

Decolonization and Deaestheticization

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When the problem about the relationship between poetry and nationalism is discussed, a well-worn strategy is to blame poetry for its deceptive power to unify the nation or people imaginatively. Some critics refer to it as aestheticization of politics. Such new waves as new historicism and post-colonialism have often pointed it out, introducing external (social or political) elements into literary texts. We owe much to these ways of study, especially when we think of the fact that the rise of Anglo-Irish studies along with the examination of colonialism has made it possible for us to read the canon in English literature (Spenser or Arnold, for example) from another point of view. On the other hand, some critics deploy such strategy in quite a fashionable way only to find fault with some literary texts. W. B. Yeats is a good prey to them, especially when they read his works as classroom clichés. The reason is chiefly that there are a lot of contradictions in his texts. To accuse Yeats, for example, of having a strong inclination toward fascism will be all the easier when one eliminates such contradictions and pick up items which serve as its evidence. In doing so, one cannot help attributing some identity to Yeats. However, as the contradictions show, it would be futile to read Yeats from the point of view of identical consistency or continuity; nothing but discontinuity will be found in his texts. The discontinuity can be found chiefly in two ways; one between his earlier and later works and the other between the self and the non-self. Regarding the nationalism which is based on the imaginative unity of the people, I once showed that Yeats's later poetics does not function as the unifying vehicle because it refuses any symbolization in the field of the imaginary.¹ To recognize this is equally to realize the futility of any condemna-

tion of Yeats's politics, whether it might be nationalistic or aristocratic, in the name of representative democracy, for it is to the same symbolic aesthetic that democratic states appeal for their own legitimation. It seems that the fact is to the contrary: the very conflict found in both his poetics and politics seems to stem from the clarity of his recognition of the bankruptcy of the aesthetic foundations of the state. The present paper aims to demonstrate Yeats's strategy to de-aestheticize the nation and the state in the midst of decolonizing project of Ireland.

1.

As I once depicted in my above-mentioned paper concerning the poem "Easter 1916", Yeats, at the most crucial moment in the process of Ireland's decolonization, at once establishes the national myth and then shifts its paradigm to all possible worlds or counterfactual situations by the implication of something surplus. While the plot of national identity necessarily returns to *the* origin which will be taken over by nameless martyrs, the martyrs in the poem, accompanied by the proper names, at once return to the heroic myth and appear as new beginnings, transforming the state of death into a moment of founding which at the same time troubles all foundation. Now I will examine Yeats's resistance to the predestined plot, that is, demythologization or deaestheticization of the national myth, in some of his later works, and then further consider a complex term in Yeats's lexicon, "remorse", in relation to all possible worlds.

The Dreaming of the Bones is Yeats's version of the Noh play, *Nishikigi*, by Seami Motokiyo, and is often regarded as "the closest approach Yeats made to the Noh form,"² though we cannot find in the play any union after purgation that is the crux of the Noh play. The play takes its theme from Irish legend and contemporary history. Two ghost lovers from Irish legend, Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, are condemned to wander for centuries after death to do penance for their betrayal of their country, Ireland, into the hands of the conquering Norman.

They haunt the scenes of their earthly life in the hope of discovering a fellow countryman to forgive them and, thus, bring peace to their errant souls. They meet in a remote place a young man of Aran, a nationalist fighter, fleeing from the British soldiers after the 1916 Easter Rising. The young man's attitude is entirely controlled by the national cause and he curses Donough O'Brien and his troop who rebelled against the King of Thomond:

And why should he rebel?

The King of Thomond was his rightful master.

It was man like Donough who made Ireland weak —

My curse on all that troop, . . .

On the other hand, the ghost of Dervorgilla attributes the rebellion of Donough to "some momentary impulse" which is not related to any revolutionary cause:

. . .if they were rebels

Some momentary impulse made them rebels,

Or the commandment of some petty king

Who hated Thomond.

While the ghost lovers wish the young man to forgive their crime of betrayal, he is obdurate: "O never, never shall Diarmuid and Devorgilla be forgiven." As Harold Bloom observes, the ghosts are not redeemed from their remorse, for the young soldier is remorseless. Yet, contrary to what Bloom argues, the play's theme is not "the blocking of purgation by remorse".³ The ghosts' remorse is not that "they cannot learn to forgive themselves" for their crime of betrayal. Their remorse is caused by the monolithic reception of their legendary myth by the nationalists. Their betrayal had nothing to do with national cause when they "brought the Norman in", just as Donough's rebellion was due to "some momentary impulse":

. . . Her king and lover

Was overthrown in battle by her husband,

And for her sake for his own, being blind

And bitter and bitterly in love, he brought
A foreign army from across the sea.

In short, their remorse is based on the apprehension of the erasure of the possibility that their legendary myth *might* be received otherwise, differently from the monolithic plot of the national cause. Their purgation is blocked by the revolutionary cause, not by remorse. What is at stake here is the word, “might”; that is, all possible worlds.

In spite of his remark that “Blake and Shelley did not deal in ghosts, but Yeats’s ghosts are usually lively enough,” Bloom missed the significance of ghosts as foregrounded in Yeats’s work. Bloom tries very hard to subordinate Yeats to the system of Blake and Shelley in order to insist that Yeats “struggled with remorse as an ultimate antagonist to his imagination” just as Blake and Shelley did. Bloom writes as follows:

Cythna [in Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam*] , we know, was Yeats’s prototype for Maud Gonne . . . For Maud Gonne as for Cythna, the pure purposes of the revolutionary excluded all possibility of remorse, and Yeats was deeply influenced by his beloved’s temperament. Cythna denounces “the dark idolatry of self”, the “vacant expiation” of remorse. Blake’s “Desperate remorse swallows the present in a quenchless rage” is paralleled by Cythna’s: “The past is Death’s, the future is thine own”.⁴

For later Yeats, unlike for Cythna, there is not necessarily a distinction between the past and the present or the future. While the young soldier finds continuity between the legendary myth of the past and the present state of Ireland, the past flows into the present, because ghosts are apparition of the past in the present. Besides, unlike Blake, it is not that “remorse swallows the present”, but that the present brings forth the remorse of the dead when it swallows the past with such monolithic reception as is simply connected to national ideology. To modify Bloom’s words, what “the pure purposes of the revolutionary excluded” is not “all possibility of remorse” but all possible worlds: such exclusion leads to the re-

morse of the dead. When ghosts with remorse appear recurrently, they are seeking for an open dimension which makes recurrent revision possible.

One may say that, though I have used, as Bloom did, the term “remorse” to examine *The Dreaming of the Bones*, the term does not in fact appear in the play. Further, one may argue against this view that “remorse” in the poem “A Dialogue of Self and Soul” is, as Bloom says, “an ultimate antagonist” to Yeats: it is only when the Self “cast out remorse” that “We are blest by everything, / Everything we look upon is blest”. But, as I will argue later, the Self’s celebration of everything is in fact mere celebration of the Self itself, which implies the continuity between the Self and the non-self — a preoccupation of symbolism which enables an imaginative foundation of nationalism that is based on the continuity between the national symbol and the people. Because we need to be careful of Yeats’s idiosyncratic use of “remorse”, I will, to clarify the meaning of the word, borrow a metaphor from Walter Benjamin, who distinguishes two views of history as follows:

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the “time of the now” which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.⁵

Here Benjamin opposes “the ‘time of now’ which is shot through with chips of Messianic time” to “a causal connection” and “the sequence of events”, just as the remorse of the ghosts in *The Dreaming of the Bones* is opposed to the young soldier’s view that their betrayal caused the disaster in Ireland. Then what is “Messianic time”? Though Benjamin does not define the meaning, we can guess

it through his reference to the Messiah:

. . . our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.⁶

Contrary to the oppression of the past by the young soldier in *The Dreaming of the Bones* who limits it only to causal connection, Benjamin's Messiah comes as "the redeemer" of the past. The past expects the Messianic power of the historian who "means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger": "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins".⁷ It is suggestive that Benjamin refers to *the dead* when he talks of the present: for him ghosts are inhabitants of the "time of the now". The remorse of the ghosts in *The Dreaming of the Bones* is a hope to be received in the phase of all possible worlds, not in the chain of cause and effect, by following generations. Therefore, to distinguish the remorse of the dead from that of the living, I will call the former "the remorse in the time of the now" which implies recurrent apparition of the past in the present and which opposes a causal connection between the past and the present that exploits the past as such, as a cause.

Messianic time for Benjamin implies not only the past in the present but also "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present". He compares it to the past belief of the Jews and says that for the Jews the future did not turn "into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter".⁸ According to Benedict Anderson, an idea of "homogeneous, empty time", as opposed to "a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present", has fundamental importance in the formation

of nationalism:

it [our own conception of simultaneity] is a conception of such fundamental importance that, without taking it fully into account, we will find it difficult to probe the obscure genesis of nationalism. What has come to take the place of the mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time is, to borrow again from Benjamin, an idea of “homogeneous, empty time”, in which simultaneity is, as it were, traverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.⁹

In other words, nationalism is formed by “homogeneous, empty time” in which the people are related to each other without knowing each other, as Anderson exemplifies:

An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd [sic] fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, *anonymous*, simultaneous activity”. (italics mine)¹⁰

The conception of “homogeneous, empty time”, as opposed to “a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present”, makes it possible for nationalism to be formed, which enables the people to unite anonymously. Needless to say, this anonymity leads to “cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers” which symbolically unite the nation, being arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism. If the proper names in “Easter 1916”, as I demonstrated in “A Function of Proper Names in ‘Easter 1916’,” brush the symbolization of the national identity based on this anonymity, Yeats goes on to challenge the retrospectively inevitable history, that is, the “homogeneous, empty time” of the national narrative, by the device called “remorse” in the “time of the now” by means of which the present encounters the past (ghosts) and future in all possible worlds that implies revisability. The remorse in the “time of the now” is foregrounded as “the remorse of the dead” in Yeats’s play, *Purgatory*, which I will examine after considering the

function of remorse in “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”.

2.

Many critics have discussed the complex structure of “A Dialogue of Self and Soul”. But what I intend to argue is only one thing: that “the Self” is an inhabitant of “the imaginary” in Lacanian sense, whose seemingly triumphant affirmation of everything is made possible only through the insistence on the continuity between the self and the non-self, that is, on symbolism. The self starts by meditation on an ancient blade:

The consecrated blade upon my knees
Is Sato’s ancient blade, still as it was,
Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
Unspotted by the centuries;
That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
From some court-lady’s dress and round
The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn.

As David Lloyd remarks, this stanza presents the descriptive image of the sword mimetically, while the Soul presents the image of the tower performatively — “I summon. . .”, “[I] Set. . .”, “[I] Fix. . .”¹¹. As is shown by the fact that the word “still” is repeated as many as four times, the Self asserts the temporal continuity of the beauty of the blade; “Unspotted by the centuries”. Besides, the Self introduces the principle of self-reflecting mirror — “like a looking-glass” — which asserts the continuity between the Self and the work of art, that is, non-self. In the next monologue, the Self still repeats the insistence on the temporal continuity — the sword was fashioned “Five hundred years ago” — which is opposed to the Soul’s emblem of change — the tower whose battlement is broken and crumbling. Further the Self insists on the continuity between the color of the embroidery and the Self’s state of mind — “Heart’s purple”. In the Self’s last monologue

which closes the poem, too, he sticks to the principle of self-reflecting mirror “until at last / He thinks that shape [cast on the mirror] must be his own”. Thus he can be content “to live it all again / And yet again”, because it is a repetition of self-content, and even though he “must suffer, if he woos / A proud woman not kindred of his soul”, he can project his desire on the woman as a self-reflecting mirror and egoistically internalize her in the end. Thus the Self’s seeming affirmation of “everything” is mere self-affirmation which is based on self-reflection:

I am content to follow to its source
 Every event in action or in thought;
 Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
 When such as I cast out remorse
 So great a sweetness flows into the breast
 We must laugh and we must sing,
 We are blest by everything,
 Everything we look upon is blest.

It is true that the end of the Self’s assertion is quite similar to what the Soul seeks for, who asserts that “Such fullness in that quarter overflows”: both of them connote the imagery of overflowing. It is also true that the Self’s claim — “forgive myself the lot” — and its state of blessedness corresponds to the Soul’s seeking for the forgiveness:

Such fullness in that quarter overflows
 And falls into the basin of the mind
 That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,
 For intellect too no longer knows
Is from the Ought, or Knower from the Known -
 That is to say, ascends to Heaven;
 Only the dead can be forgiven;
 But when I think of that my tongue’s a stone.

However, in spite of the fact that both the Self and the Soul seek for overflowing imagery and a state of blessedness or forgiveness, each mode is quite different. While the Self asserts his triumph in affirmative mode, the Soul ends by implying its passivity which is expressed in a quite similar way to that of failure of objectification and internalization. The Soul is deprived of its senses, that is, the bridge between itself and outer world — “man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind” - and of its expressive power - “my tongue’s a stone”. In fact, the Soul cannot objectify and internalize the non-self because he no longer knows “*Is* from the *Ought*, or *Knower* from the *Known*”. To sum up, the difference between the Self and the Soul is that the Self believes in the continuity between itself and the non-self to project its desire onto the other while the Soul’s fullness deprives it of its ability of objectification and internalization. Paul de Man’s remark is again astute. He modifies, with regard to Yeats, the reading of romantic literature by M. S. Abrams. While Abrams attributes the emblem of the mirror to the mimetic poetry which depends on an outside world and that of the lamp to the romantic poetry which depends on the “constitutive, autonomous self, the creative subjectivity”, de Man argues that mirror and lamp are the same in that both of them are symbols of light: the self-knowledge of a consciousness, an internalized metaphor of daylight vision”. De Man further argues that the Soul for Yeats, in contrast to the Self, does not belong to “the realm of natural or artificial (i.e., represented or imitated) light, but to that of sleep and darkness.¹² In other words, the Soul gives up casting its desire onto an outside world, while the Self exploits it as self-reflecting mirror. I do not mean to further elaborate on the complex relation between the Self and the Soul, but what is significant here is that the Self casts out remorse in the course of self-reflection; it is after “such as I cast out remorse” that the Self blesses everything — in fact itself. Remorse is something that disturbs its belief in continuity between itself and the other. Then, while nationalism emphasizes the continuity between the national symbol (origin) and the people, or that among the nation’s subjects, remorse will be an obstacle to

symbolism which in a cultural context serves nationalism.

3.

Few plays of Yeats's have so diverse interpretations as *Purgatory*. On the one hand, critics attack it as a revelation of Yeats's overt eugenic theory of nationality as kindred, because the play indicts an aristocratic woman from the Big House for a poor marital choice — marriage with a groom in a training stable - led by sexual desire. For example, a critic thus says:

Yeats is not separate enough from the old man's rage to render the play's conclusion coherent. That hardly makes the play less powerful, but perhaps we ought to resent a work that has so palpable a design upon us. Eugenic tendentiousness is not a formula for great art, even in Yeats.¹³

On the other hand, critics separate Yeats from the old man who gives a eugenic assertion that "he [the groom] killed the house; to kill a house / Where great men grew up, married, died, / I here declare a capital offense". Marjorie Howes follows W. J. McCormack's conclusion that "the old man represents the foolish, nostalgic idealization of an irresponsible landlord class rather than a tragic lament for a noble aristocratic civilization", and suggests that the old man is "a combination of diagnosis and symptom":

By the end of the play's first page, then, the attentive reader, especially the attentive reader of *On the Boiler* and Yeats's other middle and late works, is aware that the old man is not necessarily to be trusted, and almost certainly not to be admired, as an interpreter of events and meanings.¹⁴

It is certain that the old man is unreliable because, in spite of his desire to maintain the family tradition, he himself acted like his mother in that he had a tinker's daughter conceive his son whom he calls "a bastard that a pedlar [the old man] got / Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch". However, whether the old man is

trusted or not, the climax of the play shows its chief interest in the cyclic presence of the past in the present. The old man, who killed his father (groom) as a destroyer of the noble tradition of the Big House, stabs his son in a fatal repetition of his earlier crime: “My father and my son on the same jack-knife!”. He is obsessed with thoughts of anniversaries and repetition, and his son is now of exactly the same age that the old man was when he stabbed his father to death as the great house burned. It is an intersection of times with a terrible portent, where “the remorse of the dead” is foregrounded, which is implied by “hoof-beats”: “Hoof-beats! Dear God, / How quickly it returns — beat — beat — !”;

Her [his mother’s] mind cannot hold up that dream.

Twice a murderer and all for nothing,

And she must animate that dead night

Not once but many times!

O God,

Release my mother’s soul from its dream!

Mankind can do no more. Appease

The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

The figure of the old man’s dead mother appears completely hostile to his desire to keep the noble tradition of the great house. The continuity from the past to the present, which he tries to preserve, is disturbed by “the remorse of the dead”. This structure is the same as that in *The Dreaming of the Bones*. Just as the young soldier in *The Dreaming of the Bones* sticks to the chain of cause and effect, the old man is obsessed with the consequence. He tries to put an end to the purgatorial repetition of the “transgressions” of the noble tradition by his father and mother:

Re-live

Their transgressions, and that not once

But many times; they know at last

The consequence of those transgressions

.....

...when the consequence is at an end

The dream must end. . .

But his murder of his father and son cannot bring his mother's dream to an end: "Her mind cannot hold up that dream". In the end, the old man's obsession with continuity gives way to his dead mother's remorse. The remorse of the dead appears recurrently in the present and future, disturbing the desire for continuity, the causal chain of the past and the present. It is suggestive that in this play the word "remorse" is confused with "dream": "the remorse of the dead" is, from another perspective, the "dream", the yearning, of the dead; the past's apparition as ghosts in the present (the future) dreaming of, yearning for, the "redemption" from one rigid view of the past as the origin of the present. *Purgatory* is one jump ahead of *The Dreaming of the Bones* in that, while the latter, foregrounding the ghosts' remorse in the form of dance, deals with the repression of all possible worlds by the national myth, the former presents "the remorse of the dead" both as a "dream" and as a recurrent image which necessarily suggests the incessant apparition in the present and the future.

The ghosts' appropriation of the past is completely different from that by the old man and the young soldier. The difference may be compared to Benjamin's distinction between historical materialism and historicism:

Historicism gives the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience of the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history.¹⁵

The desire of the old man and the young soldier for "the empty, homogeneous time", that is, the desire to appropriate the past by conceiving history as, or confining it to, a closed, homogeneous, rectilinear, continuous course of events, stays within the field of hermeneutics which locates the interpreted text into the

totality of its epoch; one seeks for the totality of the noble tradition, the other for that of the heroic national myth. On the contrary, the ghosts' appropriation of the past is the isolation of a piece of the past from the continuity of history: "... blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework".¹⁶ Remorse in *Purgatory* and *The Dreaming of the Bones* is the yearning for the moment of this isolation, "redemption" from the totalizing view of history, and for all possible worlds.

This reading of *Purgatory* will clarify what sexual or erotic desire means for Yeats in the light of another later play, *The Words upon the Window-Pane*. In *Purgatory*, the old man's extraordinary speech, when he contemplates the repetition by his parents' ghosts of the moment of his conception, conjoins sexual desire and remorse in an unexpected constellation:

But there's a problem: she [the old man's dead mother] must live
Through everything in exact detail,
Driven to it by remorse, and yet
Can she renew the sexual act
And find no pleasure in it, and if not,
If pleasure and remorse must both be there,
Which is the greater?

It is certain that the old man is mistaken in interpreting what "remorse" is for the dead. But his unconscious apposition of "remorse" and sexual "pleasure" is to the point, because sexual pleasure functions just as remorse does in the totalizing chain of cause and effect, disrupting the seemingly seamless whole of identity, whether it is social or traditional. The mother's pleasure represents a complete excess: an excess, or surplus, beyond her identity as mother, beyond the end of conception which ruptures the noble tradition, and beyond that chain of determinate consequences. In the context of the foundation of the Irish Free State, sexual desire resists the attempt to totalize the national identity, as Marjorie Howes observes regarding a later poem sequence of Yeats's:

... rather than replacing the Free State's insistence on chastity and maternity with a feminine sexuality organized around personal pleasure and the private and subjective dramas of romance, "A Woman Young and Old" offers feminine desires whose significance is not confined to or even primarily involved in the personal. Feminine sexuality, which Free State nationality casts as a major threat to metaphysical knowledge and status (salvation), is the very vehicle through which these poems formulate a version of religious truth. Feminine sexuality is the mark of rebellion against conventional social and symbolic structures and simultaneously the embodiment of a divine/profane metaphysics.¹⁷

Whether it is national, social, or traditional identity, sexual desire resists the totalizing power of formative narrative: it remains surplus to any genealogical continuum. The same is true of "Leda and the Swan" in which erotic pleasure is juxtaposed with the determinate myth originating in the rape of Leda by Zeus assuming the form of a swan. Here and there in this poem, the conception of Helen, which leads to the myth of the Trojan War, is described with expressions which imply sexual pleasure: "her thighs caressed / By the dark webs", "her loosening thighs", "feel the strange heart beating where it lies", and "A shudder in the loins". The myth attributes the cause of the Trojan War to this intercourse, but we find in this poem surplus in the form of sexual pleasure which cannot be comprehended in the plot or causal chains of the event. It is true that love and jealousy, which imply sexuality, are part of the myth. But the interrogation at the end of the poem is clearly suspicious of the causality: "Did she put on his knowledge with his power / Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?" If Zeus is a symbol of the Greek myth, "his knowledge" is regarded as the predestined plot of the myth. The answer to the question should be "No". The intercourse is given as the origin of the Trojan War only *afterwards*: the sexual pleasure is indifferent to the result at the moment of the intercourse, only to imply a rupture in the seamless whole of the myth.

4.

The problem concerning the word “remorse” in *Purgatory*, conjoined with sexual pleasure, also appears in *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, which helps us understand another problem — the anniversary in Yeats’s work. Certainly the propelling power of *The Words Upon the Window-Pane* depends, as is usual with Yeats’s plays, on dramatic conflict and opposition; youth and age are opposed in the characters of John Corbet and Dr. Trench, and the petit bourgeois participants in the séance are conceived as an ironic inversion of Swift’s heroism. But the central opposition in the play is that between Vanessa and Stella, which leads to the question about Swift’s celibacy and the roots of mental torment. Swift refuses consummation which will beget children, firstly because of his personal taint of ill-health or madness and secondly because of the social taint of madness in the human intellect, the degeneration of the human condition. Both Vanessa and Stella attempt to appease him in his torment, yet in quite different ways. Stella’s way is characterized by the words upon the window-pane, the heroic couplets of the Age of Reason which are repeated at the beginning and the end of the play within the play:

You taught how I might youth prolong
By knowing what is right and wrong;
How from my heart to bring supplies
Of lustre to my fading eyes;
How soon a beauteous mind repairs
The loss of chang’d or failing hairs;
How wit and virtue from within
Can spread a smoothness o’er the skin.

It is clear, as his biography shows, that Swift was attracted by Stella’s intellect and reason as opposed to Vanessa’s passion; at the moment of crisis he seeks for the help of the intellect developed by past intellectuals like “the great Chrysostom” whose thought is endorsed by Stella’s poem for Swift. On the other

hand, Vanessa appeals to the consummation which necessarily accompanies sexual pleasure: "It is not enough to look, to speak, to hear. Jonathan, Jonathan, I am a woman, the women Brutus and Cato loved were not different. . . That is the first time you have touched my body". The crux of her speech is that her appeal to consummation is connected with chance. While Swift is obsessed with a predestined plot of genetic inheritance and social degeneration which makes him fear consummation, Vanessa rejects such determinate continuity:

Look at me, Jonathan. Your arrogant intellect separates us. Give me both your hands. I will put them upon my breast. . . O, it is white — white as the gambler's dice - white ivory dice. Think of the uncertainty. Perhaps a mad child - perhaps a rascal - perhaps a knave — perhaps not, Jonathan. The dice of the intellect are loaded, but I am the common ivory dice.

Here intellect and knowledge are antithetical to sexual pleasure and chance. Intellect's fraud — "The dice of the intellect are loaded" — makes up a determinate plot which confines all possible worlds.

When Swift counts on the past intellectual — "It is the thought of the Great Chrysostom" — at the moment of crisis, one will be reminded of the old man's speech in *Purgatory*: "Go fetch Tertullian; he and I / Will ravel all that problem out / Whilst those two lie upon the mattress / Begetting me". The old man is also dependent on the past intellectual when he is tormented by the image of his parents' intercourse. Vanessa is to Swift what the parents are to the old man in *Purgatory*. It is suggestive that Stella's ghost does not appear at all in the play: it is Swift's ghost who describes Stella and cites her poem. Further, it is not Swift but Vanessa that is a bearer of remorse. Just as the old man in *Purgatory* is tormented by the remorse of the dead, of his parents, Swift is by the remorse of Vanessa who suggests the disruption of his intellect's seamless plot:

[*In Vanessa's voice.*] Can you face solitude with that mind, Jonathan?

[*Mrs. Henderson goes to the door, finds that it is closed.*] Dice, white ivory

dice. [*In Swift's voice.*] My God, I am left alone with my enemy. Who locked the door, who locked me in with my enemy?

The ghosts of the old man's parents appear on the anniversary of their wedding when he was conceived: they recurrently haunt him in the form of hoof-beats on each anniversary; "Beat! Beat! / This night is the anniversary / of my mother's wedding night, / Or of the night wherein I was begotten". Swift is also haunted by the anniversary: the apparition of Swift's ghost is triggered off by Stella's poem — the words upon the window-pane — for his fifty-fourth birthday. Though the poem seems to console him in his torment - "you have answered already in that poem you wrote for my last birthday" — the recurrence of the anniversary — his birthday — does not disappear but keeps on tormenting him, as is expressed in his anguished cry at the end of the play: "Perish the day on which I was born!"

Why does the anniversary so torment the old man and Swift? What is the anniversary? In these plays the anniversary is equated with the ghosts, or remorse. The birthday of Swift or the day of conception itself does not recur: the birth or the conception is a singular event. But such an event which is supposed to be take place only once recurs as an anniversary. The anniversary is not exactly the same as the singular date of birth or conception, but it is a ghostly recurrence of the date. Or rather, anniversaries are ghosts. The anniversary recurs: it is not an singular event which enables one to think of it as *the* origin that guarantees a continuous plot, law, ideal, and identity. One will find a law or predestined plot *after* the singular event: the law or plot is possible only *afterwards*. But the law or plot is always haunted by the shadow of all possible worlds, that is, prior open dimension which will be lost when seen afterwards.

Slavoj Žižek's point of view is useful in clarifying this prior open dimension. It was after Benjamin that I referred to the remorse in *Purgatory* and *The Dreaming of the Bones* as the yearning for the moment of the isolation of a piece of the past from the continuity of history, for "redemption" from the totalizing view of

history. Žižek's reading of the same text of Benjamin's is as follows:

. . . for Benjamin, revolution is not part of continuous historical evolution but, on the contrary, a moment of "stasis" when the continuity is broken, when the texture of previous history, that of the winners, is annihilated, and when, retroactively, through the success of the revolution, each abortive act, each slip, each past failed attempt which functioned in the reigning Text as an empty and meaningless trace, will be "redeemed", will receive its signification. In this sense, revolution is strictly a *creationist* act, a radical intrusion of the "death drive": erasure of the reigning Text, creation *ex nihilo* of a new Text by means of which the stifled past "will have been".¹⁸

When I refer to ghosts and remorse — and now anniversaries — as the apparition of all possible worlds and revisability, it does not mean a regressive view of historical relativism: historical relativism sees and finds history and its plurality *afterwards*. Remorse, ghosts, and anniversaries haunt the law or predestined plot — "the reigning Text" — which is found only *afterwards*. But a prior open dimension cannot be found *afterwards*. "Erasure of the reigning Text" by *prior* open dimension depends on the strange future perfect tense, "will have been". The anniversary makes the tense possible, because, while a past singular event is inscribed in the date, the date appears as a prior open dimension, which signifies the moment immediately before the event, in the future by repetition as anniversary. Ghosts bear remorse because they are repressed and excluded by "the reigning Text": they recur repeatedly in the form of anniversaries; as he suggests, they "come from the future". Anniversaries are not the "returns of the repressed" which are past failed attempts, forgotten, excluded from the frame of the reigning history, tradition, or Text. Rather,

the actual revolutionary situation presents an attempt to "unfold" the symptom [the return of the repressed], to "redeem" — that is, realize in the Symbolic — these past failed attempts which "will have been"

only through their repetition, at which point they become retroactively what they already were. Apropos of Benjamin's *Theses [on the Philosophy of History]*, we can thus repeat Lacan's formula: the revolution accomplishes a "tiger's leap into the past" not because it is in search of a kind of support in the past, in tradition, but in so far as this past which repeats itself in the revolution "comes from the future" — was always in itself pregnant with the open dimension of the future.¹⁹

The "revolution" and the "revolutionary situation" in the text of Benjamin and Žižek can be regarded here as a synonym of the "anniversary" in this paper's context. Anniversaries inform us that the reigning text, the law, or the predestined plot which has been found afterwards by symbolization is based on the erasure of this "open dimension (of the future)" immediately before the event. It is certain that such a reigning Text or law exists, but it is haunted by anniversaries: ghosts are always before our very eyes. Thus Swift and the old man in Yeats's play are tormented by the anniversaries. Their insistence on the predestined plot cannot help being threatened by the recurring ghosts and anniversaries which suggest discontinuity and its revisability. The chance implied by the white ivory dice in *The Words upon the Window-Pane* is not one confined only to the present: it is the chance of ghosts represented by Vanessa; the open dimension found retroactively by the inversion of time, or made possible by the structure of anniversaries.

Speaking of anniversaries, we cannot but be reminded of Easter Sunday in the context of Irish history. Easter reminds us of the execution of the rebellions including Pearse, MacDonagh, MacBride, and Connolly. A strategy of sentiment refers to the execution as a singular, irreplaceable event — the origin of the Irish Free State — and comprehends it in the heroic myth of Cuchulain which, in part, defines Irish ideology. The strategy appeals to the tragedy that the irreplaceable men, such as Pearse, were executed: we have no choice but to grieve the loss of Pearse. But is it the true tragedy of Easter Uprising? As I once mentioned analyz-

ing the structure of Yeats's "Easter 1916", the martyrs' proper names signify the surplus of the mythologization. If so, the tragedy of the event is that nameless common man was accidentally forced to bear the heroic myth. The chance immediately before the event that Pearse was to become a martyr implies a possibility that he might have not been a martyr: he was *passively* exposed to the phase of chance just before the martyrdom. On each Easter as anniversary, we are to be reminded of the memory of this passivity in which Pearse was exposed to the phase of chance that will disturb his symbolization. The martyrdom, for Yeats, is not a singular and original trauma which makes the symbolization possible: the structure of repetition of the anniversary disturbs it, just as the anniversary tormented Swift and the old man. The return of the anniversary is quite similar to what Jacques Derrida calls "the return of the demonic":

The return of the demonic, not far from the "'perpetual recurrence of the same thing,'" is in convoy with repetition beyond the PP [pleasure principle]. This will recur regularly from now on.

Truly speaking, there is not a return of *the demonic*. The demon is that very thing which comes back [*revient*] without having been called by the PP. The demon is the *revenance* which repeats its entrance, coming back [*revenant*] from one knows not where . . . , inherited from one knows not whom, but already persecutory, by means of the simple form of its return, indefatigably repetitive, independent of every apparent desire, *automatic*. . . this automaton comes back [*revient*] without coming back [*revenir à*] to any one, it produces effects of ventriloquism without origin, without emission, and without addressee. It is only posted, the post in its "pure" state, a kind of mailman [*facteur*] without destination. Tele — without telos. Finality without end, the beauty of the evil.²⁰

This quotation may sound redundant because it smuggles in the beginning of Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* which I referred to so often. Yet it is suggestive that Derrida deploys a metaphor of the post which reminds us of

the fact that Easter Uprising took place in the General Post Office, Dublin, and that he touches by accident the possibility of reading the famous line in Yeats's "Easter 1916" — "A terrible beauty is born" — by saying "Finality without end, the beauty of the evil". Further, "the demonic" for Derrida reminds us of the "*Daimon*" in Yeats which has a similar structure to the apparition of ghosts and anniversaries. The "*Daimon*" in *A Vision* is called "*Ghostly Self*" or a "*Record*" where "the images of all past events remain forever 'thinking the thought and doing the deed'".²¹ Still further, Derrida's reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* leads us to the disruption of the imaginary, that is, the pleasure principle. The main theme of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the compulsion to repeat. The compulsion is a repetitive symptom which oversteps the stage of the pleasure principle (the imaginary) on which one's behavior is necessarily related to pleasure/end (telos). Derrida opposes the understanding of the repetition compulsion as a response to a singular, original trauma prior to the pleasure principle. The compulsion to repeat is not a trace of a singular trauma: it is "the *revenance* which repeats its entrance", that is, the ghost we found in Yeats's play. I will not go too far into psychoanalysis. All we have to recognize is that the disruption of the imaginary (pleasure principle) parallels the recurrence of the ghost and anniversary discussed here. Pearse's letter posted in the General Post Office has, for Yeats, "effects of ventriloquism without origin, without emission, and without addressee".

5.

Some see Yeats as idealist. But, as was shown above, the structure of the anniversary and ghost is far from the regressive naiveté of historical relativism. Besides, in his later work, the ideal — the end (telos) — which is represented by Swift's intellect is rejected — "mailman without destination[facteur]". His politics was dependent on each situation, foregrounding the oppressed ideology rather than the hegemony, as he says:

I am certain that wherever in Europe there are minds strong enough to lead others the same vague hatred rises; in four or five or in less generations this hatred will have issued in violence and imposed some kind of rule of kindred. I cannot know the nature of that rule, for its opposite fills the light; all I can do to bring it nearer is to intensify my hatred. I am no Nationalist, except in Ireland for passing reasons. . . .²²

Just as he resisted the British (victors') ideology before the foundation of Irish Free State, he opposed the Irish nationalist ideology which was about to be formed as the victors' in the wake of its foundation. Loosely speaking, Yeats's view of history I mentioned above is something opposed to the reigning official historiography. Benjamin says that "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at the moment of danger".²³ By confining itself to "the way it really was", or by conceiving history as a closed, homogeneous, rectilinear, continuous course of events, the traditional historiographic gaze is restricted to a priori, formally, gaze of those who have won: it sees history as a closed continuity of progression leading to the reign of those who rule today. It leaves out of consideration what failed in history, what has to be denied so that continuity of "what really happened" could establish itself. The reigning historiography writes a "positive" history of great achievements and cultural treasures. In contrast to the triumphant procession of victors exhibited by official historiography, the oppressed elements of history appropriate the past to themselves in so far as they are open, in so far as the "yearning for the redemption" is already at work in them — that is to say, they can appropriate what the past already contains — in the form of what failed, of what was extirpated — the dimension of the future: "The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption".²⁴ To accomplish the appropriation of this stifled dimension of the past — like the remorse of the ghosts in *The Dreaming of the Bones*, that of Vanessa's and the memory of the passivity of the Easter Uprising martyrs — in

so far as it already contains the future — the future of our own act which, by means of repetition, retroactively redeems the past (“there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth”²⁵) — we have to cut through the continuous flow of historical development and make a “tiger’s leap into the past”.

Here we need to pay attention to the relation between the structure of repetition — anniversary — and the discontinuity of history, in order to add an explanation to what I mentioned above. Again Benjamin’s observation is useful, where he deploys a metaphor of a “monad” to expound the discontinuity of history:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tension, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.²⁶

It is this very crystallization, this congelation of the movement in a monad, which announces the moment of the appropriation of the past: the monad is an actual moment to which the past is attached directly, bypassing the continuous line of evolution: the contemporary revolutionary situation which conceives itself as a repetition of past failed situations, as their retroactive “redemption” through the success of its own exploit. In the monad, time stops in so far as the actual constellation is directly charged with the past constellation — in other words, in so far as we have to do with a pure repetition. For those acquainted with the Freudian proposition that the unconscious is located outside time, all is actually said here: this “tiger’s leap into the past” with which the revolutionary present is charged announces the “compulsion to repeat”. Repetition is located outside time: it has nothing to do with a singular trauma as origin, thus has nothing to do with the cause and effect of totalizing ideology.

Yeatsian remorse is a device to foreground the oppressed or missed elements in the reigning plot or ideology, but it does not take the strategy of denying the past historical event or the reigning plot by asking for the impossible. It does not seem subversive because, in his work concerning remorse, the frame of the story does not overstep the reigning plot. For example, in *The Dreaming of the Bones* the young soldier never yields to the ghosts' attempt to lead him to the redemption of them; in *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, the story pretends as if its subject were Swift's anguish. The same is true with *Calvary* in which the plot basically follows the Bible, as Katharine Worth remarks:

the play seems to deny that improvisation is possible; the plot is fixed, variations must always lead back into the main event. The characteristic impression the dance plays make of a machine that has been wound up and cannot stop is particularly strong and painful in *Calvary*.²⁷

Thus, because of Yeats's re-working of the reigning Christ story in which all events are already known, suspense is waived. However much the details of the narrative are modified or indeed innovatory, the consequent outcome is quite familiar and unchangeable. This is the crux of the Yeatsian device of remorse: the remorse takes place at the moment the characters passively assume their predestined role, thus suggesting the memory of passivity in which they are exposed to chance — pregnancy of the open dimension in the future - immediately before the assumption. Free will and determinism are not distinguishable one from another: though Lazarus and Judas resist the reigning plot of the Christ story in their words, they have no choice but to act as the plot designates, just as "The ger-eagle has chosen his part". The Roman soldiers are supremely self-conscious and know and accept to the full that they are simply performing the required motions of the reigning text. They stick to the reigning story even when Christ orders that Judas should leave, because they say "He has been chosen to hold up the cross". When interrogated by the dying Christ as to their identity, they announce by the future tense that they are destined by the reigning story to throw

dice to choose who will take is cloak:

We are *the* gamblers, and when

you are dead

We'll settle who is to have that cloak of yours

By throwing dice. (Italics mine)

The Roman soldiers are most willing to accept their role. And it is these soldiers who represent the phase of chance — Vanessa's white ivory dice: "one day one loses and the next day wins". Paradoxically, those who accept the predestined role suggest an alternative to the reigning plot. If the God is a representative of the predestined plot, Third Roman Soldier suggests that the God - the plot - is not singular:

If he were but the God of dice

he'd know it,

But he is not *that* God. (Italics mine)

Why do they never overstep the reigning plot, obediently assuming their role? The answer is obvious: to become ghosts. They kill themselves into the reigning story to be ghosts. Otherwise they would not be able to bear the memory of passivity at the moment immediately before they are exposed to the phase of chance. This is clear when Judas retorts to Christ who says that Judas's betrayal of him was the commandment of "that God Himself" — the reigning text — and that "my betrayal was decreed that hour / When the foundations of the world were laid":

It was decreed that somebody betray you —

I'd thought of that — but not that I should do it,

I the man Judas, born on such a day,

In such a village, such and such his parents. . .

Here Judas refers to the very moment when he assumes the role to betray Christ — the moment when he dies in the reigning plot to become a ghost. The reigning text is always haunted by ghosts who bear the open dimension of the future.

Just as “Easter 1916” foregrounds a strange function of proper names, Judas and Lazarus in *Calvary* name themselves in a strange way: “I am called Lazarus”; “I am Judas”. It is true that the naming of themselves to the audience is a familiar device in Japanese Noh plays which influenced Yeats. And Noh plays are basically stories in which ghosts appear who once died in previous texts such as *Genji* and *Heike* and express their remorse. But, unlike Noh plays which are almost deprived of their political connotation, Yeatsian remorse is always related to political historiography in a very subtle way. Whether it is in Ireland or not, decolonization necessarily entails monolithic consolidation or aestheticization of a nation, which retroactively represses the phase of chance just before such national identification. Yeatsian remorse is unique in that, though it is originally a literary device of Japanese Noh drama, Yeats appropriates it in a socio-political context of decolonization to open a phase of chance for the purpose of deaestheticization of a nation.

Notes

The present paper contains portions of my paper “Ghosts and anniversaries in Yeats’s plays” (*Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. XVIII. 39-49), which chiefly addresses Yeats’s drama, in order to develop the argument to grasp Yeats’s later poetics as a whole in a wider context by relating his drama to his poetry. All the quotations of Yeats’s poems are from *Yeats’s Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1989), and those of Yeats’s Plays are from *Collected Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1982)

1 See my “A Function of Proper Names in “Easter 1916””. *Reading*. No. 19(31 Oct. 1998). 47-56

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6 Benjamin, *Illuminations*. 254

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8 Benjamin, *Illuminations*. 264

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