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“Becoming a Creatrix: Women’s Religious Roles in W. B. Yeats and Olivia Shakespear”

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Elaine Childs
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my fiancée, Kristian, who encouraged me to finish it even though that meant I had to leave him in Osijek while I returned to the United States. Svaki dan te volim više!

It is also dedicated to my parents, Kathy and Philip, and to my brother, Brock, without whose encouragement I would never have completed this degree.

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I owe special thanks to Dr. Nancy Goslee, who guided me at the earlier stages of this project. Thanks are due also to Dr. Allen Dunn and Dr. Mark Hulsether for serving on my committee and for offering valuable suggestions for future versions of this project.

Abstract

This project is the biography of a symbol: that of the holy woman motif in William Butler Yeats's oeuvre. For most of Yeats's writing life, beautiful women have a place of spurious privilege in his spiritual imagination because they have an intrinsic connection with the divine otherworld. In chapters on Yeats's beauty-worship in his long *fin de siècle*, Olivia Shakespear's critique of that beauty-worship in her fiction, and the role of *A Vision* in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, I argue that Yeats revised the holy woman motif from a limited and limiting goddess or helpmeet role in his youthful work to a full-fledged religious meaning-maker—a Creatrix—in the last decade of his career.

I include a study of Olivia Shakespear's fiction in this project because each of her seven fictional works critiques what she saw as the male tendency from which Yeats's symbology sprang: the tendency to feign worship of a beautiful woman while simultaneously limiting her ability to be a Creatrix. However, the transformation that Yeats's system underwent between the 1925 and 1937 versions of *A Vision* enabled the poet to create a model of religious identity that does not require the erasure of the self and its human desires and therefore makes space in his pantheon for the Creatrix.

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List of Abbreviations of Books by Yeats

A	*Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1956)
AVA	*A Vision: The Original 1925 Version* (New York: Scriber, 2008)
AVB	*A Vision* (New York: Collier, 1937)
CL1	*The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats*, volume one, 1865-1895 (New York: Oxford UP, 1986)
CL2	*The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats,* volume two, 1896-1900 (New York: Oxford UP, 1998)
CP	*Collected Poems* (New York: Scribner, 1983)
CT	*The Celtic Twilight: Faerie and Folklore* (London: Bullen, 1902)
E&I	*Essays and Introductions* (New York: Collier, 1961)
E	*Explorations* (London: Macmillan, 1962)
FT	*Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (New York: Dover 1991)
L	*Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (New York: Macmillan, 1955).
M	*Memoirs* (New York, Macmillan, 1973).
My	*Mythologies* (New York, Macmillan, 1959).
SP	*The Speckled Bird* (New York: Palgrave, 1976)
VP	*Variorum Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1966)

Abbreviations of Other Texts

ALS	John Harwood, *Olivia Shakespear and W.B. Yeats: After Long Silence* (London, Macmillan, 1989)
FL	Olivia Shakespear, *The False Laurel* (London: Osgood, 1896)
JHH	Olivia Shakespear, *Journey of High Honour*, (London: Osgood, 1894)
LML	Olivia Shakespear, *Love on a Mortal Lease* (London: Osgood, 1894)
OSL	John Harwood, ed. "Olivia Shakespear: Letters to W. B. Yeats" (*Yeats Annual* 6 [1988]: 59-107)
OS&Y	John Harwood, "Olivia Shakespear and W. B. Yeats" (*Yeats Annual* 4 [1986]: 75-98.)

Introduction

William Butler Yeats and His Holy Women

W. B. Yeats has long been a favorite of feminist critics because of his sympathy toward women's rights and the New Woman, his collaboration with women like Lady Gregory and George Yeats, his willingness to assume feminine masks, his acceptance and even occasional celebration of nontraditional sexualities,[1] and perhaps most notably because of his association with occult religious practices that, unlike traditional dispensations, seemingly accepted women as full-fledged participants. In fact, throughout the poet's writing life, women possessed a special connection with the divine otherworld: his heterodox religious beliefs not only allowed women like Madame Blavatsky to perform roles of importance within religious organizations, they actually enabled women to possess special religious powers. Granted, Yeats's writings usually only allude to this religious power when they are about beautiful women, but the generalization is nonetheless true that women, for Yeats, were holy.[2]

However, closer inspection of Yeats's symbology, particularly in the *fin de siècle*, reveals a vision of women's religious roles that is far from progressive. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford qualifies Yeats's feminism by writing that "Yeats loved, liked, collaborated with, and respected women—most of the time" (9), and his body of work in the 1890s delineates most explicitly the mythological paradigm that lurks below the exceptions. In these writings, women are impassioned devotees, but they tend to be divided into two classes that I designate Medium

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[1] In 1936 he wrote to Dorothea Wellesley, "when you crossed the room with that boyish movement, it was no man who looked at you, it was the woman in me" (L 868).

[2] Gloria Kline asserts that, for Yeats, woman is the center of everything of value, not only religion: "In all instances—artistic, personal and cultural—the woman at the center provides the image around which the unities that Yeats thought the greatest good could be achieved" (2).

and Minerva: the passive human reflections of the otherworldly and the beautiful, desexualized otherworldly women themselves. Nowhere in Yeats's poetry or prose of this decade can we find a fully humanized woman who is a religious meaning-maker. She must be limited in some way, either by elevating her or by silencing her.

The woman who reoccurred most frequently as a Medium in Yeats's poetry of the *fin de siècle* was Olivia Shakespear, an Edwardian novelist and the poet's first lover. The poems emphasize Shakespear's beauty and sympathy, for it is those qualities that provide a haven for the poet and allow visions of the otherworldly to enter his consciousness. Shakespear's novels tell a different story, however. In them, when a beautiful woman enters into a love affair, her beauty serves her not as a conduit for the divine. Rather it is used as an excuse for a man to put her on a pedestal and idolize her while forbidding her to speak or to accept her sympathy and support without reciprocating. Mary Daly describes this alleged goddess as being, in fact, subordinate to whims of the man who worships her: "Safely relegated to her pedestal, she serves his purpose, his psychological need, without having any purpose of her own" (161). Shakespear's fiction is a message from that pedestal: it explores the plight of the woman upon it, an idol that is worshipped, that is venerated as a goddess or a priestess, but is at the same time trapped and silenced. These novels offer a sustained critique of Yeats's Medium and Minerva by demonstrating the destructive power that those roles posses for the women upon whom they are imposed.

However, this bifurcation of feminized religious roles is not in Yeats's work simply a clumsy mechanism for idealizing women, for they prove to be a function not wholly of the poet's characterization of women but of his understanding of religious identity. As the poet/maker, he

of course has more agency than the female voices and characters he deploys, yet he was restricted by the belief he retained for much of his life that the human self must erase its more earthly desires—most notably, sexual love, but also the proliferation of more mundane daily desires that are inextricable from the human experience—in the interests of the spiritual soul that desires experience of the *other*worldly. The poet believed that self-erasure is a precondition for experiencing the divine otherworld, that human contact with the divine always entails disempowerment of the human. For all Yeats's mythmaking and heterodoxy, in his early work sexual desire is still a sickness, body is still bruised to pleasure soul. His understanding of religious identity in the 1890's disallows any negotiation between the human and the divine, any coexistence of earthly and otherworldly desires. When the human encounters the divine, the human is simply erased. Therefore, once the poet has given religious privilege to women, a sexual relationship with her would make him the disempowered partner, so he must refashion her in such a way as to limit her power and preserve his. His Minerva is divine, so she must remain untouchable; the Medium's special connection to the divine is feminized and passive, emphasizing her secondary status and enabling the poet's religious becoming rather than granting her any special power.

Decades later, however, as the poet worked through the philosophical system that he and George Yeats constructed, with its emphasis on constant exchange between the human and the divine, Yeats arrived at a more sophisticated and fluid understanding of the union of human and divine elements in religious identity. I argue in this project that in the collection of poems that

reached its final permutation in the volume *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*[3] Yeats at last exploits the full potential of elements that had been part of his poetry for over forty years to construct a model of religious identity that celebrates the interrelatedness of human desires and desire for the divine, and thereby frees the women in his poems to be religious meaning-makers. Many critics--Gloria Kline, Samuel Hynes, and Marjorie Howe, to name a few—have pointed out that as Yeats matured his representations of women did as well. I argue, however, that in order to accomplish that change he needed the system that he explored in *A Vision*, for the interpenetrating gyres emblematize the process of constant exchange between the human and the divine that for Yeats superseded the "self-erasure" model of religious identity. When loss of power is not an element of the poet's religious imaginary, women are no longer threatening, need no longer be limited to prescribed roles. Drawing on the writing of Rosemary Radford Ruether, I call Yeats's new holy woman—represented in the poems by Crazy Jane and the Mother of God—a Creatrix, a woman who interprets the otherworld instead of simply symbolizing it or acting as a conduit for it.

In any discussion of Yeats's religious beliefs, one question instantly arises: for a poet of so many beliefs, what exactly *is* religion? Richard Ellmann points out that J.B. Yeats's thoroughgoing skepticism problematized his son's revolt against the older generation, for "The son was thrown into the position of the counter-revolutionary" (23). Baptized and brought up in the Church of Ireland, steeped in both his father's rationalism and the faery stories of Sligo,

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[3] *The Winding Stair* appeared in 1929 as a collection of five poems plus the sequence "A Woman Young and Old"; in 1932 the Cuala Press issued *Words for Music Perhaps and Other Poems*, which contained twenty-two poems plus the "Words for Music Perhaps" ["Crazy Jane"] sequence; and the 1933 volume *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* combined the two previous collections. For the sake of simplicity, my argument focuses on the 1933 volume.

coming to adulthood in the heyday of occult organizations, and author of a system communicated by spirits and explaining personality, history, and the afterlife, Yeats partook of so many different perspectives on the otherworldly that to talk about his "religion" in the singular is impossible unless it is to say that by Yeatsian religion I mean something quite different than what is usually understood by the term, something that John. D. Caputo calls postsecular religion. In the opening paragraph of *On Religion*, Caputo writes that "'Religion,' in the singular, as just one thing, is nowhere to be found; [. . .] the uncontainable diversity of 'religion' is itself a great religious truth and a marker of the uncontainablity of what religion is all about" (1). If this definition is accepted, the Yeatsian "religion" may in fact be divested of its quotation marks. The poet thought of religion in what we would now call postsecular terms, so in this dissertation I use the term "religion" to mean the belief that something exists beyond the limits of everyday human awareness, something that has the potential to interact with human life. That "something" might be the Christian God and Christianity's cast of angels and devils; it might be the dead who speak through mediums or the magical powers studied in the Golden Dawn; it might be the Tir-na-n-og of Irish myth or the Byzantium of Yeats's own system. Yeatsian religion, in fact, is all of the above, and when I use the term it is with the understanding that any monolithic understanding of it is inapplicable to Yeats: what is important is this existence of a world beyond our own that still influences the human.

Without a few terms to generalize about certain facets of Yeatsian religion, however, analysis would be limited to discussing isolated specifics, so I use the terms "the divine" and the "otherworld" to designate different facets of that world beyond. The difference between those two terms is subtle, but it is nonetheless vital. The "otherworld" is a term I use to mean the

entire realm of supersensory reality that surrounds and—visibly or invisibly—penetrates the human world. I might use it therefore to refer to Tir-na-n-og the island or to Tir-na-n-og inclusive of its divine inhabitants. When I use "the divine," however, I refer specifically to a sentient being that exists as part of the otherworld, a being that might be a god, a spirit, a faery, and so forth.

As I pointed out above, the figure of the holy woman is both Yeats's primary symbolic representation of the divine and his conduit for the otherworld, and Minerva and Medium are the names I give this figure's twin permutations. I borrow the word Minerva from Yeats's description of a shared vision he had with Maud Gonne in 1898: "She thought herself a great stone statue through which passed flame, and I felt myself becoming flame and mounting up through and looking out of the eyes of a great stone Minerva" (*M* 134). Until his holy woman symbology of the 1890's began to unravel partly because of that vision, Yeats had imagined Gonne to be a modern-day Minerva: tall, beautiful, virginal (or so he thought), and warlike in her opposition to Ireland's oppression, she seemed to him like a goddess from a more heroic age, fierce and yet gentle. This goddess-figure existed in his mind before he met Gonne, but she gave a face and voice to what had been a shadowy mythological figure, and the Minerva occurs and reoccurs throughout Yeats's writings in the *fin de siècle*, whether poetry, fiction, nonfiction, or drama. The Minerva is for Yeats the human embodiment of the divine: she is holy not because she is a human woman who chooses to maintain a relationship with the divine but because her otherworldly beauty signifies that she is an incarnation of divinity herself. She is the fleshly figuring-forth of the divine, and as such she must be desexualized: were the Minerva to have a sexual existence as well as a spiritual one, her power would be too threatening.

As *The Wanderings of Oisin* demonstrates, the Medium also existed in Yeats's imagination before he met a real woman—Olivia Shakespear—to embody her. The Medium's role is that of a priestess: she is not divine herself, but her sympathetic, submissive femininity allows the divine to speak through her. The divine communiqués might come via acts of spiritualism, like séances or automatic writing, or simply through physical contact as in the poem "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty" or the story "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni." Both Rita Felski and Margaret Mills Harper[4] have pointed out the links between mediumship and the traditional feminine role: the medium is passive, obedient, a blank slate that waits at home to serve the needs of spirits and of seekers alike. Therefore, unlike the Minerva, the Medium need not be virginal, for she does not possess any power of her own beyond that of a passive conduit. In fact, it is preferred that she cares for the poet's sexual needs, that she frees him from the torments of celibacy. Of course, Yeats's conception of the role of the Medium was upset by the automatic writing experiments, a project in which his wife George was not merely a passive conduit but an interpreter and in which the poet himself had to share in the hitherto feminized role of mediumship.

From the aftermath of those experiments emerges the figure of the Creatrix, a word I borrow from Rosemary Radford Ruether's discussion in *Sexism and God-Talk* of ancient goddess religions. Ruether does not define the word but uses it to suggest the creative power of the mother-goddess, the divinity who sometimes is "an impersonalized image of the mysterious powers of fecundity" (48) and sometimes "represents wisdom, the union of divine and human order" (52). Yet, when I adopt the term I do so not to suggest that all women have a necessary,

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[4] See Harper pages 120-122 and Felski, 134.

essential connection to the divine. Yeats would assign divine privilege to beautiful women; Shakespear's fiction suggests that women who possess a certain depth of feeling and intellect are better equipped for the religious quest. In this study, however, I do not use the term to designate a person who has greater intelligence, beauty, wisdom, piety, or any other ability that privileges her to access the divine, nor do I make claims about what characteristics might best equip a religious seeker. Instead, a Creatrix, in this project, is a woman who has chosen the religious quest, who has decided that, although God may be some*one* or some*thing* that she finds or that finds her, religion is something that she makes for her individual self. Regardless of whether that woman is a Catholic like Maud Gonne, an agnostic like Olivia Shakespear, or a member of the Isis-Urania Temple of the Golden Dawn like George Yeats, a Creatrix does not accept wholesale the doctrines of any religious order, even those of an order she professes. Instead, she regards her religious practice as a continual search, or, to use Caputo's phrase, "a desire for I-know-not-what" (25). Her religious identity is therefore predicated on her choice to be a seeker, an interpreter, a meaning-maker.

In some ways, the very nature of the religious sense suggests that limitations are placed on any human's ability to be a meaning-*maker,* for I have already defined religion as the belief that there is something or someone out there to find, a divine that precedes the human's individual search. In particular, both Yeats and Shakespear believed that there is a divine otherworld, a sphere of rightness that exceeds the human, and therefore no human religious meaning-maker works with a blank slate. When I call the Creatrix a meaning-maker, then, I do not mean that she creates *ex nihilo* as if she were herself a goddess of creation. Her role is to interpret the otherworld and to represent its significance in the human realm: her task, then, is

essentially that of the artist, for she figures forth her inspiration, performs it in the mundane world of day-to-day life. She is a theologian whose conclusions may be shared from the pulpit, through the written word, or simply in the way she crafts her life. The Creatrix's role is not new. From Valmiki to Kōbō Daishi to Rick Warren, writers and religious leaders have received, professed, and inscribed religious meaning, connecting the divine realm to the human not merely as passive conduits but as interpreters, artists, and meaning makers. However, those meaning-makers are very rarely women: as Ruether writes, "The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past" (13). Historically speaking, when women—or female characters in texts—speak or write about religion, they usually gain approval and popularity by repeating what they have been taught by the masters. This dissertation seeks to underscore the desirability of a different role by giving it a name and by tracing its emergence in the work of a male poet.

The best Yeats criticism is a story, and here I write a story that would not have been possible if not for the encyclopedic biographies *W. B Yeats: A Life* by R. F. Foster and *Becoming George: A Life of Mrs. W. B. Yeats* by Ann Saddlemyer. Over the past decade, the greatest advances within Yeats scholarship have been biographical and textual rather than strictly critical. This is not to suggest that no good criticism has been published but simply to predict that the next development in Yeats scholarship will arise, as this project does, from works like Saddlemyer's and Foster's as well as from the continued publication of manuscripts and letters like George Mills Harper and Mary Jane Harper's editions of *Yeats's Vision Papers* and John Kelly's *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*. More Yeats-related letters, manuscripts, and

biographical materials are readily available in libraries than ever before, and young scholars now can garner inspiration from such materials without costly and time-consuming visits to archives.

It is my hope that the same will one day be true of the novels of Olivia Shakespear. A graduate student interested in her fiction will find little in the library except for John Harwood's *Olivia Shakespear and W. B. Yeats: After Long Silence*, which is a valuable resource but one that offers only brief and relatively unsympathetic readings of the novels. In order to read all of them I had to travel to Columbus, Winston-Salem, and Austin and to send away for microfilm and for expensive archival photocopies. Making the novels more readily available would encourage study by those who may not have the resources or ability to search them out. These novels should be reprinted not only because Yeats read them and loved their author but because they are worth studying for themselves instead of just as a brief footnote to Yeats's life.

This dissertation is a biography of a symbol. I trace the development of Yeats's holy woman, a figure that is both one and many: as Gloria Kline points out, woman is at the center of all of Yeats's religion, philosophy, and poetics (2), and therefore her role as ordering principle is the same throughout his writing life, but woman received profoundly different treatment in the poetry of the 1930's and in that of the 1880's and 90's. In one sense, then, Niamh and Crazy Jane are the bookends of the poet's development of the holy woman; in another sense they are the same woman at a different stage of her development. It is beyond the scope of this volume—perhaps of any one volume—to trace the details of her evolution over the whole fifty years of Yeats's publishing life. Instead, I study what seem to me to be the pivotal moments in the holy woman's transformation: the *fin de siècle* and the period in the late 1920's and early 1930's when Yeats was revising *A Vision*. Samuel Hynes summarizes the view that, as Yeats's

understanding of real women matured, the women in his poetry did as well when he writes that Yeats's career "begins with conventional stereotyped expressions of sexual attitudes and grows in complexity of understanding right up to the great sexual poems of his old age" (571). This assertion is unquestionable, but it is a biographical generalization, and in this study I am less interested in drawing simple connections—however just—between the history of Yeats's personal life and that of his poetry. Yeats rarely transmuted the real women he knew directly into their poetic correlations but instead fit them into his mythology, revising it along the way, and then gave that mythology a poetic form. In this dissertation I am more concerned with the transformation of myth into poem than with woman into myth.

My first chapter explores what I call Yeats's "long *fin de siècle*"—the fifteen years between the 1888 *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* and the 1902 publication of both *The Speckled Bird* and *The Celtic Twilight: Faerie and Folklore*—and argues that the role of the poet and that of the occult magician are not antithetical for Yeats, as some critics would have it, but complementary. His holy women are iconic in both Yeatsian religion and Yeatsian symbology, but in both cases they are denied any real power: the Medium enables the poet's own religious becoming by connecting him with the world beyond while the Minerva is the representation of the divine, but neither is allowed to explore what religion means to her; neither is a Creatrix. Yeats, I argue, flirts with the notion of voluntary self-erasure by the religious seeker as a vital part of the divine/human relationship, but he as a male magician-poet can assume the pose of one who submits while at the same time retaining power. Like Yeats, John D. Caputo privileges self-erasure in the divine-human meeting, represented by the Annunciation, and through the lens of Caputo's work I explore both the potential value of that self-erasure and

its costs to the holy women in Yeats's writing, figures who cannot simultaneously appear to submit and retain interpretive power. Reading Caputo against Yeats's long *fin de siècle* reveals that both writers underestimate the destructive potential of their mythologies at the same time as they privilege women as religious symbols.

In chapter two I argue that Olivia Shakespear's fiction offers a sustained critique of Yeats's faith in the religious value of beautiful women. In Shakespear's novels, beauty doesn't lend religious power to women but in fact causes them to be put on a pedestal and idolized by their lovers, which of course isolates the idols and disables them from becoming Creatrices. Because she is Yeats's Medium, Shakespear has a unique position from which to critique his symbology, and her fiction underscores the destructive potential of that symbology, a potential that might pass unnoticed in Yeats's poems. Shakespear's own religious faith was even more nebulous than Yeats's: she was a lifelong agnostic, so for her the otherworldly was unknowable and religious conclusions impossible, and yet we know from her correspondence with Yeats that she did believe in the existence of a realm outside normal human perception. Perhaps in part because of her own agnosticism, Shakespear's treatment of that realm is vague, and her fiction is thus more concerned with ethics and morality than religious faith. Each Shakespearean heroine struggles perpetually to define her role as an arbiter of right and wrong in a world that simultaneously worships her and silences her, a task that is complicated by her lack of a religious tradition to follow. Unlike Yeats's later Creatrices, she tends more to create religious meaning *ex nihilo*, and perhaps because of this her conclusions are vaguer.

I return to Yeats in chapter three to argue that the poet's representation of the holy woman was transformed by his and George Yeats's experiment with automatic writing and by

the symbolic system that arose from that writing. It is a critical commonplace that *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* is a profound departure from the preceding volume, *The Tower*: the later volume is more joyful, sensuous, personal. In this study I focus specifically on the volume's holy women who are at last Creatrices, whom Yeats at last allows to make religious meaning instead of confining them to the role of Medium or Minerva. This transformation in the holy woman symbology was enabled by a transformation in the system based on the automatic writing: the version of the phases of the moon that appears in the 1925 version of *A Vision* hearkens back to Yeats's earlier fascination with self-erasure, for the inexorable cycles of divine movement turn without heeding the human beings caught within them. As Yeats revised this symbology between the publication of the 1925 and the 1937 editions of *A Vision*, however, the phases of the moon form a palimpsest with the interpenetrating gyres of the system, permitting the human seeker to enter into a relationship with the divine based on movement and exchange. The religious person need no longer erase herself before the divine, and thus she is able to become a Creatrix.

As Gloria Kline rightly asserts, in Yeats's lifelong search for a religious system and symbology, "he retained the ancient symbolic role of the female" (19). Yeats was a man who liked women, who collaborated with them and learned from them. The "images of women" in his poetry are not always as progressive as a twenty-first century feminist reader would like or as kind as the real women that he based those images on might have wished, but in his canon women are always important and virtually never simplistic. Even the stereotypes of women that Yeats created himself are far more complex and vivid than those Olivia Shakespear denounced in her fiction: in a letter he wrote to her in the 1890's, Yeats critiqued men who profess a passion

for "some girl with pink cheaks[5] whose character they have never understood, whose soul they have never perceived, & whom they would have forgotten in a couple of months" (CL1 396). In that same decade, Yeats himself dramatically misjudged the soul and character of both the women he knew and the women he created on the page, and yet his lifelong willingness to revise his understanding of those women suggests that any feminist critique of Yeatsian gender politics is less comprehensive than the poet's own.

[5] Yeats's spelling.

Chapter One

Minerva and Medium: W. B. Yeats on Keeping Goddesses in Their "Symbolical Place"

How can life be ritual if woman had not her symbolical place?" (A 302)

In the Ireland of William Butler Yeats's early poetry and prose, the otherworldly swarms just beyond waking human awareness and occasionally pierces the limits of that awareness. A villager returning home at night selects his route according to which demon or ghost he wishes to brave[6]; lovers separated by great distance can be literally reunited by dreaming the same dreams[7]; the yoke of English oppression may be lifted by the revelation of a series of mystical Celtic rites; the right voice and words summon faery queens from caves in the earth; and beautiful women steal mortal men away to the Blessed Isle—if they are goddesses—or, if they are mortal, are stolen away themselves by the people of faery. Encounters between the human and the otherworld occur so frequently in Yeats's Ireland that they are divested of their singularity and terror and become downright civil: in *The Celtic Twilight* Yeats writes that "in Ireland there is something of timid affection between men and spirits. They only ill-treat each

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[6] Yeats reports in *The Celtic Twilight*, "To approach a village at night a timid man requires great strategy. A man was once heard complaining, 'By the cross of Jesus! How shall I go? If I pass by the hill of Dunboy old Captain Burney may look out on me. If I go round by the water, and up by the steps, there is the headless one and another on the quays, and a new one under the old churchyard wall. If I go right round the other way, Mrs. Stewart is appearing at Hillside Gate, and the devil himself is in the Hospital Lane'" (25). Unless otherwise noted, page numbers for *The Celtic Twilight* refer to the 1902 edition.

[7] In *Memoirs*, Yeats describes how he would "endeavor to send my soul" to Maud Gonne in Paris when he went to sleep, and that she would sometimes report having similar dreams on those nights (128).

other within reason. Each admits the other side to have feelings. There are points beyond which neither will go [. . .] We—we exchange civilities with the world beyond" (190, 196)

For Yeats, beautiful human women were both the representatives of and the pathways to that "world beyond," but he was not always as civil to those women as to the realm with which they connected him. Religious women in Yeats's long *fin de siècle* tend to fall into one of two types: the passive human mirror of the otherworldly—the Medium—and the beautiful, desexualized otherworldly woman herself, the Minerva. Nowhere in this decade can we find a fully humanized woman who is a religious meaning-maker, for she must be contained in some way, the Minerva by elevating her out of humanity and the Medium by silencing her as an interpreter. Mary Daly has written of the Catholic Church that "there is inexcusable hypocrisy in a species of ecclesiastical propaganda which pretends to put women on a pedestal but which in reality prevents her from genuine self-fulfillment and active, adult-sized participation in society. [. . .] Made to feel guilty or 'unnatural' if they rebel, many have been condemned to a restricted or mutilated existence in the name of religion"[8] (53). Yeats's vision of religion in the 1890's,

[8] Although Daly was writing specifically about the Catholic Church from the position of a Catholic feminist theologian—a position that she of course eventually rejected as untenable—her criticism could apply to Protestantism and to nineteenth-century occult organizations as well. After converting to postchristianity, Daly writes that "the Protestant 'reformers'' treatment of women did not differ dramatically from the words and behavior of their catholic counterparts. Indeed, this remarkable sameness makes the feminist critic of 1975 A. F. wonder to *what* significant social event the term 'reformation' could possibly have referred" (25). For Daly, the particular Christian tradition at hand is largely irrelevant because Christian symbology is intrinsically "gynocidal," and advances toward apparent equality only prevent women's realization that the system is by nature oppressive which is essentially my argument about Yeatsian religion.

despite its heterodoxy, is guilty of the same charges that Daly levels against the Catholic Church. His symbology grants women religious privilege as larger-than-life goddesses or as shadowy facilitators of man's religious experience, never as "adult-sized" participants. Although his writings of the *fin de siècle* privilege women as goddesses and priestesses, and although the occult organizations of which he was a member afforded influence and power to women, his signification of them as symbols in ritual, as whisperers of the otherworldly, simply reformulates the idealizations and restrictions of traditional Christianity as elements of occult spirituality. In fact, Yeats's vision of sexed religious identity uses "his" religious women to allude to what he saw as the unsatisfiable desire of the human whose nature forces him to partake of both the otherworld and this; therefore Yeats's symbology—for all its insistence on feminine religious power and significance—becomes simply a smokescreen concealing a coercive model of religious identities that requires women's religious experience to enable the poet's own: they may be Mediums or Minervas, but never Creatrices.

A definition of either Yeatsian religion or Yeatsian religious identity is very difficult to produce because of the broad spectrum of otherworldly experiences that are found in his work and in his personal lifelong religious quest. A brief summary of these experiences—which have become well-documented elements of Yeatsian lore—will demonstrate the problem at hand. Yeats reports in *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* that, as a child, "I did not think I could live without religion (A 26), so he observed Christianity's church-going and prayer-saying requirements. As a child living with his mother's family in the west of Ireland, Yeats first heard the Irish stories about the "gentry" or people of faery, stories that later provided the material for his collections *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* and *The Celtic Twilight: Men and*

Women, Dhouls and Faeries, as well as many of his early poems. As an adult, he was drawn to the occult as "part of the inevitable reaction against the rationalism and materialism of the Victorian culture" (Fennelly 285), and became a member of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society and then of S. L. MacGregor Mathers' Isis-Urania Temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Unlike many of the other reactionaries of the late nineteenth-century occult revival, however—people that Maud Gonne criticized for their "drab appearance and mediocrity" (Gonne 257)—Yeats had a commitment to spiritualism and the occult that was lifelong, perhaps because, as Virginia Moore believes, "To him it was not a contradiction but an extension of his childhood religion" (28). In 1914 he sponsored Georgie Hyde-Lees's induction into the Order and eventually married her in 1917. Then George[9] took advantage of her husband's interest in spiritual matters in an apparent attempt to salvage a disastrous honeymoon: on October 24, 1917, George attempted automatic writing, and spirit controls took over her hand to reveal, over the course of several years, the philosophic and symbolic system that later became *A Vision*. Yeats records in the 1937 edition of *A Vision* that he "offered to spend what remained of life explaining and piecing together those scattered sentences. 'No,' was the answer, 'we have come to give you metaphors for poetry'" (AVB 8). These metaphors from the automatic writing underpin the great poems of the last two decades of Yeats's life.

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[9] Yeats's poem "To Be Carved on a Stone at Thoor Ballylee" seems to rechristen Georgie because he wanted to rhyme "Gort forge" and "George"; however, his wife had in fact begun to call herself George at least as long ago as the spring of 1914, when she signed her name "George Hyde-Lees" in her copy of *The Crock of Gold* (Saddlemyer 62).

During his long *fin de siècle*,[10] Yeats linked Irishness and Celticness to the possession of a privileged religious sense: "every one is a visionary, if you scratch him deep enough. But the Celt is a visionary without scratching" (FT xi). This privilege seems to conflict with the privilege he gives his holy women, for, by descent, neither of the two women most significant to his religious and romantic life in the 1890's—Maud Gonne and Olivia Shakespear—was Irish.[11] However, Yeats believed that the Irish have the aforementioned comfortable relationship with the otherworldly not simply because of where they were born but because they have the reflectiveness of water, so "Images form themselves in our mind perpetually as if they were reflected in some pool" (*CT* 135) and "We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet" (136). The poems, essays, and stories of this period emphasize the religious value of silence, stillness, and reflectiveness, for through this erasure of the human self the otherworldly is "shown forth" in the material world; when a foreigner possesses these qualities of still water, she may become an honorary Celt.

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[10] Yeats's career is typically divided into early, middle, and late phases that are terminated, respectively, by *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899), *Responsibilities* (1914), and his posthumously published *Last Poems* (1939). Dierdre Toomey argues convincingly that the upset of "early Yeats's" symbolic system occurred in 1898 when Maud Gonne confessed her affair with Millevoye; however, Yeats never wholly abandoned this system but only revised it, and in the 1902 version of *The Celtic Twilight*, as well as the essays that precede that volume, Yeats's thought had not yet undergone enough revision to divide it from his 1890's canon.

[11] One woman is conspicuously absent from this mention of Yeats's "significant others": Augusta Gregory. She does not appear to have figured in the poet's pantheon because, for a holy woman as for a love interest, beauty is prerequisite.

When Yeats refashioned the real Gonne and Shakespear into mythological figures in his poetry, he made them also "Irish": Gonne was his Minerva, a woman of the Sidhe, one of the "beings" that gather about the still water; Shakespear was his Medium, the still water herself.

For the Sligo-reared Yeats, medium-like reflectiveness was also a vital part of his own religious identity. However, some varieties of this religious reflectiveness require less actual erasure of the human than others, and, as a man and a poet, Yeats was more able to walk the fine line between immersing himself in the material world and renouncing his desire for it. William H. O'Donnell argues that Yeats's work in the 1890's foregrounds the poet's struggle to balance the demands of occult Adeptship, which requires the sacrifice of the material world, and poetry, which requires the use of the material world, and concludes that "He preferred art, but refused to condemn Adeptship. The debate, which could only be ended by an exclusive choice between the mutually-contradictory duties of art and Adeptship, continued for so long that Yeats accepted his unwillingness ever to settle it" (O'Donnell 78). According to O'Donnell, both making poetry and experiencing the otherworld involve "showing forth" images, but poetry entails mastery of those images and adeptship submission to them.

However, although this claim highlights a vital, career-long nexus of tension within Yeats's work, it does not fully summarize Yeats's understanding of the relationship between the material world and the "other" world, for it neglects the power of the symbol. The poet believed in a spiritual reality that interpenetrates the human realm: the symbol, then, not only represents and enunciates but as a ritual element literally summons the otherworldly. The poet writes in the 1898 essay "Symbolism in Painting" that "All art that is not mere story-telling, or mere portraiture, is symbolic, and has the purpose of those symbolic talismans which mediaeval

magicians made with complex colours and forms, and bade their patients ponder over daily, and guard with holy secrecy; for it entangles, in complex colors and forms, a part of the divine essence" (E&I 148). The symbol, the material world's conduit of the "divine essence," links the roles of artist and adept because both vocations summon the otherworldly into the human realm by meditating on words and pictures. As Margaret Mills Harper writes, "He meant for his poetry to evoke presences, specifically and powerfully" (249).

Yeats believed in the literal reality of these presences, but in the essay "The Symbolism of Poetry," written in 1900, Yeats not only connects the processes of art and adeptship, he blurs the borders between human emotions, gods, disembodied powers, and the aesthetic elements that evoke them:

> All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and is yet one emotion. The same relation exists between all portions of every work of art, whether it be an epic or a song, and the more perfect it is, and the more various and numerous the elements that have flowed into its perfection, the more powerful will be the emotion, the power, the god it calls among us. (E&I 156-157)

As is typical of Yeats's nonfiction, this passage clusters possibilities and creates associations but will not make definite claims about several vital Yeatsian concepts. Do symbols merely evoke

human emotion, or do they actually summon "disembodied powers"? Does Yeats consider the words "emotion," "power," and "god" to signify different angles of the same entity, or is he simply unsure of their demarcations himself and therefore hesitant to make a claim? Even the most cursory analysis of Yeats's nonfiction highlights one of the problems intrinsic to all Yeats studies: for this poet, "Words alone are certain good" (CP 7) and therefore truth, reality, and meaning exist in the momentary play of language. It is impossible to extract either poetry or religious ideology from the "book" of which they are part: the autobiography and the autobiographical performance; true love and true love's self-conscious mythography; credulity, conscious suspension of disbelief, and skepticism. Yeats studies, then, is a cartography: it maps characteristics and measures distances, but its subject is a landscape in all its unruliness, not a set of clearly demarcated doctrines. Thus, critics like O'Donnell and Ruth Nevo, who observes that "Many, perhaps most, of his poems are debates between self and soul, interior dialogues between Saint and Artist as he and Schopenhauer both conceived them, but with a hard-won victory going to the Artist" (28), draw somewhat reductive conclusions about a body of lore that creates suggestive constellations of meaning rather than allocating decisive victories and preferences, even those that are hard-won.

Clearly, Yeats's religious quest and the relationship of that quest to his other vocation as a poet can only be defined at the risk of oversimplification. However, Alan F. Segal argues that the difficulties involved in defining religion in the abstract may be managed "when religion is broken down into smaller parts. When the ultimate assumptions of a society are articulated in allusive or analogical language, they are designated by a variety of nearly synonymous technical terms—root metaphor, conceptual archetype, or more simply, myth" (3). Over a career in print

that lasted more than five decades, Yeats formulated his "ultimate assumptions" into ever-changing, increasingly complex mythological cycles, but one constant throughout these metamorphoses is the figure of the holy woman. She is an elusive entity, incarnated differently each time the poet wants to represent a new angle of her referent, and yet this holy woman, in the guise of any number of Niams, Marys, Helens, Cathleens, and Shebas, is the conceptual archetype of Yeats's religion. The pursuit and the representation of the holy woman characterize Yeats's performance of religion throughout his life, and therefore his external experience of religion is a search for accurate symbology, a quest for the beautiful, the unobtainable, the otherworldly, and the words to create its iconography. For Yeats, then, religious practice is epiphanic; it shows forth the otherworld that would otherwise be entirely unavailable to humans in a pure form, and he often gives that otherworld a female form. Not all otherworldly entities are feminized in Yeats's canon, but in the Yeatsian symbology women are rarely, if ever, merely human; female figures appearing in the poetry almost always have religious nuances. Even Maud Gonne was an effect rather than a cause of Yeats's obsession with the otherworldly: as Gloria C. Kline writes, when Yeats first met Gonne "She was indeed stepping into a role already prepared in his imagination" (49), for he was casting for her part when she first walked into his father's studio to discuss "The Wanderings of Oisin," the poem of which Yeats wrote decades later in "The Circus Animal's Desertion," "But what cared I that set him on to ride, / I, starved for the bosom of his fairy bride" (CP 347)

The holy women that appear and reappear in Yeats's book of the nineties occur in two distinct roles, and yet they are too complex to be reduced to the familiar polarities of feminine stereotypes: virgin and whore, maiden and mother, anchoress and Joan of Arc. Each of these

holy women, Minerva and Medium, possess features that seem to liberate them from these bifurcated identities by granting them religious power, yet retain insidious and crippling limitations even as they evade the conventional stereotypes. However, it will be useful to begin with a brief discussion of these stereotypes so that the distinctions between them and Yeats's holy women will be clear.

Mary Daly writes that the twin myths of femininity may be summarized as the Eternal Woman and The Girl, and, although the first is the paragon of traditional Christian womanhood and the second is anathema to the Church, they are "two sides of the same mirage" (170). Both Eternal Woman and The Girl are defined according to their sexual relationships, but the Eternal Woman is "virgin, bride, and mother" (153) while The Girl is "of the world of James Bond, of *Playboy*, of advertising" (170). The Eternal Woman is the "good girl": spiritual, mysterious, elevated to a pedestal; The Girl is the "bad girl": material, accessible, publicized. Ironically, the Eternal Woman's elevation does not make her more visible:

> The Eternal Woman is said to have a vocation to surrender and hiddenness; hence the symbol of the veil. Self-less, she achieves not individual realization but merely generic fulfillment in motherhood, physical or spiritual [. . .] She is shrouded in "mystery," because she is not recognized as a genuine human person. (149)

Her identity is defined by her "vocation" to enable man's religious becoming, for, generic, self-effacing, and "Safely relegated to her pedestal, she serves his purpose, his psychological need, without having any purpose of her own" (161). The Girl is not confined or hidden like the Eternal Woman, but her mobility and sexual liberation does not free her from being man's instrument. Daly writes that "The Eternal Woman delights in being relegated to her pedestal,

while The Girl enjoys being used as a footstool. However, if one appears as supra-human and the other as sub-human, the distinction is nevertheless trivial. Both are abysmally, hopelessly, non-human" (171). In fact, humanity and femaleness are wholly incommensurable, for "woman's efforts to become more completely human [are interpreted] as efforts to become 'masculine'" (150).

Yeats's mythical women are, like Daly's, defined by their relationship to men, but they cannot be divided into spiritual and material, sacred and secular: both are holy. I call Yeats's pedestal-dweller Minerva, but instead of being maternal, mysterious, and self-effacing, she is a virgin warrior-goddess, the possessor of otherworldly knowledge. She is a Yeatsian symbol, acting as a material representation of the otherworldy, and as such she *signifies* but does not speak her own meaning. She simply *is* a religious figure, but one that requires male interpretation. Were she to come near enough to be heard or touched, she would destroy man's own humanity, the poet believes, by disabling his interpretive ability, for, as Yeats writes in "The Rose Upon the Rood of Time":

Come near, come near, come near—Ah, leave me still
A little space for the rose-breath to fill,
Lest I no more hear common things that crave,
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave—
The field mouse running by me in the grass,
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass,
But seek alone to hear the strange things said
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,

And learn to chant a tongue men do not know. (VP 101)

The poet invokes the feminized "Eternal Beauty" to "come near," but were she to come too near she would infringe upon his connection with mortality, humanity. Yeats wrote in his note to this poem that he imagined The Rose "as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from afar" (CP 453), yet she does not suffer with him as a partner.

The Medium is, like Minerva, a gateway for the otherworldly, yet her proximity does not threaten the poet's interpretive ability because her job is not to embody religious value but to reflect that value from elsewhere, so she is without religious power of her own. According to Margaret Mills Harper, "Mediums, as it were, stay at home and open windows to allow breezes from the Beyond to blow upon them (120), and thus mediumship "has a pleasing hint of feminized obedience to it" (122). This obedience and passivity does not have the power to infringe upon man's religious superiority like Minerva could, and therefore the Medium is sexually accessible: sexual union with a Medium runs no risk of overwhelming or "feminizing" the male because it merely reinforces his activity and her passivity. These twinned roles demonstrate that women, in Yeats's long *fin de siècle*, may have representative religious power if they are asexual, virginal; they may convey religious power from the otherworld—and also live the life of the body—if they silence their own voices and do not exceed their role as helpmeet. Both roles split and contain women, forbidding any potential unruly desires or innovative perspectives to break into and disrupt the masculine realm of religion.

Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether's work helps imagine an alternative religious identity for women, one which allows them to be full participants without relinquishing the sexual and reproductive elements of their being. Early goddess religions, according to

Ruether, envision the female divine as Matrix, Creatrix, and Redemptrix of the earth. Divinity exists as "the Primal Matrix, the great womb within which all things, Gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings, are generated" (48); as Redemptrix, the Goddess "conquers the dark powers and raises her son-lover from the dead" (50) and participates in "the renewal of life of urban-agricultural society" (52). A Creatrix "represents wisdom, the union of divine and human order" (52). If Ruether's three phases of the ancient Goddess might be melded and chosen by women, the result would be a religious identity/practice for which the female body is normative, neither an object of temptation nor a representative of death; female religious quest is an intrinsic part of communal religious experience; and female creation of new religious meaning is a theological and pedagogical necessity. The difficulty lies in the fusion of practice and identity: any revolutionary personal religious identity for women necessarily has a public dimension because women have always been admitted to have religious being of a sort[12]; what they have been denied is the right to be religious meaning-makers, to forge and practice their own religious identities. Were a woman to claim such freedom she would be perceived, as Daly

[12] Ruether explains that although Christianity traditionally correlates women with "the flesh," it cannot make that correlation intrinsic and permanent without barring them from the Christian religion entirely. Ruether does not speculate on why women were limited without being excised, but my own suspicion is that the appraisal of Christ's redemptive power would have to be drastically curtailed if women were assumed to be unredeemable, so women were identified with fallen nature and their restriction was then explained as punishment, not an admission that Christ's transforming grace was less powerful than original sin. So Luther writes that woman "is like a nail driven into the wall. [. . .] In this way Eve is punished" (202-203). Of course, closer inspection reveals that making women's sanctification a sub-par procedure suggests a limit to the influence of the savior; however ,the history of theology does not attest to this degree of introspection where women are concerned.

points out, as striving to relinquish her femininity and to usurp the masculine role, and in a milieu that offers only those two diametrically-opposed gender possibilities, she would be perverting or denying her (male-assigned) self. The female body is perilous, pregnant with otherness, prone to and provocative of temptation, and as such traditional Christianity either confines women to the functions of the body or grants them admission as an honorary male, alienating them from either their spiritual or physical being.

In spite of Yeats's rejection of institutional Christianity, the attitude that his early writings betray toward religious women is quite similar to Christianity's, demonstrating how deeply rooted his occult beliefs are in the more orthodox dispensations. No young, beautiful women who cannot be characterized as Minerva or Medium can be found in his early work; the implication is that Yeats's symbolic constellation has no room for any other religious identity for women until they are no longer objects of sexual interest. However, men perform a role that suggests the religious power of Minerva and Medium is not only limited but also largely symbolic. Holy women are figureheads of Yeatsian religion, not performers. The masculine religious role that the poet reserves for himself is that of the magician who creates those "symbolic talismans" alluded to before, the ones that entangle, "in complex colours and forms, a part of the divine essence" (E&I 148), who innovates religious ritual instead of only passively existing as a cog within it. Harper writes that "magicians open doors and venture into larger worlds" (120), and this role of religious seeker, religious artist, religious meaning-maker, may belong to men only.

All three roles—poet/magician, Minerva, and Medium—are juxtaposed most plainly in the story "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni," in which Yeats, a male companion, and a young

girl discover a cave by the sea that is a "notable haunt" of the faery people. The male companion plays no real role in the proceedings, and the girl only sees the faeries without being able to issue verbal commands. Yeats asks the girl if she can "see anything" (*CT* 91), which causes her to enter a trance, but she remains silent until Yeats "called aloud the names of the great faeries" (91-92), and then the girl says she can see and hear the faeries dancing. At Yeats's request, the girl calls the faeries out, but they ignore her until, when Yeats himself repeats the summons, the faery queen emerges:

> I asked her to tell the seer whether these caves were the greatest faery haunts in the neighborhood. Her lips moved, but the answer was inaudible. I bade the seer lay her hand upon the breast of the queen, and after that she heard every word quite distinctly. [. . .] I asked her other questions, as to her nature, and her purpose in the universe, but only seemed to puzzle her. At last she appeared to lose patience, for she wrote this message for me upon the sands—the sands of vision, not the grating sands under our feet—"Be careful, and do not seek to know too much about us." Seeing that I had offended her, I thanked her for what she had shown and told, and let her depart again into her cave. (93, 94)

From within her trance, the girl can see and hear, and relate her findings to Yeats, but she herself plays no active role in the proceedings. The queen, on the other hand, possesses otherworldly knowledge, and yet she is evidently at the mercy of Yeats's summons: he calls, and she appears; he questions, and she answers; he dismisses, and she departs. It is unclear why the young girl's mediumship is necessary, because the story suggests that Yeats can see the faery queen, for he calls her "a very beautiful tall woman" (93) and requests in the final sentence, "Tall, glimmering

queen, come near, and let me see *again* the shadowy blossom of thy dim hair" (96, my emphasis).[13] The queen hears his voice, and she can speak directly to him through writing, so it seems that the only thing that Yeats is unable to do is to touch her, for he asks the young girl to do so. Ironically, the implication is that her beauty is dangerous in some way, although in all other respects she seems well under Yeats's control.

The final sentence of the story signifies the ceremonial self-abasement that the magician performs in order to access these Minervas of the otherworld. As acolyte, he mimics their own disembodiedness, transforming his unwillingness to admit the possibility of their physical being into a show of deference and adulation. In spite of this show of deference, the power of the Minerva was profoundly threatening, yet access to her religious significance was necessary for Yeats the magician and poet. In order to maintain the delicate balance between desire and fear, therefore, Yeats's self-erasure before the Minerva entailed sexual self-denial, for he desires her too much to avoid her and fears her too much to give her the power over him that sexual consummation would entail: the poet cannot imagine, at this stage, any other relationship with the Minerva that is not a delicately maintained balance of power. So as not to tip that balance in her favor, the poet must deny her existence as a sexual being.

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[13] This story is identical in the 1893 and 1902 version of *The Celtic Twilight*. However, by the publication of what Edward Hirsch calls the "definitive edition" of the stories that was completed in 1925 and appears in *Mythologies* (1), Yeats can no longer see the fairy queen and must rely on the seeress's descriptions, the male companion has greater abilities as a medium and can hear the fairies, and Yeats omits the final sentence of the story in which he abases himself before the queen as a courtly lover. Each revision suggests that, later in life, Yeats felt compelled to blur the story's sharp demarcations of gender roles in interactions with the otherworld.

The celebration of passionate love in his work seems at odds with this claim, but the key to Yeats's understanding of desire in the 1890's is its symbolic quality, its otherworldly significance. His essay "The Moods" claims that

> Everything that can be seen, touched, measured explained, understood, argued over, is to the imaginative artist *nothing more than a means,* for he belongs to the invisible life [. . .] the only restraint he can obey is the mysterious instinct that has made him an artist, and that teaches him to discover immortal moods in mortal desires, an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passion. (E&I 195, my emphasis)

Yeatsian religion is inseparable from perpetual desire and the endless quest for an unobtainable otherworld, and therefore the satisfaction of physical desire is only truly complete when it is revelatory. Human desire, ambition, and passion may be sublimated by becoming conduits for the "undecaying," but otherwise they are tainted with filth and sickness. Yeats's autobiographical writings highlight the boredom and disgust he associated with sexual passion, whether solitary or shared. He confesses in *Memoirs* that his experiences with masturbation "would make me ill" (125), and Michael, the hero of the thinly-veiled autobiography *The Speckled Bird,*[14] takes a mistress because of "the persecution of sex," but "He sees the poorness of his mistress' nature and dislikes [her] the more because she is devoted to him" (109). Tormented by physical desire, the poet claims to be disgusted by the "common" mechanical means of its satisfaction, but the real source of his disgust was the commonness of his own motivation. The descriptions of these sexual experiences are harsh, and this unpleasantness stems from their failure to connect Yeats with the world beyond. Sexual experience *may* be a holy act

[14] 1896 version.

in Yeats's imaginative framework, but if it does not act as a gateway for divinity, it is preferable for desire to become a persecution rather than a motivation to connect with a woman of "poor" nature. Only through the erasure of ordinary human desire may intercourse become otherworldly and therefore permissible. Thus Yeats set up for himself a terrible catch-22: intercourse with a "poor-natured" mistress was impermissible because it does not connect him with the otherworld; intercourse with a goddess was impermissible because she would then overpower and erase him.

The biographical impetus for this doctrine is obvious. Deirdre Toomey writes that "Yeats no doubt looked forward to sexual intercourse with Maud Gonne" but what he "had in mind in the early 1890's was an *alchemistical* marriage, in which a couple would, as it were, seek the Philosopher's Stone rather than follow the mundane routine of family life" ("Labyrinths" 7). What he got, of course, was exactly that: a "deep-sworn vow," a dream marriage, and a partner in his creation of rites for the Castle of Heroes.[15] Keeping Maud Gonne unobtainable, a symbol for his poetry, is on some level exactly what Yeats wanted, Toomey believes, and yet his sexual self-erasure has a religious dimension that may have an even more pervasive impact on the work than Gonne herself. The 1902 draft of *The Speckled Bird* represents the consummation of the

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[15] In 1895 Yeats first saw Castle Rock, an island castle in Lough Key, and it inspired him to found what became known as the Celtic Mystical Order or the Castle of Heroes, an organization with a dual objective, to "unite the radical truths of Christianity to those of a more ancient world, and to use the Castle Rock for their [men and women active in the Irish cause] occasional retirement from the world" (M 124). This order was essentially an Irish version of the Golden Dawn, and Yeats wanted the rites and rituals of the order to come from vision because "I did not wish to compose rites as if for the theater" (M 124). Maud Gonne was his close ally in the project, and Richard Ellmann writes that she "thought that the order might work for separation of Ireland from Britain in the same way that the Masonic lodges in the north of Ireland were, she believed, working for union" (125).

love between the hero and Margaret, the Maud Gonne character, as only possible if they eloped instead of pursuing a clandestine affair because he believes that their passion must rise above mere hedonism: "Did she want us to be common lovers, like worldly men and women, seeking pleasure? Our love is too great for that" (88). Instead, he wants them to become social martyrs "to all the saints of passion," for "Every desire, every joy had its martyrdom, and by that it was uplifted above the world and became a part of revelation" (89). According to Michael, the pair must suffer hardship and ostracism in order to consecrate sexual love; otherwise, their affair would disconnect from the self-erasure necessary for spiritual revelation and become too satisfying, too purely human. Either lovers are canonized, or they are "common."

Earlier versions of *The Speckled Bird* explicitly liken Margaret to the Virgin Mary, thereby linking the martyrdom of unconsummated love and sexual self-denial to one of Christianity's most-honored interactions of the divine and the human, the Incarnation. Yeats thus transforms the rejection he received from the woman he loved into a religious act: Maud Gonne may have rejected him because she was "a proud woman not kindred of his soul," (CP 200), but Margaret rejects Michael because she is a Minerva, and thus her symbolic function is to erase her own desires in order to achieve holier aims. Michael meets Margaret when she is a child whose beauty is described as otherworldly, and in the 1897 version John de Burgh, Michael's father, gives her[16] a bowlful of lilies and says, "'Look at her. Is she not like the Blessed Mother of God?' and leaning back in his chair, said half to himself, '*Ecce Ancilla Domini*.'"[17] The Virgin was certainly a maidservant who would sacrifice her body and her will

[16] Margaret is named Oonah De Burgh in this draft.

[17] "Behold, the maidservant of the Lord."

to the God who called her "highly favored," which may have seemed at the time to be rather a dubious blessing; in fact, the pregnancy of the Virgin would have brought about the social martyrdom that the adult Michael requires of his and Margaret's relationship. Similarly, Margaret sacrifices her own love for Michael at the behest of her mother, according to Harriet St. George, Margaret and Michael's go-between:

> She married Captain Peters more than a year ago now. I don't think she was ever in love with him; indeed I am certain that she was not. There's only one person that she ever cared about. A woman sometimes does a thing to keep herself from doing something else, and Margaret's mother made her promise to marry a Catholic. (84)

Her sacrifice to religion extends even further: in a statement borrowed from Maud Gonne's rejection of Yeats's own marriage proposal, Margaret rejects Michael because, she says, "I know you would not be able to give up your dreams. [. . .] Oh, Michael, I am only a commonplace woman and you are, I think, a man of genius, and some day you will understand that I am telling you the truth" (50-51). Were she to agree to marry him, he would give up his occult research and become "commonplace," and to prevent this they must both give up their human desires.

In the Gospel of St. Luke Mary's self-erasure is, like Margaret's, not merely the blank slate of a young virgin or even the passive acceptance of suffering, for she verbally and willingly relinquishes control of her body and her future to the divine will: "And Mary said, 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord [*Ecce Ancilla Domini*]; be it unto me according to thy word'" (Luke 1.38). For John D. Caputo, Mary's fiat is the religious emblem *par excellence*, for the ideal religious quest is characterized by a certain loss of self and embrace of "the impossible."[18] Because of

[18] By "the impossible" Caputo means "a reality beyond reality" (15), for

this, willingly becoming a blank slate upon which God may write may be dangerous, but it is the only way to experience religion, for "The religious sense of life has to do with exposing oneself to the radical uncertainty and open-endedness of life, with what we are calling the absolute future, which is meaning-giving, salt-giving, risk-taking" (14). Caputo's interpretation of the Annunciation is a quirky vision of risky, impassioned, experimental "religious sense" in which self-erasure doesn't truly erase the self but rather is a moment of affirmation that creates the gateway to God and to a future of possibilities for the self that says yes:

> When Mary was told by the Angel Gabriel that she would conceive and bring forth a child, the first thing that Mary said, according to the gospel of Luke, was what any expectant virgin mother might be expected to say: "what are you talking about? I guarantee you, that's impossible" (loosely translated). To which Gabriel responded, with characteristic angelic composure, don't worry, "nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). The second thing that Mary says is what made her famous: "here I am," "fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum," in short, "yes, oui-oui" (in Franco-Aramaic). (6)

When Mary speaks the fiat, she emblematizes Caputo's understanding of what must take place when finite humanity encounters infinite divinity: the will of the human is surrendered. The implication of Caputo's emblem is that no other relationship between the human and the divine

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> The religious sense of life kicks in when we are solicited by the voices of the impossible, by the possibility of the impossible, provoked by an unforeseeable and absolute future. Here is a realm where things do not bend to our knowledge or our will and we are not calling the shots. We are out of our element. This is God's element, not ours, the element of the impossible. (13-14)

There is little difference, if any, between Caputo's understanding of "God" and "the impossible"; the two are virtually synonymous.

is possible because the divine is by definition unmasterable and thus cannot experience risk. The divine's is the future that creates the unknowable, but it does not experience not-knowing: the divine is never unaware of future potentialities and therefore is never at risk. The overpowering of human will is not a conscious act of domination by the divine but a result of the ontological difference between the divine and the human: when the unmasterable future of divinity and the masterable malleability of the human collide, the necessary result is the reshaping of the human future. The risk of the relationship, then, is all Mary's, for in order to dialogue with Gabriel, she must eventually submit to not-knowing while being fully known. The only power she has is the power of rejection; she cannot negotiate a less-risky relationship. The only way she can express her own will is to refuse a relationship with the divine. Within that relationship, her will is silenced.

It may be contested that Caputo's nebulous impossible is not the omnipotent willing force of the traditional Christian God and therefore "His" will does not subsume hers because the impossible does not will, strictly speaking: it simply exists as a function of human inability to know and control the future. Moreover, men as well as women must relinquish their wills in order to have a relationship with the divine. The choice that Mary makes, then, is not to erase herself before the divine will but merely to accept her own limitations instead of denying them, which is a wise choice, for her denial would only be an impotent resistance against the inevitable, and this choice is certainly not gendered because a man confronted by the Angel of the Lord—Caputo's example in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* is Abraham—would be in the identical disempowered position. If, however, the Annunciation and fiat are emblematic of religion at its finest, the implications of Caputo's emblem exceed his intentions

and take on a life of their own. Enshrining the fiat as the gateway to the true religious sense[19] presents women with an abject pair of choices: the woman who rejects openness to the other retains agency but sacrifices the possibility of creative exchange with divine otherness; the woman who speaks the fiat retains her role as the one "highly favored" by God, but that role requires her to relinquish any possibility of participating in the creation of her own religious meaning because her "participation" consists of offering her body as a receptacle for the divine plan that was not shared with her and that she cannot understand. Whichever choice a woman makes, she receives her role instead of creating it.

Caputo's model of the fiat is a useful starting point for developing a religious identity for women that affirms them as meaning-makers because, as I argue in the third chapter, its affirmation of risk breaks down the fortress of traditional, patriarchal religion. Moreover, the mere suggestion that women should have secondary roles in the important business of religious meaning-making would be rejected by Caputo outright, and it is clear that men as well as women may only experience religion by accepting Mary's "feminized" role. In short, his emblem does not categorically enforce gendered religious roles. However, it does enforce those roles symbolically, for the woman's role in Caputo's emblem is to receive and submit, not to create, and the assignment of this part to a woman, however allegorically it is intended, cannot yet be divested of the oppression caused women when their submission was prescriptive rather than metaphorical. As the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf has pointed out, feminist thinkers have

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[19] Caputo writes that "We may and need to have many religions, and many 'sacred scriptures,' so long as all of them are true" (110); truth means "being truly religious, truly loving God" (111), or, in other words, lunging toward the impossible.

just cause for objecting to a doctrine of self-erasure ("self-giving," in Volf's terminology) because the costs of such generosity have always been higher for women:

> Giving was what women, as mothers and wives, were supposed to do so that men, as sons and husbands, could do all the taking. Many women tend to give so much of themselves that they are in danger of being left literally without a self. In response to such suspicions, one could argue that the problem does not lie in "self-donation," but in that men conveniently exempt themselves from the demands they place on women. [. . .] What some feminist thinkers object to is not so much the *idea* of self-donation, but that *in a world of violence* self-donation would be held up as the Christian way. (25-26)

The purpose of Volf's argument is to show that inter-human relationships should be based on reciprocal self-giving, but his caveat is still germane to Caputo's model of the divine-human relationship. Reciprocal or "equal" self-erasure can never signify in the same way to parties whose experience of self is so profoundly disparate.

Therefore, Caputo's model remains unsatisfactory because of its neglect of the real historical position of western women vis-à-vis religion: what may appear to be an adventurous reversal for a man becomes, for a woman, merely a repetition of her traditional religious role of silence and loss of self. Moreover, women have historically been excluded from theological projects and ecumenical as well as local religious leadership; as Ruether writes, "The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past" (13). Although women have more influence now than in previous generations, the wild popularity of the 2005 inspirational book *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's*

Soul,[20] by John and Stasi Eldredge, that claims all women have only three core desires—to be romanced, to be part of a great adventure, and to be "the beauty"—suggests that the actual experience of religious women has not transformed mainstream Christianity. The Eldredges claim that when a woman denies that these desires are the most fundamental of her feminine soul, it is only the effect of the wounds in her heart caused by being unloved; unsurprisingly, although Stasi is touted as coauthor, close inspection of the book reveals that most of the text was written by John. Caputo's valorization of the fiat does nothing to overturn this silencing of women in the name of religion; instead, it assumes interchangeability of male and female in an arena where that has never been the case.

Yeats's passion for the occult placed him in a religious subculture that mirrored the false sense of equality Caputo's fiat suggests. In the late nineteenth century, the rise of magical and occult organizations seemed to give women an empowering alternative to the traditional faiths; as Elizabeth Butler Cullingford writes, "The perceived irrationality of occult investigation marks its practitioners [including men] as 'feminine'; and many of Yeats's theosophical colleagues were women seeking new sources of power in a religious organization that did not bar them from office because of their sex" (6). However, Rita Felski points out that allowing women a role—even a role of authority—within occult experimentation did not revolutionize the oppressive symbolic system that underpinned even nontraditional religious practice:

> This circumvention of gender norms rarely took the form of a direct attack on the status quo. On the contrary, spiritualism granted women a privileged status as mediums only in

[20] The authors estimated in the spring of 2008 that the book had already sold over a million copies (personal communication).

> order to reaffirm the connection between femininity, passivity, and the renunciation of self. As a cultural arena riddled with social and sexual tensions, it thus both undermined and reinforced Victorian conceptions of womanhood. (134)

Like Mary, mediums were essentially passive conduits for the otherworldly, not co-creators; like Stasi Eldredge, mediums were not coauthors but the mouthpieces of their masters. Moreover, occult practices were not considered by many of their adherents to be wholly distinct from the traditional faiths. One of Yeats's early critics, Virginia Moore, not only argued for Yeats's Christianity but believed that George Yeats agreed with that assessment (431), which deeply troubles the assertion that occult religion either subverted the silencing of women on religious grounds or disrupted strictly-gendered religious roles, since many of its practitioners regarded it as an extrapolation rather than a subversion of more orthodox faiths. As such, it was an arena where women could have practical influence on the creation and performance of religious meaning as well as on the governance of a religious organization, but one that remained private and had a dubious public reputation. Not only did occult organizations not actively subvert traditional religions, they provided an outlet for religious discontent that otherwise might have been channeled in more revolutionary directions.

Instead, occult practice required its adherents to advertise themselves as recipients rather than makers of religious truth. While it is certain that some women gained power by membership in occult religious organizations—Madame Blavatsky is a noteworthy example—and that these organizations were more inclusive than traditional dispensations, the proper relationship of the human and the otherworldly was still performed as the overwhelming of the human by otherworldly force, the search by the human for truth wholly outside herself.

Blavatsky, for example, claimed to receive instructions from her "masters" in Tibet in the form of supernaturally-delivered letters that fluttered down from her ceiling. She founded and led the Theosophical Society, yet her authority still had to be confirmed by an exotic, far-distant panel of (male) mystics. The use of an unverifiable and unknown adept to legitimize occult truth was not merely a concession to the submissive role that women were expected to follow but a feature of occult societies' need to legitimize their access to the otherworldly, for the male founders of the Golden Dawn also claimed to have a "source" for their inspiration.[21] However, this tendency to cloak religious creativity and interpretation in some invisible—and yet human—authority reiterates the exclusivity of traditional religions. The devout could not appear to be meaning-makers because truth comes from elsewhere. Therefore, Yeats's allegiance to the occult left women's religious roles unchanged in his creative imagination because although the "feminine" role of passivity and submission was expected of men as well as women, those men still possessed greater public influence and freedom than their sorors, and therefore their "passivity" was freely chosen and not as pervasive. Although some practitioners were able to transcend the feminized role and be recognized as interpreters of the otherworldly, most members of the occult rank and file did not have that privilege. Leaders like Blavatsky and Mathers possessed creative control over their respective organizations, so they were able to take back the authority with one

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[21] The three founders of the Golden Dawn, S. L. MacGregor Mathers, W. R. Woodman, and William Wynn Westcott, allegedly discovered an ancient Rosicrucian manuscript that let them to correspond with "Fräulein Anna Sprengel," a German adept who authorized them to found the Isis-Urania Temple of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Current leaders of the Golden Dawn confirm that Sprengel was almost certainly a fabrication: Chic and S. Tabitha Cicero observe that "once the mythical Soror SDA [Sprengel] had served her purpose, she conveniently died."

arm that they appeared to shed with the other, but their own power could not upset the ideology of submissiveness that their organizations preached.

In his poetry, Yeats often modeled his role in relationships with women as one of self-abasement, powerlessness, and servitude, and yet, as the writer of these poems, his power was absolute: like Blavatsky and Mathers, he retained the authority that he claimed to relinquish. This observation may, of course, be made of any writer, but it takes on special immediacy in Yeats's case because the holy women in his poetry are overdetermined with referents. As a poet who drew upon autobiography, mythology, and religion to craft a stable of symbolic "circus animals," Yeats brought forth a body of work that, when it deploys certain figures, unleashes a constellation of memories and associations, and this quality makes his Helens and Maeves and Marys take on a life of their own in a way that few, if any, of his male figures do. Readers of Yeats's work cannot overlook his canon's lifelong search for truth[22] or the twin roles of women in the early decades of that search. They are symbols of truth or conduits for it, but never participants in the quest. And thus Yeats's poetry in the first decade of his publishing life creates a pantheon of goddesses that the poet persona appears to worship but whom he had actually conscripted into service.

Yeats's Minerva and Medium are—as love interests either unobtainable or unsatisfactory—the representations of the conflict inherent in the dual nature of the human. Both mortal and immortal, body and spirit, desirous of both the flesh and the divine, the human being is doomed to an existence of unsatisfied desire because it is connected to both the otherworld and this one. Yeats writes in "The Celtic Element in Literature" that

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[22] Truth in Caputo's sense of the word.

> Men did not mourn merely because their beloved was married to another, or because learning was bitter in the mouth, for such mourning believes that life might be happy were it different, and is therefore the less mourning, but because they had been born and must die with their great thirst unslaked. (E&I 182)

The task of the Medium and Minerva is to represent this unslaked thirst, this Yeatsian belief that even if a human could obtain satisfaction for all his desires, his satiety would be destructive instead of restful. When a human is "glamoured" to fairyland, his—or her—life in that otherworld leads also to his own destruction because he is "happy enough, but doomed to melt out at the last judgment like bright vapour, for the soul cannot live without sorrow" (CT 95). Mortal desires may be satisfied there, but only at the expense of humanity itself. Once again, for the human to experience the divine, she or he must submit to self-erasure.

Female beauty, sexuality, and reproductivity lure the otherworldly and cause tragedy in the life of a human man: the Medium has a "poor nature" because of the very qualities that make her desirable, her care for man's sexual needs and the temptation she offers the otherworldly to sweep in and erase her humanity. The cost of being glamoured away is part of the reason that O'Driscoll's beautiful new bride Bridget in "The Host of the Air" and "Kidnappers" tricks him into playing cards instead of joining her while she is carried off by the people of faery, but the texts also cast her as culpable in the couple's destruction. O'Driscoll falls in with a party of faeries, not realizing what they are, and sees his bride Bridget with them. "His bride, when she saw her old love, bade him welcome, but was most fearful lest he should eat the faery food, and so be glamoured out of the earth into that bloodless dim nation, wherefore she set him down to play cards with three of the cavalcade," and her fear for him appears to be selfless, for "bloodless

dim nation" seems pejorative here.[23] He plays in a dreamlike state "until he saw the chief of the band carrying his bride away in his arms," and when he returns home O'Driscoll finds Bridget's dead body (*CT* 101-102). In both the poem and the story, O'Driscoll is consigned to games of chance while otherworldly powers steal away the soul of his beloved, which implicates her and her beauty in his misery and her soul's damnation. Yeats links sex, death, and faeryland too closely for comfort here, for he points out that "a new-wed bride or a new-born baby" are the favorite targets of the faeries (95). In spite of the connection between fairyland, death, and loss of the human soul, the thirst for it remains, for "every one is a visionary, if you scratch him deep enough" (FT xi), and, like the man who dreamed of faeryland, doomed to unsatisfied desire, one way or the other:

> He slept under the hill of Lugnagall,
> And might have known at last unhaunted sleep
> Under that cold and vapor-turbaned steep,
> Now that old earth had taken man and all:
> Were not the worms that spired about his bones
> A-telling with their low and reedy cry

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[23] In fact, Yeats reports in the notes to *The Wind Among the Reeds* that another glamoured woman was grateful to be rescued from the otherworld and had been fearful that her husband might be trapped there as well:

> She spoke often of the grand things she saw underground, and how she used to have wine to drink, and to drive out in a carriage with four horses every night. And she used to be able to see her husband when he came to look for her, and she was greatly afraid he'd get a drop of the wine, for then he would have come underground and never left it again. And she was glad herself to come to earth again, and not to be left there. (84).

Of how God leans His hands out of the sky,

To bless that isle with honey in His tones,

That none may feel the power of squall and wave,

And no one any leaf-crowned dancer miss

Until He burn up Nature with a kiss;

The man has found no comfort in the grave. (*VP* 128)[24]

Haunted by mortality and immortality, desire and dreams, in Yeats's mythology the mortal man is incapable of satisfaction, for in death as in the Country of the Young, desire is stopped without being satisfied, and in life the very qualities that make a woman desirable make her dangerous. Thus, the perpetuation of desire itself is for Yeats the definitive characteristic of the human.

When the Medium presents herself to the human, she appears to offer the reconciliation of his conflicted nature because her body is the sublimation of his human desire and her dowry is the satisfaction of his spiritual desire. When Niam[25] the daughter of Aengus, the Irish god of love and ruler of Tir-na-n-og, professes her love to Oisin the bard of the Fenians, her love entails not only her beautiful appearance but the peaceful and luxurious otherworld that awaits her consort:

Her eyes were soft as dewdrops hanging

Upon the grass-blades' bending tips,

And like a sunset were her lips,

A stormy sunset o'er doomed ships. (VP 2-3)

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[24] This poem, like much of Yeats's early work, was heavily revised by the poet over the course of his life. Unless otherwise noted, I have chosen to use the earliest printed version of each poem.

[25] The name is spelled Niamh in later versions, but in this chapter I retain the spelling from the first edition.

‘Oisin, thou must away with me

To my own kingdom in the sea—

Away, away with me,’ she cried,

To shores by the wash of the tremulous tide,

Where the voice of change is the voice of a tune,

In the poppy-hung house of the twilight fluted;

To shores where dying has never been known,

And the flushes of first love never have flown;

And a hundred steeds, tumultuous-footed,

There shalt thou have, and a hundred hounds

That spring five paces in their bounds,

No mightier creatures bay at the moon;

And a hundred robes of the softest silk,

And a hundred calves, and a hundred sheep

Whose long wool whiter than sea-froth flows;

And a hundred swords and a hundred bows,

And honey, and oil, and wine, and milk,

And always never-anxious sleep;

And a hundred maidens wise and young,

And sweeter of voice than the pleasant birds,

And swifter than the salmon herds;

And a hundred youths, whose limbs are strung
In a vigor more than mortal measure,
And floating-haired and proud in strife;
And thou shalt know the immortals' leisure,
And I be with thee as a wife.' (VP 5-6)

Although the choice and the pursuit were hers, and she is herself the daughter of a god, Niam's proposal casts her as the less-powerful party because it was Oisin's prowess in battle and fame as a bard that summoned Niam from the Country of the Young. In a manner of speaking, she is the one who was glamoured, for, like the faery queen in the sea-cave, this goddess was called forth by the words of the poet-magician:

'Good reason have I for my love,'
She said; 'for he is fair above
All men, and stronger of his hands,
And drops of honey are his words,
And glorious as Asian birds
At evening in their rainless lands.
Full many bowing kings besought me,
And many princes of high name.
I n'er loved any til song brought me
To peak and pine o'er Oisin's fame.' (VP 4)

Her love is therefore unthreatening, but these passages allude to the transitory nature of Oisin and Niam's happiness, for her lips are like "a stormy sunset o'er doomed ships," an image that

succeeds because of its painterly evocation of finitude—the loss of time, day, life, quest and possessions—if not for the descriptiveness of its simile. Niam's proposal may have seemed to present her as simply a hero's wage, but in fact it is her country to which the pair are going, a country that is uninhabitable for a human unless he relinquishes his humanity, and like Michael's soon-rejected mistress in the first draft of *The Speckled Bird*, Niam will come to seem unworthy of that price.

In fact, as Niam and Oisin travel to the Country of the Young, they are passed by "phantoms [. . .] emblematical of eternal pursuit" (*E* 392), pursuit that Oisin abandons for faeryland:

> On, on! and now a hornless deer
> Passed by us, chased of a phantom hound
> All pearly white, save one red ear;
> And now a maid, on a swift brown steed
> An apple of gold in her tossing hand;
> And following her at a headlong speed
> Was a beautiful youth from an unknown land.
> 'Who are the riding ones?' I said.
> 'Fret not with speech the phantoms dread,'
> Said Niam, as she laid the tip
> Of one long finger on my lip. (VP 8)

Oisin's question essentially asks the nature of perpetual quest and unsatisfied desire, but these are forbidden topics for the faery bride in whose country desire is instantly sated and no quest

has the possibility of failure. The future that Niam promises Oisin contains the seeds of its own destruction because she offers bows, spears, and mighty youths at the same time as the absence of the tumult and strife that necessitate weaponry and physical prowess: the youths may follow Oisin's horn, but the success of the hunt is never in question. Even the qualities of Oisin that allured Niam are contingent upon his mortality and his existence in the strife-ridden human world, i.e., the fame, wisdom, and battle prowess that provide the material for his stories. The Oisin of the Fenians whom Niam loves will essentially evaporate in the Country of the Young. She appears to be aware of his oncoming satiety, and yet she keeps this knowledge from him, for the threat inherent in the Medium is her ability to anesthetize and mislead for the purpose of her own sexual satisfaction.

As a mythological poet-hero, Oisin is characterized by chance and quest, which are the two elements of the human that cannot exist in faeryland. Both propelled by risk and desire,[26] the deer/hound and maid/youth pairs characterize the doomed courage that Yeats thought of as the stuff of Celtic art, for

> Life was so weighed down by the emptiness of the great forests and by the mystery of all things, and by the greatness of its own desires, and, as I think, by the loneliness of much beauty; and seemed so little and so fragile and so brief, that nothing could be more sweet

[26] What I call chance and quest here may be likened to the Chance and Choice of Yeats's later symbology, the antithetical pairing of fate and agency that he called in *The Vision Papers* "the first cause of the animate and inanimate world" (790). The radical difference between the early and late usage of the pair is that Yeats's early spiritual explorations suggest that the human trades both agency and fate for a timeless, changeless perpetuity when he enters the otherworld; the work that derives from the automatic writing suggests that the "faeryland" of the afterlife actually *reconciles* rather than erases these "first causes."

> in the memory than a tale that ended in death and parting, and than a wild and beautiful lamentation. (E&I 182)

In the Country of the Young, on the other hand, "Everything that's sad is wicked—" (VP 13), but since the human soul "cannot live without sorrow," the soul either dies, becomes "wicked," or relinquishes the perpetuity of faeryland for the risk and desire of humanity. As a Yeatsian poet-hero, Oisin chooses chance both in his earthly life and the afterlife, for he leaves Tir-na-n-og when he finds a broken lance on the shore and weeps, "Remembering how along the plains / Equal to good or evil chance / In war, the noble Fenians stept" (VP 17), and in the final lines of the poem assures St. Patrick that

> when life in my body has ceased—
> For lonely to move 'mong the soft eyes of best ones a sad thing were—
> I will go to the house of the Fenians, be they in flames or at feast,
> To Fin, Caolte, and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan, Lomair. (VP 52).

Life's riskiness is for Oisin actually less dangerous than faeryland because the comfort and safety of Tir-na-n-og may protect his body, but they destroy the elements of his nature that he values most.[27] The poem proves Oisin's heroism not merely because he chooses death and

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[27] Obvious parallels may be drawn here between "Oisin" and Schopenhauer's vision of the world as a realm of perpetual lack, desire, and boredom and therefore suffering, for the poem was written about the same time that Yeats is believed to have first read *The World as Will and Representation*. Although Schopenhauer's thought had a profound influence on the poet, Nevo points out that "Where Schopenhauer makes his peace with the wretchedness of existence, Yeats never does" (28). In fact, if the application of the philosopher to "Oisin" were too doctrinaire, we would be forced to conclude, as Robert Howard Allen does, that St Patrick is Schopenhauer's saint, the hero of renunciation and possessor of Unity of Being (283), when in fact the risk-taking warrior-bard is clearly Yeats's

perhaps hell in order to preserve his character but because that choice and its valuations are his to make.

This choice, the ability to create and enact their own relationship to the otherworldly, is precisely what Yeats denies his Medium and Minerva even as he uses them to enable his own religious rites; he consigns them, therefore, to an essentially dehumanized state like that of Bridget O' Driscoll. This dehumanization, as well as the distinctions between the twin roles themselves, is most salient in Yeats's 1899 volume *The Wind Among the Reeds*: as many critics have pointed out,[28] the love poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* are addressed to two different female figures, the unobtainable divine beloved and the sexualized mortal beloved, or, respectively, Maud Gonne and Olivia Shakespear.[29]

Maud is clearly a Minerva in these poems: divine, unobtainable, beautiful, virginal, and therefore threatening, the Minerva is here at her least complex and most culpable. She is divine, but the poet castigates her for her very divinity, focusing more on the homage he pays her than the qualities in her that deserve that homage:

And therefore my heart bows down anew,

At hush of evening till God burns Time

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ideal. Virtually no criticism exists that explores the complexity and longevity of Yeats's relationship with Schopenhauer's thought; such a study is beyond the scope of this project but would be a valuable prolegomenon to it.

[28] Toomey and John Harwood, for example.

[29] In order to distinguish between the "Maud" and "Olivia" of Yeats's poems and the real women to which those figures refer, I call the characters in the poems by their first names and the women themselves by their entire or last names.

Before unlabouring stars and you. ("Aedh Tells of the Perfect Beauty," *VP* 164)[30]

I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams. ("Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven," *VP* 176)[31]

'I've cap and bells,' (he pondered),
'I will send them to her and die' ("Cap and Bell," *VP* 160)

The speaker in these poems offers the Minerva his dreams, his rhymes, his endless adoration, and even his life, but *The Wind Among the Reeds* does not focus on her divinity as explicitly as the

[30] This poem's unusual publication history is especially provocative with respect to the dividing of the poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds* into Maud and Olivia groups. The poem was originally published in *The Senate* as the second stanza in a poem titled "O'Sullivan the Red to Mary Lavell"; the first stanza was the poem later called "A Poet to His Beloved" a poem that Harwood calls "clearly a poem to Olivia Shakespear" (72) and that can probably be identified with the poem Yeats had reported as written for Olivia (M 86). The next week the poems appeared separately in *United Ireland* with the following comment: " Mr. W. B. Yeats writes to us to say that the page last week, quoted from *The Senate*, 'got a good deal on his nerves' when he saw it in the journal. His proof-sheets, he says, miscarried and so the result. The following is the correct version of poem [sic], or rather poems" (quoted in VP 164). Since Harwood points out that poems mentioning eyelids (later versions of "He Tells of the Perfect Beauty" begin "O cloud-pale eyelids, dream-dimmed eyes") belong to the Maud grouping, it is not unlikely that Yeats's nerves were troubled by the fusion of a Maud and Olivia poem beneath the same title.

[31] This poem remained virtually identical from its first to last printing. Considering how greatly other poems in the volume have been revised, this poem's preservation suggests its importance to Yeats.

poems of Yeats's previous collection *The Rose*[32]; instead it foregrounds the poet's despair at her distance from him, and this despair enables him to forge a more profound connection with the unseen otherworld. In other words, the abjection that he assumes because of her repeated rejection forces the poet into a more submissive—and thus receptive—position. If religion is unsatisfiable desire, eternal quest, and submission to chance, then the endless pursuit emblematized in *The Wind Among the Reeds*' Maud poems marks her as a Minerva that enables male religious becoming by denying him. In fact, the poet's frustration leads him to wish for the utter destruction of the mortal world that forces perpetual desire upon humanity:

> Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns?
> I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;
> I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of Thorns;
> And I have hatred and hope and desire and fear
> Under my feet, that I follow you night, and day.
> A man with a wand of hazel came without sound;
> He changed me suddenly; I was looking another way;
> And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;
> And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.
> I would that the Boar without Bristles had come from the west
> And rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky,

[32] See especially the poems "The Rose of the World," "The Rose of Peace," and "The Countess Cathleen in Paradise."

> And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest. ("The Desire of Man and of Woman," *VP* 153)

Here Yeats transforms himself and Maud into the symbols from *The Wanderings of Oisin* of the perpetual desire of humanity that cannot exist in faeryland. But now, apparently worn down by this desire, Yeats longs for self-erasure—for fiat—instead of choosing to canonize the poet-hero who opted for desire and chance instead of eternal peace. His own self-erasure, however, does not signal her empowerment, for it forces the fiat upon her as well.

In fact, the speaker in *The Wind Among the Reeds* demands from his beloved the silence, peace, and passivity that is incommensurable with her divine nature. Throughout the volume, the poet struggles with the desolate and destructive force of the wind, which Yeats's notes say is used "as a symbol of vague desires and hopes, not merely because the Sidhe are in the wind,[33] or because the wind bloweth as it listeth, but because wind and spirit and vague desire have been associated everywhere" (WR 86):

> I wander by the edge
> Of this desolate lake,
> Where wind cries in the sedge,
> *Until the axel break*
> *That keeps the stars in their round,*
> *And hands hurl in the deep*
> *The banners of East and West,*
> *And the girdle of light is unbound,*

[33] In the note for "The Hosting of the Sidhe," Yeats writes that "Sidhe is also Gaelic for wind" (WR 65)

Your breast will not lie on the breast

Of your beloved in sleep. ("He Hears the Cry of the Sedge," *VP* 165)

He calls himself "a hater of the wind" ("Song of Mongan"),[34] yet he admits in other poems that his mistress's nature is as wild as the natural world that he reproves. However, the wildness of her nature is, he believes, subject to transformation, and he is convinced that such a change would result in his happiness and her well-being:

Encircle her I love and sing her into peace,

That my old care may cease, [. . .]

Great Rulers of the stillness, let her no longer be

As the light on the sea,

Or as the changing spears flung by the golden stars

Out of their whirling cars

But let a gentle silence enwrought with music flow

Where her soft footsteps go. ("The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers," *VP* 174-175)

Kline observes that "Yeats never denied the presence of independent intellect in women, but he did for the greater part of his life see it as a threat to the woman, principally as a threat to her greatest good, her symbolical place as unifying image" (3). Yeats's distaste for Maud Gonne's political agitation and her passion for the Irish people—"He hated crowds," Gonne wrote (27)—made him refer to her in later years as someone who had, "Because of her opinionated mind," traded "every good / . . . / For an old bellows full of angry wind" (CP 189).

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[34] The title in *WR* is "Mongan Thinks of His Past Greatness."

And yet his desire for her to achieve peace and "gentle silence" led to wishes that were more sinister than simple prayers to "Dim Powers":

> Were you but lying cold and dead,
> And light were paling out of the west,
> You would come hither, and bend your head,
> And I would lay my head on your breast;
> And you would murmur tender words,
> Forgiving me, because you were dead;
> Nor would you rise and hasten away,
> Though you have the will of the wild birds,
> But know your hair was bound and bound
> About the stars and moon and sun:
> O would, beloved, that you lay,
> Under the dock-leaves in the ground.
> While birds grew silent one by one. ("Aedh to Dectora, *VP* 175-176")[35]

The beloved has become so uncontainable and menacing that only her death can restore proper order for the poet, so the speaker longs for his mistress's passivity, accessibility, and symbolic

[35] It may be contested that this poem was inspired by Olivia, not by Maud. Usually when a poem in this volume refers to masses of hair, it is an Olivia poem; also, it may be that Yeats needed Olivia's forgiveness more than Maud's. However, I group this with the Maud poems because the end of his relationship with Olivia was caused by his reluctance, not hers, and when Yeats likens a woman to a willful wild animal, it is almost always a reference to Maud or Iseult Gonne. Moreover, this poem underwent very little revision, which tends to be characteristic of the Maud poems.

utility to such a degree that he wishes for her agency and independence to be erased not metaphorically but literally. Her death would lead to the couple's spiritual union—which Yeats and Gonne did accomplish in dreams and visions—and she would be incorporated into the natural world and transformed into an easily-manipulated symbol for poetry.

The Olivia poems, on the other hand, showcase a Medium who *is* passive and accessible and whose beauty is not that of a wild bird but one that, "dark and still, had the nobility of defeated things," and that could provide sanctuary for the poet who writes, "if I could not get the woman I loved, it would be a comfort even for a little while to devote myself to another" (M 85). Shakespear provided Yeats an outlet for religious, aesthetic, and sexual urges that had long been in conflict, for her mediumistic role in the poems suggests that she instigated a "new and improved" version of the Medium: like the later vision that so disrupted Yeats's symbology, that of the flame and the stone Minerva, the Olivia in the poems opens the poet's eyes to otherworldly truths because of her sexual and religious receptivity, yet, unlike Minerva, she is soft and unthreatening because the religious truth she reveals to the poet is not a result of her own wisdom but of her passivity and sympathy. Unlike the woman in the Maud poems, it is possible for her to achieve spiritual union with the poet, unity with the natural world, and symbolic utility without having to be killed off:

> If this importunate heart trouble your peace
> With words lighter than air,
> And hopes that in hoping flicker and cease: [. . .]
> Then cover the pale blossom of your breast
> With your dim shadowy hair,

And trouble with sighs for all hearts without rest

The rose-heavy twilight there. ("The Twilight of Forgiveness," VP 162-163)

Sympathetic toward "hearts without rest," Olivia ministers to four of the five senses in this passage and that in spite of the poem being an apology from the lover. The poet has to imagine that Maud is dead for him to obtain her forgiveness; he is so confident of Olivia's that his only penitence is to ask her to continue her sympathy and receptivity. Yeats's passion for the goddess Maud Gonne had demanded a self-denying asceticism; he had once seen a prostitute and "thought of offering myself to her, but the old thought came back, 'No, I love the most beautiful woman in the world'" (M 72). In order to access the otherworldly that Olivia offered, however, no such self-denial was necessary.

The poem "O'Sullivan Rua to Mary Lavell"[36] so deftly unifies sexual experience, female beauty and otherworldly vision that it is worth quoting in its entirety:

When my arms wrap you round, I press

My heart upon the loveliness

That has long faded in the world;

The jeweled crowns that kings have hurled

In shadowy pools, when armies fled;

The love-tales wrought with silken thread

By dreaming ladies upon cloth

[36] Later renamed "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty." This poem first appeared in the August 1896 issue of *The Savoy*; the same issue published the first installment of Shakespear's story "Beauty's Hour," which is about a plain woman who magically transforms into a fantastic beauty only to learn that the love given to beauty is hollow and temporary. Chapter 2 explores this odd juxtaposition in more depth.

That has made fat the murderous moth;
The roses that of old time were
Woven by ladies in their hair,
Before they drowned their lovers' eyes
In twilight shaken with low sighs;
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
Through many a sacred corridor
Where a so sleepy clouds of incense rose
That only God's eyes did not close:
For that dim brow and lingering hand
Come from a more dream-heavy land,
A more dream-heavy hour than this;
And, when you sigh from kiss to kiss,
I hear pale Beauty sighing too,
For hours when all must fade like dew
Til there be naught but throne on throne
Of seraphs, brooding, each alone,
A sword upon his iron knees,
On her most lonely mysteries. (VP 155-156)

Like still water, Olivia reflects an otherworldly past; like a medieval talisman, she summons gods into the human realm. Yeats writes that when he and Gonne attempted to obtain rites for their Castle of Heroes, "I could therefore use her clairvoyance to produce forms that would arise

from both *minds*, though mainly seen by one, and escape therefore from what is mere[ly] personal" (M 124-145, my emphasis), but the "forms" that he produces with Olivia come from sexual union: "When my arms wrap you round I press"; "And when you sigh from kiss to kiss." Because Olivia's beauty is neither hard, spearlike, nor wild, but reminiscent of "defeated things" and receptive to Yeats's advances,[37] his identity as poet-magician is not threatened. Even the images their union summons suggest evanescence, for armies flee, moths destroy the record of past loves, and the religious rites are cold, pale, and blinding. Olivia is the personification of Beauty herself, but because her sighs elicit a vision of beauty that is brooding and mysterious instead of hard and wild, the interpretive power still lies with the poet, not the "ladies" or with Beauty.[38]

These poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds* were the last Yeats was to write until the summer of 1900 because his Medium and Minerva were undermined to such a degree that his entire symbology had to be transformed. Yeats's relationship with Maud Gonne, the woman "bred to be a hero's wage" (CP 74), came to a crisis on December 8th, 1898 when she revealed that she was not the virginal Minerva of his fantasies but the mother of two children fathered by

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[37] Biographically speaking, Shakespear was the aggressor in the relationship: Yeats writes, "when on our first railway journey together—we were to spend the day together at Kew—she gave me the long passionate kiss of love I was startled and a little shocked" (M 86). Unsurprisingly, the poems make Olivia more passive.

[38] Not only the poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds* but also several of the stories in *The Secret Rose*, especially "The Rose of Shadow" and "The Binding of the Hair" further illustrate this point. *The Secret Rose* was illustrated by J.B. Yeats, and his drawing of the girl in "The Rose of Shadow" bears marked similarity to Shakespear. The cover of the book, moreover, features an elaborate design showing a rose tree with roots growing from skeletons: an emblem of the interrelatedness of sex, beauty, and death.

Lucian Millevoye, a French journalist, politician, and married man. Yeats had been in love with Gonne since meeting her in 1889, and she had several times rejected his marriage proposals, yet after confessing her scandalous history, Gonne claimed to return his love. Yeats's letter to Lady Gregory describing the event reports that

> MG has told me with every circumstance of deep emotion that she has loved me for years that my love is the only beaut[i]ful thing in her life, but that for certain reasons which I cannot tell you, reasons of a generous kind & of a tragic origin, she can never marry. She is full of remorse because she thinks that she has in the same breath bound me to her & taken away all hope of marriage. (CL2 319-320)

On December 17th Yeats proposed again, only to be rejected. Many years later Yeats wrote in *Memoirs* that Gonne rejected his proposal because she claimed to "have a horror and terror of physical love" (134). Deirdre Toomey is convinced that "The declaration that she would 'never marry' is [. . .] a piece of delicacy on her part" and that Gonne refused Yeats yet again because she had intended her confession to elicit a proposal and the fact that it was nine days in coming "exhibited Yeats's reluctance" ("Labyrinths" 4). Regardless of whether Gonne's declaration was sincere, and of whether Yeats's reluctance was genuine or only the result of fear and excessive scruple, the emotional turmoil of those weeks left Yeats drained and depressed. As he told Lady Gregory, "I am too exhausted; I can do no more" (M 134).

After this crisis, Yeats wrote no new poetry for more than 18 months because his symbolic structure had begun to conflict with his experience: "The very polarity upon which *The Wind Among the Reeds* was based, that between the mortal sexual woman and the supernatural non-sexual but threatening woman, was exploded as fallacious," writes Toomey ("Labyrinths"

10). In fact, however, Yeats and Gonne shared a vision during those weeks that unified rather than exploded the poles of his symbology. He writes that

> We were sitting together when she said, 'I hear a voice saying, "You are about to receive the initiation of the spear.'" We became silent; a double vision unfolded itself, neither speaking till all was finished. She thought herself a great stone statue through which passed flame, and I felt myself becoming flame and mounting up through and looking out of the eyes of a great stone Minerva. (M 134)

The two become one entity in an initiation named for a penetrating weapon; the male flame enters the virgin goddess of wisdom and looks through her eyes, or, in other words, shares her knowledge. Minerva is no longer a virgin. Maud Gonne had proven to be both mortal and supernatural, mother and Minerva, and as such she posed a more terrible threat than either role could have alone, for not only could she invoke both sexual and religious interpretive powers, she could no longer be contained by the symbols Yeats used to represent her. The magician-poet could not write new poetry because he had lost control over his prize circus animal: the vision he shared with Gonne suggested that otherworldly wisdom would come through sexual union with the goddess, but in such a union he would be unequivocally the disempowered partner, not the poet-magician but one who must risk.

The novel that occupied Yeats that December foreshadowed this emotional and creative crisis. In the days immediately prior to Gonne's confession Yeats had made a daily visit to the British Library to work with her on the Celtic Mystical Order and to read the book that has been called the first fantasy novel and the inspiration for Lord Dunsany and J. R. R. Tolkien: William

Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World*.[39] The narrative follows the adventures of Golden Walter, a wealthy merchant's son who sails on a trading voyage to escape an unhappy marriage and finds himself in an enchanted forest ruled by a fantastically beautiful enchantress and her lovely slave maiden, named in the text only as "the Lady" and "the Maid." The Lady uses her enchantments to torture the Maid and to lure a series of men, including Walter, to her palace for sexual dalliances, but the text's description of her likens her to Artemis:

> for sure never creature was fashioned fairer than she: clad she was for the greenwood as the hunting-goddess of the Gentiles, with her green gown gathered unto her girdle, & sandals on her feet; a bow in her hand and a quiver at her back: she was taller and bigger of fashion than the dear Maiden, whiter of flesh, and more glorious, and brighter of hair; as a flower of flowers for fairness and fragrance.[40] (101)

When Walter and the Maid fall in love, the Maid uses her own magic to trick the Lady into committing suicide, thereby freeing herself and Walter. The Lady's sexual relationship with

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[39] In a letter to Lady Gregory dated 6 December 1898, he wrote, "Miss Gonne is in Dublin & I see a good deal of her. She is rather deep in occult science just now—which pleases me. [. . .] I am reading Morris's 'Wood Beyond the World' a most beautiful dreamy book reminding one of forest glades & summer flowers" (CL2 312, 313).

[40] Compare this description with the one Yeats writes of Gonne in *Memoirs*:

> I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the blossom of apples, and yet face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and a stature so great that she seemed of a divine race. Her movements were worthy of her form, and I understood at last why the poet of antiquity, where we would but speak of face and form, sings, loving some lady, that she paces like a goddess. (M 40)

Walter has no effect on her powers, but the Maid assures Walter that "my wisdom both hath been, & now is, the wisdom of a wise maid, & and not of a woman, and all the might thereof shall I lose with my maidenhead" (179). Until the final episode of the narrative Walter is little more than a pawn in the struggle between Lady and Maid; eventually, however, he becomes a king, and since the Maid no longer needs her powers to protect them, the two marry.

It is disconcerting to speculate about the impact on Yeats's behavior at this critical juncture in his personal life of a narrative that requires the suicide of a goddess-figure who is beautiful, powerful, and sexually experienced—yet masquerading as a virgin—and replaces her with a maid who loses her power with her maidenhead. In *The Wood Beyond the World*, the goddess-figure is menacing precisely because she exceeds her prescribed boundaries and uses the wisdom of a woman instead of that of a "wise maid," and Morris's narrative eventually contains the Lady by killing her off and the Maid by making her trade her wisdom for love. And yet, the Lady and the Maid mirror the twin permutations of the otherworldly woman in Yeats's early period, the phase that essentially ended with Maud Gonne's revelation; at this moment, the gap between Yeats's reading material, his poetry, and his life is very, very narrow, but what they all evidence is a profound hostility directed against women who dare to exceed the religious and sexual bounds of the poet's symbolic constellation.

Because Yeats's poetry and his occult experiments suggest the beginning of progressive roles for women, roles that unite sexual and religious identity, it may look at first glance as though the goddesses, mediums, and faerie queens of Yeats's early work are Creatrices. They are, however, only elements in the Yeatsian symbolic constellation who are deployed at the will of the magician-poet to summon the otherworldly into the human realm and then killed off if

they trouble the poet too deeply. The "world beyond" is notably elusive and indefinable in Yeats's work, as befits a practitioner of the occult, but although the poet does not always represent the otherworldly with a female body, his words remain largely in control of it: his female partner in occult researches may be clairvoyant but Yeats is the one who actually sees and interprets the images. The three doctrines of magical practice set down in the important 1901 essay "Magic" state that Yeats bases his understanding of the otherworldly on the model of a slippery and indefinable individual and collective (un)consciousness, and yet, however elusive it is, it can be summoned by the symbol-maker:

> (1) That the borders of our mind are ever shifting and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
>
> (2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
>
> (3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols. (*E & I* 28)

Mind and memory are both individual and collective, remembered and yet contemporary, unconscious and indefinable and yet summoned to shape and conscious perception by symbols. As I have shown, female beauty in Yeats's poetry is overdetermined with symbolic power, but the women who posses such beauty are forbidden to actively deploy or interpret those symbols themselves because they are, because of their power, dangerous and disruptive. Therefore, Yeats entraps them in his own symbolic web, limiting their signifying power because, as he writes of Gonne's mediumship, "I, who, could not influence her actions, could dominate her inner being" (*M* 124).

Chapter Two

Creation as Religion: Olivia Shakespear's Beauty Theology

"Beauty in a woman is more necessary than wit or virtue: it covers all her sins."

"It might, if it outlived them." (FL 13)

In the summer of 1896, Aubrey Beardsley's periodical *The Savoy* presented to the world an odd juxtaposition of texts: in the July 1896 issue appeared William Butler Yeats' poem "O'Sullivan Rua to Mary Lavell"[41] ; in the following issue appeared the first half of Olivia Shakespear's short story "Beauty's Hour." The first text celebrates the beauty of the author of the second, a beauty oddly reminiscent of a romanticized medieval past and of, as Yeats put it, "defeated things" (M 85). The second explores the fate of a woman defeated by the hollow mythos of beauty itself. This juxtaposition is intriguing because the authors had been lovers since the beginning of the year.

Yeats's writings in the *fin de siècle* parade a number of sacred circus animals before the student of the poet's religious symbology, and it is difficult to penetrate the glamour of that parade to evaluate it objectively. Because of the profound beauty of Yeats's spectacle, his ability to manipulate language to elevate his autobiography and personal beliefs to the realm of the universal, it is easy to become seduced by the wordsmith and follow his lead in confining women to goddesses and history to myth. And yet, this metanarrative should not remain unchallenged because, as I argued in the previous chapter, in Yeats's early poetry women's twinned religious roles, Medium and Minerva, deny women interpretive religious power, deny them the right to be meaning-makers instead of mere representations. Yeats's symbology undermines the usual

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[41] Later renamed "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty."

critical understanding of women's roles in the alternative religious organizations of the nineteenth century such as the Theosophical Society and the Golden Dawn, which did allow women like Annie Besant and Madame Blavatsky to have positions of power. As I argued in the last chapter, however, this gender parity in religious practice was not reflected in religious doctrine or in Yeats's own symbology in this decade. Therefore, goddesses like Maud Gonne are elevated to the symbolic realm while simultaneously being manipulated by the poet instead of afforded real influence; mediums like Olivia Shakespear are used as conduits for the otherworldly and as helpmeets for the (male) magician or mystic, who is the one who interprets. Miranda Hickman rightly asserts that Yeats thought of mediumship as "entailing an extinction of the intellectual faculties," making the medium a passive vehicle, but mysticism did not, for him, require the same extinction (195).

For Yeats, religious roles are determined by biological sex. Women are allowed neither religious interpretive power nor, simultaneously, a sexual life and religious agency; instead, Yeats's understanding of the role of women in religion affords a particular sanctity simply to physical beauty: beauty lures the otherworldly into this world, and the realm of faery opens its gates to beautiful human women. As the bearers of such power, the beautiful woman is a threat to men because, if she were able to possess both sexual and religious interpretive power, then the poet fears that he would become the disempowered partner in actuality and not just symbolically, as he is in the pose of courtly lover.[42] He therefore confines beautiful women to their pedestals, worshipping them as idols without allowing them to be Creatrices.

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[42] A certain anachronism in the poet's terminology is justified here: a beautiful woman who achieves religious agency would also attain Unity of Being.

The limitation inherent in attempting to confine real women to mythological figures, of course, is that those real women can sometime evade capture and create their own mythologies, and in this case that is exactly what happened. Olivia Shakespear, Yeats's Medium, wrote six novels of her own, as well as the novella "Beauty's Hour," between 1894 and 1910. In each of these works, a woman struggles to escape her "symbolical place" (A 302) and become a Creatrix, a woman who freely interprets existing religious and moral codes as well as beauty itself and who then can recreate her own system of religious meaning. These novels are written from the perspective of a woman within Yeats's religious pantheon, a woman trying to claim the twinned roles that both traditional dispensations and Yeats's occult alternatives deny her, that of Creatrix and of actualized sexual being. Shakespear's heroines are always meaning-makers: in some cases they are writers, in others, religious seekers, in still others, arbiters of ethical action, but, in every novel, they are women who are driven to create, to interpret.

Shakespear's oeuvre suggests that the numerous mythologies surrounding Beauty thwart a woman's attempts to be a meaning-maker and to obtain fulfillment in a romantic relationship. Shakespear's novels usually seem to concur with Yeats's writing in the *fin de siècle* that a woman cannot be both a meaning-maker and the sexual partner of a man; in contrast to Yeats's fear of the holy beauty, however, Shakespear insists that as long as a woman is barred from becoming a Creatrix, beauty and its religious significance are, in fact, less a threat to the men who "write" her than they are lethal to the woman herself. In Shakespear's canon, it is not the overwhelming religious power of woman's beauty that disables fulfilling sexual relationships between men and women. Rather, it is the insufficient character of men's passion as conditioned by contemporary sexual expectations. According to Shakespear, passionate love demands that a

woman be either a Minerva or a Medium, an idol or an enabler, and therefore her quest is subsumed by his need, costing her the Peace that a she requires to be a maker of sacred or secular meaning.

Olivia Tucker was born on March 17th, 1863, when her father was fifty-five and her mother was 41.[43] Olivia appears to have had a close and loving relationship with both of her parents. The Tuckers were situated firmly in the leisure class: her father's estate was valued at 35,000 pounds at the time of his death in 1896. Before she was born, her father had served in India for a number of years, which suggests an early origin for much of her fiction's exoticism. Her mother's brother (one of her twelve siblings) was the father of Lionel Johnson, the family member with whom Olivia seems to have been the most in sympathy. In 1885, Olivia married Hope Shakespear, a solicitor fourteen years her elder, and the marriage was not a success. According to Yeats's well-known report in *Memoirs*, she had told him that Hope "ceased to pay court to me from the day of our marriage" (87-88). Nine months and five days later, Hope and Olivia's only daughter Dorothy was born.[44] Olivia and Yeats first saw each other at the *Yellow Book* dinner in early 1894. They were not introduced, but each made an impression on the other. Yeats recalled the event vividly in *Memoirs*:

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[43] Except where otherwise noted, all biographical information is condensed from Harwood, *ALS*.

[44] Neither Yeats's report nor the date of Dorothy's birth proves that all sexual contact between Hope and Olivia ceased after the marriage was consummated. In a letter to Yeats decades later (OSL 71-72), Olivia speculates that Dorothy and Ezra Pound's son Omar was the reincarnation of Hope, "another try" at reincarnating a soul she had lost in a miscarriage. One possible interpretation of her letter is that she and Hope had conceived a second child together.

> At a literary dinner where there were some fifty or sixty guests I noticed opposite me, between celebrated novelists [Shakespear was seated near George Moore and Pearl Craigie], a woman of great beauty. Her face had a perfect Greek regularity, though her skin was a little darker than a Greek's would have been and her hair was very dark. She was exquisitely dressed with what seemed to me very old lace over her breast, and had the same sensitive look of distinction I had admired in Eva Gore-Booth. She was, it seemed, about my own age, but suggested to me an incomparable distinction. I was not introduced to her, but found that she was related to a member of the Rhymer's Club [Johnson] and had asked my name. (72)

The two began corresponding later that spring, and, unaware of the unhappiness of her marriage (M 74), Yeats first visited Olivia on May 17. At this first meeting, according to *Memoirs*, he told her about the history of his "love sorrow" (74). It was a momentous year for her: in addition to this meeting, her first two novels were published, first *Love on a Mortal Lease* and then *The Journey of High Honour*.

The relationship between Shakespear and Yeats changed sometime around mid-1895 when Olivia confessed her love. Yeats deliberated for two weeks, and wrote in *Memoirs* two decades later that "after all, if I could not get the woman I loved, it would be a comfort even but for a little while to devote myself to another" (85). At first, they decided to wait to consummate their affair until her mother had died, at which time they would go away together. In the meantime, they met at the British Museum and at galleries. Finally, Yeats moved out of the flat he had shared with Arthur Symons and into Woburn Buildings, and plans to elope seemed to have been scrapped, for "At last she came to me in I think January of my thirtieth year [it was

1896, so actually his thirty-first], and I was impotent from nervous excitement" (M 88). Yeats's brief description in *Memoirs* does not make the affair sound very appealing: he claims that "we had many days of happiness" (88), but admits that he was often distracted by money problems and read love poetry "to bring the right mood round" (89); when Maud Gonne appeared back on the scene in early 1897, the first time he had seen her in three years, it seems to have only triggered—not caused—the dissolution of his affair with Olivia. Harwood supposes that Yeats had actually begun to fall out of love with Olivia as early as the summer of 1896, when they were separated for a period of time (ALS 57).[45]

Olivia and Yeats were apparently estranged until 1900 when Yeats wrote a condolence letter at the time of her mother's death. It seems that they had another affair around 1903 (Ellmann 182) and yet another around 1910 (Toomey, "Worst," 224), but no surviving evidence can provide certainty.[46] However, other ties are certainly better documented. Shakespear was holding a salon in her home by 1909 (ALS 130) where Ezra Pound was introduced in January. Dorothy Shakespear fell in love with him immediately, but Olivia and Hope united to oppose the match, ostensibly for financial reasons. Their objections were eventually worn down, and Ezra

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[45] The earliest outline of Yeat's autobiographical novel, *The Speckled Bird*, was composed during that separation from Olivia, and it provides some insight into his feelings toward Olivia at that time. The hero of that novel takes a mistress because of "the persecution of sex," but "He sees the poorness of his mistress' nature and dislikes [her] the more because she is devoted to him" (109).

[46] Ann Saddlemeyer writes in *Becoming George: The Life of Mrs. W. B. Yeats* that "George thought Olivia and Willie had become lovers again as early as 1903" (41) and "[George's] Jealousy of Olivia seems to have been difficult to eradicate" (119). Saddlemeyer's sources, in addition to George's questions in the *Vision Papers*, were personal communication with George Yeats and Virginia Moore, so further verification seems unlikely at this point.

and Dorothy were married in 1914. Yeats had been introduced to Pound in Olivia's home in May of 1909 and to Georgie Hyde-Lees in 1910. Georgie and Dorothy were best friends, and in 1911 Georgie's mother Nelly married Olivia's brother Harry. Hope Shakespear died in 1923, and Omar Pound was born in 1926. All of Olivia's surviving letters to Yeats are from the 1920s and '30s, and they show that her last years were full of her familiar pursuits: reading, going to concerts and lectures, and maintaining her circle of acquaintances. Olivia died on October 3, 1938, and Yeats wrote to Dorothy Wellesley that "For the moment I cannot bear the thought of London. I will find her memory everywhere" (L 916). He outlived her by only 117 days.

Beyond the preceding sketch, there is very little surviving biographical material for Olivia Shakespear, and her novels are almost unobtainable in both the United States and Europe outside of a handful of archives, with no one archive in the US in possession of more than two novels.[47] As Warwick Gould wryly puts it, "It is almost futile to search for copies of Olivia Shakespear's novels (and as hopeless to try to persuade reprint houses to reissue them)" (295). Only one partial manuscript of a fictional work survives. Therefore, literary history remembers Shakespear primarily as Yeats's first lover, Ezra Pound's mother-in-law, and Lionel Johnson's cousin and close friend. John Harwood, the only scholar who has yet attempted a book-length study of Shakespear, writes that "large areas of her life remain uncharted," and that most of the existing biographical information is Yeats-centered, so "barring the discovery of a substantial cache of papers, no such treatment [as a full-length biography] is possible" (ALS x). If

[47] Unfortunately, both *The Journey of High Honour* at Ohio State and *The False Laurel* at Arizona State are kept in the library stacks, a terrible oversight because each is the *only* copy of that novel to be available at any library in the United States. I have already been in contact with OSU's Special Collections about this.

Shakespear ever kept a journal, it has been lost, and few of her letters have survived. Even with access to Omar Pound's family papers, Harwood's own biography of Shakespear is sketchy, full of gaps, and, of necessity, focused on the Shakespear-Yeats relationship. Likewise, we know next to nothing about Shakespear's writing process because the only surviving manuscript is a late draft of *The Devotees* that is little different from the published version. That manuscript seems to have been given to Ezra Pound for scratch paper: it has survived the century in an archive because drafts of his poems are written on the back. Shakespear must have been a very private—or discreet—woman,[48] for in spite of her close connections to two of the most well-known poets of the twentieth century, as well as to the wives of those poets, we know almost nothing about her.

However, the aim of this chapter is not to analyze the woman herself but rather the record of her imaginative, intellectual, and emotional life as it exists in her fiction. Harwood points out that "the novels are not directly autobiographical" (ASL 76), an observation that is immediately apparent to a reader of the novels and of Yeats's biographies. The insistent repetition of theme and motif, however, shows a creative mind at work at solving a few salient problems: how a woman may maintain her selfhood while in a sexual relationship with a man; how religion may be defined outside of the traditional dispensations; how a woman can be a Creatrix, a meaning-maker, in a milieu that refuses her that role; and, most saliently, what is the significance of

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[48] In a 1931 letter to Yeats—one of the comparatively few to survive—Shakespear writes of love-letters written by Gaudier-Brzeska and admired by Yeats, "I myself, have received far, far better ones! (from various people, my dear). All destroyed" (OSL 76). Her caution was only sensible, however. Harwood points out that if Shakespear's marriage had ended over an affair with Yeats she would have lost custody of her daughter and Yeats would have been financially ruined (OSL 86).

physical beauty, or the lack thereof, to a woman's life.[49] These problems mesh provocatively with Yeats's preoccupations during the 1890's, but in this chapter I will focus as much as possible, given the limited resources available, on Olivia Shakespear and her analyses, keeping Yeats in the background as a complex of ideas to which she responds. Any student of Shakespear's work must find the enormous mountains of Yeats material magnetically attractive: Yeats wrote poems about Shakespear, described the affair in *Autobiographies* and *Memoirs*, fictionalized it in *The Speckled Bird*, and left behind enough biographical material for the encyclopedic R. F. Foster work *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, an 1100-page tome that includes the whole course of Yeats's lifelong connection with Shakespear. But no critical analysis of Shakespear's work exists at present, and this chapter attempts to give the woman writer a chance to speak for herself.

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[49] In addition to these preoccupations, Shakespear's last three novels revolve around themes of incest. Agatha in *Rupert Armstrong* seems to suffer from an Electra complex and Tony in *The Devotees* from an Oedipal; Rosamond Carston in *Uncle Hilary* does marry and conceive a child—unknowingly—with her own stepfather and subsequently marries her foster uncle—a distant cousin—to make the child legitimate. *The False Laurel* hints that Daria and Jonathan may be brother and sister: their parents were certainly lovers. Harwood writes that "We are left with a mystery. There is some preoccupation at work in these novels for which the novels themselves do not account, but we do not know what it is, and probably never shall know" (ALS 116).

My perspective on the incest "preoccupation" is that it is a plot device in *Uncle Hilary* and no more than a vestigial theme in *The False Laurel*; in *Rupert Armstrong* and *The Devotees* the theme is prominent but handled too superficially to provide much critical mileage. Compared to the concerns I study in this chapter, concerns that occur in every one of Shakespear's works, the incest theme is salacious yet provides less provocative material for analysis, at least in the absence of more biographical data.

The six novels did not sell well in their own time and have never been reprinted, a rather curious oversight by feminist "archeological" scholars considering that Shakespear's connections made her a well-known figure to literary history and that the novels themselves reward analysis. They show a marked repetition of theme and characterization—the beautiful but wicked mother-figure, the nunlike aunt, the May-December relationship, the beautiful protagonist with artistic aspirations, the failure of first love affairs, the obsession with a parent of the opposite sex—but fall all over the spectrum in terms of quality. The two earliest novels—*Love on a Mortal Lease* (1894) and *The Journey of High Honour* (1894)—are notably weaker in quality, featuring mostly two-dimensional characters and predictable and badly-paced stories. *The Journey of High Honour*, in particular, is unquestionably a fictional failure.

It is unfortunate that the novella "Beauty's Hour" (1896) is the only known shorter work of Shakespear's. It is an inventive, whimsical fantasy with a well-managed plot and more fully developed characters than those in LML and JHH. We know that Shakespear had written most of the short story by summer of 1894 because the first surviving letter Yeats wrote to her offers recommendations for improving it (CL1 396), but it remained unpublished for two more years. Eventually "Beauty's Hour" appeared in two parts in *The Savoy*, which makes it more readily available to readers than any other of Shakespear's fictional works. The novella seems to have been a turning point, for the last four novels, *The False Laurel* (1896), *Rupert Armstrong* (1899), *The Devotees* (1904), and *Uncle Hilary* (1910), are far more readable than the first two and show a marked improvement . All four feature well-rounded protagonists, more creative story-telling, and an increasingly-sophisticated intellectual undergirding. It is unknown what caused Shakespear to stop publishing after *Uncle Hilary*, although she may well have had

enough of poor sales and tepid reviews. She did choose a bad time to give up, however, because *Uncle Hilary* is certainly the most accomplished of her full-length novels.

With the exception of *Uncle Hilary*, Shakespear's works are not outstanding examples of the novelistic tradition to which they seem, at first glance, to belong: that of popular realist fiction. Yeats's burgeoning passion for Shakespear may have influenced his remark that *The Journey of High Honour* "should I think succeed for in all the main matters—the mens characters accepted [sic][50]—you do perfectly everything you attempt," but his less-infatuated inner critic writes more justifiably that "You *think* the events sometimes when you should *see* them & make your reader see them" (CL1 650). This evaluation should be the starting point for any reading of Shakespear's fiction: the characters frequently move against well-painted, memorable backdrops—exotically decorated drawing rooms, avenues of lime trees, extravagant Turkish gardens—but they themselves are lacking in visual quality and in psychological depth and complexity. In the first three novels, only the protagonists are much more than place-holders, and even then they are entirely lacking in psychological realism. Until *Uncle Hilary*, very few characters seem to be human beings who could conceivably exist. Plot devices are even more contrived, pivoting on improbable coincidences (Daria meets Jonathan after finding a

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[50] Yeats's unconventional spelling is familiar to any reader of his letters. To avoid tedious repetition, I will omit [sic] from future excerpts.

Even Shakespear mocked Yeats for this foible. In response to a letter he wrote inquiring about some dental surgery she had had, she replied, "I didn't have any GASS (usually spelt gas)" (OSL 70); she also wrote him impatiently, "I do wish you wd spell *crucifix* properly—not crusafix—its from the Latin crucib—a cross! I remember years ago telling you the same thing" (86). It's entertaining to imagine her reaction to the first poorly spelled letters she received from the famous poet.

letter written to him from Ravenscroft blowing about on the moors); awkward foreshadowing (two women who will be in a love triangle tear the man's letter across the signature); and predictable conclusions (Rachel's husband is discovered to be having an affair with their friend Cecily, a fact the reader knew from the first chapter).

Judged according to these standards, it is unsurprising that Shakespear's novels have not been reprinted: they do not fit their generic conventions. However, the real protagonist of Shakespear's novels is never the main character[51]: instead, each novel presents a hypothesis that characters and events are set up to test. The Idea is the protagonist—the narrative only a vehicle—and the Idea is always immediately concerned with the question "What if a woman defined strictly by her beauty or lack thereof defies convention, and the limits of conventional attachment, in order to follow a lifestyle of which her culture disapproves?" In itself, this is not provocative subject matter; as one reviewer of *Love on a Mortal Lease* put it, "As seems almost inevitable now when a lady writes a novel, Mrs. Shakespear chooses as her heroine a girl of immense cleverness who outrages the conventionalities with regard to the relations of the sexes" (29). Rita Felski writes that late-nineteenth century melodramatic women's fiction enacts a quest for the ideal, an attempt to interpret the otherworld:

> Refusing to accept that the world is drained of transcendence, melodrama relocates the spiritual at the level of the personal, endowing individual characters with auratic significance as representations of moral absolutes. Through the heightened expressivism and emotionalism of melodrama, the particular is transformed into the universal; the form

[51] Mary Gower in "Beauty's Hour" is the one possible exception to this generalization.

> constantly gestures toward an ineffable horizon of meaning in its struggle to transcend the limitations of the material world. (125)

Shakespear's fiction rarely, if ever, traffics in the moral absolutes or emotionalism of pure melodrama, but it does seem to spring from the same need to relocate the spiritual. Shakespear herself had a lifelong preoccupation with the question of *what to believe* in a world "drained of transcendence," and the sexual politics of her fiction dramatize that quest "at the level of the personal". She wrote to Yeats in the 1930's, "I am a sheer Agnostic & don't believe in anything – though of course I think anything is possible. I listen to everybody, & and wonder how you can all believe the things you do! And all different things--" (OSL 83). However, the letters demonstrate her sympathy towards a number of views: glandular determinism (67), Yeats's own theories as set forth in *A Vision* (67), reincarnation (70-71), the Swami's lectures (91), and the meaning of visions (92). Her heroines' willingness to defy convention stems from their author's attempts to test various religious, moral, and ethical hypotheses that her wide reading and interaction with some of the great minds of her day presented to her imagination.

Yeats was one of the more influential of those minds.[52] Still, Shakespear's rejection of Christianity and other organized religions predated her acquaintance with Yeats,[53] and throughout her life she rejected any other name for her beliefs than "sheer Agnostic," although

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[52] This assertion should be qualified by the reminder that virtually all of what we know of their relationship is from his perspective. As I have argued elsewhere, *The Devotees* may well have helped inspire his equation of Maud Gonne with Helen of Troy, so the influence was unlikely to have been entirely one-sided.

[53] Lionel Johnson asked a correspondent in 1884, when Shakespear was 21, where he might find a good portrait of Shelley "for a cousin who almost literally prays to Shelley, having lost all her other gods" (quoted in Harwood, OS&Y).

several critics have noted her attachment to Buddhism.[54] As I pointed out in the last chapter, the eclectic nature of Yeats's lifelong religious quest makes it impossible to define his religious beliefs without extreme oversimplification, and the same may be said of Shakespear. However, in order to understand the religious value of beauty in her fiction, as well as the elements of religious thought that are embedded in those works, a certain definitional framework is necessary. I borrow this framework from Yeats's prose because, as I will show later, Shakespear's fiction suggests that she shared a number of the poet's assumptions about the religious value of beauty, although she as a beautiful woman expressed those assumptions with more awareness of their implications.

In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, the capstone of Yeats's religious thought prior to his marriage and the automatic writing, the poet defines religious faith simply as a recognition of the existence of some divine power: "I think that all religious men have believed that there is a hand not ours in the events of life" (My 336). Neither Yeats nor Shakespear would ever have admitted the existence of a personal, knowable, definable deity: any attempt to personalize that "hand not ours" or to align it conclusively with a named religious system would be a distortion of the beliefs of both writers. However, Shakespear, like Yeats, believed firmly in the existence of an otherworld, "a hand not ours" referred to as Fate, Spiritus Mundi, or the devil, but never conclusively defined. Religious practice, on the other hand, is according to Yeats closely aligned with the creation of beauty:

> We must not make a false faith by hiding from our thoughts the causes of doubt, for faith is the highest achievement of the human intellect, the only gift man can make to God, and

[54] Harwood, ALS 127; Saddlemeyer 27.

> therefore it must be offered in sincerity. Neither must we create, by hiding ugliness, a false beauty as our offering to the world. He only can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling, unforeseen, wing-footed wanderer. (*Myth* 336)

Both beauty and faith are *made* by the religious man [sic], and made out of the acceptance of their opposites, ugliness and doubt (a very familiar Yeatsian concept indeed). One might overlook the repetition of "man" and "he" in this passage were it not for Yeats's persistent allocation of religious roles along the lines of biological sex: man is magician and mystic, religious agent, interpreter of the otherworldly; woman is medium, passive conduit, the "greatest imaginable beauty" that *is created* by the male magician.

Yeats's definition of religion as belief in the "hand not ours" and of religious practice as the willed creation of faith and beauty is commensurate with everything we know about Shakespear's religious explorations: Saddlemeyer caller her "an interested observer" of paranormal phenomenon (49); she was never, however, a devotee. We should understand her as a critic of the religious, her work as existing in "the category of the religious," to use John D. Caputo's phrase (xxi),[55] for she shares Yeats's definition of "the religious man" and yet had a fictional career that functioned as a sustained critique of his sexing of religious roles. The creation of Beauty represents for Shakespear the greatest of religious acts, and yet her fiction

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[55] Caputo's thought is explored more thoroughly in the first and third chapters of this work. His "religion without religion" could be juxtaposed with Shakespear's work in some interesting ways, but his ultimate conclusions are too widely divergent from hers for his work to be very useful in an introductory study like this one.

shows that, while this act is possible for a woman as well, for her "all imaginable pangs" are not a natural part of the human condition but artificial, the direct result of the male tendency to create and interpret female beauty while at the same time reinforcing woman's symbolical place as artifact and not artificer.

Shakespear's most accomplished work of fiction undermined Yeats's perception of her, as well as his definition of the religious value of beauty, before that perception was ever put into words. In the summer of 1896 *The Savoy* published for the first time Yeats's "O'Sullivan Rua to Mary Lavell" and Shakespear's "Beauty's Hour." Yeats's poem is a tribute to Shakespear's mild beauty, the sympathetic beauty of the Medium that triggers the magician's vision.

When my arms wrap you round, I press
My heart upon the loveliness
That has long faded in the world;
[. . .]
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
Through many a sacred corridor
Where a so sleepy cloud of incense rose
That only God's eyes did not close:
For that dim brow and lingering hand
Come from a more dream-heavy land,
A more dream-heavy hour than this;
And, when you sigh from kiss to kiss,
I hear pale Beauty sighing too,

For hours when all must fade like dew
Til there be naught but throne on throne
Of seraphs, brooding, each alone,
A sword upon his iron knees,
On her most lonely mysteries. (*VP* 155-156)

In this poem, *beauty* alone is certain good, for it not only enables sacred visions, it is the Ideal Form in the otherworld, the land of mystery and dreams, of God and seraph.[56] As the last chapter argued, for Yeats beauty signifies an otherworldly reality, so it is never simply an accident of birth but rather the penetration of the otherworld into this one and therefore the conduit between that world and this. The Olivia Shakespear that the poet embraces is neither Beauty herself nor an earthly incarnation of her but a powerless human representative that acts as a conduit directing the otherworld to the religious seeker without actually overpowering him: it is through her that the "wing-footed wanderer" arrives after the poet has suffered all other imaginable losses. In the Medium, beauty must be paired with sympathy, a quality that Yeats believed Shakespear possessed in abundance. In fact, he praised her for that quality in the earliest stage of their acquaintance, writing to her that her fictional characters are "sympathetic not because you have given them this for their character but because your own character & ideals are mirrored in them" (CL1 650).

For Shakespear, however, sympathy is a characteristic that men tend to attribute to beautiful women regardless of whether or not those women actually possess it. In "Beauty's

[56] Grossman writes that "The origin of the defeated world of 'Beauty,' which is here represented under images of a highly generalized but nonetheless distinctly chivalric character, is dream" (116).

Hour," Shakespear constructs an unusual scenario in which she can analyze what beauty means to the woman who possesses it and the one who does not—and in this story, the same woman does both. Mary Gower is the secretary of Lady Harman and is in love with Lady Harman's son Gerald, who, according to Mary, "is like other men; his point of view may be fairly taken as representing a normal one" (II 16).[57] Mary's love is unrequited because she is extremely plain-looking. But then, one evening when Mary Gower is staring into her mirror, the strength of her desire to be beautiful transforms her into a woman with a perfect face and body, and she names herself Mary Hatherley. She can make herself transform every night at sundown, but at sunrise she becomes Mary Gower again. Chaperoned by her late father's friend Dr. Trefusis, Mary enters the social circle of the Harmans, and Gerald falls in love with her and begins ignoring Bella Sturgis, the woman with whom he had previously had an understanding. However, Mary discovers the hollowness of the life of beauty, so Mary Hatherley says goodbye to Gerald and resolves to never transform again. She leaves her position as secretary and moves into Dr. Trefusis's home to become his daughter.

Most of "Beauty's Hour" was composed before Yeats and Shakespear met, for his first surviving letter to her suggests revisions for Gerald's character that would make him more defined, more like a man Yeats had met the previous winter: "He was of the type of those which face the cannons mouth without a tremour, but kill themselves rather than face life without some girl with pink cheaks whose character they have never understood, whose soul they have never perceived, & whom they would have forgotten in a couple of months" (396). Since no

[57] "Beauty's Hour appears in two parts in the August and September issues of *The Savoy*. Since the issues are not continuously paginated, I will reference both the part and the page number.

manuscript of "Beauty's Hour" exists, it is impossible to know in what state the story was in when Yeats first read it, how many revisions it underwent between his first reading and its publication two years later, or how much of its critique of beauty politics can be traced back to its author's relationship with Yeats. My own speculation is that that the length of time between the completion of a readable draft of the story and its publication suggests that significant revisions took place. Moreover, the range and force of Shakespear's critique of the politics of beauty so vastly exceed that suggested by Yeats's letter that I suppose her experience with such an acolyte intensified her critique of the type. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that enough lost manuscripts or letters will be found to verify my supposition.

In any case, the story's protagonist, Mary Gower, is a Creatrix in the most literal sense of the word, for not only does she make a new face and body for herself, her unique position allows her to experiment in the life of the beautiful woman and in the life of the plain, to draw her own conclusion about the meaning of physical beauty to women themselves, and, with the privilege of a fly-by-night beauty, to voice her conclusions to others without fear of disastrous social consequences. When Dr. Trefusis objects to Mary Hatherley's exploits, saying that the power she uses is of the devil, she tells him, "'You are helping me to buy the experience that teaches, [. . .] and it teaches bitter lessons enough: don't fear for me" (II 15). The narrative of her "bitter lessons" is a scathing indictment of men's addiction to beauty, an addiction that makes them do what Yeats did: to inject spiritual significance into the woman who possesses beauty. This addiction and its consequences drives beautiful women into vanity and superficiality and plain ones into loneliness and rejection, and it creates a social climate in which "true love" is impossible.

And yet, the goal of the Creatrix is not simply to set up a competing religious order based on female creative power. The mere ability to effect a change in the status quo is not unequivocally liberating for the Creatrix because Shakespear's story assumes a "natural" order of things, a scheme of reality that no power—however potent, however subversive—should disturb. In spite of her own agnosticism, Shakespear's fictional stage is not a moral and spiritual vacuum on which the players may create whatever code they wish to live by: the "natural order" is an arena of preexisting rightness, the realm of the "hand not our own," to which Shakespear's characters seek to conform and to influence their society to conform. This is not simply a system of ethics because it is understood to be not a code of behavior that results in good or bad in the human realm but rather the code of the otherworld, the realm in which—at least in "Beauty's Hour"—God and the devil function. But since Shakespear's otherworld is not that of an existing sacred text or of an established faith, the difficulty lies in determining exactly what that natural order is and how to follow it. That is the quest that Mary Gower, along with all of Shakespear's heroines, pursues through all its vagaries.

The first pages of "Beauty's Hour" posit Shakespear's objection to one of Yeats's religious premises: that a beautiful face and a profound spirit are necessarily connected in the valuation of the otherworld. Gerald and Mary Gower have a rapport, and he has a degree of respect and friendship for her. When he compares Mary to the beautiful Bella, he says, "She's not intellectual, and she's not really sympathetic, and I don't *like* her one quarter as much as I do you, Mary" (I 11). Mary thinks, "I loved Gerald Harman, as Bella Sturgis, with her perfect face, was incapable of loving" (I 12). Naturally, when Mary becomes the perfectly beautiful Mary Hatherley, Gerald falls in love with her instantly. Mary's soul had always been beautiful, but her

face does not match; Bella was born with beauty, but she lacks the depth of character that, for Yeats, was beauty's natural accompaniment. "Beauty's Hour" sets out to prove that a beautiful face is not the natural result of a holy soul and that the devotion that face inspires does not necessarily have any religious significance.

When Mary effects her transformation for the first time, she does not feel compelled to understand what happened to her. All the explanation she needs is that "an effort of will had conquered the power of my material conditions, and I controlled them; *my body fitted to my soul at last*" (I 12, my emphasis). For Mary, she has finally attained the power to make her inner and outer selves match, and at this early stage of her experience, she considers this to be a natural match. She seizes an otherworldly power to transform herself, but the very necessity of this power underscores the unnaturalness of the "fit" that she creates: if a beautiful soul and a beautiful body do actually fit together naturally, no transformation would have been necessary. Near the end of the story, Dr. Trefusis tells Mary explicitly that the "fit" of her beautiful body and soul is actually *un*fit, not an attainment of a "new creation":

> You have shown me how human longing, if it be powerful enough, is nearly omnipotent, for evil as well as good. Here, in these old books, in the *Magia Naturalis* of Johannes Faust, in this old Latin of Cornelius Agrippa, and many others, I learn how spirits 'can be dragged out of the air'; how alchemy can turn metal to gold; these things have a terrible fascination; but it is of the devil; I shall put them all away. Your longing turned Mary Gower, whom God made, into Mary Hatherley in whom He had no part. (II 23)

When the two replace the books on the shelf, Mary laughs when Dr. Trefusis crosses himself (II 24), but in spite of her agnosticism she concurs with the doctor's appraisal of her power as

unholy. Mary's ability to transform had allowed her a dual perspective on the value of beauty: as Mary Gower, she watches the worship from the margins; as Mary Hatherley, she is the object of worship herself. Having the view of both the insider and the outsider, Mary realizes that there is no necessary connection between a beautiful body and a soul that possesses depth of feeling, intellect, and sympathy. The story men tell—men like Gerald Harman and like Yeats—that when they worship a beautiful woman they are actually worshipping the beautiful soul within is spurious. Beauty is not holy; it is an accident of birth.

Well before Dr. Trefusis expounds on the unnaturalness of her transformation, however, Mary herself begins to realize that the mere attainment of beauty to "fit" the soul cannot reverse the profound injustice of the religious valuation of beauty; in fact, her self-willed transformation is only an act of conformity to the system of valuation that she rejects. Mary Hatherley's first social outing is to a ball at the Harman's house, where Gerald draws her aside to his mother's study to tell her that he has been looking for her his whole life. When she asks if he would have noticed her if she had a different face,

> "The face is an indication of the soul, surely," he answered.
>
> "That is a lie," said I. "A lie invented to cover the injustice done alike to the beautiful woman, and the woman who is not beautiful."
>
> "Injustice?" he echoed.
>
> "The thing is so simple," said I, with a bitterness I could not hide. "You place beauty on a pedestal; her face is an index to her soul, you say: what happens if you find she does not possess the soul, which she never claimed to have, but which you insisted on crediting her with? You dethrone her with ignominy. [. . .]"

> I stopped: Gerald sat looking at me with a rapt gaze, but I saw he had not listened to a word I said. (I 24)

Ironically, it seems as though Gerald *does* love Mary Gower, but only in Mary Hatherley's body. When Gerald tells Mary Gower that she and Mary Hatherley are very much alike in their personalities, she asks him why he never had fallen in love with her, he laughs and defends his love of beauty: "I daresay the face *does* make a difference: it makes a difference in the whole personality." Mary, however, will have none of it:

> "It's such an old story. You fall in love with a girl's beautiful face—it's not the first time you've done it; you endow her with all sorts of qualities; you make her into an idol, and the whole thing only means that your aesthetic sense is gratified. That's a poor way of loving."
>
> "It's a very real way," said Gerald, with some warmth. [. . .] "I wasn't in earnest about Bella; I admired her very much, and all that, and mother is always urging me to marry; I should probably have drifted into marrying her—," he broke off.
>
> I felt an unreasoning anger against him.
>
> "Poor Bella!" I cried. You may drift into marrying her yet!"
>
> That finished our conversation. He went away without another word, leaving me alone with my anger and my heartache. (II 18)

Gerald reacts quite differently to the same woman saying the same thing in different bodies. With Mary Gower he is willing to debate the point, to argue his side, but in the end what he expects is sympathy, not critique. Mary Hatherley, on the other hand, has the freedom to critique without provoking anger, but he doesn't actually listen to what she says. The question the story

raises is whether a man loves a beautiful soul, provided the face is also lovely, or does he only love the face and imagine the woman possesses whatever soul suits him.

The answer that "Beauty's Hour" gives to this debate is that, in almost all cases, "a man sees only with the outer, never with the inner eye" (II 16). This is tragic for the beautiful woman and for the plain alike because the plain woman is denied the life of the emotions while the beautiful one is compelled to live in that life entirely, forcing a veneer of superficiality over her personality, which the world deems irrelevant, choosing instead to "make her into an idol" (I 18). Mary Gower find Bella Sturgis in tears after an argument with Gerald, and, overcoming her jealousy, comforts her by suggesting that she try to win Gerald back if Mary Hatherley goes away. Mary realizes that she "had hitherto misjudged her: her pride, the insolence of her beauty, her caprices, had been but the superficial manifestation of a passionate spirit led astray by a world which cared only for the outer woman" (II 22).

Mary Hatherley's own forays into the life of the emotions suggested to her that men's love is worthless—cold, falsified, and juvenile—for they make the object of their affections an idol without admitting her divinity. For Mary, the female divine, the Creatrix, is a thinker, a speaker, a maker; this divinity has, necessarily, a kind of power, although it is a creative, meaning-making power and not "power over." Romantic love that affects to "worship" female beauty without responding to and interacting with the divine creative power of the woman within is simply the love of obtaining new trinkets:

> The golden key that opened their hearts led me into strange places; some had never been tenanted, and were so cold and bare that I felt they could never be warm or pleasant; others had been swept and garnished, and I was asked to believe that all traces of their

> former occupants were gone; others were full of rust and cobwebs, and old toys broken and thrust away; there was no room even for a new plaything. The key unlocked no sanctuary, with altar-lights and incense burning, waiting for the one divinity that was to fill its empty shrine. Those who loved me had loved before, and would love again. (19)

When Mary Hatherley finally says goodbye to Gerald, she tells him, "You have never loved me; you loved my face, but of my heart and soul you have known nothing" (II 26); when Mary Gower says goodbye to Mary Hatherley, she tells her own beautiful reflection, "your hour is over; each moment held a possible joy; a surer pain: a brief triumph; a long regret. Let me decline into the lesser ways of life, where Beauty's flying feet have never passed; but where Peace may be seen stealing, a shadowy figure, with eyes looking toward the sun" (II 27). Mary Gower finds that mere beauty, as well as the love and "worship" that accompany it is hollow, for a Creatrix is not simply an idol on a pedestal but also a divine soul: she is, in and of herself, valuable in her interpretive and creative powers, and it is this level of Mary's being that she believes Gerald does not recognize.

What "Beauty's Hour" makes plain is that the kind of love that Gerald offers and that Yeats celebrates in "O'Sullivan Rua to Mary Lavell" is reductive of and heart-breaking to its object because it puts her on a pedestal without admitting her to be divine. The conclusion is that sexual love is untenable for a Creatrix because, in Edwardian England, there is not a partner worthy of her, no one to let her "write herself" without making her into a Medium or a Minerva. What "Beauty's Hour" does not do is demonize those male partners, for although the story does not justify Mary's love for Gerald, it demonstrates that love by making him a sympathetic character in spite of his frailties: after Gerald falls in love with Mary Hatherley he tries to

improve himself, for his sister Betty says "He wanders about picture galleries, I've found out; and some one saw him the other day in the British Museum" (II 20); Mary Gower thinks Gerald's "charm lay in his simplicity, and a certain gallant bearing that might have fitted him to be the hero of a romance of the Elizabethan age" (II 20). And yet, however likable or attractive he might be, Gerald is still a product of cultural valuations of women that cannot allow them to be meaning-makers. Mary Gower's ultimate choice, "Peace,"—which means freedom from sexual love and the roller-coaster life of the emotions—is one that crops up again in Shakespear's fiction as the only condition under which women can be Creatrices, for sexual love deadens, perverts, and sometimes kills the woman within, not because of the intrinsic nature of sexual love or even of men themselves but because of the culturally induced frailty of virtually all potential male partners.

The effect of the *loss* of Peace on a woman's creative ability is shown most clearly in Shakespear's first and third novels, *Love on a Mortal Lease* and *The False Laurel*, both of which have a very young woman writer as the main character. These novels allow us a glimpse into what Shakespear thought of the fusion of creation and passion, for both explore the clash between a woman's pursuit of the writing life and her affair with a man. In LML Rachel Gwynne loses her ability to write and, to a large degree, her love of writing, when she embarks on a sexual affair, and later, marriage, with Colonel Denham.[58] Beautiful, eccentric, clever, and

[58] The author of the review in *The Athenaeum* wrote that the second part of the novel is a "highly interesting study of the effects of wealth on literary ambition" and that the first part recording Rachel's premarital affair with Denham is unnecessary because there turns out to be no reason that they should not have gotten married in the first place (29). The purpose that the first part serves, however, is to show that it was not wealth but the life of the emotions that killed Rachel's ambition.

cynical, Rachel both lives to write and writes to live, keeping her love for Denham in check for the first ten chapters because, as she puts it, love "can be kept at bay by one's reason" (50). She fears that she will quit writing if she allows herself to love Denham but eventually chooses the life of the emotions over the life of the intellect. Rachel becomes friends with Jarvis Ferrand, who calls her "a Madonna of the Rocks" (171) and argues that she has lowered and contaminated herself by the affair with Denham, even after the Colonel marries her. Her "purity"—as Jarvis would call it—is recovered, however, by the end of the novel when Denham is killed in a carriage smash-up while driving with his mistress. The implication is that Rachel will marry Jarvis and recover her true self, so the close of the novel suggests that the emotional, physical, spiritual, artistic, and intellectual sides of a woman may be reconciled when she meets a man for whom she can be both a Madonna and a sexual being—an optimism unique in Shakespear's fiction and one that is—significantly—only possible after the end of the woman's recorded history. If fulfillment in love and in a creative profession ever occur at the same time in Shakespear's novel, they do so only in an unwritable "happily ever after."

The False Laurel is at the other end of the spectrum, suggesting that a gifted woman is a social malignancy that can do nothing but destroy herself and those around her. Of all of Shakespear's novels, *The False Laurel* assigns the harshest fate to the Creatrix; it is also the first composed after Shakespear's friendship with Yeats had begun. The main character of *The False Laurel* is Daria Hollond, the young and beautiful daughter of a British diplomat living a fairly secluded life in Turkey. Daria writes poetry that, according to the narrator, is of a curious and Eastern-inspired character. The action of the novel begins with a visit from Hall Ravenscroft, a literary critic and friend of Daria's father. Daria falls in love with him and shows him her poems.

Ravenscroft tells her that, as a writer, "you have a thousand faults, and one saving quality. You have genius" (20). Ravenscroft does not return her love because, unacknowledged to himself, he fears her for being "a savage creature; tamed by some accident of circumstance" (18), and he leaves Turkey. Shortly thereafter, Daria's father dies, but not before revealing that, back in England, he had been in love with a woman named Daria West for whom his daughter is named. After her father's death, Daria is sent to live with relatives in Scotland, where Jonathan West, a young poet who lives in the estate next to Ravenscroft's and is the first Daria's son, sees his mother's namesake walking alone on the moor and falls in love with her. Although his friends sense some vaguely evil, serpent-like quality about her, Jonathan proposes marriage and Daria accepts on the belief that she might possibly love him one day: "she was near loving him [. . .] she told herself that to love again was perhaps not so difficult" (95). The night before their marriage, she burns every page of her poems. Their marriage is not a success, and the couple makes friends with Caroline Chesham, the sympathetic, emotional antithesis to Daria. Eventually Daria writes an extremely successful play, helped by her next-door-neighbor Ravenscroft, for whom she no longer has feelings but who has by now fallen in love with her. As she works on her second play, Daria realizes that she has lost her gift and can no longer write. She thinks she's beginning to go mad, and leaves Jonathan to go live in poverty in a garret in London. Caroline runs into Daria in the street, realizes she's going mad, and tells Jonathan how to find her. When he arrives at Daria's garret the next day, he finds her dead with a bottle of sleeping-draught in her hand. The novel implies that after Daria's death Jonathan and Caroline marry.

The parallel with Shakespear's own history is obvious. *The False Laurel* is about what happens to a woman writer when she begins a love affair with a talented poet; although Olivia's history is fortunately less grim than Daria's, this novel evidently had its genesis about the same time as its author, a twice-published although largely unsuccessful novelist, fell in love with a more well-known and critically successful poet. The similarity ends there, but the end-point of Shakespear's imaginary development of the roles that she and Yeats played in life demonstrates the importance she placed on one critical choice: whether or not to submerge her own creative life in that of her more-successful lover.

The pivotal scene in the novel occurs when Daria burns her poems the night before her wedding. Daria's motivation for destroying her own work is complex. The reason explicitly given by the novel is jealousy of Jonathan's superior talent, but Daria's mental self-justification points toward her internalization of cultural expectations for married women:

> Let her ambitions go! was her thought. Jonathan was beyond her, above her: let his be the struggle, and the laurels. For pride takes many forms; sometimes that of self-sacrifice; and the jealousy which cannot brook a rival, will draw back from any contest, with a seeming modesty.
>
> The last sheet lay in ashes; Daria put down her head on the table, and shed tears which were wrung from her by a sense of loss, of impotence, of rage against she knew not what.
>
> [. . .]
>
> Could she live Jonathan's life; look through his eyes; think through his brain; and keep silence, while he spoke in that tongue which she had once known, and must now forget?

> And even though his vision might be clear; his thoughts greater than her own; and his words such as she could never have uttered, still, would she be satisfied?
>
> (93-95)

One can read this scene, Daria's character, and indeed the whole novel in one of two ways. Taken at face value, Daria is vaguely evil, unlikable for any reason save her beauty, incapable of true love, jealous and unsupportive of her far more deserving husband. Harwood writes that "the Shelleyan opposition is clear: Jonathan is the true poet, while Daria is the 'presumptuous' imposter, crowned with the false laurel whose 'dew is poison'" (95). According to this reading, Daria burns her poems because of her "jealousy which cannot brook a rival": she sees Jonathan as a competitor and cannot bear for their work to be compared. Her emotional coldness and lack of sympathy may be caused by Ravenscroft's rejection of her,[59] and her unsuccessful marriage, failure as a playwright, madness, and suicide stem from her own dysfunctional and poisonous character. The review in *The Bookman* summarizes this "face-value" reading of Daria's life:

> One feels repulsion and very little interest in the contemplation of a woman all intellect and no emotion, who marries without love, makes her husband jealous by her intercourse with a man for whom she has no affection, who destroys her poems with jealous rage because they are not as good as her husband's, who leaves her home to write great plays, wrestles with insanity and poverty, and commits suicide in the end—none too soon for our comfort. (120)

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[59] Harwood writes that "some authorial comment in the early chapters suggests that Ravenscroft's rejection of Daria is responsible for the 'disease of the soul' which overtakes her, but the point is never developed and remains obscure" (ALS 96). In my reading, that point remains obscure because Daria does not actually have any "disease of the soul" until she burns her poems.

This is a harsh indictment of a woman "all intellect and no emotion," but it is one that Harwood confirms almost a century later.

To accept this reading, however, is to ignore a number of elements of the narrative, an oversight not difficult for an unsympathetic reviewer with a rather unskillful novel in his hands. The progression of events that transform Daria from a young girl living in Turkey to a married woman committing suicide in a London garret were, while not entirely out of her control, only representative of the limited array of choices that a woman in her situation would have. She was the daughter of a Greek woman whom she knew to have "not been deeply loved or greatly regretted" (25). She grew up in Turkey and did not like England the few times she had visited it. She fell in love with a man who deserted her after reading her poems because he was afraid of her genius, her beauty, her power to fascinate, and her wild freedom of spirit. Daria understands herself, and mankind, at last: "He was like other men; she was unlike other women; therein lay the whole tragedy" (25). The death of her father forces her to live with uncongenial relatives in a country she dislikes, and she marries Jonathan because his passion "seemed to warm her chilled heart, and set it beating again"; she says, "'I have been loved so little" (95). She burns her poems because she believes her responsibility as a wife is to "live Jonathan's life," and she realizes her mistake too late. She fraternizes with Ravenscroft because she needs his help, as a well-known critic, to get her play produced; she leaves her home because, as a playwright, she needs to live in London, which Jonathan hates. She tells him, "I haven't had much sympathy from you; and I have hidden my chief interest from you, because you did not care enough for me to sympathise" (186). Daria is not simply a character intended to represent the cruelty and egotism of a woman "all intellect and no emotion," more interested in her own creative success

than in love; she is a case study in the way that women could be tossed hither and thither because of a combination of misfortune and the limited choices available to them.

In fact, in the chapter immediately preceding the poem-burning scene, Jonathan's friend George Tremaine, who deems Daria "poisonous," informs her about Jonathan's status as a poet and about what it takes to make a writer well-known. This scene seems to be intended as the provocation for Daria's poem-burning, the real source of her malaise. Tremaine fears that Jonathan's career will be sacrificed to Daria: he tells Jonathan that she is "too unusual, too—well, too brilliant to settle down at Langton, and lead the quiet sort of life you like. And of course, if she won't settle down, good-bye to your ever doing anything worth mentioning [. . .] Too many of us have pinned our faith on you, for us to look calmly on such a possible end to your career" (85). A great poet—especially a burgeoning one—needs "sympathy and appreciation" (85), as well as a comfortable home life in order to blossom and to repay all his friends' interest. Jonathan's response encapsulates his expectations of the future wife: "'She is sure to appreciate and sympathise'" (85). The implication is not that Jonathan wants merely a beautiful and stupid wife, for Daria's obvious intelligence is a source of pride for him, and he happily tells his friend that "She is an acute critic, George, and has read more than most of us." George's response, however, is "She really should not be clever, as well as pretty" (85), a comment that might be seen as merely a pleasantry, if he had not just thought of Daria as "poisonous." Tremaine and Jonathan are at an impasse about Daria, for while both agree that Jonathan needs quiet, sympathy, and appreciation to succeed, Tremaine is convinced that Daria will not provide those qualities, and Jonathan is certain that she will. The question of what she will *do* with her own brilliance—in addition to "appreciate and sympathise"—is not addressed

because it is clear that her potential gifts and desires will be either threats or foils to Jonathan's, not elements of her personality that must be explored for own fulfillment in the marriage. Daria's decision to burn her poems and live her husband's life instead of her own, as well as her accusation later that Jonathan "did not care enough for me to sympathise" (186), is based on a correct assessment of his expectations of his wife.

When Tremaine then broaches the subject of Jonathan's career to Daria, she gets her first lesson on how someone can progress from being a closeted "scribbler" to a published and well-known writer, and the news is repulsive to her:

> "The public doesn't read poetry; not till it is forced down its throat. We mean to insist on Jonathan's being read, when his next volume comes out."
>
> "How horrible!" said Daria, with a shudder. [. . .] "And he is to be read, not on his own merits, but on the recommendation of his friends. I call that horrible."
>
> "I don't see why," said George. It's the way things are done: merit, unfortunately, is not often recognized till its existence is pointed out by someone who has authority." (87-88)

For Daria, writing had been something, private, sacred, in part because she knew that a woman writer evokes fear and contempt. She knew what Ravenscroft considered to be the most important quality in a woman, and it was not genius: "Beauty in a woman is more necessary than wit or virtue: it covers all her sins" (13). However, in Daria's experience there is one "sin" that beauty evidently does not absolve. Ravenscroft was the first to read her poems, and he left Turkey the next day, motivated by horror of her genius because "such instincts [as genius] may be for evil" (21). The scene between Tremaine and Daria is told from his perspective, so we don't know what her thought process is, but the discovery that a poet needs an authority to

publicize his work, and not only one authority, but evidently a whole troop of log-rollers, horrifies her. Moreover, Tremaine's image of writing being forced down the throat of the public is one of violation: if the pen is a metaphorical penis, as in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's famous formulation (3), then publicizing writing is a rape of one's readership. Daria's distress shows on her face, and Tremaine "was left to wonder why the idea of Jonathan's probable success should have been so disturbing to her" (FL 89). She has just discovered that not only does she need to win over "authority," which she already knows to be hostile to her gift, but that her sacred acts of creation must be profaned, transformed into a weapon with which to assault the public. Once she attempts the transition from a "scribbler" to a published author, literature becomes a power struggle, an economy, even an act of rape, a shocking revelation to a girl who grew up writing in a secluded Turkish garden.

Daria is repeatedly described by other characters as "poisonous," "morbid, not normal," "heartless," and with "a disease of the soul." These epithets, however, all come through Jonathan's friends, not the narrator, and they cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Moreover, to them Daria is a foreigner, a girl who has spent very little time in England and for whom it is an unfamiliar culture. Her first months in England are spent with unsympathetic relatives immediately after the death of her father, and for the remainder of the novel she is trapped in an unsuccessful marriage after sacrificing to conventional mores what she held most precious. It is true that at this stage of Shakespear's career, all the characters are painted with broad strokes, but although Daria is not psychologically complex, the author's attitude—and the narrative's—toward her are, a fact overlooked by what little commentary on the novel that

exists.[60] Harwood remarks, in fact, that "the author's evident attachment to him [Jonathan] draws her away from further analysis of Daria's malady, towards conventional expressions of outrage" (ALS 96). What exactly these "expressions of outrage" are, however, is not clear: soon after Daria's marriage the narrator's voice is phased out in favor of *discours indirect libre*[61] that forces a reader to judge Daria from the perspective of Jonathan—the "wronged" husband—or Caroline, who is in love with Jonathan. However, between Ravenscroft abandoning Daria and Jonathan meeting her, Shakespear interpolates a scene that suggests how she expects the reader to think of Jonathan and, indirectly, of Daria's predicament.

In chapter three, Jonathan's enters his deceased mother's bedroom for the first time since her death to open the drawer she had always kept locked. The narrator describes the room as being filled with a ghostly presence of the first Daria West: "her chair stood in the accustomed place, the cushions still bearing the impress of her body; the upper part of her escritoire was open, the letters that she had left unanswered, lying covered with a week's dust" (29). This room was Mrs. West's private refuge, for "Here, his mother had been wont to spend some hours of every day, during which it had been understood that no one was to disturb her," and yet "there were no pictures, no ornaments; just the little, bare, silent room, from whose latticed windows one could see only the sky" (30). The description of this room is like that of a prison cell. The windows are barred with a limited view of the outside world, the furnishings are only the

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[60] The editors of Yeats's *Collected Letters* call Daria "an eccentric [. . .] the half-genius, half insane Daria West" (CL1 650).

[61] It is probable that Shakespear was familiar with Flaubert's use of the technique. She read widely and was fluent in French, as her translation of *Le Comte de Gabalis* for *The Egoist*—at Pound's request (Longenbach 109)—proves.

necessary bed, chair, and desk, and, there is no decoration that suggests outside interests or personality. Mrs. West's private sanctuary is blank, without a view, and shut away from the outside world except through one vital medium: writing.

This emblem of the inviolable privacy of the soul frightens Jonathan. He remembers being a child and once peering into the room when his mother was inside, and the look on her face "had touched him with a sense of mystery, almost of fear; and when she had come out into the world again, he had hidden from her; and only ventured back into her presence at the sound of her laugh, as she walked with his father in the garden," and "Fear was upon him, even now" (30). Except as "mother" and "wife of father," she is a frightening and incalculable being, disturbing precisely because she has an existence of which Jonathan is not the center. It is only in her familial role that she is benign. When Jonathan unlocks the lowest drawer of the escritoire, he finds love letters exchanged by his mother and Daria's father when he was a small child. Jonathan is shocked and suffers anger and pain because he realizes that

> he had never known her. The mother he had loved, died a second death as he sat there, and a woman rose up in her place, who wore a mask to hide the face her son might not see.
>
> There was pity for her in his heart [. . .] none the less did he condemn her—he would have been surprised had anyone told him that he perhaps condemned her more because she had cost him an illusion, than for her sin itself. (32)

This allusion to "sin" must be taken with a grain of salt because nowhere in Shakespear's fiction is it suggested that extramarital or premarital affairs are "sinful" in the traditional sense as long as no child is affected by losing a mother or by being born illegitimate. Jonathan, then, is shown

to be conventional and conventionally self-centered from his very first appearance in the novel, expecting to be the center of the universe for the women involved with him, disturbed and put off when those women have stages in their life on which he does not star. This conventionality is not grounds for narrative condemnation, however, which is probably why it could pass unnoticed: Shakespear tends to create male characters who are extremely faulty and then take a forbearing attitude toward them, whether they are dastardly (Colonel Durham), negligible (Stephen Branden in JHH), easily manipulated by a shallow and villainous wife (Rupert Armstrong), or obtuse and even rather stupid (Tony in *The Devotees*). This introduction to Jonathan's character is nevertheless an introduction to his frailties and not an invitation to sympathize with him throughout the rest of the novel.

The relationship between Jonathan's mother and Daria's father serves no other narrative purpose other than to give Jonathan's mother and his wife the same name,[62] thereby establishing a parallel between two women who lived curtailed lives and who elicited Jonathan's condemnation and resentment because they each had existences apart from their traditional role as his mother or his wife. The contemporary reviews and existing criticism emphasize that Daria married Jonathan without loving him; the real issue is that he proposed marriage without loving *her*. Instead, for him she is an idol, an object of worship, but one that must adhere to the definition he has established for the household goddess. He fell in love with her at first sight without knowing anything about her and afterwards wished for her unwavering sympathy and

[62] Although themes of incest reoccur in Shakespear's last three novels, there is little implication in this novel that Jonathan and Daria are brother and sister. He is around seven years older than she, and the affair was of too short a duration to have produced two children who are that far apart in age. However, it is rather suspicious that Daria's father is named John.

perpetual companionship. When she wishes to go for a solitary ramble in the early days of their marriage, he "watched her go, with regret. Her fancies amused him, but only as long as he shared them; it hurt him that she should wish to go away, even for a few hours" (108); Daria, for her part "had begun to feel weary of her pedestal, and of the worshipper who kept her enthroned; inactive, with hidden feet of clay" (110). Her initial decision to destroy her poems before her marriage and instead to "live Jonathan's life" is fully justified, for he has a particular condemnation reserved for women with rooms of their own. It is not some nebulous disease of the soul but that restriction, that condemnation, writ large on her social milieu, that goads Daria into committing suicide in a garret.

Most of Shakespear's central female characters are beautiful, and most of them—notably Rachel Gwynn, Louise Libanoff, and Rosamond Carston—seem to have the eerie power of making every man who sees them fall immediately in love. From *The False Laurel* onwards, her fiction maintains the fairly standardized difference between true love and a superficial passion based on the senses. Both Jonathan's and Ravenscroft's love for Daria falls into the latter category, for neither really knows her inner being or has any desire to do so. Instead, they fall in love with her beauty and expect the woman herself to be other than what she is. "True love," like that of Jarvis for Rachel or Richard for Rosamond (in *Uncle Hilary*) appreciates and loves the woman within, no matter what her "fancies" are; false love only worships an idol on her pedestal and resents any occupation or interest that does not involve him. However, Shakespear's fiction does not exempt true love from critique. True love is just as lethal as false, for it enslaves the self: Peace, freedom from the passions, is for Shakespear the only condition under which a woman may be a Creatrix. In her fiction, Shakespear cannot imagine a version of sexual love

that does not enslave, that is conducive to Peace instead of destructive of it: her milieu's understanding of religious and sexual roles precludes partnership between men and women on the religious quest, so Shakespear's characters are forced to choose between religion and sexual love.

Shakespear's final novel *Uncle Hilary* seems, at least in the opening pages, to come around to Yeats's way of thinking about Beauty, for it juggles competing ideologies—traditional Christianity, Buddhism, atheism, radical politics—but confirms the sanctity of Beauty: the narrator tells us in the opening pages that "beauty is the real immortality; it lives in tradition when the individual incarnation is brought to dust, or broken fragments" (4). However, the history of Rosamond Colston, the protagonist, shows yet again that while Beauty in the abstract may be holy, beauty in its "individual incarnation" only provokes passion, which in turn begets slavery. Instead of placing the individual incarnation on a pedestal, like Gerald Harman, Jonathan West, and Yeats do, endowing her with a made-to-order soul and calling her a goddess, Shakespear's last fictional word asserts the holiness of a nebulous, intangible beauty: in fact, the novel foregrounds the value of the religious quest by defining religion as entirely real and yet ultimately undefinable, the "hand not ours." The woman who is beautiful is not simply one of the objects of the quest but a full-fledged participant, a Creatrix, who must free herself from the restrictions that her "incarnation" of beauty places upon her in order to pursue Beauty in the abstract.

The title character of *Uncle Hilary* is an extremely fat man of around sixty-five , repeatedly likened to the Buddha, who founded and "made the fortunes" (4) of Colston & Co., an import house. The novel is set in the 1840s, an odd choice considering the subject matter, as the

reviewer in *The Athenaeum* points out: "The will to live and the iniquity of social convention seem unlikely subjects of conversation in the forties, and the characters are, like their religion and ethics, essentially of our own day" (489). Uncle Hilary lives with his spinster sister, Aunt Colston, and Fred Colston, his nephew from an unidentified sibling. Eighteen-year-old Rosamond, a distant relative, joins the household when her n'er-do-well father dies and leaves her penniless. We learn that Rosamond's mother, a great beauty, had left the family when Rosamond was too young to remember her. All Rosamond has left from her parents is a box of papers and a miniature of her mother that her father had kept wrapped up and put away.

Uncle Hilary's dearest friend is Colonel Richard Henry, a soldier around the age of forty who has lived mainly in India since boyhood. Henry is the atheist of the novel and has a mind that is full "of revolt against what he thought were the shams and hypocrisies of current religious ideals, and respect for the moral standards which kept men honest and honourable and courageous in doing what they believed to be right" (22). Aunt Colston "treated him with a kind of severe tolerance, and left tracts in his bedroom, which he read, and it is to be feared, laughed at" (6). Colonel Henry had been married unhappily years before to a woman older than himself and whom Hilary believes to have died many years ago.

Rosamond and Colonel Henry fall in love, and after a period of reticence and agonizing, confess their love to each other and become engaged. Colonel Henry returns to India to fight in the second Sikh War, and eventually Rosamond goes out to him there and they get married. After a month, however, Colonel Henry learns that his wife is still alive and that he and Rosamond must part until he can obtain a divorce. He shows Rosamond his wife's daguerreotype, and she realizes that his first wife was her own mother, which puts them within

the prohibited degrees. They decide they must part forever because to remain together would compromise Rosamond and ruin Colonel Henry's career, so Rosamond returns to England where only a few people—sworn to secrecy—know of their marriage. Soon Rosamond realizes that she is pregnant, so she and Uncle Hilary marry in order to preserve the child's legitimacy. The infant is born and then dies in Italy, so few people knew of the child, rendering the marriage pointless, and, in the eyes of others, absurd. Rosamond suffers through a period of terrible depression until Colonel Henry returns to England, wounded and invalided out of the army. Out of loyalty to Uncle Hilary, the two do not resume their affair, in spite of the fact that their friend Major Mayne tells Rosamond that Colonel Henry has no will to live and needs her to recover. Rosamond's mother, starving and sick in a London flat, contacts her daughter and asks for money. They meet, and her mother tells her to return to "Dicky" if she still loves him. Rosamond and Colonel Henry do leave London together to travel and finally settle in seclusion in rural England. But Colonel Henry recovers his health and is bored and restless with nothing to do. Rosamond realizes that "she had given herself to him, wholly; to find that the gift was one no man really desires" (295). She returns to Uncle Hilary, leaving Colonel Henry free to return to India, realizing that love truly is, as Hilary had told her, "the greatest of the illusions" (306).

Harwood considers that Rosamond's choice is "the product of a cruel, Hardyesque coincidence which is far from universal" and that "Her feeling that the gift of herself is 'one no man really desires' is very much tied to her own history—and perhaps that of her creator" (ALS 128).[63] But it is not simply the circumstances of her relationship to Colonel Henry that create his ennui and her spiritual curiosity: Rosamond chooses to return to Uncle Hilary because her love for him does not enslave like passion does through its very pleasure. The power relations

[63] A not-unfamiliar riposte: a woman who critiques sexual politics must be unhappy in love.

between the two are, in spite of the difference in sex and age, not unequal, and therefore Rosamond is free to pursue the religious quest that has become her greatest desire. This novel is not an adequate foundation for supposing that Shakespear's critique of the economy of passion is purely a result of her own unhappiness in love: it would be more justified to say that *Uncle Hilary* is a critique of the social mores that refuse to recognize any sexual relationship outside of marriage yet condition a woman in a marriage—even a pseudo-marriage—to expect a secondary role. The novel attributes the ultimate failure of Colonel Henry and Rosamond's relationship not to "coincidence" but to a sexual economy that expects women to be wholly fulfilled by her feminine duties.

Rosamond is the quester of the novel, the experimenter in the different ideologies that other characters profess. Aunt Colston and Colonel Henry are direct opposites, the one a fundamentalist Christian, the other a militant atheist. In the library Rosamond is told "God has been invented by people who are afraid—they are afraid of the great relentless machinery against which there is no appeal" (23), but in the stairwell, "'There is only one true religion,' said Aunt Colston gravely. 'Your uncle may talk about Buddhism, or whatever it may be, but nothing is true but Christianity'" (74). At this point in the novel, Rosamond herself "had absorbed Colonel Henry's view perhaps more fully than she knew" (74-75); she listens to everyone but is yet not a meaning-maker herself because she is at first an unformed teenager without experience or learning and then too absorbed in her passion for Colonel Henry to believe in anything except love:

> "Must one always," she wondered, "be a slave to something, whether it be the idea of a God, or some other conception of life? Was any 'freedom of the spirit' impossible for

> most people?" It flashed across her, for a moment, that she herself was as much a slave to her belief that love was the one essential thing in the world, as Aunt Colston was to her religion. She refused the thought, with a shudder; it opened out possibilities from which she recoiled; the conclusions to which they led were too much opposed to her state of mind; and were, indeed, hardly to be formulated. (75-76)

Rosamond's journey is to learn to discard this fear of truth, to free herself from slaveries and to make the formulations that she recoils from as a teenager.

Hilary is, to an extent, the moral center of the novel against which other ideologies are tested, and, according to Colonel Henry, Hilary "'has arrived at the conclusion of Solomon. To him all is vanity—whatever we think. He says, further that it is all illusion'" (23). The greatest illusion, according to him, is the one to which Rosamond is enslaved. Instead of "love," however, Hilary calls it "a great force of which you don't yet know the nature; some people call it the Will to live: it keeps the world going; it is in yourself too, and for a long time you will think it the only force" (60). And yet, alone among Rosamond's influences, he does not proselytize, for he believes that "'no hand can tear away the veil of illusion for another; the mystics and visionaries can tell you what they see, but they cannot make you see it'" (60). Hilary does not doubt that Rosamond will eventually see the truths of the mystics and visionaries because he and she

> had recognized each other as being of the same spiritual kin, though one was young and the other old; but he would have spared her nothing, even if he could. He had an intuitive faith in her; and believed that one day, she would overtake him, and would know what he knew. [. . .] He was sure of this, not because he desired it, but because he had

> recognized in her that power of growth which seems to be denied to some natures, and is a quickening and nearly terrible quality in others. (59)

Although *Uncle Hilary* unequivocally eschews traditional religion and morality, like "Beauty's Hour" the novel assumes the existence of truth, of a natural order of things, and one that appears to share one of Yeats's central tenets. Uncle Hilary asserts the existence of the *Spiritus Mundi* or collective unconscious and calls it the one of the "secrets of the universe":

> "If you can take in the idea that we are not really bounded by our personality, that we have a spark of the world's consciousness in us, you will see that it is possible for us to be in relation to that consciousness; for which there is neither yesterday, to-day, nor to-morrow. We may, in sleep, or in moments of concentration, be able to receive knowledge from it, dimly, or in the case of those who have cultivated the faculty, clearly." (177-178)

Over the course of the novel, Rosamond learns to cultivate this faculty and to bring herself into harmony with the world mind. There are obviously no principles of morality that accompany this religion, however, and so Rosamond and Hilary's religious performance is a process of discovery, of creation.

What Rosamond discovers is the narrowness of a life defined by passionate love and nothing else, and what she creates is a life in which she is both free to love and free to exist in her own right. Even when she and Colonel Henry are in India together, Rosamond realizes that she resents the power relations of their affair because she begins to discover "that men love women for their unlikeness to themselves; that a man seeks love as a rest from his activities, a quiet harbour; to a woman love is the activity, into which she comes from a state of quiescence,

or expectation" (81). He is everything to her, a god whom she worships "with the intensity of a devotee to whom a new religion has been revealed" (81); to him, she is a beloved solace but only one corner of a life that is concerned primarily with his career. When they are reunited later, after Colonel Henry's illness, Rosamond is cut off from her family and from all polite society, and Henry is cut off from his career, which leads to loneliness and ennui for both of them. Rosamond realizes that "No woman, she knew instinctively, could permanently fill a man's life to the exclusion of everything else: then a searching question forced itself upon her: Could love do that even for a woman?" (273). When Colonel Henry is away for a few days, Rosamond spends a few days in quiet contemplation and

> Remembered vaguely the purport of some words of St. Augustine which had once struck her: Thou madest us for Thyself, and our souls are weary til we find Thee. It was not God she sought, in any definite form: she could give no name to that which called to her from behind the veil, which was surely, gradually lifting before her eyes; it might be but a great spiritual curiosity which urged her to answer; or a great weariness, she did not know; but she felt that curiosity would one day be satisfied, and weariness be changed into rest. (274)

This spiritual desire is Rosamond's defining characteristic. What sexual love had done to her was to enslave her: she recalls that "Her love for Uncle Hilary, real enough, as she now knew, had been a shadow compared to the passion which absorbed and dominated her" in the first months of her reunion with Colonel Henry (259); moreover, as Fred remarks in the first pages of the novel "Colonel Henry is always fighting something; generally other people's convictions" (6). Rosamond and Colonel Henry are not simply incompatible; her passion for him distracts her

from pursuing her spiritual curiosity, and were she to finally see behind the veil to the spiritual realm, Colonel Henry, as a determined atheist, would not take her revelation seriously.

In every imaginable way, it is the incarnation of Beauty—both in Rosamond, her mother, and Colonel Henry himself—that enslaves Rosamond and distracts her from her spiritual desire. She herself is described as "pretty, with long golden-brown curls hanging on each side of her face, dark eyes and a sensitive mouth" with "the unconscious grace of a child" (7). Her beauty is not repeatedly insisted upon like that of many of Shakespear's protagonists, but it is enough to induce at least three peripheral characters, including her cousin Fred, to fall in love with her. It seems unavoidable that she, a pretty woman, could be on any other terms with a man than those of love; as Hilary puts it, "Friendship between a pretty young girl and a man is difficult. You must be aware of that" (34). Rosamond herself is guilty of the same fault as Jonathan West because, in spite of being predisposed to dislike Colonel Henry for some unspecified reason, she falls in love with him at first sight because "there was something in his face that struck her with a sort of blow; not his beauty, for that she hardly noticed, but an eager appeal, to which, she felt instinctively, one would answer by giving all he chose to demand" (18). Although it may be this "eager appeal" that first attracts her, Rosamond is not unaware of his beauty; she thinks a few days later when she notices that Colonel Henry disregards Hilary's beautiful teacups, "'He doesn't care about beautiful things [. . .] perhaps that is because he is one himself'" (21). It is ultimately her physical desire for him that keeps them together despite their differences, for "The dreamer and the doer could not merge themselves in one another, save for a short time under the influence of passion" (276).

It is, however, in Rosamond's mother, Annie, that beauty's incarnation is represented as wholly malicious. In spite of being a terrible woman according to the novel, her beauty had taken in Colonel Henry long enough to induce him to marry her, which eventually ruins his and Rosamond's lives. An old acquaintance describes her to Rosamond as "Much more than pretty" (48); when Hilary examines her miniature, "he could detect no likeness to Rosamond; the hair was fair and the eyes blue; it was a beautifully-done picture of a beautiful woman" (50). Annie is repeatedly described as an adventuress, a woman who made her living by her beauty, supported by one lover after another. Rosamond has little pity for her, as her thought-process after visiting her mother for the first time shows: "She looked as though she were dying, Rosamond thought, and grasped at the possibility with a sense of relief; the world would be cleaner were she out of it" (206). Unlike Bella Sturgis in "Beauty's Hour," Annie is not exonerated by the suggestion that she is a victim of a culture that objectifies women's beauty and represses the woman within: every character who sees her or knows her calls her a "bad woman" (101), and Rosamond judges from her miniature, even before she knew her mother was still alive and married to Colonel Henry, that "She was cruel" (51).[64]

But when beauty is not expressed in the *human* form, Shakespear, like Yeats, interprets it as a conduit of the otherworld. Uncle Hilary is a collector of beautiful objects, "Oriental vases which were the desire of every connoisseur in Europe; lacquer so precious that none but Uncle Hilary himself ever touched it; ivory carvings yellowed by time; silks keeping their glowing colours, as though they were a sacred trust" (4). Rosamond and Fred share this reverence for

[64] It is worth a reminder here that in Shakespear's canon the cardinal sexual "sin" that a woman can commit is to abandon her child for a lover. Rosamond's mother committed that sin, as did Tony's mother Louise in *The Devotees*.

lovely objects, and when Fred brings a small Buddhist shrine back from China as a gift, it gives Hilary a vision:

> He held it, and closed his eyes. The tangled present faded away, as it gave him its message. He sat once more in the shade of great trees outside an Eastern monastery, and listened to the quiet voice of an old man; he saw once more the veil of illusion slowly rent, and identifying himself with the universal consciousness, peace wrapped him round like some great magical cloak of twilight: as he came slowly back to the glare of life he felt as though he had travelled far, to secret places of the soul into which he had been denied entry for many months. (145)

As the spiritual center of the novel, the emphasis placed on Hilary as a collector suggests that there is a religious value intrinsic to the beautiful object. As Fred asserts, beauty "must mean something" (158): what it "means" in this novel is both the representation and the conduit of the otherworld but only when it is located in an inanimate object. For Shakespear, Beauty in the object is a willed creation containing something of the eternal, the universal consciousness; Beauty in the human form is simply an accident of nature, brought on by and perpetuating the inexorable Will to Live with all its evil, tumult, and illusion.

Yeats would have objected to Shakespear's critique of Beauty in the human form. In the *fin de siècle* the poet understood a beautiful woman as a throwback to a long-lost heroic past or as the human representation of an otherworldly present. That conviction came at the expense of an accurate understanding of the real women who surrounded him, however, as was made clear by his disastrous relationship with Shakespear as well as by Maud Gonne's revelation. The

poetry he wrote in the twentieth century demonstrated a similar understanding of beauty, for Yeats began to think of beauty as not simply symbolic

Uncle Hilary himself is an animation of an object, and evidently he presided over Olivia Shakespear's literary salon. Ezra Pound reports that Uncle Hilary is the name given to a statue of the Buddha and that Pound was invited to meet Yeats "in a room all full of white magic where Uncle Hillary [sic] lives" (Pound 16). Shakespear's fiction repeatedly animates different versions of essentially the same woman, one who is beautiful, talented, and passionate, and then tests her in variations of the same quest for love and fulfillment; when this character fails to overcome her circumstances, Shakespear must conclude that it is only by renouncing the life of the body that women may possess real spiritual power and autonomy. Once she had located ultimate religious significance in the aesthetic *object*, she accepts stasis—Peace—as the only possibility for the devotee. It is strange that, given her repetition-with-a-difference of her own characters, she was unable to imagine other possibilities of representation that could marry the sacred and the sexual.

It is, however, these possibilities at which Yeats arrives himself in the final decades of his career. Yeats would have objected to Shakespear's critique of Beauty in the human form as forcefully as she objects to the tendency he possessed to idolize women for their beauty without really knowing them. In the *fin de siècle* the poet understood a beautiful woman as a throwback to a long-lost heroic past or as the human representation of an otherworldly present. That conviction came at the expense of an accurate understanding of the real women who surrounded him, however, as was made clear by his disastrous relationship with Shakespear as well as by his shock at Maud Gonne's revelation. The poetry he wrote in the twentieth century demonstrated a

similar conception of beauty, for Yeats began to think of beauty as not simply symbolic but as a product of suffering and growth in the past incarnations of its possessor. As he writes in "The Phases of the Moon," "All dreams of the soul / End in a beautiful man's or woman's body" (CP 165). This later development of the poet's understanding of beauty does not entirely evade the criticism that Shakespear leveled at what she saw as the male belief in the spiritual value of beauty, but it does not conscript the beautiful woman into the service of male religious identity and destroy her in the process. Instead, in Yeats's later poems, his religious meaning-makers are frequently women, women like Crazy Jane who understand that human love and love of the divine are not contradictory but complementary.

Chapter Three

The Risk that Protects: Re-Visioning the Divine in *The Winding Stair*

> "The marriage bed is the symbol of the solved antinomy, and were more than symbol could a man there lose and keep his identity, but he falls asleep." (AVB 52)

The holy city of Byzantium, a hallmark of W. B. Yeats's late work, represented for the poet the Unity of Being for which he had striven all his life. It would be difficult to overstate the importance that the city had for him as an emblem: Yeats writes in *A Vision* that in Justinian's Byzantium "religious, aesthetic, and practical life were one" (AVB 279), and Helen Vendler points out that he considered the city "at once a glory of Christian civilization and a manifestation of dying classicism" (65). The poet never travelled to Byzantium itself, but he had been a lifelong student of the art and architecture of that city, thanks in part to the influence of William Morris, for whom the Hagia Sophia was "the crown of all the great buildings of the world" (208). Within the field of Yeats studies, Byzantium is read as the unifying image of the most salient of the poet's lifelong philosophical concerns: it is the highest development of aesthetics, religion, selfhood, politics, civilization; there, saint, poet, peasant, and king collaborate, and nowhere is body bruised to pleasure soul. But unnoticed, at the buried heart of this emblem, lurks another image, a memory.

This image entered Yeats's poetic imaginary when he and George visited the new Stockholm *stadshus*[65]—City Hall—on his 1923 trip to Sweden to accept the Nobel Prize for

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[65] J. B. Bullen's recent article "W. B. Yeats, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean" brought this visit to my attention.

Literature.[66] One of the greatest achievements of the Stadshus is the Golden Hall, a large, aptly named room with floor-to-ceiling gold mosaics depicting scenes from Swedish legend on each wall. When the poet entered the Hall he encountered the room's largest mosaic, a modified Deisis[67] in which the central figure is paid homage not by John the Baptist and Mary the mother of Jesus but by various icons of world architecture, including the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, and the Hagia Sophia itself. The central figure, always Christ in traditional Deises, is in this mosaic a representation of Stockholm, the sovereign of Lake Mälaren: a woman. This re-gendering of an iconic religious image entered the poet's vision of Byzantium and has a special relevance to the development of his religious thought over the ensuing decade.

As I argued in the first chapter, Yeats's religious iconography is gendered even in his earliest poetry. His symbology afforded privileged roles to female figures, but this privilege was undermined by the polarization of those roles into the Medium and the Minerva, the helpmeet and the desexualized goddess. Throughout the course of his writing life, woman maintained her place of privilege, but the polarity of her roles was undone by a number of events in the poet's own life, namely Maud Gonne's revelation in 1898 of her affair with Lucian Millevoye[68] and later, in 1917, the poet's marriage and the event of the automatic writing. It was not until *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* that Yeats, bolstered by the system derived from that automatic writing, was able to once again construct a sustained system of representation for his holy

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[66] The Nobel banquet is currently held in the Blue Room of the Stadshus, but 1934 was the first year that happened.

[67] A deisis is a particular type of Orthodox icon that features Christ as the central figure with Mary on his right and John on his left, both bending their heads in reverence. Other figures may also flank the central trio.

[68] I discuss this event in more detail in chapter one.

women. In this chapter I read his iconography against that of two later thinkers, Luce Irigaray and John D. Caputo, in order to clarify how completely the poet's symbology was transformed from one that denigrated fleshliness and erased women's religious subjectivity into one that foregrounds women as Creatrices. Read through this lens, Yeats's holy women of *The Winding Stair* reveal their revolutionary significance, in the context of both the poet's writing life and current discussions of postsecular religion.

Yeats, Caputo, and Irigaray all use the Annunciation as an emblem of their religious thought, for that is a moment when the human woman and the divine collide and the woman must respond to the pronouncement of the divine will. Caputo reads Mary's fiat as a positive affirmation of the religious value of risk, but he does not take into account the prescriptive role for religious women that has sprung from her response: that of the blank slate, the submissive virgin-mother. Irigaray's understanding of that moment is more critical, for while she shares Caputo's passion for risk, she realizes that the Annunciation cannot be divested of centuries of women's oppression in the name of Christianity. Yeats, like Irigaray and Caputo, embraces the risk that the human takes when she encounters the divine, for the emblem of Annunciation cannot be divorced from his system in *A Vision*: the otherworldly gyres are inexorable, and the human is, to a certain extent, at the mercy of their machinations. By the second edition of *A Vision*, however, the gyres gained a much greater complexity, allowing the poet to create a symbology relying on transformation, not simple alternation, and therefore he no longer believes that the self must erase itself irrevocably when it meets the divine: the mind may become like still water, but that stillness is only momentary. It is from this model of divine-human exchange that the Creatrix can spring. Yeats's system therefore finally allows a solution that surmounts

simple alternation, one that relies on a re-vision of religious identity as the self constantly in motion, a process of constant exchange between the human and the divine otherworld. Every act of self-erasure then, is always already on its way toward self-creation and vice versa. In this chapter, I argue that *The Winding Stair* is the paradigmatic Yeatsian example of this dynamic religious identity, the book in which Yeats at last resolves his twin desires in female characters like the Mother of God and Crazy Jane. If *The Tower* is a lament for the self, defeated by this lifelong war, *The Winding Stair* is an epithalamion: it inscribes an ongoing exchange between the self and the divine, this world and the other.

The automatic writing that began on October 24, 1917 at last allowed the poet the system with which to reshape the sexed religious symbology that had been undermined back in 1898. The event enabled this reshaping for two reasons: the method of revelation from the otherworld—the roles that George and W. B. played—showed that he had wrongly conceived the relationship between religion, sexuality, and power; and the philosophical system that arose from the Yeatses' automatic writing gave him the beginnings of a symbology that eventually renegotiated the exchange of power between the human and the divine. Margaret Mills Harper has persuasively argued that the actual experience of the automatic writing led to the "undoing of the duality of body and soul, the inseparability of physicality from abstraction" in the poet's imagination (253).[69] This undoing, according to Harper, was caused by the Communicators' expectation that George and W. B. must share the mediumship and that their success was

[69] Harper's study *The Wisdom of Two: The Spiritual and Literary Collaboration of George and W. B. Yeats*, is, to my mind, the best book-length interpretation of the event of the automatic script as well as the most forward-thinking work of Yeats criticism in recent memory.

enabled by a sexual relationship between the two that was satisfactory to both partners. George was not simply a passive conduit but an interpreter, for the automatic script reveals that she carefully initialed the questions that she herself asked of the spirit communicators. Her poet-husband was not simply an empowered interrogator, a magician, but a medium who must intuit the questions that *should* be asked. As he writes in his description of the event in the 1937 version of *A Vision*, he had himself to attempt to become a bit of a passive conduit for what the Communicators wanted to discuss:

> I had always to question, and every question to rise out of a previous answer and to deal with their chosen topic. My questions must be accurately worded, and, because they said their thought was swifter than ours, asked without delay or hesitation. I was constantly reproved for vague or confused questions, yet I could do no better [. . .] (AVB 10-11)

The image of the great poet, the great talker of his Monday Evenings, being browbeaten by spirits for delay or confusion in speech is an entertaining one, but remembering that his reprimanding came from the pen of George Yeats makes the scene that much more provocative.

Regular communications went on for more than five years, first through the script and then through "sleeps" in which George talked in her sleep and W. B. summarized, and in this, the most sustained and productive occult experiment of the poet's life, religious authority was shared and the sexual and spiritual dimensions of life were shown to have an intrinsic connection. Probably every Yeats scholar has a theory about what the communications actually consisted of,[70] but I bypass the question of belief in favor of Barbara L. Croft's excellent advice that, for

[70] Harper seems to accept that that some external presence could have communicated with the Yeatses, and Brenda Maddox, on the other end of the spectrum, believes that GY's extensive reading in languages that were

the critic approaching *A Vision*, "there must be at least a temporary suspension of the scientific bias toward logic and proof and a partial agreement with Yeats that what the imagination seizes with intensity is a kind of truth" (9). What is most relevant to this project is the connection the communications created between sexuality and spirituality and the religious partnership that the experiments forged between George and W. B. Yeats. An intimate relationship with a woman who is a Creatrix—literally—did not mean that the woman would have "power over" W. B. ; instead, partnership with George enhanced his success in the two great projects of his life, occult experimentation and poetry.[71] Religious interpretive power, then, could be revisioned not as power that dominates but as power to create.

And yet, a reader of *A Vision* expecting to find in it a work of systematic theology or aesthetics is destined to share Yeats's own frustration with the communicators: "they kept me from mastering the conception. They shifted ground whenever my interest was at its height" (AVB 11). In Northrop Frye's oft-quoted assessment, *A Vision* is "to the student of Yeats [. . .] an infernal nuisance that he can't pretend doesn't exist" (14). At its most succinct and logical,

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unavailable to her husband—French, German, Italian, and Spanish—allowed her to be in conscious control of both the script and the sleeps, in other words, that she literally and consciously wrote the system herself.

My own supposition, based on Saddlemyer's discussion of George's ability to hypnotize herself almost instantly (124), is that George may have originally intended to stage a hoax but that almost immediately she put herself into a hypnotized state. Whether she spoke from her own subconscious or whether spirits spoke through her we will probably never know, but I can't help but half-believe that the Yeatses were not alone in constructing the script.

[71] Detailed analysis of the event of the automatic writing is beyond the scope of this project, and interested readers may refer to the exhaustive studies by Harper and Ann Saddlemyer.

Yeats's prose is always elusive and abstruse, and of no work is that more true than *A Vision*, for, as a theory of religion, history, and personality as explained through spirit communicators, it is written with too much idiosyncrasy to truly explicate its own hypotheses. The foundational symbol of *A Vision*—the interpenetrating gyres—defies the laws of physics, so any attempt to understand the gyres as "real" will be abortive. *A Vision* resists the analytic reader: it features the imprecise suggestiveness of many of Yeats's great poetic images without the condensed, crafted framework of his great poems that gives those images significance in their context.

Criticism of *A Vision* has viewed the book from several different perspectives and indeed, like a Rorschach test, the book through such criticism often reveals as much about the critic as about the text. Two of the most representative perspectives on *A Vision* were given by two of its most well-known readers: Helen Vendler interprets the work as a system of aesthetics, writing that it is primarily "a symbolic statement, somewhat cluttered up with psychic paraphernalia" (*Yeats's Vision* vii); for Harold Bloom, *A Vision* is a cosmology, a treatise that "expresses itself as another language of faith, a protest against the analytic attitude" (212). Any interpretation of the book is problematized, however, by one critical but often disregarded fact. Cleanth Brooks calls *A Vision* "one of the most remarkable books of the last hundred years" (60), but actually it is two books: the first version was published in 1925 (AVA) and the second, expanded edition in 1937 (AVB).[72] The changes between the two volumes are vast and difficult to summarize, but the biographical impetus for Yeats's choices as writer and researcher of *A Vision* may be summarized by two observations. First, the "spirit controls" only reluctantly allowed Yeats to publicize the system, and they insisted on their own role being kept secret in AVA, so the poet

[72] Hereafter these works will be referred to as AVA and AVB, respectively.

constructed an idiosyncratic origin story featuring Michael Robartes; in AVB, however, he admitted George's role. Second, the controls would not allow Yeats to do any research on the subject of their communications until AVA was finished, but between the publication of the first and second version he supplemented his spirits by readings in philosophy, so AVB is more dense and referential. Neither volume avoids Stephen Spender's caution that "the reader who goes to Yeats hoping to find in his work thought which is as profound as his contemporary awareness, goes away as a hungry sheep unfed" (170). Profundity in terms of social application may be absent from these volumes, but Yeats always traffics in symbols, and the development undergone by the foundational symbols of Yeats's system between AVA and AVB explicates the profound transformation that took place between poems of *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*.

Although it seems that the critical tendency has been to base analyses on the 1937 version, deciding, as Hazard Adams does, to regard that book as the shape Yeats wished his vision to have (11), a few critics—primarily George Mills Harper, Barbara L. Croft, and Miranda Hickman—compare the volumes. Harper addresses the changes from a biographical standpoint, studying the impetus for and the development of the system over the twenty years between the start of the automatic writing and the publication of AVB. Croft offers a valuable close reading, asserting that one of the most significant oversights in *A Vision* criticism is its failure to "distinguish between the 1925 version and that of 1937" (9) and arguing that one of the changes that took place was increased geometric complexity. Hickman also notes the increased geometric complexity between AVA and AVB but seems to entirely miss the mark in claiming that the transformation resulted from Yeats's attempt to impose a more scientific, rationalist shape upon his occult experiments primarily as a response to his father's criticism of those

pursuits—in spite of the fact that J. B. Yeats died in February of 1922, months before his son began serious work on the *first* version of *A Vision.*[73] Thus, on the rare occasions when Yeats criticism takes the differences between AVA and AVB into account, it tends to dwell on the motivations for those changes or, at best, in Croft's case, to offer a close reading. To my knowledge, no critical effort has been made to evaluate the effect that those changes had on Yeats's poems, perhaps because such an effort requires the complex four-fold reading that I attempt in this chapter. I perform a close reading of the completed symbol in AVA and AVB, interpret the *significance*—rather than the biographical impetus—of the transformations that take place between the two volumes, shape a theoretically informed argument about how those transformations allow a change in the poet's symbolic imagination with regards to women's religious identity, and demonstrate the effect said changes had on the poems of *The Winding Stair*.

The philosophical system upon which Yeats expounds in *A Vision* is based on an emblem of constant movement that is, as the late poetry shows, sexed. The two basic elements of the emblem are interpenetrating gyres, one primary or solar, the other antithetical or lunar. Yeats writes that in the antithetical cone, "we express more and more, as it broadens, our inner world of desire and imagination" but as the primary cone broadens we express facts and external affairs: "The *antithetical tincture* is emotional and aesthetic whereas the *primary tincture* is reasonable and moral" (AVB 71). The division of the cones into solar and lunar marks their associations

[73] Hickman's argument suffers from the attempt to draw parallels between developments in Yeats's and HD's mystical experiments. Coming from different genders, generations, and continents, and experiencing widely divergent connections to both Pound and Freud, Yeats's and HD's motivations should not be equated too closely.

with biological sex and with the sex act itself, for "Sun-in-Moon" was the Yeats couple's shorthand for sex. Yeats reiterates this association—more publically and accessibly—in the poem "Under the Round Tower," which appeared in the 1918 collection *Nine Poems*:

> He stretched his bones and fell into a dream
> Of sun and moon that a good hour
> Bellowed and pranced in the round tower;
>
> Of golden king and silver lady,
> Bellowing up and bellowing round,
> Til toes mastered a sweet measure,
> Mouth mastered a sweet sound,
> Prancing round and prancing up
> Until they pranced upon the top. (CP 137)

As feminist theorists have pointed out, Hélène Cixous among others, associating the sun with the male sex and the moon with the female is inscribed in the grammatical structures of language itself.[74] W. B. and George Yeats's use of it in the symbology is therefore hardly provocative—particularly since the primary/solar gyre is "reasonable and moral" while the antithetical/lunar gyre is "emotional and aesthetic"—but the final permutation of this astral dance takes an unusual step.

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[74] Moreover, alchemy, theosophy, and some mythologies also associate sun with male and moon with female.

The completed symbol that for Yeats explains history, personality, philosophy, and occult science, is *lunar*; the ur-symbol for time and incarnation is femininized: "Crazed through much child-bearing / The moon is staggering in the sky" (CP 242). The cycles of history as well as of incarnation may, for Yeats, be mapped on his "Great Wheel" that is divided into the twenty-eight phases of the moon. Phases eight through twenty-one are antithetical and twenty-two through seven are primary, but phases eight and twenty-two are transitional from the primary to the antithetical and vice versa. The soul moves constantly through these incarnations, completing the whole wheel up to four times before it graduates out of the cycles of death and rebirth. Thus it is in state of constant motion and change; change and rebirth are expressed, however, with all the poetry of the assembly line. The soul is represented as an automaton. It is at the mercy of the feminized cycle and, as such, calls to mind a whole host of associations: the female body wracked by menstruation and childbirth, cycles outside and inside it but not *of* it; the moon dragged through phases by the earth's gravitational pull and the reflected light of the sun; the human being in search of the divine otherworld, a divinity that seizes the human, erases its humanity, and dances off its toes (CT 106). The completed symbol here is feminized, but not demonized as such: the moon is hostaged to herself and her own brutal phases. This image of femininity being powerful and simultaneously disempowered hearkens back to the Medium and Minerva of Yeats's early poetry, but, as will be shown shortly, in *The Tower* the tragic costs of this apparent paradox are not concealed by the poetry but writ large across it.

Caught in the cycles of the moon, the soul is the object of a constant tug-of-war between antimonies. It is awkward to refer to the poles of a circle, particularly in AVA, but the Great Wheel must be thought of as having an apex and a nadir, and the incarnations of the soul move

up and down between the two phases at which the divine wholly overcomes human life. However, these polarities of lunar and solar are not negations of each other but different phases of expressing the soul whose humanity has been phased out in favor of the divine. Phases one and fifteen are not human incarnations because they are pure objectivity and pure subjectivity, respectively, and human life cannot exist in a pure state. Yeats calls phase fifteen the phase of "complete beauty" (AVA 58) and "complete subjectivity" (AVA 14). Subjectivity here means selfhood, not the state of being subjected, and complete beauty is in Yeats's understanding the manifestation of the soul:

> The song will have it
> That those we have loved got their long fingers
> From death, and wounds, or on Sinai's top,
> Or from some bloody whip in their own hands.
> They ran from cradle to cradle till at last
> Their beauty dropped out of the loneliness
> Of body and soul. (AVA 61)

Phase fifteen, then, is the purest representation of the soul's selfhood, but not the soul's self-expression: like phase one, phase fifteen is one of total passivity; the self-representation is not self-crafted. In phase fifteen, "As all effort has ceased, all thought has become image, because no thought could exist if it were not carried toward its own extinction" (AVA 59). Phase fifteen is the self made divine, the divine body, "being indeed that body which the soul will permanently inhabit, when all its phases have been repeated according to the number allotted: that which we call the clarified or *Celestial Body*" (AVA 59). In Phase 1, the phase of the dark moon, the solar

emblem dominates the lunar and the soul exists in total plasticity, passivity: "unformed / Insipid as the dough before it is baked" (AVA 7). However, "body is absorbed in its supernatural environment [. . .] and mind and body take whatever shape, accept whatever image is imprinted upon them, transact whatever purpose is imposed upon them, and are indeed the instruments of supernatural manifestation, being the final link between the living and more powerful beings" (AVA 94). Phase one, then, is the blank slate, while phase fifteen is the image "wrought to its uttermost" (CP 294). Both are states wherein the self does not express itself but *is formed* or *is expressed*.

In AVB the Wheel showing the phases of the moon is mapped onto the twinned gyres, one primary, one antithetical. Yeats positions on these gyres the Four Faculties, Will and Mask on the antithetical gyre and Creative Mind and Body of Fate on the primary gyre. Will and Mask are the personality and the ideal, chosen personality, and Creative Mind and Body of Fate may be understood as the imagination and the body of existing facts. What is important about the Four Faculties is that the whirling of the two gyres moves them into different geometric relation to each other, and it is these relations that characterize the twenty-eight phases of the moon. These faculties, also referred to as tinctures, infuse into the individual incarnation in different proportions, thereby creating its characteristics. Therefore, Yeats's Great Wheel is a palimpsest: to read the completed symbol correctly, one must visualize concurrently the moon's cycles layered upon the interpenetrating solar (male) and lunar (female) gyres. In fact, the twenty-eight phases are not really laid out in a circle at all, but on the gyres, and the imposition of the circular shape upon them occurs mainly because "it is more convenient to set these figures around a circle" (AVB 80), thereby creating the palimpsest.

When Yeats wrote AVA, he was himself unable to understand this palimpsestic relation between the gyres and the completed symbol. He wrote in AVB that "Even when I wrote the first edition of this book I thought the geometrical symbolism so difficult, I understood it so little, that I put it off to a later section" (80). In AVA, Yeats first gives a diagram of the Great Wheel on page 14, only a few pages into "Book 1: What the Caliph Partly Learned." The Faculties are described briefly and the twenty-eight phases in depth, but no gyres are in evidence. The Faculties move about on the Wheel in predictable ways, but in AVA Yeats does not explain why: in AVB he writes that he, at the time of writing AVA, "though I had abundant definitions and descriptions of the *Faculties* at their different stations, did not know why they passed each other at certain points, nor why two [Creative Mind and Body of Fate] moved from left to right like the sun's daily course, two [Will and Mask] from right to left like the moon in the zodiac" (80).

In the palimpsestic completed symbol, the circle emphasizes the repetitive, cyclical nature of the twenty-eight phases, and the gyres emphasize the conflict between the primary and antithetical tinctures, for "human life is impossible without strife between the tinctures" (AVB 79). The human soul, then, is not only in constant motion but also in a state of constant exchange. The points of both gyres, phases one and fifteen, are states of no strife, dominated respectively by the primary and the antithetical, and those phases are both otherworldly states in which no human life is possible. And yet neither point is *static* in the way that Shakespear's aesthetic object is static but only a momentary pause before the struggle begins again.

But what is the struggle between, exactly; what propulsion keeps the gyres moving? Yeats is never perfectly clear, but AVB offers two conflicting end-points or goals for the human

soul: Unity of Being and the Thirteenth Cone (or Sphere), and we can think of these as competing objectives, human and spiritual, for one is on the gyres of incarnation and one is beyond it. Unity of Being is pure harmony, identified with phase fifteen, and it is a familiar Yeatsian concept in which conflict is resolved in "a reality which is concrete, sensuous, bodily" (AVB 214). Many commentators have assumed that since the end-point of conflict is bodily unity, the conflict itself must have been between the competing desires of body and soul: Denis Donoghue writes, for example, that Yeats suffered from the "psychosis" of "the irreconcilable claims of Body and Soul," and, in the late poetry, replaced that psychosis with "a more tolerable scheme of successiveness. He resolved a contradictory 'yes-no' by setting up a plot that developed from 'yes' to 'no' and vice versa" (376, 377). Based on AVB, however, Body and Soul are not "irreconcilable claims"; they are not established as the foremost antitheses. The human soul at phase fifteen cannot be incarnated, so when Yeats writes of bodily reality at phase fifteen, he does not mean the human body in the physical world. No fleshly dancer will ever be indistinguishable from the dance. Yeats suggests a Byzantium-esque residence for the soul at phase fifteen, for "Now contemplation and desire, united into one, inhabit a world where every beloved image has bodily form [. . .] As all effort has ceased, all thought has become image" (AVB 136). The body itself is a thought-created image that *will* be—not *is*—inhabited by the soul when it has escaped the cycle of rebirth (136).

The conflict of reason and emotion, primary and antithetical, propel the soul *toward* phase fifteen; the desire to achieve the Thirteenth Cone, the moon-cycle beyond moon-cycles, propels the soul out of phase fifteen: "Neither between death and rebirth nor between birth and death can the soul find more than momentary happiness; its object is to pass rapidly round its

circle and find freedom from that circle" (AVB 236). As long as the soul is on that circle, the conflict is between the self and the world, servitude and *non serviam*, but both of these values are on the cone of human incarnation. Yeats imagines that this cone of human life—a cone composed of the antithetical and primary gyres of the twenty-eight phases—intersects with a "contrasting cone" that is "the other half of the antinomy, the 'spiritual objective'" (AVB 210). The Thirteenth Cone is "that month of the other cone which corresponds to ours" (210), and evidently, at some unspecified time after the soul has been reincarnated sufficiently, the Thirteenth Cone draws the soul to itself. Bloom writes that "there is genuine incoherence in this intervention" but that the Thirteenth Cone may be understood as being "freedom [that] is neither in the will nor in the imagination, but only in the inexplicable intervention of miracle, the Thirteenth Cone" (275).

This "intervention of miracle" is the great development of Yeats's late poetry, the element of joy that enables the poet to revise his conception of the relationship between the human and the otherworldly machinations of history and incarnation. Miranda Hickman argues that the greater complexity of the geometry in AVB stemmed from Yeats's need to impose a more objective structure upon the "amorphousness" of occult revelation and thus to "respond to the intellectual standards and epistemological modes represented" by his father (201). However, the ways that the geometry finds expression in the poems suggests that Yeats did not try to impose a masculinity of shape upon what was otherwise a primarily feminine, amorphous symbol; rather, the increased complexity of his explication of the gyre/wheel palimpsest shows that self-expression and self-erasure, shape and amorphousness, male and female, are not simply separate phases, separate incarnations through which the human wheels, around and around in a

repetitive and impersonal circle, with no escape possible. If we visualize the cycles of incarnation and history as a simple circle, then the human is leashed to the otherworldly moon, moved, not moving, not self-expressing but expressed by the holy woman—this time represented by a moon instead of a great stone Minerva but still not a Creatrix, still only a symbol of the divine force that moves her. The earlier permutations of the geometry, then, are less complex but actually *more* structured and mechanical. Moreover, in AVA the absence of the Thirteenth Cone leaves no escape route. The human soul is trapped in those mechanical cycles without the possibility of sudden and miraculous intervention.

The masterpieces of *The Tower*—"Sailing to Byzantium," "The Tower," "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" "Among School Children" and "Leda and the Swan,"—inscribe the impersonal, overpowering lunar cycle of AVA, and it is from this sense of impound that the volume's "bitterness" stems, a bitterness that, as Ellmann writes, "seems irrational in the face of all [Yeats's recent] successes" (244). These poems mourn the loss of youth, beauty, and innocence: "Many ingenious lovely things are gone" (CP 206). Sexuality is absurd, destructive, or demonic, and the cycles of history do not renew or redeem but simply repeat acts of destruction. There is little hint in this volume that "All things fall and are built again / And those that build them are gay" (CP 295); instead, as in Shakespear's works, the ultimate solution of *The Tower* is to arrive at Phase Fifteen, the pure image. Yeats realizes, however, that static objects ultimately offer little solace, for they are "self-born mockers of man's enterprise" (CP 217), and the soul has no release from the cycle: the "solution" of phase fifteen is bitter, for it will soon move out of unity into phase sixteen. Women in *The Tower* are no longer represented as figures of power: they are still holy in the sense that they have a special connection with the

otherworldly, but here they are more frequently characterized as victimized figures trapped in the merciless cycles of history.

The Tower and AVA intersect explicitly in the long poem "Desert Geometry or The Gift of Harun Al-Raschid" that, like "All Soul's Night," appears in both AVA and *The Tower*, but, unlike "All Soul's Night," was not included in AVB. "Desert Geometry" is yet another origin story for the system, and this time the "Self-born, high-born, and solitary truths" (AVA 101) come from the mouth of the new young wife of Kusta Ben Luka, learned man and friend of the Caliph. This poem minimizes the partnership, reducing the wife to an unknowing medium, for she speaks these truths in her sleep, and afterwards

> she lay down upon her bed and slept,
> But woke at the first gleam of day, rose up
> And swept the house and sang about her work
> In childish ignorance of all that passed.
> . . .
> Even today, after some seven years
> When maybe thrice in every moon her mouth
> Has murmured wisdom of the desert Djinns,
> She keeps that ignorance (AVA 101, 102)

Kusta Ben Luka spends his days puzzling over these revelations, but meanwhile he is torn between the desire for his wife's love and the desire for otherworldly knowledge:

> It seems I must buy knowledge with my peace.
> What if she lose her ignorance and so

Dream that I love her only for the voice,
That every gift and every word of praise
Is but a payment for that midnight voice,
That is to age what milk is to a child!
Were she to lose her love, because she had lost
Her confidence in mine, or even lose
Its first simplicity, love, voice, and all,
All my fine feathers would be plucked away
And I left shivering. (102)

Happiness in love and success in occult revelation are both predicated on his wife's "ignorance," but even so Ben Luka exists in a state of constant unrest caused by the precarious balance of desire created by his marriage. There is no exchange here between the human and the divine but only a one-way transmission that comes at the price of marital intimacy. Unlike George Yeats, Ben Luka's wife is not an interpreter but only a passive conduit for the otherworldly, and her passivity must be secured by concealing her ability from her. Fearing that she would come to believe their love is based on an economy in which she is paid for her services with kind words and gifts, Ben Luka creates a relationship economy in which his wife pays for her services with her ignorance. This is hardly representative of the partnership the Yeatses enjoyed, but it is a direct result of the mechanicism of AVA. Both partners, if they are to receive revelation from the otherworld, are at the mercy of the otherworldly: there is no negotiation, no exchange, whether between human and divine or human and human. Passivity and solitude are required of both of them, Ben Luka as much as his wife. The woman is obviously still less of a meaning-

maker than her husband, even though it is through her mouth that revelation comes, but, unlike in the early poems, the male partner's passivity here is not a courtly pose. When confronted with the otherworldly, the human, whether male or female, is simply overpowered. Like Job when confronted with the voice of God from the whirlwind, Ben Luka can only submit.

The poems of *The Tower* emphasize this isolation of the self and the depersonalization of the female other: man and woman are not simply unequal partners in religious quest, as in the early poetry, but rather equally disempowered in the grip of the otherworldly cycles. They are wholly disconnected from the world, their desires for the human not only unsatisfied but often ravaged by war or old age: people are not individuals in *The Tower* but rather cogs in the Great Wheel. This emphasis on solitude and impersonality begins in the first stanza of the first poem in the volume, "Sailing to Byzantium," when the poet disassociates himself from the cycles of sex, reproduction, and death by speaking impersonally of "the young" in the first stanza. This stanza shows forth the great dramas of life metonymically:

> That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
> —Those dying generations—at their song,
> The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
> Fish, flesh or fowl, commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
> Monuments of unaging intellect.

This metonymy is an abrupt departure from the intensely personal poems of the preceding volume, *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, in which Yeats writes of his wife by name, dedicates a poem to his daughter Anne, writes specifically of Maud Gonne and Con Markievicz, and in the first three poems[75] actually gives George and Iseult Gonne lines of dialogue. The women in *Michael Robartes* are real people with whom the poet interacts, but the distinct emphasis of *The Tower* is made clear from the outset: the journey that the poet must make to "the artifice of eternity" must be made alone. As Yeats wrote to T. Sturge Moore when asked, "Is your dolphin to be so large that the whole of humanity can ride on its back?" (Bridge 164), "one dolphin, one man" (164). This is not the Yeats still startled by the joy of revelation through partnership with his wife; this is the Yeats who has spent years in solitary labor hashing out the geometry of rebirth for AVA.

In the third stanza of "Sailing" the memory resurfaces of the Queen of the Mälaren in the Stadshus, the "sage" of the most recent Byzantine mosaic Yeats had seen:

> O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre
> And be the singing masters of my soul.
> Consume my heart away, sick with desire
> And fastened to a dying animal
> It knows not what it is; and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.

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[75] "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," "Solomon and the Witch," and "An Image from a Past Life."

For Yeats, artifice is a location, a place governed by distant sages who cannot understand the human heart without perning in the gyre of incarnation. These sages, feminized, as I argue, in Yeats's memory, are as divorced from the ills of humanity as are the lunar cycles in which they need not participate: Byzantium, in *The Tower*, is sterile, impersonal, remote, a city where the human heart has no place.

Unlike the later "Byzantium," "Sailing" does not detail the process of the poet's trip "out of nature,"[76] but the final stanza, as well as early drafts of the poem, make it clear that the poet's transformation into the golden bird does take him out of the world of the first stanza:

> Once out of nature I shall never take
> My bodily form from any natural thing,
> But such a form as Grecian Goldsmiths make
> Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
> To keep a drowsy emperor awake
> Or set upon a golden bough to singe
> To lords and ladies of Byzantium
> Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Sturge Moore objected to this final stanza because, as he wrote to Yeats, "such a goldsmith's bird is as much nature as a man's body, especially if it only sings like Homer and Shakespeare of what is past or passing or to come" (Bridge 162). Yeats responded that Sturge Moore's letter "showed me the idea needed exposition," and the result was the poem "Byzantium" (Bridge

[76] Early drafts of "Sailing" did include dolphins that accompany the poet to his holy city (Bradford 112)

164). Richard Finneran writes that this exchange cannot be taken at face value, although most critics have done so, for

> What had happened was that Moore had explicated the main idea of "Sailing to Byzantium" rather precisely—while thinking that the poem was attempting to say something else! So Yeats, craftily agreeing that "the idea needed exposition," set out to write another poem on the same concept. (5)

Sturge Moore was only "*rather* precise" in his explication because the golden bird has certain distinct differences from the "nature" of the first stanza and of the poet himself. It can neither beget, nor age, nor die: it has no life of the body. It is at Phase 15, the perfected image of the self that appears for a moment to be immutable, as the early drafts of the poem emphasize: in draft A1 the poet's trip from nature to Byzantium is a voyage "From things becoming to the thing become"; in A3 he is "Flying *from nature* to Byzantium" (Bradford 112, my emphasis). The golden bird is certainly not out of nature in the same sense as the "sages standing in God's holy fire," for his audience and his subject matter are human. He is still on the unforgiving cycle where every "thing become" will soon be undone. The implication is that the golden bird—that *any* aesthetic artifact, including the poem itself—are both in and out of nature, existing in the liminal arena of Phase 15 that partakes of both the static and the ephemeral because it is the perfected and yet momentary representation of the soul. In *The Tower* as in AVA, this representation is bitter because it is headed inevitably for destruction as certainly as "those dying generations."

The great poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," one of the most despairing of Yeats's canon, reinscribes the utter futility of the repetitive cycles of the moon.[77] The poem shows women to be both the governors and the most gruesome casualties of history, and even the prospect of continual rebirth does not offer hope for renewal. Yeats wrote to Shakespear that the series of poems that would later become "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" are "simple & passionate, a lamentation over lost peace and lost hope. My own philosophy does not make brighter the prospect, so far as any future we shall live to see is concerned" (L 668). The first and last stanzas of the first section of the poem undermine the seeming confidence in "Sailing to Byzantium" that the aesthetic artifact is "out of nature," for the moon destroys not only the handiwork of "Grecian goldsmiths" but also the holy gift of Minerva herself, the olive tree on the Acropolis:

> Many ingenious lovely things are gone
> That seemed sheer miracle to the multitude,
> Protected from the circle of the moon
> That pitches common things about. There stood
> Amid the ornamental bronze and stone
> An ancient image made of olive wood –
> And gone are Phidias' famous ivories

[77] 1919 was the birth year of the Republic of Ireland, according to Rob Doggett (143), so the destruction of the abstract, eternal cycles is here made very personal and immediate. Doggett's reading highlights Yeats's subversion of nationalist myth. I read the personal and immediate in terms of gender and do not discuss the nationalist elements of this poem, but such a reading as Doggett gives underscores my assertion that *The Tower* focuses on the immediate repercussions of the eternal cycles.

And all the golden grasshoppers and bees.

[. . .]

But is there any comfort to be found?

Man is in love and loves what vanishes,

What more is there to say? That country round

None dared admit, if such a thought were his,

Incendiary or bigot could be found

To burn that stump on the Acropolis,

Or break in bits the famous ivories

Or traffic in the grasshoppers or bees.

Yeats never visited Athens, but the city's holy mountain, built upon because of the mythological gift of a goddess, unified for him the aesthetic and religious life. Adams suggests that the "Pagan Era" that draws to a symbolic close with the destruction of Athens was for Yeats "perhaps even the beginnings of consciousness and humanity as we know them (141). In this first section of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," then, destruction is particularly bitter because the youth and innocence of the world are gone. At the end of the cycle, holy objects are wantonly destroyed or reduced to objects of trade: "For men were born to pray and save" (CP 108).

Between these allusive stanzas demonstrating the transience of the aesthetic artifact, Yeats personalizes the destruction caused by the pitching about of the moon, for the destruction caused by the changing cycles is measured in not only objects but bodies and blood:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare

Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door,
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before
We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole. (CP 207)

The murdered mother was Ellen Quinn, an Irish woman killed with her child in her arms by the British-recruited Black and Tans during the Irish war of independence (Doggett 146). Quinn's death was one of the well-known atrocities against Irish civilians perpetrated by the Black and Tans, and her inclusion here highlights the individual and human cost of the impersonal moon-phases: woman is no longer simply the mouthpiece or the representation of the otherworldly but the bleeding victim of it. Here, the human has suffered a decisive loss. Rebirth offers no hope, however, for "the Platonic Year / Whirls out new right and wrong / Whirls in the old instead" (CP 208): the gyres of history do not revise but only repeat. Doggett writes that "The compulsion to find order in the past leads only to an awareness of time as profoundly uncontrollable, of a Platonic year of 25,000 years in which the planets return to their original positions, of change without change" (147). The heritage of AVA is this "change without change," a heavenly cycle that continually murders the human.

In the first lines of the poem the moon is explicitly blamed for the destruction that pervades the poem, but as the poem progresses Yeats replaces the systematic, predictable moon with more chaotic images: the dragon and the wind. These images implicitly obey the cycles of

the moon for they still move in "courses," but they slowly erode even the idea of stability as the blowing wind destroys all that has been labored or dreamed over, everything that the human has built: "Now / That winds of winter blow / [we] Learn that we were crack-pated when we dreamed" (CP 209). When the wind ceases in the final lines of the poem, however, instead of the possibility of the rebirth of "many ingenious lovely things" Yeats offers the union of the human and the otherworldly framed in one of the most gruesome images of his canon:

> But now the wind drops, dust settles; thereupon
> There lurches past, his great eyes without thought
> Under the shadow of stupid straw-pale locks,
> That insolent fiend Robert Artisson
> To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler brought
> Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs of her cocks. (CP 210)

Lady Kyteler was a woman living in Leinster in 1322 who "was charged to haue nightly conference with a spirit called Robin Artisson, to who she sacrificed in the high way .ix. red cockes, & .ix. peacocks eies" (Holinshed 58).[78] Cocks and peacocks are Yeats's birds of rebirth, and he modifies his source here so that Lady Kyteler does not actually kill the birds, thus symbolically slaughtering rebirth in favor of sexual pleasure; she does, however, dismember and shame them, removing their emblems of beauty and virility. The close of the poem, then, offers a mutilated future, a lamed vision of "renewal." Lady Kyteler sacrifices too much, and the

[78] One of her accomplices was burned at the stake, but, assisted by the nobility, Lady Kyteler escaped to England.

object of her desires both human and otherworldly represents the horror and futility of that sacrifice: he "lurches" ominously like the "rough beast" on its way to Bethlehem (Doggett 150).

Lady Kyteler actively sought congress with the ominous divine, and the futility that she found is mirrored in a poem that is not usually read as foregrounding the bitterness of mutability: "Leda and the Swan." Yeats writes that "when in my ignorance I try to imagine what older civilization she refuted I can but see bird and woman blotting out some corner of mathematical starlight" (AVA 151).[79] For Adams, the event of the poem is essentially the beginning of Yeatsian time, for "This myth, fixed in image, gains dominance in Yeats's mind over at least a part of any vision he might have of previous Eras and seems to shut off his ability to discuss them. For him it is really the primal myth" (140). In terms of *The Tower*, it is appropriate that the beginning occurs "with a god's incursion into human life in violence and sexuality" (139): the collision of the human and the otherworld and the ensuing destruction characterize many, if not most, of the poems in this volume. When this collision occurs, whether it is represented by a midnight voice, a leveling wind or "insolent fiend," or "sages standing in God's holy fire," the self is consumed and mastered by the supernatural other, to the extent that s/he is often violated and always erased.

Harold Bloom writes in his analysis of "Leda and the Swan," "I wish though that the Yeats sonnet had just a touch of the Shelleyan skepticism about divine power and knowledge" (364-365), but in the context of what Yeats is saying about otherworldly power in *The Tower*, "Leda" is as much an indictment of that power as the first section of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen":

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[79] The changes that Yeats made in these few lines in AVB are vital and will be discussed shortly.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still,
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs,
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies;
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop? (214-215)

Zeus perpetuates the cycles of his own destruction: he possesses knowledge and power of a kind that would only reveal to him his limited agency within the overwhelming cycles of the moon. It is a mistake to read him—or Christ—as the mover of the cycles. Gods are part of the cycles; they are the moved. Yeats is not skeptical of the existence or potency of Zeus's power, per se, but the poem does not represent it as being necessarily desirable, for it is the power of a destructive, impersonal force, and thus it is represented as being primarily physical: "A sudden

blow," "brute blood," "indifferent beak." This "annunciation that founded Greece" (AVA 151) leads also to the burning of the Acropolis and the traffic in the golden bees, although the more immediate consequences are the Trojan War and its death and destruction as well as Cassandra's rape by Ajax and kidnapping by Agamemnon. Blow begets blow; rape begets rape.

Zeus's esoteric knowledge is of course more desirable to the poet, so the poem does not criticize knowledge as explicitly as power, but it does highlight the impossibility of transmitting that knowledge from the divine to the human. The model of annunciation here is one that erases the woman, for Leda disappears into a cluster of metonymic signifiers: she is "helpless breast" "vague fingers" and "loosening thighs." The images of her in the poem fragment her so that she is neither a whole body nor a speaking subject, but only a selection of parts, including of course, her uterus, which carries the symbols of a whole cycle of inhuman history and human casualties. The way the sonnet associates Leda with her dismembered body and then with the ruins of Troy makes the end of the poem less of "an overwhelming question" than a deflation, for there *is* no Leda to put on Zeus's knowledge with his power. Only the title actually names her, for in the text of the poem she is only "girl" or "she." It is as though the poem—not the poet—does not know who Leda is before the rape nor what to do with her after, so "the indifferent beak" simply drops her like a rag doll while her body shelters the coming apocalypse. In that sense, Leda certainly does put on Zeus's power because she becomes like him an agent of the cycles of history; unlike the god, she cannot receive divine knowledge of those cycles. Her encounter with the divine erases her selfhood but uses her body as a perpetrator of destruction. To return to Yeats's letter to Shakespear, there is indeed no hope for the human in the phases of the moon, caught as s/he is in the otherworldly machinations of time, destroyed by collision with the divine.

Hence the bitterness and despair of *The Tower*: the inhumane AVA. The human self is a cog in the Great Wheel, continually broken down and rebuilt with the old wrongs intact. However, when Yeats came to understand the cycle of incarnation as a palimpsest, as the Wheel superimposed upon two conflicting gyres, a tug-of-war between two phases of no self-expression, and intersecting a sphere/cone of "spiritual objective" that represents a nebulous "miracle of escape," he had the rudiments of a model of religious identity that catapults his poetry from bitterness to joy, his holy woman from hostage to Creatix. In chapter one I briefly discussed John D. Caputo's model of ideal religious identity, Mary's fiat, and argued that it failed to acknowledge the exclusion of women from the realm of religious meaning-making, her inscription into our religious imagination as virgin or mother—or both—but not Creatrix. When a woman speaks the fiat, she cannot take back with one hand the meaning-making power that she throws away with the other, unlike the male prophet, poet, theologian, philosopher—the accepted interpreters of the otherworldly. However, Caputo's understanding of the "religious sense of life" (14) can shed light on the significance of the elusive Thirteenth Cone, for Caputo 's religious sense is like Yeats's regard for the Cone: the religious life is the one that expects the interpolation of miracle into the everyday.

For Caputo, religion is dangerous, and risk is its defining characteristic. The religious sense of life is "a passion for the impossible" (19) that

> has to do with exposing oneself to the radical uncertainty and the open-endedness of life, with what we are calling the absolute future, which is meaning-giving, salt-giving, risk taking. The absolute future is a risky business, which is why faith, hope, and love have to kick in. (14-15).

The "absolute future" is "the future that is unforeseeable, that will take us by surprise, that will come like a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2) and shatter the comfortable horizons of expectation that surround the present" (8). There are no guarantees in this model of religion, for the absolute future might have tragedy and horror in store for its seekers. The justification for embracing the absolute future is that, without taking that risk, the world becomes one in which "God forbid!—the lawyers run everything" (5) and the human character becomes pedestrian, for "if safe is what you want, forget religion and find yourself a conservative investment counselor" (14). Yeats would certainly shudder at that prospect, at a world of lawyers and investment counselors adding "the halfpence to the pence / And prayer to shivering prayer" (CP 108).[80] In that sense, then, risk protects, protects the world and the human being from becoming staid, thoughtless, uncreative. Instead of living in terms of safety and "sure things," the individual depends on the practice of faith, hope, and love, believing in, hoping for, and loving whatever future may come. Of course, in many cases, tragedy and horror are what the future holds; that tragedy and horror, however, are not predetermined as they are in, for example, "Leda and the Swan" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." In those poems, the future is guaranteed to be horrific, and therefore the Leda and Ellen Quinn of *The Tower* are dehumanized, deprived of their selfhood, hopeless. It is in the *possibility*, however remote, of a different future that the value of risk lies. Embracing the absolute future does not affect the quality of that future; it affects the quality of life of the one who embraces.

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[80] It is beyond the scope of this project to evaluate the trajectory of Yeats's longstanding contempt for the Irish middle class and its mores. Suffice it to say that one element of that contempt—and the one that seems most justifiable—stemmed certainly from this, the tendency of the masses to prefer "plaster Saints" (CP 303) to the risky impossible.

Comparing Caputo's definitions to AVA and AVB highlights the difference between the two volumes: there is no "radical uncertainty" or "thief in the night" in AVA, for all is foreordained by the moon. In AVB, however, the impossible is always at hand in the form of the Thirteenth Cone. The absolute future for the soul whirling through its incarnations is the sudden collision with miracle that lifts it beyond the cycles of rebirth and into paradise, into freedom. The religious value of the passion for the impossible that Caputo elaborates, the idea that that risk is safer than safety, underpins all of Yeats's late work, and it enables him to overcome his fear that the holy woman, given her special connection to the divine, might somehow participate in erasing the poet. Yeats wrote to Shakespear that his youth seemed to him like a "cup that a mad man dying of thirst left half tasted" (L 721), and, as I argued in the first chapter, his reasons for refusing to drain that cup were connected in important ways to his beliefs about women's divinity. However, by the time he wrote the poems of *The Winding Stair*, it seems that, for any number of reasons both biographical and religious, Yeats came to the conclusion that it was better to drain that cup to the dregs.

In Yeats's early work, the self-erasure that transformed the self into a mirror of the otherworldly was a state to be both desired and feared, and therefore it became essentially a courtly pose, as in the final sentences of "Regina, Regina Pigmeorum, Veni" when the poet abases himself before the faery queen that he summons and dismisses at will. What arises in his late work from Yeats's expectation of miracle, however, is a fluid model of selfhood directly related to the gyres constantly in motion between self-erasure and self-expression with the ever-present [im]possibility of the intervention of the Thirteenth Cone. Caputo describes his very similar model of the self as a perpetual questioner:

> Who am I?, I ask with Augustine, and the answer is, I am a question unto myself. Who am I? The answer that comes back is another question; the answer is to keep questioning, to keep the question alive—that is what a "self" is—to keep questioning and to love God [the absolute future], to love God and to do what you will. (27)

To be a question unto oneself is to have a model of selfhood that is constantly in motion. The self oscillates perpetually between two states: the self that frames questions and makes the choice to reaffirm passion for the impossible; and the self that is too amorphous, nebulous, to exist in language and that is surrendered to the risks and dangers of the absolute future. For Yeats, this maps onto the gyres and must be thought of as a state of motion and not simply a paradox. Both Phase One and Phase Fifteen are states at which the self cannot form questions but is simply without will, moved to those phases by the predicable moon. As Yeats writes, at Phase Fifteen, "Chance and Choice have become interchangeable" (AVB 136). The other, in-between phases are the questioning ones, propelled forward but at the same time anticipating the advent of the Thirteenth Cone.

Caputo's understanding of religious identity and the absolute future can help explicate why the transformation that Yeats's system underwent between AVA and AVB overcame the bitterness of *The Tower*, but it offers no paradigm for understanding why, in the poems of *The Winding Stair*, the holy woman reemerges as a Creatrix, so for that I turn to feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray. Like Yeats and Caputo, Irigaray confronts the question of what can happen when the divine and the human interact: must all that is human be erased, destroyed, by the inexorable divine, or may the interaction be collaborative, productive? For Irigaray, the answer lies in how we imagine the divine, and although she refuses the mentality that produces representations of

the divine like AVA or Caputo's uncritical reading of the Annunciation, her understanding of the divine, read against AVB, illuminates the results of revising those gyres.

As Alison Martin writes in the introduction to *Luce Irigaray and the Question of the Divine*, "it is possible to read her entire *oeuvre* as an analysis of the absence of a female divine in patriarchal culture and the need for such a divine in order to go beyond that culture" (1). For Irigaray, God is a "horizon" that enables the becoming of men because He represents their gendered essence (*Sexes* 61). Women, however, lack that ideal gendered horizon and therefore "deprived of a God, they are forced to comply with models that do not match them, that exile, double, mask them, cut them off from themselves and from one another, stripping away their ability to move forward into love, art, thought, toward their ideal and divine fulfillment" (64). Western monotheism is simply another production of a culture that asserts one true sex and then a second "which is not one," and therefore women are not only excluded from the phallomorphic system of representation but also disabled from creating their own.

Irigaray's interpretation of the Annunciation is therefore far more critical than Caputo's because she recognizes it as not simply a model of a "passion for the impossible" and the embrasure of the risk that protects but rather a participant in the iconography that models women's relationship with the divine to mirror her relationship with phallomorphic culture. In the closing section of *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* called "the crucified one: epistle to the last christians," Irigaray compares Dionysus and Christ, first to indict traditional interpretations of the Annunciation but finally to reclaim Christ from Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity. At first glance, however, Mary is not truly a full-fledged participant in an exchange

between the human and the divine; she is simply the gates of flesh with which the Father-God does not communicate but simply writes upon:

> But her "yes" subtends Christian culture. Which would not exist without her. And if the nature of the *fiat* were questioned, perhaps the basis of centuries of Christianity would need to be reevaluated. Because, according to the traditional interpretation, her "yes" is equally a "no": a no to her own life. To her conception, her birth, her generation, her flowering. No to everything, except the Word of the Father. (*Marine* 167)

The divine here as it has been understood by "centuries of Christianity" is represented, shockingly, as the great phallus. If God simply uses Mary to mediate between himself and his male offspring, then her role in religion is wholly abject: she is, like Leda, only a fragmented body, a womb bearing death and destruction, but this time the death and destruction is primarily *of women*, of centuries of women barred from experiencing the divine as meaning-makers instead of simply wombs. Awareness of this, the horrifying invisibility of Mary's humanity, repeated over and over through centuries of prescriptive feminine behavior, is what Caputo's account of the Annunciation lacks. Mary does not put on God's knowledge with his power, for, again, there *is no* (female) human being there. Risk does not protect because the impossible is not a neutral "absolute future": it is predetermined by a civilization that moves with all the momentum of two millennia of hostility toward women.

The Annunciation as a liberating model for a religious identity for women can only occur after that startling criticism of its traditional implications has taken place. The *fiat* cannot be simply lifted from its traditional interpretation and reconstituted without first interrogating the violence that it has done to woman as Creatrix: her religious role is to create biologically, to

reproduce instead of producing meaning, to simply allow herself to be erased by her desire for the divine. After this interrogation has taken place, however, the Annunciation may be reclaimed as a site in which the divine and the human collide, but the human is not necessarily erased. This reclamation, for Irigaray, involves both a redefinition of submission and a re-characterization of the divine as a force that interacts with the human rather than overcoming it:

> The word made flesh in Mary might mean—might it not?—the advent of a divine one who does not burst in violently, like the god of Greek desire, does not simply rule the world from a heaven of dreams, and does not remain closed in a text of law either. Neither bursts on the scene nor slips suddenly away, does not act to defer the possibility that the presence will occur. The god does not brutally enter a body, only to throw it off at once, leaving it to madness and the death of a boundless passion. He does not hide behind an unending series of appearances that ease the pain of living by giving men a chance to gaze upon an alien perfection. He is not made known only through writing.
>
> He is made flesh. Continues on in the flesh. Closes with and is close to himself, from within a living body. That can be affected by *pathos*—his own and that of others. (*Marine* 182-183)

The Annunciation is worth this reclamation for a number of reasons, if not because of the affective connection that many people have with it then because of the proliferation of its representations. But for Irigaray—and, I suspect, for Yeats—the Annunciation is an emblem of this most vital relationship: the word becomes flesh. She writes that the "Christic symbol" is "the fruit of the covenant between word and nature, between *logos* and *cosmos*. A marriage that

has never been consummated and that the spirit, in Mary, would renew?" (*Marine* 190). Mary's fiat, then, is not a no to herself because what she says yes to is not the Word of the Father; she does not simply enable a between-men model of religion in which she is—and will be—invisible. Instead, she affirms the advent of a divine that performs religious meaning by living the life of the body. This advent of the divine as "measured by the limits of the human body" (*Marine* 182), as moved by emotion and subject to bodily indignity cannot erase Mary: when she enables it she validates her own fleshliness by causing the divine to partake of it. "The divine cannot be located as such, imagined or conceived of as such" (*Marine* 183), but when Mary says "Yes," she locates the divine within herself, conceives of it as body. This reinterpreted vision of Christianity is more affirming of women than Nietzsche's anti-Christian philosophy, for Nietzsche "preferred the Idea to an ever provisional openness to a female other. That he refused to break the mirror of the (male) same, and over and over again demanded that the other be his double" (187). On the other hand, "the fundamental element for Irigaray is the relation between two always already different beings which yet require recognition as divine" (Martin 179). When the divine interacts with the human, it does not overcome or demand a double. Instead, it enables—indeed, *requires*—mutual recognition, mutual risk.

This interaction must not remain in the realm of abstraction, however; it must also affect the realm of representation. In the essay "Belief Itself," Irigaray imagines the believer as a risk-taker, a figure who is poet, prophet, and exile, whose "song irrigates the world of today" (*Sexes* 53):

> Risk taken at each moment by the poet, that seeker after the still sacred ether, which today is so covered over or buried that he can trust no heaven or earth, learn his path from

> no mouth, find no sure direction. [. . .] Risk protects anyone who, insensibly, invisibly, moves onward while remaining in his own heart. Who is still alien to existence as one who yields, offers himself back in return. Access to a space and a time whose dimensions surpass the stars as well as the imaginary of each conscience. Objective and subjective lose their limits thereby. Each person and all things rest in one another, flow one into the other unconfined. Recollection of a state so ancient that few are capable of it. Crossing the frontiers of their own lives, following far and near, risking their breath, they yield the very rhythm of their breath to a new amplitude. In this way they expire one into the other, and rise up again inspired. Imperiling that citadel of being, language so that this woman, that man, can find a voice, a song. (*Sexes* 50, 51)

Irigaray here is not critiquing language as word-made-flesh but language as Word of the Father, as law. That language is a static edifice, a fortress. Experience of the divine is modeled here as an exchange that must be inscribed aesthetically in a way that also challenges its medium—language—as a "citadel" that seals the human away from awareness of what Irigaray would call the (divine) other, what Caputo would call the "absolute future," and what Yeats would call the gyres: "dying each other's life, living each other's death" (AVB 68). In Irigaray's model, s/he who yields herself, paradoxically, keeps herself most faithfully. This paradox cannot be reasoned, only represented.

Yeats's lifelong quest for experience of the divine, for identity, and for aesthetic representation of both reached a moment of achievement when his philosophy mirrored the elements that Irigaray later foregrounds in her work on the divine: risk, exchange, fleshliness, the advent of a vulnerable and not a destructive divinity. As I have demonstrated, Yeats's holy

women were at first objects of terror and later, in *The Tower*, both victims and perpetrators of violence, human women erased by the violence of the mindless feminized divine as it lurched through its foreordained cycles. The style and spirit of the poems of *The Winding Stair*, however, are fundamentally different from those of *The Tower*, and reading those poems against the shifting, fluid understanding of the divine-human relationship found in both AVB and Irigaray's *oeuvre* demonstrates why the Creatrix can in the later volume supersede the more passive earlier permutations of the holy woman.

Many writers, beginning with the poet himself, have tried to summarize the difference between these two volumes. Yeats wrote to Shakespear in 1928 that "Re-reading *The Tower* I was astonished at its bitterness" (L742) and in 1929 that the poems he was then working on were "the opposite of my recent work and all praise of joyous life" (758). According to Walter E. Houghton, it was at this juncture that "with his amazing flexibility, he wheeled away from the intellectual and exotic to the simple and elemental, from the mystical to the sensual" (316). Marjorie Howe points out that "It is customary in Yeats criticism to contrast *The Tower*'s embittered engagement with politics and *The Winding Stair*'s rejection of politics in favor of sensual pleasure and an all-accepting joy" (131).[81] Many critics, including Gloria Kline (135) and Richard Ellmann (261), point out that Yeats's near-death experience with Malta fever in 1928-1929 generated in his poetry a new-found and appreciation of the sensual. Clearly, the transformation that Yeats's voice undergoes between these two volumes is complex and multifaceted, but to my knowledge no critic has framed this transformation in terms of the

[81] Howe herself adds a different nuance to that assessment, arguing that *The Winding Stair* does not reject politics, per se, but rather offers a different "version of nationality" (132).

sexual-theological apotheosis that Yeats achieves with the aid of his revised, palimpsestic gyres. Based on that model of divine-human interaction, the divine does not erase the human, and the human need not erase herself or himself in order to encounter the divine. Those late poems inscribe a state of affairs that radically undermines the phallomorphic culture in which AVA, *The Tower*, and their inscrutable, unassailable cycles participate: particularly in the pairing of "Byzantium" and "The Mother of God" and in the sequence "Words for Music Perhaps," the poems of *The Winding Stair* inscribe a conscious exchange between a "passion for the impossible" and a passion for the human, one that explicitly reclaims woman as religious meaning-maker.

Yeats was famously particular about the order in which his poems appeared, and it is clearly not an accident that the poem of incarnation "Mother of God" immediately follows the dream-poem "Byzantium" in his canon, for when the poems appeared in the 1932 volume *Words for Music Perhaps*, "Vacillation" appeared between them, but by *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* in 1933, Yeats had moved "Vacillation" so that it fell after and not between "Byzantium" and "Mother of God." As David Rogers points out in his detailed study of "Vacillation," Yeats "did not think that poets should be overly interested in absorption into the infinite, lest they lose the images and themes that are their stock in trade" (142)**,** so, after allowing "The Soul" and "The Heart" to debate, the poet awards victory to the heart:

> *The Soul.* Seek out reality, leave things that seem.
>
> *The Heart.* What, be a singer born and lack a theme?
>
> *The Soul.* Isaiah's coal, what more can man desire?
>
> *The Heart.* Struck dumb in the simplicity of fire!

The Soul. Look on that fire, salvation walks within.

The Heart. What theme had Homer but original sin? (CP 252)

Thus "Vacillation,"—in despite of the title—ends with a decisive choice in favor of Homer "and his unchristened heart" (CP 253). This poem ends on a note of finality: in "Vacillation," poetry does not come primarily from an exchange between the human and "the infinite" but from the fleshly human heart. Of course, few if any seemingly decisive choices in Yeats's poetry outlast the end of the poem: the pendulum swings toward the choice's antithesis almost instantly. However, the premise of "Byzantium" and "Mother of God" is that poetry comes not from the "unchristened heart" but from the "christening" that is the interaction between the human and the divine. When "Byzantium" and "Mother of God" are read one after the other, the peak of the pendulum's swing lingers for quite some time on one of the antitheses: the inspiration that comes from divine interaction, as opposed to the inspiration that comes from "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" (CP 348). The placement of "Vacillation" after those poems, however, emphasizes the vacillation rather than the seemingly decisive choice in the last line, for the pairing of "Byzantium" and "Mother of God" has already shown that Isaiah's coal does not in fact negate "original sin." As Yeats writes in AVB, he "had never thought with Hegel that the two ends of the see-saw are one another's negation, nor that the spring vegetables were refuted when over" (73). Alternation is not refutation because constant interaction is taking place; even when a choice seems to be made, that momentary appearance of stasis is unsettled by the tug of the opposing alternative.

This pairing functions as an aesthetic artifact that enacts the great drama of the otherworld and this one by inscribing this exchange between the human and the divine. Helen

Vendler points out in *Our Secret Discipline* that "Byzantium" is a Unity of Being poem, but it ends "in a violent stand-off between a surge of unpurged images and the golden smithies of the Emperor" that reforge those images. "[N]owhere in the Yeatsian universe, whether in Time or Eternity, does a static Unity of Being remain untroubled" (*Our* 60), continues Vendler. Paired with "Mother of God" the poem in fact demonstrates the dynamism of the "Yeatsian universe," spiraling through eternity into incarnation:

> The unpurged images of day recede;
> The emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
> Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
> After great cathedral gong;
> A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
> All that man is,
> All mere complexities,
> The fury and the mire of human veins.
>
> Before me floats an image, man or shade,
> Shade more than man, more image than a shade,
> For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
> May unwind the winding path;
> A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
> Breathless mouths may summon;
> I hail the superhuman;

I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,

More miracle than gold or handiwork,

Can like the cocks of Hades crow.

Or , by the moon embittered, scorn aloud

In glory of changeless metal

Common bird or petal

And all complexities of mire or blood.

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit

Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,

Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,

Where blood-begotten spirits come

And all complexities of fury leave,

Dying into a dance,

An agony of trance,

An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,

Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,

The golden smithies of the Emperor!

Marbles of the dancing floor

Break bitter furies of complexity,

These images that yet

Fresh images beget,

That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

"Byzantium" is structured like a gyre, the apex of which is the seemingly static central stanza, the "changeless" golden bird at Phase 15. The first and second stanzas suggest movement, first the recession of the "unpurged images" of incarnation followed by even the sounds created by "The fury and the mire of human veins," followed by the spirit that has unwound the memories of his previous incarnation in order to become pure image. After the apex, the third stanza, the poem seems to reverse, returning through the fire-dance on the pavement that forged the golden bird from "Hades' bobbin" in the fourth stanza to the fifth and final stanza that begins with the arrival of the spirits and ends with the return of the "Fresh images" that receded in the poem's first line: "That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea." The layout of the poem is thus recession of life, the unwinding of the unpurged images of the spirit's previous life, the soul at Unity of Being, the forging of the image, the arrival of the images from the teeming sea of life.

The dynamism of the poem sets it apart from its companion, "Sailing to Byzantium," because "Sailing" is about a one-way trip. The poet leaves the country that is not for old men, his body is consumed away, and he is forged as a golden bird that sits on a golden bough. In that poem, the static golden bird is "rooted," like the green laurel in "Prayer for My Daughter," "in one dear perpetual place" (CP 189); that golden bough is its terminus. Although "Byzantium" refers to both the aesthetic artifact and the life of the body as "bitter," the emphasis is on constant

motion, constant exchange between the "gong-tormented sea" and the "golden smithies of the Emperor," and therefore neither is privileged or erased, neither is the terminus. To return to Richard Finneran's assertion that "Byzantium" is "another poem on the same concept" (5) that Sturge Moore summarized, that the golden bird "is as much nature as a man's body" (Bridge 162), "Byzantium" showcases the transience of *both* the human body and the "monuments of [so-called] unaging intellect": both are bound to the cycles of the Great Wheel. The "changeless" golden bird in "Byzantium" can choose to praise the cycle of rebirth or scorn the "complexities of mire and blood," but regardless of its choice, change it must, for the "unpurged images of day" will inexorably gain ascendency again. In "Sailing to Byzantium," the human heart was consumed and seems absent from the holy city except as a topic for song, but in the later poem the unpurged sea is always crashing at the edges of the city.[82]

According to Kevin J. Porter, the end of "Byzantium" leaves "the soul still thirsting for stasis" (15), but it is thirsting like Tantalus for what it will never have. The following poem, "The Mother of God," showcases the female body as the inverse of the Emperor's golden smithies, for that poem undoes the "changeless" image, beginning with the "fallen flare," the advent of the divine back into that sea of images:

The three-fold terror of love; a fallen flare

Through the hollow of an ear;

Wings beating about the room;

---

[82] I would love to be able to ask Yeats what he thinks of the recent archeological discovery at Istanbul of a port from 4th century AD. The discovery was made during the excavation of a subway tunnel beneath the Bosporus. (http://www.archaeology.org/0707/abstracts/istanbul.html)

The terror of all terrors that I bore
The Heavens in my womb.

Had I not found content among the shows
Every common woman knows,
Chimney corner, garden walk,
Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes
And gather all the talk?

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,
This fallen star my milk sustains,
This love that makes my heart's blood stop
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones,
And bids my hair stand up?

According to Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, "if Leda's rape was an Annunciation, Mary's Annunciation was a rape" (163), presumably because in both poems the woman's body is conscripted at the god's initiative into the service of the cycles of history. However, Mary was impregnated not by a violent rape but by a Word and a star: Yeats writes in his note for this poem that "I had in my memory Byzantine mosaic pictures of the Annunciation, which show a line drawn from a star to the ear of the Virgin. She received the Word through her ear, a star fell, and a star was born" (CP 462). It is true that her body was still colonized, so to speak, by the cycles of history, but the heritage of AVB is here represented by the difference in character

between the cycles that the two annunciations initiated. In "Leda" the upcoming cycle is characterized by destruction, that of created objects and of bodies; in "Mother" the new cycle is characterized explicitly by love, that which cares for the needs of bodies. As Irigaray suggested , the god here does not break into the human world, damage and destroy, and then return unscathed to the divine realm. This god suffers the perils and indignities of infancy. In fact, the first two lines of the third stanza demonstrate Mary's physical exchange with the Christ child. The mother/child relationship here appears almost symbiotic because Yeats emphasizes some of the most embodied, undignified details of the incarnation: Christ's body was inside Mary's, for she "purchased" his life with her pain in giving birth, and he swallows her bodily fluid to stay alive because her "milk sustains" him. Their emotional relationship seems symbiotic as well in the last three lines of the poem: "This love that makes my heart's blood stop / Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones / And bids my hair stand up?" Spiritualized love becomes physical in these lines because the feeling changes her body, bones, heart, and hair, for, as Margaret Jennings points out, in this last stanza "the terror of partial foreknowledge is shown to be much greater than the terror of conception itself" (36). These lines suggest Simeon's words to Mary at the temple after Christ's birth, "Yea, and a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" (Luke 2:35), prophesying the emotional wound she would suffer watching the piercing of her son's side. Her terror is indeed that of the flesh: the suffering of her loved one's death is inscribed in her own body with the pain of his birth.

Christ here is *logos,* the Word, but his advent does not erase Mary by imposing the Word of the Father, for she is still speaking. This poem is the aftermath of the advent of the divine into a woman's daily life; it is the thought process of a woman trying to make meaning for herself, to

interpret that advent and the transformation it brought. Moreover, Mary's reflections here do not have a single complete declarative sentence: the first stanza is a series of fragments and the second and third are two more of Yeats's famous unanswerable questions. This is a total reversal of "Leda," who cannot speak for herself, who cannot put on the power and knowledge of the god, because she has essentially disappeared. In "Mother" the divine itself is fragmented—it is a flare, a disembodied set of wings, both "Heavens" and "flesh"—and it is the women who comes across as whole: she is both the narrator, the interpreter, and the pivot of the event. She is not erased by the Word, for it is silent while she speaks. The questions she asks are not deflated by her own absence but truly provocative: compared to the heart-stopping love she now experiences, *had* she found contentment in the repetitive tasks of her daily life? was it real or imagined? What is the significance of this small body that she cares for? Her body had given flesh to the Heavens, had forged the human out of the divine, but she is not simply a vessel but a teacher through interrogation, much like her son: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?" (Matt 16:26); "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" (Matt 21:25); "If David then call Him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matt 21: 25).

This wedding of the desire for the human and desire for the divine that is inscribed in the pairing of "Byzantium" and "The Mother of God" is stated explicitly in the "Crazy Jane" poems, and here for the first time the holy woman emerges as a meaning-maker who participates in sexual intercourse. Denis Donoghue asserts that "the biological imperative, as a principle of structure, is the 'myth' of the Crazy Jane poems" ("Vigour," 379), but read within the context of Yeats's religion as dynamic exchange rather than the contest of Body and Soul upon which

Donoghue insists, the Crazy Jane poems demonstrate that sexual experience actually enables desire for the divine. In an excellent reading of "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman," J. B. Thompson writes that Crazy Jane's "incisive *tour de force* demolishes the preaching of any such dichotomies, for it brilliantly reconciles the claims of God and man, heaven and earth, this life and an after-life, body and spirit [. . .] The poem thus embodies a rare moment of imaginative insight into a harmony between two worlds" (265). Love's mutability allows the soul to be freed to go to God.

I know, although when looks meet
I tremble to the bone,
The more I leave the door unlatched
The sooner love is gone;
For love is but a skein unwound
Between the dark and dawn.

A lonely ghost the ghost is
That to God shall come;
I—love's skein upon the ground,
My body in the tomb—
Shall leap into the light lost
In my mother's womb.

But were I left to lie alone

In an empty bed,

The skein so bound up ghost to ghost

When he turned his head

Passing on the road that night,

Mine would walk being dead.

According to Thompson's reading, reconciliation is brought about when love is enacted, "unwound," and therefore completed, finished. Jane and Jack are so tightly bound by love, wound like a rope around each of them, that if they were to renounce each other and choose the celibate life—that which in Christian tradition as in early Yeats best prepares the soul to meet the otherworld—their souls would be too tied to each other to "leap into the light" of God.

Although Thompson does not explore the implications this reading has in terms of gender, after such an analysis the poem suggests that a sexual relationship between a man and a Creatrix can also disable traditional gendered power relations. The poem unwinds that sexual power dynamic that caused the young Yeats so much anxiety by suggesting that sex would not grant the woman power over him but in fact slowly draw the couple apart and towards God. Yeats betrayed a profound fear in the 1890s that a sexual relationship with a Creatrix would destroy him because her combined powers of sexuality and religious meaning-making would trump whatever power he could command; "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman" shows that the poet had come to believe that participation in the exchange between the human and the divine actually would give a woman better things to do than to control him. Here, Jane's passion for Jack is such that it could control her soul after death, compel it to follow him when it should be moving toward rebirth. However, Jane's passion for God is underscored by the most evocative

image of the poem: "I—love's skein upon the ground, / My body in the tomb— / Shall leap into the light lost / In my mother's womb." The alliteration of monosyllabic words forces the reader to linger on this line and consider the value of the "light lost." The choice of the word "leap" suggests the urgency with which Jane enters the otherworld, compelled by her desire for God. Thus Jane's desires "die each other's life, live each other's death" as her sexual experience draws her towards God.

But it is the well-known though often-undervalued poem "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop" that, in all of *The Winding Stair*, most explicitly establishes a woman as a religious meaning-maker. Donoghue's reaction to the tone of many of the poems of this series is a typical criticism of women who intrude into the man's business of answering the ultimate questions: "Yeats's recourse to simplification places him in a false position which issues in the poems as a certain stridency, a tendency to shout" (387). Yeats's position here, however, is far from a simplification. It is in fact as complex as *A Vision* itself, representing the contest between desire for the divine and desire for the human as interpenetrating instead of contradictory and, ultimately, as mapped onto the feminized body:

I met the Bishop on the road
And much said he and I.
"Those breasts are flat and fallen now
Those veins must soon be dry;
Live in a heavenly mansion,
Not in some foul sty."

'Fair and foul are near of kin,
And fair needs foul,' I cried.
"My friends are gone, but that's a truth
Nor grave nor bed denied,
Learned in bodily lowliness
And in the heart's pride.

'A woman can be proud and stiff
When on love intent;
But Love has pitched his mansion in
The place of excrement;
For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent."

The Bishop's invitation to Jane in the first stanza is usually read as an act of evangelism, a command to change her sinful ways and renounce sinful, fleshly living. That reading is troubled, however, by Unterecker's suspicion that "Crazy Jane was loved by the young theological student who grew up to be the Bishop and by Jack the Journeyman. The Bishop-to-be saw to it that Jack was banished" (227). The first stanza, then, may be the hypocritical Bishop's invitation to Jane to leave her country cottage and move to his own "heavenly" mansion, if heavenly is read in a figurative instead of literal sense. She had mocked his physical flaws in the first poem in the series, "Crazy Jane and the Bishop": "The Bishop has a skin, God knows, / Wrinkled like the foot of a goose, / . . . / Nor can he hide in holy black / The heron's hunch upon his back" (CP

256). Now that she is old, however, the Bishop reminds her—ungallantly—that her "breasts are flat and fallen now": since her young beauty is lost, there is not such a disparity between their appearances. Timothy Foley supposes that the real "Crazy Jane" protested the Bishop by attacking the parish priest's property: Yeats wrote to writer Gerald O'Donovan reminiscing about a visit when "I stayed with you at Loughrea & moralized over the broken pane of glass in the fan-light. I think you told me it had been made by a drunken woman who had some distaste for the Bishop. I remember saying it was the only sign of secular activity in the town" (Foley 232). If she couldn't attack the Bishop's home in which she had been invited to serve as a concubine, perhaps vandalizing O'Donovan's home was the next best thing.

Her verbal rejection of the Bishop in the poem is not a "secular activity," however: she claims the relationship between—not the opposition of—fair and foul, youth and age, rich and poor, heavenly and earthly. Neither sex nor death promises companionship, for, as in "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman," the human spirit is a "lonely ghost" that strengthens its attachment to fair or foul by experiencing the opposite value to the uttermost. The Bishop's attempt to convince Jane to ascend the ladder—whether physical or spiritual—by emphasizing their common bodily "foulness" is thus a precise contradiction of Jane's own valuation of foulness: it is the complete experience of "bodily lowliness" that enables the human to climb the latter, to "leap into the light lost." Her loss of beauty changes nothing, for old age is simply another variety of that bodily lowliness that, when she was young and beautiful, made her body "like a road/ that men pass over" (CP 259).

Not content with a simple rejection of the Bishop's advances, Jane moves—not unlike a preacher herself—from an accessible illustration from daily life in the second stanza to the

eternal implications in the third. The heavenly mansion and foul sty are not only "near of kin" but as intimately acquainted as the interpenetrating gyres. Yeats rarely uses "pitch" as a verb in his poems, so "Love has pitched his mansion" hearkens back to the only two times he had used it prior to this one, in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" and "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," both of which emphasize the destructiveness of the moon's cycles: "Protected from the circle of the moon / That pitches common things about" (CP 207); "I am content to live it all again / And yet again, if it be life to pitch / Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch / A blind man battering blind men" (CP 236). Those gyres might be ugly, common, and violent, but Jane embraces them: she knows that risk is safer than safety.

The poem then maps the entire universe of history and eternity onto the genital sex act. The lines "But Love has pitched his mansion in / The place of excrement" have at least three inextricable meanings. Richard Finneran claimed that "Love" here means Christ, the God who is Love incarnated in a body that excretes,[83] but when Yeats refers to Christ he almost always capitalizes the pronoun, as in "A Prayer for my Son": "You have lacked articulate speech / To tell Your simplest want" (CP 212). So Love here cannot be unproblematically equated with Christ. However, the use of the word "mansion" with all its echoes of the New Testament, distracts from a simple identification of Love with "The God of Love," as Donoghue would have it (381). The poem thus forces the reader to maintain both frames of reference at once while at the same time directing the imagination to the perineum with "The place of excrement" that "Love's mansion" entered with a forceful verb: "pitched." With a final flourish of wordplay, Jane reminds the Bishop that celibacy in life is detrimental to the leap to God in death: "For

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[83] Class lecture

nothing can be sole [soul] or whole [hole] / That has not been rent." These four lines are Yeats's cosmos in a "mouthful of air": the otherworld and the human body interpenetrate to create a palimpsest—they "die each other's life, live each other's death"; the soul and the body are torn and rebuilt again, joyously. And the poet gives these lines to a woman.

And now to return to the Golden Hall of the Stadshus. Queen Mälaren, the focal point of the room, is a palimpsest like the Great Wheel herself: beneath her visible breasts and the building on her lap lurks the memory of both Christ and the Mother of God, the traditional subjects of Byzantine iconography. She may also have suggested to Yeats the memory of an older era, one that predated the primal myth, the rape of Leda, that began his four-thousand-year cycle of history. He had written in AVA—almost complete by the time he visited Stockholm—that "when in my ignorance I try to imagine what older civilization she [Leda] refuted I can but see bird and woman blotting out some corner of the Babylonian mathematical starlight" (151), but in AVB he changed "older civilization she refuted" to "older civilization that annunciation *rejected*" (268, my emphasis), not refuted, and in a footnote clarified his imagination of what that annunciation phased out: "Toynbee considers Greece the heir of Crete [the cradle of Minoan civilization], and that Greek religion inherits from the Minoan monotheistic mother goddess its more mythical conceptions" (268). The beginning of each two-thousand year era in Yeats's system is heralded by a different mother-goddess, the antithetical Pagan era by Leda and the primary Christian era by Mary. Queen Mälaren, however, is a repetition with a difference, phasing out the biological child in favor of the aesthetic one: she holds the Stadshus. Woman in the midst of objects of production—not reproduction; woman mapped onto the Christian deity;

woman receiving honor without a child on her lap: she must have seemed to Yeats as the appropriate icon for a new era.

Conclusion

From One Gyre Into the Next

> Things thought too long can be no longer thought
> For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth,
> And ancient lineaments are blotted out. (CP 294)

In a project like this one that traces the trajectory of Yeats's development as a poet, it is difficult to write of a conclusion: Yeats was a poet who revised old love poems thirty years after their composition (Cullingford 1) and who renamed and reorganized poems on his deathbed (Foster 651). In despite of his own self-description—"I who have always hated work" (CP 322)—Yeats worked at his sedentary trade until the death of the body stopped his pen. His poetry reached a sexual-theological apotheosis in *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*, but he lived and wrote for more than five years after the appearance of that volume in September of 1933. Any achievement in his poems could be no more than momentary, for, as he phrased his familiar conception in a letter written to Ethel Mannin, "To me all things are made of the conflict of two states of consciousness, beings or persons which die each other's life, live each other's death. That is true of life and death themselves." (L 918). The only escape from the conflicting gyres of life was to embark upon the gyre of death, a transition that Yeats's poetry anticipated more and more in the last five years of his life.

One of the motifs "blotted out" in the last three collections of poems—*Parnell's Funeral and Other Poems, New Poems,* and the posthumously published *Last Poems*—is that of the holy woman. Yeats wrote to Shakespear in December of 1931, "I have begun a longish poem called 'Wisdom' [later renamed 'Vacillation'] in the attempt to shake off 'Crazy Jane' and I begin to

think I shall take to religion unless you save me from it" (L 788). Shakespear's response has been lost, but evidently she was successful at saving him, for, instead of embracing von Hügel's belief that "life and joy [are] reached through death to self (122), in the 1930's Yeats pursued extramarital affairs with a series of women: Margot Ruddock, Ethel Mannin, Dorothy Wellesley, and Edith Shackleton Heald. A fastidious reader might cringe at his exuberant letter to Shakespear regarding the joys of one of those affairs—"This is Bagdad. This is not London." (qtd. in Harwood 189)—but Yeats's delight in the female body, both poetically and personally, is a result and not a repudiation of Crazy Jane. As the poet imagined in "Crazy Jane and Jack the Journeyman," part of the right preparation for death involves unwinding "love's skein" (CP 258). Like the great last poems about his personal history, "Beautiful Lofty Things," "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," and "The Circus Animals' Desertion," poems like "The Wild Old Wicked Man" and the "Three Bushes" sequence unwind the poet's connection to life so he may be thrust unhampered "Back in the human mind again" (CP 326).

In one of the last letters of his life, Yeats wrote to Lady Elizabeth Pelham a poignant statement of his understanding of the relationship between truth and representation:

> It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put all into a phrase I say "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it." I must embody it in the completion of my life. The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence…" (L 922)

Throughout his life, Yeats sought to "embody" the abstract not only in his life but in his poems, and, for much of his writing life, that body was often female, showing forth the divine in the

human world. Her meaning shifted and transformed, but at last Yeats allowed her to "desert" so his poetry could linger in "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart" (CP 348).

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Vita

Elaine Childs was born in Lubbock, Texas, to parents Kathy and Philip and grew up in rural East Texas. She was home schooled by her parents and then attended Texas Tech University where she obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English. She completed her Master of Arts degree in English at Stephen F. Austin State University. While at the University of Tennessee she was fortunate enough to be a student in the last semester of the late Richard J. Finneran's Yeats and Joyce seminar. After acting as co-chair of the first conference in the NEXUS series, hosted by the Graduate Students in English, Elaine took a year-long leave of absence which she spent working with Roma children in the Republic of Croatia. Upon completion of this degree she will return to Croatia to marry her fiancée and work on her spoken Croatian while she searches for a teaching position in the United States.