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The University of Southern Mississippi

“THE MIRROR TURN LAMP”:

NATURAL-SUPERNATURAL IN YEATS

by

Cleston Lee Armstrong III

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2009

ABSTRACT

“THE MIRROR TURN LAMP”: NATURAL-SUPERNATURAL IN YEATS

by Cleston Lee Armstrong III

May 2009

The *supernatural* portrayed in *Yeats* represents a carefully constructed convergence of all major themes in his canon. Yeats's first exposure to myth, the supernatural, and magic occurs in the 1890s when he worked as an editor of William Blake and Irish fairy lore. This experience at once inspired Yeats to explore mysticism and to shroud his own collected works in mystery. With the onset of modernity and the age of criticism this period ushered in, however, he was unable to capitalize on the spiritual as first imagined. As mere aesthetic, peculiar illuminations of the immaterial world Yeats so intensely sought finally signal only his abilities as an editor. Textual and thematic unity in Yeats's canon does not approach the higher spiritual unity he sought before the cruel process of modernity crippled the imagination of his readers and critics. In defiance of harsh criticisms determined to fix or rationalize him, Yeats ultimately mocks this strange and public affair with the occult.

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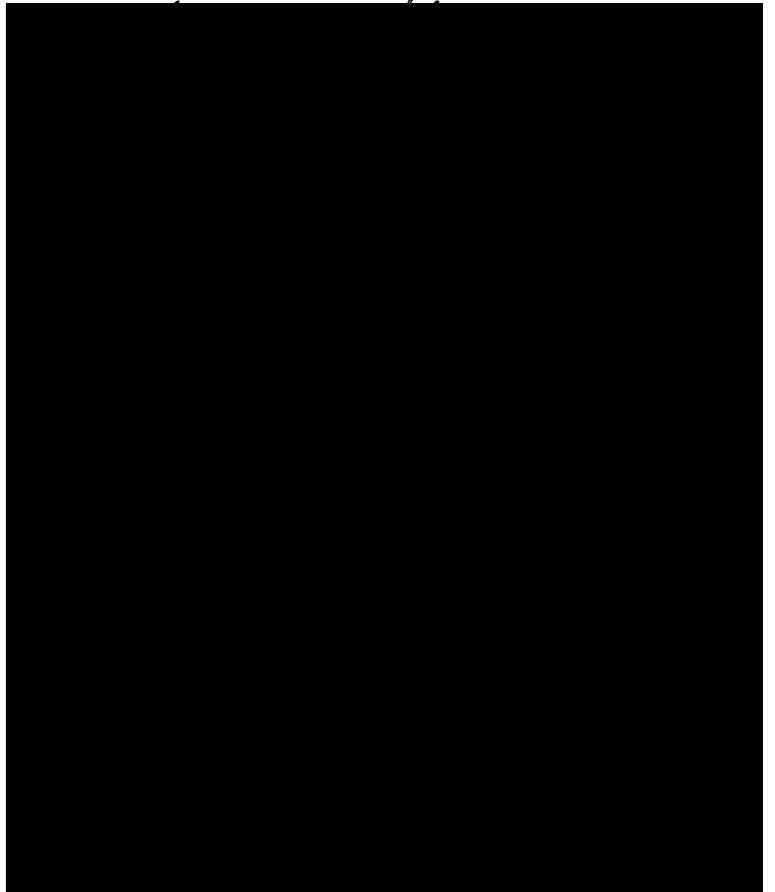
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NATURAL-SUPERNATURAL IN YEATS**

by

Cleston Lee Armstrong III

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
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for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved: *



May 2009

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my entire family, but especially to my wife and children: Brooklyn, Lily-Anne, and Emma. It is also dedicated to the unborn child we expect to deliver at any moment. The power of your belief and imagination is beyond measure. And so nothing shall be impossible for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

“THE WIDENING GYRE”: AN INTRODUCTION

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre”: these first lines from Yeats’s poem “The Second Coming” signify an applied expression of the philosophy of history he describes in *A Vision*.¹ A prose work appearing in two very different editions, *A Vision* was originally published in 1925. Yeats claimed it to be the end result of an “automatic script” drafted from conversations with spirits he invoked by ritual magic. Among the most familiar image-ideas created from this experiment, the cone-shaped gyres might be regarded as the supreme expressions of esoteric wisdom and ceremonial magic in Yeats. They depict a system of history explained by perpetual rising and falling movement in individual human life and all civilization, a turning between polarized energies illustrated as unlike ideologies. For example, “The Second Coming” is Yeats’s prophecy about the onset of an anti-Christian era ushered in at the peak of an antithetical moment in history. More than cultural significance assigned to any single period, however, Yeats emphasizes the brevity of human knowledge. His philosophy often presents in fragmented poetry and prose seeming to challenge traditional ways of knowing.

As Yeats finally collected his works, the system is everywhere to be found in the canon. His interest in the motion of human experience developed through

¹ All references to Yeats’s poetry come from the *Collected Poems of WB Yeats*, edited by Richard Finneran, unless otherwise indicated.

observations on the process of modernization. The sheer and horrific magnitude of transition from nineteenth to twentieth century, announced most obviously with the guns of August, helps to explain the notion of spinning away from romantic innocence into modern anarchy. While turning is a complicated theoretical concept attached to elusive supernatural themes in Yeats, it also has a concrete face evident in the elaborate textual production and publication histories of his important occultist works, most notably the piecemeal *Autobiographies* and *Vision* texts. With patterns of revision and republication contributing a literal dynamism and following vitality to the Yeats canon, these conclusive works uttering magic did not hold to substance or structure and were loosed upon readers and critics in forms approaching mere anarchy.

The Mirror Turn Lamp argues that WB Yeats's occult writing expresses an epistemology characterized by impermanence and uncertainty. These qualities are emphasized through ideological and textual motion situated in opposition to fixed orders of knowledge insisted upon by science and enlightenment reason. Various representations by Yeats as either authentic or sleight of hand, magic and the supernatural are at the root of this conceptualization and present a meaningful contrast to writing that attempts more passively to reflect the historical and political moment of his time. Ideas emanating from the imagination enable Yeats to test the boundaries of a primarily mimetic creative paradigm, one he exceeds in his later antithetical, illuminating creative acts. With an emergent pattern of progressive revisions aimed at canonical unity, Yeats's fluid writing and

publication process is central in widening the conversation about works steeped in the occult and their implication to unstable structures of knowledge.

Yeats's largely uncelebrated editorial work with William Blake and Irish fairy lore helped him finally to imagine and arrange his canon — or at least those works most invested in magic — as a collective expression of his mystic philosophy. This arrangement allowed him to sidestep reason-driven, rash, and evil-tongued critics and to cultivate a mystery about his work meant to ensure a place in turning history or a turning place in history. Published in the same year as his revised *Vision* text, Yeats's *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1937) is another example of how, as an editor, he refused to embrace the structuralist assumptions of other contemporary writers. As presented here, creative paradigms drawn from the supernatural undermine any assertion of fixity. Numerous modernist poets besides Yeats produced widely circulated poetry anthologies, among them Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, Laura Riding, and even Amy Lowell. Creating rhetoric and poetry, these artists struggled with themselves and others in negotiating the escalating conflict between rationalist-realist objectivity and emergent modes of subjectivity, the latter contributed by insights from Nietzsche, Freud, Pater, and other modern intellectuals.² Some artists used anthologies to attempt articulation and control of the definition of literary modernism while others such as Yeats destabilized it. Pound's *Des Imagist*

² Early deconstruction philosophy of Nietzsche, the advent of psychoanalysis by Freud, and Pater's mockery of grand narratives offered by historians all offset earlier advances in scientific thought, ranging from John Dalton's atomic theory to Dimitri Mendeleev's periodic table of elements and even Charles Darwin's contribution, *On the Origin of Species* (1859).

(1914) advocated a clear approach to writing poetry informed by specific minimalist principles, for example, and Graves and Riding's 1927 *Survey of Modernist Poetry* challenged this limited idea and expanded the sense of modern poetics.

Divergent reactions to modern poetics and modernity by poets complicate scholarship also struggling with the significance of cultural turns propelled by WWI.³ In fact, lines between poetry and criticism become blurred in Yeats's time. Randall Jarrell's "The Age of Criticism" considers modernist ruptures to the hitherto romantic tradition of criticism and the rising of criticism as its own art form; departure from romantic poetics epitomizes the shifting cultural significance of literature. Both the primary anthologies and secondary criticisms attempting to assign them value imply equal sensitivity to an age of criticism in which the heart of every mystery was prone to scrutiny. Such projects try to present fixed snapshots of what Yeats knew were at best transiently important artistic values. His approach to anthologizing poets and his following brand of peculiar criticism seldom aspire to certainty of order or meaning. Yeats's creative "Introduction" for his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* warrants the same kind of attention his poetry

³ Scholars still debate even the term *modernism*. Frederic Jameson's 2002 study, *A Singular Modernity*, "rejects any presupposition that there is a correct use of the word to be discovered, conceptualized and proposed" (13). Matei Calinescu imposes structure on modernity according to what he perceives to be its enumerated countenances. His *Five Faces of Modernity* (1977) includes essays on modernism, avant-garde, decadence, kitsch, and postmodernism. Leon Surrlette treats the occult as a defining feature of modernist literature. His *Birth of Modernism: Pound, Eliot, Yeats, and the Occult* appeared 1993.

does because it is very much a part of his elaborate challenge to fixed criticisms and the following creative paradigm predicated on mimesis.

His anthology introduction - and other writing considered in this study - shows an antithetical relationship with the intellectual traditions espousing clear boundaries in art and human knowledge. He did not lend himself to or endorse the static portrait, and his anthology characteristically does not presume to list the major developments in poetics from Pater to Pound. Instead, Yeats capitalizes on learning from his background editing and collecting the works of William Blake and Irish fairy lore and crafts a deliberately conspicuous context for poetry demonstrating the theoretical concepts of transience he thought were vital to modern verse and history. He asserts a pivotal artistic and intellectual turn to what is by implication an unstable modernist poetics; the mutable styles and significance of poetry illuminate the impermanence of human knowledge. Combined with his well earned poetic license, Yeats's perspective on modern verse resists anything approaching the determinacy suggested by dissimilar anthology projects. In representative lines from his introduction, he writes

The swing from Stendhal has passed Turner; the individual soul, the betrayal of the unconceived at birth, are among her principal themes, it must go further still; that soul must become its own betrayer, its own deliverer, the one activity, the mirror turn lamp.

(xxxiii)

This quotation challenges routine assessment of important modern poets found in other collections such as the one by Pound. It subordinates both Stendhal and

Turner to “the swing” from one past the other. In a move peculiar to his own writing style and ideology, Yeats assigns to this shift “principal themes,” including the eternal, bloodless, and immaterial soul. He finally emphasizes the poetic swing with another metaphor intent on motion: “the mirror turn lamp.” Importantly, the idea finds expression in the form of an elusive prose-poetics that reveals only in half-concealing. This phantasmagoric quality in Yeats’s writing is vital for the entire canon’s refusal of an objective reality perceivable in the mode of realism. It can be studied through regressive associations between his sometimes bizarre engagement of that always turning “individual soul” and the kindred spirits of the supernatural and magic.

Readers may recognize part of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* quotation, “the mirror turn lamp,” from the better known criticism by M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953). “The title of the book,” Abrams writes, “identifies two common and antithetic metaphors of mind, one comparing the mind to a reflector of external objects, the other to a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives” (viii). As Richard Kearney understands the binary proposed in this highly regarded criticism, “The mimetic paradigm of imagining is replaced by the productive paradigm, [. . .] the imagination ceases to function as a mirror reflecting some external reality and becomes a lamp which projects its own internally generated light onto things” (2). Abrams took his slightly modified title from the phrase by Yeats, substituting the original word *turn* with *and*. The changing of the phrase is noteworthy because *turning* proves so vital in the Yeats canon and also because the quote has been

popularized more from Abrams in revised form than by Yeats's original utterance. In a personal correspondence, Abrams recently told me that he never really thought about "turning Yeats's phrase back upon his own writings" ("The Mirror and the Lamp"). Yeats operates in both creative paradigms, but ultimately privileges the manufactured subjectivity of the latter. His turns between mirror and lamp are fueled by a wide and varied treatment of magic and the way he finally wrote and wove it into his later works.

The mirror and the lamp are not exclusive of one another, as perhaps implied by Abrams's substitution of words. In Yeats, these creative paradigms are mutually dependent. Dependency and motion between them offer obvious parallels with the primary (rational) and antithetical (imaginative) energies so completely integral for Yeats's system of history, encapsulated in the gyres, or the swirling of one into the other, as in "The Second Coming." Yeats revisits and elaborates on notions of the primary and antithetical in the 1937 revision of *A Vision* in the same year he publishes the peculiar introduction for his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Partly through deliberately complex stylistic arrangement, both works resist the concept of fixity despite the seeming resignation implied respectively by genre and what was called a deterministic system. The way these texts all speak to one another and invoke the poetry by imagining or remembering magic is not unique in the broader Yeats canon. This pattern and associated vitality suggests a calculated design that follows his early experience collecting, ordering, and establishing a new context for the works of William

Blake. With his subsequent approach to arranging and rearranging his own works, Yeats ensured his future life in the annals of literary history.

In turning “the mirror turn lamp” phrase upon him, Yeats can also be seen through the system of history he devised from these paradigms. Concentrating on the turning and widening associated with gyres and the theme of magic, this study shows how both primary and antithetical energies are present in select works extending through the entire Yeats canon. This agenda involves expanding critical approaches to *A Vision*, which is generally seen as the supreme but often isolated expression of the occult in Yeats. Even the 2008 National Endowment for the Humanities Yeats Institute, offered at the Yeats summer school in Sligo, devoted one week of the month-long program to Yeats's *Vision* in an attempt to see his relationship with the occult better. The still narrow approach to our concept does not yet regard earlier examples of attitudes and stylistic approaches to magic leading into the so-called “automatic script.”

Rather than accepting *A Vision* or *Autobiographies* as the center of a conversation on the supernatural in Yeats, I situate these texts in relation to each other and earlier formative projects. Scrutinizing *A Vision* as anything approaching a static, singular text is a mistake. The work is not automatic, and it certainly does not say everything Yeats finally discovers about magic; it merely reflects what he already knew and a great deal of what he had already written. The original vision and revision are highly dependent on earlier writings, as well as on simultaneously written and seemingly unlike pieces. By exploring of the scattered roots and branches of his visions, the intelligent design and intellectual

context informing what the Irish poet and critic Timothy Brownlow calls Yeats's "mixture of near-gibberish with astounding insight" can be established and studied.

Through his dynamic investment in magic and associated experimentation with his mirror and lamp paradigms, Yeats provides veiled expressions of the modernist tension between reason and unreason. The remaining portion of this introduction turns itself to the key texts through which Yeats develops his fluid sense of magic. The rising motion begins very early with editorial work in Blake and Irish folk lore and fairy tales, peaks with the deliberate evocation of magic in an evolved style of writing both formally and substantively designed to awaken spiritual wholeness, then turns towards an end at the poet's twilight with visions and revisions of nearly all that came before.

Chapter I accounts for the gradual rise in Yeats's interaction with myth and the supernatural and limitedly places his relationship with this concept in the history of ideas. The intellectual and vocational context emanates largely from his work collecting and providing criticism of the complete works of William Blake in the massive three volume *Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* (1893). Yeats and Blake have been widely studied along side one another, but extant scholarship does not typically focus on the actual way in which this connection between the two poets arose.⁴ As his collaborator John Ellis explains, Yeats was responsible both for translating Blake's mythology and for situating it

⁴ For scholarship on Yeats and Blake, see Hazard Adams's *The Contrary Vision* (1955), Margaret Rudd's *Divided Image* (1953), Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1969), and Kathleen Raine's *Yeats the Initiate* (1986).

as a critical lens for understanding the collected works in the essay “The Symbolic System,” a concluding section for the first volume. The present study concedes that Yeats responds to Blake’s system in developing his own, but more importantly suggests that the editorial role helped Yeats to imagine how the concept of magic could shape or distort perceptions of his own canon in the age of criticism. This insight eventually leads to his deliberate invocation of magic in tightly controlled and purposefully sequential publications, a move that also signifies a major difference in his experience with magic. Blake did not choose to be a mystic, nor did he insist upon being remembered as one, but this term is a label and a legacy Yeats actively pursues in his career.

Yeats’s work with Blake does not reflect his first serious treatment of mysticism or magic. Biographers and the poet himself explain that his earliest exposure to the world of magic occurred as a child in the west of Ireland. There, Yeats listened with great intensity to the supernatural stories passed down from his grandparents and by others in the west of Ireland: fairy tales, witches, hauntings, and devils dwelled in the mind of the poet. Poetry from *Crossways* (1889) reflects this formative experience, especially in such verse as “The Stolen Child.” Few scholars debate the light, imaginative character of this early lyrical poetry in contrast to the political writing eventually to follow. However, Yeats’s simultaneous work collecting *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) and *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892) is not typically considered as a part of the conversation about the development of these divergent styles.

Chapter II considers how Yeats engages the boundaries of reason in context of his editorial work with folk lore, a genre with specific conventions resistant to the fixity required for publication. As a young editor of magical tales, the poet struggles with and responds to the reach of rationalist thought. He accentuates the indeterminacy already evident in the emphatic narrations built into the stories through his introductions and sub-introductions, an overt challenge to fashionable modes of criticism and associated ways of knowing. The substance of these mystical tales is easily linked to his other major editorial project of the period, showing Yeats that there were local incarnations of universal ideas he was discovering in Blake. Yeats actually returns to some of the folk characters in the 1937 edition of *A Vision*,⁵ a largely unrecognized move because these works have not really been studied in the first place. Signaling a meaningful pattern, he similarly returns to Blake with his 1897 essay “William Blake and the Imagination” and his later 1910 re-introduction to the collected works. The circular motion of Yeats’s canon at once validates this developmental artistic phase and also further undermines the automatic-ness of the vision texts.

Chapter III asserts the metamorphosis in creative experience and philosophy from the primary mirror to the antithetical lamp, an instance of the demonstrated commitment to “turning” and “widening” finally expressed in Yeats’s system. This is the peak of his experience with magic. In the pieces “Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni” and “Magic” (1901), respectively published in

⁵ The characters Hudden, Dudden, and Donald O’Nery first appear in “Donald and His Neighbors” as a part of the *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland* collection; their presence in the later *Vision* text is considered in chapter V.

the *Celtic Twilight* (1893) and *Ideas about Good and Evil* (1903), Yeats creates in the more productive paradigm through his developing investment in the supernatural. The two essays published in Lady Gregory's 1920 collection *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* likewise suggest that Yeats's approach to his subject is entirely more mature here. Magic increasingly signifies deliberate engagement with the immortal soul of the universe, described most completely in the representatively distinct piece *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917). Yeats is no longer a passive editor-observer of the unseen, but rather an active projector illuminating now familiar supernatural concepts. These same concepts appear as mere tropes and metaphors contributing substantive and stylistic peculiarity characteristic of high-modernist writing in later, more heavily manufactured writing. Again, the total significance of magic relies on earlier, dissimilar experimentation as well as wholly antithetical notions of fixity expressed in such political poems as "Easter 1916."

The varied autobiographical prose from Yeats is reliant upon magic, which arguably plays a role of near protagonist proportions; chapter IV engages this material. The spinning of self and magic are inseparably linked and collectively refuse anything like static, mirrored identity generally sought in the autobiography genre. Yeats does not reflect a master narrative of self in *Autobiographies*, originally published in 1926. Rather, he conjures and creates it in literal pieces, beginning with *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* and the five books collectively called *The Trembling of the Veil*. Later incarnations of the so-called autobiographical prose include the fragments *Dramatis Personae*, *Estrangement*,

The Death of Synge, and *The Bounty of Sweden*. There are additional materials studied in this chapter that were never published as a part of the proper *Autobiographies*, such as *Memoirs* (first published in 1972) and *Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty* (first published in 1944). The confusion arising from materials Yeats sometimes included and then censored, or substituted or rearranged, represents an aspect of the difficulty scholars have in engaging the historical figure WB Yeats and his writing on the subject of magic. This disorder is a quality the poet observed in editing the works of William Blake and something he embraces as a shield against the age of criticism threatening to pluck the heart of his mystery.

Contributing to the uncertainty surrounding the publication history, at this autobiographical turn, the supernatural is deliberately evoked and carefully woven into the fabric of Yeats's contrived selves. Close treatment of the textual history of these evolving bodies of text also suggests that Yeats did want magic to occupy a formidable space in his understudied prose. As a rule of structure, the supernatural swirls into the more objective faces of Yeats in the form of political discourse. Deliberate integration of conflicting subject matter is also evident in the arrangement of poetry from the period. The collective effect is a breach in the assumptions of structural philosophies of fixed order otherwise popularized by implication in more conventional expressions of self and civilization or even in poetry anthologies. The comparable arrangement and publishing histories of the vision texts tells a similar story with equal and more obvious investment in magic.

Closing the circle, *A Vision* contributes the substance of both Yeats's and my own final chapters. Chapter V emphasizes the active textual history, suggesting an engineered relationship between this piece and others dating to his earliest editorial work with Blake and folk lore. However subtle, these intertextual links are simple to establish and widen scholarly conversations about Yeats and magic. The revised 1937 edition of *A Vision*, for instance, proves to be an even more highly feigned construct than his autobiographical prose. Despite traditional urgency about the "automatic" nature of the text then insisted upon by Yeats and his critics, *A Vision* is the product of a thorough-going filtering process produced by Yeats, the poet-as-editor.

It is a mistake to regard *A Vision* as the major achievement in Yeats and the occult or to approach it as divorced from the broader context I try to establish here. Self-conscious and often politically minded verse from this period openly questions his responsibility in having devoted so much creative energy to what, for most in his time, was patently absurd: the pursuit of magic. The public manifestation of his deeply felt and highly serious personal conflict distinguishes Yeats from Blake, helping to explain why *A Vision* is a failure rather than a success even for the poet himself. By deliberately shrouding himself in mystery to sell a few battered books, Yeats ultimately gave over to materialist culture what was once most authentic in his craft. Finally, Yeats is trapped or even complicit in the publication mechanics of modernism.⁶ That road, rather than one

⁶ Greg Barnhisel's "Marketing Modernism in America During the Great War: The Case of Ezra Pound" suggests Pound also used the machinery of war and the small presses to

set upon in pursuit of immaterial spiritual unity, may also illuminate his conclusive insistence that readers “Cast a cold eye, on life on death” (“Under Ben Bulben”).

The implications of magic and how it presents in the Yeats canon are far reaching. Yeats’s editorial experience taught him about the supernatural, but it also provided instruction on how his own work might be engineered and collected around this theme in reply to the age of criticism. He moved towards more direct and purposeful engagement with the invisible realm that piqued his curiosity and imagination, and mid-way through his life, he created from the still untainted desolate places in his mind. In a range of motion consistent with his own system, this high point leads on to his decline following less sincere treatment of the supernatural. Yeats anticipates and mocks any steadfast assertions relative to this theme, leaving us with the perhaps simple insight that that magic spins and unwinds, widens and tightens in the various works responsible for its utterance. Magic is a concept in Yeats that speaks to rationalist determinacy by refusing it.

distinguish himself and to profit as a poet. Stanford professor Hannah Sullivan’s forthcoming book *Passionate Correction* also draws attention to the publication and revision process observable in modernity.

CHAPTER I

"AN OLD MAN'S FRENZY":

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUNDS FROM BLAKE

Grant me an old man's frenzy,

Myself must I remake

Till I am Timon and Lear

Or that William Blake

Who beat upon the wall

Till Truth obeyed his call...

(Yeats, "An Acre of Grass")

Yeats's experience as an editor, excavator, and critic in his *Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* (1893) is one of the earliest and most important parts of the conversation on his relationship with the supernatural and magic. Yeats established a meaningful context for reading Blake's entire canon through the lens of his then still-encoded system of Zoas. In the process, Yeats began to imagine how mysticism could test intellectual and artistic essentials of order and exceeded the reach of positivism in his own work. Actively translating Blake's mythology helped Yeats to understand the potentially divine significance of motion associated with the mirror turning lamp. It enabled him to recognize the trappings of reason in his time, which he simultaneously became familiar with through similar work collecting, editing, and introducing Irish

fairy lore. This rising period in Yeats's treatment of divinity resulted in a degree of mystic understanding he never achieved through his own illuminations, but it allowed him to connect with and synthesize insights from other intellects such as Emanuel Swedenborg, Walter Pater, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

A formidable publication, *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical* consists of three large volumes. The first is subtitled *The System* and contains a general preface, biographical materials on Blake's life and works, and the important, long essay "The Symbolic System." The second volume has "interpretation and paraphrased commentary," and the third has primary works from Blake. The project was a collaboration between Yeats and John Ellis, but even his co-editor suggests the task decoding the symbolic order of the poetry belonged to the poet. Ellis says about Yeats,

with his eye for symbolic systems, he needed no more to enable him to perceive that here was a myth as well worth study as any that has been offered to the world, since first men learned that myths were briefer and more beautiful than exposition as well as deeper and more companionable. He saw, too, that it was no mere freak of an eccentric mind, but an eddy of that flood-tide of symbolism which attained its tide-mark in the magic of the middle ages. (ix-x)

Yeats's mythic perception of Blake's work occurs primarily in the last third of the first volume under "The Symbolic System" (235-413), where introduces and explains Blake's "conception of the Four-fold in Man" (viii). In this particular

section of the collective project, Yeats constructs a context for reading Blake from the divergent parts and unfinished manuscripts of his canon. This task is significant because it shapes Yeats's own later creative acts from the stuff of magic and enables him to anticipate criticism of his own yet-unwritten total canon. This turn may also help to explain his antithetical and mocking approach to fixed orders and absolute assertions of determinacy characteristic of the age of criticism. Yeats's system remains ahead of fixity with perpetual widening and turning only vaguely discernible by lamplight, but never by the illusory mirror falsely promised by realism.

The introductory "Preface" and "Memoir" portions of *Works* both acknowledge previous criticisms of Blake and assert an inadequacy arising from their incompleteness. "Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Gilchrist, and the brothers, Dante and William Rossetti, deserve well of literature for having brought Blake into the light of day and made his name known throughout the length and breadth of England," the preface suggests (viii). However, it continues, "whatever is accessible to them when they wrote, including the then unpublished 'Vala,' not one chapter, not one clear paragraph about the myth of Four Zoas, is to be found" (viii). The major achievement in Blake implicated here is Alexander Gilchrist's two volume work the *Life of William Blake* (1863). Yeats does not speak favorably of this collection for its limited evaluation of the total body of writing and philosophy Blake left behind, and it is this same trend in Yeats scholarship the present study hopes to amend in context of magic. Yeats drew the concept of wholeness into his criticism and applied it in his own canon following. As he writes, "There is a

vast scattered wealth of Blake-writing and Blake-drawing, which could be brought together if the value of every hint were generally known” (140). Yeats continues in his reply to the critical history of Blake,

Such statements as that of Gilchrist, Vol. I., p.383, that, perhaps, the attempt to methodize Blake’s many seemingly contradictory utterances into a system is so much labour lost, and the absurd idea of Gilchrist that “the key to the wild and strange rhapsodies Blake would utter can be supplied by love, but not by intellect,” have done great harm in discouraging a serious treatment of his mystic system. (140-141)

From Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), Yeats understood the promise of using intellect precisely to encourage in Blake scholarship “a serious treatment of his mystic system” for the first time.

The poet used his role as editor to express himself and to shape perceptions of the primary materials. Yeats actually begins the proper study of Blake with an evocation of Swedenborg. The first lines of the work beyond the preface read:

In the year 1757, according to Emanuel Swedenborg, a new age of the world began. The divine description of the kingdom of heaven as “within you” was to become more true than before by reason of a greater influx of spiritual light. (1)

As Yeats merely hints at here, Swedenborg demonstrated productive ways of harnessing imagination and intellect to the end of spiritual enlightenment. Like

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535) before him, Swedenborg modeled for Blake and then Yeats how to embrace mysticism through intellectualism.

Swedenborg and Agrippa were equally committed to science, theology, and the occult. Likewise, each influenced the underground growth of ritualized magic and theosophy through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries despite the hold of reason and positivist philosophies. Agrippa's famous *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, published in 1531 and 1533, proposed a union between the definitively observable wonders of Nature and the equally mysterious practices of magic common during his lifetime. Both natural and unnatural magic emanated from God, he suggested. Yeats would later write that, for Blake, "imagination was the first emanation of divinity, 'the body of God,' 'the Divine members,' and he drew the deduction, which they did not draw, that the imaginative arts were therefore the greatest of Divine revelations" ("William Blake and the Imagination" 112). The association between magic and myth, divinity and creation follows for both poets. Yeats uses the tradition of Swedenborg to establish the legitimacy of these relations.

Swedenborg was born into the generation after Agrippa, characterized by the first wave of the Scientific Revolution following the momentum arising from Nicolaus Copernicus's staggering assertion of the heliocentric theory in 1543. Further, the Royal Society was founded in 1660, also greatly influencing the intellectual atmosphere of Swedenborg's moment. His *Principia Rerum Naturalium* (1734) "fused the rationalist (Cartesian) and empiricist (Lockean) legacies into a natural philosophy that propounded the harmony of the

mechanistic universe with biblical revelation” (Audi 780). Yeats seems to agree with this assessment, writing further in his introduction to Blake that

The Christian Church as known and constituted externally was to begin to pass away. A new church was to take its place, and at last the exclamation of Moses, “Would that all the Lord’s children were prophets!” was to become a prayer fulfilled. Swedenborg’s prediction has undoubtedly received, and is still receiving, something of an actuality from the general growth of that influence of mind over personality and conduct which is characteristic of the present century. (1)

The legacy of Swedenborg inspired Yeats to draft a portrait of Blake as mystic prophet or “prayer fulfilled.” Direct lineage to occult wisdom and ritual magic in espousing spiritual prophecy would guide Yeats both in his presentation of Blake’s work and in the development of his own canon despite its opposition to positivism, also “characteristic of the present century.” Of Blake, Yeats writes that he “had made a new religion” from “stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians” (*Autobiographies* 115). The whole undertaking, he says, was “steeped in the supernatural.”

The relationship between God and magic evident in later writing from Yeats is vital to the notion of spiritual and artistic wholeness; this idea has origins in his work with Blake. From his overview of Swedenborg, Yeats progressively

authors a vision of Blake prophetically widening the boundaries of “universal mental life,” as he himself would later do in turning the mirror to lamp. He became familiar with these competing creative paradigms in the study of Blake. Yeats’s interpretation of Blake’s system articulated and exemplified a universal experience of consciousness, one that actually emerged from largely non-deliberate efforts to engage that universality through poetry and mysticism. As Yeats writes in a decidedly different introduction to Blake in 1910, “The profound sanity of his inspiration is proved by his never having, no matter how great the contrast between himself and the blind men and women about him, pronounced himself to be chosen and set apart alone among men” (xii-xiii). The student of Blake, on the other hand, far more deliberately and loudly imagined his system to be of and by mysticism.

Much later in his introduction to the *Works of William Blake*, Yeats returns to the idea that critics have tried to understand Blake without knowledge of all that he wrote. Yeats says, “Much that would help to complete it has been irreparably lost, but it is not too late to save more from the wreck than has come to hand in time for use in the present volumes” (141). Yeats’s exact focus here, and a key aspect of his translation of Blake’s mysticism, is the recovery of “a long mystical poem of his that had never been published or even read”: *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (Kelly 201). The importance of his treatment of the poem in that particular moment is evidenced by its lesser scrutiny in Yeats’s 1910 introduction to Blake, in which he does not present the Zoas as a substantive key to the collected poetry. Instead, he only passively refers to *Vala* by saying “It is the

most splendid, as well as the longest, of his mystical works, and was published by Mr. E.J. Ellis and myself, for the first time, in 'The Works of William Blake'" (xxix). Further, there is no detailed analysis of the complete works in context of *The Four Zoas* as in the three volume collaboration.

Henry Summerfield suggests that the textual history of *Vala* is extremely complex and that it parallels Blake's so-called conversion. *The Four Zoas* is a revised version of *Vala* and "a more ardently Christian work" (133) that

aims at a synthesis of portions of his myth he has hitherto presented in different books, at the incorporation of much new material, and at the co-ordination of multiple viewpoints with chronological narrative. This co-ordination he cannot fully achieve and therefore he eventually abandons the project. As it stands, the excessive number of major characters-four Zoas and their four Emanations-badly obscures the line of the action. (183)

Though the unrefined myth may have been a failure for Blake and a source of frustration for critics, it presented a model for young WB Yeats. Summerfield writes that Blake "began to pass through a transforming spiritual experience" (183) during his period of revision, and that the closeness of radical spiritual awakening and radically unstable texts is evident in Yeats's own vision writing and in his equally mysterious and varied autobiographical prose works. The elaborate composition and publication histories of works espousing mysticism in Yeats is also the subject of later chapters, but I can briefly suggest here that, as an editor of Blake, Yeats became schooled in the excitement and mystery of

secret, undiscovered works. More than Blake, in writing magic, Yeats struggles with the reality of a book production culture and the associated age of criticism built around it.

Besides the concept of an extensive canon structurally engineered to express and exemplify a philosophy, Yeats drew from *Vala* in devising his own system of contraries. He devotes an entire chapter to the four-fold division idea in the Ellis collaboration as a part of the broader explanation of “The Symbolic System,” an interpretation illuminating how he may have approached both development and presentation of his own system and collected works. Prior to his discussion of the four-fold in man, the subsection “The Three Persons and the Mirror” describes preconditions leading to division. “Like Boehmen and the occultists generally,” Yeats suggests that Blake, “postulates besides the Trinity a fourth principle, a universal matrix of heaven or abode, from which, and in which all have life” (246). He continues to say that this fourth principle is “represented by the circle containing the triangle of the ancient mystics, and may be described as the imagination of God, without which neither Father, Son, nor Spirit could be made manifest in life and action.” Yeats says that, in Blake, this is the first mirror, and on looking into it, God “ceases to be mere will, beholds himself as the Son, His love for his own unity, His self-consciousness, and enters on that eternal meditation about Himself which is called the Holy Spirit” (247). Energy emanating from the Holy Spirit, or Council, “wakes into being the numberless thought-forms of the great mirror, the immortal or typical shapes of all things, the ‘ideas’ of Plato.” He goes on to say that “what we call materialism” ultimately

closed up the forms and thoughts and lives within the narrow circle of their own separate existence, whereas before they had 'expanded and contracted' at will, hiding them from the light and life of God, and from the freedom of the 'imagination which liveth for ever.' The mirror was changed under its influence to that hard stepmother we call Nature. (247)

Yeats certainly engages the notion of actualizations of self and civilizations through engagement between primary and antithetical forces, but his system does not seem to approach the divine origins asserted in Blake. Though spun from the stuff of mythology and magic, his primary mirror and antithetical lamp finally prove to be more limitedly significant aesthetics with implications for critical theory. The way that he imitated Blake and tried to further his own selfhood through peculiar publications, rather than seeking unification with that first immaterial myth, contributes to this reduced end.

Yeats's progressive interpretation in the next subsection of "The Symbolic System" argues the process of division occurs "eternally, in regions of thought and life far above perceptions of corporeal mind" (251). The fragmented remains of what was before an expanding and contracting whole "build up selfhoods," or what Yeats perceives as restrictive, competing "devouring flames": the Father, Urizen (associated with Reason); the Son, Luvah (associated with Emotion); the Mirror, Tharmas (associated with Sensation); and the Spirit, Urthona (associated with Energy). With this turn, the faculty of reason dominates emotion for its defining irrationality, and the sensory by doubting and rationalizing its

perceptions. Reason thereby exacts control over what is already an illusory emotional and physical reality. Only Urthona, energy or the imagination, presents a stay against Urizen. For Yeats, Blake's contraries are in constant struggle with one another. The perpetual motion resulting from tension between contraries breathes life into our fallen humanity and the entire universe. The Zoas are "identical with the wheels of Ezekiel and with the four beasts of the Apocalypse," Yeats writes, "and resemble closely Raphael, Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and the Kabbalistic regents of the cardinal points, and like them preside over psychic and bodily affairs" (251).

Yeats insists that in that first and most ideal conception of God and his mirror, Blake imagines no separate or respective Gods lording it over the psychic and the body components of human experience. Yeats wants to bring these fragments more closely together in his own age by compromising the well-established place of rational experience or reason-based knowledge arising exclusively from sensory experience through his unlike emphasis on the motion between the primary and antithetical poles both in his system and canon. In this way, he only slightly modifies the manner in which he actually frames Blake's collected works around the progressively poorer reflections of the original unified state. The collected works presented in volume three are organized around a gradual and tragic departure from the Divine World of Jerusalem (Divine Unity or Freedom) to the Four Zoas, followed by the children of the Zoas, the Twelve Tribes, and Sons and Daughters of Albion, and finally the state of material division into Non-entity (Mundane Unity or Law, Satan) (280). Yeats would never

have been able to imagine such architecture in his own work without having been a student and editor of Blake.

Unlike most scholarship characteristic of the age of criticism, Yeats's writing on Blake is untainted "from the denial, by current philosophies colored by positivism, of the reality of a spiritual order" (Raine, *Yeats the Initiate* 281). His approach to Blake signifies a concerted effort to resurrect the imagination "laid in a great tomb of criticism" (Yeats, "The Body of the Father" 196). As Randall Jarrell would later say, "a great deal of this criticism might just as well have been written by a syndicate of encyclopedias for an audience of International Business Machines" (65). Besides the will-to-creativity evident in his consideration of Blake, Yeats's own writing avoids giving itself to the unimaginative encyclopedia business machines described here. Instead, he persists in his engagement of what Raine describes as a "learning unknown to textual scholars and literary historians which is no less exact than theirs" (*Yeats the Initiate* 281). She continues, "this learning of the imagination (from his studies of theosophy, the Cabala and Swedenborg he already possessed the key) Yeats instantly recognized in Blake" (281). The limited body of criticism on Yeats and magic often quarantines the supernatural, and it does not see it as a way of meaningfully framing the wider canon as Yeats did for Blake. The major works on Yeats by Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats* (1964) and *Yeats: the Man and the Masks* (1948), for example, both acknowledge the strange place of occult wisdom in Yeats's prose writing but ultimately suggest the poetry is a higher art form. Graham Hough's *The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats* (1984) assumes a

similar posture. This typical approach to the Yeats canon often precludes scholars from seeing the largely unified portrait of disorder Yeats very deliberately crafted in response to his experience with Blake. It is through his embrace of magic that Yeats forges the high-modernist poetics he is remembered for by all critics, and because his system relies on competing primary and antithetical forces, the occult should not be strictly separated from his more historical or political works. This model of wholeness is exactly what he assigns to Blake and ultimately informs his approach to history on both macro- and microcosmic scales.

Yeats's perennial philosophy of *A Vision* uniquely imagines and articulates a unified system of thought propelled by deliberately transient symbols unfamiliar to the language of reason. Though essentially composed from scattered materials collected over many years, this work presents a guise for understanding Yeats's canon in the same way that "The Symbolic System" veils or unveils Blake. The publication history and structure of his system in relation to other writing and its timely presentation at his twilight suggest a particular and formative relationship with Blake that follows too closely to be regarded as coincidence. Yeats purposefully and progressively capitalizes on mysticism and associated literary conventions he recognized in Blake and folk lore in his unique challenge to the increasingly singular order of reason. He experienced the limitations of reason more directly and more intensely than Blake, as evident in scathing reviews and criticisms of his most pronounced occult works, even by long time friends such as AE, and in the drama of war. From his familiarity with

Swedenborg and his approach to Blake, Yeats knew his own project of widening the “influx of spiritual light” would involve unity and not separation between intellect and imagination. However, the reason-dominated intellect driving both literary criticism and the world Yeats lived in needed to be put back into balance. In combination with the subjective veil of magic, constant turning between the two poles contributes balance to the myth of Yeats and challenges the assumptions of the mimetic paradigm or the mirror.

He arrives at this symbol or system of symbols by first embracing and emphasizing the imagination. “I wished for a system of thought,” Yeats wrote in the dedication to *A Vision* (1925), “that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of one history, and that the soul’s” (Harper and Hood xi). In the 1937 revision, he has two of his own fictional characters “discover” the manuscript conveying this system, an imagined context closely resembling the actual one surrounding Blake’s *Four Zoas* poem. Vendler explains that Yeats conceives of his system “in terms of the individual, not in terms of political or cultural history” (9), but he locates the individual within a system of history understood largely in terms of political turning points.

A Vision imagines human experience in relation to “The Great Wheel,” a system of self and history with perpetual violence between primary and antithetical or objective and subjective forces. “The diagram of the Great Wheel,” Yeats explains, “shows a series of numbers and symbols which represent the Lunar phases; and all possible human types can be classified under one or other

of these twenty—eight phases” (12). Though he privileges the lunar phases, they are effectively meaningless without their solar counterparts. Yeats states that “Sun is objective man and the Moon subjective man” (13). “Antithetical” or “subjective” man cultivates individual personality while “primary” or “objective” man surrenders individuality, as said to be required, for example, by Christianity.

In his challenge to the rule of reason, Yeats’s system celebrates and glorifies the “antithetical” man. Value is placed on the “primary” or solar phases in strict terms of their opposing value: “one considers full Sun as merely the night when there is no moon” (12). Additional oppositions influencing the location of any given individual within the wheel are the “Four Faculties,” namely “Will” and “Mask,” which are opposites and predominantly “antithetical,” and “Creative Mind” and “Body of Fate,” which are opposites and predominantly “primary.” These faculties, or “Tinctures,” influence each other and the individual at different phases in ways that are difficult if not impossible to understand when considered literally. The refusal of the system to adhere to any sort of rational translation is part of the design. Nevertheless, Yeats might say that it could be transiently understood by any reader willing to cast a cold eye on rational modes of criticism in favor of exciting the imagination.

Yeats’s concealing myth is at once an indication and an expression of the contrary but conjoined character of the human spirit and consciousness he gathered from Blake. “Philosophers have tried to deny the antinomy and give a complete account of existence either as unity (as in the case of Spinoza and Hegel),” Yeats wrote, “or as plurality (as in the case of Leibnitz), but the antimony

is there and can be represented only by a myth” (qtd. in Jeffares 162-163). His acute awareness of the universalities of mythology in general and the practical elements of transmitting them from one mind or era to the next arose from his earliest editorial work with both Blake and Irish folk lore. Exposure to these, as well as to ritualized magic with the Golden Dawn, led him to develop his own mythology and also to carefully construct his own myth-of-self through prose works exemplifying turns of the great wheel and the spinning gyres: bursts of polarized energies funneling between wider ends respectively charged with the primary and the antithetical.

The simple fact of Yeats’s mythologies, more than the finer points about them, anticipates later insights from Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Their *Dialect of Enlightenment* (1944) suggests that “disaster attends the project of Enlightenment because knowledge came to be understood as a form of rational functionalism” (Morris 18). “In other words,” says Morris, “knowledge was desired only as a means of mastering and making use of the world. Implicit in such a view is a hostility towards any form of mystery” (18). Yeats’s high regard for Blake stems largely from a philosophy counter to the one described here. He wrote that Blake’s philosophy “kept him [Blake] more simply a poet than any poet of his time, for it made him content to express every beautiful feeling that came into his head without troubling about its utility or chaining it to any utility” (“William Blake and the Imagination” 113). Yeats refused to regard mystery with fear or to dwell on material utility, leading to his embrace of what he later refers to as “wasteful virtues;” much of his canon could be called, to borrow from Bataille, an

unproductive expenditure.⁷ Yeats's work is steeped in the waxing and waning between poles of high intellect and utter mystery: not mirror and lamp, but the turning between them.

Largely due to his work with Blake's prophecies, or rather his assertion of Blake as prophet, Yeats was very much in step with Oswald Spengler's ideas about myth as proposed in the two volumes of *Decline of the West*, respectively published in 1918 and 1923. These publication dates closely parallel the development of Yeats's own thought in both the autobiographical prose and vision texts. In a language less veiled than Yeats's, Spengler argued in the second volume of his influential work that

today we simply no longer know what myth is; for it is no mere aesthetically pleasing mode of representing something to oneself, but a piece of the most lively actuality that mines every corner of the waking-consciousness and shakes the innermost structure of being. (290)

At least in the beginning, the importance of myth could not be limited to mere aesthetics for Yeats. His pursuit of the divine and high regard for serious intellectuals such as Blake and Swedenborg prove this. The mythologies he devised questioned the fundamental composition of reality and certainly turned away from the emergent perceptions of absolute and fixed epistemologies. Myth

⁷ See Michael Mays's "Yeats and the Economics of 'Excess'" for more on Yeats, his disgust at the material, production-oriented culture he observed in modern Ireland, and Bataille. Yeats's troubled sense of self in a material culture is further discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of this study.

and magic in the Yeats canon collectively explore the farthest corners and reaches of “waking-consciousness” and shook “the innermost structure of being,” in part by refusing these corners and certain structures in favor of his circular, distant, and transient moon.

The importance of myth in Yeats is evident in his total body of writing, as it allows him to identify and progressively challenge the limits of a mimetic paradigm he becomes familiar with in his study of Blake. Yeats rejects art as passive, imitative craft rather than as something approaching the deliberate act of creation depicted in Blake’s “The Tyger.” Foregrounding his position, the poet resists the notion that reality is absolute or absolutely knowable through the language of reason. He seizes upon magic as an area beyond the reach of positivism. The assumptions of mimesis and the mode of literary realism deflate myth and the human spirit because reason necessarily censors or controls sensory as well as emotional experience; reason contaminates the prospect of imitation by rationalizing what it thinks it knows. Yeats knew from Blake that “the observations of the senses, binds us to morality because it binds us to the senses, and divides us from each other by showing us our clashing interests” (“William Blake and the Imagination” 112). The imagination, on the other hand, promises god-like creation, exempt from the trappings of reason: “imagination divides us from morality by the immorality of beauty, and binds us to each other by opening secret doors of all hearts” (112). For this reason, Yeats considered it essential that “the mirror turn lamp.”

If Swedenborg and Blake inspired him to embrace magic in imagining this gradual turning motion, then Walter Pater and Friedrich Nietzsche can be said to have influenced the way that Yeats presented this material to the desired end of challenging determinacy. He was learning about all of these figures at the same time. Yeats actually begins the anthology portion of his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* with Pater's "Mona Lisa." He also spoke directly to Pater in his introduction to the same work, taking measures to rationalize or to understand the primacy of this figure for modern verse. In context of his discussion of "the revolt against Victorianism," Yeats says that Pater had the "entire uncritical admiration" of both the old and the new generation, placing him in the company of Turner and Pound (viii). But Pater did not signify a mere poetic influence for Yeats. What Yeats took from Blake and what he took from Pater are near equal in significance, but he would not have embraced Pater as fully without having so directly engaged Blake. In fact, Pater figures prominently in the way that Yeats drafts Blake in the "portrait essay" or sketch "William Blake and the Imagination," written in 1897 and published later in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1896-1903).

With its peculiar form and content, this piece is hardly a reflection of the more conventional criticism Yeats provides in his collected-works project on Blake. "William Blake and the Imagination" shows the integration of intellectual backgrounds from Pater and Blake in Yeats's developing approach to a broad vision of history. Edwin Brock has written on the relationship between Pater's "portrait essay" form and Yeats's *The Cutting of an Agate*, suggesting the similarities show mutual, "essentially *imaginative* attempts to structure and

naturalize the limits of human knowledge of individual human lives” (759). By limiting his attention to *Agate*, which follows *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903-1915), Brock’s essay understates the importance of Pater in Yeats. Beyond the peculiar genre of portrait essays, Yeats’s use of myth and magic endorse Pater’s idea that “To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be tightly known, except relatively and under certain conditions” (qtd. in Kimball 14). Pater wrote in the conclusion of his renaissance study that “our physical life is a perpetual motion” (156). For Yeats, the physical can never be separated from the spiritual. He imagines the turning that undermines fixity with even greater jurisdiction than either. Yeats’s later writing proves that “the development of his career reflects a growing profundity in his understanding of Pater’s principles” (McGrath 72).

Like Yeats and Blake before him, Pater was not strictly interested in historical accuracy or the transmission of exact knowledge. “For him,” Kimball writes, “history was a mine to be worked for the frisson of insight; a certain amount of poetic license only aided the process” (14). This quality is evident both in Yeats’s historical system and in his historical assessment of Blake and the imagination. He writes in “William Blake and the Imagination” that Blake was “a man crying out for a mythology, and trying to make one because he could not find one to his hand” (114). Yeats goes on to suggest that Blake’s mythology and, therefore, any mythology is dependent on his necessarily transient experience in time. Yeats speculates that if he were “a scholar of our time,” Blake would have

gone to Ireland and chosen for his symbols the sacred mountains, along whose sides the peasant still sees enchanted fires, and the divinities which have not faded from belief, if they have faded from prayers, of simple hearts; and have spoken without mixing incongruous things because he spoke of things that had been long steeped in emotion; and have been less obscure because a traditional mythology stood on the threshold of his meaning and on the margin of his sacred darkness. (114)

Taking both from Pater and Blake, Yeats emphasizes the permanence of myth and the transience of its familiar aspects to a given audience. This means of undermining the mimetic paradigm and therefore reasoned, contained historicity emanates throughout the Yeats canon and ultimately leads to that equally strange arrangement of a system with poetry and fictions about it, *A Vision*. Even his editorial, passively mirrored collections of folk lore and collections of self in the *Autobiographies* demonstrate Yeats's skepticism towards literal history telling and his antithetical commitment to poetic license.

Pater is closely aligned intellectually with Nietzsche, another important influence on Yeats. The relationship between Yeats and Nietzsche has been considered in several important studies, but not in context of intellectual backgrounds to magic. Their influence on the poet was really quite similar in the way that each informed a calculated reaction to the mimetic paradigm. Though other critics such as Ellmann and Bloom have engaged the topic in passing, to date Otto Bohlmann's *Yeats and Nietzsche* (1982) and Frances Oppel's *Mask*

and Tragedy (1987) are the central studies on Yeats and Nietzsche. *Mask and Tragedy* chronicles Yeats's immersion in Nietzsche between 1902 and 1904, noting that the poet is often used by Nietzsche scholars to explain the concept of the antithetical. Studies in Yeats have had a similar effect on Blake scholarship. The key years considered in Oppel's book closely parallel Yeats's ongoing work with Blake and folklore, his membership in the Order of the Golden Dawn, and his first autobiographical prose writing. Nietzsche's early treatment of language in "Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense" (1873) and the peculiar form of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-1885) seem to have also shaped the trope of the supernatural in Yeats. The way the poet imagined and then wrote an antithetical veil so completely integrated into his canon signals a clear debt to Nietzsche.

"Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense" anticipates many of Nietzsche's later philosophies, especially with regard to its treatment of language. The essay was published a year after *The Birth of Tragedy*, but its regressive line of questioning helps to explain the previous work's attack on reason. Like Blake and then Yeats, Nietzsche cultivates his own version of the human Fall. For him it began when "clever animals invented cognition" (634). As Nietzsche describes him, man does not recognize his tendency towards dissimulation or seek to discover truth. Instead, he attempts to create his own truth by "fixing" it in language. This stance is resisted by Pater with his emphasis on dynamism and motion, a cue Yeats gathers here as from his work with the perpetual transmissions of folklore in and of Ireland. Nevertheless, for Pater as for Nietzsche, no essential truth is possible within the system of signs developed by

man because the word binds the thing to a certain meaning at the expense of dynamism.

Man's "uniformly valid and binding designation of things" (635), Nietzsche writes, makes truth and falsity possible in the natural order where before they did not exist at all: "here, for the first time, originates the contrast between truth and falsity." He continues, "Every idea originates through equating the unequal" (636). For example, "[t]he liar uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make the unreal appear as real, e.g., he says, 'I am rich,' whereas the right designation for his state would be poor" (636). The word *rich* only has meaning in relation to the word *poor*, and the meaning itself results from the inequality of the two. Though opposition is central in their thinking, the falsity of language itself is also problematic for Nietzsche and for Yeats. As Nietzsche writes,

When we talk about trees, colors, snow, and flowers, we believe we know something about the things themselves, and yet we only possess metaphors of the things, and these metaphors do not in the least correspond to the original essentials. (635)

This quotation describes the linguistic manifestation of a perception deficiency Yeats already knew something about from Blake; language was one step farther from "original essentials" lost on the division of man. In his best efforts at reunification, Yeats aspires to supersede the language of reason and the corporeal mind by forging his own system around his always moving symbols: the great wheel, the gyres, and the moon. As Pater's work did, Nietzsche's *Thus*

Spake Zarathustra modeled for Yeats another fashion of challenging “what we believe we know.”

The stylistic arrangement of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* was perhaps most inspiring for Yeats, and its echoes are likewise evident in the structures of his occultist writing. Oppel suggests that Yeats read and then reread the work in 1902 and 1903. The heavy-handed embrace of metaphor and mythology in *Zarathustra* draws attention to the false reality Nietzsche believes is created by the system of language. Nietzsche finally uses metaphor to the degree of absurdity in *Zarathustra* in order to accentuate the absurdity of language and the skewed vision of reality it creates. This work anticipates and informs the style and arrangement of what is essentially the same quarrel in the conclusive *Vision* texts of Yeats. “God hath died: now do we desire - the Superman to live,” as Nietzsche writes (321). Maurice Blanchot responds, “The death of God allows man to know himself in his real limits, to leave his refuge and experience his unique possibilities, to become fully responsible for himself, that is, to become a creator” (288-89).

The Superman seems to be Nietzsche’s mirror turn lamp. “The most careful ask to-day: ‘How is man to be maintained?’ Zarathustra however, asketh, as the first and only one: ‘How is man to be *surpassed?*’” (321). Obsessed with stopping the endless flow of metaphor from within the confines of a language system, Nietzsche becomes only more and more metaphorical in his own writing. He engages the language problem by immersing himself in it, and this immersion is especially evident in reading *Zarathustra*. Yeats follows in his reaction against

rationalism and systems by creating his own. He explores Nietzsche and Pater, and from this collectively formative experience establishes a window through which we still imagine Blake's collected works.

Even limitedly placing Yeats in the history of ideas is really an exercise in substantiating the history of ideas in Yeats. There are contrary influences creating dynamic motion and refusing fixity. "Nobody can write well, as I think," Yeats said, "unless his thought, or some like thought, is moving in other minds than his, for nobody can do more than speak messages from the spirit of his time" (qtd. in Oppel 3). The movement of Yeats "in other minds than his" is easily observable, and the motion itself is as important as the minds he explored. Ted Spivey suggests in his "Yeats and the Children of Fire" (1981) that the poet "believed that the great task of modern man was to seek the unity that runs through our organized facts - our science - as well as through our stories, our myths, which express our imaginative insights" (124). But Yeats did not merely seek or mirror this variety of unity.

Instead, he actively created it through his elaborately woven canon by honoring the contrary relationships between magic and politics, for example, and stasis and dynamism with understanding that the spirit of his time would soon pass into the next. This understanding is something he took primarily from his arrangement of Blake but did not necessarily proclaim from mountain tops. He understood, as he claims Blake did, that "in the beginning of important things - in the beginning of love, in the beginning of the day, in the beginning of any work - there is a moment when we understand more perfectly than we understand again

when we are finished" (111). In context of his own mythology, Yeats's beginning with Blake, Pater, and Nietzsche constitutes such a moment.

CHAPTER II

DIVINITIES NOT FADED:

YEATS AS AN EDITOR OF IRISH FAIRY LORE

In combination with his Blake collection, Yeats's edited collections *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888) and *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892) constitute the rising action associated with the turn from imitative mirror to illuminating lamp. Parallel to his active work translating Blake's mythology, Yeats awakens the sleeping giants of Ireland's history with the supernatural. He experiments with a nationalist variety of this concept and develops what would soon become a substantive and aesthetic staple in his own collected works. Through his role as editor, Yeats persistently accentuated the essential indeterminacy of the material in rejection of exact verisimilitude and controlled phenomena insisted upon in the scientific approach to literature popularized by Emile Zola. Akin to its reliance on necessarily dynamic oral transmission, magic appears as an unforeseen happening and is not deliberately evoked in these characteristically distinctive portraits. Yeats's work here anticipates important theoretical concepts associated with postmodern thinkers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and others writing in the later part of the twentieth century.

In his peculiar editorial introductions and notes for each volume, Yeats calls attention to the process of gathering and publishing the tales and draws into question the reliability of various narrators. Collected stories such as "Frank Martin and the Fairies," "The Priest's Supper," and "How Thomas Connolly Met

the Banshee” all rely upon sophisticated narrative modes that collectively contribute an exponential uncertainty to the seemingly mimetic reports. Yeats imitates this unique narrative framework in his “Dreams that have no Moral,” an original fairy tale actually written by Yeats and later anthologized by Jack Zipes. These qualities anticipate both the more developed veil that Yeats creates through his treatment of the supernatural and the subjective literary conventions of high-modernist poetics. The supernatural is a substantively elusive concept of the fairy tale collections and also a kind of writing highly sensitive to its own transmission through the restrictive reality offered by science. As with his experience editing and collecting Blake, Yeats takes from this project a clearer sense of how magic would enable him to resist fixed orders of knowledge in the construction of his own canon. It also allowed him to temporarily approach that more authentic spiritual reality closely aligned with the imagination of God.

While Joseph Hone provides valuable context to the fairy tale collections, he mentions only the first collection, and he does so in passing. Yeats biographies from R. F. Foster and A. Norman Jeffares do not acknowledge *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* or *Irish Fairy Tales*, nor do the older landmark studies on the personality and work of the poet by A. G. Stock and Richard Ellmann. Hone talks about the first volume in context of a series of commissioned works occurring when Yeats relocated to Bedford Park in London after spending considerable time in the west of Ireland. According to Hone, the family was in serious financial trouble (60). As an artist now experiencing first hand “the dreary intercourse of daily life,” Yeats was very production oriented

during this period. However, the texts he was only passively collecting were steeped in ideas antithetical to the material culture he found himself giving into. Yeats participated in collecting the work of contemporary Irish poets for the volume *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888); he also received commissions from London publishers to collect the first volume of fairy tales that same year. Hone suggests that “London was ready to accept him as an authority on fairy lore” (60).

The significance of the publications is not limited to the stories within them. Convergence of the fairy projects with other simultaneous works by Yeats is an important element of his approach to presenting material that demonstrates a clear tension between the mirror and the lamp paradigms. As Raine writes of Yeats in her forward to a later edition of his anthologies,

interest in the collecting of folk-lore coincided with his most active years of magical and esoteric studies, and his readings in works of esoteric learning—the Neoplatonists; Cornelius Agrippa; More and other Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century; Swedenborg and Blake; Theosophy, with its roots in Indian metaphysics and Egyptian Mysteries of the dead. (xiii)

In this expansive intellectual context, the heavy-handed narration in the fairy tale genre can be more easily situated in stark contrast to Yeats’s piece *John Sherman*, for example, a strictly realist novel published in 1891. Producing such divergent literatures at the same time heightened Yeats’s sense of the

fundamental assumptions of the passively mimetic and imaginative, illuminating creative modes.

The characteristic mutability and magic of the fairy tales excited his imagination in the same way that Blake's mythology did, while the more traditional prose he was experimenting with was less inspiring. The positive arc in publications steeped in the substance and newly discovered conventions of the supernatural suggest as much, while Yeats's realist phase effectively ceased. Yeats's philosophical and aesthetic conflict with realism, his belief in the impossibility of writing as a scientist, is manifest in the fairy tale collections. Through his approach to stylistic arrangement, introduction, and heavy-handed presentation of magical entities, Yeats opposes the assumptions of realism briefly sought in *John Sherman*. This opposition occurs even within the trappings of order.

The poet proves this intellectual debate with his evocation of James in the early lines of his first introduction: "Dr. Corbett, Bishop of Oxford and Norwich, lamented long ago the departure of English fairies" (3). He continues, "But now in the times of James, they had all gone [. . .]." Yeats talks about "one great merit" associated with the practice of fairy tale collection and the people doing it: they have "made their work literature rather than science" (6). He also identifies "one great fault," namely that these increasingly popular literatures speak to "the Irish peasantry rather than of the primitive religion of mankind." Yeats's objection to science interrupting the imagination persists in following lines, but his subtle insistence to understand the imaginative stories as incarnations of "the primitive

religion of mankind” rather than as strictly cultural phenomena experienced exclusively by poor Irish should also be noted.

The higher significance aspired to with this emphasis on ancient belief certainly suggests that his parallel work aligning Blake’s Zoas with other mythologies figured in his approach to staging magic even as editor. He would certainly not endorse the scientific approach to this agenda, writing that such a move would involve tabulating “all their tales in forms like grocer’s bills-item the fairy king, item the queen” (6). “Instead of this,” he says, “they have caught the very voice of the people, the very pulse of life, each giving what was most noticed in his day” (6). The idea of “catching” the voices is important because it emphasizes the motion associated with these tales as well as their dependence on oral transmission, both integral aspects in opposing the fixity aspired to by science. The scientific point of view Yeats mocks is not as vague or general as it might appear. With his evocation of James in the same pages, Yeats calls out an intellectual tradition and an approach to literature he would develop in opposition to.

Emile Zola’s *Experimental Novel* (1880), which James endorsed entirely, exemplifies the mimetic tradition Yeats ultimately turns away from with his embrace of magic. Zola takes for granted the reflection in the mirror that Abrams is interested in or what Villanueva calls “genetic realism.” In this tradition “the writer’s importance derives from his position as an observer of and experimenter with a total and solvent reality that only he can significantly imitate and convey for his readers’ apprehension” (40). Genetic realism, Villanueva continues, “implies a

realism that originates both in reality and in the writer's objective capturing of that reality." The stuff of magic and the highly literary conventions Yeats discovers about it do not agree with these assumptions. In fact, the craft of writing magic actively opposes "capturing" or fixity. Zola sets out to prove that, "if the experimental method leads to the knowledge of physical life, it should also lead to the knowledge of the passionate and intellectual life" (645). Situating the *novelist* along side the *doctor* is, for Zola, an important reply to the expanding primacy of science during his time. Yeats takes the opposite approach, attempting to distance his work from the sciences.

Unlike Yeats, Zola is most concerned with determinist phenomena and with observation and experiment. In his fairy tales, Yeats engages a content antithetical to determinist phenomena that thrives on oral transmission rather than direct observation. Magic at this phase is something that simply happens, and it can not be predicted or controlled. The essential difference between Yeats and Zola is the attitude each holds towards the enlightenment and the associated role each assumes as experimentalist-observer or magician-creator, mirror or lamp. Following Blake, Yeats would say the lamp is inherently more authentic and productive in breaking down epistemological and literary barriers to the end of spiritual wholeness. Even as a young editor of folk lore, Yeats scrutinized the presumption of authorial objectivity in rejection of absolute visions of perceivable reality, a defining characteristic of Zola's thinking and the mimetic paradigm.

However, the poet finds himself working within the trappings of rational thought on ordering his otherwise elusive material. The organization of the fairy

tale collections around classified orders of mystical beings closely follows the fragmented structuralism of Blake's fallen Zoas, or more precisely Yeats's subsequent organization of the Blake canon around these. He writes that the Zoas "have innumerable sub-divisions" and that to the sub-divisions "Blake applies names, each portion being a personage in its way, and justifying a separate myth" (254). This classification system is symptomatic of the fallen state both authors recognized and attempted to surpass through study and deployment of magic in the arts, a rise above structure from within its constraints.

Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry consists of an introduction by Yeats and nine categories of "fairy and folk tales": the Trooping Fairies (nineteen stories); The Solitary Fairies (twelve stories); Ghosts (seven stories); Witches and Fairy Doctors (eight stories); Tir-Na-N-Og (five stories); Saints and Priests (five stories); The Devil (four stories); Giants (two stories); and Kings, Queens, Princesses, Earls, and Robbers (eight stories). Yeats intertwines a number of poems throughout the book, including some of his own, and concludes with an appendix on "Some Authorities on Irish Folk-lore."

Irish Fairy Tales is very similarly assembled. It begins with an introduction, also by Yeats, and four categories of "fairy tales": Land and Water Fairies (seven stories); Evil Spirits (three stories); Cats (two stories); and Kings and Warriors (two stories). There is an appendix on "Classification of Irish Fairies" and another on "Authorities on Irish Folk-lore." Numerous poems on the topic of lore are also woven into the fabric of this volume, an approach to collecting his work that intercepts static assertions of meaning arising from order.

Although Yeats “refused to rationalize a single fairy or ghost” (Hone 60), he does in fact categorize and stylistically arrange the stories as an editor must. Stories are grouped according to their similar or dissimilar protagonists and plot lines, each classification given its own myth. This necessarily rational approach to producing a deliberately ordered book from the stuff of dreams is offset by a defining indeterminacy woven into the collections. The faculty of reason is also undermined in the divisions in context of what Yeats says about Blake. In other words, the divided fairies are still much closer to the unified imagination of God than readers, scientists, or critics attempting purposefully to perceive them. The experience of excavating and arranging variations of ancient mythologies and folk lore heightened Yeats’s awareness of the growing tension between mutability and stasis evident in his modern age of criticism. These ideas oppose the unavoidable editorial task of imposing order, and the conflict is observably manifest in the way that Yeats draws attention to the unreliability of country narrators toying with “outsiders” curious about old stories and beliefs. Yeats’s role as equivocator is most evident in his introductions and sub-introductions leading into the primary tales.

To offset the rational organization and arrangement of his tales, Yeats formally writes the teller, the recorder, himself as editor, and even the reader-receiver into each section; he employs the conventions of literature to cast doubt upon the objectivity of science, likewise introduced and often mocked. In the introduction to the 1892 volume, subtitled “An Irish Story-Teller,” Yeats brings to life the key narrator Old Biddy Hart and her uncompromised belief in “the goblin

kingdom” and “the feet of little dancers.” He depicts her and her remembered tales in opposition to unbelievers, writing:

I am often doubted when I say that the Irish peasantry still believe in fairies. People think I am merely trying to bring back a little of the old dead beautiful world of romance into this century of great engines and spinning-jennies. Surely the hum of wheels and clatter of printing presses, to let alone the lectures with their black coats and tumblers of water, have driven away the goblin kingdom and made silent the feet of the little dancers. (301)

Exponential and escalating contexts for the fairy tales render them as largely unfixable stories progressively filtered through Yeats (“I”), his audience (who often doubt him), and the original re-collector: old, isolated, peasant Biddy Hart. Language itself is similarly problematic for its progressively removed relationship with signified things or phenomena as discussed in context of Nietzsche in the previous chapter. Contributing added tension, Yeats evokes the more concrete historical moment of the project, with its “great engines and spinning-jennies,” “the hum of wheels and clatter of printing presses;” these production-oriented aspects of technology and material culture are presented in Blake as the perpetuation of divisions prolonging the fallen state of humanity. Lecturing professors dwelling in unreal cities are also claimed to be responsible for material and cultural division, but the humble population in desolate places where modernity is still foreign have their own measures of greatness: belief. The deliberate stage set by Yeats agrees with and magnifies the internal narration by

various story-tellers within the volumes in a sustained departure from certainty.

The elaborate framework and layers of narration evident in and around the stories are essential in Yeats's refusal of rational thought, a philosophy more fully developed in later writing.

Besides his proper "Introduction" for both anthologies, Yeats writes a short sub-introduction for each of the nine categories of lore in the first collection and the four categories in the second. Most obviously, these serve the purpose of establishing the basics of "popular beliefs" transmitted about "Solitary Fairies" or "Ghosts," for examples. More subtly, through these prose commentaries, Yeats structurally writes himself into the collective histories of belief and reminds readers that print versions of supernatural wonder tales do not constitute or make a science of them. Instead, these are merely fragments of belief collected from numerous books and orators, and their fixed, published versions are less important than the fact of telling. As Auden seemed to understand on Yeats's passing, poetry is at best "a way of happening / a mouth" ("In Memory of WB Yeats"). Yeats inserts himself into the experience of the text as a stay against fixity, his own way of happening, rather than simply providing conventional introductions to works he hoped were beyond academic scrutiny. This tendency shows his involvement with a philosophical debate more viable than hocus-pocus naysayers will concede. In the introduction to "The Trooping Fairies," Yeats writes

Many poets, and all mystic and occult writers, in all ages and countries, have declared that behind the visible are chains on

chains of conscious beings, who are not of heaven but of the earth, who have no inherent form but change according to their whim, or the mind that sees them. You cannot lift your hand without influencing and being influenced by hoards. The visible world is merely their skin. In dreams we go amongst them, and play with them, and combat with them. They are, perhaps, human souls in the crucible - these creatures of whim. (11)

Yeats makes quite overt reference to the limitations of epistemologies predicated on “the visible” or sensory perception more generally by association. This approach does not permit awakening to the “chains on chains of conscious beings” without “inherent form” and prone to constant change. The relationship between ideas espoused here and in his criticism of Blake is indubitable. For Yeats, these fairy tale stories are access points to something more profoundly experienced in dreams and the imagination. He develops this idea in the shapeless form of the *Spiritus Mundi*, discussed in the next chapter. And though he favors the imagination in these substantively and stylistically sophisticated introductions, they are just as steeped in the intellectual backgrounds he was simultaneously collecting.

In accord with his learning, the overall form of the collections is deliberately fragmented by periodic insertion of poetry. This arrangement makes them strange and difficult to examine as a scientist might like to do; the same quality of diverse content undermines Pater’s history-telling. The sub-introduction to “Trooping Fairies,” for example, is followed by the poem “The Fairies” by

William Allingham. Yeats's own "Stolen Child" appears mid-way through the same section. This play between accurate transmission of ancient stories and poetry becomes conventional in Yeats's later writing, but it starts here. Yeats sees the mirror clearly, imagines beyond it, and conceptualizes the lamp in relation to the supernatural. He grasps the potential for a calculated veil afforded by the magic being essential to both his philosophy and art. It was something he saw woven into the fairy and folk lore, and something he imitated in his introductions to this material.

Yeats includes narrated accounts of passive happenings with magic that emphasize the chains of transmission, the telling, or otherwise accentuates the illusory lenses of perception. Again, these were concepts he was actively discovering and creating in Blake at the same time. The stories appear as memories and recollections or as meta-tales passed from one person or village to the next. William Carleton's "Frank Martin and the Fairies," for example, begins "Martin was a thin, pale man, when I saw him, of a sickly look, and a constitution naturally feeble" (6). It continues, "Indeed, I remember that the expression of his eyes was singularly wild and hollow, and his long narrow temples sallow and emaciated." The initial phraseology here, "*when* I saw him" (emphasis mine) and "I remember" typically undermine the certainty of the actual fairy tale. As Yeats tells us in his general introduction, this style of narration is the stuff of literature, and it seems to illuminate the substance of the supernatural by even further mystifying it rather than providing the mimetic verisimilitude of realism. Very similarly, T. Crofton Croker's contribution "The Priest's Supper" begins,

It is said by those who ought to understand such things, that the good people, or the fairies, are some of the angels who were turned out of heaven, and who landed on their feet in this world, while the rest of their companions who had more sin to sink them, went down farther to a worse place.(18)

Yeats would also have recognized the similarity between this idea of an original turning out from heaven and Blake's mythology of an original split from the imagination of God. The significance of the quotation exceeds its content, however. The perspective and linguistic lenses framing the first part of the quotation are as important. The words "It is said" and "those who *ought to* understand" (emphasis mine) do not convey any sense of certainty about what that follows. Variations of this indeterminacy are evident in all of the stories Yeats included, often accentuated through references to the passing of time or the desolate places where encounters with the supernatural originally occurred. With their authenticity and accuracy so deeply rooted in the telling, these narrative structures undermine traditional approaches to authoritative epistemologies and their counter-emphasis on direct observation of controlled phenomena.

In "How Thomas Connolly Met the Banshee," readers step into a tale already in progress: "Aw, the banshee, sir? Well, sir, as I was striving to tell ye [. . .]" (100). The entire story is a conspicuous fragment promising a pale reflection of the already doubted experience with banshees. Connolly can only "strive" to tell, which is very different from a more authoritative, rational, or factual variety of transmission. The implication is that the speaker necessarily falters in his attempt

to capture something formless that changes at whim. This is also the quality of the story itself, something Yeats capitalizes on in his following attempts to write magic. Yeats knew that the “heavy-handedness of the telling” (Gose xviii) was not necessarily an act of domination or cultural appropriation, but rather an essential component of the life and energy of the stories perpetually renewed in their transmittal and metamorphosis. The acute sense of narrative contributes the very armor protecting the irrational from the rational; it is what Yeats imitated in his own editorializing and what he recognized as complementary to the intellectual backgrounds in Blake.

Even in the 1902 fairy tale written by Yeats and anthologized by Zipes, the poet overtly imitates the conventions he was obviously aware of and helped to accentuate in the first volumes he “collected” and “recorded.” “Dreams that Have no Moral” also begins *in medias res*: “The friend who heard about Maive and the hazel-stick went to the workhouse another day” (544). The unnamed character, who only passively “heard about” the Queen, returns to a place familiar to her but unknown to readers. The confusion arising from this first line persists, as Yeats spins the tale from an increasingly complicated range of memories, places, and perspectives:

A man had just left them who had played cards in a rath with people of fairy, who had played “very fair”; and one old man had seen an enchanted black pig one night, and there were two old people my friend had heard quarrelling as to whether Raftery or Callanan was the better poet. One had said of Raftery, “He was a

big man, and his songs have gone through the whole world. I remember him well. He had a voice like the wind"; but the other was certain "that you would stand in the snow to listen to Callanan."
(544)

The busy, obfuscating layers of narrative of these eleven lines of text compound the more essential filters of memory and language. In this terribly confusing and wholly contrived circumstance, Yeats recollects Maive from the passive perspective of a bystander already tainted by numerous associated memories of random lore. He continues,

Presently an old man began to tell my friend a story, and all listened delightedly, bursting into laughter now and then. The story, which I am going to tell just as it was told, was one of those old rambling moralless tales, which are the delight of the poor and the hard driven, wherever life is left in its natural simplicity. (545)

These contextualized narrative settings necessary for telling and, therefore, belief are astoundingly consistent in the fairy tales Yeats collected. Despite the playfulness of the set described here by Yeats, the indeterminacy that results is sophisticated in the sense that it immediately anticipates and helps to explain his more developed experience with magic in subsequent phases of his career. In fact, the motion associated with this dynamic telling speaks to that characteristic turning essential to the gyres he later becomes famous for.

Yeats's role as an editor was quickly recognized by Oscar Wilde, who wrote that "he has shown great critical capacity in his selection of the stories, and

his little introductions are charmingly written” (127). Wilde goes on to call the collection “purely imaginative,” but this perhaps understates the seriousness of the achievement. With attention beyond the scope of substance, Yeats was diligent about providing authentic transmission by capturing the complex narrative apparatus of the stories. The imagination and the intellect come together in a careful balance. However, Yeats is attacked in another contemporary review that hopes to assume national ownership of the material, a perspective ignorant about what Yeats was learning from Blake. Following pages of criticisms that fundamentally take issue with the promise and failure of the initial volume title, Nutt writes:

These chap-book versions are spiritless and flatulent, much as were the chap-book versions of the old English ballads which came into vogue during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and effectually killed out the genuine traditional forms. (131)

This criticism seems to suggest that there are “genuine traditional forms” of these tales that Yeats perverts and distorts as an editor for an English publisher. But as Yeats writes in his introduction, nationalism and the Irish peasantry figure little in comparison with the implications of these tales to primitive religions. Yeats “had spent much of his boyhood around Sligo, Ballisodare and Rosses, and the country people knew his family and Yeats himself well enough to give him their stories without reserve” (Raine, “Forward” xiii). He legitimately gathered and emphasized the spiritual significance and associated motion of the stories, how they refuse to be fixed into illusory perceptions of genuineness.

While the Irish nationalism represented by these tales is questionable, what they signify for Yeats as a developing artist turning towards a productive rather than a mimetic creative paradigm is not. He may have failed in satisfactorily representing the Irish peasantry, but Yeats establishes his own presence in the collections through his role as editor-introducer and seems to synthesize his collective learning in this capacity. The convergence of these projects with his work with Blake was profoundly meaningful for Yeats and momentarily freed his imagination to create in a way he could only dream about duplicating in his twilight. The poet at once awakens to and denies rational thought in these early explorations of the supernatural, even as he finds himself operating within its trappings in having to order and group the stories. Importantly, then, the fairy tale collections show persistent engagement with intellectual traditions not imagined by Wilde or Nutt in their shallow assessments.

Failure to recognize Yeats's total experience as an editor of materials steeped in the supernatural is punctuated by the unwillingness of scholars to recognize the viability of the fairy tale tradition. Yeats's critics do not regard the edited volumes of folklore as part of the total conversation on magic, or otherwise, despite the merit of the subject in other intellectual circles ranging from beyond literature to psychoanalysis and anthropology. Representative studies in these areas include Marie-Louise von Franz's *Animus and Anima in Fairy Tales*; Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*; Ruth Bottingheimer's *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, a collection of essays from a host of international scholars; and Max Luthi's *Fairy Tale as Art Form and*

Portrait of Man and The Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales.

Most concede either in introductions or in elaborately sustained criticisms that part of what makes fairy tales interesting is their definitive transmittal through time and space, through language and text. Luthi's *Once Upon a Time*, for example, contemplates the fact and implication of progressively published materials on folklore and fairy tales in the more than 150 years since the Grimm brothers:

in our present era of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, the oral tradition by which fairy tales were passed down from generation to generation has been, not only disturbed, but practically destroyed. (83)

Luthi merely hints at the struggle between mutability and fixity in stories passed from one generation to the next, increasingly by way of a counter-tradition Yeats witnessed the birth of. On the other hand, Yeats maintains the fact and primacy of oral tradition from within the constraints of a production-oriented print culture. He anticipated the acceleration of this conflict in his age of criticism, which explains why he strives to retain the mutability or motion of the stories in a way that reflects their refusal of the rational thought propelling materialism.

In their oral transmission, fairy tales were necessarily stamped by the minds that transmitted and received them on a continual basis, meaning in one context and then the next. In combination with mystical substance recognized from Blake, the dynamic quality of this knowledge made the fairy and folk genre especially attractive for Yeats, given his devotion to Pater and the belief that all

knowledge is relative and transient. The gap in any fairy tale created by print culture, Luthi suggests in *Once Upon a Time*, “has been filled by books of tales and legends. Parents and teachers tell fairy tales to children just as they have found them in the book, or they read them aloud” (84). The exception to this rule is the local legend, “which is bound up much more closely than the fairy tale with the personal milieu of the narrator and his hearer” (84). Yeats seems to discover and to explore this aspect of his fairy tales even in his role as editor. He writes uncertainty and instability into his volumes, later capitalizing on the same formalist conventions of indeterminacy in tales about himself.

In some ways, the evolution of fairy tale transmission from oral to print form is an indicator of more widely acknowledged modern and postmodern debates about the state of knowledge. Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), for example, speaks very clearly to “the transmission of narratives” (20). In his challenge to master narratives, Lyotard notes many of the qualities that appear in Yeats and that fairy and folklore scholars have been moved to consider. As Lyotard writes:

What I am getting at is a pragmatics of popular narratives that is, so to speak, intrinsic to them. For example, a Cashinahua storyteller always begins his narration with a fixed formula: “Here is the story of --, as I've always heard it told. I will tell it to you in my turn. Listen.” And he brings it to a close with another, almost invariable, formula: “Here ends my story of --. The man who has told it to you

is — (Cashinahua name), or to the Whites — (Spanish or Portuguese name).” (20)

Following his description of “this double pragmatic instruction,” Lyotard concludes that “the narrator’s only claim to competence for telling the story is the fact that he has heard it himself.” The accuracy of a given tale relies as delicately on the assertion of “faithful transmission.” As a part of his own developing encounter with enlightenment reason and the fallacy of the mimetic paradigm, Yeats uses his introductions and notes as well as the printed forms of the fairy and folklore to challenge the notion of “faithful transmission.” He capitalizes on the slippery subject matter of the narratives to destabilize further the idea of an exact portrait or absolute static knowledge. The poet draws from the contrary character of fairy tales what Luthi in *The Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* calls “[s]tasis and dynamism, constraint and freedom, and stability and variability” (68). These oppositions fascinated Yeats both personally and as an artist, and this fascination is evident in confrontations staged in his canon between the mirror and the lamp, primary and antithetical energies propelling the gyres.

Another widely published scholar on folklore and the editor of *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (2000), Zipes begins his book *Fairy Tales as Myth* (1994) with the assertion that, “Since myth narrates the deeds of supernatural beings, it sets examples for human beings that enable them to codify and order their lives” (1). To impose order and to codify his life, so torn between politics and art, is precisely what Yeats aspires to do in the autobiographical prose and *Vision* texts. The nature of codification, however, is peculiar to Yeats; his published

writing chronicles a life very literally informed by the supernatural and, accordingly, characterized by the same indeterminacy and transience he noted as an editor. Criticism of occult writing in Yeats does not generally include the work I hope to incorporate into the discussion here, and such scholarship does not see his fairy and folk lore collections as a response to rationalism or as a preamble to Lyotard. In *Fairy Tales as Myth*, though, Zipes engages the conflict directly just as Yeats does:

During one period in our history, the Enlightenment, it seemed that we people of reason were about to disenchant the world and get rid of all the old myths and religions that enfeebled our minds so that we could see clearly and act rationally to create a world of equality and liberty. But [. . .] we simply replaced archaic myths with a new myth of our own based on the conviction that our own civilized reason had the true power. (4)

Yeats understood this sleight-of-hand substitution and, in his refusal of one myth or other, chose to mythologize himself turning between these poles according to the principles of the folklore and mythologies he studied and wrote about very early in his career. The poet capitalized on the essential relationship between magic and the motion of narrative. Yeats draws from his experience as editor not simply the idea of magic and the supernatural, but its peculiar and necessary representation emanating first from the oral tradition and then in print form. The telling is the magic, as it accounts for the transmission of beliefs antithetical to reason from one generation to the next. In his progressive experiences with

writing magic and himself, Yeats surpasses his role as passive reflector and becomes an active illuminator. On turning from mirror to lamp, Yeats represents magic not as a happening but as a deliberately invoked force with implication to primitive religions and not regional politics. These perspectives confront one another in peculiar ways on the playgrounds of the supernatural in the expanding and contracting occult canon of Yeats.

CHAPTER III
“SEIZE THE FIRE”:
YEATS AND THE LAMP

Through his role as editor of fairy and folk lore and his experience collecting the works of William Blake, Yeats became fascinated with integrating supernatural concepts into his writing. More actively experimenting with magic as a trope between 1893 and 1917, Yeats maximizes his creative ability and generated a new kind of writing that presents in diverse forms still sensitive to the transmission of art and human knowledge. Realist objectivity tested in earlier supernatural sketches fades altogether, and Yeats transforms from a recorder to a creator of his own peculiar supernatural lore. As his ideas about magic take shape, Yeats’s writing on the subject becomes more substantively and structurally dynamic. The occultist writing considered in this chapter is progressively more universal than Irish, in part because Yeats draws from intellectual backgrounds he became familiar with through Blake. Heavy-handed folk narratives give way to erudite essays tracing the origins of witches and wizards and, later, to personal essays characterized by an even more defamiliarizing structure that finally anticipates his most recognized occultist works.

In *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) and *Ideas about Good and Evil* (1903), respectively including the representative pieces “Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni” and “Magic,” Yeats tests a creative paradigm through his developing investment in magic. The different, almost scholarly essays “Swedenborg,

Mediums, and Desolate Places” and “Witches and Wizards in Irish Folk-Lore” from the Lady Gregory collections *Visions and Beliefs in Ireland* (1920) demonstrate the range of stylistic and intellectual influence of the supernatural for Yeats. The concept of the supernatural increasingly signifies a serious and personal engagement with the immortal soul of the universe, described most completely in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917). Yeats attempted to control the reception of this diverse writing and to legitimize it in later introductions and parallel commentaries, often scattered throughout the canon. With trembling veils and mutable forms gradually written beyond the isolated sphere of folk lore, Yeats’s mirror turns lamp.

In the *Celtic Twilight* (1893), Yeats manipulates and alters the fairy tale tradition by recording his own personal and deliberate experience with the supernatural. This collection of writing constitutes movement towards the original style of writing we now call modernist. Whereas the biographers and critics of Yeats have largely ignored the anthologies discussed in the last chapter, *Twilight* is sometimes noted. Foster writes that the volume is “not only an enterprise exploring the avenues opened up by Blake, but also an implicit commentary on Irish identity and culture” (129). He sees *Twilight* as a continuation of Yeats’s fairy tale collections: “non-English, anti-materialist, anti-bourgeois.” Blake’s influence in imagining *Twilight* is important, but not in a fashion exclusive of other works. Foster at once misunderstands and underestimates the formative nature of the folklore anthologies. The fairy tales and folk stories Yeats collected, arranged, and introduced were not limited in significance to the Irish peasantry,

and this restrictive context of meaning is as misplaced with *Twilight*. There is universality about the stories achieved, in part, by the way in which they are told. Many of the tales are characteristically filtered through the memories of third parties not necessarily even present for the brushes with the supernatural they attempt to recall.

In "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni" the poet actually describes himself as his own recorder and expresses essential ideas about shared memory or consciousness resulting from purposeful evocation. Yeats embeds himself in the creative narrative:

One night a middle-aged man, who had lived all his life far from the noise of cab-wheels, a young girl, a relation of his, who reported to be enough of a seeress to catch a glimpse of unaccountable lights moving over the fields among the cattle, and myself, were walking along a far western sandy shore. (54)

The word *myself* is an intensive of the personal pronoun *I* or *me* and refers to WB Yeats, the author credited with experiencing and recording events explained in the sketch. He assumes the new and dynamic role of creator and character in the story, capitalizing on any credibility he established for himself as a folklorist. This element of the narrative signifies a move away from the mere recollections or observations of disinterested storytellers from folk lore previously collected by Yeats. Both narrative and content demonstrate Yeats's desire to experiment beyond convention and to promote himself as some kind of modern Blakean mystic. The poet did not simply imply his desire within *The Celtic Twilight* either.

Yeats returns to the *Celtic Twilight* and other of his works from this creative period to clarify or to adjust his meaning through notes and introductions not often considered in their own right. In a note to the 1925 *Mythologies* edition of *Celtic Twilight*, for example, Yeats talks about deliberate revisions to his actual style of writing during the 1890s. Describing his work as “essays,” Yeats writes

[t]hey were, as first published, written in that artificial, elaborate English so many of us played with in the ‘nineties, and I had come to hate them. When I was changing the first story in the light of a Sligo tale [. . .] I asked Lady Gregory’s help. We worked together [. . .] till all had been put into that simple English she had learned from her Galway countrymen, and the thought had come closer to the life of the people. (1)

This passage demonstrates Yeats’s sensitivity to trends in literature associated with his peculiar interest in the unseen. The 1925 note also implies sensitivity to mutability and revision, an important concept he observed in his attempts to capture the supernatural in writing before the turn of the century. The objective was to write the supernatural in plain language, an achievement he realizes but then turns away from in later works in purposefully mystifying himself and his beliefs. Despite the embrace of simple English, narrative emphasis on the telling itself remains integral both within and outside of the actual stories.

The notes and commentaries category of writing represented in the previous example from *Mythologies* is often attached to experimental or transition works about magic and fairies. In turn, it signals acute awareness of how such

material requires persistent, methodical transmission in refusal of critical determinacy projected from without. Though emanating largely from the supernatural prose works, these kinds of notes are instrumental in the wider Yeats canon and cannot be separated from the primary works they comment on. The tendency for Yeats to engage Yeats perhaps mimics the layered narrative debates about the supernatural he had collected, and his deliberate engagement with magic to the end of an altogether more imaginative creative paradigm also follows the convergence of earlier projects. A very different variety of writing from Yeats results and is entirely distinct from his more feigned treatment of the same material in postures assumed for executive overseers of print culture.

Another departure from tradition, brushes with the supernatural cease to be spontaneous in original writing from *The Celtic Twilight* and often result from the deliberate action of an invocation. A 1924 note added to “Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni” clarifies that the title refers to “words used as an evocation in Windsor Forest by Lilly, the astrologer” (54). Yeats had already been involved with the Golden Dawn for three years when *Twilight* was published, and this association helps to explain why “Regina, Regina” and notes added to it emphasize an original style and experience with calculated, deliberate enchantment. Foster has Yeats drawn back to Sligo during the period of *Twilight*’s composition due his grandmother’s death (125). He reports that, in addition to writing fiction, Yeats was also investigating “local fairy lore with his uncle George Pollexfen and his cousin Lucy Middleton, ‘the only witch in the family.’” It is probable that the cast of characters, including Yeats, illuminates

these historical figures. The casting further suggests that the poet was increasingly moved to look inwards as he began to explore the reaches of imagination.

As narrator and his own character, Yeats explains how the three characters in "Regina, Regina" approach a desolate place along "a far western sandy shore" where fairies were said to haunt. With many questions for the "Forgetful People," he asks the seeress if she could see anything. Yeats writes:

She stood still for a few minutes, and I saw that she was passing into a kind of waking trance, in which the cold breeze no longer troubled her, nor the dull boom of the sea distracted her attention. I then called aloud the names of the great faeries, and in a moment or two she said that she could hear music far inside the rocks, and then a sound of confused talking, and of people stamping their feet as if to applaud some unseen performer. (54)

Beyond the originality associated with Yeats's first person narration and deliberate evocation here, the concept of a "waking trance" is carefully distinguished by its divorce from the physical perceptions of wind and sea. Through his invocation by calling out the names of "the great faeries," Yeats plays into this counter-perception of reality arising from his work with Blake. Sensory experience and rational interpretation of it become subordinate to a heightened sense of imaginative vision. As importantly, his experience is necessarily filtered through the seeress. While "she said that she could hear music," Yeats himself apparently does not. He initially remains loyal to his

conventional role as narrator-recorder and does not affect the action of the encounter beyond calling out names. By contrast, the third character is ultimately touched by the influence of the spirits: “he passed close to us, and as he did so said suddenly that we were going to be interrupted, for he heard the laughter of children somewhere beyond the rocks. We were, however, quite alone” (54).

The notion of a collective trance situated in opposition to the physical reality is not unlike the spells of fairy and folk history aspired to in Yeats’s collected anthologies and the introductions throughout them. Those stories become indubitably real through the act of telling and retelling them. As perhaps with the readers of his edited works, in this piece Yeats himself becomes so entranced that he more directly participates in the arena of the supernatural. He utters the title command several times, and “what we call the unreal had begun to take upon itself a masterful reality, and I had an impression, not anything I could call an actual vision, of gold ornaments and dark hair” (55). In a subsequently inserted 1924 note, Yeats writes “The word ‘trance’ gives a wrong impression.” He continues,

I had learned from MacGregor Mathers and his pupils to so suspend the will that the imagination moved of itself. The girl was, however, fully entranced, and the man so affected by her that he heard the children’s voices as if with his physical ears. On two occasions, later on, her trance so affected me that I also heard or saw some part of what she did as if with physical eyes and ears.

(55)

There is an intersection between deliberate intellectual learning and suspension of the will or automatic movement of the imagination, here anticipating the alleged automatic-ness of *A Vision*. Such notes allow Yeats to emphasize this intersection as his own varying understanding of the supernatural becomes more developed. In addition to the tendency to revisit his earlier writing through running commentaries that either further encode or decode himself, this passage engages the tensions at play between scientific rationalism and supernatural indeterminacy, literary realism and modernism. The man and the seeress both hear and see, “as if with physical eyes and ears,” perceptions seeming to give themselves to realism but in fact expressed with the uncertainty of the modernist style. Similar to the convergence of influences informing *Celtic Twilight* from Blake to the fairy tale collections, Yeats describes a variety of Swedenborgian correspondence between the spirit of the imagination and the body. He vitalizes this correspondence of seemingly divergent parts through his notes, which parallel other writings more intricately describing his understanding of unseen forces shaping his reality and art.

The resolve to embrace the supernatural within “Regina, Regina” ends abruptly just as “the essay” itself does, with the summoned fairy taking offense at the endless questions posed by Yeats. “Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us,” she says to them (56). This episode finds Yeats once again caught in the trappings of rationalism, just as he was with his taxonomic approach to fairy-types in the earlier anthologies. Even in trance, Faust-like, he attempts to know too much about the subjects of the vision. The alternative to the

positivist epistemology implied here is what Yeats crafts in the majority of these early supernatural stories: recollections told through scores of narrators, exciting the imagination and acting as a stay against reason. This conflict is at once a defining attribute of modernity and a deeply personal tension developing in Yeats. The experience of invoking a shared trance described in “Regina, Regina” foreshadows what the poet talks about directly in a more conventional essay style in the *Ideas of Good and Evil* piece “Magic.” By regarding these small pieces as segments of an emerging whole, we can begin to understand how Yeats developed his more mature visions in essays from the Lady Gregory anthology *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920) and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

The 1903 collection *Ideas of Good and Evil* included the essay “Magic,” but this short piece was first published alone in September 1901 in the *Monthly Review*. Reprinting it in the company of other substantively similar writing emphasized what was most important about it for Yeats. As Krans wrote in response to *Ideas of Good and Evil* in his *William Butler Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival* (1905),

The function of art being the invocation of spiritual influences upon the world, it follows that only such and so much material should be used by art as serves that end. In other words, realism must be utterly banished, and no place left for the merely mimetic, for natural description for the sake of description, for anecdote for the sake of anecdote, or for scientific opinion on its own account. The

business of art, in short, is not with thought and criticism, but with revelation and invocation. (165)

This assessment by Krans could well be informed by Yeats's own criticism. Despite the mechanical publication and re-introduction process proving to become routine for Yeats, the poet was emphatic about situating "Magic" and *Ideas of Good and Evil* as revelations and invocations surpassing the business and production of art.

Yeats pressed the role of imagination for the audience he wanted to engage through the convention of an anachronistic introduction manufactured in 1937 and placed in the 1961 *Essays and Introductions* publication, which included *Ideas of Good and Evil*. In the general introduction to *Essays and Introductions*, Yeats talks about being justified as a poet "not by the expression of himself, but by the public he finds or creates; a public made by others ready to his hand if he is a mere popular poet, but a new public, a new form of life, if he is a man of genius" (x). Yeats was able to create a new audience through his peculiar occultist writing. In this same particularized introduction, the poet goes on to identify *The Celtic Twilight* and *Ideas about Good and Evil* as vital developments towards his own progression from popular to modernist poet, from realist recorder to mage creator.

The *Ideas about Good and Evil* essay "Magic" signifies another original and direct engagement with the supernatural written for an audience Yeats was only beginning to develop. It was evidently composed and later more broadly imagined for an extensive audience not limited to Yeats's "schoolmates," as he

referred to those personal acquaintances and readers who shared his passion for the occult. This element of a purposeful audience helps to shape perceptions of other works attached to the supernatural and ultimately situated to emphasize the higher spiritual significance of the subject. "Magic" begins almost in the manner of a folk tale, but with a far more personalized and seemingly intellectual tone:

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed. (28)

Despite the direct, plain language approach to his subject suggested in the title of the essay, Yeats limits the definition of this "practice and philosophy" to "what we have agreed to call magic." There is no clear sense of an exact audience or what the agreement between author and reader actually is. The elusive treatment of magic persists with his evocation of spirit beings, about which he reports, "I do not know what they are." Similarly, he does not attach magic to Truth, but rather "visions of truth" discernable only when "the eyes are closed."

Even in what first appears to be a candid essay about magic and the supernatural, Yeats employs conventions of modernist literature undermining the potential of certainty about his subject. He goes on to discuss three doctrines, "which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices" (28). The claim to authority emanates

from the first person, as well as from the assumption of accurate transmission from past thinkers. These concepts are easily discernable in Yeats's folk lore anthologies and overtly put to use here in his otherwise original approach to magic. He enumerates and explains the doctrines as follows:

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

Although Yeats had not in 1901 imagined or articulated the gyre symbol ultimately embodying the shifting energies described here, the first and second principles were already observable in *Celtic Twilight*. It is perhaps for this reason that Yeats returns to these works to clarify or to re-create their significance through his subsequent writing. The central idea is shifting or turning between apparent borders, and the Yeats canon shows carefully constructed devotion to transience in the strain of writing most obviously invested in elusive magic. This writing presents a stark and purposeful contrast to the political literature informed by conflict over literal borders of Ireland and its cultural identity.

Unlike the seemingly straightforward beginning of the essay, the remaining portions of "Magic" describe two visions shared among a trinity of

participants in a near-duplicate experience with invocation and the supernatural to that of “Regina, Regina.” The unusual blend of essay form and narrative story telling become increasingly familiar in Yeats, a stylistic convention attached to the supernatural making it difficult to pin down exact meaning. The poet draws both from Pater and Nietzsche in imagining such structure. The description of his invocation is also resistant to determinacy due to the uncertainty written into the narrative. As Yeats writes,

At the time these two visions meant little more to me, if I can remember my feeling at the time, than a proof of the supremacy of imagination, of the power of many minds to become one, overpowering one another by spoken words and by unspoken thought till they have become single, intense, unhesitating energy. One mind was doubtless the master, I thought, but all the minds gave a little, creating or revealing for a moment what I must call a supernatural artist. (36)

Yeats draws attention to the unreliability of memory and recollection, contributing significantly to the overall indeterminacy of the essay. With his allusion to the “supremacy of imagination” in creative arts, the poet also emphasizes a productive paradigm separate from mimesis. The evolved paradigm closely parallels the practice and philosophy of magic. At this time, Yeats identifies magic as a means to writing new poetry and cultivating a new public to the end of engaging the collective “memory of Nature herself.” In context of this piece, magic and poetry collaboratively contribute to “creating or revealing for a

moment” an invisible energy untouched by the reason. Poetry does not passively draw from the concept magic in this phase of Yeats, but emanates entirely from it to an end altogether more important than popular or modern designations. With his weaving together of art and the supernatural, Yeats begins to achieve the “old man’s frenzy” he first imagined in pursuit of Blake and the divinities not faded he encountered as an editor of Irish folk lore. To use his own words, he becomes a “supernatural artist.”

The two essays that Yeats contributed to Lady Gregory’s *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* anthology, as well as the notes that he provided, demonstrate continued artistic intellectual development enabling Yeats to become and to promote himself as a mystic artist. Although Gregory’s collection was not published until 1920, her preface is dated 1916 and Yeats’s notes clarify that his writing is from 1914. In these almost academic essays composed during Yeats’s explosively diverse and creative emergence, the poet surpasses the limited enchantment of writing and recording the supernatural in the mode of feigned realism and instead illuminates the subject through direct, intellectual discourse. While the first three-quarters of Gregory’s text chronicle traditional visions and beliefs in the west of Ireland, as the title suggests, the last chapters are distinct and belong only to Yeats.

The essay “Witches and Wizards and Irish Folk-Lore” places the beliefs of his rural countrymen in what is for Yeats a now discernable context more expansive than Irish culture and history. Witches and wizards of Ireland are contemplated in relation to those of England and France and likewise in relation

to ideas from pre-Christian writings on magic by Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535BC). Intellectual placement of supernatural beliefs passed on in folk lore and literature persists in Yeats's second essay, "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places." He writes, "Much that Lady Gregory has gathered seems but the broken bread of old philosophers, or else of the one sort with the dough they made into their loaves" (395). A note explains that "Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places" was written in 1914. The delayed publication of this fascinating essay is typical of Yeats, and its composition in 1914 is meaningful in relation to the defining event of modernity. World War I confirmed what Yeats already knew about the assumptions of positivism and reason, at this time increasingly debated by poets and philosophers, scientists and politicians. Unimaginable, violent combat justified the poet's sustained embrace of the irrational as a way of refusing the rotten fruits of science.

Placement of these pieces in a collection of stories quite obviously inspired by the poet's earlier anthologies implies that Yeats and Gregory wanted to assert the intellectual and the spiritual viability of the folk form and not just to celebrate Irish culture. Whereas before the editor Yeats was interested in tellers such as Biddy Hart and Paddy Flynn, he now looks past them and instead contemplates Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), and "learned Latinists, or notable Hebrew scholars" (396). The original scope and sophistication of the poet's treatment of the supernatural emerges from his more far-reaching studies of William Blake. With pieces written for Lady Gregory's collection, Yeats better understood how he might approach that first imagination

he had learned about from Blake, and rather than perpetuating divisive beliefs into non-entity, his craft worked towards regressively bringing them all together. His heavy-handed intellectual study of the supernatural echoes Yeats's progressively creative conceptualization of shared memory as variously described in *Celtic Twilight*, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, and those notes conspicuously written by the poet to situate both collections in a particular way. Given this conversation with intellectual history, it is easy to imagine that Yeats began to understand the major conflict of rationalist modernity through the trope of magic. The 1917 publication *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* signals further motion towards a developed creative process antithetical to mimesis; it illuminates Yeats's ideas about shared consciousness, first introduced in the context of invoked supernatural experience.

A striking element of *Per Amica* is its peculiar assembly, which rather like the essay "Magic" goes between fact and fiction, poetry and prose in articulating the concept of self and anti-self. A short "Prologue" appears just before the poem "Ego Dominus Tuus," then followed by the two sections of prose "Anima Hominis" and "Anima Mundi" and an "Epilogue." The "Prologue" is addressed to 'Maurice' (Yeats's quotes), inviting 'him' to remember "that afternoon in Calvados last summer" (319). Yeats stages the book as a memory to an interrupted conversation "often interrupted before, upon certain thoughts so long habitual that I may be permitted to call them my convictions." He continues, "When I came back to London my mind ran again and again to those conversations and I could not rest till I had written out in this little book all that I had said or would have

said.” The date May 11, 1917, is conclusively specified and offsets the invocation of memory and speculation about what might have been said. Although it is very short, the introductory “Prologue” is an interesting aspect of the work and by this time an identifiable literary convention contributing to Yeats’s veil in his treatment of supernatural matters. The “essay” is followed by the poem “Ego Dominus Tuus.”

“Ego Dominus Tuus” was composed in 1915 and subsequently appeared by itself in the *Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) after *Per Amica*. The poem captures a dialogue between two figures, Hic and Ille.⁸ The character Hic represents the primary face of Yeats’s system with his solar, objective, and physical determinations of self. Ille represents the antithetical: lunar, subjective, and occupied with the bloodless spirit. The conversation between them occurs in a climate of solar objectivity and favors Hic, or what is described more elaborately in the *Vision* texts as a primary phase of human history. According to the poem “The Second Coming,” both Yeats and the antithetical characters he created are caught in its final stages as the peak of the Christian era necessarily gives way to the Antichrist “slouching towards Bethlehem.”

In lines very transparently expressing how Yeats felt as an artist-occultist in the expanding urban spaces of violent, political, warring modernity, Ille says:

We have lit upon the gentle, sensitive mind

⁸ The poem also names the character Michael Robartes, who figures prominently in “The Phases of the Moon” and plays a similar role in liaising between the system and its expression in the overall form of *A Vision*. In fact, Robartes is credited with discovering the lost manuscript of *A Vision* in its initial form. “The Phases of the Moon,” Robartes, and *A Vision* are considered in chapter V.

And lost the old nonchalance of the hand;
 Whether we have chosen chisel, or pen or brush,
 We are but critics, or but half create,
 Timid, entangled, empty and abashed,
 Lacking the countenance of our friends. (321)

The alternative to this vision of half creation is objective action of and through the body, which in the time of Yeats consisted largely of violent political activity easily observed in Ireland and on the world stage. In this case, emphasis is on physical reality (the hand) rather than on the imagination. Ille's quarrel continues:

For those that love the world serve it in action,
 Grow rich, popular and full of influence,
 And should they paint or write, still it is action:
 The struggle of the fly in marmalade.
 The rhetorician would deceive his neighbors,
 The sentimentalist himself; while art
 Is but a vision of reality.
 What portion in the world can the artist have
 Who has awakened from the common dream
 But dissipation and despair? (322-323)

Yeats probably believed that his mere visions of reality transcended the insights of those rational-minded scientists intent on proof and measurement. He was also intelligent enough to realize that his seemingly absurd revelations of

awakening and “common dream” superstitions would not, as AE would write of *A Vision*, “effect many.”

Especially in his most creative works, with their reliance on the supernatural, language could not at all convey what Yeats really meant to hostile critics dwelling in cities rather than in those desolate places giving the mind over to imagination. Framed by the conflict described in the “Ego Dominus Tuus,” Yeats begins the “Anima Hominis” portion of *Per Amica* by writing,

When I come home after meeting men who are strange to me, and sometimes even after talking to women, I go over all that I have said in gloom and disappointment. Perhaps I have overstated something from a desire to vex or startle, from hostility that is but fear; or all my natural thoughts have been drowned by an undisciplined sympathy. (325)

This now highly personal dialogue shows the subjective mind in conflict with objective mind, and it recalls somewhat the “Prologue” on interrupted or inadequate conversations about convictions. Yeats was terribly insecure about his explorations of the supernatural in context of the violent political upheaval in Ireland and around the world, and attempting to explain them either in poetry or essays or conversations only heightened this sense. Sensitivity to the age of criticism informed Yeats’s eagerness to directly and indirectly integrate personalized narrative rationalizations of his interest in magic either in essay forms or in notes subsequently added to them. These initially genuine notes and

commentaries later become sleight-of-hand veils mocking himself and others, as will be shown in later chapters focused on the *Autobiographies* and *Vision* texts.

Discussion about the alternative to insecurity arising from objective minds follows in *Per Amica* and explains the essential insight of the diverse work as it relates to contrary creative paradigms:

now there must be no reaction, action only, and the world must move my heart but to the heart's discovery of itself, and I begin to dream of eyelids that do not quiver before the bayonet: all my thoughts have ease and joy, I am all virtue and confidence. When I come to put in rhyme what I have found it will be a hard toil, but for a moment I believe I have found myself and not my anti-self. (325)

The oppositions Yeats sets up here reflect the more central tension between certainty and indeterminacy that he at once anticipated and observed in the intellectual climate of his lifetime, that he endured on a very personal level as a public figure in Ireland during symptomatically troubled times, and that he ultimately wrote into his canon. As he says later in the essay, "The soul cannot have much knowledge till it has shaken off the habit of time and of place, but till that hour it must fix its attention upon what is near" (358). It was the collection and arrangement of the works of William Blake and the dynamic fairy tales and folklore that first awakened the poet to the prospect of surpassing his "time and place" so that he might imagine, experience, or even create the soul of the universe through magic and his own writing. "Because even the most-wise dead,"

Yeats said, “can but arrange their memories as we arrange pieces of a chess-board, and obey remembered words alone” (359).

In “Reality by Moonlight” (1918), Brock responded to *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* as other contemporary critics did, with excitement and confusion.

Regardless of the intricate philosophies Yeats expounded, where they do not seem to make sense or where they fail to convince, he acknowledges the feat of creation that has occurred. This is part of what Yeats was after, as he tightly controlled the arrangement of those memories and words left behind for the primary-minded critics and executives to remember him by. For another audience, the group of imaginative readers he hoped to entice away from literal interpretations, the mystery about the work itself constituted its own victory. As Brock writes,

Into that ‘Celtic twilight’ we cannot follow him: but we are the more curious about his habit of passing into it because of his wisdom and subtlety before he has passed into it. Where we can follow him, he is a guide to be trusted; and then suddenly he leaves us in a cloud.

(284)

In a similar contemporary review, Francis Bickley (1918) suggested that the poet’s mind was “like a country of delicately colored clouds, of which the forms are beautiful but dissolve and change too quickly ever to be fully apprehended” (285). Likewise writing in 1918, T. S. Eliot said, “It is always a pleasure to have Mr. Yeats talking, even when we cannot follow his argument through all its mazes” (287).

There is sufficient evidence in those essays written by Yeats and integrated into Lady Gregory's collection of "wonder tales" that he was capable of explaining his thoughts in context of intellectual history when he felt like it. Placement of these erudite pieces links them substantively to the poet's own anthologies of "heavy-handed" narrations of memories and hearsay of lore. With *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, Yeats creates something altogether different in his deliberate application of magic and ultimate search for a higher and deeply personal spiritual reality. He embraces the peculiar forms of his earlier anthologies and the ways of telling fairy tales to the end of a calculated veil that says as much in itself as it does about what is in front of it or behind it. This creative achievement anticipates what is merely staged in *Autobiographies* and *A Vision*: careful construction, arrangement, and revision; transience between poetry and prose, fact and fiction; explication and obfuscation; and stasis and dynamism in publication.

In this fashion, Yeats began to cultivate the collective memory of self. He begins "A General Introduction for My Work," "A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table; there is always a phantasmagoria" (509). The phantasmagoria in Yeats is largely dependent on magic and the supernatural. Scholars have too long studied the fact of the illusory in Yeats rather than the way in which he first develops and then actually writes the veil. New directions in criticism must consider carefully the literary conventions associated with the lamp itself, as well as what they

create or reveal. There is no static narrative, but rather a constant shifting and shape changing associated with Yeats's phantasmagoria. While authentic and arguably essential for Yeats at this turn, more dramatic presentation of the supernatural gradually overwhelms in later writing. The constructed, purposive veil becomes overly conventional and suffocates the invisible reality it first hoped to shed light upon. Yeats and his primitive beliefs, the sincere excitement of his imagination, later fade to reveal a bitter old man bored with what has become feigned and all too familiar.

CHAPTER IV
CRAFTING YEATS:
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROSE

Development of Yeats's representation of the supernatural does not arrest during his transition from passive recorder to supernatural artist. The direct and authentic treatment of magic in diverse, original pieces composed between 1893 and 1917 ushers in a different approach to the subject.⁹ Regressively elusive, magic next appears in writing falsely assumed to be accurate and historical because of the genre: autobiography. Through literary conventions of narrative attached to folk lore tradition and calculated juxtapositions between private supernatural experiences and public life, Yeats's *Autobiographies* challenges the promise of historicity. Rather than the mimetic portrait readers may expect from familiarity with other autobiographical writing, the decidedly fragmented "autobiography" created by Yeats is an incomplete and imaginative expression of self. This design is evident in the involved composition and selective publication process.

Autobiographies was purposefully constructed and arranged over many years. In addition to the initial 1926 British and 1927 American *Autobiographies: Reveries over Childhood and Youth and The Trembling of the Veil*, there is also the substantively distinct 1938 *Autobiography of W.B. Yeats*, as well as the

⁹ The previous chapter traces dramatic evolution in Yeats's approach to writing the supernatural between 1893 and 1917. During this period, Yeats publishes a range of original work including *The Celtic Twilight* and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

posthumously published 1955 Macmillan edition we now generally accept as *Autobiographies*. The 1955 version incorporates the *Bounty of Sweden* and *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, both originally published in 1936 along with *Dramatis Personae*, *Estrangement*, and the *Death of Synge*. None of these essays were included in either the 1926 or 1938 editions. Other writing such as *Memoirs* (first published in 1972), *Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty* (1944) and similar autobiographical prose works were either deliberately unpublished or otherwise excluded from the proper *Autobiographies* project. The text was always in flux and did not stabilize even after Yeats's death, a quality very close to the central concept of magic. In the same way that he used notes and running commentaries to rationalize his treatment of the irrational in earlier writing, composition of the autobiographical prose demonstrates commitment to hyper-conscious transmission of a necessarily dynamic and therefore largely inexpressible self. Yeats's representation draws from the literary conventions associated with the supernatural that he first imitated and then reinvented during the rising portion of his experience with magic.

Few scholars address the issue or implication of textual history and construction in Yeats's *Autobiographies*, forgetting the uninterpreted lists of standard Yeats bibliographies from Allan Wade (1958), K. P. S. Jochum (1978), John Stoll (1971), and K. G. W. Cross and R. T. Dunlop (1971). The initial segment of *Autobiographies*, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* was written between January and December of 1914, the same time Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was serialized in installments by *The Egoist*. On the basis

of Joyce's emerging portrait, "Yeats recommended Joyce to the secretary of the Royal Literary Fund" (Ronsley 21). The poet was moved by what he described as "a disguised autobiography." Yeats's reply was a sort of inversion, a disguised fiction in the form of an apparent autobiography. With his carefully situated treatment of magic, he undermines the prospect of self-knowledge in a way that at once anticipates and helps to develop his epistemology as expressed in *A Vision*.

Wright's "The Elusive Self" (1978) also engages the relationship between the first installments of autobiographical prose by Yeats and Joyce. Wright understands *Reveries* as a natural evolution from Yeats's earlier attempts at a more obviously disguised autobiographical novel. He considers the works *John Sherman*, originally published in 1891, and *The Speckled Bird*; only sections of the latter were posthumously published in 1941 and 1955 (Wade, *Bibliography* 22, 363). *Sherman* dramatizes the tension between the "fertility, freedom, authenticity and true love" of Sligo and the "sterility, confinement, falseness and misplaced affection of London" (Wright 41). This same tension is evident in *Reveries*, but is perhaps accentuated or arguably overshadowed by the more decidedly overt focus given to Yeats's experience with mysticism and folklore in the west of Ireland.

Despite its earlier composition parallel to the poetry volume *Responsibilities* (1914), *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* was not published until March 20, 1916. In the space between, Yeats wanted to continue revealing or creating an image of himself. The poet wrote to his father in 1915, "I dare say I

shall return to the subject but only in fragments” (Wade, *Letters* 589). He continues, “I am going on with the book, but the rest shall be for my own eye alone” (603). Yeats’s sensitivity to audience is evident in other of his works, but seems especially defined in this phase of his development when he ultimately chooses to present a far less determinate portrait of himself than the more complete one he actually wrote. The second block of his so-called autobiography is *The Trembling of the Veil*. Importantly, this is not the piece of himself he discovered or created after *Reveries*. The *de facto* continuation, *First Rough Draft of Memoirs Made in 1916-1917*, was composed and then placed in a sealed envelope and never attached to the collected autobiographical prose except in small pieces.

In 1972, Macmillan published the complete contents as transcribed and edited by Denis Donoghue under the title *Memoirs: The Original Unpublished Text of the Autobiography and the Journal*. From the very first sentence of that text, a preoccupation with the supernatural is evident: “I began to read Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*, and this, when added to my interest in psychical research and mysticism, enraged my father, who was a disciple of John Stuart Mill’s” (19). There is an appendix devoted to “Occult Notes and Diary, etc.” and another on *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*. Understanding the age of criticism as he did, Yeats was cautious about publishing this writing given its more serious and personal approach to the occult; he was his own audience. The subjects of self and magic are otherwise revealed only partially in prose actually published as a part of the *Autobiographies*, suggesting that what he does

say about the supernatural is merely posturing. This circumstance probably informed by emphasis on Yeats not being understood in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*.

The Trembling of the Veil, or what became the second part of the apparent autobiography, was privately printed and published in 1922 by T. Werner Laurie. Another piece of the puzzle, *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, appeared just one year later. *The Bounty of Sweden* and *Estrangement* were circulated in 1925 and 1926, at which time the first version of *Autobiographies* also appeared. The 1926 British and 1927 American editions of *Autobiographies* included only *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* and *The Trembling of the Veil*. They were reviewed by a variety of people and sources, most notably by AE for the *Irish Statesman* (Cross and Dunlop 15). That *Bounty* and *Estrangement* were both already written and published but not included in the first version of his autobiography suggests that Yeats had not yet fully determined what shape his disguised fiction would ultimately take.

Yeats published *The Death of Synge* in 1928, with *Dramatis Personae* appearing in print seven years later. A collection including *Dramatis Personae*, *Estrangement*, *The Death of Synge*, and *The Bounty of Sweden* appeared together in a 1936 American and a separate British edition of collected prose writing. There is no indication from Yeats bibliographies by Cross and Dunlop or Wade that this volume was intended or presented as “autobiographical” or that it would eventually combine with other pieces to comprise *Autobiographies* as we now know it. Just two years later in 1938, however, *The Autobiography of W.B.*

Yeats issued by the Macmillan Company included *Dramatis Personae*, but excluded other writing that finally appeared in the most widely circulated and studied posthumous 1955 edition: *Estrangement*, *The Death of Synge*, *The Bounty of Sweden* and *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, and *Notes*. *The Autobiography of W.B. Yeats* was the second and last edition of Yeats's autobiography published while he was living; it was reissued in 1953. The singular title and carefully selected contents indicate that Yeats wanted his story to be read as one purposively unstable, fragmented history. It is finally the chronicle of a dreamy, rural Irishman early on fascinated with folklore and mysticism and subsequently tormented by the measures of urban citizens and society. This is a very different story than the one told by the 1955 collected works version that concludes with the triumphant *Bounty of Sweden* episode showing Yeats as a 1923 Nobel Prize winner.

The 1955 autobiography is, in fact, not the collection of fragments Yeats endorsed by renaming it before his death, and this misunderstanding has caused divergent and incomplete criticisms. In his article "Singular Pluralities: Titles of Yeats's Autobiographies" (1995), Warwick Gould argues that there is a great deal in a name. Though Gould concentrates on the disputed title of the initial *Autobiographies* (1926), it is evident from his scholarship that Yeats was supremely interested in the titles of his entire collected works and especially the autobiographical prose. There was also a conflict over Yeats's chosen title to the first autobiography, *Reveries*, which he wanted to call *Memory Harbour*. This title was taken from a painting of the same name by Jack B. Yeats, which originally

appeared “in a separate portfolio entitled *Plates to accompany Reveries over Childhood and Youth*” (205). However, the name *Memory Harbor* had already been used in a 1909 publication by the Irish journalist and essay writer Alexander Bell Filson Young. This debacle raised consciousness of and excited debate about titles to the pending *Collected Works* Yeats had agreed to with Macmillan in 1916.

As Gould writes, “volumetrics and the question of uniform titles were delicate matters. Yeats and his publisher were aiming at uniformity for many reasons” (211). Gould situates the poet not in the wildly authentic valleys Auden remembers him for, but rather in the tainted spaces where publishing executives roam. Titles developed, he continues, “a structural capaciousness congruent with the emphasis on multitudinous-ness emerging in the as yet privately printed *A Vision* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1925, and not at this point part of the canon)” (212). Yeats himself was largely responsible for the transition between titles and forms of his autobiography. He arranged his autobiographical works to create the postmodern indeterminacy or plurality later used by postmodern intellects to explain the impossibility of grand-narratives. Yeats’s resistance to traditional narrative structure occurs substantively with his consistent but varied treatment of the occult and also in his strikingly consistent choice of plural titles: *Reveries*, *Responsibilities* (1914), *Autobiographies*, *Mythologies* (1959).

Yeats’s clear discrimination against certain autobiographical works and his embrace of other writing used to represent himself suggests that there was some formal and substantive design meant to tell a specific story or perhaps to conceal

one. For example, the isolated work *Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty* was also posthumously printed in 1944 but not included in the 1953 reissue of *The Autobiography* or in the 1955 edition. There is an important distinction between the autobiography published under the eye of the poet and the ones issued or reissued by editors after his death. The tension over editorial constructions of Yeats arising from his incompletely collected autobiographical works is compounded by incomplete criticisms of the prose itself. This is essentially the same obstacle Yeats identifies and attempts to overcome in his introduction to Blake and one he seems actively to cultivate in a sense for his own canon. Yeats's writing is unconventional as autobiographies go, especially due to its decidedly fragmented and generally indeterminate subject matter. The fusion of dynamic composition styles and the cultivation of structure in these works suggest that Yeats was experimenting with how fiction informs fact, how reality is necessarily constructed, and how unity of being must be imposed, imagined, or created rather than passively observed or imitated in man's life or civilization.

The often overlooked element of textual history helps to explain ideological distance between extant criticisms. A generally agreed-upon sense of what Yeats's autobiographical story fundamentally consists does not yet exist. Ronsley wrote the first book-length study of Yeats's autobiography in 1968. His *Yeats's Autobiography: Life as Symbolic Pattern* attempts "to discover the design underlying Yeats's presentation of events, people, and ideas" (1). The study reveals a pattern of integrated themes: poetry, politics, and religion. "Parts of *The*

Autobiography, then, are built upon an imaginatively subjective patterning of experience, others upon the facts themselves,” he writes (5). This same formal approach to confusing fact and fiction contributes to Yeats’s sense of unity, according to Ronsley: “Yeats conceived that unity of being was a state in which the intellect, joined with the emotions and many seemingly disparate aspects of the individual life and its surroundings, became exalted by fusion”(6). As he represents them in *Autobiographies*, the “seemingly disparate aspects” of Yeats’s life did not have the effect of unified criticism.

Autobiographies evoked an entirely different reading from Flannery, whose *Yeats and Magic* appeared in 1977. Later studies by O’Hara (1981) and Fletcher (1987) also assume the stability of an *Autobiographies* text and, likewise, suffer from incomplete survey of the structure manufactured by Yeats. This scholarship embraces one or some combination of poetry, politics, and the occult, but does not see the three ideas as parts of one decidedly calculated whole. Nevertheless, wholeness is an undeniable aspect of the 1938 edition. The remaining portion of this study privileges the 1938 version because it was the last one published under the watchful eye of the poet. He establishes a subtle but definite structural and thematic interplay between the supernatural and the historical, and the fragmentary quality and opposing ideological assumptions associated with both elements of this design confound accurate or complete description of WB Yeats.

In fact, *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* actually begins “[m]y first memories are fragmentary and isolated” (41).¹⁰ The admission of incompleteness positions Yeats for creatively assembling his histories from what is at best a broken body of incompletely remembered fragments. *Reveries* soon follows with a non-suspect narration of his first supernatural awakening on finding a flag he carefully folded each night “knotted round the bottom of the flagstaff so that it was touching the grass” (46). The poet concludes that “a faery had tied those knots” and from that also comes to believe “that one had whispered in my ear,” a reference to an earlier experience in which he had heard a gentle voice speaking to him. He continues with obvious emphasis on the supernatural in a flurry of innocent reveries distinct from his more mature approach in *Twilight* and *Ideas*:

I have been told, though I do not remember it myself, that I saw, whether once or many times I do not know, a supernatural bird in the corner of the room. Once, too, I was driving with my grandmother a little after dark close to the Channel that runs for some five miles from Sligo to the sea, and my grandmother showed me the red light of an outward-bound steamer and told me that my grandfather was on board, and that night in my sleep I screamed out and described the steamer’s wreck. (46)

Yeats concludes that his grandfather “had, as I remember the story” actually crashed on the rocks just as he foresaw. Even the sentences are constructed as

¹⁰ Page references for *Reveries* and *The Trembling of the Veil* are to the collected works edition edited by O’Donnell and Archibald.

fragments and convey a deliberate uncertainty complementary to occult substance: “I have been told” and “I do not remember it myself” and “whether once or many times I do not know” and “as I remember the story.” This indeterminate modernist style of history-telling recalls Yeats’s work as an editor and collector of Irish fairy and folk lore. The emergent modernist conventions elaborated and more expansively deployed here are unique only by virtue of the apparent genre. But the history is undermined at every turn either by the shifting text, the shadowy occult substance, or the language itself.

Just as the knots of the flag suggest, this fragment of autobiographical prose shows Yeats’s fragmented experiences with the supernatural progressively knotted together with parallel themes of poetry and politics. Simultaneous allusion to poetry and politics directly follows this initial reference to the supernatural, substantiating patterns identified in both Ronsley and Fletcher. Yeats describes the experience of his “principal friend,” the stable-boy, exposing him to verse: “He had a book of Orange rhymes, and the days when we read them together in the hayloft gave me the pleasure of rhyme for the first time” (47). It is significant that Yeats’s first exposure to verse comes from a stable-boy in possession of elitist, aristocratic rhymes. The reference to the “Orange rhymes” is to the historic “Orange Society” or “Orange Order,” an organization in support of the Protestant Ascendancy and violently opposed to the antithetical Fenian struggle for Home Rule.

The poet continues to explain that, as he imagined his own future, he thought he “would like to die fighting the Fenians.” The details are of his brave

and glorious passing, a vision more interesting in context of his personal struggle to reconcile intellectual and mystic arts with direct political action:

I was to build a very fast and beautiful ship and to have under my command a company of young men who were always to be in training like athletes and so become as brave and handsome as the young men in the story-books, and there was to be a big battle on the sea-shore near Rosses and I was to be killed. (47)

How poetry inspired him to dream of and prophesize dying in the war waged *against* the Fenians demonstrates the antithetical quality and instability of the themes Yeats most actively drew from in his development as an artist and thinker. Contrary to what is suggested by this quotation, Yeats actually immortalized Fenians like John O’Leary in his middle poetry, and he became horrified by violent acts of war. This parallel verse shows Yeats more maturely and less comfortably struggles to measure himself and his contribution to modernity against the passionate combatants of later conflicts.

Responsibilities (1914) and *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1918) engage the crisis of modernity and the historical figures and events Yeats found difficult to understand. In the *Responsibilities* poem “September 1913,” sameness and careful calculation contradict the passionate intensity of those “that stilled your childish play” and “have gone about the world like wind,” those who “weighed so lightly what they gave.” With still greater vision, Yeats reflects upon the value of measurement and his life and death in the poem “Under Ben Bulbin” (1939). The fourth section draws attention to the creation of measure and anticipates an age

or epistemology that does not value it. Here, Yeats uses the now fully articulated form of his history of philosophy, only just developing at the time of *Reveries, Responsibilities, and Wild Swans*. “Measurement began our might,” he says, before describing antithetical historical emphasis on creation. The poem concludes by drawing these ideas into one another:

Gyres run on;
 When that greater dream had gone
 Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude
 Prepared a rest for the people of God,
 Palmer’s phrase, but after that
 Confusion fell upon our thought. (63-68)¹¹

The bewildering process of objective to subjective gyres running on into one another is dramatized in this passage, the former manifest in “Measurement” and the latter in “Confusion.” The gyres themselves signify the chief metaphor of Yeats’s occult philosophy and encapsulate a very real tension only feigned in his autobiographical writing. Yeats’s unwillingness or inability to measure himself accurately explains why the supernatural is so completely integrated into his autobiography and wider canon. It defies the presumption of rationalism and represents elements of modern life that could not be measured out in coffee spoons, to borrow a phrase from Eliot.

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, all poetry line numbers refer to verse as printed in *The Collected Poems of WB Yeats* edited by Richard Finneran.

After the first of Yeats's two very different visions of his own death, the first imagined with a bang and the second a whimper, later sections of *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* continue to intertwine structurally the major themes in Yeats. In part XXI, Yeats recalls through the admittedly unreliable lens of memory unexplainable experiences "that brought me back to the superstitions of my childhood" (88). He writes, "I do not know when it was, for the events of this period have as little sequence as those of childhood." Confusion over time may be sincere, but the suggestion that this episode has no deliberate sequence in the autobiography is patently false. The complicated textual history of the work shows that Yeats arranged the selected material in a very purposeful fashion. He continues by consciously drawing attention to his elusive recollection with an objective assertion of accuracy consistent with traditional modes of folk lore and fairy tales, which he drew on in orchestrating his own myth of self.

"Though it was all years ago," he writes, "what I am going to tell now must be accurate, for no great while ago she wrote out her unprompted memory of it all and it was the same as mine" (88). This sketch from *Reveries* is essential because it describes Yeats's evolving perceptions of the unseen through a now conventional narrative mode, further complicating the vision described. The "unprompted memory" described in this passage is necessarily filtered through Yeats's prompted one, and his emphatic certainty about how accurate the story is takes away from his credibility. The heavy-handed storytelling is still less determinate given the content of the recollection, which is not of one single event but of several chance brushes with the supernatural tied together: objects thrown

through the air, heavy footsteps in empty houses, strange lights “moving over the river where there is a great rush of waters” (88). The only invocation is the text itself. Each episode relies progressively on memories framed by the language of uncertainty: “I think” and “they say,” for example. While appropriate for the stuff of folk lore, this narrative style is not at all aligned with Yeats’s more intellectual portrayal of magic as in the Lady Gregory essays and seems especially out of place in what is called an autobiography.

The poet goes on to explain how these recollections led to his belief in the supernatural, also helping to place his embrace of same within the more viable history of ideas. He speaks out against the rationalist approach to reality predicated on proof and, instead, champions knowledge essentially composed from faith in primitive beliefs. “I began occasionally telling people that one should believe whatever had been believed in all countries and periods,” he writes, “and only reject any part of it after much evidence, instead of starting all over afresh and only believing what one could prove” (89). In the next lines, however, the portrait overtly suggests that Yeats was always prepared to sidestep the seriousness of his convictions. Yeats says, “I was always ready to deny or turn into a joke what was for all that my secret fanaticism.” This admission makes it difficult to accept his reliability as a narrator, just as did his refusal to present key writings about the occult that would lead to a more complete image. The collective passage again undermines its own historicity with reliance on “occasional telling,” for example, which presents a contrast with “secret fanaticism.” Yeats’s readiness to “deny or turn into a joke” his devotion to the

unknown forces he had already been exploring in other projects signals awareness of rationalist criticisms most drawn to his widely studied historical and political poetry. Yeats scholarship has always been uneasy about the occult, with critics like Ellmann separating high-serious materials from those perceived to be childlike or unserious superstitions. Yeats not only makes this differentiation possible, but encourages it.

Yeats's craft seems consciously to move away from what he calls "mere reality," and this idea applies aptly to the autobiographies. As he writes, "I did not care for mere reality and believed that creation should be deliberate" (92). Imitating reality, after all, presupposes that one can know and express it in language through the filters of the mind. But in the wake of Freud and Nietzsche, this supposition was challenged, and the realist conventions of James and Zola became increasingly problematic for Yeats, inspiring him to embrace and deploy the invisible forces he imagined first in his study of Blake and the Irish folklore collections. He turned a calculatedly indeterminate lens upon himself, presenting a direct opposition to his assertion in the following section of *Reveries* that "I have a way of acting what I write and speaking it aloud without knowing what I am doing" (92). This statement predates the automatic script, but foresees the feigned spontaneity associated with both works.

The poet's antithetical public "fanaticism" with poetry and politics explains why he would dilute or distort his occult preoccupations in the first place. After engaging the mysticism and the occult directly for many pages in his *Autobiographies*, Yeats revisits the more public, serious side of his experience

with his recollection of becoming involved with the great Fenian leader John O'Leary, who inspired and led him to seek out and create a national literature, bringing together Irish Catholics and Protestants. As he remembers,

I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, a European pose. (105)

Yeats understands the purpose of the national literature he hopes to create as a cultural fusion between two antithetical sects with the result of unity within the Irish culture. The poet himself confronted the formidable task of unifying his diverse experience with poetry, politics, and the supernatural in his book if he was to enjoy unity of being even in revealing or creating portions of his life.

Reveries concludes with a sentiment against the portraits he provides, perhaps drawing readers back to the promise of the unknown, woven into the story by way of the occult. He says, "all life weighed in the scales of my own life seems to me a preparation for something that never happens" (108), or perhaps something that contrarily cannot be known or weighed at all. The scales of Yeats's life and death did not measure in familiar terms. Traditional ways of knowing could not express or comprehend those brushes with the occult that could not be predicted or controlled, communicated or understood. In writings cut from the autobiography project he imagined that such experiences would bring him closer to the memory of Nature herself, but he presents only shattered reflections of this

desire still further diluted because bound structurally to the less divine dreary intercourse of political life.

The pattern is as easily traced through *The Trembling of the Veil*. Yeats likens himself to “men of genius” from Ireland’s past as the second part of the autobiography opens, “unlike others of my generation in one thing only” (115). He elaborates by writing,

I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.

Because it is “steeped in the supernatural,” Yeats’s new religion recalls how the systems of Swedenborg and Blake celebrated the imagination and art as supreme expressions of worship. His religion, though, is not depicted in *Autobiographies*. And if this misrepresented philosophy constitutes the fundamental difference between Yeats and other “men of genius,” then their common ground must be nationalism and the potential for art to promote it. This perhaps more real but lesser objective becomes clear in subsequent pages as the poet transits into a celebration of his relationship with the intensely political and artistic Maude Gonne. Yeats deliberately recollects Gonne as having been guided to him by the also intensely political John O’Leary, who was absolutely essential in imagining a national literature. He asserts to have “supported her

against my father" (120), whom she opposed, among other reasons, for his political inactivity and/or his hatred of politics.

Importantly, though, by this point in the autobiography, the poet has already identified the primary opposition between himself and his father as erupting from his supernatural obsession. Similar to the case of *Reveries*, we see the pattern of Yeats's always oppositional existence staged in the first book of *Veil*. He ends the initial installment with a commentary on unity, and readers must understand this commentary in context of the dissimilar themes he persistently arranges side by side: "nations, races, and individual men are unified by an image, or bundle of related images, symbolical or evocative of the state of mind which is, of all states of mind not impossible, the most difficult to that man, race, or nation" (167). What was most difficult for Yeats was to reconcile his "secret fanaticism" with the public responsibility associated with being a well-known national artist. The next book of *Veil* sustains the swirling of theme into theme, "each one living the other's death, dying the other's life" (Harper and Hood 130). Such thematic interplay is apparent when Yeats discusses his National Literary Society, Young Ireland, and his involvement with theosophy and the occult in what is essentially the same breath comprising the second book.

He spends far more time engaging his political and literary life in this section of the autobiography, but this is merely a function of the period: "Ireland after Parnell." The supernatural, as throughout, is persistently present but just beyond reach; it effectively contributes to the latter half of this book. Yeats writes near the end that, when "we loathe ourselves or our world, if that loathing but turn

to intellect, we see self or world and its anti-self as in one vision" (192). His involvement in the political arena was a source of anxiety during his lifetime, and something he considered anti-artistic. He believed that art ultimately held the key to a lasting peace in Ireland and that the supernatural more than history empowered him to create it. Poetry, politics, and the occult were often facing off in Yeats's consciousness, but his autobiographical prose is merely a shadow of that portrait. If Yeats understands his gyres as swirling into one another, then there can be no victory in a single being, mask, or unopposed theme. The vitality born from conflict is another idea he shares with William Blake and one converted in his constant effort to situate and resituate primary and antithetical life energies. Though never fully realized in his life, Yeats stages such unity throughout *Autobiographies*.

The emergent pattern of subjective-objective opposition, respectively manifest through ideas about political measurement and mysticism, can be catalogued from beginning to end of each part of the 1926 and 1938 versions of the *Autobiographies*. The 1955 edition tells a different story, one finally created by editors and showing a triumphant WB Yeats celebrating his recognition on the world stage. This chapter demonstrates a divergent portrait dependant upon a necessarily calculated thematic pattern anchored in the concept of magic. Because it neglects textual history, the necessarily fragmented criticism indicates that scholars have not thought enough about how Yeats's autobiographical prose was engineered or what the peculiar arrangement meant for him. The decided structure suggests a unity finally forged from the opposing themes of poetry,

politics, and the supernatural. In accepting this obvious pattern as highly purposive, new criticisms can begin to understand what Yeats intended when he shifted or contrived memories in the form of his autobiography. The resulting manifold illusion is merely one version of a story that exists in alternative writing not generally equated with assessment of *Autobiographies*. By thinking about the structure of magic and understudied companion texts, the implications of broadening discourse in Yeats extend beyond the writing considered here. This agenda continues to suggest a manufactured and apparently comprehensive veil carefully draped over the Yeats canon.

CHAPTER V

YEATS'S QUARREL:

POETRY, POLITICS, AND A *VISION*

In 1954, Virginia Moore wrote of Yeats's *Vision* that "[c]ritic after critic has approached it, fascinated, balked, condescending, shocked or respectful; yet there it stands, still waiting for solution" (1). Although fifty-five years have passed since Moore's book was first published, her general assessment of scholarship dealing with *A Vision* is still remarkably accurate. Shortcomings in criticism result in great part from characteristic failure to study the total portrait Yeats insists upon by drawing earlier writing and poetry into original and revised forms. The first edition appeared in 1925 and a revised text circulated in 1937. In self-conscious poetry from the long composition period spanning key years in Ireland's violent pursuit of independence, Yeats questions his philosophical and artistic investment in this work and begins to explain why he so carefully and completely revised it. Though he embraced the supernatural to test the boundaries of a strictly mimetic paradigm and to approach divinity, Yeats finally felt trapped by his own mystic gyres. His almost desperate need to revisit and qualify earlier works steeped in magic illuminates the textual dynamism of *Vision*.

Yeats reported that his *Vision* was informed by séances and the supernatural, automatic writing and conversations with the dead. This strange episode seems to reflect a creative process firmly anchored in the spontaneity associated with imagination. However, the course and scope of revisions to this

text, in addition to its peculiar arrangement, undermine its legitimacy as evidence of the poet's conjuring prowess. In his writing, esoteric mysteries presented by Yeats progressively face off with historically real politics that drove him to write the veil. Concentrated engagement of Irish political history in the pieces "September 1913" (*Responsibilities*, 1914) and "Easter 1916" (*Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921) is later diluted or complicated with treatment of Yeats's mysticism, as in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (*The Tower*, 1928) and "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (*The Tower*, 1928). The latter two historical poems suggest that Yeats was uncertain about his subjective or antithetical craft against the backdrop of the violent uprisings in Ireland, in which he did not take an active part. Contrary to hardened sentiments expressed in this poetry, *A Vision* (1925) employs the supernatural to champion Yeats himself as well as previous works drawn from the same elusive material. The play between ideological positions dramatized in verse and prose depicts a very real quarrel the poet seems incapable of resolving in his art.

Yeats's poetry response to events occurring in September 1913 and on Easter 1916 rendered him a public contradiction in Ireland, whose romantic national intensity was clearly not dead and gone. These tensions ultimately lead to his intense psychic experiments and experimental writing. Included in the Pound-influenced volume *Responsibilities* (1914), the poem "September 1913" aptly expresses Yeats's divergent attitudes towards Irish politics and art. "September 1913" speaks primarily to the Hugh Lane scandal, the Dublin Corporation's refusal to build a gallery for a collection of priceless French

paintings, but it also parallels the Dublin labor lockout. The Hugh Lane episode, with what Henn calls its “revelation of sectarian and political animosity as well as the philistinism of the mob” (88), deeply affected Yeats. In verse perhaps more sincere than much of his autobiographical prose, the poet pronounces his disgust at how the political situation in Ireland penetrated the once transcendent world of art and recalls the integrity of O’Leary, dead since 1907. His powerful assertion that “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone” signifies a dramatic departure from what critic Jeffares identifies as his “impersonal love poetry, sad, melancholic, [and] weak” (23). But the bitter tone and content could not have imagined what Bloom calls “the bewildering excess of love in the revolutionary martyrs of ‘Easter 1916’ who were so profoundly to shock the conservative Yeats by proving that Romantic Ireland was not dead and gone” (172).

At the time of the 1916 Easter uprising, the defining action for the passionately intense, Yeats was in Gloucestershire following supervised performances of his *At the Hawk’s Well* for Queen Alexandra and other assorted nobility. News of the rebellion shook the poet, who besides entertaining the English was also otherwise occupied with his supernatural research and experiments. Through Maud Gonne and his early days with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, he had become personally acquainted with most of the participants of the revolt. It is safe to assume these figures did not share his passion for the mystic arts. Thinking of his own seemingly limited contribution to the Nationalist cause and perhaps torn by his simultaneous devotion to occult philosophy

through these years of struggle, Yeats expressed disappointment at being left out of the event. He questioned the extreme tactics of the IRB, but the ensuing fifteen executions silenced his criticisms and led to an emotional inventory of his own contributions to the cause. The poem “Easter 1916” was the result. In it, Yeats considers the executed as he remembers them and attempts, largely without success, to locate himself in some meaningful way amid the undeniable chaos.

After the uprising and his subsequent composition of this piece, Yeats realized that he had never been as fully aligned with the Brotherhood as he had thought, giving of himself only “polite meaningless words.” And though Yeats’s words may have been meaningless, he could not take them back. For example, recall his powerful declaration that romantic Ireland was dead. Although political history and rhetoric continued to infiltrate Yeats’s poetry, it became deeply and self-consciously stamped by his more subjective occult philosophy.

The poems “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” (1919—22) and “Meditations in Time of Civil War” (1921—22) demonstrate the extent to which Yeats finally questioned the value of his poetry and occult philosophies in light of the violence in Ireland. Both poems were composed during key moments in Irish history and parallel to his obsessive automatic script writing. In “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” he writes:

Now days are dragon—ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,

To crawl in her own blood, and go scot—free;
 The night can sweat with terror as before
 We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
 And planned to bring the world under a rule,
 Who are but weasels fighting in a hole. (25-32)¹²

In this stanza, Yeats juxtaposes the graphic violence typical of 1919 Ireland with the role of philosophic thought that now occupied most of his time. The poet was actively developing what would become the first edition of *A Vision*. He was also intensely preoccupied with the more universal mysteries of the human soul he imagined passed down or lost through history. Yeats appears sensitive to what was, at best, a menial and absurd contribution made by piecing his “thoughts into philosophy” while Irish mothers were being slaughtered in their own homes.

The fifth section of the poem shows Yeats almost painfully resorting to self-loathing and mockery. He mocks “the great” toiling “to leave some monument behind,” but unable to feel “the leveling wind.” He mocks “the wise” who “fixed old aching eyes” on calendars instead of watching “how seasons run.” “Wind shrieked,” he says, and quickly dismantled as mercilessly “the good” that “fancied goodness might be gay.” The last stanza of the section turns a critical eye upon the poet himself, bitter for his inability to realize any concretely meaningful contribution to the historical moment giving context to the poem:

Mock mockers after that

12 All line numbers refer to verse as printed in *The Collected Poems of WB Yeats*, edited by Finneran, unless otherwise noted.

That would not lift a hand maybe
 To help good, wise or great
 To bar that foul storm out, for we
 Traffic in mockery. (108-112)

As in “September 1913” and “Easter 1916,” “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” speaks to Yeats’s personal conflict with his removed role in modern Irish history. Contributing to the highly personal tension evident here, he repeatedly insists to his readers that such attempts to capture the workings of history in verse pale in comparison to the unyielding course of history itself.

“Meditations in Time of Civil War” goes on to suggest that Yeats had sadly resigned to dwelling in the abstract and had come to terms with his failure to influence the Irish situation through direct, physical action as combatants had. He writes,

I turn away and shut the door, and on the stair
 Wonder how many times I could have proved my worth
 In something that all others understand or share;
 But O! ambitious heart, had such a proof drawn forth
 A company of friends, a conscience set at ease,
 It had but made us pine the more. The abstract joy,
 The half—read wisdom of daemonic images,
 Suffice the aging man as once the growing boy. (32-40)

When this poem was composed in 1921, Yeats was translating the automatic writings from apparently channeled gibberish into publishable form. He had

already extracted his self-validating system of history and the individual from the thousands of scripted pages and, less mockingly, presents his quarrelsome assertion that “abstract joy” from “half-read wisdom” would “suffice” regardless of the ever-escalating violence in Ireland. This is a very personal admission, and it reflects Yeats’s resignation to never fully understanding or affecting his own life or human history beyond the scope of illusory texts filled with necessarily transient insights. *A Vision* and the veiled process behind its construction and reconstruction tell this story.

Mays suggests that the 1907 essay “Poetry and Tradition,” written by Yeats in reply to controversy at the Abbey Theater, anticipated the Hugh Lane scandal and “signaled a growing disillusionment and marked the beginning of an extended (though not final) withdrawal by Yeats from the tumultuous arena of public life” (297). As part of his calculated departure from public affairs, Yeats rushed from the events of Easter 1916 simultaneously into marriage and the antithetical world of occult practice and philosophy. Within a week of his October 1917 wedding to George Hyde-Lees, the two began to experiment with so-called automatic writing. This mysterious practice was inspired by Yeats’s sustained involvement with invoked spiritualism, as well as his more recent interest in séances. Yeats and George recorded questions posed to and answered by various spirits during the automatic writing sessions; as Yeats tells us in the 1937 revision, the spirits insisted that “we have come to give you metaphors for poetry” (8). “Metaphors for poetry” is of course very different from presenting a system of

history to impose method on the chaos Yeats observed in Ireland and on the world stage.

Ultimately, the process resulted in 3,627 pages of text, not including additional writings taken from sleep and meditation. This seemingly mysterious undertaking has been well documented by George Mills Harper in his *The Making of Yeats's A Vision* and *Yeats's Vision Papers*. Both multivolume works show and consider the actual writing produced over 450 sessions between November 1917 and April 1925. The enormity of editing and forming scribbled, automatic gibberish into coherent writing suitable for publication reveals an obvious un-automatic quality about the 1925 edition of *A Vision*. The revised 1937 text also shows undeniable distance between invocation of spirits and what is mistakenly regarded by some as an incredible achievement in psychical research. What is remarkable about Yeats's *Vision* is the way that he manufactured it by willing relationships both with his similar supernatural and dissimilar political writing. The involved composition process demonstrates the ability of an experienced, visionary editor imposing unity in his own collected works and his presence in literary history. While significant, the value associated with this interpretation is far less meaningful than Yeats's well documented desire to experience more completely a world transcending both transient politics and harsh criticism of his writing.

Determined at once to liberate and validate himself as an artist in times of political upheaval, Yeats became obsessed with the developing *Vision* project. "I wished for a system of thought," he wrote in the dedication, "that would leave my

imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of one history, and that the soul's" (Harper and Hood xi).¹³ The established context of his system allows readers to better understand the poet's famous statement from *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* that "Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry" (*Mythologies* 331). In fact, Yeats overtly links the earlier text in his 1937 reintroduction to *A Vision*, writing that in *Per Amica* he "made a distinction between the perfection that is from a man's combat with himself and that which is from a combat with circumstance" (8). Confrontation with political circumstance is evident in Yeats's poems "September 1913" and "Easter 1916." By contrast, *A Vision* insists upon a personal and honest conflict, even if it reveals Yeats's struggle to rationalize opposition between major forces in his life: poetry and his private mystical pursuits, on the one hand, and political, public life on the other.

The automatic script and textual assembly involved in making *A Vision* generated a great deal of important writing free from the grip of political rhetoric, and this escape is apparent when one considers poems resulting directly from Yeats's vision such as "The Phases of the Moon," "Leda and the Swan," and "All Souls' Night." These poems appear in the initial *Vision* along with two others, "The Fool by the Roadside" and "Desert Geometry." Yeats's integration of poetry into the prose contributes to the overall strangeness and following significance of the collective work. In addition to the five poems, there is a "Dedication," an

¹³ Page references to the 1925 edition of Yeats's *Vision* are to Harper and Hood's critical edition.

“Introduction,” and four enumerated books: “Book I: What the Caliph Partly Learned,” describing the great wheel and twenty-eight moon phases; “Book II: What the Caliph Refused to Learn,” introducing the gyres; “Book III: Dove or Swan,” an application of the emerging system to historical cycles; and “Book IV: The Gates of Pluto,” finally contemplating transition from death to birth. The arrangement and presentation of this “system of thought” lends itself to criticism in a way that Yeats’s philosophy does not; indeed, confused criticism over the system has generally upstaged treatment of its peculiar presentation. The haze critics struggle through in negotiating *A Vision* is deliberately engineered, a reflection of the indeterminacy Yeats wanted to reveal about human experience in reply to his ongoing quarrel.

As a part of the elaborate framework through which readers and critics perceive Yeats’s vision of history, which only becomes more developed on revision, Owen Aherne is credited with writing the “Introduction.” His presence signifies another departure from the automatic quality of the text and also signals Yeats’s efforts to elevate his earlier substantively occultist writing and associated emphasis on indeterminacy. Instead of the historical figure William Butler Yeats boldly telling a philosophy of history, our necessarily limited perceptions can only see through a set of characters that he created, killed, and then resurrected: Owen Aherne and his counterpart, Michael Robartes. In the introduction, Aherne questions Yeats’s whereabouts and then recalls earlier encounters with Robartes over the miraculous discovery of ancient, bundled texts. As Aherne explains, one scroll describes “the mathematical law of history, that bundle the adventure of the

soul after death, that other the interaction between the living and the dead and so on" (xx). This staged circumstance illuminates how Yeats perhaps saw himself "discovering" unstudied mystic poetry from Blake and functions as a narrative veil protecting the hyper-conscious master of puppets from criticism.

Other than in the vision texts, the character Aherne figures most prominently in "The Phases of the Moon" with his cohort Michael Robartes. Before publication of that poem in 1919, he appeared in "The Tables of the Law" (1904). Adding to the prominence of Robartes and Aherne, "The Phases of the Moon" is actually situated within *A Vision*. Both characters in the poem mock Yeats's purposive studies into human nature and civilization, because they claim the enlightenment he seeks depends on a kind of knowledge antithetical to reason. In addition to the dialogue between two imaginary figures, much of what passes is about playing or illusion and the impossibility of knowing. As Robartes says,

Were not our beds far off I'd ring the bell,
 Stand under the rough roof-timbers of the hall
 Beside the castle door, where all is stark
 Austerity, a place set out for wisdom
 That he will never find; I'd play a part;
 He would never know me after all these years
 But take me for some drunken country man;
 I'd stand and mutter there until he caught
 "Hunchback and Saint and Fool," and that they came

Under the three last crescents of the moon,
And then I'd stagger out. He'd crack his wits
Day after day, yet never find the meaning. (124-135)

The central idea in this passage is that, despite his intellectual pursuit of the invisible forces shaping reality and human experience, Yeats "will never find" the meaning; this sentiment is repeated twice. Approaching *A Vision* in the same manner as Yeats depicted himself in a futile search for secret knowledge, it suggests, is an exercise in frustration and time wasted. Reason and realism are undermined both by the supernatural substance of the system described and by the form and manner of utterance following the prose introduction, said to have been written by Aherne, and a subsequent section he is also credited with. This heavy-handed telling has roots in Yeats's early work with fairy lore of Ireland and other episodes undermining the automatic-ness of the carefully assembled work.

The poet conceded in the dedication to the 1925 edition of *A Vision* that he could "make the book richer, perhaps immeasurably so, if I were to keep it by me for another year, and I have not even dealt with the whole of my subject, perhaps not even with what is most important. [. . .] Doubtless I must someday complete what I have begun" (xii-xiii). "Someday," as it turned out, came sooner rather than later for Yeats. Poor reviews of his strange text once more fueled his habitual need to revisit published works to clarify—or perhaps to further confuse—his meaning. Just after the six hundred copies of the book were distributed to subscribers in January 1926, Yeats's long-time friend George

Russell (AE) reviewed it for the *Irish Statesman*. Russell was one of very few literati to publicly acknowledge the publication by way of formal review. AE wrote,

Here I fall away from a mind I have followed, I think with understanding [. . .] and as he becomes remote in his thought I wonder whether he has forgotten his own early wisdom, the fear lest he should learn 'to speak a tongue men do not know.' I allow myself to drift apart because I feel to follow in the wake of Mr.

Yeats's mind is to surrender oneself to the idea of Fate and to part from the idea of Free Will. (337)

He continues, "Now Mr. Yeats would have me believe that a great wheel turns ceaselessly, and that I and all others drop into inevitable groove after groove." Given the heated and often violent political situation in Ireland, the suggestion of a universe controlled by moon phases and fantastical gyres offended Russell and what other readers there were. Russell insists that "it is always possible for a man to rise above his stars." Concentrating on the fatalistic system Yeats proposed, rather than the significance of its fragmented arrangement or relationship to other writing, AE was also extremely troubled by Yeats's failure to elaborate on any number of concepts that he takes up in *A Vision*. "The thought which in other writers would be expanded into volumes," he writes, "is here continually reduced to bare essences, to tables of the faculties and their interactions [. . .]" (338). AE concludes his review with the solemn prediction that "it is not a book which will affect many in our time."

Such public criticism of *A Vision* forbade the freeing of Yeats's imagination, prolonging and intensifying his personal quarrel over the place of private, philosophical pursuits and public, political ones. Appointed for a second term as an Irish senator in 1925, Yeats was even more vulnerable to attacks on the basis of his strange interests, and his role there may also help to explain his intense revision of the text. Despite his best efforts to elude the public life following the events of September 1913 and Easter 1916, as a senator Yeats delivered numerous controversial speeches expressing minority views. For example, he spoke most notably on divorce and censorship. His primary contribution came as Chairman of the Commission on Coinage, where he was able to act according to his true instincts as an artist instead of anything like a contrived political persona. As Jeffares writes in his "Yeats the Public Man" (1964), the poet "was not incapable of political thought but he scorned mere political action, any mere playing of the role of popular politician" (31). In this phase of his experimental life, Yeats was living the tensions described in his *Vision* work and less exactly staged in his autobiographical prose. He transited between the esoteric, antithetical abstractions of his invoked philosophy and the rational-minded political realities he loathingly perceived as the measure of modernity.

The conclusive statement about politics in "A General Introduction for My Work" (1937) is not ambiguous and arises from the combination of his involvement in the political arena and revisions to the vision inspired by ongoing dialogue with the dead and critics. He writes,

I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons; State and Nation are the work of intellect, and when you consider what comes before and after them they are [. . .] not worth the blade of grass God gives for the next of the linnet. (525)

Aside from general attempts to promote the role of art in Ireland, Yeats's labor in the Senate went against everything he had expressed in *A Vision* and probably aggravated residual insecurities about his relationship to the passionately intense Irish Republican Brothers and such figures as Maude Gonne. The senator Yeats was forced to think and operate in the same objective reality condemned in his book. He was a small piece of a great machine, one as busy with manufacturing literary modernism as it was spitting out modern Ireland. Feigned supernaturalism expressed in a published book, even if veiled in peculiar introductions and imaginative poetry, could not distance Yeats enough from this reality.

Elaborate changes to the better known 1937 edition of *A Vision* insist on the antithetical quality of the project in relation to politics, as well as the automatic-ness of the manuscript. The revision signifies Yeats's attempt to elude authorial responsibility for the strange prose work and perhaps the harsh criticisms it ushered in. Revision also substantiates the notion of textual and epistemic transience first explored early in his collection and comparison of rural folk and fairy tales, implied in the autobiographical prose, and finally presented in Yeats's philosophy. "The Phases of the Moon" poem is highlighted in the new table of contents as a section in itself, one of three poems remaining from the

initial edition. A new poem engaging the characters Huddon, Duddon, and Daniel O'Leary from Yeats's folk lore collection also appears. The more heavily dramatized and amended fiction, "Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends: An Extract from a Record Made by his Pupils" precedes five enumerated books: "Book I: The Great Wheel," "Book II: The Complete Symbol," "Book III: The Soul in Judgment," "Book IV: The Great Year of the Ancients," and "Book V: Dove or Swan"; the poem "All Souls' Night" appears as an epilogue. Of the four books from the original version, only "Dove or Swan" is recognizable by name in the 1937 text.

Although the philosophy of the 1937 edition is essentially the same, still emphasizing formative tension between primary-rational energies and antithetical-imaginative ones, it is presented in more universal terms. This may suggest a deliberate distancing from the personal, individualistic approach to mysticism in the 1925 version and also evident in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. Reorganizing the material and presenting it differently create the possibly false impression that Yeats more noticeably commands his system, a development the poet speaks to in the beginning of the work. His intellectual development can be explained, if you believe WBY in his prefatory comments, through his reading of philosophers that his controls had forbidden him to read during the initial phase of composition. Having now purposively studied Plato, Plotinus, Berkeley, Coleridge, and others, Yeats was able to display, as Powell writes, "remarkable understanding of the philosophical problems which had to be resolved if his system were to be more than an occult curiosity" (273). While insightful, Powell's

narrow assessment of the revision disregards new arrangement and presentation of materials providing further possibilities of meaning. First disclosure of the strange and “still stranger phenomena” apparently leading to the 1925 publication is integrated into a political commentary. Together, these changes either illustrate or mock the better formed philosophy Powell and other critics seek.

“A Packet for Ezra Pound” serves as a collective reintroduction to the 1937 edition of *A Vision*. “Do not be elected to the Senate of your country” (26), Yeats advises Pound in “A Packet.” He continues, “Neither you nor I, nor any other of our excitable profession, can match those old lawyers, old bankers, old business men, who, because all habit and memory, have begun to govern the world.” The poet goes on to sketch the rationally minded politicians with bankers, described as lightly conversing during rifle fire at a Dublin bank. He mockingly writes that, in this very real circumstance, “they had to raise their voices a little as we do when we have selected by accident a restaurant where there is an orchestra.” Yeats’s description depicts both groups as willfully blind to the violent tensions navigated in his antithetical work. The bank scene is very similar to the women coming and going in Eliot’s “Prufrock” poem, ignoring somehow the impenetrable yellow fog arresting all vision and clarity but not the illusion of high-culture evident in their “talking of Michelangelo.”

That Yeats spoke against the Senate in the new introduction suggests that he wanted to position politics as the primary force of opposition to material in the work itself. The strange commentary also substantiates reading of *A Vision* as

the manifestation of Yeats's most significant quarrel with himself. In addition to his direct treatment of politics and politicians, the revision disclosed the extraordinary circumstances of *A Vision's* composition. "On the afternoon of October 24th 1917, four days after my marriage," Yeats explains, "my wife surprised me by attempting automatic writing" (8). He continues, "What came in disjointed sentences, in almost illegible writing, was so exciting, sometimes so profound, that I persuaded her to give an hour or two day after day to the unknown writer, and after some half-dozen such hours offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences." It is evident from this substantive change, in addition to what its placement suggests, that Yeats wanted readers to think his system arose from lived supernatural encounters more profound than could be imagined in banks and political chambers. The will-to-mystic designation distinguishes Yeats from Blake, an antithetical debt as practical as it was philosophical because it arose from his editing work.

Drawing equally from his editorial roots in the anthologies of Irish fairy and folk tales, "A Packet" leads into the "Stories of Michael Robartes and his Friends" with its integrated description of strange and unpredictable supernatural happenings. A deliberate mixture of fact, fiction, and poetry, the radically revised 1937 version of the Robartes framework Yeats had clumsily engineered in the 1925 edition more completely undermines any rational legitimacy about the system itself. The poet further develops and justifies the initial attempt at a fictional haze, essentially discrediting the "absolutes" of his system by stating that

as my wife was unwilling that her share should be known, and I to seem sole author, I had invented an unnatural story of an Arabian traveller which I must amend and find a place for some day because I was fool enough to write half a dozen poems that are unintelligible without it. (19)

The story as now printed, he explains in a footnote, is the amended version. Although the revision rejects with shame the 1925 story about how Michael Robartes chanced upon the book of Giraldus and the Judwali tribe and that he and Aherne argued with Yeats about philosophy, it is really no less calculated or un-automatic.

The revised *Vision* fiction still attempts to pique the interest of Yeats's readers, ushering them into an increasingly staged canon that pits his experience with imagination against reason. In fact, two years before publication of the *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921) volume of poetry, Yeats wrote in the *Wild Swans at Coole* "Preface" (1919) that

Michael Robartes and John Aherne, whose names occur in one or other of these, are characters in some stories I wrote years ago, who have once again become part of the phantasmagoria through which I can alone express my convictions about the world. (qtd. in *Variorum Poems* 852)

This passage closely resembles sentiments published in the same year in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* and subsequent allusions to phantasmagoria uttered in "A General Introduction to my Work" (1937). The phantasmagoria calculated by

Yeats and situated around the supernatural in his canon is part of his reply to scientific rationalism that began long before his brush with the Golden Dawn. The primary points of contact are to contrived dialogues corroborating convictions otherwise expressed in poetry, as in “Ego Dominus Tuus” and “The Phases of the Moon,” along with the characteristically contrary perspectives of the characters in each respective poem. The two central characters in both versions of the *Vision* text appear most prominently in the later 1919 poem, among the most essential pieces to the familiar system Yeats finally describes overtly in the 1925 edition.

The blueprint for embedding the system with other elements of his writing is difficult to date. Barbara Croft points out that letters written by Yeats, “do not reveal at what point [he] decided to present the system as an edition of a manuscript that had been discovered by Robartes, nor why he abandoned John Aherne, nor why some portions are ‘written’ by Owen” (141). In lines that underestimate the primacy of his earliest autobiographical work and the way in which it was influenced by the folk lore, Croft continues:

Yet clearly the problem of how to present this exotic material absorbed him. He seems finally to have settled on a piece-meal tactic whereby he would first seed the ground with advance poems and sly hints within his prose work. (141)

Yeats did not “finally” settle on a piecemeal tactic. Rather, he was already in the process of discovering and presenting one from his early explorations of William Blake, folk lore, and experimentation with disclosing a partially but necessarily

feigned self and vision of the supernatural in his autobiographical writing. As early as 1915, having completed *Reveries over Childhood and Youth*, Yeats wrote to his father that he would “dare say I shall return to the subject, but only in fragments” (Wade, *Letters* 589). The integration and more prominent recasting of Robartes and Aherne is one such fragment.

Another similarly recycled fictional fragment is “Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O’Leary” portion of the revised 1937 fiction. Importantly, this piece of the fictive element in the revised vision is merely “An Extract from a Record” made by the pupils of Robartes. The characters indeterminately extracted from a record by still other fictions date back to the *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* anthology, appearing there in modified form under the “Kings, Queens, Princesses, Earls, Robbers” section as “Donald and His Neighbors.” The conclusive appearance of Huddon, Duddon and Daniel O’Leary is especially significant because of the folk universality they bring to Yeats’s own occult writing. Their genealogies alone signal the primacy of the heavy-handed telling and perpetual transmission affording such universality for them and Yeats. They also help to distance *A Vision* from the inhibiting nationalist context implied by AE with his focus on the hazards of determinism; Yeats also refused a strictly nationalist context for his folk lore anthologies. In a persistently un-automatic fashion, the folk lore characters excite the imagination in a way that political strife could not, perhaps granting access to the universal memories and experiences the poet is still talking about thirty-seven years after his work editing the projects. As the narrative conventions of Irish wonder stories taught him to do, Yeats

progressively instituted a modernist convention of confusing fact and fiction, in part, through layers of perception tempered by presentation or formal arrangement of materials not limited to single works, but rather woven through the entire canon. The increasingly complicated structural framework of Yeats's *Vision* signifies this literary and epistemic veil, and critics who neglect this element of the text in favor of attacking his system only substantiate the.

In his "Mr. Yeats, Michael Robartes and Their Circle" (1975), Michael Sidnell writes that "Yeats attempted to develop further the unity of metaphysical speculation and passionate occasions through the Robartes phantasmagoria, by which, fantastically, he was stepping outside his own productions and offering to observe the observer" (228). Passively observing both Robartes and other earlier, perhaps less tainted fruits of his imagination — and being moved to do so as a part of a personal quarrel over such creations and associated supernatural interests in time of violence — suggests a turn back from lamp to mirror. Yeats's seemingly regressive move to observation of those characters he first created and then used to establish textual and thematic dynamism in his writing closes a circle he first imagined and then necessarily constructed over many years from the energies generated by conflict in his personal life. His deliberate turn, or editorial insistence upon convergence of style between mimetic and productive creative paradigms, embodies the motion and philosophy of his gyres and the way he used them to create and illuminate himself and his collected writing. Even the alleged spirit mediums suggest the system of oppositions between the primary and antithetical, an expression of the defining characteristic of modernity,

must be understood through application and by implication turned on Yeats. As the poet writes in the revised 1937 introduction, "They encouraged me, however, to read history in relation to their historical logic, and biography in relation to their twenty-eight typical incarnations, that I might give concrete expression to their abstract thought" (12). The literary manifestation of his greatest quarrel with himself, the internal conflict between his work in literature and his involvement in politics, is *A Vision*.

This present study does not attempt to solve the mystery of the *Vision* texts, which Yeats essentially tells us is impossible. Instead, it places the peculiar work into an appropriately expansive context and arrives at a greater understanding of the relationship between Yeats's poetry, politics, and wider canon. Yeats sought to end the inhibiting effect of political reality on his work through the creation of a mythology that would celebrate the role of the artist in history and, ideally, "free his imagination." The dream was never fully realized during his life, due in part to his unavoidable engagement with the course of modern Irish history ensured by his multiple appointments to the first Senate of the Irish Free State. Further, the reception of his book was unfriendly and did not completely free his imagination to create, despite the renewed sense of pressure to be creative. Although he continued writing poetry, Yeats essentially spent the rest of his life revising the text and attempting to make it fit the greater canon for anyone who might read all that he wrote.

Whether or not Yeats was ever completely satisfied with *A Vision* is subject to debate. We do know that upon receiving a copy of the 1937 edition he

immediately began making corrections (Hood 62). Nothing came of these amendments. As he knew we would, students continue to engage Yeats only in part through whatever pieces of the puzzle we can piece together. The passing fashions of literature and literary criticism likewise continue to dictate our approach to his writing, often still blind to the lenses Yeats left for us to perceive him through in finally engineering his vision. One theory or interpretation of Yeats's strange works will create opportunity for the next, but not even the gold ones will stay.

CONCLUSION

NATURAL-SUPERNATURAL:

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

The supernatural in Yeats represents a great convergence of major ideas carefully woven into his entire canon. At once a philosophical concept and literary convention, it presents the opportunity to explore a highly spiritual creative paradigm transcending fundamental assumptions arising from mimesis and the equally inhibiting age of criticism. The imitative mirror Yeats's refers to in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* becomes an illuminating lamp precisely through his treatment of imagination and the supernatural, a transition inspired by his own study and arrangement of similar material in Blake. Although pivotal, this ideological and stylistic turn gave way to another in a manner seeming to explain and validate the constant motion of Yeats's gyres. Given the overwhelmingly material quality of those last works so artificially steeped in folk tradition and ceremonial magic, the illuminating lamp is reduced from spiritual principle to staged construct. Both *Autobiographies* and *A Vision* finally demonstrates Yeats's astonishing achievement as a visionary craftsman and editor rather than as a mystic. The personal significance of the subject for Yeats was never publicly expressed in a manner even closely showing his intense attachment to it. The closest he came was in the middle period of his prolific writing career, when he more privately developed his unique incarnation of what we may inexactly refer to as "magic" in scattered and still hidden pieces of writing.

The works most heavily studied in the universe of his occultist thinking, *Autobiographies* and *A Vision*, are feigned veils gradually presented to validate earlier writing and to deny purposively the certainty about him insisted upon by the science-minded critics wanting to fix his meaning. His twilight posture is informed by tragic understanding of what separated his brush with the immortal spirit of the universe from that of his idol William Blake. Yeats ultimately suggests something about the impermanence of human knowledge with his mechanical production of a perpetually shifting natural-supernatural, but never completely achieves the more important spiritual unity or closeness to that first imagination he was learning about in the 1890s.

As an editor, collector, and interpreter in his *Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, William Yeats became versed in the profundity of mysticism and the potential for an entire canon to be aesthetically situated around it. He imposed order on incomplete assessments and undiscovered works, an agenda ultimately culminating in his interpretation of what he asserted was Blake's spiritual opposition to a material culture predicated on division rather than unity. Key in the way that Yeats understood him, Blake did not emphasize his mystic experience with the supernatural in furthering his often veiled social criticisms. He did not promote or popularize himself by talking openly about the strange visions and abilities he is said to have had. Yeats, on the other hand, actively pursued the designation of spiritualist mystic and progressively, deliberately wove proximate and familiar versions of what he perceived to be

universal mythologies into his canon. He used the same approach in forging the cult of his own personality to break away from the trappings of reason.

During what I have described as the rising period associated with this concept, in which Yeats transits from a passive collector of mystic experiences to an active invocator, he appears terribly sincere in his effort to realize and transmit for his readers a spiritual wholeness in rejection of divisive or fixed realities sought by scientists and realist authors. He persists as an editor of Irish fairy and folk lore, again carefully introducing, arranging, and often annotating these works and beliefs in resistance to enlightenment thought through their peculiar arrangement and introduction. The phenomenon of convergent influence between his study of universal spiritual principles in Blake and national mythologies in Ireland becomes more pronounced in his later collected works. This writing more purposefully draws from numerous periods of his development as an artist. In his gradual expression of self, Yeats merged the essential indeterminacy about higher powers unperceived by sensory experience with a progressively layered narrative style instrumental to the timeless quality of Irish wonder tales.

Yeats's vision of self and civilization is modeled after the concept and conventions of transient and supremely unfixable knowledge, a philosophy arranged in a way that evokes the stylistic peculiarities of both Walter Pater and Frederick Nietzsche. The impermanence and following impossibility of such knowledge represents a significant quarrel for Yeats rather than an avenue of artistic liberation. On his deliberate invocation of magic and following turn from

mirror to lamp in the *Celtic Twilight* and *Ideas of Good and Evil*, the poet embraces and the constant shifting associated with magic and collective memory. Yeats's emphasis of invoked dynamism in his own works signifies a dramatic departure from merely reporting what he heard from Irish countrymen or learned studying William Blake. His approach to the supernatural becomes personalized, often predicated on personal narrations, and he struggles to depict it accurately in controlled ways, using the kinds of introductions and arrangements typical of his folk lore anthologies. He persistently returns to previous works during this period of transformation through notes and commentaries and even re-collections of writing in new or different editions. The overwhelming self-consciousness observed from Yeats as an editor of his own progressively elusive works corroborates his philosophy of a motion he came to associate with the supernatural and magic. These dynamic concepts further converged with external pressure from the very real and violent course of modern Irish history creating an energetic vitality about the entire canon.

Yeats's tendency to configure and then reconfigure his perceptions about the supernatural is most pronounced in the scattered essays, introductions, and notes collectively comprising *Mythologies* and *Essays and Introductions*. These works include the essays "Magic" and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. Treatment of such pieces generally occurs in isolation, if at all, rather than in relation to one another or the anachronistic commentaries Yeats provided. This convention signaled for his readers the primacy of what might be called intra-text, something not limited to but certainly most evident in his occultist writing. Reading into

selected works the encircling poems or notes or introductions contributes a perpetual motion causing the cloak of almost impenetrable secrecy surrounding Yeats and magic to tremble. He did at times also speak plainly to his perceptions about this topic. The essays in the Lady Gregory collection *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* are straightforward and intellectual, but this direct approach is decidedly sidestepped in the writing he most actively promoted for his readers. There is also selected autobiographical prose published long after Yeats's death that honestly discloses his investment in magic, but this is not what he left audiences to understand or more exactly to misunderstand him by. These kinds of understudied pieces are hardly subordinate to those traditionally anthologized works by Yeats and must be more fully drawn into extant and future scholarship in recognition of the way that Yeats himself attempted to intertwine and validate all of his collected works.

The running notes, commentaries, introductions, and withheld publications often counter or entirely reverse what we think we know about the poet. Yeats's *Autobiographies* represents only the strain of writing he carefully forged, in part parallel to his development of the automatic vision script. This fragmented branch of the Yeats canon is to great extent feigned, and the historical impossibility about it seems to be modeled after his emerging portrait of the supernatural. The textual history of Yeats's autobiography was constantly shifting, as he said the memory of the Nature herself was. For his public audience, he crafted an image of himself as a child curious about the subject of magic. In this circumstance the supernatural transfigures from an occurrence to a purposefully invoked force and

literary convention, and then to a subsequent epistemology. The turning of the topic itself draws into it and illuminates the antithetical matter of political life in Ireland, realistically and sincerely represented in a style and language more suitable for perception and measurement by readers and critics. This entire body of writing, however, is so fragmented that the real story is in the formidable intra-text students will generally not know about as passive recipients of Macmillan's collected works.

If *Autobiographies* illustrates through its pieces the swirling of primary into antithetical in Yeats's life, then *A Vision* even more cryptically explores the system he ultimately gave to his readers in justification of what was, in the end, a fundamentally flawed experiment. The delicate unity of being conceived from Blake and meant to prevent division into non-entity is not realized in this final piece, even though it is once again depicted only after years of heavy textual revision. The poetry surrounding *A Vision* suggests that Yeats was finally tormented by his once secret fanaticism over the supernatural. Throughout the text, the elaborate narrative structure and feigned postures that Yeats situates himself within are really a demonstration of his ability to mock his critics and even countrymen. As per the method of his canon leading to *A Vision*, there are certainly genuine fragments of Yeats's esoteric wisdom spun from his image of the gyres and great wheel. However, these are often so deeply embedded in texts predicated on the illusory matter of the dead and remembered utterances by contrived characters that hope for conclusive certainty beyond the awe-inspiring feat of creation is lost. To Virginia Moore, Yeats might say: there is no

solution to my philosophy. But there are realistic and meaningful avenues for further study into Yeats's natural-supernatural.

One of the major implications of the manufactured phantasmagoria Yeats cultivated is for epistemology. There is a dynamic motion ascribed to magic and overtly reflected in the narrative style and publication history of the canon. Stylistic arrangement of fragments punctuated by poetry not obviously related and prose intra-texts contribute to the mutability of Yeats's history and to his perceptions of human history. The piecemeal tactic favoring links in the chain of human knowledge represents a comprehensive pattern and guiding principle in Yeats, first anticipating and today evoking such thinkers as Jean-Francois Lyotard. Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* refuses the grand narrative sought by enlightenment minds, and the Yeats canon endorses this position with its reliance on dynamic qualities radiating from his natural-supernatural portrait. Thinking about Yeats beyond the scope of his literary contributions may prove rewarding in developing his place in the history of ideas, especially by concentrating on his application of a creative paradigm predicated on mobility or the impossibility of complete or static knowledge. This was Yeats's own painful revelation after failing to unearth the mysteries he was drawn to and created from. Another area for sustained thought on the topic of Yeats and intellectual history arising from his most imaginative works is to psychoanalysis.

The central insight of Yeats's investment in magic, as the 1901 essay by the same title says, is that the borders of the mind are always shifting but ultimately emanate from a single consciousness. Though Yeats does not really

return to this idea with any candid discussion after “Magic” or perhaps *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, choosing instead to veil its treatment beneath layers of contrived narrative apparatus, my sense is that it would be rewarding to isolate this strain of his thought and to explore it in relation to insights from Carl Jung. Jung popularized the notion of shared memory and collective unconscious in a way that Yeats’s work did not. Like Yeats, he was supremely interested in the potential for human beings to share visions and other phenomena of consciousness. Unlike Yeats, Jung’s work is informed by a background in science, and he therefore demonstrates commitment to the variety of convergent forces the poet relished in his own search for spiritual wholeness; this potential correspondence between spirit and intellect recalls the quality Yeats admired in Swedenborg. Both intellect and imagination necessarily shape Jung’s *Alchemical Studies* and *The Archetypes and Collective Unconscious*, for example. Thinking about the poet and psychoanalysis might be easier today on looking past those texts situated openly within the collected works in favor of those still concealed, unstudied, unpublished, or even undiscovered. Yeats wrote repeatedly that certain of his personal writings and supernatural explorations were intended for “his schoolmates only.” Some of these works, such as his *Memoirs*, warrant close scrutiny and might unearth his more sincere thinking on collective trance, memory, or consciousness.

Returning to understudied works in the Yeats canon, for any reason, leads into another area with potential for new directions in criticism. Careful concealment of particular writing and diligent disclosures about other works

through notes and commentaries suggest that Yeats's writing process was extremely involved. Building from the present study, my hope is to visit special collections such as those of Emory University to explore original manuscripts with Yeats's running notes that may have shaped his revisions. These notes may shed light on the relationship between his creative process and the implied epistemology behind or in front of it. The extent to which Yeats actually manufactured his supernatural phantasmagoria requires critics to think carefully about the elaborate book-production process, including composition, revision, and later dissemination of collected notes and essays. Passively detecting the constructed veil is only the beginning of our excavations. Again, my suspicion is that there are blueprints to Yeats's canon formation in the manuscripts and even in the physical places where he lived, wrote, and performed.

A final area targeted for future development of this project spins from Yeats's role as dramatist. The poet was so persistent in his staged performance of the supernatural in verse and prose that it only seems natural to think carefully about how this translated into his *de facto* stage productions, which as Howe has shown in her *Nation States* were often invested in mythology and the occult in the same way that his other writings were. Because Yeats's poetry and prose works speak so clearly to one another, often times overtly and in other instances by way of notes or introductions, the drama undoubtedly has a similar relationship to other works espousing ancient beliefs and primitive religions. Besides his plays anchored in the familiar stuff of Irish mythology, an appropriate starting point might be Yeats's *Words upon the Windowpane*. While there is

some criticism concerning how folk lore and the supernatural figure in certain plays, no scholarship that I am aware of considers the relationship between this aspect of Yeats's canon and other writing that experiments with the same material. I suspect close scrutiny of plays steeped in the illusory topic of primitive beliefs and magic will reveal characteristic devotion to epistemological uncertainty and dynamism, as well as to that dependence on intra-text evident in considering the relationship between the poetry and prose. The creative and composition processes informing this perhaps isolated genre of the Yeats canon would also figure prominently in further study. How did he write, revise, publish, and perform the plays in relation to the themes they engage?

This study is neither exhaustive nor complete. Instead, each chapter initiates viable conversations in areas of Yeats scholarship that have effectively escaped many critics to date. My concluding sentiment is that Yeats very literally and more passionately than can be expressed in words believed in the variety of mysticism he first engaged in when studying Blake. His role as an editor and book publisher overshadowed that first passion, however, and Yeats finally left his readers only a fragmented portrait or illumination of that concept as he did or did not understand it. The major works considered in the last chapters of my dissertation do not reflect his belief, but this absence was perhaps part of the design he intended.

Neither Yeats nor magic were ever meant to be caged or fixed to static definitions or contexts, and the poet at once enables and mocks those determined to tie him down in this regard. His strangely assembled body of

writing gives itself to structuralist thinkers just as it does to poststructuralists.

He anticipates and invites the psychoanalyst, the anthropologist, and the historian too. Nevertheless, he denies each of them with his persistent reliance on narrative conventions first lifted from folk lore — and then developed in his own writing — that ultimately resist anything approaching certainty, beyond perhaps the illusion of it.

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