

November 2018

## International Yeats Studies, Volume 3, Issue 1

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## INTRODUCTION: YEATS AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS

*David Dwan and Emilie Morin*

Yeats often aspired to a lofty independence—to an aristocratic form of art that had “no need of mob or Press to pay its way” (CW4 163). But his own desire for an audience—at least of some notable scale—triggered many a descent from the mountaintop and much contact with the throng (Standish O’Grady would rue the way Yeats had “got down into the crowds”).<sup>1</sup> His pursuit of a public necessarily led him into the world of mass media—a landscape populated first by newspapers and later by radios, which he learned to navigate with shrewdness and skill. The purpose of this special issue is to examine Yeats’s various ventures in mass communication—a key component of the literary marketplace in which the poet advertised and peddled his wares. Yeats’s exposure to the demands of journalism, book reviewing, and radio broadcasting also had a decisive bearing on his poetics, influencing his ideas about how art should be received and even structured. “What is popular poetry?” Yeats asked in 1901; the newspaper and the radio gave particular inflections to that question (CW4 5). His lifelong concern with the social purpose of art was also significantly determined by his thinking about mass media. Every society, he suggested, needed its prophet, priest, and king (CW4 191)—with the artist sometimes seeming to serve as a synthesis of each of these roles—but none of these figures could hold sway in the modern world without some mastery of mass media.

Yeats became such a master even though, mostly for rhetorical purposes, he liked to cast himself as a dilettante, a dissenter, or a naïve observer. He was, for a start, a prolific journalist and essayist (MacNeice emphasized his “brilliant journalistic qualities” while also acknowledging his contempt for journalism).<sup>2</sup> He complained to Katharine Tynan in 1888 about his “ever multiplying boxes of unsaleable MSS—work to[o] strange at one moment and to[o] incoherent the next for any first class Magazine and too ambitious for local papers” (CL1 71); nonetheless, his work would appear in over seventy different newspapers, magazines, and periodicals over his lifetime. Some of his most famous poems—from “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” to “September 1913” (initially published as “Romance in Ireland”)—first appeared in newspapers. Indeed, when it came to the press there was no bridle for this Proteus. He contributed to the Catholic *Irish Monthly*, the evangelical *Leisure Hour*, and the theosophical *Lucifer*. He also published in the Parnellite *United Ireland*, the socialist *Irish Worker*, and the unionist *Daily Express*. When asked by W. E. Henley to review

Ellen O'Leary's *Lays of Country, Home and Friends* for the "ultra-Tory" *National Observer*, Yeats acknowledged that there were limits to his elasticity: "When I consented to Henley's suggestion that I should review it for him I had no idea how difficult it would be. If I were a Tory it would be easy enough, or if I could descend to writing as a Tory who did not let his politics quite kill his literary sympathies" (CL4 929). The review never appeared. But fifteen of his poems and several other reviews made their first appearance in Henley's paper.

Yeats could travel comfortably in the lowlands and uplands of journalism. He was a gossip "Celt in London" for the *Boston Pilot* and a relatively austere judge of "popular journalism" in the *Bookman* (CW9 341). He stooped to the *Girl's Own Paper*, but he also felt at home in more exclusive journals such as *The Yellow Book* and the *Little Review*. By the late 1890s, the Yeats brand was sufficiently high status to allow journals to trade on his name. In 1897, for instance, *The Dome* smiled at the bafflement Yeats produced among *Daily Mail* readers:

Some person who is quite good enough for *The Daily Mail* has been reading the twelve lines by Mr. W. B. Yeats which appeared in our last number. This "Sonnet," as he intelligently calls it, had the effect of sending him "careering back to commonplaceness with a sigh of relief." All humane men and women will feel glad that *The Daily Mail* person returned to his own place so safe and sound, and nice and early, after his venturesome little excursion in foreign parts.<sup>3</sup>

Yeats liked to cultivate a similar hauteur. As he confided to Ernest Rhys in his youth, "I use all my great will power to keep me from reading the newspapers and spoiling my vocabulary"—an impressive ambition given how often he would write for them.<sup>4</sup> His diatribes against journalism were liable to have the same boomerang effect as his attacks on the middle class, but they nonetheless remained central to his self-presentation as an artist. "I hate journalists," he announced to Tynan in 1888. "There is nothing in them but tittering but jeering emptiness. They have all made what Dante calls the Great Refusal. [sic] that is they have ceased to be self centred [and] have given up their individuality" (CL1 91). Journalists, eternally in thrall to the demands of readers and editors, lacked true self-ownership. Yeats on the other hand wanted to write his "own thoughts—wishing never to write other peoples [sic] for money" (CL1 117). Of course, this was easier said than done and he would remain reliant on newspapers for much of his income for the first two decades of his career. As he confided to Robert Bridges in 1897, "One has to give something of one's self to the devil that one may live"—a fact which helped to explain why so much of his criticism was, as he put it, "merely conscientious journalism" (CL2 111).

Despite his dealings with the devil, a histrionic antipathy to newspapers became a staple of Yeats's language of self-legitimization. "[D]istrust

in journalism,” he liked to announce, was “[t]he beginning of success in literature.”<sup>5</sup> He disparaged the “base idioms of the newspapers” (CL8 18), “the rough-and-ready conscience of the newspaper” (CL8 29), and “a style, rancid, coarse, and vague, like that of the daily papers.”<sup>6</sup> He thus aspired to “a poetical style where there is nothing ostentatious, nothing crude, no breath of parvenu or journalist” (CW4 167). His commitment to verbal hygiene was often taken at face value, with readers finding “no dilution of journalism in his works.”<sup>7</sup> Newspapers such as the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* recirculated his denunciations of newspapers and they were sufficiently well known to become the stuff of parody. For instance, in *Daisy Darley; or, The Fairy Gold of Fleet Street* the press is pronounced an existential threat by a transparent caricature of Yeats (“‘I am glad,’ said the poet, ‘that my back is turned to Fleet Street. Fleet Street is an enemy of the Immortal Moods’”).<sup>8</sup> His views were more respectfully received by other mandarins of taste. As Richard Aldington declared in the *Little Review*, “Mr. Yeats is right when he complains that newspapers have spoiled our sense of poetry.”<sup>9</sup> The true artist, according to Auden, needed to be “more than a bit of a reporting journalist,” but Yeats—at least in theory—decried all such mergers.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, Yeats baited newspapers with declarations of his own independence. In a spat with the *United Irishman* in 1902, for instance, he proudly announced: “Writers who write for a very small circle of highly cultivated readers like A. E. and myself, can whistle at the newspapers, for our readers are not influenced by them” (CL3 188). But this was an elaborate fantasy: he had long sought to woo readers for himself and for others through the press. He was an adept logroller. Or, as Tynan recalled, “he was apt, I think, to be over-generous to the work of those he liked.”<sup>11</sup> He heaped lavish praise on Æ—“No voice in modern Ireland is to me as beautiful as his” (CW9 284)—and on Lady Gregory. His account of *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*—“the best book that has come out of Ireland in my time”—drew loud heckles (*P&I* 224). Yeats was sensitive to the charge of logrolling, asking Tynan not to sign an interview with him in *The Sketch* in 1893 lest they be accused of underhanded self-promotion. A doting interview nevertheless appeared with the initials K. T.<sup>12</sup>

Yeats was a good interviewee, offering his views with a carefully weighted mixture of humor, gravity, and earnestness. But he could also bristle at the intrusiveness of journalists. He complained for example about the tactics of the *Daily Mail* in the pages of the *Freeman's Journal*: “It is obvious that the practice of quoting in the Press private conversations, however important in themselves, if generally adopted, would make it impossible to receive a representative of the Press as the equal of men of breeding.”<sup>13</sup> Here and elsewhere, he was prepared to emphasize journalism's uncertain social credentials. As Max Weber once noted, the journalist lacked “a fixed social classification,” and belonged as a

result “to a sort of pariah caste, which is always estimated by ‘society’ in terms of its ethically lowest representative.”<sup>14</sup> For Yeats, always sensitive to his own fragile status, being “hated by journalists and groundlings” became a source of pride (CW5 213).

Fractional encounters with the nationalist press stimulated his hostility to newspapers. The deep connection between newspapers and nationalism in Ireland is of course well known, and became part of the folklore of nationalism itself.<sup>15</sup> The notion of the press as a constitutive power in the life of a community was advertised in the very title of *The Nation* newspaper; moreover, the idea that the journal had brought a “new soul” to Ireland was rehearsed by a long line of newspapers, competing for a stake in national soul-manufacture. Yeats famously blew hot and cold about the legacy of Young Ireland, applauding its communitarian ambition while decrying its instrumental view of literature and its aesthetically compromised results, but the group certainly confirmed for him the immense power of journalism. Indeed, by 1909 he was convinced that the national spirit was dying because the influence of *The Nation* was passing away (*Mem* 180). Of course, the national spirit was not dying; it had simply assumed a form that Yeats disliked. The *Playboy* riots—and their long gestation—convinced him that public opinion in Ireland had become ever more Catholic, shabbily bourgeois, and exultantly philistine. Newspapers, he believed, had effectively killed J. M. Synge. Reflecting on the baseness of journalists in his diaries in 1909, his mind turned to his friend, “dying at this moment of their bitterness and ignorance” (*Mem* 161). In his great essay on Synge published the following year, he duly rounded on “the pomp and gallantry of journalism” and queried its “right to govern the world” (CW4 227). The autonomy Yeats claimed for himself, he now extended to his dead friend—a man “all folded up in brooding intellect, knowing nothing of new books and newspapers, reading the great masters alone” (CW4 225) —a portrait of Synge that required active repression of the fact that he had written a significant body of journalism.

The *Playboy* controversies marked the high point of Yeats’s disenchantment with nationalist newspapers, but he had attacked newspapers on nationalist grounds in other contexts. For instance, in *The Celtic Twilight* in 1902 Yeats described how the devil initially presented himself to a woman from Mayo in the guise of a newspaper floating down the road: “She knew by the size of it that it was the *Irish Times*”—and, presumably, by the same paper’s unionist connections—that it was the devil in disguise (CT 62).<sup>16</sup> Nationalists often cast the destruction of tradition in Ireland as a process of Anglicization, so the unionist *Irish Times* in this context was a serviceable symbol for the ways in which modern mass communications encroach upon traditional life-worlds. Newspapers for Yeats were simply the most aggressive expression of modern

print-capitalism: a discursive system that was, he felt, gradually supplanting traditional forms of oral culture. Though the distinction between oral and print cultures was never as secure as Yeats liked to think, he consistently deplored those who would “substitute for the ideas of the folk-life the rhetoric of the newspapers” (CW8 59). The press was often lauded as an agent of enlightenment in Ireland, but Yeats decried its terrible disenchantment of the world. As he put it in the *Scot’s Observer* in 1889:

Most men know the prophecy of Thomas of Ercildoune: “The time is coming when all the wisdom of the world shall centre in the grey goose quill.” So much of prophecy has been fulfilled. Tradition seems half gone. Thomas of Ercildoune and his like go with it. The newspaper editors and other men of the quill, this long while have been elbowing fairy and fairy seer from hearth and board.<sup>17</sup>

This anti-journalistic journalism was a curiously paradoxical art. Indeed, Yeats often seemed to operate as if the only cure was in the poison itself: he published a large swathe of folk and fairy tales in newspapers. This blurred the very terms of the opposition (oral culture versus print technology; folklore versus journalism) he used to sanction such publication ventures. As John Kelly has shown, the elision of boundaries became embarrassingly evident when Augustus O’Shea challenged Yeats’s claim to have first encountered the story of the Countess Cathleen in the West of Ireland:

Mr. Yeats told me he heard it in the west of Ireland. This would be a surprising coincidence were it not [...] that I had it printed in the *Shamrock*, of Dublin [October 6, 1867] which largely circulates among Irish people. [...] Singularly enough, it was reprinted in the same periodical at a comparatively recent date. (CL2 539)

Yeats often lamented the lack of an educated audience in Ireland (“No Irish books were read except books of rhetorical or melodramatic journalism, bound in staring green, and covered with Shamrocks”),<sup>18</sup> but he would also attack the culture of the book. Reading, he believed, undermined face-to-face interaction and separated the individual from the broader life of the community: “When a man takes a book into the corner he surrenders, so much life for his knowledge, so much, I mean, of that normal activity that gives him life and strength; he lays away his own handiwork and turns from his friend” (CW8 97–98). Here he sponsored the communitarian nature of oral culture over the individualizing tendency of print. “It is a much more natural thing,” he insisted, “to listen than to read.”<sup>19</sup>

This partly explains Yeats's attraction to the radio in the last decade of his career, though it evidently took him some time to adjust to the fact that people didn't listen to it as a crowd, but "singly or in twos and threes" (*CW10* 234). In the texts of Yeats's BBC broadcasts we can trace his own acclimatization to this new medium, and his many attempts to conceive of radio in light of the already familiar. The audiences he imagines in the introductions to his BBC broadcasts occupy a range of semi-public, semi-private spaces in which sociability can thrive according to pre-established rules—the theater, the lecture hall, the university, the rural cottage, the pub, the parlor.<sup>20</sup> He liked to exaggerate his lack of acquaintance with the oral world of radio, and to recall his long experience of publishing as a poet and a journalist. "My Own Poetry Again," a BBC broadcast from 1937, begins with Yeats invoking the time when he "made [his] living reviewing books" in London and explaining how the homesickness from which he suffered spurred him to write "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (*CW10* 290). In an earlier broadcast, "Poems about Women," he observed that the experience of reading his own poems on radio should—at least in principle—"be no worse than publishing love poems in a book" (*CW10* 234). When he eventually purchased a wireless set, he did so as a present to his wife, and through the BBC. This was a gift but not a surprise: "I am getting you a wireless through the B.B.C, I get a discount which should pay the tax, & they are getting it should be the best," he wrote to George (*CL Intalex* #6669). His friends poked fun at his technological incompetence—Lennox Robinson reported how Yeats, unable to confirm to the BBC whether or not his Dublin home had electricity (it didn't), had to wire George for an answer.<sup>21</sup>

Nonetheless, in practice Yeats would soon become a keen broadcaster, at home in the BBC's London studios and endlessly fascinated by the powers of the microphone. In his dabblings with radio he found greater fulfilment, it seems, than in his sustained involvement with journalism and the world of print more broadly. Ronald Schuchard has emphasized the significance of radio broadcasting to Yeats's late career, showing how his collaboration with the BBC enabled him to refashion his ideas about the "spiritual democracy" he had yearned for all his life; as Schuchard argues, radio also led Yeats to give new articulations to ideas about minstrelsy and ancient bardic traditions which had long preoccupied him.<sup>22</sup> Emily C. Bloom has demonstrated how much radio brought to Yeats's approach to his poetic practice, to his understanding of his own public, and to "the auditory poetics of his late lyrics;" radio, as Bloom shows, "played a pivotal role as a medium through which Yeats performed, publicized, and published poetry at the end of his life."<sup>23</sup> Radio also provided a whole new grammar for thinking about perception and became the site of another paradoxical alliance of interests, in which Yeats's different and sometimes competing interests as private spiritualist and public poet could be expressed

simultaneously. Indeed, the new medium often encouraged Yeats, in his radio texts of the 1930s, to borrow from the spiritualist rhetoric and associations that he had explored as part of his experimental psychical research with George Yeats in the early years of their marriage.<sup>24</sup> The Yeatses' performative occultism, as Margaret Mills Harper observes, was always sharply attuned to the cultural changes taking place around them, and registered the "shock of new technologies that recorded and transmitted symbolic and linguistic information, such as photography, film, and recorded sound."<sup>25</sup>

To the BBC, even in the early days of broadcasting, Yeats was a pioneer—often unbeknownst to himself, since George Yeats dealt with much of the correspondence—as well as a safe investment. His approach was hands-off, as a letter to the Society of Authors from 1923 makes clear: "I leave the matter of fees entirely to you. I know nothing about the capacity of wireless to pay, & you do. Whatever you arrange I shall be satisfied with the result" (*CL Intelix* #4361). His plays—particularly *The Land of Heart's Desire* and *The Shadowy Waters*—were perceived as ideal radio material by the BBC from 1924 onward and were broadcast frequently thereafter, while his poetry became a regular fixture on air throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>26</sup> The publics that these broadcasts reached were international, diverse, and of considerable size. Through these early radio adaptations, with which Yeats had no involvement, his poems and plays were widely disseminated to Irish, British, and international audiences, including in areas covered by the BBC Empire Service. When he turned to broadcasting, the poetry readings that he conceived for the BBC were widely praised and remembered. The *Manchester Guardian* received his readings particularly warmly, noting how Yeats's voice came across as a welcome antidote to "that dismal and often portentous droning of verse which is too often heard from the BBC."<sup>27</sup> Certainly, his was one of the voices that many of his contemporaries could recognize. By the mid-1930s, he was such a strong presence that he could be introduced in the pages of the *Radio Times* as the poet whose work "has something to say to everyone."<sup>28</sup> The poet had certainly come down from the mountain. But he also attempted to train his audience, using radio to develop a different kind of musical literacy whose experimental nature, for Adrian Paterson, resonated with contemporaneous innovations in music composition.<sup>29</sup> Many were struck by his peculiar style of recitation; the *Manchester Guardian* radio critic observed, in the wake of "Poems About Women," that "[w]hen the poems were read we began to think that after this perhaps no poems should be read except by their authors."<sup>30</sup> On occasion he felt that the medium was beyond him, in spite of his long experience working with sound and speech, and could not be domesticated. The "Abbey Theatre Broadcast," to which he had taken an experimental approach, was a "fiasco," he complained to George Barnes, his BBC producer, in February 1937:

Every human sound turned into the grunt roar bellow of a wild [beast]. I recognise that I am a fool & there will be no more broad cast [sic] of verse from the Abbey stage if I can prevent it. [...] Possible all that I think noble & poignant in speech [sic] is impossible. Certainly I have no knowledge of what is possible. Perhaps my old bundle of folk tricks is useless. [...] I am an humbled man—when you get those “records” you will know all about it. (*CL IntelLex* #6798)

Between radio and television there was only a short step. To the BBC, Yeats's plays were also secure territory for experimental television: they had been integrated into radio programs from the early days of the Corporation's existence, and Yeats's non-interventionist approach made further experimentation possible in the late 1930s, when the author's radio days were coming to an end. The plays selected by the BBC were *The Words upon the Window Pane*, *The Shadowy Waters*, and *Deirdre*. Sadly, traces of these televised performances are scant, but the performances broadcast live in 1937 and 1938 earned fulsome praise in newspaper reviews.<sup>31</sup> It may be that Yeats would have become more involved with television if ill-health had not hindered the continuation of his broadcasting career. His last meeting with Barnes after his final BBC reading in October 1937 ended with a speculative discussion about a television appearance from Alexandra Palace (*Life* 2 601). By that stage, the moving image industries were familiar territory. As Megan Girdwood has shown, Yeats had a number of interactions with the film industry in the Irish Free State—as Senator and as Abbey Director—and played various roles in opposing film censorship and facilitating film projects during the 1920s.<sup>32</sup>

The collaboration that Yeats initiated with the BBC generated more than just broadcast programs: several poems from this period were broadcast before appearing in print, notably “For Anne Gregory,” “Roger Casement,” “Come on to the Hills of the Mourne,” “Sweet Dancer,” and “The Curse of Cromwell.”<sup>33</sup> When writing for *The Listener*—the BBC publication conceived to complement the *Radio Times*, which aimed to initiate fruitful discussions of broadcasting—Yeats also produced a slightly different kind of journalism. The text of a planned broadcast entitled “I Became an Author,” published in *The Listener* in August 1938, is a remarkably candid confession, which comes across as a sequel of sorts to another *Listener* essay from 1934, “The Growth of a Poet,” and other texts in which Yeats returns to his career as a poet. In “I Became an Author”—one of his last publications before his death—Yeats recalls his early years in London as “one of the rising poets” and as a struggling amateur journalist: “As a professional writer I was clumsy, stiff and sluggish; when I reviewed a book I had to write my own heated thoughts because I did not know how to get thoughts out

of my subject" (CW10 300). He repeatedly returns to his difficulties with learning and presents his career as a succession of accidents:

How did I begin to write? I have nothing to say that may help young writers, except that I hope they will not begin as I did. I spent longer than most schoolboys preparing the next day's work, and yet learned nothing, and would always have been at the bottom of my class but for one or two subjects that I hardly had to learn at all. [...] Greater poets than I have been great scholars. Even today I struggle against a lack of confidence, when among average men, come from that daily humiliation, and because I do not know what they know. (CW10 297)

There are many candid admissions in Yeats's radio broadcasts too. The texts he composed for the wireless often pivot upon his own declared ignorance, deployed to different rhetorical ends. In his first broadcast, conceived to accompany a production of *Oedipus the King* broadcast from Belfast the following week, Yeats emphasizes his lack of acquaintance with radio and presents himself as a naive listener-to-be: "If the wireless can be got to work, in the country house where I shall be staying, I shall be listening too, and as I have never heard a play broadcasted I do not know whether I shall succeed in calling into my imagination that ancient theatre" (CW10 220). In an interview to the *Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, published the day after the talk was broadcast, he stresses once again his complete ignorance of broadcasting, but takes the opportunity to comment on the development of industry and mass communications:

Gone are the days of the poet's licence, thinks W. B. Yeats, Ireland's greatest living poet, who made his debut "on the air" by broadcasting from the Belfast Radio Station last night. "Nowadays," he remarked to a *Whig* reporter shortly before he went before the microphone for the first time in his life, "a poet must aim at perfect precision and accuracy of movement." [...] Describing his feelings at approaching the microphone for the first time, Mr. Yeats said he was not experiencing any sensation of "stage fright." "The only thing about it," he said, "is that instead of speaking to a great many people altogether I shall be speaking to a great many people who will be separated. What it feels like to listen to a man speaking over the radio I do not know, for although I have heard music broadcast have never listened in to anyone speaking over the wireless." Discussing the opening up of the countryside by means of such developments as rural motor bus services, the Shannon electricity scheme, and the introduction of talking picture houses into the remote country towns, Mr. Yeats said that there was a danger of the culture of the Irish countryside being lost unless the old folk lore was maintained by means of the printed word.<sup>34</sup>

Print, once cast as the ravager of folk-life, now functions as its great preserver. But as ever Yeats managed to sound both nostalgic and avant-garde at the same time. The manner in which his comments tie the wireless to “rural motor bus services, the Shannon electricity scheme, and the introduction of talking picture houses into the remote country towns” is less predictable, however, and points to Yeats’s perception of a modernity integrated into all aspects of domestic, urban, and rural life, in which radio acts as a vanguard phenomenon.

The texts of Yeats’s BBC broadcasts reveal how quickly radio became the technological setting in which he could pursue his fantasies about the public poet and bring them a few steps closer to reality. His first BBC broadcast ends with a reminder that the Abbey Company are about to cross the Atlantic, “to play the Abbey plays all over the United States as far west as California, as far south as Texas” (*CW10* 223). This meditation on audiences across the globe prompts Yeats to fuse theater and radio publics, and to reflect on the large and elusive mass of his radio listeners—who include the thirty million Irishmen and women “scattered throughout the world [...] ready to share our imagination and our discoveries” (*CW10* 223). To these millions in exile Yeats—speaking on behalf of the Abbey—is “sending a vision of the new Ireland, so full of curiosity, so full of self-criticism” (*CW10* 223). In January 1937, in anticipation of the BBC’s Abbey Theatre broadcast in which “Roger Casement” was read for the first time, he bragged about contacts in Egypt and articulated his hopes that radio would enable the poem to reach a much broader and naturally sympathetic audience: “The Casement poem will be sent out on the wire-less from Athlone either on Feb 1 or Feb 9—it has to be sung on the Abbey stage & the date depends upon the plays—it can only go on if the play is short. The ‘record’ of it will then be sent to Cairo where the wireless is in Irish hands” (*CL InteLex* #6786). Ireland’s spiritual democracy looked set to become an empire. In contrast to the press, laden by too many agendas that Yeats resented, radio seemed to him to be a freer medium, which could provide the perfect conditions for creating the ideal audience he had always dreamt of finding.

The texts, contexts, and moments discussed in this special issue reveal the importance of print and broadcast media to Yeats’s artistic ventures, legacies, and reception, and draw attention to his industrious output and evolving thought on mass communications. As the following essays show, Yeats’s views on his real and desired publics, on the vagaries of his profession, and on the dissemination of his work are played out loudly and clearly in his perspectives on the newspaper, print, film, and radio cultures of his time. Radio for Yeats was not simply a means of artistic expression: it was also, as Emily Bloom demonstrates, a particularly valuable tool for emphasizing the contingency of historical meaning and for shaping historical memory. Bloom focuses on the Easter Rising poems that Yeats broadcast on the BBC—which included “On

a Political Prisoner,” “The Rose Tree,” and “Roger Casement,” but excluded “Easter, 1916”—and traces in Yeats’s broadcasting practice a reframing and reshaping of the historical memory of the Rising in the early years of the Irish Free State. Clare Hutton focuses on other forms of refashioning that Yeats pursued among his hodge-podge of magazine and periodical contributions. She examines Yeats’s brief associations with the modernist little magazine self-consciously poised at the cutting edge of experimental writing, the *Little Review*. Ezra Pound, who was the magazine’s “Foreign Editor” for a time, initially had no plans to include Yeats, but arranged for the publication of a series of poems between June 1917 and January 1919—including “The Wild Swans at Coole,” “In Memory of Robert Gregory,” and many others—as well as *The Dreaming of the Bones*. Hutton shows how Yeats used the *Little Review* as a form of draft publication and sets Yeats’s submissions in dialogue with other contributions by Joyce, Pound, and Eliot. *The Little Review* purported to make “no compromise with the public taste,” but Yeats often worried about the direction the public taste was taking. Noting Yeats’s fascination with new technologies such as the radio and the cinema, Charles I. Armstrong explores Yeats’s concerns that literature might have a diminished status in a brave new world of culture. He focuses in particular on an unpublished fragment from *A Vision* entitled “Michael Robartes Foretells.” Melissa Dinsman shares the view that Yeats was something of an innovator when it came to his use of the radio, but she also argues that his radio work needs to be situated alongside his interest in authoritarianism and eugenics. In “In the Poet’s Pub” and “In the Poet’s Parlour,” Dinsman discerns coded fears about cultural degeneration and shows how Yeats used the radio as a means of disseminating frequently contradictory ideological beliefs.

“Between my politics and my mysticism I shall hardly have my head turned with popularity,” Yeats announced to Lady Gregory in 1901 (CL3 72–3). But Yeats would always have his head turned toward some kind of public and he had a rare ability for turning heads. Here the newspaper and the radio became his circus animals, while his skills as a mass communicator never deserted him.

## Notes

1. Standish O’Grady to Yeats, December 12, [1900], *Letters to W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, eds. Richard J. Finneran, George Mills Harper, and William M. Murphy (London: Macmillan, 1977), 77.
2. Louis MacNeice, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), 203.
3. “Four Notes,” *The Dome* 3 (Michaelmas 1897): 93; cited in Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 134.
4. Ernest Rhys, “W. B. Yeats: Early Recollections,” in *Interviews and Recollections*, vol. 1, ed. E. H. Mikhail (London: Macmillan, 1977), 36.

5. "The Theatre and Ireland: Lecture by Mr. W. B. Yeats," *Irish Times*, March 4, 1910, 9. See also *Irish Independent*, March 4, 1910, 6.
6. Yeats, "To all Artists and Writers," *To-Morrow* 1, no. 1 (April 1924): 4. Though he was its author, Yeats did not sign the editorial—Francis Stuart and Cecil Salkeld did.
7. "Mr. W. B. Yeats: An English Tribute," *Irish Times*, November 19, 1923, 4.
8. William P. Ryan, *Daisy Darley; or, The Fairy Gold of Fleet Street* (London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1913), 166.
9. Richard Aldington, "A Young American Poet," *The Little Review* 2, no. 1 (March 1915): 24.
10. W. H. Auden, "Psychology and Criticism," in *The Complete Prose of W. H. Auden. Volume 1: Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse, 1926–1938*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 132.
11. Katharine Tynan, *Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1913), 190.
12. K. T., "William Butler Yeats," *The Sketch* 4, no. 44 (1893): 256, reprinted in Carolyn Holdsworth, "Shelley Plain: Yeats and Katharine Tynan," *YA* 2 (1983): 84–88.
13. Letter to *The Freeman's Journal*, May 2, 1901, 4.
14. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, new edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), 96.
15. On this point see Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism: The Irish Provincial Press, 1850–1892* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999); David Dwan, *The Great Community* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 141–168; and Ann Andrews, *Newspapers and Newsmakers: The Dublin Nationalist Press in Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014).
16. He expressed his contempt for the paper in a letter to Florence Farr in 1905: "The 'Irish Times' is the most influential paper here—so God help us—or rather he does for we find the papers have no influence on our public" (*CL4* 113).
17. Yeats, "Scots and Irish Fairies," *The Scot's Observer* 1, no. 15 (March 2, 1889): 410.
18. Yeats, *The Union of the Gael in '98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France: Report of Speeches etc.* (Dublin: Bernard Doyle, 1898), 8–9.
19. Yeats, "Four Lectures by W. B. Yeats," ed. Richard Londraville, *YA* 8 (1989): 84.
20. Notably, he had a marked tendency to approach the new medium as an extension of the theater. See Charles I. Armstrong, "Pub, Parlour, Theatre: Radio in the Imagination of W. B. Yeats," in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, eds. Matthew Feldman, Erik Tonning, and Henry Mead (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 23–37.
21. W. R. Rodgers, "W. B. Yeats: A Dublin Portrait," in *In Excited Reverie: A Centenary Tribute to William Butler Yeats 1865–1939*, eds. A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross (London: Macmillan, 1965), 7.
22. Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xix, xx, xxiv, 191–218.
23. Emily C. Bloom, "W. B. Yeats's Radiogenic Poetry," in *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 29.
24. See Emilie Morin, "'I Beg your Pardon?': Yeats, Audibility, and Sound Transmission," *YA* 19 (2013): 191–219.
25. Margaret Mills Harper, *Wisdom of Two: The Spiritual and Literary Collaboration of George and W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 156.
26. The first recorded trace in radio programs of a broadcast drawing on Yeats's work was a reading by C. A. Lewis from a selection of unspecified texts by Yeats, broadcast on March 17, 1924 on the BBC London station 2LO, as part of a St Patrick's Day "Irish Night" including songs and music. *Radio Times*, March 14, 1924, 451; "Broadcasting," *Irish Times*, March 17, 1924, 6. For more detailed chronologies, see Jeremy Silver, "W. B. Yeats and the BBC: A Reassessment," *YA* 5 (1987): 181–85; Emilie Morin, "W. B. Yeats and Broadcasting, 1924–1965," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 1 (2015): 145–75.

27. "Review of Broadcasting," *Manchester Guardian*, April 3, 1937, 14.
28. *Radio Times*, June 7, 1935, 56.
29. Adrian Paterson, "'Music Will Keep out Temporary Ideas': W. B. Yeats's Radio Performances," in *Word and Music Studies 12: Performativity in Words and Music*, eds. Walter Bernhart and Michael Halliwell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 43–76.
30. M. C., "Week-end Broadcast: A Byrd Mass," *Manchester Guardian*, April 11, 1932, 10.
31. Joyce Grenfell, "Broadcasting: Two Good Short Plays," *Observer*, September 26, 1937, 26; E. H. R., "Television," *Observer*, March 20, 1938, 24; "Television," *Observer*, May 15, 1938, 3.
32. Megan Girdwood, "W. B. Yeats, the Abbey Theatre, and the Cinema: 1909–1939," *Irish Studies Review* (2018), DOI: 10.1080/09670882.2018.1515878. We thank Megan Girdwood for sharing her forthcoming article with us.
33. See Bloom, "W. B. Yeats's Radiogenic Poetry," 25–63.
34. "Yeats's 'Hello to Everybody!': Famous Irish Poet 'On the Air' For First Time," *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, September 9, 1931, 3.



## BROADCASTING THE RISING: YEATS AND RADIO COMMEMORATION

*Emily C. Bloom*

Ireland's Decade of Centenaries, which began in 2012 and will continue until 2022, has brought renewed attention to the political framing of the events that led to the establishment of the Irish Free State. Various acts of commemoration have taken place in an expanding media landscape that operates across multiple platforms. The state-sanctioned events and publications have emphasized workers' rights; suffrage and the role of women in nationalist organizations; provincial insurrections beyond Dublin; and Irish fatalities in World War I. Whereas earlier commemorations have been charged with focusing narrowly on the martyred leaders of the 1916 Rising, the contemporary Irish state has chosen to emphasize pluralism in its narrative of the origins of the nation. In addition to traditional media productions, including the large-scale documentary *1916: The Irish Rebellion* narrated by Liam Neeson, there have been a range of websites and social media feeds by the BBC, Raidió Teilifís Éireann, and the Irish government's Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht that have given audiences access to archival materials and interactive timelines.

One aspect of these commemorations across media has been persistent: the ubiquity of Yeats's "Easter, 1916." As Patrick Crotty observes, "this lyric which came into existence as an act of commemoration has over time become part of the national memory of the very event it commemorates."<sup>1</sup> Yeats's words have come to define the poetics of the Rising to such a degree that, even if one disagrees with how the poem characterizes the event—and there is much in the poem that is at odds with the post-conflict rhetoric of the Decade of Centenaries—it has become almost indispensable to narratives about the Rising.

Two decades following the Rising, one person shied away from using "Easter, 1916" to frame commemorations: Yeats himself. In a series of radio broadcasts from 1931 to 1937, Yeats presented several poems about the Easter Rising—"The Rose Tree," "On a Political Prisoner," and "Roger Casement," as well as poems that touch on the Rising obliquely, such as "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz"—but not "Easter, 1916." It is therefore worth asking why Yeats omitted his most famous Rising poem from the airwaves and what his choice of poems tells us about his poetics of commemoration in the 1930s, as well as his understanding of mass media. Yeats was unusually savvy about the possibilities for mass media in shaping historical memory and was early to see the radio as a key medium for reframing the Rising as it began to settle into history. He broadcast his 1916 poems on air as part of an ongoing

political strategy to shape the narrative of the Rising in the early years of the Irish Free State. The poems he chose and the ways in which he contextualized them in his radio broadcasts reveal his understanding of radio as a commemorative medium *par excellence*. Radio is at once an ephemeral medium—each broadcast fades away at the point of transmission, leaving hardly a trace—and, despite its mass audiences, a curiously intimate one, reaching listeners in the privacy of their homes. These two features of radio were especially well-suited for Yeats's minor poems about the Rising; through multiple broadcasts responding to new historical developments, Yeats could give listeners new perspectives on the Rising and emphasize the event's changing meaning from the vantage of the present moment.

The birth of the Irish Free State and the rise of the radio medium were closely connected. In the months leading up to the Rising, a makeshift signaling company was established at Joseph Plunkett's estate at Larkfield with Volunteers who were experienced Marconi operators. The initial purpose was to receive wireless messages from Roger Casement's submarine on his gunrunning expedition from Germany. The first deaths among the Volunteers on the Thursday before Easter were directly connected to broadcasting; a car, driven by Con Keating, was sent to Kerry to obtain a wireless apparatus when the driver took a wrong road and ended up plunging into the sea, killing himself and two other passengers.

During the Rising itself, a group of Volunteers that included the Abbey Theatre actor Arthur Shields took control of the School of Wireless Telegraphy with instructions to repair the wireless apparatus. One Volunteer, Captain Thomas Weafer, was killed on the roof in the process of repairing the aerial.<sup>2</sup> Once the wireless transmitter was in working order, the rebels broadcast a message proclaiming that the Irish Republican Army had taken over Dublin. Marshall McLuhan refers to this as the world's first radio broadcast because it was one of the first documented instances in which the medium was used for a one-way transmission rather than the point-to-point communications that preceded it.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the extensive links between the Rising and radio broadcasting, Christopher Morash writes: "the Irish Free State was thus born simultaneously with radio, coming into being in a world in which the airwaves were wide-open spaces suddenly filled with voices and music, a great lost continent conjured into existence from thin air."<sup>4</sup> If radio and the Irish Free State both represent the opening of a new territory—a lost continent, in Morash's words—then they also quickly became hotly contested spaces for warring ideologies.

Whether Yeats was aware of the connections between the Rising and the wireless is not clear, but he was certainly attuned to the mass publics that radio opened to the writer, and was alert to the medium's powerful potential as a tool of mass communication. In his influential study of the publication contexts

for Yeats's poetry, *Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print*, Yug Mohit Chaudhry argues that "our understanding of Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival can be enhanced significantly, and perhaps fundamentally altered, by relocating his work in its original bibliographical and socio-historical environment."<sup>5</sup> While Chaudhry emphasizes the initial publication contexts of Yeats's works as essential for understanding his complex and shifting politics, it is just as important to understand the venues that Yeats chose for subsequent publications and readings, especially in the case of radio. The 1930s broadcasts of the Rising poems show Yeats cultivating a commemorative sense of the event through not only the selection and omission of poems, but also the words he chooses to introduce the poems to his audience, which often aim to expand or correct his listeners' understanding of the key players, aims, and impact of Easter 1916. Through Yeats's radio broadcasts, we can see how the poems are deployed not only through their initial publication, but also, later, in new commemorative contexts.

Yeats took an active role in creating his radio programs, first with staged performances of his works from the Abbey Theatre for Radio Éireann, and later in the BBC studio where he collaborated with George Barnes on a series of poetry programs that included readings, songs, music, and commentary. Ronald Schuchard describes Yeats's BBC work as continuous with his "lifelong effort to revive the lost bardic arts of chanting and musical speech."<sup>6</sup> Even before Yeats became directly involved with broadcasting, there was great interest in airing his work. However, for the BBC it seems that the Irish poet of the pre-1916 poems was in many respects preferred to the post-1916 modernist. In the BBC's copyright files for the years 1924–39 there is a clear preference for the earlier Celtic Twilight poems over the later poems.<sup>7</sup> The poems that the BBC requested are decidedly less political than the poems Yeats himself selected for the air; they include love poems such as "Down by the Salley Gardens" and "When You are Old," as well as poems that draw on Irish folklore such as "The Song of Wandering Aengus" and "The Stolen Child."<sup>8</sup> The BBC also tended to request traditional ballads like the "Ballad of Father Gilligan" and "The Fiddler of Dooney." In their preference for ballads on air, the BBC and Yeats were in agreement. Charles I. Armstrong argues that radio "helped [Yeats] return to the ballad genre with reinforced urgency, rethinking his aims in relation to a large, public audience in the process."<sup>9</sup> Many of the Rising poems that Yeats composed are ballads, but the ballads that the BBC chose tended to shy away from overtly political themes.

In 1964, the BBC aired a radio program about Yeats called "Choice and Chance," written by the poet Patric Dickinson. The program was listed as "A study of W. B. Yeats based on the assumption that he lost his life in the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916."<sup>10</sup> Dickinson, who narrates the program, tells the audience: "At the age of fifty-one Yeats would have lost his life in the Easter

Rising—by mistake, I think, possibly meandering along to the Post Office to buy a stamp. Certainly, despite his theories about the glories of fighting, there would have been no question of his standing beside Pearse or Connolly gun in hand.”<sup>11</sup> If Yeats never stood beside Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, his radio broadcasts throughout the 1930s work to cement the association of his name with the Rising, keeping it fresh in the minds of his listeners and reframing his approach to the event in light of changing political circumstances.

In the years when Yeats was broadcasting his Rising poems, the debate over how to frame 1916 commemorations was already well underway. Róisín Higgins points out that “the Easter Rising was itself a commemorative event,” modeled in the image of the 1798 Rebellion and other moments of insurrection against the British.<sup>12</sup> Yeats was involved in the centenary celebrations of the 1798 Rebellion, working to call forth the memory of the event on behalf of *fin de siècle* nationalism. Yeats’s involvement in the 1798 centenary included speaking at a convention at Phoenix Park, a meeting at Dublin’s City Hall, and the ’98 Centennial Association of Great Britain and France in London.<sup>13</sup> In its design, the 1916 Rising follows the pattern of earlier annual commemorations and emerges out of what Guy Beiner describes as a “commemorative culture” in both Fenian and unionist movements.<sup>14</sup> In the 1930s, the wounds of the Civil War were still very raw and the debate over commemorations centered on the legitimacy of the founding of the Free State in 1922. The tenth anniversary of the Rising witnessed an unofficial commemoration by Anti-Treaty republicans in Glasnevin Cemetery where the martyred leaders were buried, and nine years later in 1935, 1,000 people marched to the cemetery for an alternative commemoration in defiance of the official state celebration.<sup>15</sup> Yeats’s broadcasts entered the public sphere at a time when both representatives of the Free State and Anti-Treaty republicans were making conflicting appeals on behalf of the martyrs of 1916.

Like these graveyard commemorations, Yeats’s 1916 poems are mostly elegies that lay political claims to dead bodies, and the most famous of these, “Easter, 1916,” dramatizes the fraught politics of commemoration. Heather Laird describes commemoration as the “highly selective process that transforms the past into history.”<sup>16</sup> We see this process unfold in “Easter, 1916” as Yeats’s acquaintances are “[t]ransformed utterly” by their martyrdom. When the poem turns from Yeats’s original reminiscences about the Rising’s leaders whom he knew personally—Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Constance Markievicz, and John MacBride—and muses on the nature of their transformation, the speaker plays with the distinction between the Rising as an event that irrefutably occurred in the past and the event as it will be perceived over time as it becomes a part of history. The relationship between the stone and the river in the poem’s third stanza represents this tension between the historical event and historical memory:

Hearts with one purpose alone  
 Through summer and winter seem  
 Enchanted to a stone  
 To trouble the living stream. (*CW1* 180)

In this first description of the stone and the river, Yeats introduces the question of perception: the hearts in question “*seem* / Enchanted to a stone” (emphasis added). If we look at the stone in a river, we see it refracted by the stream. Moreover, time (the flow of the water) and perspective (the angle of the viewer) will change our vision of the stone. The imagery that follows includes a series of visual and auditory disturbances as the river is shadowed by passing clouds and distorted by the splashing of horse-hooves and moor-hens who call to each other. The stanza strangely lacks an eye or an “I” to perceive these changes and it is left to the reader to process the relationship between the shifting living stream and the immovable stone that lies beneath.

In the final stanza, dominated by questions, Yeats introduces the problem of sonic memory and tasks himself and the reader with the role of “murmur[ing] name upon name, / As a mother names her child” (*CW1* 181). This line suggests that, collectively, the community must sanctify the names of the martyrs through the spoken word, which is associated with the intimacy of the mother tongue. Several lines later, a question breaks the certainty with which he calls for this naming of the martyrs: “Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said” (*CW1* 181–82). This question acknowledges that further historical events may change the meaning of the Rising over time. If England keeps faith—granting Ireland the Home Rule that the Irish parliamentarian John Redmond negotiated as a condition of Ireland’s participation in World War I—then those names may no longer be recited in the communal litany. The spoken word is irrevocably yet invisibly altered by time. The historical meaning of the Rising, especially dependent on England’s actions, was still very much in flux when Yeats wrote this poem.

Yet for all this ambiguity, the poem ends by ceasing to question how history will perceive the Rising and, instead, fixes the event in the poet’s own commemorative statement:

I write it out in a verse—  
 MacDonagh and MacBride  
 And Connolly and Pearse  
 Now and in time to be,  
 Wherever green is worn,  
 Are changed, changed utterly:  
 A terrible beauty is born. (*CW1* 182)

When the poem moves from the maternal tongue to the written word, historical memory calcifies and the poet takes on the public role of commemorator. The questions of the previous section dissolve into a statement of fact and the flux of the river imagery turns static. Yeats claims that in committing these names to verse, they will forever signify the birth of a “terrible beauty.” John Wilson Foster observes that, in doing so, Yeats offers “a canonical image of the Rising that establishes the importance as much of Yeats to the Rising as of the Rising to Yeats.”<sup>17</sup> What is most definite in the poem is the power of the poet to create a canonical version of the historical event.

Whereas the poem forcefully asserts the poet’s capacity to frame the events of the Easter Rising, Yeats was, according to R. F. Foster, “extremely cautious” about its initial publication (*Life* 2 34). Not only was the poem potentially treasonous, but Yeats feared alienating his unionist supporters in the Hugh Lane controversy. The first published version of the poem appeared in a privately circulated pamphlet, only twenty-five copies of which were printed by Charles Shorter. Although there remains debate about the publication date of this pamphlet, Matthew Campbell dates it to Easter 1917 and notes that of these twenty-five copies one was registered at the British Library that year and therefore available to a broader public than the private printing might suggest.<sup>18</sup> The poem was subsequently printed for a larger audience in *The New Statesman* (October 23, 1920), followed by its publication in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). In this collection, the poem appeared as the first in a suite of Rising poems that included “The Rose Tree” and “On a Political Prisoner.”<sup>19</sup> Compared to the other Rising poems that Yeats published in that collection, “Easter, 1916” is a deeply ambivalent poem that neither directly praises nor blames the leaders of the Rising. Despite this ambivalence, publishing “Easter, 1916” in the heated aftermath of the Rising may well have been interpreted as support for the rebels. James Pethica observes that Yeats’s reluctance to publish it “surely reflected his uncertainty as to the long-term political consequences of the Rising.”<sup>20</sup> By the time of the 1930s broadcasts, however, the Irish Free State had been established and Yeats no longer needed to show caution in praising the leaders of the Rising. Moreover, Yeats was more secure in his public position and less cautious about making extreme statements, or acting as the old man “on the boiler.” In his broadcasts, Yeats went out of his way to include poems about the Rising—keeping the event active on the airwaves—without reading “Easter, 1916,” a poem that was quickly calcifying, stone-like, into the canonical version of the event. “Easter, 1916” dramatizes the shifting nature of commemoration, only to transform into an inescapable statement on the Rising. The poems that Yeats read on the air, on the other hand, are more self-consciously minor poems that intervene in the contemporaneous conversation about the Rising.

Radio has a unique relationship with time: just as a broadcast goes on air, it disappears. Especially in the period during which Yeats was broadcasting, programs were rarely recorded and so existed entirely in the present moment. Although the BBC maintained print records of broadcast scripts and correspondence, the record of Yeats's broadcasts is particularly incomplete since German bombs during the Blitz destroyed a section of the BBC archive housing the transcripts and correspondence relating to some of Yeats's broadcasts.<sup>21</sup> His broadcasts are therefore more stream and less stone. Drawing upon the medium's sense of ephemerality and flux, Yeats introduces his *Rising* poems on air with short preambles that signal the poet's intention to alter his interpretation of the events of the *Rising* from the distance of two decades.

Two figures who are not mentioned by name in the final passage of "Easter, 1916," Markievicz and Casement, became central to Yeats's radio broadcasts of the 1930s. Casement does not feature in "Easter, 1916" at all and Markievicz is described as the furious harpy of the second stanza but is not named in the poem (*CW1* 180). In his 1932 broadcast "Poems about Women," Yeats includes his poem about Markievicz, "On a Political Prisoner." It is the last poem that Yeats reads in the broadcast and, for this reason, it sounds a political note at the end of a program dominated by love poems. In the program, Yeats calls the poem "To a Political Prisoner," which suggests increased intimacy from the more impersonal "On a Political Prisoner": the poet is speaking *to* Markievicz rather than musing *on* her in the manner of a poetic ode. The shift from the page to the airwaves introduces a sense of intimacy into the poem and, in this respect, follows the radio style of Hilda Matheson, a friend of Yeats's who was the first Director of the BBC's Talks Department.<sup>22</sup> According to David Cardiff, Matheson "fostered the art of the spoken word as a means of domesticating the public utterance."<sup>23</sup> Matheson understood broadcasting as a strange fusion of the public and the private and encouraged presenters to address radio's mass publics through intimate forms of address. Yeats described radio's intimacy in similar terms, as the "remarkable experience" of speaking "to a multitude, each member of it being alone."<sup>24</sup>

Like the subtle shift from "on" to "to," Yeats's introductory comments foster intimacy by softening some of the poem's harsher charges against Markievicz. Yeats tells the audience: "In the lines of the poem which condemn her politics I was not thinking of her part in two rebellions, but of other matters of quarrel. We had never been on the same side at the same time" (*CW10* 242). With these words, Yeats draws listeners' attention to his own changing relationship to the poem's content. In the poem, the speaker asks:

Did she in touching that lone wing  
Recall the years before her mind

Became a bitter, an abstract thing,  
 Her thought some popular enmity:  
 Blind and leader of the blind  
 Drinking the foul ditch where they lie? (*CW1* 183–84)

Clarifying his intentions for this denunciation of Markievicz as “blind” and “bitter,” Yeats endorses her role in the two rebellions—both the Easter Rising and the Civil War—while alluding to “other matters of quarrel.” Yeats’s quarrel with Markievicz centered on what he saw as her lowering herself to the crowd and his distrust of her socialism, but the broadcast leaves the subject of the quarrel deliberately vague. In this respect, Yeats’s hint at his problem with Markievicz’s socialism, without clearly articulating it in the introduction, provides further evidence of what Margot Gayle Backus describes as Yeats’s banishing of socialism from his framing of the rebellion.<sup>25</sup> By the time of the broadcast, Yeats could confidently state his support for the Irish insurrection (he could not do so in its immediate aftermath), but his later support distanced the event from its association with socialism. In the broadcast, he positions himself as an admirer of Markievicz while obfuscating and undermining the nature of their disagreements.

Markievicz died of peritonitis in 1927. Although the poem was originally published in 1920, its broadcast five years after her death gives the poem an elegiac quality. Yeats introduces the poem with his personal reminiscences of Markievicz from his childhood in Sligo. While the poem, like “Easter, 1916,” does not name the political prisoner, Yeats’s introduction on air gives her a name and a detailed biography: he presents Markievicz as an admired but distant figure, defined by her role as daughter of the Big House. He remembers looking out of the windows of his grandparents’ house to see “Sir Henry Gore-Booth’s great grey house among trees”: “His daughter Constance lived there, a daring rider and country beauty. I had never spoken to her but I had often seen her upon horseback” (*CW10* 241). This portrayal of Markievicz accords with poems such as “Easter, 1916” and “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz,” in which Yeats emphasizes her youth and grace, presenting her as a famous rider. In “Easter, 1916” Yeats praises her beauty and aristocratic background, while chastising her for her involvement in politics:

That woman’s days were spent  
 In ignorant good-will,  
 Her nights in argument  
 Until her voice grew shrill.  
 What voice more sweet than hers  
 When, young and beautiful,  
 She rode to harriers? (*CW1* 180)

Here as in other poems about Markievicz, Yeats consistently undercuts her political career while over-praising her youthful good looks, allure, and vigor. When Yeats wrote "Easter, 1916" Markievicz was still alive and so he includes her in the descriptive passage, but her commuted sentence and, by extension, her gender, do not entitle her for inclusion among the list of martyrs named at the end of the poem. While "On a Political Prisoner"—also written before Markievicz's death—uses some of the same vitriolic rhetoric as Yeats's other poems about her, the introduction in the broadcast works to soften the tone and restore her name in the list of 1916 martyrs.

Yeats also included "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz" in "Reading of Poems," his first poetry reading on air for the BBC's Belfast studios in 1931, the year before his broadcast of "On a Political Prisoner." In introducing "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," Yeats describes a turn from the folkloric subjects of his early poetry to the personal and elegiac nature of his late poetry: "Sometimes I have written of the death of friends and acquaintances and such poems are probably the best I have written of recent years" (*CW10* 227). Emphasizing the personal nature of these elegies for "friends and acquaintances," Yeats again contrasts the beautiful young Anglo-Irishwoman with the hardened revolutionary: "The older is condemned to death, / Pardoned, drags out lonely years / Conspiring among the ignorant" (*CW1* 233). When Yeats returns to the microphone to broadcast a second poem about Markievicz, he seems determined to represent her in more complimentary terms.

Yeats makes an additional revisionary gesture in his introduction of Markievicz in his 1932 broadcast of "On a Political Prisoner" by offering an appreciative take on her role in the Rising. He tells listeners:

She was in command of the rebels who had seized and fortified the College of Surgeons. She fought bravely, was condemned to death and pardoned at the last moment. After the Treaty she took part in the rebellion against the Free State Government and was again imprisoned. I heard that while in gaol she tamed a seagull, taught it to come into her cell for food and take the food out of her hand. (*CW10* 242)

Yeats depicts Markievicz here as a full-blooded revolutionary who was unambiguously "in command" and "fought bravely" in the insurrection. He uses fewer valedictory verbs and adjectives to describe her role in the Civil War on the Anti-Treaty side, but continues to present her as an active rebel as if to compensate for the poem's nostalgic focus on her lost beauty. Whereas Yeats's Markievicz poems continually privilege the Constance of Yeats's youth—the beautiful and spirited girl of the Big House—over the mature woman who

inhabits the public sphere, his 1932 broadcast takes some pains to reimagine Markievicz as a political agent and as a martial woman. Yeats wants the audience to remember his personal Markievicz, while also belatedly emphasizing her public role and softening some, but not all, of the more negative rhetoric of his poems.

By the 1930s Markievicz had become, if not a martyr, at least a figure rendered saintly by her death and the elaborate state ceremony that accompanied her funeral. There were a fair number of elegies among Yeats's radio poems, which may speak to the fact that, as Emilie Morin argues, in the Yeats household the radio medium was strongly connected to spiritualist practices.<sup>26</sup> In elegizing the dead Markievicz, Yeats felt the need to blunt the edges around his earlier personal attacks. Yeats's radio broadcast of "On a Political Prisoner" is his way of belatedly numbering Markievicz in his song of the Rising. His inclusion of this poem is not unlike the present Irish state's revisionist take on women in the Rising—the desire to name and explain a female presence that had been written out of history.<sup>27</sup>

While Yeats may not have been particularly worried over Markievicz's marginalization as a woman, he *was* concerned about the marginalization of Protestants in Irish public life. At a time when Yeats was producing numerous elegies to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, it is notable that he chose two Protestant leaders to commemorate in his broadcasts.<sup>28</sup> Promoting not only Markievicz's role in the Rising but also Casement's helped Yeats establish the relevance of Irish Protestants to Irish national culture at a time when the Catholic majority was exercising its newfound dominance in public life.

On February 1, 1937, Yeats broadcast a live program from the Abbey Theatre on Radio Éireann that he was planning to record and subsequently re-broadcast on the BBC. He also, ambitiously, believed he could circulate the recording through connections to Egyptian broadcasting.<sup>29</sup> He imagined a transnational audience for this broadcast that could help repudiate what he was convinced were false claims against Casement by the British government.<sup>30</sup> The poem was occasioned by the publication of William J. Maloney's *The Forged Casement Diaries* (1936), which argued that Casement's infamous "Black Diaries," chronicling his sexual exchanges with men and boys, were forgeries circulated by British emissaries to discredit Casement and clear the way for his execution. Yeats himself did not deny Casement's homosexuality, but he was appalled by the underhanded way in which the diaries were produced and disseminated.<sup>31</sup> He was therefore quick to believe that they were forgeries—a theory that has been subsequently dismantled and Casement's authorship of the diaries confirmed.<sup>32</sup>

If the 1932 broadcast of "Poems about Women" that included "On a Political Prisoner" had been a relatively straightforward reading of poems by the

author, the “Abbey Theatre” broadcast for Radio Éireann was a much more complicated and formally innovative affair that involved readings, songs, and sound effects, and ended up serving as a forerunner for the kind of programs Yeats would go on to make with Barnes, the BBC producer. The last item in the broadcast, “Roger Casement,” was read by John Stephenson and was preceded by a song setting of “Come Gather Round Me Parnellites.” It is no accident that Yeats ended both “Poems about Women” and the “Abbey Theatre Broadcast” with 1916 poems; in both programs, he leaves listeners with a parting message that asks them to recall the unfinished business of the Rising. Whereas there is a gap in time between the initial publication of “On a Political Prisoner” in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* in 1921 and its subsequent broadcast ten years later, in the case of “Roger Casement” the poem appeared nearly simultaneously on air and in print. It is therefore an example of one of Yeats’s radio poems which reached listeners on air for the first time.<sup>33</sup> When Yeats introduces “Come Gather Round Me Parnellites,” directly preceding the reading of “Roger Casement,” he asks listeners to imagine that they are hearing the song upon returning from Glasnevin Cemetery:

Now Mr. Stephenson is going to sing the poem about Parnell and you’re to think yourselves old men, old farmers perhaps, accustomed to read newspapers and listen to songs, but not to read books. You are old and decrepit, because you have been to Glasnevin on all the anniversaries of Parnell’s death for the last forty years. There are not many of you left, and you’re to imagine yourselves sitting in a public house, after you have returned from Glasnevin graveyard. (CW10 263)

Yeats’s strategy in adapting to the deterritorialized space of the broadcast medium was to encourage the audience to imagine themselves in specific settings and social milieus, in this case as farmers returning from Glasnevin graveyard.<sup>34</sup> Glasnevin was the site of the contested republican commemorations taking place in the 1930s, often in opposition to the Free State’s official commemorations. Yeats is therefore laying the foundation for “Roger Casement” by asking his audience to imagine themselves as Irish republicans engaged in acts of commemoration.

Yeats follows this rousing call to political identification with a poem that revisits one martyred leader of the Easter Rising and demands new justice. Yeats wanted the poem to reach people in positions of authority and not only broadcast it on Radio Éireann but published it the next day in the De Valera-backed *Irish Press*. The reference to Glasnevin commemorations preceding the poem was therefore in line with one of the main target audiences whom Yeats sought to reach in order to redress wrongs against Casement. If Irish

nationalists had backed away from including Casement in the pantheon of martyred leaders because of his homosexuality, Yeats wanted this audience to lead the charge in reinstating him. In preparation for the broadcast, Yeats sent out what Colton Johnson refers to as a “volley of alerts” to friends and influential figures to tune in to the broadcast in the hope that it would impact public opinion and political decisions.<sup>35</sup>

Yeats was wary about the British response to his poem, warning Barnes about the planned re-broadcast of the program on the BBC: “The last item is unsuited for the B.B.C., being political” (*CL Intelix* #6788). Here Yeats may have simply been anticipating that the BBC would censor “Roger Casement”—the corporation had a mandate to avoid politically divisive topics.<sup>36</sup> However, in the same letter, dated January 23, 1937, Yeats also laments how little authority he is able to exercise in London as opposed to Dublin: “I like working here [Dublin] because I am not afraid of anybody and most people are afraid of me. It is the reverse in London” (*CL Intelix* #6788). It was not, in the end, because of the political nature of “Roger Casement” that the program was not rebroadcast from London, but rather due to the disappointing quality of the broadcast itself. Yeats complained to Barnes: “Broadcast a fiasco. Every human sound turned in to the groans, roars, bellows of a wild [beast]. I recognise that I am a fool and there will be no more broad cast [sic] of verse from the Abbey stage if I can prevent it” (*CL Intelix* #6788). Blaming the poor production quality on the Abbey staff and his own inexperience with the radio medium, Yeats turned to the BBC to produce a higher quality of programming that better aligned with his ideas for presenting poems to a mass audience.

Despite his initial hesitation about broadcasting political topics on the BBC, Yeats explicitly turned to politics in a later broadcast, “My Own Poetry” (July 1937), in which he introduces what he describes as a “public theme” with a sequence of three political poems: “The Rose Tree,” “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death,” and “The Curse of Cromwell.” The program included readings and songs by V. C. Clinton-Baddeley and Margot Ruddock, with musical settings by Edmund Dulac. The first poem, “The Rose Tree,” presents a dialogue between Pearse and Connolly on the theme of martyrdom and was read on air by Clinton-Baddeley. The broadcast begins with Yeats introducing the events of the Rising to his listening public. His first words to the audience offer historical framing:

In 1916 the poet and schoolmaster Pearse, the labour leader Connolly, and others, including those two unknown men, De Valera and Cosgrave, seized certain public buildings in Dublin and held them against the English army for some days. Neither Pearse nor Connolly had any expectation of victory. They went out to die because, as Pearse said in a famous speech, a national

movement cannot be kept alive unless blood is shed in every generation. A poem containing this thought will be the first spoken. (*CW10* 283)

Yeats offers a vision of the Rising from the perspective of the present; he refers to Éamon De Valera and W. T. Cosgrave, two representatives of opposing sides in the Civil War, as “two unknown men” to point out the distance between 1916 and 1937. He describes these men as two obscure rebels in 1916, but by alluding to them, his reminiscence of 1916 is shadowed by the Civil War that followed. Planting De Valera and Cosgrave in his introduction to a poem that seems to glorify nationalist martyrdom points to the unfinished business of the Rising. By referring to both men’s role in the Rising, moreover, Yeats takes a neutral stance, refusing to identify either the Free Staters or Anti-Treaty republicans as true heirs to the Rising. Unlike his direct appeal to De Valera’s followers in presenting “Roger Casement,” Yeats identifies De Valera and Cosgrave as two “unknown men” in the Rising; they both have equal claims as participants, but neither rises to the status of its mythic leaders. By the 1930s Yeats was less hesitant about presenting himself as a partisan on the side of the martyred leaders of the Rising. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the Civil War, he shows caution by presenting his poems as amenable to both sides of this more recent conflict.

“The Rose Tree” represents Pearse as confident in his aims and their expected results: “O plain as plain can be / There’s nothing but our own red blood / Can make a right Rose Tree” (*CW1* 284). When paired with the introduction’s evocation of De Valera and Cosgrave, the broadcasting of this poem in 1937—after a devastating Civil War in Ireland, in a Europe on the brink of world war—feels ominous. Yeats introduces “The Rose Tree” as “a poem containing this thought” regarding blood sacrifice, and the passivity of the language distances the poet from the thought—it belongs to the speaker, Pearse, and perhaps to the poem itself, but not to the poet. This is not to say that Yeats was opposed to bloodshed—in fact some of his bloodiest poems were written in the period in which he was broadcasting—but rather, that in broadcasting the Rising poems he asks his listeners to consider the legacy of this bloodshed from the vantage of the present.

During his years as a broadcaster, Yeats was also writing new poems about the Rising, including not only “Roger Casement” but also “The O’Rahilly” and “Three Songs and the One Burden.”<sup>37</sup> The latter two poems are ballads that emphasize the importance of song and the spoken word to keep alive the ongoing commemoration of the Rising. Although neither poem was broadcast, both continue to emphasize the forms and themes that we see in the broadcast poems, including the use of the ballad form and calls on the audience to participate: to sing and to praise the dead martyrs of the Rising. Yeats insists that the Rising must be kept alive through constant oral invocation. He calls

on listeners to “Sing of the O’Rahilly” in “The O’Rahilly” and to “Come praise Nineteen-Sixteen” in “Three Songs and the One Burden” (CW1 307, 330). His radio broadcasts are an important iteration of this call to verbal commemoration. On air, Yeats could continually bring forth the memories of 1916, while also adapting them to changing circumstances.

Throughout the history of the Rising, from its earliest moments when the rebels broadcast their message into the ether, radio would play a key role in creating a platform for recursive invocations of the event, keeping it alive in public memory while also continuously adapting its meaning for changing times. In 1966, for the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising, the BBC aired a program on the Home Service comprised of interviews with survivors of the Rising, including those who fought as well as those who lost family members and friends. The hour-long program was compiled from recorded interviews by the Northern Irish broadcaster W. R. Rodgers and produced by R. D. Smith.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the interview, the program included readings by the actor Micheál Mac Liammóir of the “Proclamation of the Irish Republic” and two poems by Yeats: “The Rose Tree” and “Easter, 1916.” The placement and use of these two poems points to their disparate importance in historical memories of the Rising. The program quotes from “The Rose Tree” only to challenge its interpretation of events. Mac Liammóir delivers the poem in its entirety, ending with the lines that Yeats attributes to Pearse, extolling blood sacrifice: “There’s nothing but our own red blood / Can make a right Rose Tree.” The reading of Yeats’s poem is followed by critical commentary by a former soldier in the rebellion. Sean MacEntee, then a member of the Dáil, argues that Connolly did not share the view of blood sacrifice expressed in the poem: “Pearse and perhaps Joseph Plunkett, from what I know of them, may have had that idea of blood sacrifice. I doubt if that was really a compelling motive in the case of James Connolly.”<sup>39</sup> MacEntee goes on to speculate that Connolly was most likely motivated by his sense that Great Britain could lose World War I and that acting before the end of the war would give Ireland a seat at the table during peace negotiations.

Following the poem with MacEntee’s criticism resituates the Rising in the context of World War I and disentangles the pragmatic, socialist Connolly from the mythic Pearse. The radio program invokes “The Rose Tree” only to offer a platform for MacEntee to question its relationship to historical reality. Although Connolly was first and foremost committed to the cause of a workers’ republic, he was not entirely immune to Pearsian rhetoric. As he wrote in the *Workers’ Republic*: “we recognise that of us as of mankind before Calvary it may truly be said: *Without the Shedding of Blood there is no Redemption.*”<sup>40</sup> Although Yeats’s poem portrays Connolly asking questions rather than explicitly extolling martyrdom (those lines of dialogue are left to Pearse), MacEntee further distances Connolly from Pearse’s rhetoric of blood sacrifice.

In contrast, Yeats's most famous Rising poem, "Easter, 1916," appears at the very end of the broadcast, at which point it is given the final word. After listening to an hour of voices explaining different takes on the Rising, the listener once again hears the sonorous voice of Mac Liammóir delivering the poem's famous final lines. However, the program fades out mid-refrain, leaving the listener with an unfinished line: "A terrible beauty..." The program omits the third repetition of the refrain's ending—"is born"—and expects the listener to fill in the rest. Leaving the line unfinished prompts listeners to remember that the events of the Easter Rising are themselves incomplete and that their meaning remains to be defined by each future listener. The audience is called upon to finish the line, thereby participating in the oral evocation of the event and murmuring name upon name with each successive act of commemoration.

As seen in this radio program, which was not only broadcast on air but commercially sold as a gramophone recording, communications media have been central to framing historical memories of the Rising. In fact, there is a peculiarly close connection between commemoration and mass media in the twentieth century; the scheduling demands of radio and television feed off the flurry of programming possibilities that a commemorative year enables. The fiftieth anniversary, when the BBC's "Easter Rising" aired, was not only a politically fraught moment preceding the resurgence of violence in Northern Ireland, but also a significant stage in media history with the growing importance of television.<sup>41</sup> Changes in mass media prompt new forms of commemoration that allow for the continual re-invention of national origin myths.

Yeats's approach to broadcasting the Rising reveals the plasticity of historical memory. If the version that he presented in "Easter, 1916" helped set a still-fluid event into stone, then the versions that he would proliferate via broadcasting would introduce subtle changes; they would suggest more intimacy between Yeats and the Rising's leaders, incorporate new figures into the pantheon of martyrs, and include strident language supporting the republican cause while avoiding linking that cause too closely with either side in the Civil War that followed. It is perhaps no accident that Yeats was drawn to a medium such as radio, defined by its ephemerality. Radio allowed Yeats to reach a mass audience with spoken words that would immediately dissipate into the ether. In this respect, radio called to mind the oral literatures of the past and present. And yet radio was even more radically ephemeral than oral tradition, with no promise of the continuity that the word 'tradition' evokes. In this respect, it perfectly embodied the temporality of commemoration: characterizing historical events through the political imperatives of the present. Broadcasting his lesser-known Rising poems through new communication media allowed Yeats to project a moment in his shifting attitude toward the Rising out into the world and, in this process, to address the exigencies of the contemporary moment.

## Notes

1. Patrick Crotty, "Instant Commemoration? Yeats, 'Easter 1916' and the Easter Rising," *Journal of Irish Studies* 31 (2016): 4.
2. Fergus O'Kelly, Statement of Witness, Bureau of Military History, 1913–21, no. W.S. 351, Military Archives, Ireland. O'Kelly's first-hand account of the wireless operations surrounding the Easter Rising in the Bureau of Military History documents his time as a member of the Irish Volunteers attached to the Signalling Company.
3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 266.
4. Christopher Morash, *A History of Media in Ireland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131.
5. Yug Mohit Chaudhry, *Yeats, The Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 1.
6. Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xix.
7. The first poem of Yeats's listed among the BBC's copyright requests is, perhaps unsurprisingly, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," which was requested for a broadcast in 1927. See the W. B. Yeats Copyright File, 1924–39, BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham.
8. One interesting exception to the BBC's apparent aversion to Yeats's political works is the frequent requests to air radio adaptations of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. One of the first works of Yeats's performed on the BBC, before any requests for poems appear in the archives, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was requested by the BBC as early as 1924, only two years after the BBC was formed. It is not in the scope of this paper to examine the plays produced on the BBC, but it is worth noting that the early copyright files suggest that the BBC was even more interested in Yeats the playwright than Yeats the poet. By the 1930s, Yeats would set out to distance himself from the unapologetic call to nationalist blood sacrifice that he presents in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and, in selecting poems for broadcast, would curate a more ambiguous mixture of political poems.
9. Charles I. Armstrong, "Pub, Parlour, Theatre: Radio in the Imagination of W. B. Yeats," in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, eds. Matthew Feldman, Erik Tønning, and Henry Mead (New York, Bloomsbury, 2014), 34.
10. Patric Dickinson, "Choice and Chance," January 1, 1964, Scripts Library, BBC Written Archive Centre, Caversham, 1.
11. Dickinson, "Choice and Chance," 2.
12. Roisin Higgins, "'The Irish Republic Was Proclaimed by Poster': The Politics of Commemorating the Easter Rising," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*, eds. Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 51.
13. Crotty, "Instant Commemoration?" 4–5.
14. Guy Beiner, "Making Sense of Memory: Coming to Terms with Conceptualisations of Historical Remembrance," *Remembering 1916*, 15.
15. Higgins, "The Irish Republic Was Proclaimed by Poster," 55.
16. Heather Laird, *Commemoration* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2018), 11.
17. John Wilson Foster, "Yeats and the Easter Rising," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 11, no. 1 (1985): 22.
18. Whereas earlier critics have characterized the first publication by Shorter as reaching only a narrow, private audience, Campbell points out that the poem was registered in the British Library as early as June 9, 1917 and was therefore "in the public domain—or at least was available to readers in the British Museum—three and a half years earlier than is usually

- thought." Matthew Campbell, "Dating 'Easter, 1916,'" *International Yeats Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 57.
19. The other Rising poems in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* are "Sixteen Dean Men" and "The Leaders of the Crowd."
  20. James Pethica, "'Easter, 1916' at its Centennial: Maud Gonne, Augusta Gregory and the Evolution of the Poem," *International Yeats Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016): 42.
  21. Yeats's first poetry broadcast, "Reading of Poems," was one program that was destroyed in the Blitz. Its contents were reconstructed by Colton Johnson through Yeats's working typescript and surviving fragments of recordings (CW10 391 n. 380).
  22. Matheson became part of Yeats's circle through her long-term romantic relationship with Dorothy Wellesley. Yeats was particularly impressed with Matheson's administrative abilities and, in a letter to Wellesley discussing plans to reorganize the Cuala Press, he wrote, "If only there were an Irish Hilda Matheson." November 2, 1937, *CL InteleX* #7106.
  23. David Cardiff, "The Serious and the Popular: Aspects of the Evolution of Style in the Radio Talk, 1928–1939," in *Media, Culture and Society* 2, no. 1 (1980): 31.
  24. Quoted in Colton Johnson, "Yeats's Wireless," *Wilson Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2000): 24.
  25. Margot Gayle Backus, "'More Useful Washed and Dead': James Connolly, W. B. Yeats, and the Sexual Politics of 'Easter, 1916,'" *Interventions* 10, no. 1 (2008): 69.
  26. Emilie Morin has pointed out that the wireless "provided a register in the Yeats family for thinking about the supernatural." Emilie Morin, "'I Beg Your Pardon?': W. B. Yeats, Audibility and Sound Transmission," *YA* 19 (2013): 201.
  27. Laird has criticized the tokenistic mode of including select women in Ireland's Decade of Centenaries. She argues that "the project of making accounts of key historical events more inclusive often involves intentionally inserting women, who may have played a crucial though less overtly 'central' role in such events, into a history writing that is structurally patriarchal." Laird, *Commemoration*, 19.
  28. A list of Yeats's elegies to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that were published during the time of his broadcasting would include "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz," "Coole Park, 1929," "Coole and Ballylee, 1931," "The Curse of Cromwell," and "The Municipal Gallery Re-visited."
  29. Johnson, "Yeats's Wireless," 28.
  30. For more on "Roger Casement" and Yeats's attitudes toward transnational broadcasting, see Emily C. Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 36–42.
  31. Regarding Casement's sexuality, Yeats wrote in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, "If Casement were a homo-sexual what matter! But if the British Government can with impunity forge evidence to prove him so no unpopular man with a cause will ever be safe." W. B. Yeats, *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, ed. Dorothy Wellesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 141.
  32. See William J. McCormack, *Roger Casement in Death: Or, Haunting the Free State* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2002).
  33. Other radio poems include "Sweet Dancer" and "The Curse of Cromwell," which were first published on air. See Bloom, *The Wireless Past*, 46–63.
  34. For more examples of Yeats's appeal to listeners' imaginations, see Armstrong, "Pub, Parlour, Theatre" and Bloom, *The Wireless Past*, 35–45.
  35. Johnson, "Yeats's Wireless," 28.
  36. The founding Director-General of the BBC, John Reith, posted a memo to broadcasters in 1925 that included a list of prohibitions, including a ban on "political allusions." Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922–1938* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 21.

37. "Roger Casement" and "The O'Rahilly" both appeared in *New Poems* (1938) and "Three Songs to the One Burden" was published posthumously in *Last Poems* (1938–39).
38. Rodgers tape-recorded his interviews using an early recording system called the telediphone and then edited them into a portrait-like compilation, known as the "Rodgers Technique." His most famous use of this technique was for a series of "Irish Literary Portraits" for the BBC that, like the Easter Rising program, compiled interviews by people who knew famous literary figures such as Yeats and Joyce. Rodgers later described these programs as his "most intensive and significant work over the past twenty years." Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, *Introduction: W. R. Rodgers Papers* (Belfast: Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 2007), 5. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/rodders-papers-d2833.pdf>.
39. R. D. Smith, "The Easter Rising 1916," BBC Home Service, April 1966, Fontana Records.
40. Italics in the original. Thanks to David Dwan for drawing my attention to this quotation. James Connolly, "Notes on the Front," *Worker's Republic*, February 5, 1916, reproduced at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1916/02/fronta.htm>.
41. Roisín Higgins writes: "While the commemoration of the Easter Rising did not cause the conflict in Northern Ireland, it has been seen by unionist politicians as central to the build-up of tension and the subsequent breakdown of order." Higgins also points out the centrality of broadcasting to the fiftieth anniversary, noting that it was "the first commemoration to be broadcast on the recently established Irish television network Telefís Éireann, and at a point when Ireland was intensely aware of its image in the outside world." Higgins, *Transforming 1916: Meaning, Memory and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Easter Rising* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 1–2.

## YEATS, POUND, AND THE *LITTLE REVIEW*, 1914–1918

Clare Hutton

Writing to the French poet Henry Davray in 1896, Yeats expressed his sense of intended audience and purpose with energy and simplicity:

I am an Irish poet, looking to my own people for my ultimate best audience & trying to express the things that interest them & which will make them care for the land in which they live.<sup>1</sup>

The commitment here is notable: if believed, it is that of a writer, aged just over thirty, who wishes to produce work which would appeal to Irish readers of all classes. Even in 1896 this is hardly to be trusted, and certainly by the time he reached his later forties Yeats's attitude to the literary marketplace and his ideal intended readership had adjusted quite significantly. To make money as a poet, he had had to work out how to negotiate the complexities of London's highly stratified literary marketplace, by positioning works within newspapers and periodicals, creating a context of appreciation for his work, and gradually and slowly gathering individual poems into shaped and intended volumes by publishers such as Elkin Mathews, A. H. Bullen, T. Fisher Unwin, and, from 1901, Macmillan and Company. As his career became more assured, it also became more international, and there is no doubt in this regard that his introduction to Ezra Pound in London at the end of April 1909 was particularly formative. Pound was younger and more energetic, and had a very different sense of the literary sphere in which he wished to make an impact. He wanted to ensure that his work and that of other writers that he valued would be read by the right sort of readers on both sides of the Atlantic. On Pound's insistence Yeats made a small but interesting set of contributions to the avant-garde, US-published *Little Review*, a journal which is now enjoying a renewal of critical interest thanks to the energies of the New Modernist Studies and its remediation in digital form by the Modernist Journals Project.<sup>2</sup> In fact the *Little Review*, which ran from 1914 to 1929, has always been a source of considerable interest to scholars of modernist literature because it serialized much of Joyce's *Ulysses* between March 1918 and December 1920, and was guest-edited by Pound for two years from May 1917.

The founding editor of the *Little Review* was Margaret Anderson (1886–1973), the feminist and *littérateur* who was later joined by her partner, Jane Heap (1883–1964), a more shadowy but arguably more significant editorial presence behind the scenes, particularly during the *Ulysses* period and thereafter. In setting up her journal, Anderson had determined that it was to be her

own “personal enterprise” and “neither directly nor indirectly connected in any way with an organization, society, company, cult or movement.”<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless Anderson had strategically positioned the first office of the *Little Review* within the Fine Arts Building in Chicago, where she was friendly with Harriet Monroe, who in October 1912 founded *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, one of the best known of modernism’s “little magazines.”<sup>4</sup> This association with Monroe smoothed the way for the association with Yeats. *Poetry* had printed an address which Yeats made to “American Poets” during his visit to Chicago of March 1914, and the *Little Review* reprinted it in April 1914. The very act of reprinting such a specific item implies Anderson’s openness to European literary culture, and her tacit support of the advice Yeats gave to American poets. The address was predictably pompous. Though he was only forty-eight, Yeats’s address positions himself as an old man (“I have lived a good many years”), an expert reader, and one who has rebelled against “rhetorical poetry” and the artificiality of “poetic diction.” He continues by observing that American poetry is full of “sentimentality” and “rhetoric,” and that American poets suffer from being “too far from Paris.” Pound is presented as the one shining exception to all of this, and his poem “The Return” is commended by Yeats as “the most beautiful poem that has been written in the free form, one of the few in which I find real organic rhythm.”<sup>5</sup> These comments provide an interesting frame for Yeats’s other contributions to the *Little Review*, which were all solicited and arranged by Pound during his tenure as “Foreign Editor” of the *Little Review*.

Despite her editorial brio and considerable charm, Anderson clearly found it difficult to sustain the *Little Review* and, according to Pound, the journal had become “scrappy and unselective” during 1916.<sup>6</sup> It had certainly diminished in volume and regularity, only appearing seven times that year though labelled a “monthly.” Some issues only comprised thirty pages, and even those were padded out with advertisements.<sup>7</sup> Pound had been angling to get the “corner” of a journal for some years, and during 1915 had contemplated setting up one himself, sponsored by John Quinn, his friend and patron. These plans, which were set out in a prospectus for Quinn, did not materialize. Nonetheless, and in view of what did emerge, the terms of Pound’s vision are worth considering. In private correspondence with Quinn, he described a journal which “could completely support Joyce, Eliot, Myself and asst-edtr,” and proposed that it be a “male review” published under the banner “No woman shall be allowed to write for this magazine” on the grounds that “active America is getting fed up on gynocracy.”<sup>8</sup> While it might be appropriate to dismiss these comments as bluster, it is worth remembering that Pound’s plans for literary journalism ultimately led to collaborations with notable feminists, not just Anderson and Heap of the *Little Review* but also Dora Marsden and Harriet Shaw Weaver of *The Egoist* (which regularly advertised in the *Little Review*, and occasionally

described itself in a slogan—which has a Poundian swagger—as a “journal of interest to virile readers only”).<sup>9</sup> Anderson and Heap had not met Pound before his association with the *Little Review* began but Marsden had, and clearly had some sense of his chauvinism. Acting on behalf of *The Egoist* and against Weaver’s wishes, Marsden turned down an offer of cash from Pound in exchange for control of her magazine on the grounds that it would considerably reduce her editorial power.<sup>10</sup> Anderson, by contrast, was more receptive to Pound’s offer to “help the *Little Review*” by bringing capital and offering to solicit and edit literary work.<sup>11</sup> This is because the finances of the *Little Review* were genuinely perilous and because she knew that the *Little Review* would benefit from Pound’s international connections, which had done much for *Poetry*. The decision to accept Pound’s offer is also arguably a sign of Anderson’s confidence that she could work around whatever editorial pressures Pound exerted. After all, she had founded the *Little Review* and sustained it for three years without Pound’s assistance, and in the closing months of 1916 had already planned a move from Chicago to New York on the grounds that she and Heap “have an entirely new lease on life and were just starting with what we have to say.”<sup>12</sup>

Let us return to Yeats, and to the context of his own contributions to the *Little Review*. What is notable about Pound’s plans for the journal is that Yeats was never part of them. In the leading editorial of May 1917, for example, Pound puts all the emphasis on his desire to publish the “current *prose* writings of James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot and myself [...] regularly, promptly, and together.”<sup>13</sup> The same piece makes it clear that Pound has had several arguments with the editors of *Poetry* (who, in his opinion, have shown “an unflagging courtesy to a lot of old fools and fogies”); in addition, he regards the “elder generation of American magazines” with “contempt,” and describes Joyce, Lewis, and Eliot as authors of “the most important contributions to English literature of the past three years” and of “practically the only works of the time in which the creative element is present.”<sup>14</sup> But the experience of actually obtaining copy from this ideal trio proved to be more difficult than Pound had anticipated. In a letter of June 21, 1917, for example, Pound told Anderson that contributions from Lewis had dried up, that Joyce was “incapacitated” with eye troubles and Eliot had done “no work for weeks” (he “returns from the bank, falls into a leaden slumber and remains therein until bedtime”).<sup>15</sup> The crisis was bringing about something of a rethink and, ironically, saw Pound asking Anderson in the same letter to suggest “ANY English or continental authors [...] whom you think it peculiarly desirable to grab.” Meanwhile he had suggestions of his own, including Lady Gregory, Ford Madox Ford, and Thomas Hardy. He also knew that he could count on Yeats, who was a personal friend, “to turn out a few more poems.” The implication of this exchange is that Yeats was being positioned within the *Little Review* as a kind of filler, until more committed modernist work could be

elicited. While it would be imprudent to overstate an argument of this kind, it is certainly the case that a lack of the right kind of copy is one among a number of factors working behind the scenes at the *Little Review* and should be borne in mind in assessing intertextual dialogues within the journal.

Yeats's contributions to the *Little Review* are listed in Figure 1:

**FIGURE 1:** Yeats's Contributions to the *Little Review*, compiled by the author from the *Little Review* and VP.

<i>Little Review</i> Date	Content by Yeats	Type of Publication	Further Publication Detail
Apr. 1914	"William Butler Yeats to American Poets"	Reported lecture	Published in <i>Poetry</i> , Mar. 1914.
Jun. 1917	"The Wild Swans at Coole" "Presences" "Men Improve with the Years" "A Deep Sworn Vow" "The Collar-Bone of a Hare" "Broken Dreams" "In Memory"	Poetry	Subsequently published with revisions in <i>The Wild Swans at Coole, Other Verses and a Play in Verse</i> (Dublin: Cuala Press, Nov. 1917), hereafter TWSC 1917, and the expanded volume <i>The Wild Swans at Coole</i> (London and New York: Macmillan, Mar. 1919), hereafter TWSC 1919.
Aug. 1917	"Upon a Dying Lady"	Poetry	Also published in <i>The New Statesman</i> , Aug. 11, 1917 and in TWSC 1917 and 1919.
Sep. 1918	"In Memory of Robert Gregory"	Poetry	Also published in <i>The English Review</i> , Aug. 1918 and TWSC 1919.
Oct. 1918	"To a Young Girl" "A Song" "Solomon to Sheba" "The Living Beauty" "Under the Round Tower" "Tom O'Roughley" "A Prayer on Going into My House"	Poetry	Published in <i>Nine Poems</i> (London: 1918) and TWSC 1919.
Nov. 1918	"Major Robert Gregory"	Obituary	From the <i>Observer</i> , Feb. 17, 1918.
Jan. 1919	<i>The Dreaming of the Bones</i>	Drama	Published in <i>Two Plays for Dancers</i> (Dublin: Cuala Press, Jan. 1919).

In June 1917 Yeats was in the midst of creating *The Wild Swans at Coole* as a volume, and was preparing a draft version and arrangement of the volume for private press publication with his sister's Cuala Press. His mood was elegiac. The war had stretched out over several seasons, and was the source of continuing turmoil. He sensed his ageing intensely, but the intimacies of his life were by no means settled. Following the execution of John MacBride for his role in the uprising of Easter 1916, Yeats proposed to Maud Gonne, was rejected (again), and then proposed to her daughter, Iseult, who also turned him down.<sup>16</sup> He was also having to come to terms with the huge political and cultural upheavals brought about by the events of Easter 1916. In the face of so much uncertainty writing was particularly important. As he wrote to his sister, "there is nothing to be done but do one's work" (*Life* 2 46). Draft publication was especially important, and a necessary step before commitment to Macmillan, his major commercial publisher in London. For early versions of works which he had yet to fully finish, he could choose to publish a few individual poems in a serial (such as the *Little Review*), or he could issue a larger arrangement of work in a small and limited private edition (as with the Cuala Press).

Yeats's commitment to serial publication, a central facet of his professional writerly practice, was not just about aesthetics. It was also, crucially, about payment and copyright, and perhaps to a lesser extent about securing readerships beyond his immediate and local worlds in London and Dublin. Publication in the *Little Review* gave Yeats a means by which he could secure his copyright in the United States, a necessary step owing to the "manufacturing clause" of the 1891 International Copyright Act. This stipulated that foreign works needed to be printed from *type set in the US*, in order to be copyright-protected.<sup>17</sup> Yeats had toured the US extensively, was popular among the Irish American literati, and was thus particularly vulnerable to piracy. Publication in the *Little Review* was a means of mitigating that risk. It was also a source of payment, and here it is worth remembering that Pound's involvement with the *Little Review* unleashed a source of payment for the authors he selected, a crucial "pull" factor in the chain of events which led to the compilation of the twenty-two issues of the *Little Review* to which Pound contributed as editor between May 1917 and April 1919.<sup>18</sup> The money came from Quinn and, for those two years from the spring of 1917, Pound was paid at least \$300 per annum as editor, and received an allowance of \$450 per annum to pay contributors.<sup>19</sup> Though the evidence on exactly who was paid, for what, and how much remains patchy, it is clear that the appointment of Pound led to the creation of a dual economy, comprising the paid (mainly European, male, and chosen by Pound) and the mostly unpaid (mainly American, sometimes women, and chosen by Anderson and Heap). Yeats, along with Eliot, Joyce, and Lewis, was on the paid list; the unpaid included figures such as Djuna Barnes, Dorothy Richardson, and Baroness Elsa

von Freytag-Loringhoven. The correspondence of the period makes it clear that Anderson and Heap were perpetually broke: sometimes to the point of being hungry, usually unable to pay their rent, and often struggling to meet production costs. Pound's open checkbook was thus an inevitable source of tension, but was tolerated because his contributors were a continuing source of copy and energy, and thus attracted new and more obscure writers to the pages of the journal. Pound's paid list of European contributors facilitated the continuation of the *Little Review* and helped to create a context for a distinctive American avant-garde, which included writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams.

Anderson and Heap had ready eyes for the sustaining appeal of being transgressive, and Pound was a brilliant sloganeer. By June 1917, just a month after he had become Foreign Editor, the *Little Review* had remodeled its format, masthead, and banner to reflect these aims, switching the rather bland strapline of "Literature Drama Music Art" for the rather more riven and adversarial "Making No Compromise with The Public Taste," a slogan which suggests a determination to shock and challenge readers. This proved prescient given the serialization of *Ulysses* and the prosecution, in February 1921, of the *Little Review* editors on the grounds of the "obscurity" of the third instalment of chapter 13 (in which Bloom masturbates on Sandymount Strand).<sup>20</sup> Behind the scenes there were multiple editorial compromises, and certainly any close reading of the contents of the *Little Review* should proceed with an awareness of gendered, national, and material economies. Consider for example Yeats's "A Deep Sworn Vow," a six-line poem which appeared in the issue of June 1917:

Others, because you did not keep  
That deep sworn vow, have been friends of mind,  
Yet always when I look death in the face,  
When I clamber to the heights of sleep,  
Or when I grow excited with wine,  
Suddenly I meet your face.

October 17, 1915<sup>21</sup>

It is impossible not to read this poem in biographical terms, even if they are reductive. It is about the "vow" which Maud Gonne apparently made to Yeats (that she would not marry anyone), his despair that she married MacBride in 1903, his friendship with Lady Gregory, and Gonne's continuing presence in the life of his mind. The personal tragedy is too close to the poem, and the elaborate syntactical movement (beginning with the word "others") is artificial and labored. Writing about his decision not to write free verse, Yeats would later comment:

all that is personal soon rots. It must be packed in ice or salt. [...] If I wrote of personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accidence, I would be full of self-contempt because of egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must choose a traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional. [...] Ancient salt is best packing. (*Ec&I* 522)

Certainly this poem has “traditional” formal elements: a tight and unexpected rhyme scheme (ABC/ABC), and an irregular mix of trimeter, tetrameter, and pentameter lines. Yet there is an egotism and indiscretion in the poem, particularly when read next to “Broken Dreams,” which appeared on the same page of the *Little Review* and opens with “There is grey in your hair. / Young men no longer suddenly catch their breath / When you are passing.” Yeats seems determined to haunt the addressee of these poems, and by including the dates in the serial publication (October 17, 1915 for “A Deep Sworn Vow” and November 1915 for “Broken Dreams”) he is pointing, egotistically, not just to the act of composition but to a specific moment of emotional suffering.<sup>22</sup> Yeats has not escaped from the “accidence” which produced the idea for each text. Or, to suggest the case another way, perhaps he should have used less “salt” and written about his feelings with less labor and more immediacy.

Yeats’s contributions to the *Little Review* are a navigational point from which one can orient a reading of the contextual dissonances of an emerging modernism. This is particularly true for the September 1918 issue, which included “In Memory of Robert Gregory” alongside four poems by T. S. Eliot (“Sweeney among the Nightingales,” “Whispers of Immortality,” “Dans le Restaurant,” and “Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Morning Service”), chapter 6 of *Ulysses*, and an excerpt from the novel *Women and Men* by Ford Madox Ford (who was known as Ford Madox Hueffer at this time). To complement these works (which were arranged by Pound), Anderson and Heap arranged for the publication of two stories—“Senility” by Sherwood Anderson and “Decay” by Ben Hecht—and they arranged the contents of the infamous “Reader Critic” column, which featured the responses of readers to earlier issues. Stretching to twenty-two of the issue’s sixty-four pages, Joyce’s contribution, labelled “Episode VI,” is the longest of all. It appears without any editorial or introductory casing, and though complete in itself, is a considerably shorter version of what is now known as the “Hades” episode of *Ulysses*. The chapter is a group portrait, and reveals Bloom’s social interactions among his male peers. It divides neatly into two halves, with the first meticulously describing the journey across the city by horse-drawn carriage to Prospect Cemetery in Glasnevin and the second describing the arrival of the cortège, a service of committal in the chapel, and the burial of Paddy Dignam. It concludes with Bloom’s thoughts and experiences as he meanders

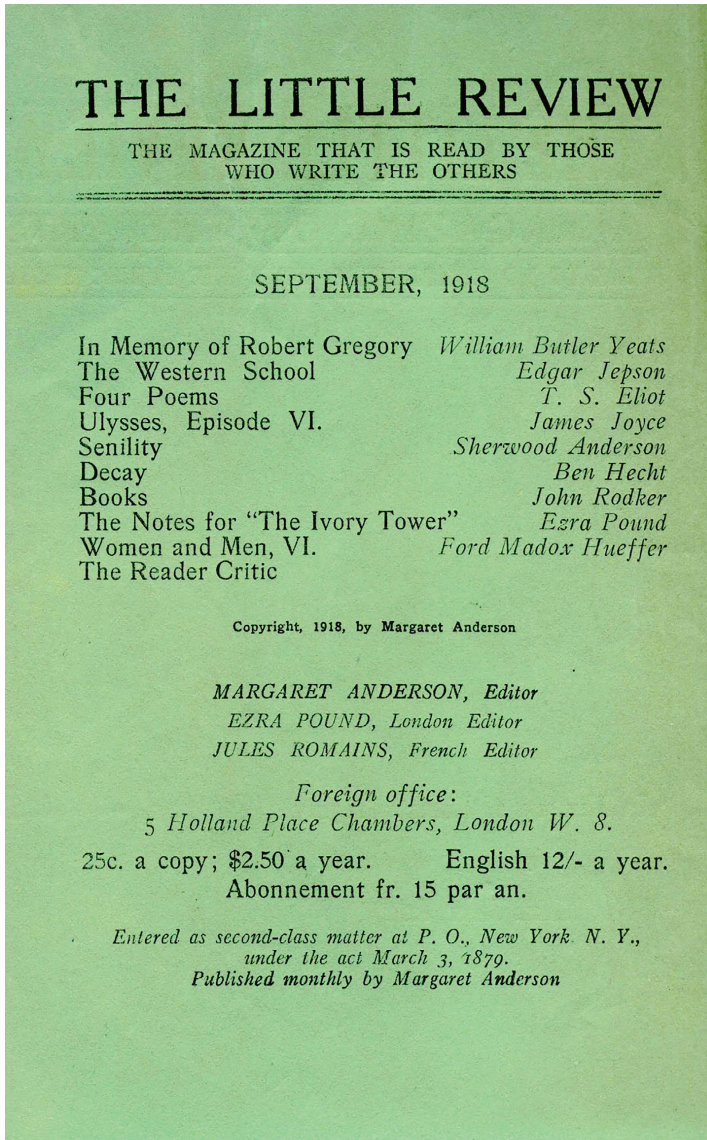


FIGURE 2: *Little Review*, contents page, September 1918. Reproduced by permission of the Modernist Journals Project (searchable database, Brown and Tulsa Universities (ongoing), <http://modjourn.org>).

among the gravestones. Apart from the occasional moments of humor, often supplied in Bloom's musings and through dialogue involving Simon Dedalus ("Most amusing expressions that man finds"), the atmosphere of the text is somber and elegiac.<sup>23</sup> It thus links, in thematic terms, with what was billed as the leading text of this issue, Yeats's "In Memory of Robert Gregory," one of

the elegies for Lady Gregory's son, Robert Gregory (1881–1918), a Major in the Royal Air Force who was killed in action in January 1918.<sup>24</sup> Though Yeats and Joyce are often viewed as belonging to quite different cultural and literary constituencies, what is striking in viewing the adjacent publication of these two texts is the way in which both build on multiple Irish cultural and historic specificities, which must have been difficult for American readers to grasp.

An implicit recognition of these difficulties in respect of Yeats's poem is suggested by the republication of Yeats's obituary for Gregory in the *Little Review* of November 1918, in response to "so many letters asking for particulars about Robert Gregory."<sup>25</sup> One such particular is that Gregory died fighting in the war, a fact that is omitted in the poem; the word "Major," included in the title of the poem in volume editions from 1919 onward, is not present in the *Little Review*.<sup>26</sup> As James Pethica has argued, the poem does not make "any kind of conventional claim for Robert's death as an heroic contribution to a valiant or necessary war."<sup>27</sup> Instead it attempts to make "appropriate commentary" (in its own rather hollow phrase) by promoting a view of Gregory as an all-round Renaissance man who loved painting ("that stern colour and that delicate line"), playing the host ("your heartiest welcomer"), and craftsmanship (he "understood / All work in metal or in wood / In moulded plaster or in carven stone?").<sup>28</sup> The poem is technically accomplished—it has a "stately rhetoric and architecture," with twelve stanzas written in the Cowley eight-line form, in lines which rhyme aabbccddc.<sup>29</sup> It is full of reminiscence, with stanza eight reading as follows:

When with the Galway foxhounds he would ride  
From Castle Taylor to the Roxborough side  
Or Esserkelly plains, few kept his pace;  
At Moneen he had leaped a place  
So perilous that half the astonished meet  
Had shut their eyes; and where was it  
He rode a race without a bit?  
And yet his mind outran the horses' feet.<sup>30</sup>

The work is replete with political and emotional evasion. Lady Gregory had asked Yeats to "write something down that we may keep," a task which Yeats found particularly awkward.<sup>31</sup> This particular stanza "commending Robert's courage in the hunting-field" is a case in point: Lady Gregory had hoped for mention of "aero planes & the blue Italian sky" in which Gregory had met his death, but Yeats firmly resisted such suggestions (*Life* 2 126). Gregory's enlistment was partly motivated by a desire to escape a conflicted home situation, brought about by his wife's discovery of his extramarital affair. Yeats knew of this, and of Gregory's Unionist leanings and general aimlessness. He knew too

that Gregory had been particularly cruel to his wife, and that even his mother regarded him as a “cad.”<sup>32</sup> Thus the description of Gregory as “Our Sidney and our perfect man” is quite an imaginative feat.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly this poem, positioned within this *Little Review* context, has been read in very different terms by Jeffrey Drouin, author of “Close- and Distant-Reading Modernism: Network Analysis, Text Mining, and Teaching the *Little Review*,” an article which uses techniques in network analysis in order to understand the journal’s general emphasis on “life and vitality” and the specific features of the September 1918 issue, particularly its “mention of the First World War and thematic coherence around death.”<sup>34</sup> For Drouin, Yeats’s poem is one of the *Little Review*’s “few direct references to the First World War.”<sup>35</sup> Yet it is worth stressing that the poem does not make any “direct” reference to the war at all. Without being aware of Gregory’s biography, American readers could not reasonably surmise that Gregory had died in the war. The poem simply does not state this fact, but meanders through a description of the dead “friends that cannot sup with us.” Awkwardly, Yeats suggests he can accept the passing of those he names (Lionel Johnson, John Synge, and George Pollexfen) but he stumbles on “my dear friend’s dear son” who is only named in the title of the poem. Naming and not naming are crucial strategies in this poem, as in “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death,” a poem which was similarly inspired by Gregory’s death, but derives considerable power from not naming him (though it does specify “My country is Kiltartan Cross / My countrymen Kiltartan’s poor”).<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, this poem—a more ambivalent appraisal of Gregory (“The years to come seemed waste of breath”)—was not in the public domain in September 1918; it was not published until the Macmillan version of *The Wild Swans at Coole* appeared in March 1919. Perhaps Yeats wanted to hold it back from serial publication for fear that he might offend Lady Gregory.

Sean Latham has argued that the particular value of reading historical periodicals is that it enables the study of “emergence,” “a particular kind of complexity that arises not from the individual elements of a system, but only from their interaction.”<sup>37</sup> For scholars of magazines, he suggests, “emergence provides a powerful way of thinking” and “moments of emergence are exciting, but also provisional, unstable, and sometimes even difficult to capture using our current theoretical and historical frames.”<sup>38</sup> Emergence is certainly an interesting way of thinking about “In Memory of Robert Gregory” as it was published in the *Little Review*, because the magazine was deliberate in its omission of any discussion of the war. This is apparent from a reading of the content from 1914 to 1918, and a particular exchange which was published in the “Reader Critic” column of August 1917. Under the heading “War Art,” a reader from Kansas praises the *Little Review* for being “the only magazine I have laid eyes on in months that hasn’t had a word in it about this blasted war.”<sup>39</sup> In response Heap

comments that “none of us considers this war a legitimate or an interesting subject for Art, not being the focal point of any fundamental emotion for any of the people engaged in it.” She rejects the widely held critical commonplace that the literature of war and suffering is “deeply touching and of poignant appeal” and offers the view that “nine tenths of the stuff written is a rotten impertinence to be discouraged.”<sup>40</sup>

There was, of course, a political context to the non-mention of the war, and it related ultimately to the interest which Anderson and Heap had in anarchism and the thinking of Emma Goldman (1869–1940), a leading political activist whom Anderson first heard lecture in Chicago in the spring of 1914. For Anderson, this experience was formative. She “turned anarchist before the presses closed” and rushed an article on “The Challenge of Emma Goldman” into print in May 1914.<sup>41</sup> Goldman and Anderson became close friends, and may even have been lovers.<sup>42</sup> This association was to have a lasting and shaping impact on the *Little Review*. Advertisers shied away from being associated with a journal which openly espoused anarchism, and other tenants of the Fine Arts Building complained that Emma Goldman was among Anderson’s regular visitors.<sup>43</sup> By spring 1917, when Quinn and Pound became associated with the *Little Review*, the political context for the publication of casual articles about anarchism had changed quite decisively, owing to the war in Europe. Diplomatic relations between the US and Germany broke down in February 1917, and Congress voted to declare war against Germany on April 6, 1917. This decision, which brought conscription in its wake—and a vigorous anti-conscription movement spear-headed by Emma Goldman—quickly led to the introduction of the Espionage Act. There were many first-generation German immigrants in the US, and the Espionage Act was designed to ensure that they would be patriotic to their new country. It specifically prohibited the support of America’s enemies during wartime, any attempt to interfere with military operations, any action which promoted insubordination, and any action which interfered with military recruitment.<sup>44</sup> Under the terms of that act Goldman and her partner Alexander Berkman were arrested on June 15, 1917, and charged with inducing “persons not to register.”<sup>45</sup> Heap and Anderson attended the ensuing trial, and Anderson circulated a formal letter—written by Heap, but signed by her—asserting that “protesting” had become “a crime overnight.”<sup>46</sup>

Objecting to conscription, in Heap’s eloquent and reasoned argument, had nothing to do with anarchism and everything to do with the cherished principle of free speech, an argument Goldman herself invoked by way of defense in her trial (“We say that if America has entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America”).<sup>47</sup> These arguments work around the First Amendment to the US Constitution (the amendment that prohibits the making of any law abridging the freedom of

speech) in crucial ways. They also point to the complicated and varied political positions held in the US at this precise moment. Quinn, for example, was in favor of US participation in the war, but he was opposed to conscription and, of course, opposed to anarchism. His views were shared by Pound. When the US entered the war Pound told Anderson, with characteristic and emphatic confidence: "I am very glad America is in AT LAST, and think we should have been in long ago, BUT I prefer volunteer armies."<sup>48</sup> Anderson and Heap meanwhile continued to support Goldman, and were opposed to the war and conscription to an extent which both men failed to grasp.

These editorial tensions are relevant to my reading of "In Memory of Robert Gregory," a poem which does not acknowledge Gregory's active service for very different reasons. Yeats did not want to be associated with a poetic tradition which valorized the efforts of those on the Western Front, and omitted to mention the circumstances in which Gregory died, as noted. "On Being Asked for a War Poem," written in February 1915 and published in an anthology edited by Edith Wharton in 1916, is another evasion, and fails to acknowledge Irish nationalism—the real reason for his silence

I think it better that in times like these  
A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth  
We have no gift to set a statesman right;  
He has had enough of meddling who can please  
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,  
Or an old man upon a winter's night.<sup>49</sup>

As the war progressed and war poetry became a popular critical category associated with figures such as Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen, Yeats's dislike for this work and its reception intensified. This antipathy found ultimate critical form in his work as editor of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936), a volume which omits Owen's poetry on the grounds that "passive suffering is not a theme for poetry." (*OBMV* xxxiv) These comments, read alongside the commitment of Anderson and Heap to Goldman and the anti-Conscription campaign, point to the complexities of what was going on behind the scenes at the *Little Review*, and the importance of studying "emergence." Yeats published different versions of his works in different contexts, and with an anticipated sense of different types of reader and interpretive community. He was prepared to publish "In Memory of Robert Gregory" in the US because he wanted Pound's check and a secure copyright. But out of respect for the grief-stricken Lady Gregory, who had been such a loyal friend and patron, he needed to publish the work in London too. At her request, and that of her now-widowed daughter-in-law, the poem was published in *The English Review* in August 1918.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, in

that context Yeats appears to have been willing to acknowledge the significance of the war. The text appears with a subtitle immediately after the title, which insists on listing Gregory's distinguished military credentials and honors: "Major Robert Gregory, R. F. C., M. C., Legion of Honour, was killed in action on the Italian Front, January 23, 1918."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps that note was intended for publication in the *Little Review*. Perhaps it was lost in transmission. Or perhaps, and this seems plausible given Heap's insistence that the war is not "an interesting subject for Art," the editors decided not to include it.<sup>52</sup>

Bibliographical scholarship attends to the specificities of what was published, when and where. In Yeats's case, there is much work still to be done on the versions of self he presented to readers in the US. This involves recovering versions of texts which have long been buried in periodicals, a task which is easier now given digital resources such as the Modernist Journals Project. Scholarship of this kind also involves considering the choices being made by writers in selecting what and where to publish. Yeats knew that the determinedly avant-garde *Little Review* courted controversy. When the October 1917 issue was "suppressed" by the New York Post Office because of a story by Wyndham Lewis, he told Pound that "the suppression of the October number is great luck and ought to be the making of the magazine."<sup>53</sup> Yet he did not wish to join the editors in contributing to controversy. His controversial poems of the period are not those that appeared in the *Little Review*, but those that comment on Irish politics, including "Easter 1916" (completed September 25, 1916), "Sixteen Dead Men" (completed by December 17, 1917), "The Rose Tree" (completed April 7, 1917), and "On a Political Prisoner" (completed January 1919). "Sixteen Dead Men," which includes the lines "You say that we should still the land / Till German's overcome; / But who is there to argue that / Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?," might have persuaded Anderson and Heap that the war could be "an interesting subject for Art."<sup>54</sup> But it was not to be. Yeats did not offer these poems to Pound: he was wily and cautious, and did not, at this time, wish to court extreme reaction or controversy on the question of what could or should happen in Ireland. As a result these texts, which might have been included in the expanded *The Wild Swans at Coole* (published by Macmillan in March 1919), were not published in any form in either Britain or the US until November 1920.<sup>55</sup> By that time, the War of Independence had superseded the Rising as the crisis of the moment and, as Foster notes, "the political situation in Ireland and Anglo-Irish relations with it, had changed more utterly than anyone could have foreseen" (*Life* 266).

## Notes

1. Yeats to Henry Davray, March 19, [1896], in *CL2*, 15.
2. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 737–48. For digital copies of the *Little Review* (hereafter *LR*) from 1914 to 1922, see the Modernist Journals Project: <http://modjourn.org>. There is also a paper facsimile of the complete run (1914–29): *Little Review* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 12 vols.
3. *Little Review*, March 1914, 2.
4. On the history of *Poetry* see Helen Carr, "Poetry: A Magazine of Verse (1912–1936), Biggest of Little Magazines," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, vol. II: North America, 1894–1960*, eds. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 40–60. Early issues of *Poetry* have been digitized; see <http://modjourn.org>.
5. "William Butler Yeats to American Poets," *LR*, April 1914, 47, 48.
6. *LR*, April 1916, 36.
7. 1915 had been a considerably stronger year: 11 issues and 636 pages in all (compared to 7 issues and 308 pages in 1916).
8. Pound to Quinn, September 8, 1915, October 13, 1915, and August. 26, 1915, in *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound to John Quinn, 1915–1924*, ed. Timothy Materer (London: Duke University Press, 1991), 48, 53, 41. The letter of September 8, 1915 has been misdated 1916 by Materer.
9. See, for example, *LR*, March 1918 [n. pag; inside front cover].
10. See Dora Marsden to Harriet Shaw Weaver, March 13, 1916, Harriet Shaw Weaver Papers, British Library Add. MS 57354.
11. Pound to Anderson [November 29, 1916], in *Pound/The Little Review: The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson: The Little Review Correspondence*, eds. Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman (New York: A New Directions Book, 1988), 4.
12. *LR*, November 1916, 21.
13. *LR*, May 1917, 1. Emphasis added.
14. *LR*, May 1917, 1, 4, 5.
15. Pound to Anderson [June 21, 1917], *Pound/The Little Review*, 78.
16. For a detailed account of this period, see *Life* 2, especially 44–93.
17. For information on the copyright situation see Robert Spoo, *Without Copyrights: Piracy, Publishing and the Public Domain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially "Transatlantic Modernism and the American Public Domain," 65–115. Wikipedia is also usefully informative on the function and rationale of the "manufacturing clause" of the US International Copyright Act of 1891: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Copyright\\_Act\\_of\\_1891](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Copyright_Act_of_1891)
18. Pound arranged most of the content for twelve issues from May 1917 to April 1918. During the second year of Quinn's subsidy, one issue ("An American Number") was edited by Jane Heap, and one issue (February–March 1919) was a double number; thus, Pound contributed to twenty-two issues between May 1917 and April 1919. Readers wishing to gain a sense of the schisms within the *Little Review* (and within modernism more generally) could compare one of the Pound issues with one of those edited by Anderson and Heap.
19. Pound to Quinn, February 8, 1917, *Selected Letters of Pound to Quinn*, 95; figures from Scott and Friedman, *Pound/The Little Review*, 13n. The correspondents discuss dollars and sterling interchangeably, making it difficult to be precise about how much money was changing hands.
20. The wording of the banner may have been suggested by Anderson, as Golding notes. See Alan Golding, "The Little Review (1924–29)," *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of*

*Modernist Magazines* vol. II, 61. The banner can also be read as a deliberate rebuke to the masthead used by *Poetry* (Whitman's statement: "To have great poets there must be great audiences too"). My monograph, *Serial Encounters: Ulysses and the Little Review* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2019) discusses the trial of the editors in some detail.

21. *LR*, June 1917, 11.
22. *LR*, June 1918, 11, 12.
23. *LR*, September 1918, 28.
24. *LR*, September 1918, 28.
25. *LR*, November 1918, 41.
26. W. B. Yeats, *The Wild Swans at Coole* (London: Macmillan, 1919). See also Stephen Parrish, ed., *The Wild Swans at Coole: Manuscript Materials by W. B. Yeats* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994). Yeats included the word "major" in the title of the poem in the first manuscript draft of the poem ("Quinn 2" in the Cornell edition) but omitted it in the second ("Emory" in the Cornell edition).
27. James Pethica, "Yeats's Perfect Man," *The Dublin Review* 35 (Spring 2009): <https://thedublinreview.com/article/yeatss-perfect-man/> (unpaginated web version).
28. *LR*, September 1918, 4, 2, 3.
29. Pethica, "Yeats's Perfect Man."
30. *LR*, September 1918, 3.
31. Quoted in Pethica, "Yeats's Perfect Man."
32. Quoted in Pethica, "Yeats's Perfect Man."
33. *LR*, September 1918, 2.
34. Jeffrey Drouin, "Close- and Distant-Reading Modernism: Network Analysis, Text Mining, and Teaching *The Little Review*," *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 110–35.
35. Drouin, "Close- and Distant-Reading Modernism," 114.
36. W. B. Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. N. Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), 237.
37. Sean Latham, "Unpacking My Digital Library: Programs, Modernisms, Magazines," in *Making Canada New: Editing Modernism and New Media*, ed. Dean Irvine, Vanessa Lent and Bart Vautour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 31–60, 43.
38. Latham, "Unpacking My Digital Library," 43.
39. *LR*, August 1917, 25.
40. *LR*, August 1917, 25.
41. *LR*, May 1914, 5–9.
42. See C. Brid Nicholson, *Emma Goldman: Still Dangerous* (London: Black Rose Books, 2010); for a convincing argument that Goldman was bisexual, see "Sex and Sexuality: The Silenced Skein," 170, 176.
43. Margaret Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War* (1930; New York: Horizon Press, 1969), 56, 75, 74.
44. See <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/espionageact.htm> for the full text of the Espionage Act.
45. Marian J. Morton, *Emma Goldman and the American Left: Nowhere at Home* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 87.
46. Holly A. Baggett, *Dear Tiny Heart: The Letters of Jane Heap and Florence Reynolds* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 45. The letter, addressed to "American Citizens," is dated June 23, 1917.
47. *Trial and Speeches of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman in the United States District Court, in the City of New York, July, 1917* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1917).
48. Pound to Anderson, August 3, 1917, *Pound/The Little Review*, 96.
49. Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, 259.

50. W. B. Yeats, "In Memory of Robert Gregory," *English Review*, August 1918, 81–83. Information from *Life* 2 126.
51. *English Review*, August 1918, 81.
52. *LR*, August 1917, 25.
53. Pound to Anderson, [December 14, 1917], *Pound/The Little Review*, 167.
54. Yeats, "Sixteen Dead Men," *Yeats's Poems*, 289; "Reader Critic," *LR*, August 1917, 25.
55. All four poems were published in *The Dial*, another US journal with which Pound was associated. *The Dial* has yet to be fully digitized, but parts are available through Google Books and Internet Archive. For a listing, see: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=thedial>.

**“SOME OVID OF THE FILMS”:  
W. B. YEATS, MASS MEDIA,  
AND THE FUTURE OF POETRY IN THE 1930S**

*Charles I. Armstrong*

Toward the end of Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*, a wide-ranging conversation takes place between the World Controller for Western Europe, Mustapha Mond, and three characters at odds with his regime. Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson have both fallen from places of privilege due to their dissatisfaction with the current world order, while John the Savage—having been fetched in as a curiosity from an enclosed reservation—can only observe it as a skeptical outsider. The Controller is at home, and indeed in control, engaging in a leisurely chat with his guests before ushering Marx and Watson to their banishment on a distant island. Mond tells them that their civilization has no use for old, beautiful things. While the autobiography of Henry Ford, who is treated as a divine creator of their civilization, appears to have the status of gospel, he explains there is no place for high art:

[New literature] couldn't possibly be like *Othello*. [...] our world is not the same as Othello's world. You can't make flivvers without steel—and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. [...] You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead.<sup>1</sup>

The “scent organ” is a sensory device that accompanies the high-tech “feelies,” a kind of futuristic film. Having once experienced a pornographic version of the latter, John the Savage is quick to dismiss them as senseless and horrible products “told by an idiot.”<sup>2</sup> The readers of Huxley's novel are encouraged to identify with Savage's unsuccessful rebellion against the world order. Like him, the book's audience is intended to experience a “sinking sense of horror and disgust” in the face of a “nightmare of swarming and indistinguishable sameness.”<sup>3</sup> Set several hundred years in the future, *Brave New World* is a scathing presentation of a totalitarian society where social and genetic control are in evidence everywhere. Individual thought and artistic expression are impossible, replaced by the mass enjoyment of drugs and various leisure activities including mindless new sports such as Centrifugal Bumble-puppy, Electromagnetic golf, and Riemann surface tennis.

Huxley's novel, published in 1932, was not his first work of satire. William Butler Yeats was taken by an earlier effort, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), which lampooned the circle of Lady Ottoline Morrell. By April 10, 1936, Yeats wrote to Olivia Shakespear that he was reading Huxley alongside Vita Sackville-West (without mentioning book titles). He disliked both authors yet admitted: "I admire Huxley immensely" (*CL InteLex* #6533). Two days later, he reported in a letter to W. J. Turner that although he was largely unfamiliar with contemporary novel writing, he had "read much Huxley" (*CL InteLex* #6534). By March 26, 1937, Yeats wrote to his wife that he was going to meet Huxley who, he approvingly added, "has taken up Astrology" (*CL InteleX* #6885). Whatever impact Huxley had on Yeats, and irrespective of whether Yeats actually ever read *Brave New World*, placing the Irishman in this company has the virtue of alerting us to the 1930s context of Yeats's later work. Yeats's views on the future, in particular, benefit from being considered with Huxley as a background figure. Typically read as a poet who framed his perspective on the future exclusively via Romantic versions of apocalyptic vision and ancient prophecy, Yeats can also fruitfully be interpreted in the context of a twentieth-century turn to dystopia that included not only *Brave New World*, but also novels such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) and, after Yeats's death, George Orwell's *1984* (1949). As Peter J. Bowler has shown, not all the literature and journalism of this period was equally pessimistic about the future, but Yeats shares with Huxley and Orwell an alarmed counter-reaction to H. G. Wells and other commentators making optimistic predictions based on contemporary technological development.<sup>4</sup>

This article will look at Yeats's conception of poetry's place in the 1930s. I will try to sketch out how Yeats's understanding of the future of literature and lyric poetry is affected by the historical changes—both political and technological—that shaped his own time. Although there are key statements on poetry's formal underpinnings in his introduction to Scribner's planned version of his collected works, Yeats does not reflect much, or indeed systematically, on the issue of how poetry relates to other genres and artistic forms. One has to piece together different fragments, if one wants to present anything approaching a consistent position on this matter. I will mainly base my argument on three pieces of evidence, all coming from the paratextual margins of Yeats's oeuvre. First, I will take a look at how Yeats, in reported table talk, allegedly compared poetry to the novel, claiming that the former had been marginalized by its lack of relation with modern technology. Secondly, the argument will move to a discussion of how the future of literature is presented by Yeats in an unpublished fragment of *A Vision*, entitled "Michael Robartes Foretells." This will provide the most extensive analysis of this article, in which a central concern will be a reference made to Ovid and cinema. Although Yeats appears to present a

pessimistic diagnosis in "Michael Robartes Foretells," my reading will tease out—via references to Gabriele D'Annunzio and other texts by Yeats—the spiritual and metamorphic possibilities of a future literature deeply affected by the development of other mass media. Thirdly—and lastly—I will turn to Yeats's radio broadcasts, also from the 1930s, showing how Yeats's own practice at this time underscores an affirmative vision of a popular art that develops in close connection with contemporary technological developments.

Virginia Woolf's diary notes from a dinner at Lady Ottoline Morrell's on November 8, 1930 provide a point of entry. Yeats attended this dinner together with fellow poet Walter de la Mare, and their conversation with Woolf developed into a contrast between the possibilities of poetry and the novel. According to Woolf:

Yeats said that "we", de la Mare and himself, wrote "thumbnail" poems only because we are at the end of an era. He said that the spade has been embalmed by thirty centuries of association; not so the steam roller. Poets can only write when they have symbols. And steam rollers are not covered in symbolism—perhaps they may be after thirty generations. He and de la Mare can only write small fireside poems. Most of the emotion is outside their scope.<sup>5</sup>

Woolf ends this quotation with a rhetorical twist that turns Yeats's abjection into a kind of heroism: "All left to the novelists I said—but how crude and jaunty my own theories were beside his: indeed I got a tremendous sense of the intricacy of the art; also of its meanings, its seriousness, its importance, which wholly engrosses this large active minded immensely vitalised man."<sup>6</sup> If one synthesizes Woolf's personal portrait with the alleged quotation from Yeats, one gets a complex picture. Poetry is marginalized by modern technology, reduced in scope, and is losing ground to other genres. The precariousness of poetry's position is exacerbated by the fact that Yeats is living at "the end of an era." Yet at the same time, the seriousness and vitality of the poet and his poetry mean that the work somehow punches above its weight. The status of poetry is akin to that of Yeats's friends of the 1890s, whom he saw as heroically out of synch with their own time, remnants of a different and more serious art.

An obscure prose fragment by Yeats called "Michael Robartes Foretells" fleshes out this picture. As the editors of the *Collected Works* version of Yeats's 1937 text of *A Vision*, Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine Paul, suggest, it is a "heavily corrected nine-page typescript" that "is probably one of the discarded versions of the ending of *A Vision*" (CW14 462 n134). The text contains a framing dialogue between Hudden, Duddon, and Denise, fictional characters utilized both in other introductory material to *A Vision* and elsewhere in Yeats's works. Here, however, I will focus on the subsequent, second part of the

text: the “prophecy” of Michael Robartes that provides the conclusion of the typescript. The latter is an attempt to replace the concluding vision of the 1925 “Dove or Swan” section of *A Vision*, where Yeats had tried to predict future historical change on the basis of the system propounded in his book. Yeats was, however, dissatisfied with the 1925 “Dove or Swan,” and would make major revisions before presenting an alternative version in the 1937 edition of *A Vision*.<sup>7</sup>

In the original version of “Dove or Swan,” Yeats contrasted the imminent, new era with a classical precursor:

The decadence of the Greco-Roman world with its violent soldiers and its mahogany dark young athletes was as great, but that suggested the bubbles of life turned into marbles, whereas what awaits us, being democratic and *primary*, may suggest bubbles in a frozen pond—mathematical Babylonian starlight. (*CW*13 176)

Arguably modern science, corresponding to the Babylonian science of the stars, is here being introduced as an important contrast between the respective outcomes of ancient and modern epochal turning points. As we shall see, the prophecy in “Michael Robartes Foretells” returns to explore this parallel between the classical and the contemporary, discovering both possibilities and complications in the process. It is a parallel also explored in *The Resurrection* (1931). But where the concluding song of that play (included too in “Two Songs from a Play” in *The Tower*) proclaims that “The Babylonian starlight brought / A fabulous, formless darkness in” (*VPI* 931; *CW*1 217), a different and less obscure change issues from “Michael Robartes Foretells.” The latter text is less apocalyptic than in Yeats’s typical approach to the future—more akin, in this respect, to Huxley’s dystopian vision than, say, the apocalyptic classicism of “Leda and the Swan” or “The Second Coming.”

The opening of Michael Robartes’s prophecy is actually so skeptical that it undercuts the possibility of making any predictions about the future: Robartes states that we “are misled the moment we try to imagine some future work of art or historical event.”<sup>8</sup> This anticipates the eschewal of any concrete details in the prophecy ventured in the final, 1937 version of *A Vision*. Robartes nevertheless goes on, in the earlier draft, trying to predict what will happen on the historical scene in some of the concluding stages of the current civilization, based on Yeats’s system of the twenty-eight phases of the moon. As in much of Yeats’s later work, the focus is on the final phases of the current Christian era and an apprehensive anticipation of what kind of civilization will be ushered in after its demise. The Russian Revolution and modernism, described as “the art and thought of our time,” are referred to as the 23rd stage of the current era.<sup>9</sup> What Yeats sees as totalitarian systems on both the right and the left are

described as "Dictatorships in various parts of the world": these are placed in the 24th phase.<sup>10</sup> The text tries to elaborate upon the social, political, and aesthetic developments of the 24th phase as well as what Robartes anticipates of a coming 25th phase.

As in *Brave New World*, the coming world order neither has much time for difference nor appreciates the creative potential of unhappiness. This, Robartes predicts, will be an age of "imitativeness in which there is always happiness." The 24th phase communicates "the mass mind" and is "pre-occupied with the common good." Dejection with the dictators and "the leadership of men who offer nothing reason cannot understand" results in a reactive immersion in triviality. People, Yeats asserts, "will return to women, horses, dogs. They will prefer to the political meeting, the football field or whatever thirty or sixty years hence may have taken its place."<sup>11</sup> The final prediction is linked to Yeats's claim, doubtlessly referring to the radical politics of his age, that "the old age of our civilisation begins with young men marching in step, with the shirts and songs that give our politics an air of sport."<sup>12</sup> The triumph of sport is anticipated in early Yeats, for instance in the contrast made in "When Helen Lived" between beauty and "some trivial affair / Or noisy insolent sport" (CW1 110). The text's treatment of crowds also hearkens back to Yeats's antipathetic reaction to the 1897 Jubilee Riots, and how he consequently sought to achieve an alternative to the "mob" in an Irish national theater.<sup>13</sup> Yet Yeats's position in "Michael Robartes Foretells" is specific to its historical moment. In Tyrus Miller's words, the 1930s "were years in which the collective intruded into the question of art."<sup>14</sup> Like Huxley's *Brave New World*, this text of Yeats's brings out the dominance of mass society, reflected and sustained by large-scale industrial production and by popular cultural expressions such as music and sports. Given the Roman tenor of Robartes's prophecy, the football field appears as a modern, and perhaps also humorously dystopian, setting for the "mahogany dark young athletes" (CW13 176) evoked in the view of Roman decadence in the 1925 version of *A Vision*.

In "Michael Robartes Foretells," Yeats predicts that political change will be accompanied by developments in the arts. A Whitman-like Virgil will be representative of the 24th phase, and at the 25th phase another figure will take center stage: "Some Ovid of the films [will] surpass even his popularity by celebrating our common casual pleasures."<sup>15</sup> The phrase "Some Ovid of the films" should give us pause. While Virgil makes a number of appearances in Yeats's oeuvre, albeit usually as a prophetic figure, Ovid is not someone Yeats refers to frequently.<sup>16</sup> The Roman poet probably appears here for a variety of reasons. Most immediately, he surfaces as part of the classical context for Yeats's attempt to make sense of the 24th and 25th phases. Another typescript, presumably written around the same time and reproduced by Harper and Paul, similarly

expresses Yeats's wish to "separate the Roman 23rd phase from the general turbulence of the civil wars (phase 22)" (CW14 295), mentioning particularly Augustus Caesar and Virgil as key figures in that 23rd phase. Ovid, born twenty-seven years after Virgil, would naturally fit as a literary reference-point for the next phase.

Many of Yeats's revisions to the first edition of *A Vision* can be traced to the historical and philosophical sources he read at that time. In the 1940s, Isaac Asimov would turn to *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon as a source for his science fiction view of the future. Yeats's source was a less-canonized version of Roman history. A concluding note in "Michael Robartes Foretells" specifies that Yeats "accept[s] Schneider's identification of Virgil, Ovid, Nero, Epictetus with certain logical developments of Roman thought and I name those developments Phases 24, 25, 26, 27."<sup>17</sup> This refers to the work of a University of Leipzig professor, Hermann Schneider, and his two-volume *Die Kulturleistungen der Menschheit*, translated in 1931 as *The History of World Civilization*. In another draft of what would become "The End of the Cycle" in the final version of *A Vision*, Yeats writes that a prophecy of the future must base itself on "some other age like and yet unlike what the symbol seems to foretell. Perhaps certain pages of Schneider's analysis of Roman civilization give me what I need though my instructors spoke of Greek civilization alone in their examination of the pre-Christian age" (CW14 294).

In the second volume of *The History of World Civilization*, Schneider identifies a turning point in Roman philosophy that is manifested only in the work of its literary authors. Prior to the establishment of the republic, there was (in Schneider's words) the "triple dictatorship" of Caesar, Pompey the Great, and Marcus Licinius Crassus. During the reign of Caesar's successor, however, there was a "conflict of religious and philosophic views that was fought out in the Augustan age in poetry, not in philosophic works. Virgil, followed by Horace and Livy, stood for the ideal of social reform that Augustus strove to effect. Tibullus, Propertius, and especially Ovid were in opposition."<sup>18</sup> Schneider identifies with Emperor Augustus a "framework of moral and religious duty," which exhorted Roman citizens to "submit piously to the will of the gods, attain moral self-mastery, and serve eternal Rome and the divine imperial house, and that not only on the battlefield and in the council chamber but through a pure family life and the procreation of children."<sup>19</sup> In Schneider's disillusioned account, Virgil "wrote for a society in which there were no longer any knights, but only officers at best," in what was essentially a "capitalist economy." In this reading, Virgil's hero becomes a vehicle to celebrate the emperor: "Doubtless his Aeneas was a disguised Augustus."<sup>20</sup> This bureaucratic, propagandizing Virgil provides a model for Yeats's description of "some Virgil at Phase 24," who "may celebrate whatever popularisation our civilisation permits for the perfect

official, carrying out the plan of an Olympian Board of Works amid many perils, amid much self-conquest."<sup>21</sup>

A contrast, in Schneider's account, is provided by Ovid. He is a decadent figure who finally—with his banishment to Tomis, at the edge of the empire, in 8 AD—went too far. His rebellion, including a sexual element contesting Augustan domesticity, led to his own demise. More generally, though, the "new spirit" of an "extreme development of individuality" that he represented eventually succeeded.<sup>22</sup> For Schneider, Ovid's "amorous battles," "graceful impudence and rococo femininity" showed "no desire to instruct or educate morally," but rather aimed "simply to entertain idle society gentlemen and ladies."<sup>23</sup> Schneider appears to be reading Roman poetry through the lens of late-nineteenth-century rebellion against bourgeois mores. One wonders whether Yeats would have seen in Schneider's Ovid a classical version of Oscar Wilde, in whom Yeats himself (in *A Vision*) professed to find "something pretty, feminine, and insincere, [...] and much that is violent, arbitrary and insolent, derived from his desire to escape" (CW13 69; CW14 112).

In "Michael Robartes Foretells," Yeats's future Ovid is linked to "casual pleasures." The latter phrase might seem straightforward enough, given how the Roman poet's *Ars Amatoria* for instance gives lessons in how to pick up women when attending gladiator shows. At the same time, Yeats's use of the adjective "casual" is richly allusive, and has a distinctly Yeatsian ring. In "The Statues," the monuments "look but casual flesh" (CW1 345) but are really so much more. This sense of restriction is brought out more fully in "Her Triumph," the fourth poem of the series "A Woman Young and Old." In the latter poem, the speaker has been awakened from the sensual limitations of a view whereby she "had fancied love a casual / Improvisation, or a settled game / That followed if I let a kerchief fall" (CW1 276). The miraculous awakening in "Her Triumph" is a more erotic version of the change undergone by the revolutionary heroes of "Easter, 1916" who, having been transformed, have resigned their part in "the casual comedy" (CW1 183).

The Ovid of "Michael Robartes Foretells" can thus be seen as the representative of a negative version of more revelatory cataclysms. Rather than moving from casualness to ecstatic rigor, he appears to represent an opposite movement: a winding down of history into a form of careless mediocrity. The movement toward a comic paradigm anticipates the lament for tragedy in *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939), epitomized by the hero's ignominious demise at the hand of the Blind Man. Yet given such a context, one may still ask, why is this an Ovid "of the films"? In the absence of any discussion of the connection between Ovid and film in Yeats's letters and published work, one possibility here is that he was drawing upon Gabriele D'Annunzio, who frequently linked Ovid with the new cinematic medium. D'Annunzio was critical of the mass appeal of

the form, yet at the same time he saw in it creative possibilities that were characteristic of Ovid's poetry—and more specifically his *Metamorphoses*:

I thought that from the cinema a delightful art could be born, one whose essential element was the "wondrous." Ovid's *Metamorphoses*! There is a true subject for the cinema! Technically, there is no limit to the representation of marvels or dreams. [...] I never stop thinking of Daphne's delicate arm, changed into a leafy branch. The true and unique virtue of the Cinema is metamorphosis, and I'm telling you that Ovid is its poet.<sup>24</sup>

We see that D'Annunzio sees potential in the new art form of cinema, precisely insofar as it has an inherent relation to the poetry of Ovid. Could Yeats have been hinting at something similar in his prophecy of a future "Ovid of the films"?

The only reference to Ovid in *A Vision*, the work in which "Michael Robartes Foretells" presumably would have ended up had it been published, is an off-hand one. In the introductory text dedicated to Ezra Pound, Yeats mentions "a Metamorphosis from Ovid" —alongside "the Descent into Hades from Homer" and various "medieval or modern historical characters"—as the basis for Pound's Cantos (CW14 4). There Yeats is at pains to distinguish Pound's poetry from his own. Yet the relationship between the two writers was full of ambivalence. In the original version of *A Vision*, in a passage that was to be omitted in 1937, Yeats identified the art of Pound and other modernists—characterized by "technical research" as it was (CW13 174)—as belonging to the 23rd phase. Since Yeats saw his own art as representing the preceding phase, Pound's modernism was interpreted as entailing an increase in the kind of impersonal objectivity characteristic of the ending of the current historical era.<sup>25</sup>

Since Yeats feared being left behind by the modernists, one can see in "Michael Robartes Foretells" an implicit literary history whereby the future, representative artist described as an "Ovid of the films" is going to be responsible for a marginalization of the literary remnants embodied by his Virgilian predecessor. The text appears to posit a rather unequivocal narrative of decay, whereby contemporary art is going to be replaced by mass communication. This process would itself be one of metamorphosis, which might suggest a possible way to decipher the ambiguity of the term "Ovid of the films." Is this Ovid a poet who writes about, or likes, films, or is it an Ovid who is representative of a new age, in that his chosen medium is the new art form of cinema? If this figure is to be interpreted as a director or filmic auteur, then the Ovidian tag accrues another potential association. He is an Ovid not only because he follows the civic epic of a Virgil with a more "casual" idiom, or because film is quintessentially (for the early twentieth-century audience) a medium characterized by change, but also because the dethronement of literature as a key

form represents a major shaking up of the hierarchy of arts. The essence of art, one might say, suffers a metamorphosis into a more communal shape where film replaces literature as the capstone of the available forms.

If Yeats is critical of this transformation, it is because he sees in the new mass communications a fall from earlier standards. We know from other contexts that Yeats was critical of what he saw as the stultifying effects of the new mass society. In a letter to Shakespear on March 14, 1920, while on tour in the United States, he reported having told a Mormon in Salt Lake City that "America & Germany had both made [the] same mistake, the mistake of standardizing life, the one in interest of monarchy, the other in interest of democracy but both for the ultimate gain of a sterile devil. That once both America & Germany had been infinitely abundant in variation from type & now all was type" (*CL Intalex* #3710). Later he would report that there was, "especially in America, [...] signs of prophetic afflatus" about a "new movement [...] consonant with the political and social movements of the time," which embodied "a desire to fall back or sink in on some thing or being" (*CW5* 110). This kind of view was far from unique, echoing for instance the anti-American undercurrent of *Brave New World*, which has been interpreted as "developing a dystopian future for England in large part through a venomous satire of American capitalism and entertainment."<sup>26</sup>

But Yeats's polemics are, like his inspirations, rarely as unequivocal as they first appear. There is much in Yeats's cultivation of the lyric form, as well as the poetic voice in his drama, to suggest that his *oeuvre* constitutes a conservative version of the kind of media specificity that Clement Greenberg proclaimed to be characteristic of modernism. For Greenberg, modernism entailed that each art form sought a purified version of its own medium, as evidenced by how abstract visual art aimed to affirm solely the flat canvas without any illusion of three-dimensional figurality.<sup>27</sup> In Yeats's conception of the lyric voice, there is (at least in certain versions) a similar attempt to jettison narrative and all dependence upon other media. Like the "oath-bound men" of the poem "The Black Tower," he can be interpreted as a stubbornly heroic defender of old modes and verities in a time of change (*CW1* 339). At the same time, though, evidence of more supple relationships to new media is not hard to find. This includes Yeats's relationship to cinema. Already in the 1920s, as part of his work in the Irish Senate, he participated in the Censorship of Films Appeal Board. We also know for instance that he made a point of watching Eisenstein's film *The Battleship Potemkin* in 1929, together with his wife, with tickets given by his friend and illustrator Edmund Dulac, who was on the council of the Film Society in London (see *YGYL* 212 n2). In a letter to his wife, George Yeats, from February 8, 1932, he praised *An Indian Monk*, the autobiography of Shri Purohit Swami, for being "a masterpiece. A book the like of which does not exist, written with the greatest possible simplicity—mahatmas, cows, children,

miracles, a sort of cinema film to the glory of God" (*CL Intellex* #5590). Here literature approaches the form of cinema not through process of degeneration, but through a form of revitalization. In the listing of the "mahatmas, cows, children, miracles," the motif of metamorphosis recurs, as it is the ever-changing focus of the monk's prose that appeals to Yeats. In his later prose introduction to *An Indian Monk*, there is no reference to cinema, but a passage generalizing on the monk's perceptions strikes a related note:

The Indian [...] approaches God through a vision, speaks continually of the beauty and terror of the great mountains, interrupts his prayer to listen to the song of birds, remembers with delight the nightingale that disturbed his meditation by alighting upon his head and singing there, recalls after many years the whiteness of a sheet, the softness of a pillow, the golden embroidery upon a shore. These things are indeed part of the "splendour of that Being". (*CW5* 133)

As William H. O'Donnell's note makes clear, the final quotation, referring to God as a Divine Being, is from the Gayatri Mantra in the Rig Veda.

The surprising nexus established between divinity and film in these passages implies a divergence from Yeats's most typical stance on representation. Most often, we find Yeats contrasting, in a manner evocative of Coleridge and the Romantics, the creativity of the imagination to a kind of slavish mimeticism, often associating the latter with the passivity of a mirror.<sup>28</sup> In the writings coming out of Yeats's friendship with the Swami, however, a more positive appraisal of mimeticism, associated with Eastern mysticism, comes to the fore. This can take the form of "the selection of some place, object or image, as the theme of meditation" (*CW5* 158). More profoundly, Yeats's recalibration of his view of literary form entails opening up to the deeper experience of "Spirit, the Self that is in all selves" as a "pure mirror" (*CW5* 147). Access to the deeper, common self is the highest form of enlightenment. In his introduction to the English translation of the *Mandukya Upanishad*, Yeats describes the mind being a "reflection" of a "Self" that is common to all: "the images of the gods can pass from mind to mind, our closed eyes may look upon a world shared, as the physical world is shared" (*CW5* 161). This is familiar Yeatsian territory, the common storehouse of images identified by the poet as the *Anima Mundi*. The implicit link drawn in "Michael Robartes Foretells" between cinematic experience, Hindu mysticism, and that common store is less familiar. To imagine the experience of film images as analogous to divine inspiration is not what one expects from Yeats, who was more inclined to seek the shared movement of transcendent images in the séance room than in the darkened movie theater. Certainly, the links traced here are implicit, and cross from text to text in a subterranean and understated manner.

Could the classical divinities of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have been at the back of Yeats's mind in "Michael Robartes Foretells," infusing the decadent figure of that fragment with a supernatural gravitas? In his *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound declared: "I assert that the Gods exist. [...] I assert that a great treasure of verity exists for mankind in Ovid and in the subject matter of Ovid's long poem."<sup>29</sup> One need not conjecture a similar faith in Yeats to detect an alternative to his usual criticism of mass society. There are other, more overt forms of affirming the possibilities of the spaces of mass media in Yeats. This is evident for instance in Yeats's engagements with radio in the 1930s. Yeats contributed to several radio programs for the BBC and Radio Éireann between September 1931 and October 1937, in addition to writing a script for one program that was not broadcast.

These radio programs represent something of a return to the idea of a popular art, which Yeats's experiments with Noh theater had temporarily set aside. In his first broadcast, he reminisces about his earliest work on an English version of *Oedipus the King* back in 1912: "I did not want to make a new translation for the reader but something that everybody in the house, scholar or potboy, would understand as easily as he understood a political speech or an article in a newspaper" (CW10 219). To Yeats, the radio work must somehow recreate the inclusiveness of the political rally or mass-produced newspaper. This will indeed require some kind of simplicity. One form of quasi-simplicity that Yeats favors is the ballad form, privileged in the 1930s broadcasts. As Louis MacNeice pointed out, Yeats's late interest in the ballad is the crystallization of a life-long interest in the genre.<sup>30</sup> Another distinctive feature of Yeats's work for the radio is that he is acutely conscious of its distinctiveness and tries to conceptualize it in terms related to how he understands the performance of his poetry and plays. Thus in his third broadcast, from April 10, 1932, he introduces the program by reflecting on the choice of poems. He refers to his old friend Shakespeare—who remains unnamed in the actual broadcast—encouraging him to read love poems on air. He recalls a reading session in the United States, where he declined reciting such personal material in public. This, however, leads to a realization of the unique possibilities of the new medium:

Then I remembered that I would not be reading to a crowd; you would all be listening singly or in twos and threes; above all that I myself would be alone, speaking to something that looks like a visiting card on a pole; that after all it would be no worse than publishing love poems in a book. Nor do I want to disappoint that old friend of mine for I am sure that she has her portable wireless brought to her room, that she is at this moment listening to find out if I have taken her advice. (CW10 234)

There is indeed a form of simplicity at work here, as the radio broadcast does not reach its audience in one big mass—as, say, the mass spectacle of a sports event does in a stadium—but rather in a more intimate and secluded form. Here we approach a paradox not uncommon in modernism, which often features “scenes of communication where intimacy appears indistinguishable from the exchange of information,” and “simple conversation” is coexistent with “a daunting degree of technical proficiency.”<sup>31</sup> At the transmitting end of this scene, Yeats seems relieved by the simplicity of the radio studio. Before his very first radio broadcast, George Yeats had written to Yeats that she had arranged with the BBC for him to “have a try-out on the microphone before [...] actually do[ing] the thing,” warning him: “you won’t be able to tiger up and down the room as you usually do when you speak!” (YGYL 245). Even if it appears Yeats quickly found himself comfortable in the studio, the rhetoric of his gesture in the broadcast is perhaps more complex than it seems. Even while he refers to a simplicity of address he opens up a parallel, exemplary logic. Everyone listening to his words is encouraged to imagine Shakespeare’s response, and also perhaps even to imitate what Yeats anticipates as her benevolent and finely tuned attitude. At the same time, the microphone’s appearance of being “like a visiting card on a pole” might be taken as alluding to the absence of a missed or deferred assignation, rather than the presence of a face-to-face encounter.

The idea of an intimate space is elaborated in later broadcasts, two of which have Yeats asking his audience to imagine that they are sitting in a pub. Thus a broadcast from April 1937 has Yeats addressing his listener as follows: “I want you to imagine yourself in a Poets’ Pub. There are such pubs in Dublin and I suppose elsewhere. You are sitting among poets, musicians, farmers and labourers” (CW10 267). The preceding broadcast from the Abbey stage asks his audience to “think yourselves old men, old farmers perhaps, accustomed to read newspapers and listen to songs, but not to read books” (CW10 262). What is interesting here is that the space of the pub does not seem far removed from the football field previously imagined in “Michael Robartes Foretells” (even though the intimacy of poetic address is preserved). In this context—which seems to embody a space where the ideals of a later stage of civilization (in Yeats’s view) have been anticipated—elitism is out of place. The pub, one might claim, manifests precisely what had been anticipated in “Michael Robartes Foretells”: “the completion of a public ideal, its assimilation to the common civilization, where all, whatever degree or rank or station remain, will live and think in much the same way.”<sup>32</sup> Although Yeats often tends to present this “public ideal” as a pernicious levelling of standards, his own embrace of the mass medium of radio—alongside a career-long interest in popular art—complicates the picture somewhat.

Some caveats are in order here. In “Michael Robartes Foretells” and *A Vision*, Yeats sees the final phases of his era as ushering in the transcendence of political conflict, as part of the establishment of an implicitly more totalitarian society, yet even in his radio broadcasts he uses the ballad form for a belligerent political rhetoric linked with Parnell. In addition, one might question whether even his radio-friendly version of the poet is fully submerged in the public space: unlike his Virgil and Ovid of the later phases, the poet of Yeats’s radio broadcasts stands at least partially apart as the maker and singer of fine things. In any case, the radio work shows that Yeats is not unequivocal on poetry’s place at the end of an era.

Yeats’s response to the prominence of the novel and the growing popularity of film and other mass forms of culture displays a figure at times defensive, at times fascinated, at other times hopeful. The negative, dystopian Yeats is in some ways close to Huxley’s *Brave New World*. Both authors picture the coming of a society where equality and happiness, coupled with a new emphasis on mass society and sports, overshadow individual identity and expression. The poet as a carrier of tragic insight is in danger of becoming entirely marginalized in an age of uniformity, blithely immersed in mass culture. Yet in Yeats there is also the realization of new possibilities for poetry in an age of burgeoning mass media. Literature may appropriate the form of cinema, as in Yeats’s comment on the Swami’s autobiography, or alternatively it may take over the means of mass communication—evident in Yeats’s radio programs—to explore new forms of community with its audience. All of these are different facets of Yeats’s supple calibrations of the future of poetry in a time of change.

## Notes

1. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007), 193–94.
2. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 194.
3. Huxley, *Brave New World*, 183–84.
4. See Peter J. Bowler, “Introduction: Progress or Threat?,” in *The History of the Future: Prophets of Progress from H. G. Wells to Isaac Asimov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–15.
5. Virginia Woolf, *A Moment’s Liberty: The Shorter Diary* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1985), 289.
6. Woolf, *A Moment’s Liberty*, 289.
7. On Yeats’s revising of “Dove or Swan,” see Matthew DeForrest, “W. B. Yeats’s *A Vision*: ‘Dove or Swan,’” in *W. B. Yeats’s “A Vision”: Explications and Contexts*, eds. Neil Mann, Matthew Gibson, and Claire Nally (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012), 136–58.
8. William Butler Yeats, “Michael Robartes Foretells,” in Neil Mann, “The System of W. B. Yeats’s *A Vision*,” <http://www.yeatsvision.com/Endcycle.html>, accessed May 19, 2018. Edited transcripts of this text have been presented previously by Hazard Adams, Walter Kelly Hood, and George Mills Harper. Of particular assistance to my own interpretation has been the section devoted to “Michael Robartes Foretells” in Wayne K. Chapman, *W. B. Yeats’s*

*Robartes-Aherne Writings: Featuring the Making of His "Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends"* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 312–39. Against other scholars' contention that the text was written in 1936, Chapman argues for it being composed sometime between August 1932 and July 1933.

9. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
10. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
11. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
12. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
13. On this theme see Marjorie Howes, "When the Mob Becomes a People: Nationalism and Occult Theatre," in *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66–101.
14. Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 212.
15. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
16. Ovid does not appear at all in Brian Arkins's survey of Yeats's classical allusions and inspirations. For a discussion of Roman writers (including Virgil) in Yeats's writings, see Brian Arkins, *Builders of My Soul: Greek and Roman Themes in Yeats* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1990), 141–51.
17. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
18. Hermann Schneider, *The History of World Civilization*, vol. 2, trans. Margaret M. Green (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), 617.
19. Schneider, *The History of World Civilization*, 618.
20. Schneider, *The History of World Civilization*, 650.
21. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."
22. Schneider, *The History of World Civilization*, 618.
23. Schneider, *The History of World Civilization*, 656.
24. Gabriele D'Annunzio quoted in Gianni Oliva, *Interviste a D'Annunzio (1895–1938)* (Lanciano: Carabba, 2002), 282, 284; translated in Martin M. Winkler, "Ovid and the Cinema: An Introduction," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, 1st ed., eds. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 470.
25. On Pound and *A Vision*, see Catherine A. Paul, "A Vision of Ezra Pound," *W. B. Yeats's "A Vision": Explications and Contexts*, 252–68.
26. Genevieve Abravanel, *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43.
27. See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brien (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).
28. On this contrast, and the use of the mirror image, see Matthew Gibson, *Yeats, Coleridge and the Romantic Sage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).
29. Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1938), 299.
30. See Louis MacNeice, *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (London: Faber, 1967 [1941]), 141–49. For a related interpretation of how musical chanting—facilitated by the ballad form—was pursued through much of Yeats's career, see Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For recent readings of Yeats's radio work, see for instance Emily C. Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Emilie Morin, "W. B. Yeats and Broadcasting, 1924–1965," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 1 (2015): 145–75; Adrian Paterson, "Music Will Keep out Temporary Ideas: W. B. Yeats's Radio Performances," in *Word and Music Studies 12: Performativity in Words and Music*, ed. Walter Bernhart and Michael Halliwell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 43–76. I have

previously addressed the same theme in "Pub, Parlour, Theatre: Radio in the Imagination of W. B. Yeats," in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, eds. Matthew Feldman, Erik Tonning, and Henry Mead (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 23–37.

31. Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 12.
32. Yeats, "Michael Robartes Foretells."



## POLITICS, EUGENICS, AND YEATS'S RADIO BROADCASTS

Melissa Dinsman

In the opening to his 1937 BBC broadcast "In the Poet's Pub," William Butler Yeats claims: "I want to make a certain experiment." He then proceeds to explain that his experiment includes connecting spoken poetry with "musical notes" so as to "enable the [listener's] mind to free itself from one group of ideas, while preparing for another group, and yet keep it [the mind] receptive and dreaming" (CW10 266). The purpose of this experiment was to improve listener comprehension and connectivity. Music, which filled the spaces between poems, was intended to unite radio listeners with the broadcast and ensure that their minds did not break away from the "dream" that the radio performance cast.<sup>1</sup> Yeats had a specific vision as to how the broadcast should be performed, especially with regard to shaping the listening experience. But he also attempted to control *how* people listened to radio, an experiment in which many radio broadcasters and theorists of the 1930s were invested.<sup>2</sup>

"In the Poet's Pub" marks a shift in Yeats's radio priorities. Whereas in earlier broadcasts, such as "Poems about Women" (1932), Yeats is content to imagine his audience listening to him ("Then I remembered that I would not be reading to a crowd; you would all be listening singly or in twos and threes"), by 1937 Yeats wants to shape how the audience receives and perceives him and his poetry (CW10 234). While critics have argued that Yeats's desire to control every stage of a broadcast from production to reception stems from his aspiration to create a democratic listening experience, I suggest instead that the themes prevalent in Yeats's late BBC broadcasts maintain diffuse affinities with the anti-democratic and "conservative revolutionary" politics that he displayed in other contexts, through his support for the Army Comrades Association (more commonly known as the Blueshirts) in the early 1930s and his publication of the eugenicist-laden pamphlet *On the Boiler* in 1938.<sup>3</sup>

Much has been written about the right-wing politics and eugenicist sympathies of Yeats's late 1930s poetry in general and about *On the Boiler* in particular. Yeats's focus on Ireland's degeneration and his calls for its regeneration through cultural (and even biological) methods coincided with his dalliance with the para-fascist Irish Blueshirts and his frustrations with the Catholic nationalist transformations of the Irish Free State under Éamon de Valera.<sup>4</sup> However, these years also proved to be Yeats's most active in terms of radio broadcasting, with six of his nine broadcasts made between 1937 and 1938. In this essay, I read Yeats's broadcasts, in particular "In the Poet's Pub," "In the Poet's Parlour," and "My Own Poetry" alongside *On the Boiler* to show how themes of degeneration

and regeneration link these works.<sup>5</sup> While radio proved a valuable tool for promoting democratic ideals and encouraging a participatory listenership, it is also true that the medium was favored by authoritarian leaders and their sympathizers throughout the 1930s. As a medium, radio could advance the cultural degeneration and pandering to the masses to which Yeats was opposed. However, it was also within radio's capabilities to control modes of broadcasting, influencing public taste and regenerating Irish culture through the dissemination of poetry.

It is important to note that the critical response to Yeats's involvement with fascist and eugenicist ideas is far from consistent. For example, in *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, Elizabeth Cullingford provides a thorough overview of Yeats's political evolution; however, her retreat into the argument that Yeats's poetry "escapes simple political labels because it is essentially dialectical, while his practical choices reveal the inappropriateness of the label 'fascist,'" reads as an avoidance of, rather than an engagement with, Yeats's right-wing sympathies.<sup>6</sup> Cullingford also justifies Yeats's eugenicism, which she states "in the thirties did not possess the sinister connotations now indelibly stamped upon it by Hitler's policies," but admits that "Yeats was playing with theories which in other hands were to have terrible applications."<sup>7</sup> Other critics have agreed with Cullingford's assessment of Yeats's politics. In *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s*, for example, Paul Scott Stanfield calls Yeats's interest in eugenics a "dabbling" and a departure from his standard poetic preoccupations.<sup>8</sup> And in his biography of Yeats, Terence Brown explicitly agrees with Cullingford, claiming that Yeats saw his involvement with the Blueshirts as "a last resort if the IRA and economic troubles continued to bring chaos." Instead of "rule by a Fascist gang," Brown argues, Yeats desired the reinstatement of the educated, upper-class Anglo-Irish to power. However, Brown remains critical of Cullingford's "tolerant historicizing" of Yeats's eugenics, arguing that Yeats's position on the subject spread far beyond *On the Boiler* and cannot be so easily dismissed as a "character" he was playing in the prose work.<sup>9</sup> Even critics who are quick to criticize Yeats for his eugenicism, such as Spurgeon Thompson, gloss over his interest in fascism. Thompson argues that Yeats's turn to eugenics is a result of his colonialist mentality and that *On the Boiler* "is a tract about nothing other than a colonial anxiety about the state."<sup>10</sup> Yet this line of reasoning ignores the fact that while eugenicist thinking was popular in the 1930s with both the political left and right, the more extreme version that Yeats presents in *On the Boiler* was aligned more with fascist ideologies on the rise throughout Europe, with which Yeats sympathized. W. J. McCormack is perhaps the most ardent critic of Yeats's right-wing politics and argues in *Blood Kindred* that Yeats's "self-proclaimed disillusion" with the Blueshirts should not be read as a renouncement of fascism. McCormack chastises past biographers who have been quick to "confine

[Yeats] to an external relationship with fascism" out of concerns that a fascist Yeats "would be a less marketable commodity."<sup>11</sup>

Recently, scholars have begun to take a more nuanced approach to Yeats's right-wing politics, exploring its motives and arguing that its reach extends far beyond *On the Boiler*. In his extensive study on eugenics in the works of Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, Donald Childs neither apologizes nor condemns; instead, he explores the reasons why modernists were interested in eugenics, which he claims boil down to a fear of the masses and dismay over recent political attacks upon the arts.<sup>12</sup> Scholars have since expanded upon Childs's argument and have begun to connect Yeats's politics to his 1930s radio broadcasts. Emily C. Bloom, for example, discusses Yeats's eugenics in connection to his radio poem "The Curse of Cromwell." Bloom acknowledges that "Yeats's radio work coincided with his interest in fascism;" nonetheless, she questions the critical impetus to "imagine his approach to radio as inherently authoritarian" and suggests instead that we read Yeats as "an adventurous novice in a new medium, attempting to find the best reception for his new auditory publics."<sup>13</sup>

I would like to develop further the connection Bloom makes between Yeats's eugenicism and "The Curse of Cromwell" and show how a broader selection of the poet's radio performances includes references to social eugenicist thought (including his condemnation of Ireland's cultural degeneration and his hope for national regeneration through art). I will also argue that Yeats's eugenicism should not be read as disconnected from his praise of fascism. By doing so, I argue that the politics of Yeats's broadcasts may be more radically conservative than previously assumed. By choosing this approach, I am following the example set by David Lloyd, who writes in *Anomalous States*:

Certainly Yeats continues to cause discomfort, at least to any critic unwilling to separate the aesthetic too readily from the political. The difficulty lies most evidently, of course, in the fact that we must acknowledge, when all quibble and interpretation "is done and said", the avowed authoritarianism, if not downright fascist sympathies, of his stated politics, while at the same time acknowledging the power of his writing to return and to haunt.<sup>14</sup>

While the terms "authoritarian" and "fascism" are too amorphous to carry much significance when reading the work of an individual writer, Yeats's conservative revolutionary politics certainly align him with much of pre-war Germany's literati who "eschewed the NSDAP's institutionalized violence and the 'vulgar' biological determinism in favor of persuasion through the force of cultural ideas."<sup>15</sup> Yeats argued for the spreading of a selective kind of Irish art and culture as a means to promote national regeneration; although he also, as I show below, suggests that violence and eugenics are other potentially valuable

methods. Thus, while Yeats certainly had the ability to use his “experimental” broadcasts to promote democratic radio listening and participation in the aural arts, his broadcasts perform a conservative revolutionary politics that not only bemoans the degeneration of Irish culture and politics, but presents Yeats and his art as the antidote.

### I. A CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTIONARY

Yeats’s admiration of Benito Mussolini and Italy’s transformation under fascism has been well documented, even though, as Lauren Arrington points out, his grasp of Italian fascism was not always secure.<sup>16</sup> According to Stanfield, Yeats believed that Italy’s political path could prove a model for an Ireland still finding its footing after independence.<sup>17</sup> The poet’s interest in fascism hit its peak in the early 1930s when he became involved with the Irish Blueshirts, a paramilitary organization that arose in opposition to de Valera. Although some critics have been hesitant to categorize the Blueshirts as fascist, Yeats himself uses this term while expressing his fervent support for the organization: “Politics are growing heroic. De Velera [sic] has forced political thought to face the most fundamental issues. A Fascist opposition is forming behind the scenes to be ready should some tragic situation develop [sic]. I find myself constantly urging the despotic rule of the educated classes as the only end to our troubles” (*CL Intelix* #5915). In a letter to Olivia Shakespear, Yeats again labels the Blueshirts fascist and confirms his involvement with them: “At the moment I am trying in association with ex-cabinet minister, an eminent lawyer, & a philosopher to work out a social theory which can be used against communism in Ireland—what looks like emerging is Fascism [sic] modified by religion [sic]” (*CL Intelix* #5857).

The Blueshirts formed in 1932 as a response to the election of de Valera and the Fianna Fáil party. Composed of former members of the Free State army and the ousted Cumann na nGaedheal party led by William Thomas Cosgrave, the Blueshirts saw themselves as providing stability and authority to post-revolutionary Ireland. Fianna Fáil, however, was concerned about the threat that the Blueshirts represented and about their violent street clashes with the IRA. In iconography the Blueshirts very much resembled the Italian Blackshirts and Nazi Brownshirts.<sup>18</sup> Like other fascist movements throughout Europe, they saw themselves as the last defense of traditional values, on the one hand fighting against the spread of Communism, and, on the other hand, protecting against the return to unfettered free market capitalism, which had led to the market crash only a few years earlier. They were vocally anti-democratic and championed violence as a political method. Moreover, Blueshirts leader Eoin O’Duffy was a vehement supporter of fascist ideologies and gave very radical

and violent speeches. However, the fascism of O'Duffy and other Blueshirts elites failed to fully reach the rank-and-file followers, which ultimately resulted in fascism failing to take hold in Ireland in the same way that it did in Italy and Germany. Because of this and their eventual ousting of O'Duffy for corporatists Michael Tierney and James Hogan, who shared the economic ideologies of fascism (including the goal of reorganizing Irish society by trades) but not the social ones, the Blueshirts are perhaps more accurately described as para-fascists.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, however, the question as to what degree the Blueshirts were fascist seems to me less important than the fact that Yeats believed them to be so.<sup>20</sup> From the evidence available, it appears that Yeats involved himself with the organization precisely because of its anti-democratic ideologies and its willingness to use violence to achieve their political aims.

Labeling Yeats a conservative revolutionary does not deemphasize the fascism of his politics; instead it contextualizes his fascism within a broader "counter-revolutionary" framework.<sup>21</sup> It also allows us to see why Yeats's traditionalist ideologies would lead both to his involvement with the Blueshirts and to eugenicist theories. Eugenics is not always tied to fascism, as numerous nations participated to various degrees in social and biological conditioning, including Britain, the US, and Sweden. However, as I have noted earlier, Yeats's eugenicism is very much tethered to his conservative revolutionary politics. Yeats was a relatively late convert to eugenicist thinking. According to most critics, it was not until the 1930s that he fully embraced eugenics, and he did not join Britain's Eugenics Society until November 1936.<sup>22</sup> At this point, the society was moving in a more progressive direction. According to evolutionary biologist and prominent society member Julian Huxley, the society sought to "transform the social system" and work toward the "equalizing of environment in an upward direction." As David Bradshaw observes, in late 1930s, society was "far from being a hot-bed of authoritarian bigots and Nazi sympathisers."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, eugenicist thinking was embraced by both the political right and left. For example, socialists like H. G. Wells and G. B. Shaw were also supporters of eugenics. Yeats's eugenicism, however, did not fully align with the more socially liberal direction the society was headed. In his detailed examination of Britain's Eugenics Society and its influence on Yeats's *On the Boiler*, Bradshaw makes a compelling case that Yeats's eugenicism cannot simply be dismissed as a commonly held position among 1930s thinkers. Instead, Bradshaw argues that Yeats deviates from the standard and more socially liberal eugenicist doctrine of the 1930s that looked to correct environmental factors, in favor of something "alarmist" and "hereditarian" that promoted "state control of genetic inheritance."<sup>24</sup> But while *On the Boiler* certainly uses the language of biological determinism, his radio broadcasts partake in a social eugenicism typical of conservative revolutionaries.

The most obviously eugenicist and anti-democratic of Yeats's texts is, of course, *On the Boiler*. While I do not wish to retread the extremely fertile critical ground of existing criticism about this pamphlet, I do want to briefly discuss Yeats's provocative positions in *On the Boiler* in order to show that his late 1930s broadcasts made use of a similar rhetoric and that the move to the radio broadcasting itself might be read more critically in light of Yeats's conservative revolutionary politics. Yeats intended *On the Boiler* to be a political tract. As he wrote to Maud Gonne in June 1938, "For the first time I am saying what I beleive [sic] about Irish & European politics" (CL Intellex #7273). Throughout *On the Boiler*, Yeats expresses his concern that degeneration is happening throughout Europe but is being kept secret from the public. He writes: "Though well-known specialists are convinced that the principal European nations are degenerating in body and in mind, their evidence remains almost unknown because a politician and newspaper that gave it adequate exposition would lose, the one his constituency, the other its circulation" (CW5 228). As a poet, Yeats liked to proclaim himself free from the shackles of popularity. Thus, in *On the Boiler*, where he seeks to "write whatever interests [him] at the moment," he rants upon this theme which seemed to occupy much of his work in his final years (CW5 220). A major part of the degeneration in Ireland, according to Yeats, stems from the fall of the Anglo-Irish from political and cultural power. Like other conservative revolutionary elites of the time, Yeats bemoans the destruction of traditions, which includes the Anglo-Irish big house, and writes that these once grand homes of "old historic bricks and window-panes" have been "obliterated or destroyed" (CW5 221). This mourning for a loss of power over the land also extends to politics. Yeats, who was unhappy with de Valera's direction for Ireland, rails against a political system which "has given Ireland to the incompetent," noting that as "the nominated [Anglo-Irish] element began to die out ... the Senate declined in ability and prestige" (CW5 223).

Yeats offers a number of solutions to Ireland's problems. Some of these go beyond the social eugenicism favored by conservative revolutionaries to include a biological determinism similar to that put forth by fascist groups throughout Europe. A primary concern for Yeats was that the upper class was having less children than the lower class: "Since about 1900 the better stocks have not been replacing their numbers, while the stupider and less healthy have been more than replacing theirs. Unless there is a change in the public mind every rank above the lowest must degenerate, and, as inferior men push up into its gaps, degenerate more and more quickly" (CW5 229). Yeats's answer to his perceived need to "limit the families of the unintelligent classes" include war as well as state-mandated medical intervention (CW5 231, 232).<sup>25</sup> Yeats praises fascist countries for "know[ing] that civilisation has reached a crisis," but in

true elitist form he disapproves of their embrace of the uneducated masses as a disposable labor force that can “dig or march” in a future war economy. By putting “quantity before quality” the fascist nations have, according to Yeats, “accelerate[d] degeneration” (CW5 230). Like the fascist groups he admires, Yeats also sees armament as a central means of Ireland’s regeneration; a more powerful military along Ireland’s border could thwart “uneducated” immigrants from entering the county (CW5 241).

But Yeats also proposes arts education as a more benign option, one Bernard McKenna reads as part of a “larger cultural program” across Yeats’s writing. This program, made explicit in *On the Boiler*, includes a prolonged narrative about Ireland’s degeneration and the hoped-for regeneration through education:

If read as a whole, [*On the Boiler*] presents a dual vision: Ireland’s culture is in a state of decline that can be traced to the breaking apart of Yeats’s program of cultural nationalism, but eugenics and education are the keys to forming a new cultural nationalism that can redeem the Irish nation, that can heal society and that can unite the various factions that exist in Irish society, that, in short, can “restore the soul.”<sup>26</sup>

In the “Ireland after the Revolution” section of *On the Boiler*, Yeats makes it clear that the education he has in mind would be made possible through literature, in particular poetry. As McKenna notes, this section “articulates hope rather than despair:” “education is a way to breathe fresh life into the goals of [cultural nationalism] despite the disintegration of his old paradigm.”<sup>27</sup> The question that emerges from Yeats’s focus on poetry in *On the Boiler* is whether or not we can read Yeats’s radio broadcasts as part of his call to reeducate Ireland through literature, and thus also as part of his conservative revolutionary politics.<sup>28</sup>

## II. DEGENERATION AND REGENERATION IN YEATS’S RADIO BROADCASTS

In his reading of Yeats’s bardic aspirations, Ronald Schuchard convincingly argues that at the turn of the twentieth century, Yeats began working toward a “spiritual democracy” as a means to “redress the cultural imbalance brought by the book” and “restore personal utterance to dramatic, narrative, and lyric poetry for all the people.”<sup>29</sup> Schuchard’s claim for a “democratic” Yeats is based on the poet’s privileging of orality as a medium for the masses over the selectivity of print, as found in early texts like “Literature and the Living Voice” (1906). However, Schuchard’s argument that Yeats’s radio career was a “gradual resurrection” of a democratic impulse based in what Yeats saw as Ireland’s oral

tradition ignores not only the significance of print circulation in radio broadcasting, which Bloom discusses at length in *The Wireless Past*, but also the shift in the author's politics during the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> Forming new listening audiences and imagining new listening spaces do not cancel out Yeats's admiration and vocal support for fascism and eugenics. Instead, it could be argued that rather than democratize the airwaves, Yeats used the radio to bring his conservative revolutionary ideologies into the private, lived spaces of isolated listeners.

For example, "In the Poet's Pub," which was broadcast by the BBC on April 2, 1937, begins with Yeats explaining to listeners how he crafted the poetry reading with a mixture of song and spoken word to improve their comprehension of, and connectivity to, the broadcast. But Yeats's desire to control the listener's experience extends beyond the construction of his broadcast. He plays the part of the announcer and sets the imaginary scene at a pub, a communal location that illustrates his desire to build a connected audience: "I want you to imagine yourself in a Poet's Pub. There are such pubs in Dublin and I suppose elsewhere. You are sitting among poets, musicians, farmers and labourers" (CW10 267). Yeats's imagined space is an intimate one filled with people from various classes and occupations, including both the arts and manual labor. This cross-section of imaginary listeners speaks to Yeats's desire to form a new and broader audience for his work. But this idealized space, in which pub-goers listen attentively to a poetry reading, is also an illusion created to enhance the power of the broadcast. Yeats wants listeners to see what he envisions for them—"in a pub as *I* have imagined"—rather than create their own imagined space (emphasis added, CW10 272). Yeats does not frame his broadcast as a democratic listening experience; instead, he explicitly states his aim to control the broadcast from its output to reception.<sup>31</sup>

Yeats's radio pub broadcast provides an example of what Theodor Adorno referred to as the "illusion of closeness." According to Adorno, the intimacy that results from radio listening is a fantasy:

What is actually listened to does not depend only on the picking up and transmission of the broadcast but also on the room where it is listened to. [...] This bears upon the illusion of closeness. One might assume that it is partly due to the over-strength of a radio playing with full power in a small room. [...] The listener feels as if presented with something totally familiar, and familiar it may be indeed, yet in such a manner that it assumes an air of strangeness.<sup>32</sup>

Yeats's listening audience, tuning in to his broadcast in the privacy of their own homes, accounts for a first level of this illusion of closeness. Regardless of the imaginary setting, Yeats's voice entering the private, lived spaces of his listeners creates, as Adorno would put it, an artificial intimacy and "familiar[ity]." But

Yeats creates a second level of illusion through the imagined pub space. Not only is his audience most likely tuning in from "a small room," but they are asked to imagine that they are listening in a different small space, one made even more intimate by its fictional crowdedness and its inhabitants' increasing drunkenness. Yeats even hints at the familiarity of this imagined scene when he states that such a pub can be found in Dublin and elsewhere.

In the BBC broadcast that followed on April 22, 1937, Yeats restricts the listener's imaginary space even more, as he moves the fictional setting of the broadcast from a pub to a parlour. In his opening to "In the Poet's Parlour," Yeats again sets the scene for his listeners. His description emphasizes the intimacy and artistic exclusiveness of the space:

When we were in the Poets' Pub I asked you to listen to poems written for everybody, but now you will listen, or so I hope, to poems written for poets, and that is why we are in the Poet's Parlour. Those present are his intimate friends and fellow students. There is a beautiful lady, or two or three beautiful ladies, four or five poets, a couple of musicians and all are devoted to poetry. (CW10 276)

A question emerges from this change in setting: how are poems written for poets different from those written for the general population, especially when both programs are broadcast to the public? If we read these broadcasts as part of Yeats's larger mission to regenerate Ireland through poetry, then perhaps these increasingly intimate and culturally elite settings are meant to attune listeners to a cultural hierarchy. If this is the case, then it is noteworthy that the poems for "In the Poet's Pub" are all written by authors other than Yeats, including the English poets Hilaire Belloc, C. K. Chesterton, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, whereas "In the Poet's Parlour" begins with Yeats's own work.<sup>33</sup> Yeats seems to be suggesting that he is making his poetry, previously meant for the culturally elite, accessible to a larger public in order to bring them into this previously exclusionary space. Also of note is that Yeats's selection of his own poetry for "In the Poet's Parlour" focuses on themes that mirror his conservative revolutionary concerns, such as the decline of Anglo-Irish power and traditional politics, cultural degeneration, and artistic autonomy as a necessary remedy.

In the poem "I Am of Ireland," two speakers engage in a short exchange. The first speaker, an elderly female meant to represent an ancient Ireland who has seen "time run on," asks the second speaker to dance. He declines and laments that the nation's political and cultural degeneration is to blame for Ireland no longer being as seductive as she once was:

One man, one man alone  
In that outlandish gear,

One solitary man  
 Of all that rambled there  
 Had turned his stately head.  
 "That is a long way off,  
 And time runs on," he said,  
 "And the night grows rough." (CW10 277)

The "rough[ness]" of present-day Ireland, now "a long way off" from Ireland's glory days, however, are not the only reasons the "stately" speaker cannot dance. For now even the musicians, Ireland's cultural heritage, are broken:

The fiddlers are all thumbs,  
 Or the fiddle-string accursed,  
 The drums and the kettledrums  
 And the trumpets are all burst. (CW10 277)

One could also read this stanza as being about the second speaker's sexual impotence. His inability to perform sexually due to an "accursed" and "burst" instrument would, as Yeats writes in *On the Boiler*, make space for "inferior men [to] push up into [the] gaps, [and] degenerate more and more quickly" (CW5 229).

Yeats explores a similar theme in the broadcast's next poem, "The Wicked Hawthorn Tree." Here, however, the references to the decline of the landed class and aristocratic tradition are more obvious. In a conversation with a hawthorn tree, a travelling man reveals that he has seen the ghosts of the past dancing in a castle: "Yet all the lovely things that were / Live, for I saw them dancing there." The tree, however, tells the man that what he saw is no more. The "Lovely lady and gallant man" are now "cold blown dust or a bit of bone" (CW10 278). The death of the aristocracy is made concrete by the image of decayed bodies. In *On the Boiler*, Yeats concludes with a poem that contains a similar theme to that of "The Wicked Hawthorn Tree"; the poem invokes the anti-democratic fervor of Yeats's conservative revolutionary politics more directly than Yeats's radio broadcast. In this poem, an older and now retired politician reflects on former years and the current state of Irish politics:

I lived among great houses  
 Riches drove out rank,  
 Base drove out the better blood,  
 And mind and body shrank. (CW5 250)

But Yeats's fears of democratic representation also invoke a biological determinism that goes beyond both the conservative revolutionary and left-leaning

eugenicist platforms. The references to "better blood" and shrinking minds and bodies in this poem, although only alluded to in "The Wicked Hawthorn Tree," recur in the prose passages of *On the Boiler*.

For Yeats, one method of combating Ireland's political and social degeneration involved an increased access to art, one that required the artist be free to create. Throughout the 1930s, artistic freedom became increasingly precarious in nations under fascist and authoritarian rule. Once World War II began, complaints about the inability to write became an even more common refrain, especially among British authors.<sup>34</sup> But Yeats found the threats to his artistry closer to home from both the increasing enthusiasm for leftist politics among British and Irish poets including W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Cecil Day-Lewis, as well as from the socially conservative de Valera government, which Yeats criticized in *On the Boiler*. Under de Valera, the Abbey Theatre saw a decrease in its government subsidy and further regulation by way of a government-appointed board member, who prohibited Yeats's play *The Herne's Egg* from being produced.<sup>35</sup> In his poem "Sweet Dancer," Yeats takes up the theme of artistic freedom and pleads with the listener to defend the dancer so that she might finish her dance before being censored: "Lead them gently astray; / Let her finish her dance, / Let her finish her dance" (CW10 277). But the quest for artistic autonomy is only part of this poem. The dancer is also a symbol of Ireland's potential regeneration. In the first stanza, the speaker claims that the dancer escaped from stifling artistic conditions, which symbolize the current state of the arts in present-day Ireland: "Escaped from bitter youth / Escaped out of her crowd / Or out of her black cloud" (CW10 276). It is in the dancer's potential to complete her art that hope for Ireland's future lies. The speaker repeats his plea in the second stanza, "Let her finish her dance." Yeats also strikes a hopeful, if not quite regenerative tone at the end of "The Wicked Hawthorn Tree," as the tree ponders whether it might cheat death after claiming that "Nobody knows what may befall" (CW10 278).

But in the following program, "My Own Poetry," broadcast on July 3, 1937, Yeats suggests that cultural education may not be enough to save Ireland. In the first "political" poem of the broadcast, "The Rose Tree," Yeats argues that violence and war are needed to rejuvenate Ireland's revolutionary spirit (CW10 286). In "The Rose Tree," originally published in the *Dial* in 1920, Yeats presents a fictional discussion between two leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising: James Connolly and Padraig Pearse. Using horticultural imagery, Connolly proposes that Irish nationalism (the rose tree) needs to be tended to and cultivated in order to survive: "It needs to be but watered; / [...] / 'To make the green come out again'" (CW10 284). Pearse, however, disagrees and in the final words of the poem claims that without the resources to grow the nationalist spirit, the only answer is violence: "O plain as plain can be / There's nothing but our

own red blood / Can make a right Rose Tree” (CW10 284). Although originally published almost two decades earlier, by broadcasting the poem in the late 1930s, Yeats recasts the poem as significant to contemporary politics. Considered in its 1937 context, Yeats’s choice to give the nationalist Pearse the final word over the socialist Connolly suggests Yeats viewed political violence, and more specifically revolutionary violence that installs nationalist policies, as the answer to Ireland’s “withered” political and cultural state. (This is an idea Yeats also proposes in *On the Boiler* (CW5 241–42).) But it also seems to reflect the poet’s conservative revolutionary politics. Yeats not only saw violence as a viable means to keep socialism at bay but also believed that romantic nationalism (which he had once found in the Blueshirts) was the rightful inheritor of Ireland’s revolutionary past.

By reading Yeats’s radio broadcasts in light of his political affiliations during the 1930s and *On the Boiler*, it becomes apparent that the influence of Yeats’s conservative revolutionary principles extend beyond a single pamphlet and instead spread across different genres and modes of mass communications. Although Yeats’s turn to radio allowed him to experiment with a new medium and reach a different and more diverse listenership than his print work, it also enabled him to disseminate in more bite-sized and appetizing chunks the eugenicist and para-fascist narratives that reemerge in a more violent form in *On the Boiler*. This reading of Yeats’s radio work is not intended to diminish the value of Yeats’s aesthetics nor take away from his attempts to reach a broader audience. However, by placing his broadcasts within a larger historical and literary context, we can begin to see how Yeats’s radio work not only voiced conservative revolutionary ideologies in *On the Boiler* but also performed the cultural education program that he saw as a necessary therapy for a degenerating Ireland.

## Notes

1. Emilie Morin argues that Yeats’s “poetry broadcasts, whose conventions were as yet unformalised, granted Yeats the freedom to conceive new relationships between musical speech and non-vocal sound.” See Emilie Morin, “‘I Beg your Pardon?’: W. B. Yeats, Audibility and Sound Transmission,” *YA* 19 (2013): 204.
2. For example, in his radio play *The Flight Across the Ocean* (*Der Ozeanflug*), which was originally broadcast as *Der Flug der Lindberghs: Ein Radiolehrstück für Knaben und Mädchen* (or Lindbergh’s *Flight: A Radio Learning Play for Boys and Girls*), Bertolt Brecht choreographed a call-and-response broadcast as a means to alter the listener’s interaction with the broadcasting station. Walter Benjamin also experimented with training people to listen to the radio with his *Radau um Kasperl* radio play, while Archibald MacLeish sought to create a controlled imaginary mental space through aural images, a process he theorizes in his Foreword to *The Fall of the City: A Verse Play for Radio* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), x. For a more detailed reading of broadcasters seeking to control the listening experience, see

Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics during World War II* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

3. I am borrowing the term "conservative revolutionary" from Matthew Feldman, who uses it to define those writers and philosophers who found kindred spirits in fascism's longing for a resurgence of traditional culture and renewed national spirit, but found Nazism violence and crudeness distasteful. Matthew Feldman, "Between Geist and Zeitgeist: Martin Heidegger as Ideologue of 'Metapolitical Fascism,'" *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6, no. 2 (2005): 175–98, 176. See also Armin Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994).
4. "Para-fascist," which Roger Griffin describes in a footnote as "interwar European regimes which created an elaborate fascist façade while remaining at heart conservative," seems the most accurate term to describe the Blueshirts, which incorporated elements of fascism (the iconography of the shirts and salute; violent scuffles with the political left, including the IRA; and anti-democratic values) but was not successful in bringing fascism to Ireland in the same way that fascism succeeded in Italy and Germany. Roger Griffin, "Hooked Crosses and Forking Paths: The Fascist Dynamics of the Third Reich," in *A Fascist Century*, ed. Matthew Feldman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 83–113, 233.
5. Although I am only discussing a handful of poems from three of Yeats's radio broadcasts, Yeats's politics extend to his other radio poetry. For example, "The Curse of Cromwell," broadcast as part of "My Own Poetry," contains references to Ireland's degeneration and the loss of Anglo-Irish power. Emily Bloom discusses this poem's multimedia history extensively in *The Wireless Past* and also touches on eugenics in the poem. See Emily Bloom, *The Wireless Past: Anglo-Irish Writers and the BBC, 1931–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 53–63.
6. Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), viii. Cullingford echoes this position again a decade later in *Gender and History on Yeats's Love Poetry*, where she argues that Yeats's interest in eugenics is tied to his notions of class, rather than to his interest in fascism. Cullingford, *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 84.
7. Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 229.
8. Paul Scott Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics in the 1930s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 187.
9. Terence Brown, *The Life of W. B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 341, 367.
10. Spurgeon Thompson, "Yeats and Eugenicism: The Garrison Mentality in a Decolonizing Ireland," in *W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism*, ed. Deborah Fleming (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill, 2001), 27–49, 30.
11. W. J. McCormack, *Blood Kindred: W. B. Yeats—the Life, the Death, the Politics* (London: Pimlico, 2005), 8–9, 378.
12. Donald J. Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), 18–19. Susan Johnston Graf offers a third possible reason for Yeats's eugenics, namely his interest in the occult and sexual magic; see Johnston Graf, "An Infant Avatar: The Mature Occultism of W. B. Yeats," *New Hibernia Review* 9, no. 4 (2005): 99–112.
13. Bloom, *The Wireless Past*, 36, 63. See n5 above.
14. David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 60, 59.
15. Feldman, "Between Geist and Zeitgeist," 176. It is difficult to define fascism because its expression is often rooted within local conditions and fascist movements took on different forms in Germany, Italy, and indeed the Irish Free State. Commenting on newer scholarly understandings of fascism, Feldman writes that Nazism must be understood as "part of a larger politico-cultural movement, one that includes permutations as varied as the CR

[Conservative Revolutionaries], Italian Fascism, the Romanian Iron Guard, the British Union of Fascists, and so on. Each of these revolutionary clusters can be usefully viewed in terms of prevailing inter-war sentiments of decline and expected collapse" (177). McCormack also notes that fascism's roots begin in the nineteenth century and should not be read only in the context of its more successful twentieth century versions. According to McCormack, we should not "define fascism by reference near-exclusively to successful fascism, to those instances where fascist movements acquired governmental power" as in Germany and Italy, but to also see similar conditions for its growth in Denmark, Switzerland, Britain, and Ireland. McCormack, *Blood Kindred*, 337.

16. Lauren Arrington, "Fighting Spirits: W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and the Ghosts of *The Wind-ing Stair* (1929)," *YA* 21 (2018): 269–93. Arrington notes that in the early 1920s both poets turned to Italy as a political model; Yeats, notably, quoted Mussolini in his Tailteann Games speech. Although Yeats's relationship to Italian fascism was "less direct" than Pound's, who thought he might become Mussolini's "literary advisor," Arrington observes that Yeats's relationship to Italian fascism was "nonetheless troubling" (276). In his discussion of Yeats's Tailteann Games speech, Roy Foster points to a draft version that suggests that the industrial strikes in Ireland "which had nearly sabotaged the opening of the Games" were part of the reason why Yeats saw Italian fascism, which had outlawed the right to strike, as a potential solution to Ireland's continued upheaval. Moreover, in this speech Yeats praises authoritarianism as an antidote to the "widening of liberty" that had occurred in the nineteenth century (*Life* 2 265–66). Arrington, however, points out that Yeats's focus on family and the individual was also at odds with political structures like fascism and communism, which require submission to "the supremacy of the corporate state" (274, 277). Thus Yeats's praise of Mussolini's authoritarianism did not always align with his belief in individualism.
17. Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics*, 58. Stanfield, however, quickly shifts his ground on Yeats's fascism, calling the Blueshirts only "superficially fascist" and claiming that "there are good reasons for not considering this episode especially significant" (40). Cullingford also down-plays the fascism of the Blueshirts and states that "Irish fascism, indeed, was always far more Irish than fascist." Cullingford argues that Yeats's involvement with the Blueshirts stems from his fear of communism and the further breakdown of the Irish economic system. While this may have been his motivation for supporting the organization, it does not make the group any less fascist, nor does it make Yeats's praise of the group any less problematic. Such political and economic fears were shared by Nazis in Germany as well as other para-fascist groups across Europe. See Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism*, 200, 204. See n4 above for a discussion of para-fascism.
18. Mike Cronin argues that on the whole the Blueshirts did "possess certain fascist traits" which he locates in "the liturgical identity, the fascistic policies of the Blueshirts, the violent activities of their followers, and the perception by others in the Free State that the Blueshirts were a fascist body." Cronin, "The Blueshirt Movement, 1932–5: Ireland's Fascists?," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995): 311–22, 312.
19. Cronin, who also turns to Griffin's definitions of fascism and para-fascism, suggests that the Blueshirts were "potential para-fascists" because they "never achieved control of the country" and thus their para-fascist potential remained "underdeveloped." Cronin, "The Blueshirt Movement," 325, 326. As noted above, however, critics like McCormack have suggested that political success should not be the bar by which one defines fascism. For further information on the social and economic politics of the Blueshirts, see Fearghal McGarry and Brian Hanley, "The Blueshirts—Fascism in Ireland?" interview by Cathal Brennan and John Dorney, *Near FM*, May 18, 2012; Fearghal McGarry, *Eoin O'Duffy: A Self-Made Hero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Eugene Broderick,

- Intellectuals and the Ideological Hijacking of Fine Gael, 1932–1938* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).
20. Cronin, "The Blueshirt Movement," 313.
  21. David Dwan provides an even longer historical analysis of Yeats's nationalism, which he puts in conversation with the Young Irelanders of the 1840s and the Irish political thinker Edmund Burke, among others. Dwan notes that Yeats's "counter-revolutionary" impulses ultimately sought "the end of a democratic age and the establishment of authoritarian rule across Europe." *The Great Community: Culture and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2008), 135.
  22. Cullingford, Stanfield, and Bradshaw suggest that Yeats did not become a eugenicist until the 1930s. However, Childs argues that Yeats's interest in eugenics started much earlier and dates Yeats's "earliest acquaintance with eugenics" at the turn of the century, when he was asked to review Allan Estlake's *The Oneida Community*. See Childs, *Modernism and Eugenics*, 170. One can also see Yeats's fear of Anglo-Irish degeneration in his earlier poetry, including, for example, the "My Descendants" section of his *Meditations in a Time of Civil War* (1923–24): "And what if my descendants lose the flower / Through natural declension of the soul, / Through too much business with the passing hour, / Though too much play, or marriage with a fool?" (CW1 207).
  23. David Bradshaw, "The Eugenics Movement in the 1930s and the Emergence of *On the Boiler*," *YA* 9 (1992): 189–215, 191–92.
  24. Bradshaw, "The Eugenics Movement," 190. In his essay, Bradshaw examines the influence of R. B. Cattell's *The Fight for our National Intelligence* on Yeats's *On the Boiler* and *Purgatory*. Although Cattell's work found favor with Yeats, it was dismissed by Huxley and the Eugenics Society for its "penchant for rhetorical excess and tub-thumping alarmism" (197) which are the very qualities that attracted Yeats to it.
  25. Although Yeats is not specific about what this medical intervention would look like, it could include everything from birth control to forced sterilization.
  26. Bernard McKenna, "Yeats, *On the Boiler*, the Aesthetics of Cultural Disintegration and the Program for Renewal 'of our Own Rich Experience,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 35, no. 4 (2012): 88.
  27. McKenna, "Yeats, *On the Boiler*," 84.
  28. The manuscript drafts of *On the Boiler* provide an interesting rhetorical connection between *On the Boiler* and Yeats's radio broadcasts. Of the many changes that *On the Boiler* underwent, one of the titles considered was "Poets' Corner." This is a remarkably similar title to two of Yeats's broadcasts: "In the Poet's Pub" and "In the Poet's Parlour." Bradshaw notes that in the "Poets' Corner" version of *On the Boiler*, Yeats explicitly advocates war and sterilization as a means to control the "unfit." Bradshaw, "The Eugenics Movement," 204, 207–08.
  29. Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 191.
  30. Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels*, 336.
  31. The introduction to "In the Poet's Parlour" speaks to Yeats's desire to control audience reception. Here he explains how the broadcast was crafted in order to teach his audience *how* to listen to poetry performed over the radio. The directions include, "there will be music to rest and hold your attention" and "whether we speak or sing, our sole object is to fix your attention upon the words" (CW10 276). Yeats also exerted tremendous influence over the creation and production of his broadcasts. As Schuchard notes in *The Last Minstrels*, after his "Modern Poetry" broadcast, Yeats was granted the authority to "write the scripts, choose the poems, and have them spoken or sung as he liked, using a variety of musical instruments according to his directions and excluding professional singers, the BBC orchestra, and chamber music of any kind" (375). But such control did not always end well. Colton

Johnson writes that during the rehearsals to “My Own Poetry” Yeats’s creative demands offended not only Margot Ruddock, but also the singer Olive Groves, the harpist Marie Goossens, and the musical composer Edmund Dulac, the result being that a subsequent radio appearance by Yeats was cancelled (CW10 407).

32. Theodor Adorno, “The Radio Voice,” in *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 345–91, 348.
33. “In the Poet’s Parlour” begins with Yeats’s “Sweet Dancer,” “I am of Ireland,” and “The Wicked Hawthorn Tree” before moving on to poems written by other authors.
34. Writing in her diary on September 6, 1939, only three days after the war’s outbreak, Virginia Woolf bemoans that “all creative power is cut off.” Taking a more public approach, George Orwell warned in a 1941 radio talk for the BBC Overseas Service that the spread of totalitarian regimes would result in the end of literature as democratic societies have come to know it. Others, like Cyril Connolly, argued that the act of writing itself was a form of resistance. This argument would later be pithily encapsulated by Elizabeth Bowen, who asked: “I wonder whether in a sense all wartime writing is not resistance writing?” Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5: 1936–1941, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 235; Orwell, “Literature and Totalitarianism,” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters vol. 2: My Country Right or Left, 1940–1943*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 2000), 134–37; Connolly, “Comment,” *Horizon* 1, no. 5 (May 1940): 314; Bowen, “Preface,” *Ivy Gripped the Steps and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), x.
35. Stanfield, *Yeats and Politics*, 33.

## A REVIEW OF *IRISH DRAMA AND THE OTHER REVOLUTIONS*

Susan Cannon Harris, *Irish Drama and the Other Revolutions: Playwrights, Sexual Politics and the International Left, 1892–1964* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 280, ISBN 9781474424462.

*Reviewed by Soudabeh Ananisarab*

In *Irish Drama and the Other Revolutions*, Susan Cannon Harris shifts the dominant critical focus on the relationships between the Irish dramatic revival and the struggle for Irish independence, to consider the work of playwrights such as Shaw, Yeats, Beckett, and O'Casey in the context of two other international, rather than national, revolutions. These are the socialist movement emerging in the 1880s and gathering momentum until the 1950s, and the campaign for gender and sexual liberation. Harris's fascinating study of the intersections between these movements and Irish drama succeeds in uncovering some of the ways in which the playwrights discussed operated in "an international network of left organisations, people, parties and states" (5) to present a compelling account of the contributions made by Irish playwrights to modern European drama.

Harris begins in 1894 at the Avenue Theatre with the season of plays organized by the feminist actress Florence Farr and subsidized by Annie Horniman, a wealthy tea merchant who would later fund the building of the Abbey Theatre and establish the first English regional repertory company in Manchester. This season—which initially included Yeats's one-act play *The Land of Heart's Desire* and John Todhunter's lesser-known *A Comedy of Sighs*, and later featured Shaw's *Arms and the Man*—has been well documented by theater historians and Shavian scholars for its status as the first production of Shavian drama outside of private dramatic societies.<sup>1</sup> However, Harris provides an original reading of this event to argue for its role not only in establishing Shaw's reputation as a playwright but also in shaping his entire dramatic approach. Harris rightly insists that Shaw's politics should not be read purely through his associations with the Fabian Society. Situating Shaw's *Arms and the Man* amidst the critical and public reactions to *The Land* and *A Comedy*, Harris introduces one of the main concepts of this book through associating Shaw's early politics with what she identifies as queer socialism: a movement "defined by an insistence on pleasure as both practice and the objective of social progress" (11), emerging from Shelley's "radical *eros*" (23) and later developed by William Morris, Oscar Wilde, and Edward Carpenter. According to Harris, hostile reactions to the depictions of desire between women in the works of Yeats and Todhunter

instilled fear of punishment in Shaw and prompted him to revise *Arms and the Man* and substitute Farr for a more “gender-conforming” actress (12). One of the most fascinating aspects of this chapter is Harris’s reading of Blanche in Shaw’s *Widowers’ Houses*, first performed prior to events at the Avenue in 1892. Through connecting Blanche’s violent behavior to nineteenth-century fears of the masculinization of women and its supposed links to homosexuality, Harris provides a plausible reading of a perplexing aspect of Shaw’s characterization and offers further support for her argument that events at the Avenue marked a significant shift in Shaw’s theater and politics.

In Chapter Two, Harris continues to explore Shaw’s turbulent relationship with queer socialism through examining Shaw’s radical ambivalence about Irishness and utopian desire, which Harris argues were interlinked for Shaw. Using the work of Lee Edelman and José Muñoz, Harris identifies two types of socialist utopias, reproductive futurism and queer futurity, with both of which Shaw associated. Other scholars have previously explored Shaw’s relationship with utopian desire, most notably Matthew Yde in *Bernard Shaw and Totalitarianism: Longing for Utopia*. Like Yde, in her analysis of *Man and Superman* Harris demonstrates Shaw’s acceptance of reproductive futurism in his characterization of Jack Tanner, sentiments that would result in his support for twentieth-century totalitarian regimes. Harris’s intervention into this debate, however, is to argue that in this play, Shaw also simultaneously represents the limitations of a world without space for queer socialism, later highlighting and rejecting Yde’s view of Shaw as “always already totalitarian” (207). Considering the Irish Players’ visit to London in 1904 (that included plays by Yeats and Synge) which depicted an Ireland that had not only resisted capitalism but also the reproductive imperative, Harris then presents *John Bull’s Other Island* as a play in which Shaw rejects his earlier enthusiasm for reproductive futurism as depicted in *Man and Superman*.

In Chapter Three, Harris moves her focus from Shaw to revolutionary Ireland to investigate the representation of syndicalist labor at the Abbey. In this analysis, Harris is not concerned with the most well-known playwright of this period, Sean O’Casey, and instead considers three largely forgotten strike plays: St. John Ervine’s *Mixed Marriage*, A. Patrick Wilson’s *The Slough*, and Daniel Corkery’s *The Labour Leader*. According to Harris, syndicalism incorporated elements of queer socialism in its concept of “sympathetic” action, which implicitly encouraged workers to feel “for and with each other” (102). This link between syndicalism and queer socialism is further extended through the agitational style used by a key figure in the movement, James Larkin. Harris’s analysis of these plays is centered on their connections with Larkin as Harris argues that “Larkin’s theatricality was a source of both inspiration and anxiety to all of the playwrights under consideration” (104). Ervine’s focus on a

working-class family emphasizes heterosexual mixing, as the name suggests, suppressing the potential for homosocial relationships between male strikers. Wilson, inspired by Ervine's play, also adopts the family plot, revealing similar anxieties about the supposed disruptive potential of syndicalism. Harris once again returns to Shaw in her discussions on Corkery to argue that through embracing Larkin's excess, Corkery presents the case for a revolutionary theater receptive to syndicalism's passions, as opposed to the more cerebral model championed by Shaw and dominating the stage of the Abbey at the time.

Chapter Four explores the relationship between the Irish dramatic revival and the propaganda battles fought over the Spanish Civil War. Harris forms connections between the two by considering Brecht's use of elements from Synge's *Riders to the Sea* in *Senora Carrar's Rifles*. Surprisingly for Harris, Synge's Aristotelian play did not specifically interest Brecht for its Irish setting or plot, but rather for the possibilities it introduced in regards to Brecht's evolving thinking about form and style. According to Harris, frustrated by the disastrous Theatre Union production of *The Mother* in New York in 1935 in which Brecht's techniques were either poorly executed by the performers or misunderstood by the audience and critics, Brecht began to pursue alternative ways of dramatizing the radicalization of the working-class mother; a challenge with which Brecht had long struggled. Harris argues that Murya's refusal to express grief in *The Riders* inspired Brecht to refine his use of the V-effekt to create "audience excitement" without empathy that involved "the spectator's involuntary reproduction of the performers' emotion" (150). In other words, Brecht used *The Riders* to create the desired effects of epic theater techniques in *Senora*, a play that in many ways adheres to realistic conventions, and was thus within the technical capabilities of the amateur performers with whom Brecht was then cooperating.

In Chapter Five, Harris continues to investigate the impact of the Soviet Union on modern drama through exploring connections between O'Casey's aesthetical choices and his political affiliations during his red period. Harris undermines earlier readings by key critics including O'Casey scholars David Krause and Ronald Ayling, who dismiss any relationship between O'Casey's drama and his politics to argue that elements of O'Casey's post-realist work are firmly embedded in his exposure to Larkinite Syndicalism and Soviet Communism. Demonstrating a firm grasp of O'Casey's life and works, Harris presents O'Casey's interest in the Soviet Union as based on ideological similarities as well as O'Casey's pursuit of a market for his anti-realist work, previously rejected by Abbey directors. Harris considers O'Casey's relationship with queer socialism, like Shaw's, to be ambivalent. According to Harris, while O'Casey, in dialogue with Larkin syndicalism, adopted excess in his aesthetic style, he also adhered to Soviet orthodoxy through idealizing heterosexual masculinity.

Harris concludes with an Epilogue that extends her study beyond Europe to consider the impact of Irish playwrights on the American Left during the Cold War. In this section, Harris once again takes us out of “straight time” (214) to consider the moment of intersection between Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and O’Casey’s *Red Roses for Me*—both of which received their New York premieres in the spring of 1956—in the work of the queer African-American writer Lorraine Hansberry. Harris provides a detailed close reading of Hansberry’s lesser known *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* to demonstrate Hansberry’s use of the techniques of Beckett and O’Casey to critique what Harris describes as heroic masculinity, “an ideal masculinity founded on an impossible desire for the individual’s heroic resistance to overwhelming forces of control” (220). Through its dialogue with the works of O’Casey and Beckett, Harris argues that *The Sign* enters the future as it points to new forms of activism that are grief-ridden rather than tied to an unattainable heroic masculinity.

This leads Harris to her conclusion, in which she provides a potent evaluation of the relevance of her study to current political issues without simplifying her arguments. Harris connects her study of the intersections between sexual and social politics with the challenges confronting the Left following Brexit and Trump’s election in 2016. She insists that the Left’s response to such events should not be to solely concern itself with the economic troubles of white working-class men, as suggested by some pundits, but to accept that “these revolutions need not and should not be in opposition or in competition” (239). Continuing with her repudiation of world systems paradigms based on evolutionary theory that Harris considers to be “wedded to the developmental logic of capitalism” (5), she further argues that considering the Irish dramatic revival’s internationalism points to new “ways of thinking about global networks and exchanges;” ways that are not stringently tied to “structures of a catastrophically exploitative global capitalism” (239). A thorough discussion of these issues is outside the scope of this book and thus, Harris only cites Mark Lilla’s controversial “The End of Identity Liberalism” as an example of the criticism against the Left she describes. Of course, Lilla is not alone and this critique of the Left is not limited to US politics. For instance, in recent years, Trevor Phillips has presented similar arguments in Britain, insisting that identity politics is no longer concerned with ending discrimination but is about stifling debate, leading to the marginalization of new groups including white working-class men.<sup>2</sup> Responses to these claims in the press have highlighted some of the flaws in a worldview that separates identity and class politics to reinstate already existing gendered and racialized hierarchies. Harris’s study is a valuable addition to this debate as it points the reader to new ways of engaging with and responding to such arguments.

In conclusion, *Irish Drama and the Other Revolutions* is an important study that makes valuable contributions to the debates with which it engages. The wide range of writers and works discussed does not result in oversimplification as Harris demonstrates a firm grasp of Marxist, feminist, and queer theoretical issues as well as relevant historical contexts while offering detailed original close analyses, often in the context of specific productions vividly brought to life through her extensive use of archival research. Consequently, although the range of topics and individuals discussed may mean that not all sections of this study are of direct relevance to the specific research interests of each academic engaging with the book, Harris's methodologies and findings present new ways of considering the relationships between form, content, and historical context in drama and, as her Conclusion states, new directions for thinking about our current social and political landscapes. Harris's writing is engaging and at times refreshingly honest as she avoids overstating or exaggerating the significance of her study and findings. The focus on lesser-known plays is never to establish them as long-lost treasures but rather, as Harris acknowledges and makes clear, to assess the relationships with which she is concerned. Thus, even if one does not agree with or find relevant every reading presented, *Irish Drama and the Other Revolutions* is always highly insightful and enjoyable.

### Notes

1. For instance, see Sheila Goodie, *Annie Horniman: A Pioneer in Theatre* (London: Methuen Drama, 1990), 1–12; Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (London: Vintage, 1998), 170–74; and Rex Pogson, *Miss Horniman and the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester* (London: Rockliff, 1952), 8–10.
2. See Trevor Phillips, “The day I was accused of being racist, I knew political correctness had gone mad,” *Daily Mail*, February 22, 2017. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-4251306/Political-correctness-gone-mad-writes-TREVOR-PHILLIPS.html>



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