1785), when it passed to Agmondisham's nephew, Colonel George Vesey, who married Emily La Touche. Their daughter, Elizabeth Vesey (the namesake of our Elizabeth Vesey), kept the demesne until her death in 1840. Overall, the Lucan demesne belonged to the Sarsfield from 1560 to 1699; by way of marriage, it passed to the Vesey from 1699 to 1840. After that date it came into the ownership of Elizabeth's husband, Nicholas Colthurst. The Sarsfield-Vesey family kept the Lucan House demesne for just below 300 years (Bergin 2018; Irwin 1964). For a complete history of Lucan House, see Stefanelli 2023, clvii-clxix.

<sup>5</sup> The style of the Lucan House is often defined pseudo-Palladian or Neo-Palladian; Palladian, however, is what the owner and the architects who contributed to its building had in mind.



vestigation and criticism of archival and medieval documents and manuscripts by the Christian monk Jean Mabillon in his *De re diplomatica* (1681), more than a century would pass for the meaning of the French word *négociation* to be replaced, in the foreign affairs jargon, by an act of diplomacy, i.e. the art and science of maintaining peaceful relationships between nations, groups, or individuals. The word appeared in *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) in 1791, when both spouses who had lived in Lucan House had died. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of the Pentarchy (France, Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia) that dominated Europe and the great power rivalry between them, with diplomacy to confront the “culture of power” (Scott, Simms 2009); the subsequent century would gather from the previous one and develop the new idea of culture sprung from the Industrial Revolution: ordinary rather than elitarian, inclusive rather than exclusive, with growing social awareness and the knocking down of barriers.

In between the death of the two Veseys (1791) and the beginning of the diplomatic relationship between Italy and Ireland (Irish Free State 1922-1925), doctor Lorenzo Salazar Sarsfield (1857-1924) – with a special emphasis on his second surname<sup>6</sup> – the son of Italian Demetrio Salazar (1822-1888) and his wife, Anglo-Irish Dora MacNamara Sarsfield, was posted to Dublin as a Consul General of Italy to serve in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. During his mission as a diplomat, he founded The Dante Alighieri Society, the most prestigious member of which was Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of radio-wave based wireless telegraphy. He also obtained from the University of Dublin, Trinity College, a chair of Italian Language and Literature.

Today Lorenzo’s great great grandson, Vincenzo Ercole Salazar Sarsfield, an Italian Senior diplomat, serves at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rome. The bond grown between Italians and Irish in the past, enshrined in his surname, carries a four-century old history of “quite simply the most compatible people on the planet”, as former President of Ireland Mary McAleese has pronounced the Irish and the Italians (Savoia in Cortese 2023, ci).

#### 4 *The Vesey Couple*

Turning towards what has been called the infringement into people’s lives, it is imperative to recognize that taking into consideration people’s private lives is, by definition, impossible. It is plausible, however, to touch on events or occurrences stemming from endorsement from reliable sources, records from a subject’s private correspondence or a two-way interaction, on the study of the social and cultural contexts of the specific timeframe, and the conveyance, by word of mouth, of news, events, facts, comments, and even trivia to propagate.

The married life of Agmondisham Vesey Jr. with his cousin Elizabeth Vesey started in 1746, when the couple took their residence in the Lucan castle or, as was called in the county, Lucan Manor, a two-storey over basement a fortress like building with a five-bay extension accessed from a flight of stairs that went back to the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1159. A well-preserved tower belonging to the ancient dwelling rises north of the ruined church in the demesne.

Not long after their marriage, the couple befriended the Rev. Patrick Delany and Mary Granville Delany (1700-1788), who loved to be entertained at Lucan. The four of them had a liking for the minor art craft consisting of a collection of prints to exhibit on walls, a style that came from Italy, where it originated, and became fashionable in Ireland around 1750. Here is the description of Lady Louisa Connolly’s print room at Castletown: “The print room was assembled by pasting prints on to cream painted wallpaper surrounding them with elaborate

<sup>6</sup> See “The Sarsfields” in MacMahon 1995, 3-4

frames with bows and swags cut from printed sheets and then hanging whole sections on to the walls” (Tillyard 1995, 202 and 204). The Lady of the house thus satisfied her “pleasure in planning, ordering and balancing” (*ibidem*). It is the same appreciative manner that Mrs. Vesey would learn to relish at the sight of the Italian classical ideal beauty. Subsequently, as Lady Llanover reports, “Mary Delany visited her friends the Veseys, who lived at Lucan Castle, outside Dublin (replaced, sadly, in 1772 – print room and all – by a Palladian-style mansion)” (Letter no. 563, Mrs. Delany to Mrs. Dewes, June 30, 1750, in Llanover 1862, vol. 1), a visit that Mrs. Delany described in a letter to her sister, Mrs. Dewes:

On Monday, Mrs. F. Hamilton, Bushe, D.D. and I went to breakfast at Lucan, left this at half an hour after 7 [...] breakfast prepared for us in Mrs. Vesey’s dairy, and the table strewn with roses; just as we were in the midst of our repast came in Lady Caroline Fox, Mr. Fox, Mrs. Sandford, and Master Fox [...] Mr. Fox is a sensible, agreeable man. Lady C. F. humdrum. It rained furiously; so we fell to work making frames for print. (Mrs. Delany to Mrs. Dewes, Letter, Delville, 30 June, 1750, in Llanover 1861, vol. 2, 202-204)

On 11 April 1751, Mrs. Delany finally received the frames for the prints from her brother, Bernard Granville, to whom she explains the way of going ahead with the work:

I have received the six dozen frames all safely, and return to you, my dear brother, many thanks for them. They are four framing prints [...] The manner of doing them is to have straining frames made as much larger than your print as will allow of the border; the straining frame covered with coarse cloth, the print pasted on it, and then the borders, leaving half an inch or rather less of margin round the print. Mr. Vesey has a room filled with prints made up in that way, and they look very well. (34-35)

As the letter goes, it was Mr Vesey who played the role of print craftsman, and who revealed a sensibility at work described as masculine, classical works with no festoons.

In London Mr. Vesey, thanks also to Joshua Reynolds and his wife’s close friend Edmund Burke’s support, became a member of Dr. Johnson’s “Literary Club” in 1773. In his role as Professor of Architecture in Johnson’s utopian university, he could consult efficiently with the Scottish architect William Chambers about his plans for the new house.

London was the place where a community of learned ladies – the famous Bluestocking coterie – would begin to assemble, as it was happening in France, in the stately premises of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu (to be referred to, later, as “Queen of the Blues”) or at Mrs. Vesey’s lodging, to converse with literati and scholars like, among several others, Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, Adam Smith, Elizabeth Carter, Frances Burney, and personalities of different nationalities.

The following years saw the progress of the couple in the respective areas of activities with the wife providing increasing support to the husband’s enthusiasm and devotion to classical architecture.

The escalation of the Veseys took place with the intervention of painter Thomas Roberts (1748-1777), the young landscapist that the Irish aristocrats and politicians with an interest in neoclassic architecture who lived in Dublin – Lord Charlemont, Thomas Dawson, and Agmondisham Vesey – patronized. His father, “Honest” John, described by Maurice Craig, an “unreconstructed Palladian” (1982, 209), designed the Catholic cathedral of Waterford with Corinthian columns (Laffan, Rooney 2009, 18-19). Before the demolition of the castle and the realization of the Palladian replacement, Thomas was appointed by the Veseys to produce a quartet of four paintings attuned with one another, one of which flaunting the mansion to be destroyed. Two compositions of the “Lucan series”, *Lucan House and Demesne with Figures Quarrying Stone* (n.1) and *The River Liffey in Lucan House Demesne* (n.2), doubtlessly needed a special negotiation with Roberts’ patrons, and more particularly with Mrs. Vesey, about *her* presence (n.1) in the demesne as a figure at the front door in the act of leaving the iconic house in

the wake of her acquiescence of the new abode in the classical style. As for the couple walking in the park (n.2), though not irrefutably the figures of Agmondisham and Elizabeth – as Laffan and Rooney admit (2009, 173) – they gracefully announce the theme of classicism. The gentleman's position recalls the post-Hellenistic Roman marble statue of Apollo del Belvedere that Johann Joachim Winkelmann considered “the highest ideal of art among the ancient works that have survived to this day”<sup>7</sup>. The lady beside him, wearing an elegant attire in expensive purple colour traditionally associated with Royals and accessorized with a stately hat, was an adequate appearance beside her companion. For both, the suggestion came, unquestionably, from the painter.

As a sign of distinctiveness, in a painting intended to preserve the past when the present is *re-presented* in the plans for the new house, the Vesey couple are enjoying, as Arthur Young who visited the Lucan demesne refers in his report, “a walk on the banks of the river, chiefly under a variety of fine wood, which rises on varied slopes, in some parts gentle, in other steep; spreading here and there into cool meadows, on the opposite shore, rich banks of wood and scrubby ground” (1780, 20). As Mrs. Montagu writes in a letter to Mrs. Vesey, “the Gothick days of hospitality” are replaced, at the present time, with refinement and “finer virtues of politeness and delicacy” (Montagu to Vesey, Letter, September 2, 1777, Huntington, mssMO 6507), qualities associated, in Adam Smith's perspective, with “civilization” and “humanity” (1976, 190). In other words, the Lady's apparel, better suited to a social city gathering with the nobility than a stroll in search of fresh air between the verdure of plants and the water flowing towards the “salmon leap” (after “Leixlip”, a town near Lucan on the Liffey), represents the fusion of town and country, savagery and civilization, history and progress, as the Italian style Lucan House to be raised on the Irish natural grounds would symbolize. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, after all, culture required “a more serious social vision of country life” (Williams 1973, 68 and 83), with landscape to balance the real activities of industry that replaced the exclusively elitarian use of the land, as Roberts was transmitting to his patrons. Even the system of improvement that characterized the English countryside with those entering the owner/despot's domain being considered “intruders” was becoming old-fashioned when compared with painting, where the inhabitants of smaller cottages and dwellings were considered ornaments to the landscape.

A modern idea, linked with the new ethics that Roberts may have shared with his patrons, was the sense of inclusion through the “rustic figures” at work in the parkland to transmit to the viewer. Indubitably the explosion of the industrial revolution in England activated the necessity to be mindful of the social dimension involved in the architectural enterprise, namely the workers' hard labour, the owners' economic investment, and the enjoyment available to the community who would be granted the opportunity to walk, fish, rest, or simply benefit from the natural appeal of the trees and the river. An amenity at easy reach for Lucanians who were able to glimpse at the sumptuous quarters through a round opening in the wall to reveal the beauty of the edifice. Thomas Roberts, who was to die at only thirty years of age, anticipated, in his paintings, the concept of a cultural policy that would lead, in our time, to the implementation of cultural relationships that became fundamental when diplomatic relations between states had to be dealt with. With Elizabeth Vesey's Bluestocking assemblies, a wide policy of inclusion was adopted that led to internationalism, interculturalism, and the concept of a “soft power” based on the enhancement of the international presence of frequenters and the upgrading of their cultural standing on the global cultural scene – a strategy that many years later would characterize *cultural diplomacy* (Nye 2011).

<sup>7</sup> From the panel describing the absent statue Apollo del Belvedere in the Vatican Museums removed for restauration (December 11, 2023).

#### 4.2 Agmondisham Vesey Jr.

When the couple got married, the husband had been Accountant and Controller General of Ireland from 1734 and a Member of the Irish Parliament for Harristown, county Kildare, from 1740. The vote for Kinsale, county Cork, came later because a note for “Irish Parliamentary Elections” reports that in 1765 Mr. Vesey disbursed quite a considerable sum of money (£ 760 3s 6d) for entertainment, and more money for invitations to dinner and musical events towards his election<sup>8</sup>. Once his career was fully established and the seats in Parliament secured, The Right Honourable Vesey’s attention could be turned to the architectural context within which the classics inspired construction he had been dreaming of building would be raised. Several books are mentioned in Mrs. Vesey’s library, of which most with her bookplate, some others with the bookplate of her husband and of his heir, Colonel George Vesey, who inherited the demesne when his uncle died<sup>9</sup>. A list follows of the volumes Vesey could count on when he started to work for the new house: Sir William Chambers’ *A Treatise on Civil Architecture in which the Principles of that Art are laid down and illustrated by a great number of Plates* (1757) was certainly instrumental for Vesey’s planning, listing as it does “Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew”. A footnote in the catalogue draws attention to an observation by a Mr. Coulston: “It is a little curious that Scotland, at that time far behind the sister country in painting should have produced both Chambers and Adam, by far the greatest architects of their time [...]” (Robinson 1926, 7). A further group of architectural publications are listed along those without any bookplate, or with the Colonel’s. Given Agmondisham’s academic interest in the discipline, they might have belonged to the uncle with the added Colonel’s bookplate: F. Blondel, *Cours d’Architecture* (1698), Colin Campbell’s *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1731), Matthias Darly, *The Ornamental Architect or Young Artist’s Instructor* (1770), John Evelyn, *Parallel of the Ancient Architecture with the Modern* (with Palladio and L.B. Alberti among the ten Principal Authors who wrote upon the Five Orders, London 1733), William Salmon, *Palladio Londinensis* (1734), Vitruvius, *Les Dix Livres d’Architecture de Vitruve* (1684), Joseph Moxon on *Vignola* (1694), [Claude] Perrault, *Treatise of the Five Orders of [Columns in] Architecture* (1722), Brook Taylor, *New Principles of Linear Perspective* (1749; with Agmondisham Vesey in the List of Subscribers), J. Woolfe and J. Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannica; or the British Architect* (1767)<sup>10</sup>. A list of works, by English and Scottish authors, that does not

<sup>8</sup> A note, in the Sarsfield-Vesey collection, reports: “On June 26 he entertained eighty gentlemen to dinner at a cost of £80; and on the following day he expended £111 14s. 10d. on a ball and supper at which large quantities of wines and spirits were provided. Payments to the town clerk and four poll-takers, and to the sheriff ‘for expedition on the return’; the hire of horses and messengers ‘at and for a month before the election for divers errands’; and the providing of music and a gun with thirty pounds of gunpowder, further increased his expenses. In addition, he had to pay the travelling expenses of eight persons who came from Dublin to vote at the election of magistrates on June 29 ‘when a push was apprehended’” (McCracken 1947, 226; see: P.R.O.I. Sarsfield-Vesey Collection, bundle 54).

<sup>9</sup> When the date of the book publication refers to several decades before the Colonel came into possession of the demesne (1785), the book had belonged with satisfactory evidence to Agmondisham Vesey Jr., especially when the subject was architecture.

<sup>10</sup> Many more works listed: James Gibbs, *Book of Architecture: Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments* (1739), *The Designs of Inigo Jones* (1727, 1743), William Halfpenny, *A New and Complete System of Architecture Delineated* (1749) and *Practical Architecture* (1736), Joshua Kirby, *Dr Brook Taylor’s Method of Perspective Made Easy both in Theory and in Practice* (1755) and *The Perspective of Architecture* (1761), Batty Langley, *The Builder’s Director, or, Bench-Mate: Being a Pocket-Treasury of the Grecian, Roman, and Gothic Orders of Architecture* (1747), Robert Morris, *The Architectural Remembrancer* (1751), *Lectures on Architecture* (1734), and *Rural Architecture* (1750), Seb.

include any Irish book might surprise the reader. As a matter of fact, the architect whom the *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (2009), by way of Professor Edward McParland's pen, describes: "the greatest architect in Ireland in the first half of the eighteenth century [...] his greatest building, the Parliament House (latterly the Bank of Ireland) on College Green, Dublin, is a building of international significance" is Edward Lovett Pearce (1699-1733) who did not write books of any notice (2018). He, however, "showed himself, in his annotations to Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura* and in his drawings, to be a sensitive, learned, and discriminating architectural critic and scholar" (*ibidem*). His documentary legacy, too, is an important collection: it amounts to three volumes of architectural drawings catalogued for the use of those who study the architecture of the Georgian era (Colvin, Craig 1964). Too young for having talked to Agmondisham on any specific subject other than during an encounter with him as a child, Mr. Vesey may have learnt of Pearce as architect when he was only fourteen years old in connection with the building in 1722 of William Conolly's stately mansion in Celbrige (few miles away from Lucan), called (above mentioned) Castletown, the first Palladian country house, still today a renowned Georgian mansion. Commissioner of the Revenue in the reign of Queen Anne and George I, Privy councillor in the reign of George II, Speaker of the House of Commons in Ireland and ten times Lord Justice of Ireland, Conolly became rich from buying land confiscated from King James' supporters after the Battle of the Boyne in which William III defeated the exiled King James II (July 1st, 1690). As the only architect, at that time, to have studied in Italy and having travelled widely in the Veneto region where, in 1724, he studied many of Palladio's villas before returning to Ireland, Pearce could boast having met, and studied with, Italian architect Alessandro Galilei (1691-1737) who, in 1717, had come to work for his two kinsmen in Ireland where he "pioneered a neo-antique style of architecture" (McParland 2018). Once back to Italy in 1719, Galilei continued working on the plans for Castletown from a distance and, after meeting Sir Edward Lovett, may have recommended that the twenty-five-year-old continue working on the plans while staying connected with the Italian. The Irish architect's life ended in 1733; his contribution to Castletown consists of the entrance hall and the building of the curved colonnades and wings.

Other travellers on the Grand Tour that Vesey knew well were James Caulfeild, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord of Charlemont (1728) and Thomas Dawson. The former left in 1746, with his tutor Edward Murphy, for Italy, France, Spain, besides the Eastern countries, Turkey, Greece, and Egypt. In Rome he had associated with Giovanni Battista Piranesi, and became a benefactor, among others, of Sir William Chambers. He also journeyed to Vicenza (on the road back to Ireland) to survey the Palladian Villa "La Rotonda". Once home, he developed his estate and built his "Casino Marino"; he also approached Thomas Roberts to have him paint his jewel designed by Chambers. With his experience of Italy and, specifically Rome, he had a lot to teach to his friend Vesey who, despite his love for Neoclassicism, never travelled to the South of Europe. The latter grand tourist to Italy, Thomas Dawson (1725-1813), became a member of Parliament for county Monaghan for the period 1749-1768 and belonged to the House of Lords as Baron Dartry from 1770. The son of Richard Dawson and Elizabeth Vesey, Agmondisham Sr.'s daughter, he was Agmondisham Jr.'s cousin. He left for the Grand Tour when he was twenty-six and was at the same time in Rome as Lord Charlemont.

Le Clerc, *Treatise of Architecture* (1732), a translation by E. Chambers from the French of *The Practice of Perspective* (1743), Marie-Joseph Peyre, *Oeuvres d'Architecture* (1765), Stephen Riou, *The Grecian Orders of Architecture* (1767), Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra* (1753).

On January 1773 Vesey, who had already contacted Chambers on his project, wrote to the Scotsman: “I have got the landskip of Lucan and its environs and wish to show you the situation and aspect of a place which I am persuaded will receive great embellishments from your hands” (Laffan, Rooney 2009, 174) and two months later he informed him of his intention of “finishing the South front of your plan at Lucan” that summer. He also asked him for “any rough sketch for a portico of four columns” (*ibidem*). Chambers informed his Irish friend that he did not wish to continue to produce any further material for the house. It seems plausible that between 1772 and 1775 Vesey would have involved James Wyatt in the design of the house – the same Wyatt who would play a key role in the erection of the Monument to Patrick Sarsfield. The staircase at Castletown (completed as late as 1759) provided the model for the same element at Lucan (Irish Architectural Archive, *Dictionary of Irish Architects* 2024)<sup>11</sup>.

In 2017 a Society for Old Lucan (SOL) was founded. In “A new Approach to Lucan House” (2023), Jonathan Cully points out that, instead of incorporating a part of the existing building, the new Lucan House was raised nearer to the river, while the tower and a fraction of the old castle that Patrick Sarsfield had inhabited would stay in its place as a citation of the gothic manufacture. With the original castle demolished and the new house erected, the entrance that approached the house from the side, would have to be changed. “Wanting to better showcase his new house Agmondisham Vesey redesigned the grounds and access to his Demesne”, Cully continues. “A new, longer approach to Lucan House would be laid out, one which would frame the front of his new Villa in all its grandeur and leave any would-be visitors with no doubts as to Vesey’s wealth and standing in society”. Another way of providing the public “a tantalising view of Agmondisham Vesey’s new Palladian villa” was granted by the “oculus” that may have been barred eventually when safety reasons appeared more compelling than ostentation. The appeal of the demesne enriched with an orderly and enlightened Palladian Villa would be appraised nonetheless with security as inherent component of the project’s development (Cully 2023)<sup>12</sup>.

Though it is not possible to know how much of Agmondisham’s knowledge was shared with his wife, a considerable part of it must have been matter for discussion among the artist and both patrons. He curiosity might have also directed her to the Library.

#### 4.3 Elizabeth Vesey

Elizabeth was born in a more than distinguished family: her mother Mary, whose father Denny came to Ireland from Surrey (England) at the time of the Norman invasion, was the only heiress of the Muschamp family, her father Thomas Vesey (the second son of John Vesey, Archbishop of Tuam) was an Eton and Oxford educated First Baronet, and LL.D. honoris causa from Trinity College Dublin. He would become Bishop of Ossory and be created first Baronet of Abbeyleix in the Peerage of Ireland. Their daughter was a refined scion among whose family descendants would be the Viscounts de Vesci and Princess of Wales Diana Spencer.

Perhaps unexpectedly because of her intellectual vivacity, Elizabeth was not offered, being a woman, the choice of higher education. She is reported to have met Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu as early as 1749. By 1750, we are told, the two spa friends “arranged proto-salons during the summers at Tunbridge Wells; and soon after, salons are established every winter

<sup>11</sup> The footnote below his biography for the completion of Lucan House supplies the dates: 1773-1780/81, and the nature of the building: “Apparently contributed to design of house, modifying designs supplied by Chambers” (Vesey, Agmondisham, 1773-1780/8, in *Dictionary of Irish Architects* 1720-1940, n.p.).

<sup>12</sup> The Society for Old Lucan was founded in 2017 by a group of individuals living in Lucan who are all passionate about local history and heritage. See <<https://soc4oldlucan.com/home/blog>> (05/2024).

in the London drawing rooms of Hillstreet [Montagu's] and Bolton Row [Vesey's], as well as at other homes of lesser lights" (Heller 1998, 59). Their encounter was the beginning of a fellowship that developed into intimacy, with a rich correspondence between the two Elizabeths – more than a hundred letters from Vesey to Montagu and replies from the latter (see "Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers" at Huntington Library, San Marino, California). The bulk of existing letters, that the ladies often referred to as "conversations", are vital for the reader to become familiar with the exchange of each other's feelings, the news they supply concerning the societal circumstances and rituals, the celebrations or dramas of friends, affiliates, and associates, their covered political ideas and suggestions, along with, of course, gossip. They were vital, also, for Vesey who could not regularly join the London society on account of her living in Lucan when her husband's parliamentary sessions took place in Dublin – a thing that made her sad and melancholy, but also enlivened her correspondence with descriptions of pictures of the Lucan demesne.

There is evidence of Mrs. Vesey's gradual loosening of the chain that anchored her to the Irish ancient dwelling that greeted her in the demesne as a bride, and her anxious anticipation of the fine fashionable villa where she would live breathing the cultivated air of ancient Rome. Her appeal for the Italian culture was of long track, given her good command of the language and her acquaintance with the literature, of which she could be rightfully called a *connaissanceuse*, as is clear from her letters to Lord Lyttelton where she unsheathed her linguistic competence with several quotes from Ariosto, Tasso, and Guarini produced, unsuspectedly, by heart, and her metaphorical disguise behind a *mythic* heroine when, with a flirting approach to her addressee who suggests an elopement, she evokes Medea's kettle for her own rejuvenation<sup>13</sup>. Eliza Vesey, as she called herself, was not an ordinary type in the kingdom of England and Ireland with George I, the first Hanoverian king (1714-1727), at her birth recently crowned, to inaugurate the Georgian era in a period of spectacular maritime grandeur and commercial power. Among the collection of books, a few copies that make Mrs. Vesey's Library "original" carry titles like: *Three unknown books printed at Aberdeen*, *Four Unknown Editions of Cicero*, *The First Circumnavigation of the Globe*, and *The only copy known*, an account that makes the collection as special as her owner. Not to be neglected: works in Italian and Latin<sup>14</sup>.

It should not come as a surprise that the library catalogue unveils, interlaced with a non-strictly rigid alphabetical list of volumes interrupted by sets of thematic or nominal sections, a narrative that tells the reader of the newly acquired pursuance. An excursus from the erratic file advises the reader that the *Considerations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Decadance*, attributed to an unknown "[M.M. Bousquet ]" in square parentheses is, in fact, the work of the better-known Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, a Lausanne-printed edition with Mrs. Vesey's bookplate and her autograph dated 1749 which, at the time when the new construction was being discussed within the family, she had probably delved into already, being French literature and philosophy objects of study for aristocratic ladies. Other books that might have been part of a reading list traced in the catalogue are *Cyclopaedia* by Ephraim Chambers (no connection with the Scottish architect) who was competent in architecture, and a work, dated 1731, dealing with the Greek travels of Pausanias displaying both Mrs. Vesey's autograph in two places and Col. Vesey's bookplate. Similarly, Hooke's *Roman History* (1738-1771) bears both Mrs. Vesey's autographs in three places and Col. Vesey's bookplate. The list of valuable books to acquire for a historical background to the classics

<sup>13</sup> Six letters, Vesey to Lyttelton, are kept at Huntington, "Elizabeth Robinson Montagu Papers", mssMo 6265-6270.

<sup>14</sup> Algarotti, Dizionario di J. Baretto, Boccaccio, Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Petrarca; in Latin, Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, Cicero, Oratius, Lucretius, and other Italian, Latin and ancient Greek authors in English.

would have included *History of Greece at the time of Alexander the Great* by Goldsmith (d. 1774) and *History of England Starting from Julius Caesar's Conquest* by Hume (d. 1776). The relatively nearby dates of publication, 1774 for Goldsmith's with her bookplate and 1762-1763 for Hume's with her autograph in two places to which are added an "Index" and "Note in Her Hand" in vol. 1 and "Notes on Titles" of vols. 3 and 5 (1754-1762), suggest that Agmondisham's heir, who did affix his bookplate on Hume's publication, must have done so after Mrs. Vesey, who had probably received the books as a gift by the authors (both of them, their intimate friends) and, in accord with her own exquisite manners, had examined the books without hesitation and expressed her gratefulness to the authors<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4.4 *Elizabeth to Elizabeth or; Carter to Vesey*

As pointed out above (1), Elizabeth Carter, the scholar translator of Epictetus, was not too soft with her beloved, cherished Sylph, and often tried hard to supply her own (often wrong) impression and appreciation of Vesey's character and attitudes. She could not bear with her taking her distance from Gothic art and move closer to neoclassicism; she was in complete disagreement with Vesey siding with people who sought independence and demonstrated a freer mind; she half promised Eliza that she would go and visit her in Lucan, knowing in advance – and telling her! – that it would never happen; the idea of Vesey not being *English* was hard for her to metabolize, too.

Here follows a sequence of Carter's letters to give evidence of what has been pointed out.

For having turned back on the Gothic style, for betraying Britain's colonial policy, for not being English, and for submitting to her husband's will, Mrs. Vesey deserved being admonished, and Mrs. Carter did not refrain from an attack:

I hope if ever Mr. Vesey talked of demolishing this enchanting abode, he meant nothing more by it than merely to give you an opportunity for the display of your eloquence for its preservation. It is impossible he can be so unsentimental, so unpoetical, and so anti-romantic, as to think seriously of committing so atrocious an action against all the powers of imagination and against you – which all the courts of judicature in Europe, that have any degree of true taste, must allow a most sufficient ground of divorce [...]. (Carter to Vesey, Letter XXXVIII, Deal, August 3, 1768, in Pennington 1809, vol. 3, 343)

In the same letter, projections of the ancient castle's shadows and arches that characterized medieval cathedrals are mentioned *passim* to make Elizabeth aware (by Carter) of the serious error her husband was making while she, inappropriately, subjugated to the masculine authority:

Your French verses are pretty, but French verses can never be either sentimental or sublime; and to mention nothing more, I cannot bear the *riens* [French for: we are laughing] in the last stanza, which might do very well for the chateau of Monsieur le Marquis, but the idea does not form a proper accompaniment to the solemn shades and venerable arches which you and Lady Bingham have so well described at Lucan. (*Ibidem*)

and

<sup>15</sup> More books of historical interest listed in the library catalogue are: Abbé Gedoyn, *Pausanian ou Voyage Historique de la Grece* (1731), with Mrs. Vesey's autograph in two places beside the bookplate of Col. Vesey; N. Hooke, *The Roman History from the Building of Rome to the Ruin of the Commonwealth*, 4 vols (1757), with the bookplate of Col. Vesey and Mrs. Vesey's autograph in three places; Oliver Goldsmith, *The Grecian History from the Earliest State to the Death of Alexander the Great*, 2 vols., with Mrs. Vesey's bookplate in each (1774); David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688*, 6 vols, with the bookplate of Col. Vesey in each vol. and with Mrs. Vesey's autograph in two places, an "Index" and "Note in Her Hand" in vol. 1 and "Notes on Titles" of vols. 3 and 5, (1754-1762).



Will the day ever come that I should visit you there? If it was only to laugh, I should never wish it. One may laugh any where; [...] but I should form expectations of a much higher entertainment in conversing with you amid Gothic arches and ivyed towers". (343-344)

Carter's insistence on the Gothic features, cleverly opposed to the style of the Palladian replacement, however, does not question the beauty of the boisterous Lucan's landscape, much less in accord with a classic, pastoral atmosphere than with a native untamed nature, as the footnote useful to integrate Elizabeth and Lady Bingham's description suggests:

In Mr. Vesey's house in London were a set of views of Lucan, from which it appears as a delightful place, abounding in wild and picturesque scenery. (343)

Having set aside the direct opposition to the theme of the house demolition aiming at challenging Elizabeth's resistance, Carter uses a softer approach comforting her friend for the loss of a dear person with reference to a natural landscape reflected through an architectural element:

How much do I feel myself obliged to you for wishing so kindly that I might share your charming morning scene of the river; yet I think I would rather choose to meet you in the more solemn retreat, where the moonlight gleams through the gothic window: I hope you will transport yourself on one of the beams to return my visit on the sea-shore, where the moon forms a scene equally solemn, though in a different style, and I believe you would find the soft murmurs of the ebbing waves as musically soothing as the whispers of your trees. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXVII, Deal, September 10, 1770, in Pennington 1808, vol. 2, 21)

In her intention of waking up Elizabeth by way of asserting her right as a woman to visit the spa with female friends, Carter wrote Vesey in 1771:

By all means, my dear Mrs. Vesey, leave Dr. James to swallow his own powders, and Mr. Vesey to squabble with his two old gentlemen, and do you get as fast as you can to Tunbridge. If you do not find health in the spring, you will at least acquire good spirits from the society. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LIX, Deal, June 13, 1771, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 26)

A month later, she again opposes the style of the past with the fashion of today:

It is scarcely possible, I should suppose that you can have resisted the temptation of the great spectacle in your neighbourhood; at least I think, in the same situation, I could not. Yet perhaps I might have been disappointed in the expectation of realizing my ideas of gothic grandeur and solemnity as too probably the whole show will be influenced by the genius of modern taste, which has substituted the tinsel of finery and the whims of fancy, for the noble ornaments of magnificence, and the solemn and sublime enchantments of the imagination. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LX, Deal, July 26, 1771, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 29-30)

In a further epistolary exchange, Carter quotes from Vesey's letter, a way for the reader to have a first-hand look at the way in which her addressee denies that age might invalidate relationships unless for lack of love. The "natural ties are not loosened by age except in those who never loved much" were the words with which Carter agreed, making a point that:

It is not to these that ambition and avarice succeed, but to the other more earthly passions which are perpetually changing their appearance, 'stained with the variation of each soil', in passing through the several stages of a shifting mortal constitution. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXIV, Nov. 21, 1771, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 41)

If “variation of each soil” entails “variation from the soil of England”, the text evidently carries a nuance of racism towards her Irish friend, since halfway through her letter, she writes condescendingly:

I scarce even met with an Irish woman in my life, who did not in a very kindly manner take root and flourish in the soil of England. We are much obliged to you all for this partiality, for you have among you imported more sense and virtue than I fear we are likely to repay you, by all the hungry people whom we send to eat you up from thence. (43)

Won by Vesey’s soft reaction, she cannot but adopt a persuasive tone:

I congratulate you on the elevated situation of our dressing-room which exalts you above the fogs of Dublin and sets your imagination at liberty to expatiate in the regions of pure aether. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXV, Clarges Street, Feb. 7, 1772, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 45)

Elizabeth would rather express her fears to the more understanding Montagu by confessing her tremors before a decision that the future might judge not worth the financial effort:

Lucan is going on at a great expense I have the weakness not to be able to say no to a pleasant object tho’ it may have its edge in a future Day. The embellishment of Grounds is a smooth deceiver it appears so harmless so natural the solitary winter nights that threaten at a distance are well thought of. (Vesey to Montagu, Letter, July 6, 1774, Huntington, mssMO 6298)

On September 20, 1777, construction was near to completion at Lucan, so Carter, who conceived of her friend as a spiritual creature – “you sylphs, who range ‘the crystal wilds of air’” (1766, 288) – wrote to Montagu from Deal belittling the new Palladian construction because of its inappropriateness to Mr. Vesey’s wife’s intangible nature and good enough for his own normal and unexceptional needs, as was recorded above (1).

By October 2, 1777, Mrs. Vesey, who very much liked the new house thanks also to Thomas Roberts’ ability in preserving its memory through his art, mentioned the beauty of her boudoir as a countermeasure of being unable to reach London, and provoked such reply:

I am enchanted with the situation of your dressing room, and your moral application of the object with which it is furnished, will render it a better school of virtue, that the hermit’s hour-glass and bones, over which he sits dreaming over the end of life, while you are endeavouring to discipline the passions [...]

The same letter also contains a comment on the colonies:

Every body seems very impatient for important news from America; for my little part I have so little hope of any good to the public by such a quarrel, that I chiefly wish intelligence for the sake of the poor people who are anxious for their friends. Oh, that they were all safe in England! (Carter to Vesey, Letter CVIII, Deal, Oct. 2, 1777, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 185)

On 13 July 1775, Carter had written:

Though you are too much of an American to rejoice in the conquest of Long Island, you are however too much a friend of humanity, not to feel thankful, that it has been carried with so little loss on the side of our troops. I heartily wish it could have been accomplished with as little on the side of the poor misled provincials. God grant this check may incline them to listen to proposals of peace. (Carter to Vesey, Letter C, Deal October 13, 1776, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 163)

This piece, however, was preceded by another proposition that would sound rather rude to Mrs. Vesey's ears, if she did not know that Mrs. Carter, by her own admission, is capable of an "idle trick" deriving "from mere flippancy" (Carter to Vesey, Letter XLVI, Clarges Street, Feb 28, 1772, in Pennington Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 29-30):

I hope I shall close my Letter, with the account of their [our friends] being all safe and well on the Kentish shore; and may all bring back English hearts, and English manners, in which wish I trust you are not too well bred to join me. (Carter to Vesey, Letter C, Deal, October 13, 1776, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 162-163)

Carter's rejection of Mr. Vesey's guilty act of demolishing the Gothic castle for the neoclassical construction is evident from a comment in a letter à propos a funeral service she has attended of a young Queen imprisoned at Elsinore taking place in a reconstructed Pantheon model:

It is a strange transition from the solemn archs of Westminster Abbey, to the gay rotunda of the Pantheon, but as it is a fashionable thing, perhaps you will expect me to say something about it. Indeed I can say but little about it, for though I was there one evening I stayed but an hour and found that sufficient pour m'ennuyer. The architecture is, I believe, very fine: and it is, perhaps, the single instance in Europe of so large a building finished in all the nicety of a papier maché snuff-box. This mixture of great and little makes a confusion in one's ideas, and is, I think, by no means advantageous. You would, I think, be pleased with the appearance of the dome. It is lighted by invisible lamps which diffuse a general illumination, very soft and pleasing. In short it is an Arabian tale, or a fairy vision. (Carter to Vesey, Letter LXVI, Clarges Street, 28 February 1772, in Pennington 1809, vol. 4, 52)

### 5. *Politics and Diplomacy*

Whether Bluestocking assemblies would take place in Lucan or in London, it was a pleasure to be hosted by Elizabeth Vesey, as Mrs. Montagu very nicely puts it, when the new Lucan House is completed: "I hope you will convey me to Dublin, for I long to see your charming house, & ye centre of your round room is the centre of my wishes" (Montague to Carter, Letter, September 4, 1777, Huntington, mssMO 6507). Mary Delany and Hannah More, too, would direct attention to their friend's warm dwelling: "[...] no house in Ireland I like so well to be in for any time except my own" is Mrs. Delany's statement about visiting Mrs. Vesey in the Gothic Manor at Lucan when she lived in Dublin with her husband, Rev. Delany (Day 1991, 109), while Hannah More's comment is recorded by Robinson:

Hannah More, whose critical judgement was equal to that of any bluestocking, not only gave precedence to 'Vesey, of verse the judge and friend' in her poem *Bas Bleu*, but she also wrote 'I know of no house where there is such good rational society and a conversation so general, so easy, and so pleasant'. She was introduced to Johnson at Reynolds and pleased the great doctor by her not too artless flattery and her sprightly verses such as the *Bas Bleu*, which Johnson was permitted to see in manuscript. (1926, 34)

In 1772, Elizabeth Montagu describes Elizabeth Vesey's Salon to Elizabeth Carter emphasizing her ability as host: given the size of the room, her private meeting became an almost public one so that

it served a quasi-political purpose bringing together English, Scottish and Irishmen with different loyalties and beliefs who 'all gather together under the downy wing of the Sylph [i.e., Vesey], and are soothed into good humour: were she to withdraw her influence for a moment, discord would reassume her reign and we should hear the clashing of swords, the angry flirting of fans, and St Andrew and St Patrick gabbling in dire confusion the different dialects of the Erse language'. (Major 2002, 180)

The bluestocking salons, thus, “expanded the intellectual and the public space in which women could function without incurring social disapproval” (Meaney, O’Dowd, Whelan 2013, 23). That Vesey inclined towards the political is not a surprise, both as far as national and international affairs are concerned. The extension of nationalities represented in the Bluestocking circle is confirmed in one and a half lines by Hannah More in a letter to one of her sisters (dated London 1781), where she points out the geographical provenance of the profusion of guests followed by her experience of the meeting:

On Monday I was at Mrs. Vesey; she had collected her party from the Baltic to the Po, for there was a Russian nobleman, an Italian virtuoso, and General Paoli. In one corner was the pleasantest group in the world; and having peeped into the various parties in both rooms, I fixed upon that which I best liked. [...] The conversation was quite in my way, and in a great measure within my reach; it related chiefly to poetry and criticism. (Roberts 1845, 125)

Mary Hamilton also has a list of members of humanity one might encounter in the Salons:

one meets with a charming variety of society [...] the Learned, the witty, the old & young, the grave, gay, wise & unwise, the fine bred Man & the pert coxcomb; The elegant female, the chaste Matron, the severe prude, & the pert Miss, but be it remembered that you can run no risque in Mrs. Vesey’s parties of meeting with those who have no claim to respect. (1925, 132)

As to politics, a woman like Mary Delany would write “The world is in a bustle about American affairs, but I’m no politician, and don’t enter into those matters. Women lose all their dignity when they meddle with subjects that don’t belong to them” (Llanover 1862, vol. 2, 103). Maria Edgeworth would refuse her aunt to write on a political subject while she would have been ready to deal with any other subject. For Carter political affairs were threatening; Vesey, instead, is covertly in favour of the “sister colonies”, in respect of whom her dear friend Edmund Burke had pronounced a speech for conciliation (1755) in Parliament containing the famous sentence: “Whatever England has been growing to by a progressive increase of government, brought in by varieties of people, by succession of civilizing conquests and civilizing settlements, in a series of seventeen hundred years, you shall see as much added to her by America in a single life” (Anonymous 2010; for first edition see: Robinson 1926, 13). She was also attracted to Abbé Raynal, the prophet of American Revolution who denounced colonialism, despotism, and slavery, a contentious writer of *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770), and a champion of human rights whom she wished to introduce to Doctor Johnson while her friend Mrs. Carter – not unique in her judgement – deemed him “licentious, profligate, infidel” (Carter to Vesey, Letter CXLVI, Chapel-street, 9 January 1782, vol. 4, in Pennington 1809, 300). Lastly, among many other foreigners, one of her closest characters was General Pasquale Paoli, the Italian patriot who fought ardently for the independence of Corsica earning the confidence and respect, among other Bluestocking participants, of Samuel Boswell, who visited him in Corsica during his Grand Tour and wrote *An Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour to that Island and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* (1768) with a Foreword in the form of a letter from the Right Honourable George Lord Lyttelton where he states that the Government should have shown “more respect for Corsican liberty” (n.p.) and that, he thought, it “disgraces our nation that we do not live in good friendship with a brave people engaged in the noblest of all contests, a contest against tyranny” (n.p.) as he felt they had “never given us any cause for complaint” (n.p.). Besides Elizabeth Vesey, who was near to him in his London years after 1769, Paoli befriended Anna Barbauld, Hannah More, and Hester Thrale Piozzi.

At the time in which the replacement of the house took place, supposed regular (daily, weekly or monthly) sessions presumably took place of the patrons with twenty-two-year-old Roberts as custodian of the Gothic past to preserve. As illustrator of a contemporary broader landscape Roberts may well have suggested to incorporate the display of workers' activity, the small cottages with people and animals, and the vernacular architecture of the village with its busy coming-and-going to provide realism. Gradually, Elizabeth must have shelved the preference for the "dear old castle with its niches and the thousand Gothic beauties" of which her friend Elizabeth Carter was a devotee (Ball 1906, 53).

The new house brought with itself the need for a new decoration: in fact, Vesey's letter to Montagu about ornaments is a starting point to joke about her namesake being able, in her being originated from Circe, the sorceress, to fascinate ("bewitch") her own husband with a description ("Picture") of how the fine decoration of her Salon has added pepper ("je ne scais quoi") to the conversation: "there are who might assemble a company in one of their own coal pits and said company would swear at the bucket that was let down to whirl them up again into daylight but in general I think decoration not useless [...] there is a sort of finesse of arrangement – which tho short of magnificence adds je ne scais quoi to conversation in short it is what your Circeship has so artfully given a Picture of in your reverie to Mr Vesey which I think has bewitch'd him and as for me I am quite mad" (Vesey to Montagu, Letter, 5 March 1778, Huntington, mssMO 6319). Valuable ornaments in the new Lucan House can be identified in Michael Stapelton's plasterwork and Pietro Bossi's mantels, yet, more significantly, she might have played a role in having Pieter de Gree painting the roundels on the models of Angelica Kaufmann in the Blue Room (*blue* from Bluestocking?) on the left of the entrance Hall, a room that is symmetrical with the Library on the right of the entrance Hall. It is a sort of sought-after symmetry, visible from outside, with a dumb window created behind the mantelpiece in the Blue Room. Mrs. Vesey did meet Swiss-born painter Kaufmann, whom her artist-father escorted to Rome to study the Old Masters in Italy. In 1766 she travelled to London where she joined Sir Joshua Reynolds's social circle, and, of course, also attended Bluestocking meetings. She acquired a reputation for portraiture and history painting that led to her becoming a founder member of the Royal Academy in 1768, after which she started focusing her art on female subjects from classical history and mythology.

It is a pity that Elizabeth Vesey lived only for a short span of her life in Lucan House. Nonetheless she continued to entertain in Ireland. Through her polite dealing as a "Shepherdess" of her "flock" in Lucan House when the *villa* was finally available for living there and for her salons held in Ireland (Prendergast 2015, 78-105). At that point, she could count on the perfect venue for renovating the special friendship between Ireland and Italy, while unconsciously setting up the location for future discussions on Anglo-Irish Agreement, European Community policies, foreign affairs in general, and a major venue for international meetings and a polyglot social life – all those diplomatic events that would take place at Lucan House *in the twentieth-century* and through the *millennium* to follow. She thus earned a position in the history of diplomacy.

The last word is appropriately Montagu's, who, writing to Carter on 4 September 1772, remarks:

I delight already in ye prospect of ye blue box (alias Drawing Room) in which our Sylph assembles all the heterogeneous names in the World, & indeed in many respects resembles Paradise, for there ye Lion sits down by the Lamb, ye Tiger dandles with the Kid; the shy Scotchman and ye etourdi Hibernian, the Hero & Maccaroni, the Vestal and the demi [illegible] the Mungo of Ministry and the inflexible partizans of incorruptible Patriots, Beaux esprits & fine Gentlemen all gather together under the downy wing of the Sylph, & are soothed into good humour: were she to withdraw her influence a moment, discord wd reassume her reign and we shd hear the clashing of swords, the angry flirting of fans & St. Andrews and St. Patrick gabbling in dire confusion of different dialects of ye Erse language. Methinks

I see our Sylph moving in her circle, & by some unknown attraction keeping the whole system in due order. (Montagu to Carter, Letter, 4 September 1772, Huntington, mssMO 3304)

A timely circumstance has involved Lucan House demesne in a program of revision of the embassies abroad. Its extraterritoriality status, therefore, will end in May 2024, when President of Italy Sergio Mattarella will give back the Italian inspired House to the Irish people, who, according to their cultural history and intellectual traditions, will treasure it involving visitors in a historical narrative that speaks of the Italian soil's ancient heritage. From now on, Italian visitors in Ireland will take the opportunity to recognize in the original example of Palladian architecture on the Liffey shores a source of one stage of their own civilization.

The closing lines of *Bas Bleu*, the poem devoted to Vesey, convey the depth of her ethical views strictly linked with her intellectual appreciation of the interchange of ideas and thoughts, an entertainment that she cultivated throughout her life (cf. Haslett 2010):

'Tis more than wit, 'tis moral Beauty  
'Tis pleasure rising out of duty (More 1786, 95)

With charm and the “witchcraft” of “conversation”, Vesey uses a “magic spell” that infuses national and moral excellence to the poem, both qualities that make *conversation* a duty and a pleasure with *civilization*, and characterize both society and the nation. A framework, therefore, for the soon to flourish art of *diplomacy*, ironically registered in an update of Johnson's *Dictionary* in the year of her death.

After only seven years from their relocation, Agmondisham died (1785), and Elizabeth suffered her loss before her mental health slowly started to deteriorate.

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# Burdens and Opportunities of Tradition in Artistic Communities: Listening to Narratives of the Arts in Siamsa Tíre's *Sounds Like Folk* Podcast Series

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## *Abstract:*

Like many venues and arts companies across the world, the Siamsa Tíre Theatre and Arts Centre in Tralee, Co. Kerry, Ireland experienced significant disruption to programming and other activities due to COVID-19 between 2019 and 2022. One of Siamsa Tíre's responses was the development of a podcast series, *Sounds like folk*. In this paper, I critically reflect on the representation and evocation of two communities of artistic practice internal and external to Siamsa Tíre. I highlight recurring themes that include the value of collaboration in arts practice, the sense of duality between tradition and innovation, and references to the Irish language and its role in current artistic endeavour. The podcasts reflect efforts to engage respectively and creatively with folk culture and intangible cultural heritage, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities presented by the material and the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Folk Theatre, Irish Language, Irish Traditional Music, Podcasts, Siamsa Tíre

## *1. Introduction*

*Sounds like folk* is a podcast series by Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland featuring guests from the performing company and the wider arts scene in Ireland. The company's Repertory Director, Joanne Barry whose responsibilities normally centre on the preparation of summer season productions and the training of cast, presented the series. The podcasts provided an opportunity to reflect on and discuss matters of importance to Siamsa Tíre and the wider arts community in Ireland. The guests include current and former cast members, associate and other external artists, trainees and former employees. As a podcast series,

it facilitated connection with members of the communities in a virtual space at a time when face-to-face interaction, including live performance, was limited by COVID-19 restrictions.

Siamsa Tíre developed from community initiatives in the 1960s, spearheaded by a local priest, Pat Ahern (Foley 2013; Phelan 2014; Motherway, O’Connell 2022). The introduction to each episode of *Sounds like folk* recalls the origins of the company from within the local community. Despite the appellation “National Folk Theatre”, Siamsa Tíre are a provincial theatre company (Kearney 2021a), and the podcast provides a perspective on the Irish arts scene from a rural, west of Ireland position, mixing local interest with a wider discussion from artists who are part of a wider network. The discussions on *Sounds like folk* are dominated by a desire to understand what Siamsa Tíre is and how it can develop as a relevant folk theatre company. References to places and spaces firmly locate the Siamsa Tíre community in Kerry; older members reflect on the Teach Siamsa in Finuge, a training centre that, along with another similar centre at Carraig in west Kerry, is currently not in use, with great affection, affording it near mythical status; a news story indicating that Siamsa Tíre were to sell the Teach Siamsa in Finuge in the early 2000s was met with a negative reaction by many former members (Kearney 2013).

The format of the podcast is a conversation between Barry with a series of guests about Siamsa Tíre and their understanding and experience of folk culture. The series also aims to “examine the idea of folk theatre and where it stands in today’s world” (Siamsa Tíre 2021). The guests include current and former cast members and professional artists with former or current links to the company. In this paper, I critically examine the narratives, which are co-constructed through conversations in these programmes. The aim of the paper is to critically engage with the themes that emerge through the podcast series, consider the purpose of and audience for the podcast series, and how it sheds light on the workings of the company. I critique the balancing of emic reflections that evoke some of the history and philosophy of the company, and a desire to move forward through collaboration with other artists, and how this may inform an understanding of artistic engagement with themes from folk culture in a theatrical context. I argue that these discussions can inform a wider understanding of folk arts and the desire for artistic innovation in Ireland and internationally.

## 2. Positionality and Circumstance

It is important to consider the circumstances and context in which the series was developed, as well as my positionality as researcher and the positionality of each of the individuals involved in the podcast. There is recurring reference to COVID-19, described by many guests as an opportunity to pause and reflect, but this was a period of challenges for many involved in the arts and events industries. Those employed in these sectors faced loss of income and restrictions on their ability to engage in their practice. They, along with community arts practitioners, some of whom earned some income from their arts practice, also highlighted the impact on their social lives and well-being. Influenced by policies in Ireland that sought to restrict people at times to within 5km of their home, the conversations consider the fact that the “local is global” and this podcast series presented an opportunity to engage a global audience in a conversation from the south west of Ireland.

With the theatre building closed for extended periods due to restrictions related to COVID-19, Siamsa Tíre took time to consider the essence and purpose of the company. This process involved professional facilitators including artists and public relations experts leading to a rebranding with a new logo and an Associate Artists Scheme, established in Autumn 2020 with the aim “to support and engage professional artists across Ireland whose work explores folk artforms and folk culture in different ways” (*ibidem*). The podcast appears to align well

with these other developments and, collectively, there is evidence that these informed new directions in creative practice and development by members of the company. These efforts signify a desire to refute any suggestions that the company is solely focused on tourism (see Foley 2015; Kearney 2022b), not relevant to an Irish audience and insular in its thinking. The parallel approaches of speaking to people within the Siamsa Tíre performing community and with artists with whom Siamsa Tíre may have or seek to collaborate with present two conversations that are both introspective and outward looking.

My positionality has challenged me in listening to this podcast and writing this paper. I know the presenter and many of the guests, having trained and performed with some of them. I can relate to some of the stories, which echo my experiences. I auditioned for and attended classes in music, song, dance, and theatre in the training centre in Finuge, before auditioning again for a place in the cast. Through my teenage years, I began performing up to six nights a week throughout the summer and, at times, worked in a full time capacity for the company performing, developing new work and training younger members. Although no longer directly involved with the company, I continue to undertake research that is based on, inspired by or engaged with my experience of Siamsa Tíre and its ongoing development. I represent one of the audiences for this podcast – a member of the extended Siamsa community – but I am also listening critically as an academic, seeking to develop an understanding of the artistic culture being represented by Siamsa Tíre and the podcast series.

Barry's positionality is also important, particularly her relationship with her guests. She is the Repertory Director for the company and, in her conversations she is speaking with her colleagues including her line manager and cast members whom she directs, and artists with whom she has worked previously. In some instances, the personal relationships that Barry has with her guests, some extending back to childhood, add a warmth and richness to the discussion but with a challenge to ensure that the conversation is relatable to a broader audience. This reflects Siobhán McHugh's assertion that "podcasting is fomenting a new, more informal, genre of audio narrative feature centred on a strong relationship between host and listener, with content that is 'talkier' and less crafted" (2016, 65). It also echoes trends towards personal narrative journalism and podcasting that present "subjective approaches to storytelling" and "explore lived, personal experiences" (Lindgren 2016, 23). Aided by her prior relationships with her guests, Barry succeeds in maintaining a flowing conversation with them.

Critically listening across several episodes evidences a richness to the series that may lead to it achieving more than its stated aim to "examine the idea of folk theatre and where it stands in today's world" (Siamsa Tíre 2021). The series draws attention to different contexts for the arts in Ireland that may be divided between professional and participatory and sometimes rural and urban. The format of the podcast conversation allows Barry to articulate her opinions and perspectives, often giving an insight into the current and ever-evolving philosophy of Siamsa Tíre, which is developed by the people who are there at a particular point in time. Informed by Edward Said's (2004) reflections on the public role of writers and intellectuals in a globalised economy, I examine how *Sounds like folk* facilitates intellectual participation and engagement with the public sphere on developments in the arts in Ireland in the context of a locally based theatre company.

### 3. Podcasting

Podcasts have become a popular media with increasing audiences in recent years. The controversy in 2022 surrounding the Josh Rogan series on Spotify, in which Rogan was accused of

spreading misinformation about COVID-19, not only related to content but highlighted the significant amount of money and number of followers involved and reflects the public attention being paid to the media form (Forde 2022; Lynsky 2022). McHugh (2016) identifies a post-2014 resurgence of podcasting that engages with non-fictional audio storytelling formats, highlighting a growth in the sector and differences with radio as a mode of delivery (see also Berry 2015). Various groups and individuals have embraced podcasting to reach audiences. Artists use podcasts to engage with fans and cultivate a sense of community, building “audience connections by expanding interaction beyond their episodes and into the online spaces” (Wrather 2016, 43). For a theatre company and artistic community, *Sounds like folk* seeks to speak to two distinct yet inextricably linked audiences – those who may have an interest in viewing the theatrical productions and those who are part of the community that created them.

Introducing *Podcasts: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*, Llinares, Fox and Berry state that podcasting “exemplifies the maxim that ‘the specific is universal’ by creating spaces for niche and cult content that caters for the more idiosyncratic cultures of interest” (2018, 2). This is echoed by John Sullivan who states:

the popular fascination with podcasting stems mainly from the home-grown, grassroots nature of its content. Thanks to independent and amateur podcasters creating new podcast episodes on a continual basis, podcasting has developed a powerful ethos of authenticity. Since the economic and technological barriers to podcast production are low, tens of thousands of podcast shows have mushroomed, covering extremely small ‘niche’ topics. (2018, 39)

Although engaging in the production of these podcasts as part of her employment with Siamsa Tíre, Barry is not a “professional” presenter and there is a “broadcasting from home” vibe communicated through the series. Barry compares the podcast to the tradition of *bothántaíocht* or visiting neighbouring houses for conversation. Despite the niche nature of the podcasts, they provide insights into the zeitgeist, drawing on particular perspectives of the arts in Ireland, and sometimes internationally, during a particular period or set of circumstances shaped by a global pandemic.

The format, structure and approach of *Sounds like folk* is comparable with other podcasts and offers listeners opportunities to hear intimate conversations, sometimes augmented with recordings of music and song, without a fee. In her introduction to a review of the podcast series *Ethnomusicology Today*, Lea Hagmann states:

Podcasts are easy to produce, more affordable than printed books or films, and released in a format that can be easily and rapidly accessed by consumers around the world. In addition, podcasts can be more inclusive than written texts by communicating musical knowledge cross educational, social, and economic boundaries. (2021, 209)

*Sounds like folk* demonstrates many of the aspects described by Hagmann, although musical examples are not present in every episode. For *Sounds like folk*, each of the episodes is approximately between 40 and 50 minutes in duration and is usually a relaxed conversation structured around questions that are shared with guests in advance. For the most part, this structure does not inhibit the discussion but allows Barry to maintain some consistency in thematic content across the programmes.

The diversity of guests chosen by Barry lead to different perspectives on both Siamsa Tíre and the wider Irish arts scene but there are some overlapping themes. While Siamsa Tíre is part of a wider arts network, the conversations highlight that for some of the Siamsa Tíre members, their awareness of, or engagement with, the arts scene beyond the company is limited, while others have “moved on” from Siamsa Tíre to develop careers in the arts elsewhere. A number

of the conversations discuss ways to develop new work and innovate, often trying to connect this to various understandings of folk culture. It is unsurprising that the impact of COVID-19 on the arts in Ireland is a recurring question. It becomes evident that Siamsa Tíre, like other artists, are active citizens who are seeking to shape the place where they live, responding to the challenges faced by both the company and society.

#### 4. *A Sense of Community*

The programmes begin with audio of reels performed by the company's musicians, with a voiceover by Barry:

Despite current restrictions, the creative impulse to swap our stories and engage with our audiences remains. I hope you enjoy this new way of *bothántaíocht* or gathering together, allowing a window into Siamsa Tíre, which itself was born from a coming together of like-minded people; a place where ideas and stories are celebrated.

The guests on *Sounds like folk* may be viewed as two separate groupings – one reflecting a specifically Siamsa Tíre community and one reflecting a wider arts community, although some reflect an overlap.

A sense of community amongst Siamsa Tíre performers is very evident in the episodes with both current and former cast members. It is useful to contrast the older memories of Anne O'Donnell, Nóirín Lynch and Pierce Heaslip (Barry 2021c), with the more recent reflections of the younger group of Derwin Myers, Helena Brosnan and Jamie Flannery (Barry 2021g). The first cohort reflect the long history of the company and highlight some notable activities, including Pierce Heaslip's reflections on the 1976 tour to the USA that included performances on Broadway (see also Kearney 2019; Kearney 2022b). Through this discourse, the series asserts a link with the past and the history of the company. Heaslip speaks about taking over from his father Liam, or singing the song "Róisín Dubh", which is associated with another cast member, Seán Ahern, articulating the transition across generations. Heaslip and Barry highlight the importance of the 1991 production *Ding Dong Dederó*, performed first for the opening of the new theatre, when a number of former cast members returned to perform with the company. Remembering her early involvement with Siamsa Tíre and the production *Ding Dong Dederó*, Paula Murrphy reflects on the opening of the Siamsa Tíre Theatre and Arts Centre in Tralee in 1991 and what it symbolised for those who had been involved in the beginning (Barry 2021a). Many dignitaries attended the opening, which received national television coverage. Indicating a desire to reconnect with different generations of the company, O'Donnell suggests a need to explore that activity again (Barry 2021c).

Repeating a trope familiar to many in the community cast, members refer to Siamsa Tíre as a family, with all of the difficulties that being part of a family includes. Myers highlighted the amount of time spent together, particularly during the summer, which contributes to a sense of community (Barry 2021g). Similarly, Flannery noted the like-mindedness of everybody coming together and the bond between members, stating "you mightn't see each other for six months" but get back on stage together and connect again (*ibidem*). Myers identifies the theatre as a "safe space" that evokes a sense of "home" when he returns but also values the "seal of approval" from older cast members, something that is repeated by Lynch and Heaslip with specific reference to founding member Seán Ahern. Rob Heaslip points to the importance placed on being a member of the company by his family, notably his grandmother. It is notable that each of the guests, like many others in Siamsa Tíre, have family members who have performed with the company (Barry 2021i). The development of the cast, often through training from a young age

before integrating young performers into productions alongside more established members of the cast, contributes to this sense of community. Some also refer to the experience of touring abroad and how that was both an adventure and something that solidified friendships.

Reflecting on their shared experience, Barry and Murríhy reflect on learning from older cast members. In a few episodes, Barry describes the learning as a process of osmosis, learning from watching the older performers. In conversation with Drummey, Barry reflects on how they “soaked up all this information” as children, saying “we were sort of trained as professional actors but no one said ‘oh you’re being trained now’, we just watched people and learned and [...] looked at all the experts” (Barry 2021j). Murríhy remembers that there was never a direct instruction on how to walk or how to sing, rather the younger members were surrounded by the older generation and “there was a handing down of traditions that happened quite naturally, even on stage” (Barry 2021a). She notes her fortune to be part of the generation that performed alongside some of the founding members. Pierce Heaslip goes further, noting how he watched his father before taking over from his father and then watching his own children join the cast (Barry 2021c). Drummey states: “When you have the foundation that we had and you are learning from the masters and people who are so brilliant at what they do, then you are really getting such a great foundation for being a professional” (Barry 2021j).

### 5. *Beyond Siamsa Tíre*

While some members of Siamsa Tíre have performed with the company over several decades, many of those who train with the company leave the area for further studies and employment. Some continue to pursue careers in the arts, which are influenced or informed by their formative experiences with the company. Conversations with opera singer Paula Murríhy, actor and film-maker Sarah Jane Drummey and choreographer Rob Heaslip highlight how their early experiences with Siamsa Tíre supported their career development. Although her participation with Siamsa Tíre was shorter, singer Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh also recognizes the value of her three years of training in the Teach Siamsa in Carraig and summer season performances subsequently (Barry 2021n). She expresses a feeling that, as a child, she “didn’t fit in” at a stage when she was still developing and wanting to explore the traditions without yet having a focus. Each of these guests highlight the impact of the experiences they gained with Siamsa Tíre in their youth, albeit their training was further developed in other contexts. In contrast to the others, Drummey did not undertake formal training but had the confidence, having completed a university degree in languages, to seek work with the belief that her training and experience with Siamsa Tíre was sufficient. Commenting on her decision to pursue a career in acting, Drummey states:

We all started as children. When you start at that age, not only did we get the training for two years and then you go and you audition to get into the main company, and you’re performing four nights a week during the summer season, you’re going away on tour, you are involved in the creation and development of new plays and exciting new dance pieces, and then you see a core ensemble being created and you see that they get to do this all day every day, and for me it was a no brainer, of course I wanted to spend my life doing this. (Barry 2021j)

The idea of establishing a professional ethos is particularly evident in conversations with Drummey and Murríhy. Drummey states:

What we were getting was the discipline, and the level of professionalism that is necessary to do, in any field of work, but especially in our industry, of showing up on time, and rehearsing to death, and getting it right and doing it over and over and over again so that you really get the show that you want. It was invaluable, it really was, and I never underestimate that. (*Ibidem*)

Murrihy similarly points to the professionalism of the company, noting in particular the repetition of shows with different cast members and the need to always be fresh every time.

The way that we performed and that we learned there was a lot of repetition of certain shows [...] we had to also be fresh in ourselves and find new things every time as well and that is something that has stood to me to this day. [...] We learned that from the older members of the company. (Barry 2021a)

As well as the importance and influence of the training and performance experience, all of the guests who had performed in the Siamsa Tíre cast also pointed to the sense of fun that is felt on and off stage. This sense of fun is intergenerational.

The influence of Siamsa Tíre is evident in the subsequent professional artistic output of former members. Murrihy's debut solo album *I Will Walk With My Love* released in 2020 presents "a programme loosely based on folksong, or the idea of it" (Jeal 2020). Rob Heaslip's works such as *Strawboys* (2021) and *Meitheal* (2012) are suggestive of direct links to his experiences of training and performing with Siamsa Tíre. While folklore and "folk" is evident in a number of Heaslip's works, the connection with Siamsa Tíre is most explicit in the use of a song from the production *Oileán* in his work. Embracing the political undertones of the song, but seeking to creatively enquire about what the future might be, Drummey developed a film around the song "Róisín Dubh" (2018) in which she seeks to celebrate the power of storytelling and the artistry of sean nós singing. Drummey recognises the importance of this song in the repertoire and for the community of Siamsa Tíre. The song is also cited and featured in episodes with other guests, notable when Pierce Heaslip reflects on being invited to sing the song after the retirement of Seán Ahern. In a subsequent film, *134* (2019), Drummey involves performers including Anne O'Donnell, Jimmy Smith, Anne McAulliffe and Nicky McAulliffe, with whom she had performed in Siamsa Tíre.

## 6. *The Burden of Tradition*

The echoes of inherited source material are evident in both productions by Siamsa Tíre, which often include intertextual references to previous productions (Kearney 2022a), and the outputs of former members, whose work, like that of Heaslip and Drummey, contains intertextual references to particular songs. From its inception, Siamsa Tíre has had a close connection to its local area, seeking to draw up and represent the intangible cultural heritage of Kerry. The episode with current Artistic Director, Jonathan Kelliher, presents an informative autobiographical portrait that inextricably connects Kelliher with both the milieu of North Kerry and the company. He details his family background, early training in the Teach Siamsa in Finuge before "graduating" to perform with the company in Tralee and subsequently being offered a full time professional position with the company. With references to music-making in the home, the Listowel Races and going to the bog, Kelliher embodies the lingering culture that inspired founding Artistic Director Pat Ahern to develop the company, probably best exemplified in the production *Fadó Fadó* (1968). Kelliher's older brother and sister were already part of the company but Kelliher himself would dedicate himself to this as a career, particularly in the area of dance. The episode may be read as the constructing a justification for Kelliher's occupation of the role of Artistic Director of the company and also recognises the challenge for Artistic Directors of the company to both develop and continue the mission of Siamsa Tíre.

The sense of tradition as burden is also articulated by Kennedy, who was appointed to the role of General Manager of Siamsa Tíre at the age of twenty-six. She points to the legacy of Martin Whelan, who had been with the company for twenty-six years. While Kelliher attempts

to articulate a respect for his predecessor Ahern but also “move on”, Kennedy explains that she was directed in her thinking by a consideration for what Whelan would do in her situation. However, Kennedy also refers to the institutional knowledge of the company, stating “the whole of Siamsa is based on the intergenerational, and the value placed on people and community” (Barry 2021f). She concludes her conversation with Barry noting that, when Pat Ahern began, he was imagining something that did not exist and now artists are at a point where they must imagine again, but with institutional knowledge behind them.

Other episodes provide a similar thread that indicate some of the challenges faced by the company members who may feel inhibited by an understanding of “folk” and “tradition”. Reflecting on current discourse on and trends in music, singer and broadcaster Ruth Smith highlights the blurring of what “folk music” is (Barry 2021b). In the context of dance, Barry describes choreographer Michael Keegan-Dolan’s work as contemporary folk culture with Keegan-Dolan suggesting that we can be overly concerned with what is “new” and forget things that are “good” from the past (Barry 2021e). Conor Mitchell speaks about a particular Belfast context and his experience growing up where there was a sense of erasure of the traditional arts amongst some communities (Barry 2022). In conversation with theatre maker Philip McMahon, Barry reflects on her own position stating: “there’s other things we want to say within that folk idiom, you know, and sometimes there is a resistance to that” (2021d). It perhaps underlines the fact that the diversity of work undertaken by Siamsa Tíre has not always been appreciated but it also relates to the sense of tradition that Kelliher articulates almost like a burden. While asserting a respect for those who came before and the work that they did, Kelliher underlines the need for artistic development and refers to activities that the professional company engage in that might not, in itself make the stage, but inform the creative processes. Lynch suggests that reverence for the past and the opinions for older ideas is too strong but notes the regular turnover within the cast (Barry 2021c). In the same episode, O’Donnell refers to comments made by Philip King, a broadcaster based in West Kerry, who described Siamsa Tíre as a car driving forward but always looking in the rear view mirror. Across a number of episodes, guests discuss how engaging with the past informs development.

Siamsa Tíre’s history has shaped its identity and influences the development and reception of the company. It has become a tradition, with all of the need to engage in a discussion around change and development. Saying, “There’s such a story behind you”, Kelliher emphasizes the respect that he has for the people that came before him and what they have achieved but, emphasizing a “but” he states:

You can’t live in that shadow, that’s the other side of it. You just can’t. You have to move on, you have to move forward with what we all believe in, what you believe in yourself, and what the current members believe in; that’s so, so important. But you still have to keep that spirit and that ethos that started the whole thing, back in the 60s, that has to be in your mind and in your heart and you have to bring that with you. You always have to be respectful of what was given to you [...] You have the responsibility of ensuring that what you have been given is passed on to the next generation. (Barry 2021h)

It is critical to understand, therefore, what Siamsa Tíre is and what Kelliher and his colleagues have inherited. It is more than a repertoire of music, song and dance. It is an approach to presenting this material on stage, innovating using traditional sources and engaging with other artists. There is a “professionalism”, whereby cast members who are not full time performers conduct themselves in a professional manner in the context of the theatre. Attitudes to rehearsals, pre-show preparations, awareness of health and safety, engagement in technical aspects including sound and lighting, and respect for fellow cast members are all part of an



enculturation process. In contrast with many other theatre companies, there is a regular return to source, be it performances of *Fadó Fadó*, a version of the first production devised in the 1960s, or engagement with recordings of the North Kerry dancers such as Jack Lyons and other pupils of the dancing master Jeremiah Molyneaux.

Emphasising the importance of the Munnix dance tradition for the company, speaking with Kelliher, Barry states, “down through the years, whether you know it or not, you have become the go-to guy for Munnix” (*ibidem*). She refers to the *From the Sources* (2020) video made by Kelliher for TradIreland, supported by the Arts Council of Ireland, in which Kelliher places himself centre in a narrative about Molyneaux and integrates his own dance teacher, Jimmy Hickey as a gatekeeper. Hickey was not previously prominent in the development of Siamsa Tíre but the role of other dancers is neglected as Hickey is foregrounded. Referring to a weight on his shoulders and constructing a narrative of legitimate inheritance, Kelliher himself makes the statement:

When Pat Ahern, our founding director was retiring, he called me into the office one day in or around that time like that and [...] he says now that I’m retiring, he says, the north Kerry dance style, he says, is now in your hands. (*Ibidem*)

Two things are notable. Kelliher asserts that he had not previously shared this story but it also underlines the respect for and authority that Ahern had.

The Munnix dance tradition has been integral to the company’s development. Perhaps attempting to underline the “uniqueness” of Siamsa Tíre, Barry makes the statement: “You know that his type of dancing is unique to Siamsa, so there is nobody else in the country that’s doing that type, or anywhere else in the world that’s doing that style of dance” (2021e). While this is setting a particular narrative for Siamsa Tíre, it ignores the significant increase in interest in local styles of dance, particularly over the past decade. It does not recognise the significant research and activities of Dr Catherine Foley at the University of Limerick, preceded by fieldwork that paralleled the development of Siamsa Tíre. Significant is Foley’s (2020) research highlighting the popularity of the Munnix Blackbird in competitive contexts over the past decade. Indeed, the global popularity is evident in the contrary narrative presented by Siamsa Tíre in relation to the online dance workshops facilitated by Kelliher. Other influential teachers include Patrick O’Dea, whose influence on dancers in the USA is evident in *From the Floor* (2019), articulated by dancer Jackie O’Reilly (2020) in her paper at ICTM Ireland 2020. The influence of the Munnix style on Irish dance in the USA is also indicated in the recent television documentary *Steps of Freedom* (2021), in which Kelliher and Hickey feature (Magan 2021). Thus, the unresolved duality of Siamsa Tíre, wishing to simultaneously maintain its uniqueness while connecting with a wider artistic network is evident in the podcast series. The choices, exclusions, and emphases, reflect Said’s (2004) critique of newspapers and news media such as CNN and *The New York Times*, whereby prepackaged information dominates and “the media, advertising, official declarations, and ideological political argument designed to persuade or to lull into submission, not to stimulate thought and engage the intellect” (Said 2004, 73).

The podcast with the Siamsa Tíre Academy Students (Barry 2021m) provides an interesting contrast to the episode with Kelliher (Barry 2021h). It demonstrates a sound purpose but the prepared answers of the young guests undermine the efforts to demonstrate the awareness of the academy students of the greater whole or philosophy behind the company. Too often, the young people revert to referencing the learning of music, song and dance and Barry has to interject to note the significance of the company. Having clearly done their homework, the young guests do articulate some aspects of the history, largely echoing the material on the website related without demonstrating a fuller understanding. In addition to the company itself,

Barry asks questions related to the dancing master Jeremiah Molyneaux, whose biography is used as the basis for a foundation myth for the company in the production *Ding Dong Dederó* (Kearney 2021a; 2021b). A well-prepared answer demonstrates knowledge but an interjection from another student noting that Molyneaux taught her grandfather is perhaps more informative, demonstrating the connection between cast members and the intangible cultural heritage developed by Siamsa Tíre. They are also aware that he is buried near where they go to school. Two of the girls note that their mother and uncle were “in Siamsa”, highlighting the strong familial links across generations of cast. Barry notes her own role in transmission, which has also extended to online workshops in Irish song during the pandemic period, stating “I definitely feel the weight of sort of having to hand on [...] what I’ve learned or what I know” (2021d).

### 7. *Reaching Out and Collaboration*

While Siamsa Tíre has a large repertory company, since the 1980s it has embraced opportunities for collaboration and worked with many other artists and creatives (McGrath 2016). Noting the initial role of Pat Ahern in developing the company, Drummey notes the importance of collaboration across the arts stating:

It’s such a collaborative industry, you can’t do it all yourself, you need other brilliant minds and other energies and spirits and personalities, and that’s the thing that we just have in our blood thanks to Siamsa. (Barry 2021j)

Beginning with Roberto D’Amico in the 1980s, there have been many choreographers, represented in the podcast series by Cindy Cummings. O’Donnell notes the influence of Anne Courtney, choreographer for *Ding Dong Dederó*, who opened her mind to the potential of contemporary dance (Barry 2021c). From the same period, Lynch points to *Idir Eatarthu* (1989), also a collaboration with Courtney involving the music of Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin and, echoing the writing of dance critic Diane Theodores who suggested that this represented a potential path towards a new Irish dance form, noted that it demonstrated the creative potential being explored by Siamsa Tíre.

The 1990s were an important decade in the context of developing artistic practice and debate in the traditional arts. Dominated by *Riverdance* (1994) (Ó Cinnéide 2002; Scahill 2009), *River of Sound* (1995) and the Crossroads Conference on tradition and innovation in Irish traditional music (Hamilton 1999; Vallely, Hamilton, Vallely, *et al.* 1999), Siamsa Tíre’s output included choreography for Bill Whelan’s *The Seville Suite* (1992) in collaboration with Flamenco dancer, Maria Pages in 1992 (Kearney 2022a). Choreographer Caimin Collins was appointed Associate Artistic Director of Siamsa Tíre in 1995, and led the devising of two large-scale productions: *Immram* (1996) and *Eachtra* (1997). Following the retirement of Ahern in 1997, American John Sheehan was appointed Artistic Director. Sheehan recognised the company’s strength in dance and sought to develop the theatrical potential (Walsh 1997). Later, core company members undertook postgraduate studies in contemporary dance at the University of Limerick. Through its engagement with a number of dance-theatre specialists, *Sounds like folk* reinforces a sense of primacy of the dance but also points to other aspects of the company. Productions and developments that demonstrate a strengthening of other strands include the involvement of composers including Eoin McQuinn and Conor Mitchell (see Barry 2022), the development of a National Folk Theatre choir and a collaboration with local musicians to facilitate the establishment of a large Irish traditional music ensemble or Trad Orchestra.

Many of the company’s productions involve a collaborative effort. Kennedy’s description of the creative team behind the production *Oileán* (2003) highlights the various external contributors to the development process. The production was directed by former Artistic

Director Oliver Hurley, who had trained with and joined the company as a child. The production was devised by the Core Company, all of whom had been members of the company since childhood, and the score was composed and arranged by Siamsa Tíre Musical Director Tom Hanafin. This local team is augmented by the involvement of American-born choreographer Cindy Cummings, who built a strong relationship with the cast over a number of projects. Returning to a sense of community, Kennedy celebrates the presence of young children alongside longstanding cast member Seán Ahern in the cast.

Collaborations have often pushed the artistic and aesthetic boundaries of the source material. In conversation with Rob Heaslip, Barry notes that Siamsa Tíre does not “stick to” Irish dance and the cast have had a lot of opportunities to work with other choreographers, such as with Cindy Cummings for *Oileán* (Barry 2021i). Heaslip and Barry discuss Cummings’ approach and the creative possibilities that this brings. These collaborations require a coming-together of approaches and understanding. In a separate episode, Cummings describes *Oileán* as a learning process, trying to understand how to connect and communicate creative ideas (Barry 2021i). Describing the process as “speaking completely different languages” (Barry 2021i) in relation to elements and steps, stating that the language around Irish dance was completely different to contemporary dance. Recognising a musicality to the dance, with Cummings noting that “You sing the steps”, Barry notes that Cummings challenged the Irish dancers who focused primarily on their feet and legs to think about their entire body.

Cummings also refers to *rEvolution* (2005) and *rEvolution Reloaded* (2005), which she identifies as important projects between *Oileán* and *Tearmann* (2006). Barry describes them as experimental projects that strengthened the relationship between the Siamsa Tíre company and Cummings, as well as with visual artist Andrew Duggan. Barry and Cummings reflect on experiments with other art forms beyond dance, engaging with visual arts and sound, describing an emphasis on conceptualising the process including interviews with cast members. Part of this was an effort to understand “folk”, a theme that recurs with Heaslip.

Demonstrating the wider connections that Siamsa Tíre have developed and a desire to move beyond conservative spaces for the performance of folk culture by Siamsa Tíre, the story behind Barry’s connectivity to McMahon is informative. Referring again to a sense that “Folk theatre is for the tourists”, the discussion with McMahon refers to performances at WERK – a performance art event in a nightclub in Dublin (Barry 2021d). This project removed Siamsa Tíre from its rural, west of Ireland location and placed it in an urban cosmopolitan event. Director of the event, McMahon states:

We were kinda interested in a mash-up of performance [...] in loads of ways we are kind of doing the same thing [...] investigating Irish culture and unpacking it for ourselves [...] paying reverence to traditions that you guys are riffing off as well. Moving beyond the manifestation – wigs, dance music, glitter – and finding the philosophy and thinking behind it. (*Ibidem*)

The conversation with McMahon highlights the urban-rural or, more explicitly, Dublin-Rest of Ireland divide that exists. Siamsa Tíre’s active engagement with urban, primarily Dublin-based artists turns on its head the sense that “it is still relatively common to find rural musics presented as the authentic material for study and urban musics as no more than bastardised imitations that threaten to supplant the latter” (Stock 2008). It is through engagement with urban-based developments that Siamsa Tíre seek to develop a more authentic response to contemporary folk culture. Simultaneously, it is informative to hear choreographers such as Cummings and Keegan-Dolan speak about leaving the city, for Kilkenny and west Kerry respectively. Linked to a conversation around the use of the Irish language, Barry recognises the changing geography of the arts in Ireland and the challenges working in provincial theatres.

## 8. Language

Although the Irish language is prominent in the 1972 plan for the development of Siamsa Tíre (Ahern, O’Sullivan 1972), many of those involved in the company are not fluent and its presence is largely in the song repertoire performed by the company. Discussions on the Irish language are central to podcasts involving conversations with Nic Amhlaoibh, Rob Heaslip and Kennedy, and it is referenced in several others. Smith suggests a current folk revival that includes renewed interest in the Irish language and the discussions on language often parallel those on tradition and innovation (Barry 2021b).

Echoing the weight attached to passing on the tradition that exists in Siamsa Tíre, Nic Amhlaoibh notes a pressure to preserve the language, reflecting on comments when she was young that she was part of the last generation who would grow up with the Irish language. This impacted on her engagement with song as she was “terrified to touch them, terrified of getting a word wrong” (Barry 2021n). She proclaims her “great respect” (*ibidem*) for what has come before which she believes is evident in her work but emphasises that it is important to her to have “a creative outlet and that I can grow and develop as an artist” (*ibidem*). Referring to the conceptualisation of a duality in terms of tradition and creativity, Nic Amhlaoibh believes it does not have to be one or the other. She emphasises the importance of continuing to create “in the language rather than constantly looking back and archiving it and treating it as an artefact; you have to move forward and bring it with you” (*ibidem*). Her project *Aeons* (2018) with Pádraig Rynne opened up creative possibilities to her that she consciously does not explore when performing the *sean nós* traditions: “there are lines that I choose not to cross when I perform traditional song but it doesn’t mean I don’t want to try it out in other ways”.

Others also discuss the role of the Irish language in their work and creativity. Reflecting on his creative processes as a choreographer, Heaslip discusses how he seeks to involve both Irish and Scots Gaelic languages. He describes his work as “finding a way for dance to be the catalyst for people accessing the language without necessarily knowing”, hoping to identify what surrounds the language and engages with it through engaging with through research on customs and rituals (Barry 2021i). Keegan-Dolan describes engaging with the Irish language through working with Liam Ó Maonlaí and other artists around 2009 (Barry 2021e). Now living in west Kerry, he humorously reflects on the challenges of trying to learn the language referring to the existence of two dialects in Corca Dhuibhne – *caighdeán* as learned in school and the *caniúnt* or local accent with its own musicality. Barry refers to poet Ciara Ní É suggesting that the syntax of Irish soul is Irish and we can understand even if we are not fluent. Together they discuss the importance of approaching the emotion of language and emotion of learning the language noting that often the depth of engagement is not there for children.

Kennedy, from Dublin, is now a lecturer in drama, theatre and performance at NUI Galway and formerly General Manager of Siamsa Tíre. Her engagement in theatre was inspired by her interest in the Irish language and the sense of community that existed around the Irish language. Prior to her role in Siamsa Tíre, she was the manager of Taibhdéarc na Gaillimhe, the national Irish language theatre. More recently, she has pioneered Irish language modules in theatre studies at NUI Galway and views presenting the Irish language on stage as a challenge to the canon, reflecting wider social politics and discourse in the arts internationally. Kennedy recognises that there is a need to understand where Irish language programming “fits” in the context of funding and time but argues that there is an audience for work in the Irish language, not limited to an Irish-speaking audience. Kennedy argues that the use of the Irish language in theatre is not a barrier to audiences, noting a need to consider how artists use the language (Barry 2021f). This is

evident in the episode with Murríhy, who highlights the need to have an overview of a language when taking on opera roles. Unlike some of her opera colleagues, Murríhy did not spend a year in Italy or France, although she has lived in Germany. On taking on a role, she goes through the text to develop an understanding of the translation and pronunciation. Murríhy reflects on her exposure to folk music and storytelling through the Irish language informed her approach to preparing for opera roles and communicating, noting the detail and nuance in the Irish language and the attention to this detail in her training in Siamsa Tíre (Barry 2021a).

The discussion on the Irish language is interesting in the context of other aspects of artistic development. While Irish traditional music is often mediated through the Irish language, with *Raidió na Gaeltachta* and *Teilifís na Gaeilge* presenting significant programming throughout their existence, there has been a surge in Irish language film in the past five years. This has been aided in part by the foundation in 2017 of Cine4, a partnership between TG4, Screen Ireland and the BAI, which aims to fund two Irish language films a year. *Fir Bolg* (2016), *Black '47* (2018), *Arracht* (2019) and *Is Olc an Ghaoth* (2020) have received critical acclaim but Colm Bairéad's *An Cailín Ciúin* (2022) has achieved unprecedented financial, as well as critical success (Brady 2022). Although *Sounds like folk* does not refer to these films, and the episodes cited predate the cinema release of *An Cailín Ciúin* (2022), the discourse parallels contemporaneous writing and response to Irish language films, suggesting a need for further and broader discussion on the arts in Ireland.

## 9. Conclusion

A study of the podcast series *Sounds like folk* by Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, presents an opportunity to engage with significant issues related to the arts in Ireland, questions of tradition and innovation, and artistic engagement with the Irish language from a localized perspective. The series presents immensely valuable discussions that locate the work of the company within a wider contemporary arts environment. The discussions demonstrate the different pathways into the arts that exist in Ireland and celebrate the success of local artists who were part of Siamsa Tíre and have developed international careers in the arts. The discussions with external artists provide insights into how they work, which can inform the development of Siamsa Tíre and reinforces a sense of a network of artists to which Siamsa Tíre must belong. The series captures much of the *Zeitgeist* of the arts in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic but develops conversations that are relevant beyond the circumstances of that point in time.

*Sounds like folk*, reflects two sides of Siamsa Tíre – an artistic company aiming to be at the fore of the arts in Ireland today and a community of performers with a history spanning half a century. While Siamsa Tíre were responding to circumstances that limited or challenged their ability to engage in other forms of work dependent on face-to-face activities, the podcast series demonstrates the potential of utilising an existing model for engaging audiences. The podcasts compliment other developments by the company that embrace a virtual space, including the *TradConnections* series of Irish traditional music concerts that were streamed on the company's Facebook page.

Contributors provided varying perspectives on staging and representing folk culture in terms of place, time, language, and the synergy of native and classical arts disciplines. There is a sense of ownership evident amongst the Siamsa Tíre cast members who articulated their desire for more involvement in the creative development of the company. Conversations with Kelliher and other cast members provide insights into the workings of Siamsa Tíre while episodes with external guests provide a shop window for the work of others but suggest opportunities for the company to pursue. The guests implicitly locate Siamsa Tíre primarily within the world of theatre and dance with an emphasis on innovative creative practice, and less in the world of the traditional arts.

The richness of the podcast series is most evident when listened to as a collection of narratives with shared themes, each reinforcing the messages but drawing on the different perspectives of the guests. *Sounds like folk* demonstrates how the theatre company can engage with, reflect and be relevant to a much wider audience, network and scene than may be initially imagined when thinking of a folk theatre company in the south west of Ireland.

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# Voices



*Memories in Dialogue*

edited by Samuele Grassi and Fiorenzo Fantaccini,  
with poems by Seán Hewitt,  
translated into Italian by Andrea Bergantino





## Of Hollies and Other Little Wonders: In Conversation with Seán Hewitt

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### *Abstract:*

Born in Warrington, UK, Seán Hewitt is an acclaimed author and poet, critic, and lecturer at Trinity College Dublin, where he now resides. He has been hailed as one of the most talented young voices in Irish literature and culture today, and he has received a number of awards, including the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature (2022) and The Poetry School's Resurgence Prize (for eco-poetry). Hewitt's writing explores themes of identity, memory, and the environment, with particular attention given to how the episodic or temporal is linked to larger historical and cultural issues. This interview was conducted online in the Spring of 2024 with the aim of showcasing his work and his ideas to an Italian audience.

*Keywords:* Seán Hewitt, Interview, Irish Poetry, Translation

### *1. Introduction*

A picture shows the close-up of a bed, unmade. A pillow, with the impression of a head. In place of the head, a photograph depicting a park walk, a tree, and a bench. The bench is empty. There is nobody around. Absence is the only visible presence in the photograph. Histories of violence both lived and inherited have instructed some people, not others, to read this scene as the memorialisation of a death. With this shot, Brian Teeling<sup>1</sup> re-activates the memory of Declan Flynn (1951-1982), a gay man who was beaten to death in Fairview Park, Dublin in the early 1980s – a murder with no conviction that has lived through to the present as “a foundational injustice in the Irish LGBTQ+ Pride movement” (Taylor 2024)<sup>2</sup>. This space is a powerful lo-

<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, “Declan Flynn in Dublin” (2021) can be seen on the website of The National Gallery of Ireland, <<https://www.nationalgallery.ie/art-and-artists/exhibitions/zurich-portrait-prize-2021/declan-flynn-dublin#na>>.

<sup>2</sup> Another memory is activated, one more “allusion to the loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives” (Muñoz 1999, 170), to borrow from José Esteban Muñoz's powerful annotation of Félix González-Torres billboard, *Untitled* (1991), where the impression of a head on the pillow is the sign of

cation from where to address all that has been concealed from dominant LGBT archives. There is so much we still need to listen to.

The poet, memoirist, novelist and literary critic Seán Hewitt is one of the emerging voices in Ireland exploring what listening to “the chorus of voices” in the Irish queer archive(s) involves. His homage to Flynn, “We didn’t mean to kill Mr Flynn” (Hewitt 2024, 16), featured in this issue of *Studi irlandesi*, gathers several “fragments of language” he accessed while working at the Irish Queer Archive. The resulting poem re-stages the night of Flynn’s murder, “ventriloquis[ing] him through the voices of family, friends, and details from court proceedings” (Taylor 2024). The poem fiercely confronts the reader with trans- and homo-phobic violence and its enduring legacy, which Hewitt seeks to transform into artistic expression, the clearing of a space for something else:

This particular poem came after reading quite a few boxes of materials from newspapers and magazines relating to Flynn’s murder, and hearing so clearly the voices of his killers recounted in them. Of course, I couldn’t let Flynn’s voice speak, because he died before any of those texts were written, so I had to. The idea of footnoting the sources of the poem came through a desire to point a reader to the reality of the language, which is often shocking in both its unguarded brutality and its powerful, defiant sense of tragedy. (Taylor 2024)

Hewitt’s first collection, *Tongues of Fire*, addresses the experience of queer people “growing into sex and shame” (Hewitt 2020); but it also sets the scene for his distinctive looks at the natural world, where being, feeling, and gathering a sense of oneself all combine in unison. In the Resurgence Prize-winning “Ilex”, the speaker is distractingly walking, when suddenly they discover a white holly plant, a symbol of “endurance against adversity” (Emerald Isle), the combination in nature of fragility and persistence. This holly evokes mediaeval relics and ancient unearthed artefacts. The poem then transitions to the speaker’s personal struggle with a baby who won’t latch, drawing a parallel to the holly’s delicate nature: “and I came back to this holly, unhardened // by the sun, unable to turn the light / into strength” (Hewitt 2020: 42). The hope is for the flower to never learn the arts of hurting, of damaging others (“may it never learn the use of spikes”), but conversely, to shine their existence into the ordinary made exceptional, what looks like the tiny little part of the worlds we want to treasure as the richest beauty: “may the people approach one by one / to witness how a fragile thing is raised” (*ibidem*). Hewitt recalls sending the poem to a competition where the jury assumed the author was a woman, highlighting the idea of a possible genderless writing:

I think it’s interesting if you remove the image of the poet, how different the poem can be. Almost anyone can speak the text, can be the ‘I’ of the poem. So it’s interesting to me that the poem could be genderless or androgynous in some way, that it could also speak to experiences I’d never had. (in Solloway 2020)

a death from AIDS. The two scenes cannot be compared, their incommensurability includes, at least, the cause of one’s death, the subjectivity of the dead, and the different regimes under which their death took place. In spite of their incommensurability, however, they prompt a similar reflection concerning the possibility to imagine otherwise, to pre-figure a different space within the traumatic moment (past or present): “touched by the catastrophe of HIV and other genocidal epidemics, the image is an allusion to the loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives, Latino/a lives, and many other communities at risk or people who share this structure of feeling”.

## 2. Conversations, poems, worlds

The interview originated from the journal editorial team's desire to showcase Hewitt's work to an Italian audience, inspired by the recent translation into Italian of Hewitt's and Luke Edward's 300,000 Kisses, *300.000 Baci. Racconti d'amore queer dal mondo antico*, published by independent Milan-based publisher Ippocampo and reviewed by Diego Salvadori in this section. Readers will discover various aspects of the poet's life and career, from his creative writing and teaching at renowned Irish institution Trinity College Dublin to his more personal narrative moments, when for instance, he remembers the experience of writing his memoir, *All Down Darkness Wide* (2022). When selecting the texts, preference was given to poetry, which allows readers to delve into the influence of poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins to Jesmyn Ward on Hewitt's work. Previously in interview, Hewitt cited Seamus Heaney as a major influence on his poetry, dating back to his formative years in Britain:

We were given various models that I could have gone to, and Heaney was the one that I chose. But at other moments I ran away from Heaney's influence because there is something about the music and the language of his poetry so embedded in me that I worry it comes too easily. When I sit down, I can almost write a parody of a Heaney poem. So there were a couple of years when I actively tried to escape that influence. I brought him into my work in a way that I was happy with – by throwing him up against queer poetry. I escaped my Heaney parodies by blending Heaney with the people I was reading at the time like Danez Smith, Ocean Vuong, Mark Doty, and queer American poets. I think that intersection is where my poems came from. And I think Heaney is definitely one tributary into the writing. (Sullivan 2023, 144)

The section features four poems from *Tongues of Fire* and one from his more recent collection, *Rapture's Road* (2024), where Hewitt's residency at the Irish Queer Archive is a key source. Quite a few of Hewitt's poems included here, like "St John's Wort" / "Erba di San Giovanni" (Hewitt 2020, 11) and "Wild Garlic" / "Aglia selvatico" (Hewitt 2020: 18) are heartfelt reflections on the themes of nature, history, and the desire for connection; however, in the former this is counteracted by the awareness of an impending loss – in Hewitt's case, his father. The saint's decapitated head is thus transfixed into a beloved's head, held reassuringly between one's hands, with the yellow-laden illuminations springing from the herb, care, and love embracing a hospital bed ("Bringing no gift, I took your head / in my empty hands like a world and held it"). Kelly Sullivan (2023) rightly notes how Hewitt's use of "Heaneyesque" language is particularly evident in "Old Croghan Man" / "Vecchio uomo di Croghan" (Hewitt 2020: 39), where the poet recounts the discovery of an Iron Age bog body<sup>3</sup>. "Ta Prohm" (Hewitt 2020: 64) is a profound evocation of the imposing history of monumental architecture and personal loss. Here, too, the mind goes back to a father lying in a deathbed, as nature descends to the ground, enveloping the whole scene in beautiful and generous greenery. In the midst of uncertainty about what lies ahead, the speaking 'I' seems to wonder: what if surviving is easier than we believed? Is this forgetting, or else is it a coping strategy for those who stay? Finally, "We didn't mean to kill Mr Flynn" / "Non volevamo uccidere Mr Flynn", from Hewitt's *Rapture's Road*, captures the cacophony of voices that demand to be heard, memorialising the silences within the queer archive. Death, mourning, and violence pervade these atmospheres, reminding us of the systematic domination intersecting gender, class, race, and sexuality.

<sup>3</sup> The body was discovered in the area of Croghan Hill, in the Eastern and Midland part of the Republic of Ireland, in the early 2000s.

Transformative writing can heal, but it can also hurt. Hewitt emphasises the importance of being ready to listen, acknowledging the emotional complexities that writers, especially poets, navigate in their work.



*SG: How has your identification as an openly gay author influenced your writing within the context of recent advancements in LGBT rights in Ireland? Have you come across any particular way or set of ways to reckon with the country's past that has stayed with you and with which you also come to terms?*

SH: I think the term “openly gay” is a little dated, and though I’m not the sort of person who would want to distance myself from what that means, I do (forgive me) get a bit tired of being called upon as ‘the gay writer’ for panel events, workshops, pieces for the media, etc. Sometimes, it can feel like all you get to talk about is being a gay writer, or about gay literature, when actually you want to be in the other room, with all the rest of the people, who get to talk about big things like history, religion, politics, and, well, writing. I’m really glad there’s a platform for queer literature in Ireland now, though there’s still a long way to go, particularly for trans and gender non-conforming writers and people of colour. We identify ourselves in order to draw attention to an issue, and that is good, but that’s also, I hope, just a stepping stone along to a world where we won’t have to identify ourselves at all. I don’t feel like a ‘gay author’ when I’m at home, or when I’m on my own – I only get made to become a ‘gay author’ when I’m in public, and I have come to resent that a little, not because I resent being gay, but because I resent not getting to be an author like everyone else.

But what is good, in terms of labels, is that the interest in queer writing is providing opportunities for queer writers to platform their work, and to delve into queer histories in Ireland. This is aided by the work of activists, community works, magazines, and academics, all of which form a collective custodianship of the country’s queer past. I see my work, outside of writing, as a responsibility to new generations of queer writers to help them, mentor them, support them, and hold space for them. There is a lot of value in that, and it’s something I’m honoured to be able to do.

In 2021, I was writer in residence at the Irish Queer Archive, which was donated to the National Library of Ireland, and is a massive resource and treasure trove. Spending six months working through the manuscripts there informed many of the poems in *Rapture’s Road*, and one in particular, “We Didn’t Mean to Kill Mr Flynn”, translated in this journal by Andrea Bergantino, gives a window into the archive by citing various sources to piece together the story of a homophobic killing in Dublin. My work has a close relationship with history, in that way, and I hope that being in conversation with history gives depth and perspective to my writing.

*SG: Could you share which authors or poets have influenced your work? What ways do you think your writing resonates with their voices?*

SH: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Alice Oswald, W.B. Yeats, Tennyson, Thomas Hardy... Those are probably the classics. And, more recently, Jesmyn Ward, Sheridan Le Fanu, Jean Rhys, Carl Phillips, Sarah Perry. I can’t think what connects them all, because I tend to be reading things that are alike, somehow, to the sort of energy and atmosphere I’m trying to capture in my writing at any given time, and that changes for each poem, each project, but if I had to say what I love,



it's probably a sort of vulnerable formality, a commitment to atmosphere and the baroque, the decorated, a high register or atmosphere that admits, on occasion, a surprisingly human voice.

*SG: You grew up and gained notoriety as a writer within the context of a shrinking book market, which has historically been a primary target of the devaluation of culture in neoliberal times. Concurrently, you also decided to pursue a career inside the academy, where the same market-driven mentality is deracinating intellectual curiosity, free thought and speech, and an education unmoored by capitalist values. How do you reconcile these two sides of your current life alongside the pursuit of a writerly future?*

SH: In my own context, at Trinity College Dublin, I don't find there to be much to reconcile. The university is very supportive of my work, and I enjoy speaking to my students about books and their own writing. Being in that headspace for long periods of time is a privilege for a writer, because you're constantly thinking about the mechanics of literature, and you're around a group of excited, enthusiastic people. I also get periods of time to do my own writing, and have access to brilliant libraries, and my colleagues are full of ideas and information when I get stuck on research or for something to read. Also, we're lucky in Ireland to have a very healthy book market, and a very avid reading public, so I don't feel that I have too much to complain about in either regard. Academics have the right to complain, of course, but I come from a place where people have to do much worse jobs to earn a lot less money, so I remind myself of that often.

*SG: You have referred to the act of translation as a means of exploring identities. Could you elaborate on how translation serves as a metaphor in your work, both in terms of language and personal experience?*

SH: I think that translation, as metaphor, is a very potent one not only for writing, but for life. In writing, the whole world you want to create appears perfectly in your mind, and the (very difficult, basically impossible) task that you have is to lift that world out of the mind and onto the page, to let someone else live in it. That is an act of translation, from the pre-verbal language of the mind, to the language we use every day, and it's near impossible not to lose things along the way. The same goes for personal experience: we live entire, imagined, emotional, real lives in our heads; we carry so much history and thought with us, that never finds expression, and so when we try to communicate with each other, we often feel like we haven't quite excavated the heart of what we meant. We're translating all the time, from the subconscious to the conscious, the pre-verbal to the verbal, and things get lost, yes, but if we do it well, it's a sort of miracle.

*SG: Your memoir All Down Darkness Wide, among other things, literalizes your vicinity to severe mental illness. The visceral, breath-consuming acknowledgment (or, sense of acknowledgment) of one's individual loneliness provoked by depression, for example, can be remembered by those who experience it as a devastating bodily memory. Yet, it may also remind us of how profoundly collective the experiences of mental health illness can be for LGBTQI+ people, and indeed, have been, particularly in times of "crises". Is there anything you have learned from this experience that you hope you are now taking with you, in terms of relationships with others?*

SH: You're right. In the most basic way, I struggled to find a book about that experience when I was going through it – the experience of caring for someone in mental distress and

illness, that is – and so I wrote my own book in the hope that it might articulate things. I'm not an expert, nor a therapist, and so I don't like to use my own life or thoughts as an exemplar for others. I also don't like to take lessons from one relationship and apply them to another relationship – each relationship is its own, organic thing, and needs to be built from the ground up, and to develop its own set of experiences, on its own terms, though of course we try not to make the same mistakes we have before.

*SG: Your background in literary studies and the environmental humanities overlaps with your poetic practice. In conversation/interview, you have admitted that All Down Darkness Wide “centres the natural world”, whereas Rapture’s Road is studded with “fear of environmental collapse” (Aitken 2023). How do these disciplines inform your exploration of queer ecologies and landscapes in your writing?*

SH: In much the same way as any writer, I imagine, I follow my own interests in my reading and research, and that reading and research begins to inflect, or prise apart, the things I write. *All Down Darkness Wide* was not, really, a book about nature, though I have a tendency to focus on the natural world in all my work, to different degrees. *Rapture’s Road*, though, was a continuation of the project of my first collection, *Tongues of Fire*, but it is a more formally-ambitious book, in which the certainties – or near certainties – of the earlier poems are questioned, or collapse. If the poems in *Tongues of Fire* built a mythology of renewal, the poems in *Rapture’s Road* look into the opposing mythology, that of spiralling and ecstatic decline. During my PhD on the Irish playwright J.M. Synge, I read a lot of XIX century texts on animism, primitivism, and folklore, and these spark poems and images. For *Rapture’s Road*, that project continued, but I began to be more interested in queer ecologies, apocalypse, Hopkins, dreamscapes, nightmares. There's no direct or noticeable line between research and writing that I can identify: the best I can say is that, when I'm researching, certain images will lift into my mind and find language, and certain ideas will be noted down as possibly good for a poem.

*SG: Collaboration seems to be an integral part of your creative process, whether it is working with other artists or engaging in interdisciplinary projects. How do these collaborations enrich your exploration of key themes in your poetry, and more generally, in your practice as interdisciplinary/intermedia artist?*

SH: I myself am certainly not an interdisciplinary artist – I'm stuck with words, I'm afraid. But writing is an incredibly solitary practice, for the most part, and any opportunity to work with other people, and to take on practical tasks, is good for me. I come from a very practical family – joiners, mainly – and have always envied people who can occupy themselves with practical tasks. I love working with artists and illustrators because they see from a different angle – they're thinking about colour, perspective, dimension, and often the finished product of the book itself. Fundamentally, I think I like making things, and I see writing as an attempt to make something, and I like to work with other people who make things.

*SG: There seems to have been renewed interest in poetry by Irish authors and in Irish poetry by literary and cultural critics outside of the island. I wonder if this is a sign of how, in times of crises and with the fear of collapse, writing poetry is revealed as feeling closer to a writer's self while finding solace in reaching out to the world. How do you feel about your poetry being seen as a healing practice?*

SH: I don't believe that poetry is healing for the writer, but if people find it healing as readers, then that can be a good thing. I think that various things have led to the opening up of Anglophone poetry in the past decade: the internet, for a start; and a sort of transnational exchange of traditions; and a push to begin including more lives within the remit of the poetic subject. I don't believe in 'relatability' per se, but I do believe in the excitement of seeing some aspect of yourself reflected in literature, and that excitement has been multiplied as the subjects of writing have diversified. In terms of political and environmental collapse, I think poetry has a unique ability to distil complexity into forms which don't reduce that complexity – when the problems are so big that they are hard to comprehend, the poem can step in as a device for holding very large subjects. Poems are also, I think, particularly good at giving expression to anger, grief, protest, etc, because of their musicality. That is the most primal and valuable thing about poems, to me.

*SG: While discussing All Down Darkness Wide in an interview with Andrea Bergantino (2022), you have spoken about memoir's ability to see ghosts as "reassuring figures who witness a certain kinship". How do you see the interplay between queerness, memoir, and these ghostly presences in your work? Is this also a charting of new forms of queer kinship?*

SH: When I was writing *All Down Darkness Wide*, I began to see history as a sort of echoing tunnel. If I had an idea or experience now, in the present, I would test it to check for echoes in the past, to see if the sound of my own voice was returned, distorted perhaps, but still recognisable, by some historical figure. The people who returned those echoes most clearly were the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the Swedish poet Karin Boye. But I also began to think about these historical figures, or ghosts, if you will, as members of a cross-generational kinship. I think the idea of 'chosen families' common in queer thinking is a bit trite at times, but I believe in the necessity of antecedents, and these ghosts offered themselves as guiding spirits, or pastoral thinkers, for my own writing. Most queer people do not have queer parents, and so it is only natural that we should look to other figures to guide and educate us in some of the initiations we go through in life. On a literary level, it is important to me, when I write, to conjure a tradition for myself – it helps me to feel less alone in writing, perhaps.

*SG: My last question is a counterintuitive move to shift my curiosity to the pleasure you seem to take in talking in public and giving interviews, acting as a would-be critic of your own work. Have you ever reflected on how this has played out in your writer's progress?*

SH: I'm certainly not a critic of my own work, and tend to be much less articulate off the page. I enjoy reading my work aloud, and talking to readers, but I like discussing myself much less, and often struggle to discuss my work in a way that feels satisfying to myself. I think being a writer is a privilege, and being able to earn a living through writing is the most satisfying thing I can do. I don't tend to surround myself with other writers, nor to pay too much attention to trends; I prefer to surround myself with relatively normal people, with normal jobs, because I value the perspective that gives to me. The main role of public events and interviews is to connect with readers, to answer their questions as best I can, and hopefully to reassure them that the best answers I can give are all inside my books, and not inside myself. The reader is the critic, not the author. Once they're published, my books have relatively little to do with me, at least not in the grand scheme of things.

### 3. Reading with and about Hewitt

In addition to the works cited in the above, the following presents a list of Hewitt's major publications to date, followed by several readings (mostly interviews) that have informed the present interview. Most of the following entries are also recorded on Hewitt's website (<<https://www.seanhewitt.com>>), in addition to other useful material about the artist and his work.

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## Five Poems by Seán Hewitt, translated by Andrea Bergantino\*

### “Erba di San Giovanni”

Prende il nome da un uomo che porta la propria testa  
su un vassoio, da un giorno in cui il sole diffonde  
la luce sulla terra in modo così lento, così misurato,  
che la notte si rannicchia e aspetta. Un pegno  
d’amore, di pazienza, della volontà di sollevare la mente  
fuori di sé e lasciarla riposare. Lasciarla guarire. Solo,  
mi ricordai di questa piccola pianta, le spine gialle  
del fiore, gli orpelli dello stame, qualcosa di simile  
alla felicità – le stelle luminose, una piccola recita  
di speranza, quel suo modo di stagliarsi tra l’erba –  
e la portai a te, una luce per illuminare  
le fosse scure dei tuoi occhi. All’entrata  
del reparto, dopo avermi perquisito, l’infermiera  
si portò via la mia raccolta di fiori.  
Ti trovai a letto, lo sguardo assente, ancora sconvolto.  
Senza regali, ti presi la testa  
tra le mani vuote e la mantenni come un pianeta.

### “Aglione selvatico”

Nella boscaglia dopo la pioggia  
(troppo tardi per essere qui).  
Il terreno caldo, lo sgocciolio  
di insetti dalle foglie.

Frugo tra i gambi teneri  
e li giro fino a liberarli – petali fradici

\* “St John’s Wort”, “Wild Garlic”, “Old Croghan Man”, and “Ta Prohm”  
are published in *Tongues of Fire* (2020), “We didn’t mean to kill Mr Flynn” is  
published in *Rapture’s Road* (2024).

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mi toccano il braccio, boccioli,  
il prurito delle foglie, selvaticità

sulla pelle. Le piante portano con sé  
un odore ricco di terra, troppo pesante  
per sollevarsi all'altezza del capo, e gli stivali  
e i jeans si macchiano di bianco.

Il sentiero di casa è tutto cosperso  
di fiori bianchi e a punta  
che illuminano la via. Il mondo è buio  
ma il bosco è pieno di stelle.

### **“Vecchio uomo di Croghan”**

*‘i capezzoli venivano loro tagliati di modo che non fossero idonei al trono... la suzione dai capezzoli  
di un re rappresentava un importante gesto di sottomissione’*

Eamonn P. Kelly, ‘Un’interpretazione archeologica  
dei corpi di palude dell’età del ferro irlandese’

Solo un torso ormai, la testa  
recisa dal collo, il bacino  
contorto come una radice testarda.

Ricordo la giacca consunta  
del suo corpo schiacciata  
nella palude; lassù, le galassie

di erioforo si sono volte  
sotto sopra, come piccole anime  
tra le eufrasie e

il centocchio. Non è un posto  
dove lasciare solo un uomo.  
E sotto i capezzoli

un’incisione profonda, larga quanto la lama.  
Anche allora servivano ragazzi  
come me – perché ci lasciassimo il potere

alle spalle, e abbassissimo la testa  
per portarla a quella morbida  
sporgenza rosa. Avrei sentito,

allora, il divenire di un re;  
avrei saputo che Dio, attraverso le mie labbra,  
stava entrando nel suo corpo.



**“Ta Prohm”**

Un calore soffocante – l’aria pesante –  
e tutt’intorno la foresta rumorosa, bagnata  
che annoda gli spazi vuoti nel suo suono.

Una pace conquistata da tempo, poi interrotta;  
e tu, lontano, in un letto d’ospedale.  
Un ficus strangolatore ha le radici

allacciate qui sul tempio  
come se fosse cresciuto giù dal cielo,  
inviato a tenere insieme

tutto questo lavoro umano. E poi,  
attraverso la sala del fuoco e le gallerie  
cadute, mi sono arrampicato nel fumo indaco

fino a dove sedeva la divinità  
in cerchi d’incenso. E sì,  
mi sono inginocchiato a lei. E sì, ho pregato

nella mia incredulità. Forse ora,  
padre, solo qualcosa di antico  
e impossibile può salvarci.

**“Non volevamo uccidere Mr Flynn”**

*Non volevamo uccidere Mr Flynn. Ho pensato che era gay e che era al parco per incontrare altre  
persone gay. Eravamo a caccia di froci quell’estate.*

Dichiarazione di Anthony Maher riportata  
dall’*Irish Times*, 9 marzo 1983

## I

È stato facile trovare delle buone mazze –  
c’erano un sacco di alberi coi rami bassi\*.  
Eravamo lì in attesa, al buio

coi bastoni, il cappuccio sopra la faccia<sup>†</sup>.  
Paddy ha urlato due volte – ‘Prendi quel bastardo’<sup>‡</sup>.  
Ne avevamo menati venti di finocchi<sup>§</sup> quell’estate,

\* *Magill*, aprile 1983, “The Night They Killed Declan Flynn: Maggie O’Kane talks to the Fairview Killers”, 11.

† *The Irish Press*, 9 marzo 1983.

‡ *Irish Times*, 9 marzo 1983.

§ *Irish Times*, 9 marzo 1983.

noi in gruppo, per ripulire il parco da froci  
e pedofili<sup>†</sup>. Forse quella volta abbiamo esagerato,  
ma coi pervertiti bisogna fare qualcosa

di fisico – castrarli, non so\*\*.  
Così siamo corsi, tutti noi, e l'abbiamo inseguito  
finché non è caduto, e ora riesco a pensare solo

al sangue che gli usciva dalla bocca.  
L'ho rivoltato sul fianco  
così non si strozzava\*. Era pesante.

Quello me lo ricordo. E poi  
ha smesso di parlare, immobile, e allora ho capito  
che era morto<sup>†</sup>.

## II

Era una notte calda a Fairview.  
Non un orto degli ulivi, ma un altro Getsemani  
di betulle e platani vicino alle acque salmastre,

alle oscenità<sup>‡</sup> di corvi e gabbiani –  
un buon posto per nascondersi, un bene  
e un male. Io balbettavo e sono rimasto fermo

quando hanno urlato<sup>§</sup>, e gli alberi a cui mi ero affidato  
per coprirmi hanno offerto loro i rami –  
colpi e frustate finché non è calato

il buio – e quello ero io, lì a terra  
quando è arrivato lui, solo un lieve gorgoglio,  
il sangue che mi sgorgava dalla bocca<sup>¶</sup>.

Mi ci sono soffocato, così hanno detto. Mi hanno  
fatto soffocare dalla mia stessa vita\*. Poi, mio padre  
in lacrime vicino al camino. Il bacio di un traditore, forse,

ma nessuna pietra è rotolata via, nessuna ascensione.  
*Sono usciti dal tribunale liberi*, ha detto,  
*ma mio figlio non può più uscire dal cimitero di Glasnevin<sup>†</sup>.*

<sup>†</sup> “Queer Bashing: Five Youths Freed After Park Killing”, *Irish Independent*, 9 marzo 1983.

\*\* *Magill*, aprile 1983, “The Night They Killed Declan Flynn: Maggie O’Kane talks to the Fairview Killers”, 16.

\* Testimonianza di Robert Armstrong riportata in “Martyr in the Park”, *GI Magazine*, 2001.

<sup>†</sup> *Magill*, aprile 1983, “The Night They Killed Declan Flynn: Maggie O’Kane talks to the Fairview Killers”, 16.

<sup>‡</sup> *Irish Times*, 21 marzo 1983.

<sup>§</sup> “Queer Bashing: Five Youths Freed After Park Killing”, *Irish Independent*, 9 marzo 1983.

<sup>¶</sup> Testimonianza di John Sheridan riportata in *GI Magazine*, “Martyr in the Park”, 2001.

\* Relazione dell’inchiesta sulla morte di Declan Flynn. Causa del decesso: “Asfissia dovuta all’inalazione di sangue”.

<sup>†</sup> “Queer Bashing: Five Youths Freed After Park Killing”, *Irish Independent*, 9 marzo 1983.



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“Ma dei due il mortal  
mi parve / più bello assai del dio”.  
*300.000 baci*  
di Seán Hewitt e Luke Edward Hall

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*Abstract:*

Starting from the anthology *300.000 Kisses* by Seán Hewitt and Luke Edward Hall, we aim to analyze the literary manifestations of queer themes, exploring how the act of anthologizing serves as an orienting and guiding force. In this case, the “anthology operation” functions as a compass, highlighting significant trends and providing a cohesive understanding of queer literary landscapes. Through reading *300.000 Kisses*, it is possible to trace not only the archetypes of queer culture but also to propose new reading methodologies that allow for a fresh approach to literary text analysis, as well as the storytelling forms that populate contemporary imagination.

*Keywords:* Anthology, Gay Studies, Lesbian Studies, Queer Literature, Queer Studies

*1. It's a queer world*

“Words, they cut like a knife”. Così cantava Madonna in uno dei brani di *Erotica*: il disco oggi considerato uno dei capolavori della produzione di Miss Ciccone – nonché della musica Pop – ma all'epoca (era il 1992) andato incontro a un'operazione demolitiva da parte della critica del settore, complice anche la pubblicazione del libro *Sex* (Ciccone 1992), che amplificava le tematiche dell'album in un fototesto dai toni espliciti (e pertanto etichettato come oltraggioso, pornografico, ai limiti della blasfemia). Sono ben consapevole di quanto sia eterodosso muovere le fila da colei che, per il filosofo Jean Baudrillard, aveva finito per incarnare quella “frigidity frénétique de notre époque” (1995, 60), ma le parole – è un dato di fatto – tagliano (e il “taglio” è intendersi anche come traccia indelebile e oltremodo traumatica), uccidono, ed è giocoforza impugnarle, sovvertirne il potere annientante, alla ricerca di una valenza salvifica, liberatoria (“a

message from heaven / a signal from hell”, concludeva Madonna alla fine del brano). È il caso della parola “queer” – dal germanico *quer* (“diagonale”, “obliquo”) – utilizzata nella lingua inglese a partire dall’Ottocento in funzione dispregiativa per indicare le minoranze sessuali e conseguentemente tutto ciò che era opposto all’idea di straight – cioè il “dritto”, la “rettitudine” e dunque anche il maschio eterosessuale (Bernini 2017, 119). Successivamente, e intorno gli anni Novanta del Novecento, queer si fa sinonimo di un’identità politica – penso al “pianto” degli attivisti gay newyorkesi, che per Times Square ripetevano il loro “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it” – volta a rivendicare un significante versatile, fluttuante, indeterminato, tale da rendere la parola non tanto un’arma da taglio, quanto piuttosto una pratica di ri-significazione del mondo: uno strappo nel cielo di carta in cui sessismo, maschilismo, omofobia, transfobia e bifobia vanno a costituirne il palinsesto regolatore, unitamente alla “critica del binarismo sessuale [e] dell’eteronormatività” (*ibidem*). Questo non toglie, ovviamente, che la paura di un pianeta queer – parafrasando il titolo del volume di Michael Warner (1993) – sia tutt’altro che spenta, specie in una realtà a storytelling aumentato, perfuso (Calabrese 2012), dove tutti possono dire, legiferare e soprattutto scrivere, armati del *vade retro* contro gli spettri “dell’inversione” e del mondo al contrario. Ecco perché l’antologia *300.000 baci. Racconti d’amore queer dal mondo antico* (2023), curata da Seán Hewitt e accompagnata dalle splendide illustrazioni di Edward Hall, si candida, specie quanto concerne l’orizzonte di attesa italiano, a testo necessario, dinamitardo, piacevolmente “scomodo”: una cretomazia a tinte fluide che va ad integrare lo sparuto gruppo di testi consimili – proseguendo il lavoro che, nel 2006, Paolo Zanotti avviò con la sua antologia, ormai divenuta introvabile, dal titolo *Classici dell’omosessualità* – e parimenti illumina uno spazio letterario all’apparenza cristallizzato e inviolabile come quello della letteratura classica, operando – e qui mi sia concesso un rimando a Adrienne Rich – una re-vision<sup>1</sup> in chiave queer che, inevitabilmente, scuote il lettore e gli chiede di uscire dalla narcosi di una supina risposta estetica.

## 2. *Il più bel fior ne coglie*

*300.000 baci*, lo abbiamo detto, è un’antologia. Una scelta (*legein*) di fiori (*anthos*) che si fa monade temporale e attraversa, quale nucleo unitario, il mare della molteplicità, anche in risposta a quello che Ernestina Pellegrini ha definito, a proposito delle operazioni antologiche, come un “bisogno radicale di memoria e di promozione della memoria” (Pellegrini 2009, 30). Il testo di Hewitt e Hall prosegue quel movimento di selezione e raccolta che, per quanto concerne le antologie gay e queer, ha inizio nel II secolo d.C. con Stratone di Sardi (il primo a compilare una raccolta di epigrammi a tematica gay); trova un ulteriore consolidamento, nel 1836, in Heinrich Hössli<sup>2</sup> e la sua *Eros. Die Männerliebe der Griechen* (1998)<sup>3</sup>; e giunge infine a un primo punto di assestamento nel 1902, quando Edward Carpenter dà alle stampe la prima antologia gay in lingua inglese, dal titolo *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship* (con testi di Pindaro, Plutarco, Agostino, Byron, cfr. Zanotti 2006, 8-9). Per Zanotti:

La produzione di antologie conobbe una notevole impennata nel secondo Ottocento, o per meglio dire nel secondo Ottocento, il momento chiave per la formazione della cultura omosessuale. Spesso basate

<sup>1</sup> “The act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich 1972, 18).

<sup>2</sup> Hössli è stato uno dei primi militanti del movimento omosessuale.

<sup>3</sup> L’antologia di Hössli riuniva brani sulla pederastia greca.

sul lascito delle letterature classiche (che normalmente circolavano in edizioni edulcorate), queste antologie non riguardavano solo un pubblico di eruditi [...] [e] rispondevano a esigenze diverse. In primo luogo, offrivano qualcosa da leggere a un pubblico che altrimenti non avrebbe saputo a chi rivolgersi. In secondo luogo, *la loro ricostruzione di una tradizione passata permetteva di porre le basi per una tradizione culturale presente*. Si trattava più che altro di rivendicare il diritto a un'altra fratellanza e a un altro sguardo, e non (sarebbe stato francamente prematuro) di fondare una tradizione antagonista; di trovare qualcosa in cui riconoscersi, non di essenzializzare la differenza dell'arte omosessuale. (*Ibidem*, corsivi miei)

*300.000 baci* guarda sì a una tradizione culturale consolidata ma, e mi riallaccio al *pensum* di Zanotti, non essenzializza la differenza, non opera quella che per Mario Mieli – in relazione all'eterosessualità e all'omosessualità – era una mutilazione del soggetto volta “a ridurre l'originaria ricchezza polimorfa dell'Eros” (Mieli 2007 [1977], 18), quanto piuttosto sembra riabilitare il segreto che, per Mieli, era racchiuso nell'omosessualità stessa, ovverosia “la possibilità di intendere l'ermafroditismo psichico-biologico non quanto *bi*-sessuale, ma in quanto erotico in senso nuovo (e anche remoto), [e cioè] *polisessuale*, *trans*-sessuale” (31). D'altronde, proseguiva Mieli:

Le categorie *eterosessuali* si reggono sulla censura dell'ermafroditismo profondo, sulla sottomissione del corpo alle direttive nevrotiche della mente censurata, sulla visione *Ego*-istica del mondo-della-vita determinata dalla repressione della donna e dell'Eros, dalla morale sessuale coercitiva, dalla negazione della continuità umana, dall'autorizzazione individualistica. Inutile calare dal basso della nostra *ratio* categorie *bi*-sessuali e cioè *etero*-sessuali sulla superiorità del latente e del rimosso: inutile calare *dal basso*, a meno che non ci si accontenti di un misconoscimento della portata del rimosso che ci vincoli allo status quo: noi gay rivoluzionari vogliamo piuttosto elevarci, liberandoci concretamente, alla transessualità. (32)

Ma come possono Omero, Virgilio, Senofonte, Teognide e gli altri autori qui antologizzati da Hewitt portare avanti questo processo di liberazione? Cominciamo col dire che *300.000 baci* è un libro che sboccia, si desta, erompe, ma soprattutto tracima. E il suo è un debordare capillare e potente, pronto a innescarsi sin dalla pagina d'apertura, in cui le elegie del summenzionato Teognide non solo segnano un risveglio dell'Eros, bensì inaugurano una isotopia vegetale che vedono i fiori e le piante farsi indiscussi protagonisti di questi tasselli. Cito dalla traduzione italiana:

I  
Eros anche si desta nella bella stagione,  
la Terra intera si accende di fiori.  
Solo la dea lascia Cipro e raggiunge  
le genti e sparge semi sopra i campi.

II  
Ragazzo, tu somigli a un cavallo già sazio  
di semi, eppure cerchi la mia stalla,  
e chi sappia montarti, e la luce dei prati,  
e l'ombra della macchia e l'acqua limpida.  
(Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 7)

“The erotic takes place alongside the elemental” – scrive Hewitt nell'introduzione al volume – “nature governs the passions; everything is full of longing and it is only right that we are too” (Hewitt, Hall 2023a, 8). È il *mythos* a guidare una partitura in cui il corpo è di carne e di *logos*: è eredità biologica ma al tempo stesso retaggio, genealogia. Ma soprattutto, le liriche di

Teognide “give us sight of a world long before our own, where queerness was not only acknowledged, but shown to be utterly part of the fabric of life” (*ibidem*) e fanno di questa antologia una carta divinatoria nelle pieghe sempre più imperscrutabili della realtà, al che i brani raccolti vanno a costituire una sorta di meta-racconto: un inesausto recitativo che via via illumina quelli che Hewitt non esita a definire quali “archetypal myths of queerness” (13). L’operazione, per certi aspetti, è etichettabile anche come filologia *queer*, cui fanno da contraltare le operazioni di recupero e rilettura che *300.000 baci* mette in atto pagina dopo pagina, sotto la spinta di una militanza dell’intelletto che manomette lo *status quo* sollecitando interrogativi molteplici. Scrive Hewitt:

There are some very contemporary questions provoked by reading these classics. Who do we imagine love for? Who do we credit with desire? On whom do we bestow the gift of immortality? Can the body be changed to better suit the soul inside? By picking up these questions in our own time, and by tracing them back through the tales of the ancients, we see new pathways, new pasts, and new ways of moving forward. What we find is the illumination of a world that completely overthrows the puritanism of our own. *The exuberant frankness of the Greeks and Romans makes a mockery of how narrow our popular vision is, even now.* (10, corsivo mio)

*Vision* e, verrebbe da dire, *Re-vision*. Il prefisso – senza l’urgenza di tornare ancora al testo di Rich – è d’obbligo, non fosse altro perché la letteratura è la sede dell’immaginario e, come vuole il *pensum* lanciato da Massimo Fusillo,

[del] desiderio, soprattutto se represso, in tutte le sue forme. Sia perché è un linguaggio che usa le tecniche oblique dell’implicito e del non detto, affrontando la sfida di comunicare l’incomunicabile; sia perché attinge molto all’inconscio e lo rende esprimibile attraverso una serie di figure di mediazione e compromesso, come la litote. (Fusillo 2015, 31)

Ecco: nei testi antologizzati in *300.000 baci* il desiderio non è represso, né tantomeno sottotraccia. A questo si deve aggiungere la distanza siderale di questi “racconti d’amore” dall’idea stessa di omosessualità, che come parola “è in effetti di origine secondo-ottocentesca: [...] usata per la prima volta dall’ungherese Károly Mária Kertbeny [...] nel 1869. [E] sempre nel 1869 nacque anche l’“inversione”, un termine inizialmente di maggior successo rispetto a ‘omosessualità’” (Zanotti 2006, 14). C’è una *queerness* pura, autentica, pronta a manifestarsi in tutte le sue molteplicità costitutive e oltremodo fluide: dalle lesbiche *butch* di Marziale, ai *twink* dallo sguardo efebico rapiti dagli dei o tramutatisi in fiori; dalla *ractio perversa* di Nerone e il suo amante Sporo, all’*escort* Nèvolo – al centro di una satira di Giovenale – la cui amara constatazione sul senso dell’esistenza (“Se le stelle ti sono ostili, non conta la grandezza dell’uccello”, Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 166) non può non strapparci un amaro sorriso. Quest’antologia, insomma, ci pone dinanzi a una lingua franca, a un immaginario non ancora cristallizzato e con cui tutti, almeno una volta, abbiamo avuto a che fare. Penso, a tal proposito, all’episodio di Achille e Patroclo, antologizzato da Hewitt e sotto certi aspetti leggibile ricorrendo alle già citate parole di Fusillo:

Non è un caso se la letteratura ha raccontato l’omosessualità secoli prima che nascesse il termine, già a partire dall’*Iliade* che è anche, per via allusiva, un poema sull’amore tra Achille e Patroclo. Con questo riferimento antico non intendo certo impelagarmi nella (falsa) dicotomia fra essenzialismo e costruzionismo, terminata geneticamente, o comunque permanente e universale, e chi la considera una costruzione culturale che varia a seconda delle epoche e delle culture [...]. [Ma] la letteratura è stata ed è un campo particolarmente adatto a esprimere marginalità e differenza, per cui la preistoria della letteratura gay [...] è incredibilmente lunga e articolata, più di quanto si creda in genere. (Fusillo 2015, 31)

*Desideri trasformativi, trasformazioni desideranti*

I testi che vanno a costituire *300.000 baci* perimetrano uno spazio e un tempo ben definiti (il Mediterraneo e l'Età classica), ma nel rifuggere una collocazione diacronica si dispongono per assonanze tematiche, quasi alla stregua di una lanterna magica, anche in virtù delle splendide illustrazioni di Luke Edward Hall che rendono questo libro più simile a un iconotesto o, perlomeno, a un giustapporsi di parole e immagini, là dove queste ultime sono sia il contrappunto aereo della diegesi, sia il suo necessario prolungamento e estensione. *Per verba in pictura*, verrebbe da dire.

Ma cos'è che passa da una semiosi all'altra? Qual è l'energia che attraversa questo duopolio (tra l'immagine e la parola) ineludibile e fermentante? È la forza del *mythos*, il suo essere brado, randagio: "nel mito", ha scritto Claudio Magris, "nulla è accaduto e tutto viene solo raccontato e accade ogni volta che viene raccontato" (1997, 84); per Mircea Eliade, invece, il mito è "le récit d'une "création" : on rapporte comment quelque chose a été produit, a commencé à être" (Eliade 1963, 15), al che "les mythes relatent non seulement l'origine du Monde, des animaux, des plantes et de l'homme, mais aussi tous les événements primordiaux à la suite desquels l'homme est devenu ce qu'il est aujourd'hui" (21). Non è un caso, dunque, che il primo tassello mitico del libro sia estrapolato dalle *Metamorfosi* ovidiane: mi riferisco al *Ratto di Ganimede*, cui si congiungono – sempre da Ovidio – le trasformazioni di Giacinto e di Ciparisso (metamorfosi dall'umano al vegetale in cui Apollo è l'unico a rimanere in vita e piangere l'amante perduto). Il dio resta orfano dell'innamorato anche nel caso di Bacco (dai *Fasti* Ovidio), che in memoria dell'amato Àmpelo disegnerà nel cielo il profilo di un vendemmiatore; Eracle, invece, dopo aver visto sbranare il compagno Abdero dalle cavalle di Diomede, sfogherà la sua ira dando in pasto quest'ultimo alle giumente antropofaghe<sup>4</sup>; Dioniso, di ritorno dall'Ade, scopre che l'adorato Prosimno è morto, e allora si reca sulla sua tomba, taglia un ramo di fico, ne fa un *dildo*, per poi dare inizio a una sepolcrale masturbazione. L'episodio è tratto dal *Protrettico* di Clemente di Alessandria:

Fu allora che si accorse di un ramo di fico che cresceva dalla tomba. Ne tagliò un ramo, con grande cura, usando un coltello, ritagliò il ramo dandogli la forma perfetta di un fallo. Poi chiuse gli occhi, pensando a Prosimno, il cui corpo era forse dentro l'albero.

Afferrò il fallo di legno scuro e, dopo essersi steso sulla tomba del pastore, si penetrò, senza mai smettere di pensare a Prosimno.

(Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 182)

Relativamente agli episodi mitici della raccolta, un discorso a parte merita la vicenda di Eracle e Ila, due degli Argonauti partiti con Giasone alla ricerca del Vello d'oro, che Hewitt riprende dagli *Idilli* di Teocrito e di cui cito la parte finale proprio per rendere conto della larvata, eppur dirompente, disperazione che emerge da queste parole:

Non molto passò: Eracle cominciò a preoccuparsi per l'assenza del ragazzo e uscì a cercarlo, portando l'arco e la clava.

<sup>4</sup> Il brano è ripreso dalle *Immagini* di Filostrato il Vecchio.

Chiamò Ila a gran voce tre volte  
 con la sua voce profonda e Ila rispose tre volte  
 da sotto le acque, senza speranza d'essere udito.  
 Come un cerbiatto bramisce e grida tra l'eco dei colli  
 e un leone balza a dargli la caccia, così Eracle  
 vagava impazzito tra cespi di rovi,  
 avanti e indietro, dilaniato dal dolore. Per campi,  
 per boschi, puniva se stesso per amore,  
 temendo il proprio fallimento, i piani di Giasone  
 e l'*Argo* svaniti. La notte passò e le vele  
 al far dell'alba la nave spiegò  
 e l'equipaggio aspettava il ritorno di Eracle,  
 ma l'eroe era ormai folle  
 a furia di riempire boschi e valli del nome di Ila.  
 Ora, il ragazzo dai capelli d'oro vive, e mai svanirà,  
 in immortale compagnia, ed Eracle dagli eroi  
 fu schernito per diserzione. Ma non era così:  
 il suo viaggio da solo terminò, e giunse infine  
 alla terra dei Colchi. (75)

Secondo Hewitt “the poem shows us how queer myths become central texts to relationships outside of mythic time. In the ‘present moment’” (Hewitt, Hall 2023a, 72), a riprova della polisemia stessa del mito: una latenza narrante e rivelatrice dischiusa all'atto stesso della sua riscoperta (o rilettura, che dir si voglia). Le tessere di *300.000 baci*, pertanto, incorniciano il senso del *queer* da più angolazioni: *monument speech* (si pensi al monumento eretto da Eracle per l'amato Sòstrato)<sup>5</sup>, quotidianità *tout court* (Alessandro che, nelle *Vite* plutarchiane, bacia teneramente il giovane Bagoas), oppure militanza *ante litteram*, come nel caso del “Battaglione Sacro”, anch'esso presente dalle *Vite* plutarchiane e composto da centocinquanta coppie di amanti. Giustamente, Hewitt fa notare come nel 1990, il gruppo di protesta newyorkese ACT UP, avesse stampato un volantino che riprendeva la storia del Battaglio stesso. Scrive Plutarco:

Vedi, quando il pericolo si manifesta, clan e tribù possono  
 rivoltarsi gli uni contro gli altri, e voltare le spalle ai feriti.  
 Ma un battaglione unito all'amore, che non può spezzarsi  
 né svanire, sarà a sua volta indissolubile. Quando il pericolo  
 si manifesta, un'armata di amanti tiene duro. L'amante  
 protegge l'amato, e l'amato protegge l'amante. (Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 51)

L'amore è il comun denominatore di questi testi e trova un punto di origine nelle battute che danno il titolo al libro stesso, cioè il *Carme* 48 di Catullo dedicato all'amante Giovenzio e di cui Hewitt apprezza “[the] keen sense of the interplay between abundance and satisfaction” (Hewitt, Hall 2023a, 95). In lingua italiana, il componimento, come spesso accade per le altre liriche presenti nell'antologia, è reso con un andamento perfettamente endecasillabico:

Il miele dei tuoi occhi, mio Giovenzio,  
 lasciamelo gustare con le labbra  
 fino a porvi trecentomila baci:

<sup>5</sup> L'episodio è tratto dalla *Descrizione della Grecia* di Pausania.



non potranno saziarmi, amore mio,  
foss'anche folta più di spighe estive  
queste messe di baci che raccolgo,  
alba dorata fragrante di sole.  
(Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 95)

Lo schema ritmico si ritrova altresì nelle *Elegie* di Teognide poste a chiusura, sicuramente tra le più intense di questi *300.000 baci*, proprio perché fanno breccia nella vulnerabilità di un amore non corrisposto, nello strazio del corpo consumato dal desiderio. Cito solo la prima parte:

Fanciullo mio, ti ha benedetto Cìpride  
di grazia e tutti gli uomini ha condotto  
attorno a te, attirati alla tua fiamma.  
Allora ascolta, Amore è un grave peso,

tu solo puoi alleviarlo, bello mio.  
Doloroso è il mio amore e tu soltanto  
lo puoi lenire, e lustrare, e ridarmi  
la perduta allegria. Mi devi accogliere

solo un momento, e potrai rispedirmi  
come nuovo al lavoro e alla saggezza. (190)

La quadreria imbastita da Hewitt non adombra quelle che sono le rappresentazioni dell'amore lesbico, ed ecco che allora questo canone *sui generis* si problematizza non poco, perché accanto a autori di sesso maschile come Luciano e Marziale, troviamo Saffo e le sue *Odi*, cui finiscono per aggiungersi due testi 'extravaganti' e perciò di notevole interesse per le studiose e gli studiosi di letteratura lesbica: il primo è il graffito pompeiano oggi conservato presso il Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli – “one of the few poems with a woman speaker addressing a woman lover to survive from the ancient Roman world” (Hewitt, Hall 2023a, 23); il secondo è un sortilegio risalente al III o IV secolo d.C., rinvenuto in Egitto e inciso su tavoletta, in cui una donna di nome Sofia invoca le entità demoniache affinché facciano bruciare d'amore l'amata Gorgonia, in un giustapporsi di *logos* e incomprensibili lasse apotropaiche. Per Luciano e Marziale, invece, il discorso cambia radicalmente, giacché il femminile lesbico passa attraverso lo *speculum* maschilista, e pertanto non è immune dalla misoginia che trasfigura la donna 'libera' in *monstrum*. Penso a Filènide – dagli *Epigrammi* di Marziale – che per Hewitt si fa immagine *queer* “so powerful, so contrary, as to confound the heterosexual gaze altogether” (Hewitt, Hall 2023a, 98):

Filènide, arrapata più d'un satiro,  
regina dei centauri: i maschi inculca  
e chiava donne, una dozzina al giorno.  
Si rimbocca le gonne e poi si butta:  
sport maschili nel fango della lotta,  
lei, iperpalestrata come un gay,  
si inonda di sudore puzzolente;  
quindi trinca una tanica di birra,  
e la vomita in tempo per la cena.  
Poi si scòfana sedici razioni  
e in panza se le insacca con un rutto.

Forte e dura, ora è pronta per scopare,  
 però non succhia cazzi, questa è roba  
 per le checche: lei slingua nella topa.  
 Dei centauri regina, a te Filènide  
 Conceda un dio tutto quel che mai volle  
 il tuo cuore di donna con le palle.  
 (Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 98)

Il tono disgustato di Marziale, dinanzi a questa donna che come un uomo si atteggia, è amplificato in fase traduttiva grazie a specifiche scelte lessicali, che nel guardare a epiteti omofobi (“checche”) o comunque relativi allo spazio omosociale (“iperpalestrata”, “incula”) spoglia il femminile della sua stessa essenza e restituisce una “regina dei centauri” con chiodo di pelle e Harley-Davidson. Ma, alla luce di una lettura *queer*, l’immagine icastica e detonante veicola anche un istinto di rappresaglia che si potenzia, sempre negli *Epigrammaton*, nella figura di Bassa: colei che può fare a meno del maschio e pertanto epitome di un femminile completo, che basta a sé stesso, pronto a esibire la propria potenza in quello *strap on ante litteram*:

Non ti ho mai visto dare un bacio a un uomo,  
 né mai ti ho visto, Bassa, lusingarlo.  
 Ogni esigenza tua trova risposta  
 Nel tuo sesso, e dei maschi te ne infischi.  
 Io ti facevo la moglie perfetta,  
 ma donne – che vergogna – ti scopavi.  
 Hai una fica di bronzo, e con un cazzo  
 fasullo la strofini a un’altra fica.  
 Sei sempre stata, Bassa, un vero enigma,  
 e la Sfinge di te sarebbe fiera:  
 non c’è uomo qui intorno, però al dunque...  
 c’è adulterio ovunque (100)

Al tribadismo di Marziale, modalizzato e di prassi nelle pagine di De Sade, fa da ideale contraltare la levità delle odi di Saffo, dove l’amore lesbico si risolve in un’atmosfera lacunosa e impenetrabile in cui i puntini di sospensione – come spesso accade nelle prime narrazioni dell’amore omosessuale al femminile – si fanno latori di un vuoto semantico e dell’impossibilità di dire questa passione:

A Sardis,  
 ma spesso è qui con il pensiero...

e tu eri per lei come una dea,  
 la tua canzone sopra tutte le altre

la cullava... ora lei va  
 fra le donne di Lidia, luminosa.

Come la luna e i suoi placidi raggi  
 oscurano le stelle e il firmamento

al tramonto del sole... La sua luce  
 su per i prati, il mar salso e la rosa

dischiusa alla rugiada, ed il cerfoglio  
agghindato fra il dolce meliloto...

Così vaga laggiù, e pensa Atthis,  
il cuore dolce roso dal passato...  
(Hewitt, Hall 2023b 102)

Ha scritto Paola Lupo che “il discorso dell’amore fra donne appare piuttosto rarefatto, costruito su pochi temi e condotto attraverso percorsi che, pur originando da punti apparentemente opposti, vengono a convergere nella produzione di significati analoghi e di medesimi effetti pratici” (2008, 11), ragion per cui “può essere ritenuto un qualcosa che non conosce possibilità di realizzazione concreta, o una sconcezza così scandalosa da non poter neppure essere nominata, e l’incidibile è così trasformato in inesistente [...]” (*ibidem*) o, per dirlo con Terry Castle, in una lesbica fantasma (1993, 6): un ectoplasma che si aggira in un immaginario esclusivamente al maschile. Ecco perché la lettura incrociata di questi brani può, in un certo qual modo, illuminare ulteriormente l’accidentato percorso della lesbica in letteratura e, perché no, ricostruirne l’inaridita genealogia, restituendo a quell’immagine fantasmatica il corpo di cui, per troppo tempo, è stata privata<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. Imperfections

“Canone” è una parola scomoda, e ancor più lo diventa quando si parla di letture *queer* o, in uno spettro più ampio, di quelle che Bloom non aveva esitato ad etichettare come ermeneutiche del risentimento. In seconda battuta, per quando le genealogie si rendano necessarie, il rischio di un’ossificazione tematica o, ancor peggio, di una topica *prêt-à-porter* è sempre in agguato, specie in un’epoca in cui le forme di *storytelling* finiscono per ridursi – complici i *feed* e le diavolerie algoritmiche – a veri e propri depositi dell’immaginario. Eve K. Sedgwick, nel suo insuperato *Epistemology of Closet* (1990), non mancava di individuare le aporie e le contraddizioni insite in una simile operazione, facendo della *queerness* il punto di forza per un ripensamento del canone stesso:

Has there ever been a gay Socrates?

Has there ever been a gay Shakespeare?

Has there ever been a gay Proust?

Does the Pope wear a dress? If these questions startle, it is not least as tautologies. A short answer, though a very incomplete one, might be that not only have there been a gay Socrates, Shakespeare, and Proust but that their names are Socrates, Shakespeare, Proust; and beyond that, legion dozens or hundreds of the most central<sup>11</sup> canonic figures in what the monoculturalists are pleased to consider “our” culture, as indeed, always in different forms and senses, in every other. (1990, 52)

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. anche Coppola 2011, 167: “Il canone lesbico è costituito da più canoni lesbici. Dalle poesie di Saffo a quelle di Audre Lorde, fino alle opere di Monique Wittig [...], i testi di riferimento per la cultura e per le lettrici lesbiche (e non solo) sono numerosi”.

Certo, l'antologia di Hewitt e Hall postula un ordinamento che, per quanto *a parte subiecti* (Luperini 2002, 81) e immune da qualsivoglia pretesta storicizzante, finisce per notomizzare il senso del *queer* nel mondo antico; ma l'impianto antologico non deve trarci in inganno, non fosse altro perché questi racconti chiamano, e lo fanno a gran voce, la risposta di un destinatario che non può più celarsi nel *closet*. Se la lettura risponde al bisogno di "addomesticare il nostro rapporto con la realtà umana e sociale, per aggiornare gli schemi che usiamo nel prendere coscienza delle trasformazioni che incidono sul nostro orizzonte di vita" (Garritano 2023, 82), il contatto con questi racconti, così si legge nell'epilogo della raccolta, "continue to offer that same sense of deep belonging for many LGBTQ+ people today" (Hewitt, Hall 2023a, 199), il che conferma la valenza trasformativa della lettura e, in un certo qual modo, quella felice sovversione veicolata dal senso stesso del *queer*, che nello spingersi oltre una stereotipia ghezzante e oltremodo nociva, riabilita la potenza salvifica della parola, la sua carica detonante e decostruttiva. Non più uno strumento da taglio, quanto piuttosto un'arma di conoscenza di sé, del mondo, di *noi*. Chiudo questo mio percorso citando un brano di Cicerone contenuto in *Sulla natura degli dei*, il cui titolo, per certi versi, si ricollega alle mie battute d'apertura: a quelle che nel metterci a nudo rivelano una vulnerabilità fisica ed emotiva in cui però, e lo credo sempre più fermamente, potremmo piantare il seme di qualsivoglia di orgoglio. Il brano ha come titolo *In lode delle imperfezioni*:

Non parlo per falsa modestia, ma a dirla schietta mi considero meno bello del toro che rapì Europa. La questione però non ha a che vedere con la nostra intelligenza, ma col nostro senso estetico. Se potessimo reinventare le nostre forme, combinando quelle che vediamo negli altri, non saresti contento di rassomigliare a un Tritone, una creatura marina che ci appare spesso con sembianze in parte umane? Certamente questo è un terreno scivoloso come base per le nostre discussioni. Dopo tutto, la nostra natura e i nostri istinti fanno sì che nessun essere umano desideri assumere una forma diversa dall'umana. Allo stesso modo una formica, penso, non vuol essere altro che una formica. Possiamo però almeno chiederci a quale specie di uomo Vorremmo appartenere. La bellezza è una qualità rara: quando ero ad Atene, per esempio, a stento riuscivo a trovarne bello uno per ogni plotone di addestramento. Tu ridi, ma è la verità. Comunque, quelli di noi che si trovano bene in compagnia dei giovinetti, secondo gli insegnamenti dei filosofi antichi spesso trovano affascinanti anche le loro imperfezioni. "Alceo ammirava perfino un neo sul polso del ragazzo amato". Un neo è considerato un difetto estetico, ma ad Alceo sembrava un pregio. Quinto Cātulo, il padre del nostro collega e amico, aveva un debole per un tuo concittadino, Roscio, e ne ha tessuto l'elogio in questi versi:

Un giorno, nell'uscir sul far dell'alba  
a pregare il mio dio, l'astro nascente,  
chi incontrai se non Roscio, tutto acceso  
dalla luce del sole? Perdonate,  
o numi, ma dei due il mortal mi parve  
più bello assai del dio.  
(Hewitt, Hall 2023b, 172-173)

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# Writings





*The Map of the World*

*La mappa del mondo*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin

Translated and introduced by Conci Mazzullo





## Mapping Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Etceteras

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### Abstract:

This introduction deals with the idea of mapping Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's latest collection of poems *The Map of the World* (2023). Inspired by Umberto Eco's *The Infinity of Lists* (2009), it combines two analytic approaches of mapping her poems, focusing on both definite synchronic maps and limitless Etceteras.

**Keywords:** Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Etceteras, Irish Poetry, Mapping, *The Map of the World*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's latest collection, *The Map of the World*<sup>1</sup>, shortlisted for the 2023 T.S. Eliot Prize (2023), stands out for its height, its synchronic and diachronic strength, and its incisiveness; its impact can be compared to that of the powerful 2020 *Collected Poems*, a vast anthology including poems from *Acts and Monuments* (1972) to 2020.

The idea of the map has often run through the poetic vein of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin. To better illustrate and interpret the way it has worked so far, I will borrow Umberto Eco's thesis from 2009's *The Infinity of Lists*<sup>2</sup>. Eco refers to two kinds of representations of possible worlds in Homer's Iliad. The first is a description of the shield of Achilles forged by the god Hephaestus for him, after his original shield was taken by Hector. There was shown "the whole of the cosmos (from the stars in the sky to the sheep in the fields)" (Beard 2009) contained within the solid, firm frame of the shield. In the second, "there is that open-ended list of military forces, [...] of the poem, with all its indeterminacy and allusions to infinity, euphemistically known as 'The Catalogue of Ships' [...] dominated by a 350-line list of the various Greek forces that made up the 'coalition of the willing' in the invasion of Troy" (*ibidem*). Eco clearly shows which style of

<sup>1</sup> Short-listed for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2023, the collection is "among the 10-strong books of poems for the prestigious award" (Iorizzo 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Umberto Eco's book was produced in collaboration with the Louvre while he was writer in residence there.

presentation he prefers: the infinite list. Eco's enthusiasm for the sheer abundance of meaning and the uncontrollable excess that supports the second representation, projects endless lists of chiefs and leaders, ending with immense promising Etceteras.

And it is impossible to ignore the fact that Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin makes use of both, the shield of Achilles, nailing down complete definite scenes, (stories, also in memory of artists, poets, family members) and, hypertexts, capturing historical events, highlighting personal memories and memories of the collective through maps of indefinite times and places, and Etceteras.

Her poems are both powerfully synchronic and diachronic in the poet's attempt to capture the essence of life, art, culture, history, geography, language, languages, translations, journeys, etcetera, as in the medieval Summae. Her hypertexts are overwhelming, 'fascinated' by her reading and interpretation of endless places and images that, despite their infinite number, point to her unique poetic world.

At first, you may get lost as she follows maps through her new collection, but later you'll find them as subtexts that will eventually lead you to discover your inner worlds. Following her journey, the maps may disappear at times, but by following them, you can trace infinite worlds like Calvino's Kan's dreams in *Invisible Cities* (Calvino 1974), and end up tracking down limitless trajectories of places, people, visions, visionary realities, untold stories, portraits, historical events, sensations, colours, mysteries and Etceteras!

I once asked her what relationship she had with maps and if she was fascinated by them. I certainly knew she loved them because they meant travelling; I also wanted to know if she had a globe in her house, and if she loved geography, and I was not surprised by her reply: "I hated geography as it was very badly taught, loved maps because they made it possible to understand history and then discovered geography again. Also travel of course [...] Yes, we had a globe. In 1950 it was covered in red for the British empire. Apart from the red-spattered globe I think the influential map in my childhood was the one of the tuppenny stamp. The British were furious that it showed the whole island"<sup>3</sup>.

The fascination of mirabilia, the vertigo of limitless as in Astolfo's world in Ariosto (Beard 2009) can be traced through Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's macrotext and her new collection. Maria Johnston defines her poetry in *The Map of the World* as an art of memory, metaphor and metamorphosis, travelling through the Earthly and the Cosmic (Johnston 2023). Furthermore *Voices at the Edge, Irish Poets on Skellig Michael* (Bushe 2010) certainly carries an important testimony to maps in "Indoors", one of a series of six poems that begin and end with two texts both called: "Vertigo" (1. *The Litany*, 2. *The Storm*, 3. *Indoors*, 4. *Direction*, 5. *Outdoors*, 6. *Vertigo*, 111-117):

The map of a language  
Spilling across a border. (113)

According to Marie Heaney, "Skellig Michael [is] a natural magnet for writers" (Heaney 2010, 11), and "This otherworldly place inevitably brings most of the poets to reflect on the fundamentals of human existence: time and eternity, the past and the future [...] Some are ambushed by memories [...] Others have experiences that border on the visionary" (12). And so it was for Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin who climbed the stairs carved by the monks and anchorites, with other poets on an artistic venture, and felt the *vertigo* of being there. In 2009 a group of poets and a photographer were invited to enjoy the island for some days exploring its unique fascination of "genius loci" and inspiring them to write poems, captured by the wilderness of a

<sup>3</sup> From a conversation with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin.

high rock lashed by the wind and sea. Here the map expands through her creative imagination and overflows boundaries. As Jerry Brotton writes: “A map is a way of projecting [man] in the environment, and therefore it is more a symbol of [his] own existence rather than a tool for orienting [himself]” (Brotton 2015, 7, my translation). Maps are also a “graphic representations that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes, or events in the human world”(19).

Thanks to these definitions Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem “St. Brigid’s Well” fits well with man’s projection in the environment as she actually searches for the Saint’s wells. The poem was commissioned for “St. Brigid’s Well, Lá Fhéile Bríde” an event held at Hamilton Gallery in Sligo in 2022 that sponsored a project of 101 women artists who were inspired in different ways by lines in Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem to create paintings, culminating in a final exhibition in Sligo and the publication of a catalogue prefaced by the poet herself (Hamilton Gallery 2022). The same exhibition was shown at Nanchizi Art Museum in Beijing<sup>4</sup> on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 to celebrate St. Brigid and Irish women, with Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin as guest of honour and *primo motore immobile* of the whole project. In the “Introduction” to the Catalogue, Ní Chuilleanáin writes: “[...] I was looking for more signs of her presence, and for the people to whom the holy well had meaning”. The poet, doing her research, going through the map of the wells, remarks: “but I could not have anticipated how many surprises and mysteries I would encounter in the space of two days wandering around [...] Stories, phrases, conversations overheard. In the poem I wrote I couldn’t cram all those details inside its boundaries. [They] are welling up out of history” (Hamilton Gallery 2022).

And the poem reads:

[...]  
 If I wanted a map that would just show the wells,  
 the culverted streams, the short cuts, they came,  
 they congregated, they insisted,  
 [...]  
 I heard the mill stream splashing downhill,

and here the map is pointing to:

[...]  
 the excess of water, the excess of all the stories  
 I might have heard, as I searched for St. Brigid’s well.

Through the power of water Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin evokes “the perfect image of what cannot be represented [...] only made visible by its contexts: its courses and wells [...] Water is like everything and nothing and the triumph of the image maker is to capture and reveal it (*ibidem*).

There are other maps in her poetry, however, all leading to *The Map of the World*. In her previous collection, *The Mother House* (2019), maps are to be found in “A Map of Convents

<sup>4</sup> The exhibition is now on at the Nanchizi Art Museum in Beijing, China, courtesy of Ireland’s Ambassador to China Ann Derwin and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.

‘Cove Lane’ ” revealing Nano Nagle’s<sup>5</sup> dream of secretly setting up a convent in Cork during Penal Laws<sup>6</sup> challenging the British establishment:

Here is the map with the underground streams,  
 [...] the walled islands,  
 and the fine gardens. There was another map,  
 of a different place, in her head; she told nobody.  
 [...]  
 The map of the city never showed  
 those children swiftly assembling  
 into a parliament of girls and boys. (14)

Amazingly, today Nano Nagle’s map needs a real map of the world to trace all the settlements of the Presentation Sisters across the continents, from Europe, America, Africa, Asia to New Zealand.

By mapping the poet’s maps, within her macrotext, we finally get to “The Blood Map” which reveals her grief as she struggles against the hardship she experienced during Ní Chuilleánáin’s husband<sup>7</sup> serious unexpected health misadventures, allowing an interminable chain of places, like rosary beads, to follow the stages of his pilgrimage through various hospitals:

The map in my head is coloured with the places  
 where they took your blood, Ostia,  
 [...]  
 In Madonna Alta  
 they sucked three red tubes out of your arm;  
 in Castiglione Fosco they rewrote the prescription  
 [...]  
 in Terontola  
 we took an hour’s break (Ní Chuilleánáin 2020, 364),

finally leading to a useless solution.

In the new collection, *The Map of the World* (2023), seven maps, out of thirty-five poems, interspersed throughout the text, brim to the surface, as in “Air: The Map of the World”, both in the title and in the poem itself:

The map had told us already what would happen to the peoples of the west —

<sup>5</sup> Honora Nagle (c.1718-1784), known as Nano Nagle, was the founder of the Presentation Sisters. She was declared venerable in 2013 by Pope Francis.

<sup>6</sup> Penal Laws did not allow education for Catholics in Ireland, and as “operating a Catholic School could result in three months imprisonment, Nano had to work in secret. She began by opening a school for young girls next to the actual site at Nano Nagle Place in the early 1750s. This girls’ school focused on reading, writing, Catechism (Catholic religious instruction) and needlework”, <<https://nanonagleplace.ie/the-story-of-nano-nagle/>> (05/2024).

<sup>7</sup> Macdara Woods (1942-2018), poet and founder-editor of Cyphers, a journal of Irish and international poetry. In 1986 he was elected as member of Aosdána, an organization that “over its 40years has honoured artists whose work has made an outstanding contribution to the creative arts in Ireland”, <<http://aosdana.artscouncil.ie/general/the-arts-council-announces-aosdana-beginnings-by-mark-duncan/>> (05/2024).

opening up horizons of migration, journeys beyond the unknown, to England and America nourishing the sense of grief and loss:

[...] *they don't come back from America,  
they comes back from England, not America, they never comes back* — (13)

Another interesting, cathartic surface map finds its way into the multiple narrative of “Echo is dumb”. It unfolds uncharted spaces where Eiléan feels Macdara’s absence as she moves through history, “the century of war and the climb towards peace” (18), Andrew Marvell’s politics and poetry, and her memories guided by a map:

[...] I remember, when the map led us  
to La Verna, we came,  
climbing through the slim tree-trunks  
and the tailor was there, a pilgrim  
where St Francis came searching for peace. (19)

Maps also appear in the poem “The Conversation” dedicated to her friend Philip Casey:

[...] To reach it again, though,  
you have to pause. The map is crumpled up,  
East Arran Street hidden between the folds  
where nobody searches now. (20)

These lines show the forgotten map of his address, despite his great popularity in generously running a digital platform “as founder and editor of the website Irish Writers Online, providing biographical details of Irish writers” (Doyle 2018) and of his colleague poets thanks to his indefatigable will. But Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin is eager to capture more of his nature. Her lines

[...] I want a likeness  
taken somewhere on his travels  
[...] but the years he gave away to the big conversation  
afford his best presence, a voice  
that speaks, that knows its right to a hearing

exalt and well complement her devoted obituary on the *Irish Times*: “Stories of him dancing on his prosthetic leg in Sicily, tales of his travels in Germany and Spain, remind me of what a thirst he had [...] still writing poetry and fiction with aplomb, still exploring ways of putting technology at the service of the literary community [...] But poetry was really at the heart of his writing life.” (Ní Chuilleánáin in Doyle 2018).

By following her maps, we also land on “Seasons of the Lemon House” and welcome her concern for lemon trees and unexpected climate behaviour:

[...] Now on the edge, where the climate shifts.  
Spreading across the map, the lemon trees are safe (Ní Chuilleánáin 2023, 29),

while in “Instructions to an Architect” we share the sense of freedom felt in an imaginary cave hidden under a quilt:

[...]  
The child knew her bunk was all the space she needed,  
her quilt a cave, her map of freedom. (30)

So far, maps have surfaced through her poems, mentioned as nouns to mark their presence, thus showing cameos and synchronic definite images and examples of realities that are easy to pin down. But there are other maps to be tracked down, and they can only be reached following her endless wanderings. Through *Etceteras*, tracing subterranean streams that surface and drawing other substantial maps, Ní Chuilleanáin’s pursuit will traverse maps of colour and art, historical maps, memory maps, other poets’ maps, and cosmic maps. And in fact, a hidden map of the new collection is unexpectedly revealed in Nano Reid’s painting “Horse at the Gate”<sup>8</sup>, depicted on the front cover with its soft and delicate tones. It belongs to one of the most important maps, the map of colours, pointing to the well-known painter who challenged catholic morality with the picture of a man with an orange stuck in his groin, that she eventually had to overpaint to appease public modesty. And the poet comments:

[...]  
We could not capture the painter’s  
leaf-thin imaginings:  
the young man with an orange  
stuffed in his groin — she painted  
over that nude vision,  
[...]  
In which brown overcoat?  
Is that him, hesitating  
hunched in the rainy twilight? (23);

here the orange and the nude colour of the naked skin sway and mix. But the map of colours and Art projects also into “A Shadow in Her Notebook” referring to the well-known stained glass artist Helen Moloney<sup>9</sup>, whose strong and contrasting colours overlap, issuing vibrant sensations:

She sent a ten-pound note to the Poor Clares  
and imagined them in their brown habits,  
[...]  
They sent her a fish, swimming  
[...]

<sup>8</sup> Nano Reid (1900-1981) was an Irish modernist painter. “She was best known for presenting typically ‘Irish’ subject matter in an idiosyncratic, abstract style”, <<https://thebridgetcd.com/2018/05/28/nano-reid-artist-profile/>> (05/2024).

<sup>9</sup> Helen Moloney (1926-2011) was a modernist Irish stained glass artist known for her work with architect Liam McCormick in 1960s and 1970s. “Moloney’s simple but bold designs, stylised and often semi-abstract, harmonised with the modernism of McCormick’s architecture, and her preference for strong primary colours complemented his customarily white surfaces”, <<https://www.dib.ie/biography/moloney-helen-a9896>> (05/2024). Her works can be admired in a number of churches, in particular in St Michael’s Church Creeslough, Donegal.



in the dark water. They sent her a lion, then a star.  
 [...] The lion raised his paw,  
 coloured like the sun, glowing now

against a glass curtain, such a blue  
 it seemed a kind of night. The darkened interior  
 sucked in colours.  
 [...] *But could it not be clear glass?*  
 No.  
 [...] the woman  
 dressed in brown,  
 [...] they gathered around her clean white page, demanding  
 indigo glass (16)

If in “A Shadow of Her Notebook” the dense colours of the stained glass saturate darkness, in “Instructions to an Architect”, architectural metaphors are evoked through Petrarca’s poem: “Rotta è l’alta Colonna”, in which he mourns Laura, the love of his life and a friend. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin says: “[...] make sure that the high window frames a chosen scene, a tall distant pillar [...] suddenly split, fractured from the inside”, next to the crashing giants defeated by the gods in Palazzo Te, near Mantua.<sup>10</sup>

Ní Chuilleanáin’s words:

[...]  
 In a closed room of giants, I saw a tense fellow  
 who from the beginning needed more space, yet  
 pushed up his burden of stacked storeys  
 and only slowly forced to his knees  
 [...]

The “Room of Giants” is perfectly in keeping with and Ní Chuilleanáin’s and Giulio Romano’s aim of breaking down architectural boundaries to free them from spatial edges concealing the shifts from horizontal to vertical planes, smoothing out the corners of the walls, and throwing the viewer inside it.

But what I found more subtle, intimate and personal was the “map of hair” that resonates “Muriel Gifford After Her Fever” and “In Ostia, August 2020” (Ní Chuilleanáin 2023, 26, 33) which traces a map of the poet’s latest memories through a map of her hair, and “The Ash-tree at My Window” (28) which defines her relationship with her new self after Macdara’s death.

The first poem lives through the parallelism of combing, brushing and caring for the hair of Muriel Gifford and Ní Chuilleanáin’s hair after a fever and Covid:

[...]  
 is it called *fever?* the weariness  
 that comes after fever, even too weak to brush my hair?  
 [...] The long strand of memory twisted and blended

<sup>10</sup> Palazzo Te, is one of the most beautiful Renaissance villas in Italy. It was designed by Giulio Romano (1525-1535) for Federico II Gonzaga.

[...]  
 In those days they cut your hair off if you'd had had a fever,  
 but Muriel's hair was lovely,  
 her husband prevented them cutting,  
 he sat beside her [...]

carefully combing [...]  
 stroking every long hair free  
 [...]  
 When I finish my hair I'm too weak to begin the day  
 putting on your heavy carved ring,

And here the poet's memory entwines Irish revolutionary past with MacDonagh and his wife evoking historical events when both of them were

[...]  
 swept  
 away, as they were swept  
 by the firing squad and the stifling, coiling wave. (26)

"In Ostia, August 2020", the poet recalls her first night in Italy after the Covid pandemics and the loss of her husband:

My first night in Italy since the whole world changed –  
 [...]  
 but also, as before, they think I am German –  
 because of my hair? Because I'm old and travelling alone?  
 There is food, and a glass, and I am alone. (33)

Similarly, in "The Ash-tree at My Window", the poet, reflecting on her own physical and mental state, dwells on feelings of loneliness:

[...]  
 For five years no one has lived beside me,  
 my bones are bare, my spine is a tree stem  
 threatened with dieback.

My room on the top floor is a green cage,  
 Spring is here and the ash tree is flowing  
 up to the window,  
 [...]  
 The bare ideogram announcing *Tree*  
 changes annually to a flourish  
 of intimate leaves,

[...] Please,  
 hide me in summer. (28)

As Ní Chuilleánáin has often stated, Dante has always been her main source of inspiration and she has often reread the *Comedy*, most recently during the Covid pandemics. In “The Universe in 1300” three stanzas pursue the three Cantos of *Hell*, *Purgatory* and *Paradise*:

I never fitted in that windy place –  
but neither did they. A face, a runner  
one instant in a frame, a body stuffed  
half underground, they twisted  
in search of rest like ancients in their beds,

Here she refers to Canto XIX of *Inferno*, where the Simoniacs are punished by being half buried, head down. These are clerics, even bishops and popes, who, speculating on the administration of the sacraments, despised the power of the grace received. The sacraments, powerful signs and places of divine grace, such as baptism and baptismal font, act as symbols and places where the Simoniacs find their punishment. There is also reference to Brunetto Latini<sup>11</sup> as the runner figure. The second stanza of the poem, “The Circle of the Prodigals”, on the other hand, is linked to Canto XIX of the *Purgatorio*, in which the sinners remember what they did to be punished:

[...]  
I spent the legacy they earned,  
those ancestors that served their time  
in the convent and the internment camp  
refining the skills they'd studied  
in homes of modest, anxious labour, of long hours  
gazing at the accounts, bare bedrooms.

I spent it all on the followers of love not war  
who knew where the keys of intoxication were buried;  
they dealt in bribes, their lives, their bodies, currency. (14)

The third and last stanza includes a fascinating reference to a hypothetical solar eclipse, as we find in the final verses of Canto XXV of *Paradiso*, where Dante feels blinded as if he were looking at the sun when he looks at the divine light of Saint John. However, what makes Eiléan Ní Chuilleánáin's poem even more compelling, however, is that the poet relates Dante's episode to a real-life solar eclipse that she experienced with some friends:

[...]  
We sat on the day of the solar eclipse.  
It grew a little dark, the birds interrupted their song,  
the boy ran for a shaving glass and a sheet.  
We watched the moving star so far away  
in the dark depth of the house. [...]. (15)

As a conclusion I would like to share the strong sense of vertigo the poet certainly felt on Skellig Michael which led her to ponder, as often, on some of her most compelling Etceteras:

<sup>11</sup> Brunetto Latini (c.1220-1294 or 1295) was Dante's teacher.

6. *The Litany*

[...]  
 Steady though the long gap in the story  
 [...]  
 The soaking tears of centuries drill down  
 Low passages in between the stones,  
 [...]  
 The wave can pause no longer, called back to Brazil. (Ní Chuilleanáin in Bushe 2010, 111),

and also led her to ask recurring questions through the rising and falling of waves:

2. *The Storm*

[...]  
*And where is truth* under the slamming and roaring,  
 [...]  
*Where is pity now?* (112)

The quoted lines give us a strong direction to the reading of *The Map of The World*, a text which guides us through places, historical events, art, architecture, literary works, imagination, sensations, reflections, and portraits perceivable as infinite lists, letting us embark on a journey of limitless Etceteras and Etceteras.

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# *The Map of the World* *La mappa del mondo*\*

Eiléan Ní Chuilleánain

Translated by Conci Mazzullo

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**“The Miracles”***for Siabhra Woods and Antonio Piacenza*

Coming out of a country where emptied houses  
 lay open to the weather, sheep in the entry,  
 weedy graveyards, the foxes' cry at night  
 their only music; the bridge, the shifting planks  
 greased with a season's flattened leaves  
 as frost loosened its grasp; then on the far side  
 withered grass trampled, the briar hedge where ice  
 lingered underneath —

I could not have made it up:  
 how, in the tall church beside the wide calm river,  
 a short walk from the city walls, the poor  
 whose luck once seemed to have definitely run out  
 had made, from wooden spars and their own old clothes,  
 the image of deliverance, the moment  
 when the Virgin interfered just as the torturer  
 was ready to start work, or the rope broke,

the reprieve made it across the slippery bridge in time  
 even though the clock had been put forward  
 so it would come too late. Thronging the walls,  
 these puppets of misfortune, not the natural kind  
 like a mad bull or a robber or evil spirits — instead,  
 the tall tree of human revenge, dressed up  
 to look like justice, instantly bending its branches  
 loaded with mercy like fruit: look at their faces,  
 they can't believe it's true. But their truth holds out,  
 as when they manufactured it themselves,  
 the scenes of distress, their crash and agony changed  
 into carpentry and the needle's deliberate work.

It's the same rough craft that made the sod cabin  
 to defy the writ of eviction. The same bridge  
 spanning the gully. Fear, which is everywhere,  
 pushed back, and those truths, that were nearly told  
 at the wrong moment, were able to wait —  
 just as tonight the parent climbing the stairs —  
 after three warnings feels the brush of her sleeve,  
 swallows back the word that can't be recalled if spoken,  
 and goes quietly down again.

**“Air: The Map of the World”**

The map had told us already what would happen to  
 the peoples of the west —  
 long promontories hurrying them out into the salty  
 ocean fields,



**“I miracoli”***per Siabhra Woods e Antonio Piacenza*

Partita dall'Irlanda, case svuotate  
 aperte alle intemperie, pecore all'ingresso,  
 tombe con erbacce, l'urlo della volpe, di notte,  
 la loro unica musica; il ponte, le tavole dissestate  
 oleate con foglie stagionali appiattite  
 appena il gelo allentava la presa, poi più lontano  
 appassiva erba calpestata, la siepe di rovi dove il ghiaccio  
 vi si annidava sotto —

Non avrei potuto inventarlo:  
 come nell'alta chiesa accanto il fiume calmo;  
 un breve percorso dalle mura della città, i poveri  
 la cui fortuna sembrava essersi definitivamente esaurita  
 avevano fatto, con assi di legno e i loro vecchi abiti  
 l'immagine della liberazione, il momento  
 in cui la Vergine interveniva proprio quando il torturatore  
 era pronto a iniziare il lavoro, oppure la corda si spezzava,

la grazia riusciva a superare il ponte scivoloso in tempo  
 anche se l'orologio era stato portato avanti  
 così sarebbe arrivata troppo tardi. Assiependosi sui muri  
 questi manichini della sfortuna, non di tipo naturale  
 come un bue impazzito, o un ladro, o spiriti cattivi — invece,  
 l'alto albero della vendetta umana, vestito  
 per imitare la giustizia, piegando istantaneamente i suoi rami  
 carichi di misericordia, come frutta: guarda le loro facce,  
 non possono credere sia vero. Ma la loro verità tiene duro,  
 come quando l'hanno messa insieme loro stessi,  
 le scene della desolazione, la loro caduta e agonia mutate  
 in lavoro del legno e ponderato lavoro dell'ago.

È lo stesso grezzo artigianato che ha permesso alla capanna di zolla erbosa  
 di resistere all'ordinanza della cacciata. Lo stesso ponte  
 che supera la voragine. Paura. Che è ovunque,  
 spinta via, e quelle verità che furono quasi dette  
 al momento sbagliato, furono in grado di attendere —  
 proprio come stasera il genitore che va su per le scale —  
 dopo tre avvertimenti sente il fruscio della sua manica,  
 riinghiotte la parola che non può essere ripresa se detta,  
 e ritorna giù in silenzio.

**“Aria: la mappa del mondo”**

La mappa ci aveva già detto cosa sarebbe accaduto  
 alla gente dell'ovest —  
 lunghi promontori la facevano affrettare dentro il vasto  
 oceano salato,

roads that twisted around inlets constantly promising  
 a place to rest —  
 and yet invention does not falter,  
 just feel the tailor's clutch of the variously woven tweeds  
 ready for the scissors, the tacking, the silky lining, listen.  
 As the echoes are twisting into a macaronic language,  
 listen to the places we came from, their stories  
 elbowing each other out of the way  
 (can you recall the dripping walls of the library, the lads  
 who were thought to be studying grammar to prepare  
 for Maynooth?  
 but instead they were planning their forays across the  
 plains of Argentina).

Up comes the prophecy I heard in the train making the  
 slow journey  
 from Fishguard as far as the junction, when the big woman  
 with red hair  
 in the green and white dress with a gold belt, and red shoes,  
 told us over and over, *they don't come back from America,*  
*they comes back from England, not America, they never*  
*comes back* —  
 and along the carriage a man was playing an accordion,  
 the cards were slapped down on suitcases, do we not know  
 about those journeys now? or how the accordion's long  
 note  
 spoke up in agreement? so that I could never have recalled  
 her voice  
 except for that music, its delays and provisos,  
 dividing up the time.

### “The Universe in 1300”

I

I never fitted in that windy place —  
 but neither did they. A face, a runner  
 one instant in a frame, a body stuffed  
 half underground, they twisted  
 in search of rest like ancients in their beds,  
 not truly bodies though, yet their unrest  
 I felt in my own body, the urgent  
 hungover battering in my head, my lungs  
 complaining.

Hunted by twisters and scooped  
 forward by demons resenting my gaze  
 as the forge steamed, I did not escape,  
 I was expelled. The blast knocking me sideways,  
 then stilled, but the walls, the stairs,  
 the precipices wanted me gone.

strade che si torcevano intorno alle baie promettendo sempre  
 un posto per riposare —  
 e ancora la loro creatività non vacilla,  
 devi proprio sentire i campioni del sarto dei vari tessuti di tweed  
 pronti per le forbici, l'imbastitura, la fodera di seta, ascolta.  
 Come gli echi si intrecciano in un linguaggio maccheronico  
 Tendi l'orecchio ai nostri luoghi di provenienza, alle storie che  
 sgomitano fuori dalla strada  
 (ti ricordi i muri sgocciolanti della biblioteca, i ragazzi  
 che si pensava studiassero la grammatica  
 per Maynooth?  
 mentre stavano preparando le loro incursioni  
 nelle pianure argentine).

Ecco arriva la profezia che sentii in treno  
 nel lento viaggio  
 da Fishguard sino allo svincolo, quando una donna  
 dai capelli rossi  
 in verde e bianco, con una cintura dorata e scarpe rosse,  
 continuò a ripetere *Non tornano dall'America,*  
*ritornano dall'Inghilterra, non dall'America,*  
*non tornano più —*  
 e avanti nel vagone un uomo stava suonando un organetto,  
 le carte sbattute sulle valigie, non sappiamo di  
 questi viaggi ora? O come la lunga nota  
 dell'organetto  
 alzava il tono in armonia? Cosicché non avrei mai potuto ricordare  
 la sua voce  
 tranne che per la musica, le pause e le battute,  
 che segnavano il tempo.

### “L' Universo nel 1300”

#### I

Non ero adatta per quel posto ventoso —  
 ma neppure loro. Un viso, uno di corsa  
 un istante nella cornice, un corpo sbattuto dentro  
 seppellito a metà, si giravano  
 in cerca di riposo come vecchi nei loro letti,  
 non corpi veri però, tuttavia la loro inquietitudine  
 la sentivo nel mio stesso corpo, l'urgente  
 postumo di sbornia che irrompeva nella mia testa, i miei polmoni  
 si lamentavano.

Inseguito da imbroglioni e beccato  
 da demoni che non sopportavano il mio sguardo  
 quando la fornace fumava, non fuggii,  
 fui espulso. La forza del vento mi prese sui fianchi,  
 poi si fermò, ma i muri, le scale,  
 i precipizi mi volevano via.

## 2 CIRCLE OF THE PRODIGALS

I spent the legacy they earned,  
 those ancestors that served their time  
 in the convent and the internment camp  
 refining the skills they'd studied  
 in homes of modest, anxious labour, of long hours  
 gazing at the accounts, bare bedrooms.

I spent it all on the followers of love not war  
 who knew where the keys of intoxication were buried;  
 they dealt in bribes, their lives, their bodies, currency.  
 The light of dawn saw them returning,  
 the jewels in their hats far beyond price.  
 In the middle Sunday of Lent I remember them,  
 they loved as well as I did, but love destroyed them.  
 They have left me staring long hours at the accounts.

## 3

Years ago, far away, in daylight  
 stronger than summers here,  
 we sat under the gazebo  
 and the voices began, their questions  
 brought out by the light, their explanations  
 reflecting light as glass flashes.

We sat on the day of the solar eclipse.  
 It grew a little dark, the birds interrupted their song,  
 the boy ran for a shaving glass and a sheet.  
 We watched the moving star so far away  
 in the dark depth of the house. All  
 but one remember it, and he will be a guide  
 when the darkness comes, until the birds  
 resume their song, as the light grows strong and plain.

**“A Shadow in Her Notebook”**

*(Helen Moloney, stained-glass artist, 1926-2011)*

She sent a ten-pound note to the Poor Clares  
 and imagined them in their brown habits, praying  
 for her to find an idea. That was a start.

They sent her a fish, swimming and wavering, its head  
 enormous in the dark water. They sent her a lion, then a star.  
 She drew the lines of lead that held the sun in its place,

that funnelled the light through what was once the open air.  
 The clouds paused on the mountain top:  
 a gleam of weather somewhere else, then the storm

## 2 CERCHIO DEI PRODIGHI

Ho speso l'eredità che hanno guadagnato,  
 quegli avi che hanno vissuto il loro tempo  
 in convento o in campi di concentramento  
 affinando le abilità che avevano appreso  
 in case di modesto, ansioso lavoro, di lunghe ore spese  
 a fare conti e nelle nude stanze da letto.

Ho speso tutto sui seguaci dell'amore non della guerra  
 che sapevano dove le chiavi dell'intossicazione erano sepolte;  
 trafficavano con mazzette, usavano le loro vite, i corpi come moneta.  
 La luce dell'alba li vide tornare,  
 i gioielli nei cappelli ben al di sopra del prezzo.  
 Li ricordo a metà domenica della Quaresima,  
 li amavano come me, ma l'amore li distrusse.  
 Mi hanno lasciato a osservare per ore i conti.

## 3

Anni fa, lontano, alla luce del giorno  
 Più forte delle estati qui,  
 seduti sotto un gazebo  
 e le voci cominciavano, le loro domande  
 tirate su dalla luce, le loro spiegazioni  
 riflettevano la luce come guizzi sul vetro.

Eravamo seduti il giorno dell'eclissi solare.  
 Crebbe l'oscurità, gli uccelli smisero di cantare,  
 il ragazzo corse a cercare uno specchio da barba, un lenzuolo.  
 Guardammo la stella che si muoveva così lontana  
 nell'oscuro profondo della casa. Tutti tranne uno  
 la ricordano e sarà una guida  
 quando arriva il buio, sino a quando gli uccelli  
 riprendono a cantare, quando la luce ritorna forte e chiara.

**“Un'ombra nei suoi appunti”**

*(Helen Moloney, artista di vetrate, 1926-2011)*

Mandò dieci sterline alle Clarisse  
 e le immaginò negli abiti marrone a pregare  
 perché lei trovasse un'ispirazione. Era un inizio.

Le mandarono un pesce, che nuotava e guizzava  
 enorme testa nell'acqua scura. Le mandarono un leone, poi una stella.  
 Disegnò le linee di piombo che tenevano il sole al suo posto,

incanalando la luce verso un precedente spazio aperto.  
 Le nuvole si fermavano sulle cime:  
 un guizzo di maltempo altrove, poi la tempesta

pounding overhead before it slid off northward,  
 a dark prow. The lion raised his paw,  
 coloured like the sun, glowing now

against a glass curtain, such a blue  
 it seemed a kind of night. The darkened interior  
 sucked in colours. Always the voice in her head  
 objecting: *But could it not just be clear glass?*  
 No. The shadow of the bell tower, the woman  
 dressed in brown, a shadow behind a screen:

they gathered around her clean white page, demanding  
 indigo glass for the narrow tight window  
 and oyster white, a little off-centre, for the loaf.

Just there on the border between the storm and the hush,  
 the fish trembled in the light from the clouded sky,  
 weaving like a hologram.

On her page the same tremble threw

a swimming shadow that covered the chancel floor.  
 Only the blind organist's daughter will ever see  
 how it shivers, floated safe in empty air.

### **“Echo is Dumb”**

Without you beside me, echo is dumb as I ask what it means  
 to speak about the century of war and the climb towards  
 peace;  
 it's not just the wasteland of years between lying open,  
 their sandstorms of change, their Ozymandias moments:

remember, when the noise retreated,  
 how in dappled light, stepping straight  
 our enemies appeared and, moving  
 out of the shade, slow and aloof,  
 dug in their pockets for the measure,  
 then stretched it twice. Claiming descent  
 from Andrew Marvell's day, they're reading  
 out of a page we barely see.

*How could I write like him, at home  
 inside a verse as in a room  
 securely his by lock and key?  
 That isn't how verse came to me —  
 rather, in wounds and desolation;  
 if calm, the cold of separation.  
 If I speak hoping to be heard  
 it must be on a theme that's shared,  
 but how not fail, miming that voice  
 that reasoned in the midst of noise?*

martellante in alto scivolò giù a nord,  
 un'oscura caccia. Il leone sollevò la zampa,  
 colorata come il sole, ora lucente

contro una cortina di vetro, un blu così  
 sembrò come notte. L'interno buio  
 risucchiava i colori. Sempre una voce in testa  
 che si opponeva: *Ma non potrebbe essere solo vetro chiaro?*  
 No. L'ombra del campanile, la donna  
 vestita di marrone, un'ombra dietro lo schermo:

si spinsero intorno alla sua pagina bianca e pulita, chiedendo  
 vetro indaco per la strettissima finestra  
 e bianco ostrica, un po' fuori centro, per il pane.

Proprio lì al confine tra la tempesta e il silenzio,  
 il pesce tremò, nella luce del cielo plumbeo,  
 un ologramma tremolante.

Sulla sua pagina lo stesso tremito

ispirò un'ombra che nuotando copriva l'area del presbiterio.  
 Solo la figlia dell'organista cieco vedrà mai  
 come si frantuma, fluttuando al sicuro nell'aria vuota.

### “L'eco è muto”

Senza te accanto, l'eco è muto mentre chiedo che significa  
 parlare del secolo della guerra e della scalata verso  
 la pace;  
 non è solo la terra desolata degli anni intercorsi che si aprono,  
 tempeste di sabbia per cambiare i loro momenti osimandici:

ricorda, quando il rumore arretrava  
 come in luce chiazzata, avanzando dritti  
 i nemici apparivano e, uscendo  
 fuori dall'ombra, lenti, impavidi,  
 scavavano nelle tasche per la misura,  
 poi la allungavano due volte. Reclamando di discendere  
 dai tempi di Andrew Marvell, leggono  
 una pagina che noi a malapena vediamo.

*Come potrei scrivere come lui, a casa  
 in un verso come in una stanza  
 chiuso al sicuro da chiave e serratura?  
 Non è così che mi è arrivato il verso —  
 piuttosto con ferite e desolazione;  
 se calmo il freddo della separazione.  
 Se parlo, sperando di essere sentita  
 deve essere di un tema che è condiviso,  
 ma come non fallire, mimando quella voce  
 che ragionava in mezzo al rumore?*

I may not leave the singular,  
gripping the chart that's served so far.

The mountain roads, knotted and sprawled,  
the twisted tree, the waterfall,  
are only frames to hold the level  
widening perspective of the civil —  
but how to step in through the frame?

I remember, when the map led us  
to La Verna, we came  
climbing through the slim tree-trunks  
and the tailor was there, a pilgrim  
where St Francis came searching for peace.  
He recognized the cut of your clothes.  
That forest, once, was famous for thieves;  
the goddess honoured on the mountain chose  
to make her home a refuge for the fugitives.

### “The Conversation”

*. . . and when I die  
will I be transformed into a thought  
travelling at the speed of light?  
— Philip Casey*

The shiver travelling up the cat's backbone  
when something flutters in the garden,  
a shiver in water moving under thin ice —  
that's the nearest thing to the live  
thrill in the air that is Philip now.  
It's a flutter that stops before finishing  
since it needn't be entire to give  
his singular greeting.

To reach it again, though,  
you have to pause. The map is crumpled up,  
East Arran Street hidden between the folds  
where nobody searches now. I want a likeness  
taken somewhere on his travels  
in plain daylight by a journeyman's hand. I can see  
the years of his life that were taken,  
the years of work too, but the years  
he gave away to the big conversation  
afford his best presence, a voice  
that speaks, that knows its right to a hearing:  
*'And this is how we spend our days'.*

It echoes in the corridor  
where they queued on plastic chairs.



Non potrei abbandonare il singolare,  
afferrando la mappa che è servita sin'ora.

Strade di montagna annodate e spalancate,  
l'albero contorto, la cascata  
sono solo cornici per mantenere il livello  
che apre la prospettiva crescente del civile —  
ma come attraversare la cornice?

Ricordo quando la mappa ci portò  
alla Verna, arrivammo  
arrampicandoci attraverso tronchi sottili  
e il sarto era lì, un pellegrino  
dove era giunto S. Francesco in cerca di pace.  
Riconobbe il taglio dei tuoi vestiti.  
Quella foresta, un tempo era famosa per i ladri,  
la dea onorata sulla montagna scelse  
di fare la sua casa rifugio per i fuggitivi.

#### “Conversazione”

*. . . e quando muoio  
sarò trasformato in un pensiero  
che viaggia alla velocità della luce?  
— Philip Casey*

Il brivido che viaggia su per la spina dorsale del gatto  
quando qualcosa sbatte le ali in giardino,  
un tremolio nell'acqua che si muove sotto il ghiaccio sottile —  
quella è la cosa più vicina al vivo  
fremito nell'aria che è Philip ora.  
È uno svolazzare che si ferma prima di finire  
visto che non deve essere completo per dare  
il suo singolare saluto.

Per raggiungerlo di nuovo, però,  
devi fermarti. La mappa è spiegazzata,  
East Arran Street è nascosta tra le pieghe  
dove ora nessuno cerca. Io voglio un ritratto simile  
preso da qualche parte nei suoi viaggi  
in piena luce dalla mano di un navigato apprendista. Posso vedere  
gli anni presi della sua vita, pure  
gli anni del lavoro, ma gli anni  
che ha speso nella grande conversazione  
garantiscono la sua presenza migliore, una voce  
che parla, che conosce il suo diritto all'ascolto:  
*'Ed è così che trascorriamo I nostri giorni'.*

Essa riecheggia nel corridoio  
dove facevano la fila su sedie di plastica.

A field full of words,  
 a field that Cadmus planted,  
 a voice that speaks about them all.  
 They have almost run out of chairs  
 but the doctor still sits in her dim  
 packed office, reaching still for forms to sign  
 to certify the condition has not changed,  
 as the traffic slows on the quays of the city.

**“Two Paintings by Nano Reid”**

I MAKESHIFT GATE NEAR WILDGOSE LODGE

A horse hesitates on the edge of brightness.  
 In her work, even water has boundaries  
 and segments, like a leaded window.  
 Here is a barrier, deliberately now  
 halting my advance, if roughly placed —

and now is a longer word than I had thought:  
 this is the art announcing, here is the place  
 now; the push and scrape of the brush at work  
 tell me how fast it was done, barring the way.  
 It shows she understood how  
 people must live hereabouts, the way  
 they dodge around the map, they force the place  
 into reluctant changes, as they need  
 the stopgap (and nobody who passes  
 imagines it will endure). A barricade explains  
 how they feel about time, not expecting  
 anything will last longer than a season,  
 and yet they hope it may serve  
 in a present continuous, marking a grammar  
 with useful divisions, ignoring the future  
 and the notorious inflated past.

2 LOAFERS

We could not save the painter's  
 leaf-thin imaginings:  
 the young man with an orange  
 stuffed in his groin — she painted  
 over that nude vision,  
 so which of the dark street corners  
 harbours his body now?

In which brown overcoat?  
 Is that him hesitating  
 hunched in the rainy twilight?

Un campo pieno di parole,  
 un campo che Cadmo ha seminato  
 una voce che parla di tutti loro.  
 Hanno quasi finito le sedie  
 ma la dottoressa è ancora seduta nel suo ufficio,  
 affollato e semibuio per raggiungere ancora schede da firmare  
 per certificare che la condizione non è cambiata,  
 mentre il traffico rallenta sui lungofiume della città.

### “Due dipinti di Nano Reid”

I UN QUASI-CANCELLO VICINO WILDGOSE LODGE

Un cavallo esita sull'orlo della luce.  
 Nella sua opera, persino l'acqua è sconfinata  
 e i segmenti, come in una vetrata.  
 Qui c'è una barriera, che frena ora deliberatamente,  
 la mia avanzata, barriera instabile —

e ora c'è una parola più lunga di quella che avevo pensato:  
 questa è l'arte che si rivela, questo è il posto  
 ora; la spinta e lo sfregare del pennello  
 mi dicono quanto è stato veloce, a sbarrare la via.  
 Mostra che capiva il modo in cui  
 le persone vivono qui, il modo in cui  
 sottrarsi nella mappa e forzare il luogo  
 in riluttanti cambiamenti, come se a loro servisse  
 una soluzione temporanea (e nessuno che passa  
 immagina che la sopporterà). Una barricata spiega  
 cosa sentono del tempo, non aspettandosi  
 che nulla duri più di una stagione,  
 e tuttavia sperano che serva  
 nel presente progressivo, segnando una grammatica  
 con utili divisioni, ignorando il futuro  
 e il famigerato esasperato passato.

2 LOAFERS

Noi non potevamo salvare  
 le sottili fantasie della pittrice:  
 il giovanotto con un'arancia  
 ficcata nell'inguine — lei vi dipinse sopra  
 quella visione nuda,  
 allora quale angolo oscuro  
 ospita ora il suo corpo?

In quale cappotto marrone?  
 È lui, quello esitante  
 curvo nel piovoso imbrunire?

Or the man lying flat  
 on the warm grey metal roof  
 he's covering with dark thick tar?

The body retreats into  
 the scruffy quotidian,  
 still the pulse beating  
 in its dark refuge, now.

### **“St Brigid’s Well”**

1

When I asked the way to the well people knew what I meant,  
 and at last I found the place. There was a tree  
 with rosary beads and white paper  
 twisted around the branches. I watched a girl  
 who arrived just after me wearing pink trousers

and bright red sandals. She came in from the road, she stood  
 and prayed and reached out, stroking a stone, then moved  
 a few feet to the right and did it all again. Just there,  
 the path was a shortcut from the road to the houses,  
 people passed with their shopping, heading home,

one woman with a child. I heard her saying  
 to the child walking along in her school uniform,  
 ‘It’s for all the little babies that passed away.’  
 I wrote her words down that same evening, to be sure  
 I had the truth. It was three in the afternoon,

Wednesday, in the month of June, that I caught her answer  
 to the question I didn’t hear, in among the voices,  
 the cars on the road, the soft slap of the sandals  
 the silent visitor wore, the children coming from school.

2

Well, I thought, who needs apparitions?  
 But they came anyway, in spite of me,  
 rising like steam out of a dark patch on the road,  
 or matched with a burning smell  
 from a dark patch on an old door.

If I wanted a map that would just show the wells,  
 the culverted streams, the short cuts, they came,  
 they congregated, they insisted, ‘What about  
 the wall where the girls played one-two-three-O’Leary?’  
 they said. I said, ‘Why do you want me to put that in?’  
 ‘Or Lovers’ Walk?’ they said. I gave them back their stare:

O l'uomo sdraiato  
sul caldo tetto grigio di metallo  
che sta coprendolo con scuro spesso catrame?

Il corpo si ritrae nello  
sciatto quotidiano  
ma pulsa ancora  
nel suo scuro rifugio, ora.

### “Il pozzo di S. Brigida”

1

Quando chiedevo indicazioni per il pozzo sapevano cosa intendevo,  
e alla fine trovai il posto. C'era un albero  
con grani di rosario e carta bianca  
arrotolata sui rami. Osservavo una ragazza  
arrivata dopo di me, indossava pantaloni rosa

e brillanti sandali rossi. Veniva dalla strada, stette un po'  
pregò e si avvicinò, strofinando una pietra, poi fece  
pochi passi a destra e lo ripeté. Proprio lì,  
il percorso una scorciatoia tra la strada e le case,  
le persone passavano con buste della spesa, dirette a casa,

una donna con una bimba. Le sentii dire  
alla bimba che camminava nella sua uniforme,  
'È per i piccoli bambini scomparsi'  
Scrissi le sue parole quella stessa sera per essere sicura  
che fosse vero. Erano le tre del pomeriggio,

mercoledì, nel mese di giugno, che colsi la risposta  
a una domanda non sentita, tra le voci,  
le macchine per strada, il delicato rumore dei sandali  
della silenziosa visitatrice, i bambini che rientravano da scuola.

2

Bene, pensavo, a chi servono le apparizioni?  
Ma vennero comunque, nonostante me,  
crescendo come fumo fuori dall'oscuro sentiero sulla strada,  
o insieme a un odore di bruciato  
da una scura toppa su una vecchia porta.

Se volevo una mappa che mostrasse solo pozzi,  
ruscelli sotterranei, scorciatoie, loro venivano  
si riunivano, insistevano. 'Hai dimenticato  
il muro dove le ragazze giocavano a un-due-tre-O' Leary'  
dissero. Io dissi, 'Perché volete che ce li metta dentro?'  
'Oppure il sentiero degli innamorati?' dissero. Restituii il loro sguardo

‘What about the swan?’ said I, ‘I saw her just now in my  
 search,  
 so close to me, through a gap in a high wall,  
 her head, her bending neck, white feathers of one wing?  
 How could she nest up there, and seem at ease?’

but when I turned to leave the dead end behind  
 and come down again beside the factory wall,  
 I heard the mill stream splashing downhill,  
 inside its prison pipe, out of the brimming pond  
 that I had not seen. Could I have forgotten

the excess of water, the excess of all the stories  
 I might have heard, as I searched for St Brigid’s well?

### “Muriel Gifford After Her Fever”

Fluttering coiling a strand of hair a phrase,  
 a tune remembered, not named —  
 is it called *fever*? the weariness  
 that comes after fever, even too weak to brush my hair?

(the mass of tangles at my neck like the leaves  
 blown into a corner, piled  
 by a feverish wind).  
 The long strand of memory twisted and blended

entwines around my hand holding the brush, and  
 the story my grandmother knew  
 catches, my mother told me she gave her  
 the way to untwist the long tangled locks of hair.

In those days they cut your hair off if you’d had a fever,  
 but Muriel’s hair was lovely,  
 her husband prevented them cutting,  
 he sat beside her and used the tip of the comb,

carefully combing all the way down, slowly  
 stroking every long hair free  
 until she could wind it again  
 twisted in plaits and piled up as she chose.

When I finish my hair I’m too weak to begin the day  
 putting on your heavy carved ring,  
 with its dark green stone, and my mother’s ring  
 on the other finger. My hand feels light, something swept  
 away, as they were swept  
 by the firing squad and the stifling, coiling wave.

‘Che cosa sapete allora del cigno?’ dissi io. ‘Lo vidi proprio ora  
 nella mia ricerca,  
 così vicino a me, attraverso un varco in un muro alto,  
 la sua testa, il collo piegato, bianche penne di un’ala?  
 ‘Come poteva avere un nido lassù e sembrare a proprio agio?’

Ma quando mi girai per lasciare indietro la via senza uscita  
 e scendere di nuovo accanto al muro dell’industria,  
 sentii il ruscello del mulino che schizzava giù dalla collina,  
 dentro il suo tubo-prigione, fuori dal traboccante laghetto  
 che non avevo visto. Avrei potuto dimenticare

il troppo dell’acqua, il troppo di tutte le storie,  
 che avrei potuto sentire, mentre cercavo il pozzo di S. Brigida?

### “Muriel Gifford dopo la febbre”

Tremante arricciando una ciocca di capelli, una frase,  
 un brano ricordato, titolo? —  
 È chiamata *febbre*? La stanchezza  
 dopo la febbre, persino troppo debole per spazzolare i capelli?

(la massa di nodi sul mio collo come le foglie  
 spinte in un angolo dal vento, impilate  
 da un vento febbrile).

La lunga ciocca di memoria si arrotolò e si fuse,

girando attorno la mia mano che teneva la spazzola e  
 la storia che sapeva mia nonna  
 mi prende, mia mamma mi raccontò che le disse  
 come slegare i lunghi capelli annodati.

In quei giorni tagliavano i capelli se avevi la febbre,  
 ma i capelli di Muriel erano così belli,  
 che suo marito impedì loro di tagliarli,  
 si sedette accanto a lei e usò la cima del pettine,

pettinandoli con cura per tutta la lunghezza, liberando  
 lentamente ogni lungo capello  
 sino a quando lei poté intrecciarli di nuovo  
 e tirarli su come voleva.

Appena sistemo i miei capelli sono troppo debole per iniziare la giornata  
 mettendo il tuo pesante anello inciso,  
 con la sua pietra verde scuro e l’anello di mia madre  
 nell’altro dito. La mano si sente leggera, come spazzata via,  
 come loro furono spazzati via  
 dal plotone di esecuzione e dalla soffocante onda avvolgente.

**“Where Truth Lives”**

Settled in their orbits  
 the distances determined,  
 dependent on each other —  
 the bodies keep their measure.  
 This is where truth lives

in one material form  
 as with the old machines  
 partly still visible though  
 no longer in daily use —  
 they do not intend to change.

This is where the past lives,  
 the frescoes peeled away,  
 the portrait sold for cash  
 to appease a thirsty lover,

the separated bodies, the space debris  
 (because they move in orbit and catch  
 light from each other, the glance in a crowd  
 a crooked reflection, that glazed curve  
 where light flashes elated, speaking  
 the many forms of connection)

they enter our shared space, alongside  
 the word spoken to the empty passenger seat,  
 the gleam from the pantry, provisions for the day  
 just dawning.

**“The Ash-tree at My Window”**

As in a landlord’s dream the houses  
 change their shapes according to the season,  
 they bulge, then they shrink.

For five years nobody lives beside me,  
 my bones are bare, my spine is a tree stem  
 threatened with dieback.

My room on the top floor is a green cage,  
 Spring is here and the ash-tree is flowing  
 up to the window,

as a tall cloud wandering may drift  
 upwards a little, and closer, and  
 probe a tidal edge.

No need to make sense. It is there,



**“Dove vive la verità”**

Sistamate nelle loro orbite  
 le distanze determinate,  
 dipendenti l'una dall'altra —  
 i corpi mantengono la loro misura.  
 Questo è dove vive la verità

in una forma materiale  
 come con le vecchie macchine  
 ancora parzialmente visibili sebbene  
 non più in uso quotidiano —  
 non intendono cambiare.

Questo è dove il passato vive,  
 gli affreschi scrostati,  
 il ritratto venduto per soldi  
 per acquietare un'amante assetato,

i corpi separati, i detriti nello spazio  
 (perché si muovono nelle orbite e colgono  
 la luce da ognuna, lo sguardo nella folla  
 un riflesso storto, quella curva smaltata  
 dove i lampi di luce esaltavano, parlando  
 le molte forme d'incontro)

entrano il nostro spazio condiviso insieme  
 alla parola detta ad un sedile vuoto,  
 al bagliore della dispensa, alle provviste per il nuovo giorno  
 che sta albeggiando.

**“Il frassino alla mia finestra”**

Come nel sogno di un proprietario,  
 le case cambiano d'aspetto secondo la stagione,  
 si gonfiano, poi si restringono.

Da cinque anni nessuno vive accanto a me,  
 le mie ossa sono nude, la mia colonna è lo stelo di un albero  
 minacciato di inaridirsi.

La mia stanza all'ultimo piano è una verde gabbia,  
 la primavera è qui e il frassino fluisce  
 su per la finestra,

come il vagabondare di un'alta nuvola possa finire  
 un po' più su e più vicino e  
 sondare il limite della marea.

Nessun motivo che abbia senso. È lì,

it whistles and tumbles. Think of a cloud,  
we could not live there,

but engaging with air and element  
it offers the terrace a space while it grows —  
a cat on patrol.

The bare ideogram announcing *Tree*  
changes annually to a flourish  
of intimate leaves,

their tips barely moving, their pale approach  
floating up from shady depths. Please,  
hide me in summer.

### “Seasons of the Lemon House”

The shadows in the lemon house hinted  
a place of refuge, their semitones of light  
carefully inclining along the downward curve,  
pausing on a twilight verge. The high, dim glazed  
frames gently allowing the light inside.

In the Shrovetide frost they kept their counsel.  
Now on the edge where climates shift  
spilling across the map, the lemon trees are safe,  
herding together, brushing twigs and leaves,  
the fruits floating under the ruffled skirts

shining yellow as ever. The heavy pots of clay  
readied for the move outside are not yet stirring  
at their slow procession. Their wheels complaining.

I thought of the nets of language, how  
they float past each other: never engaging,  
they lie side by side, a shallow tidal zone between.  
Codes of work and home: one basks  
and the other shivers — light, then dark.

The order is not spoken yet, the knife still  
in the sailor's pocket. Then *cut it* —  
The knitted flesh  
tight inside, segmented like the compass rose.

By July we will have forgotten the word for frost.

fischia e fa capriole. Pensa ad una nuvola,  
non potremmo viverci lì,

ma affrontando aria ed elementi  
offre a Selskar Terrace uno spazio mentre cresce —  
un gatto in perlustrazione.

Il nudo ideogramma che annuncia *Albero*  
cambia di anno in anno per fiorire  
di intime foglie,

le loro cime che si muovono appena, il loro pallido approccio  
che fluttua su da ombrose profondità. Per favore  
nascondimi in estate.

### “Stagioni della limonaia”

Le ombre nella limonaia indicavano  
un posto rifugio, i loro semitoni di luce  
si inclinavano, attenti, lungo la curva in basso,  
fermandosi su un bordo crepuscolare. Le alte, fioche  
cornici di vetro accoglievano con delicatezza la luce.

Nel gelo di carnevale tennero consiglio.  
Ora al limite dove il cambiamento del tempo  
si sparge attraverso la mappa, gli alberi di limone sono salvi  
raggruppati, sfiorando rametti e foglie,  
i frutti galleggiano sotto le arruffate gonne

splendenti giallo come sempre. I vasi di coccio pesanti  
pronti ad essere spostati fuori non si stanno ancora muovendo  
nella loro lenta processione. Le loro ruote si lamentano.

Pensavo alle reti della lingua, come fluttuano  
passandosi accanto: mai in gara, fianco a fianco,  
tra bassa e alta marea.

Codici di lavoro e casa: uno si scalda al sole  
e l'altro rabbrivisce — luce, poi buio.

L'ordine non è stato ancora fatto, il coltello ancora  
nella tasca del marinaio. Poi *tagliato* —  
Il fitto tessuto  
dentro, segmentato come la rosa dei venti.

In luglio avremo dimenticato la parola gelo.

**“Instructions to an Architect”**

*Rotta è l’alta colonna*

1

Yours is the art that conveys  
what the world is made of, where its weight  
presses, and you can disguise, leading  
the eye aside with colonnades —

Could you build me a shelter, showing  
how a roof is carried aloft, its poise  
lifted on the heads of maidens  
or crouching Moors, whatever  
comes handiest; and then make sure  
the high window frames a chosen scene,  
a tall distant pillar, as straight a figure  
as I can find for courage  
matched with generosity and wit,  
suddenly split, fractured from the inside?

2

The child knew her bunk was all the space she needed,  
her quilt a cave, her map of freedom.  
She wanted everything to be fair but then she saw  
the purple jar she really loved, and she pleaded —

quarrels and thunder smashing my model village,  
I didn’t know which of my tenants to save,  
the stuffed cat or the painted wooden grandad  
fallen out of his rocking chair.

3

In a closed room of giants I saw a tense fellow  
who from the start needed more space, yet  
pushed up his burden of stacked storeys  
and only slowly forced to his knees  
was crushed at last, while over ages  
the old boss gods looked to carry with ease  
their lighter load.

Could you make it plainer?  
*Next time I must try, if there is another time.*

**“Istruzioni a un architetto”***Rotta è l'alta colonna*

1

La tua è l'arte che ci dice  
 di cosa è fatto il mondo, dove il suo peso  
 preme, e tu puoi farlo sembrare diverso, indirizzando  
 l'occhio di fianco alle colonnate —

Potresti costruirmi un rifugio, mostrando  
 come è portato su un tetto, la sua posa  
 sollevata sulle teste delle fanciulle  
 o dei mori accovacciati, qualsiasi cosa  
 è più conveniente, e poi assicurati  
 che l'alta finestra incornici una scena scelta,  
 un alto distante pilastro, una figura adatta  
 a rappresentare il coraggio  
 unito a generosità e ingegno,  
 improvvisamente spezzato all'interno?

2

La bimba sapeva che il suo letto era tutto lo spazio necessario,  
 il suo piumone una grotta, la sua mappa di libertà.  
 Voleva che tutto fosse giusto, ma poi vide  
 il barattolo viola che le piaceva tanto, e lo chiese —

tuono e litigi distruggevano il mio modello di villaggio,  
 non sapevo chi dei miei due inquilini salvare,  
 il gatto impagliato o il nonno di legno dipinto  
 caduto dalla sua sedia a dondolo.

3

In una stanza chiusa di giganti vidi un tipo teso  
 a cui sin dall'inizio serviva più spazio, tuttavia  
 spingeva su il suo carico di piani sovrapposti,  
 e soltanto lentamente forzava le ginocchia,  
 alla fine fu abbattuto mentre negli anni  
 i vecchi dei, padroni sembravano portare agilmente  
 il loro carico più leggero.

Potresti renderlo più semplice?

*La prossima volta devo riprovare, se ci sarà un'altra volta.*

**“A Game”**

She pointed me to the house where  
 a child, viewed through a window in dim light,  
 was hopping on one foot between  
 the clay pots on the floor. The game was,  
 not to touch them with her apron  
 or the hem of her flying skirt.  
 She hopped with confidence and care,  
 a practiced skill, and when the music  
 stopped, she turned and smiled.

In the garden, the solitary bee crawled out of her lair.

**“In Ostia, August 2020”**

My first night in Italy since the whole world changed —  
 and what has changed? The taxi driver overcharges,  
 he drives me past the ruins of the port and the Papal tower  
 to the hotel where they remember me  
 but also, as before, think I am German —  
 because of my hair? Because I am old and travelling alone?  
 There is food, and a glass, and I am alone  
 on the warm terrace looking out  
 on the small pool and the sunset. As before,  
 a cat appears exactly as the sun goes down,  
 and a kind of mechanical crab  
 with a long flex that arches like a snake swimming  
 begins to crawl around the bottom of the pool,  
 bangs its nose off the tiles, recoils and begins again.

**“Achilles and Phoenix”**

*for Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin*

1

I dreamed three nights about files,  
 about sliding drawers and labels;  
 as dreams declare their interest  
 I was dreaming a code and its keys:

just as the arrows pointed  
 I dreamed a token for the uncle —  
 the one who has to take charge  
 when a generation is plucked away —

the clue was a small, quite new,  
 quite heavy, shiny black tool

**“Un gioco”**

Indicò la casa dove  
 una bimba, vista attraverso la finestra con luce fioca,  
 stava saltellando su un piede tra  
 i vasi di coccio sul pavimento. Il gioco era,  
 di non toccarli col suo grembiule  
 e l'orlo della gonna svolazzante.  
 Lei saltava sicura e attenta  
 un'abilità esercitata, e quando la musica  
 finì, si voltò e sorrise.

Nel giardino, l'ape solitaria strisciò fuori dalla sua tana.

**“Ostia, agosto 2020”**

La mia prima notte in Italia da quando il mondo intero è cambiato —  
 e cosa è cambiato? Il tassista mi chiede di più,  
 guida attraverso le rovine del porto, e la torre papale  
 verso l'hotel dove si ricordano di me  
 ma anche, come prima, pensano sia tedesca —  
 per i miei capelli? Perché al di là con gli anni e viaggio da sola?  
 C'è cibo ed un bicchiere, e sono sola  
 sulla calda terrazza prospiciente  
 una piccola piscina e il tramonto. Come prima,  
 un gatto appare esattamente al calar del sole,  
 una specie di granchio meccanico  
 con un lungo tubo flessibile, come un serpente si inarca e nuota,  
 inizia a strisciare intorno al fondo della piscina,  
 sbatte il muso sulle mattonelle, indietreggia e ricomincia di nuovo.

**“Achille e Fenice”**

*per Cormac Ó Cuilleain*

1

Ho sognato per tre notti di fila,  
 cassetti scorrevoli ed etichette;  
 visto che, come i sogni dichiarano il loro interesse,  
 io stavo sognando un codice e le sue chiavi:

proprio come le frecce puntate  
 sognavo un segno per uno zio —  
 quello che deve occuparsi di prendersi il carico  
 quando una generazione è spiumata via —

la chiave era uno strumento nero piccolo,  
 abbastanza nuovo, pesante, lucido

designed for a particular task  
 but here employed as a paperweight  
 keeping a stack of mismatched files  
 in place, held steady and together.

## 2

Understanding flows like the river  
 that slid under the house where we stayed in France,  
 keeping the cheeses cool in the cellar;  
 it flows on still to the weir, it reflects the sky  
 as the dream is contrived to hold in view  
 history's patched lining, the sewing:

an old nun writes to her niece once a fortnight;  
 smart Miss Healy from the shoe shop  
 opens the bottle of cod liver oil,  
 to physic her widowed brother's two small sons;  
 a young man whose parentage  
 nobody asks about calls to the lawyer's office  
 collecting his allowance. And so on,  
 all the way back to the *Iliad* —

when Achilles would not listen  
 to the visiting Greeks, he threw them out,  
 except, he said, Phoenix can stay,  
 when I was a child he treated me kindly;  
 and Phoenix, who was an exile  
 and under a curse but found a refuge  
 in the house of Peleus, Achilles' father,  
 wept and called him his dear child,  
 remembering the little boy who sat on his knee at the feast,  
 and how afterwards Peleus asked him  
 to go with Achilles to Troy,  
 because Achilles was ignorant of the evils of war.

**“Milton Hears Mozart on the Mountain”**

He holds on fast to the guidebook. The guide has left him,  
 having other business. It was too dark to see.  
 He has evaded the devil Salmasius  
 and climbed warily up on the corpse of Cromwell  
 to emerge in a greying dawn. If he expects  
 that light so long withheld, effulgent, mild —  
 Not yet. A mountainous cold, and he shivers:  
 could their fiction of Purgatory be real enough  
 to cast a real shadow? Bodies lie here,  
 laid flat as autumn leaves, the slain of Drogheda,  
 but stir now, and pronounce their penetrating  
 syllabic metres. *Colkitto or Galasp?*



progettato per un compito specifico,  
 ma qui usato come ferma carte  
 che tiene a posto una pila di fogli disordinati,  
 tenuti insieme e stabili.

2

La comprensione fluisce come il fiume  
 che scivolava sotto casa quando stavamo in Francia,  
 mantenendo freschi i formaggi in cantina;  
 fluisce ancora verso la piccola diga, riflette il cielo,  
 come il sogno è progettato per tenere in vista  
 la fodera rattoppata della storia, il cucito:

una suora anziana scrive a sua nipote ogni quindici giorni;  
 l'elegante Miss Healy del negozio di scarpe  
 apre la bottiglia di fegato di merluzzo  
 per curare i figli di suo fratello vedovo;  
 un giovane, dei cui genitori  
 nessuno chiede, va all'ufficio dell'avvocato  
 per il suo sussidio. E così via,  
 tutto a ritroso sino all'*Iliade* —

quando Achille non volle ascoltare  
 gli ospiti greci, li buttò fuori,  
 tranne Fenice, disse: 'può rimanere',  
 quando ero bambino mi trattò con gentilezza;  
 e Fenice, che era un esule  
 e maledetto, trovò rifugio  
 nella casa di Peleo, il padre di Achille,  
 pianse e lo chiamò mio caro figlio,  
 ricordando il bambinetto che sedeva sulle sue ginocchia  
 alla festa, e come dopo Peleo gli chiese  
 di andare con Achille a Troia,  
 perché Achille sconosceva il male della guerra.

### **“Milton sente Mozart sulla montagna”**

Lui si aggrappa con forza alla guida turistica. La guida lo ha lasciato,  
 altro da fare. C'era troppo buio per leggere.  
 È sfuggito al diavolo Salmasio  
 e si è arrampicato con fatica sul cadavere di Cromwell  
 per emergere in una grigia alba. Si aspetta  
 che la luce così a lungo trattenuta, splendente, tenue appaia —  
 Non ancora. Freddo di montagna, lui rabbrivisce:  
 potrebbe la loro finzione del purgatorio essere abbastanza reale  
 per proiettare una vera ombra? Corpi giacciono  
 appiattiti come foglie d'autunno, i massacri di Drogheda,  
 ma si agitano e pronunciano i loro penetranti  
 metri sillabici. *Colkitto o Galespo?*

*Liber scriptus proferetur.* a voice intones.  
 Quintilian retches. *Can nobody here*  
*speak decent Latin? Would a Sibyl say that?*

Ignoring him they rise with pain, and step  
 forward now slowly, doubtfully, as sheep  
 hesitate when gates open. Ariosto's  
 chaotic planet of loss, Astolfo's ride,  
 enlighten him. Mysteries of time reversed,  
 the dark beyond the world, revealed, now  
 he smells his way upward.

A long way off,  
 a stream is venturing a brisk melody.  
 He imagines it serpentine, trickling  
 in between pebbles, making them glitter.  
 The stones are heavy like words, but the swift note  
 caressing melts them, they seem transparent,  
 and then the choral moment strikes: *Listen*,  
 the body's eye still blinded, light is flowing  
 into his waking dream:

*Lacrimosa*,

but these are the tears of pleasure, and now  
 the angelic waitress pleads questions of love.

### “Sirens: with Leopold Bloom”

Nothing can be compared to anything else —  
*was that a shadow, the shadow of a bird* —  
 the notes dissolved in air as if it were water,

and yes, it has happened again, proportion gone,  
 perspective abolished. Those vibrating walls . . .  
 and within he waits for the shock to dissipate

slowly, as the room allows the present quarter  
 its share of time to pass.

Down there in the cellar,  
 confirming the worst, the cat lands on the keyboard

hitting all the barreltone base notes together.  
*Silence*, and then she deftly trots all the way  
 along the white keys, only to pause where

the single high note expected to finish, so,  
 she waits for him; he reaches out his hand,  
 nailing the chord —

the one surviving law.

*Liber scriptus proferatur*; una voce si intona.  
 Quintiliano vomita. *Qualcuno qui*  
*sa parlare un latino decente? Lo direbbe una Sibilla?*

Ignorandolo si sollevano dal dolore, e camminano  
 ora lentamente, in dubbio, come pecore  
 esitanti col cancello aperto. Il caotico  
 pianeta della perdita di Ariosto, la cavalcata di Astolfo,  
 lo illuminano. Misteri di tempo a rovescio,  
 l'oscuro al di là del mondo rivelato, ora  
 segue col naso il suo percorso verso l'alto.

Molto lontano

un ruscello azzarda una frizzante melodia.  
 Lo immagina zig zagare, colare  
 tra i ciottoli, facendoli brillare.  
 Le pietre sono pesanti come le parole, ma la nota veloce  
 accarezzandole le scioglie, sembrano trasparenti,  
 e poi esplose il momento corale: *Ascolta*,  
 l'occhio ancora cieco, luce fluente  
 nel suo sogno risvegliato:

*'Lacrimosa'*,

ma queste sono lacrime di piacere e ora,  
 l'angelo-cortigiana invoca domande d'amore.

### “Sirene: con Leopold Bloom”

Niente può essere paragonato a nient'altro —  
*era un'ombra, l'ombra di un uccello* —  
 le note si dissolvevano nell'aria come fossero acqua,

e sì, è successo di nuovo, nessuna proporzione,  
 prospettiva abolita. Quei muri vibranti . . .  
 e dentro aspetta che si dissipi lo shock

lentamente, come la stanza permette al presente quarto d'ora  
 la sua parte di tempo da trascorrere.

Giù nella cantina,

confermando il peggio, la gatta atterra sulla tastiera

colpendo tutte le note basse.  
*Silenzio*, e poi impettita trotta lungo la via  
 dei tasti bianchi, solo una pausa dove

la singola nota acuta doveva finire, così,  
 lo aspetta; lui allunga la mano,  
 inchiodando l'accordo —  
 l'unica legge che resiste.

**“Let Me Explain”**

They had taken my fiddle away from me in the passage;  
 they said, You won't need this for a while.  
 When I insisted they put it away, carefully,  
 and brought me in, to the kitchen, to the heat —

but I knew I needed to get out of that room:  
 the man with his shirt open leered at my aunt  
 breastfeeding, and the boy was there too,  
 I'd been found with him before.  
 His brother smoked at the fireside, below  
 the dangling laundry. A goose on the table  
 half-butchered, a small naked dog under a chair —

the ladder just next to the stove  
 had been taken away so I tried the other door  
 and it led me to the flat roof beside a bedroom window.  
 I swear I never even looked in, I tried  
 the fire escape, ending on a stone terrace,

and when I shouted I could hear the words came  
 in a strange language and said things I knew were false.  
 I kept on, because I knew their conversation  
 was not about what was really on their minds,  
 how their lives would be if I could not be managed —

and what, they probably said, did I really need?  
 I kept on calling, afraid that if I stopped for breath —  
 out of breath — I would lose the power of speech for ever.

**“The Well”**

It's her mind that slides down into the darkness  
 (he has made a ladder out of her bones,  
 he treads the knuckles). Cool forests of weed  
 fold her in a loose embrace, keeping her  
 whole. She wonders, what comes next? And,  
 when the ladder buckles, how she knew  
 there was no other, this was the only way?

Still, when she comes whizzing up  
 again, every hair plaited, her shoes  
 and her stockings dry, the crease in her apron  
 sharp as ever, it's only the hand she keeps  
 hiding the bent little finger in her pocket  
 makes the difference between her and the two sisters  
 who never slid or sank or swam below —

as she did, under there, counting the stations,  
 the chapels, halls, the long wards. She remembers

**“Fammi spiegare”**

Avevano preso il mio violino al passaggio;  
 dissero ‘Non ti servirà per un po’.  
 Quando insistetti lo misero via, con cura,  
 e mi portarono dentro in cucina, al caldo —

ma sapevo che dovevo uscire da quella stanza:  
 l’uomo con la sua camicia aperta stuzzicava mia zia  
 che allattava e il ragazzo era pure lì,  
 mi avevano trovato con lui prima.  
 Suo fratello fumava davanti il camino, sotto  
 il bucato penzolante, un’oca sul tavolo  
 mezza macellata, un piccolo cane nudo sotto la sedia —

la scala proprio accanto la cucina  
 era stata portata via così provai l’altra porta  
 e mi portò al piatto tetto accanto alla finestra della stanza da letto.  
 Giuro non guardai mai lì dentro, tentai  
 la scala di sicurezza che finiva su una terrazza di pietra,

e quando gridai potei sentire le parole che venivano  
 in una strana lingua e dicevano cose. Sapevo che erano false,  
 continuai perché sapevo che la loro conversazione  
 non era su ciò che avevano davvero in testa,  
 come sarebbero le loro vite se non potevo essere controllata —

e di cosa, probabilmente dissero, avevo davvero bisogno?  
 Continuai a chiamare, spaventata che se smettevo di respirare —  
 senza respiro — avrei perso il potere delle parole per sempre.

**“Il pozzo”**

È la sua mente che scivola nell’oscurità  
 (ha fatto una scala delle sue ossa,  
 lui calpesta le nocche). Fresche foreste di alghe  
 l’avvolgono in un largo abbraccio, facendola  
 una. Lei si chiede che succede dopo? E  
 la scala si piega, come lei sapeva  
 che non ci fosse altra via, era questo l’unico modo?

Ancora, quando lei arriva sfrecciando  
 di nuovo ogni capello intrecciato, scarpe  
 e calze asciutte, la piega nel grembiule  
 tagliente come sempre, è solo la mano che tiene  
 nascosta il ditino, piegato nella tasca,  
 fa la differenza tra lei e le due sorelle  
 che mai scivolarono o nuotarono lì sotto —

come fece lei, lì sotto, contando stazioni  
 cappelle, sale, lunghi reparti infiniti. Ricorda

their donor names. It's too late now to explain,  
and the reason has to stay rolled up, tight  
as her fist, clenched when the three sisters wait  
in the locked room for him, trying his hand,  
reaching in the dark, to recognize

the youngest one, with the broken little finger.

### **“Marking the Place”**

1

A snug of reflections: this  
hinged glass returns a clear light  
off-centre, leading away  
down a corridor of time.

No one inside, a flicker  
catching the intruder's eye  
flashes from a top window,  
from the bus passing outside.

The deep glass answering back  
reproves with its clear strain  
whatever is half-mounted,  
the rushed vice of poverty:

here is a space that is yours  
for a time, judged and recalled.

2

I looked for a slip of paper to keep  
the page I reached, but I touched only  
the bandage I had ripped  
away from my skin, where  
the needle dug in, with one bloody drop.  
It will do to mark the place.

### **“A Colophon”**

The printer stands upright and stretches his shoulders.  
The copy in all its length has been rolled up,  
then pushed aside. Now comes the gathering and binding  
and the journey to populate shelves alongside its peers.

This happens slowly, unlike the crowding  
of bees in a swarm, but it's the same rush  
to be packed together, as votes in their urn, as choirs —

i nomi dei donatori. È tardi ora per spiegare,  
 e il motivo deve stare nascosto, chiuso  
 come il suo pugno, stretto, quando le tre sorelle lo  
 attendevano nella stanza chiusa, provando la sua mano,  
 tastandola al buio, per riconoscere

la più giovane, col mignolo rotto.

### “Segnando il posto”

1

Un angolo di riflessi: questo  
 vetro appeso ritorna una luce chiara  
 fuori-centro, che fluisce  
 giù verso un corridoio del tempo.

Nessuno dentro, un guizzo  
 che coglie l'occhio intrusivo,  
 riverbera da una finestra  
 dell'autobus che passa.

Lo spesso vetro risponde  
 rimanda con una striscia chiara  
 qualsiasi cosa mal fissata,  
 il vizio affrettato della povertà:

qui c'è un tuo spazio  
 per una volta, giudicato e richiamato.

2

Ho cercato una striscia di carta per segnare  
 la pagina trovata, ma ho toccato solo  
 la benda che avevo strappato  
 dalla mia pelle, dove  
 l'ago scese profondo, con una goccia di sangue.  
 Servirà a segnare il punto.

### “Un Colofone”

Lo stampatore sta dritto e allunga le spalle.  
 La copia è stata arrotolata in tutta la sua lunghezza,  
 poi spinta di fianco. Ora è il momento di mettere insieme i fogli a rilegare  
 e il viaggio per popolare gli scaffali come gli altri.

Ciò accade lentamente, a differenza dello  
 sciame delle api, ma è la stessa corsa  
 per ammassarli, come voti nell'urna, come cori —

the libraries, dumb in their long closed weekends, are always  
attracting paper, plucked from the private office,  
uprooted from barrows, into the summed catalogues.

Now the hand embraces the long expected volume,  
in the clutch of paper the finger holding its place:  
the margins defaced, the manicule and the asterisk land  
like wasps. Released from its clasp, the book relaxes.

### “Home”

Somebody has a perfect garden, stretching  
gently uphill to a high stone wall.  
Where the box hedge finishes, near the basement windows,  
the grass is closely mown. The daisies  
have shut up for the night. A servant girl appears —  
it should be time for her dinner, but  
she waits outside as the light fades, watching  
the light in a first-floor window. When it goes out  
she sighs and heads back indoors.

In the big study

a man stares at a letter written  
in a language he can't understand, although  
he knows the script is archaic.  
He wonders again, would it be safe  
to ask the schoolmaster what it all means,  
although he guesses well enough  
what the writer intended him to know.

### “For the Record”

#### ROARINGWATER BAY

‘The strangest thing was,’ she said, ‘I never saw  
the wave. I heard his voice, just before  
the boat swung. *Hold on now*. His wife grabbed a rail,  
but I flew across the small cabin, the child  
held so fast in my arms it seemed  
I knew nothing else. We collided and then  
regained our stance, there was a groan from the boat.’

‘I was there,’ she continued, ‘and it was true.  
And does it matter now? If it was real then  
it matters now, even after the silence of years.’

— Since she knew the voice was the same one heard long  
before,  
when she flew out of the known world, loosed  
from all surroundings into a blinding truth



le biblioteche, mute nei loro lunghi weekend, attraggono sempre manoscritti, lettere, carte, presi da uffici privati, sradicati dalle bancarelle, cataloghi accorpati.

Ora la mano abbraccia il volume lungamente atteso, nella presa della carta il dito tiene il suo posto i margini sfigurati, la manina e l'asterisco atterrano come vespe. Liberato dalla sua chiusura, il libro respira.

### “Casa”

Qualcuno ha un giardino perfetto, che si snoda elegantemente su per la collina verso un muro di pietra. Dove finisce il bosso, vicino alle finestre del seminterrato, l'erba è rasata minuziosamente. Le margherite si sono ritirate per la notte. Una domestica appare — dovrebbe essere ora di cena, ma aspetta fuori mentre la luce si smorza, guardando la luce nella finestra del primo piano. Quando esce sospira e rientra dentro casa.

Nel grande studio un uomo osserva una lettera scritta in una lingua che non capisce, sebbene riconosca che lo scritto è arcaico. Si interroga di nuovo, sarebbe opportuno chiedere al maestro di scuola cosa significhi, sebbene indovina abbastanza bene ciò che lo scrivente intendesse fargli sapere.

### “Documento”

#### LA BAIA DI ROARINGWATER

‘La cosa più strana fu’, lei disse ‘Non ho mai visto l’onda. Ho sentito la sua voce, proprio prima che la barca fu scossa. *Tenetevi forte ora*. Sua moglie afferrò la ringhiera, ma io volai attraverso la cabina, il bimbo stretto forte nelle mie braccia, sembrava che non sapessi altro. Abbiamo urtato e poi ripreso equilibrio. Un lamento dalla barca’.

‘Ero lì’, continuò, ‘ed era vero. Ha importanza ora? Se era vero allora, ora è importante, persino dopo il silenzio degli anni.’

— Da quando seppe che la voce era la stessa sentita tempo fa,  
quando volò via dal mondo conosciuto, liberata dal suo ambiente in un’accecante verità

landed beside her, gasping like a freak wave,  
groaning like a boat, and afterwards a long stillness.

1990

I heard about the man who abandoned his family,  
in a frightened call from Dublin, when I was in London  
waiting  
for the first day of the absence nothing could fill.

I sat in Palmers Green in the empty front room  
and I could not move to go back to the others.  
(Every armchair and glass and bottle was holding still.)

But after a while I was able to move again  
back to the catastrophe as it drew much nearer,  
the loss no quantity of love could oppose;

and I was silent about the ones deserted, who just then  
were beginning their long wait in another city, so long  
that after the decades they have still found no news.

I went back to the kitchen, the receiver in one hand,  
nothing in the other. Why should I try for balance?

### “Cat sa Leaba”

Cat carad, agus mé ar cuairt chuige,  
bhuail sí isteach sa seomra  
nuair a bhíos chun dul a chodladh  
agus ligead di fanacht in aice liom —  
bhí teas agus fionnadh uaim;  
ach dúisíodh mé ag a trí a chlog,  
mar bhí sí ag cíoradh mo ghruaige lena hingne  
is ag brú orm, a srón beagnach saite  
isteach im' chluas. Níor dhein sí crónán ar bith,  
lean uirthi ag obair chun rud éigin a chur  
i gcuimhne dom, ag obair i ndáiríre  
chun go dtuigfinn, ach theip uirthi,  
bhí an codladh ró-throm. Ansan thosnaigh sí ag caoineadh  
agus bhí orm éirí agus í a scaoileadh amach  
faoin oíche, mé cosnochta ar urlár fuar.

Ar maidin,

bhí ionadh orm faoin rud a tharla, ach  
cén fáth nár thuigeas pé rud a bhí i gceist?  
Nach mar sin a bhíonn an scéal,  
an fhilíocht ag breith orainn le greim —  
le greim an uafáis, sa dorchadas  
is ag imeacht arís gan fiú focal amháin,

atterrata accanto a lei, annaspando come una strana onda,  
lamentandosi come una barca, e poi lunga immobilità.

1990

Ho sentito dell'uomo che abbandonò la sua famiglia,  
durante una spaventosa telefonata da Dublino, quando a Londra  
attendevo  
il giorno dell'assenza che nessuno poté colmare.

Ero seduta in Palmers Green, nel salotto vuoto  
e non mi potevo muovere per tornare dagli altri.  
(fermi, ogni poltrona, bicchiere e bottiglia.)

Ma dopo un po' fui in grado di muovermi di nuovo,  
verso la catastrofe che si avvicinava sempre più,  
alla perdita, nessuna immensità d'amore poté opporsi;

non dissi niente di quelli abbandonati, che proprio allora  
stavano iniziando la loro lunga attesa in un'altra città, così lunga  
che dopo decenni non hanno ancora avuto notizie.

Ritornai in cucina, il ricevitore in una mano,  
niente nell'altra. Perché dovevo tentare di bilanciare?

### **“La gatta nel letto”**

La gatta del mio amico, quando andavo a trovarlo,  
gironzolava nella stanza da letto  
quando stavo per dormire  
e la lasciavo stare accanto a me —  
volevo il suo calore, il suo pelo,  
ma alle tre ero sveglia  
perché mi stava pettinando con le unghie  
e mi spingeva, il muso quasi dentro  
l'orecchio. Niente fusa,  
continuava a lavorare per ricordarmi di qualcosa  
che dovevo capire, non ci riusciva  
il mio sonno troppo profondo. Poi iniziava a lagnarsi  
e dovevo alzarmi e farla uscire  
di notte, a piedi nudi sul freddo pavimento.

Di mattina,

ero sorpresa che fosse accaduto, ma  
perché non capivo cosa fosse?  
Non è così che funziona,  
la poesia che ci afferra —  
la presa del terrore, nell'oscurità  
e poi di nuovo svanisce senza una parola

agus an dualgas fágtha aici romhainn,  
 an eachtra a thuiscint, conas a tharla  
 tiomnú cait a bheith chomh deacair san a mhíniú?

### “Loquitur Caliban”

Ná bíodh faitíos oraibh. Tá an t-oileán plódaithe  
 le fuaimeanna, portaireachta binne, aoibhneas gan dochar.

Uaireanta, bíonn cling ceolmhar na mílte n-ionstraim  
 im’ thimpeall ag crónán, is arís bhíodh glórtha,  
 is go fiú mé bheith múscailte tar éis bheith i mo luí le fada  
 chuirfeadh ar ais chun suain mé; is ansan chonac in aisling  
 na néalta ag oscailt chun saibhreas a nochtheadh,  
 réidh chun titim orm, agus nuair a dhúisigh mé  
 thosnaigh mé ag caoineadh le fonn filleadh ar an aisling.

### “An Bord”

*le Ileana Mălăncioiu*

Bhíodair ina suí ag mbord céanna,  
 agus tusa sínte air, le trí lá,  
 ocras ortha níos measa ná riamh,  
 ach ní raibh fonn ar éinne  
 lámh a leagadh ort, ná an fheoil  
 bhlasta, chumhra a briseadh.

Thosnaíodar leis an anam,  
 is mar sin is gnáth arsa mise liom féin  
 agus mé ag féachaint tamall ortsa,  
 tamall eile ar na béi ar leathadh  
 chun na dí naofa a ól  
 agus cúl ag teacht uirthi

an uair inar slogadh siar í  
 ag an mbord céanna  
 ga aon eagla  
 is gan aon dochar a shamlú;  
 Glacaidh, ithidh, do dhúisigh mé  
 ag béiceadh, is é seo a corpsa<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> From *Legend of the walled-up wife, poems by Ileana Malancioiu*, / *They were at the table*, / They were at that same table / you had lain on for three days, / they were more ravenous than ever / but nobody had the courage / to lay a hand on you, to break into / your sweet fragrant flesh. // They started with the soul, / said I, that must be the custom, / looking now at you, / now at the mouths wide opened / to drink that holy drink / which foamed up // when it was swallowed / there at the table / without fear /without any thought of ill; / take, eat, I woke up shouting, / this is her body!

lasciandoci davanti al dovere  
 di capire l'accaduto, perché è così  
 difficile spiegare l'ordine perentorio del gatto?

**“Parla Calibano”<sup>1</sup>**

Non devi avere paura. L'isola è piena di rumori,  
 suoni e dolci arie che danno piacere e non fanno male.

A volte sento mille strumenti vibrare e mormorarmi  
 alle orecchie. E a volte voci che,  
 pur se mi son svegliato dopo un lungo sonno,  
 mi fanno addormentare di nuovo. E poi,  
 sognando, vedevo spalancarsi le nuvole e  
 apparire ricchezze pronte a cadere su di me,  
 così, svegliandomi, piangevo per sognare ancora.

**“Erano a tavola”**

*di Ileana Mălăncioiu*

Erano lì alla stessa tavola  
 eri stesa lì da tre giorni,  
 erano più voraci che mai  
 ma nessuno aveva il coraggio  
 di mettere una mano su di te,  
 di penetrare  
 la tua carne dolce e fragrante.

Iniziarono con la tua anima,  
 dissi io, questa deve essere l'usanza,  
 guardandoti ora,  
 con le bocche spalancate  
 per bere quella sacra bevanda  
 che risaliva su schiumante

quando veniva ingoiata  
 lì a quella tavola  
 senza paura  
 senza alcun pensiero del male;  
 prendete e mangiate, mi sono svegliata gridando,  
 questo è il suo corpo!

<sup>2</sup> W. Shakespeare, *La tempesta*, Italian trans. by A. Lombardo, Milano, Garzanti, 1984, 123.

**“The Lad of the Skins”**

*after Lady Gregory*

So she sat there reading all the way down the page  
until she came to the line where the man says,  
about his own wife, speaking to the other man,  
watch her all day, and when she is combing her hair  
ask her then, because she is obliged, whatever  
she’s asked when she’s combing her hair, she must agree.

The reader stopped there, the page open, her finger  
marking the line, thinking of the woman  
trapped, a comb in her hand. After the day,  
a quarter of an hour to sit and attend to her hair,  
and he comes pestering her with his questions.  
And all because of the secret she knows —

about that other world, land under water,  
so familiar to her, so hard for him to believe.  
The reader sees her, the long hair blinding  
her dark eye.

She retreats under her hair,  
as if to her lost palace under the wave.  
He hears only the whistling of eels in the sea.

**“ ‘Some lads were walking home late after a dance’ ”**

Although I don’t know just what happened then,  
the words are a warning, gripping me, alerted  
as if by the sharpening breeze they felt when,  
reaching the crest of the low hill,  
they had a few miles yet to go,  
the odd sound from far off, the cooling air  
freshening their wits. The rhythm of walking,  
the company, made the way seem short enough.  
A shadow, hare or cat, was crossing the road  
where it sloped gently downward from the cross.

And what was shown to them there,  
what words were spoken? Although  
(since this is a typical episode)  
I can guess, an encounter, a door  
opening to an urgent world,  
which needs to speak, which asks for help.  
One of them was called by his name  
and given a message to pass on  
to a neighbour of his own.

**“Il ragazzo delle pelli”***da Lady Gregory*

Così lei stava lì a leggere tutta la pagina sino alla fine  
 sino a quando non giunse alla riga dove l'uomo dice,  
 parlando di sua moglie all'altro uomo,  
 osservala tutto il giorno, e quando si pettina i capelli  
 chiedile, perché deve rispondere, e  
 e deve essere d'accordo con qualsiasi cosa le venga chiesto.

La lettrice si fermò lì, la pagina aperta il suo dito  
 che segnava la riga, pensando alla donna  
 intrappolata, col pettine in mano. Alla fine del giorno,  
 un quarto d'ora per sedersi e occuparsi dei suoi capelli,  
 e lui arrivava a tormentarla con le sue domande.  
 E tutto questo per il segreto che custodisce —

dell'altro mondo, una terra sott'acqua,  
 a lei così familiare, così difficile per lui crederle.  
 La lettrice la vede, i lunghi capelli,  
 che accecano il suo occhio scuro.

Si ritrae sotto i capelli,  
 come se fossero il suo palazzo perduto sotto l'onda.  
 Lui sente solo il fischiare delle anguille nel mare.

**“Ragazzi di ritorno a casa tardi dopo un ballo”**

Sebbene non sappia proprio cosa capitò allora,  
 le parole erano un avvertimento che mi afferrava, all'erta  
 come se l'affilata brezza che sentirono quando,  
 raggiungendo la cima delle colline basse,  
 dovevano ancora percorrere poche miglia,  
 lo strano suono da lontano, l'aria che si sta raffreddando  
 acuendo il loro ingegno. Il ritmo del loro passo,  
 la compagnia, gli fece sembrare la via abbastanza breve.  
 Un'ombra, lepre o gatto, stava attraversando la strada  
 che scendeva delicatamente dalla croce senza sbalzi

E cosa gli fu mostrato,  
 quali parole furono dette? Sebbene  
 (visto che è un episodio tipico)  
 Posso indovinare: un incontro, una porta  
 che si apriva su un mondo urgente,  
 che deve parlare, che chiede aiuto.  
 Uno di loro fu chiamato per nome  
 e gli fu dato un messaggio da passare al vicino.  
 Tutti e tre videro, quattro campi più in là,

All three saw, four fields away,  
 a light in the ruined house.  
 The story is current still in the place.  
 They never forget that meeting,  
 but remember especially how wide awake,  
 how ready they had felt, at midnight  
 outside the dancehall, calling out goodbye  
 before turning together for the road home.

### “The Bishop and His Sisters”

The question was too hard for them, so they went and  
 asked the Bishop.

After they left, he turned in his chair  
 and took down the big book from Salamanca.  
 He opened at the page, and read,  
 ‘A woman naturally beautiful, dressed  
 in the usual fashion of her native country,  
 is allowed to walk along a certain street  
 even if she knows that somebody there  
 will commit sin when he sees her. Occasionally,  
 she might go around the longer way,  
 if not very inconvenient.’

He closed the book,  
 and thought about her stepping on the cobbles  
 between the grooms and the horses, if she tried  
 going round by the long lane beside the stables.  
*A woman naturally beautiful.* How long  
 since he looked straight in a woman’s face? He remembered  
 his own sisters, how he’d see the three of them  
 filling big jugs together at the pump  
 so they could wash themselves, and the soft knock  
 to be heard from their bedroom, and sometimes a splash,  
 and how they looked when they came downstairs,  
 their hair in plaits, their faces fresh and calm,  
 able to face the day, and the day’s work.

### “Noah’s Ark”

*after Ileana Mălăncioiu*

Fear is spreading like a weed,  
 spreading like fire in a meadow,  
 it spreads like water over the whole earth  
 and Noah’s ark is still not finished.

When there are no timbers, no pitch,  
 when seven pairs of beasts cannot be found,  
 when Noah’s sons are not at home,  
 when Noah is not in the best of shape.



una luce nella casa distrutta.  
 La storia è ancora attuale laggiù.  
 Loro non dimenticano quell'incontro,  
 ma ricordano particolarmente come fossero totalmente svegli,  
 come se fossero pronti, a mezzanotte  
 fuori dalla sala da ballo, salutandosi  
 prima di girarsi verso la strada di casa.

### **“Il vescovo e le sue sorelle”**

La domanda era troppo difficile per loro, così andarono a chiedere al vescovo.

Dopo che andarono via, si girò sulla sedia  
 e prese il grande libro di Salamanca.  
 Lo aprì alla pagina e lesse,  
 ‘Ad una donna bella di natura, vestita  
 alla moda del suo paese d’origine,  
 è permesso camminare lungo una certa strada  
 anche se sa che qualcuno peccherà  
 quando la vede. A volte  
 potrebbe andare per la via più lunga,  
 se non fosse molto scomoda.’

Chiuse il libro  
 e pensò a lei che camminava sul selciato  
 tra stallieri e cavalli, se lei provasse  
 ad andare per la strada lunga accanto le stalle.  
*Una donna bella di natura.* Da quanto tempo  
 non aveva guardato una donna in viso? Ricordò  
 le sue sorelle, come vedeva loro tre  
 riempire grandi brocche alla pompa  
 per potersi lavare, e il delicato tocco  
 che poteva sentire dalla loro camera, e a volte spruzzi,  
 e come sembravano quando scendevano giù,  
 i loro capelli intrecciati, i loro volti freschi e sereni,  
 pronte per affrontare il giorno e la giornata di lavoro.

### **“L’arca di Noè”**

*da Ileana Mălăncioiu*

La paura si sparge come le erbacce,  
 si propaga come il fuoco nel prato,  
 fluisce come l’acqua sopra l’intera terra e  
 l’arca di Noè non è ancora finita.

Quando non ci sono assi, nessuna pece,  
 quando non si trovano sette paia di animali,  
 quando i figli di Noè non sono a casa  
 quando Noè non è proprio in forma.

I saw him yesterday shaking all over,  
 he's stiffened like an old suit of armour,  
 and he stares at the muddy waters  
 which nobody is going to escape.

It was not I who decided, he seems to say  
 staring everywhere at once  
 like a wild thing cornered, even though for ages  
 all around him there has been nothing but the flood.

### “What Happened Next?”

So, will we ever be told what happened afterwards  
 to the man who had fallen among thieves  
 as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho:  
 half killed, what happened to him  
 after the Samaritan paid for his care at the inn?

Or what became of the women in Naples in 1944  
 who sold rough sex to soldiers in public for food,  
 their faces never changing as they took it?  
 How can I even ask, who would I ask? Indeed,  
 it was never the point of the story.

Fiction or truth, it will be told again:  
*This happened in my lifetime in a place that I know —*  
 the moment the light falls on the victim and then  
 it moves away slowly, the light  
 that also falls when there's nobody there to see it.

When I begin the telling the words will not be quiet,  
 I have to lie down beside them and listen  
 to the crackling syllables that keep beginning again  
 each time the wheel of language spins,

but they never tell what happened after the ending.  
 They have so many stories, and not all  
 have been heard already, and not all of them  
 can tell us clearly what we ought to have done.

### “War Time”

The convent now is full of women down on their luck,  
 abandoned wives, mothers in law,  
 nieces and daughters of men who needed  
 to vanish for a while. Avoiding each other,  
 waiting, reading a little or sometimes  
 wasting an hour drafting a letter —  
 they slip upstairs to dig in backpacks, hunting  
 for the last envelope with a real address.

Lo vidi ieri che tremava tutto,  
 si era irrigidito come una vecchia armatura,  
 e lui guarda le acque fangose  
 a cui nessuno potrà sfuggire.

Non sono stato io a decidere, sembra dire  
 guardando dappertutto contemporaneamente  
 come una cosa selvaggia messa all'angolo, anche se per anni  
 tutto intorno a lui non c'è stato altro che il diluvio.

### **“Che cosa è accaduto dopo?”**

Allora, ci diranno mai cosa accadde dopo  
 all'uomo che è incappato nei briganti  
 mentre scendeva da Gerusalemme a Gerico:  
 mezzo morto, cosa gli successe  
 dopo che il Samaritano pagò per le sue cure alla locanda?

Oppure cosa successe alle donne di Napoli nel 1944  
 che vendevano rude sesso ai soldati in pubblico per cibo,  
 le loro facce immutate quando lo prendevano?  
 Come posso pensare di chiedere, a chi chiedere? Di fatto  
 non è mai stato questo il punto della storia.

Finzione o verità, sarà raccontata di nuovo:  
*Questo accadde nella mia vita in un posto che conosco* —  
 Il momento in cui la luce cadde sulla vittima e poi  
 si allontanò lentamente, la luce  
 che cade anche quando non c'è nessuno lì a vederla.

Quando inizio a raccontare le parole non starò zitta  
 mi devo sdraiare accanto a loro e ascoltare  
 sillabe frammentate che ricominciano di nuovo  
 ogni volta a ruotare la ruota della lingua,

ma loro non dicono mai cosa successe dopo la fine.  
 Hanno così tante storie e non tutte  
 sono state ascoltate, e non tutte  
 possono dirci chiaramente cosa avremmo dovuto fare.

### **“Tempo di guerra”**

Il convento ora è pieno di donne disperate,  
 mogli abbandonate, suocere, nipoti e figlie di uomini che  
 dovevano svanire per un po'. Evitandosi l'un l'altra,  
 aspettando, leggendo un po' o a volte  
 perdendo un'ora buttando giù una lettera —  
 scivolano al piano di sopra per cercare negli zaini a caccia

Where do they all sleep? The young ones camp  
in the refectory, under the frescoed arch.  
The girl who finished in boarding school has nowhere to go  
now, her home is beyond the new border.  
She practises scales on the tablecloth, breathing  
in four-four time. Then she begins the concerto,  
first with a gallop, then a long pause  
counting the bars, her fingers held up in the air.

It is time. The women have drifted singly down  
along the short path leading to the chapel,  
the sisters' voices heard, as the door opens,  
a brief crescendo. At the edge of the table  
she waits until a sign from her dead music mistress  
tells her to bring the spread fingers down.  
She holds the chord in place pressing her foot  
into the floor, the note sinking into time,

the time that's lost, the note so much older  
than the hand that conjures, filling the empty room.

*2021*

dell'ultima busta con un indirizzo vero.  
Dove dormono tutte? Le giovani sono accampate  
nel refettorio, sotto gli archi affrescati.  
La ragazza che è finita in collegio non ha dove andare  
ora, la sua casa è oltre il nuovo confine.  
Lei pratica scale sulla tovaglia da tavola, respirando  
in quattro quarti. Poi inizia il concerto,  
prima con un galoppo, poi una lunga pausa  
contando le battute, con le dita sollevate in aria.

È giunta l'ora. Le donne hanno vagato su e giù  
lungo il breve sentiero che porta alla cappella,  
sentite le voci delle sorelle, all'apertura della porta,  
un breve crescendo. Al bordo del tavolo  
lei aspetta sino al segno con cui la sua insegnante di musica morta  
le dice di abbassare le dita aperte.  
Lei mantiene l'accordo pressando il piede  
sul pavimento, affondando la nota nel tempo,

il tempo che è perduto, la nota tanto più vecchia  
della mano che la coglie, riempiendo la stanza vuota.

*2021*





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Chris Arthur, *Hidden Cargoes*, Rochester, EastOver Press, 2022, pp. 232. € 20.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-958094-03-7

*Hidden Cargoes* is the latest collection from Irish essayist Chris Arthur. This substantial collection of essays is a treasure trove of thought and ideas, presented in a volume which is beautifully designed by E.K. Larken for Eastover Press. The current volume again showcases Arthur's experimentation with the essay form. It is Arthur's eighth collection. Twelve essays offer readers the chance to slow down and meditate on the meaning to be gleaned from close observation of various phenomena and experiences. The starting points for the essays vary, ranging from languid recollection of childhood memories of nature to moments of insight or observation inspired by interactions in everyday life.

In all cases, the import of the essays consists of two strands. Firstly, there is a unifying theme of there being an inherent meaning in all things. Secondly, this sense of meaning is amplified and distilled in Arthur's luminous prose, where the *mot juste* is coupled with an elegant style and interesting meditations, both the author's own, and those of various savants. In "A Kist o' Whistles" the author recalls being "anchored, grounded" to the woods of his childhood, "as if this was somewhere the voltage of my youth could be safely grounded" (19).

For Arthur, all life is connected, and there are multiple starting points for finding meaning. We must, however, slow down. Slowing down is necessary in order to follow the carefully composed logic and description, and involves effort. This is also a deeply humanistic collection, whose philosophical framing is the idea that humans belong to a cosmos which can be observed in small details, which are beautifully described. William H. Gass has described how the essay form "convokes a community of writers" and makes use of the writers like "instruments in an orchestra" (1985, 27). The essays in *Hidden Cargoes* echo this musical metaphor: they strike up a note, develop a theme and then amplify and diversify the originating inspirational material by introducing further meditation on, and exploration of the initial source - by citing the work of others, and reflecting on this. So it is that in an essay called "Leaf" we meet George Steiner, and must stop to reflect on his observation that metaphors offer "new mappings of the world" (67). Elsewhere we meet linguists, historians and philosophers, both well-known and less known, all of whose voices are offered to us in the context of Arthur's everyday observations.

In many essays the elegance of Arthur's style mitigates the sometimes serious tone and occasionally ponderous reflection. (The gentle meandering is always worth it). Elsewhere there is humour. In "Earpiece" for example, the musings that follow meditation on a fellow passenger's ear are interrupted by the interpolation of "His Brother's Voice", where Arthur's brother, in the guise of being a critical friend, impatiently asks for more detail and a more conventional telling:

'Ok I get it that you stared at a pretty girl's ear to pass the time on your bus journey. I'd still like a name for her though, and to know more about her story'. (38)

A thread of decentring is weaved throughout the collection. In "Still Life with Witch Hazel" we move from our short-term and individualistic perspective to that of witch hazel. Witch hazel holds various memories for Arthur. It becomes the catalyst for his imaginings of his parents' marriage. It brings us to an interrogation of the phenomenological theories of philosopher Edward Husserl and thence to memories of the author's gardens. The effect is both moving and meaningful. "Life is bigger than us" is the enduring theme; meaning comes from perspective.

Arthur himself provides a succinct summary of his book's approach and theme:

Meaning-making, that unnoticed industry we're perpetually engaged in, the process by which we make the world make sense to us, depends on cutting down the gargantuan scale of time and space that faces us into moments, objects, relationships, making stories that are sized to fit the constraints of consciousness and the limits of our language. (212)

In a world where the craving for instant gratification and instant "knowledge" is being deliberately promoted by algorithms cut off from community, nuanced and thought-provoking contributions such as *Hidden Cargoes* are needed more than ever. This is a generous intellectual offering, clothed in humour and lyricism, like a warm coat on a cold day or a magic cloak to shield us when we travel too near to the sun.

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*Róisín Ní Ghairbhí*

Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History*, Syracuse, Syracuse UP, 2004, pp. xxxi+256. \$45. HB. ISBN: 978-0-8156-3044-9.

#### *1. Introduction*

Joseph Lennon's *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* is a compelling exploration of the complex relationship between Ireland and the Orient. In this groundbreaking book, Lennon takes readers on a thought-provoking journey through Irish literature and intellectual discourse, shedding light on how the Irish imagination engaged with and interpreted the East. With meticulous research and insightful analysis, Lennon presents a comprehensive study that challenges traditional perspectives and narratives, deepens our understanding of Irish cultural identity, contributes to ongoing conversations about the dynamics of Orientalism and post-



colonialism, and offers new insights into Irish cultural identity. This review examines the key themes, strengths, and contributions of Lennon's work, highlighting its significance in the field of literary and intellectual history. Scholars, students, and anyone interested in Irish literature and intellectual history will find this book to be a valuable and thought-provoking resource.

Lennon's writing style is accessible and engaging, making his book an enjoyable read for both academic scholars and general readers. His meticulous attention to detail, combined with his ability to present complex ideas in a clear and concise manner, ensures that readers are able to grasp the intricacies of Irish Orientalism without feeling overwhelmed by jargon or dense theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the book is well-structured, with each chapter building upon the previous ones to create a cohesive narrative that guides readers through the evolution of Irish engagement with the Orient. Moreover, Lennon's research is commendable, as he draws from a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including literary texts, historical documents, and critical studies. This comprehensive approach not only strengthens the validity of his arguments but also provides readers with a rich and diverse collection of materials to explore further. Lennon's thorough analysis of both well-known and lesser-known texts ensures that his study encompasses a broad spectrum of Irish Orientalist discourse, avoiding any oversights or omissions.

## *2. Thematic Exploration*

Lennon masterfully examines the multifaceted aspects of Irish Orientalism, exploring the intersections of literature, politics, religion, and nationalism. By delving into both Irish writing about the East and Irish encounters with Oriental cultures, he provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. The book explores a wide range of themes, including exoticism, cultural borrowing, religious encounters, political ideologies, and postcolonial perspectives, all of which contribute to a nuanced understanding of the Irish engagement with the Orient.

Lennon's work raises important questions about the nature of cultural exchange and appropriation. Through his examination of Irish writers' engagement with Oriental cultures, Lennon prompts readers to consider how ideas, symbols, and narratives are borrowed, reimagined, and reinterpreted across different cultural contexts. This exploration of cultural borrowing and exchange adds depth to our understanding of the dynamics of literary and intellectual history, emphasizing the fluidity and interconnectedness of cultural production. In his analysis, Lennon skillfully navigates a vast array of literary works, from canonical figures like Jonathan Swift and W.B. Yeats to lesser-known writers who contributed to the discourse of Irish Orientalism. By examining poetry, fiction, travel writing, and intellectual debates, he reveals the diversity of perspectives and motivations that shaped Irish responses to the East. This breadth of coverage ensures that readers gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

## *3. Intellectual Contributions*

One of the key strengths of Lennon's work lies in his ability to uncover and analyze the often overlooked connections between Irish literature and Orientalism. He illuminates how the Irish engaged with the Orient in a manner distinct from their British counterparts, forging a unique path that reflects Ireland's historical, religious, and political context. Lennon's research fills a significant gap in the scholarship on Orientalism, showcasing the distinctive contributions made by Irish authors and intellectuals to this discourse. Lennon's examination of the inter-

sections between Irish nationalism and Orientalism is particularly enlightening. He skillfully demonstrates how Orientalist tropes and ideas were incorporated into the construction of Irish national identity, challenging the assumption that Irish cultural identity was solely based on opposition to British imperialism. By highlighting the ways in which Irish nationalists drew inspiration from Oriental cultures and narratives, Lennon prompts readers to rethink traditional notions of Irish identity formation.

Another noteworthy contribution of Lennon's work is his incorporation of postcolonial perspectives. He deftly analyzes the power dynamics inherent in Irish encounters with the East, interrogating the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. By exploring the ways in which Irish writers and intellectuals negotiated their own position within the global hierarchy of power, Lennon offers a valuable contribution to postcolonial literary studies.

Further strength of Lennon's work is his attention to the nuances and complexities within Irish Orientalism. Rather than presenting a monolithic view, he highlights the variations and contradictions that exist within Irish literary and intellectual responses to the Orient. By doing so, Lennon avoids oversimplification and acknowledges the diverse range of perspectives and motivations that shaped Irish engagement with the East. This nuanced approach challenges the notion of a singular Irish identity or a uniform Orientalist discourse, and instead reveals the intricacies and tensions inherent in the subject matter.

Another commendable aspect of Lennon's research is his incorporation of marginalized voices and perspectives. He not only explores the works of well-known Irish writers but also delves into the writings of lesser-known figures who contributed to the discourse of Irish Orientalism. This inclusion of voices that have been historically marginalized provides a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the topic, enriching the overall narrative.

Additionally, Lennon's analysis of the religious dimension of Irish Orientalism is particularly enlightening. He examines the encounters between Irish Catholicism and Eastern religions, shedding light on the ways in which Irish writers and intellectuals navigated the complexities of religious identity and spirituality in the context of Orientalist discourse. By exploring the interplay between religion, culture, and literature, Lennon offers a fresh perspective on the Irish engagement with the Orient, further deepening our understanding of the complexities of Irish cultural history.

While Lennon's work is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the field, one potential limitation is his interpretation of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) as an Arabic romance, "discussing the similarity in Irish and Arab temperaments and natures" (156), which is surprisingly untrue. *Lalla Rookh* is a Persian romance with Persian characterisation and setting, and is set in the context of a romanticized portrayal of Persia (present-day Iran).

#### 4. Conclusion

Lennon's *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* is a significant addition to the field of literary and intellectual history, offering a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between Ireland and the Orient. It is thought-provoking work that sheds light on an often overlooked aspect of Irish cultural history. Through his meticulous research, insightful analysis, and engaging writing style, Lennon challenges traditional perspectives and offers new insights into the complexities of Irish engagement with the Orient. By examining the intersections of literature, politics, religion, and nationalism, he uncovers the multifaceted motivations and implications of Irish Orientalism. This book serves as a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in Irish studies, literary and intellectual history, postcolonial studies, and Orientalism. Lennon's work not only deepens our understanding of Irish cultural

identity but also contributes to broader discussions on the complexities of cultural encounters and the power dynamics inherent in the construction of national narratives. *Irish Orientalism* is an invaluable resource for scholars, researchers, and readers interested in Irish studies, literary and intellectual history, postcolonial studies, and cultural exchange. By illuminating the multifaceted nature of *Irish Orientalism*, Lennon invites us to critically examine the dynamics of cultural encounters and the construction of identity in a global context.

*Hamid Farahmandian*

Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation, 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2023, pp. 728. £ 195. HB. ISBN: 978-1-4744-9917-0.

The first volume from the series *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press* documents the history of the press of these nations between 1640 and 1800. At the outset, the 1640s were chosen as a starting point because this was the decade when news publications including both foreign and domestic news began to appear on a more or less regular basis (Raymond 1996). Moreover, the decision to end the volume in 1800 is sensible: the final decade of the eighteenth century witnessed important new directions in the print media that were to shape the news in the following century. In relation to *The Sunday Press*, for instance, it was no earlier than 1791 that Britain's oldest extant title (the *Observer*) was founded, the move towards Sunday newspapers becoming ever more prominent in the years to follow, when a handful of papers' owners turned them into successful entertainment papers (Conboy 2010, 69).

The volume is an ideal combination of core chapters and case studies. On the one hand, chapters are concerned with the business of the press, production and distribution, legal constraints and opportunities, readers and readerships, with a well-balanced overview of the emerging identities and opportunities of news writers and journalists. On the other hand, case studies zoom in on particular people, titles and other press-related phenomena. The overall thematic coherence of the volume reflects great credit on Nicholas Brownlees, the editor, and individual contributors alike, with some contributions focusing on specific national contexts – notably Scotland, Ireland and Wales – and others with more of a cross-national dimension.

First and foremost, the volume addresses the issue of news production and transmission, with a view to both periodical news publications and the specialised press as instantiated by essays, literary and review journalism, and medical journals. Among the aspects explored in most detail is the extraordinary dynamism of the British and Irish press in the first years of the eighteenth century due to, among other things, the new legislative framework following the collapse of the Licensing Act in 1695. In the aftermath of the demise of the Act, a freer and more competitive market was to emerge as legal restraints were no longer in place preventing potential publishers from launching and running publications they believed might be profitable. In this type of scenario, the volume sheds light on the complex business of managing news publications. Besides advertising, which played a critical role in ensuring newspaper viability, due emphasis is therefore laid on business considerations such as costs, distribution, how many people to employ, taxation and, last but not least, the management of contents, design and formats.

Against this backdrop, readers interested in Irish studies will not fail to show their appreciation for the volume. Accordingly, the strategic importance of advertising is assessed with regard to the

island of Ireland as well. The relationship between advertising revenue and journal sustainability would become ever closer as the word “advertiser” itself made its appearance in newspaper titles, with examples of name changes being very common in response to the increasing financial interdependence between mercantile interests and newspaper profitability. Not surprisingly, therefore, a Dublin paper established in 1736 with an eye to attracting ads did not hesitate to proclaim itself the *Dublin Daily Advertiser*, “entrepreneurial print specialist Francis Joy” following suit “in Belfast with the *Belfast News-Letter, and General Advertiser*” (Brownlees, Finkelstein 2023, 38).

More generally, the context to the development of the press in Ireland is provided by Toby Barnard’s contribution (“Irish periodical news”). He notes that, compared with Britain and other western European countries, Irish print media got off to a sluggish start. Their late arrival is accounted for by Barnard as due to a relatively small and scattered population, “generally meagre incomes and low levels of literacy” (Barnard 2023, 239), along with linguistic disunity. With bilingualism on the increase in the seventeenth century, the majority of Irish men and women still spoke Irish, while printing in the latter posed technical and ideological difficulties, and far more people were able to speak (rather than read) the language.

What the volume meticulously examines is the trajectory followed by the press in Ireland in the wake of such first, tentative steps. From Yann Ryan’s study of form, layout and reader demand in relation to Irish news in the late 1640s, with perceptive insights into news coverage of Ireland within London newsbooks, to Colum Kenny’s research into *Mercurius Hibernicus*, Ireland’s first newspaper gaining traction in the second half of the century, the volume carefully traces the evolution of the Irish print media in subsequent decades. Kenny’s thorough analysis helps clarify the point as the author convincingly shows how different Samuel Dancer’s *Mercurius Hibernicus* was in style from earlier titles. As a commercial venture aimed at an English-speaking readership, the paper had “some of the hallmarks of a modern newspaper”: hence, it was “informative in a general way, including news from Ireland and abroad” and most importantly, it revealed details about the controversial Court of Claims in Dublin, which itself was “the first example of regular Irish court reporting” (Kenny 2023, 257).

Moving on to a later period, a further merit of the volume is that it aptly describes the radicalisation of the Irish press in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Amidst renewed demands for a complete break from England, the House of Commons made use of available legislation to open actions for breach of privilege against the *Volunteer’s Journal* and the *Freeman’s Journal*. At the same time, the attorney general set out to proceed against newsmen in the Court of King’s Bench. In this context, the government vowed to support private suits for libel and mobilised significant resources “to entice newsmen away from opposition”: in this vein, the increase in the duty on newspaper stamps and the tax on advertisements had the intended effect “on the oppositional press as notices placed by the government in friendly newspapers were exempt from the duty” (Kemp, McElligott 2023, 82). This was the framework within which the *Freeman’s Journal* would navigate its course after it broke with the government, it regained an independent voice and eventually managed to become the prominent newspaper it was by the mid-nineteenth century, as rigorously investigated in F.M. Larkin’s (2023, 267) case study.

It would be wrong, to conclude, to assume that the volume only focuses on the production of news. In fact, contributors also turn their attention to the reception of the press by discussing key issues such as who read the news and why, along with the impact the press had in early-modern society. Authors such as Sophie H. Jones and Rebecca Shapiro engage with these topics while at the outset, the editor advocates an interdisciplinary approach on which the volume effectively delivers. To name but a few more chapters, Kemp and McElligott examine the legal contexts in which the press operated in Britain and Ireland in the years between the fall of the

Star Chamber in 1641 and the passage of the Act of Union in 1800, while Brownlees and Bös focus on the language of periodical print news as it transformed from the short pamphlets of the 1640s to the ever more heterogeneous British and Irish newspapers of the eighteenth century.

The first volume of *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press* is therefore an impressive collection of excellent pieces of solid research, and it represents a more-than-welcome addition to the well-established field of historical news analysis.

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*Davide Mazzi*

Wei H. Kao, *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, pp 314. £ 75.99. HB. ISBN: 978-1-5275-8864-6.

*Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century* by Wei H. Kao offers a challenging exploration of Ireland's twentieth-century history through the lens of theatre and conflict. Kao, renowned for his extensive research in Irish theatre, brings together various facets of Irish dramatic works, shedding light on often overlooked pieces within the Canon.

The book delves into how class conflict or master-slave dynamics in the context of the Anglo-Irish Big House occurs, how historical events such as the Easter Rising and the thirty-year Troubles of Northern Ireland are represented on stage, as well as the portrayal of Irish experiences by women playwrights. Kao's dedication to excavating lesser-known works adds depth to the discourse surrounding Irish literature and theatre.

In Part I, comprised of two chapters under the title "Dramatizing Anglo-Irish Conflicts", the author initiates discussions with Iris Murdoch's *The Servant and the Snow* (1970), perhaps the least known of the plays covered in the book. The first chapter is significant as it analyzes the play from the perspective of Anglo-Irish class struggle, integrating it into the context of Irish literature and theatre. The subsequent chapter also addresses plays set in Anglo-Irish big houses, providing informative insights into a less-discussed aspect of the literary genre. It's worth noting that while much discussion exists about Anglo-Irish Big House Novels, the examination of their theatrical equivalents is relatively sparse. However, there arises a question regarding the portrayal of class struggle in the Anglo-Irish Big House in the context of "wars". While class struggles and master-slave dynamics in colonial situations can be construed as part of "wars" in a broader sense, they may not align with readers' expectations from the book's title.

Part II, titled "Theatrical Voices from the South", delves into various "history" plays by prominent Irish playwrights, such as W.B. Yeats, Sean O'Casey, Denis Johnston, Brendan Behan, Donal O'Kelly, Tom Murphy, John Arden (with Margaretta D'Arcy), Larry Kirwan, and Terry Eagleton, each chapter offering significant discussions. However, the section's organization could be enhanced for better coherence. For example, in Chapter 3, a comparison between O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and Christina Reid's *Joyriders* (1986) in terms of intertextuality seems noteworthy. Yet, discussing Reid's work within the framework of "Theatrical Voices from the South" raises some discomfort, given her usual categorization as a Northern playwright. Additionally, Part II's independence from Part III, where Reid is further examined, hampers the overall cohesion of the book.

Also in Part II, many plays related to the Easter Rising of 1916 are discussed and analyzed. For instance, Chapter 4, entitled "Staging The Easter Rising" deals with works by Yeats (*Dreaming of the Bones*, 1919), O'Casey (*The Plough and the Stars*, 1926), and Tóibín (*Beauty in a Broken Place*, 2004), while Chapter 5, "Performing 'Easter 1916'", explores plays by Johnston (*The Scythe and the Sunset*, 1958), Murphy (*The Patriot Game*, 1991), and O'Kelly (*Operation Easter*, 1995). Three plays in Chapter 8, "James Connolly on Stage", by Arden and D'Arcy (*The Non-Stop Connolly Show*, 1975), Kirwan (*Blood*, 1993) and Eagleton (*The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, 1993), are included as plays about the Easter Rising. These chapters juxtapose lesser-known plays with those considered canonical, revealing shifts in historical interpretations over the century. However, it is unfortunate that the chapters are entirely independent, lacking interaction between them. A holistic analysis across these chapters could have showcased the "continual adjustment and modification" of historical events "in new circumstances and contexts" (Carlson, quoted in Kao, 2).

In Part III, which focuses on female playwrights from the North, Anne Devlin, Marie Jones, and Christina Reid are prominently featured. This perspective offers a valuable re-examination of the Troubles of Northern Ireland from the viewpoint of women playwrights. The choice of these playwrights is highly compelling, since they are equally important playwrights, both in terms of the number of works they produced and in terms of their importance. However, there appears to be some imbalance in chapter allocation, with Devlin receiving more attention compared to Jones and Reid.

These organizational concerns may depend on the fact that each chapter is actually based on previously published journal articles, as mentioned in the Acknowledgements by the author.

This may explain the inherent incoherence when compiled into a book format. However, there remains room for improvement in structuring the book for a more cohesive narrative.

*Hiroko Mikami*

Manuela Palacios, *Us & Them: Women Writers' Discourses on Foreignness*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2023, pp. 240. € 39.80. ISBN: 978-3-86596-489-2.

Manuela Palacios' latest publication, *Us & Them: Women Writers' Discourses on Foreignness*, is an interdisciplinary work that combines topics with which the author is well acquainted, such as the study of migration, post-colonialism, ecofeminism, Irish and Galician studies, or translation. These are subjects with which Palacios has engaged in some of her previous publications; she is the editor of several anthologies, among which we can find *To the Winds Our Sails: Irish Writers Translate Galician Poetry* (2010), co-edited with Irish author Mary O'Donnell; *Forked Tongues: Galician, Basque and Catalan Women's Poetry in Translations by Irish Writers* (2012); *Six Galician Poets* (2016), an anthology of Galician poetry translated into English by Irish author Keith Payne; *Los ritos de los sentidos* (2015), a volume of translations of Arabic poetry co-edited with Jaouad Elouafi, Takkouche Bahi and Arturo Casas; or *Migrant Shores: Irish, Moroccan and Galician Poetry* (2017).

*Us & Them* is neither an anthology nor a translation project, it is instead an ensemble which seeks, as the title announces, to explore the construction of foreignness in literary pieces from Galician and Irish women authors and its intersection with national identity and gender. This multifaceted book is divided in three sections, and only the first one is devoted to the study and comparison of the notion of foreignness in both Irish and Galician literary works. The second section of this book explores the contribution of translation as a mechanism to bind nations and contest some of the existent concerns over globalization. The last part of the volume concludes on a more personal tone by featuring several Galician and Irish women authors' comments on their own experiences abroad, with the Other and their renegotiations with identity.

Galician scholars' lasting interest in Ireland's culture and society can be traced back to the nineteenth century, with the observation of similar traits between the two nations. In absence of a Galician Celtic lore, this encounter with Ireland inspired a Celtic renaissance that has proven to be significantly influential in the formation of the Galician national identity, demarcated from the homogenizing Spanish power which recurrently fought against the singularities of the Galician culture. As Palacios explains in the introduction to her book, Galician scholars have long looked to Ireland as an "inspiring Other" (12), as they considered Ireland's fight for independence from England – and English identity – of relevance for Galicia. Ireland's impact was remarkable and its influence in Galician literature, especially in the twentieth century, remains noticeable.

To better comprehend the emergence of Irish-Galician studies, we must take into consideration the similarities between the two nations that go beyond the Celtic imaginary, their geographical situation, or the identity struggle. The importance of landscape, a common history of emigration due to economic crisis and political hostility, and the linguistic conflict (Galician-Spanish and Irish-English) are amongst the shared circumstances that accompany the ongoing surge of women authors in both literary panoramas and the increase of environmental, feminist and post-colonial awareness that challenge established discourses of androcentrism, colonialism and racism.

In the first section of the book, “The Genres of Foreignness”, Palacios explores the debates about cultural difference and the encounter with the Other through the analysis of works of poetry, short fiction, novels, and drama authored by Irish and Galician women. *Us & Them* exhibits the differences and similarities between these literary fields, suggesting that the congruences and disparities spotted may complement one another, helping readers gain comprehensive insight into women’s configuration of foreignness and identity. What is particularly relevant is the privileging of female voices regarding the issue of migration and nomadism, a topic that was mostly concerned with male displacement and positioned female migration as an afterthought. Furthermore, women’s observations about the subaltern can be extremely revealing, considering their own plight as the alienated individuals in society and their subjection to double colonization in colonized nations.

Palacios launches her analysis assessing poetry with Mary O’Donnell’s anthology *Massacre of the Birds* (2020), and Galician author Alba Cid and her work *Atlas* (2019). Through these very recent publications we have access to contemporary debates concerned with topics such as the encounter with the Other in foreign countries and the West’s imposition of a perspective of the Other that dehumanizes and stigmatizes those considered too exotic or alien. The works selected by Palacios demonstrate both O’Donnell and Cid’s awareness and consideration regarding new forms of colonial discourse that objectify and impair vulnerable and migrant subjects. O’Donnell’s clear ecofeminist approach to displacement and foreignness addresses the animalization and sexualization of women and migrants while Cid’s intertextual work emphasizes the “spectacularization of the Other” (46) and the predicament of portraying foreign countries and cultures which are vulnerable to essentialism and misrepresentation.

*Us & Them* aptly allots short fiction its own space for discussion, which is a manifestation of the particular relevance of this genre, an extremely prolific one, for emergent literatures which can be explained on the basis of its immediate nature. Fiona Barr’s “The Wall Reader” (1979), Anne Devlin “Five Notes After a Visit” (1985) and Mary O’Donnell’s “Twentynine Palms” (2008) are the Irish texts selected for an examination of the interiorization of English colonial discourse and the construction of an Irish national identity. Palacios interrogates here the existing tension in Irish identity as a predominantly emigrating country, with the exception of the Celtic Tiger years, and their past as a colonized nation and, subsequently, as the Other. This section emphasizes and probes the prevalence of dualism and hierarchy in Western thought, and Palacios draws attention to a possible “nomadic nature” (93) withheld from women, trapped by an androcentric binary system that chained them to the domestic space and rendered a public life unreachable. The Galician short stories chosen – Ánxela Gracián’s “As noites en que o vento asubía o teu nome” (“The nights when the wind whistles your name”, 2000), “Lola” (2000) by Rosa Aneiros and “Meghalaya” (2019) by Iria Collado López – underline the interaction with the Other, human or nonhuman, through travel practices, as a broadening experience for women and their configuration of identity, one that may challenge and decompose this alienating logic that opposes and privileges the self over the Other.

Palacios brings to the forefront the discussion of gender in confluence with diaspora studies via Evelyn Conlon’s *Not the Same Sky* (2013), a novel which fictionalizes the stories of Irish orphan girls that were displaced to Australia during the Famine years and Eva Moreda’s novel *A Veiga é como un tempo distinto* (2011; published in English as *Home Is Like A Different Time* in 2019), about the Galician diaspora in London around the 1960s and 1970s. These novels examine the construction of collective identity in the diaspora, the resulting contradictions between the nation and the self, and the tension between trauma, xenophobia, and memory that problematizes dual identities. Despite the possibility of forming community in exile, Pala-



cios ponders on the likeness of such a community to be destroyed by prejudice that surpasses national identity, vulnerable to class, gender, or sexual discrimination, “no matter how strongly the notion of us is desired or reaffirmed by migrants, its repressed heterogeneity surfaces before long, as families are reshuffled and migrant’s networks undergo wrenching tensions” (127).

The analysis of discourses of foreignness in drama begins by drawing attention to the deep-rooted underrepresentation of women playwrights in both literary fields, and the overwhelming exclusion of their works in anthologies and theatre productions. This chapter focuses on the use of distance as a literary technique to engage the reader in the permanence of issues in past and present. Lorna Shaughnessy’s *The Sacrificial Wind* (2016) and Luz Pozo Garza’s *Medea en Corinto* (2003; *Medea in Corinth*) are the plays selected for analysis and they revisit two different Greek myths, the stories of Iphigenia and Medea, respectively, partially relocating the latter to the Galician landscape. Palacios reflects on the prevalence of the dramatic revision of classical myths in certain literary traditions to find in the past a reflection of contemporary issues and expose their permanence through time. *Us & Them* does a splendid job of addressing and pointing out the implications of these re-examinations for Galician and Irish discourses of identity and its application to the exploration of foreignness and feminism from a detached perspective.

Galicia’s already mentioned interest in Ireland has not been equally required, and despite the efforts of Galician authors and the cultural and social similarities that seem to tie both nations, Galician culture has remained rather obscure for Irish authors and scholars. In the second section of the book, “Glocal Identities in Translation”, Palacios articulates Ireland’s lack of reciprocal activity towards Galician authors and explains that translation has accomplished the bridging of both nations. Although the Galician tongue has achieved the status of co-official language of the autonomous community (1981), it continues to be a minoritized language, underprivileged and belittled, in particular by the more conservative faction of the Spanish society. Palacios points out the relevance of translation in the diffusion of local cultures expressed in minoritized languages. This section acknowledges the well-grounded concerns regarding globalization and the use of English as the vehicular language – the Irish language was precisely replaced by English and the latter has become the primary language of Irish literature – but the author also posits its potential utilization to rapidly establish transnational bonds. Emphasis is fixated on the importance of the local to assuage some of the uneasiness regarding globalization and the author of *Us & Them* remarks that translation practices have the capacity to assist “in the dissemination of the local through transnational projects that involves both stateless nations and nation-states” (181).

*Us & Them* closes with a last section titled “Mixing Memory and Desire: Women Writers’ Emigration and Wanderlust”, in which Palacios inquires of Irish and Galician women authors about the topics handled in this book, in particular, their personal experiences as migrating subjects and the implications in the construction of identity. These heterogeneous answers belong to Galician authors Marilar Aleixandre, Yolanda Castaño, Lupe Gómez Arto, María do Carme Kruckenberg, María do Cebreiro, Eva Moreda, Teresa Moure, Chus Pato and Luz Pichel; and Irish writers Celia de Fréine, Mary Hosty, Rita Kelly, Lia Mills, Mary O’Donnell and Lorna Shaughnessy. From this conglomerate of perspectives, the reader is able to acquire a more clear and intimate vision of the nomadic aspect of women authors from Irish and Galician communities, addressing the influence of travel practices and experiences in foreign countries on their works. This section brings up discussions about the ramifications of displacement, the marks left in these authors, and their communities in general, and the ensuing effect on the shaping of the self, whether as migrating subjects themselves or due to an episode involving relatives. Finally, Palacios will inquire about the experiences of the authors regarding funding

from institutions to go abroad, alluding to a potential structural struggle that impedes, among other issues, accessibility to collaborative work between artists from different literary fields.

The appeal of *Us & Them* hinges on its multifaceted approach to the topic of foreignness, not limited to the comparative analysis of texts. This versatile contribution is the product of the author's expertise and background managing translation projects, her experience collaborating with writers from different nations, and her informed observations drawing on sources from authors such as Edward Said, Julia Kristeva, Rosi Braidotti, Marisol Morales Ladrón or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Palacios advances the studies attentive to the interaction of Irishness and Galicianness, further balancing the not always reciprocated exchanges between the two cultures. The author also calls attention to the configuration of identity in nations encompassed by colonial and national discourses and the resulting predicament for societies that are veering toward multiculturalism, most notably illustrated in Ireland's case. The present book introduces understated questions about women's migratory identity and the interaction with the Other, vindicating women's stifled nomadic character and travelling as an expanding practice to contest female paralysis. Thus, despite any possible misconceptions about the content being too niche, the relevancy of the subjects raised and its applicability to other literary fields render *Us & Them* engaging for an ample readership.

*Olalla Santos*

William Wall, *Ti ricordi di Mattie Lantry?*, traduzione di Stefano Tettamanti, Milano, Ugo Guanda Editore, 2024, pp. 315. € 19. ISBN: 978-88-235-3363-9.

È un passato che non passa quello al centro del nuovo romanzo dello scrittore irlandese William Wall, o meglio, un passato che ritorna come un blocco emotivo rimosso con tutta la sua carica perturbante. *Unheimlich* per dirla con Freud, a significare la componente di spaesamento che si porta dietro e che provoca. E se è vero, per dirla sempre con il padre della psicoanalisi, che "l'inconscio non ha tempo", questa sorta di noir che Wall costruisce con una sapiente tessitura narrativa, ha il potere di riportare lo scrittore Jimmy Winter, protagonista dell'azione scenica, al nucleo rimosso della sua adolescenza.

Il plot è ingegnoso. Durante il lockdown in Irlanda, Winter si ritira con la moglie Catherine in un piccolo borgo di pescatori irlandesi battuto dal vento e dalla pioggia, dove aveva trascorso la giovinezza e dove i due possiedono una casa, decidendo di dar vita a un workshop di scrittura online con una selezione che porterà ad ammettere solo cinque candidati, coperti da anonimato così come il docente.

Ed è proprio in questa diversità di stilemi proposta dai corsisti che l'autore dimostra la sua capacità plurilinguistica, l'attitudine a rendere multiforme la sua prosa, circostanza che, forse, lo autorizza ad alcune apprezzabili divagazioni metaletterarie, incentrate sul senso della scrittura, secondo una tradizione che vede nel romanziere spagnolo Javier Marías il più autorevole e convinto rappresentante.

Un esempio significativo a pagina 307 del noir che – è bene sottolinearlo – è uscito in traduzione prima in Italia che in Irlanda, a conferma di un amore dell'autore per il nostro Paese, dove ha scelto di vivere con la moglie Liz, alternando periodi a Camogli ad altri nella nativa Cork:

In un saggio sul rapporto tra letteratura e menzogna, Mario Vargas Llosa sostiene che scriviamo libri per consentire agli altri di vivere vite diverse da quella che vivono, dal momento che l'essere umano non

accetta di dover vivere l'esperienza di una singola vita. E se il vero obiettivo della letteratura fosse invece l'opposto? Determinare la singola vita di ognuno, avvolgere chi legge, o chi scrive, con uno sciame di vite alternative che non sono le loro e che loro non possono vivere, in altre parole affinare ininterrottamente, attraverso un continuo processo di eliminazione, una definizione quanto più possibile della vita di ciascuno? La sua assoluta ineluttabilità esistenziale.

Man mano che il protagonista riceve il lavoro *in fieri* degli aspiranti scrittori, dalle pagine di una di essi (Deirdre) cominciano a prendere corpo e a filtrare luoghi e particolari di un passato fin troppo familiare a Winter che, in una spirale di congetture, finirà col sospettare che quelle pagine siano costruite e dirette a lui non come scrittore, ma in quanto persona.

Da questo momento la ricerca di Winter, volta a scoprire chi si cela dietro il nome di Deirdre, diventerà ossessiva e motore del prosieguo del romanzo, con tutta la sua carica destabilizzante che porterà a mettere in crisi anche il suo rapporto coniugale e a rivelarci la caratura umana dell'affermato scrittore che, novello Edipo, si trova a rincorrere la verità sepolta di un passato che torna con prepotenza a fare sentire la sua voce, anzi, le sue voci.

Perché ognuno ha il suo segreto, una consapevolezza che diviene l'aspetto centrale del romanzo insieme al tema della memoria. Ci sono ricordi che vanno dimenticati per poter sopravvivere – questa sembra essere la consapevolezza che il lettore acquisisce procedendo nella appassionante narrazione tesa a rivelare il mistero che si cela dietro l'identità di uno degli scrittori anonimi.

Wall è abile nel tratteggiare il carattere delle *dramatis personae*, soprattutto quello di Mattie e dello stesso Winter che, per dirla con Musil, si rivela un "uomo senza qualità" o, meglio ancora, un insieme di qualità senza uomo.

Sullo sfondo la pandemia, un morbo che sempre più si caratterizza come metafora della condizione umana e sociale del nostro tempo, e un paesaggio duro, a tratti burrascoso e violento, che funge da contraltare alla vicenda e che Wall descrive magistralmente. Nelle pagine finali si consuma il dramma personale di Jimmy Winter, messo a confronto coi fantasmi, anche sordidi, della sua giovinezza, capaci di portare alla luce la ferocia di una condizione umana dalla quale sembra non esserci riscatto, almeno per il protagonista.

Daniele Serafini

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, *Selected Stories*, Belfast, The Blackstaff Press, 2023, pp. xxvii + 337. € 14.99. ISBN: 978-1-7807-3369-2.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's *Selected Stories* is not her first collection of selected stories. In 2003 Attic Press published *Midwife to the Fairies. New and Selected Stories* with a "Preface" by Anne Fogarty; as the title says, some new unpublished stories were included together with a selection from Ní Dhuibhne's first two collections, *Blood and Water* (1988) and *Eating Women is not Recommended* (1991). Fogarty's "Preface" provided a precious critical journey into the way the Author moves in the realm of short story writing, following a narrative form that best responds to her artistic needs.

In 2017 a second volume of *Selected Stories* appeared with Dalkey Archive Press, presenting twelve stories written over the span of nearly thirty years and chosen from the five volumes published until then: *Blood and Water*, *Eating Women is not Recommended*, *The Inland Ice* (1997), *The Pale Gold of Alaska* (2000) and *The Shelter of Neighbours* (2012). Interestingly, the stories "Blood and Water" and "The Flowering" are included in both volumes, as a sort of manifesto of Ní Dhuibhne's writing in their search for the past, the complex relationship between past and present, and a statement of artistic expression.

Now a new collection of *Selected Stories* is published in 2023 by Blackstaff Press, gathering fourteen stories from all the volumes that came out between 1988 and 2020, thus including her latest collection, *Little Red and Other Stories*. This is a happy return after the publication of her moving memoir, *Twelve Thousand Days: A Memoir of Love and Loss*, in 2018, and *Little Red and Other Stories* in 2020.

As a matter of fact, considering that her first story, “Green Fuse”, was published by David Marcus in the “New Irish Writing” page of *The Irish Press* in 1974, these *Selected Stories* mark nearly fifty years of Ní Dhuibhne’s short story writing, thus anticipating the celebration of the special Spring issue of the *Irish University Review* dedicated to her work and due to come out in 2024. A hint at a celebratory mood is implicit in the critical frame the volume offers, with Margareth Kelleher’s “Foreword” and Ní Dhuibhne’s “Introduction”, which distinguish these *Selected Stories* from previous selections and publications and provide keen insight into the development of over four decades of Ní Dhuibhne’s short story writing.

Kelleher opens her “Foreword” with a quotation from one of the stories in the collection, “The Banana Boat”, aptly choosing it as a programmatic critical intent, but also as a statement of Ní Dhuibhne’s writing as a whole: “It is precarious and delicate, our dull and ordinary happiness” (ix). She thus points out the interlacing of fragilities, the fragility of human lives and human happiness and the fragility of the oral stories Ní Dhuibhne collected as a professional folklorist, which often provide a basis or a starting point for very personal re-elaboration and retelling. References to and quotations from critical studies of the short story as a genre (Raymond Carver, William Trevor, Frank O’Connor, Joyce Carol Oates) anticipate the intertextual layers that characterise Ní Dhuibhne’s writing, in which the patterns of traditional stories are juxtaposed to their modern counterparts, and explicit or more implicit literary references act as textual markers. Kelleher also points out the richness of Ní Dhuibhne’s writing in occasional sources, such as Elizabeth Boyle’s study *The Irish Flowerers* (1971) in “The Flowering” or the real episode of the sinking of the ferry *Estonia* in 1994 in “Estonia”. Her double roots in English and Irish characterise her versatility as a writer and provide a springboard to delve into liminality.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s own voice in her “Introduction” completes and counterpoints Margareth Kelleher’s “Foreword” and leads the reader into the patterns and point of view of the writer. Ní Dhuibhne recalls her first steps into writing paying tribute to David Marcus for his encouragement, and describes how she writes, where stories come from, stating that “Stories are everywhere” (xxvi): “I think I feel the urge to write a story when something I encounter resonates with some feeling or thought buried inside me. It is that conjunction that generates the spark, and if I grab it before it fades, I get the story” (*ibidem*).

Choice is always hard when making a collection that is also a selection, necessarily something has to be left out, and Ní Dhuibhne focuses on the criteria followed in selecting the stories for the present volume. For example, stories that “tend to get anthologised regularly” (xxiv) are passed over, which explains the absence of one of her most poignant stories, “Midwife to the Fairies”, her first experiment in the juxtaposition and interpolation of a traditional story and its modern version. The Author underlines the relevance of her discovery of Alice Munro (*ibidem*) as well as of “cultural feminism in the 1980s”, which led her “to focus on women’s experiences, in contemporary Ireland and in the past”, attracted by the concept of “herstory” (xxv). Personal features underlie the stories, for example the importance of place, Donegal in particular, and she closes on a further personal note mentioning the support of her husband, Bo Almquist, who “seldom read my work but was totally supportive of it” (xxvii).

The selection follows an even distribution of stories taken from the various collections, roughly two stories from each volume, with the exception of *Little Red and Other Stories*, from

which three are chosen. “The Coast of Wales”, instead, was first published in *The Long Gaze Back*, edited by Sinéad Gleeson, in 2015, and was included in the 2017 *Selected Stories*. The stories are arranged in chronological order of publication thus offering an overview of her whole career and providing a glimpse of her development as a writer. An exception is “Blood and Water”, which – Ní Dhuibhne says in her “Introduction” – “we placed ahead of the earlier ‘The Postmen’s Strike’ (1979)” (xxiv), a suitable option for a collection that is representative of a whole writing life.

In fact, in this fine story past and present interlace in the first-person narrator’s voice, alternating the perspectives of childhood and adulthood in a game of memories and recollections. Ní Dhuibhne says in her “Introduction” that “Blood and Water” is “representative of the style of story I began to write from the 1980s” (xxiv). It is thus seminal work in the contrast between the country and the city, the persecution of the past, family roots and family ties, the sense of shame of the young protagonist of having an aunt who is “not the full shilling” (1). The story introduces the feature of the Irish college which will later become the narrative core of her 1999 novel *The Dancers Dancing* and its version in the Irish language *Cailíní Beaga Ghleann na mBláth* of 2003. The choice of placing “Blood and Water” as the opening story also highlights Ní Dhuibhne’s academic background as a folklorist, as the “big splodge of a dirty yellow substance” (6) the young protagonist sees in the scullery is for her the epitome of Donegal backwardness as well as the objective correlative of the past and its continuity. She will need academic work in the form of a course in ethnology to make sense of a Donegal tradition as the spot is “nothing other than butter, daubed on the wall after every churning, for luck” (*ibidem*). The conclusion of the story retrieves this obsessive image of her childhood as a metaphor for the malaise and heaviness of the past: “I feel in my mind a splodge of something that won’t allow any knowledge to sink in. A block of some terrible substance, soft and thick and opaque. Like butter” (14).

“The Postmen’s Strike” is a dystopian story set in the future of 1999, somehow anticipating Ní Dhuibhne’s 1990 novel *The Bray House*. Matilda has started a new life in Denmark just before a ten-year-long strike cut Ireland off from the rest of the world. While Matilda was thriving in Denmark, the long years of isolation have changed the country into a nightmarish Big-Brother New Ireland. The arrival of Matilda’s husband, Michael, when the strike is over brings tidings from the old country, where the Irish language has been “unofficially banned since 1994” (23) and where the Irish past has been rewritten, deleting Old Irish and Middle Irish, the Book of Kells or “anything commonly masquerading under the title of Irish History” (24). Michael is now a perpetrator of the new *status quo* in his position as “Chief Poet of the New Ireland” (26) and the perspective of a return to Ireland creates a picture of a grim future from which it is necessary to escape.

“The Flowering” is another pivotal narrative in Ní Dhuibhne’s career, it revolves around a young woman of today, Lennie, trying to discover her roots in order to discover herself. She thus gets to know the story of her ancestor, Sally Rua, whose ability at crochet, the “flowering” of the title, goes well beyond the opportunity of earning a living: it is a form of art. When deprived of it, she falls into madness: “She went mad because she could not do the work she loved, because she could not do the flowering. That can happen. You can love some kind of work so much that you go crazy if you simply cannot manage to do it at all” (49). The story is Ní Dhuibhne’s personal statement on creativity, weaving together different layers, the discovery of personal and communal past, art, and the conscious use of fiction.

Creativity is embedded in “The Wife of Bath”, in which a pub manageress, Dame Alisoun, welcomes the first-person narrator “to beside Bath” (54) and proudly speaks of her skill at em-

broidery in a playful Chaucerian direct quotation from *The Canterbury Tales*: “I passeth ’em of Ypres and of Ghent” (58). This accidental encounter mixes echoes of Chaucer and of Jane Austen, references are made to the Pump Room (62) and Catherine Morland (65), which mark the story as an explicitly postmodern statement on the fiction of narrative. Notably, Alisoun gradually becomes aware of her artificiality as a fiction straddled from a medieval text. “You don’t even exist”, the nameless protagonist says to her at some stage, “you are just a figment of some man’s imagination” (62). Alisoun reinforces these words by repeating them, making them a form of identity: “I was just one man’s invention. I’m made of parchment”. (65). On the other hand, the protagonist too, like Alisoun, is an invention, a product of imagination, a literary character in a story of postmodern self-reflexivity.

Something similar happens also in “Gweedore Girl”, a story of emigration which casts attention on transformation into text and implies a reflection on the conscious artificiality of the story. The first-person narrator, Bridget, leaves her native Donegal to take up a position as a servant in Derry, where she is courted and then seduced by Elliot, the butcher boy. Robbed of the only two pounds she possessed, Bridget sues him in court and thus becomes a story: “They wrote about me in the paper” (94). Likewise, just before the end of the story, she describes a dream. While waiting for Elliot, she is approached by a woman who “was not any woman I know but... she looked like someone I knew” (93), her *alter ego*. In the dream the woman dissolves into paper: “She had turned into a piece of paper. She was a large cut-out doll, drawn in heavy black ink, [...] She was folded in two on the ground and I opened up and spread her out and read her” (94).

Concern with art characterises several stories in a variety of ways, but “Estonia” is probably the most openly engaged with issues of art. It takes inspiration from the sinking of the ferry *Estonia* travelling from Tallin to Stockholm on September 28, 1994, a disaster in which over nine hundred people lost their lives. The story alternates between the disaster and Emily’s brief love story with Olaf, who died on the *Estonia* with his family. However, “Estonia” is intertwined with literary references due to Emily’s work as a librarian, something she does not particularly enjoy since it is deprived of passion and curiosity but is based on automatization. Yet, like Sally Rua, Emily is also an artist, a poet. She stays “in the same job, doing the same things, year after year” (102), clinging to “her secure, familiar work as a drowning man clings to a straw” (*ibidem*). The simile based on drowning anticipates the actual drowning of the *Estonia* victims, at the same time introducing writing as rescue, a life belt, as Emily becomes “in her spare time, a poet”, and “the words she wrote at home, late at night” are more than an “outlet” (*ibidem*): “The poems erupted, like volcanic dreams, full of strange, exotic images” (*ibidem*). Ní Dhuibhne also introduces in “Estonia” the commitment to writing and the relationship between a writer and his/her own writing: “Writing is art; writing is work. The artist simply does the work – simply, with total concentration, makes the thing itself... And then it is finished... The writer goes back to the empty page and stays there. The work is its own highest reward” (103).

The following story, “The Pale Gold of Alaska”, is like “Gweedore Girl” a story of emigration, from Donegal to the United States, loosely based on Míic Mac Gabhann’s memoir *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*, translated into English as *The Hard Road to Klondike* (1959). Set during the gold rush, the story features the character of Sophie, a young woman leaving Donegal like Bridget and falling in love with Ned while crossing the Atlantic. Her expectations of married life happiness are thwarted by reality and only her native Indian lover, North Wind, makes her feel alive again, teaching her a new language of nature and freshness: “The names of the months. The month of the melting snow. The month of the greening grass. The month of the rutting stag. He told her about the animals in the mountains: the great brown bears, the thin mountain lions” (147). When the baby she has had from him dies, she turns into an

animal madwoman, like Sally Rua in “The Flowering”, walking “around the shanty town, wrapped in her sealskin coat, chanting... incantations, without cease” (157), interlacing to the litany the name of North Wind.

In “The Banana Boat” the routine of a family holiday in Kerry is broken by the possibility of disaster and tragedy. The danger of losing her son who risks drowning off the coast of Castlegregory evokes Peig Sayers who “lost several sons to the sea” (178) and arouses a storm of emotions in the protagonist narrator, who realises she is losing her adolescent children anyway as they grow up and change. The story is also an interesting experiment in intertextuality and an alternative to Ní Dhuibhne’s use of postmodern rewriting of traditional tales. The first-person narrator openly acknowledges Mary Lavin’s story “The Widow’s Son”, a story with two endings, which Ní Dhuibhne paraphrases: “I realize right now that there are two ends to the story, two ends to the story of my day and the story of my life. I think of Mary Lavin’s story about the widow’s son...” (172). Likewise, Alice Munro is also openly present in direct quotation from the story “Miles City, Montana” (179) as an acknowledgment to a writer she discovered at the beginning of her career.

The literary establishment looms largely in “A Literary Lunch”, a story set in the context of a board meeting, whose aim is to assign funds and bursaries to writers. The setting of a fashionable bistro provides an occasionally sarcastic and entertaining insight into the world of Dublin’s literary life, in which discussions about productions at the Abbey Theatre are a mask to conceal patterns of authority and power. Francie Briody, “a writer whom nobody read” (188), already in his fifties, is refused financial support once again, in spite of having been awarded several prizes. Bitterly, he ponders that “Nobody was interested in a writer past the age of thirty”, “It was all the young ones they wanted these days, preferably women with lots of shining hair and sweet photogenic faces” (*ibidem*). Francie takes his revenge murdering the head of the board he deems responsible for his failure, yet in spite of this tragic conclusion, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne takes the opportunity to play with the fashionable clichés of literary criticism, describing Francie’s latest novel as “a heteroglossial polyphonic postmodern examination of postmodern Ireland, with special insight into political corruption and globalisation, beautifully written in dark masculinist ironic prose with shadows of *l’écriture féminine*, which was exactly what Fintan O’Toole swore that the Irish public and Irish literature was crying out for” (189).

A longer format characterises “The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman’s Here”, and “Bikes I Have Lost”, both of them organised in various sections. In “The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman’s Here”, the protagonist, Polly, comes back to her native place in the West of Ireland after thirty years of absence, as she was rejected by her own family for being an unmarried mother. The various sections in the story (twelve in all) are uneven in terms of length, ranging from a single paragraph to several pages. This sort of textual fragmentation is consistent with Polly’s journey home, an attempt at reconciliation with place and family, especially with her deaf and half-blind mother, to whom she intends to tell the story of her life: “Until Polly tells this story to her mother, she will be unfree, ununited, unwhole” (206). The story of Polly’s past is set alongside the story her old mother tells herself, an old legend the end of which she has forgotten, and which strikingly resembles or retells Polly’s own. “The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman’s Here” is also a tale of loss, as the memory of Paddy’s death, her one-time boyfriend and father of her child, still marks Polly’s life.

A similar experiment in form is represented by “Bikes I Have Lost”, which shares with the previous story the theme of loss. It is organized in four different parts, each of them bearing a different subtitle, so it is a sequence of self-contained parts. Bikes are a metonymy for a journey into the past as the story recounts Helen’s life through the stories of her bikes, starting with the theft of a three-wheeler, going on with the bike she uses to go to work in the Green’s bookshop,

moving to her first boyfriend's Honda, a witness of their consuming love relationship as well as of the young boy's tragic death. The organization in single episodes is an interesting insight into the fragmentation of the protagonist's memories, at the same time keeping the unity of the fictional autobiography intact. The use of a present perfect form in the title highlights the account of past episodes that have an impact on the present. Interestingly, the four parts are in increasingly longer stretches as the protagonist grows up and the language develops from the nearly baby talk of the first part "The Buildiners" to a greater language awareness, thus following the protagonist's development. Interestingly, a direct quotation among others from *Midsummer Night's Dream* acts as a commentary or metatextual reflection on the organization of the story as a whole: "Seeming parted, but yet an union in partition" (Act III, Scene 2). In fact, the apparent "partition" or fragmentation of the story contributes to its "union", while cycling metaphors intensify in the final part of the story. The simile "falling in love is not like learning to ride a bicycle. It's more like falling off one" (282) develops into losing "balance" and "tumb(ing) off the wheel" (286). Helen gets lost and falls off life after being rejected by Sean and literally disappears becoming anorexic. The structural organization of the story highlights this process, as quite short paragraphs overlap with Helen's consuming herself and thinning out. The text thus thins out together with its protagonist.

"The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman's Here" and "Bikes I Have Lost" introduce the two subsequent stories, "The Coast of Wales" and "New Zealand Flax", both revolving around the theme of loss, grief and bereavement. In "The Coast of Wales" the divergent settings provide a meditation on grief and represent an echo of Ní Dhuibhne's own personal experience in recent years. The graveyard where the first-person narrator visits her husband's tomb is the background for the nearly funny episode of another widow's little dog almost being run over by a hearse: "How ghastly. First your husband, then your dog" (305). The dog is spared, but the thoughts of death haunt the protagonist. The other setting, Wales, is evoked as a special place for the couple, and it is there that she would like to leave some of his ashes, as an act of love: "Some of yours (your ashes) are at home too. I am planning to scatter them on a nice headland near the place where *we* went on holiday on Anglesey, where almost everyone speaks Welsh" (302). Wales is invisible now, "There is a coast that you can't see over the horizon. Wales" (304). Wales is as invisible as her husband is, still existing in the ashes, tomb and lawn cemetery that mark the story.

"New Zealand Flax" opens on the richness of Frieda's house garden in Kerry, "The early purple orchids are plentiful this year" together with "the other flowers of June, the clover, the buttercups. The yellow one, bird's-foot trefoil" (307). Such opulence in flowering marks a sharp contrast with Frieda's sense of loss. She has travelled to the cottage in Kerry on the pretext of cutting the grass, but mostly to feel the presence of her husband. As a revenant, the dead husband makes his appearance when the sun goes down (315), Elk comes back as a comforting presence, to share the evening meal and the wine, "he looks like himself... wearing his navy blue jumper... His voice is his voice... He is blurred, like a photograph that is not in focus" (*ibidem*). The use of simile makes the world of the living and of the dead closer, Elk's voice is "like a mellow burgundy" and "Like a purple orchid" (*ibidem*), a coreferent to the Chablis on the table and the orchids Frieda has been looking after in the garden.

In the final story, "Little Red", the reference to the fairy tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" is implicit in the title, though it openly appears only at the end of the story, when Fiona thinks of the way her little grand-daughter Ellie wants the story to be told, "the version that is not scary" (336). Yet she finds herself inside the scary story, when on a Sunday afternoon a man comes to her house, a possible contact of her online dating: "A figure appears outside the patio door", "He is tall, with



a long pointy face, a crest of grey hair springing back from his forehead, a sunburnt complexion. Neat clothes – jeans and a pale grey shirt, a grey anorak” (329). He introduces himself as Declan – “Is that Declan the plumber or Declan the electrician or Declan the serial killer?” (330) – and gets inside uninvited expecting something to eat. His ambiguous desire for food makes him a wolf in disguise, and his direct requests – “Is there anything to eat?”, “I wouldn’t say no to a sandwich” (332) – are evocations of the wolf eating Little Red Riding Hood and her Grannie in the fairy tale. The open ending leaves the story undisclosed with the undefined intentions of going for a walk.

As a fairy tale, “Little Red Riding Hood” has its roots in folklore, and by placing this particular story at the end of the volume a circle comes to a full end. The volume opened with the disturbing splodge of butter obsessing the first-person narrator in “Blood and Water” in a disguised evocation of folklore tradition. It closes with a reelaboration of echoes of a traditional fairy tale in a contemporary context, exploiting variations of the plot yet displaying veiled references to it. The volume thus offers new readers an enjoyable corpus of stories and provide affectionate readers with a keen insight into Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s development as a short story writer over years and decades. In her latest *Selected Stories* each of the fourteen stories included is a step in a fascinating chronological journey through four decades in the writing of a “master storyteller” as Margaret Kelleher introduces her (ix). It is a gift of storytelling.

Giovanna Tallone

María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera, José Carregal-Romero (eds), *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. xix + 246. € 42.79. ISBN 978-3-0313-0457-6.

Silence has many faces, many shades and hues capable of conveying meaning in a variety of ways, often contrasting with one another. It is an expression of powerlessness and oppression but also a form of communication that can be louder than sound, language or words. Silence could be a form of pain, of refusal, of reticence, resistance, fear or control, but also of detachment, denial, or acceptance. In his tragedy *Thyestes*, Seneca said that “Silence is a lesson learned from the many sufferings of life”. And these words lie in the background of the fine Open Access volume edited by María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera and José Carregal-Romero, *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak*, who have gathered a stimulating collection of provocative essays on the issue of silence, of what is not said or has been kept unsaid and unspoken in Irish history, society, culture and literature.

The ten essays cover different aspects of silence in contemporary Irish fiction from a variety of critical perspectives. However, a *fil rouge* underlies them all, as the impact of the past on the present and of silence, hidden truths, secrets that have marked distant or recent history in the country reverberate in the discussion of their disturbing or violent legacy.

The paratextual frame of the volume paths the way to the various essays. On an unnumbered page the dedication to “the victims of institutionalised silence” is preceded by a double quotation as epigraphs; one is by the Nobel prize poet Louise Glück: “I am attracted to ellipsis, to the unsaid, to suggestion, to eloquent, deliberate silence. The unsaid, for me, exerts great power...”, therefore shedding light on the more intimate and private aspects of silence. The second, in Spanish, is by Latin American journalist and essayist Eduardo Galeano, and focuses on the impossibility of history to be silent, thus giving prominence to a more public dimension

of silence: “No hay historia muda. Por mucho que la quemen, por mucho que la rompan, por mucho que la mientan, la historia humana se niega a callarse la boca”.

This looms largely in the “Foreword” by Paige Reynolds, who points out that many of the writers considered in the volume “make vividly public topics that once were regarded as strictly private” (ix) highlighting the complexity of silence. She introduces the volume as “indispensable”, and plays on the irony of announcing a book that is a study of silences. Breaking endemic silences that have characterised Irish history and society implies breaking a taboo, though silence is also a “means of expression” (x). Reynolds also provides a personal anecdote regarding the impact of silence in literature, making reference to her own experience of applying silence as a reading key to her teaching of Joyce’s *Dubliners*, “a collection famously ridden with silences” (x-xi).

Echoes of Reynolds’ words resonate in the Editors’ “Introduction. Silences that Speak”, which displays clear focus of the volume’s critical intentions. The multifacetedness of silence is considered in a triple perspective, “as an aesthetic practice, a key narrative element or a textual strategy” to speak of the unspeakable (1), and these features are in communication with one another in the various essays. After a theoretical overview of studies on silence from George Steiner, to Julia Kristeva to Susan Sontag and Michel Foucault, the “Introduction” considers various facets of silence as examined by Irish contemporary fiction writers, it is used for characterisation, as an aesthetic principle, to cover “inconvenient truths” such as institutional abuse, but it can also be ambiguous and subversive. The conclusion is thus that silence is a site of analysis and enquiry, if silence speaks, so all the essays in the present volume also speak.

Emma Donoghue is the object of Marisol Morales-Lladrón’s opening essay, investigating two historical novels, *The Wonder* (2016) and *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), from the perspective of cultural history approach. “Conspicuously Silent: The Excesses of Religion and Medicine in Emma Donoghue’s Historical Novels *The Wonder* and *The Pull of the Stars*” takes into account interconnected themes related to silence and the unveiling of silence questioning the role of the past. Morales-Lladrón points out the continuity of both novels in Donoghue’s writing, bringing to the forefront liminal and marginalised characters, controlled and silenced by figures of authority, namely in medical care and religious morality. The setting of *The Wonder* in post-famine rural Ireland interweaves the assumedly miraculous self-imposed fasting of eleven-year-old Anna with the unwanted fasting of the famine a few years earlier. The control of a male local committee to verify if this is fraud is sustained by English nurse Lib, who as an atheist cannot accept or understand the new environment she finds herself in. The silence that surrounds Anna’s fasting is conducive to other forms of silence to hide incest, of which Anna feels guilty, following the moral code of the place and the time that certain truths cannot be disclosed. Early in the essay, Morales-Lladrón highlights the role of riddles in the novel, in the form of “untold secrets, lies and violence perpetrated by the conspicuously silent family, religion and society”, which turn “the novel into the true riddle” (26). The setting of *The Pull of the Stars* is the Great Flu pandemic of 1919, focusing once again on silenced female bodies, imprisoned in marriage and the health system in a patriarchal system of values. Donoghue breaks the silence on the female experiences of pregnancy and labour at a time when the First World War “overshadowed” the “appalling circumstances” (33) of the pandemic. In her conclusion, Morales-Lladrón emphasises Donoghue’s contribution in retrieving past experiences from oblivion and “disclosing the silence around the experiences of women throughout history” (39) in very sharp historical narratives.

The following contribution by María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera, “‘To Pick Up the Unsaid, and Perhaps Unknown, Wishes’: Reimagining the ‘True Stories’ of the Past in Evelyn Conlon’s *Not the Same Sky*”, is ideally connected with the previous one in genre and theme, as Conlon’s

2013 novel retrieves lost stories of women in the aftermath of the Great Famine. In the first section of her essay, Caneda-Cabrera introduces academic studies that point out the blanks and gaps in history and the silence that surrounds the Great Famine, a phenomenon that, quoting Margaret Kelleher, is unspeakable and unspoken, thus an “inexpressible reality” (44). Evelyn Conlon’s concern is to turn to forgotten and silenced voices, in particular to the Irish Famine Orphan Girls, transported to Australia between 1848 and 1850 under the supervision of Superintendent Charles Strutt, the colonial officer entrusted with them, who is also a translator. In her analysis of the novel Caneda-Cabrera recurs to issues relevant to translation studies, in particular to the concept of “transmigration” (47) as migration, or in this case forced migration, is also a process of translation between places, languages and cultures. Language issues come to the fore in the girls’ inability to speak and make themselves heard in a narrative “written in the imperial language” (52) and Caneda-Cabrera considers the ship a metaphor for translation. The novel is a famine narrative but also a travel narrative in which displacement and dislocation play a relevant role and in reappropriating a silenced story Conlon retrieves the Orphan Girls from historical neglect in an “imaginative act of memory” and a “retrospective textual creation” (49).

José Carregal-Romero discusses the use of silence as an aesthetic and a narrative element in the fiction of Colm Tóibín. His thorough essay, “‘He’s Been Wanting to Say That for a Long Time’: Varieties of Silence in Colm Tóibín’s Fiction”, takes into account the use of silence as a form of continuity in Tóibín’s fiction underlining the “importance of silence in artistic creation” (65) as a relevant marker of significance. Carregal-Romero covers Tóibín’s production from his first novel *The South* (1990) to his short story collection *The Empty Family* (2010), considering also the silence of “unverbalised desires and unsolved dilemmas” (67) in *Brooklyn* (2009). The essay focuses in particular on the use of silence in his gay writings, in which “secrecy, reserve and gloomy introspection” (67) are part of the dynamics of concealment and emotional tension in the complexity of the self. After considering Tóibín’s collection of essays *Love in a Dark Time* (2001), attention is given to *The South* as a novel with a gay subtext, in which expatriation is liberating for the protagonists. Interestingly, references to different versions and drafts and to the suppression of specific parts belong to the discourse of silence that underlies Tóibín’s first openly gay novel, *The Story of the Night* (1996), which connects sexual and political oppression highlighted by an aesthetics of silence. Sexual taboos and traumas mark *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), whose protagonist, AIDS-affected Declan, is characterised by silence. The final part of the essay analyses some of the short stories in *The Empty Family*, which Carregal-Romero says are “round things unsaid” (78), considering also the silence around the Church scandals in the 1990s.

In “The Irish Short Story and the Aesthetics of Silence”, Elke D’hoker discusses the genre of the short story as an art of silence. Referring to various definitions of the short story, D’hoker emphasises Claire Keegan’s assumption that the short story is “a discipline of omission” (87), a “place to explore that silence between people” (88), which creates a space of interrelation between the short story and silence. Recalling what Susan Sontag called the aesthetics of silence, this rich and thorough essay focuses on the formal strategies of silence and the brevity of the short story in connection to the treatment of silence as a theme, and considers how Irish writers have investigated silence connected to trauma, taboo and secrets. Starting with the many forms of silence present in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), D’hoker discusses the use of ellipsis, eclipse and epiphany as technical devices characterizing the brevity of the short story, and then considers and analyses some contemporary writers whose fiction exploits silence to communicate the unsayable. Edna O’Brien’s “A Scandalous Woman” (2003) points out silence as a consequence of the personal trauma of rape, while in Maeve Kelly’s “Orange Horses” (1991)

silence is part of domestic abuse in the traveller community. Secrets and silence are at the heart of William Trevor's narrative and of his *Last Stories* (2018) in particular. However, D'hoker points out, "in several of these posthumous stories silence is connoted positively" as a form of respect and sympathy (98). This is what underlies the final part of the essay, which examines the ambivalence of silence in three stories by Claire Keegan. Secrets are at the core of "Walk the Blue Fields" (2007) and "The Forester's Daughter", both based on illicit love affairs and on deception, and are built on narrative eclipses. In the long short story *Foster* (2010), secrecy and silence are a form of self protection in the aftermath of sorrow.

Thomas O'Grady's "Infinite Spaces. Kevin Barry's Lives of Quiet Desperation" sheds light on the incapacity of male characters to articulate the complexity of their feelings in a failure of language beyond the surface. This comes to the fore with the analysis of the 2019 novel *Night Boat to Tangier*, pointing out the "malaise of maleness" (110) and the discrepancy between the characters' loquaciousness and their difficulty of using language at an emotional level, so that speaking becomes a sort of silence. Some short stories taken into account reflect for O'Grady Frank O'Connor's famous issue in *The Lonely Voice* (1963) of a "submerged population group" marked by loneliness, and in the case of Barry's stories "Atlantic City" (2007) and "Across the Rooftops" (2012) by the incapacity of going beyond the shield of a façade (112) they have built for themselves. The dystopian novel *City of Bohane* (2011) plays on "the stereotypical strong silent male" (118) and emphasises the difficulty of "translating" (119) emotions and feelings into words. In *Beatlebone* (2015), a fictional John Lennon recurs to the "Primal Scream therapy" the real Lennon and Yoko Ono practiced in the 1970s breaking silence with a "torrent of words" (122). The essay closes with a recent story published in *The New Yorker*, "The Pub with No Beer" (2022), set in an empty pub during the COVID pandemic, in which "lost voices" (125) of dead or absent customers fill the void of loneliness, making the silence speak to the protagonist.

In his contribution, "The Silencing of Speranza", Eibhear Walshe speaks in his double role as a literary critic and as a writer of fiction engaged in bringing back to life lost voices from the past. Making reference to his own experience of writing his 2014 novel, *The Diary of Mary Travers*, and then of carrying research for his 2020 *Selected Writings of Speranza and William Wilde*, Walshe sheds light on and discusses the silence that surrounds the career of Jane Wilde after the 1895 scandal and trial which convicted her son, Oscar Wilde, to hard labour. Walshe takes the reader along a journey into the silencing of a voice whose scholarly and intellectual career had many facets: a nationalist, a poet, renowned for her writing on the Famine and for her Saturday literary salons, editor of *The Nation*. The trial was in a way a watershed whose consequence was that her "place in literary culture was compromised" and her "valued reputation was eroded" (136). As an imaginary first-person account of the libel of Mary Travers against William and Jane Wilde, *The Diary of Mary Travers* gives voice to a young woman who at the time had the courage to speak and was then silenced. This enterprise led Walshe to collect the writings of Lady Wilde in a "fruitful interchange between writing fiction and archival recovery" (147). He thus investigates the lost voice of Jane Wilde in an essay in which he breaks barriers between genres with a specific aim: "art and historical research can be deployed to recover lost voices" (*ibidem*).

Sean Crosson's essay, "'A Self-Interested Silence': Silences Identified and Broken in Peter Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin* (1967)", points out the climate of oppression and censorship in which cinema and film developed in post-independence Ireland. The film under scrutiny, Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin*, leads the critic to self-reflectively question his own contribution: "why include a consideration of documentary in a collection concerned primarily with *Narratives of the Unspoken?*" (152). As a matter of fact, *Rocky Road* was in a way silenced in Ireland when it was released precisely because it broke silences, while it was well received outside the

country. The contrast between inside and outside emphasises the “groundbreaking” role the documentary had in the “process of critical examination” (152) of diverse aspects of society, in that multiple silences imposed by Church, State and society are taken into account. Exploiting Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of “hegemony” and “common sense” (154), in other words control and submission, the essay considers the format of the documentary as criticism of Irish society making use of distinctive cinematography. Interviews with leading figures in the world of letters and politics (the film opens with Sean O’Faolain) interact with Peter Lennon’s voice over as critical standpoint (159), with significant contaminations of the Nouvelle Vague DOP Raul Cotard (160). The contradictions and ambiguity of the figure of the priest are thus highlighted by the use of light and shadow (161), while relevance is given to the female perspective. This is however disclaimed by the scene at Trinity Crosson describes, in which female voices are not allowed to enter the discussion by male counterparts (159). In *Rocky Road to Dublin*, rereleased as DVD in 2005 (153), the “camera could be used as a weapon” (159) aims at critically bringing back to life silent voices of oppression and censorship.

In his deep essay, “Silence in Donal Ryan’s Fiction”, Asier Altuna-García de Salazar examines Ryan’s preoccupation with representations of silence as an ubiquitous presence in a variety of forms, from trauma to secrets to violence. Exploiting the theoretical framework of Pierre Macherey, Pierre Bourdieu, George Steiner and Michel Foucault, the essay explores the relationship between silence, taboos and hidden truths. The setting of the novel *The Spinning Heart* (2012) around the time of the post-Celtic Tiger recession provides a background of incommunicability as the twenty-one characters express themselves in monologues, overwhelmed by individualism and by the inability to react and interact as a community. Silence as the representation of a community returns in *The Thing About December* (2013), a novel which, Altuna-García de Salazar says, “represents the inability to articulate new realities at individual and community levels during the Celtic Tiger times” (179). Three further novels are examined, *All We Shall Know* (2016), on the prejudice surrounding the female protagonist who keeps silent about her unborn baby’s father; *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018), dealing with the unspoken reality of multicultural Ireland (181); and *Strange Flowers* (2020), on the realities of lesbian lives in in the 1970s. All of them provide variations of the issue of silence and fathom the relevance of silence, trauma, secrets, prejudice in individuals and communities.

María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera’s second contribution to the volume, “‘Sure, Aren’t the Church Doing Their Best?’ Breaking Consensual Silence in Emer Martin’s *The Cruelty Man*”, opens making reference to the conspiracy of silence around the graves of the Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, discovered in 2017, as well as to the cases of institutional abuse which were kept secret for many years. Highlighting the historical context, documents and studies on these silenced topics, Caneda-Cabrera points out the “conspiracy of silence” (192) or the “consensual silence” (196) in the development of national narratives. Emer Martin’s novel *The Cruelty Men* (2018) focuses on the untold stories of an Irish-speaking family literally dislocated to a different part of the country in post-independence Ireland, allegedly to keep the language alive, as a matter of fact in a “plan of social engineering” (199). As the family members are dispersed, their language is also lost and forgotten, forced by necessity to use English in a socially constructed silence. *The Cruelty Men* rescues the lost voices of victims of institutional abuse, and denounces the institutional practices of Madalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes and the traumatic experience of marginalised and excluded women. Only the power of storytelling is a form of rescue and healing, an act of resistance to the oppressive silence of the past.

José Carregal-Romero returns once again in the final essay in the collection, “Unspeakable Injuries and Neoliberal Subjectivities in Sally Rooney’s *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal*

*People*”, thus closing the volume with his analysis of vulnerability, silence, dysfunction and miscommunication in Rooney’s two novels. The study draws on research on neoliberal value system culture (214), which in Rooney’s work represents a failure (215) and lies behind the protagonists’ unsteady behaviour. In this context silence is a structuring principle and speaks for the generation of millennials depicted in the novels. The fluidity of “speech” in virtual communication is contradicted by the characters’ inability to express themselves, made vulnerable by the competitive and individualistic world neoliberalism is responsible for. Silence is a refusal to conform (215) and in *Conversations with Friends* (2017) what remains unsaid or cannot be said is repeatedly emphasised, thus turning into “a gesture within communication” (218) manifesting itself on the body, such as actual self-imposed bodily harm. Marianne’s dysfunctional silence and Connell’s class-related silence in *Normal People* (2018) conceal and express their vulnerability in a social context imposing expectations.

In its variety of original essays, marked by critical sensitivity and careful and detailed analysis, *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak* is a significant contribution to an area of study that is provocatively ambiguous, and penetrates areas of research that in history and culture have been variously neglected. Not by chance do expressions like “lost voices”, “silenced voices”, “acts of silencing” recur throughout the various essays, which highlight the volume’s critical intentions. Occasional negligible misprints do not have an impact on what is an essential and groundbreaking tool that provides an insight into the hues and varieties of the sound of silence.

*Giovanna Tallone*

W.B. Yeats, *Drammi celtici*, introduzione e traduzione di Giorgio Manganelli, a cura di Viola Papetti, Milano, BUR, 2024, pp. 310. € 13. ISBN: 978-88-17-18687-2.

Quando W.B. Yeats vinse il Nobel per la letteratura, nel 1923, il poeta sentì di aver ricevuto questa onorificenza non solo, e non tanto, per la sua poesia, quanto e soprattutto, per il suo teatro e, ancora di più, per la sua capacità di aver messo insieme un gruppo di mestieranti dell’arte drammatica – dal talento forse irregolare ed in parte improvvisato, ma sicuramente unico ed originale – quali Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge, i fratelli Fay e molti altri che contribuirono alla nascita dell’*Irish Dramatic Movement* e al repertorio dell’Abbey Theatre di Dublino. Per questo, nel discorso di accettazione del premio Yeats scrisse:

I have chosen as my theme the Irish Dramatic Movement because when I remember the great honour that you have conferred upon me, I cannot forget many known and unknown persons. Perhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised upon the stage. perhaps even – though this could be no portion of their deliberate thought – if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement. (Yeats 2010, 410)

Oggi, la produzione teatrale di Yeats non è ciò per cui il poeta viene ricordato. Per questo, ancora più apprezzabile che Rizzoli abbia deciso di riproporre una selezione di drammi yeatsiani nel nuovo volume dal titolo *Drammi celtici*. Le motivazioni che rendono questa raccolta particolarmente apprezzabile anche da un pubblico non specialista sono almeno due: la prima è l’argomento, sempre di interesse, di matrice folklorica delle antiche saghe irlandesi,

riproposto da Yeats in forma drammatica e poetica; la seconda motivazione è la firma illustre del traduttore, Giorgio Manganelli.

Tra i tanti drammi scritti da Yeats, viene dunque riproposto da Rizzoli (classici moderni) il ciclo riguardante gli eroi delle leggende irlandesi, *Deirdre*, *Al pozzo dello sparviero*, *L'elmo verde*, *Sulla spiaggia di Baile* e *L'unica gelosia di Emer* nella traduzione di Giorgio Manganelli, con una introduzione di Giorgio Manganelli e la curatela di Viola Papetti. Un'operazione non del tutto nuova, visto che nell'ormai lontano 1999, quattro di questi cinque drammi celtici, trovati da Lietta Manganelli tra le carte manganelliane, erano stati già pubblicati nella Bur Teatro, sempre a cura di Viola Papetti. Anche in quel caso, come nella nuova edizione, la scelta del testo introduttivo era caduta su un saggio di Manganelli intitolato "La rinascenza celtica: i riti drammatici", pensato per il Terzo Programma Rai del 1950. Nel saggio, Manganelli ripercorre quale fosse l'idea di dramma e di teatro nazionale irlandese secondo l'intenzione yeatsiana e, giustamente, menziona l'esperienza di Lady Augusta Gregory e di J.M. Synge, tratteggiando brevemente per un pubblico generalista quel trittico dai contorni quasi mitici che pose le basi del "Theatre of a Nation" (Levitas 2002).

Oggi, alle quattro traduzioni del volume del 1999, se ne aggiunge una quinta, *L'elmo verde*, una traduzione fino ad ora "non pervenuta". Da una corrispondenza tra Manganelli e Giuseppe Macrì, "amico ispanista [...] probabilmente collaboratore" di Guanda (5-6), casa editrice con cui Manganelli stava prendendo accordi per pubblicare queste traduzioni, si evince che Macrì avesse ricevuto in visione le traduzioni dei drammi poi proposti nel 1999, recuperate da Lietta Manganelli tra le carte del padre, stampate in seconde bozze e rilegate con spirale. Per quel che riguarda *L'elmo verde*, invece, all'epoca era stato dato per disperso. Solo recentemente, racconta Viola Papetti (44), Lietta Manganelli ha rintracciato il dattiloscritto di questa traduzione presso il Gabinetto Vieusseux di Firenze, dove era conservato fra le carte dell'Archivio Contemporaneo "A. Bonfanti". In questo modo, il nuovo volume aggiorna quello del 1999. Entrambe le edizioni riportano il testo originale a fronte e le note ai testi, che, però, in questa nuova veste sono aggiornate ed accorpate in un'unica sezione iniziale. Anche la bibliografia essenziale è stata rivista ed ha il pregio di comprendere una breve sezione dedicata agli scritti di Giorgio Manganelli sull'opera di Yeats. Tra la bibliografia, essendo il libro inteso per un pubblico italiano, sarebbe stato utile includere la monografia di Fiorenzo Fantaccini (2009) sulla ricezione dell'opera di Yeats in Italia che dedica spazio anche al rapporto tra Yeats e Manganelli.

La bella presentazione di Viola Papetti pone l'accento sia sul teatro yeatsiano – e sull'unicità del momento vissuto da quel piccolo gruppo di intellettuali della *Protestant Ascendancy* che misero in piedi un teatro nazionale che presto sarebbe loro sfuggito di mano – sia sulle affinità tra l'idea di teatro di Giorgio Manganelli e quella di W.B. Yeats. Proprio su *Studi irlandesi*, Viola Papetti, ripercorrendo i saggi di Manganelli sull'amato "mago astuto", e raccontando la vicenda / non vicenda editoriale di queste traduzioni pubblicate solo postume, parlava di come il teatro di Yeats fosse congeniale a Manganelli in quanto teatro di parola: proprio per questo motivo, uno dei paragrafi della presentazione titola significativamente, citando una conversazione con Manganelli, "il mio teatro è di parola" (10).

A questo proposito la raccolta testimonia una affinità di vedute su un tipo di teatro in cui la lingua ritrova una posizione centrale, così come nel "teatro di Shakespeare, [che è] letteratura non perché esibisca i personaggi, ma perché questi sono delle attive, violentissime costanti linguistiche, e dunque ambigue, instabili e contraddittorie" (Manganelli 2000, 36). Un teatro, dunque, che rappresenti un "linguaggio totale, che si nutre delle invenzioni di tutte le classi, impudico, lubrico, blasfemo, estroso, mai sentimentale; un impasto di sfatto barocco, di gerghi plebei e furbeschi, di autentica dottrina, di erudizione d'accatto, di arguzia stilistica e incon-

тиненza oratoria” (21). Yeats era dello stesso intendimento quando scriveva come Shakespeare fosse da considerare un modello per l’uso della lingua: “we have looked for the centre of our art where the players of the time of Shakespeare and Corneille found theirs – in speech, whether it be the perfect mimicry of the conversation of two country-men of the roads, or that idealised speech poets have imagined for what we think but do not say” (Yeats 2003, 101), e quando, allo stesso proposito, aggiungeva: “[...] if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon stage” (27).

Viola Papetti chiude la sua presentazione citando H. Kenner, che identifica il luogo del teatro yeatsiano come una unicità – ma direi, anzi, singolarità, prendendo a prestito la definizione usata in fisica. Il teatro è un non luogo, il posto in cui avviene una cerimonia, come il pozzo sacro dello sparviero del dramma yeatsiano, un posto magico, e, appunto, una singolarità dove una situazione quasi statica viene trasformata in una molto dinamica a seguito di un cambiamento impercettibile, e dove quindi anche un minimo movimento come un gorgoglio d’acqua può assumere un significato straordinario (12). Scrive Manganelli:

Per quel che capisco di questo misterioso e mirabile mostro che è il teatro, non mi pare che i suoi intrichi polimorfi vogliano essere “capiti”; questo evento fatto di parole non lette ma pronunciate, e dunque foneticamente plastiche, e di non parole, di luoghi mentali, di inesistenti invenzioni, di epifanie e di magherie non aspira affatto ad essere “capito”, ma ad essere accettato. (2000, 41-42)

Per gli autori, il teatro è cerimonia ed artificio, una rappresentazione sacra. *Drammi celtici* testimonia ed è il prodotto di questa sintonia che meglio può essere descritta chiosando proprio con le parole di questi due funamboli (cf. Melchiori 1955) del teatro e della parola:

The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty; [...] as long as drama was full of poetical beauty, full of description, full of philosophy, as long as its words were the very vesture of sorrow and laughter, the players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious. (Yeats 2003, 150, 73)

Si parla spesso di “cerimonialità” del teatro. Questo significa: pubblico tenuto a bada con pacato terrorismo, attore sostituito dal celebrante, scenografia rituale, rigorosa delimitazione dello spazio deputato al prodigio, ed invenzione dell’opera teatrale come prodigio. Cerimonia e artificio. [...]. (Manganelli 2000, 37)

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Fabio Luppi



Madalina Armie, Veronica Membrive (eds), *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature. Wounds of the Body and the Soul*, New York-London, Routledge, 2023, pp. xviii+203. £ 100. HB. ISBN: 978-1-032-40964-1.

*Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature: Wounds of the Body and the Soul* is a welcome venture in the field of Trauma Studies, as it explores through a variety of critical essays the interconnection between trauma, memory and silence in contemporary Irish literature. The apt choice of title highlights the original meaning of the word “trauma”, physical injury, later to be extended to more profound injuries leaving indelible scars. The double perspective on wounds hard to heal embedded in the subtitle emphasises the mutual interaction of wounds in body and soul with particular attention to Irish women from the North and the Republic. This is an engaging collection investigating a wide range of topics and literary works written at the turn or in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The concern with trauma and memory creates a triad with the issue of silence as tightly connected with the unspeakability of trauma.

The Editors have collected eleven essays covering a diversity of issues dealt with in works of contemporary Irish fiction considering the manifestation of female trauma from a variety of critical perspectives. The volume is organised in three parts. An introductory section provides a “Foreword” by Evelyn Conlon and the “Introduction” by Madalina Armie and Veronica Membrive; Part I contains the single contributions organised according to thematic development; finally, in Part II three “Pieces of Creative Writing” by Catherine Dunne, Mia Gallagher and Lia Mills provide a significant conclusion to the book.

Evelyn Conlon defines her “Foreword” a “welcome mat” (xi) for a collection of essays she appreciates for the “dedication to the subject matter” (ix). Her voice highlights her personal engagement with female and feminist activism in Ireland, making reference to specific episodes over the years, such as the creation of Attic Press and of the Rape Crisis Centre, and provocatively wonders: “Is the trauma of Irish women different to British, Spanish, Romanian, North American?”, it is rather a common experience (x). Before quoting an excerpt from her short story “The Park” (xii) which concludes her contribution, Conlon’s congratulations to the editors in the Irish language pave the way to a triple reflection respectively on Catholicism, history and the Famine, each of them introduced by the caption “A brief word on” and taking the space of single paragraphs. This stylistic choice ideally unites the interweaving of such topics in the various essays in the volume.

The Editors’ “Introduction” can by all means be considered a twelfth essay in its complexity and thoroughness, highlighting the impact of trauma, memory and silence through the perspective of different recent approaches, from psychoanalytic theory to Gender Studies and Cultural Studies (1). Literary works investigate trauma to reflect on reality and “explore the very nature of trauma experienced by female characters” (2) as they can express what cannot be expressed or is unsaid or unspeakable. The Editors underline the intersections of trauma, memory and silence in the context of both the North and the Republic making it “essential” (3) to read female trauma in contemporary cultural and national discourse. An analysis of the conditions of women in history, culture and society points out factors that have had an impact on women’s lives leading to trauma and silence as a reaction (5), a situation that is common to both territories. Themes such as patriarchy, the female body, the impact of history on the present, the concept of legacy in families as well as sectarian conflict (15) are sites for the discussion of trauma and its consequences. The Editors provide a significant corpus of studies and reading material in an overview of Trauma Studies over the past few decades (17), as well as an outline of the various chapters. However, they also mark the specificity of the volume as it considers

literary works published between 1987 and the post-Celtic Tiger era, taking into account “male and female authors from both sides of the border” including diasporic and foreign voices like Irish-Canadian Emma Donoghue and British Rachel Seifert (*ibidem*). With a humorous touch of self-reproach, the Editors define their project an ambitious “pastiche” (*ibidem*), which in the richness of its variety and construction is everything but a pastiche.

In the first essay, “Trauma, Reproduction and Breeding in Catherine Brophy’s *Dark Paradise*”, Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen considers Brophy’s feminist dystopia *Dark Paradise* (1991) as trauma narrative and a paradigm of hegemony, patriarchy and oppression conducive to trauma. Pointing out the ambiguity of the title (33) in its oxymoronic overtone, Aliaga-Lavrijsen claims that the format of science fiction provides the opportunity to focus on “multiple ways of violence exerted against women” (32) and is thus an apt tool in the depiction and discussion of trauma. In the setting of the far from ideal planet of Zintilla, a society based on order has erased emotions and humanity, and new forms of reproduction and breeding, as well as forced sterilization and ectogenesis in the name of eugenics, have turned into further ways of female oppression. The state’s control on reproduction and breeding is a mask for the control of women, which for Aliaga-Lavrijsen speaks for the reality of Ireland.

In “*Different Kinds of Love: Silenced Women in Leland Bardwell’s Short Fiction*”, Burku Gülüm Tekin examines three short stories from Bardwell’s 1987 collection focussing on silence as a form of response to traumatic events (44). The stories taken into account, “The Dove of Peace”, “Euston” and “Out-patients”, are disturbing narratives of incest, mental illness, domestic violence, abuse, whose setting – the home – cannot provide safety. Making reference to the theoretical framework of Caruth and Luckhurst, the essay discusses the double perspective of silence, for the victim as a form of self-protection, for the community as deliberate neglect. The themes present in Bardwell’s collection in the late 1980s are still part of the Irish context when the volume was republished in 2011, so that “unspoken truths, painful taboos and neglected silences” (*ibidem*) seem to remain across time. The careful and deep analysis of the three stories points out the “recurrent presence of horrific everyday realities” (53), which is even more problematic considering the self-blaming (51) shared by all the protagonists, the feeling of wrong doing in an endemic sense of guilt.

The tragedy and secrecy of institutionalised violence and oppression is at the centre of the trauma of survivors in the Magdalene Laundries. In their compelling contribution “Trauma after a Life of Torture in Irish Magdalene Laundries: Magdalene Survivors’ Testimonies and Patricia Burke-Brogan’s *Stained Glass at Samhain*”, Elena Cantueso Urbano and María Isabel Romero Ruíz’s exploit real oral and written testimonies of women who experienced the abuse perpetrated in the laundries (54). Their discussion of the trauma of confinement and oppression kept under silence for decades is carried out vis-à-vis the analysis of the play by Patricia Burke-Brogan’s *Stained Glass at Samhain* (2003). The essay has thus a double focus in disclosing the traumatised and silenced voices of the victims, and in the reality of authentic accounts and the imaginative creation of drama women who suffered abuse in the Laundries are retrieved and kept alive. The analysis of Burke-Brogan’s play acts as a counterpart to real voices staging the complexity of moral response to clerical abuse. “Theatre”, the authors say, “allows the representation of silenced topics” (55) and in the play “the victims are not present” while the audience act as witnesses in the interaction with the past (60). The theory of Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder underlies the presentation of real testimonies and its artistic transformation in a play which revolves around the cruelty marginalised women considered immoral had to undergo.

A look from outside is represented by Paula Romo-Mayor’s work, which considers the novel *The Walk Home* (2014) by British novelist Rachel Seiffert. The essay, entitled “Shattering

the Moulds of Tradition: The Role of Women in the Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Rachel Seiffert's *The Walk Home*", discusses what the Author describes a "thought-provoking novel" (66) in terms of transgenerational trauma. Romo-Mayor claims that the consequences of trauma have "a crucial role in the construction of Irish identities" (65), which is evident in *The Walk Home*, a novel centered on a working class Protestant family living in Glasgow, unable to come to terms with the trauma of dispossession and forced emigration after the Irish Free State. Such trauma is embodied in the figure of Robert, whose obsession with the past and with past injustice makes him impose his ethics to the family, transmitting his acrimony to younger generations. In the atmosphere of "toxic Protestant masculinity" (69) Brenda and Lindsay are figures of resisting women, struggling against the oppressive traditions that mark their lives in a dysfunctional family.

In an ideal link to the previous essays, Melania Terrazas's contribution, "Representations of Trauma, Memory and the Silencing of Irish Women: Storytelling in Emer Martin's *The Cruelty Men*", relies on Will Storr's theory and research on storytelling to highlight the way in which people are connected "to each other, but also to their cultural identity and roots" (76). The first novel in a trilogy of dislocation and dispersion, *The Cruelty Men* (2018) intertwines the stories of two different families in the background of post-independence Ireland, in which the "cruelty men" of the title have to find poor children and put them in industrial schools, where sexual and emotional abuse is the rule. Likewise, the presence of Magdalene Laundries and Mother-and-Baby Homes and the abuse perpetrated in such institutions loom largely in a novel in which gender and class are prominent. The "silencing of Irish women" (78) in a continuous line of trauma is at the heart of the novel and Terrazas's feminist perspective addresses the role of storytelling in female identity. In fact, the main character, Mary, is also the main storyteller, whose voice is capable to break silence and reassert identity.

F.B. Schürmann analyses Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) highlighting the protagonist's desire for resistance and self-determination. "Exposition of a Half-formed System: Trauma and Other Matters in Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*" discusses the novel through the lens of the Lacanian psychoanalytic status of lack and the Lacanian concept that "there are no *a priori* traumatic events" (92), so the protagonist's capacity to make choices and take steps against abuse and oppression creates a dynamic with her self-annihilation. The essay exploits the theory of the split subject which lies at the basis of the half-formedness embedded in the novel.

Alicia Muro discusses in depth Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* (2017) and *Normal People* (2018) in an essay that considers the intricacies of trauma, shame and silence and the presence of what she calls "damaged" characters in both novels. "Damaged Women. Trauma, Shame and Silence in Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*" opens contextualising post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and the changes the country has gone through as a consequence of economic imbalance. After taking into account the traditional role of women in Irish society, attention is given to the theoretical framework of trauma and shame to counterpoint the historical trauma of the country, from the Great Famine to the Troubles, to the specificity of individual traumas in contemporary fiction. This is what Sally Rooney deals with in novels in which the female protagonists, Frances and Marianne, are quite similar to one another, since they suffer from the consequences of traumatic events in the past, they are wounded in body and soul. The dysfunctional families each of them has grown up in mark interpersonal relationships, their limited self-esteem leads to feelings of inadequacy conducive to sense of shame, while the inability to speak and express trauma and shame verbally is continuously embedded in the narrative. Muro highlights "the new kind of traumas contemporary

Irish women are facing” (111), and concludes her analysis of Rooney’s *bildungsromans* comparing the different generations of mothers and daughters.

In “Conditions of Homecoming: Self-Care and Anticipation in Louise O’Neill’s *Only Ever Yours* and *The Surface Breaks*” Kayla Fanning discusses the need to “re-politicise an ethic of self-care” (115) considering two dystopian novels by Louise O’Neill, and opposes Georg Lukács concept of “rounded action” and homecoming (116). Casting a glance at Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Only Ever Yours* (2014) displays the traumatic experiences of female characters in an oppressive society in which self-care is imposed with the consequence that it is never achieved and antagonism with the body develops (117). Andersen’s Little Mermaid is at the roots of *The Surface Breaks* (2018), a reimagining of the story from a feminist perspective. Like Freida in *Only Ever Yours*, Gaïa as the new mermaid experiences dissociation from her own body and self and, Fanning concludes, the protagonists “struggle to seize slivers of genuine self-care through modes of escaping” (125).

The two following essays are centered on lesbianism in an interconnected way. Asier Altuna-García de Salazar examines Donal Ryan’s novel *Strange Flowers* (2020) in his contribution “Confronting Female Unspeakable Truths in Ireland. Donal Ryan’s *Strange Flowers*” discussing the trauma experienced by lesbians in oppressive rural Ireland. Opening in the 1970s, this transgenerational or multigenerational (126) novel highlights the pain and trauma enacted by the necessity to keep same sex relationship hidden. Altuna-García works on the issue of the “unspeakable/unsayable” (127) and the secrecy of unspoken truths to develop his analysis of trauma generated by invisibility (128) as well as by “the social, cultural and religious conditioning of generations modelled upon by patriarchy” (130). Thus, Altuna-García remarks, the protagonist’s identity is a prototype of “traumatic subordination encapsulated in silence” (133), which makes Ryan’s novel an agent to recover a forgotten past.

In a similar way, lesbianism and silence are at the heart of Mayron Estefan Cantillo-Lucara’s “Emma Donoghue’s *Hood* and the Aesthetics of Existential Claustrophobia: From Traumatic Self-Retreat To Uncloseted Grief”. The 1995 novel, republished in 2010, is here examined through the perspective of Heideggerian hermeneutics and read as a trauma narrative. Based on “an intricate aesthetics of existential seclusion and self-closeted grief” (139), *Hood* follows Penelope’s grieving for the sudden loss of her partner in the notion of *Geworfenheit*, or thrownness, conditioned by the necessary silence to be kept on the relationship (140). The protagonist is thus unable to elaborate the trauma repressing her feelings and sense of bereavement and retrating into herself. The same silence she imposes on herself prevents her from dealing with loss, until “her *Mitsein* is rebuilt and repaired” (145) and the healing process can begin breaking silence and sharing her bereavement.

“Don’t Tell Them: The Strategy of Silence in Anna Burns’ *Milkman*” is the final chapter by María Gaviña-Costero, who focuses on a novel that, she says, “has produced a revolution in recent Irish literary studies” (150). Recalling Burns’ experiences of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, Gaviña-Costero points out the recurring themes in the writer’s literary output as a sign of the “personal and collective trauma” (*ibidem*) the Troubles have imposed on individuals and communities and highlights the risk that past episodes may be forgotten. Set in the late 1970s, a time when sectarian turmoil did not leave space to women’s voices, *Milkman* (2018) exploits experimentation in language to shed light on the consequences of a “falsely closed conflict” (151), on the legacy of individual, collective and cultural trauma (*ibidem*), and the different facets of silence around the Troubles. Only through the distance in time, thirty years after the events, can the first-person narrator and protagonist break the silence about that time, but also the silence imposed at the time on individuals and community. On the other hand, silence is

also a response to trauma; in her attentive and thorough analysis, Gaviña-Costero underlines the protagonist's reaction to multiple harassment: "on every occasion she freezes into silence" (154), later to claim the relevance of silence also at a linguistic level: "Expressions signifying silence and effacement are the most frequent type of lexicon in this narrative" not only for the protagonist but also for the community (156). The theoretical framework on memory, history and trauma is at the basis of this chapter, which with its keen eye on silence ideally and circularly closes the pattern of the volume.

Part II, "Pieces of Creative Writing", collects three contributions by writers Catherine Dunne, Mia Gallagher and Lia Mills, each preceded by an "Explanatory note", which provides a fascinating insight into the writers' writing and working methods as well as their personal perception and manifestation of trauma, memory and silence. Catherine Dunne offers five extracts from her novel *A Good Enough Mother* (2024) that was forthcoming at the time of the volume's organization. Here Dunne explores motherhood through the voices of different characters in different historical moments between the 1970s and the new century, each of them subject to the traumas of the past. Mia Gallagher's piece comes from a work in progress, a novel entitled *Kindergirl* set in Germany in the mid-1980s, revolving around two Irish girls and various facets of traumatic events, including disability, emigration, discrimination and violence. The last contribution is a full story by Lia Mills, "Flight", previously published in *The Stinging Fly* in 2011. The text "revisits, revises and plays" with the Irish legend *Tóiríocht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne / The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Grainne* from the Fenian Cycle (189). In line with the contents and analysis of the volume, the story breaks female silence, giving voice and possibility of choice to silenced women in a patriarchal society.

This final section of creative writing dealing with the themes discussed in the various essays is the perfect way of closing an engaging volume that interlaces trauma, memory, gender, identity and silence. The volume is thus a significant accomplishment in the area of Trauma and Memory Studies, and it offers a precious tool to academics and specialists involved in the field, at the same time providing a valuable and captivating introduction for students developing initial interest in the subject.

*Giovanna Tallone*

John Greaney, *The Distance of Irish Modernism: Memory, Narrative, Representation*, London, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 248. £ 91.99. HB. ISBN: 978-1-35012-52-8.

In *The Distance of Irish Modernism: Memory, Narrative, Representation*, John Greaney riflette sulla complessità del concetto di "Modernismo irlandese", sia da un punto di vista prettamente etimologico, che storico-letterario. Partendo dall'assunto che esso possa essere considerato "a commonplace descriptor [...] for twentieth-century production in, and in relation to, Ireland [and its historical context]" (2), Greaney mette in discussione le nozioni relative al Modernismo irlandese – come per esempio quella dell'esistenza di una salda connessione tra il testo letterario e il contesto nazionale – e nella "Preface" rende immediatamente chiaro al lettore lo scopo del suo studio: dimostrare che sebbene le "Irish modernist fictions maintain a certain proximity to historical and material realities, they also manifest an irreducible distance to the national and transnational histories of their period and places" (vii). Di fatto, Greaney si propone di (ri)orientare il modo in cui si pensa al Modernismo irlandese, e stimolare una riflessione sul

canone letterario a esso connesso. Dopo aver gettato le basi teoriche per la sua argomentazione nell'Introduzione al testo ("The Vicinities of Irish Modernism"), Greaney esamina alcune opere di due scrittrici e tre scrittori modernisti, quali Samuel Beckett, Brian O'Nolan (conosciuto con gli pseudonimi di Flann O'Brien e Myles na gCopaleen), Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien e John McGahern, analizzandoli da vari punti di vista, e dedicando loro un capitolo. Ne risulta un'opera estremamente innovativa che rivisita le interpretazioni convenzionali del Modernismo irlandese e propone una nuova lettura delle memorie culturali a esso (apparentemente) connesse (29).

Greaney apre la sua argomentazione con un capitolo dedicato a Samuel Beckett ("Samuel Beckett and the Context of Modernism"), esplorando i contesti che hanno plasmato la sua espressione artistica attraverso l'analisi di alcune delle sue opere: *Malone Dies* (1951), *Molloy* (1951) e *The Unnameable* (1953). La particolarità dello studio condotto dall'autore su Beckett è quella di combinare abilmente l'analisi testuale di queste opere con un'attenta esplorazione dei contributi più specifici di Beckett al movimento modernista, come il saggio "Recent Irish Poetry" (1934). Sebbene riconosca nelle tre opere la presenza di riferimenti storici al contesto irlandese contemporaneo a Beckett, Greaney sottolinea come queste spesso superino i confini tradizionali della narrazione e del contesto geografico irlandese per acquisire una dimensione più universale. Ciò è reso possibile, spiega l'autore, dal linguaggio innovativo adottato da Beckett, caratterizzato da quello che gli definisce " 'styleless' style" (28); un linguaggio fatto di semplicità e minimalismo, in cui tuttavia sono sempre presenti riflessioni filosofiche che mettono in discussione la realtà esplorando i temi dell'esistenza, dell'identità e del tempo.

Le due parti successive all'analisi del contributo beckettiano al Modernismo irlandese, ovvero "Brian, Flann, Myles and the origins of Irish modernism" e "Elizabeth Bowen's modernist history", affrontano, seppure da due punti di vista differenti, la stessa tematica: "[Ireland's] absent presence" (29). Nel caso di Brian O'Nolan, Greaney si concentra infatti sul carattere frammentario e pseudonimo della sua scrittura. Nel condurre l'analisi di Bowen, invece, pone attenzione al romanzo *The Last September* (1929) per dimostrare come le strategie "moderniste" adottate dall'autrice nel suo testo, interagiscano con la metanarrativa dell'indipendenza irlandese.

Nelle ultime due parti dello studio di Greaney, "the focus turns to moderately symbolic literatures which the new modernist canon encompasses" (*ibidem*).

Nello specifico, nel capitolo 4, intitolato "Kate O'Brien's 'flawed' modernism", Greaney tenta di riposizionare la figura della scrittrice irlandese nel contesto modernista a lei contemporaneo, analizzando tre delle sue opere: *Mary Lavelle* (1936), *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938) e *The Land of Spices* (1941). Fin dai suoi esordi, fa notare Greaney, la scrittura di O'Brien è sempre stata considerata "imperfetta", a causa della costante co-presenza, nelle sue opere, di due tematiche tra loro non direttamente connesse, ovvero quelle che Anne Fogarty ha descritto come "women's romance [and] social critique" (116). Tuttavia, secondo Greaney, è propria questa duplicità che rende degno di nota il lavoro letterario di O'Brien. Adottando la strategia del narratore onnisciente, l'autrice riesce a mescolare "social critique with narratives of individual development to create surreptitious queer perspectives, and otherwise difficult to voice cultural, social and political commentaries that are implanted on, rather than imitatively represented in or dictated by, the space of Irish and European convent" (137).

Greaney dedica, infine, l'ultima parte del suo lavoro ("John McGahern and the limits of Irish Modernism") a John McGahern considerato in realtà, come Greaney stesso afferma, "very rarely a modernist or [an Irish modernist]" (141). La decisione di includerlo nella sua "lista" dei modernisti degni di nota, sembra derivare dalla necessità di indagare i limiti del Modernismo irlandese al fine di comprendere dove e quando questo "finisce". L'analisi si concentra sulle strategie narrative utilizzate da McGahern in opere come *The Barracks* (1963), *The Dark*

(1965), *Amongst Women* (1990) e *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), come per esempio l'insistente uso della figura retorica dell'analepsi.

La discussione di Greaney si conclude con un epilogo che riassume efficacemente i concetti esplicitati nei vari capitoli del libro. Esso offre una riflessione sulle tematiche che permeano l'intero studio e sostiene l'idea che la l'analisi del concetto generale di "Modernismo" e, in particolare, di "Modernismo irlandese" richieda un approccio molto più "aperto" e poliedrico. In conclusione, si potrebbe affermare che in *The Distance of Irish Modernism*, John Greaney conduce un'analisi metacritica che sfida la convinzione che la memoria culturale e la storiografia postcoloniale abbiano influenzato la lettura, e dunque la ricezione, delle opere letterarie. Esso si configura quindi come uno studio che mira a rinnovare il dialogo critico attorno alla definizione e all'interpretazione del Modernismo irlandese, incoraggiando un'indagine più approfondita e dunque una comprensione più completa di questa importante fase letteraria.

*Alessia Gentile*

Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke, J.M. Smith (eds), *Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2022, pp. 520. € 25. ISBN: 9781910820896.

Nel 2013, davanti ai membri del Parlamento, l'allora primo ministro Enda Kenny chiese scusa per il coinvolgimento dello Stato irlandese in ciò che definì "national shame", ossia le Magdalene Laundries. In queste strutture, le lavanderie dei conventi, venivano rinchiusi giovani ragazze madri per evitare che infangassero il buon nome delle loro famiglie per aver avuto un figlio fuori dal sacro vincolo del matrimonio. Si calcola che dal 1922 al 1996, anno di chiusura dell'ultima Magdalene Laundry, siano state circa 10.000 le donne internate in queste strutture. Alcune di loro sono sopravvissute, altre non ce l'hanno fatta.

Ma le Magdalenes non erano l'unica istituzione repressiva del Paese: intorno alla metà del '900 l'Irlanda era lo stato europeo con la più alta percentuale di cittadini che vivevano fuori dai contesti familiari. Le donne nubili rimaste incinte venivano confinate nelle Mother and Baby Homes: dopo il parto i loro bambini venivano dati in adozione – molti di loro negli Stati Uniti – e, i meno fortunati, raggiunta l'età scolare, erano costretti a frequentare gli istituti di avviamento al lavoro presenti in tutto il Paese. L'Irlanda aveva uno più alti tassi di mortalità infantile d'Europa che nelle case per ragazze madri arrivava ad essere 4-5 volte superiore a rispetto a quello della popolazione generale. Nella casa per ragazze madri di Tuam, nei pressi di Galway, gestita dalle suore del Buon Soccorso, dal 1925 al 1961 si sono verificati numerosi episodi di violenza e deprivazione di madri e bambini, con percentuali di mortalità infantile estremamente elevate. Molti anni dopo la sua chiusura, durante dei lavori di scavo in un terreno nelle vicinanze della struttura, è stata scoperta una fossa biologica in disuso, coperta con una lastra di cemento, che conteneva resti umani. Un'inchiesta del 2021 ha accertato che, nell'arco degli anni di apertura delle Mother and Baby Homes e di altre istituzioni simili, sono morti circa 9.000 bambini.

*Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*, curato da Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke e James Smith, esplora il tema complesso e doloroso della giustizia di transizione in Irlanda, investigando in particolare gli episodi di abusi fisici e psicologici perpetrati nelle istituzioni religiose e statali. I curatori offrono un'ampia panoramica dei diversi casi, combinando l'analisi rigorosa dei fatti con il rispetto e la sensibilità per le vittime: non solo si descrivono gli

eventi ma viene fornita anche un'analisi critica delle politiche e delle pratiche di riparazione messe in atto dallo Stato e dalle istituzioni religiose coinvolte, attraverso una combinazione di interviste, *case studies* e analisi storiche.

Il libro è strutturato in sezioni che coprono un'ampia gamma di argomenti, tutti collegati alla *giustizia di transizione* – “Truth-Telling”; “Irish State (In)justice”; “Transitional Justice: Opportunities, Limits”; “Motherhood and Adoption”; “Children in State Care”; “Knowledge, Memory and the Magdalene Laundries”; “Truth-Telling and the Archive” – locuzione con cui si definiscono tutti i processi e le pratiche che affrontano le violenze perpetrate all'interno di una comunità in un preciso periodo storico. Questa prassi giuridica, che si è sviluppata a partire dalla fine degli anni Novanta, ha lo scopo di portare alla luce le violenze e, anche attraverso un dibattito pubblico, di rivelare fatti ancora sconosciuti alla maggior parte della popolazione, non solo per evitare che vengano dimenticati ma anche per accertarne le responsabilità e dare riconoscimento e voce alle vittime.

Il volume mostra come spesso le istituzioni coinvolte fossero riluttanti ad ammettere apertamente il proprio coinvolgimento negli abusi commessi, a causa di preoccupazioni di carattere politico, religioso, economico e di credibilità: le istituzioni tendono, infatti, a voler chiudere i conti con il passato piuttosto velocemente invece che affrontarlo in modo approfondito, minimizzando l'impatto che la scoperta della verità potrebbe avere sulla società. La stessa diocesi di Galway, dalla quale dipendeva la casa del Buon Soccorso di Tuam, afferma di non essere stata a conoscenza di ciò che accadeva nella struttura. Padre Monaghan, il segretario della diocesi interpellato sui fatti, rispose: “I suppose we can't really judge the past from our point of view, from our lens. All we can do is mark it appropriately and make sure there is a suitable place here where people can come and remember the babies that died” (O'Toole 2014).

Il volume offre principalmente la prospettiva delle vittime e delle loro famiglie dalla quale emerge con forza la richiesta di giustizia, verità e autentico riconoscimento del dolore e delle sofferenze subite. Le testimonianze riportate nel testo mostrano come le persone coinvolte in questa “vergogna nazionale” si sentano ignorate, deluse e tradite dalle risposte inadeguate e tardive delle istituzioni. Ciò che emerge è il bisogno di vedere riparati i torti subiti, attraverso risarcimenti economici, iniziative di ‘memoria storica’ e riforme istituzionali che affrontino il tema con decisione. Per onorare le vittime e fare giustizia non basta un memoriale “to remind [Ireland] all of this dark part of [its] history” (“Magdalene laundries: Enda Kenny delivers state apology”, 2013).

*Redress* offre un approccio multidimensionale al tema della “giustizia di transizione”, combinando il rigore dell'indagine storica con le testimonianze dirette delle vittime e dei loro familiari. Gli autori evidenziano come il coinvolgimento attivo e la mobilitazione delle organizzazioni della società civile e delle associazioni delle vittime possano creare una forte spinta dal basso verso la verità e la giustizia, contrastando la lentezza, l'inerzia e la resistenza delle istituzioni.

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*Francesca Salvadori*





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