

MAGUIRE

ONE DAY, WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

Edited by Burçin Erol

IRISH WRITERS SERIES:2

One Day William Butler Yeats

Edited by Burçin Erol

Department of English Language and Literature
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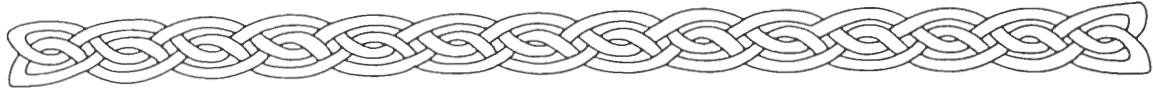
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Foreword

This volume is comprised of the articles focusing on different aspects and works of William Butler Yeats that arose out of the presentations of the “One Day , William Butler Yeats Conference” held at Hacettepe University in 2012 with the collaboration of the Embassy of Ireland.

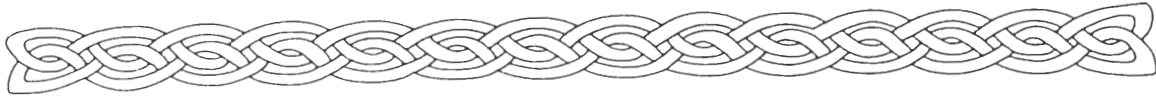
The aim of the volume is to bring together the work of the scholars in Turkey who specialise in and have publications on the specific writer and the guest scholar Nicholas Grene to provide a compendium of research on one specific Irish writer. The second conference and the ensuing volume in the Irish Writers Series has been devoted to the works of the first nobel laureate of Ireland, William Butler Yeats. He was the driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival along with Lady Gregory and others. His fascination in Irish myths and legends found its expression in many of his works. He contributed to the formation of the Irish identity and the expression of the culture with his works.

The articles in this volume deal with the poetic and dramatic works of Yeats spanning over various issues. The first article by Nicholas Grene deals with the lyrics of Yeats that were incorporated into his dramatic works which were later published separately among his poems and gave rise to a controversy, and the article sets out to explore what the lyrics contribute to the experience of the drama, how they reflect or refract the meaning of the action. The second article by A. Deniz Bozer examines the revisions of Yeats’s play *The King’s Threshold* so as to shed light on the changing relationship of Yeats both with Ireland and his public role as a poet. In the third article N. Belgin

Elbir discusses four of the *Last Poems* that Yeats wrote in the last year of his life and prepared for publication. She argues that these poems seem to be “his poetic last will and testament” and are about his past work and remaking of his artistic identity. Huriye Reis in her article states that Yeats not only relied on Celtic myths, legends and history in creating and sustaining the Irish identity but also he made use of the practice of citing and inscribing names in his poems. She asserts that the names mentioned deliberately in his poems are a means of identity construction. Hande Seber in her article deals with the early poems of Yeats which are based on characters from Celtic mythology and the desire to enter in/or to avoid fairyland in pursuit of wisdom, happiness, love, fulfilment or simply to perceive the unknown. Özlem Uzundemir in her article concentrates on specific examples of Yeats’s later poems dealing with art and discusses the concern of the poet in bridging the verbal and the visual arts, and Yeats’s views on Western, Classical and Asian art and his wish for Irish poetry to draw inspiration from the visual arts.

I hope this volume will provide pleasant and fruitful reading.

Burçin Erol



1

Yeats's Counterheroic Voices

Nicholas Grene

In 1983, when Richard Finneran published his new edition of Yeats's poetry, the volume aroused considerable controversy. There were issues about the editing of the poems and the new order in which they appeared, creating a quite different looking canon from that in the old familiar red-covered Macmillan *Collected Poems*. But another controversial feature was Finneran's decision to include a substantial section of 'Additional Poems'. Here were not only uncollected poems of Yeats that had appeared in the Allt and Alspach *Variorum* edition, but also all the lyrics from the plays. Finneran might perhaps have justified the inclusion of some of these in so far as Yeats had chosen to publish them as separate poems before they appeared in the plays. Still, these dramatic lyrics were planned as constituent parts of Yeats's drama, and to Finneran's critics it seemed inappropriate to remove them from their theatrical contexts as though they were standalone poems.

I am interested in this matter as part of the general question of *how* the choric lyrics do or do not relate to the plays in which they are embedded. What bearing do the voices of the lyrics have on the enacted drama? Within the Noh-style 'Plays for Dancers' the musicians act as narrators, setting the scene, describing the action. But their lyrics,

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like the choral odes of Greek tragedy, are at least semi-independent of the drama, with their own imagery and symbolism relating only obliquely to the plays. I want to explore what the lyrics contribute to the experience of the drama, how they reflect or refract the meaning of the action.

Having decided that this would be the subject for my lecture, I became preoccupied with one particular strain within these dramatic lyrics, what I am calling Yeats's counterheroic voices. In so far as the term 'counterheroic' seems to be a coinage of my own, I need to explain what I mean by it. What I have in mind are those attitudes, thoughts and feelings that counter the heroic in Yeats, resist its energies and resolute will. Once again there are precedents in Greek tragedy. The Greek tragic chorus typically moralises on the action, recoils in horror from its terrible events, condemns the wickedness of the wicked or prays piously to the gods for a favourable outcome. Recurrently, also, though, the catastrophes befalling the tragic protagonists serve to remind them how fortunate they are to be living ordinary lives, unlikely as a result to attract the special divine wrath reserved for the great and famous. As the Chorus in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* puts it:

Ambitions steps high, and stumbles.
Zeus sees with thunderous brows
And down goes ambition, down.

Better to be humble, unenvied. (Raphael and McLeish 16)

That is one version of the counterheroic. But it seems to me that there is a considerable range of counterheroic voices in Yeats, and what I want to do in this talk is to tease out how these voices speak or sing in the plays.

In *The Countess Cathleen*, the play which Yeats chose to stand at the head of the *Collected Plays*, there appear to be two dramatic conflicts. At the centre of the play is the clash between good and evil:

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the wicked merchants, agents of Satan buying up people's souls, aided by the peasants Shemus and Teigue who have gone over to their side, against the Christ-like Countess, willing to sacrifice everything, even her own soul, to save the starving people from the forces of darkness. The secondary conflict is that between Cathleen, the evidently idealised version of Maud Gonne to whom the play is dedicated, and the poet Aleel, equally obviously a stand-in for the lovelorn author. Aleel stands around, wringing his hands poetically, deploring the Countess's dedication to her doomed cause. Cathleen herself conjures up the alternative world to which Aleel urges her to escape, a recognizably Yeatsian paradise of the 1890s:

Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp,
when the trees
Had made a heavy shadow about our door,
And talk among the rustling of the reeds,
When night hunted the foolish sun away
With stillness and pale tapers. (Alspach 85)

In as much as this vision comes to Aleel in a dream from Aengus, pagan god of love and poetry, Cathleen's rejection of it in favour of self-sacrifice is marked as explicitly Christian, enforced by an invocation of the Virgin as Mater Dolorosa 'whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced'.

However, this conflict of love against duty, poetry against action, paganism against Christianity is more apparent than real in the play; that much is clear already in Aleel's first song in Scene 1. When the Philistine Shemus mutters about Aleel starting to play his music, Cathleen defends him: 'Ah, do not blame the finger on the string' (Alspach 21). And the lyric that follows shows Aleel with uncharacteristic aggressiveness aligning himself with the Countess against Shemus whom he already intuitively feels to be her adversary:

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Were I but crazy for love's sake
I know who'd measure out his length,
I know the heads that I should break,
For crazy men have double strength.
I know – all's out to leave or take,
Who mocks at music mocks at love [. . .] (Alspach 23)

The imagination of the wispy Aleel turned mad beserker breaking heads all around him has its comic side. The lyric has the characteristic Yeatsian strain towards the counterfactual -- 'Were I but crazy for love's sake' – and the opacity of meaning: what exactly is meant by 'all's out to leave or take'? But the significance of the lyric for the values of the play is clear. Music and love are identified with one another – 'who mocks at music mocks at love' – and in support of both Aleel is allied with the Countess against the likes of Shemus.

Even the two later lyrics by Aleel in the play do not offer an unequivocally alternative point of view to the heroic martyrdom of the Countess Cathleen. In Scene II, Aleel speaks for a pagan vision opposed by the orthodox Oona, Cathleen's aged nurse and foster-mother. She warns the Countess against listening to Aleel: 'These are no thoughts for any Christian ear' (Alspach 57). (This is in the revised version of the play: in the original text, played in the 1899 first production, it was Oona who sang the bardic lyric 'Who will go drive with Fergus now', which Joyce loved so much, setting it to music and making it one of Stephen Dedalus's haunting echoes in *Ulysses*.) In the later texts of *Countess Cathleen*, Aleel's response to Oona's pious disapproval is a lyric of defiant hedonism:

Lift up the white knee;
Hear what they sing,
Those young dancers
That in a ring
Raved but now

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Of the hearts that broke
Long, long ago
For their sake.
[. . .]
But the dance changes,
Lift up the gown,
All that sorrow
Is trodden down. (Alspach 57-59)

Aleel's Utopia offers forgetfulness in the ecstasy of the dance: 'All that sorrow/ Is trodden down'. But what comes across in the lyric, for all its assertion of gaiety, is the plangent undersong of the unrequited lovers who broke their hearts for the white-kneed dancers, so immediately expressive of Aleel's own predicament.

In the late retrospect of 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', Yeats gave his own interpretation of the inner meaning of *The Countess Cathleen*:

I thought my dear must her own soul destroy
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it.
(Allt and Alspach 630)

That would imply that the tragedy of Cathleen a.k.a. Maud Gonne derived from her failure to listen to the love and alternative vision of Aleel/Yeats. But in the play, Aleel does not represent a better way; he is instead an admiring witness to the Countess's heroic action, however anguished and heart-wrung it leaves him. This is the burden of his last love-lyric in the play:

Impetuous heart be still, be still,
Your sorrowful love can never be told,
Cover it up with a lonely tune.
He who could bend all things to His will
Has covered the door of the infinite fold

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With the pale stars and the wandering moon.
(Alspach 129)

I do not profess to understand the exact meaning of the last three lines of this lyric, but I think the overall effect is clear. The tragic sacrifice of the Countess is God-ordained, and in the light of that high destiny the lover must make a co-sacrifice of his love. Aleel ends the play as the authoritative seer of the Countess's death and final salvation, synthesising his own Celtic pagan mythology with the Christian symbolism of the Redemption. His is in the end a triumphant expression of the heroic rather than a counterheroic voice.

The Countess Cathleen, with its Faust-like miraculous ending, stands in the tradition of romantic melodrama. *On Baile's Strand*, chronologically the first of Yeats's Cuchulain plays, premiered in 1904 at the opening of the Abbey Theatre, dramatises the conflict of truly incompatible forces and principles that makes for tragedy. Conchubar and Cuchulain, king and hero, are bound together in mutual dependance like the Fool and the Blind Man, their counterparts in the play's comic subplot. Conchubar stands for the state, for law and order and government; Cuchulain represents the force of the invincible warrior needed for the defence of the realm. They have analogues in Greek mythology and in Homer: Heracles who must complete his twelve labours under orders from King Eurystheus, Achilles who, for all his mutinous anger in the *Iliad*, has finally to serve the commander-in-chief Agamemnon. Conchubar makes explicit the trade-off between the two: 'I give my wisdom, and I take your strength' (Alspach 499).

The tragedy arises from the disabilities that go with those attributes. The king, like the Blind Man, can devise clever plans but may be blind to their implications and consequences. The hero, like the Fool, runs headlong on impulse but is capable of intuition which the king in his supposed superior wisdom disastrously overrules. So Conchubar has decided that Cuchulain can no longer be allowed to follow his own life of heroic self-will, making war or making love as he feels like it. His anarchic energies are a danger to the kingdom; he must be bound by oath to do the King's bidding, that is serve

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the state. Cuchulain, urged on by everyone, including his own boon companions, reluctantly takes the oath. The first test of his obedience comes when the King orders him to fight the nameless young man from Aoife's country who challenges Cuchulain to a duel. Cuchulain senses an affinity to the young man, wants to make a friend of him, but Conchubar insists that Cuchulain take up the challenge. The young man is killed only to be revealed as Cuchulain's own son. The very person who might have given the hero a stake in the continuity of the generations, and thus tied him in to the social system of the state, is destroyed. Cuchulain runs mad and seems to die fighting the waves. Cuchulain, in his crazed murder of his offspring is again like Heracles, both expressive of the tragic incapacity of the hero to enjoy the ordinary fulfilment of love, marriage and family happiness.

This tragic destiny is what the chorus of Women at the centre of the play try to exorcise, vainly as it turns out. Even the form in which the opening lines are couched suggests the futility of the attempt:

May this fire have driven out
The Shape-Changers that can put
Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous. (Alspach 495)

The past perfect subjunctive makes this sound like pious wish rather than convinced hope. We have heard of the Shape-Changers, Fand and Boann, from the Fool early on. They are thought to be the witches who drive Cuchulain to the impiety of attacking the High King himself; they will delude him into fighting the waves, seeing 'King Conchubar's crown on every one of them' (Alspach 524). The echoes of *Macbeth* in the Women's lines have often been noticed, as they describe the effect of the witches' enchantment:

[. . .] the man is thrice forlorn,
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss

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While they murmur, 'After this
Hatred may be sweet to the taste'. (Alpsach 497)

Another Shakespearean analogue is the blessing of the Fairies on the married lovers at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But whereas, the epithalamion at the end of Shakespeare's comedy must be supposed to hallow the marriages to come, the good spirits potent in banishing the evil spirits of discord, the Women in the Chorus of *On Baile's Strand*, express all too powerfully the fate that afflicts the tragic hero Cuchulain. As he himself says,

I have never known love but as a kiss
In the mid-battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water [. . .]
A brief forgiveness between opposites (Alspach 489)

His son, product of his brief love-affair with Aoife, becomes her instrument of hatred against him, and indirectly the agent of his destruction. The Women's Chorus that accompanies Cuchulain's oath to Conchubar, in its very effort to avert the tragic destiny of the hero, affirms that it is coming inevitably like the waves on Baile's strand.

At the Hawk's Well, the first of Yeats's plays for dancers, written and performed in 1916, is by way of being a prequel to *On Baile's Strand*. In the earlier play we see Cuchulain's fate come upon him, as he appears to die fighting the waves, even though in the cycle of Yeats's plays, he will of course be resurrected in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and live on to be beheaded by the Blind Man in the very late *The Death of Cuchulain*. In *At the Hawk's Well*, the young Cuchulain is shown as a young man entering into that tragic destiny. The play dramatises what is the archetypal choice of Achilles between a long inglorious life or the brief life of the hero that will be remembered for ever. The theme is announced in one of opening lyrics for the unfolding of the cloth, the ritual which Yeats invented as his symbolic scene-setting for his very unJapanese Noh plays:

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What were his life soon done!
Would he lose by that or win?
A mother that saw her son
Doubled over a speckled shin,
Cross-grained with ninety years,
Would cry, 'How little worth
Were all my hopes and fears
And the hard pain of his birth!' (Alspach 399)

That thought of the mother contemplating her aged son and wondering was it all worth while was famously to reappear in 'Among School Children'. Here, though, the spectre of the old man in all his physical frailty is counterpoised with the alternative of an early death. In so far as the craven Old Man of the play, clinging to the last hope of immortality from the waters of the well, represents the inglorious long life, there appears little to recommend it. By contrast, Cuchulain's boldness and generosity, offering to share the water of life with the Old Man, seems admirable. But the Old Man warns Cuchulain of the hero's tragic fate, the curse 'never to win a woman's love and keep it / Or always to mix hatred in the love' (Alspach 407), or to kill his own children, the fate that we have seen befall Cuchulain in *On Baile's Strand*. This curse comes on him when he gazes on the Guardian of the Well when she is possessed by 'the mountain witch, the unappeasable shadow' (Alspach 407). At his exit, the character who is only ever named as the Young Man in the play's speech prefixes, assumes his heroic, tragic identity as he cries: 'He comes! Cuchulain, son of Suaitim, comes!' (Alspach 412).

A version of the play's central conflict is announced elliptically in an almost unintelligible couplet sung at the start of the play by the Second Musician:

The heart would be always awake,
The heart would turn to its rest. (Alpsach 400)

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Two later quatrains, sung by both Musicians, expand and explain this apparently schizophrenic heart. The first is placed just before the Old Man enters:

'Why should I sleep?' the heart cries,
'For the wind, the salt wind, the sea wind,
Is beating a cloud through the skies;
I would wander always like the wind'. (Alspach 401)

It is only after a passage of spoken narrative describing the Old Man's movements, that we hear the second complementary song:

'O wind, O salt wind, O sea wind!'
Cries the heart, 'it is time to sleep;
Why wander and nothing to find?
Better grow old and sleep'. (Alspach 402)

The very symmetry of these two lyrics gives an equipoise to the alternative impulses of the heart, the one towards an ever restless life of action, the other an urge down towards sleep and death. This is a balance unlike the earlier enunciation of the choice of Achilles theme, with its apparent affirmation of the glories of the heroic.

He has lost what may not be found
Till men heap his burial-mound
And all the history ends.

He might have lived at his ease,
An old dog's head on his knees,
Among his children and friends. (Alspach 410-11)

A fully alternative counterheroic vision is first declared in the lyric sung immediately after Cuchulain's first exit, following the dancing Hawk/Guardian in a dream:

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Instead of the spectre of the old man 'cross-grained with ninety years' whose mother would not think him worth all her maternal efforts, there is an attractiveness in this picture of a relaxed third age. An echo of *Macbeth* may again be present, the doomed tragic hero in his isolation acknowledged: 'that which should accompany old age, / As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, / I must not look to have' (5.4.26-8)

The final lyrics of the play seem to express the reaction against the heroic, the vision of its opposite, with a new authority enforced by their position as the concluding chorus. The first of the two songs with its first person subject position has the choric voice standing in for a spectator shuddering away from the tragedy we have just witnessed:

Come to me, human faces,
Familiar memories;
I have found hateful eyes
Among the desolate places,
Unflinching, unmoistened eyes. (Alspach 412)

The second and third stanzas of this song, though, set up an unexpected opposition of 'folly' and 'wisdom':

Folly alone I cherish,
I choose it for my share;
Being but a mouthful of air,
I am content to perish;
I am but a mouthful of sweet air.

O lamentable shadows,
Obscurity of strife!

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I choose a pleasant life
Among indolent meadows;
Wisdom must live a bitter life. (Alspach 413)

This is not the opposition of the heroic against the unheroic that the play might have led us to expect. Instead it sets up an acceptance of mortality – ‘I am content to perish’ – as opposed to the futile pursuit of immortality represented by both Cuchulain and the Old Man. Folly and wisdom in this contrast are ironically transvalued.

The last lyric pursues the images of an ordinarily pleasant life but no longer expressed in the first person. Instead it is the play's central scenic images, the dry well and the leafless tree, to which the words are attributed:

‘The man that I praise’,
Cries out the empty well,
‘Lives all his days
Where a hand on the bell
Can call the milch cows
To the comfortable door of his house.
Who but an idiot would praise
Dry stones in a well?’

‘The man that I praise’,
Cries out the leafless tree,
‘Has married and stays
By an old hearth, and he
On naught has set store
But children and dogs on the floor.
Who but an idiot would praise
A withered tree?’ (Alspach 413-14)

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Rarely elsewhere in Yeats is there such a positive image of the contentments characteristic of pastoral. The quietistic acceptance of the ordinary here is certainly very different from the ignoble version of the unheroic represented by the Blind Man/ Conchubar in *On Baile's Strand*. Yet we are distanced from the sentiments both by the very fact that it is a choric lyric and by the re-echoing of the images associated with the desolate action we have witnessed, the well and the tree. The tragedy of the hero is that it is inevitable; the choice of Achilles is no choice. For Cuchulain life within reach of the milch cows, marriage, children and dogs on the floor is not an option.

In the plays for dancers music was given a new importance, the music composed by Edmund Dulac in the case of *At the Hawk's Well*. That raised questions about the intelligibility of the sung lyrics. In the production of *On Baile's Strand*, Yeats apparently had not greatly cared that the Women's chorus during the oath-swearing ceremony should be fully understood by an audience: according to his stage direction 'they sing in a very low voice after the first few words so that the others all but drown their words' (Alspach 495). But he was insistent in the performance of the plays for dancers that the words of the songs should be paramount, the music of gong, drum, zither and flute used to point and accentuate the lyrics. *Calvary*, Yeats's highly unorthodox Passion play from 1920, can be used to explore how far an audience might be expected to understand the symbolism of his choric lyrics, however unobtrusive the music to which they were set.

In *Calvary* Christ relives his Passion, dreaming through the road to Calvary, meeting on his way those who reject or are indifferent to his sacrifice. In Yeats's drama these include not only Judas the betrayer, but Lazarus who did not want to be brought back from the dead, and the indifferent Roman soldiers who dice for his clothes, dancing around the Cross. From the opening lyric, these figures are associated with the image of the heron:

Motionless under the moon-beam,
Up to his feathers in the stream;
Although fish leap, the white heron

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Shivers in a dumbfounded dream.

God has not died for the white heron. (Alspach 780)

One can see how the solitary heron, which appears to look at his own reflection in the water, becomes, as it were naturally, a symbol of narcissistic self-sufficiency. But this is not just any white heron, but a heron 'in a dumbfounded dream' at the time of the full moon:

But that the full is shortly gone
And after that is crescent moon,
It's certain that the moon-crazed heron
Would be but fishes' diet soon. (Alspach 781)

For those familiar with the system of Yeats's *A Vision*, this places the heron at the full moon, the climax of the antithetical, subjective phases, the very opposite of the primary cycle, inaugurated by the Crucifixion.

How many people would have understood all that if the play had been produced at the time it was written? None, Yeats himself answered, in a defiantly bitter note on the play when he published it first in 1921: 'I have written the little songs of the chorus to please myself, confident that singer and composer, when the time came for performance, would certainly make it impossible for the audience to know what the words were' (Alspach 789). Certainly it would have been impossible to catch on the ear the full implications of symbolic meaning that Yeats goes on to expound in this note. What is likely to have come across, however, are certain dominant recurrent images, the heron and the moon. Meaning is achieved not through the elaboration of the symbolic system underpinning the references, but by the iterative visual imagery supported by alliterative sound patterns. This associative significance is achieved by the repeated references in the second lyric, on the mockers of Christ:

Nicholas Grene

O, but the mockers' cry
Makes my heart afraid,
As though a flute of bone
Taken from a heron's thigh,
A heron crazed by the moon,
Were cleverly, softly played. (Alspach 781-2)

A flute made out of a heron's thigh, a heron crazed by the moon – it seems absurd if you try to take it literally. In reading the imagery of the heron can seem overexplicit; in performance it may be only indirectly suggestive. At least, that was my experience at what may have been the first production of the play in the tiny Dublin University Players Theatre in the summer of 1965, directed by James Flannery. It was played with *The Resurrection*, with *Calvary* performed a second time after a discussion of the two plays. At 17 I knew nothing of *A Vision* or indeed of Yeats's plays: this was my first exposure to them. But at least the second time round, with some help from Flannery's expositions, I was beginning to hear the meanings of *Calvary* at work in the choruses.

The point of view of the Musicians as chorus in the play is significant. Their role is not so much to react directly to the tragedy of the Passion, but to express symbolically the failure of the principle of the Redemption for those who do not accept it. There is a key shift here in the third choric lyric, which follows after the evocation of Christ's devoted followers, 'Martha, and those three Marys, and the rest / That live but in His love' (Alspach 783):

Take but His love away,
Their love becomes a feather
Of eagle, swan or gull,
Or a drowned heron's feather
Tossed hither and thither
Upon the bitter spray
And the moon at the full. (Alspach 784)

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This extends for the first time the range of birds identified with those excluded from the Christian Redemption, while by the return of the heron and the moon tying them in to the original image cluster.

Such a transition prepares us for the closing chorus in which neither heron nor moon appears. Instead the three stanzas focus in turn on the three birds, 'eagle, swan or gull', referred to in the earlier lyric. Now the refrain, which in the opening lyric was 'God has not died for the white heron' becomes 'God has not appeared to the birds' (Alspach 787). It is no longer just the self-absorbed solitaires like the heron – the nay-sayers Lazarus and Judas – who resist Christ's love. It is a whole indifferent natural universe that maintains a self-sufficiency in which Christ appears irrelevant, the equivalent of the careless Roman soldiers. The gull, the eagle or the swan can in other Yeatsian contexts all stand as emblems of the heroic. Here, though, they represent the counterheroic in so far as they are outside the scheme of the heroic Christian sacrifice, and their exclusion from it makes the Passion tragically futile. This is a version of the counterheroic very different from that, say, in *On Baile's Strand*, where it is associated with marriage, settlement, the continuity of the generations. It is different again from the counterheroic of *At the Hawk's Well*, a relaxed acceptance of mortal ordinariness. The counterheroic voices vary according to the changing forms of tragic heroism against which they are set.

The hero Cuchulain haunted Yeats's imagination from the 1890s poem 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea' to his very last play *The Death of Cuchulain*. I want to end with 'Cuchulain Comforted', the poem he was writing up until days before his death, just fifty years ago. The essence of the heroic in the many shapes it takes in Yeats is passionate individuality, the extraordinary dimensions of the hero that mark him or her off from the rest of us. In this all but last poem, Yeats imagined a posthumous transmutation of the hero in which he is made one with his very antithesis. Let me offer it to you as one final counterheroic voice:

Nicholas Grene

'Cuchulain Comforted'

A man that has six mortal wounds, a man
Violent and famous, strode among the dead;
Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone.

Then certain Shrouds that muttered head to
head
Came and were gone. He leant upon a tree
As though to meditate on wounds and blood.

A Shroud that seemed to have authority
Among those bird-like things came, and let fall
A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and three

Came creeping up because the man was still.
And thereupon the linen-carrier said:
'Your life can grow much sweeter if you will

'Obey our ancient rule and make a shroud;
Mainly because of what we only know
The rattle of those arms makes us afraid.

'We thread the needles' eyes and all we do
All must together do'. That done, the man
Took up the nearest and began to sew.

'Now must we sing and sing the best we can
But first you must be told our character:
Convicted cowards all by kindred slain

'Or driven from home and left to die in fear'.
They sang, but had not human tunes nor words,
Though all was done in common as before,

Yeats's Counterheroic Voices

They had changed their throats and had the throats of birds. (Allt and Alspach, 634-5)

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2

Artistic Freedom Challenged by Political Oppression in W. B. Yeats's *The King's Threshold*

A. Deniz Bozer

The King's Threshold (1903), which is among Yeats's (1865-1939) early plays, is a one-act play mainly in verse. Since the Abbey Theatre had not yet started operating, *The King's Threshold* was first performed at the Molesworth Hall in Dublin on 7 October 1903 by the Irish National Theatre Society (Yeats "Notes" 1966: 315). It was first published for private circulation in New York in 1904 (Bushrui 77), and in the same year was published publicly in London.

It is commonly maintained that *The King's Threshold* is based on several sources. Since Yeats preferred to choose the subject of his plays from Irish folklore and mythology, one of the sources for this play was a Middle Irish tale named "Immtheacht na Tromdaimhe" (Bushrui 75). Another source is Yeats's friend Edwin Ellis's play, *Sancan the Bard*, written ten years earlier (Yeats "Notes" 1966: 315). However, Yeats points out that his story is told "from the poet's point of view, and not like the old story-tellers, from the King's" (qtd. in Ross 349).

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Yeats marks that *The King's Threshold* "was written when our Society [The Irish National Theatre Society] was having a hard fight for the recognition of pure art in a community of which one half was buried in the practical affairs of life, and the other half in politics and a propagandist patriotism" (Yeats "Notes" 1966: 315). Despite this statement, having lived in politically charged times between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth which saw the land reforms, revolutionary nationalism, the issue of the Home Rule and the founding of the Irish Free State, Yeats himself could not avoid politics. Moreover, being one of the founders of the Irish National Theatre, which was later to become the Abbey Theatre, reveals his Irish nationalistic interests at heart. In addition, Yeats's love for the politically motivated actress/activist Maud Gonne may also have contributed to his interest in politics. However, it is difficult "to pin a particular political label upon Yeats" because of "the apparent inconsistency of his utterances" (Allison 10), revealing "many political identities" (Allison 4). It can safely be noted that Yeats displayed different political tendencies in his lifetime: mainly as a young man in the 1890s he was a cultural nationalist; like quite a few members of the Gaelic League, Yeats, too, was a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, a prequel to the Irish Republican Army (IRA); in mid-life he served as a senator in the Senate of the new Irish Free State in 1922 for two terms; "Yeats's political ideas became more reactionary, as he began to admire Mussolini [. . .]"; and although for a short period of time, in Conor Cruise O'Brien's view he supported the anti-Republican Blueshirts after the electoral victory of de Valera in 1932 [. . .]" (Allison 5). Less supportive of revolutionary politics, however, the publication of his poem "Easter 1916" written in 1916 but published five years later in 1921, reveals how Yeats politically distanced himself in the turbulent days of the Rising and its aftermath. As Foster states, in fact "Easter 1916' is a very ambivalent reaction to the Rising, emphasising the 'bewildered' and delusional state of the rebels as much as their heroism" (131). Finally, in 1938, thirty-four years after *The King's Threshold* and just a year before he died, Yeats explicitly put life and beauty before politics in his short poem entitled "Politics" as the elderly man who is the persona of the poem, dreams

of a beautiful young girl and wishes to ignore the political problems of the world:

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
[...]
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms! (2000: 297)

Thus, the elderly Yeats, like the old man in the poem, admits that although he is aware of the political issues in the world, he is more interested in the pleasures of (female) beauty and living life to the full.

Yeats first wrote *The King's Threshold* when he was thirty eight years old. But between 1904, the time of the publication and staging of the play, and 1922, the time Yeats made his first major revision to the play, his political views seem to have somewhat changed. *The King's Threshold* is the story of a bard who undertakes a hunger strike against the King for having been dismissed from his position on the state council. In the earlier versions of the play, Seanchan reconciles with the King. Yeats justifies this reconciliation in the Prologue to the original version: "Some think it would be a finer tale if Seanchan had died at the end of it, and the king had guilt at his door, for that might have served the poet's cause better in the end. But that is not true, [...] the ending would not have been true and joyful enough to be put in the voices of players and [...] poetry would have been badly served" ("Notes" 1966: 313). Also, as Hogan states, the "happy ending" of the early versions of the play with the King yielding to the bard's hunger strike, illustrates his "humbly conceding the centrality of the poet in the machinery of the state" (78). However, in 1922 Yeats made the most significant of his many revisions to the play, by having the bard die as a result of the hunger strike, which he justifies in the following words: "I had originally intended to end the play tragically and would

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have done so but for a friend [Lady Gregory] who used to say ‘o do write comedy and have a few happy moments in the Theatre’” (“Notes” 1966: 316).

Several critics have commented on the connection between the revised ending of *The King’s Threshold* featuring Seanchan’s death and the death of Terence MacSwiney, author and politician, who also went on hunger strike. In March 1920, during the Irish war of independence Terence MacSwiney was elected Lord Mayor of Cork and also became commandant of the Cork brigade of the IRA (“MacSwiney”). A few months later, he was arrested in Dublin on charges of possessing seditious articles and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment in Brixton Prison, London. In protest, he went on hunger strike which, after seventy four days, ended in his death (“MacSwiney”). Underscoring the possible relation between the change Yeats made for the ending of his play and MacSwiney’s death, theatre critic MacGreevey wrote in 1921 a review on a performance of *The King’s Threshold*:

Only a great poet could give adequate artistic expression to the revelation of the greatness and the pitifulness of the human spirit that was granted to those who had eyes to see when Terence MacSwiney went out of life a year ago. It was natural that Mr. Yeats’s mind should turn in those days to that play of his in which a poet had starved rather than see his calling dishonoured by a little king and an ignorant military ascendancy; and that, in the light of MacSwiney’s unalterable faith in himself, of the nobility of the impulse that drove him to the course he took, and the pitifulness of his end, Mr. Yeats changed the old pretty ending to a new one of tragic dignity.
(570)

It can be contended that the revisions of the play reflect “ a history of rewriting that mirrors Yeats’s own evolving relationship with Ireland and with his public role as bard” (Hogan 78).

“The hunger strike [...] an integral part of Irish history and mythology” is a non-violent, passive-aggressive resistance where the person refuses to eat (or drink); it was practised as an act of protest in “pre-Christian Ireland when there was a strong tradition of oral legal codes. These codes were known as the Brehon laws [. . .]” (Sweeney 421). Fasting, named as *troscadh* or *cealachan*, was used as a method of protesting injustice. The fast was often carried out on the doorstep of the home of the offender. Or, sometimes the person who owed a debt to another of higher status, fasted at the doorstep of the moneylender so that he could be given more time to pay back his debt. “If the lender allowed the debtor to die on his doorstep, he was shamed for inhospitality and lack of generosity” (“Precedents for Hunger Striking”). The person who was responsible for the death of the other who was fasting was dishonoured and ostracised by society. Yeats stated, “When I wrote this play [*The King’s Threshold*] neither suffragette nor patriot had adopted the hunger strike, nor had the hunger strike been used anywhere, so far as I know, as a political weapon” (“Notes” 1966: 315). The use of the hunger strike as a political weapon in Ireland exploded after the 1916 Easter Rising. As O’Malley marks [in his *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair*], the first major incident was in 1917 when Thomas Ashe, who had been imprisoned for taking part in the 1916 Easter Uprising, in protest, went on hunger strike and eventually died despite being force-fed (qtd. in “Precedents for Hunger Striking”).

The protagonist of *The King’s Threshold*, Seanchan, is a bard/poet at the court of King Guaire who was the King of Connacht in 6th century Ireland. The setting is Gort, a town in the west of Ireland, where the King had built a fortress. The King’s “Bishops, Soldiers, and Makers of the Law”, have long been considering that the poet had no place among them and should be dismissed from the council of the State. The representatives of the religious, military and legal institutions which ran the country together with the monarch, considered the bard to be beneath them:

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King: [...] against their dignity
for a mere man of words to sit amongst them
At the great council of the State and share
In their authority.
[...]
And that it was the men who ruled the world,
And not the men who sang to it, who should sit
Where there was the most honour. [...]
(Yeats 1966: 259-260)

Taking their advice, the King dismisses the poet. This is very much against the tradition as “[i]n ancient Ireland the men of learning were esteemed beyond all other classes; all the great ollaves and professors and poets held the very highest social position, and took precedence of the nobles and ranked next to royalty” (Jeffares and Knowland 43). Therefore, Seanchan believes that he has been wronged, and that it is a poet’s right to be on the council. He undertakes a hunger strike at the palace gates to insist on the crucial role of the poet “in the hierarchy of political power” (Hogan 78). Through the King’s words, Yeats informs the reader/spectator of the old Irish custom of fasting to redress an injustice:

King: [...]. He has chosen death:
Refusing to eat or drink, that he may bring
Disgrace upon me; for there is a custom,
An old and foolish custom, that if a man
Be wronged, or think that he is wronged, and
starve
Upon another’s threshold till he die,
The common people, for all time to come,
Will raise a heavy cry against that threshold,
Even though it be the King’s. (1966: 258)

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Throughout the play, Seanchan remains at the threshold which carries semiotic significance. “By making the threshold central to the play, Yeats designated it as a cite of power struggle between the King and the poet, the poet and pupils” (McAteer 55-56). However, the King cannot go back on his word:

King: I cannot give way.
Because I am King; because, if I give way
My Nobles would call me a weakling, and it may
be,
The very throne be shaken. (Yeats 1966: 261)

The King asks Seanchan’s pupils to dissuade their master from starving himself to death. For various selfish reasons, other characters such as the Mayor, the Lord High Chamberlain, the Monk, the Soldier and the two Cripples also try to persuade Seanchan to put an end to his hunger strike. Yet, Seanchan does not give in; his “unbending assertion of artistic autonomy, [is] represented by his refusal to move from the steps” (McAteer 57) at the king’s threshold.

Seanchan, who is Yeats’s spokesperson in the play, underlines his responsibility as a poet:

But I am labouring
For some that shall be born in the nick of time,
And find sweet nurture, that they may have
voices,
Even in anger, like the strings of harps;
And how could they be born to majesty
If I had never made the golden cradle? (Yeats
1966: 266)

His pupils, the Oldest Pupil and the Youngest Pupil, who act like a chorus, are foils to Seanchan; they draw attention to the significance of poetry in people’s lives:

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Seanchan: What evil thing will come upon the world

If the Arts perish?

Oldest Pupil: If the Arts should perish,
The world that lacked them would be like a woman

That, looking on the cloven lips of a hare,

Brings forth a hare-lipped child.

(Yeats 1966: 264-265)

The Cripples, “personify the spiritual corruption into which the community has sunk in expelling the poet from the court” (McAteer 59). In addition, they represent the significance of the artist/poet to society:

Seanchan: But why were you born crooked?

What bad poet did your mothers listen to

That you were born so crooked?

(Yeats 1966: 298-299)

“The cripples and beggars in *The King’s Threshold* were the result of a society that inhibited the imagination. [...] Civil remedy for such personal and social ugliness is the unfettered expression of the imagination” (Lenoski 79). They are merely simple people after their daily bread with their eyes on the food that have been brought for Seanchan but not eaten by him. The Cripples curse the King for trying to change an old custom, that of the poet’s sitting on the State council, while they attribute some kind of heavenliness to the poet:

Second Cripple: If I were the King I wouldn’t meddle with him; there is something queer about a man that makes rhymes.

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First Cripple: Those that make rhymes have a
power from beyond the world.
(Yeats 1966: 269-270)

The Mayor of Kinwara, a village north-west of Gort, is the first in line as each character has his/her turn in trying to persuade Seanchan to end his fasting. Along with a series of antagonists who mockingly look down on the poet, hence poetry, the Mayor is caricaturised by Yeats:

Mayor: [...] What is he saying?
I never understood a poet's talk
More than the baa of a sheep! (1966: 276)

Bushrui marks that “the Mayor’s comic ignorance is thus raised to tragic heights, because of the threat it holds for all that is beautiful in life and art. His defence of the King’s policy is a defence of the [...] Bishops, Soldiers, Makers of Law” (81). When Seanchan’s loyal servant Brian and the two Cripples inquire the reason for his defence of the King, the Mayor’s answer reduces him to an even more lower position as he unquestioningly upholds a sovereign’s authority:

Mayor: And hadn't he the right to? And hadn't he
the right
to strike your master's head off, being the King?
(Yeats 1966: 280)

Upon these words, “*Brian seizes the Mayor*”, who is crying out for help, while the Cripples attack him and the First Cripple beats him “*on the legs with his crutch*” (Yeats 1966: 282). The Mayor is not only humiliated by those beneath him but his authority is also undermined by the Lord Chamberlain who shoves the Mayor himself or has him irreverently shoved by his men several times despite the Mayor’s exaggerated show of respect. The Mayor’s foolishness and lack of control are illustrated through his confusion about what he planned to say despite his use of the Ogham stick which is an ancient Celtic ‘Tree Alphabet’ with letters engraved on a wooden stick “Ogham”:

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The Mayor has an Ogham stick in his hand. Mayor: [...] 'Chief poet, Ireland, townsman, grazing land'. those are the words I have to keep in mind, 'Chief poet, Ireland, townsman, grazing land'. I have got them all right now, they are all here cut upon the Ogham stick, 'Chief poet, Ireland, townsman, grazing land', and that's the right order. (He keeps muttering over his speech [...])
(Yeats 1966: 268-269)

Seanchan's asking Brian what his mother makes of his fasting serves as a foreshadowing of the end of the play:

Seanchan: What did my mother say?

Brian: Your mother gave no message, for when they told her that you had it in mind to starve or get again the ancient right of the poets, she said, 'No message will do any good. We cannot change him,' and she went indoors, lay down upon the bed and turned her face out of the light.

[...]

Seanchan: Tell them that my mother was in the right, go tell them that, go tell them that she knew me. (Yeats 1966: 275)

In his turn, the King's Chamberlain tells Seanchan's pupils to persuade their master to put an end to his fasting. He warns Seanchan that chaos will ensue when the King's authority is challenged:

Chamberlain: [*to Seanchan*]. Well, you must be contended, (for your work

Has roused the common sort against King,
And stolen his authority. The State
Is like some orderly and reverend house

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Wherein, the master being dead of a sudden,
The servants quarrel where they have a mind to,
And pilfer here and there. (Yeats 1966: 284)

Ironically, he is unaware that their insistence on keeping the poet away from the State council may actually be triggering chaos and paving the way for a state of disorder among the people.

Then, the Monk, whose hypocritical understanding of God is satirised by Yeats, is asked by the Chamberlain to act his part. However, he refuses, marking that pride and disobedience should not go unpunished:

Monk: Certainly I will not.
I've made too many homilies, wherein
The wanton imagination of the poets
Has been condemned, to be his flatterer.
If pride and disobedience are unpunished
Who will obey? (Yeats 1966: 285)

Representing institutionalised religion, the Monk, too, opposes Seanchan as he considers poetry a threat to the authority of the Church and the State. As can be understood from the last two lines of his speech, he almost wishes the poet dead:

Monk: The pride of the poets!
Dancing, hurling, the country full of noise;
And King and Church neglected. Seanchan,
I'll take my leave, for you are perishing
Like all that let the wanton imagination
Carry them where it will, and it's not likely
I'll look upon your living face again.
(Yeats 1966: 291)

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Upon which, Seanchan scorns the Monk's hypocrisy and greed.

Unlike the Monk, the Soldier who does not hypocritically mince his words, refuses right from the beginning to persuade Seanchan to eat, and straightforwardly states that the society is better off without the poet:

Soldier: I will not interfere, for if he starve
For being obstinate and stiff in the neck,
'Tis but good riddance. (Yeats 1966: 285)

Yeats satirises the Soldier for his blind obedience to the King and has Seanchan insult him by calling him the "King's dog" (1966: 287).

The Girls who represent the ladies at the court, egoistically do not want Seanchan to die lest they lose their source of entertainment:

First Girl: We cannot dance,
Because no harper will pluck a string for us.
[...]
And I love dancing more than anything.
(Yeats 1966: 286)

Moreover, as the Second Girl notices fearfully, by this time the people have turned against these figures of authority. Thus, Yeats draws attention to the anarchy lurking in the background as the poet's fasting continues.

The King himself has even asked his daughters to go and persuade Seanchan. The two Princesses take food and drink to Seanchan:

First Princess: My father bids us say
That, though he cannot have you at his table,
You may ask any other thing you like
And he will give it to you. (Yeats 1966: 295)

Seanchan insults them, too, by calling them “lepers”:

Seanchan: [*standing up*] There is no sound hand
among

You --- no sound hand.

Away with you! Away with all of you!

You are all lepers! There is leprosy [....]

(Yeats 1966: 297)

As a physically deforming disease, leprosy, since ancient times, has been associated with moral corruption. The disfigurement of lepers was associated with inner corruption. As Schellinck stated in 1343, “[l]eprosy is the corruption of the body externally and internally ... their complexion [...] is bad and corrupting and so are their thoughts and their mind is bad and poisoned” (qtd. in Allan and Burrige 208). “Leprosy was a disease of the soul, brought on by moral corruption and sin. [...] and] moral corruption, like the disease that was its physical manifestation, was believed to be highly infectious” (Nirenberg 57). Stigmatising in the eyes of the community all the members of the King’s court as ‘lepers’, Seanchan is implying that the ruling class is contaminated and morally diseased.

From his monologues, it is understood that Seanchan hallucinates at times for having gone without food for sometime. As the Mayor marks, he is almost “delirious” towards the end (Yeats 1966: 299). Nevertheless, he persists in his contention and turns a deaf ear even to his beloved Fedelm’s words of persuasion. When all have had their turn, Seanchan has still not yielded. Finally, the King himself arrives, and hoping that it will make Seanchan change his mind, orders that his pupils will have to die with him if he dies as a result of the hunger strike. He asks his men to bring Seanchan’s pupils who have been tied up:

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King: If his heart's set upon it, he may die;
But you shall all die with him. (Yeats 1966: 307)

The King wants the pupils to beg for their lives. But both the Oldest and the Youngest Pupil refuse and cry out:

Die, Seanchan, and proclaim the right of the
poets. (Yeats 1966: 308)

Seanchan marks that when he and his pupils die, it will be a happy death as they will then be away from all the lepers and the society they have contaminated, lying in the clean and fresh air on "some windy hill" (Yeats 1966: 309). Hence, Seanchan dies in defence of his ideals and from his last words, it is understood that he dies a triumphant death as he is spiritually fulfilled and aware that his legacy on the significance of the role of the poet will make its way into the future. He knows that his laughing face will haunt the King and his advocates, and torment them for having committed injustice. It is note-worthy that the last word he utters is "laugh":

Seanchan: [...] The man that dies has the chief
part in the story,
[...]
That mankind and that leper there may know
Dead faces laugh. [He falls and then half rises.
King! King! Dead faces laugh. [He dies
(Yeats 1966: 309)

The King orders the pupils to take Seanchan's body with them and leave the town.

Nicholas Grene posits that [a]s long as there has been a distinct Irish drama it has been [...] closely bound up with national politics" (1), a statement which can safely be applied to *The King's Threshold* as well since the play reflects Yeats's views on the poet's role in society. The poet is endowed with the double role of both sitting with the rulers

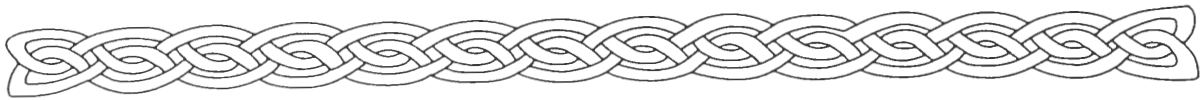
of the state and yet providing a voice of dissent when necessary. In his polemical essay dated 1989 and entitled “Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of William Butler Yeats (Excerpt)”, Conor Cruise O’Brien, argues that “Lady Gregory’s diaries make clear that Yeats supported the Free State’s ruthless policies against the Republican hard-liners, including the decision to hold out against the Republican hunger strikers” (qtd. in Allison 6). Yeats’s 1922 revision of the ending of *The King’s Threshold* seems to prove true this claim as the state does not give in and the poet dies of hunger.

Although Yeats’s early poems prove him to be an aesthete, art is not merely an aesthetic end in itself; although it is above politics and should not be reduced to a propagandistic instrument, it does have moralistic and political functions. However, once a society strips the poet of his power and restricts artistic freedom, that society is doomed to corruption.

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3

Last Words : W. B. Yeats's Last Poems

N. Belgin Elbir

The title of this paper refers to poems that Yeats wrote during the last year of his life, between January 1938 and January 1939 before he died on January 28, 1938. These poems were published by the Cuala Press in the order Yeats intended in July 1939, several months after he died. Curtis Bradford states that "During the last days of his life Yeats arranged the work he had completed since *New Poems* by number and title in a manuscript table of contents" (Bradford "On Yeats's Last Poems" 76). *New Poems* was the last collection of poems that Yeats saw through to publication. As Stephen Regan notes, "he clearly had plans for another collection which was published posthumously with "The Death of Cuchulain" and "Purgatory" as *Last Poems and Two Plays*" (Regan 87).

We do not know whether Yeats had planned the title, but it is possible to infer from the poems themselves and from his arrangement of them that he intended this last volume to be read as his "poetic last will and testament" (Stallworthy "Introduction" 20). Although there are nineteen poems in the volume, I will be discussing only four; "Under

Last Words

Ben Bulben”, “The Man and the Echo”, “The Circus Animals’ Desertion” and “Politics”, not in the order of composition but in the order that, as Curtis Bradford has shown (Bradford “The Order of Yeats’s Last Poems” 515), Yeats wanted them to be read. These are poems that are explicitly about his own past, his past works, his own death and the remaking of his artistic identity, and are all concerned with coming to a conclusion; in other words, with saying the last word or words. Hence, this paper will examine the significance and implications of these poems and Yeats’s arrangement of them in making and remaking his last words as a poet.

Last Poems and Two Plays opens with “Under Ben Bulben”, originally given the title “His Convictions”. In order of composition “Under Ben Bulben” is the earliest of the three final dated poems, the other two being “Cuchulain Comforted” and “The Black Tower”. The place of “Under Ben Bulben” in the edition is significant, for as Marjorie Howes remarks,

One of Yeats’s last creative acts was to re-arrange the contents list for *Last Poems* so that “Under Ben Bulben,” with its hectoring, assertive tone and its triumphalist ambitions to enable the poet to determine his own legacy, opens the volume (though this order is not reproduced in the *Variorum Poems*). The rest of the volume tears down the certainties proposed by “Under Ben Bulben,” and brings the speaker to an acknowledgement that he cannot make final sense of his life, control his own death, or determine how he will be remembered. (Howes 17-18)

The first five sections of “Under Ben Bulben” set the stage for Yeats’s legacy and epitaph, and thus function as a “preface” (Rosenthal 344) to the sixth and final one where Yeats describes himself as already dead. The sixth section begins by referring to Yeats himself:

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Under bare Ben Bulben's head
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid
An ancestor was rector there
Long years ago, a church stands near,
By the road an ancient cross.
No marble, no conventional phrase;
On limestone quarried near the spot
By his command these words are cut:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by! (UBB VI. 304)

The speaker of these words refers to Yeats as already dead and buried. The line "By his command these words are cut" records that his command has been realized after his death. Thus, Yeats creates the impression of speaking from the tomb, and also presents his own epitaph. As Jahan Ramazani notes, "the self-epitaphic discourse seems to have passed beyond the life" and as such can "aspire to auto canonization". (Ramazani 147). In fact, by positioning the poem as the first in the volume Yeats has created the effect of speaking not only "Under Ben Bulben" but "all his last poems from the tomb" as his "farewell to life and art" (Bradford 77).

The command in the final section is, however, not the only command in the poem. Actually, throughout the poem Yeats addresses a specific group of people, and issues several commands and instructions. The first section starts with the injunction to:

Swear by what the sages spoke
Round the Mareotic Lake

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That the witch of Atlas knew,
Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.

Swear by those horsemen, by those women
Complexion and form prove superhuman,
That pale, long-visaged company
That air in immortality
Completeness of their passions won;
Now they ride the wintry dawn
Where Ben Bulbin sets the scene. (UBB I. 301)

The artists whom Yeats directly addresses later in the poem are ordered to “swear by”, to learn from the completeness of the horsemen and women, from “that air in immortality/completeness of their passions won”. The next section pronounces death to be only “a brief parting from those dear”, a fact that “ancient Ireland knew” (UBB II. 302). This stanza ends with the image of “gravediggers” whose “toil is long,/Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,/ They but thrust their buried men/Back in the human mind again” (UBB II. 302) . Here Yeats implies that death is not final, for as he says “Many times man lives and dies” (UBB II. 302). Furthermore, the depiction of the strong, muscular gravediggers, who thrust the dead back in the human mind is itself a challenge to the power of death, since the dead will continue to survive in the human mind.

Section IV instructs artists, poets, sculptors and painters to do what their great forefathers, the “ancient Ireland”, did:

Poet and sculptor, do the work,
Nor let the modish painter shirk
What his great forefathers did,

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Bring the soul of man to God,
Make him fill the cradles right. (UBB IV. 302)

Yeats then goes on to allude to artists who “thought” and “wrought” artistic forms that were proof of their “might”. Among these artists is Micheal Angelo, who left “a proof that there is a purpose set/Before the secret working mind:/Profane perfection of mankind” (UBB IV. 303). As one critic puts it, “Yeats’s highly selective history of art in this section corresponds with his general conservatism and nostalgia for a lost past” (Rosenthal 345). His nostalgia is, in fact, implied in his comparison of the past with the present when this section ends with the pronouncement that “Confusion fell upon our thought” (UBB IV. 303) as the present age drew near.

Yeats’s final instructions in the poem are reserved for Irish poets, his successors:

Irish poets, learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well-made,
Scorn the sort now growing up
All out of shape from toe to top,
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds. (UBB V. 303)

As Stephen Regan points out, the call to Irish poets to sing whatever is well-made, is “followed by the extension of that formalist aesthetic to a hatred of the ugly and misshapen in the human sphere” (Regan 87), an indication of Yeats’s interest in selective breeding; that is to say, eugenics, in the 1930s. Yeats then instructs Irish poets to praise peasantry, country gentlemen, monks, porter-drinkers, all “figures beyond the perimeter of unromantic, bourgeois society” (Stallworthy “Under Ben Bulben” 238), not “the sort now growing up”

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(UBB V. 303); in other words, the middle classes, the bourgeoisie who Yeats believed, had no respect for the values that he cherished. He also urges poets to “cast [their] mind on other days/That we in coming days may be/Still the indomitable Irishry” (UBB V. 304), referring to a time when the lost values he mourns will be restored.

The pronouncements, assertions, the injunctive discourse and finally the epitaph can be regarded as an effort on Yeats’s part to achieve self-mastery over mortality and the finality of death. However, “Under Ben Bulben” also “obscures the real question of authority that puts such pressure on the work—namely the relation of the poet to death’s ultimate authority” (Ramazani 146). In this context, it becomes rather difficult to take at face value the poet’s statement in the poem that death is only a “brief parting” that enables man to “complete his mind” and to “accomplish fate” (UBB III. 302). In other words, the poem desires a reversal of power and suppresses the strength of death. As Ramazani puts it, in “Under Ben Bulben” Yeats “celebrates death as the occasion for completing a narrative about himself” (Ramazani 151), a narrative that canonizes him as a representative of “ancient artistic and social values that were also dead or dying” (Rosenthal 346).

The three poems that close *Last Poems and Two Plays* seem to explore, and also, question the convictions stated so forcefully in “Under Ben Bulben”. The direct address of “The Man and the Echo” is spoken not by the posthumous voice of “Under Ben Bulben”, but by a speaker who “remains largely within the bounds of human striving” (Vendler “The Later Poetry” 98). In this dialogue with his own echo, instead of presenting his convictions, Yeats openly confronts his lack of power and knowledge, and relentlessly questions himself.

At the beginning of the poem, the speaker, “man”, states that he has come to an ancient rocky chasm and has found himself at the bottom of a pit. Seamus Heaney describes the situation of the man in “The Man and Echo” as “that of somebody *in extremis*, somebody who wants to make his soul, to bring himself to wholeness, to bring his mind and being into congruence with the divine mind and being”

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(Heaney 96). Indeed, the man's agonizing awareness of his limited knowledge is made clear at the beginning of the poem as he emphasizes his solitary state and reveals that all his past utterances and deeds have turned into questions; "grammatical correlatives for his moral and epistemological incompleteness" (Ramazani 195):

Man In a cleft that's christened Alt
Under broken stone I halt
At the bottom of a pit
That broad noon has never lit
And shout a secret to the stone.
All that I have said and done,
Now that I am old and ill,
Turns into a question till
I lie awake night after night
And never get the answers right. (MAE 298)

As he looks retrospectively at his past works and deeds, his mind becomes frustrated with guilt and remorse. He looks back on the events of Easter 1916 and asks himself if his own play had led certain men to rebellion and thus caused their death. He then questions himself about the consequences of the words he had spoken or left unspoken, but cannot get the answers right (MAE 298). Finally, at the end of this first speech, he confesses that he felt all that he has said and done "seems evil" until he "would lie down and die". The echo repeats not the entire last line, but distorts it to shout back the "doom laden" (Vendler *Our Secret Discipline* 243) words, "lie down and die" (MAE 298). It is important to note that the echo communicates only what Heaney describes as "the man's own most extreme and exhausted recognitions" (Heaney 96).

As soon as the echo repeats "lie down and die" in the form of an imperative, man stops his questioning and begins to reflect on the

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significance of “the spiritual intellect’s great work” (MAE 298), in a desperate attempt to totalize and judge his past:

That were to shirk
The spiritual intellect’s great work,
And shirk it in vain. There is no release
In a bodkin or disease,
Nor can there be work so great
As that which cleans man’s dirty slate. (MAE 298)

This is the task he wants to accomplish. He admits that when he was healthy he was able to evade this task, but now it has become urgent:

While man can still his body keep
Wine or love drug him to sleep,
Waking he thanks the Lord that he
Has body and its stupidity,

But body gone he sleeps no more,
And till his intellect grows sure
That all’s arranged in one clear view,
Pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
Then stands in judgment on his soul, (MAE 298-99)

At this point, the man begins to lose confidence in his “great work” of cleaning his “dirty slate”, and acknowledges that “... all work done” he will “sink at last into the night” (MAE 299). The echo once again repeats the darkest words that imply death: “Into the night” (MAE 299). The echo’s words “lie down and die” and “Into the night”

form an injunction that reminds the man of his powerlessness before the finality and inescapability of death. His next question “O Rocky Voice/ Shall we in that great night rejoice?” (MAE 299) turns the Rocky Face’s command to “Rejoice” (G 249) in an earlier poem “The Gyres” into a question, indicating that he cannot assert with conviction as he did in “Under Ben Bulben”, that man can “accomplish fate” and “laugh aloud, his heart at peace” (UBB 302).

The last question “What do we know but that we face/ One another in this place?” (MAE 299) once again admits that his knowledge is limited, and also reveals his sense of imprisonment in his inner struggle and in this life. The poem ends with the cry of a stricken rabbit that calls the poet back to life, bringing his dialogue with the echo to an end:

But hush, for I have lost the theme,
Its joy or night seem but a dream;
Up there some hawk or owl has struck,
Dropping out of sky or rock,
A stricken rabbit is crying out,
And its cry distracts my thought. (MAE 299)

The cry of the rabbit’s agony is sufficient to disrupt his meditation on death. He can no longer devote himself to “the spiritual intellect’s great work”. By giving the rabbit’s distracting cry of pain the last word in the poem, Yeats dramatizes his realisation that he can not imagine his own death, he can not reach the ultimate point where he can achieve, as he puts it in the poem, “one clear view” (MAE 298) and can “sink at last into the night” (MAE 299).

In spite of the speaker’s failure to complete his task, the poem attributes significance and power not only to Yeats’s past works and deeds but to the present work as well. The questions that allude to Yeats’s past works and his involvement with the historical events in

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Ireland presuppose a certainty about the power and capacity of his words and deeds to influence and change other people's lives. Moreover, in its pronouncement that "there can be no work so great/As that which cleans man's dirty slate" (MAE 298), the poem declares its own work to be greater than any other. Yet it is equally true that in "The Man and the Echo", the speaker's solitary and frail state, his gloomy mood, his relentless questioning, his painful acceptance of responsibility for his past, and the relatively simple, monosyllabic diction make this attempt to complete the task of self-judgment a moving account of a deeply self-searching inner debate.

In "The Circus Animals Desertion", placed immediately after "The Man and the Echo", the first line, "I sought a theme and sought for it in vain" (CAD I. 296) connects with the lines "But hush, for I have lost the theme/ its joy or night seem but a dream" (MAE 299) of the earlier poem, and exposes the poet's state of mind, which is the occasion for the poem's retrospective evaluation of past literary achievements:

Maybe at last, being but a broken man,
I must be satisfied with my heart, although
Winter and summer till old age began
My circus animals were all on show,
Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,
Lion and women, and the Lord knows what.
(CAD I. 296)

The first part of the poem states that Yeats, because he is now an old and broken man, must stop searching for new themes. He has been deserted by his images, described ironically as "circus animals", and trivialized or dismissed, with the phrase "the Lord knows what". In the second part of the poem, after the question "What can I but enumerate old themes?" (CAD II. 296),

Yeats “enumerates” old themes, and in each of the three stanzas reviews one of his works. The “sea-rider Oisín led by the nose”, the “Countess Cathleen who, pity-craned, had given her soul away” and finally the hero Cúchulain who “fought the ungovernable sea” (CAD II. 296) are now seen by the old poet as “themes of the embittered heart.../ That might adorn old songs or courtly shows” (CAD II. 296), bringing forth “a dream” that itself had all his “thought and love” (CAD II. 296), the dream that itself “enchanted” (CAD II. 296) the poet. His enumeration of his themes present the artist’s creative act as a way of compensating for unsatisfied wishes and desires; a way of creating verbal constructs that soon replace the reality. Compared with the life events from which they were generated, the themes of works of art appear to be only “dreams” like the themes and their “joy or night” that seemed to be “but dreams” at the end of “The Man and the Echo”. The fictional heroes and heroines, in other words, the imagined dreams, are described at the end of the second part as: “Character isolated by a deed/To engross the present and dominate memory” (CAD II. 296), and Yeats admits that “Players and painted stage took all my love/And not those things that they were emblems of” (CAD II. 296).

His analysis of his process of writing begins with a question: “Those masterful images because complete/Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?” The answer to this question reveals the origins of the “masterful images” in “exaggeratedly low diction” (Draper 71) as:

A mound of refuse, or the sweepings of a street
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till...(CAD III. 297)

In the last lines of the poem Yeats concludes “Now that my ladder’s gone/I must line down where all the ladders start/In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart” (CAD III. 297). The heart, previously described in the poem as containing “mysteries” (CAD II. 296) that

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generated the images of heroes and heroines, has now become a “rag-and-bone shop”. In Helen Vendler’s opinion, “the conceiving of the heart as a rag-and-bone shop with a raving slut at the till, and the poet as inhabitant of this location” is “the most forceful imaginative move” (Vendler *Our Secret Discipline* 277) of the final part. Having thus demystified heart’s mysteries, the poet now deserts his “complete images” and joins the real world where everything is old, incomplete and broken. But this act of demystification may be regarded as, in Ramazani’s words, a “remystification”, belonging ultimately to “Yeats’s myth of self-remaking” (Ramazani 190), an act by which he gains authority over his approaching death. The return to reality, “the rag-and-bone shop of the heart”, in its description of this reality with the repetitions, sound effects and unusual, “unpoetic” images of ordinary objects, and the presentation of the muse as a “raving slut”, puts emphasis on the poet as a creator of verbal constructs of reality in his “shop”, transforming him from the maker of mythologies to a rag-and-bone artist. The retrospective gaze becomes an act of making or remaking his identity, and turns his remade self into another emblem, an “artifice of eternity” (STB III. 163) of one of his earlier poems, “Sailing to Byzantium”.

The short lyric “Politics” that Yeats wanted to be printed last in the volume, seems to mock the urgency and intensity of not only the stated convictions of the first placed “Under Ben Bulben”, but also the agonizing self-interrogations of both “The Circus Animals’ Desertion” and “The Man and the Echo”. The poem itself and the act of placing it at the end “deliberately invert the programmatic meditation on death” (Ramazani 193). “Politics” is, in fact, a reply to a statement by Thomas Mann that is cited as epigraph: “In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms” (P 297). Yeats replies:

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix

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On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms. (P 297)

“Politics” presents the poet as an old man who is unable to fix his attention on world politics and contemporary events of great significance. It does, however, also reveal his awareness of his life-long involvement in these events and thus asserts his role as a public figure. This time it is not a cry of suffering that distracts him, but the sight of a “girl standing there”. Considered by one critic to be “an appropriate ‘signing off’ by Yeats” (Regan 89), the poem laments the poet’s lost youth in its ironic and yet poignant cry “O that I were young again”. Yeats’s last placed poem affirms, in its last lines, the primacy of private, personal life and romantic desire, out of which he created so many “masterful images” including this last one, “to engross the present and dominate memory”.

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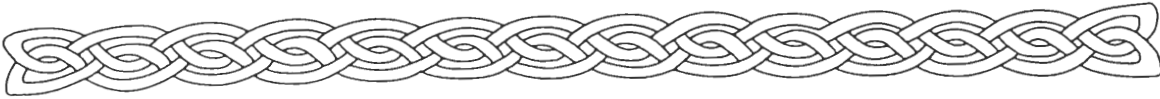
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4

Names, People and Identity Construction in Yeats's Poetry

Huriye Reis

Yeats's tomb stone in the county of Sligo is inscribed with the cryptic epitaph, "Cast a cold eye/ On life, on death/ horseman, pass by." This dismissive gesture towards life and its endurance invites a paradoxical comparison with Yeats's attempts to turn his life and the people who inhabited it into an experience of permanence and continuity. It is commonly acknowledged that Yeats's poetry shows a permanent interest in constructing and continuing Irishness. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923, Yeats's poetry was described as "inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation." Moreover, it is stated of Yeats that "If it is true that Yeats is best known as a love poet, it must be conceded that the prime object of his affections was the country that he loved and hated". (Bushrui and Prentki 21). Yeats, in fact, as Hande Seber argues in her article in this book, sought the source and definition of Irishness in the distant past and tried to recover it through the myths and legends of Ireland. Yeats argued that "Of the many things the past bequeaths to the future, the greatest are great legends; they are the mothers of nations. I hold it the duty of every Irish

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reader to study those of his own country till they are as familiar as his own hands, for in them is the Celtic heart.” (Flanagan 46) This obvious concern of Yeats to recreate the “past values for the present’s concern” (O’Neill 95) displays itself also in his tendency to engage in identity building for Ireland through citing and inscribing names in his poems. In “To Ireland in the Coming Times”, the poet reassures the reader that “I cast my heart into my rhymes/That you, in the dim coming times,/ May know how my heart went with them...” (Yeats, *Collected* 46) and he contends that “I hunger to rebuild them anew” in “The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart” (Yeats, *Collected* 52). Although his nationalist politics provokes criticism, particularly significant in this context is Yeats’s recognition of his poetry as a product of his own beliefs and convictions about what he considers to be constituent of the Irish past and Irishness. Indeed, Yeats considers his poetry as a useful means of national construction and speaks of its role in creating an Ireland to last forever (Kiberd 100). In the *Responsibilities*, Yeats suggests that his childless existence can be tolerated for the failure of the speaker to contribute to biological increase and continuity is compensated by poetry’s power to “prove your blood and mine”:

Pardon that for a barren passion’s sake,
Although I have come close on forty-nine
I have no child, I have nothing but a book,
Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.
(Yeats, *Collected* 101)

Yeats frequently intimates that poets “engage in a kind of labour that performs a vitally important role. They make sense of experience” (O’Neill 13). I would suggest that a significant part of Yeats’s labour is to write a poetry of names and speak to us of an Irish history he constructs through the people that he names in his poems. Yeats keeps the communication between the past and the present alive by constructing in his poems a world populated simultaneously by the living and the dead. Naming evokes people who either died

recently while attempting to establish their own form of Irishness as in “Easter, 1916” or long ago as in “September 1913” as well as people he considers as part of Irish history as in “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” as well as in poems like “To a Shade” addressed to Parnell, and “Municipal Gallery Revisited.” Naming is Yeats’s method of constructing a national past/a history that he as an Irish man and poet both witnessed happening and wanted to continue through his poetry. It is in this context that the first line of “Municipal Gallery Revisited” significantly reads “Around me the images of thirty years” before it provides a list of names which provides a significant insight into the culture and history of Ireland. The poem acknowledges the continuity in change symbolized by the names cited in it: “ ‘This is not’ I say/ ‘The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland/ The poets have imagined, terrible and gay”. It is suggested that, in these portraits, it is possible to trace “Ireland’s history” (Yeats, *Collected* 326). As argued by Jeffares (178) much of Yeats’s poetry is occasioned by his own life and is concerned with people in his life. Accordingly, he records the names of the people who played a significant role in the formation of a new Ireland. It is instructive that this endeavour invites a recognition of the people thus named and their stories as familiar to the reader. In a way, in Yeats’s poetry, the names come to represent and define the national past in so far as it is redefined and re-formed through them. Moreover, naming people and listing figures seem to be a way of connecting art and life. Yeats stated that “the arts have always lost something of their sap when they have been cut off from the people as a whole” (qtd in Ward 150). Although the defeating refrain in “September 1913” reiterates the idea that once dead, people are gone and forgotten, it is an interest in reviving the dead that inspires much of Yeats’s poems of names. Yeats never lets the dead be; on the contrary, his poetry functions as a site where the dead inspire and contribute to the living in the sense that the names and their stories represent the public memory. “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” emphasizes naming as its *modus operandi* as it brings together in the same company the living and the dead. It is clear that the friends the speaker names are part of a shared experience that is re-experienced through evoking

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their names. The poem opens with the statement that the presence of the absent friends is an effect of naming them:

I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us
Beside a fire of turf in the ancient tower
And having talked to some late hour
Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed
Discoverers of forgotten truth
Or mere companions of my youth,
All, all are in my thoughts to-night, being dead.
(Yeats, *Collected* 132)

As it suggestively introduces a context of presence through death, the poem considers the dead among the living and thus redefines “being dead” as “friends that cannot sup with us”. Moreover, naming Major Gregory as one of the figures of national history, the poem endorses a continuity guaranteed in the existence of those figures “in my thoughts...being dead.” Within this frame, the poem reconstructs “the death of Robert Gregory” as the “death of the young hero” and compares Robert Gregory to the other national heroes named in the poem. As stated, “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory” as a poem of names makes the explicit comparison of Robert Gregory with the great figures of Irish national past a central concern. As Robert Gregory is revived as a scholar he is positively compared to Lionel Johnson. Like Lionel Johnson, he was a scholar. Like John Synge, who “dying chose the living world for text”, Robert Gregory is depicted as a man who preferred a life outlook similar to Synge’s. Moreover, like George Pollexfen, he was “a peerles horseman”. Yeats’s comparisons give a sense of seriality, a continuity achieved despite the reality of death and its destructive power. It appears that as a consequence to naming these figures as people present in the thoughts of the poet, a customary behaviour of the living is revived and the interaction between the generations is emphasised with particular stress on their being dead. Thus, the companionship developed in death is necessarily based on

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an intergenerational relationship. Dying of a young hero adds to the increase and requires proper welcome:

Always we'd have the new friend meet the old,
And we are hurt if either friend seem cold,
And there is salt to lengthen out the smart
In the affections of our heart,
And quarrels are blown up upon that head;
But not a friend that I would bring
This night can set us quarrelling,
For all that come into my mind are dead.
(Yeats, *Collected* 132)

Similarly, in "September 1913", the speaker conceives death in terms of its inscription in poetry the names that constituted Irish history. "September 1913" expresses, on the one hand, a profound discontent with the present Irish politics in its reiteration of the death of "romantic Ireland" (Yeats, *Collected* 107). In fact, "September 1913" is one of the Lane poems which give voice to Yeats's disappointment caused by the frustration of his objectives with regard to Irish art. This poem is a powerful example of Yeats's recognition of Ireland's failure to live up to the standards of the heroic past as a proposed bequest of an art collection comes to be embroiled in and failed by the oppositional contemporary politics. O'Neill states "it was a feature of Yeats' literary career that he was frequently embroiled in controversy concerning Irish literary politics" and that such disputes often focus on divergences between Yeats and others about forms a new Ireland should take (10-11). The historical circumstances that created the controversy thus inscribed as part of Irish history are that Lady Gregory's nephew Hugh Lane proposed a bequest of his collection of Impressionist paintings to Dublin on the condition that the city had a suitable gallery built for them. Lane wanted the gallery to be built by Lutyens, an Englishman, and Yeats supported the idea but it was objected to by some people of influence like William Murphy, a

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leader of Catholic Ireland (Unterecker 117-118). With political views oppositional to Murphy's, Yeats considered the rejection of the bequest as a betrayal of the heroic national past of Ireland. Similar to Yeats's later *Tower* poems "Nineteen Hundred Nineteen" and "In Time of Civil War", "September 1913", records this period of Ireland in the process of its self formation. The poem names Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone and O'Leary, and underlines the significance of these names in the construction of Ireland and Irishness. For the speaker, the names mentioned are somewhat betrayed and devalued as a result of the attitudes of the living towards their contribution:

Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,
All that delirium of the brave;
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone
It's with O'Leary in the grave.

(Yeats *Collected* 107)

However, it must be noted that the resignation observed in this poem with regard to Ireland's people is less than characteristic. Yeats's protest in this poem certainly is a reminder of the value he invests in the people he associates with identity building. Each of his names represents a certain chapter of the Irish history and Irish identity. Of the names included in "September 1913", each represents a rebellion or an uprising against the English and each of these suffered consequently. Wolfe Ton was captured while Lord Edward Fitzgerald died of wounds in the uprising of May 1798. Similarly, Robert Emmet was executed as a result of a brief rebellion in 1803. The repeated name O'Leary, on the other hand, comes to symbolise the heroism and sacrifice that define Ireland and Irishness as Yeats would define it.

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In this context, "Easter, 1916" is an important poem of names, too. It involves commemoration, lament and criticism written on the Irish nationalist uprising against the English in 1916. The poem concerns again a particularly troubled period in the history of Ireland's nation building. It records a failed attempt at rising against the British rule in the aftermath of the beginning of the First World War. The uprising was planned by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). However, there were efforts to cancel the rebellion because it was realized that Britain knew about the preparations but the cancellation was not communicated in time. During the uprising, the rebels occupied the General Post Office in Dublin as well as several other important places throughout Dublin. At the end of a week of fighting the rebels surrendered on April 29 1916. The names Yeats inscribes in his poem are the leaders who were caught and then executed for their part in the rebellion. The rebellion was not supported by the majority of the Irish but the execution of the rebels caused a negative attitude towards Britain and the public came to view the rebels as martyrs and heroes. In this sense, "Easter, 1916" is emphatically a poem of change and reconstruction as it recognises and inscribes the Irish nationalist politics through naming the major figures involved in a national political dream the Irish rebels tried to realise. Moreover, "Easter, 1916" is an important poem of names as it represents the particular roles played by the named individuals in the construction of national identity. The poem defines the fighters through poetry as present "now and in time to be" and it thus connects the act of repeating the names of the Irish nationalists with the production of a sense of Irishness. Moreover, in the poem the creative and nourishing role of a mother is evoked. By introducing a list of the names thus murmured through poetry as representative figures of Irishness, "Easter, 1916" also suggests that the names and the Irishness they represent are part of a continuum characterised by change and continuity. It is in this poem that Yeats states the function of poetry, "our part",

To murmur name upon name.
As a mother names her child

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When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild.
(Yeats, *Collected* 182)

and emphasizes his particular function as a poet in creating a national history through names:

I write it out in a verse
McDonagh and McPrice,
Donnely and Pearse
Now and in time to be
Wherever is green worn
Are changed and changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born. (Yeats, *Collected* 182)

Not all the names Yeats inscribes in this poem as constituting the change necessary for national growth are those Yeats would approve of (Lloyd 193). However, the poem inscribes the disapproval but also the necessary recognition accorded to the people named in the poem for their part in sustaining the continuity. The poem, for instance, singles out MacBride as a figure of dissent but then consents to his inclusion among the names: “Yet I number him in the song/He too has resigned his part” (Yeats, *Collected* 182). Yeats considers these figures as part of Irish history and nation. Accordingly, he positions himself as a national bard with his “song” and presents the details not of the rising per se but those involved in it (Kiberd 213). As in “Statues” , Yeats’s aim is to equate the names he cites with the national forefathers of the Irish and the myths and legends they have generated. The “Statues” reads:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the post Office? What
intellect,

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What calculation, number, measurement,
replied?

We Irish, born into that ancient sect

But thrown upon this filthy modern tide

And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,

Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace

The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

(Yeats, *Collected* 344)

“Easter 1916” envisages such a unity and cohesion for the thorough change and the birth that ensues thereafter. Yeats notes this wholesale change in his comments on the Uprising: “we have lost the ablest and the most fine natured of our young men...A world seems to have been swept away”(Letters 614). The poem registers the transformation from anonymity to naming as part of the national transformation. It does not first give individual names, but refers to the fighters as “that woman, or this man”.

Each name pronounced represents a particular aspect of this transformation as all those cited were executed. The poem’s “this man”, for instance, refers to Patrick Henry Pearse. He was a supreme council member of the IRB. He helped to plan the Easter Rising and surrendered to the British on April 29, 1916 and was arrested. He was executed by a firing squad. Pearse was also a teacher, poet, and writer. MacDonagh worked with Pearse at his school, and was the assistant headmaster and teacher. He was a poet and playwright, too. He was also a leader in the Easter Rising although he did not get into action. He surrendered on April 30 and was arrested. He was executed by firing squad on May 3. Among the names named by Yeats we also have Major John MacBride. He was the husband of Maud Gonne, who was the woman that Yeats had been madly in love with for many years. He was involved in the Easter Rising, but he was not a member of the Irish Volunteers. He did not plan to get involved either, but got involved and offered to help the rebels. He was executed on May 5. He stood before the firing squad, but he refused to be blindfolded. It is evident that

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Yeats's approach to this sacrifice is not one of endorsement but he is well aware that the names involved in the uprising make a national truth prevail through their death. As Perloff argues

In 'Easter, 1916', the trick is to immortalize the rebels, not as heroes in the abstract, but as agents of *change*—change by no means all positive, but dramatic in the mere fact of its taking place. And drama is the key word here, for Yeats presented his characters as actors playing out a script largely beyond their control, actors caught up in a street theatre in which their individual identities are subordinated to a larger communal drive, Easter itself symbolizing the power and possibility of wholesale renewal. (232)

It must be noted that, Yeats, indeed, is a poet of conflicting affirmations. Concerned with his poetry's role in the construction of Ireland, he clearly evokes the nationalist poetry of the past, and the poets Davis, Mangan, Ferguson and includes himself in their company in an attempt to become a member of that tradition (Flanagan 44). This is an instance of affirmation. His conviction that Ireland will continue to flourish is endorsed in the refrain to "Easter, 1916": "A terrible beauty is born". If this beauty is Ireland, it is borne upon the names Yeats names in his poetry. In an important letter to Lady Gregory, Yeats wrote:

If the English conservative party had made a declaration that they did not intend to rescind the Home Rule Bill there would have been no rebellion. *I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me*—and I am very despondent about the future. At this moment I feel that all the work of years has been overturned, all the bringing together of classes, all the freeing of

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Irish literature & criticism from politics . . .
(Yeats, *Letters* 613)

The poem's controversial question, too, "O when may it suffice?", and especially 'Was it needless death after all?' are suggestive in that for Yeats death was never quite needless, not unequivocally anyway. As Ward suggests, Yeats's poetry is not formed of reconciliations of tensions (144). Yeats's advice to his fellow poets is "Cast your mind on other days/That we in coming days may be/Still the indomitable Irishry." ("Under Bulben" *Collected* 333) This invitation to continue the present through reconnection with the past is also observed in lines "We know their dream; enough/To know they dreamed and are dead; ("Easter, 1916" *Collected* 182) Pearse contented that though the rebels lost the actual fight against the English, "they would win it in death". As a nationalist Irish hero, Pearse stated:

Life springs from death and from the graves of
patriotic men and women spring living waters...
The fools, the fools, the fools, they have left us
our Fenian dead and while Ireland holds these
graves Ireland unfree shall never be at peace.
(qtd in Kearney 168)

MacDonagh defended the Proclamation in similar terms: "You think it a dead and buried letter but it lives, it lives, from minds alight with Ireland's intellect it sprang, in hearts aflame with Ireland's mighty love it was conceived. Such documents do not die" (qtd in Kearney 167). Yeats in "All Souls Night", suggests such transformation into a higher significance where

...names are nothing. What matter who it be,
So that his elements have grown so fine
The fume of mascatel
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy
No living man can drink from the whole wine.

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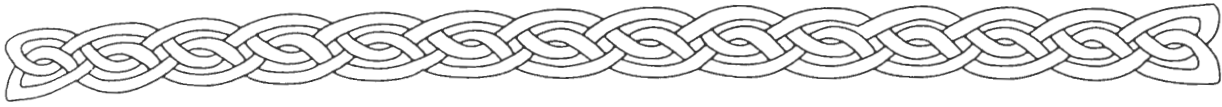
I have mummy truths to tell
Whereat the living mock
Though not for sober ear
For maybe all that hear
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock.
(Yeats, *Collected* 231)

I would suggest in conclusion that it is necessary to recognize naming names as a characteristic strategy in Yeats's poetry. Naming clearly has strong ideological implications which Yeats does not attempt to play down. Naming indeed, to a great extent, is how Yeats writes about Ireland and Irishness. As we have seen, his poetry abounds in references to names. Among some common phrases are "... names are nothing," ("All Souls Night"), "I will name those.." (In Memory of Major Robert Gregory), "Our part is to murmur names upon names" ("Easter 1916") which identify his part in the national history of Ireland as inscribing the names of national significance in the history of the nation. In other words, it seems important for Yeats that his names signify a strong sense of the past for the creation of a reliable future. He seems to subscribe to the view that the national identity of Ireland needs to be constructed in conjunction with its past and its representative figures. Thus, to a great extent, Yeats uses the names he cites in his poems as means of identity construction and speaks to the present and the future through the dead. Naming thus is an attempt to fight the erosive effects of the conflict with England while at the same time it is related to his interest in constructing an Irishness created by the unique names he identifies with a uniquely Irish past.

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5

In Between Two Worlds: The Call of Fairyland in Yeats's Early Poetry

Hande Seber

Yeats in his essay "The Celtic Element in Literature" states that in the past, people, the poets in particular, looked at nature with a more imaginative eye, and used it as the source of inspiration to explain their feelings and experiences (174-175). They were able to capture the beauty and magic of nature in their songs and stories (176). These people according to Yeats, "had imaginative passions because they did not live within our own strait limits" (178). Talking about the characters in Celtic folk tales who in fairyland and in the woods experienced mysteries, timelessness and long life, he believes that by entering into the woods metaphorically "one will find there all that one is seeking" (179). Therefore, Yeats's early poems that are based on the characters from Celtic mythology and the ones about the desire to enter in/or to avoid fairyland illustrate one's continuous search for wisdom, happiness, love, fulfilment, or simply the desire to perceive the unknown which would compensate for what one has lost.

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However, more significantly, these ancient characters, many of whom experienced sorrow “are indeed but the images of the primitive imagination mirrored in the looking-glass of the modern and classic imagination” for Yeats (182). “The myths and legends of ancient Ireland, the stories of Cuchulain, Deirdre, Diarmuid and Grania,” as Macrae states “operate, according to Yeats, like Jungian archetypes and they demonstrate patterns of conduct and imagination which lie behind our individual lives and minds” (54). Sorrow, pain, old age, but above all melancholy that these characters experienced are not at all different from what “most people” experience (183-184). Yeats further argues that “literature dwindles to a mere chronicle of circumstance, or passionless fantasies, and passionless meditations, unless it is constantly flooded with passions and beliefs of ancient times” (185). That is, he finds in the Celtic myths the “fountain” of imagination (187), and he states that “while the Irish legends move among the known woods and seas, and have so much of a new beauty that they may well give the opening century its most memorable symbols” (187).

These “memorable symbols” will be studied in Yeats’s early poetry, particularly in the poems where the characters and elements from Celtic mythology appear, mirroring the melancholy, sadness and yearning that one could experience in life, and at the same time projecting visions of fairyland and real world at times the borders in between them are blurred – the melancholy, shared by these ageless characters and the poet himself. Therefore, Yeats’s collections *Crossways* (1889), *The Rose* (1893), and significantly *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) will be the main concern of this study. In most of the poems in these collections, by depicting two opposing realms; people who are faced with two choices or simply who are on the verge of making a decision that would shape the future of their lives; people who are reluctant to face the realities of life or brave enough to face it, Yeats sings the songs of both the “happy” and the “sad” shepherds as he indicates in the first two poems of *Crossways*. He sings of “earth’s dreamy youth,” the things that passed away—like the stories of the

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ancient times ("The Song of the happy Shepherd" 54), and talks of sorrow and "piteous story" ("The Sad Shepherd" 9) of what is indeed life, with its contradictory sides, against a background coloured by characters and realms from Celtic mythology.

In using these myths, Ellmann believes that Yeats concentrated mainly on their significance, as he "[b]y uncovering these he could make the myth apply to his own time as well as the past, for the basic wisdom of the race which it contained must be for ever applicable" (17). Referring to Yeats's own words that one should use these myths "for new methods of expressing ourselves" (qtd in Ellmann 17-18), Ellmann states that

the artist was to conceive of himself as a representative figure, to identify himself with all men, or with Ireland, or with some traditional personage. In this way the correspondences of old legends with modern life could be established, and so, as Yeats proposed, a dead mythology might be changed to a living one. (18)

In the process of turning these long forgotten or ignored tales into living ones, Yeats gives new identities to these ancient Celtic characters. Other than with their heroic accomplishments, they are represented as individuals who experience conflicts, go in between joy and frustration, yearning and fear. The characters, their deeds, accomplishments and experiences, the realms that they belonged to or travelled are represented as universal symbols in Yeats's early poetry. Accordingly, the themes of immortality, melancholy, yearning, complaint, escape/inability to escape, the destructive nature of love, the desire to turn sorrow into a poetic expression can be clearly observed in most of these poems. Unterecker, with reference to *The Wind Among the Reeds*, thinks that Yeats is more a dramatist than a poet in this collection and was able to see "his own character as a compound or warring personalities" and has given a voice and

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identity to each “his several selves” and “[u]sing his feeling of multiple personality, he created poems” (87-88).

Yeats’s concern in reviving these old tales, and making them the subject matter of his poetry constitutes the main theme of the first and the last poems of Yeats’s collection *The Rose* (1893); “To The Rose Upon the Rood of Time” and “To Ireland in the Coming Times.” However, “To The Rose Upon the Rood of Time” is marked by the hesitant state of the poet in determining the subject matter of his poetry. In a state of being in between past and present, magic and reality, the speaker is able to decide, after a long period of hesitation, to sing of the ancient days

Addressing the “*Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all [his] days*” the speaker says that he will sing the “*ancient ways*” of Cuchulain, the Druid and Fergus and their “*untold*” stories (1-5). The speaker wants to “*learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know*” (21). Despite such determination, he experiences a moment of hesitation, for he seems to wonder whether he could cope with his subject matter. He calls the rose to “*Come near, come near, come near*” but then says “*Ah! Leave me still*” (13). Smith relates the poet’s “inconsistent” attitude towards the rose with the multiple symbolic meanings attributed to it stating that “it symbolizes at once the reward of suffering and the pain of that suffering, the quest and the object of the quest” (178). Among its other significances, rose is a personification that stands for Ireland (Jordan 28). The poet’s hesitation changes into an assertion in the closing lines of the poem. He will make the ancient Ireland the subject matter of his poetry:

. . . *I would, before my time to go,
Sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.
(22-24)*

Getting involved with the past of Ireland, and making it the subject matter of poetry constitutes the main theme of “To Ireland

in the Coming Times.” According to O’Neill, “[a]mong Yeats’s most significant poetic apologies, the poem serve as a retort to dismissals of his first volumes as escapist in mood and lost in the mists of a Celtic twilight” (101). Yeats gives an account of how he is going to employ these myths and characters. As a poet, he states his intention to sing the ancient history of Ireland, even before “*the angelic clan*” (8). He “*journeys on*” with “*the elemental creatures*” (23-29), and he would see the “*faeries, dancing under the moon*” and hear “*a Druid tune*” (31-32). He wants to combine the ancient history of Ireland with his own life which is only as short as “*the winking of an eye*” (36) – the love he lived, the dream he saw. He would unite this magical past with what he experienced:

*I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart went with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem. (45-48)*

In the process of Yeats’s casting his heart into rhymes in his early poetry, among the elements derived from the mythical past of Ireland, a yearning for fairyland or getting involved with a realm far away from the real world inhabited by the legendary Irish characters, and blending these elements of the ancient stories of Ireland with his own feelings are commonly employed. Macrae refers to a letter that Yeats had written to Katharine Tynan in 1888:

I have noticed some things about my poetry I did not know before... it is almost all a flight into fairyland from the real world, and a summons to that flight It is not the poetry of insight and knowledge, but of longing and complaint – the cry of the heart against necessity. (qtd in Macrae 56)

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Such a flight provides the poet with an escape from the sorrow and limitations of the real world. Despite all its fascination and beauty, Yeats's approach to fairyland is not always one that is marked by yearning and desire. There is also fear along with the feeling of regret in entering into this unknown realm. Such conflicting feelings are also reflected in the representation of fairyland, as it is both depicted with its beauty, bliss and brightness, and with its darkness, horror and inevitability. Moreover, it at times becomes a place where one can face with his hidden desires and fears, or a place to escape from them all by leaving behind the real world.

"What is most important in the poetry of W.B. Yeats is not where or what fairyland is, but how he responds to its allure" says Smith (13). However, despite all its allure, mainly ambivalence is what characterizes his attitude towards fairyland (Smith 224; Heininge 102, 109; Unterecker 73). This ambivalence leads the reader to a discovery of various possibilities to cope with the real world with all its sorrow and joy, at the same time leaving some space for hope and dreams – or in Yeats's words, for the things that one's heart cries for.

Still, the imaginary voyages to this realm, the supernatural events that are experienced, and the words uttered by the legendary characters are not far removed from reality. The traces of the real world along with ordinary concerns of people are in the core of these poems. As Good suggests "[t]hese legends and tales present an extension of reality rather than a mere reflection," and with the landscapes used in them "Yeats suggests that place may be a way of opening a door into another world, that landscape is in fact visionary" (7). Fairyland, the call of fairyland or an unknown realm, yearning for a quest for the unknown with an aim of consolation, fulfilment, escape are among the major themes in most of the poems in his early collections. Smith argues that Yeats's handling of these folkloric elements are "intensely personal," and talking about the importance Yeats gives to fairies, he states that Yeats "has thought so much about the fairies that his dialogue with them has become almost synonymous with his inner life" (19). The biographical elements from his own life, his search for

inspiration as a poet along with a heartfelt longing to enter into a realm of imagination, his encounter with what is supernatural yet natural, and the highly suggestive symbols he employs characterize these poems.

In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats describes the land of fairies, and his desire to capture its beauty:

In the dim kingdom there is a great abundance of all excellent things. There is more love there than upon the earth; there is more dancing there than upon the earth; and there is more treasure there than upon the earth. In the beginning the earth was perhaps made to fulfil the desire of man, but now it has got old and fallen into decay. What wonder if we try and pilfer the treasures of that other kingdom! (137)

However, this pilfering the treasures is a hard task – for fascination and fear exist side by side for fairyland.

Yeats's early poems about fairyland, the land of the Sidhe, offer different pictures of this unknown realm, along with the different attitudes and the experiences of the speakers. One tendency is that of yearning, which will end up in frustration. The other is a more neutral attitude in which the two worlds – the real and the ideal – are presented as side by side, making the differences between them as much visible. Despite all its fascination and beauty, it is acknowledged that when one enters into the land of fairies he/she has to say farewell to the real world, and should be cautious of its dangerous or fatal consequences. On the contrary, it is also depicted as a desirable place to escape into, where one can find all that can be hardly attained in the real world. Heininge believes that “[b]y refusing to create a black-and-white relationship between the Sidhe and the world, Yeats forces us to interrogate our own conflicted ideas about life, death, and the possibility of an afterlife” (116).

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The destructive consequences of too much yearning for fairyland and its secret wisdom is illustrated in “The Madness of King Goll,” “Fergus and the Druid” and “The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland.” The insufficiency of such wisdom is represented in all these poems, but more poignantly in “Cuchulain’s Fight With the Sea.” Smith believes that “[f]airyland for Yeats represents an escape from the fallen world, but the escape itself is difficult and of questionable desirability. The price of escape is complete alienation from the quotidian world” (19), and these poems all illustrate such alienation and disillusionment.

In “The Madness of King Goll,” the speaker of the poem is lured to another realm by the unceasing flutter of the beech leaves. In his own world, Goll was strong, heroic, his “word was law” (2), and he had many loyal men. However, in hearing this mysterious call, in his spirit he feels “A whirling and a wandering fire” (29) and begins wandering in the woods. Finding an “old tympan” which was deserted, he tries to play it (55). Neither song, nor music, but only a mournful cry comes from it (58-59). The poem best illustrates the state of being in between the two worlds and its inevitable result of alienation. Having once experienced disillusionment, Goll belongs neither to fairyland nor to the real world. His search is unfulfilled, fruitless, and leads him to more despair. He also appears as a frustrated poet, whose search for inspiration fails. Yeats suggested in “The Celtic Element in Literature” that woods of fairyland are the places where one can find what he is seeking. However, it is ironic to see that Goll, who left behind worldly power, only hears “inhuman misery” (58) and mourning in the woods – other than peace. Each stanza ends with the same refrain, repeated six times: “*They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech leaves old.*” This repetition according to Bloom has “uncanny force,” and “the fluttering of the leaves is itself a kind of natural supernaturalism, a force that Goll vainly sought to master, first through kingship and than through poetry” (110).

“Fergus and the Druid” is a poem about a similar search for wisdom, and like Goll, Fergus ends up with frustration and a sense of defeat. The poem makes the point clear that even wisdom cannot

give an end to human plight, and too much knowledge and contact with the unknown realm brings bitter wisdom. The poem is a dialogue between Fergus and the Druid. To Fergus's amazement, the Druid keeps changing his shape all through the day and he ends up in human form, as an old, thin man. As a man in sorrow and despair Fergus no longer wants to be the king, but learn "the dreaming wisdom" of the Druid (22). However, with this experience "he may find himself more truly and more strange" (Bloom 110).

The Druid asks him three times "What would you" addressing him twice as "king of the proud Red Branch kings" and once with his name "Fergus." He warns him about the dire consequences of attaining wisdom, and states that he is an old lonely man whose hands cannot "lift the sword," and who is neither loved by any women nor any men asked for his help (23-26). Fergus fails in understanding the warnings of the Druid, because he is so tired with worldly things that he only yearns for an escape – from his crown, the sorrow that it brought to him (13-14), and from the pride of being a king (16). For Fergus "A king is but a foolish labourer / Who wastes his blood to be another's dream" (27-28). What he wants is to have his own dream, and hence, the Druid offers him a "bag of dreams" (29). When the dreams "wrap [him] round," he sees his own life "go drifting like a river," he changes into many things in nature, attaining no great thing but realizing the presence of sorrow in all things (30-38). Stating that the poem "shows the limitations of wisdom," Smith argues that wisdom "is unattainable; or, if it can be attained, it is unbearable" (191).

A more painful and bitter recognition of the meaninglessness of existence and the insufficiency of the wisdom of the Druids constitute the subject matter of "Cuchulain's Fight With the Sea." The wisdom that Fergus and Goll were after fails in preventing the fate that awaits Cuchulain. He "is also forced to recognize a meaningless universe" (Smith 202). Learning that Cuchulain is with a young "sweet throated maid" (15), and having been blinded with jealousy, his wife Emer sends their son, the young Cuchulain, for revenge making him take the oath to reveal his name only "[a]t the sword-point" (54). As Cuchulain has

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taken the same oath, in “the war rage” (65) he fatally hurts his own son, learning his name at the moment when he is to give him the final stroke. To prevent the destructive consequences of Cuchulain’s madness, King Conchubar first sends him the maid. Seeing that it is all in vain, he then sends him the Druids to “Chaunt in his ear delusions magical” (80). Smith suggests that “the wisest response to a meaningless universe is only delusion” (202). In spite of all the efforts of the Druids who “chaunted for three days” (83), Cuchulain ends up in madness, fighting with the “invulnerable tide,” he in the end dies (85-88). The magic and enchantment cannot prevent his tragic waste, and there is no compensation for what he has done.

“The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland” is the poem “that best conveys the doom of alienation” (Smith 198). As the title indicates, the man only dreams of fairyland, but even a dream is enough to bring his downfall. While the speaker of the poem is busy with ordinary things, he begins to dream of fairyland, and then he wanders all discontent until the day he dies. The call of fairyland is presented as disastrous; not only a physical contact, but also too much yearning for the unknown and at times too much dreaming can lead one to a realization of the meaninglessness of existence. Bloom sees “a lament of Experience” in the poem (115). However, this experience does not bring happiness but waste, not only in this life but even in death. Death, which is supposed to be an “unhaunted sleep” (38) giving an end to all worldly pain brings no ease to him as he “has found no comfort in the grave” (48).

The “inadequacy of the world” (Smith 223), leads Goll, Fergus and the man who dreamed of fairyland to a fruitless search which leads them not only to face with the meaninglessness of existence but also with a sense of loss as they then belong to neither of the worlds. Regardless of the danger and frustration that the fairyland brings along, its difference from the real world and the seemingly neutral attitude in its representation is apparent in “The Stolen Child” and “The Unappeasable Host.” The two worlds are presented as side by side with all their fascination and horror. In referring to such instances of duality, particularly in “The Unappeasable Host,” Heininge thinks

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that “these poems show not only us the Yeats’s ambivalence about the Sidhe, but also about this world” (115). One has to be cautious, as these poems seem to offer two choices yet at the same time acknowledging that once the decision is taken, there is no return. In this sense, these poems illustrate the state of being in between these two worlds, and facing with all that is unknown.

In “The Stolen Child” the call of the fairyland is presented as an escape from the pain of the real world, from the pain and the trouble that is far beyond the perception of the human child. It is such a world that even dreams and sleep do not give peace to people. “The solemn eyed” human child through the end of the poem enters into fairyland leaving the world behind. In the poem, fairyland becomes synonymous with death and escape. The call of fairyland is repeated three times in the poem until the child enters into it:

*Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world’s more full of weeping than you can
understand.*
(9-12; 24-27; 38-41)

Even though there is said to be “weeping” in this world it is not at all bitter, because in the poem there are “images of domestic bliss” (Smith 184), ordinary and familiar details from daily life. While Fergus and Goll made a wilful choice in leaving the real world, the child is confronted with a dreadful end which he cannot avoid. The title, in this respect, is also significant as the child is “stolen” from real life, not simply called. Unterecker thinks that, the child “in accepting the freedom from weeping that the fairies of the magic island promise, learns that he will also be freed from human peace and human joy. Though immortality is much to be desired, an unemotional, trivial,

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inhuman immortality attained at the price of feeling itself may be a poor bargain" (73).

"The Unappeasable Host" is also marked by a striking contrast between the two worlds. While the Danaan children are laughing in their cradles, a human child is wailing and the mother pressing it to her breast, trying to soothe, but "the narrow graves" (16) are calling them. However, the innocent laughter of the Danaan children, according to Smith "begins to acquire sinister connotations" when in the third line it is stated that "they will ride the North, when the ger-eagle flies," as the bird on which they will ride is one of "ill omen" (225). All through the poem the "desolate winds" are said to be blowing, shaking the hearts of humans, making its presence felt among them. In the poem, if it is the same fairyland in "The Stolen Child," it appears to be a place that is not desirable, and that the mother and the child are reluctant to enter in. In this respect, the call represents an inevitable doom that is associated with death. However, there is also a great contrast between the two worlds; for the Danaan children, fairyland is a place for laughter and joy, a "comelier" place whereas death sooner or later is what awaits the mortals.

The poems that are so far discussed present a dark and mysterious picture of fairyland, which is also a realm different from the one that is inhabited by human beings. Nonetheless, the fascination with what is unattainable, remote or different paves the way to another picture of fairyland where its beauty becomes more visible. In *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats states that worldly feelings and emotions make people tired and weary; contrary to this he thinks that:

If we could love and hate with as good heart as
the fairies do, we might grow to be long-lived like
them. But until that day their untiring joys and
sorrows must ever be one-half of their fascination.
(122)

Therefore, “The White Birds,” “The Hosting of the Sidhe” and “The Everlasting Voices” illustrate the poet’s attempt to capture such joy of “the untiring ones” (122). In these poems, fairyland is depicted as a beautiful place the call of which should be answered. With “Into the Twilight,” “The Song of Wandering Aengus” and “Who Goes with Fergus” the door of fairyland opens for the ones who are ready to enter in.

“The White Birds” is about “an impatience with all natural limitation” (Bloom 113). The speaker wishes him and his beloved turn into “white birds on the foam of the sea” (1). This poem is not about a call, but about a strong desire to attain happiness in a remote land, by turning into another being that is related to fairyland. It is thought to be a place where time, sorrow and fret could no longer hurt – a place away from the weariness. A similar desire for escape constitutes the main theme of “The Hosting of the Sidhe” which is both the opening poem of the *The Celtic Twilight* and also of *The Wind Among the Reeds*. The poem is about the call of fairyland, however, what one will face with is not clearly indicated. It is the call of the legendary figures and fairies. It gives a chance of escape for the speaker, an escape from the miseries of the world to greater hopes and deeds that fairyland promise (14). Similar to the speaker’s desire to turn into the white birds of fairyland, to be a participant to its joys, the call in the poem is to join to those legendary figures like Caoilte and Niamh, to share the beauty of the realm that they live in. This call is indeed symbolic as it suggests a new beginning, because one should enter there by renouncing heart’s “mortal dream” (5).

When read immediately after “The Hosting of the Sidhe,” “The Everlasting Voices” is a reply to this call or at the same time an attempt to avoid this call. The speaker wants the “sweet everlasting Voices, be still” (1), because unlike the fast pace of the wind that stands for the fairy host in the previous poem, human beings are characterized as weary with their hearts as old. Therefore, he feels that he might not be able to cope with the call of the fairies and legendary figures. According to Smith, it is “a more melancholy poem” than the former

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one (220) because “Yeats bids the Everlasting Voices be still because he fears that he cannot answer their call” (220).

However, a sudden shift in attitude towards fairyland is observed in “Into the Twilight.” In the poem, the fairyland/otherworld becomes a desirable place when one experiences the weariness of this world and there is “unambivalent acceptance of fairyland” (Smith 227). The speaker, who is tired and grows old with weariness and love, yearns for fairyland. The contrast between these two worlds, mortality and immortality, is again evident. Having experienced the passing of time, the speaker with his worn out, laughing and sighing heart (1-4) knows that fairyland is a place where there is not old age: “Your Mother Eire is always young / Dew ever shining and twilight grey” (5-6).

A similar weariness and longing is further illustrated in “The Song of Wandering Aengus.” Aengus enters into the hazel wood, a place of “enchantment and metamorphoses” (O’Neill 106). He makes a fishing rod from a hazel wand and he catches “a little silver trout.” When he turns back to blow the fire he hears that someone is calling him by name:

It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air. (13-16)

Although he says that he is “old with wandering” (17), he is determined to find the girl, and then to “kiss her lips and take her hands” (20). He is called to the forest of apple trees and there he will pluck “The silver apples of the moon, / The golden apples of the sun” (23-24) which suggests a sense of immortality or “untiring joy” that is associated with fairyland. This poem presents a different fairyland from the one in “The Stolen Child” and “The Unappeasable Host.” It is a beautiful and dreamlike place, it is not “the fairyland of unfulfilled desire” but

“the fairyland of fulfilment,” it is “a world without dichotomies, a world of Truth, where fact and imagination are one” (Smith 229).

Unlike the vacillation observed in most of the poems so far discussed, there is a strong desire for life despite all its pain in “Who Goes with Fergus.” Fergus of the poem is not the frustrated, disillusioned, weary man of “Fergus and the Druid.” The poem encourages ones who are brave enough to live with all its joy and sorrow, instead of brooding over the miseries of life: “And no more turn aside and brood / Upon love’s bitter mystery” (7-8). Different from the man who sank into sorrow in the previous poem, Fergus is represented as ruling – not only “brazen cars” as the king, but also the “shadows of the wood,” “the white beasts of the dim sea” and the “dishevelled wandering stars” (9-12). In the previous poem, with the bag of dreams he lived through “change to change” and turned into many things, but now he seems to overcome his sorrow and is able to “rule” all that he was once. He appears as one who has attained wisdom and mastery, and started all over again. The call in the poem, in this respect, suggests not a renunciation and disillusionment – as Goll and Fergus of the former poem experienced – but rather a union with nature, sharing its power and mystery. “Who Goes with Fergus?” poses a question the answer to which is hidden in it: one who is brave enough. Smith believes that “Fergus is no longer the ruler of the restless dissatisfaction,” and he stands for Yeats, and just like Fergus finds peace in the end, “so does Yeats find peace” (252).

Along with representing the unknown, unattainable, mysterious, beautiful and at times darkness and fear, fairyland in Yeats’s works is also used “to represent the realm of art and imagination” (Smith 178). Accordingly, King Goll, Fergus and Aengus at the same time represent the poet who is in search for poetic creativity in realms that are far away from the real world. With all its failure and fulfilment, the search of King Goll and Fergus of “Fergus and the Druid” end up with the realization of the presence of sorrow beneath all things; in the tune of the broken tympan, even in the hush of the leaves and the dreams that are supposed to bring wisdom – that is what the call of

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fairyland brings to them. On the contrary, the call that leads Aengus to the forest of apple trees, or a desire to enter into the realm where Fergus rules suggests the quest of a poet for poetic accomplishment, imagination and the sources of inspiration.

The power of imagination to make “uncomely” things beautiful and the desire to make them “anew” is the subject matter of “The Lover Tells the Rose in his Heart.” Although the poem is not directly about fairyland or a yearning for it, it is almost the same desire that leads the poet to the legendary realms to make him shape through dreams a rose in the “deeps of” his heart:

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too
(great to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green
(knoll apart,
With the earth, and the sky and the water, re-
(made, like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a
(rose in the deeps of my heart.

(5-8)

O'Neill thinks that with these lines the poem moves “towards the imagining of how the poet, though wishing to set himself ‘apart’, would create through his art a perfected vision of the real” (105).

The “inadequacy of the world,” a search for what is ideal, a desire to capture the beauty of the unattainable leads the speakers of the poems to a discovery of fairyland where they at the same time experience self discovery. The way that they enter into fairyland or respond to its call mingles with yearning, fear, hesitation, projecting different and conflicting moods that human beings are made of. Some are able to capture at least half of the happiness and joy of fairies, some end up in alienation, and despair. Still, the beauty and its mystery are always present in the poems, along with the horrors of

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the unknown. Such response to the call of fairyland is an attempt to share what Yeats aims at capturing the “imaginative passions” of these ancient figures, the passions that are not limited by the concerns of the contemporary men (“The Celtic Element in Literature” 178). Either by giving voice to the Celtic characters or at times by using his own voice, in a place that is in between the real world and fairyland, Yeats presents a number of possibilities in responding to the pains and joys of life. Going, yearning or simply dreaming of fairyland is like a quest for self discovery where one can learn about what life is and at times face with his “multiple selves.”

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6

Yeats's Gallery of Visual Images in His Later Poetry

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William Butler Yeats, the painter John Yeats's son, strived to bridge the gap between verbal and visual arts throughout his career, saying "I would have all the arts draw together [...]" (Yeats 1990:ix). The art training he received first from his father and later at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art and the Royal Hibernian Academy between 1884 and 1886 contributed to his poetic creativity. He wrote many poems on art and especially in his later poems, he employed art works as muse to inspire his poetry. The common themes in such poems are the permanence of art as opposed to the temporality of the Western world, the dichotomy between Asian and Western, specifically ancient Greek art, and a yearning to see Irish art feeding on national sources. In this paper, I will briefly comment on "Sailing to Byzantium", which appeared in *The Tower* (1928), "Byzantium" in *The Winding Stairs and Other Poems* (1933), "Lapis Lazuli" in *New Poems* (1938), "The Statues" in *Last Poems* (1938-39) to trace these themes, before I deal largely with "The Municipal Gallery Revisited", which was published in the same book with "Lapis Lazuli" to underline his concern for Irish art.

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“Sailing to Byzantium” is about the poet’s desire to go back in history to the time of Byzantine art, which represents for him a perfected symbol of the unity he strove for all his creative life. As opposed to the individuality and fragmentation of 20th century Western art, Yeats adores Byzantine art due to its collective characteristic, the anonymity of the artist, and the sense of unity. He expresses his desire to spend a month in Byzantium in his book *A Vision* (279), and contends that in this period: “The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people” (267-268). The permanence of art sets a stark contrast with the sensuality and transitoriness of life. Since, “Whatever is begotten” (6) is bound to die in Ireland, Yeats considers it to be “no country for old men” (1). Therefore, he prefers the spirituality of Byzantium characterized by the “Monuments of unageing intellect”(8). Through the allegorical journey, the poet aspires to become everlasting, like the saints in the mosaics or the golden bird on a bough, which sings to the onlookers “Of what is past, or passing, or to come”(32). For an old man, one who is like “a tattered coat upon a stick,” (10) becoming part of an art work is a form of defying the boundaries of time and space.

In “Byzantium”, Yeats uses harsher and more disturbing, “unpurged” (1) imagery, such as “[t]he Emperor’s drunken soldiery” (2) and the “night-walkers” (3), than the previous poem to criticise the distasteful characteristics of his time. Along with the earlier poem, “Byzantium” accentuates the eternity of art through the same imagery of the bird on a golden bough, and expects this “changeless metal” (22) to look down on the passions of life represented by “all complexities of mire or blood” (24). However, unlike “Sailing to Byzantium”, Yeats prefers to stay in the world of change rather than becoming an artwork, for by now Yeats has realized the importance of life for art, that “Those images that yet / Fresh images beget” (38-39). In one of his letters to his friend Edmund Dulac, he says, “I warmed myself back into life with ‘Byzantium’” (1991: 598).

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Published just before the second world war, Yeats embraces life with joy in "Lapis Lazuli" by getting inspiration from the carvings on a stone. In the first stanza, he states the common theme of his last poems that Western civilisation has come to an end and that art can no longer satisfy people; "That if nothing drastic is done," (5) the societies might be wiped out owing to the wars. Although he foresees the destruction of eternal works of art – that even Greek sculptor, Callimachus's marble statues of perfection will not stand the flux of time – he is not pessimistic, as in "Sailing to Bynzantium". He claims: "All things fall and are built again, / And those that build them again are gay" (35-36). Moreover, in his description of the stone, lapis lazuli, Yeats sees three Chinese men climbing a mountain, and imagines that even if these men are watching "the tragic scene" on earth, there is joy in "[t]heir ancient, glittering eyes" (56). Hence, the carved stone in "Lapis Lazuli" bespeaks gaiety and optimism even in turmoil. Yeats's description of an Asian art object also expresses his valorization of Asian art. In a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, he explains that what he notices on the stone forms the "eternal theme of the sensual east. The heroic cry in the midst of despair. [...] the east has its solutions always and therefore knows nothing of tragedy. It is we, not the east, that must raise the heroic cry" (qtd. in Jeffares 163-4).

"The Statues" reverses the glorification of Asian art over the West, saying that Greek art is superior to "[a]ll Asiatic vague immensities" (12). This poem repeats Yeats' admiration of ideal beauty and perfection in ancient Greek art, whose origin is based on Pythagorean theory of numbers. If Irish artists want to create prominent art objects, they should follow the characteristics of Greek art, namely intellect, calculation, number and measurement, unlike Oliver Sheppard's statue of Cuchulain in the General Post Office (25-27). Yeats considers that the Irish artists' revival of perfection in Greek art will create among people a sense of relief from the troubles of the modern world. He writes:

We, Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide

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And by its formless, spawning, fury wrecked,
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.
(28-32)

“Municipal Gallery Revisited”, which Yeats considers to be among his best (qtd. in Unterecker 274), dwells mainly on the works of Irish painters, apart from two works by the Italian painter Antonio Mancini, to elaborate on Irish national history. The gallery of modern art, also known as “Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane” was founded by Hugh Lane in 1908 to promote Irish art and is one of the first public modern art galleries of the world. As the word “revisited” in the title suggests, this is not Yeats’s first poem about the gallery. The poet wrote “To a Wealthy Man Who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery If It Were Proved the People Wanted Pictures” published in *Responsibilities* in 1914 to criticise an unnamed wealthy person who was reluctant to fund the construction of a new building that would house Hugh Lane’s collection of pictures. After the new gallery was built in 1937, a room was reserved for Hugh Lane’s pictures.

In the later poem, while Yeats talks about the 30 years of Irish history, he also gives information about his concept of art based on the revival of a nation’s past. Before writing this poem, Yeats in his speech in Irish Literature Academy on August 17, 1937 declares:

[...] I think, though I cannot yet be sure, that a good poem is forming in my head [...]. A poem about the Ireland that we have all served, and the movement of which I have been a part.

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; [...] the events of the last thirty years in fine pictures[...] 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. (qtd. in Unterecker 274)

Yeats's definition of the poem he imagines as "that great pictured song" displays the inspiration he gets from the gallery as well as his ambition to bridge the gap between the sister arts.

I will firstly make a list of the paintings Yeats describes throughout the poem sometimes by openly declaring the painter or the title of the painting, sometimes only by describing it with a phrase. Then I will try to analyze the importance of this visual experience for Yeats's poetry and his notion of art. In the first stanza, Yeats mentions a lot of paintings by Irish painters that remind the poet of various aspects of Irish history. "An ambush" (2) in the second line refers to the Irish painter, Sean Keating's *The Men of the South*, in which a group of armed IRA men with determined looks are waiting in ambush for a British military vehicle to pass¹. Through the phrase "pilgrims at the water-side" (2) in the same line, Yeats touches upon religion. This time Yeats alludes to the well-renowned Irish painter, John Lavery's *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, showing a group of pilgrims on the island in Lake Derg. "Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars, / Guarded" (3-4) refers to Lavery's *The Court of Criminal Appeal*, which depicts the Irish nationalist Roger Casement's conviction of treason by the British in 1916. In the last line of this stanza followed by the first two lines of the next, Yeats once more highlights Irish nationalism through

1 Although Arra Garab writes in his article that in this line Yeats refers to Keatings's *The Men of the West* (183), I think the painter's *The Men of the South* actually reflects a group of men in ambush.

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his description of Lavery's painting *The Blessing of the Colours*. In the painting the poet sees "A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed; / An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand / Blessing the Tricolour" (8-10). Lavery's portraits of two Irish political figures of the independence struggle, Arthur Griffith, the founder of the Sinn Fein party, and Kevin O'Higgins, the Irish politician, also remind the poet of a vigorous and dignified struggle in the Irish problem: In the eyes of Griffith, Yeats sees "hysterical pride" (4), while O'Higgins has "A gentle questioning look that cannot hide / A soul incapable of remorse and rest" (6-7).

In stanzas 2, 3, 4 and 7, Yeats continues bombarding the reader with other portraits of famous Irish figures. There are speculations about the woman's portrait in the second stanza described as "Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way. / I met her all but fifty years ago / For twenty minutes in some studio" (14). It might be an allusion to the Irish painter, Sarah Purser's portrait of Yeats's lifelong lover and one of the leading national figures, Maud Gonne². Deirdre Toomey, however, claims that Yeats here refers to Charles Shannon's painting *The Lady with the Green Fan*. The model of the painting is Muriel Broadbent, whom Yeats probably met in the 1880s when she stayed with the painter's friend, Herbert Horne (Toomey 158). According to Toomey, in a poem with so many public figures, the reason for Yeats's reference to a private experience is his mourning for the death of his youth (159). Then Yeats commemorates Augusta Gregory's son Robert Gregory, who was killed in Italy at an early age and John Lavery's wife and Hazel Lavery by naming their portraits made by the Irish painter, Charles Shannon and Lavery respectively. The Italian painter, Antonio Mancini's portrait of Hugh Lane, should undoubtedly be acknowledged as the "onlie begetter" of the gallery. Amid all these figures, Yeats assuredly refers to the portraits of his two best dramatist friends: Augusta Gregory and John Synge. For Mancini's picture of Augusta

2 John Unterecker implies that this quote might refer to an important woman, like Maud Gonne, in Yeats's life (274).

Gregory, Yeats quotes John Synge, who once said “Greatest since Rembrandt,” (26) and John Yeats’s portrait of John Synge, is described as “that rooted man, / ‘Forgetting human words,’ a grave deep face” (48-49). Yeats’s Nobel Prize speech at the Swedish Royal Academy in 1923 underlines his rooted friendship with Augusta Gregory and John Synge, and their massive impact on his art. He asserts: “I think when Lady Gregory’s name and John Synge’s name are spoken by future generations, my name, if remembered, will come up in the talk, and that if my name is spoken first their names will come in turn because of the years we worked together” (qtd. in Unterecker 275). Yeats utters their name once more while talking about his concept of art.

Yeats’s aim in touching upon all those images he beholds in the gallery is to get inspiration from them so that the poet will create eternal works, similar to what the painters have done. Through the repetition of words related to both painting and poetry, Yeats glorifies the sister arts: the words “image” and “portrait” are each employed thrice in this poem, the words “poet” and “ballad-singer” once, and the verb “sing” twice. Yeats’s reference to what he sees as “My permanent or impermanent images” (20) iterates the eternity of art as opposed to the transitoriness of life, as he underlines in earlier poems. Peter McDonald questions the possessive adjective, “my”, whether it suggests “an admission of shared history – the images are mine too [...] – or a proprietary gesture, hinting that the images are or record things that are some sense his creation” (248). I think the poet implies both a sense of sharing a common past and his creative power to reproduce those images that were produced by the painters.

Apart from celebrating Irish public figures, the poet also expounds his views on Irish art. Having changed his aesthetic concern since “Sailing to Byzantium”, Yeats no longer stresses his ambition to be eternal by becoming an artwork. On the contrary, while looking at Augusta Gregory’s portrait, he questions whether a painter could faithfully imitate life: “A great ebullient portrait certainly; / But where is the brush that could show anything / Of all that pride and that humility?” (27-29). According to Yeats, the artist must feed upon

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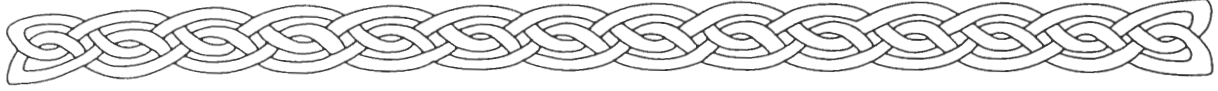
national sources, saying "John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought / All that we did, all that we said or sang / Must come from contact with the soil..." (41-43). He performs what he preaches in these lines by reviving Irish art through its national figures, most of whom are his personal acquaintance as well. At the end of the poem, Yeats gives advice to those who would visit "this hallowed place / Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon; / Ireland's history in their lineaments trace" (52-54). Garab claims that the phrase "hallowed place" should be read as a "holy" place as well as a place "full of saints." (193). The gallery in Yeats's poem, is no longer a mere source of inspiration for the poet to talk about personal acquaintance, but is turned into a shrine, where the following generations should visit to learn Irish history and art.

In his essay "Art and Ideas", Yeats asserts that "works of art are always begotten by previous works of art" (1961: 352), and that Irish artists should "re-create the ancient arts" (1961: 206). The poet exemplifies the allusive nature of art in his later poetry not only by emphasizing the Irish artists' necessity of reviving Greek art but also by describing visual art works in his poetry. As he evokes in "Under Ben Bulbin": "Poet and sculptor do the work / Nor let the modish painter shirk / What his great forefathers did" (37-39). Because of its enduring nature, art is idealized in "Sailing to Byzantium" where the poet is determined to be in the realm of artifice. "Byzantium" which is also about the perfection of art, ends with the realization that the source of art is life. In "Lapis Lazuli", Yeats draws similarities between art and life, that both involve tragedies and that both are reconstructed after having been destroyed, and in "Statues" he yearns to see the eternal art of the Greeks in his country. "Municipal Gallery Revisited" dwells mainly on Irish art, and the poet advises the artists and the writers of his country to focus on national sources. Thus, Yeats's gallery of visual images, creates "an Ireland / The poets have imagined, terrible and gay" (11-12) to emphasize the grandeur of art.

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