

Barry Sheils



W.B. Yeats and
World Literature
The Subject of Poetry

W.B. Yeats and World Literature

The Subject of Poetry

BARRY SHEILS

University College Dublin, Republic of Ireland

ASHGATE

© Barry Sheils 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Barry Sheils has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
110 Cherry Street
Suite 3-1
Burlington, VT 05401-3818
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:

Sheils, Barry.

W.B. Yeats and world literature: the subject of poetry / by Barry Sheils.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4724-2553-9 (hardcover: alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-4724-2554-6 (ebook)
— ISBN 978-1-4724-2555-3 (epub)

1. Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865–1939—Criticism and interpretation. 2. Yeats, W. B. (William Butler), 1865–1939—Influence. I. Title.

PR5907.S36 2015

821'.8—dc23

2015005738

ISBN: 9781472425539 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781472425546 (ebk – PDF)

ISBN: 9781472425553 (ebk – ePUB)



Printed in the United Kingdom by Henry Ling Limited,
at the Dorset Press, Dorchester, DT1 1HD

W.B. YEATS AND WORLD LITERATURE

I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,
Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering white;
The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,
The East her hidden joy before the morning break,
The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,
The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge A.P. Watt at United Agents on behalf of Caitriona Yeats for granting me permission to reprint copyrighted material from Yeats's *Uncollected Prose Vol.1*. Ed. J.P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970).

A portion of Chapter 2 of this book was published as “‘Dark Cognition’: W.B. Yeats, J.G. Herder and the Imperfection of Tradition’ in *Irish Studies Review* 20.1 (2012): 299–321 (<http://www.tandfonline.com>), and a revised version of Chapter 5 appeared under the title ‘Poetry in the Modern State: The Example of W.B. Yeats’s “Late Style” and “New Fanaticism”’ in *New Literary History* 45.3 (2014): 483–505 (<http://newliteraryhistory.org>). I acknowledge The Taylor & Francis Group and Johns Hopkins University Press respectively for permission to republish this work. I also thank the Centre for Irish Studies at Charles University, Prague, in whose publication *The Politics of Irish Writing* (Ed. K. Jenčová *et al.*, 2010) I rehearsed my thoughts on ‘Easter 1916’.

Additional acknowledgements go to Ann Donahue at Ashgate for her editorial expertise, to the academic readers whose reports on my draft manuscript were knowledgeable and always constructive, and to the artist Rosie O’Gorman of Cow House Studios in Wexford (<http://www.rosieogorman.com>) for providing me with the cover image.

This book evolved from a PhD thesis written under the supervision of Michael Bell at Warwick University. I would like to thank Michael for his many and varied insights on the work in its early stages, and for the enduring example his intellectual conviviality provided. Thomas Docherty and Ed Larrissy read and commented on my thesis, and the book was finished for the first time while I was working as a lecturer at Swansea University. There I joined a great community of students and colleagues, including John Goodby, Richard Robinson and Steve Vine, in whose spirited conversations I always found encouragement. I have been extremely fortunate with my families. I have benefitted from the support and kindness of Gabriel, Rosaline and Helen Sheils, and I owe an incalculable debt to my partner Julie Walsh whose buoyancy of spirit remains always my major source of inspiration.

List of Abbreviations

<i>Au</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Autobiographies</i> (London: Macmillan 1979).
<i>CL Intalex</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats</i> . Gen. ed. John Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press Intalex Electronic Edition, 2002), letters cited by Accession number.
<i>CT 93</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>The Celtic Twilight: Men and Women, Dhoulis and Faeries</i> (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893).
<i>CT 02</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>The Celtic Twilight</i> (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1902).
<i>E&I</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Essays and Introductions</i> (London: Macmillan, 1961).
<i>Ex</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Explorations</i> (London: Macmillan, 1962).
<i>KT</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>The King's Threshold: Manuscript Materials</i> . Ed. Declan Kiely (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2005).
<i>L</i>	<i>The Letters of W.B. Yeats</i> . Ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).
<i>M</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Memoirs: Autobiography – First Draft, Journal</i> . Ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972).
<i>Myth</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Mythologies</i> (London: Macmillan, 1934).
<i>OBMV</i>	W.B. Yeats (ed.), <i>The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892–1935</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).
<i>P&I</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Prefaces and Introductions</i> . Ed. William O'Donnell (London: Macmillan, 1988).
<i>PP</i>	<i>Poets to a Poet 1912–1940: Letters from Robert Bridges, Ernest Rhys, W.B. Yeats, Thomas Sturge Moore, R.C. Trevelyan and Ezra Pound to Rabindranath Tagore</i> . Ed. Bikash Chakravarty (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1998).
<i>UP1</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Uncollected Prose Vol. 1</i> . Ed. J.P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970).
<i>UP2</i>	W.B. Yeats, <i>Uncollected Prose Vol. 2</i> . Ed. J.P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1975).

- V* W.B. Yeats, *A Vision*, 1937 edition (London: Macmillan, 1992).
- VP* W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*. Ed. P. Allt and R.K. Alspach, (New York: Macmillan, 1957).
- VPI* W.B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats*. Ed. R.K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966).
- WB* *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical*, Vol. 1. Ed. Edward John Ellis and William Butler Yeats (New York: AMS Press, 1973 [1893]).

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Yeatsian Transmissions: Between Kiltartan and the Sky	27
2 Folklore and the New World of Text	65
3 'Put into English': The Monoglot Translator and World Literature	101
4 'Woman' and the Poetics of Destitution	131
5 Fanatic Subjectivity in the Modern State	161
<i>Bibliography</i>	183
<i>Index</i>	193

Introduction

The Venture

In 1900, after publically declaring his support for the anti-British forces in the Boer War, W.B. Yeats was rumoured to have been deprived of a family subvention by his loyalist uncle George Pollexfen who was then chief executive of the family's shipping and grain-supply business, W.G.T. Pollexfen Company Ltd.¹ The company operated internationally, but its headquarters were in Sligo, roughly locatable between 'Knocknarea' and 'Ben Bulbin', a good walk from 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', a stone's throw from 'Drumcliffe churchyard', set back from Rosses Point, and just down the road from Lissadell House: it was a silent and invisible partner in the production of a famous poetic myth. After all, it was from his mother's well-heeled, Pollexfen-funded 'Sligo girlhood' that Yeats had borrowed his longing for the West of Ireland, and from the example of her thrift when living in exile in London, and her ultimately fatal 'anxiety about money', that he had learned his starkest lesson about modern economy (*Au* 31). As his father would never tire of reminding him, the poet was a Pollexfen as well as being a Yeats.²

Having learned this familiar lesson, Yeats was strategically placed to cope with disinheritance. By the turn of the century he had cultivated smart, almost lucrative relations with Maud Gonne's neo-Fenian associates in Dublin, and with the new benefactress of his literary theatre, Lady Augusta Gregory. He wrote the following gumptious half-truth to Gregory in the same centurial year: 'In a battle, like Ireland's which is one of poverty against wealth, one must prove one's sincerity, by making oneself unpopular to wealth. One must accept the baptism of the gutter' (*L* 339). The irony of such a declaration, issued to a woman whose considerable material holdings he would go on to borrow, spend and invest for most of the remainder of his life, did not overshadow its rhetorical brilliance, and Yeats published it openly a full 35 years later in his autobiographical volume *Dramatis Personae* (1935) (*Au* 410). Here, among various related reminiscences on the inception of the Irish national theatre against the backdrop of violent uprising in South Africa, he reflects also on an enterprising suggestion of the novelist George Moore. '[D]riven to frenzy by the Boer War', Moore had concocted a

¹ Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, The Apprentice Mage*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 228.

² On one occasion, having received money from his son, John Butler Yeats opined: 'it was like a Yeats to send this money and make no fuss about it. It was like a Pollexfen to have it to send.' J.B. Yeats, *Letters to his son W.B. Yeats and Others* (New York: Dutton, 1946), 229. Quoted in William H. Murphy, *Family Secrets: William Butler Yeats and His Relatives* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 6.

‘project of lecturing in America [on a pro-Boer and pro-Irish platform] against an Anglo-American alliance, much talked of at the time’ (*Au* 431). Yeats had felt considerable enthusiasm for the venture:

Less because of any harm [Moore] may do the Anglo-American alliance than because it will help to make [Ireland’s] extremists think about the foundations of life and letters, which they certainly do not at present. To *transmute* the anti-English passion into a passion of hatred against the vulgarity and materialism whereon England has founded her worst life and the whole life that she sends us, has always been a dream of mine, and Moore may help in that *transmutation*. (*Au* 431–2, my emphasis)

Though doubting the efficacy of performing the sometimes-extreme politics of Ireland on the stage of the New World, Yeats nonetheless appreciated, and continued to appreciate in his memoir, the act of ‘transmutation’ implied by Moore’s proposal. Through America the narrow constitutional fight between Ireland and England could become generalised as the worldwide fight between spirituality and vulgar materialism.

This is one of the best-rehearsed of Yeats’s Manichean formulations of global modernity: spirituality versus materialism. But the role of American transmutation within this deceptively binary formulation is worthy of further exploration. America represents the transmutation of constitutional politics into a general spiritual philosophy, but also, I suggest, of constitutional politics into global economics. Yeats doesn’t declare it outright, but what was most exciting about America was its capacity to launder money: New World capital dissociated from the polluted symbols of the British Empire could be mobilised *against* English materialism; you could have American money and still be unpopular to English wealth. The poet’s practice bears this theoretical irony out. Not exempt from the necessity of making a living, Yeats had long been writing Irish stories for the American Press; and from 1902 the New York lawyer and collector John Quinn would become the most reliable patron of the poet’s Irish theatre and both the artisanal concerns with which the poet was associated: the Dun Emer and the Cuala Industries. Quinn also helped to organise – in emulation of Moore’s idea – lucrative US lecture tours. Indeed, in his first American tour of duty in 1903–04, Yeats cleared a considerable profit of £646 speaking on Irish themes.³ His story of squaring his account with Lady Gregory in the wake of this success is ostentatiously old-fashioned but also brimful of pride. It shocked him that he owed her ‘Five hundred’, but the matter was simply resolved: he ‘wrote to an American lecture agent, earned the money and paid it back’ (*Au* 408). Here we have a poet baptised by the Irish gutter but rarely lacking in cash assets, whose enterprise creates capital that, in the end, far exceeds a family subvention from uncle George.

An apocryphal story, as told by Samuel Beckett among others, concerns the award of the Nobel Prize to Yeats in 1923. Having called with the good news and

³ Murphy, *Family Secrets*, 120.

started on his congratulatory oration, the Lord Mayor of Dublin is impatiently interrupted by the poet: 'yes, yes, just tell me what it's worth! How much will I get?'⁴ The reader might expect that one embellish such an anecdote with a satisfied remark or two about the discrepancy between high art ideals and financial opportunism. But our business here is not to audit the poet's personal accounts, which, however impeachable, can only in the end provoke the banal accusation of hypocrisy. We can say with some certainty that for all his high talk of heredity – familial, aristocratic, and national – Yeats's cultural possessions were largely borrowed, and that the resourcefulness of his lateral relationships proved just as important to his work as his inheritances. But rather than provide yet another empirical account of how the author came by a room – or in this case a Norman tower – of his own to write in, this study will consider how a greater appreciation for global economic relations in the early twentieth century necessarily opens the biography of a single poet to the geopolitical dilemmas of modern poetry.

Already we can see how extrinsic relations to South Africa and America influenced Yeats's ostensibly nationalistic expression; neither is it inconsequential that the poet's Nobel windfall was made possible by a close alignment of international competition and literary value. But money was not simply the abstraction of social relations that allowed Yeats the personal freedom to write poetry; it also, more broadly, determined the language and form of his writing. For example, the poet was accused (once more in 1900) on the pages of the Sinn Féin organ the *United Irishman* of wanting Ireland to play the 'missionary nation [...] for spirituality, for ideality, for simplicity in the English-speaking world'.⁵ Indeed he did. But what those arguing for a more self-sufficient, Irish-language nationalism deemed an egregious betrayal was equally a form of literary advantage in a world economy where the missionary nation – Ireland – could transmute base English materialism into poetry. Again, this cultural profiteering is backlit by New World ontology: Yeats was trading in a language liberated from its proper home. Much like Marx's commodity, defined by its vagrancy and deceptive autonomy, the poet's characteristically Irish brand of English literature flourished in a market of translation and exchange. He was well paid for speaking of the spirituality of the Irish language, but only ever in English.

This book is the first study of Yeats's poetic modernity to scrutinise within his writing the relation between the order of poetic expression and the effects of money, trade and globalisation. It will build on a spate of recent works connecting a world systems theory of economic and social modernity to the institutionalisation of modern, specifically modernist, literature, in order to consider how the international circulation of literary objects and values recursively impacts on forms of literary production. It will be shown that, though expressive of cultural nationalism, Yeats's work discovers its modernity through accepting and exploiting its worldly relations. In W.H. Auden's famous elegy 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' the Irish

⁴ Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Summit, 1990), 610.

⁵ Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 220.

poet's reputation lies at the mercy of the 'importance and noise of tomorrow / when the brokers are moving like beasts on the floor of the Bourse',⁶ Granted, Auden was writing in a period of economic depression and World War, and before Yeats became one of the most written about and institutionally embedded poets of the twentieth century. But, even so, his critical ambivalence sets the industry standard for 'Yeats Studies': Auden's Yeats is both a comforting remnant of the poetic per se, in an age when 'true' poetry has begun to seem impossible, and a complacent 'beautiful soul', living and dying in shameful ignorance of modern economic and political realities. This accounts for the compelling mix of revenge and redemption detectable throughout Auden's poem. Most specifically, Auden insinuates that 'silly' dead Yeats was mistaken in trying to exempt his 'mad Ireland' and the Irish weather from what all the instruments agreed upon, namely the gloomy political and economic forecast of 1939. Weather cannot be nationalised, the poem suggests, nor can nations be exempted from the weather systems of the world. It is hard to disagree; and yet the question of whether or not Yeats can still be considered 'our' contemporary – implicit in all studies such as this one – seems to depend on whether the poet was mistaken about air pressure, cold fronts and other such systematic energies blowing ceaselessly and invisibly across sovereign borders, or whether he understood them only too well.

Irish Modernism: 1900

We can say of the institutionalisation of literary modernism over the last century that it has had two minimum conditions: an imaginary space beyond the political space of the nation through which literature can 'happen'; and a sense of simultaneity, usually nominated as a particular year, in which the extant order of the world is deemed to have fundamentally changed. Along with many other soon-to-be-modernists, Yeats was both a poet and a mythographer of his own literary moment. In his 1936 introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* he tells one version of modernism's most traditional story as follows: 'in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic Church; or if they did I have forgotten.' 'Victorianism had been defeated' he concludes, and hard on the heels of that defeat came the redundancy of Victorianism's ostentatious antagonist, literary decadence, whose spiritual heartland had always been Paris (*OBMV* xi). In the second volume of his autobiographies, *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), Yeats announces this same epochal shift away from literary Paris with a mix of regret and terror: 'I say, "After Stéphane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Paul Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God"' (*Au* 348). Considering the prestige

⁶ W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', *W.H. Auden: Selected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 80–82.

of Parisian modernism in the first decades of the twentieth century, it remains somewhat paradoxical to state that true modernity had already absconded from the capital of European art – it was a city that had from Yeats's perspective ossified into a monument for *La Belle Epoque*. Although once a Paris-facing decadent himself, part of the so-called 'Tragic Generation' of writers including Oscar Wilde and Lionel Johnson, it became imperative to '[g]ive up Paris', as he was to counsel his friend and collaborator John Millington Synge as early as 1896 (*E&I* 299). George Moore too, he noted with some approval, was to come 'to hate his own past in [Emile] Zola' (*Au* 452). Only with Paris renounced could one confront the 'savage' non-European gods of twentieth-century modernity.

This conception of a modernist break with a definitively European, Paris-centric past is bound to be overdetermined, of course; but among its necessary, if insufficient conditions we might include the 'Balkanisation' of Europe propelled by small-nation nationalisms such as Ireland's, the corruption of the centralising bourgeois narratives of historical progress, the international expansion and increasing complexity of financial markets, and the representation of a unitary world space through the development of new technologies such as the phonograph, the telephone, the cinema and the radio. The cultural theorist Friedrich Kittler has proposed '1900' as a shorthand for a shifted 'discourse network' in which a romantic-era hermeneutics, conjuring metaphysical origins, national languages (mother tongues) and the bureaucratic apparatus of the European state, was replaced by the plurality and 'histrionics' of the media age.⁷ Where 'once there was investment in singular meaning – exemplified by the pure breath of the romantic poet's sigh – in 1900 there is only the flight from meaning into media: interference, multiple voices, the manipulation and recording of sound and nonsense. Paradoxically, a world made smaller by technology, but also by politics and economics, was also a more fractured world; as Eric Hobsbawm puts it, a world 'bound together ever more tightly by the bonds of moving goods and people, of capital and communications, of material products and ideas' had at the same time 'drifted into division'.⁸ David Harvey describes a similar paradox when he points to the modern coincidence of the compressed spatialisation of the world tied to colonial administration and its 'insecure temporality' indexed to the opening of stock and capital markets and the internationalising of trade after 1850. This unified but destabilised modern world is exemplified for Harvey by 'an age in which the artefacts of the past or from afar began to trade as valued commodities'. Not only do culturally distinguished objects become internationally available with increasing speed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but the traversing of space this availability entails, from one zone of economic development to another, doubles as a kind of time travel: thus, the 'foreign craft market' is perfectly consistent with the temporal revival of the craft tradition promoted by

⁷ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks: 1800/1900*. Trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 178, *passim*.

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London: Abacus, 1994), 13.

those like William Morris in Britain, and through this spatio-temporal dislocation the commodity becomes allegorical of modernity itself.⁹

The imbrication of the antique and the foreign within the modern commodity form, and the corresponding inscription of place within a globalising economy of exchange, has hardly been acknowledged in the existing critical literature on Yeats's work; and yet, as we shall see, the scene of modern Ireland, which is also, for the poet, the scene of ancient idealism and the living tradition, is significantly founded on modes of geographic displacement. As a disciple of Morris's (though also a Morris apostate¹⁰), a life-long admirer of Japanese prints and Indian spiritualism, as well as the editorial advisor on his sisters' artisanal publishing ventures, Yeats was intimate with international commodification: namely, the processes through which local crafts were reproduced within international archives and primitive traditions supplemented by modern technology. We might consider, in particular, the 1906 Irish Industrial Exhibition in New York where Dun Emer craft goods, including some of Yeats's books, were sold as 'authentic' products from 'home'.¹¹ Such occasions replayed the phantasmagorical reproductions of the non-European world within the market interiors of the great London and Paris Exhibitions of the 1850s, except by 1906 the site of valorisation was America and the exotic commodities for exchange ostensibly European.

I shall argue that Yeats's work is tied to the productions of these modern world interiors – or globes. Even when professing his unwillingness to endure 'an international art, picking stories and symbols where it pleased', and asserting the distinction of his cultural reference points within Ireland – replacing Prometheus with 'Patrick or Columcille, Oisín or Finn' – his perspective of Ireland-as-place is invariably supplemented by Ireland's relative position in a converging world space (*Au* 193–4). In this respect we might augment Dipesh Chakrabarty's arresting phrase 'provincialising Europe', meant to suggest the possibility of an 'enlightened' resistance to European historicism, by proposing that this was a process already taking place – albeit ironically – within Europe's own provinces.¹² The cultural self-centring of the Irish Revival, whilst a form of stake-holding in a nineteenth-century Europe of distinct but related national cultures, was also, in the context of colonialism and expanding global markets in the twentieth-century, a portent of the fracture of Europe's classical idealisation. We encounter famous renderings of this fracture in Yeats's formulised late lyrics. The 'twenty centuries of stony sleep' in 'The Second Coming' (1920) constructs a retrospective myth

⁹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 272.

¹⁰ Yeats became frustrated with a brand of socialism he associated with Morris's followers (though not with Morris himself) whose economic histories ignored 'religion' and the qualities of belief necessary to effect a 'change of heart' in society. 'I did not read economics, having turned Socialist because of Morris's lectures and pamphlets, and I think it unlikely that Morris himself could read economics' (*Au* 146).

¹¹ Murphy, *Family Secrets*, 131–9.

¹² See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 2–23.

of European temporality only in order to anticipate its falling apart in the age of Bolshevik revolution and World War (VP 401). 'Meru' (1934) is more explicit still as a farewell to Judeo-Christian linearity and the aesthetic privileges once guaranteed to a Mediterranean geography: 'Egypt and Greece, good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!' Were things better before under 'the semblance of peace' and through 'manifold illusion', the sonnet asks, or is the new globally appointed 'desolation of reality' to be preferred (VP 563)? Whether Yeats's geographical references extend as in this case to the exotically global Mount Meru and Everest, or contract to the exotically Irish Croagh Patrick, Ben Bulbin and Knocknaree, it is the alternate broadening and narrowing of perspective that significantly destabilises the representation of political space. Yeats's 'savage god' marks the entry of non-classical and ostensibly primitive material into Europe's imaginary; but it is also suggestive of new economic relations no longer dressed-up in the clothes of European 'civilization', denoting the meeting-point between Yeats's 'rough beast' – a new god in waiting – and Auden's 'beast'-like brokers stalking 'the floor of the Bourse'. On the one hand, a network of Irish, Asian and African locales anticipates the ground for an anti-colonial critique; on the other it augurs capitalist globalisation and the affiliated savagery of twentieth-century race philosophies.

John Brannigan has argued that, once deprived of place and language, a globalised Irishness often came to rely on the 'Great Memory' of race for its identity.¹³ Specifically, the idealised Irish-American narrative systematically erased the existence of the racialised other – most starkly, the African-American labourer. Brannigan's keynote example is a Golden Blush tobacco advertisement, published in the *Irish Independent* in the auspicious year of 1922, which depicts the happy and incorruptibly 'white' eventuality of successful 'Irish'-American manufacturers producing their valued commodity in Virginia for sale to the Irish back in Dublin. Yeats's expression of race ideology has already been extensively studied, but it is nonetheless worth reminding ourselves of this potential connection between transatlantic venture, the de-territorialisation of national culture, and paranoia concerning race degeneration. While the anti-decadent imperative of scientific eugenics attained its most extreme notoriety through the politics of European fascism, it emerged also in Yeats's work as a deferred symptom of the poet's longstanding ambivalence concerning a specifically Irish modernity: the scientific question of life was tied to the poet's need to make a *living*, the poetic qualities of Ireland's national *life* and the location of a *living* tradition. Once more, 1900 provided Yeats with his significant tipping point:

Since about 1900 the better stocks have not been replacing their numbers, while the stupider and less healthy have been more than replacing theirs. Unless there is a change in the public mind every rank above the lowest must degenerate, and, as inferior men push into its gaps, degenerate more and more quickly. (Ex 423)

¹³ John Brannigan, *Race in Modern Irish Literature and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 16–17.

This is from *On the Boiler* (1939), Yeats's much-maligned and self-contradictory polemic against modern society in which he predicts a coming civil war between the docile masses and the skilled riders of machines, the new aristocrats on metal horses. The prediction is based upon the crisis of political sovereignty across Europe, ominously manifest in the 1930s, but for Yeats already implicit in the Irish Civil War of 1922–23 and in the savage temperament of modernity underway since 1900. Most significantly, however, he turns his attention to America, in particular to the United States army, which had begun organising its troops according to tests of 'mother-wit'. His concern is for the Irish immigrants, whose intelligence has been scoring 'lowest in the scale' (426). On the one hand, such IQ tests only corroborated the eugenicist arguments of the period, with which Yeats had vocally agreed: namely, that national intelligences, including Ireland's, were in decline in the twentieth century on account of bad breeding.¹⁴ On the other, they provoked the poet to reconsider his position: might it be that the definition of intelligence is at fault? Is it not the case, in fact, that 'we Irish are nearer than the English to the Mythic Age'? He tentatively draws out this old counter-argument by giving the example of Mayo boys and girls 'looking at a film or a magazine page for the first time' who are so mythopoeically alive in their primitivism they cannot recognise pictorial representations of natural objects (*Ex* 427n). Since this underdeveloped sense of objectivity had long been held as the basis of Irish cultural superiority (and of Yeats's poetic subjectivity), the value of an international objective standard of intelligence must be called into question. Yeats intimates this much, but resists writing anything conclusive against his newer, more savagely objective and eugenicist perspective. Instead he ends this meditation by quoting the Irish ballet dancer Ninette de Valois who had lived much of her life in England and would go on to form the first ballet school in Turkey: "'The Irish", she said, "are adaptable immigrants, the bigger and emptier a country the better it pleases them. When England fills up, they will disappear; they will lunch in bed instead of merely breakfasting there, they will be scared off by the Matriculation papers"' (*Ex* 428). The romanticised suggestion that Irish life will not submit to modern standardisation sits uncomfortably alongside the New World fantasy of an empty space where population control is not the concern that it is in Europe. The America that measures intellectual degeneration, and through this philistine culture of measurement perhaps comes to embody such degeneration, is equally the transcendent, post-European destination for the non-standardisable Irish migrant – who also doubles as the successful Irish entrepreneur. Such is the intricacy of twentieth-century modernity. In light of the fact that Yeats gives us

¹⁴ Yeats quotes confidently from texts by two prominent eugenicists of the period, Lewis M. Terman (*The Measurement of Intelligence* (New York: Arno Press, 1975 [1916])) and Raymond Catell (*Fight for the National Intelligence* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1937)). This literary relationship between Yeats and the eugenicists has been discussed most fully by Donald Childs in *Modernism and Eugenics: Woolf, Eliot, Yeats, and the Culture of Degeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).