

Trinity University

Digital Commons @ Trinity

English Honors Theses

English Department

5-2022

How to Do Things with Magic: Yeat's Incantatory Performatives

Zoe E. Grout

Trinity University, zoeegrout@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/eng_honors

Recommended Citation

Grout, Zoe E., "How to Do Things with Magic: Yeat's Incantatory Performatives" (2022). *English Honors Theses*. 38.

https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/eng_honors/38

This Thesis open access is brought to you for free and open access by the English Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

How to Do Things with Magic: Yeats's Incantatory Performatives

Zoe Grout

A departmental senior thesis submitted to the Department of English at Trinity University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with departmental honors.

April 28, 2022

David Rando, Thesis Advisor

Betsy Tontiplaphol, Department Chair

Jennifer Henderson, AVPAA

Student Agreement

I grant Trinity University (“Institution”), my academic department (“Department”), and the Texas Digital Library (“TDL”) the non-exclusive rights to copy, display, perform, distribute and publish the content I submit to this repository (hereafter called "Work") and to make the Work available in any format in perpetuity as part of a TDL, digital preservation program, Institution or Department repository communication or distribution effort.

I understand that once the Work is submitted, a bibliographic citation to the Work can remain visible in perpetuity, even if the Work is updated or removed.

I understand that the Work's copyright owner(s) will continue to own copyright outside these non-exclusive granted rights.

I warrant that:

- 1) I am the copyright owner of the Work, or
- 2) I am one of the copyright owners and have permission from the other owners to submit the Work, or
- 3) My Institution or Department is the copyright owner and I have permission to submit the Work, or
- 4) Another party is the copyright owner and I have permission to submit the Work.

Based on this, I further warrant to my knowledge:

- 1) The Work does not infringe any copyright, patent, or trade secrets of any third party,
- 2) The Work does not contain any libelous matter, nor invade the privacy of any person or third party, and
- 3) That no right in the Work has been sold, mortgaged, or otherwise disposed of, and is free from all claims.

I agree to hold TDL, DPN, Institution, Department, and their agents harmless for any liability arising from any breach of the above warranties or any claim of intellectual property infringement arising from the exercise of these non-exclusive granted rights.”

I choose the following option for sharing my thesis (required):

- Open Access (full-text discoverable via search engines)
 Restricted to campus viewing only (allow access only on the Trinity University campus via digitalcommons.trinity.edu)

I choose to append the following [Creative Commons license](#) (optional):

Attribution-NonCommercial

CC BY-NC

How to Do Things with Magic: Yeats's Incantatory Performatives

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.

-W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium"

Introduction

This passage from W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" comes at a pivotal moment in the poem's progression. In the two stanzas preceding it, Yeats laments the physical deterioration and social disregard that come with age. As the opening stanzas to his 1928 collection *The Tower*, they set a fairly depressing tone for what's to come. However, he avoids solidifying this despondent tone when this excerpt from the beginning of the third stanza shifts our perspective toward the hopeful. It is here that Yeats begins to propose his own method for avoiding these pitfalls and ails of growing old in our society. Here, he creates his own space, his imagined notion of Byzantium, where he can continue to grow spiritually in order to avoid the inevitable death that awaits him in the physical realm. His turn to the metaphysical, though, is not merely a suggestion or an alternative route through old age; it furthermore calls the possibility into literal being. That is, Yeats did not merely publish a poem in 1928—he also published an incantation counteracting the finality of physical death.

This argument may at first seem outlandish: however, Yeats's occult ties, and indeed his magical practices, are well-known to virtually anyone who has spent more than thirty seconds reading into his biography. Read any history of 19th-20th century occultism, and you will find Yeats nestled away in the index, mentioned along with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (the secret society with which he is most often associated). Unsurprisingly, this heterodox strain of Yeats's biography comes up often in literary criticism surrounding his work, so much so that there is an entire subfield of Yeatsian studies devoted to chronicling and understanding his occult

work and influences. This niche has no doubt done incredible work, without which I could not have performed any of my own.¹ However, these analyses often parse out what his more esoteric poems mean in the context of his metaphysical philosophy and practices rather than analyze the ways in which they are parts of developing those philosophies and enacting those practices. Again, these types of analyses are important, especially given the complexity that is inherent to Yeats's spiritual thought. But by not speaking to the *how* of the connection between Yeats's poetry and magical practices, we do him and ourselves a disservice.

Hence, in my thesis I plan to fill this gap in criticism by analyzing the ways that Yeats's literary work acts in tandem to his magical work. First and foremost, I will explain a brief history of Yeats's magical involvement, and some of the major principles that guided his belief system. In doing so, I will prove that his magical practices *were* intrinsically tied to his poetic composition and that there is inherent value in treating the two as not only complementary, but also as one and the same. I will then use one of Yeats's most important magical symbols, the gyre, to analyze his poem "All Souls' Night." In this poem, Yeats uses the symbology of the gyre to explore his own conceptions of the life and death cycle, and moreover his belief in the promise of renewed spiritual life after our inevitable physical deaths. Hence, I will argue that in "All Souls' Night," Yeats finds the inspiration to write an incantation ensuring this spiritual life after physical death in "Sailing to Byzantium." My argument will culminate with my reading of "Sailing to Byzantium," where I will use both J. L. Austin's and Jacques Derrida's theorizations of the performative speech act to argue that Yeats *does* intend to enact change in the world, and specifically in the life/death/renewed life cycle, with his poetic utterances.

¹ Margaret Mills Harper, for example, is a noted occultist Yeatsian scholar, who has published extensively on Yeats's occult involvements. Her article, "Yeats and the occult" chronicles his magical practices over the years. Similarly, M. C. Flannery's book, *Yeats and Magic* follows Yeats's occult biography, and often uses it as a lens for reading his literary work. Together, these works became frequent references for myself.

Yeats's Magical Doctrines and Practices

I have found it incredibly easy to become lost in the seemingly infinite number of titles we attribute to W. B. Yeats. To the public, he is a poet, playwright, folklorist, senator, and even a Nobel Laureate. To those who dig deeper into these personae, though, he is also a father, husband, and unrequited lover of uninterested actresses. There is absolutely no shortage of information about him, be it from his own autobiographical work, the notes of his peers, or even the surplus of critical material analyzing his life and times. In all of this cacophony, I have come to imagine him as a human kaleidoscope. Learning a new piece of information about him, reading another poem, or another reading *of* one of his poems, seems to me much like turning a kaleidoscope just so, and finding an entirely new and complex image. For me, however, always at the center of his kaleidoscopic web lies one of his core and crucial identities: Yeats the Magician.

Yeats's magical practices are incredibly well-documented. He himself wrote a number of essays explicitly stating his magical beliefs and practices, using his own real life experiences and research into others' mystical encounters as evidence. Magic pervades all of his work, so much so that it may be his largest literary constant. As such, we might use any piece of his oeuvre as a starting point to prove his magical investment. But the clearest, most explicit one comes in his 1901 essay, aptly titled "Magic," from his 1903 essay collection *Ideas of Good and Evil*. Yeats opens the essay with an explicit statement of belief: "I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed" ("Magic" 33). This opening statement rings eerily

similar to the Christian Apostles' Creed, which begins with the affirmation "I believe in God the Father Almighty." Unlike the Apostles' Creed, which is a centuries-old statement of faith representing the general thoughts of a massive community, Yeats's own "Magical Creed" is incredibly novel. His use of a nearly-ancient creed as a model tells us that he views his own Magical Creed as equally worthy of lasting centuries. That is, he believes in it strongly and steadfastly. Furthermore, Yeats's Creed represents a mosaic of his studies in various occult subjects, such as Celtic folklore, Tarot, and Hermeticism. While he may not necessarily have personally seen them as incompatible with traditional Christian doctrine, he must have known that these ideas were highly unorthodox. Therefore, his bold choice to implicitly compare the two tells his reader how seriously he took his magical practices, and in turn how necessary it is for any reader to do the same.

Beyond making simple declarations of belief, Yeats uses "Magic" to give his own eyewitness testimonies as evidence to support his dogma. He describes multiple instances on which he has, at least to his mind, conjured (or seen conjured) various magical symbols. The first of these occasions came to him on a visit to a friend's house. During their meeting, the host and hostess performed a ritual. The host stood on a platform, holding a mace, looking at "a tablet of many-coloured squares," and muttering what I assume to be an incantation while his wife (the "seeress") interpreted the vision he had ("Magic" 35). According to Yeats, "Almost at once my imagination began to move of itself and to bring before me vivid images that, though never too vivid to be imagination, as I had always understood it, had yet a motion of their own, a life I could not change or shape" ("Magic" 35). The essay provides a number of other examples of similar occurrences, where Yeats believed that he had visions of symbols or events, and even that, on occasion, he could transfer these symbols to others' minds using his own power. This is

all to say that Yeats, beyond a measure of doubt, did practice magic, and fully believed in it. His status as a magician is by no means hearsay or speculative—rather, it is remarkably well-preserved, even in his own hand.

Indeed, Yeatsian scholars address this magical practice often, tracing it across his life to identify the various groups in which he participated and the exact principles in which he believed. A researcher of Yeats would be hard-pressed to find a biography that does *not* acknowledge these practices. The first volume of R. F. Foster's biography of Yeats is titled *The Apprentice Mage*, while Richard Ellmann's noted biography, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*, discusses his magical practice and devotes multiple chapters to it (for example "Michael Robartes and the Golden Dawn" and "Esoteric Yeatsism: The Flowering of a Dream"). Several monographs are dedicated entirely to chronicling Yeats's magical practices, such as M. C. Flannery's *Yeats and Magic*, one of my primary reference points. They focus especially on his involvement with the Theosophists of Madame Blavatsky, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, as well as his culminating work, *A Vision*.²

However, much of the occultist Yeatsian criticism tends toward the biographical rather than the intensely analytical. These scholars tend to read Yeats's poetry through the lens of the esoteric portion of his biography, and the resulting readings often discuss the symbolism of his poetry with regards to his metaphysical beliefs in a fairly general way. That is, they do not delve deeply into formalist analysis of the poems, despite the historical relationship between Yeats's poetry and formalist scholarship. Furthermore, while such critics acknowledge that Yeats associated poetry writing with magical practices, they do little more than recognize that fact. In

² The Theosophists were an occult society formed in the late 19th century that drew from both Western and Eastern thought, particularly Hinduism (Foster 47 and Flannery 16); the Golden Dawn was another occult society, with a greater focus on honing one's ritual magic abilities more so than the Theosophists (Foster 103-5 and Harper 154); *A Vision* is a study of the metaphysical symbols that govern our world and humanity at large.

other words, they do not often conceptualize the ways in which Yeats's poetry *is* a form of incantation for him, despite the overwhelming extent to which he explains the correlation in his essays. If we examine these essays, we might find that the common acknowledgement of his poetry as incantation does not suffice—we must explore the connection more fully to truly understand his poetry.

If we return to “Magic,” we see that after the statement of faith that opens his Magical Creed, Yeats lists the three major principles of his belief system:

- (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. (“Magic” 33)

These doctrines explain the way that Yeats believes the world works. To his mind, all humans can tap into a singular collective mind, a kind of communal memory bank, which binds us all together. His second principle expands that collective memory to be enveloped in the greater memory of Nature, thus connecting all of us to each other and to the world around us. Finally, his last principle argues that symbols are a means for us to access this memory bank.³ Because Yeats is famously a symbolist poet, we are accustomed to reading his poetry through the lens of his quintessential symbols. However, few critics, as I mentioned above, give extensive thought to the ways in which his symbols aid his magical work *through* his poetry. The fact that he includes symbols as the mechanism by which we can perform magic in his doctrine raises the possibility

³ Hence his focus on the apparition of symbols in his magical practices, as discussed earlier.

that symbols, including the poetic kind, intertwine with his magical practices. Indeed, he goes on to write in “Magic”:

Have not poetry and music arisen, as it seems, out of the sounds the enchanter made to help their imagination to enchant, to charm, to bind with a spell themselves and the passers-by? These very words, a chief part of all praises of music or poetry, still cry to us their origin. And just as the musician or the poet enchants and charms and binds with a spell his own mind when he would enchant the mind of others, so did the enchanter create or reveal for himself as well as for others the supernatural artist or genius, the seeming transitory mind made out of many minds, whose work I saw, or thought I saw, in that suburban house. (52-3)

Thus, Yeats *does* certainly consider his poetry to be a vessel for magic, and it would follow that we should dedicate more critical attention to the ways in which he weaves the two together.

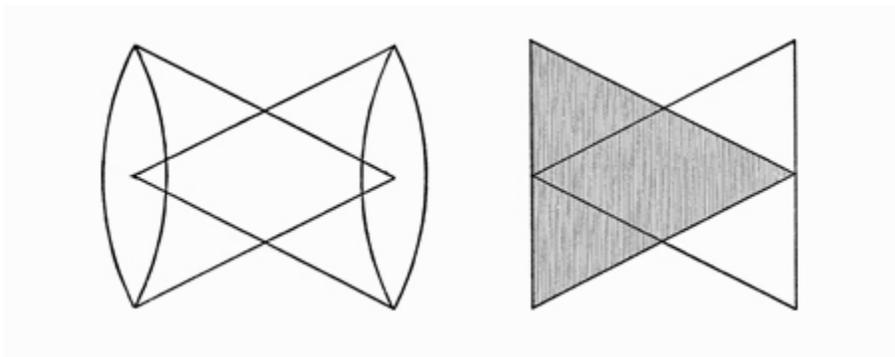
A Vision and the Gyre

The culmination of Yeats’s metaphysical thought came in 1925 with the publication of his esoteric philosophical study, *A Vision*.⁴ Although central to Yeatsian occult studies, *A Vision* has notoriously confounded its readers (myself and my advisor included) and even critics for years. In it, Yeats uses various forms (letters, metaphorical narratives, poems, nonfiction essays, etc.) to establish and explain the occult symbology that he understands to be the set of rules by which the world works. He includes natural processes into his musings, including the phases of the moon,

⁴ He did heavily revise and republish *A Vision* in 1937, two years before his death. I am using the 1937 version, which postdates the poetry with which I am working, but the core principle of the gyre that I discuss remains fairly static between the editions.

along with various lines of religious thought, including Christian and Hindu principles, and more esoteric influences, such as astrology and Tarot. Essentially, *A Vision* is a tessellation of all of Yeats's ideas concerning philosophy, poetry, and, of course, magic. One of the core symbols that joins this tessellation into a cohesive unit, though, is the gyre, explained here:

If we think about the vortex attributed to Discord as formed by circles diminishing until they are nothing, and of the opposing sphere attributed to Concord as forming from itself an opposing vortex, the apex of each vortex in the middle of the other's base, we have the fundamental symbol of my instructors.⁵



If I call the unshaded cone “Discord” and the other “Concord” and think of each as the bound of a gyre, I see that the gyre of “Concord” diminishes as that of “Discord” increases, and can imagine after that the gyre of “Concord” increasing while that of “Discord” diminishes, and so on, one gyre within the other always. (*A Vision* 50).

For my purposes, it is not necessary to fully understand what Yeats means by “Concord” and “Discord.” Rather, what really matters is that they are opposites. Binaries are at the core of Yeats's gyric symbology—these conical shapes represent the ways in which opposite ideas rise

⁵ These instructors are Yeats's spirit guides who, according to Yeats, spoke through him and his wife to explain these symbols and ideas that shaped his philosophy.

and fall in relevance to accommodate each other. That is, when an idea that represents one end of a binary rises in relevance or popularity, its antithesis must decline in popularity to make space. In that way, we may also think of the gyre's ideology as similar to that of a pendulum: as the pendulum swings toward one end, it must move away from the other.

Yeats believed that these gyres would create continuous cycles of binary movement, of theses and antitheses changing power. He most notably applied this logic to the movement of Western Civilization with regards to religion. That is, he believed that Western history was made up of 2000-year periods which corresponded (loosely) to gyres of secularism and religiosity, whose beginnings were spurred by the rape of Leda and the immaculate conception of Christ respectively (*A Vision* 21, 191-207 and Adams 121-127).⁶ However, we can apply this same logic to any set of binaries we choose, and indeed, Yeats does so in much of his poetry. For example, his epilogue to *A Vision* takes form in his 1920 poem, "All Souls' Night," which is heavily rooted in exploring binaries (*A Vision* 221).

"All Souls' Night"

In typical Yeatsian fashion, the epilogue to *A Vision* takes form in his 1920 poem, "All Souls' Night" (*A Vision* 221); in this poem, Yeats seeks to distill the principles and symbols of *A Vision* into one place, where he can finally index them and put them into practical use. Although it is an all-encompassing epilogue poem, Yeats's binary gyres take on the leading role. Indeed, "All Souls' Night" is a poem structured largely by dualities. Its content focuses on binary oppositions, its literal structure can be divided into twos, and even some of its linguistic choices follow the symbolic order of the gyre and its binaries. Furthermore, just as a Yeatsian gyre

⁶ Following this logic, he believed that, during his lifetime, he witnessed the West's Christian-religious gyre nearing its end, and the rise of a new gyre of secularism.

recognizes that two ends of a binary can coexist (since they grow and shrink within each other) so does his epilogue poem explore the ways in which the two antitheses coincide. As such, at its core “All Souls’ Night” is a poem about the binary between life and death, and the ways in which our souls and lives operate through that life/death gyre cycle. Specifically, it is about how at some points during our lives we turn toward the base (the fullest side) of the death gyre, and in doing so also prepare to move past the death gyre into one of renewed life after death. Thus, although it is not an outwardly incantatory poem in of itself, it makes use of Yeats’s magical symbols to create meaningful poetry that explores his magical and metaphysical thought.

“All Souls’ Night” consists of ten stanzas in five sets of two. The first and last sets bookend the poem with Yeats’s own philosophical musings, while each of the three internal sets of stanzas examines a specific soul as a vehicle to better explore his own views on the life/death gyre cycle. In that way, the poem is structured much like a standard five-paragraph essay: there is an introduction, three body paragraphs with evidence and analysis, and a conclusion that uses the imagery of the introduction to tie the argument together. His expository stanzas begin with the establishment of the setting: All Souls’ Night. He paints a picture of the speaker (fairly equivalent to himself) sitting at a table with two glasses of wine before him. The wine becomes a centerpiece to the narrative, as he writes that:

A ghost may come;
For it is a ghost’s right,
His element is so fine
Being sharpened by his death,
To drink from the wine-breath

While our gross palates drink from the whole wine. (5-10)

He thus establishes that, given the nature of the day, ghosts may circulate around the world of the living. As I mentioned above, in establishing this liminal setting, Yeats states that he intends to work through the grey area in a binary between life and death. He clearly realizes that they are opposites, but likewise hopes to think through the ways in which they intersect rather than simply stand at opposing ends of a spectrum. Specifically, as we will see in the bulk of the poem, he will use his gyres as a tool to think through these intersections and relationships.

Before turning to those gyre images, though, we might note that in this introduction, Yeats also sets up many of his thoughts on the nature of the soul, specifically how it moves through this life/death gyre cycle. In the lines quoted above, Yeats argues that the deads' palates are more refined than our own, so much so that they need only drink the "wine-breath" while we must consume "the whole wine." He thus appears to view the dead as more advanced spiritually (alcohol pun intended). That notion of the deads' superiority continues into the second stanza, where Yeats laments that he has much to say on the nature of the soul, but that the living will not understand him. He writes:

Because I have a marvellous thing to say,

A certain marvellous thing

None but the living mock,

Though not for sober ear; (15-18)

That third line especially points out that the living are the ones who misunderstand him and his philosophies, that any other creature (most notably those who have already passed death by), would recognize the marvel of his revelations.⁷ So, in writing these introductory stanzas he manages to establish his liminal subject for inquiry while also foreshadowing his belief that the dead (or perhaps more accurately, those with renewed life), having more experience through the life/death cycle, are more advanced spiritually than the living, and will be more receptive to the truths he believes he has uncovered.

Yeats then moves into his case studies of souls, to explore and give evidence for his philosophies. Each of these sets of stanzas explores a specific soul belonging to one of Yeats's contemporaries from the Golden Dawn (an occult secret society of which Yeats was a noted member) with whom he had a falling out (Adams 154): first, William Thomas Horton, an artist; second, Florence Farr Emery, a multi-talented artist-turned-teacher in Sri Lanka; and finally, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, cofounder of the Golden Dawn (*A Vision*, 465-6 n. 2, 5 and 402 n. 17). The first stanza in each set begins with an invocation of sorts ("Horton's the first I call," "On Florence Emery I call the next," and "I call MacGregor Mathers from his grave," 21, 41, and 61) before Yeats begins to expound on his subject and their soul. It is interesting to note that these invocations do not speak to their subjects directly. In a standard invocation, we might expect narrators to address their muse or call them by name. Indeed, that direct line of communication seems to be an important part of the invocation process, given that it opens a dialogue between the narrator and subject. In "All Souls' Night," however, Yeats chronicles his actions to the reader and tells us what he does rather than performing it in the poem. This lack of a true invocation may remind us that in this poem, Yeats does not necessarily seek to incant;

⁷ Of course, we might also read these lines as a defense against the criticism he must have known he would receive for his admittedly unorthodox ideas.

rather, this poem serves as an exploratory work, a place for him to put his philosophy into practice, a piece of elaborate and admirable scratch paper, as it were.

Each set of stanzas, in being twofold, creates the internal possibility of a binary. And indeed, the sets deal with the binary between life and death implicitly by exploring the dead through the eyes of the living. However, the stanzas themselves do not actually follow the binaristic structure—they are not meant to oppose one another—but rather the second continues the narrative exploration that the first begins. That the two do not oppose each other thematically reminds us that gyres, while dealing in opposites and binaries, also create infinite cycles. Yeats's duality of stanzas thus reminds us that even binaries coexist in progressive states.

In the first set of 'soul stanzas,' Yeats deals with both Horton's soul and that of his lover, who tragically died before him. As such, he explores what happens when people are left alone in the world of the living while their lovers have passed on to the world of the dead. Yeats furthermore uses this set as an opportunity to think about how we, in the gyre of life, begin to move towards that of death. Theoretically, we all begin our lives at the base of the 'life' gyre, and end it squarely in the 'death' gyre. But here, Yeats considers that in order for his gyre symbolic logic to be true, there must be a moment in our lives when we become closer to the death gyre's base than the life gyre's.

In the case of Horton, Yeats seems to argue that that moment came when his lover died:

He loved strange thought
And knew that sweet extremity of pride
That's called platonic love,
And that to such a pitch of passion wrought

Nothing could bring him, when his lady died,
Anodyne for his love. (21-26)

He describes how his friend's demeanor, and indeed his will to live, changed and withered away after the death of his lover. Even the sonic landscape of the poem mimics Horton's own gyre-cycle of life and death: the first set of lines is characterized by more short and lively sounds, often including plosives, like "pride," "platonic," or "pitch of passion," suggesting his lively manner. Then, when Yeats reveals the depression that settled over Horton following the death, he begins to use much softer consonants and long vowel sounds—e.g., "wrought" or "anodyne"—which parallel the lower energy and momentum that came with Horton's movement into the rise of the death gyre.

Interestingly, in the second stanza in this set, Yeats furthers Horton's story by telling us that when Horton turned his attention toward the afterlife he became more transcendent:

But think that his mind's eye,
When upward turned, on one sole image fell;
And that a slight companionable ghost,
Wild with divinity,
Had so lit up the whole
Immense miraculous house (33-38)

After Horton looks upward toward his lover in Heaven, the poem's imagery changes to reflect this new shift, using nearly sublime imagery, including "divinity," "lit up," and "immense

miraculous.” Instead of staying in the somber character of the first steps into the death gyre, Horton embraces death and finds peace in it. In that way, we might view Horton as reaching death’s base by facing it directly, and beginning to move into a gyre that once again leads to renewed life.

In the set of stanzas on Florence Farr Emery, Yeats investigates the ways in which aging in particular contributes to the movement of the life/death gyre cycle, as well as the impact that change of perspective can have on finding renewed life after reaching the death gyre’s base. He writes that Florence:

Who finding the first wrinkles on a face
Admired and beautiful,
And by foreknowledge of the future vexed;
Diminished beauty, multiplied commonplace;
Preferred to teach a school
Away from neighbour or friend,
Among dark skins, and there
Permit foul years to wear
Hidden from eyesight to the unnoticed end. (42-50)

While in Horton’s case, the switch between the life and death gyres was very sudden, denoted by a specific point in time, Emery’s shift was a more gradual one. She realized that her youth was fading as she began to see wrinkles form and her beauty dwindle, and so she left to teach in Sri Lanka (*A Vision*, 402 n. 17). Again, this account of the life/death gyre cycle differs significantly

from that of Horton. Instead of demarcating the turning point in her gyre cycle by succumbing to depression, Emery fled to relative obscurity.⁸ Yeats acknowledges this turning point in his poem with distinct letters; specifically, he uses the letter “x,” whose shape resembles that of a gyre, to indicate Emery’s gyric shift. In the line “And by foreknowledge of the future vexed,” he marks that exact moment at which she realized what lay in store for her with the mark of a gyre, leaving little question of her fate for the reader (44).

However, much like the Horton set of stanzas, the second in Emery’s set gives the reader more hope for the renewed life gyre, which promises to follow the initial gyre of death. Yeats narrates Emery’s journey in Sri Lanka in greater detail, and he recounts how the physical journey paralleled her soul’s journey. According to Yeats, she met a man there who taught her about the soul:

How it is whirled about
Wherever the orbit of the moon can reach,
Until it plunge into the sun;
And there, free and yet fast,
Being both Chance and Choice,
Forget its broken toys
And sink into its own delight at last. (54-60)

Clearly, Yeats deals with a number of different binaries in this stanza which all work together to cast more light on the life/death gyre binary. These pairs include the sun and moon, free and fast, and finally, “Chance and Choice,” which we might understand as destiny and free will. Each of

⁸ Though less obscure now that she has been immortalized in this poem.

these opposites, though, he describes as if they are colliding: the moon literally plunges into the sun, and the other pairs are connected with the conjunction “and” rather than “or.” Hence, Yeats wants to think about the ways in which these binaries intersect, as they do at the halfway point of a gyre, and see how they might interact. In the case of this poem, their interactions act as a means to understand how a soul, after reaching the pinnacle of its death gyre, may achieve renewed life. Apparently, at least for Florence Emery, the coexistence of these opposites was a result of traveling to a new place and gaining new knowledge. Thus, Yeats begins to see the journey of the soul as a result of displacement from one’s ordinary locale in tandem with the pursuit of knowledge in one’s new place. (Predictably, this stanza in particular becomes the blueprint for Yeats’s own imagined spiritual journey in “Sailing to Byzantium.”)

The final set of case study stanzas focuses on Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. Interestingly, this is the set of stanzas in which the speaker (i.e. Yeats) is most involved. In the other cases, we know that Yeats’s own opinions and experiences shape his portrayals of his peers, but here, Yeats frequently uses first-person pronouns to indicate a closeness to Mathers that we do not see in the other sets. This is perhaps in part because this set seems concerned with the possibilities of constants throughout the cycles of life and death. Yeats apparently views himself as one of these constants: “I thought him half a lunatic, half a knave, / And told him so, but friendship never ends” (64-5). Hence, Yeats appears to believe that relationships, even those strained by conflict, can remain constant despite the turbulent changes that come with life and death. However, Yeats’s more pronounced hand in these stanzas may also be a product of his relationship with Mathers as he approached the height of his death gyre.

Yeats characterizes the later years of Mathers’s life with descriptions of lunacy and arrogance, as in:

I thought him half a lunatic, half knave,
...
Much boisterous courage, before loneliness
Had driven him crazed;
For meditations upon unknown thought
Make human intercourse grow less and less;
...
A ghost-lover he was
And may have grown more arrogant being a ghost.⁹ (64, 72-75, 79-80)

To Yeats's mind, then, this descent into madness is the hallmark of Mathers's movement toward the death gyre. Once again, Yeats uses binaries to make this connection to the gyre clear; this time, he concentrates his efforts on structural binaries within the stanzas. For example, he writes, "And what if mind seem changed, / And it seem changed with the mind" (66-7). The switched positions of "mind" and "seem changed" in the first line and the second creates a chiasmus, or better yet an invisible gyre. The content of the lines, too, speak to the switch from the life to the death gyre. With this phrasing, Yeats suggests that Mathers's mind has changed in being inverted, that his mind is not what it used to be. Interestingly, Mathers is the only case-study subject who does not himself realize his turn toward death and face it. This could be another reason that Yeats chose to involve himself so much more in these stanzas: he (perhaps

⁹ These last couple of lines may also indicate that Yeats viewed some personality traits (arrogance in this situation) as possible constants throughout a soul's life/death cycle, in addition to the soul's relationships.

egotistically) realized that he knew more of Mathers's last years than Mathers did himself, and felt the need to insert his perspective into Mathers's narrative to clarify and explain.

Finally, we return to the bookends of the poem. The first of the concluding stanzas essentially mirrors the first set of stanzas. It calls back to mind the image of a ghost inhaling Yeats's wine, and reminds us that the living will not truly understand Yeats or take his work seriously. However, it is not only the thematic repetition of these ideas that makes this stanza interesting; rather, it is more significant that he copies almost the exact phrasing of the first iterations in the second ones. His syntax becomes especially mimetic in the second half of that first concluding stanza, where he writes:

I have mummy truths to tell
Whereat the living mock,
Though not for sober ear,
For maybe all that hear
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock. (86-90, cf. 14 and 17-20)

There are, of course, some basic variations on the original lines, but the central words and phrases are the same. By holding a mirror to his first stanzas, Yeats shows us the cyclicity of his gyres, creating a semi-tangible model for how they might work in the poem. Certainly, there will be variations and differences in a renewed life and death, but their pith will remain the same. The paralleled phrases may also remind us that Yeats himself is stagnant in the poem—in the narrative of the poem he is still sitting with the wine at the table, pondering life and death and our souls. These poetic progressions are creations of his own mind, and all of this philosophical

work, while mentally traveling long distances, takes place inside his own head. Indeed, all of his work is mental, because this is where the growth of the soul truly takes place.

The last four lines of the poem also speak to Yeats's belief in the interiority of the soul's growth. He writes:

Such thought, that in it bound
I need no other thing,
Wound in mind's wandering
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound. (97-100)

He tells his readers that he needs only to wrap himself in his own thoughts, to be spun into his own mind, to find truths of the soul. His use of the "mummy" image in particular (again a repetition from his first stanzas, specifically line 14) is interesting, as it evokes a time before Christianity, before the beginning of our own Christian gyre. It tells us that Yeats does hope to travel to some distant place to retrieve the images and knowledge he needs to advance his soul, just as Florence Emery did. However, it also tells us that his hopeful destination is not one that we can physically access anymore, because it is thousands of years removed. Instead, he hopes to use what he knows of this past place to create his own imagined space where he can, in the confines of his own mind, grow spiritually. He must have seen that his contemporaries, being too close to the living, would not understand the philosophies that he formed as he drew closer to the base of his own death gyre.

Thus, in "All Souls' Night," Yeats finally takes his conception of the gyre and puts it into practice, using it to both structure his thoughts on the page and explore them conceptually. That

is, he uses gyres and various literary devices which align with the geometry and duality of the gyre to fully understand his thoughts on the life/death/renewed life gyre cycle. By probing his own ex-friends' minds as case studies, he finds that there may be a point in all of our lives at which we turn toward the base of the death gyre, away from that of the life one. Yeats tends to avoid delving deep into the implications of the death gyre itself, though, instead apparently preferring to focus on the possibility of renewed life after our physical deaths. This hope for something new, for something to live past us when our bodies decay, becomes a seed for a future poetic incantation, one which would ensure that Yeats's preparation for renewed life could propel him through the turmoil of physical death.

“Sailing to Byzantium”

That seed blossomed into a flower a few years later in 1927, when Yeats must have found himself at the crossroads of a gyre himself. He had recently published the first edition of *A Vision* (1925), and was therefore at a new zenith of clarity with respect to defining his metaphysical ideology, while, at the same time, he knew that he was aging, and thus drawing closer to the base of his own death gyre. To work through this crossroads, Yeats (to no one's surprise) wrote a poem. Much like “All Souls' Night,” “Sailing to Byzantium” tracks the movement of the life/death/renewed life gyre cycle; however, unlike “All Souls' Night,” which merely seeks to explore the gyre cycles of others, “Sailing to Byzantium” seeks to control the movement of his own gyre cycle. Specifically, Yeats uses his poem as an incantation, one which will power him onward toward the gyre of renewed life, to find new meaning all while physically stuck in the decay of the death gyre.

Before I examine “Sailing to Byzantium” in full, though, it would be useful to consider how to go about understanding the literary mechanisms of Yeats’s incantations, something too few scholars have sought to understand. In particular, speech act theory, as theorized by both J. L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, can be helpful in examining the practical ways in which Yeats viewed his poetry as magic. While its use has not become a wildly popular trend in Yeats studies, there is precedent for its application to magical studies in multiple fields. In particular, speech act theory has become a useful tool for literary critics and anthropologists (Byville and Tambiah).¹⁰ That trend, even if slight, makes sense if we consider the baseline assumptions of speech act theory. In particular, speech act theory, as explored by J. L. Austin in his 1962 work *How to Do Things with Words*, argues that we can divide all speech acts (or “utterances,” as he often calls them) into two categories: the constative and the performative (Austin 3-6). The constative describes its subjects, explains events, clarifies, and communicates information. A simple example might be “The magician cast a love spell,” where one party explains the activities of a local magician to a friend. For Austin, the constative is the more common of the two speech acts. That makes sense, since the constative does what we generally assume language sets out to do: it facilitates the exchange of information from one party to another.

The second type of Austinian utterance is the performative, a speech act which, in being spoken, actually enacts that which it sets out to do. It does exactly what the name suggests: it performs an act, and in performing changes the nature of the world. It is this aspect of speech act theory that has appealed so heavily to scholars of magical practices, because spells and incantations follow the same internal logic as the performative. That is, in speaking an incantation, a magician intends to create a change to the current state of the world in some way.

¹⁰ Ralf Haekel is one of the few Yeatsian scholars who does analyze his work, specifically “Among School Children,” through the lens of speech act theory, though not with respect to literal incantation.

To continue with the previous example, if a magician were to incant a love spell, then in theory, the subjects of the spell should fall in love. Of course, there are other parameters that a spell may require to work properly—following a decided pattern and order of words, particular motions or accompanying symbols, and even the intent of the magician.¹¹ While Austin does not appear to have considered magic in his original theorization of speech act theory, his discussion of its complexities does make room for this ritual aspect of incantatory logic as well. In the second section of his , he expands on his original theory and argues that a performative can only be successful if it fits a certain number of parameters (13-15). For example, the speaker's intentions must match the goal of the speech act, and there must be accompanying rituals that help accomplish the performative's goal. While Austin's preferred example of the ritual in question might have been more traditional, such as the exchange of wedding vows and rings, we can apply the same logic to the execution of a magical spell.

Austin's theory, as one might guess, is quite narrow in its scope of what it means to be and utter a performative. He sets constatives and performatives at odds with each other, seemingly imagining a Venn diagram of two completely independent circles. For him, there is no spectrum or overlap between the two, and since the majority of utterances are constatives and only a small percentage performatives, to be in the performative circle is to be part of a select few. Furthermore, they must check a number of other boxes to be considered successful for Austin, so the criteria for a truly effective performative are even more exclusive. Therefore, when applying Austinian performative theory to Yeats's poetry, only a select few phrases will make the cut. But because these phrases are so decidedly devoted to accomplishing a purpose (the purpose of the incantation at hand) they will be the cruxes of the spell at large. These will be

¹¹ We do not necessarily know the exact spells that he cast, or the exact methods of all his ritual practices, but from the aforementioned notes in his essays and from his own reflections on his magical encounters, we can assume that, as a practitioner of magic, Yeats followed a theoretically similar framework to the one I present here.

the phrases where Yeats devotes himself purely to carrying out the incantation, in the most intentional way possible, actively seeking to enact his goal through performative language. In practice, these intensely performative instances may be marked by a number of literary or syntactical features. In the case of “Sailing to Byzantium,” those performative markers often appear in indicators of verb tense.

The first two stanzas of “Sailing to Byzantium” hold very little in the way of Austinian performatives, or what I and others would call incantations. For Austin, the majority of these stanzas, if not their entirety, would fall into the constative category, because they essentially explain what it means to be old, Yeats’s disdain for physical deterioration, and the implications of operating within the death gyre. The Austinian performatives begin to truly appear in the third and fourth stanzas. In the third stanza, Yeats tends to use present imperatives to incant. He thereby *insists* that the events he has described will become manifest in the very moment of the poem. Indeed, it is here that he first conjures the images which he seeks to reify in our cultural consciousness, writing them down to make them part of the physical realm as much as the metaphysical. It also matters that he uses imperatives in the present tense as much as it matters that he uses the present tense itself. In fact, he intends to emphasize his insistence on his incantation’s success to the extent that this stanza essentially consists of a list of imperatives. Significantly, it opens with an invocation of Byzantine sages, echoing the ancient epic tradition of assigning imperatives to supernatural beings through incantation.¹² By aligning himself with such a staple feature of the Western epic canon, Yeats implicitly argues that his spiritual journey is one of epic proportions, and one worthy of epic attention. He assigns value to his proposed method for renewed life before he fully explains it. It is also significant that he invokes sages in

¹² Notably, this invocation demonstrates Yeats’s progression from “All Souls’ Night,” where his invocations were described rather than performed. Now, he is prepared to put that same concept into practice.

particular to follow his imperatives; the ancient epics invoked muses, the artistic gods of the time. Yeats, though, chose sages, the epitome of wisdom and spiritual fortitude, to aid his journey, thus emphasizing the spiritual wisdom he hopes to attain.¹³

He describes these sages as “standing in God’s holy fire / As in the gold mosaic of a wall” (17-18). The color scheme itself—the gold of the mosaic and the understood gold and warm tones of the fire—imply an association with warmth, richness, passion, and the fire of knowledge. Again, he hopes to find all of these on his journey to spiritual greatness. The specific phrases that the palette describes, too, delineate the specific mechanisms he plans to use for his incantation. The first phrase, “God’s holy fire,” tells the reader that Yeats intends to cast his incantation on those imagined sages blessed directly with God’s grace; he envisions himself calling on that boon to find the new spiritual strength he desires. Thus with this image, he lets the reader know that he seeks to use divinity as one source of power for his magic-fueled spiritual journey. The second phrase, “the gold mosaic of a wall,” expands the scope of the incantation to include rich artistic creation. As I mentioned above, the gold represents the spiritual richness he plans to work toward, as well as the revived passion and inspiration he hopes for. The image of the mosaic itself, though, calls to mind the phenomenon of artistic creation as a means to reach spiritual growth, a phenomenon that he himself mimics in writing poetry. Hence, the second image self-reflexively confirms that his own artistic creation will help him to reach spiritual growth.

Interestingly, his first actual incantatory command for the sages is to “Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre” (19). Apparently, he does not mean to leave them in their sanctuary, but instead forces them to enter his own self-sanctioned space, a gyre. Remembering the larger

¹³ Again, his sages call to mind Florence Emery’s stanzas in “All Souls’ Night,” where Yeats recounts her spiritual teacher, an Indian sage.

context of the poem, the gyre in question is surely that of his own life/death/renewed life cycle. So, Yeats intends to displace these sages from their comfortable space of orthodoxy to a space of his own, all contained within the context of a poem of his own creation. This first incantation, then, seeks to put Yeats in a position of power with regards to the sages, so that he can have a better hold on their spiritual power. He finalizes that transfer of power with the last line in the sentence: "And be the singing-masters of my soul" (20). The verb "to be" insists on an equivalence between two things, so Yeats's use of it as a command here creates a direct relationship between the Byzantine sages and his assigned role for them as his spiritual teacher. In doing so, he also leaves no room for dispute in the goal of his incantation—he means to wield these sages for their spiritual supremacy. The title "singing-masters," too, evokes further images of artistic creation, which again reminds the reader that one of the dominant ways Yeats intends to reach this spiritual renewal is through his own poetic creation. At the same time, Yeats's command that these sages become his masters is somewhat paradoxical. After all, he is the one demonstrating power over them in the poem, and he intends to use their expertise for his own gains. The specific use of "masters," then, seems to imply that Yeats does put his trust into these sages. He recognizes the power of their abilities and, though still holding to his overarching power as the magician-poet, trusts their judgment in steering him on his journey to renewed life.

The imagery and commands in lines 21-24 become more gruesome, alluding to the disdain Yeats feels for the tolls of physical aging and deterioration: "Consume my heart away; sick with desire / And fastened to a dying animal / It knows not what it is" (21-24). In the first phrase of the sentence, and another imperative, he asks the sages to metaphorically eat away his heart, the central organ sustaining his physical form and therefore determining the rate of his movement through the death gyre. As such, he essentially asks the sages to rid him of the literal

body that no longer serves him the way it once did, when it kept him squarely in the life gyre, so that he can focus entirely on sustaining and nursing his metaphysical soul in preparation for renewal. He separates the next phrase of his sentence with semicolons, keeping it apart from the actual commands so that he can elaborate on the *reason* he needs to wash away his traces on the physical plane.¹⁴ “Sick with desire” again demonstrates disgust for his bodily form, as exemplified by his heart, the life force, which is no longer at its peak performance (since it is “sick”) and is more susceptible to falling into the traps of human mortality. He then tells the reader and sages alike that his heart is “fastened to a dying animal,” symbolic of his decaying body. Finally, he laments that his decaying bodily self “knows not what it is,” meaning it has lost self awareness and is even further removed from the height of its humanity and cognitive fortitude. It is furthermore interesting that Yeats refers to his body as “it” rather than “me” or “my body.” He does remark that his heart is his own, when he says “my heart”; but perhaps he makes an exception for the organ that also, metaphorically, controls some aspect of the soul. The heart may have dual meaning in that way—it controls both the spirit and the body. Many of his other organs, on the other hand, have singular functions, ones that no longer serve the purpose he seeks to achieve.

His final incantatory command of the poem comes in the last line and a half: “gather me / Into the artifice of eternity” (23-24). Truly, it is this last micro-incantation of the stanza that captures the goal of the incantation at large: Yeats seeks to become part of the infinite cycle of renewed life through the spiritual growth he will gain from training with Byzantine sages, specifically training in the art of creation. The verb “gather,” interestingly, implies that at the time of composition, Yeats stands metaphorically scattered, a nebulous cloud of spiritual Irish

¹⁴ While this itself is not quite an Austinian performative, and rather falls into the constative category, it lends context and justification to his performative incantation and therefore should be addressed in tandem with the magical practices themselves.

matter to be gathered up and sealed in infinity. It seems, then, that part of the thing he hopes to gain from training with the sages is direction. He recognizes that he needs guidance to become less scatter-brained, as it were, and join an organized spiritual solar system. In recognizing that, he adds it as an implicit goal to his incantation—to grow spiritually he also needs a central point, a sun, on which to converge. Finally, the image of the “artifice of eternity” is provocative for its duplicity of possible meanings. First, the artifice may just be an artificial (or manmade) construction of eternity. It could easily refer to his own poem, an artificial poetic self-made construct that immortalizes not only his mind but also his incantation and spiritual journey. However, it may also refer to “artifice” in the sense of deceit and deception, in which case, Yeats may be suggesting an implicit wariness toward his own goal of eternal spiritual growth and remembrance. He may recognize that, while he does perform his incantation, it may not be entirely foolproof. That is, he must still pass through the death gyre.

In the fourth and final stanza, Yeats’s incantatory performatives turn to the simple future tense, rather than the present. While the present tense seeks to create truth in the moment that it is written, the future tense insists that an event *will* take place at a later time. It demonstrates pure confidence that, by virtue of Yeats’s magical abilities infused with his poetic expertise, the statements that he makes will come to pass. We should not take for granted that he chooses the *simple* future, rather than any other variation on the future tense—the “simple” characteristic underscores how sure he is of his spell, to the point where he does not feel the need to add any qualifications and provisional phrases. The subject of this verb tense is also different from that of the third stanza; here, the recurring subject-verb relationship is the supremely confident “I shall” (25), rather than deference of commands to his Byzantine sages. Here, then, he envisions all of which he will be capable in the future, given the efforts he conjures up from those sages in the

third stanza. The two final stanzas become a kind of “If, then” statement, without the implicit possibility of failure that traditionally comes with “If.”

The first two lines of the stanza give another version of the incantation’s goal: “Once out of nature I shall never take / My bodily form from any natural thing” (25-26). Again, Yeats emphasizes that he wishes to remove himself from the natural, physical world of the life/death cycle and instead install himself in the spiritual, metaphysical plane where he might encounter renewed life. We have already received this information, though, a number of times. His reiteration of the sentiment does emphasize the point and solidify it in our minds as his goal in writing this poetic incantation. But furthermore, the fact that he has now spelled it out for us twice using two different tenses, with two different subjects to go along with the different tenses, indicates that he strives to cover all his bases. In the previous stanza, he established that he would leave the physical world in that exact moment, with the sages as the conduits in that moment. Here, he again purports that after that present moment passes, he will never again return to the physical realm. He wishes to exist separate from the natural, physical realm and reside exclusively with the renewed, spiritual spaces he and his sages construct.

The next four verbs in the stanza give metaphorical examples of that which Yeats intends to invoke spiritually. He begins with the verb “make,” which explains quite explicitly what Yeats intends to happen through his artistic process: “But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enamelling” (27-28). He presents his alternative to taking a bodily form from nature, as he condemns in the previous two lines, and pictures a new idealized spiritual form comparable to a great work (an “artifice”) of antiquity. The allusion to “Grecian” artisans places Yeats’s spiritual pinnacle on the same level of those classical creators that we idealize as the very paragon of Western art, along with all of those more recent artists who have drawn on

Classical themes to create new staples in the canon.¹⁵ Likewise, the repeated emphasis on “gold” elevates Yeats’s spiritual potential to the esteemed value we associate with gold, and those artisans skilled enough to work with it. By assigning all of this reverence to his goal, that desire for a renewed life even in the throes of oncoming death, he contends that he has succeeded in crafting the perfect incantation to achieve it, and that he will certainly exemplify reaching a zenith of the new spiritual gyre. His next verb phrase, “To keep a drowsy Emperor awake,” is an infinitive that continues his original “I shall ... make” phrase. He explains that, after achieving an elite form representative of the height of Western creation, he will prove the extent of his newfound achievements by entertaining even a Byzantine emperor. “Keep” as a verb is especially compelling here, as it implies that Yeats will be able to sustain attention for prolonged periods of time. It also accentuates that potential to keep an audience engaged by keeping the reader’s attention as they take the time necessitated by the long e vowel sound to read the phrase.

The second verb phrase comes in line 30: “Or set upon a golden bough to sing.” Yeats elaborates on the possibilities that will open up to him once he reaches his renewed spiritual enlightenment. First, he purported that he could dazzle a leader of an entire empire with his newfound knowledge; now he argues that he will be able to express himself even from a delicate, stationary position on a golden bough (again, a gold-infused image that instills opulence). The verb “sing” calls to mind a different kind of artistic creation, though one that still aligns with poetic composition. On its own, singing is another form of artistic expression, and its evocation suggests that Yeats’s ability to create, though contained in his poetry, is not inherently tied to only one form of art. Rather, he will have the power to master a large variety of forms of creation. That being said, song does hold ancient ties to poetry. We know that for thousands of

¹⁵ I think specifically of Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” here, though we might include any number of writers who have followed the Western literary tradition

years, poetry and epics in particular have been performed through song. The concept of bards, too, is not unfamiliar to our modern cultural consciousness. Indeed, if we recall the earlier-quoted section from his essay, “Magic,” we will see that Yeats himself saw a correlation between musicians and poets (52-53). That is all to say, by arguing that he will “sing,” Yeats taps into yet another ancient poetic tradition that strengthens his artistic prowess. We might also note that singing, in addition to its poetic associations, connects well with literal incantation. Here, the spells that Yeats intends to cast are written, whereas we may expect a conventional spell to be orated, either through speech, chant, or even song. Thus, the inclusion of “sing” as an act that will metaphorically take place in the future, allows space for the incantation to be sung, all while existing in the confines of a poem.

We may also consider the significance of exactly what it is that Yeats intends to sing, and to whom: “To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come” (31-32).¹⁶ Again, he shows confidence in his future ability to capture the interest of the elite, gesturing likewise to the confidence he has in his own incantatory abilities. But the content of his metaphorical song brings our attention once again to the timeframe of the poem, or perhaps more accurately the lack of one. The poem exists in a temporal void, intentionally so; if its purpose is to escape the confines of the real world by using an imagined alternative reality, then it follows that the poem would evade conventional time. Indeed, this line points out that in the world of “Sailing to Byzantium,” Yeats represents an intersection of all time, past, present (“passing”), and future (“to come”). The present and future we have already discussed—the present tense serves to create truth in the instant of being written, while the future tense insists that the events

¹⁶ Of course, the words listed in the phrase “past, or passing, or to come” are all adjectives, not verbs. They describe the all-encompassing scope of Yeats’s prophecy, but whether or not they actually *do* anything, in the Austinian performative sense, may be up for debate. However, their placement in the direct context of Austinian performatives asks us to consider them with such regard, as was the case for lines 21-23.

it prescribes will come to pass once the present moment has taken place. The poem does not interact, however, with the past tense. In verbiage alone, it exists either in the present or the future. Again, this temporality makes sense, since the goal is to avoid looking to the past. After all, that is where Yeats's memories of youth's glory, and his physical deterioration, live. Even so, the entire poem exists in a strange, historical context. Byzantium, of course, was a real place. The Byzantine Empire was one of the great empires of late Antiquity through the Middle Ages. It was furthermore the era which Yeats idealized above all others: "I think if I could be given a month of Antiquity and leave to spend it where I chose, I would spend it in Byzantium a little before Justinian opened St. Sophia and closed the Academy of Plato" (*A Vision* 203). Yet Yeats has taken that historical context and re-appropriated it for his own needs, idealizing and molding it so that it can properly house his metaphysical growth as he sees fit. The poem thus in many ways represents his mastery over the past, along with the present and future. These final lines remind the reader of that power; they proclaim that Yeats's incantation-poem can bend time itself to his own needs.

Hence, the Austinian performative can be helpful in understanding Yeats's incantations, by identifying the moments in Yeats's poem that undoubtedly show the necessary confidence and ability to enact. However, Austin's definition of the performative is decidedly narrow, and indeed he is far from the only philosopher to delineate the schema of speech act theory. Jacques Derrida, for example, famously critiqued and elaborated on Austin's theorization in his article "Signature, Event, Context." Derrida takes many issues with Austin's theory, but above all, he finds an inherent issue in viewing the constative and performative as complete opposites without overlap or the presence of a spectrum (Derrida 13-21 and Wortham 135-6). The performative, conceptually, presents little quandary to him. He admits as much:

You cannot deny that there are also performatives that succeed, and one has to account for them: meetings are called to order...; people say: "I pose a question"; they bet, challenge, christen ships, and sometimes even marry. It would seem that such events have occurred. And even if only one had taken place only once, we would still be obliged to account for it. (Derrida 17)

However, he believes that Austinian constatives can have as much of a hand in creating the world before us as Austinian performatives. If we are to return to "The magician cast a love spell," we may notice that the statement indeed describes an event; but for Derrida, by using language to fashion a statement, a speaker calls that statement into being, making it true in the process. In other words, to Derrida, the world does not exist in the fashion that we perceive it until we explicitly note and comment on its nature. Derrida thinks in terms of what is true for society, and for people, since our perception of the world is what actually matters when we consider language and culture. So, for Derrida, while the Earth is round scientifically, it is not *truly* round until we continue to say that it is round, and call that truth into being through repeated performance. We have to perform ideas and "facts" through language over time to make it true that thing X can be described as thing Y, or that thing X even exists. Hence, in Derridean terms, the magician's love spell first comes into being when the magician says "I cast a love spell," and then ripples out into a stronger, more true being every time someone utters the statement "The magician cast a love spell." In turn, any constative can indeed retain some of the function of a performative, since its utterance calls its subject's possible truth into being by virtue of being spoken.

From his critique of the Austinian performative, we may rightfully assume that the Derridean performative's scope is significantly less rigid. Indeed, we might say that effectively anything could be a performative, merely by nature of an utterance's existence. This phenomenon, to my mind, would be amplified even further in literary contexts. One of the main functions of literature is to create realities and truths by writing them down. Fictionalized (though often autobiographical in Yeats's case) writing is an especially potent example— Yeats's conceived Byzantium would not exist without Yeats. The existence of literature guarantees that, for as long as a piece remains in circulation, the worlds and ideas it purports or creates will survive in some sphere of our social world. And so, if we accept the Derridean definition of the performative, we could argue that on some level, all literature is composed entirely of performatives (in the weaker Derridean sense). In turn, all literature could be considered a web of individual incantations because they all create truths and meanings merely by being written, even if their purpose is not necessarily to incant. I will therefore use this Derridean vantage point to consider the ways in which Yeats's poetry acts as incantation on a much wider scale, and how the Derridean incantations complement the more intentionally magical pockets of Austinian performatives.

We might first consider the ways in which Yeats uses his very title, "Sailing to Byzantium," to add incantatory meaning without using the Austinian performative verb tense. Yeats might have easily titled the poem with a literal verb in mind, such as "I Will Sail to Byzantium." In that case, the title alone would have held incantatory weight, and contributed to the overall spellwork of the poem. In reality, though, he chose to use a present participle to allude to the central metaphorical action of the poem, "Sailing." Hence, Yeats likely did not mean for his title to be a central part of the actual incantation itself. Perhaps this is because a title should

let the reader know the purpose of the incantation or spell without setting it in motion. The title does not hold the space necessary to properly enact a spell, in the intentional Austinian sense, since it lacks the room for intricate ritual form and syntax. Certainly it might allude to incantatory actions, but it by nature cannot properly perform a spell to the same level as the poem itself. However, the title acts as a guide as to the purpose, and therefore incants the themes and rationale of the poem into being in the Derridean sense of performativity. The present participle allows the reader to understand the actions taking place by placing those actions in the noun form rather than the active verb. In this particular case, the title lets the reader know that the poem will depict sailing toward Byzantium, opening up various questions on the metaphors and connotations of sailing in particular, as well as the issues that arise when one travels to a technically obsolete place. The title invites all of these questions, these notions of the incantation's uses, but it does not definitively incant itself in the Austinian sense. Instead, it performs the basis for the spell, incanting the incantation into being.

Beyond the title, the poem as a whole chronicles Yeats's own exploration of his age, and his journey to find a way to continue to grow spiritually as his physical body deteriorates. As I mentioned previously, in the first couple of stanzas he considers the ways in which the physical world is built for youth and agility (the life gyre), not for age and decay (the death gyre). Yeats initiates his poem with the simple phrase "That is no country for old men" (1). The sentence encapsulates the theme of aging in his poem, establishing that the physical world no longer suits him as he approaches the base of the death gyre. Interestingly, the sentence does not take up the entire first line; instead, he continues with "The young / In one another's arms . . . ," letting the rest of his second thought enjamb in the next line. In doing so, he seems to reinforce to the reader that even his own lines, inherently parts of the physical world, cannot slow down to meet the

pace of his aging mind. Or perhaps he uses enjambment here to fit as many thoughts as possible into one poem, making them physical and thus making himself a little bit more immortal. In either case, he makes the argument that the physical world, literally represented by his poetry in print, cannot match the needs of the old. And how can we possibly disagree with him, when he proves his argument to be true by crafting his evidence himself?

The first stanza goes on to give examples of all the ways in which our physical world caters predominantly to the young, to those in the golden age of the life gyre. He thinks of the young lovers, young birds singing, young fish during mating season, repopulating to continue their species. He gives attention to the “Fish, flesh, or fowl commend[ing] all summer long” (5), noting that the earthly bias toward youth spans all of nature, not just our human societies. He even highlights the season most noted for its abundance, summer. The fricative sound of alliterating **f** in the line also lends itself to Yeats’s admission of youth’s predominance; when we utter a fricative the air lingers between our lips, inviting us to ponder the word it creates further. It calls us to extend our focus on the fricative’s subject, and in this case that subject is youth in three forms. We are hence made to ponder the ways in which youth permeates our culture. In line 6, though, he does finally return to the idea of old age and deterioration, when he gives us his notion of the life/death gyre cycle as it is perceived by the world: “Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.” The focus here is again on stages of youth: one is (usually) young when one begets a child (and of course a child is as young as they come when it is begotten) and birth traditionally takes place in the parents’ youth (and again, without exception the one being born is fairly young at the time of their birth). Yeats erases everything else that comes between, skipping only to death. He ignores the process of aging and the rot of the fruits of the young, instead electing to emphasize the end of a life. While morbid, his technique is effective in convincing us of how

much our society tends to focus on major events of young life (such as giving birth), rather than the more quiet milestones that might come with old age, and the inevitability of renewed life that comes after. Hence again, he validates his own rationale by performing the circumstances with which he takes issue, thus assigning them truth.

In the next stanza, we see Yeats attempting to remediate this problem by seeking a way for the old to continue to grow in another way. That is, he implicitly argues that, while the old are deteriorating physically, they are still able to progress and grow spiritually toward transcendent renewal. He again juxtaposes the old with the young, by creating an image of age that directly opposes the abundance he painted for youth in the previous stanza. Here, he writes that “An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick.” (9-10). The imagery is physical; it makes reference to an old man’s strength and physical capabilities, or more appropriately the lack thereof, with the descriptor “paltry.” Even furthermore, when he calls the man a “thing,” he draws attention away from his humanity, instead electing to focus on the objectification of the old man. He therefore highlights the ways in which society treats the old as less than people. His imagery goes on with the picture of “A tattered coat upon a stick.” Again, the old man is no longer a person, but instead a kind of inhuman scarecrow, less than a skeleton. In the image, we can tell that the ghost of a person exists through the presence of the coat (notably a tattered and likely less aesthetically pleasing one) but he no longer resides on our physical plane. The very sounds in this phrase in particular, the repetitive occlusives in the **t** and **c/k**, along with the emphasis on monosyllabic words (with the exception only of “tattered”) make it very snippy and short. The tone the reader ends up getting from this section, then, is rather curt. However, Yeats prevents us from perceiving his speaker as churlish because he has already proven his point. It is

simply in these lines that we find the culmination of Yeats's frustration with the world's attitude toward age, a frustration which he hopes to enchant us into sharing.

At the end of that second line of the second stanza, though, we see Yeats finally turn to the possibility of hope, to his conceived method to continue to grow even while he begins to physically deteriorate. His very last word on the line, following his bleak description of old age, is "unless" (10). The word in of itself creates a new hope, the possibility of a contradiction from his recent melancholy. That the following phrase enjambes into the next line furthermore tells the reader that Yeats is eager to begin his journey, to materialize it on the page rather than letting it continue to ruminate in his mind. That is, in these lines Yeats instills in us the hope for life beyond death, and reinforces his belief that his poem will continue to materialize that possibility through its performance.

He begins the next line of the stanza with the introduction to that very journey, the one he now intends to reify through his incantatory page. Yeats's "unless" consists of: "Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing / For every tatter in its mortal dress" (11-12). We may first note that the dominant verb here, the central action in Yeats's proposed aging journey, is "sing." However, he does not assign the task to the old, or even the larynx; instead, he suggests that the "soul" should create music, that the metaphysical soul should be the one going on a new redemptive journey rather than the earthly body. The tense that he uses to make that argument, though, is quite interesting. In the isolation of line 11, the phrase reads as a command, an Austinian incantation in of itself: "Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing." It gives directions, assigns a quest, entreats its subject to do a particular action. Merely writing it out creates the possibility for it to come true. In that sense, Yeats incants the spiritual gyre into being on the page, perhaps even writing a performative before his definitive, Austinian incantation

begins in stanza three. However, if we consider that the phrase *actually* begins with the word “unless,” the meaning changes. Now, instead of being a command, line 11 becomes a conditional phrase. With that adjustment, Yeats’s incantation becomes a necessity to escape the physical life/death gyre and reach into the gyre of spiritual renewal. He implicitly argues that, if we do not turn to other means, we *will* be left as the tattered coats on sticks, the empty scarecrows, with age. His conditional clause does admit that his incantation is a possibility, rather than a certainty, but in doing so he also assigns a great amount of value to his proposition. Yeats’s conditional tense lets the reader know that the journey he submits for approval is indeed our only escape from physical deterioration if we choose to incant it.

In the following three lines (12-14), Yeats elaborates on his vision, telling the reader that his soul’s journey toward growth will consist not of an existing school, one that has physical roots and a lineage, but instead of the study of its own self: “Monuments of its own magnificence” (14). The alliteration in “Monuments” and “magnificence” also creates a linguistic connection between the two, suggesting that they are intrinsically tied, and in turn that the soul is therefore a worthy source of self-reflexive study. The last two lines of the stanza, “And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium,” give his final statement of purpose before the ultimate incanting begins (15-16). The first of these lines details the journey he has taken thus far to reach the origin of his spiritual journey. In his own words, he has already “sailed the seas,” an alliterative phrase that draws attention to the action itself. It is important to Yeats that we understand the hardships he has already endured, comparable to a dangerous trek across the ocean, to reach this point. These lines mark a major shift in his poem, where he goes from describing the past and the gruesome realities of the physical realm to looking forward toward his own imagined Byzantium, where he incants a new spiritual life for

himself into being. The phrase “sailing the seas” encapsulates all that the previous two stanzas represent.

“The holy city of Byzantium,” then, represents all that is coming. It is the space where Yeats will find himself spiritually enriched, and it is once again a space of his own creation. He does invoke the “holy” implications of the Byzantine empire, and in doing so associates his own quest and goal with divinity, but the central part of Yeats’s Byzantium is that it is entirely constructed. He does not choose to go out to the countryside to find himself, as the Romantics would have him do. Instead, he goes to a place entirely constructed by man. His Byzantium is largely his own device, one that he has thought up to meet his own needs. Of course, Byzantium *was* a real city, and Yeats’s imagined version of it finds roots in this true history. Even so, we should remember that our memory of Byzantium is entirely manmade. That is to say, the things we remember about Byzantium are the buildings, the artwork, and the history that remains of it—nature, in this case, is largely irrelevant. So too, then, is the natural course of physical life and death. Furthermore, our memories of it come from centuries of humans passing down information and knowledge to one another, again a construction of history devised by humans rather than nature. His Byzantium therefore represents a holy epitome of both artificiality and unity. It is the center of his spiritual practice, the culmination of both his own work and the unconscious work of those who created the tradition for centuries before him; in a word, it is his sanctum. I believe he said it best in *A Vision*, when he explained why he would visit Byzantium of all places in Antiquity:

I think that in early Byzantium, maybe never before or since in recorded history,
religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, the architect and artificers . . . spoke to the

multitude and the few alike. The painter, the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of sacred books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. (203)

Thus, the Derridean performative can be a useful tool when approaching Yeats's magical poetry, and especially the ways in which his incantations pervade the poem even if he does not seem to be intentionally incanting at first glance. Thus far, though, we have only considered the ways in which the Derridean performative applies to diction and syntax. This focus makes sense, because diction and syntax define the ways that we explicitly and directly communicate. However, these are not the only ways that we can communicate information. We use any number of non-syntactical devices to convey meaning, one of the most common of which may be rhyme scheme. Rhyme schemes, significantly, carry their own connotations that contribute to the overall meaning of a verse. For example, it matters a great deal which lines are rhymed together—rhymes imply equivalence, or at the very least they invite readers to compare the content of two given lines and derive meaning from doing so. Furthermore, our poetic canon is teeming with forms traditionally associated with specific rhyme schemes. The classic example is, of course, the sonnet, which has a specific rhyme scheme (though this varies depending on whether it is English or Italian) and implies a romantic theme, as well as the presentation of a problem and a solution at specific points within the scheme. Hence, when a rhyme scheme is attached to a specific traditional form, it carries even greater potential to create meaning in a poem. In turn, in the case of Yeats's incantatory poetry, a rhyme scheme's ability to create

meaning gives it an inherent ability to contribute to an incantation, and to ignore these possibilities is to ignore a large part of the poem's magical matrix.

Yeats, in addition to being a poet-magician, was famously a strong proponent of using form to harness his ideas into the most cohesive poetry (and even incantations) possible. In the case of "Sailing to Byzantium," he uses the *ottava rima* stanza, an eight-line stanza in iambic pentameter with an ABABABCC rhyme scheme originating from medieval Italian poetry. It was popularized largely by Boccaccio, and thus holds grand connotations in the realm of Western literary form (Preminger et al. 179). That may have been another part of the reason Yeats decided to use it—the scheme allowed him both formal clarity and proximity to other poetry of epic, canonical proportions.

The form itself, aside from its high literary regard, has become a favorite of many other poets over the centuries, including Lord Byron and John Keats,¹⁷ for its ability to both carry narrative and explore thematically. It presents a delicate balance between the two: the poet can use the three iterations of the AB pattern to progress a narrative and explore major themes, and still use the final rhyming couplet to conclude a stanza thematically, comment on the previous six lines, or even satirize (Preminger, Hardison Jr., and Warnke 179). Yeats takes advantage of this flexibility, and uses the *ottava rima* scheme to first substantiate the underlying argument for his incantation in the first couple of stanzas, and then to finally execute the incantation proper in the last two.

The first couple of stanzas of "Sailing to Byzantium," as I have established, fulfill a number of purposes. They do, above all, incant Yeats's initial images, purposes, and beliefs into being by virtue of being put to paper. They furthermore create the basis for Yeats's incantation proper, when he directs his spell to a particular goal in the last couple of stanzas. Moreover, they

¹⁷ In *Don Juan* and *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil* respectively

exist to give background for the issue that his incantation seeks to solve, thus proving to the reader that it is a valid pursuit. *Ottava rima* helps Yeats to build that argument. The first stanza, for example, gives the reader the information they need to understand where Yeats is coming from. It uses its AB section to illustrate the realities of the physical life cycle and to underscore the importance of youth over age for preserving that cycle, as is often the goal in the natural world. He ends with a couplet that encapsulates his argument about the value of youth over age. The second stanza continues Yeats's justification, by using the AB section to present his argument clearly and efficiently. The first AB iteration presents the problem with getting old, the second proposes a possible solution, and the third builds off of the second by elaborating on that proposed solution. Finally, the ending couplet gives the reader the now-clearly-logical outcome of his solution: that he has traveled to Byzantium to open the gyre of his soul and begin the life/death cycle anew. Now, having used the rhyme scheme to establish the rationale for his incantation, Yeats can soundly begin the spell itself.

The third stanza, as again I elaborated on at length earlier, presents imperatives for the imagined sages of Byzantium. In terms of the rhyme scheme, Yeats can use the AB section to build each iteration above the other, adding energy and intent with each micro-section. Again, he ends this stanza with a couplet centered on the overall goal of his incantation. In the incantatory version of his *ottava rima*, then, Yeats's final couplets at times serve to confirm and solidify the purpose of his spell. Doing so may add power to it, by making his goals explicit and by associating them with the centuries-long tradition of encapsulating themes and narratives in the small space of final couplets. He repeats that pattern in the final stanza, when he prophesies the outcomes of his spell, and so makes them manifest. As in the third stanza, he builds upon each iteration of the AB scheme until he has crafted an image so clear that it conjures itself into

metaphorical reality, before ending on the final couplet declaration that his spell will give him power over time itself. Interestingly, the final couplet inverts the rhyme of the second couplet (instead of “come” to “Byzantium,” the final version writes “Byzantium” followed by “come”). That inversion of the rhyme again calls attention to Yeats’s mastery of time. The first of these couplets follows a logical path; in order to get somewhere (in this case Byzantium), one must first come from somewhere else. Thus, this second stanza couplet follows the logical progression of the first half of the poem, where the goal is to prove the necessity of the incantation. The final couplet, however, argues that there will be future events and people to come to Byzantium, where Byzantium is the waiting source of a new gyre rather than the initial journey’s end goal. Here, Byzantium becomes an epicenter, a nucleus for others to converge on. The couplet does predict that Yeats will have control over time and its boundaries, yes, but it also predicts that Yeats’s proposed escape from age will become so widespread that Byzantium will cease to be the point of his singular journey, and will instead become a much larger phenomenon to be reckoned with.

These last two Austinian incantatory stanzas, though, do deviate from the more rigid constraints of the *ottava rima* that we see in the explanatory first couple of stanzas. In terms of punctuation, the first couple of stanzas match the rhyme scheme quite closely: the couplets are always bracketed off with either a period (in the first stanza) or a semicolon (in the second). If we once more consider these stanzas in terms of their goal (to prove the worth of Yeats’s incantation), then we acknowledge that they have a very real need to be as clear and delineated in their argument as possible, down to the level of punctuation. The last two stanzas, however, exist singularly to incant, and thus can bend more to Yeats’s will than only to that of the *ottava rima* tradition (though it still shapes this half of the poem as well). In the third stanza’s couplet, for

example, the traditional function is changed. The rhyme scheme stays the same—CC as always. However, the couplet usually functions as a somewhat distinct entity from the AB iterations. As I mentioned above, it tends to conclude or comment on the AB section. In this stanza, however, the last bit of the AB section bleeds over into the couplet with the phrase “It knows not what it is” (23). Yeats apparently wants the readers to note how out of place that phrase is in the context of the discrete couplet. He intends to draw our attention to it, and make us face how true it is that when we age, we lose our self-awareness. Indeed, Yeats seems to make the point that this phenomenon even extends to the constraints of the poem, where in this stanza the couplet no longer knows what it is, or what its function should be. For Yeats, all is lost when society lets us give into the decay of physical age, making his solution and his demands to the sages all the more necessary.

The last stanza, too, warps the *ottava rima* form past its traditional boundaries. While again the rhyme scheme stays static, the semicolon at the end of line 29 divides the stanza into five lines and three, rather than six and two. In that way, the final couplet of this stanza is almost less of a couplet than the others. It does, in my opinion, still encapsulate all that Yeats envisions for his poetic incantation, but it remains less conclusive and satisfying than, say, the couplet in the second stanza. Part of this new structural division may be in part to his desire to create two distinct, yet well-explored, images that lend themselves to the vision he has for himself. Furthermore, he may use that precursory line (30) to provide more context, and a greater level of imagery to support that last couplet that does truly get to the heart of what Yeats wants from his incantation.

Hence, we may use both the Derridean and the Austinian notions of the performative to better understand incantation, especially in Yeats’s poetry. While these understandings of the

performative are undoubtedly different, and in fact are quite different on purpose, I do not find them to be mutually exclusive. Instead, I find that they represent two levels of incantation with which Yeats's poetry interacts. On the much smaller scale, there is the less common Austinian performative. After all, we cannot equate the efficacy of all performatives—it is exceedingly clear that “They will fall in love” holds more performative weight than “The magician cast a love spell.” The same is true in poetry, where some select phrases and lines hold much more performative intent than others. In Yeats's body of work, I often interpret these more performative phrases as incantatory. To me, they are ways for Yeats to literally enact change in the world with the decided intent he found in his more literal, ritual magical practice, only this time through poetry.

On the wider level, though, there remains the Derridean performative, which argues that by mere virtue of having written his poetry, Yeats calls into being the images and ideas that he conjures. Whether or not he intends to do so with every line (though he almost certainly hopes to do so with at least some of them), he does create new knowledge, truths, and meanings through writing alone. Furthermore, given his ritual focus on the effects and inner workings of symbols, it is difficult to imagine that he did not view his poetry as spellwork on some level, even if the entire poem's purpose was not necessarily to incant. Thus, I view his entire corpus as a form of magic, one that manifests its own ideas and images by being written; furthermore, I understand his use of literary devices as rituals he uses to magically enact those ideas, regardless of whether or not they bear the same surficial relevance to incantation that the Austinian performatives' construction might.

Conclusions

Throughout this thesis-writing journey, I often wondered whether or not Yeats would approve of my arguments. I have little doubt that he would agree with my assessments of his poetry as incantatory, though the specifics may vary from his personal beliefs. But as I have progressed along this path, I have begun to wonder less about his approval, and more about where exactly he might be now. If we take his life/death/renewal gyre cycle theory as a possible truth, then we must acknowledge that he, or his soul, may be out in Byzantium living anew. So, what *did* happen to Yeats's soul after he died?

For this, I have no answer, but I find it useful to turn to the marker of the end of his physical death, his grave, to remember what he saw coming next, even in his last years. Perhaps one of his final incantatory poems, "Under Ben Bulben" calls into being the details of his tomb:

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

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.

Horseman, pass by! (84-94)

He tells the reader his intended burial circumstances, and in doing so both invokes them by writing them out, and creates a cache of descendents to confirm that his wishes have been fulfilled after his death. And indeed, his grave is exactly as he said: his coffin lies in Drumcliff churchyard near Co. Sligo (where he spent much of his childhood) under Ben Bulbin, a large geological formation that made its way into many of his Sligo poems.¹⁸ Above all else, though, his epitaph is as he wrote in the final three lines of the poem. Fittingly, it entreats its readers to note that death is not a final conclusion, nor is life itself beyond scrutiny. Both the physical life and death that make up the material section of the life/death gyre cycle have become irrelevant to Yeats, so much so that he commands Death itself to pass him by. Yeats had no intention of dying, not truly. He knew that he would simply pass on into another gyre cycle of renewal and spiritual growth. That being said, with any gyre cycle, one must pass through both ends of a binary—all life must be followed by a kind of death. We have to wonder, then, what happens during spiritual decay, and what kind of new life comes after? And so, the question might even become: how many times has Yeats died?

¹⁸ Though there is some debate over whether or not the bones in Yeats's coffin are entirely his (Marlowe).

Works Cited

- Adams, Hazard. *The Book of Yeats's Vision*. University of Michigan, 1995.
- Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things With Words*. Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Byville, Eric. "How to Do Witchcraft Tragedy with Speech Acts." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2011, pp. 1-33. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1353/cdr.2011.0013. Accessed 20 Oct. 2021.
- Ellmann, Richard. *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*. Norton, 1978.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press, 1988, pp. 1-21.
- Flannery, M.C. *Yeats and Magic*. Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe Ltd., 1977.
- Foster, R.F. *The Apprentice Mage*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Haekel, Ralf. "Performance, Performativity, and the Medium of Poetry: W. B. Yeats's "Among School Children."'" *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, vol. 64, no. 3, Nov. 2016, pp. 263-280. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1515/zaa-2016-0028. Accessed 3 Nov. 2021.
- Harper, Margaret Mills. "Yeats and the occult." *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*, edited by Marjorie Howes and John Kelly, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 144-166.
- Marlowe, Lara. "WB Yeats: Papers confirm bones sent to Sligo were not poet's." *The Irish Times*, 18 Jul. 2015, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/wb-yeats-papers-confirm-bones-sent-to-sligo-were-not-poet-s-1.2288662>. Accessed 15 Apr. 2022.
- Preminger, Alex, et al. "Ottava Rima." *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 179-180. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.trinity.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=cookie.ip.uid&db=nlebk&AN=791292&site=eds-live>.

Tambiah, Stanley J. "Form and meaning of magical acts: A point of view." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2017, pp. 451-473, doi:10.14318/hau7.3.030.

Accessed 20 Oct. 2021.

Wortham, Simon Morgan. "Performativity." *The Derrida Dictionary*, Continuum, 2010, pp. 135-6.

Yeats, W.B. *A Vision: The Revised 1937 Edition*, edited by Margaret Mills Harper and Catherine E. Paul, Scribner, 2015.

Yeats, W.B. "Magic." *Essays*, Macmillan, 1924, pp. 33-63.

Yeats, W.B. *The Poems: Revised*, edited by Richard J. Finneran, Scribner, 1997.

Yeats, W.B. "The Symbolism of Poetry." *Essays*, Macmillan, 1924, pp. 188-202.